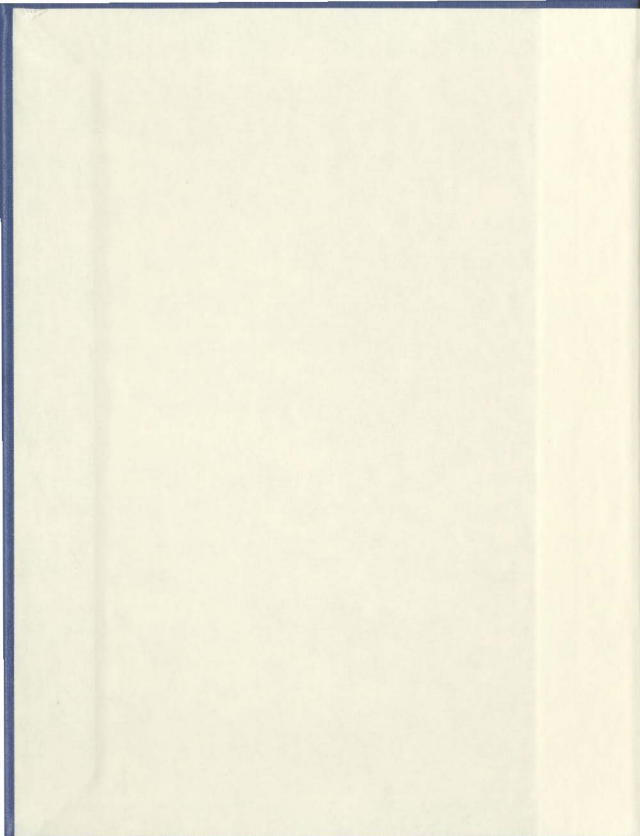'I WILL GO AND RETURN'
MOTION, TENSION AND THE UNCERTAINTY OF
SALVATION IN THE LANGUAGE AND LITERARY
STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK OF HOSEA

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'I will go and return.' Motion, tension and the uncertainty

of salvation

in the language and

literary structure of the book of Hosea.

By

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Table of Contents

Abstract

This thesis explores the theme of ambiguity in the book of Hosea, the means by which this theme is communicated and its effects upon the interpretation of the book as a whole. The contention of this thesis is that the book of Hosea does not allow for 'closed' readings or 'final' interpretations of the book's message and that the book delivers a message which wavers between threats of punishment and promises of reconciliation, yet avoids providing the reader with a final, unqualified statement in favour of one or the other. This tension between threat and promise is one of the qualities which gives the book its tremendous power, yet at the same time the uncertainty it expresses has been a source of many difficulties for the book's commentators. The first chapter explores the 'marriage metaphor' which has captured the attention of biblical scholarship for many years, examining the uses of words derived from the root זנה, including the varying interpretations of the expression אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים. The interpretations of the early chapters of Hosea as 'biography' are critiqued and rejected in favour of viewing the use of such expressions as not only inconsistent with the methods of most proposed biographical reconstructions, but also as a result of the polemical aims and language of the text. The second chapter discusses the literary devices used to create a sense of ambiguity and instability within the book's opening chapters. Special attention is given to the sequence surrounding the naming of the children in the first two chapters and the recurring use of the negative לֹא, but a discussion of Hosea's use of imagery with multiple connotations, in particular the 'wilderness' and its role in the

wife's abandonment and return, is also included. The third chapter continues the exploration of polyvalent imagery, moving into the latter portion of the book (chapters 4-14). The investigation deepens by examining the intertwining of the images of 'Exodus', 'Egypt' and the 'wilderness', the use of the root שוב in conjunction with these images as illustrations of the polyvalent imagery found in the book of Hosea, and the element of physical motion involved in metaphors of apostasy and faithfulness. From this analysis one can more clearly see how the 'marriage metaphor' of Hosea 1-3 sets forth the book's basic themes, and also provides the reader with both a means of entry into the dynamic tension of the text, as well as some of the interpretative tools required to analyse a book which consistently defies expectations and evades facile summarisation.

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Abbreviations

Abbreviations conform to the *Journal of Biblical Literature*'s "Instructions for Contributors" in *JBL* 117/3 (1998) [555-579] (also on-line under "Publications" at [http://scholar.cc.emory.edu]). Lexicons are cited by both page number and column (e.g., BDB 177b -- Brown, Driver & Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon to the Old Testament*; second column on page 177). Because of the large number of commentaries cited the series to which each commentary belongs is referenced in each and every citation. The Hebrew versification of Hosea differs slightly from the English, the former is used throughout in keeping with scholarly practice. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. The following abbreviations are also used:

DCH	*The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew.* David J. A. Clines (ed.); Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993- .
ET	English Translation
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FCB	*The Feminist Companion to the Bible.* Athalya Brenner (ed.).
Herm	Hermeneia–A Critical and Historical Commentary

Chapter 1

The book of Hosea is widely acknowledged to contain numerous difficulties. First, the difficulty of the book's language is legendary among its commentators, although there is little agreement concerning the reasons for this difficulty. One of the prevailing theories is that Hosea may well be the best (if not the sole) written representative within the biblical canon for the specifically 'northern' traditions associated with the kingdom of Israel and that the book therefore may contain peculiarities of dialect. These would, however, only appear to be peculiarities. Much of what has formed the basis of the biblical text's Hebrew has been transmitted through the southern kingdom of Judah, leaving the Hebrew of the northern kingdom with fewer witnesses in the biblical canon.[1] Hosea's language is also characterised by obscure words and phrases, many of which are virtually inexplicable. F. I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman maintain for instance, that the "text of Hosea competes with Job for the distinction of containing more unintelligible passages than any other book of the Hebrew Bible."[2] Yet the difficulty of its language is only one of several puzzles and these are not

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[1] Terminological problems are apparent in the study of Hosea. 'Israel' can be used to refer to both Judah and the Northern kingdom or merely the Northern Kingdom, which also goes by the names Samaria and Ephraim (e.g., Hos 4:17; 5:3, 5 ; 7:1). In addition, naturally, 'Israel' is also another name of the patriarch Jacob (Gen 32:23-33; 35:9-15; Hos 12).

[2] Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 24; Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1980), 66.

limited to the difficult passages containing rare words or obscure phrasing to which Andersen and Freedman refer. As Yvonne Sherwood recently put it:

> From centuries of critical debate only one consensus on the book of Hosea emerges: that this is a disturbing, fragmented, outrageous and notoriously problematic text. Many texts pose ethical and/or semantic difficulties, but the difficulty of Hosea is defined by superlatives…Statements of bewilderment unite critics across chronological and theological divides…[3]

Or as Jerome put it centuries ago: "Si in explanationibus omnium prophetarum sancti Spiritus indigemus aduentu, ut cuius instinctu scripsi sunt…Quanto magis in explanatione Osee prophetae orandus est Dominus…?"[4]

Within the history of Hosean studies, the first three chapters of the book of Hosea have received a disproportionately large amount of attention from scholars, and are often cited in the descriptions of the book as 'disturbing' and bewildering. This attention is intriguing because chapters 4-14 are generally viewed as the more difficult in terms of their language. For example, Sherwood's above comments on the text's interpretative problems are directed exclusively towards chapters 1-3. One of these difficulties is the terse wording of Hosea 1:2:

> When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom

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[3] Yvonne Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet: Hosea's Marriage in Literary-Theoretical Perspective* (JSOTSup 212; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 11-2.
[4] Jerome (Hieronymus), *Commentarii in Prophetas Minores* (CChr Series Latina 76; TVRNHOLTI: TYPOGRAPHI BREPOLS EDITORES PONTIFICII, 1969) PROLOGVS (1): "If we stand in need of the presence of the Holy Spirit when interpreting all the prophets (as they were written at his instigation)… by how much more in the interpretation of the prophet Hosea should the Lord be called upon?"

by forsaking the LORD." So he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. (Hos 1:2-3, NRSV)

Sherwood describes Hosea as a "problem text" and Hosea 1:2 as containing "the text's most notorious problem" in the figure of Gomer.[5] Responses to Yhwh's commandment for one of his prophets to "take" a "woman of whoredom" as a sign or illustration of the apostasy of the land and its inhabitants have been many and varied, but have tended to share a feeling of shock and dismay that has been constant from the time of Jerome until today.

> Quis enim non statim in fronte libri scandalizetur, et dicat: Osee primus omnium prophetarum meretricem accipere iubetur uxorem, et non contradicit?[6]

> The godly imperative is both so startling and commonplace as to require two chapters of the book to elucidate...The balance of the call or charge to the prophet is to marry a promiscuous woman, certainly one of the more startling divine allocutions recorded in the Bible.[7]

The reaction to this "startling divine allocution" has been varied. The problem of interpretation is not just that the opening verses of the book are shocking or that the action which Hosea is commanded to undertake is "atrocious."[8] The difficulty of interpretation is compounded by a very similar verse in chapter 3: "The LORD said to me again, 'Go, love a woman who has a lover and is an adulteress, just as the LORD loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes'" (Hos 3:1, NRSV).

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[5] Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, 19.

[6] Jerome, *Commentarii in Prophetas Minores*, "For who would not be immediately scandalised before this book, and would not say: 'Hosea, the first of all the prophets, is commanded to take a *meretrix* as a wife and he does not object?'" (1).

[7] Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea* [AB 24], 115-6.

[8] H. W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton 1: Hosea* (BKAT 14/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1965), 15. ET: *Hosea* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 15.

Scholars have long wrestled with the relationship between chapter 3 and chapter 1. The prevailing assumption is that Hosea 1-3 forms a single unit, distinct from the rest of the book in terms of both theme and genre, and that there is a way in which these verses can be harmonised within this unit.[9] This approach is based upon the assumption that Hosea 1-3 contains biographical information about Hosea. On the surface, this approach would seem to be warranted because of the nature of the content of these chapters. The language of these chapters is based upon incidents concerning the wife and children of the prophet. Yet a closer investigation reveals that a biographical approach is not especially well suited to the material, despite the use of the prophet's family in the book's symbolism.

> The LORD said to me again, "Go, love a woman who has a lover and is an adulteress, just as the LORD loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes." So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer of barley and a measure of wine. And I said to her, "You must remain as mine for many days; you shall not play the whore, you shall not have intercourse with a man, nor I with you." (Hos 3:1-3, NRSV)

If one assumes a biographical basis for chapters 1-3, the issue of whether or not the commandments of Yhwh in chapter 3 are merely a different account of the commandment in 1:2, becomes a matter of critical importance for the interpretation of chapters 1-3 and the symbolism of Hosea's marriage to Gomer. The symbols and their meaning are greatly affected if one assumes that these incidents are biographical. If these are two entirely separate incidents involving the same woman, entirely different incidents involving different

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[9] Gale A. Yee, *Composition and Tradition in the Book of Hosea: A Redaction Critical Investigation* (SBLDS 102; Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1987), 51-2.

women, or even parallel accounts of the same event, a different interpretation must arise in each case. Francis Landy describes the question of 'the woman' of chapter 3 and her identification with Gomer as "One of the perennial, but irresolvable, critical issues." For Landy, however, 3:1 "clearly recalls" 1:2.[10]

This perennial issue is, however, a debate founded upon a mistaken understanding of the purpose and nature of Hosea 1-3. The purpose of Hosea 1-3 is not to establish biographical details about Hosea and Gomer, but rather to establish a metaphorical lens through which the rest of the book may be viewed. Despite admitting that this is the most likely purpose of the text,[11] most scholars have persisted in interpreting these three chapters as biography. This tendency manifests itself in the explanations of the phrase "woman of harlotries" and the discussions surrounding the nature and manner of Gomer's harlotries. Because of the preponderance of this approach, these traditional interpretations must first be examined and critiqued in order to fully demonstrate the need for a different approach and understanding of chapters 1-3 and consequently the book as a whole.

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[10] Francis Landy, *Hosea* (Readings: A New Biblical Commentary; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 48.

[11] ibid., 12 ("The narrative of ch. 1 is a prototype of that of the entire book…we will also consider ch. 2 as a *mis-en-abyme*, or microcosm, of the whole."); James Luther Mays, *Hosea: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), 15; Martin J. Buss, *The Prophetic Word of Hosea: A Morphological Study* (BZAW 111; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1969), 34, 58; Andersen and Freedman *Hosea* [AB 24], 48, 68; G. I. Davies, *Hosea* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 36.

The obvious similarities between chapters 1 and 3 have focused attention on the equally obvious differences between the two chapters, especially the troublesome word "again" in the first verse of chapter 3. The appearance of the word 'again' renders the explanation that chapter 3 is merely a parallel account of chapter 1 difficult. The syntax is also troublesome, since it is unclear which verb, "he said" or "go," is governing the word 'again' (עוֹד). William Rainey Harper's view represents a widely accepted explanation of this problem:

> The עוֹד is thus to be taken with לֵךְ, and not with וַיֹּאמֶר in contrast with "in the beginning" (1⁵) [NRSV: "when first"]. The "woman" is unquestionably the same woman, Gomer, described in chap. I, because (1) she is later defined as an adulteress; (2) she plays the part, in parallelism with Israel, represented by Gomer; (3) *her*, of *and I bought her* (v.²), refers to a particular woman, viz. the one described in v.¹; (4) if this is another woman, why is not some reference made to the fact? (5) the introduction of two women would entirely spoil the essential thought.¹²

Despite Harper's view, harmonising these two chapters presents many difficulties. The commandment in 1:2 is for Hosea to wed an אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים. In chapter 3, however, the text states "I bought her" (וָאֶכְּרֶהָ),¹³ and this time the woman remains strangely nameless.

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¹² William Rainey Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea* (ICC; Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1905), 216-7.

¹³ In this instance the meaning is clear, as the rest of the verse gives the price for which he acquired the woman. כרה indicates the act of purchasing ("einhandeln", "feilschen" *HALAT* 472b-3a, ET: 497a; "get by trade", "buy" BDB 500a [√ II כרה]). Harper terms this the "inexplicable point" (218) as one wonders why a man should purchase his own wife.

Despite this problem many scholars, in fact the majority, have not shown any reticence in treating the woman of chapter 3 as Gomer, nor in speaking of Hosea's "marriage."[14]

Such confusion about the figure of the woman (assuming momentarily that the women in chapters 1 and 3 are the same) is linked more to the flexibility of the marriage metaphor than to the confusion over the meaning of the expression אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים, or over the interpretation of the parallel accounts in chapters 1 and 3. Much more of the confusion has been the result of the inability of scholars to properly comprehend the symbolic nature of chapters 1-3. Thus, despite overtures to acknowledging the lack of biographical content available in Hosea 1-3 and the subordination of any such material to the metaphor being established, many scholars nevertheless attempt an almost purely biographical interpretation.

Identifying the genre of Hosea 1-3 has proven difficult. Questions such as the relation between the woman of chapter 3 to that of chapter 1 are rooted in the assumption that the metaphor and symbolism of Hosea are explicable through reference to Hosea's personal life. The 'marriage metaphor', with Hosea standing for Yhwh and a 'woman of harlotries' for Israel, is more fluid and flexible than the majority of scholars have imagined.

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[14] Even the use of the word 'marriage' has not gone unchallenged. Davies, (*Hosea* [NCB], 50-1) objects to this standard view. The commandment literally reads לֵךְ קַח־לְךָ which means "Go, take for yourself!" without explicit mention of the word marriage, although the root לקח is a common Hebrew idiom for marriage and the majority of the commentaries do assume such a meaning here. See BDB 543a Qal 4e [√לָקַח]; *HALAT* 507b 7, ET: 534b; *DCH* Vol IV 573a 2 [לקח]; Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, 19 note 3; Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea* [AB 24], 170. Davies is the chief exception on this point.

Some scholars, however, try to resolve the difficulties and inconsistencies with reference to the text's redaction:

> Because of the literary character and the original function of both chapters, neither argument is compelling [i.e., that there are two women or that the two chapters are parallel]. It lies beyond the scope of chap. 1 to provide a glimpse of the marriage's continuation. As the writer of chap. 3, Hosea does not presuppose any knowledge of chap. 1, which summarizes Hosea's previous experiences… Chap. 3 should be understood in terms of chap. 2, not chap. 1.[15]

William Rainey Harper wants to interpret chapter 3 and chapter 1 together, while Hans W. Wolff wants to relate chapter 3 to chapter 2 and leave chapter 1 as its own account of events. Both are united in their relating 'again' (עוֹד) to the verb 'said' rather than 'go', as are many other commentators.[16] This point of translation has very little real impact however, as one's understanding of the redaction and authorship of each component is far more important to one's interpretation of the passage as a whole.[17] There is no difference between "Yhwh *said again*, 'Go love a woman'" and "Yhwh said 'Go *again* and love a woman'" since in either instance one has to interpret why either the action or the command needs repeating (e.g., does

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[15] Wolff, *Dodekapropheton 1* [BKAT 14/1], 74. ET: [Herm], 59.

[16] Wolff, Harper, Andersen and Freedman (*Hosea* [AB 24], 294-5) understand the phrase in this way, but cf. A. A. Macintosh (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Hosea* [ICC; Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1997], 93).

[17] Davies, *Hosea* [NCB], 99: "This rendering ['said again']…does not make any real difference to the meaning, because the normal rendering (as in RSV) is already open to the interpretation that the **woman** is not Gomer, and the inclusion of **again** anywhere excludes the view, mentioned above, that this is an account of the same event as 1:2-3." Davies is right to claim that the difference in rendering means little, although he is mistaken to think that one cannot think of this verse as a parallel to 1:2, if only because so many commentators have thought exactly that.

it need to be said twice to get him to follow the command?).[18] Yet the commentators are not at all in agreement as to which of chapters 1 or 3 are Hosean, or even if either are.[19] Thus, much of the commentary written attempts to establish which of the two chapters takes priority in establishing the historical details of Hosea's life, and thus assigns the responsibility for the text's difficulty to the history of its redaction.

The attempt to clearly delineate the biographical elements within chapters 1-3 strongly influences the interpretation of the literary structure of these chapters. If the relationship between Yhwh and his people is described as a marriage as a result of the personal experiences of Hosea (which is the opinion of many of the commentators) then one would reasonably expect the metaphor to carry fewer loose ends and to be more rigorous in its role designation. Yet the question of whom precisely the woman of chapters 1 and 3 represents is not easily resolved.

The phrase כִּי־זָנֹה תִזְנֶה הָאָרֶץ מֵאַחֲרֵי יְהוָה (Hos 1:2) would suggest that the figure of the woman represents "the land" (הָאָרֶץ). The use of the word, "the land," to represent Israel as a nation is readily understandable,[20] although as the first chapter

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[18] Andersen and Freedman, Hosea [AB 24], 295: "[T]he second time he is not told to marry her, for he is already married to her. The thing to be done now is to love a woman who is already his wife."

[19] Gale A. Yee, for example (Composition and Tradition, 51-125, 315-6) believes neither chapter originates from Hosea himself.

[20] Harper, Amos and Hosea [ICC], 207 (referring to both Israel and Judah); A. A. Macintosh, Hosea [ICC], 9; Andersen and Freedman, Hosea [AB 24], 169.

progresses the reader discovers that the children of Hosea are given symbolic names

("Jezreel"/יזרעאל ; "Lo-Ruhamah"/לא־רחמה) and they seem to stand as symbols for the

inhabitants of the land. Thus the mother equals the land and the children the nation. But to

read this into chapter 2 would create larger problems of interpretation. In 2:4 the 'children'

are aligned against their mother, yet the initial commandment and symbol established in 1:2

was a woman **and** children of harlotries. Wolff comments on Hosea 2:4:

> It is surprising that in this allegorical speech the children are drawn to the father's side
> against the mother. But do not both mother and father represent Israel? Do Israelites take
> sides against Israel? Here the collective idea, in its various forms, noticeably breaks
> down…[21]

The problem then is not merely one of the relationship between 3:1 and 1:2, but the question

of the relationship between "the children" and their "mother" as symbols.

> The story is not allegory in the strict sense. It is prophecy…The similitude is vast, and
> equations are not to be sought in minute details. We have only to mention the fact that either
> the wife or the children can represent Israel in order to indicate that a neat scheme is not
> possible. At the same time some distinctions are made. The mother represents Israel in
> general, but is sometimes compared with *the land* (1:2, and also, most likely, in 2:4)…All
> the children together (2:6) also represent Israel in general. But when the three children are
> distinguished, they severally represent Israel under three aspects…Besides the shifting focus
> back and forth from Hosea to God and from family to nation, the presentation is variegated
> even further, but also unified, by the fact that the children alone or the mother alone, and not
> just the family as a whole, also represent Israel.[22]

The difficulty of the question of "who represents what" manifests itself in the language used

by commentators in assigning a genre to the first three chapters, and whether it is best

described as "allegory" or by some other term.

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[21] Wolff, *Hosea* [BKAT 14/1], 39-40. ET: [Herm], 33.
[22] Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea* [AB 24], 124-5.

> This marriage, together with the children born to it, constitute a parable or sign (cf. the Hebrew word *mšl*) of the nation's apostasy together with its inevitable results. The marriage is not contracted in order to illustrate the message; it constitutes the beginning of the message itself; for it is an outward sign or representation of the relationship between God and his people, and it is the means by which God began to communicate to Hosea his message to the nation.[23]

> In view of this conclusion [the narrative's historicity], the passage's literary genre [Gattung] is by no means an allegory, but rather a *memorabile*. Narratives which tell of prophetic symbolic actions belong to the literary genre of the *memorabile*. This particular example of the *memorabilia* exhibits two essential characteristics: God's command to perform a certain task, and its interpretation as a sign.[24]

James Luther Mays prefers to speak of "reports of symbolic acts"[25] and "family metaphors"[26] in describing the literary form of the first three chapters of Hosea, while Francis Landy describes the use of "the verb *znh*, 'to be licentious, fornicate, whore'" as signalling the "dominant metaphor of the first part of the book."[27]

There is some irony in the fact that so many of the scholars who write about the book of Hosea, and in doing so write extensively about the book's metaphorical language and its multiplicity of meanings, attempt at the same time to write about the man Hosea and his life. The problem with this biographical tendency on the part of commentators is that it relies upon untested assumptions about the relationship this book has with history, in particular the applicability of the symbolism of the adulterous wife/promiscuous woman and her children

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[23] Macintosh, *Hosea* [ICC], 9.

[24] Wolff, *Hosea* [BKAT 14/1], 9. ET: [Herm], 10. Wolff does use the word "allegory" in commenting on other passages such as 2:4 (39, ET: 33) and denotes its lack of clarity as it contains "many possibilities of interpretation."

[25] Mays, *Hosea* [OTL], 3.

[26] ibid., 24.

[27] Landy, *Hosea* [Readings], 22.

to the life of the man Hosea. Even in the instance of Gale A. Yee, for whom neither the figure of Gomer nor the woman of chapter 3 come from the pen of Hosea, a correct understanding of the text's redaction gives insight into the 'marriage metaphor' and its 'original' meaning: "[T]he mother who is denounced is Rachel, the favorite wife of Jacob who is the father of Israel. Her children are the northern tribes, the House of Israel, who attribute their ancestry to her line."[28] More prevalent among the historical interpretations, though, is the attitude expressed by Andersen and Freedman in the Anchor Bible Commentary: "it seems clear that the theological imagery arises out of his personal tribulation."[29] Yet to make this claim at the same time as dismissing difficulties in interpretation because the book is "not allegory but prophecy" is to beg the question. The variety of theories surrounding the relationship of chapters 1 and 3, and the complexity of some of the theories concerning the text's redaction makes any link between the present text and the personal experiences of Hosea seem more distant and hypothetical.

Another objection to viewing Hosea 1-3 as biography is the nature of the book's language. The already-mentioned ambiguity of Hosea's language is well established and widely recognised, as are some of the theories which have been proposed to explain it. The

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[28] Yee, *Composition and Tradition*, 305. Yee claims that the original Hosean oracle begins in "2:4aA" and ends somewhere in the thirteenth chapter. The actual Hosean content in 1-3 amounts to something like a mere 40 words (122-3). This understanding drastically affects the interpretation of the 'original' symbolism since neither chapter 1 nor 3 play any role.

[29] Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea* [AB 24], 46.

process by which the Bible has come into existence has produced a document reflecting a primarily Judean, specifically Jerusalemite, origin. If Hosea is indeed an Israelite (that is, a "northern kingdom" prophet) the difficulty of his language may reflect dialectical peculiarities which are not part of what is 'standard' biblical Hebrew, rather than resulting from textual corruption, a favoured explanation until recently.[30] That there was more dialectal variety in ancient Israel and Judah than the Bible generally indicates is more than likely, even without considering the famous Shibboleth incident (Judg 12:5-6), especially if one considers the editorial process that likely accompanied the biblical text's transmission. Yet even if it seems "more probable that we should see the difficulty as being our ignorance of the peculiar dialectical background to Hosea"[31] than to blame corruption, this explanation does not go far enough in explaining all the difficulties, especially those at the level of interpretation.

The difficulty with this explanation is not simply that Hosea lacks some of the most assuredly 'Northern' traits (most notably the use of the relative שֶׁ instead of אֲשֶׁר[32]) but also that many forms are no more readily explainable even if one accepts that Hosea's Hebrew

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[30] Macintosh, *Hosea* [ICC], liii–lxi for an overview. Harper, *Amos and Hosea* [ICC] : "Hosea's reputation for obscurity is due in large measure to the corrupt form in which the text of his message has reached us" (clxxiii).
[31] Ian Young, *Diversity in Pre-Exilic Hebrew* (FAT 5; Tübingen: Mohr, 1993), 167. On the "Shibboleth" incident see 188-9.
[32] ibid., 163; BDB 979a ("limited to late Heb., and passages with N. Palest. colouring"). cf. GKC §2v (16-7); §36 (112); §155 (485 n. 1). Hosea does use the relative (or rare demonstrative) pronoun זו (Hos 7:16, GKC §34b (109 n. 3)).

represents a relatively poorly attested northern dialect. The form אהבו הבו (Hos 4:18) for example, could just as readily be explained as merely having been misread in the manuscript tradition.[33] Yet the trend of more recent commentaries is to retain the form, perhaps a *pe'al'al*, and interpret it as an emphatic usage.[34] The uncertainty over the word's form should give one pause before discussing its meaning, yet problems such as this verse and others (e.g., Hos 8:13's equally obscure הבהבי) do not constitute difficulties of the same exegetical magnitude as does the use of more concrete, common terms in Hosea.[35] This example readily illustrates the problem, as either of the two leading explanations lead to much the same interpretation, that the passage is an emphatic use of the verb אהב. Yet this sort of difficulty has not received the same sort of attention as the words, generally more concrete and common, surrounding the woman of chapters 1-3. Chief among the more common, concrete linguistic puzzles is Hosea's use of words derived from the root זנה, a key

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[33] Harper, *Amos and Hosea* [ICC], 266: "הבו seems to have arisen through dittography"; Wolff, *Dodekapropheton 1* [BKAT 14/1], 90. ET: [Herm], 73: "a misreading of אהב אהבו"; also Mays, *Hosea* [OTL], 76.

[34] Thus Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea* [AB 24], 379; Macintosh, *Hosea* [ICC], 169.

[35] Andersen and Freedman state that "In any case, an elative meaning is probably intended" (379). "In any case" most likely means that *regardless* of what the form is, we can know what the gist of the passage is. Macintosh's discussion (169) cites it as "an emphatic form" which he declares a *pe'al'al*, but which essentially means the same as emending along Wolff's lines to an infinitive absolute. One cannot disagree with the interpretation, as in either case the English rendering of the passage is much the same, although those who wish to avoid emendation (such as Macintosh) should take note of the relative rarity of such forms. GKC §55e (152) discusses the formation of the *pe'al'al* and gives examples, although GKC notably suggests emendation for both this form and one of Macintosh's examples of comparable verb forms. As Buss (*The Prophetic Word of Hosea*) relevantly notes: "Fortunately, the general drift of a passage is usually clear even if the details are not" (6).

component of the 'marriage metaphor' of 1-3 and a source of much of the confusion surrounding these chapters.

Hos 1:2, in the course of Yhwh's initial commandment to Hosea, uses words derived from the root זנה four times. "And Yhwh said to Hosea:

לֵךְ קַח־לְךָ אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים וְיַלְדֵי זְנוּנִים כִּי־זָנֹה תִזְנֶה הָאָרֶץ מֵאַחֲרֵי יְהוָה׃

The use of the infinitive absolute in conjunction with the finite verb gives an intensity to the phrase כִּי־זָנֹה תִזְנֶה[36] (rendered variously as "great whoredom" [NRSV] "vilest adultery" [NIV], and somewhat weakly as "unfaithfulness" [REB]. The use of the verb echoes the phrase "woman of harlotries and children of harlotries" in the first part of the clause, with its nouns formed from the same root. The translation of the root זנה in its so-called metaphorical usage has been a source of difficulty for translators, as English words such as "harlot" carry a great many connotations which may not accurately reflect the sense of the Hebrew. This difficulty is especially detectable in Hosean studies, because of the desire to interpret אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים in a literal, historical sense while still being true to the phrase's metaphorical meaning. Thus one encounters a huge variety of explanations as to when and

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[36] Harper, *Amos and Hosea* [ICC], 214; Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea* [AB 24], 169; Macintosh *Hosea* [ICC], 8; Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 35.2.2 (580-3); GKC §113 l-n (342).

how it became obvious that Gomer was such a woman as well as to the sort of woman the phrase indicates.

The standard lexicons define the root זנה as indicating illicit sexual activity.[37] The English word "harlot" (and its archaic predecessor "go awhoring") may not, however, be the best word in this instance as it has associations beyond unfaithfulness that have more to do with sexual activity as an occupation rather than unfaithfulness in the context of marriage.[38] The root meaning is commonly used to deal with sexual activity outside of marriage. It bears some relationship with the root נאף,[39] although it seems that "znh is the more general or inclusive term" of the two.[40] The key to the use of both these roots is the violation of the husband's marital rights as "znh is not used for incest or other prohibited relationships such as homosexual relations or bestiality."[41] Unfortunately, זנה also "includes the activity of the professional prostitute",[42] which makes the distinction between the two uses dependent to a large degree upon the context. In terms of specific verbal form, however, there is good

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[37] "buhlen", "treulos sein" ("commit fornication", "be unfaithful" *HALAT* 264a, ET: 275a); "commit fornication, be a harlot" (BDB 275b); (*DCH* vol. III, 121a "prostitute oneself" [זנה I]).

[38] "Both translations, however, share an orientation toward the professional prostitute" Phyllis Bird, "'To Play the Harlot': An Inquiry into an Old Testament Metaphor" [75-94] in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Peggy L. Day (ed.); Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 75.

[39] "Ehebruch treiben", "commit adultery" (*HALAT* 621b-2a, ET: 658a). "usu. of *man*, always with wife of another" (BDB 610b Qal 1a [√נאף]). The NIV renders Hosea 1:2 as "adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness" thus taking *'ēšet zĕnûnîm* to be virtually synonymous with נאף. REB chooses the adjective 'unchaste'.

[40] Bird, "To Play the Harlot" 76.

[41] ibid., 90, note 13.

[42] ibid., 77.

evidence that it is *only* the feminine qal participle which specifically designates the professional prostitute. Deuteronomy 22:13-21, for example, describes a situation in which a woman can be divorced and stoned on the grounds of not having been a virgin when married. She is said to have "committed a disgraceful act in Israel by prostituting herself in her father's house" (Deut 22:21, NRSV).[43] The use of זנה here is obviously in reference to an act of illicit sexual activity before marriage, and the action is an offence against the young woman's father, the man under whose authority she is. In this instance the woman is deemed guilty for having had sexual relations as a maiden in her father's household. Her role is not, in spite of the use of the root זנה, the same as the socially denigrated, but accepted, role of the prostitute.

As Phyllis Bird notes, however, these two distinct uses of זנה can sometimes occur within the same passage, as in the story of Judah and Tamar (Gen 38).[44] When Judah approaches Tamar to purchase sex (Gen 38:15, 16), he does so because he is convinced she is a professional prostitute (ויחשבה לזונה כי כסתה פניה) — "he thought she was a *zônâ* because she had covered her face"). When Judah later discovers that his daughter-in-law has become pregnant, it is announced to him: "Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the whore

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[43] כי־עשתה נבלה בישראל לזנות בית אביה (NIV: "a disgraceful thing in Israel by being promiscuous while still in her father's house"; REB: "an outrage in Israel by playing the prostitute in her father's house")
[44] Bird, "To Play the Harlot" 77-8; "The Harlot as Heroine: Narrative Art and Social Presupposition in Three Old Testament Texts" *Semeia* 46/1989 [119-39] 124.

(זנתה תמר כלתך); moreover she is pregnant as a result of whoredom (לזנונים)" (Gen 38:24, NRSV). Yet in verse 24 there is no prostitute, there is only a sexually active widow. The two uses of זנה in the same passage point to a distinction that sometimes goes unrecognised because both these meanings are derived from the same root: a confusing fact even though they are different forms of the verb.

> [T]he RSV contains a word play that is absent in the Hebrew, or it sharpens a word play that is not focused in the original. The translation of the verb *zanâ* as "play the harlot" is, I think, mistaken, but it points to an important socio-linguistic consideration in the language employed to describe Tamar's disguise and her crime. The English translation acknowledges that Tamar "played the harlot" when, in fact, no one but the reader knows that that is literally true…The essential difference between the two uses is the socio-legal status of the woman involved…The activity is the same in both instances, as the common vocabulary indicates, namely, non-marital intercourse by a woman. In one case, however, it appears to be licit, bearing no penalty; in the other it is illicit, bearing the extreme penalty of death.[45]

The word זונה is used in Genesis 34 at the end of the story of Dinah and Shechem in the phrase הכזונה יעשה את־אחותנו, "Shall they treat our sister as a זונה!?" (Gen 34:31). In this instance Dinah is most emphatically not a prostitute, nor do her brothers seem to be holding her responsible for what has happened. The use of the word *zônâ* is obviously rhetorical and anticipates an emphatic denial, particularly as her brothers have already enacted revenge for what they have considered mistreatment. The unspoken understanding is that it is only with a *zônâ* that one could expect to have had sex without any

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[45] Bird, "The Harlot as Heroine" 124.

consequences.[46] In Leviticus it is forbidden for a priest to marry either an אשה זנה or "a woman who has been defiled" (Lev 21:7, NRSV).[47] The restatement of these injunctions substitutes זנה for אשה זנה, indicating that these two terms are synonymous.[48] If one considers further the example of Rahab,[49] she is called both an אשה זונה (Josh 2:1) and "the *zônâ*" (Josh 6:17, 25), further indicating that these two terms are synonymous, while in Judges 16:1 Samson stops to see an אשה זונה at Gaza (i.e., to visit a prostitute, not an adulterous woman). Deuteronomy forbids the offering of אתנן זונה in the house of Yhwh (Deut 23:19). This passage obviously represents a woman who is viewed somewhat negatively, but whose presence is acknowledged and accepted in a way in which sexually active daughters are not. It is thus evident that the form *zônâ*, the qal participle, is the form

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[46] i.e., The answer is "No! No one treats our sister like a *zônâ*!" *contra* Andersen and Freedman (*Hosea* [AB 24], 160), who seem to misunderstand the rhetorical nature of this question in their analysis, citing this passage as evidence that *zônâ* can be used in a general way to indicate loss of virginity before marriage.

[47] *HALAT* gives the term 'defiled' (וּלֲלָה) the meaning "deflowered" [entjungfert] (307b, ET: 320b) BDB as 'sexually dishonoured' (BDB 321a). This is reiterated in the statement that a priest will marry "only a woman who is a virgin" (Lev 21:13) and not "a widow, or a divorced woman… or a זנה" (Lev 21:14).

[48] Thus *DCH* vol. 3, 122a [זנה I 4] "ptc. as noun (alw. fem.) זנה, **prostitute, harlot,** (often אשה זנה *a woman, a prostitute*)" and further Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 5.2d (86). Whether or not the tendency to write the word *scriptio plena* (with a waw, unusual in the Lamed-He class) is a result of its being considered chiefly an occupational noun rather than a participle is possible, although not easily demonstrable. See James Barr, *The Variable Spellings of the Hebrew Bible* (The Schweich Lectures 1986; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 76-7.

[49] Bird, "The Harlot as Heroine" 126-32. Bird argues that Rahab's role in the story must be understood as that of a common prostitute rather than a hierodule. One encounters a similar attempt to link Gomer, and thus the term אשה זנונים with temple prostitution, or in Wolff's case one-time ritual sex.

that specifically designates the professional prostitute.[50] Unfortunately the other forms of the verb do not bear the same meaning, which is the source of the confusion over translation to which Bird refers.[51] This confusion is why Tamar's activity is acceptable as long as she is an anonymous woman with the status of a *zōnā*, but the same activity in a daughter-in-law living in one's home may be punished by death. The stipulation in Deuteronomy 22 follows much the same rationale. The use of the same root may have arisen from a usage indicating the denigration of a woman who has participated in illicit sexual activity by referring to her as "behaving like a *zōnā*" or the opposite, wherein a prostitute is characterised by "being promiscuous." In any event, there is no need to confuse these two uses.[52]

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[50] Thus a separate entry in *HALAT* (264b, ET: 275b), although the phrase "occasionally or professionally committing fornication" qualifies the distinction between the participial form and other verbal forms. The *Anchor Bible Dictionary* also makes this distinction in a somewhat tentative manner (see Elain Adler Goodfriend, "Prostitution" *ABD* V [505-510] and Karel van Toorn, "Prostitution (Cultic)" [510-513]). This use of a participle as an occupational noun is relatively common, cf. *sōphēr*, *kōhēn*, *qōholeth*.

[51] Teresa J. Hornsby ("'Israel Has Become a Worthless Thing': Re-Reading Gomer in Hosea 1-3" *JSOT* 82/1999 [115-28]) falls into the same error by failing to distinguish between *zōnā* and the finite verbal forms of the root זנה, particularly with reference to the story of Judah and Tamar (119-20). She also underplays the reasoning behind the standard translation of לקח as a reference to marriage (124: "no reason"). She does all this to attempt to promote the figure of a free, autonomous businesswoman brought under control, as the image in Hosea 1-3 is "an enraged representation of how the Yehud natives perceive what has happened to Israel at the hands of the immigrant factions, particularly the priests" (127). This interpretation requires a post-exilic dating "in Persian-period Yehud. It was a time and place of social, political and religious turmoil" (125). Needless to say, it is difficult to gauge the relative level of tumult between this period and many other times and places suggested for the origins of Hosea 1-3. For another perspective see Rut Törnkvist, *The Use and Abuse of Female Sexual Imagery in the Book of Hosea: A Feminist Critical Approach to Hos 1-3* (Uppsala's Women's Studies; Uppsala: Uppsala Library, 1998), 85-115. Törnkvist also objects to זנה as 'whore' but on different grounds, tracing an alleged 'changed meaning' (115) from 'foreign' to 'whore', but without denying the derogatory tone of the word.

[52] However the usage arose it is readily understandable. One need only compare colloquial uses of terms like "whore" to see how fine nuances of meaning become blurred and distorted in polemical language. There is a large degree of overlap between the language applied to prostitutes and the language of promiscuity, and

While other forms of the verb can indicate illicit sexual activity (Deut 22:21), a common use of the root זנה refers to a description of the Israelites' worship of gods other than Yhwh. This use is particularly striking in the prophetic works (e.g., Ezek 23; Hos 1:2; Jer 2:20; 3:1), but is by no means confined to these books (e.g., Judg 2:17; 8:27, 33). The use of 'sexual' language (i.e., language concerning betrothal, marriage, infidelity, etc.) on a broader scale is also used to describe the relationship between Yhwh and Israel. Israel's lack of faithfulness is described as 'adultery' (נאף, e.g., Ezek 23:47), and the relationship between Israel and Yhwh is likened to a marriage (e.g., Hos 2:19, 20) or the union of lovers (Ezek 16:8). A large part of the confusion and ambiguity surrounding the uses of זנה (and in particular the metaphor of Hosea 1-3) is a result of the application of the entire spectrum of זנה-related terms from the world of marital and sexual relationships to the relationship between Yhwh and Israel.

Phrases such as 'play the harlot' and 'awhoring' are, if not over-translations, at the very least questionable because of the status that words like 'harlot' and 'whore' have in English. While there is no way to avoid the use of some type of terminology that accurately reflects the occupation of the *zônâ*, a woman from whom one can purchase sexual favours,

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either explanation leads to much the same state of affairs that we encounter in the biblical text. *Zônâ* is used of Nineveh in Nahum 3:4 in the phrase the "*zenûnîm* of a *zônâ*", which is once again abusive rather than descriptive language. The "harlotries of a harlot" seems rather redundant if taken as descriptive language. It bears noting that this phrase tells against a completely positive sense of the occupational noun *zônâ*. Tolerance is not the same as complete acceptance.

it is necessary to ask whether the phrase 'play the harlot' carries the necessary connotations to capture a phrase like זנה תזנה הארץ in English. It seems particularly strange, if not misleading to refer to a *zônâ* as a 'prostitute' and then to revert to more archaic language (such as 'whoring') when other verbal forms are encountered. Yet it is confusing to misrepresent the distinction between *zônâ* as the professional prostitute and the use of *znh* to indicate sexual transgressions. Even more importantly many scholars have misunderstood the nature of the 'metaphorical' use of related words and phrases, particularly as found in the prophetic literature and have applied far too literal a reading in most of these instances. In Hosea we encounter a use of *znh* that is an extension of the use of this root to indicate illicit sex. The paralleling of זנה-derived terms with נאף-derived terms is a common feature of this 'metaphorical' use of *znh*.[53] This paralleling has led to an understanding of these two terms as more or less synonymous, with נאף bearing the 'more restricted sense.' According to the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*:

> The ptcp. *zônāh* or *'ishshāh zônāh* designates a woman who has had sexual intercourse with someone with whom she does not have a formal covenant relationship. Any sexual relationship of a woman outside the marriage bond or without a formal union is termed fornication. When there is already a formal union and the sexual association is formed outside this union, *zānāh* becomes synonymous with *ni'eph*, "commit adultery" (*ni'eph* being thus a narrower term than *zānāh*).[54]

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[53] e.g., Hos 2:4; 4:13; Jer 3:8-9 and also Ezek 23:37 (cf. 23:35 for the term 'whorings').
[54] *TDOT* IV, 100.

The paralleling of נאף with זנה in the prophetic literature has unfortunately led to a confusion between these two distinct terms, adding to the confusion over the twofold use of זנה. After carefully defining the difference between the two terms, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* states:

> The terms, however, are not mutually exclusive: a prostitute can be married and thus be an adulteress, and an adulteress can accept payment for sexual favors (Jer. 5:7f.; Hos. 4:13f.). Hosea's wife Gomer is an example of terminological interaction, for she is both an adulteress and a prostitute (Hos. 2:4[2]; 3:1-3).[55]

This statement is far from unassailable and very strong objections can be raised against it. The verse references given are more damaging than helpful to this position, since if one examines them closely one finds reasons to challenge Gomer's being proffered as an example of terminological overlap and Hosea 4:13 as providing support to the above statement. Hosea 4:13 does not, for example, directly equate נאף with זנה. The line: "Your daughters play the whore, and your daughters-in-law commit adultery" (על־כן תזנינה בנותיכם וכלותיכם תנאפנה) does set the two in parallel, but this sort of paralleling does not necessarily indicate that the two terms are synonymous. Hebrew poetic style is heavily dependent upon the device of parallelism, but 'parallel' does not mean that two terms are equated in terms of their semantic content.[56] "How can I pardon you? Your children have

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[55] *TDOT* IX, 115.

[56] Kugel (*The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981], whose work challenges the very use of the term 'poetry' as a category in discussing the Hebrew Bible, states: "our whole presentation has been pitched against the notion that it is actual *paralleling* of any

forsaken me, and have sworn by those who are no gods. When I fed them to the full, they committed adultery and trooped to the houses of prostitutes" (Jer 5:7, NRSV). This verse is a similar example to the one above although, when placed in its larger context, its purpose is obviously to decry the offences of the 'children' in a vivid, imaginative manner and not to describe in a semantically nuanced way the actions which have led to the prophetic condemnation. The following line: "They were well-fed lusty stallions, each neighing for his neighbor's wife" (Jer 5:8) continues the polemic.[57] This sort of language is obviously exaggerated so as to drive home a point, not to give information about the circumstances which the prophet is condemning. It is colourful, blunt language which is meant to offend and decry but not to describe. It would be methodologically weak to read too many nuances into each of the words in such phrases.

When one examines the scholarship on the figure of Gomer one discovers that there are several obfuscating tendencies on the part of commentators. The uncertainty of the meaning of the phrase אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים is part of the confusion, but by no means is it decisive.

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sort that is the point." (51). The point for Kugel is the emphatic character of the second portion of the clause ("carrying it further, echoing it, defining it, restating it, contrasting with it, *it does not matter which*—has an emphatic, 'seconding' character"—51). Even among those who continue to use the term 'parallelism' there is a recognition that the idea of "parallelism" as "a semantic phenomenon" is "an old one" (Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*, [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985], 19).

[57] The previous line is no less figurative for all that it may describe realistic activities, as not every adulterer would necessarily frequent a *bêt zônâ* , nor would solicitors of prostitutes all be adulterers (keeping in mind that adultery requires the violation of another man's sexual control over a woman). Both are merely examples of the sort of behaviour in which the apostate indulge, at least from the point of view of the one issuing the condemnation.

In fact, the desire to make sense of Hosea 1:2 in terms of biography or history has given rise to a larger portion of this confusion than the dispute over semantic nuances of this or that phrase, although the latter plays a large role when scholars fail to recognise when it is appropriate to interpret a passage in such a manner and when it is not.

To return to the figure of Gomer as we find her in Hosea 1:2 (and the commentaries), we encounter the זנה-based noun זְנוּנִים, not the qal participle *zônâ* ('prostitute'). The pattern of this word is commonly classed as an abstract.[58] There are other instances of nouns built from the root זנה used in a similar manner such as זְנוּת[59] (e.g., Hos 4:11; 6:10; Ezek 23:27), although in both instances the ambiguity concerning the nuance of the phrase remains. There are two problems with determining in what manner one should understand these words and phrases. Firstly the phrase אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים is followed by the expression וְיַלְדֵי זְנוּנִים making interpretation all the more difficult, since a 'wife of harlotries' is mysterious enough without the expression 'children of harlotries' accompanying it. This mystery is particularly troublesome for a biographical approach, as marriage is assumed to precede children rather than all being mentioned in one fell swoop.[60]

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[58] "pl. abstr. intens." (BDB 276a). *HALAT* gives as its primary definition the concrete act "fornication" although Hos 1:2 is noted as describing tendency or characteristic ("inclined to fornicate" *HALAT* 264b, ET: 276a). On the formation see GKC §124f (398).

[59] זְנוּת, "n.f. abstr." (BDB 276a). For the formation of nouns in ‑וּת‑ see GKC §86k (241). The classification of a noun as abstract need not, however, prevent its use as a concrete noun, see GKC §83c (226).

[60] Naturally the question of how exactly one goes about finding such a wife is rather problematic, especially when one is also looking to acquire children with the same attributes.

The phrase אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים as being a description of character, one with a proclivity for

the activities described by the root זנה, has a significant tradition of interpreters. Jerome's

commentary notes this sense of the word *zenûnim*:

> Verbum Hebraicum zanunim, non fornicariam et fornicationem, ut plerique aestimant, sed
> multas fornicationes sonat. Ex quo ostenditur mulier ista, quam propheta sumit in coniugem,
> non semel sed frequentius fornicata, ut quanto illa sordidior est, tanto sit propheta patientior,
> qui talem uxorem duxerit.[61]

This is the interpretation followed by Harper in his commentary, although he claims that this

tendency would not have been readily apparent.

> —*A wife of whoredoms*) Not (I) one who was unchaste, *i.e.* a harlot, at the time of marriage,
> because (*a*) Hosea would scarcely have attributed such a command to Yahweh; (*b*) this
> would be inconsistent with the symbolic representation which makes Israel (and, therefore,
> the woman) at first faithful (Je. 2²); (*c*) the ordinary word זֹנָה would better have been used.
> Nor (2) one who, like all Israelites of the day, was spiritually unclean, *i.e.* addicted to
> idolatry. But (3) one who, although chaste at the time of marriage, had in her a tendency to
> impurity which later manifested itself.[62]

Wolff agrees with not confusing an ordinary prostitute ("a soliciting prostitute") with the

woman described in Hos 1:2. His understanding is also that "זְנוּנִים refers to a personal

quality, not an activity" although this is "a personal trait recognizable before the marriage,"

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[61] Jerome, *Commentarii in Prophetas Minores* [CChr], "The Hebrew word *zanunim* does not, as many think,
mean a prostitute [fornicaria] or fornication but rather rings [sonat] of many fornications. That woman (whom
the prophet takes in marriage), not once but repeatedly fornicated so that however disgraceful [sordidior] she
is, by that much may the prophet who will have married such a woman suffer" (8).

[62] Harper, *Amos and Hosea* [ICC], 207. Needless to say it is hermeneutically suspect to so easily associate 'one
who is unchaste' with the term 'harlot' in English. This is to say nothing of reason (Ia) which assumes what
Hosea would or would not attribute to Yhwh, never mind that *someone* has written that Yhwh gave the
commandment "Go, take a wife of whoredoms" caring little about defining under precisely what conditions
her 'whoredoms' are to be understood. The irony here is that the biblical text attributes exactly such a
commandment to Yhwh: it is the modern reader / commentator who can scarcely accept or believe it.

and not a term chosen in hindsight.[63] Wolff favours understanding these "harlotries" as occurring in a fertility rite, although this is not to say that Gomer was a cultic prostitute but rather "simply representative of her contemporaries in Israel." Gomer was thus a one-time lay participant (rather than a cultic specialist) in a fertility rite which occurred once in every Israelite woman's lifetime.[64]

Wolff's interpretation is echoed by James Luther Mays' commentary, although Mays prefers to see Gomer as a 'sacred prostitute' rather than a mere participant in cultic fertility rites.

> 'Harlotry' (zĕnûnîm, a plural of abstraction) denotes a category of person, their class more than their activity. Hosea was to select a woman who was recognizable as harlotrous in the sense of the word in his prophetic vocabulary. She could not have been simply a woman of unknown promiscuous tendencies; that would not serve as conscious obedience to the command. A common prostitute would satisfy the public symbolism, but not as eloquently as one whose sexual promiscuity was a matter of the very harlotry of Israel in the cult of Baal. The more likely category is that of the sacred prostitutes (qĕdēšōt; cf. 4. 14).[65]

Mays' suggestion is that Gomer, in order to properly fulfil Yhwh's commandment, could not have been either an ordinary Israelite woman nor a woman whose promiscuous nature became apparent after marriage. Rather she must have been clearly identifiable as "harlotrous" from the very beginning, nor could she have been a 'mere' prostitute.

Andersen and Freedman understand זנונים אשת to mean "a promiscuous wife" although they feel it is "a mistake in analyzing the word znwnym to separate the idea from

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[63] Wolff, Dodekapropheton I [BKAT 14/1], 13. ET: [Herm], 13.
[64] ibid., 15. ET: 15.
[65] Mays, Hosea [OTL], 26.

the action, since these are organically related in biblical thought."[66] The related term זָנָה,

which is used in parallel, demonstrates that "she has violated her marriage vows." This could

have occurred in "cultic sexual activity",[67] although these activities would only have taken

place some time after the marriage. They write:

> A literal reading of the passage *'št znwnym wyldy znwnym* would require her to be an adulteress with several children before even meeting Hosea. Common sense, if not more complex laws of evidence and probability, dictates that we keep the number of wives and children to a minimum. The story of the children makes it clear that 1:2 must be understood proleptically—Hosea did not acquire them all at once but only after several years. Similarly his wife only became an adulteress after marriage and, if we can take 2:7 as a description of domestic reality, only after the children were born.[68]

A. A. Macintosh also renders אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים by the phrase "promiscuous wife" with

the understanding that this commandment of Yhwh's is "the result of Hosea's reflecting

retrospectively on his experiences and his message"[69] while G. I. Davies claims the phrase

means merely "a prostitute" and the unusual phrase "may have been chosen to lay greater

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[66] Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea* [AB 24], 157: "Anyone described as "a promiscuous wife" is engaged in activity consistent with her character, which is expressed by the word *znwnym*." Do Andersen and Freedman want to keep the reader from postulating a "promiscuity of character" that involves no real physical promiscuity? This phrasing is as obscure as any within the text of Hosea.

[67] Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea* [AB 24], 159.

[68] ibid., 162. "Common sense" is a notoriously suspect line of argument, particularly when the biblical text itself seems to do nothing to dissuade "a literal reading" of the passage. It does seem more logical to keep the number of wives and children limited, but the fact that the initial commandment of Yhwh is so 'shocking' might lead one to be more cautious in summoning common sense to one's aid in the treatment of this text.

[69] Macintosh, *Hosea* [ICC], 7-9.

emphasis on the woman's character than on her profession, or to match more closely the form of the following phrase."[70]

One should note how the commentaries, while acknowledging certain difficulties, fail to distinguish clearly enough the difference between a זוֹנָה and the woman Hosea is commanded to 'take'. There are reasons for this confusion; firstly the confusing role that chapter 3 and its woman play in regards to Hosea's relationship to Gomer. Secondly, the phrase "These are my pay, which my lovers have given me" (Hos 2:14, NRSV) gives rise to a certain amount of confusion. The word אֶתְנָה, found only here, is assumed to indicate the "pay" or recompense of a prostitute by the majority of the commentaries connecting it with the word אֶתְנַן (Deut 23:19, אֶתְנַן זוֹנָה).[71] Andersen and Freedman observe that there may be a distinction being made by the author: "The fact that Hosea avoids the regular term for a prostitute's fee, as well as the term for prostitute in speaking of the woman, indicates that she did not fill that role, at least professionally."[72] Andersen and Freedman obviously do not

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[70] Davies, *Hosea* [NCB], 50-1. Davies thus does not consider לקח to indicate marriage in this context, although one should note that in his interpretation there is room for a prostitute of a certain 'character' rather than merely one with the appropriate professional status, whatever sort of "character" he is implying in this passage. Davies' interpretation of the symbolism is intriguing, as in his analysis of a liaison with a prostitute Hosea would stand for Baal rather than Yhwh, although he still sees an emphasis similar to other commentaries in the phrase אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים.

[71] Thus *HALAT*: "gift (to a harlot), harlot's reward" (99b, ET 103a); BDB 1071b [√ זונה] and 1072b [I אֶתְנַן זוֹנָה] ; Harper, *Hosea* [ICC], 231; Wolff, *Hosea* [BKAT 14/1], 36, 46., ET: [Herm], 31, 38 "Dirnenlohn"; Mays, *Hosea* [OTL], 42; Macintosh, *Hosea* [ICC], 63; Davies, *Hosea* [NCB], 77.

[72] Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea* [AB 24], 254. The vagueness of this statement and its wholly speculative basis (the one appearance of אֶתְנָה) would, one would think, serve as a warning about the usefulness of this text for historical inquiry. At the very least one should not speculate upon the basis of a *hapax legomenon*.

want to identify "the woman" with a "regular" prostitute for whom one would use "the regular term for a prostitute's fee." The references to "pay" and to "purchasing" (Hos 3:2) leave one wondering why there is no direct statement of the woman of 3:2 (nor Gomer in chapter 1) being a *zônâ*, if there is indeed biography present in these chapters. It is this omission which should warn commentators that the presentation of the woman (or women[72]) in chapters 1-3 is not concerned with providing the sort of details that modern commentators are seeking, nor in being consistent in the language used to describe her.

The problems involved with these interpretations do not deal solely with the semantic range of Hebrew words or Hebrew lexicography. There is a strong tendency to use language that properly applies to the world of prostitution when harshly criticising sexual promiscuity. One need only think of colloquial English in its application of a word like "whore" to women who are not necessarily promiscuous or prostitutes. It is merely used to lash out and has relation to the woman's status from the point of view of the wronged party. Scholars and philologists have, for whatever reasons, largely ignored this polemic side to the use of language associated with prostitution. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (8th ed., 1990), to take a comparable example in English, gives as a definition of the word 'slut': "a slovenly

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Unfortunately this warning has remained unheeded in recent commentaries despite overtures to the problems of finding biography in Hosea 1-3. How one 'fills the role' of a prostitute, but not professionally, is difficult to understand. A simpler explanation is that there is no prostitute anywhere, merely exaggerated rhetoric that does not balk at coarse language or imagery.

[72] The dispute over whether there is one woman or two is virtually irrelevant to the point being stressed here concerning the ambiguity of the language and the avoidance of the term *zônâ*.

woman; a slattern; a hussy." If one looks up the word 'slovenly' one discovers the definition "careless and untidy; unmethodical." 'Slattern' unfortunately is also defined as 'a slovenly woman' while 'hussy' is defined as "an impudent or immoral girl or woman." It may be because of the peculiarities of Canadian English, but one would be hard pressed to find the use of the word 'slut' (both derogatory and offensive) in popular usage as an insult in the sense 'unmethodical'. At the very least one should note the complete absence of sexual references in regard to this particular dictionary entry, a fact which would probably surprise many English speakers.[74]

The exact meaning of זנה is also obscured by the scholarly use of words like 'fornication' and 'harlot'. The *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* defines זנה as "primarily a sexual relationship outside of a formal union… Any sexual relationship of a woman outside the marriage bond or without a formal union is termed fornication."[75] Yet, as has been indicated above, if a זונה is a soliciting prostitute regardless of her social status or the attitude with which society views her, her activities are not equal to those of either a married woman or an unmarried woman in her father's household. The difficulties in

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[74] This may have to do with the dictionary's manner of treating "vocabulary that is or can be offensive, either generally or to particular groups of people" although the claim expressed for the dictionary's procedure is "that by explaining them with appropriate historical comment and a clear indication of the offensiveness involved, a better awareness of their inherent distastefulness may be generated." ("Preface" to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, ix)

[75] *TDOT* IV, 100.

terminology stem in large measure, as mentioned above, from the uncritical use of the rather vague, polemical sexual terminology in the prophetic literature and from the lack of clarity to words like 'fornication' in contemporary English usage.

The largest obstacle to clarifying the figure of Gomer, one placed there by her interpreters, is the deeply rooted historical questions surrounding her. The fact that most of the commentaries are anxious, in spite of a rather consistent etymologising of אשת זנונים as "a promiscuous woman," to speak of both marital breakdown and, in the same breath, of Gomer's possible status as a prostitute rather than some other, perhaps less elaborate, explanation is a puzzling fact (e.g., perhaps Hosea was commanded to marry a promiscuous woman and he did just that). The blurring of 'prostitute' with 'adultery' and 'promiscuity' on the part of scholars stands in sharp contrast to the amount of critical effort directed towards understanding Hosea and Gomer in biographical terms.[76] As Yvonne Sherwood notes:

> Despite the huge variety of interpretations, commentators are united in their assertion that Hosea could not possibly have married an אשה זנונים, and this reading has attained such ascendancy that critics rarely think, or dare, to suggest an alternative. Without suggesting that there is only one way to read the text, I find it suspicious that the most obvious interpretation, that the prophet did marry a wife of harlotry, is so studiously avoided.[77]

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[76] As has been noted above, there is a certain amount of ambiguity in the language which is applied in these areas although one would hope for a more careful analysis from scholars. In Harper's phrase "one who was unchaste, i.e. a harlot" the "i.e." betrays the sensibility of the commentator. A professional prostitute is certainly not chaste, but not everyone who is 'unchaste' (however that is defined) is a prostitute. The word 'harlot' itself has become a not very meaningful way of translating, since it is hardly a commonly used word in contemporary English.

[77] Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, 39.

There are several reasons for this studious avoidance of "the most obvious interpretation" but most rest with the mistaken quest for biography with these chapters, and a scholarly concern for exactness of meaning. These concerns are in marked contrast to the text itself, where subtle nuances of meaning have been subordinated or entirely ignored for the purposes of polemic. The quotation taken from Harper's commentary shows how a sense of propriety or seemliness can be used as a self-evident justification of an uncertain interpretation. It also shows that the interpretation has succeeded by the fact that its commentators share in the condemnatory language towards the figure of Gomer, and seemingly fail to realise that the text they are reading is polemical and not descriptive.[78] Scholarly propriety may also play a role, as it seems that few have raised the suggestion that the use of *znh* in the prophetic books of the Bible is more akin to the use of the words "slut" or "whore" in the contemporary vernacular than it is to anything like finely detailed descriptions of the worship being condemned or of the woman symbolising the worship. The desire to seek out a historical, biographical context lessens the impact of such material, and unfortunately completely misses the point.

The discussion to this point has largely dealt with the various ways in which the figure of Gomer, the אשת זנונים, has been viewed and the semantic range of the *znh*

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[78] Mary Joan Winn Leith, "Verse and Reverse: The Transformation of the Woman, Israel, In Hosea 1-3" [95-108] in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, "The woman of harlotry and the adulteress have committed related but not identical misdeeds... What is important is that both [chapters 1 and 3] accounts preserve the essential image of a wife deemed unfit" (97).

terminology which surrounds her. The designation of her as a "prostitute" or as a "shrine prostitute" has been shown to stand on far from secure ground. There is good lexicographic evidence to refute this understanding, but surely far more damaging are the literary considerations. The purpose of Hosea 1-3 is not to establish biographical details about Gomer and Hosea, but rather to establish a metaphorical lens through which the rest of the book may be viewed. Hosea represents Yhwh, and he is linked to a promiscuous woman. As has been discussed, the language surrounding promiscuity is polemical, not descriptive, and to attempt to make all the terms such as "prostitution," "adulteries" and the like bear up in all their nuances under a biographical inquiry leads to confused interpretations. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, for example, thinks of Gomer as "a prostitute" but "both an adulteress and a prostitute."[79] It is hard to imagine how this could have any sort of literary impact were it biographical, as it seems difficult to empathise with someone marrying a prostitute and then complaining about her lack of chastity![80]

In the case of Hosea 1-3 scholarship has been slow to recognise that in terms of biography it is important to be exact, but in polemics it matters little. Thus, despite being "a promiscuous woman" and not a prostitute, it is not contradictory to use a line such as "these are my pay" because the point is to decry religious apostasy in colourful language.

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[79] *TDOT* IX, 115.
[80] Excepting that one imagine a scenario wherein Gomer was thought to have reformed, but returned to a life of prostitution nonetheless, but this would be in the realm of pure speculation so far removed from the text as to be difficult to either refute or support.

Regardless of whether or not Hosea himself experienced any personal tribulation, the point of Gomer in Hosea 1:2 is to represent the land in a general way. If one is prepared to use the symbol of a promiscuous woman then it is only a logical extension to make use of language that could be applied to the world of prostitution as well. Colloquial English does much the same thing, with words like "whore" bearing a wider semantic range than merely being references to the realm of the professional prostitute, particularly when used to describe a woman who has been deemed to be unfaithful.[81] It is offensive, but it is meant to be a sweeping attack upon religious practices and activities, not a detailed analysis or diagnostic survey of the condemned actions and the people or nation involved. To take this sort of language literally, or to search through it for reliable biographical information, is to miss its point. The designation of Gomer as a "cult prostitute" can be analysed with the very same methods of historical inquiry, but surely the more damaging critique is the one made by literary analysis. Such a clearly metaphorical literary unit must, at some point (even if originally biographical), involve a telescoping or manipulating of the history or biography it purportedly contains. There is ample evidence cited here to cast doubt upon the popular designation of Gomer as a prostitute, or even as a participant in sexual cultic activity. The fact that these are different roles, yet are often

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[81] It ought to go without saying that there is a double-standard imbedded in popular linguistic usage in which there are countless offensive terms to describe a promiscuous woman, but precious few directed against men. The use of the word 'whore' in other contexts to describe various manners of behaviour should also be noted.

viewed as interchangeable by commentators speaks to the lack of clearly biographical information in Hosea 1-3. The various designations of Gomer as a fertility cult participant or a shrine prostitute are based upon tenuous evidence, and the very act of theorising about the manner of her promiscuity stems from not properly understanding the nature or literary character of Hosea 1-3 and the language it contains.

Chapter 2

Most studies of Hosea divide it into two main sections: 1) chapters 1-3, and 2) chapters 4-14. As was explored in the previous chapter, this attitude towards the book's basic structure has often been combined with an interest in searching for biographical material about the prophet Hosea, his wife Gomer, and her alleged infidelities. The confusion over the designation of the genre of Hosea 1-3 and the seemingly tenuous relationship it shares with chapters 4-14 is largely a result of this emphasis and its exegetical efforts. Recently however, some scholars have argued against this view and have maintained that its literary and symbolic nature have priority over the search for biographical material.

The reaction against the preoccupation with biographical material is most notable in, though not confined to, feminist readings of Hosea.[1] In addition, several studies of Hosea as a literary work have appeared in recent years, investigating different questions and applying different approaches than those which had shaped previous generations of scholars.[2] Yet these readings, for the most part, are as exclusively concerned with Hosea 1-3 as the works with which they are taking issue. The stance taken here, however, is that while the

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[1] Naomi Graetz, "God is Israel as Husband is to Wife: The Metaphoric Battering of Hosea's Wife" in *The Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (FCB 8; Athalya Brenner (ed.); Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), [126-145]; Fokkelien Van Dijk-Hemmes, "The Imagination of Power and the Power of Imagination: An Intertextual Analysis of Two Biblical Love Songs: The Song of Songs and Hosea 2" *JSOT* 44/1989 [75-88], "I do not conceive of Hosea 2, nor of its immediate context, chs. 1 and 3, as a direct reflection of the 'real' life of Hosea." (79); Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, 18: "'Hosea', 'Yhwh' and 'Gomer', therefore, are simply references to characters in a text and no epistemological or historical statement is implied. Any similarity to any persons, living or dead, is, as they say, entirely coincidental."

[2] Francis Landy, *Hosea* [Readings]; Fisch, "Hosea: A Poetics of Violence" in *Poetry With A Purpose: Biblical Poetics and Interpretation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), [136-57]; Paul R. House, *The Unity of the Twelve* (JSOTSup 97; Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1990); Gerald Morris, *Prophecy, Poetry and Hosea* (JSOTSup 219; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

special character and nature of chapters 1-3 must factor into any reading of the book as a whole, the role of these chapters belongs within the larger context of the book and not as an independent, isolated unit. If the focus of Hosea's first section is not biographical but serves some other purpose, what might that purpose be? The very division of chapters 1-3 from the rest of the book is largely dependent upon the assumption of historical or biographical motivations lying behind the first three chapters, and although there are ample problems for this view it is not enough merely to point out its shortcomings: some alternative understandings must be explored.

Scholars such as Morris and Fisch have brought forward many examples of stylistic connections between 1-3 and 4-14 such as repetition (from ordinary repetition to a variety of puns), use of certain key-words and phrases, and recurring imagery,[3] all of which testify to a manner of reading Hosea in its entirety, even though Hosea has not been a book that always appears as a unified work to either historical or literary critics. This apparent lack of cohesiveness might first appear as problematic for the larger aim of this thesis, which is ultimately concerned with the role of the first three chapters within the framework of the entire book. Acknowledged here is the fact that since the concern of all previous scholarship has been primarily with the first three chapters, a large portion of this project must of a necessity be directed towards the same section, if only to position the analysis and discussion here in their proper place within a wider arena. As well, stating that previous scholarship has

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[3] Morris, *Prophecy, Poetry and Hosea* 45-100; Fisch, "Hosea: A Poetics of Violence" 144-49.

been mistaken in terms of its understanding of the book, in particular its isolation of chapters 1-3 from the rest of the book, need not require a statement against the book's fragmentary nature; the often mentioned fragmentation, ambiguity, and seeming defying of both logic and the reader's expectations is at the very heart of Hosea. Hosea's 'unity' is in its use of paradoxical utterances and metaphors that do not cohere in a logical or systematic fashion. The seeming lack of organisation to chapters 4-14 is not accidental, and it is only the emphasis placed upon chapters 1-3 as being at some level biographical (with its accompanying efforts to organise and re-organise the material into a coherent whole) which has obscured the fact that chapters 1-3 are themselves sequentially illogical and make antithetical and even contradictory statements. To read Hosea carefully is to discover that the key feature which unifies the book is its alternating promises and imagery of punishment and forgiveness. This creates a tension and uncertainty within the book in regards to the positive or negative nature of the chief message being expressed.

The alternation of the imagery is part of the large-scale structure of the book. Chapter 1 begins with a negative judgement on the behaviour of Israel while chapter 14 brings the book to a close on a positive note with promises of growth, fertility and the turning away of Yhwh's anger (Hos 14:5-7). The early chapters play a special role within the book by introducing this stylistic feature in a variety of ways. By means of wordplay upon the names of Hosea's children (*paronomasia*), the text establishes a special and distinctive nuance to the negative adverb לֹא. The ambiguous use of images (rendering positive images as negatives, negatives as positives, or allowing a single image to carry both positive and

negative associations) also creates uncertainty as to the message of the oracles which employ these images. The early chapters of Hosea alert the reader to these stylistic characteristics and devices, introducing the book in its entirety as presenting a message filled with uncertainty and tension between threats of punishment and promises of reconciliation. This chapter will closely examine these devices found in the early chapters of Hosea, particularly chapters 1-2.

Previous scholarship as expressed in the standard academic commentaries has not dealt all that well with the issue of the structure of Hosea. The tremendous amount of time and energy directed towards the type of analyses critiqued in the first chapter has distracted attention from the issue of the present shape of the early chapters of Hosea and its influence upon what follows. The commentaries generally make some sort of reference to the general shape of the book as a whole, taking note of its beginning with the negative indictment of Israel under the banner of the charge כִּי־זָנֹה תִזְנֶה הָאָרֶץ and its ending with a positive section in chapter 14. Yet at a closer level there are many differences between the various commentaries, although they share many of the same basic understandings concerning the relation the early chapters of Hosea have with the following chapters.

Harper's influential ICC commentary divides the text, true to the methodology of his time, into original and 'secondary' sections. The original verses run throughout the entire book, beginning in the first chapter and ending with the first verse of the fourteenth.[4] There

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[4] Harper, *Hosea* [ICC] has a chart (clx) mapping out the original and secondary portions of the book.

is a further division in the book's structure within the verses Harper believes to have originated from Hosea himself:

> (1) 1^{2-9} 3^{1-4} is a story, briefly and simply told, of the prophet's own family experience, narrated in part to make known how he came to *see* the message which he was to deliver to his people.
>
> (2) $2^{6-7, 10-14, 18, 19}$ is the prophet's suggestion of the *meaning*, obtained in the light of his own experience, in its explanation of Israel's situation.
>
> (3) Discourses uttered from time to time, put together without chronological or logical relationship, –a group of thirteen, presenting, under varying circumstances, the double thought of *guilt and inevitable punishment* (4^1-4^4).[5]

Harper's division of Hosea's "family experiences" from the rest of the book has continued to enjoy the support of most commentators. Although his view on the lack of logic present in the book's structure in chapters 4-14 has met with some contrasting views in more recent commentaries, his statement that this portion of the book seems to be assembled without a discernible order or pattern represents the opinion of a large percentage of the book's readers throughout the years.[6] Most notably, Harper's commentary breaks up the order of the MT to set the first three chapters in an order which makes the most sense in terms of his analysis, a practice which later commentators shy away from doing in such an open manner.[7]

Hans W. Wolff distinguished three "transmission" units within the book; 1-3, 4-11, and 12-14 respectively.[8] Once again chapters 1-3 are set apart from the rest of the book, although Wolff's commentary attempts to find thematic and structural connections, both between the larger sections (i.e., 1-3; 4-11; 12-14) and within each smaller transmission unit.

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[5] ibid., clxiii.

[6] This division between chapters 1-3 and 4-14 did not originate with Harper. For an overview see Yee, *Composition and Tradition*, 1-25.

[7] That is to say that the same processes are still at work in the commentary, merely that the canonical chapter and verse divisions are not re-ordered to visually aid the exegete's argument.

[8] Wolff, *Dodekapropheton I* [BKAT 14/1], xxiii-xxvii; ET: [Herm], xxix-xxxii.

This effort is often difficult, according to Wolff, because of the manner in which the book has been redacted and transmitted. Chapters 4-11, for example, and the "peculiar way the sayings have been strung together" are "explicable only if these kerygmatic units present sketches of scenes which were written down soon after the prophet had delivered his message."[9] Wolff, unlike Harper, perceives a certain thematic structure and unity to the book as a whole, however confusing the organising principle might be in the case of smaller units within each of the three transmission units. He concludes that the "three large complexes of transmission are parallel to each other in that they each move from accusation to threat, and then to the proclamation of salvation."[10] This observation of Wolff's is, as will be discussed below, on the right track in terms of demonstrating one of the key elements to the structure of Hosea though, as discussed in the first chapter, his designation of the genre of chapters 1-3 as *memorabile* is rooted in an assumption about these chapters containing more elements of biography than this present study accepts as probable or necessary for the interpretation of the book of Hosea.

More recent commentaries have maintained this basic division and understanding of chapters 1-3 and 4-14. Andersen and Freedman, in the Anchor Bible volume on Hosea, describe these "unequal parts" as "quite distinct, though not so different as to constitute separate works of two prophets living decades or even a century apart."[11] Chapters 4-14 "show little superficial evidence of careful composition or organization" although there "are

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[9] ibid., xxv; ET: xxx.
[10] ibid., xxvi; ET: xxxi.
[11] Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea* [AB 24,] 57.

many thematic links between the parts, and some editorial supervision of the whole can be postulated."[12] The Anchor Bible commentary, despite its claim to be a 'conservative'[13] analysis of the book of Hosea, makes the same divisions within the text as previous commentaries. The emphasis on rhetorical criticism and the final form of the text is undermined by the authors' acknowledgement that much of the text is unintelligible. In fact, they urge caution in the analysis of passages which seem not to contain the structural and organisational unity which the presuppositions of a basically sound text and single person authorship would lead one to expect:

> Because of the many subtleties and intricacies in the text which are noted below, and which make it clear that the Book of Hosea is not a mere hodgepodge, extreme caution is advisable in dealing with materials where patterns are not discernible.[14]

Thus on the one hand, Andersen and Freedman attribute a unity to the book while fully acknowledging that the book can at times appear as nothing more than a "hodgepodge" of seemingly unrelated statements. This admission makes the emphasis on unity seem forced, despite the "many subtleties and intricacies" that they find in the text. Viewed against the background of the previous commentaries this claim is an important one, yet Andersen and Freedman are still wedded to many of the same presuppositions (such as the biographical origins of chapters 1-3) and to the perspective that the book is best viewed as two very different, uneven sections.

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[12] ibid., 58-9.
[13] ibid., 59: "As we turn to the question of the literary character of the work, we must consider two anterior issues: the unity of the work, and the integrity of the text. In both cases, our premise and point of departure are conservative, that the book is essentially the work of a single person, and that the text is basically sound."
[14] ibid., 66.

The most recent ICC commentary on the book of Hosea, by A. A. Macintosh, contains some minor differences from previous efforts. Whereas Wolff's method was form-critical and Andersen and Freedman made use of rhetorical analysis in conscious distinction from form-critical methods,[15] Macintosh has been influenced by recent interest in rabbinic exegesis, which he sees as a means of avoiding excessive use of comparative philology.[16]

> If heavy reliance upon the work of the medieval rabbinic commentators serves as a proper defence against arbitrary or subjective use of the methods of comparative philology, it has the added advantage that it often illuminates the traditions of interpretation upon which the renderings of the ancient versions are based.[17]

Despite this change, Macintosh makes much the same division in the book as the commentators cited above. He entitles chapters 1-3 'Hosea's Marriage', and treats 4-14 as a fragmentary collection of oracles from various times addressing a wide variety of circumstances.[18]

The commentaries discussed above all share the same basic view that Hosea 1-3 forms its own distinct literary unit, somewhat haphazardly placed in front of the rest of the book. Regardless of any differences regarding sub-divisions within either chapters 4-14 or 1-3 or variations in theories of redaction, the book's basic shape is seemingly unanimously confirmed by the manner in which commentators study it. One should not expect a

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[15] ibid., 71-3, "[T]he major thrust of critical investigation of Hosea during this century—form criticism—has proved disappointing, or at least has not yet yielded agreed results, as a comparison of current proposals soon shows" (71). Whether or not rhetorical criticism has succeeded where form criticism has failed is perhaps open to debate, at least if "agreed results" is the measure of success.
[16] Macintosh, *Hosea* [ICC], lvii-lviii.
[17] ibid., lix-lx.
[18] "Hosea's Marriage" ibid., [113-26]. Mays (*Hosea* [OTL]) has not been discussed, although he shares the common view that the book "falls into two easily recognized sections" and also sees disunity in chapters 4-14, as the section "lacks the clear plan of the first" (15).

commentary whose format and emphasis is on the book's historical setting to attempt an analysis with an eye to the book's literary unity, but it is a curiosity that some of the commentaries, most notably Andersen and Freedman's, make a concerted effort to analyse the text in its final state and yet nonetheless still continue to view it as comprised of two uneven sections between which connections are hard to find.

The recent movement in biblical studies, under the influence of literary criticism, towards approaching the text with less interest in the various hypothetical stages of redaction has also made its presence felt in Hosean studies. This approach has become fairly well established in dealing with biblical narrative, but it is fair to say that no area of biblical studies has been unaffected. Much of the recent work on Hosea can be classified with this approach to the biblical text, although Macintosh's commentary signifies that the traditional model of study is far from being abandoned.[19] Gerald Morris has recently published a study of Hosea as a poetic text in which he attempts to analyse the book in its entirety as a unified work.[20] In his book, Morris primarily analyses poetic devices, chiefly Hosea's uses of wordplay and repetition, as a means of setting forth the book as a poetic whole. From a poetical perspective, according to Morris, there is a marked unity to the book. Not a single

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[19] Obviously there are various types of literary analysis which make use of varying methods and approaches. Francis Landy's relatively recent work (*Hosea* [Readings]) contains insights on individual passages, but has very little to say about larger issues of structure. Macintosh, despite being aware of the sorts of objections that feminist readers have towards standard interpretations of Hosea, chooses not to include them in his commentary. See Sherwood's discussion of Macintosh's response, in the November 16th issue of *The Independent*, to a previous article published on Hosea which Macintosh criticised for overlooking Hosea's love for "his fickle wife" (*The Prostitute and the Prophet*, 256).

[20] Morris, *Prophecy, Poetry and Hosea*.

chapter is void of the poetic devices of varying types of wordplay, in particular puns and 'root-play,' and repetition. Morris states that it "is hard to imagine another book in which wordplay is such a pivotal device."[21] The prevalence of similar forms of wordplay and repetitions which run throughout the entire book (e.g., the use of the root שוב being juxtaposed with the root ישב[22]) leads Morris to criticise previous commentators for not perceiving the stylistic unity that is present in the book in its current form. He places the blame squarely on the shoulders of commentators' inability to correctly identify the genre of the book of Hosea, an inability which causes them to misread what is in front of them.

> Those critics who have found Hosea to be structurally incoherent are invariably applying to this poetic text the structural standards of rhetoric. Rhetoric, in order to persuade with clarity, requires coherence and logical transitions, standards which these same interpreters would not dream of imposing on a long lyric poem such as Whitman's 'Song of Myself' or the Bible's Song of Songs.[23]

For Morris the unity of Hosea is to be found in "other features, previously ignored as rhetorically irrelevant."[24] Chapters 1-3 are an integral part of the book as they serve to introduce many of the words and catch-phrases which will come to characterise later chapters, often by means of providing a lengthy list of the key words.

> These early chapters abound in lists. For instance, as described in some detail earlier, 1.7 includes a list of human means of salvation [root ישע, used twice in this verse]: bow, sword, war, horses and riders. The first three items on this list reappear in 2.20 and then separately

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several times in the main body of the book. The last two items, a formulaic word pair, disappear until 14.4, where 'horse' reappears, again in conjunction with the verb root שוב".[25]

The links which Morris finds are only visible, he says, if one accepts the premise that Hosea is first and foremost a poetic text. This classification of a prophetic book as poetic is not a new suggestion, but Morris claims that biblical scholars have misunderstood the implications of designating Hosea as a book of poetry by continuing to view it as rhetoric at the same time, a genre designation which he finds unlikely. He writes:

> Those who identify biblical prophecy as rhetoric and then add blithely that it is poetry, have not perhaps considered how very odd such a connection really is. In terms of purpose especially, the two types of communication stand utterly opposed to each other. Rhetoric is equipmental language: it exists for an external purpose. Rhetoric seeks to persuade an audience of a proposition or a course of action.[26]

The question of the genre of prophetic literature and its relationship to poetry is difficult to solve because of the many problems associated with applying terms like poetry or prose to the Bible.[27] That there has traditionally been an association between the concepts of poetic and prophetic inspiration is certain,[28] yet there is an equally strong tradition that attempts to dissociate prophetic writing from too easy an association with poetry.[29]

That being the case, there is much to speak against the rather sharp and absolute separation which Morris makes between poetry and rhetoric, not least of all the confusion

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[25] ibid., 111.
[26] ibid., 42.
[27] James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry*, 59-95. Also on 'genre' of prophecy cf. House, *The Unity of the Twelve*, 37-62.
[28] Robert Carroll, "Poets Not Prophets: A Response to 'Prophets through the Looking Glass'" *JSOT* 27/1983 [25-31] 25: "They were certainly poets, probably intellectuals, and possibly ideologues."
[29] Kugel, "Poets and Prophets" in *Poetry and Prophecy* (James L. Kugel (ed.); Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990) [1-25], 6-11.

over terminology in biblical and non-biblical literary theory.[30] There is also little need to repeat once more the now standard criticisms most literary analyses of the Bible make against previous scholarship, such as its obsession with hypothetical redactors and the exaggerated value it placed on the search for the *Urtext* or its oral forebears. Yet it is most notably the issue of unity which separates Hosea's readers from one another, including critics who are attempting a 'poetic' reading such as Morris and are not concerned with competing theories concerning various layers of redaction within the book.

Morris claims that the disunity most scholars find in the book is a result of misreading the book as rhetoric, citing many examples of running puns and *Leitworte* to support his designation of the book as poetry. While his examination of stylistic devices can only benefit readers, his definitions of both poetry and rhetoric are rather narrowly confined by his understanding of Aristotle's categories[31] and he appears not at all in tune with or even aware of what is normally the broader use of the term 'rhetorical' in biblical studies or in wider literary theory.[32]

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[30] Aichele, Burnett, et. al., *The Postmodern Bible* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), especially concerning the chapters on "Structuralist and Narratological Criticism" (70-118) and "Rhetorical Criticism" (149-86). They write, "poetics…most often appears as the preferred term in Hebrew Bible studies for what New Testament critics call narratology" (70).

[31] Even Aristotle writes of the commonality shared by poetry and rhetoric in matters such as concern for style (*Rh.*, III. I 3-4): "It is clear, therefore, that there is something of the sort in rhetoric as well as in poetry [δῆλον οὖν ὅτι καὶ περὶ τὴν ῥητορικὴν ἐστι τὸ τοιοῦτον ὥσπερ καὶ περὶ τὴν ποιητικήν] (John Henry Freese (ed., trans.), *The "Art" of Rhetoric* [LCL; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1947], 346-347).

[32] J.J. Glück, "Paronomasia in Biblical Literature" *Semitics* 1/1970 [50-78], comments "we shall use the word 'rhetoric' to denote literature intended mainly for oral delivery" (50, n. 2). This definition should serve as an indicator of the breadth of the term's use in biblical studies, although it should be mentioned (*contra* Morris) that the distinction of rhetoric from poetry is not absolute now, nor was it so in ancient times. See Brian Vickers (*In Defence of Rhetoric* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988], 59-62); Donald C. Bryant ("Uses of Rhetoric in Criticism" [1-14]) and O. G. Brockett ("Poetry as Instrument" [15-25]) in *Papers in Rhetoric and*

Despite all the confusion and debate cited above, one can still approach the book of Hosea in its entirety and find patterns in its structure and use of language. There is no denying the special status and unique character of chapters 1-3, but the nature and role of these chapters is best understood when viewed against the backdrop of the book as a whole. This is not to say that 'unity' of theme, message, or language is always a pre-requisite for a literary text, nor for literary analysis, and this is certainly not the case with the book of Hosea. To a certain extent the chief error which has been committed in the study of Hosea is not the interpretation of the text as fractured (Harper) nor as a unity (Morris), but rather mistakenly viewing these two options as unable to exist simultaneously within the text.[33] If Hosea has a unifying feature amongst all fourteen chapters, it is to be found in precisely such features as the book's continual thematic vacillation and the fluctuation between its promises of destruction and forgiveness as well as the accompanying positive or negative imagery.

Among modern commentators it was Wolff who first observed the alternation of divine punishment and divine forgiveness in Hosea and understood it to be an important component of the book's present structure. Wolff's pattern was slightly more uniform and progressive than the one this thesis will outline, yet his observation on the regularity of the

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Poetic (Donald C. Bryant (ed.); Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, Nov. 12 and 13, 1964) to see the depth of the debate which Morris chooses not to acknowledge with his "utterly opposed" (above note 21) definitions. For the most extensive discussion of the rise of rhetorical criticism in biblical studies see Roland Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis: An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric* (JSOTSup 256; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 9-42.

[33] This point has been taken up by analyses with a deconstructionist slant such as Sherwood's, who places much emphasis on the text's lack of unity. This thesis does not address all the same concerns (Sherwood's focus was almost solely on Hosea's marriage), but is rather interested in the entirety of Hosea and the devices which make the text a whole--among them being the lack of coherence and unity on which Sherwood focuses.

alternation between two extremes of positive and negative opens up a means of approaching this very basic dynamic within the text. On the surface, the book of Hosea begins with condemnation and ends with blessing. In much the same way, the naming of the children and their re-naming in 2:25 follows a similar line of progression from negative to positive, although it is a peculiar characteristic to have the 'positive' form be the result of the removal of a negation, previously added to a positive term, since this construction of positive and negative terminology does not allow either messages of doom or forgiveness to stand in isolation from each other.

This pattern of alternation, which is one of the keys to grasping the book as a whole, is established in part by the use of a very common key word, לֹא, in the first two chapters of the book. The pattern established in chapters 1-2 can be observed at work throughout the entire book and represents the application of a literary device which for lack of better terminology can be classified with what Luis Alonso Schökel terms antithesis and polarisation.[34] The stylistic use of לֹא is a result of its being intertwined with the naming of the children in chapter 1, while the very explicit removal of לֹא from the children's names in 2:25 also directs attention towards the negative adverb's role as both a descriptive compound element and as a common part of speech.

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[34] Luis Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics* (subsidia biblica 11; Rome: Pontifical Institute, 1988), 85-94. Alonso Schökel notes there is a continuum along which the division of certain phrases into examples of 'merismus', 'polarisation' and 'antithesis' is not entirely accurate.

The names given to Hosea's children in the first chapter have literal as well as

symbolic meanings, and by extending the varying uses and functions of their names one can

see a pattern of condemnation followed by reversal of the judgement into its positive

opposite. This pattern is in addition to the names' function as embodying a certain aspect

of a larger metaphor concerning Yhwh and Israel. "Jezreel" for example, brings to mind the

place-name 'the Valley of Jezreel', and as well as playing off of the name's literal

significance ("God sows"[35]) it also forms a pun with "Israel" (יִזְרְעֶאל / יִשְׂרָאֵל). לֹא

רֻחָמָה and לֹא עַמִּי ("Not pitied" and "Not my people") are further examples of a similar

type of wordplay based upon proper names that is a key stylistic device in these early

chapters of Hosea. Yet at the same time that the use of names is introduced as a device, the

names themselves draw attention to certain characteristics they have in common. Two of the

children's names are formed with a prefixed negative, drawing attention to both the negative

adverb itself and the positive element with which it is combined.

The first two appearances of the negative לֹא in the entire book are in the name Lo-

Ruhamah and in the explication of the name's significance. "Call her name Not Pitied, for

Not again [אֲרַחֵם] לֹא רֲחֵמָה כִּי לֹא אוֹסִיף עוֹד] shall I pity the house of Israel" (Hos

1:6). The naming of לֹא עַמִּי (Hos 1:8) continues the pattern established with Lo-Ruhamah:

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[35] שִׁבַּרְתִּי אֶת־קֶשֶׁת יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵמֶק יִזְרְעֶאל (Hos 1:5). The personal and place names are both re-defined in 2:25 when the name is "used with its literal meaning: 'God sows', indicating that God would henceforth bless Israel" L. H. Eybers "The Use of Proper Names as A Stylistic Device" *Semitics* 2/1971-2 [82-92] 83. In much the same way the "Valley of Trouble" (עֵמֶק עָכוֹר) in 2:17 will become an entrance of hope (תִּקְוָה לְפֶתַח).

"Call his name Not My People (לא עמי) for you are not my people (כי אתם לא עמי)."

Verse 1:9 makes use of two negated names, one of which is intended for the son Lo Ammi while the other is a play upon the divine name:

$$\text{ויאמר קרא שמו לא עמי ← כי אתם לא עמי}$$
$$\text{ואנכי לא־אהיה לכם :}$$
(Hos 1:9)

The phrase "Lo-Ehyeh" (לא־אהיה) is widely understood, because of its position in the text, as building upon the use of names previously encountered with the naming of Hosea's children. The literal meaning is "I shall not be," and most commentators have understood this use of אהיה as a divine name, with allusions to the story of the revelation of the divine name יהוה and its meaning to Moses, in particular its use in Exodus 3:14.[36] The *Maqqeph* in the MT of Hosea (indicating that the negation and the verb are to be read with one stressed syllable) taken with the preceding examples of Hosea's children strengthens the interpretation of Hosea 1:9 as a new, negated divine name: Lo-Ehyeh.[37] Of the six appearances of the negative לא in the first chapter of Hosea, three appear as portions of

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[36] "Thus you shall say to the Israelites: "'Ehyeh' has sent me to you'" (Exod 3:14). Wolff, *Dodekapropheton I* [BKAT 14/1], 23-4; ET: [Herm], 21-2; Mays, *Hosea* [OTL], 29-30; Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea* [AB 24], 197-9; Davies, *Hosea* [NCB], 59-60; Macintosh, *Hosea* [ICC], 26-9; Harold Fisch, "Hosea: A Poetics of Violence" 144-6; Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, 248-51. Thus Kuhnigk (*Nordwestsemitische Studien zum Hoseabuch* [Biblica et Orientalia 27; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1974]) argues on this basis against the critical apparatus of the BHS, writing "Die Annahme dieses Wortspiels ist auch ein Argument gegen die BHS (u.a.), die für *'ehyeh lakem* als probabiliter legendum *'elohêkem* notiert" (5).

[37] Wolff observes: "The last four words are comprehensible only when thus interpreted: 'I am not' (לא־אהיה; note the maqqeph) functions as a predicate noun" (24; ET: 21).

names while two of the remaining occurrences appear in the explanations of the names' significance and meaning.

As the reader who is familiar with the naming of Hosea's children well knows, the anticipated positive forms of the children's names do eventually appear in 2:25, foreshadowed by a preliminary re-naming in 2:3.[38] This structure establishes a pattern which is invoked in virtually every occurrence of the negative adverb לא in the first two chapters. For example, in Hosea 2:6 the phrase לא ארחם is exactly the phrase used to explain Lo Ruchamah's name in 1:6. "Name her *Lô Ruchamah*, for I will no longer pity them (*arechem*)." Yet in 2:6 the verse intertwines the explanation of Lo Ruhamah's name with other symbolic 'names' for the Israelites. The Israelites, represented symbolically by Hosea's children, Lo Ammi and Lo Ruhamah, alternate between being ילדי זנונים (1:2), בני ישראל (first appears in 2:1), בני אל־חי (2:1) and בני זנונים (2:6) within a short amount of space. This pattern creates the perception of a continual shifting between positive and negative, with one anticipating the other since it is impossible to invoke a negated term without mentioning the positive term at one and the same time.

Chapter 2 adds to this pattern by removal of the negation from the names of the children (Hos 2:3), immediately followed by two more uses of the negative: "Contend with

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[38] Fisch, "Hosea: A Poetics of Violence" also observes that names containing a negated term contain and thereby anticipate that term in its positive form, although he views the situation strictly dialectically; "But all these names contain their own antitheses. In fact they are themselves antitheses, names that exist only by virtue of that which is denied. We are haunted by our contraries" (145).

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your mother, contend: for she Not my wife (Lo-išštî / לא אשתי), and I Not her man (Lo-išah / לא אישה)" (Hos 2:4). The wording is similar to that found in the first chapter with Lo Ammi's name being formed in the same manner, with a negative attached to a suffixed noun:

Hos 1:9	Hos 2:4
כי אתם לא עמי	כי היא לא אשתי
ואנכי לא־אהיה לכם	ואנכי לא אישה

The similarities between these two verses in terms of both content and syntax supports the sense of a stylistic rather than accidental connection between the two. In 2:10 another similar sounding phrase occurs: והיא לא ידעה כי אנכי נתתי לה. All the same elements, including the same parts of speech that occurred in the phrases in 1:9 and 2:4 are present, with merely the positions of the *waw* and *kî* being reversed in 2:10. Once again the phrases are alluded to later in the chapter in their positive forms (2:18, 22), although in a less direct manner this time. 2:25 also contains a direct play upon the names of the children, with removal of the negation, in a manner similar to that of 2:3 and foreshadowed by its phrase לא־עמי אתם. The difference is that in 2:3 it is not Yhwh who is saying 'my people', but merely commanding it to the siblings (plural suffixed form כם-).

The appearance of the positive forms of Lo Ammi and Lo Ruhamah in 2:25 is, even for the inexperienced reader, not an unanticipated occurrence. The reason for that is not only 2:3 but the very similar pattern of phrases like 2:4's ואנכי לא אישה (a phrase which

receives its 'un-negation' in 2:18) and 2:10's וְהִיא לֹא יָדְעָה (turned into a positive in 2:22), both of which undergo reversals into their positive opposites through removal of the negation in an interwoven pattern. The pattern is, at this point in the book, well established. The negated name or descriptor is followed in each case by its positive counterpart at a later point. In the case of the alternation between תִּקְרְאִי אִישִׁי / לֹא אִשְׁתִּי (2:4) and (2:18) this pattern occurs within the series of negative / removal of negative initiated with the children's names in chapter 1 but not completed until the end of chapter 2. These patterns occur within the initial naming and re-naming of the children and, by following the same pattern, foreshadow it. The final re-naming of the children in 2:25 should occasion little surprise for the reader after seeing similar patterns at work with terms like 'my husband' and 'she is not my wife'.

If one lists the occurrences of לֹא in the first two chapters alone one finds that the use of negated names is closely followed by what appears to be the 'normal' use of the negative: לֹא־יִמַּד וְלֹא יִסָּפֵר (2:1, in a description of the number of לֹא־אֱלֹהַי,לֹא עַמִּי, (1:6), לֹא רֻחָמָה (1:8), כִּי־הִיא לֹא אִשְׁתִּי (2:1, to the בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל), לֹא־עַמִּי אַתֶּם (2:1, to the בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל), וְאֶת־בָּנֶיהָ לֹא אֲרַחֵם (2:6), לֹא תִמְצָא (2:8, of the woman searching for her way/paths), וְלֹא מָצָא and וְלֹא תַשִּׂיג אֹתָם (2:9, of the woman and her lovers), וְלֹא־תִקְרְאִי־לִי עוֹד בַּעְלִי (2:12),[39] וְאִישׁ לֹא־יַצִּילֶנָּה מִיָּדִי (2:10), and וְהִיא לֹא יָדְעָה

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[39] This phrase is especially important as it illustrates the use of polarisation and antithetical phrasing. It contains a negated term ("no snatcher from my hand"). Note the use of the root נצל (BDB 664b [√נצל]),

וְלֹא־יִזָּכְרוּ עוֹד בִּשְׁמָם (2:18, 19)--both in reference to the putting away of the names of the Baalim and replacing them with "*îsh*"), and lastly, the names of the children: וְרִחַמְתִּי

אֶת־לֹא רֻחָמָה and וְאָמַרְתִּי לְלֹא־עַמִּי עַמִּי־אַתָּה (2:25), with which the sequence began.

The line between the use of names and the more usual and expected sequence of the negative followed by a verb is a very thin one. In the case of the names encountered in chapter 1 both Lo Ruhamah and Lo-Ehyeh are, at the same time as being names, also examples of the rather ordinary syntactical sequence of לֹא followed by a verb.[40] Thus, it is not an exaggeration to read the occurrences of לֹא which follow immediately upon and during its use in the naming and re-naming in chapter 2 with a particular force and emphasis which would not be present in these phrases in a different context.

This pattern does not yet challenge the division of 1-3 from the rest of the book at this point, since the above examples are all derived from within chapters 1 and 2. The pattern

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which in the Hiphil often bears a positive meaning but also carries negative nuances. In 2:11 it is used to signal the stripping away of goods and produce from the wife in a threatening manner but in 2:12 the same root is used in reference to someone rescuing the woman. The Qal and Piel conjugations of the root bear more consistently negative meanings with an edge of violence, namely 'strip off', very appropriate as a sub-text to these two verses where the stripping off of the woman's goods precedes the uncovering of her nakedness, an action that was threatened back in 2:5. 2:5's use of פֶּן־אַפְשִׁיטֶנָּה עֲרֻמָּה [פשט] (BDB 832b-3a Hiphil 1) is far more violent than 2:12's use of אֲגַלֶּה אֶת־נַבְלֻתָהּ [גלה] Piel 1a) (used in the Piel of normal sexual relations, see BDB 162b-3a [גלה] Piel 1a), although the word 'arumah' (nakedness) in 2:5 is without the negative connotations of 2:12's *nablut* ("**immodesty, shamelessness, lewdness** Ho 2:12." [BDB 615a]). The use of a violent verb with a relatively modest noun, and of the normal verb for sexual relations with a noun of negative connotations, is a striking and colourful means of associating a positive element with a negative verb and vice versa. Also, the use of אִישׁ in this verse (meaning "no one, not a single person") is intriguing since the woman's referring to her husband/Yhwh as "*îshî*" has not yet occurred (she has merely referred to the husband/Yhwh as "Lo Ishi"); thus, she is, at this point, literally without an *îsh* to save her in this verse (meaning "no one, not a single person") and, of the normal verb for sexual relations with a noun be a play upon these different meanings of the word אִישׁ.

[40] GKC §152e (479).

does, however, challenge the attempts to read chapters 1-2 in an order other than the present one on the assumption that the present order is merely the result of the book's redactional history. Yet to further confirm the importance of this pattern of alternation between positive and negative and the importance of giving special attention to the use of the negative adverb, examples can easily be drawn from elsewhere in the book. Hosea 11:9 contains four occurrences of the negative לא. In this verse it is difficult not to see the negative as providing a link between the various elements of the verse, as well as with certain elements found elsewhere in earlier portions of the book. Below is 11:9 according to the verse divisions of the *BHS*:

לא אעשה חרון אפי   לא אשוב לשחת אפרים
כי אל אנכי ולא איש
בקרבך קדוש   ולא אבוא בעיר :

One can see from this layout that the negation forms an integral part of the verse.[41] In each bicolon the first word in the second stich is the negative adverb (with or without the prefixed-*waw*), and the word beginning the first stich of the first bicolon is also לא. The middle bicolon in particular brings to mind chapter two, although in this bicolon and throughout the entire verse the negative signifies something positive: "For 'El' am I, and 'Lo-īš'." The name of Yhwh is not just לא־אהיה (Hos 1:9) but also לא איש (Hos 2:4; 11:9). The fact that the consonants of לא and אל are the same adds to this fluctuation of positive and

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[41] Andersen and Freedman (*Hosea* AB 24) feel that this verse provides an instance of the asseverative use of לא (GKC §149 [471-3]), thus meaning "I will surely destroy" (589).

negative phrasing, particularly in this stanza in which 13 of the 18 words contain either an *aleph* or a *lamedh*, the two consonants which make up the respective words, and in which the second word in five of the six cola contains an initial *aleph*. The verse is more effective for these reasons, but its success is far more heavily dependent upon the reader's being attuned at this point in the book to this use of the negative, prepared by the use of the negative in the symbolic names and descriptions of the children and the wife (אשת זנונים, 1:2; לא אשתי, 2:4) in the early chapters of the book. The use of לא in a positive description first appears in 2:1 (in reference to the number of Israelites exceeding any possibility of being counted) and 2:18-19. In the latter verses it bears a positive sense because it is an exclusion of the word/name בעל from both the woman's mouth and memory.

The logical contradiction of Yhwh's referring to himself as being both an איש to Israel (2:18) and adamantly claiming to be לא איש (11:9) does not speak against the large-scale structure of the book being examined here. The alternation between positive and negative is an integral part of the book's structure, evidenced by the naming and re-naming of the children and the wife. The key is to be found in the numerous reversals of phrases, not in the consistency of their descriptions.[42] The naming and re-naming of Lo Ammi, for

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[42] As the first chapter made clear, the figure of the woman is not described in consistent descriptive language, a fact which makes the interpretation of her as anything more than a symbol extremely difficult. This is no less the case with the children, and it is worth noting that very few commentators have felt the need to attempt the same sort of biographical efforts with the children which they have expended on Gomer.

example, fluctuates back and forth between the negative name and its positive counterpart. In 1:8 Lo Ammi is named, whereas in 2:1-3 there is already a hint of the removal of the negation that fully comes about in 2:25: "and in the place where it was said to them, 'You are Lo Ammi' it shall be said to them, 'Sons of living El'" (2:1). In 2:6 the text joins together the explanation of the name Lo Ruhamah (לֹא אֲרַחֵם) with the phrase בְּנֵי זְנוּנִים and, despite Lo Ruhamah's absence from this verse, the name is brought to mind in a relatively direct manner by the use of the exact wording of its explanatory phrase.

In 2:25 the final removal of negation from Lo Ammi's name occurs: "I shall say to 'Lo Ammi', you are 'Ammi'." Many commentators have noticed a similar process at work with לֹא אֶהְיֶה, claiming the later appearances of אֶהְיֶה allude to the use of Ehyeh in 1:9.[43]

> A hint of positive resolution comes in [chapter 11] v. 4, where God says, 'I will be (אֶהְיֶה) to Israel like one who lifts a yoke'…In ch. 13, אֱהִי, a short form of אֶהְיֶה, appears four times: 'I will be like a lion (13.7), 'I will be your king' (13.7), 'Death, I will be your pestilence' and 'Sheol, I will be your sting' (both 13.14)…The divine name 'I will be who I will be' has been restored, but exactly what 'I will be' is still in doubt. Here, God promises that he will be punishment. In ch. 14, however, God promises 'I will be (אֶהְיֶה) like the dew to Israel.' The true divine name, taken away in 1.9, has been restored, and it is once again a name of blessing.[44]

This sort of connection between the early portions of the book and its later chapters, along with the recurring use of the negative as a stylistic device, should be taken as an indicator of greater unity in the book than has traditionally been found there by its commentators, at least in terms of devices employed.

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[43] Andersen and Freedman (*Hosea* [AB 24] 635) also note a possible pun on the interrogative אֵיךְ; Macintosh, *Hosea* [ICC], 571; Fisch, "Hosea: A Poetics of Violence" 145; Buss, *The Prophetic Word of Hosea*, 26.
[44] Morris, *Prophecy, Poetry and Hosea*, 128-9. BDB (13b) and GKC (§150 1 (475-6)) do not accept this interpretation of the form.

One of the reasons that interpreters have found it difficult to understand Hosea as a unified work is the regularity of this alternation. Difficulties arise when one reads with an eye towards unity of theme, message, or even thought as the features which hold a book like Hosea together. For this reason earlier interpreters have not hesitated to designate as secondary verses deemed to be too positive in their message to have originated with Hosea himself,[45] yet one must be more cautious when one takes note of the numerous alternations between positive and negative noted above.

> [A] passage which provides evidence that Hosea's judgmental sayings, radical though they are, do not exclude the possibility of Yahweh's intervention in salvation is ch. 1 with its symbolic names by which judgement is proclaimed against the nation. Once again hope is latent in the word of judgement…and לֹא רֻחָמָה and לֹא עַמִּי are constant reminders of a relationship now broken.[46]

The device of alternation between two opposites or extremes is not found solely in Hosea's application and removal of the negative adverb, although this use can serve to alert the reader to the device and is certainly a striking illustration of it. The alternation between positive and negative invocations of the same imagery could also be attributed to this device, rather than to a variety of editorial hands at work.[47] The large variety of imagery in prophetic literature in general, and in Hosea in particular, makes analysis difficult. Yet at the same time there are certain unique characteristics present in the use of certain images in Hosea. Chief among them is obviously the אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים of 1:2, who stands as a representation of the

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[45] e.g., on chapter 2 see Harper, *Hosea* [ICC], 226–48; cf. Yee, *Composition and Tradition*, 115.

[46] Grace I. Emmerson, *Hosea: An Israelite Prophet in Judean Perspective* (JSOTSup 28; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 15.

[47] Alonso Schökel (*A Manual of Hebrew Poetics*, 95–141) warns of the difficulty of dealing with the subject of images in poetry, although they may be said to be "the essence of poetry" (95).

land and its people. Yet other symbols in Hosea such as the wilderness, dew, and grapes are used in ambiguous and inconsistent manners.

For example, James L. Mays remarks that the destruction to cultivated vegetation and the hostility of the natural world in 2:14 experiences a reversal in 2:20: "The covenant [of 2:20] reverses the role of the beasts as the instrument of judgement..."[48] This change, according to Mays, demonstrates Yhwh's ability to control threats from the natural world, yet surely much more is going on than a display of Yhwh's ability to control the חית השדה. For example, in 2:5 the wilderness (מדבר) is a place for the woman to be set as a means of punishing and killing her, as is the forest (יער) in 2:14 (although for the latter it is the חית השדה who will do the actual killing). Yet in 2:16 the מדבר is a place where Yhwh will set the woman in order to "speak to her heart" before 'betrothing' her for himself (2:21-22) and a place to which he takes her after 'seducing' her. It is not merely an opposition between the cultivated and natural worlds,[49] nor a demonstration of Yhwh's control over nature, as the *midbar* is at almost the same time a place of betrothal and a place where the wife may be put to death by her husband. Nothing illustrates the book of Hosea's ability to render a symbol (and thus a passage) ambiguous better than the fact that one and the same

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[48] Mays, *Hosea* [OTL], 49.

[49] Shemaryahu Talmon, "The "Desert Motif" in the Bible and in Qumran Literature" *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations* (Alexander Altmann (ed.); Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1966) [31-63], writes: "*Midbar* describes agriculturally unexploited areas, mainly in the foothills of Palestine, which serve as the grazing land par excellence for the flocks, and the cattle of the semisedentary and the sedentary-agriculturist population. In this context the term often is paralleled by '*arabah*, and like it may be translated "steppe." The majority of occurrences of the word *midbar* in the Bible will come under this heading" (40).

place is both an image of death and an image of reconciliation within the space of a few verses.

On one level this section of chapter 2 belongs to the theme of Yhwh's control over nature and its fertility, a theme which runs throughout the entire book.[50] Yet the image of the *midbar* within chapter 2 is neither a positive nor a negative image solely, but moves between the two extremes, first the negative then the positive.[51] Subsequently, the *midbar* is a place which reminds Israel of its dependence upon Yhwh (Hos 13:5) and a place of happy meeting: "When I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert; when I saw your fathers, it was like seeing the early fruit on the fig tree." (Hos 9:10, NIV). The phrase "like grapes in the wilderness" (כענבים במדבר) is presumably intended in a positive sense, yet the ענבים used to make cakes in Hosea 3:1 are, if not themselves condemned as idolatrous, at the very least a component of a whole spectrum of religious practices which Hosea is condemning. If the ענבים serve as a positive image in this context, it also calls to mind that the ענבים are used in a decidedly negative sense elsewhere in the book.[52] The pairing of the raisins with the *midbar* is intriguing because of the *midbar*'s own somewhat unclear position. It is difficult to see how the *midbar* can be viewed as a symbol of betrothal

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[50] Hos 4:3; 6:3 (comparison to the גשם and the מלקוש, the rains which provide fertility) 8:7; 9:11-16; 14:5-9 (אני כברוש רענן ממני פריך נמצא).

[51] Fisch, "Hosea: A Poetics of Violence," writes: "It is a place of terror but also of assignation" (143).

[52] Chronologically the mention of the finding of the grapes occurs out of order, since it is during the wilderness period of Israel's history. The reading of it 'out of order' is almost a form of reverse foreshadowing, since the reader was introduced earlier on in the book to what Hosea sees as the misuse of the ענבים.

and seduction (Hos 2:16) without its role as a place of deprivation ('an arid land') and death ('I shall kill her with thirst'—Hos 2:5) coming to mind at one and the same time. For Yhwh to find ענבים, which in 3:1 were used to make cakes associated with illicit worship,[53] in a place that can be a symbol of either union or execution, is surely something of a mixed blessing. 13:5's אני ידעתיך במדבר plays on the use of the *midbar* as the place of union between Yhwh and Israel as in 2:16 (noting the use of the root ידע, cf. Hos 2:10, 22) while the latter portion of the verse (בארץ תלאבות) makes reference to the *midbar* as a place of drought and deprivation, similar to its role in 2:5. Yhwh is even able to provide for Israel in the midst of the desert, yet the desert is at one and the same time a "land of droughts"[54] and the place of Israel's meeting with Yhwh. This verse unites the two ways of viewing the concepts the *midbar* represents without any attempt to provide a synthesis of the two.

The language of Hosea 1–3, as discussed in the first chapter, is concerned with setting up an intense image with which to compare Israel's ways and deeds. This image does not

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[53] 'Illicit' from Hosea's point of view, of course. Nothing mentioned in chapter 3 is associated with that catch-all of Hosean studies: Canaanite religious practices. The ephod and teraphim, the מזבח, the מצבה, and the עגבים אשירה are all attested as Israelite elements of worship without any embarrassment. David, for example, distributes raisin-cakes (2 Sam 6:19) as part of the celebration surrounding the bringing of the ark to Jerusalem. Dwight R. Daniels (*Hosea and Salvation History: The Early Traditions of Israel in the Prophecy of Hosea* [BZAW 191; Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1990]) speaks thus: "The preceding investigation has clearly shown that Hosea saw the decline of his people in the Canaanization of Israel in both the religious and social spheres, with emphasis on the former." Daniels admits, however, that "Of course, Hosea himself does not speak of 'Canaanization'" (111). This lack of a clear reference in Hosea to "Canaanite religion" poses a difficulty for this interpretation. Niels Peter Lemche (*The Canaanites and Their Land: The Tradition of the Canaanites* [JSOTSup 110; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991]) writes, "it is only the modern scholar, and not Hosea's contemporaries, who knows about the idolatrous Canaanites" (136).
[54] BDB 520b [√תלאב]. The word is a *hapax legomenon*, although the interpretation of *HALAT* is much the same as BDB (*HALAT* 1599-1600, ET: 1736-7).

fade away, however, as it continues to lurk in the background throughout the rest of the book, needing only to be invoked from time to time. As was examined in the first chapter, the most striking use of znh-derived words in Hosea is in the first three chapters, particularly 1:2. Yet while most of the critical energies directed towards the image of the אשת זנונים have been concerned with either biographical interpretations of Hosea's marriage or with newer attempts to invert "the critical obsession with Hosea's Marriage"[55] there has been far less energy expended on viewing the use of znh terminology as part of a wider use of terminology and imagery which defies expectations and creates ambiguity and contradiction.

The root זנה in 1:2 is directed towards a description of Hosea's wife, or more precisely, to the woman whom he is commanded to marry. The point which has caused so much contention and critical excitement is the jarring nature of this union. Yhwh says, "Go and marry a promiscuous woman" and Hosea does just that, a point which the vast majority of critics have found difficult to accept.[56] The reason for the difficulty is simply that the verse defies the reader's expectations: the proper sequence is for him to marry a woman and for her then to become promiscuous. Many of the commentaries are dedicated to showing that this sequence is what is 'really' there in the text because the present sequence is difficult to explain.

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[55] Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, 55.

[56] Stephan Bitter, *Die Ehe des Propheten Hosea: Eine auslegungsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1975), 181-2 for a summary of pre-critical (pre-nineteenth century) views.

Yet the examination of the problems of interpreting the text in this manner leads one to find most of the proposals dubious and, if the observations above are correct, the use of other terms and images in Hosea are equally contrary to more general expectations of consistency and logic. The special role of *znh*, indeed the whole range of words dealing with sex and marriage, is to aid in preparing the reader for what follows, adding to the ambiguity created through the use of other images and the patterning of the children's names described above. In Hosea 2:4 the woman who stands as a symbol for Israel is refused the title of wife, although she is still called "your mother." She is stripped naked, hedged in[57] and paraded about naked, and then taken out to the desert to be killed.[58] Instead, there she is 'allured' and betrothed.[59]

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[57] Paul Kruger ("„I will hedge her way with thornbushes" (Hosea 2,8): another example of literary multiplicity?" *BZ* Jahrgang 43-Heft 1/1999 [92-9]) rightly observes that the language of this section of Hosea is "open-ended" (93) and that "to restrict the semantic potentiality to only one possibility does not do justice to the multivalency of meaning nuances of metaphorical language" (99). Yet Kruger does not follow his own advice when he writes of the actions of a "typical harlot" (94) and states that "the aim of the husband (Yahweh) is abundantly clear" (94). Part of this sequence seems not to be about restricting "the adulterous movements of his wife" (94), but rather about temporarily denying her very status as wife as discussed below.

[58] Renita J. Weems ("Gomer: Victim of Violence or Victim of Metaphor?" *Semeia* 47/1989 [87-104] 97) cites the right to kill an adulterous wife in Deut 22:22 in discussing this verse. This observation is interesting since in that instance, despite the denial that "she is not my wife and I am not her husband" the woman is being handled under a law which by its very invocation declares her married. There is also another interesting aside as the phrase בעלת־בעל makes use of the root בעל, another name which is denied to the woman in this chapter. Obviously the reader who follows Weems' interpretation never really believes or takes too seriously the statement "she is not my wife" (94), but rather about temporarily denying her very status as wife as discussed below. According to Buss (*The Prophetic Word of Hosea*) "Hos 2:4ff. is designed to elaborate the opposite of a claim upon the wife" (87).

[59] There has been much speculation concerning the possibility that Hosea preserves a view concerning the period in the wilderness following the Exodus that was viewed as an ideal time for the relationship between Yhwh and Israel. Daniels (*Hosea and Salvation History*) represents this view: "For Hosea this is the period *par excellence* of Israel's history to date…This period was one of harmony between Yahweh and Israel in which Yahweh cared and provided for his people…The Exodus-wilderness period is followed by the period of Canaanization…" (117-8). Again, generally understanding the importance of ambiguity to Hosea, states that it "is not that the nomadic life of the desert is glorified by Hosea. The desert represents a Sheol in which the creative activity of Yahweh sets up the incipient nation. Israel is to be led again into the desert — either outside of Palestine or within it as a wasted land — in order to be *re-created in that state of disorder*" (The Prophetic

The order of the terms 'allure' and 'betroth' is an odd one if one is merely to read the text in its present order in hopes of a logical, coherent sequence. Hosea 2:16 states: "Therefore[60] I am 'alluring' her, and I shall take her to the *midbar* and I shall speak to her heart." The word 'allure' is the piel of the verb פתה which means 'to persuade' but also 'to seduce'.[61] The chief parallel for the meaning 'seduce' and 'entice' is Exodus 22:15:

וכי־יפתה איש בתולה אשר לא־ארשה ושכב עמה מהר ימהרנה לו לאשה:

(Exod 22:15)

The verse is a specific case instance of a maiden (בתולה) who is 'deceived' (יפתה) by a man. The actual point of this phrase is the deceitfulness of the action and not the fact that its object is a virgin, since the act of copulation (ושכב עמה -- 'and if he lies with her') occurs immediately after the enticement and is a separate act than that of פתה. The key point is the fact that she is 'not betrothed' (לא־ארשה), which means he may still 'pay the bride-price'[62] and marry (Exod 22:16 gives the father the right to refuse the marriage but the bride-price must still be paid). The root ארש is used to indicate the act of betrothal, which means the paying of the bride-price and thus the establishment of the man's right to

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Word of Hosea, 132, italics mine).

[60] The לכן הנה in the MT is troublesome in terms of the logical sequence that would produce a לכן. The הנה is here, as is most often the case, better left untranslated, rather than to use 'behold' or some similar phrasing (the French *voici* or *voilà* are better approximations).

[61] BDB 834b Piel 1.

[62] BDB 555b [√ מהר II].

possession of the woman.[63] Yet in the sequence in Hosea 2 the verb is not used until 2:21-2, three verses after 'my husband' makes its appearance in 2:18.

From a logical perspective, the sequence of events is inverted. First the woman is denied the status of wife (Hos 2:4), although she is then paraded before her 'lovers' (2:12) and threatened with the punishment of death. These are not the actions one inflicts upon one who is not one's wife. Yet to be followed by the allurement, then the reinstatement of the title 'husband' before the act of 'betrothal' has the normal sequence of events all wrong. Particularly since it all begins with a call to the children to aid in the denial of the woman's status as wife, so that she is acknowledged as mother long before betrothal! Small wonder that attempts to relate chapter 2 to some sort of description of Hosea's domestic reality have been less than successful. While purely metaphorical language does not need to neatly arrange its components, the complete reversal of the logical order of events, however metaphorical the language, is a striking device when viewed against the background of the text's careful balancing of negative symbols and descriptions with their positive counterparts outlined above.[64]

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[63] BDB 76-7 [√שׂרא]; DCH Vol I, 399a. In 2 Sam 3:14 David demands Michal, saying he 'betrothed' her with a hundred Philistine foreskins.

[64] Once again, the 'over-reading' of the language in this chapter can lead one astray. Daniels (Hosea and Salvation History) speculates on the use of שׂרא as to the question of how the bride's father in this instance receives the מהר. "Once the gift had been received, the girl or woman became the legal wife of the groom (Deut. 22:23-24) even though the marriage was not yet physically consummated (Deut. 20:7; 28:30). But who could be conceived of as Israel's father?" (102). cf. David J. A. Clines, "Hosea 2: Structure and Interpretation" On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1967-1998 Volume I (JSOTSup 292; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 293-313, who writes: "The allegory is necessarily defective at this point" (308). Daniels provides an example of reading too much into the metaphor of betrothal; to try to find out who the proud parents would be in a marriage of Yhwh and Israel is certainly to misunderstand the entire chapter on a very basic level.

The result is that neither the condemnations nor promises of salvation are clear and unambiguous. By occasionally couching forgiveness in negative terms, by removal of a negation from a positive, or by the use of images that call to mind both positive and negative associations, the 'message' that Hosea gives is not one which lends itself to easy classification as either one of judgement or forgiveness. There is always some element of the one in the other, and even the very positive ending of the book recalls in its last line that the wicked stumble (יכשל)", cf. Hos 4:5; 7:5) if they are not watchful of their ways and deeds. Even in the last lines of the book of Hosea there is no certainty given to the messages of forgiveness, since the צדיקים are defined by contrast to the פשעים.[65] The paradoxes of Hosea lie at every level, down to the very oddity of Yhwh's proving himself to be a provider by not providing, since Ephraim / Israel's fruitfulness only increases his distance. As Buss observes, "in Hosea, culture and success as such ---- even as a gift of God ---- is paradoxically a problem."[66]

Martin Buss closes his book on Hosea by commenting on the book's ability to unite its message through its use of negation:

> Hosea's prophetic word points to a reconciliation which incorporates, but goes beyond, a consciousness of personal reality with a sense of responsibility and alienation. In dialectical terminology, it is a negation of the negation. It does not ignore a condition of tension, but having pictured reality in the blackest terms possible, it goes on to announce a victory beyond.[67]

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[65] cf. 7:13 and 8:1 for פשע.
[66] Buss, *The Prophetic Word of Hosea*, 132.
[67] ibid., 140.

There is no way to correctly sum up the 'message' or 'meaning' of the book of Hosea. The book does not lend itself easily to a summary. Although its structure is one of movement from judgement and desolation towards reconciliation and renewal, the very devices by which it displays this movement shows it to be a relational one.[68] The removal of the negative from the children's names and the turning of negative images into positives does not create a larger distance between the extremes of the messages, but rather shows one to be dependent upon the other. The negatives and the positives within Hosea each bear the mark of one another and draw their very power from that relationship. Each negative in Hosea 1-3 stands in contrast to its positive counterpart yet clings to it at the same time. Lo Ruhamah's transformation into Ruhamah would be far less striking were she to start out as Ruhamah, or were her name to have become something other than Ruhamah in her re-naming. In the same fashion, Hosea's final verses bring the book to a close on a note of promise, all the while invoking all the preceding images of judgement against those who 'stumble' (כשׁל). The uses of antithesis and contrast discussed above are, while mainly directed towards the early chapters, concerned with the book of Hosea as a whole. The next chapter will discuss some examples from the latter portion of the book demonstrating these same characteristics.

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[68] Eschatological studies would invoke the relevant principle of *Urzeit wird Endzeit*, wherein beginnings and endings, salvation and destruction become inextricably intertwined.

In the previous chapter the vacillation between threat of judgement and promise of forgiveness within the first three chapters of the book of Hosea was explored. Chapters 4–14 manifest a similar multiplicity of meanings, and create a similar ambiguity with regards to a final decision regarding the positive or negative interpretation of Hosea's oracles. The ambiguity is especially clear in the use of the imagery of Egypt, the Exodus, and the ties of both these images to the image of the *midbar*. This ambiguity is also present in the figure of Ephraim in chapter 5, an ambiguity shared with the lexically and structurally similar figure of the woman in chapter 2. Additional examples of this ambiguity include: the representation of the 'prophets,' the image of the טל (*tal*- "dew"), and the use of the root שוב (*šûb*- 'turn back', 'return'), a central term in Hosea. The impact of the ambiguity central to chapters 1–3, and its effect upon the manner in which the latter part of the book is read and interpreted, will be examined through these examples.

A key element of this ambiguity is its ability to make available the opportunity for the reader to question the tone and message of an oracle or a passage. "Läßt die Unbedingtheit und Radikalität solcher Ankündigungen noch Raum für einen Ruf zur Umkehr?"[1] This question from the article on the root שוב in the *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament* illustrates the point that room *always* remains within the Hosean oracles for a call to repentance, regardless of how negative a tone the condemnations may initially have. The use of the same or similar words for both apostasy and repentance within the

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[1] *TWAT* VII 1140.

prophetic books² generally relies upon the availability of this 'room' for repentance. Hosea is no exception to this pattern, with the root שוב appearing nineteen times in the qal system.³ The concrete meaning of שוב accords well with the main point of contention in this thesis, inasmuch as it is used to indicate one or the other aspects of a shifting between positive and negative, with the very physicality of the word heightening this basic alternation. Herbert Marks notes that "return" "is also the burden of the composite narrative of Hosea's marriage in chapters 1-3."⁴ This observation on "the reciprocal relationship between Israel's 'return' and YHWH's 'turning'"⁵ catches the importance of the root's use but does not fully explore it.

In the case of the structure surrounding the wife's abandoning of her husband to go after her lovers (2:7), her apostasy is described as a physical motion away from Yhwh. The physical return of the wife to her husband from her lovers (2:9), of course, serves in turn as a metaphor for Israel's repentance. The placement of this metaphor within the structure of the naming and re-naming of the children allows the physicality of the metaphor of the wife's

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² Often described as physical actions like 'going away' and 'turning' (e.g., from שוב alone: משובה, תשובה, שובה). Also, רדף (2:9), פדה (4:14), הלך (5:6—of Yhwh's withdrawal), הלך אחרי (5:11), and so on. Buss (*The Prophetic Word of Hosea*) labels the language of 'going after' "typically levitic-deuteronomic" (102).
³ *TWAT* VII, 1129: According to *TWAT* the qal of שוב appears some 206 times in the prophetic books alone, and the use in Hosea can be designated a '*Leitwort*'. Only the much longer books of Ezekiel (37), Isaiah (32) and Jeremiah (78) have more occurrences.
⁴ Herbert Marks, "The Twelve Prophets" in *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Alter and Kermode (eds.); Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1987), 207-233, 213.
⁵ ibid.

movements to associate a sense of vacillation from negative to positive. This, in turn, is associated with a physical metaphor of a similar motion from positive to negative and back (the wife goes from her husband who lavished gifts on her, pursues her lovers, is subsequently punished and returns).[6] The theme of ambiguity is introduced and maintained by ambiguous imagery (as outlined above with the varied use of positive and negative shading to images such as the *midbar*) and by the wife's movements.

Hosea's use of 'reversal' in imagery has been remarked upon by previous scholars in varying ways,[7] and is in part a result of the use of the poetic device of antithesis with its necessary corresponding use of binary terminology. Yet in Hosea the urgency and physicality of the shifting and its use of negation and 'un-negation' gives an undertone to both the negative and positive oracles of the book. The positive, because it is defined by its relationship to the negative (and conversely the negative to the positive), bears a reference to its own opposite as a sub-text within individual oracles. This situation is explicit in chapters 1-2 with the extended metaphors involving the wife and the children, and can be

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[6] Clines ("Hosea 2: Structure and Interpretation") sees the larger structure of Hosea 2 as falling into the twin categories of 'belonging/not-belonging'. He notes the *spatial* terminology (305) which marks both Israel's going away and Yhwh's "restoration' of Israel.
[7] Mary Joan Winn Leith ("Verse and Reverse: The Transformation of the Woman, Israel, in Hosea 1-3" [95-108] *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*) sees the use of reversal in Hosea as part of a "dialogue" with mythology, which works consciously with certain mythic themes. She writes, "God is reversing time (itself an essential product of cosmogony) as well as the pattern of Israel's creation" (96). Michael DeRoche ("The Reversal of Creation in Hosea" *VT* 31/1981 [400-409]) sees a similar, conscious reversal in Hosea 4:1-3's use of motifs and elements drawn from the creation tradition preserved in Genesis 1. These analyses are based upon Hosea's use of historical/mythological traditions, but describe a similar motion within the text to the one here.

seen in the latter portion of the book with the use of a single image to denote either condemnation or reconciliation. The structure is, however, present in instances in the book's latter portion in addition to the images already discussed.

To take an example of the continuing effects of the themes and their structures introduced in the early chapters, Hosea 5:11-13 contains a description of Ephraim's movement away from Yhwh towards Assyria (וילך אפרים אל־אשור) and utilises certain elements of the sequence involving the wife's activity described above. This movement is based upon a desire for healing, something which Assyria will not be able to do (5:13), because it is Yhwh who has struck and wounded Ephraim in order to demonstrate his power. The wording is emphatic:

אני אני אטרף ואלך אשא ואין מציל :

(Hos 5:14)

The twice repeated "I" has an urgent feel: "But it is I, I who shall rip and raise up without a rescuer!"[8] Ephraim realises his mistake because of Yhwh's violent action, and makes the decision to return to him (6:1). This short sequence brings to mind the figures and actions of the wife / Israel, and husband / Yhwh in chapter 2, as in both cases the abandonment of Yhwh to go after something or someone else is only realised to be a mistake after Yhwh strikes a blow as a demonstration of his power. In this instance, the wife does not seek her

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[8] Once again, the use of a root [נצל] encountered earlier in 2:11's והצלתי צמרי ופשתי and 2:12's מידי and ואיש לא־יצילנה should be noted. Also Buss (*The Prophetic Word of Hosea*) 85 and Ps 50:22 for a similar phrase to 5:14.

lovers, rather Ephraim seeks the aid of the king of a powerful kingdom.[9] Yet after being chastised Ephraim decides to return, using language very similar to that of the wife when, after being stripped of all her goods, she decides that her original situation with her husband was better after all. Phrases such as *hlk* in combination with *šûb* are used in both instances, particularly in the phrases indicating a change of heart on the part of Ephraim and the woman:

<div dir="rtl">

אלכה ואשובה אל־אישי הראשון
(Hos 2:9)

אלך אשובה אל־מקומי
(Hos 5:15)

לכו ונשובה אל־יהוה
(Hos 6:1)

</div>

In each instance the same sequence of abandonment, punishment and return is present. This similarity is thus one of structure in addition to the lexical similarities. In both instances there is a back and forth motion that, though metaphorical, manifests itself in the use of physical language. The use of language describing either abandoning or turning away, juxtaposed with the language of return (most noticeably in the appearances of the root שוב) is an example of both the centrality of ambiguity to the book, and the means by which it is communicated. In the sequence above the same verb which indicates repentance also indicates Yhwh's act of withdrawing from Israel (with the result of making Israel seek Yhwh

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[9] Buss writes, "One of the indications of the power of a deity is that it both smites and heals, kills and brings to life" (111).

more energetically[10]). This adds a destabilising undercurrent to the use of שוב as a signal

of the decision to repent. Its occurrence in conjunction with the root *hlk* intensifies the sense

of vacillation and hovering between repentance and apostasy. "Come, let us return to

Yhwh!" (5:15) is an interjection which draws heavily upon the use of the physical language

of positive and negative states of Israel's relationship with Yhwh.[11] The use of the words

"going" and "returning" in the descriptions of Israel's rebellion or repentance provides a

visual image of back-and-forth movement which corresponds to the text's presentation of the

uncertainty of Israel's relationship to Yhwh.

The two aspects of negative and positive in the literary structure of Hosea's language

are apparent in the continued appearance of paired vocabulary items drawn from the actions

viewed as positive (e.g., 'returning to Yhwh', 'knowing Yhwh') and negative (e.g., מאם,

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[10] There is also an additional structural comparison to be drawn with chapter 2 with regards to the theme of seeking and not finding (e.g., the wife pursuing her lovers), a theme which adds an urgency and desperation to the act of return to Yhwh. Precisely this theme of urgently seeking one's lover('s) has been the focus of comparisons between the wife in chapter 2 and the figure of the woman in the Song of Songs (cf. Cant 5:5-8; Fokkelien Van Dijk-Hemmes, "The Imagination of Power and the Power of Imagination" 80-81).

[11] GKC §120g (396-387): "The imperatives קוּם, לְכָה, and c.) and לְכִי, לְכוּ, לְכִי, לֵךְ, and c.) are exceedingly common with the sense of interjections, before verbs which express a movement or other action." Thus the use of *hlk* commonly occurring in hendiadys with another verb, both as a flavouring imperative/particle (cf., the use of "come on," "go on" in English or the virtually meaningless "là" of Quebecois French) and as an infinitive. Yet it is also noteworthy that, in addition to its common use in verbal hendiadys, *hlk* can indicate both apostasy or faithfulness (cf., Jer 2:2, 5-6, 8, 17, 23, 25 and the comments of Michael DeRoche, "Jeremiah 2:2-3 and Israel's Love for God during the Wilderness Wanderings" *CBQ* 45/1983 [364-376] 368). Moreover, it is always a word with very physical imagery associated with it.

(שבח).[12] Many of these words form a distinct pair, with 'knowledge of Yhwh / God'

(דעת אלהים) being the positive state corresponding to the negative actions or states of

'forgetting' or 'not knowing' (Hos 2:10, 15). Yet in the book of Hosea a large number of

these lexical items contain ambiguous connotations. For Buss the continued use of בקש

('seek', corresponding to מצא, 'find') "appears to be a technical term for repentance in the

situation of lament. Seeking, however, also represents the wider range of every turning

toward God."[13] Yet 'seeking' is not in and of itself a word that carries entirely positive

connotations in Hosea, despite representing a "turning towards God."

ורדפה את־מאהביה ולא־תשיג אתם
ובקשתם ולא תמצא ואמרה אלכה
ואשובה אל־אישי הראשון כי טוב לי אז מעתה:
(Hos 2:9)

The activity of the woman in pursuing (but not overtaking) her lovers, and then seeking (but

not finding) them, is a prelude to her decision to return to her first husband.[14] In 5:15 Yhwh

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[12] Once again, Buss (*The Prophetic Word of Hosea*) lists negative, positive and ambiguous terms that occur in the book of Hosea (81-113).

[13] Buss, *The Prophetic Word of Hosea*, 106.

[14] Hos 10:9 repeats the phrase לא־תשיגם (with the object suffix) found in 2:9, recalling the wife's pursuit of her lovers. The NRSV renders the verse, "Since the days of Gibeah you have sinned, O Israel; there they have continued. Shall not war overtake them in Gibeah?" The MT reads quite differently. Among other things this verse is not a question in the MT. The apparatus of the *BHS* suggests emending with a ה-interrogative yet cites no manuscript support. The LXX reads "there they stood" [ἐκεῖ ἔστησαν] where the MT reads exactly the same phrase (שם עמדו), presumably rendered by 'there they have continued' (the NRSV is also missing the "sons of injustice," also attested by the LXX). The verse is difficult, although it is likely that its main function is to exploit the wordplay upon גבעה (10:8, 9). The statement defies easy explanation either way, but the *lectio difficilior* would be the current, cryptic state of the MT.

states that "they seek my presence" (וּבִקְשׁוּ פָנָי), but Yhwh has withdrawn from them. The

verb בקשׁ, first used with the woman's lovers as an object and later used with Yhwh as an

object, would seem to gain a positive nuance in the latter instance. Yet in 5:6 there is a

motion towards "seeking Yhwh but not finding him, for he had withdrawn." In 7:9 the lack

of seeking is classified alongside the act of not returning:

וְעָנָה גְאוֹן־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּפָנָיו
וְלֹא־שָׁבוּ אֶל־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם וְלֹא בִקְשֻׁהוּ בְּכָל־זֹאת׃
(Hos 7:9)

Expanding the examination of 'seeking' to include words with similar meanings such as

וְנִדְעָה נִרְדְּפָה לָדַעַת (cf. 2:9) one can see the same sort of polyvalence. In 6:3

אֶת־יְהוָה makes knowledge of Yhwh its object, on any reading of Hosea a goal which is of

primary importance,[15] yet it is only by way of sharp contrast to the woman's pursuit of her

lovers (2:9) and Ephraim's equally vain pursuit of the winds (12:2) that this expression gains

a positive nuance.

Hosea's references to 'prophets' (נְבִיאִ[ם]) follow similar patterns and share the same

characteristic ambiguous status. The prophets occasionally are the instruments of Yhwh

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[15] Knowledge of Yhwh is very important in Hosea. See וְיָדַעַתְּ אֶת־יְהוָה (2:22), וְהִיא לֹא יָדְעָה (2:10), לִי יִזְעָקוּ אֱלֹהַי יְדַעֲנוּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל (8:2), מִבְּלִי הַדָּעַת (4:6), וְנִרְדְּפָה לָדַעַת אֶת־יְהוָה (6:3), וְהוּא לֹא יָדַע (7:9), יָדַע יִשְׂרָאֵל (8:4), הַשִּׁירוּ וְלֹא יִדְעוּ (9:7—reading with the MT's admittedly disordered state, see below) (13:5). אֲנִי יְדַעְתִּיךָ בַמִּדְבָּר (13:4), וֵאלֹהִים זוּלָתִי לֹא תֵדָע (11:3), וְלֹא יָדְעוּ כִּי רְפָאתִים (13:5). These instances are not exhaustive and do not address synonyms at all, but merely demonstrate the centrality of the concept.

(Hos 6:5; 12:11), the recipients of visions sent by Yhwh (12:11), and the means by which Yhwh saves his people (12:14). The prophets are instruments of destruction in 6:5 and 12:11 through which Yhwh will act out his punishment while also serving to 'guard' (12:14) and 'watch' (9:8). These are explicable as expressions of Yhwh's wrath or forgiveness, yet in each instance the 'prophet' is represented as being a serious figure with whom Yhwh communicates. What then is to be made of the phrase in 9:7, "The prophet is a fool, the man of the spirit is mad"? The NRSV and NIV emend the MT, which reads "Israel will know (or 'let Israel know')" immediately before the phrase אויל הנביא משנע איש הרוח in order to make it more intelligible and consistent.[16]

> The days of punishment are coming, the days of reckoning are at hand. Let Israel know this. Because your sins are so many and your hostility so great, the prophet is considered a fool, the inspired man a maniac. (NIV)

> The days of punishment have come, the days of recompense have come; Israel cries, "The prophet is a fool, the man of the spirit is mad!" Because of your great iniquity, your hostility is great. (NRSV)

באו ימי הפקדה באו ימי השלם ידעו ישראל
אויל הנביא משנע איש הרוח
על רב עונך ורבה משטמה:

Gerald Morris claims that this phrase demonstrates Hosea viewing his own work "as a work of ποίησις rather than as a work of προφήσις"[17] while the English versions seem content

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[16] The LXX [ἥκασιν αἱ ἡμέραι τῆς ἐκδικήσεως, ἥκασιν αἱ ἡμέραι τῆς ἀνταποδόσεώς σου, καὶ κακωθήσεται Ισραηλ ὥσπερ ὁ προφήτης ὁ παρεξεστηκώς, ἄνθρωπος ὁ πνευματοφόρος· ὑπὸ τοῦ πλήθους τῶν ἀδικιῶν σου ἐπληθύνθη μανία σου.] testifies to a marginally different reading, if only in terms of the pointing.

[17] Morris, *Prophecy, Poetry and Hosea*, 146.

to sort out the meaning through re-ordering the verse into a coherent, intelligible phrase.[18] Morris' interpretation rests upon the idea that most Hosean references to prophets are "castigations of unworthy servants of God" although this verse may be an ironically "oblique self-reference to his work as a poet."[19] Yet, as discussed above, the "prophets" are mentioned elsewhere in Hosea as people to whom Yhwh speaks and gives visions (12:11), and through whom he led Israel out of Egypt (12:14). These references are hardly 'castigations.' 12:11 in particular stresses that it is Yhwh who is the author of the prophets' visions, thus emphasising the authenticity of those visions. The MT of 9:7 as it currently stands makes it extremely difficult to reconcile the two views of the prophet in the book of Hosea.[20] Is the prophet a madman or does Yhwh speak to him? Can it be both at the same time? As far as this thesis is concerned there is no doubt that the figure of 'the prophet' within Hosea will prove to be as equally unstable and multi-faceted a symbol as the other ones examined here. Hosea does not say that 'some say' the prophet is a fool, although we really know he is not and that Yhwh speaks to him. Rather, the prophet communes with Yhwh *and* the prophet is a fool. This verse accepts both sides of what would normally be

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[18] "The days of punishment are come, the days of vengeance are come when Israel shall be humbled. Then the prophet shall be made a fool and the inspired seer a madman by your great guilt." (NEB). For an explanation of this interpretation (עַל as "kausale Präposition") see Kuhnig, *Nordwestsemitische Studien zum Hoseabuch*, 116.

[19] Morris, *Prophecy, Poetry and Hosea*, 146.

[20] Certain other of the 'writing prophets' do not speak highly of the נְבִיאִים as a group. The encounter between Amos and Amaziah (Amos 7:10-16) where Amos denies being a נָבִיא comes to mind in particular. Yet Hosea is a different situation inasmuch as the book speaks positively of the actions of the prophets, in particular the (nameless) prophet through whom Israel was led out of Egypt.

contradictory statements, in part because the book is portraying a relationship and all the tensions and contradictions which arise from it. Hosea does not allow the image of 'the prophet' to be merely subservient to an image of an exodus in the nation's past, nor solely an individual who is unusual and therefore gains the label of a fool from his audience.[21] There is no mediation or attempted dialogue between the two presentations, both are presented as appropriate to the figure of 'the prophet'. It should occasion no surprise that Hosea allows us to see a figure who, despite his relationship to Yhwh, represents a suspect and unstable personality. Yhwh may indeed speak to the prophet, but far from stabilising him as a religious authority he becomes an unreliable figure who is 'mad' and 'a fool'.

The word טל is also used as both a positive and negative image (Hos 6:4; 13:3; 14:6). In the one instance it serves as the description of the fickle nature of Israel's attachment to Yhwh. "Your *hesed* (חֶסֶד) is like a morning-cloud, and as the *tal* which departs in the early morning" (Hos 6:4). The second occurrence of the word bears a strong resemblance to 6:4, with the entire expression כַּעֲנַן־בֹּקֶר וְכַטַּל מַשְׁכִּים הֹלֵךְ repeated word for word in 13:3. In both cases, the image of dew is used because of its short-lived, transitory nature and seemingly without any awareness of the blessing which it might

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[21] As Francis Landy notes (*Hosea* [Readings]) the interpretations of most critics who see this verse "as a dialogue between the prophet and his audience" do so "without any real justification" (115). Their reason for doing so may be motivated by a desire to make Hosean references to 'prophets' somewhat more consistent.

potentially bring in the form of fertility to vegetative life.[22] The concept of the dew as a cause of fertility is completely absent from its use in 13:3, as the comparisons to chaff (מץ) and smoke in the next two cola of the verse illustrate. "Chaff" is only peripherally associated with fertility and the productivity of the field, as it is one of the final components separated in the threshing process from the grain itself.[23] To be both the dew and the chaff is to be transitory and ephemeral, and the last destination of chaff is its separation from the grain, the most important component of the crop.

In a third instance ("I shall be as *tal* for Israel, he will sprout as the lily"--Hos 14:6) the טל is used as a comparison for Yhwh's giving of fertility to Israel by his presence (אהיה bringing to mind the allusions to the divine name Yhwh in 1:9[24]). This verse seems to be unaware of its rupturing of the use of טל as a negative descriptor. To be like the dew is not a statement of praise in 6:4 and 13:3, yet in 14:6 it becomes syntactically linked to the divine name אהיה. Whether or not the last occurrence is enough to overcome or change the

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[22] *TDOT* V [323-30], observes that "Behind nearly all the mentions of dew in the OT (some 30 in all) stands the conviction that the dew is a gift of Yahweh, just as in the religion of Ugarit it is a gift of Ba'al. Yahweh is the giver of fertility, and without dew there is no fertility. The dew is thus an expression of Yahweh's blessing, belonging as it were to the order of creation" (324).

[23] Oded Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 66, 68. The English expression "to separate the wheat from the chaff" demonstrates the same metaphorical use as many of the biblical uses of מץ, with the implicit assumption of the lack of utility to the chaff in comparison to the grain.

[24] cf. Exod 3:14; Hos 1:9 and the above discussion in Chapter 2 (49-50) and the sources cited there.

negative associations developed in the word's other appearances seems unlikely, but it does add a new positive component and dynamic to the image of the כל in the book as a whole.

As mentioned earlier, the word 'return' (שוב) is widely used in prophetic literature, especially in Hosea, to indicate the acts of repentance and 'turning'.[25] Hosea also uses it in reference to a threatened 'return to Egypt'. This threat is interesting because it links an image with multiple associations to a central term and concept of the book.[26] The references to 'Egypt' in Hosea are of as varied a nature as the other words and image discussed above. The wife in 2:17 will respond "as on the day she came out of Egypt" in marked contrast to her present unfaithfulness, implying that Israel 'responded' in a much more appropriate or preferable manner upon leaving Egypt than at present. Egypt is symbolic of the relationship between Yhwh and Israel (11:1: "Out of Egypt I called my son,"[27] and as cited above on the discussion of Hosea's references to prophets, "By a prophet Yhwh brought Israel up from Egypt, and by a prophet he was guarded" --12:14). Egypt is also a reminder to Israel of Yhwh's importance: "I am Yhwh your god, from the land of Egypt" (12:10; 13:4). Egypt also serves as a symbol of foreign threat and exile (7:16; 8:13), as it does throughout much

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[25] Marks, "The Twelve Prophets" 213.

[26] A large component of the vacillation present in the book of Hosea is on account of this bringing together of terms, images and allusions with multiple associations. The effect is one which allows an intertwining matrix to spread throughout the book between these references. Leith ("The Transformation of the Woman, Israel") describes the weaving together of the main themes as follows: "Hosea puts special emphasis on the thematically resonant triad of exodus, wilderness wandering, and possession of the promised land" (96).

[27] Naturally the placement of quotation marks (whether "Out of Egypt I called, 'My son!'" or as rendered above) is uncertain.

of the Bible.[28] Yet the symbol of Egypt carries a multiplicity of associations because it does not exist in isolation from a wider matrix of images with similar allusive qualities. The exodus from Egypt and the narrative of the subsequent wanderings in the wilderness are so interwoven and tied together in the present biblical text that, regardless of the history of such traditions, the text as it now stands can only refer to the motifs and images in all their good and bad connotations. Egypt is a positive symbol in part because it represents the beginning of Israel's time in the wilderness, a reference which cannot help but carry some ambivalence considering the many attitudes displayed towards this period in Israel's history.

The question of Hosea's possible knowledge of a tradition concerning an exodus from Egypt, as possibly reflected in the above references, has taken on a certain immediacy with renewed scholarly debate over the dating of the Pentateuch as well as the origins of ancient Israel. The interest is understandable since possible access to variant traditions may cast light upon the processes through which the Pentateuch has taken shape. The 'tradition' of an exodus from Egypt certainly seems to be present in the text of Hosea: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" (11:1, NIV), "By a prophet Yhwh brought up Israel from Egypt" (12:14). There has also been a linked interest in a tradition of the so-called "wilderness period" of Israel's history following its flight from Egypt. The

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[28] There is an ambivalence built into biblical references to Egypt. *TDOT* VIII, מצרים [519-30] states that "Ideologically, the OT associates Egypt primarily with the land of slavery…Egypt was also viewed as a rich, fruitful land where one could find refuge in times of drought and famine" (521).

period in the wilderness following the exodus from Egypt is obviously a key component in the present form of the Pentateuchal narrative, yet in studies of the prophetic literature there has emerged a theory of a rather distinct set of traditions concerning the 'wilderness period' alone which, it is argued, can be observed in the prophetic literature and which can be viewed apart from references to traditions of the Exodus.[29] In chapter 2 Hosea's references to the *midbar* were discussed in some detail, although without exploring all the wider issues associated with this image. One of the theories which have enjoyed some popularity, touched upon briefly above, is that the time in the wilderness was viewed as a time of love and devotion between Israel and Yhwh, a 'honeymoon' period which was put aside when Israel entered the land of Canaan and became forgetful of all that Yhwh had previously done:

> On the basis of Hos. 9:10-13 the boundary between the Mosaic period and the period of Canaanization can now be set definitely. It is marked by the episode with Baal-Peor in which Israel first fell to the enticements of the Baal cults. Here lies the germ of all subsequent apostasy, the point at which Canaanite practices first infected Israel. The passage also sheds a certain light on Hosea's conception of the wilderness period. It is a period characterized by Yahweh's joy and delight in Israel.[30]

> Hosea thus sees the Exodus and the wilderness wanderings as a single period. Whether this was a period of complete harmony between Yahweh and Israel is not the concern of the text. Rather the emphasis is upon Yahweh as the sole God of Israel in this period... Overwhelmed by the beauty of the land and the prosperity which flowed from it, Israel became prideful. He failed to internalize the underlying realities which together created and sustained his existence.[31]

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[29] See Shemaryahu Talmon, "The 'Desert Motif' in the Bible and in Qumran Literature" [31-63] in *Biblical Motifs* for an overview of the rise of this theory in scholarly circles. The isolation of the motif of the desert has led to theories of separate 'desert traditions' as distinct from Exodus traditions, including the subordinate theory of a 'finding' tradition as representing the start of Israel's original covenant with Yhwh, based upon passages such as Ezek 16.

[30] Daniels, *Hosea and Salvation History*, 59.

[31] ibid., 76.

The patriarchal period is followed by the Exodus-wilderness period (12:13-14 [12:13]; cf. 2:16-17 [14-15]). For Hosea this is the period *par excellence* of Israel's history to date. It began with the Exodus from Egypt under prophetic guidance in the person of Moses (11:1; 12:10, 14 [9, 13]) and continued until the episode with Baal-Peor (9:10). This period was one of harmony between Yahweh and Israel in which Yahweh cared and provided for his people and Israel came to know Yahweh (9:10; 13:4-5).[32]

This idealised view of the wilderness period has been seen in both Hosea (Hos 2:17) and Jeremiah (Jer 2:2-3). Speculation upon a tradition of Israel and Yhwh in the wilderness separate and distinct from the Exodus, as a place of harmony between Yhwh and Israel, has been widespread at times in scholarly circles.[33] Powerful critiques have been made against this view,[34] but for the purposes of this project the importance of the debate is that it draws attention to the mutability of these images and their multiple associations, both individually and collectively. Talmon, for example, claims that it is only through secondary associations that the *midbar* can be viewed as a positive motif.

> Whenever the "desert motif" seems to attain the status of a self-contained positive value, this attribution will be shown to result from variational developments of the initial themes, by way of the infusion into it of other, originally unrelated, themes. In essence the process may be described as a "mixing of motifs", which introduces new subsidiary elements into the "desert motif" with a concomitant mutation of its original significance.[35]

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[32] ibid., 117. Thus also Robinson, *Die Zwölf kleinen Propheten* (HAT 14; Tübingen: Mohr, 1964), 43.

[33] See Else Kragelund Holt, *Prophesying the Past: The Use of Israel's History in the Book of Hosea* (JSOTSup 194; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 116-139.

[34] Talmon, "The 'Desert Motif'" 34-39. Michael V. Fox, "Jeremiah 2:2 and the 'Desert Ideal'" *CBQ* 35/1973 [441-450] *passim*. For a view which balances the two sides in this debate, see DeRoche, "Jeremiah 2:2-3 and Israel's Love for God," who concludes, "Jeremiah knows of a tradition which describes Israel as faithfully following Yahweh through the desert of Sinai…This positive tradition, however, is not to be understood as a 'nomadic ideal.' Nowhere does Jeremiah describe the desert as an ideal habitat, or the nomadic existence as an ideal way of life. And unlike Hosea, Jeremiah never prophesies that Israel will or should return to the desert. For Jeremiah the ideal is the attitude that Israel showed Yahweh while wandering in the desert. Jeremiah wants Israel to return to following after her true husband" (375).

[35] Talmon, "The 'Desert Motif'" 37.

This present project does not, however, view the uses of certain images as an either/or choice between positive and negative, nor is it a necessity to view a positive value within uses of the desert motif as solely the result of subsidiary influences.[36] To continue with the examples of Egypt and the wilderness, both can be images bearing messages of hope or punishment.[37] Egypt brings to mind Yhwh's care for "his son" (11:1) and is a reminder of the days of Israel's 'youth' (2:17), yet Egypt is also a place of bondage and oppression under a foreign ruler. On one level all of these references within the book of Hosea may be to an exodus tradition and threats of its symbolic or literal reversal. They may also be references to certain political realities rooted within the eighth century context in which Hosea is assumed to have been active, such as the possibility of Hosea's contemporaries seeking refuge in Egypt from the threat of Assyrian invasion.[38]

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[36] Talmon distinguishes between a 'motif' and an image (39), claiming that a motif cannot be studied in isolation. The distinction is valid enough, although the question of whether or not the 'wilderness' ever functions solely as an image is problematic. It would be difficult to demonstrate the use of most of these images in anything approaching complete isolation from other elements.

[37] The arguments for a separate 'finding' tradition in the wilderness will not be examined here. The variant theories are too many to review properly, although it seems that this theory has arisen partly out of desire to explain the positive tone of the mentions of the wilderness wanderings, somewhat surprising in light of the traditions of grumbling and unrest among 'the people' preserved in the Pentateuch during their time in the wilderness (Num 11-14; 20). As Fox notes ("Jeremiah 2:2" 442) it is Yhwh's love and support of Israel and thus Israel's dependence upon Yhwh which is being stressed rather than the faithfulness of Israel.

[38] Any oracle's *Sitz im Leben* would be hard to pinpoint based on this criterion alone. As K. Lawson Younger, Jr. notes ("The Deportations of the Israelites" *JBL* 117/1998 [201-227]), there is debate "over which Assyrian king captured Samaria...Sargon II makes direct assertions that he deported the Israelites. What is often forgotten in the discussion is the fact that there had already been several significant deportations of Israelites by the Assyrians. These must also be included in any investigation into the deportations that ended the northern kingdom of Israel" (201). But as Younger points out, there may have been several severe deportations, possibly under three different kings (Tiglath-Pileser III, Shalmaneser V and Sargon II), a period

It is more likely, however, that if v 13 is a threat of exile (rather than a description of diplomatic traffic, our preferred interpretation), then it is a prophecy which turned out to have been wrong. Egypt was less prominent in the fate of the northern kingdom than Hosea's symmetrical statements suggest."

Yet there is no need to interpret references to Egypt in a solely literal, nor a purely symbolic manner. In a few of the appearances of the word 'Egypt' in the book of Hosea 'Assyria' is also mentioned in close proximity (8:9, 13; 9:3; 11:5; 12:2).[40] A close look at a verse like 9:3 ("Ephraim will return to Egypt, and in Assyria they will eat unclean food") or 11:5 ("Will they not return to Egypt and will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent?", NIV[41]) ought to promote caution in interpreting references to Egypt solely in terms of certain

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spanning over twenty years (roughly 745-722 BCE). To relate any references in Hosea to one in preference to another would require (in addition to the difficulty in dealing with specific passages in Hosea) firmer evidence of the number of deportations and their severity than now exists.

[39] Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea* [AB 24], 510-11. Wolff saw a symbolic meaning as being intertwined with a literal political reference to a return to Egypt (*Dodekapropheton 1* [BKAT 14/1], 199; ET: [Herm], 154-55). Macintosh cites with approval Wolff's use of both a literal, political meaning and an "explicit reversal of the theme of the exodus" (*Hosea* [ICC], 330-31, 342). As will be discussed below, there is another way to view Hosea's references to 'Egypt and Assyria' that need not require a 'wrong' prophecy.

[40] Kuhnigt notes that the formulaic pairing of 'Egypt and Assyria' occurs in Ugaritic as well (*Nordwestsemitische Studien zum Hoseabuch*, 94, 134).

[41] The pun (on *šûb*) between returning to Egypt and refusing to repent (return) is very pointed in the Hebrew: לֹא יָשׁוּב אֶל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְאַשּׁוּר הוּא מַלְכּוֹ כִּי מֵאֲנוּ לָשׁוּב. There is a textual difficulty in the Hebrew concerning the consonants לֹא in the MT. The LXX (and largely on this basis the *apparatus criticus* of the *BHS*) testifies to the homonymous pronoun לוֹ, although it reads it with preceding verse (LXX: καὶ ἐπέβλεψεν πρὸς αὐτὸν δυνήσομαι αὐτῷ. κατῴκησεν Εφραιμ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ). Kuhnigt challenges the view that the MT is a mistake, citing Hosea's use of "doppeldeutig" words and expressions, particularly the use of *šûb* in this verse. *Nordwestsemitische Studien zum Hoseabuch* 134: "Ob da nicht auch die dem *yašûb* vorangestellte Partikel *lʾ* von Hosea bewußt mit einem ironiegeladenen Anklang an die Negation *lōʾ* gesprochen wurde? Das läge in einer Linie mit den nicht seltenen Fällen, in denen der Prophet sich bewußt doppeldeutig auszudrücken scheint." Francis Landy (*Hosea* [Readings]), commenting on 9:3 notes: "In 11.5 the text asserts that Israel will not return to Egypt. The contradiction is evident, and is explicated in various ways by commentators: by a change of mind by Hosea, by the use of Egypt as a metaphor for Assyria...If Egypt represents the subjugation from which God shielded Israel, and is consequently the archetype of the other peoples, then the return to Egypt would close the circuit of Israel's history. The contradiction opens it, and is equivalent to the vacillation elsewhere in the book between destruction and continuance" (114).

historical circumstances involving the role Egypt may or may not have played in eight-century Samarian politics. As noted above, the interpretations proffered by some commentators of 8:13's reference to a return to Egypt concentrate upon Egypt's lack of prominence in the fall of the northern kingdom, at least in comparison to the role suggested by Hosea. Yet one could alternatively suggest that the book of Hosea is not at all concerned with 'Egypt' as a historical or political reality in these verses, and that this verse represents being in Assyria as symbolically equivalent to 'being in Egypt.'[42]

Jerome's comments upon 8:13 ("Qui enim de Aegypto exierant per confessionem Christ, perfidia in Aegyptum sunt reversi."[43]) and 9:3 express little interest in the possible political implications contained in the reference to Egypt, but much in what Egypt as a symbol represents. For Jerome, Egypt is the symbol of the Exodus: "Non habitabunt in terra domini, qui ab Ecclesia recesserunt, et reversi sunt mente in Aegyptum."[44] The 'return' is accomplished *mente*, and need not be physical. By being relocated to Assyria, one has spiritually and symbolically returned to Egypt.[45] In other words one can 'return to Egypt' and

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[42] Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea* [AB 24], 510-511.

[43] Jerome, *Commentarii in Prophetas Minores* [CChr], 90. "For whoever had gone out of Egypt through confessing Christ, they have returned to Egypt by faithlessness."

[44] ibid., 93: "They who abandon the Church will not live in the Lord's land, they have returned spiritually to Egypt."

[45] The power of the symbolism has not been lost upon the author of the gospel of Matthew. The flight into Egypt (Matt 2:13-15) obviously belongs to Matthew's larger agenda of representing Jesus as an embodiment of all Israel. Thus a flight into Egypt fulfills the symbolism surrounding the Exodus, enabling a 'saying' of Hosea's (Hos 11:1) to be fulfilled (ἵνα πληρωθῇ τὸ ῥηθὲν ὑπὸ κυρίου διὰ τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος, Ἐξ Αἰγύπτου ἐκάλεσα τὸν υἱόν μου (Matt 2:15)). The infant Jesus thereby escapes the slaughter of children by Herod (Matt 2:16-18), much like both the infant Moses and the firstborn of the Hebrews during the period

eat unclean food in Assyria without needing to travel to both locations. Jerome's understanding in this instance, while 'ecclesiological' (that is to say that the image of the Church serves as the typological lens through which he forms his interpretations), begins with a perspective that allows reference to 'Egypt' to be a general reference to unfaithfulness and foreign nations. To 'return' thus symbolises the undoing or, at the very least, a reminder of the events of the Exodus. Egypt thus serves as a symbol representing a broad spectrum of promises and threats in both Israel's past and future.

The *midbar* is intertwined with the Pentateuch's narrative surrounding the Exodus, thus the leading of the wife into the *midbar* as 'in her youth' is an allusion for some readers to the Exodus from Egypt (2:17).[46] As discussed in chapter 2, the *midbar* is the place in which she has been previously threatened with death, making the undercurrent of the image

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of slavery in Egypt escape death. The symbolism is less than covert or subtle, although in certain respects there is a perceptiveness to both this interpretation and Jerome's reading which can be lost on modern commentators. That 'Egypt' can still serve as a powerful symbol in the Roman era demonstrates the importance of the theme of the Exodus to later readers of the Bible. In the same way the image of 'Babylon' imprints itself upon the book of Revelation (when it is obviously not referring to 'Babylon' itself but rather to Rome, the contemporary political threat). Interestingly enough, this figure is described by similar imagery as a "great prostitute" and a "mother of prostitutes" [δεῖξὸ σοι τὸ κρίμα τῆς πόρνης τῆς μεγάλης τῆς καθημένης ἐπὶ ὑδάτων πολλῶν, μεθ᾽ ἧς ἐπόρνευσαν οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς, καὶ ἐμεθύσθησαν οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν γῆν ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς. καὶ ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον αὐτῆς ὄνομα γεγραμμένον, μυστήριον, Βαβυλὼν ἡ μεγάλη, ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς. Rev 17:1-2, 5]. It is not necessary to assume that Hosea is referring to the Exodus story as found in the Pentateuch, but merely that he is referring to some sort of tradition involving an exodus from Egypt. The oblique references to Jacob in Hosea 12 belong in the same category inasmuch as they are not 'historical' in terms of providing information about Jacob as a historical figure, but they are 'historical' in the sense of being a witness to a tradition concerning a figure who would have been recognisable to the audience. The current later dating of the Pentateuch should give more than a second glance to the older assumptions concerning Hosea's use of written versus oral traditions, since it seems less plausible now than ever that a copy of a strand of the Pentateuch, 'J' or 'P', at least as we now know it, would have been in Hosea's hands.

[46] Fisch, "Hosea: A Poetics of Violence" 143; Leith "The Transformation of the Woman, Israel" 100.

less than positive, even though its context makes it obvious that it is meant to be interpreted more positively. The ambiguity that surrounds the entire spectrum of allusions to the Exodus mirrors the comments often made on the role of the *midbar*, and one that applies to a far larger group of symbols and images. Egypt is a negative symbol because it invokes images of foreign oppression, exile, subjugation and slavery, while Egypt is a positive symbol because it represents Yhwh's role as a deliverer for Israel.[47] This double-sided image parallels the *midbar*, which is both negative (a representation of desolate, barren land), and positive (a signifier of Yhwh's care and guidance of Israel and a necessary prelude to entrance into the promised land). Walter Brueggemann writes, "In a usage very much like 11:3, 13:5 employs the wilderness motif to ramify the Exodus event of the preceding verse… Here the positive side of the tradition is stressed. Israel survived in the wilderness only by the continuing sustenance of Yahweh."[48] The wife's being placed in the wilderness stands for Israel במדבר with this symbolic background in mind. Talmon remarks: "It may be that the author of the book of Hosea infused an independent 'love on the drift' theme into the equally independent trek motif, and thus created the quite uncommon motif combination 'love in the historical desert period.'"[49] Yet surely this understanding underestimates the

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[47] *TDOT* VIII observes, "Hosea foresees a return to Egypt for Israel, a return that will bring about a kind of new beginning (Hos. 8:13; 9:3,6 compared with 2:16[13])" (528).

[48] Walter Brueggemann, *Tradition for Crisis: A Study in Hosea* (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1968), 34.

[49] Talmon, "The 'Desert Motif'" 51.

multiplicity of associations that each motif carries. There is a positive element and a negative inherent in each, and the jumbling together of several such images (mother / אשת זנונים, deprivation in the wilderness / reliance upon Yhwh's providence, Egypt as a symbol of foreign oppression / Egypt as a symbol of Yhwh's making Israel his people) makes unqualified application of the terms 'positive' and 'negative' problematic if not impossible.

The points discussed above demonstrate Hosea's weaving together of motifs and images such as those surrounding the wilderness, the Exodus and Egypt. These last three symbolise, individually and separately, an entire spectrum of themes. They can be read as bearing reference, either directly or obliquely, to the sequence of liberation from Egypt followed by a period in the wilderness, yet they are individual symbols as well as part of a collective, each having its own individual range of associations serving as a sub-text. The wilderness can represent deprivation, but also a place of transformation and reliance upon Yhwh's providential care. In a similar manner, Egypt represents the threat of foreign exile and oppression but also serves as a symbol of Israel's coming to 'know' Yhwh (13:4). These references all contain plays upon the language of 'return' (שוב) as both a threat and as a representation of Israel's appropriate response to Yhwh. This entire matrix, taken in conjunction with the analysis in chapter 2 of the children's names and the other images discussed in this chapter, demonstrates the ambiguity which is at the heart of the book of Hosea. The use of antithetical expressions and reversal of imagery discussed here is not

unique to Hosea, but Hosea represents an extreme case in which each and every word is given a shade of ambiguity. A book that uses a 'return to Egypt' (9:3; 11:5) as a threat and at the same time mentions "your god from the land of Egypt" (12:10; 13:4) as a positive statement makes it difficult to label any symbol or image, and ultimately any oracle, as unambiguously positive or negative.

> It is the poetry of love and estrangement, but neither can be entertained without the other. That is the special agony of Hosea. An angry God —— and he is never more angry than in Hosea's prophecies —— is nevertheless haunted by his own unsubjugated affections. It is this oscillation of love and hate, nearness and distance, already intimated for us in the story of Hosea and his estranged wife in chapters 1 and 3, that shatters continuities. Images of love carry with them their dark antithesis.[50]

There are many more images that could have been explored such as the figure of Jacob (12:3-5), and the references to priests (4:4-6, 9; 5:1)[51] and 'the people'(4:9-12, 14; 14:9).[52] To analyse all these references in any detail would have been beyond the scope of this project. However, a brief return to the imagery and symbolism of the *znh* terminology is called for.

The first two chapters of this thesis dealt with the treatment the early chapters of Hosea have received at the hands of scholars, most especially their isolation from the rest of the book and the quest for biography within them. In conjunction with what has been discussed above, the function of the early chapters appears to be primarily in the introduction

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[50] Fisch, "Hosea: A Poetics of Violence" 140.
[51] Jack R. Lundbom, "Contentious Priests and Contentious People in Hosea IV 1-10" *VT* 36/1986 [52-70]
[52] C. L. Seow, "Hosea 14:10 and the Foolish People Motif" *CBQ* 44/1982 [212-224]

of imagery which can alter and shift between negative and positive. This shifting serves to create ambiguity inasmuch as the resulting positive or negative oracles can never be interpreted in isolation from their antithetical opposites. It is for this very reason that Hosea is to marry an אשת זנונים, as his wife is thus a wife, mother, and promiscuous woman all at once. The biographical approaches attempt to arrange these elements in a logical, sequential pattern. In light of the rest of the book, however, it makes far more poetic sense for the woman to represent all these things at one and the same time. There is a great power to this polyvalent imagery, as even the most extreme sort of negative image can be turned into a positive element, as seen in the examples of an adulterous wife pursuing her lovers returning and saying 'my husband,' or a child named 'Not-Pitied' earning the name 'Pitied'. It is in this light that an early commentator like Jerome made the comment that the reason for Yhwh's original command to his prophet makes good sense, if one views it as an attempt to render a situation more extreme in order that its corresponding positive opposite is all the more forceful.

> "Nec culpandus propheta, interim ut sequamur historiam, si meretricem conuerterit ad pudicitiam, sed potius laudandus quod ex mala bonam fecerit. Non enim qui bonus permanet, ipse polluitur, si societur malo; sed qui malus est, in bonum uertitur, si boni exempla sectetur. Ex quo intelligimus non prophetam perdidisse pudicitia, fornicariae copulam; sed fornicariam adsumpsisse pudicitiam quam antea non habebat…[53]

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[53] Jerome, *Commentarii in Prophetas Minores* [Cchr], "The prophet is not to be blamed (if we should meanwhile follow the story) if he will have turned a *meretrix* to chastity. Rather he ought more to be praised because he will have made good from bad [ex mala bonam fecerit]. For he who perseveres as a good man [bonus] defiles himself if he should associate with bad [malo], but he who is bad [malus] is turned to the good [in bonum] if he should follow examples of good [boni exempla]. From which we will perceive that the

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Jerome is able to see the twin roles that the positive and negative elements play, although his interpretation will not allow the two to continue to coexist. Rather one must subsume and transform the other, from "fornicaria" to "pudicitia" or "bad" into good. The pairing of the elements זנונים and אשת זנונים argue against seeing a complete transformation of the figure of the woman, as she is not transformed but remains under the banner אשת זנונים throughout all that follows, being a mother and wife yet pursuing lovers. The text informs us of her 'weaning' her child (Hos 1:8), an image of maternal care, after providing us with the description of her as an אשת זנונים without any attempt to modify or soften the harshness of 1:2's statement. In the same manner there is no attempt to soften or synthesise the ambiguous imagery elsewhere in the book. The *midbar*, for example, conjures up multiple associations without clear assurance of the nuance it conveys.[54] The other images and motifs discussed follow the same pattern, rarely being neutral but even more rarely being solely positive or negative.

Yvonne Sherwood's description of Hosea 1-3 could well be applied to the book in its entirety: "The text appears to be less a presentation of a univocal message than a sustained

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prophet has not destroyed chastity [pudicitia], uniting with a prostitute [fornicaria], but rather that the prostitute [fornicaria] has taken on a chastity [pudicitia] which she did not have previously" (8).

[54] Fisch, "Hosea: A Poetics of Violence" 144: "We are at a great distance here from the Greek logos, for the words of which we speak often lack a rational form or *telos*; they are to be found in isolation from one another with great gaps in between, their meanings undetermined, contradictory, discontinuous —— wandering signifiers that return upon us with a dreadful pertinacity."

attempt at punning, and the retraction and affirmation of various words and ideas suggests that the text deconstructs itself at a deeper, ideological level."[55] Attempts by earlier generations of scholars to see Hosea as a 'prophet of love' were based upon attention to only one component of the book's central theme and its wide variety of imagery. To view it in this strictly dialectical manner too quickly synthesises and smoothes out the contradictory statements, especially the use of two elements presented simultaneously as positive and negative without mediation or movement towards synthesis.[56] These are the very elements which give the book its power. This observation is not motivated by an attempt to 'deconstruct' the text of Hosea, although important literary insights are to be gained from asking questions concerning the interplay of the roles of the children and the wife. There should be virtually no need since this book contains so much that can be read in so many different ways that it deconstructs itself in terms of everything from its imagery to its logic, and most especially with regards to its overarching message or meaning. The line between bad and good is a thin one in Hosea, defying logical ordering and resisting the constrictions placed upon the book by its interpreters. Sherwood comments upon the use of Hosea's use of לכן (the word used most frequently in biblical Hebrew to demonstrate clear, logical consequences) well describe the logic of the book as a whole:

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[55] Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, 204.
[56] As seen above, the desire to have one element completely subsume the other goes back to Jerome and continues to make its presence felt among more modern commentators.

'Therefore', a word that establishes connection and continuity, becomes in this poem a pivot between antitheses and a sign of discontinuity. It does not further one argument but undecideably supports irreconcilable arguments and associates indiscriminately with threat and with promise.[57]

[57] ibid., 205.

Conclusion

The preceding chapters have explored the book of Hosea's use of ambiguity from many perspectives. Certain issues, particularly methodological ones, which are widely debated by biblical scholars have been glossed over, mainly on account of space. This thesis is obviously not a traditional, historically-oriented project, but neither does it reject historical inquiry on methodological or hermeneutical grounds. In the case of Hosea, the evidence for the sorts of studies undertaken in most of the standard commentaries falls short, not on account of its theoretical underpinnings (although these may well be open to criticism), but rather by its own criteria. There may well be *some* biographical foundation to the description of Hosea's family, but the text as it now stands is far too laden with polemical metaphors and poetic hyperbole to allow this possible foundation to be teased out of it. Analysing the final form of the text is, in this case, a decision based more on pragmatic grounds than on theoretical ones.[1]

The conclusion of this project is deceptively simple in its formulation: Hosea is a book of multiple meanings, with tension filled vacillation between positive and negative oracles. The power of the book is found in many places, in its visceral imagery and strained syntax in particular, but mainly in its ability to relate both promise and threat at the same

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[1] Yet it is true that analysis of the text's literary characteristics presupposes the openness to those same critical impulses which have thrown the historical orientation and focus of the discipline of biblical studies into question. The validity of historical inquiry itself need not be undermined if historical scholars themselves remain open to admitting that with certain texts such questions are virtually inoperable, and that literary analysis is a valuable tool for the biblical exegete's already eclectically arranged toolbox.

time. This ability is the hallmark of great literature and great poetry, although it creates difficulties for those commentators who attempt to draw out simple, one-dimensional messages of hope or judgement as the central meaning of the text. This multiplicity of meaning may be the result of the redactional history of the Bible in general,[2] and the book of Hosea in particular, although any reconstructions of such a history are extremely difficult and entirely hypothetical. Yet with the אשת זנונים as the book's introductory image it is difficult to imagine a theory of redaction or transmission which would plausibly account for the book's seemingly illogical ordering of metaphors and images, and fluctuation between promise and threat, the very aspects of the book which continue to both shock and intrigue its commentators and readers. Moreover, the emphasis of previous scholarship on Hosea 1-3 becomes more understandable, although in need of some correction, when one examines certain elements which run throughout the book. The indictments in chapter 4 (4:2) do not mention זנה, but the presence of נאף, itself associated with זנה throughout chapters 1-3 (and in 4:13-14), among the 'deceit, murder and theft' in 4:2 casts as wide a net as possible in accusing Israel of wrongdoing and maintains a relationship between the metaphors of chapters 1-3 and the following lists of wrongdoing. The mentioning of 'children' is not systematic (אֶת־בָּנֶיהָ לֹא אֲרַחֵם כִּי־בְנֵי זְנוּנִים הֵמָּה -4:6, cf. 2:6's אֶשָּׁה בָּנֶיךָ גַם־אָנִי, and the בָּנִים זָרִים of 5:7), but these scattered references fall into similar patterns to the ones

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[2] "Le texte établi, canonisé est un patchwork de fragments" Mieke Bal (Femmes Imaginaires: L'ancien testament au risque d'une narratologie critique [Paris: Nizet, 1986], 10). This observation does not impair Bal's avowedly ahistorical approach to the text, nor should it affect the analysis here.

encountered in the book's first three chapters. The children are 'forgotten' and 'alien' children, yet the possibility remains open, in light of the transformation of the children in chapter two (Lo Ammi into Ammi, Lo Ruhamah into Ruhamah), that they may not necessarily remain foreign or forgotten.

The use of שוב in the book's last chapter (14:2-3, 5, 8), while it draws upon the use of the root throughout the book until this point, does not change or resolve the basic dynamic within the book nor the multiplicity of meanings associated with the language of departing and returning.

שובה ישראל עד יהוה אלהיך כי כשלת בעונך
קחו עמכם דברים ושובו אל־יהוה אמרו אליו
כל־תשא עון וקח־טוב ונשלמה פרים שפתינו:
(Hos 14:2-3)

ארפא משובתם אהבם נדבה כי שב אפי ממנו:
(Hos 14:5)

ישבו ישבי בצלו יחיו דגן
ויפרחו כגפן זכרו כיין לבנון:
(Hos 14:8)

Many of the other terms (עון, רפא, etc.) have been encountered earlier in the book. Yet despite a promise to heal (a promise that arrives "because my anger has 'turned' [שב] from him," 14:5), the reference to healing cannot help but bring to mind that it was Yhwh who also did the wounding, and whose uprooting is reversed by the new growth (cf. 6:1). Even the book's closing oracles of promise rely upon the background of judgement and punishment for their power, and can only provide, at best, a qualified hope. The reader

should, at this point, have become wary of placing too much weight upon statements of punishment or reconciliation taken in isolation from one another, since so much of the book's energy has been directed towards Yhwh's alternation between punishment and forgiveness, itself closely paralleled (and anticipated) by the emotional and physical movements of the woman symbolising Israel. Those who would seek to impose an external uniformity upon the book of Hosea would do well to heed Robert Lowth's description, first uttered in 1787 during his lectures on Hebrew poetry: "There is therefore no cause to wonder, if in perusing the prophecies of Hosea, we sometimes find ourselves in a similar predicament with those who consulted the scattered leaves of the Sibyl."[5]

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[5] Robert Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews, Volume II* (G. Gregory (trans.); London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1995), 96.

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