which would seem to be strong evidence of heavy editing of the language of the current biblical texts.

To me, it seems that the analogy with orthography is most suggestive. Based on the evidence of pre-exilic inscriptions, the orthography of the MT Pentateuch in many ways looks relatively more archaic than other Hebrew in the MT. But the inscriptions show that this means relatively earlier in the post-exilic period. There are a small number of survivals from the pre-exilic period, such as some 55 cases of the third person masculine singular suffix spelled with *He* not *Waw*, but mostly we are seeing a typologically later spelling than anything found in the pre-exilic inscriptions. So too, if Hornkohl has discovered anything related to chronology, it seems more likely to be evidence of a slightly more archaic form of language, in a small number of linguistic features, of a MT Pentateuch whose current form is still post-exilic.

For these and other reasons, I cannot share Hornkohl's optimism that the patterns he has discovered reveal any clear evidence of the various chronological contexts of the authors of the Pentateuch and Former Prophets. To highlight our quite different understanding of the nature of the evidence, I summarise my previously published views (which, unlike Hornkohl's conclusions, are not in conflict with mainstream biblical scholarship): The compositions comprising the Hebrew Bible were certainly produced over a period of several centuries. However, according to general scholarly consensus, none of these compositions was just written once, at one time, but all exhibit an ongoing process of editorial and scribal development. The data indicates that it was not usual for less common linguistic features to be retained in scribal transmission. Therefore, the language of all the manuscripts in our possession is a mixture reflecting multiple chronological periods (and likely: multiple geographical locations, registers, etc.). Until we have sufficient dated and localised non-literary evidence, we will not be able to disentangle the chronology in the case of most individual linguistic forms. We certainly cannot argue based on any of our current, late, literary texts that their linguistic profile indicates composition in one specific chronological period, or that the linguistic profile of the MT version of any book gives us meaningful evidence of the language and hence date of the authors of that book.

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LAU, PETER H. W. *The Book of Ruth*. NICOT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023. Pp. xxxiv + 342. Hardcover US $48.00.

Peter H. W. Lau's commentary on the book of Ruth is shaped by both his theological training and by his deeply personal experience of navigating cultural boundaries and religious commitments. Born in Hong Kong and raised in

Sydney, Lau describes himself as someone who belonged and yet did not fully belong—a dynamic of marginality and integration that resonates with the figure of Ruth herself. His identity as an ethnically Chinese Christian, his immersion in a Reformed-leaning evangelical tradition, and his doctoral formation under Jewish supervision have all contributed to a distinctive interpretive lens that is attuned to questions of identity, loyalty, and belonging across cultural and theological contexts.

Lau's commentary offers a close literary reading shaped by honour-shame dynamics and an eye to the theological trajectory of the canon according to a Christian perspective. Framed as a "short story" with a theological message rather than a moral fable or ideological polemic, Lau presents Ruth as a narrative of divine providence expressed through human initiative and loyal love (*ḥesed*), culminating in the restoration of Naomi and the emergence of David's line.

Lau's contribution is significant in that he bridges literary, theological, and socio-cultural approaches. His approach is distinct from postexilic readings of Ruth that frame the book as a subversive response to Ezra-Nehemiah's rejection of foreign wives, such as those of André LaCocque (*Ruth*, trans. K. C. Hanson, CC (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004)) and Yair Zakovitch (*Das Buch Rut: Ein jüdischer Kommentar*, trans. Andreas Lehnardt, SBS 177 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1999)). While Lau acknowledges the ethnic tensions that might frame such readings, he argues that the narrative itself does not prioritise Ruth's Moabite identity as a problem to be resolved. Rather, Ruth's enactment of *ḥesed* and her ability to navigate the socio-cultural codes of her adoptive kin group position her not as a threat but as an exemplar. Lau's concern is predominantly with how the narrative functions theologically and literarily. The result is a commentary that will resonate with those attuned to theological readings of scripture, though it may be less satisfying to those seeking ideological critique or historical revisionism. Lau interacts respectfully with a wide range of scholarship, including feminist and socio-critical interpretations, yet he maintains a focus on the theological functions of the text rather than providing an ideological reading.

The commentary's distinctiveness lies in its use of honour-shame dynamics to elucidate the emotional and social stakes of key narrative moments. Drawing on anthropological models of collectivist cultures and citing relevant literature on honour and shame in endnotes throughout his discussion, Lau examines how characters navigate systems of perceived honour, reputation, and familial duty. Considering the fact that honour and shame are key dynamics through which Lau examines Ruth, one might have expected to find a more detailed and sustained discussion of these concepts in the introduction as well as a clear justification for their application to Ruth (albeit in an abbreviated form fitting for a commentary of this kind). In addition, a response to critiques of the honour-shame framework would have enriched Lau's analysis, both at a conceptual level—as in the work of social anthropologist Unni Wikan, who problematises

the application of the honour-shame dichotomy in anthropological fieldwork, stating that "the apparently binary nature of 'honour' and 'shame' is deceptive. They are poorly matched on a conceptual level" ("Shame and Honour: A Contestable Pair," *Man* 19 (1984): 635–52, at 649)—and in relation to its biblical application, which is complicated by Johanna Stiebert in her study of shame in the prophetic literature, in which she argues that "shame is not well elucidated from the parameters of the honour/shame model" (*The Construction of Shame in the Hebrew Bible: The Prophetic Contribution*, JSOTS 346 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 165).

Nevertheless, Lau's reading of Ruth through the lens of honour and shame is indeed fruitful, as the following examples amply demonstrate. Naomi's initial lament, in which she names herself Mara and returns to Bethlehem "empty" (Ruth 1:19–21) is interpreted not only as personal grief but as a performative gesture of public humiliation. Ruth's actions, from gleaning in Boaz's field (Ruth 2) to her daring visit to the threshing floor (Ruth 3), are cast as calculated risks within a social world structured by gendered expectations of propriety and shame. Lau argues that these acts, far from transgressive, embody a culturally intelligible strategy to reclaim honour and restore kinship bonds.

These insights come to the fore in Lau's reading of Ruth 4, the climactic chapter of the narrative. Lau emphasises that Ruth's reward is not only marriage or motherhood, but the public recognition of her loyalty and virtue—what he calls "widespread recognition—both in private and in public." The honour she accrues is relational, collective, and reputational. According to Lau, Ruth's inclusion in the genealogy that concludes the book that bears her name is the narrative's decisive act of social vindication. Ruth is now embedded in the line of David, and through her, the house of Naomi (and Naomi's own "dignity and social status") is restored. Lau interprets the genealogy as a canonical anchor that provides a resolution to the story's internal tensions (e.g. Naomi's emptiness, Ruth's marginality, Boaz's obligation) and also situates the narrative within the broader arc of Israel's redemption history. Divine agency, largely implicit throughout the book, is subtly foregrounded in this final act. Lau argues that God's is the "gentle guiding hand beyond the reversal" of Naomi's and Ruth's fortunes, and this is discernible throughout through acts of kindness, legal negotiation, and social recognition. The characters "enact and reflect" God's kindness, becoming agents of covenantal repair.

Lau's tone and argumentation remain relatively conservative throughout the commentary. Readers looking for sustained engagement with feminist, postcolonial, or trauma-informed approaches will find these acknowledged but not pursued in great detail. Nonetheless, Lau's contribution to the New International Commentary on the Old Testament series is both substantial and generative. Lau's capacity to draw together literary analysis, social anthropology, and theological depth without sacrificing clarity is especially valuable. This volume is warmly recommended for pastors, scholars, and theological educators seeking a

commentary that honours the theological and cultural world of the text from a Christian perspective.

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MELANCHTHON, MONICA JYOTSNA and ROBYN J. WHITAKER eds. *Terror in the Bible: Rhetoric, Gender, and Violence.* IVBS 14. Atlanta: SBL, 2021. Pp. xiv + 246. Paperback. US$35.00.

Readers familiar with the groundbreaking work of Phyllis Trible will undoubtedly approach this book with an inkling of its interpretive loci. Resonating with both the title and the methodology of Trible's iconic volume *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) this edited volume brings together twelve essays at the nexus of feminist theory, interdisciplinary perspectives, intersectional awareness and the realities of gender-based violence in the Australian context and beyond. With a forward from Trible, the essays are varied in methodological and hermeneutical strategies, held together by their ideological underpinnings and the critical engagement with text and contemporary context.

While the origin of many of the essays was a conference around feminist readings that critically engage with *Texts of Terror*, the introductory essay by Monica Melanchthon and Robyn Whitaker, locates the volume against the backdrop the COVID-19 pandemic. Noting that the pandemic of violence against women and children has a long history, they bring to the fore the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and on minoritised and diverse communities, including the increased violence against women and girls that resulted from the intersectional impacts of systemic and structural inequalities. The Bible has been implicated in the marginalisation of different groups of people; women, LGBTQI+ folk, indigenous communities impacted by colonisation, people of colour, those with disabilities, oftentimes used to sanctify violence and support the ideologies underlying the many "*-isms*" that shape the world.

Although the essays in the volume are not about Trible, they are shaped by the critical feminist reading of Trible, and by her notion of *in memoriam* (in memory of), readings of difficult texts through which the "abused, victimized, violated, dehumanized, nameless, and murdered characters," are remembered "in continuum with similar victims today" (p. 4). The essays engage with texts from both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, and include the voices of Australian European interpreters, alongside scholars from South Africa, Tonga, India, the United States of America and Aotearoa.