



**The Woman Babylon and the Marks of Empire:  
Reading Revelation with a Postcolonial Womanist  
Hermeneutics of Ambivalence (Emerging  
Scholars)**

*Shanell T. Smith*

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# The Woman Babylon and the Marks of Empire: Reading Revelation with a Postcolonial Womanist Hermeneutics of Ambivalence (Emerging Scholars)

*Shanell T. Smith*

## **The Woman Babylon and the Marks of Empire: Reading Revelation with a Postcolonial Womanist Hermeneutics of Ambivalence (Emerging Scholars) Shanell T. Smith**

The "Great Whore" of the Book of Revelation—the hostile symbolization used to illustrate the author's critique of empire—has attracted considerable attention in Revelation scholarship. Feminist scholar Tina Pippin criticizes the use of gendered metaphors—"Babylon" as a tortured woman—which she asserts reflect an inescapably androcentric, even misogynistic, perspective. Alternatively, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza understands John's rhetoric and imagery not simply in gendered terms, but in political terms as well, observing that "Babylon" relies on conventionally coded feminine language for a city.

Shanell T. Smith seeks to dismantle the either/or dichotomy within the "Great Whore" debate by bringing the categories of race/ethnicity and class to bear on John's metaphors. Her socio-cultural context impels her to be sensitive to such categories, and, therefore, leads her to hold the two elements, "woman" and "city," in tension, rather than privileging one over the other. Using postcolonial womanist interpretation of the woman Babylon, Smith highlights the simultaneous duality of her characterization—her depiction as both a female brothel slave *and* as an empress or imperial city. Most remarkably, however, Smith's reading also sheds light on her own ambivalent characterization as both a victim and participant in empire.

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