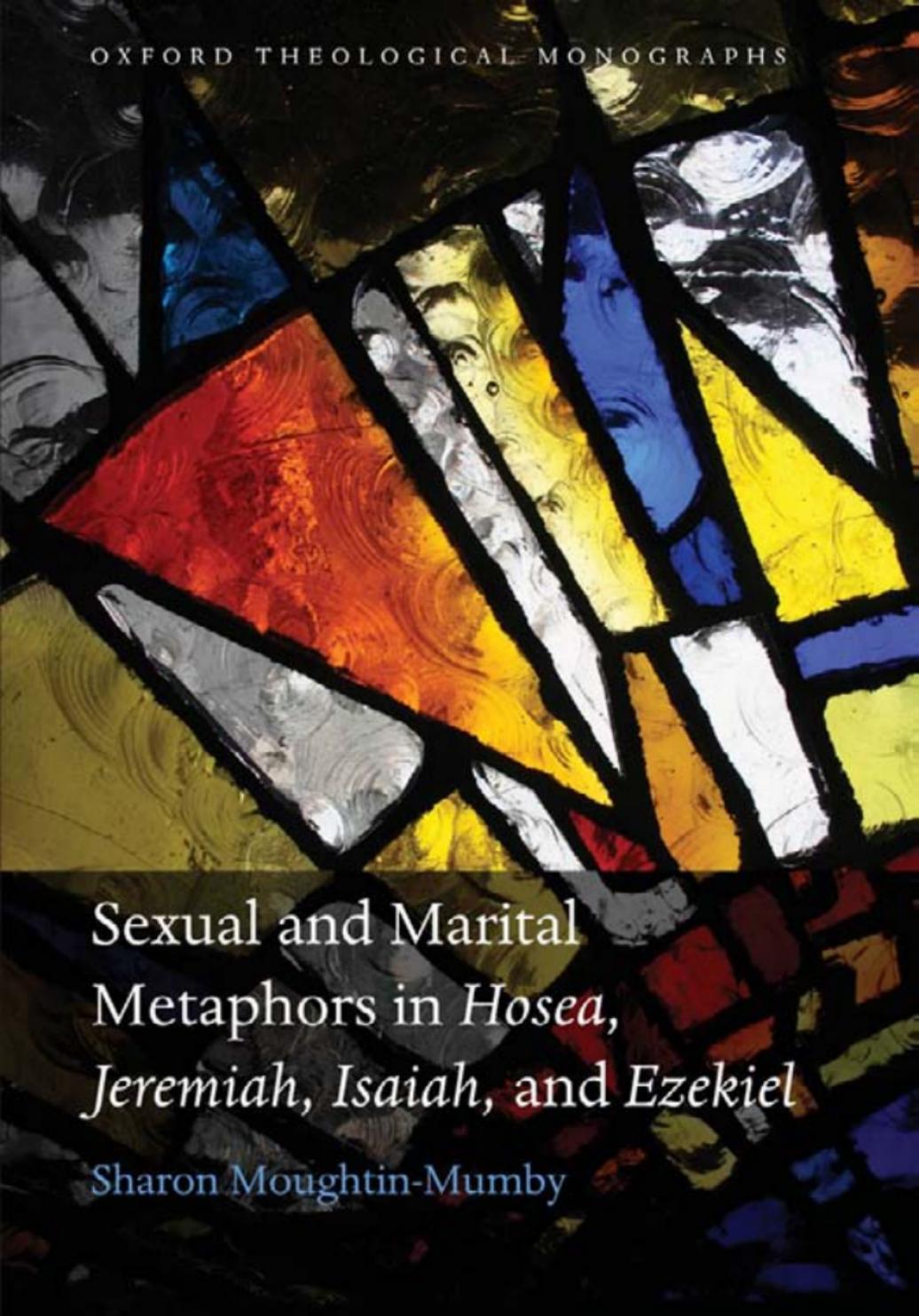


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Sexual and Marital  
Metaphors in *Hosea*,  
*Jeremiah*, *Isaiah*, and *Ezekiel*

Sharon Moughtin-Mumby

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*For my father and mother,  
Ross and Jacqui,  
with love*

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# Contents

<i>Abbreviations</i>	x
Introduction	1
Mapping the Field	6
Traditional scholarship	6
Feminist scholarship	13
Literary-historical approaches	17
Mapping the field: a wider perspective	30
A Cognitive, Contextual Approach to Metaphorical Language	31
Living, dead, and dormant metaphor	36
The Co-operative Reader and the Resistant Reader	38
A Literary-Historical Approach	41
Associated commonplaces and socio-historical reconstruction	43
A Diachronic Approach	46
The Scope of the Study	48
1. <i>Hosea</i> 4–14	49
<i>Hosea</i> 4–14: The Wider Frame	49
Metaphorical language in <i>Hosea</i> 4–14	50
Simile and metaphor in <i>Hosea</i> 4–14	51
Metaphorical language and fertility/sterility in <i>Hosea</i> 4–14	53
Metaphorical language, repetition, and intratextuality in <i>Hosea</i> 4–14	54
Metaphorical language and word-play in <i>Hosea</i> 4–14	57
Sexual and Marital Metaphorical Language in <i>Hosea</i> 4–14	61
‘Prostitution’ and word-play in <i>Hosea</i> 4–14	67
Wider sexual and marital metaphorical language in <i>Hosea</i> 4–14	70
A meeting of metaphor and metonym: <i>Hosea</i> 4: 13–14	72
Reflections	75
2. <i>Jeremiah</i> 2: 1–4: 4	80
<i>Jeremiah</i> 2: 1–4: 4: The Wider Frame	80
Repetition in <i>Jeremiah</i> 2: 1–4: 4	81
Rhetorical questions in <i>Jeremiah</i> 2: 1–4: 4	84

Sexual and Marital Metaphorical Language in <i>Jeremiah</i> 2: 1–4: 4	89
‘Prostitution’ in <i>Jeremiah</i> 2: 1–4: 4	96
Wider sexual and marital metaphorical language in <i>Jeremiah</i> 2: 1–4: 4	102
Sexual and Marital Metaphorical Language in <i>Jeremiah</i> 3: 6–11	106
Reflections	110
3. <i>Isaiah</i>	117
Sexual and Marital Metaphorical Language in <i>Isaiah</i> 1–39	117
<i>Isaiah</i> 40–55: The Wider Frame	122
The theme of transformation in <i>Isaiah</i> 40–55	122
Rhetorical questions in <i>Isaiah</i> 40–55	125
Sexual and Marital Metaphorical Language in <i>Isaiah</i> 40–55	126
Sexual and Marital Metaphorical Language in <i>Isaiah</i> 56–66	142
Reflections	151
4. <i>Ezekiel</i> 16 and 23	156
<i>Ezekiel</i> 16 and 23: The Challenge	161
The Book of <i>Ezekiel</i>	165
Extended metaphorical language in <i>Ezekiel</i>	166
Narrative structure in <i>Ezekiel</i>	168
<i>Ezekiel</i> 16	169
<i>Ezekiel</i> 16A: the wider frame	170
Sexual and marital metaphorical language in <i>Ezekiel</i> 16A	184
<i>Ezekiel</i> 23	189
<i>Ezekiel</i> 23B	189
<i>Ezekiel</i> 23A: the wider frame	190
Sexual and marital metaphorical language in <i>Ezekiel</i> 23A	195
<i>Ezekiel</i> 16A and 23A: ‘Sister Narratives’	200
Reflections	201
5. <i>Hosea</i> 1–3	206
<i>Hosea</i> 1–3 and Four Pervasive Assumptions	206
Assumption 1	206
Assumption 2	208
Excursus 1 into prophetic sign-act narratives	210
Assumption 3	212
Excursus 2 into prophetic sign-act narratives	214
Assumption 4	215
<i>Hosea</i> 1–3: An Approach	217

<i>Hosea 1</i>	218
Sign-act 1	219
Sign-act 2	224
Sign-act 3	226
Sign-act 4	227
<i>Hosea 1: a summary</i>	230
<i>Hosea 3</i>	231
Sign-act 5	232
Sign-act 6	237
Sexual and marital metaphorical language in <i>Hosea 3</i>	241
<i>Hosea 3: a summary</i>	244
<i>Hosea 2</i>	245
<i>Hosea 2A</i>	246
<i>Hosea 2B</i>	253
<i>Hosea 2B and 4–14</i>	257
Reading the Final Form of <i>Hosea</i>	260
Reflections	263
<i>Conclusions</i>	269
<i>Works Cited</i>	277
<i>Index</i>	301

## *Abbreviations*

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> , ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992)
ACLNE	Ancient Codes and Laws of the Near East
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
BAR IS	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i> International Series
BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972)
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologiarum Lovaniensium
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> , ed. K. Elliger and W. Rudolph (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1977)
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches</i>
BibOr	Biblica et Orientalia
BibSem	The Biblical Seminar
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BLS	Bible and Literature Series
BRA	Beiträge zur Religionsgeschichte des Altertums
BS	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur <i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBOT	Coniectanea Biblica Old Testament
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CC	Continental Commentaries
CCR	Cambridge Companions to Religion
CIS	Copenhagen International Seminar
CLLP	Clarendon Library of Logic and Philosophy
COP	Cambridge Oriental Publications

CS	<i>Cahiers Sioniens</i>
CUP	Cambridge University Press
DCH	<i>The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> , ed. D. J. A. Clines (Sheffield: SAP, 1993– )
EC	Epworth Commentaries
EH	Europäische Hochschulschriften
EJ	<i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>
ET	English translation
ET	<i>The Expository Times</i>
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GCT	Gender, Culture, Theory
GPT	Growing Points in Theology
GTA	Göttinger theologische Arbeiten
HALOT	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> , ed. L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, 4 vols.; trans. and ed. under the supervision of M. E. G. Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000)
HAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
Herm	Hermeneia
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
ICC	The International Critical Commentary
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
Interp	Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
IRT	Issues in Religion and Theology
ISBL	Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature
ITC	International Theological Commentary
JANESCU	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JNSL	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>

JQR NS	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review, New Series</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTS	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
K	Ketib (the written text)
KJV	King James' Version of the Bible
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
LCBI	Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation
LXX	The Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NICOT	The New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NJPS	Jewish Publication Society of America's <i>New Translation of the Holy Scriptures according to the Traditional Hebrew Text</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version of the Bible
NVBS	New Voices in Biblical Studies
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OLP	<i>Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica</i>
OTG	Old Testament Guides
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTM	Old Testament Message
OTS	Oudtestamentische Studiën
OTWSA	<i>Oud Testamentiese Werkgemeenschap in Suid-Afrika</i>
OUP	Oxford University Press
POS	Pretoria Oriental Series
PPBAT	Die poetischen und prophetischen Bücher des Alten Testaments
Q	Qere (the spoken text)
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
RHPR	<i>Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses</i>
RNBC	Readings: A New Biblical Commentary
RSV	Revised Standard Version of the Bible
SAAB	<i>State Archives of Assyria Bulletin</i>
SAP	Sheffield Academic Press

SAT	Die Schriften des Alten Testaments
SB	Subsidia Biblica
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SEÅ	<i>Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok</i>
SEL	<i>Studi Epigrafici e Linguistica</i>
Sem	<i>Semitics</i>
SH	Scripta Hierosolymitana
SJOT	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
SJT	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SPEI	Selected Papers from the English Institute
SPOT	Studies on Personalities of the Old Testament
SSN	Studia Semitica Neerlandica
SV	Skizzen und Vorarbeiten
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , trans. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1964–74)
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> , ed. G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1977–2006)
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
TSK	<i>Theologische Studien und Kritiken</i>
TZ	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
UBL	Ugaritisch-Biblische Literatur
UCOP	University of Cambridge Oriental Publications
UF	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTS	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i> Supplements
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WmBC	Westminster Bible Companion
WSPL	Warwick Studies in Philosophy and Literature
ZA	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZAW NF	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i> neue Folge
ZThK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

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# Introduction

Metaphor is one of the most powerful, if not subversive, tools of persuasion. It has the ability to reorganize our thoughts, introducing associations and assumptions that we would perhaps not ourselves have imagined, or even desired. Such an understanding of metaphor is central to this exploration, which is concerned with the sexual and marital metaphorical language of the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible. While this study seeks to highlight the distinctive character of such language in different contexts, we might say that, for the most part, prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language is used to speak of the worship of gods other than YHWH, participation in undesirable cultic practices, or political alliances with foreign nations. The ways in which this metaphorical language is employed, however, vary widely over the prophetic corpus, reflecting the characteristic themes, persuasive strategies, and particular concerns of the texts involved.

If metaphor has the power to transform perceptions and reorient perspectives, then it is a cognitive device. We begin with a statement about metaphor because it seems to me that shifting beneath the surface of the differing readings of sexual and marital metaphorical language within current scholarship are essentially differing views of metaphor. At present a gulf exists between traditional and feminist approaches. This gulf is perhaps best exemplified by the insistence, on the one hand, by feminist readers that sexual and marital metaphorical language reinforces negative stereotypes of women and female sexuality and condones male physical violence; and the persistent response, on the other hand, by more traditional scholarship that such readings miss the point: these are 'only' metaphors, and should be read within their historical and literary contexts. Brenner writes in her introduction to *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (1995) of the 'Divine Husband/Unfaithful Wife Metaphor': 'The metaphor constitutes an act of religious propaganda anchored in preconceptions of gender relations and the nature of female sexuality which reinforces a vision of negative female sexuality as against positive or neutral male sexuality.'<sup>1</sup> The response of traditional

<sup>1</sup> Brenner (1995: 26).

scholarship is well represented by Day: ‘Hosea has been much studied recently by feminist scholars (see Brenner 1995). The prophet’s references to “whoring” have been much criticized, but his use of this image is not anti-women, since it is applied to the nation as a whole (e.g. Hos 5:3; 6:10), and presumably had particular reference to the male political and religious leaders.’<sup>2</sup> A more extreme reaction is presented by Stienstra:

It has by now become commonplace to remark that in the broken relationship it is the wife who is always the guilty party. Some authors even go so far as to say that the metaphor serves to depict the sinful as female. It cannot be denied that it is always the wife who is in the wrong, but this is obviously inevitable in the case of a metaphor in which the relationship between God and man is pictured as a marriage. If God were to be female, it would be the husband who was always in the wrong. The discussion as to the sex (or gender) of the Deity is well beyond the scope of this study, but I would like to point out that the (unfaithful) wife of YHWH includes both the men and women of the people of Israel and in fact any human being is invited to identify himself or herself with this disloyal wife, who fails to respond to the love of the divine partner. That God was the husband in a metaphor that originated in a patriarchal society where women were not only supposed to be submissive but also very much in need of protection, hardly calls for comment.<sup>3</sup>

Day and Stienstra present a similar argument, and one that is common within traditional approaches.<sup>4</sup> In a culture where God (YHWH) is male, a ‘marriage metaphor’ will inevitably present Israel/Judah as female. While the female is presented as sinful, this is a necessary corollary that should not be taken to imply a negative view of women more generally. To suggest that these passages are ‘anti-women’ or ‘depict the sinful as female’ (Brenner) is to misunderstand them.<sup>5</sup> Feminist scholars respond that this in itself is a misapprehension of the issues. Exum insists, ‘Sexual violence... cannot be dismissed by claiming that it is only “metaphorical”, as if metaphor were some kind of container from which meaning can be extracted, or as if gender relations inscribed on a metaphorical level are somehow less problematic than on a literal level.’<sup>6</sup>

A gulf has opened between traditional and feminist approaches, which cannot be dismissed as superficial. Its creation could be attributed to a number

<sup>2</sup> J. Day (2001: 572).      <sup>3</sup> Stienstra (1993: 97–8).

<sup>4</sup> Ben Zvi (2004: 367–77) provides a fairly recent example.

<sup>5</sup> Carroll (1995: 278–9) echoes such a perspective: ‘From my point of view, the use of metaphors of women for the community, nation, city and land in the prophets may have little to do with the representation of women as such, just as the metaphorization of men for the community and the nation in the prophets may have little bearing on the representation of men as such.’ He explains: ‘such representations are inevitably metaphoric their referential force is symbolic.’

<sup>6</sup> Exum (1996: 119). Exum’s critique of Carroll (1995) is a case in point (pp. 119 f.).

of influences, but I believe a substantial force is essentially differing understandings of metaphor shifting beneath the surface of the debate. In *The Rule of Metaphor*, Ricoeur witnesses a schism in approaches to metaphor cutting across the breadth of the humanities. On the one side are those with a broadly 'substitutionary' understanding; on the other lie those sharing a 'tension' or 'interactive' approach.<sup>7</sup> I believe that a related schism cuts across Hebrew Bible scholarship. Traditional, historical-critical approaches, for the most part, share the more traditional, substitutionary views of metaphor. In contrast, feminist and literary approaches, influenced by recent Anglo-Saxon literary theories, tend towards interactive, or what we will refer to as 'cognitive', views of metaphorical language.

This study does not seek to provide a comprehensive summary of metaphor theory. In the words of Black, 'The extraordinary volume of papers and books on the subject produced during the past forty years might suggest that the subject is inexhaustible.'<sup>8</sup> A brief introduction to the distinction between substitutionary and cognitive approaches, however, should shed some light on present discussions of prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language. Substitutionary theories tend to coincide with the belief that metaphorical language is decorative, or ornamental.<sup>9</sup> Underlying such approaches is the assumption that a metaphor can be translated, as a 'substitution' for a more 'literal' word or phrase, without any substantial loss of meaning.<sup>10</sup> Thus the metaphor 'Debs is a gazelle' could be teased out to give 'Debs is like a gazelle *à propos* the following qualities . . .', or even 'translated' to mean 'Debs is graceful'. Any 'extra' connotations can be dismissed as superfluous,

<sup>7</sup> Ricoeur (1978: 4): 'The confrontation is prepared by distinguishing . . . between a semantics, where the sentence is the carrier of the minimum complete meaning, and a semiotics, where the word is treated as a sign in the lexical code. Corresponding to this distinction between semantics and semiotics I propose a parallel opposition between a tension theory and a substitution theory.'

<sup>8</sup> Black (1979: 19).

<sup>9</sup> Black (1962: 34) summarizes the approach: 'Except in cases where a metaphor is a catachresis that remedies some temporary imperfection of literal language, the purpose of metaphor is to entertain and divert.' Cf. Abma (1999: 8): 'metaphor is explained as the substitution of a literal term by a figurative or "strange" term. In order to understand the metaphor, one only needs to reverse the process and replace the metaphorical term by a literal term. The implication is that metaphors do not represent additional meaning, but are simply another, nicer way of expressing the same meaning. In the same spirit, metaphor came to be looked upon as a decorative device or literary ornament, belonging to the sphere of rhetorics rather than to the sphere of semantics.' Soskice (1985: 1–14, 24–31) provides a useful introduction, where she discusses our broader 'substitutionary' approaches under the dual headings of 'substitution' (ornamental) theories and 'emotive' theories.

<sup>10</sup> Black (1962: 31): 'Any view which holds that a metaphorical expression is used in place of some equivalent literal expression, I shall call a *substitution view of metaphor*.'

especially if they are unwanted.<sup>11</sup> A quick glance at traditional readings of prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language confirms that these share a substitutionary approach. If this metaphorical language has negative connotations for readers, then this is unfortunate, but of no lasting consequence. Such connotations can be explained by the patriarchal context in which the passages were written: the ‘real’ meaning of the passages lies beyond this. Indeed, sexual and marital metaphorical language can be ‘translated’, leaving these connotations behind. Day and Stienstra neatly illustrate a substitutionary view of metaphor and represent many traditional scholars, both within the study of the Hebrew Bible and perhaps also within wider humanities subjects.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast to substitutionary theories of metaphor, cognitive approaches are adamant that metaphor cannot be translated; metaphor is not simply a ‘substitution’ for another word, and any paraphrase will always result in ‘a loss of cognitive content’.<sup>13</sup> The connotations surrounding any metaphorical word are intrinsic to its meaning, and cannot be differentiated from this. Indeed, metaphor, as a cognitive device, is often believed to *create* meaning, having the ability to introduce new perspectives and outlooks. Soskice speaks of metaphor as ‘a new vision, the birth of new understanding, a new referential access’.<sup>14</sup> When this approach to metaphor is applied to prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language, the problems facing feminist readers become clear. For the negative connotations, or ‘associations’, concerning the female that these metaphors introduce/reinforce cannot be ignored or dismissed. Rather, they are an inherent part of metaphorical meaning, and therefore also of the meanings of the passage within which the metaphor lies.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Richards (1936: 96–100), who speaks of ‘18th Century assumptions that figures are a mere embellishment or added beauty and that the plain meaning, the tenor, is what alone really matters and is something that, “regardless of the figures” might be gathered by the patient reader’ (p. 100).

<sup>12</sup> Stienstra (1993) may be surprised to find herself discussed alongside substitutionary approaches. Certainly, she presents her understanding of metaphor as cognitive (‘the marriage metaphor is an indispensable cognitive device’, p. 21), drawing on prominent cognitive theorists. Stienstra’s understanding of what it means for metaphor to be ‘cognitive’, however, is perhaps so wide as to render the term meaningless (‘Man’s cognitive capacity is intrinsically metaphorical with respect to metaphysical concepts’, p. 10), and, in practice, she seems more influenced by substitutionary than by cognitive approaches. Cf. Abma (1999: 13): ‘Stienstra in practice works with a transference (i.e. “substitutionary”) rather than an interaction concept of metaphor. She does not allow for the creative aspects in the metaphor which express new meaning, but assumes tacitly that vehicle or tenor may be virtually identified.’

<sup>13</sup> Black (1962: 46): ‘the relevant weakness of the literal paraphrase is not that it may be tiresomely prolix or boringly explicit (or deficient in qualities of style); it fails to be a translation because it fails to give the insight that the metaphor did.’

<sup>14</sup> Soskice (1985: 31). Cf. McFague (1975: 49–50): ‘metaphor creates the new; it does not embellish the old, and it accomplishes this through seeing similarity in dissimilars. This process, in essence, is the poet’s genius—the combining of old words in new ways to create new meanings.’

Black exacerbates the problem even further in his classic discussion (1962). Concentrating on metaphors in the form 'A = B', he introduces the idea that, if metaphorical language is active and cognitive, then on encountering a metaphor, our associations with *both* subjects (A and B) will be altered: 'If to call a man a wolf is to put him in a special light, we must not forget that metaphor makes the wolf seem more human than he otherwise would.'<sup>15</sup> Details of Black's theory have been criticized (particularly his illustrations of 'filter' and 'screen'<sup>16</sup>), and he later modified his thesis (1979).<sup>17</sup> Yet his suggestion that metaphor has the ability to reorganize our perception of both subjects (A and B) has remained influential, informing feminist readings of sexual and marital metaphorical language. Feminist authors have powerfully argued that the repeated depiction of the female as in the wrong, while the male is in the right and justified in physically punishing the female for her actions, coupled with the portrayal of female sexuality as degrading, subversive, and even 'sinful', has the effect of reinforcing negative stereotypes of women. Sexual and marital metaphorical language not only negatively influences our understanding of Israel/Judah; it also has the potential negatively to influence our understanding of women more generally and is therefore unacceptable. Setel insists:

The sexes of Gomer and Hosea and their respective behaviour are not a random representation, but a reflection and reinforcement of cultural perceptions. Hence Hosea's metaphor has both theological and social meaning. With regard to theological understanding, it indicates that God has the authority of possession and control over Israel that a husband has over a wife. The reverse (...) is a view of human males as being analogous to Yhwh while women are comparable to the people, who, by definition, are subservient to Yhwh's will.<sup>18</sup>

While the above provides only a simplistic sketch of substitutionary and cognitive theories of metaphor, this basic outline serves to illustrate the gulf we have identified, and goes some way to explain why its negotiation has proved so difficult. Underlying feminist and traditional interpretations are fundamentally different understandings of metaphor, which are essentially reacting with each other to shape the contours of readings of prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language. We will return to the approach to metaphor adopted for the purposes of this study later in the introduction. Before embarking on our own exploration, we should first familiarize ourselves with the terrain before us.

<sup>15</sup> Black (1962: 44).                      <sup>16</sup> Black (1962: 39–41).

<sup>17</sup> Black (1979). Soskice (1985: 41–3) and Ricoeur (1978: 88–90) critique Black's original theory.

<sup>18</sup> Setel (1985: 91–2).

## MAPPING THE FIELD

If we map the field of recent readings of sexual and marital metaphorical language, then by far the most prominent feature is the gulf of which I have spoken. If we survey the scholarly landscape further, using recent discussions of metaphor theory as a lens, then we will find that characteristic features of traditional scholarship have similarly been shaped by their substitutionary approach.

## Traditional scholarship

Within traditional (historical-critical) scholarship, sexual and marital metaphorical language is frequently referred to as ‘the marriage metaphor’. This choice of phraseology is not incidental, but betrays a number of assumptions. For this generic term (with its definite article and singular noun) epitomizes the widespread practice of harmonizing sexual and marital metaphorical language. A significant way in which this can be traced is through the tendency to read a sexual or marital metaphor in one prophetic book from the perspective of another, often even filling in the details which the first book ‘fails’ to supply. Boadt’s discussion of *Jeremiah* 2: 2–3 is a case in point:<sup>19</sup>

The images in vv. 2–3 draw heavily on Hosea. Israel’s ‘devotion’ (i.e. her *hesed*, the loving loyalty of a covenant partner) and her ‘bridal love’ (her *’ahab*, the intense love of a husband and wife used often in Deuteronomy when speaking of the covenant) picture a golden time in the desert similar to that given by Hos. 2:14–16, 11:1–4 and 13:4. Jeremiah also borrows Hosea’s double image of Israel as God’s beloved child and as his bride.<sup>20</sup>

Boadt’s interest in the similarities between *Hosea* and *Jeremiah* is appropriate, but his characterization of *Jeremiah*’s language as ‘borrowed’ or ‘drawn’ from *Hosea* reveals an assumption that details of *Hosea* can be read into *Jeremiah*. As we will see, this common assumption has little basis, and can lead to significant problems.

To my mind, this approach is a direct consequence of a substitutionary approach to metaphor. Ricoeur highlights the tendency of substitutionary

<sup>19</sup> My reasons for italicizing the titles of biblical books will be explained towards the end of the introduction. Suffice it to say here that my aim is to avoid confusion between allusions to the title of the prophetic book and the figure of the prophet who appears within that book.

<sup>20</sup> Boadt (1982: 19). Cf. Holladay (1986: 112), Mays (1969: 39).

theories to understand metaphor as *word-based*.<sup>21</sup> It is this that leads to the perception that metaphorical language can be substituted, so that a 'literal' word can be straightforwardly inserted to replace a metaphorical word without any significant change in meaning. An inevitable consequence is that attention is taken away from the literary context in which the metaphorical word lies. If no consideration is paid to the context of metaphor, even where it is radically different, then there remains nothing to differentiate metaphors sharing the same, or related, metaphorical word. It is hardly surprising, then, that traditional scholarship synthesizes sexual and marital metaphors, referring to them generically.

Indeed, this approach underlies the surprisingly widespread notion among traditional scholars that 'the marriage metaphor' was a recognized concept throughout the period in which the prophetic books were written, consisting of a number of known features, which are deliberately recalled whenever sexual or marital metaphorical language is used. An extreme version of the belief is expounded by Stienstra:

It is important to note at this stage that our decision to opt for an interpretation on the basis of the marriage metaphor whenever possible depends on the assumption that the prophet consciously based his exposition on a certain metaphorical concept, and more specifically on the titular metaphor of the monograph. Consequently, when we interpret a passage in the light of the marriage metaphor, this is not a matter of circular argumentation, nor a case of saying: we have this metaphor and when we see a possibility of fitting it in, we will. Rather we assume that, *whenever we encounter evidence of the marriage metaphor, this is not fortuitous, but precisely what the prophet intended us to see*. Therefore we are in a sense forced to adopt the interpretation imposed by the marriage metaphor, whenever it presents itself.<sup>22</sup>

Stienstra even suggests that 'the marriage metaphor' 'was so well-known and pervasive that a small cue was enough for an Israelite audience to interpret correctly a text in which it was alluded to'.<sup>23</sup> Few spell out their assumptions so explicitly, but many traditional readings share similar beliefs, commonly expressed in the idea that there is a story-line lying behind sexual and marital

<sup>21</sup> Ricoeur (1978: 3) describes the classical view on which substitutionary theories draw: 'The rhetoric of metaphor takes the word as its unit of reference. Metaphor, therefore, is classed among the single-word figures of speech and is defined as a trope of resemblance. As figure, metaphor constitutes a displacement and an extension of the meaning of words; its explanation is grounded in a theory of substitution.' Cf. pp. 4, 65, 101.

<sup>22</sup> Stienstra (1993: 143, emphasis mine).

<sup>23</sup> Stienstra (1993: 165). Cf. Ben Zvi (2004: 361): 'The marital metaphor became for the (mostly, if not exclusively, male) literati of ancient Israel—and for those who accepted their discourses—a way to shape, imagine, express, and communicate their understandings of the nature and story of their relationship with YHWH.' He continues: 'the text [Hosea] *presupposes* a readership that is aware of this use of the image' (p. 354, emphasis original).

metaphorical language, which progresses along similar lines in various prophetic books. McKeating speaks of a recognized ‘history’ lying behind *Hosea* and *Jeremiah*: ‘It is clear from Hos. 2:14–15 (MT 2:16–17) and Jer. 2: 2 that there had existed a version of Israel’s history which saw it as having begun with a “honeymoon period” (this is precisely that language which Hosea and Jeremiah use) in which Israel had been faithful to God and the relationship between the two had been idyllic.’<sup>24</sup> The considerable implications of such an approach will become apparent through the course of this study.

A second significant feature of the terrain of traditional scholarship is a marked interest in the historical background of ‘the marriage metaphor’. Various different possible ancient Near Eastern backdrops have been proposed,<sup>25</sup> ranging from *hieros gamos* (‘sacred marriage’) theories,<sup>26</sup> through the widespread practice of deities taking consorts,<sup>27</sup> to the proposal that capital cities (or their goddesses) were perceived as the consort of that city’s ‘patron deity’.<sup>28</sup> A common background suggested for the frequent use of ‘prostitution’ as a metaphorical motif is the purported practice of ‘sacred’ or ‘cultic prostitution’, a theory to which we will return. These possible influences on the emergence of prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language, and various others besides, have been discussed at length with varying degrees of credibility. My interest here is not in whether these proposals are convincing (though some seem more likely than others), but rather in the search itself for a historical explanation for the development of such metaphorical language. For this search can also be traced to the influence of substitutionary theories. We might say that if a word-based approach to metaphor presumes that any metaphorical word is a substitution for a ‘literal’ word, then the task of an interpreter is to identify that ‘literal’ word (or paraphrase) in order to ‘translate’ the metaphor. If, in addition to this, substitutionary approaches have led to the harmonization of all sexual and marital metaphorical language into ‘the marriage metaphor’, then the interpreter is faced with identifying an appropriate and consistent ‘translation’ for all sexual and marital metaphorical language: quite a challenge. In order to accomplish such a venture, traditional scholarship has looked to the historical background of such language.

<sup>24</sup> McKeating (1993: 78).

<sup>25</sup> Abma (1999: 13–23) provides an overview.

<sup>26</sup> Wolff (1974: 15–16), Ringgren (1987: esp. 424–7), Mays (1969: 25–6).

<sup>27</sup> Korpel (1990: 225–8, 231–7) compares Ugaritic deities. Margalit (1990: 285) suggests that the ‘idea of Israel as Yhwh’s wife’ is a ‘polemical response’, ‘the pervasive catchphrase *yhwh w’srth* of contemporary Hebrew inscriptions’.

<sup>28</sup> Lewy (1944), Fitzgerald (1972, 1975), Schmitt (1995), Biddle (1991). Follis (1987) raises a further possibility, exploring the ‘Holy City as Daughter’ language in the light of Hellenistic concepts of the divine daughter. G. Cohen (1966) suggests alternatively that the prophets ‘inherited it from more ancient circles of popular and priestly monotheism’.

This act of turning to history is perhaps a natural response: if we can explain how something came to be, it seems likely that this might somehow identify it, and perhaps also set limits on what it can be. However, significant questions have been raised recently over such an approach. A pertinent parallel within the study of the Hebrew Bible is the tendency to turn to etymology in order to understand or translate a word. Although this was at one time common practice, Barr has convincingly highlighted both the risks and the limitations of such an approach: ‘The main point is that the etymology of a word is not a statement about its meaning but about its history; it is only as a historical statement that it can be responsibly asserted, and it is quite wrong to suppose that the etymology of a word is necessarily a guide either to its “proper” meaning in a later period or to its actual meaning in that period.’<sup>29</sup> In the wake of Barr’s work, it is widely recognized that the etymological background of a term will not necessarily provide a useful guide to its meaning (unless no other avenues are available),<sup>30</sup> but rather that an investigation into the use of that word in practice is a more fruitful approach.<sup>31</sup> It is precisely for this reason that this study is concerned to explore the meanings of prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language within its distinctive contexts. The word-based, substitutionary approach to metaphor underlying traditional scholarship does not promote such an approach, however, instead encouraging a reliance on the historical background, or ‘etymology’, of metaphorical words as a guide to their meaning.

Focusing further on traditional interpretations of the popular use of ‘prostitution’ as a metaphorical motif, we can perceive the implications of this ‘etymological’ approach to metaphorical meaning more clearly. For ‘sacred’ or ‘cultic prostitution’ is traditionally cited as the background to the ‘prostitution’ motif, yet, perhaps more than any of the other backgrounds suggested, this theory has recently lost support. Indeed, this is so much the case that recent studies scarcely pay any attention to the hypothesis. Abma dismisses the theory within three pages,<sup>32</sup> while Galambush relegates the discussion to a single footnote, beginning ‘There is no evidence that the apostate Israelites engaged in sexual intercourse as part of their “whoring

<sup>29</sup> Barr (1961: 107–60, citation p. 109).

<sup>30</sup> Barr (1961: 158): ‘[W]here there is a long period of no recorded usage, the gap can be filled from etymological considerations only with the utmost reserve; and where there is recorded usage, etymology may be of help to supplement the study of that usage and to show how it has developed; but it cannot impose a sense authoritatively upon known usage.’

<sup>31</sup> *Contra* Biddle (1991: 173): ‘The basic issue with respect to this imagery is then, not its various manifestations, but its source.’

<sup>32</sup> Abma (1999: 14–15, 138): ‘Re-examination of the extrabiblical texts and rituals reveals that the evidence for the existence of such sexual rituals is scanty, whether in Mesopotamia, Sumeria or Ugarit.’ Cf. van den Eynde (2001: 86–8), Yee (2003: 87–9).

around on Yahweh".<sup>33</sup> A full treatment of the subject is beyond the scope of this study; suffice it to say that the hypothesis of 'cultic prostitution' (in its various forms) now has few supporters, not only among biblical scholars, but also among those investigating the evidence within Classical Greece and Mesopotamia.<sup>34</sup>

This does not preclude the possibility that sexual activities may have taken place during, or following, cultic activities. Narratives such as *Exodus 32*, where the people 'sat down to eat and rose up to play' (32: 6), discourage strong denials. It does, however, recognize that when we turn to look for convincing evidence that prostitution was formally sanctioned by a cult within the ancient Near East, there is a deafening silence. It also recognizes that theories of 'cultic prostitution' are largely based on the now notoriously disreputable 'comparative anthropology' of Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890). Once more, however, my primary interest at this point does not lie in how credible 'sacred' or 'cultic prostitution' is as a background for metaphorical prostitution; instead, it lies in the implications of the concentration on such an 'etymology' for traditional interpretations. Mays's words provide a useful illustration:

The foil for Hosea's use of marriage as a model of Yahweh's relation to Israel and of sexual promiscuity as the leit-motif of his portrayal of Israel's sin is to be found in the fertility cult of Canaanite religion . . . To anticipate, induce, and participate in Baal's intercourse with earth, sexual rites were used, the *hieros gamos* celebrated in the cult by representative protagonists. The theme of 'harlotry' is a distinctly Yahwistic interpretation of Israel's involvement in the cult of Baal . . . the rigid exclusivism of the Yahwist faith against every syncretism furnishes the basis for the cry of 'harlotry'/'adultery'. And of course the cry was *more than theological metaphor*. The cult of Baal involved both men and women in sexual rites; the men lay with sacred prostitutes and the women as devotees of Baal possibly made themselves available to male worshippers to receive fertility through the cult. *Here metaphor and reality are almost synonymous*.<sup>35</sup>

A significant consequence of traditional scholarship's 'etymological' approach to metaphor has been the tendency to read metaphorical prostitution

<sup>33</sup> Galambush (1992: 30 n. 16). Ben Zvi (2004: 379 n. 31) similarly reduces his dismissal to a footnote. Cf. Fontaine (1995a: 53): 'sources used to reconstruct a "sex cult" in eighth-century Israel are late and speculative at best. Even in Mesopotamia, where better documentation for the existence of a cult of sacred sexuality exists, the relationship between "secular" and "sacred" practises is unclear.' Cf. Keefe (1995: 79), Kamionkowski (2003: 21–2).

<sup>34</sup> Bird (1997), Fisher (1976), Gruber (1986), Hackett (1989), Harris (1974), Henshaw (1994: 218–56), Hillers (1985), Oden (1987), Renger (1967), Westenholz (1989), and Yamauchi (1973), among others. Frymer-Kensky (1992a: 199–202, citation p. 199) insists 'the whole idea of a sex cult—in Israel or in Canaan—is a chimera, the product of ancient and modern sexual fantasies'.

<sup>35</sup> Mays (1969: 25, emphasis mine).

no longer as *metaphor* in practice, but as *metonymy*. Metonymy can broadly be understood as the use of a word or phrase, strongly related to a whole, to stand for that whole; for instance, the frequent use of ‘10 Downing Street’ to stand for the Prime Minister. By insisting that the metaphorical prostitution of the prophetic books must denounce unacceptable *cultic* practice because such metaphors are based on ‘*cultic prostitution*’, we might say that traditional scholarship suggests that such metaphors are metonyms. Mays himself hints at this in his words ‘the cry was more than theological metaphor’.<sup>36</sup> It seems to me, however, that, rather than making the prophetic accusation ‘*more than theological metaphor*’, such a reading does not understand the accusation as metaphorical at all, but rather as metonymical. Mays’s comment that ‘*metaphor and reality are almost synonymous*’ is similarly telling.<sup>37</sup>

It has been observed that substitutionary theories can lead to a blurring of the distinction between metaphor and metonym, as both are understood as substitutions for literal words or phrases.<sup>38</sup> Traditional scholarship’s persistent reading of the prophetic motif of ‘prostitution’ as metonym, while speaking of metaphor, is a good example of such a blurred distinction. Nor is this reliance on the ‘etymology’ of metaphorical prostitution evidenced only in older works; it remains prevalent in recent scholarship, despite the numerous questions raised over the hypothesis of ‘*cultic prostitution*’. Macintosh’s (1997) and Day’s (2001) commentaries convincingly attest to this.<sup>39</sup> Once again, the lie of the land of traditional scholarship can be seen to be strongly shaped by the substitutionary understanding of metaphor moving beneath it, shaping its contours, and ultimately the rift that presently exists in Hebrew Bible scholarship.

<sup>36</sup> Erlandsson (1980: 102) speaks of ‘harlotry in a double sense, since actual sexual intercourse was part of the cult (4:13 f.) and its idolatry meant faithlessness toward Yahweh (4:15)’.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Fensham (1984: 73): ‘Gomer is not a real prostitute, but only one who partakes in the prostitution of the fertility cult. It might be a case where practice and the metaphoric usage overlap.’ Zimmerli (1979: 335): ‘the reference to the unfaithful wife in Ezekiel is more than an allegorical image, simply chosen for aesthetic appeal. In it there lives the reality of the people. In Ezek 16 (and 23) the gap between the metaphor and the fact portrayed can easily disappear, and the reality referred to may arise directly out of the metaphor. The reality portrayed is not simply portrayed artificially, but is present with unusual power in the metaphor.’

<sup>38</sup> Ricoeur (1978) notes this phenomena within Cohen’s ‘New Rhetoric’ (‘the difference between metaphor and metonymy reduces to a difference between the partial and the total character of the self-same addition–suppression action’, p. 165) and Ullman’s ‘psychologizing semantics’ (‘metaphor and metonymy derive their similarity from association itself. The only differentiating factor is the nature of the association. The distinction between figures is reduced to a psychological difference within a single general mechanism’, p. 118).

<sup>39</sup> J. Day (2001: 574). Macintosh (1997: 157–9) seeks to redefine ‘*cultic prostitution*’; but his reading rests on similar assumptions.

It is vital that those who continue to take a traditional approach to the Hebrew Bible recognize the power of the assumptions about metaphorical language underlying their readings. In recent years, we have become increasingly aware of the importance of identifying the presuppositions and methods that an interpreter takes to a text. This has been a particularly important step for historical critics, who might previously have perceived themselves as approaching the text from a 'neutral' position. With just a handful of traditional critics falling back to fight a resistance, most are now aware of the importance of acknowledging that there is no one 'objective' approach, and that we must increase our awareness of any assumptions. Few traditional scholars, however, have made explicit—or even been aware of—their substitutionary understanding of metaphorical language, despite its powerful influence on their readings. In my view, this is an oversight that needs addressing in future studies. It is even possible that a recognition of this significant assumption has the potential to ease communication between feminist and traditional approaches. Although the essentially divergent assumptions between traditional and feminist approaches are likely to remain distinct, a deeper understanding of the way in which they interact, by both sides, might create a more stable ground from which to negotiate the chasm.

If a first step is for traditional scholarship to recognize its substitutionary understanding of metaphorical language, perhaps a further step might be to face the question of whether such substitutionary theories remain convincing in the light of recent metaphor theory. From a wider perspective, word-based theories of metaphor remain popular in Europe, where semiologists strive to manage the weaknesses of substitutionary theories. Ricoeur seeks a middle ground between the extremities he characterizes as Anglo-Saxon, semantic theories of metaphor on the one side, and European, semiotic, word-based theories on the other. Drawing on what he perceives as the strengths of each of these approaches, he presents his own theory, which endeavours to span the gulf.

If the prevalence of semiotic approaches to metaphor in European metaphor theory, coupled with Ricoeur's harnessing of their strengths, suggests that substitutionary theories are defensible,<sup>40</sup> however, it is perhaps more difficult to defend the particular brands found within traditional scholarship of the Hebrew Bible. A number of the difficulties associated with these approaches have already been discussed. Reading metaphorical prostitution

<sup>40</sup> Black (1962: 45) suggests that there are instances where "substitution" and "comparison" views sometimes seem nearer the mark than "interaction" views' in their approach to metaphor. He is clear, however, that this is only in 'trivial cases', and it seems unlikely that prophetic sexual and marital metaphors should be included among these.

as if it were metonymical is a useful example: it quite simply does not always work in practice. Most obviously, once ‘prostitution’ is used to speak of political alliances, then the supposed background of ‘cultic prostitution’ is no longer plausible. Such metaphors cannot be read as metonyms, and in practice few propose ‘sacred’ or ‘cultic prostitution’ as a background for such instances. This leads to an inconsistency in approach, where all references to ‘prostitution’ are treated in the exactly the same way (except for the handful which indisputably break the mould). In brief, although word-based theories of metaphor remain popular among semiologists, the particular manifestations of substitutionary theories that we find within traditional scholarship on the Hebrew Bible do not bear scrutiny in practice.

### Feminist scholarship

If traditional readings are strongly but unconsciously defined by their underlying substitutionary approach to metaphor, the opposite could be said of feminist readings, which tend to show an acute awareness of their cognitive appreciation.<sup>41</sup> Graetz is not unusual for beginning her paper with the words, ‘As many have pointed out, it is no longer possible to argue that a metaphor is less for being a metaphor. On the contrary, metaphor has power over people’s minds and hearts.’<sup>42</sup> The cognitive understanding of metaphor shared by feminist readings is nowhere so apparent as in the collective emphasis on the problematic implications of the prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language for current perceptions and experiences of women. Indeed, we might say that the dominant feature on the cognitive side of the gulf is the rising mountain of problems to which feminist readers call attention, dwarfing all other characteristics of the feminist debate. Feminist approaches to the prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language have become increasingly difficult to characterize in recent years, diversifying and proliferating, having previously been warned of becoming formulaic and predictable.<sup>43</sup> In particular, we could say that a greater and more confident

<sup>41</sup> Graetz (1995: 127), K. M. O’Connor (1992: 171), Yee (1992: 199).

<sup>42</sup> Graetz (1995: 135). Törnkvist (1998: 47): ‘Metaphors are not value-neutral . . . metaphor has moral, as well as aesthetic and conceptual significance.’ Cf. Exum (1996: 118–19), van Dijk-Hemmes (1993: 169).

<sup>43</sup> Carroll (1995: 282): ‘Judging by the amount of feminist readings of Hosea and Ezekiel currently available in the guild of biblical scholarship it is quite clear to me that dominant feminist ideologies enable feminist readers to read the texts in specific but very predictable ways.’ Sherwood (1996: 266–7): ‘very few [feminist] critics make reference to other feminist articles and they never engage in dispute’; ‘Ironically, as biblical feminists, like all feminists, try to counter the idea of woman as the eternal feminine or “a universal unified simplistic abstract”

determination has grown among many to respond dynamically and imaginatively to the challenges presented by the prophetic texts.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, exposing and naming the difficulties of these texts has remained a priority. If we draw on Richards's terminology, we might say that feminist approaches tend to concentrate on the *vehicle* of the prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language (the female personification of Jerusalem, for example) rather than on their varying *tenors* (for instance, unacceptable cultic practices in Jerusalem).<sup>45</sup> Moreover, they tend to be more interested in the implications of the vehicle for *current* readers, rather than for previous audiences/readers.<sup>46</sup> It is perhaps here that the influence of cognitive approaches can be witnessed most clearly, and the gulf is at its widest.<sup>47</sup>

If feminist readings tend to take an explicitly cognitive approach to metaphor in theory, however, this is not always borne out in practice. Many

they inadvertently create another seeming monolith called Feminist Biblical Criticism.' See also pp. 269–86. Cf. Kamionkowski (2003: 41).

<sup>44</sup> We will encounter many such readings through the course of this monograph. Paying attention to the ways in which texts have the seeds of their own deconstruction within themselves has proved an especially fruitful approach. Cf. Sherwood (1996) and Shields (1998) for particularly compelling examples. For examples of feminist readings which call for the rejection of prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language, see Wacker (1987), Maier (1994: 85–103), Graetz (1995: 145), Magdalene (1995: 352), Törnkvist (1998: 72, 174).

<sup>45</sup> Richards (1936: 96–7). Galambush (1992: 4) explains: 'In the metaphor, "the earth is our mother", the tenor would be "earth" and the vehicle "mother".'

<sup>46</sup> Dempsey (1998: 70): 'the (re)readers of the text are presented with a metaphor that not only shaped a story in the past but one that also continues to shape theological imaginations today in a way that is offensive and unacceptable.' Fontaine (1995*b*: 63): 'The silenced and humiliated Gomer, abused into submission during her supposedly "honeymoon"-like reunion with her master, became less of an "object lesson" about inappropriate female behavior and more like an icon of what women may expect from the biblical god and his male representatives.' Cf. E. Seifert (1997: 258), Sanderson (1992: 221). E. W. Davies (2003: 93) characterizes feminist biblical critics thus: 'the question they are concerned to ask, when faced with such passages in the prophets, is not "What do these texts mean?" but "What do these texts do?" What effect does reading them have on real women who have been victims of sexual or physical abuse? How are females supposed to respond to images which appear to justify violence against women and which luxuriate in the gruesome details of their humiliation?'

<sup>47</sup> Richards (1936: 135–6) presents an interesting challenge to those who concentrate on the metaphoric vehicle to the disadvantage of the tenor: 'The psycho-analysts have shown us with their discussions of "transference"—another name for metaphor—how constantly modes of regarding, of loving, of acting, that have developed with one set of things or people, are shifted to another. They have shown us chiefly the pathology of these transferences, cases where the vehicle... tyrannizes over the new situation, the tenor, and behaviour is inappropriate. The victim is unable to see the new person except in terms of the old passion and its accidents. He reads the situation only in terms of the figure, the archetypal image, the vehicle. But in healthy growth, tenor and vehicle... co-operate freely; and the resultant behaviour derives in due measure from both.' It seems to me important to recognize Richards' insistence that metaphor is the interaction of vehicle and tenor and to consider both in our discussions: a belief reflected in the approach to metaphor advanced in the introduction.

continue to display signs of the substitutionary approaches to metaphor we outlined in regard to traditional readings. It is common to find references to sexual and marital metaphorical language as ‘the marriage metaphor’, even though this phrase undermines essential features of a cognitive approach.<sup>48</sup> The assumption that ‘the marriage metaphor’ was a recognized concept consisting of certain given features in the period in which the prophetic books were written is also prevalent. Bird speaks of *Hosea’s* expression, ‘zānâ + min / mē (away) from’, as being ‘dictated by the marriage metaphor to which Hosea has adapted his usage’;<sup>49</sup> K. M. O’Connor displays astonishment that *Jeremiah* involves details regarding the relationship between YHWH and his ‘wife’ that are absent in *Hosea*,<sup>50</sup> while Dille notes that ‘Deutero-Isaiah draws on an established tradition of YHWH as husband . . .’<sup>51</sup> Frymer-Kensky even believes that ‘the marriage metaphor’ was in circulation prior to *Hosea* 1–3.<sup>52</sup> It appears that there are traces of substitutionary approaches to metaphor still lingering among some feminist readings, despite their explicit commitment to cognitive methodologies.

If the traces of substitutionary approaches to be found within feminist scholarship are surprising, they have not combined to staunch the flood of feminist readings, or the strength of their critique of the prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language. Nevertheless, feminist readers have often lamented the lack of interest among traditional scholars in their observations.

<sup>48</sup> Yee (1992: 199; 2003: 81), Graetz (1995: 127), K. M. O’Connor (1992: 171), Frymer-Kensky (1992a: 144–52), Exum (1996: 113). Brenner (2004: 70, emphasis original) notes that ‘the name given to such texts in biblical criticism, feminist and otherwise, is the *marriage metaphor*. . . . A longer title for such passages will read something like this: *The prophetic metaphor about the relationship between YHWH—metaphorized into a loving, wronged and enraged husband—and his people, metaphorized into a loved but unfaithful wife*.’ It is striking that in Brenner’s ‘longer title’, ‘the’ metaphor remains singular and defined in terms of husband and wife only.

<sup>49</sup> Bird (1989: 81). Brenner (1996: 63): ‘Hosea 1–3, Jeremiah 2–5, Ezekiel 16; 23 and Deutero-Isaiah 47 . . . are variations of the image of the faithful husband and his promiscuous wife.’

<sup>50</sup> K. M. O’Connor (1999a: 283): ‘Surprisingly, the wife Jeremiah is talking about (2:1–3:5) is YHWH’s second, and he had divorced the first one though Hosea never mentioned it.’

<sup>51</sup> Dille (2004: 155). ‘This metaphor’, she continues, ‘can be seen clearly in Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, as well as in Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah.’ Dille understands ‘this metaphor’ to be an ‘*Israelite* tradition, perhaps originated by Hosea, and utilized by Jeremiah and Ezekiel’ (p. 157, emphasis original).

<sup>52</sup> Frymer-Kensky (1992a: 263 n. 10): ‘it seems unlikely that a metaphor drawn solely from one individual’s experience would have so influenced first, Jeremiah (who never married), and Ezekiel (who seems to have had a good marriage). The casual mention by the eighth century Judean prophet Isaiah that Jerusalem has become a “harlot” (Isa. 1: 21) may indicate that the parallel between Israel and wife is already in use.’ Some even look to the various possible ‘backgrounds’ of the prophetic language in order to understand its meanings, taking an etymological approach to metaphorical meaning. Cf. Törnkvist (1998: 83–95). This is much less common, however, due to the more typical concentration on the implications of the prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language for current readers.

Keefe sounds a note of disquiet in her review of Weems's *Battered Love*: '[T]raditional commentators continue to wax warmly about the romantic drama of the divine husband's love for his wayward wife Israel, as if there were no difficulty with the presence of sexual violence in the sacred text.'<sup>53</sup> Macintosh provides a powerful illustration in his response to *Hosea* (1997):

It is, then, not surprising that the soliloquy moves from expressions of outrage and pain through the desire to isolate and coerce the wayward wife to repentance, to the ultimate wish of the husband to start his marriage anew upon a basis of mutual trust and affection. The lyrical and beautiful expression of the latter is no more than an expression of hope and, applied, hope that the nation will repent and thereby find its salvation and true destiny.<sup>54</sup>

More recently, Ben Zvi's paper on 'the marital metaphor' (2004) takes immense care to recognize the kinds of issues with which feminist readers are concerned, outlining some of the material available and insisting that 'the corpus of research on this issue is very extensive'.<sup>55</sup> Still, he makes no attempt to engage with feminist readings himself, even to critique them. Having pointed readers their way, he simply moves on to reiterate the same traditional arguments we encountered in the work of Day and Stienstra.<sup>56</sup> No longer can such a lack of engagement be attributed to the 'predictability' (Carroll) of feminist readings. It seems to me that at the heart of the problem is, instead, the essentially differing approaches to metaphor underlying feminist and traditional readings. These distinct approaches have not only strongly shaped readings of the prophetic texts, they have also left feminist and traditional readers lacking a common language and shared understanding of what metaphor entails, seriously complicating their attempts to engage with each other. Discovering a way in which to dialogue will be a major challenge for feminist and traditional scholarship in the future, and it may be that a greater awareness of the metaphor theories assumed by both sides—and their implications—might help to alleviate some of the problems currently experienced.

<sup>53</sup> Keefe (1999). L. Day (2000: 225): 'Despite the fact that during the past many years some of the difficult aspects of Ezekiel 16 have been articulated by other scholars, these men, [Brownlee (1986), Hals (1989), Blenkinsopp (1990), Clements (1996), and Block (1997)] by and large, have ignored their concerns.' Cf. Törnkvist (1998: 64 n. 188): 'the problem with Yee and many other commentators, male as well as female, is that they refuse to see and recognize disastrous and oppressive images of God, like the imagery used in Hosea.' Brenner (1996: 64): 'many other readers have viewed and continue to view these same passages as merely "erotic" imagery, utilized for a theological purpose.'

<sup>54</sup> Macintosh (1997: 117–18). Cf. Mays (1969: 58).

<sup>55</sup> Ben Zvi (2004: 365).

<sup>56</sup> Ben Zvi (2004: 367–77).

## Literary-historical approaches

If there is a gathering number of readers within feminist scholarship determined to move the debate forward, a distinct group of approaches has emerged in recent years to share the cognitive terrain, seeking to draw on the resources not only of literary and feminist theories, but also of historical-critical approaches, to equip them for the difficult task ahead. It is worth taking some time to familiarize ourselves with these literary-historical approaches to the prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language, for this is the kind of approach that I will be adopting. Galambush (1992), Darr (1994), Weems (1995), Abma (1999), and Baumann (2003) all consciously align themselves with cognitive theories, affirming the power of metaphorical language to create new meanings that cannot simply be paraphrased. Each book begins with an outline of metaphor theory, drawing on prominent cognitive theorists to promote its own cognitive approach.<sup>57</sup>

While all five attempts are concerned with prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language, each deals with a different body of material. Darr concentrates on *Isaiah*; Galambush focuses on *Ezekiel*; Abma covers *Isaiah* 50: 1–3, 54: 1–10, *Hosea* 1–3, and *Jeremiah* 2–3; Weems encompasses *Hosea*, *Isaiah*, *Ezekiel*, and *Jeremiah*; while Baumann tackles the widest breadth of material: *Nahum* 3: 4–7, *Hosea* 1–3, *Jeremiah* 2–3, *Ezekiel* 16 and 23, *Isaiah* 40–66, *Lamentations* 1, *Micah* 1, and *Malachi* 2.<sup>58</sup> This interest in different material inevitably means that these readers are confronted with different issues. For, contrary to the suggestions of traditional scholarship, there is little conformity among prophetic sexual and marital metaphors and similes. Abma's interest in *Hosea* 1–3 means that she must engage with the specific issues of this controversial section, while Darr and Galambush can pass over these difficulties swiftly. *Isaiah's* sexual and marital metaphorical language is strikingly more positive than that of other prophetic books, leaving Darr with less reason to struggle with problems surrounding negative female imagery.

<sup>57</sup> Galambush (1992: 5) insists that metaphor 'provokes us to see connections where none had been seen before'. Baumann (2003: 29) echoes: 'The new thing thus produced is creative and also effects an imaginative and reflective process in the readers.' Darr (1994: 43) stresses: '[F]igurative language accomplishes both informative and performative functions. By "informative", I refer to imagery's ability to communicate ideas, data, perspectives, etc., to its audience; by "performative", I mean that aspect of imagery intended to elicit participation on the part of readers or hearers.' Abma (1999: 10–11) asserts that there is 'no doubt that metaphors have a cognitive content and open up accurate knowledge of realities beyond observation'. Weems (1995: 15) claims that the prophetic poets 'understood, first, the power of figurative speech over the human imagination; and they understood, second, the power of that same speech to convey certain things about reality that no amount of paraphrase could impart'.

<sup>58</sup> Baumann (2003: 1).

*Ezekiel* 16 and 23's distinctive use of 'narrative metaphor' is a strong influence on Galambush's discussion, while Weems's commitment to providing a thorough discussion of the hermeneutical issues leaves her with less opportunity to focus on individual verses. Baumann's attempt to cover a broad terrain gives her a wider perspective, but necessarily reduces the attention she can pay to each book.

Nevertheless, there are similarities between these five works. Perhaps most strikingly, in addition to adopting a cognitive approach to metaphor, all five are keen to read the prophetic books within their broad socio-cultural and historical setting and are concerned with the varying *tenors* of these metaphors, as well as their notorious *vehicles*. In other words, they are crucially different from their feminist colleagues, whose focus tends to remain resolutely on the vehicles of such metaphorical language and its impact on current readers. It is in recognition of the endeavour of Galambush, Darr, Weems, Abma, and Baumann to maintain a balance between their engagement with literary theory and their awareness of the socio-cultural and historical context of the prophetic books that we will speak of these works as 'literary-historical' approaches.<sup>59</sup>

### *Socio-cultural and historical concerns*

Abma, Baumann, and Weems are explicit in their reasons for adopting such an approach. Abma observes, 'A text may be offensive in some respect but on another level it may still be interesting, illuminating, confronting and worth interpreting. My point of departure is that a comment about the violence in the text as outlined above can never be the only interpretative comment in relation to this text,'<sup>60</sup> stressing that, 'biblical texts have their origin in a specific historical context'.<sup>61</sup> Weems asserts, 'If this language is extravagant and explicit, it is supposed to be. After all the prophets were poets. And how else do poets hope to arrest the attention of their audiences except by first seizing their imaginations?,'<sup>62</sup> insisting that 'metaphors cannot be separated from the socio-historical contexts that generate them and the socio-historical contexts to which they seek to respond'.<sup>63</sup> Baumann explains, 'As is evident from the feminist theological interpretation of the prophetic marriage imagery, serious problems arise when one attempts to interpret the texts against

<sup>59</sup> This is not to suggest that these works never display feminist characteristics and concerns. Baumann (2003: 2) even writes of 'feminist exegetes, among whom I count myself'. Nevertheless, these five approaches remain distinctive for their desire to combine literary and historical approaches.

<sup>60</sup> Abma (1999: 29).

<sup>61</sup> Abma (1999: 29).

<sup>62</sup> Weems (1995: 13).

<sup>63</sup> Weems (1995: 7).

a present-day background of understanding... Explanations of the text against their own background yield a different result from that achieved when this imagery is read against the background of today's (modern Western) images and experiences of marriage.<sup>64</sup> Thus, she concludes, 'it makes sense to consider the God-image in the various biblical texts against their own particular cultural and contextual—historical and literary—backgrounds'.<sup>65</sup> All three are keen to underscore the importance of recognizing the negative implications of prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language for current readers.<sup>66</sup> At the same time, however, they suggest that, if we can understand what these metaphors are doing, what messages they strive to convey, then maybe we can go some way to understanding why such violent and offensive imagery appears in the Hebrew Bible.

Galambush and Darr are less explicit about their motives for adopting a literary-historical approach, with references to the feminist debate barely appearing within their discussions. This is more understandable in Darr's case, as *Isaiah* does not repeatedly confront us with negative sexual imagery.<sup>67</sup> The lack of extended engagement with feminist scholarship in Galambush's work, however, is surprising, as it is in *Ezekiel* that sexual and marital metaphorical language is at its most problematic. Where Galambush does make reference to the feminist debate, it is only in footnotes, where she speaks of *Ezekiel* 16's female being 'perceived as a dangerous "other"' and alludes to the idea that this narrative's strongly subjective stance might be compared to pornography.<sup>68</sup> Even here, however, she does not make explicit the problematic nature of these assumptions. Galambush's reading introduces issues of clear relevance to feminist discussions. Most strikingly, she speaks of the way in which the female Jerusalem as Temple in *Ezekiel* 16 is 'always in risk of pollution, either through menstruation or through illicit sexual activity',<sup>69</sup> observing that in the restoration chapters of *Ezekiel* 40–8 this personified female is notably absent, replaced by a city of 'inanimate stone'.<sup>70</sup> She writes: 'The city's fidelity is therefore guaranteed, if only because infidelity has been made impossible; the "woman" Jerusalem has become, literally, an object, and

<sup>64</sup> Baumann (2003: 229).

<sup>65</sup> Baumann (2003: 233). Cf. p. 3.

<sup>66</sup> Abma (1999: 29): 'To take Hosea 2 as an example, it is undeniable that there are elements of violence in this text. No matter how and within what framework one attempts to explain this, the violence to the woman should not be denied or silenced. It should rather be brought into the open by any interpreter.' Weems (1995: 110): 'Metaphors can hurt. Metaphors can distort. Metaphors can kill. Metaphors can oppress.'

<sup>67</sup> Indeed, Darr (1992a, 1992b) demonstrates her clear interest in the subject elsewhere in papers on *Ezekiel*.

<sup>68</sup> Galambush (1992: 104–5 nn. 39, 40, 42, 44, 45; citation p. 104 n. 38).

<sup>69</sup> Galambush (1992: 88).

<sup>70</sup> Galambush (1992: 147).

so incapable of further disobedience.<sup>71</sup> We will return to these observations later, but for now it seems astonishing that in making them Galambush does not once reflect on their potential implications for women today. Even in her conclusions, where she describes *Ezekiel* 16 and 23 as ‘pornographic writing in the most literal sense of the word’,<sup>72</sup> Galambush does not engage with the wider implications of such language. Her silence may be influenced by the fact that her monograph is the earliest of the five works to emerge, published three years before *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (1995), which particularly highlights feminist perspectives. Yet she does refer a number of times to Setel’s influential ‘Prophets and Pornography: Female Sexual Imagery in Hosea’ (1985), without engaging with its major thesis. It is possible that Galambush is concerned about the academic acceptability of such observations, leaving them unsaid and implicit; but this is to enter into the thorny area of what might be in the mind of the author. We have only Galambush’s monograph with which to work, and here there is little explicit interest in the impact of *Ezekiel*’s language on current readers; a surprising absence in a work that otherwise takes such a strongly cognitive approach.<sup>73</sup>

If explicit engagement with feminist issues is absent in the discussions of Darr and Galambush, there are nevertheless traces of a desire to explain the difficult prophetic language through reference to its socio-cultural and historical settings. On the few occasions when *Isaiah* uses sexual or marital metaphorical language with a negative force, Darr is quick to stress its social context to account for its unsettling quality. She writes:

Israel’s hierarchical and asymmetrical social divisions, as well as the honor/shame values embedded in its patrilineal culture, had crucial and wide-ranging implications both for the lives of Israelite women and for stereotypical associations with females.... In a society where adult males were normative, women were inevitably regarded as the ‘other’ to some degree. Negative and/or threatening associations with women’s distinctly female body functions (e.g. menstruation) appear in certain texts, as do references to the potential threat uncontrolled sexual activity posed for Israel’s patrilineal society.<sup>74</sup>

Likewise, Galambush repeatedly refers to the book’s ‘logic’ in the face of the profoundly disturbing metaphorical language of *Ezekiel*: ‘The absence of the city’s female persona from the vision of restoration, while initially

<sup>71</sup> Galambush (1992: 130).

<sup>72</sup> Galambush (1992: 124–5).

<sup>73</sup> Interestingly, Törnkvist (1998: 21–2) speaks of Galambush’s work as an ‘important source of inspiration’ for her own explicitly feminist work (p. 21), recognizing that Galambush ‘uses terminology drawn from feminist and semiotic analysis’ (p. 22). It remains notable, however, that Galambush does not herself explicitly reflect on the implications of her observations.

<sup>74</sup> Darr (1994: 122).

surprising, is in fact a *logical solution* to the problem of the pollution that drove Yahweh from his Temple.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, Galambush particularly betrays her desire somehow to explain *Ezekiel's* use of offensive language in her repeated insistence in her conclusions that such language is an 'appropriate'/'convincing' vehicle.<sup>76</sup> Whether consciously or unconsciously, it seems that Galambush and Darr also share the perception that historical-critical approaches to prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language can enable us to understand *why* such language might have been used.

### *Literary concerns*

If the five literary-historical works draw on the resources of historical-critical approaches, they are also keen to avail themselves of the assistance offered by literary theories. In other words, not only are they concerned with the broad socio-cultural and historical context of prophetic sexual and marital metaphors, they also show a marked interest in their literary contexts. Weems's work is an exception, as her desire to grapple at further length with the hermeneutical issues raised limits the possibilities for such discussion. Even so, she still endeavours to discuss each prophetic book individually, and is aware of the impact of these different settings on metaphorical meaning. An interest in literary context is far more apparent in the other four works. Galambush is keen to discuss *Ezekiel* 16 and 23's female personifications in the context of female personifications elsewhere in *Ezekiel*.<sup>77</sup> Darr considers *Isaiah's* sexual and marital metaphorical language in the wider context of the book's family imagery.<sup>78</sup> Baumann aims to explore 'the context of each formulation of the imagery within a particular book',<sup>79</sup> even if the number of prophetic books she covers only allows her to do this briefly (and not at all in the 'Book of the Twelve'). Abma's desire to recognize literary context is even more explicit: 'The aim at this stage is to bring into focus the individual character of the texts in the books of Isaiah, Hosea and Jeremiah. What is the composition of a text, what is its main thrust? In which particular sense does it attempt to speak to its audience? Only after considering such questions will it be possible to deal with the function of the marriage imagery

<sup>75</sup> Galambush (1992: 151 n. 53, emphasis mine). Cf. p. 156.

<sup>76</sup> Galambush (1992: 159, emphases mine): 'Ezekiel's personification of Jerusalem in chaps 16 and 23 is an *appropriate vehicle* to describe various aspects of the relationship between Yahweh and the city. . . . [T]he use of the marriage metaphor, and specifically the metaphor of sexual infidelity, provides a *convincing vehicle* by which to depict (and justify) the intensity of Yahweh's outrage against the city.'

<sup>77</sup> Galambush (1992: 2).

<sup>78</sup> Darr (1994: 35).

<sup>79</sup> Baumann (2003: 34).

within these texts.<sup>80</sup> The understanding of metaphor as intrinsically involving literary context, rather than existing as an individual word, is a central tenet of cognitive approaches. Thus we might say that Galambush, Abma, Darr, and Weems present truly ‘literary-historical’ approaches, aligning themselves with literary approaches to metaphor, while also drawing on the tools of historical-critical approaches.

### *Cracks in the cognitive terrain*

The terrain lying before these literary-historical approaches is treacherous, however, and so it is perhaps unsurprising that these works encounter a number of problems in their attempts to traverse it. Despite the resolutely cognitive approach assumed, all five books shows traces of assumptions more commonly associated with substitutionary theories. These are similar to those we perceived earlier within feminist scholarship, but even more perceptible: first, the search for historical backgrounds to metaphorical language; second, the use of the generic term, ‘the marriage metaphor’; and third, the belief that a recognized story underlies prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language.

#### 1. The search for ‘etymologies’

The quest for socio-cultural and historical backgrounds to the metaphorical language is particularly evident in the work of Galambush, Baumann, and Abma. Galambush draws on Fitzgerald to argue that an appreciation of ancient Near Eastern understandings of capital cities as the consort of the city’s patron god is essential for an understanding of *Ezekiel’s* metaphorical language:<sup>81</sup>

Ezekiel’s use of the marriage metaphor depends for its coherence on the culturally accepted notion that the female capital city is married to a male god. Though, as we shall see, Ezekiel is also dependent on earlier OT authors, none of the OT usage of sexual terminology to describe the relationship between the people and God can be understood apart from the status of the marriage metaphors as a part of the worldview of the ancient Near East.<sup>82</sup>

Baumann devotes a whole chapter to ‘Ancient Near Eastern Ideas as Background for Prophetic Marriage Imagery’, explaining, ‘The hope is that by referring to the ancient Near Eastern environment we may develop a background for the prophetic marriage imagery that casts some light on it that the Old Testament does not provide.’<sup>83</sup> She is at least aware of the

<sup>80</sup> Abma (1999: 1).

<sup>81</sup> Galambush (1992: 20–1). Fitzgerald (1972, 1975).

<sup>82</sup> Galambush (1992: 23).

<sup>83</sup> Baumann (2003: 67–81).

limitations of these approaches, however, observing, ‘it seems to me appropriate in light of these considerations, to maintain some scepticism toward descriptions of historical “models” for Israel’s “whorish” behaviour.’<sup>84</sup> Abma is keen to find a background within Israel itself, arguing that ‘the unique outlook of the biblical marriage metaphor suggests a primary link with the intra-biblical idea of covenant rather than with extra-biblical influences.’<sup>85</sup> My concern is not with the validity of the proposals of Galambush, Baumann, and Abma, although all three touch on debated issues.<sup>86</sup> Instead, it lies more generally with their reliance on historical backgrounds for their understanding of metaphorical meaning. For this betrays the underlying assumption that, if we can detect how a metaphor came to life, then we can understand its meanings. These readers all presume that, by searching for the ‘etymology’ of metaphorical language, they can discover the meaning of a given metaphorical word in a literary text: an assumption we have seen Barr convincingly oppose in relation to the meaning of words more generally. While etymological investigations can be an illuminating last resort, it is hard to justify giving such hypotheses precedence over the literary context of a given word, whether literal or metaphorical, when exploring its meanings. For a start, meanings change over time; and if lexicalized words can develop in this way, then metaphorical language has the potential to mutate even more dramatically. Even if the backgrounds that Galambush, Baumann, and Abma propose are accurate, they should not be used to govern our understanding of living sexual and marital metaphorical language.<sup>87</sup> The interest of Galambush, Baumann, and Abma in hypothetical backgrounds of metaphorical language little befits their conscious adoption of a cognitive approach.

## 2. ‘The marriage metaphor’

We noted earlier that the uniform reference to sexual and marital metaphorical language as ‘the marriage metaphor’ characterizes substitutionary approaches.

<sup>84</sup> Baumann (2003: 91; cf. p. 81).

<sup>85</sup> Abma (1999: 24), following Adler (1990). Cf. Weinfeld (1975: esp. 277–8), G. Cohen (1966).

<sup>86</sup> Abma (1999: 22) dismisses Galambush’s attempts to identify *Hosea* 2’s female as city Samaria and *Jeremiah* 2: 1–3: 5’s female as Jerusalem as ‘an attempt to force the texts into a system into which they poorly fit’. Abma’s understanding of covenantal language is in turn challenged by Nicholson’s (1986) work on covenant. Kamionkowski (2003: 28) also critiques Adler (1990), on whom Abma is reliant. Drawing on McFague’s work (1982), highlighting the metaphorical character of all language speaking of God, Kamionkowski observes: ‘asserting that marriage is the most appropriate vehicle by which to describe biblical covenant theology is fraught with assumptions regarding the “unmetaphorical”, literal language of covenant.’

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Darr (1994: 132): ‘Debates over the origins of adulteress/prostitute city imagery will continue. Most important for our purposes, however, is the recognition that such imagery could be developed by Israel’s prophets and other poets in more than one way.’

It is perhaps surprising, then, that both Weems and Galambush retain this designation.<sup>88</sup> If this seems inconsequential, we should remember that, in adopting a cognitive approach to language, they promote the idea that the medium of an expression cannot be separated from its meaning. The term ‘the marriage metaphor’ is problematic for two reasons. First, it suggests that all prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language is inherently related to marriage, which is simply not the case, as we will discover. Second, the designation can more troublingly betray an understanding of such metaphorical language as homogeneous, or as emanating from a single underlying metaphor. It is precisely for this reason that I avoid the term, referring to such language broadly as ‘sexual and marital metaphorical language’, promoting a recognition of the variety involved.

Darr, Abma, and Baumann display some awareness of the issues involved, albeit to different degrees. Abma occasionally speaks of ‘the marriage metaphor’, or ‘marriage imagery’, but is clear to limit the designation to those metaphors that she believes assume a marriage background, conscious that זנה (‘to prostitute’) ‘does not always imply the notion of a marriage relationship.’<sup>89</sup> Baumann avoids the generic singular term ‘the marriage metaphor’ and recognizes that ‘the concept of “marriage imagery” is not really satisfying as a description of the phenomenon in question’;<sup>90</sup> but nevertheless opts to maintain the phrase, explaining, ‘but since it has become customary usage among scholars I have adopted it.’<sup>91</sup> Indeed, through the course of her monograph, Baumann becomes markedly less careful in her allusions to ‘marriage imagery’,<sup>92</sup> even suggesting that זנה (‘to prostitute’) is ‘a much better indicator’ of such ‘marriage metaphors’ within the prophetic texts.<sup>93</sup> Darr is notable for her decision to steer clear of the phrase ‘the marriage metaphor’, using varying descriptions to speak of *Isaiah’s* metaphors and similes.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Weems (1995: 4, 19, 22, 26, etc.); Galambush (1992: 23, 35, 37, 44, etc.).

<sup>89</sup> Abma (1999: 3): ‘It is important to note that the term “marriage imagery” is in fact an umbrella for various sub-forms of metaphorical speech. Such different notions as divorce, adultery, promiscuity, love and a renewed commitment come to the fore within the framework of marriage imagery. The notion of marriage is thus a root metaphor that can be elaborated in various directions and result in various forms of metaphorical speech.’ She insists that the terms קנה, אהב, and זנה should be distinguished from such ‘marriage imagery’ (p. 4).

<sup>90</sup> Baumann (2003:1).

<sup>91</sup> Baumann (2003: 1).

<sup>92</sup> Baumann (2003: 41) later observes: ‘In the texts of the prophetic marriage imagery there is a cluster of terms that appear in other Old Testament texts in connection with marriage. On this basis, we can rightly speak of “marriage imagery” or “marriage metaphors”.’

<sup>93</sup> Baumann (2003: 41).

<sup>94</sup> Examples of Darr’s descriptions (1994: 132) include ‘marriage and adultery/harlotry tropes’ and ‘adulteress/prostitute city imagery’.

Baumann, Abma, and Darr are at least alert to the difficulties surrounding the traditional expression. In contrast, Galambush and Weems show little awareness of the issues. On one level, both are keen to distinguish between distinct uses of prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language, recognizing the impact of literary context. However, not far beneath this surface lies the belief that such differences can be characterized as adaptations of a single 'marriage metaphor'. Galambush continually uses language of 'reworking',<sup>95</sup> 'transforming',<sup>96</sup> 'exploiting',<sup>97</sup> 'recasting',<sup>98</sup> 'shaping',<sup>99</sup> 'reshaping'<sup>100</sup> to describe *Ezekiel's* sexual and marital metaphorical language, stressing the book's reliance on 'the marriage metaphor' as it appears in other prophetic books. She even suggests that Ezekiel 'deletes the "honeymoon" stage from Yahweh's marriage as depicted by both Hosea and Jeremiah';<sup>101</sup> and states that 'Jeremiah makes effective use of the already traditional metaphor of Jerusalem as Yahweh's wife'.<sup>102</sup> Such an approach sits uncomfortably with her emphatic adoption of a cognitive appreciation of metaphorical language. Cognitive theories insist that context is just as important an influence on metaphorical meaning as the specific metaphorical word. Thus it is simply not possible to encounter precisely the same metaphor within different contexts, even if the same metaphorical word is present. Yet Galambush's language continually suggests that this is the case: 'Ezekiel 16 is somehow more offensive than the use of the *same metaphor* in Hosea and Jeremiah'.<sup>103</sup>

Galambush's emphasis on *Ezekiel's* 'reworking', 'recasting', etc. of a pre-existent metaphor leaves little room for the insistence that metaphorical language *creates* meaning, which it seems to me is essential to a truly cognitive approach. Ricoeur insists that metaphors have the power to 'project and reveal a world',<sup>104</sup> while Black notes, 'It would be more illuminating in some... cases to say that the metaphor creates the similarity than to say that it formulates some similarity antecedently existing'.<sup>105</sup> Galambush's tendency away from this approach is particularly unexpected when we recall her introductory words that metaphorical language 'provokes us to see connections where none had been seen before'.<sup>106</sup> Yet she is not alone in this, with Weems betraying a similar proclivity, albeit to a lesser extent, in phrases such as 'some of the assumptions *embedded* in the metaphor'.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Galambush (1992: 86).

<sup>96</sup> Galambush (1992: 87).

<sup>97</sup> Galambush (1992: 87).

<sup>98</sup> Galambush (1992: 106).

<sup>99</sup> Galambush (1992: 89).

<sup>100</sup> Galambush (1992: 106).

<sup>101</sup> Galambush (1992: 81, emphasis mine).

<sup>102</sup> Galambush (1992: 57).

<sup>103</sup> Galambush (1992: 102, emphasis mine).

<sup>104</sup> Ricoeur (1978: 93; 1979: 150–2).

<sup>105</sup> Black (1962: 37).

<sup>106</sup> Galambush (1992: 5).

<sup>107</sup> Weems (1995: 41, emphasis mine). Cf. Baumann (2003), who may avoid alluding to 'the metaphor', but demonstrates a similar tendency in speaking of 'the imagery'. She writes: 'In Ezekiel 16; 23, we find a much-expanded form of the Old Testament marriage imagery'

### 3. 'The story' of YHWH and his wife

Finally, we come to the third influence of substitutionary approaches to metaphor on the five literary-historical works. Earlier, we witnessed the tendency within traditional scholarship to presume that a recognized story-line lies behind all prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language. It is surprising to find such an assumption underlying these cognitive approaches also. Galambush refers to the story only occasionally in practice, possibly due to her strong focus on the background of city as consort; nevertheless, the assumption underlies her discussion: 'Ezekiel recasts *the story* of Yahweh's adulterous wife as a two-part story, each part of which takes place in two stages';<sup>108</sup> 'Ezekiel rereads and retells *the story* of the woman Jerusalem as a story of female sexual pollution and of male disgust and revenge.'<sup>109</sup> Baumann makes the assumption explicit, insisting, 'A survey of the above texts reveals a kind of "history of the relationship" between YHWH and "his wife."<sup>110</sup> She even goes further to outline the 'story's' five motifs:

First, there is a narrative of the marriage between YHWH and his 'wife,' as well as her 'harlotry.' Second, YHWH's reaction is described as the punishment of the 'wife,' often painted in scenes of sexual violence or as divorce from 'her.' Third, YHWH then also takes Zion/Jerusalem (or Judah) as a wife, and she, too, 'whores' away from him. Fourth, she is also punished by him, or he considers divorce. Finally, in many texts a fifth motif announces, after the punishment or suffering of the 'wife,' that YHWH has forgiven her, put an end to her suffering, or restored her (as land or city).<sup>111</sup>

The reduction of all sexual and marital metaphorical language to such a story-line is startling within a cognitive approach to metaphor. If Baumann makes the assumption clear, however, it is within Weems and Abma's work that the belief has most impact.

(p. 135); 'Ezekiel has fundamentally reshaped the existing imagery' (p. 145). Indeed, Baumann repeatedly speaks of 'the special tailoring of the marriage imagery,' 'this formulation of the imagery,' 'the expansion of the imagery,' the 'reformulation of the imagery,' and the 'detailed development and expansion of the imagery' (pp. 144–5), perhaps echoing Galambush's approach.

<sup>108</sup> Galambush (1992: 99).

<sup>109</sup> Galambush (1992: 124).

<sup>110</sup> Baumann (2003: 41).

<sup>111</sup> Baumann (2003: 41–2). In a previous paper (1999) providing the same outline, she admits, 'There are different versions of the story of YHWH's wife in each of the prophetic books' (p. 559), acknowledging, 'In summary, we can see that each of the prophetic books gives us its own version of the prophetic marriage metaphor' (p. 565). Baumann believes that it is only through the twelve minor prophets that we can 'come to know the complete stories of the female personifications of Israel and Jerusalem/Zion in relation to YHWH' (p. 566). However, her belief in such a 'history' is clear.

For Abma, such a story is closely bound up with an understanding of covenant as a background to marital metaphors: 'Every stage in Israel's history corresponds to a stage in the marriage between Yahweh and Israel. The growing love during the time of youth, the engagement and bridal time in the wilderness and the married life in the land with its concomitant deceptions and nadirs, all fit *within the scheme of the covenant history as the biography of a marriage*.<sup>112</sup> Abma believes that the marital metaphors of each prophetic book progress through a similar plot, reflecting a recognized covenant story. We will find that such an understanding of prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language is difficult to maintain in practice. My real interest at this point, however, lies in Abma's motivation, perhaps best illustrated by the following insistence:

The covenant relationship also provides the love and commitment of Yhwh to Israel with a dimension of durability. Yhwh's love for the people is not a sudden burst of emotion or a temporary affair, but a reliable and lasting commitment. It is a commitment that stretches back in time and that stretches out into the future. The notion of partnership, therefore, also provides prospects and expectations for the future. On the whole, the covenant setting of the notions of love and marriage indicates that the love and engagement of Yhwh to Israel should not be understood only as emotions but also as acts that confirm and fill out Yhwh's commitment to Israel.<sup>113</sup>

Abma's focus on the background of covenant allows her to treat negative marital metaphors, whose problematic nature have been so convincingly highlighted by feminist readings, as ultimately positive. Having established the 'covenant story' as a backdrop, she argues for an 'abstraction' of the metaphorical language, insisting we can retain the broad plot and message, while rejecting the reinforcement of gender stereotypes, through 'a creative adaptation of the tradition.'<sup>114</sup> She writes, 'I would, therefore, seek the point of the marriage imagery in the notion of partnership, in relative abstraction of the gender roles. Israel and Yhwh are bound as partners in a covenant relation and the marriage imagery signifies that this is more than a formal affair: it is a passionate affair with a strong and affectionate involvement of the two partners.'<sup>115</sup> Abma's reading of marital metaphors as essentially covenant imagery, combined with her 'abstraction' technique, leaves her with a remarkably positive reading of the problematic marital imagery:

<sup>112</sup> Abma (1999: 255, emphasis mine). Abma is strongly influenced by Neher (1954) and Adler (1990). See pp. 110, 258, for illustrations of her belief that prophetic marital metaphors follow covenant history.

<sup>113</sup> Abma (1999: 258).

<sup>114</sup> Abma (1999: 254).

<sup>115</sup> Abma (1999: 254).

[I]t is striking to note how the biblical texts conceive of the love of Yhwh. They allude to this love in such a way that it is not simply a circumstance that one can just as well neglect. The essence of the love of Yhwh seems to be that this love from the other side offers security and safety and a companionship from which one can never fall. The companionship with Yhwh, as every love relationship, provides Israel with a home and a future.<sup>116</sup>

We may not even recognize the passages of which Abma speaks, so powerful is the double lens of covenant and ‘abstraction’ she uses.

Abma excludes the particularly violent *Ezekiel* 16 and 23 from her discussions, referring to them only in passing, and we might suggest that it is this that enables her to paint such an optimistic picture. Nevertheless, her approach to prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language raises important questions. In the first instance, her blanket equation between marital and covenant metaphorical language and her assumption of a single recognized story-line simply does not survive a close reading of the texts. Perhaps most importantly at this stage, however, Abma’s ‘abstraction’ approach flies in the face of cognitive theories, which stress that a metaphor cannot be simply translated, even if one chooses to call such a translation ‘abstraction’. We could say that Abma engages in a kind of macro-substitutionary approach. While resisting the substitution of individual marital metaphors, in place of this, she substitutes the story-line she perceives behind these metaphors with a covenant story, leading to an almost unrecognizable reading of the prophetic texts.

Weems also speaks of a covenant story-line underlying the metaphorical language, similarly using this plot to redeem the words that she finds so problematic. While recognizing that the passages concerned are ‘complex and discomfiting’,<sup>117</sup> for Weems, this is offset by the knowledge that this is ‘part of the messiness of intimacy’<sup>118</sup> (indeed ‘covenant intimacy’)<sup>119</sup> with God:

God remains powerful, compassionate, and uniquely devoted to Israel, says the metaphor. At those times, God suffers and anguishes with Israel in its calamity (after all, the husband is as distraught and out of control as the wife is broken and humiliated). More surprising is that, after a period of punishment, God stands ready and willing to comfort a weeping nation (Rachel), dry her eyes and reward her for her trials with an invitation for renewal (Jer 31:16–34).<sup>120</sup>

Weems is aware that the issues involved in current readings of prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language are complex, acutely aware of their cognitive power (‘Metaphors can hurt. Metaphors can distort. Metaphors can

<sup>116</sup> Abma (1999: 259).

<sup>119</sup> Weems (1995: 74).

<sup>117</sup> Weems (1995: 78).

<sup>120</sup> Weems (1995: 82–3).

<sup>118</sup> Weems (1995: 78).

kill. Metaphors can oppress'<sup>121</sup>) and their hold on human imagination.<sup>122</sup> Her response, therefore, itself becomes more complex, as she encourages readers to adopt a 'dual hermeneutic': 'one that helps a reader to resist the ways in which texts subjugate aspects of a reader's identity, and another that allows a reader to appreciate those aspects of the text that nurture and authorize them in their struggle for personhood'.<sup>123</sup> Yet this approach still rests on the assumption that sexual and marital metaphorical language can be substituted with 'covenant' language.

Underlying Weems's search for 'nurturing' aspects is the familiar belief that the prophetic metaphorical language can be cast as a drama, in this case one of 'rape and romance', which has a happy ending.<sup>124</sup> In order to find such a story, Weems is compelled to harmonize the language in a manner strongly reminiscent of traditional approaches. In order to suggest that 'The reconciliation of husband and wife is described in such heart-warming ways that it is almost easy to forget that retaliation, according to the metaphor, is a prerequisite to reconciliation', she draws on *Jeremiah* 30–1's 'new covenant' passages, arguing that this covenant renewal also renews the divine-human marriage vows negated in *Jeremiah* 2–3.<sup>125</sup> Thus, once again, we witness the unexpected belief that 'the marriage metaphor' can be substituted by a recognized covenant story within a literary-historical approach.<sup>126</sup>

So far, we have mentioned little of Darr. Darr resists the impact of substitutionary approaches more resolutely than Galambush, Baumann, Weems, and Abma, perhaps due to her wider concern with family imagery and the more positive nature of *Isaiah*. It is of marked interest, then, that where metaphorical prostitution features in *Isaiah*, Darr immediately strives to lessen its negative impact. In response to *Isaiah* 1: 21, she seeks to distance the personified female from her actions: 'Zion has become a "harlot" *precisely on account of her rebellious and sinful inhabitants*'.<sup>127</sup> She is also keen to stress that 1: 21 has an ultimately positive end: 'But Yahweh acts *ultimately on behalf of Zion and those in her who repent*'.<sup>128</sup> This approach becomes even more explicit in her discussion of *Isaiah* 54: 7–8: 'It is clear that this description of

<sup>121</sup> Weems (1995: 110).

<sup>122</sup> Weems (1995: 85). She argues that feminist readings are motivated by a desire to 'demystify' this offensive, but compelling language (p. 88).

<sup>123</sup> Weems (1995: 100).

<sup>124</sup> Weems (1995: 113).

<sup>125</sup> Weems (1995: 91).

<sup>126</sup> Sherwood (1996: 282–6) provides a critique of Weems's approach, not only highlighting the problems with the metaphor theory she advances, but also illustrating how Weems ultimately sides with the male against the female. Sherwood suggests that these problems stem from Weems's 'desire to present Yhwh as a gracious deity' (p. 286).

<sup>127</sup> Darr (1994: 139).

<sup>128</sup> Darr (1994: 140).

what Jerusalem has endured, and of what Yahweh desires beyond her punishment cannot be discerned apart from the poem's marriage metaphor; the two are one.<sup>129</sup> Thus, even while Darr works with the markedly less problematic *Isaiah*, she joins the other literary-historical works in witnessing traces of the impact of substitutionary theories on her cognitive reading of prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language.

### Mapping the field: a wider perspective

If we step back at this point, to survey the landscape once more, the gulf created by the different approaches to metaphor shifting beneath the surface still stretches across the terrain, dividing feminist and traditional approaches. On the cognitive side, feminist readers continue to call attention to the scale of the mountain of problems created by prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language, with some beginning to gather the strength and creativity to approach this considerable challenge. It is within this context that we can now perceive the five literary-historical works emerging alongside their feminist colleagues, as they adopt a cognitive view of metaphorical language, yet strive to scale the mountain through harnessing the tools provided by historical-critical approaches. Within these literary-historical works themselves, we can nevertheless still perceive traces of the impact of substitutionary theories. These traces show in what we might call the vulnerabilities of these approaches: their desire to limit the potential of this offensive metaphorical language; their aspiration to rescue the texts from the plight in which earlier feminist readings left them; and perhaps even a common longing to bridge the gulf by dialoguing with traditional scholarship on shared ground.

If these are significant weaknesses, I would like to conclude by emphasizing the importance of these works and the great extent to which they have moved the debate forward. If these discussions have experienced complications, this only testifies to the difficulty of the terrain with which they are faced. My aim in this study, then, is to draw on the contributions of Galambush, Darr, Weems, Abma, and Baumann in an attempt to advance further the discussion of prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language, adopting a similar literary-historical method, while maintaining a cognitive understanding of metaphorical language, as far as I am aware and able.

<sup>129</sup> Darr (1994: 181).

A COGNITIVE, CONTEXTUAL APPROACH  
TO METAPHORICAL LANGUAGE

If metaphor theory has proved an effective lens through which to map the scholarly terrain, it will also be an invaluable aid for this exploration. Before we begin, it is therefore worth briefly outlining the specific cognitive understanding of metaphorical language that will inform the discussion, and introducing the vocabulary on which we shall draw. I should note at this point my particular indebtedness to the work of Soskice (1985), Black (1962, 1979), Kittay (1987), and Ricoeur (1978) for this consciously simplified and practically oriented approach to metaphor.

If asked for the most significant tenet of cognitive metaphor theory for our purposes, my response would undoubtedly be ‘Context, context, context’. We saw earlier that substitutionary approaches tend towards a word-based view of metaphor. In contrast, it seems to me that an awareness of literary context is central to a cognitive approach, and thus to this particular exploration. First, and most basically, a consideration of the context of a metaphorical word is a vital step in determining whether that word is indeed metaphorical. Ricoeur explains the problem neatly: ‘There is no grammatical feature that distinguishes metaphorical attribution from literal attribution. For example, grammar makes no distinction between Churchill’s calling Mussolini “That utensil!” and the use of the same phrase in a frying-pan advertisement. . . . Not marking the difference, and, in this sense, hiding it, is precisely that trap that grammar sets.’<sup>130</sup> Most cognitive theorists stress the importance of context for detecting metaphorical language. Beardsley argues that we can perceive a word to be metaphorical when we detect ‘logical absurdity’,<sup>131</sup> or when the statement in which the metaphorical word lies appears to be ‘self-contradictory’.<sup>132</sup> Kittay suggests that metaphor is detected in response to an ‘incompatibility’ or ‘some conceptual or conversational incongruity’ within a statement.<sup>133</sup> Ricoeur observes, ‘In a literal interpretation, the meaning abolishes itself.’<sup>134</sup> Within biblical scholarship, Eidevall even goes so far as to say, ‘Context-free sentences

<sup>130</sup> Ricoeur (1978: 252), drawing on Turbayne (1962: 14).

<sup>131</sup> Beardsley (1958: 138). Cf. Black (1979: 21): ‘When Wallace Stevens says, “A poem is a pheasant,” he cannot really mean that it flaps its wings and has a long tail—for such things are plainly false and absurd. But such “absurdity” and “falsity” are of the essence: in their absence, we should have no metaphor but merely a literal utterance.’

<sup>132</sup> Beardsley (1958: 141): ‘Whenever an attribution is indirectly self-contradictory, and the modifier has connotations that could be attributed to the subject, the attribution is a metaphorical attribution, or metaphor.’

<sup>133</sup> Kittay (1987: 24).

<sup>134</sup> Ricoeur (1978: 230).

cannot be classified as metaphors.<sup>135</sup> Although the identification of metaphor is a complex and controversial issue, it appears that there is an agreement among many that context is key to its recognition.

The significance of context, however, is by no means limited to the detection of a metaphorical word. It is also context that provides that metaphorical word with new meaning. Ricoeur writes: 'Metaphorical meaning . . . is not the enigma itself, the semantic clash pure and simple, but the solution of the enigma, the inauguration of the new semantic pertinence.'<sup>136</sup> Such 'new semantic pertinence' can be found only through reading the metaphorical word within its present context. Ricoeur underscores the point by speaking of 'statement-metaphor'.<sup>137</sup> It is for this reason that by 'metaphor' or 'metaphorical language'<sup>138</sup> I do not simply refer to the metaphorical word itself, but rather to *the metaphorical word within the context that is vital for creation of meaning*. Black's terminology can be drawn upon to promote this view, where metaphor is presented as the interaction of '*focus*' (the metaphorical word) and '*frame*' (the context of the metaphorical word, which for Black is conveniently characterized as the sentence in which it appears<sup>139</sup>). Indeed, it is this terminology that will provide the vocabulary for this exploration. While most prefer Richards's language of 'vehicle' and 'tenor',<sup>140</sup> tracing the 'tenor' within the prophetic books can prove problematic. Galambush speaks of *Hosea's* 'unique combination of a clear, forcible vehicle with an elusive tenor'.<sup>141</sup> Most importantly, however, Black's language of 'focus' and 'frame' is particularly appropriate for our purposes, as we explore metaphorical meaning within specific literary contexts.

A discussion of the way in which 'focus' and 'frame' work to create metaphorical meaning is far beyond the scope of this study. It is, however, worth highlighting two basic points that will inform us.

(1) Within cognitive approaches metaphor is often characterized as the 'tension'<sup>142</sup> ('interaction', 'interanimation', 'interface', or other active, relational words) between two systems of '*associated commonplaces*'. A term coined by Black, associated commonplaces might be characterized as those

<sup>135</sup> Eidevall (1996: 27). <sup>136</sup> Ricoeur (1978: 214, cf. p. 230).

<sup>137</sup> Ricoeur (1978: 4, 214). Cf. Black (1979: 24): 'Hereafter "metaphor" is usually short for metaphorical statement.'

<sup>138</sup> By 'metaphorical language', I accommodate both metaphor and 'modelling simile'. Cf. Soskice (1985: 58–61) and the first chapter of this monograph.

<sup>139</sup> Black (1962: 28).

<sup>140</sup> Richards (1936: 96 f.). Galambush (1992: 4) explains, 'In the metaphor, "the earth is our mother", the tenor would be "earth" and the vehicle "mother".'

<sup>141</sup> Galambush (1992: 45). Dille (2004: 18): 'when the tenor is "God", much of the discussion about the meaning of the tenor is irrelevant or even absurd.'

<sup>142</sup> Ricoeur (1978), Kittay (1987).

commonly held beliefs that an average person ‘in any given culture’ might associate with a given word.<sup>143</sup> While Black’s theory has been criticized for assuming that such commonplaces must be associated with two subjects (concentrating on metaphors in the form of ‘A = B’), many have developed his theory to accommodate a broader definition, encompassing metaphors whose foci might be adjectives, or verbs: for instance, ‘After a winter’s gestation in its eggshell of ice, the valley had *beaked* its way out into the open, moist and yellow’;<sup>144</sup> or ‘Pepper vines *snake* up electric poles.’<sup>145</sup> Another way in which such an interaction has been expressed, in a manner especially appropriate for this investigation, is by Goodman, who suggests, ‘[M]etaphor is an affair between a predicate with a past and an object that yields while protesting.’<sup>146</sup>

The first point I wish to highlight is this: although a metaphorical focus may bring with it associated commonplaces, or a ‘past’, this does not mean that all such associations are apparent in every metaphor in which the focus might feature. Black writes, ‘The wolf-metaphor suppresses some details, emphasizes others—in short, organizes our view of man.’<sup>147</sup> While many find details of Black’s theory problematic (especially his use of ‘filter’ and ‘screen’ to describe the ways in which metaphor goes about its organization<sup>148</sup>), he has proved an important starting point for many subsequent theories and highlights an important characteristic of metaphorical language. If metaphor is characterized as the working together of focus and frame to create meaning, then, even if used repeatedly, the same focus cannot take identical meanings each time it is used, as its frame will necessarily be different.<sup>149</sup> It is precisely this stress on the vitality of the frame (or context) for metaphorical meaning that leads me to reject the harmonization of sexual and marital metaphors through their designation as ‘the marriage metaphor’. Indeed, we might say that the hypothetical story of ‘the marriage metaphor’ has proved to be what Kittay calls a powerful ‘default frame’ in

<sup>143</sup> Black (1962: 40).

<sup>144</sup> Rushdie (1995: 10, emphasis mine).

<sup>145</sup> Roy (1997: 1, emphasis mine). Cf. Soskice (1985: 50): ‘It is important to say that these networks of associations are not necessarily generated by two distinct *subjects* of a metaphor (say, men and wolves) but can also be networks surrounding particular terms of a metaphor. For example, in a metaphorical use of the phrase “metaphysical streets”, these associations would be with the terms “metaphysical” and “streets”. This is more than a quibble, for if we think of this initial interanimation as not between subjects but between terms, we can make the theory applicable not only to metaphors like Black’s “Marriage is a zero-sum game” but also to metaphors like “He examined his tattered scruples”. In the latter we do not have two distinct subjects but we can still say that there is interanimation between the associations of “tattered”; and those of “scruples”.’ Cf. Black (1962: 28 n. 1).

<sup>146</sup> Goodman (1968: 69).

<sup>147</sup> Black (1962: 41).

<sup>148</sup> Black (1962: 39, 41).

<sup>149</sup> Black (1962: 28).

traditional scholarship, within which sexual and marital metaphorical language has been forced to find meaning. Kittay writes, 'When a given sentence has been artificially taken out of context . . . the features of the world that we take to be normal and our usual expectations of our world (as far as these are relevant to the utterance), serve as an implicit context (the default frame) determining our interpretation.'<sup>150</sup> It is perhaps for this reason that metaphorical foci such as 'prostitution', or 'marriage', have been assumed always to carry the same force within the prophetic books. In failing to pay sufficient attention to literary context, many readers have opted to read such foci within the 'default frames' of 'the marriage metaphor' and 'cultic prostitution', so that their force has appeared strikingly similar even in different contexts. My aim is to underscore the sheer diversity of associations suggested by prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language once it is read within its distinctive literary frames.

Ricoeur expresses the point well:

We are brought thus to picture discourse as a reciprocal interplay between the word and the sentence. The word preserves the semantic capital constituted by these contextual values deposited in its semantic treasury. What it brings to the sentence is a potential for meaning. This potential is not formless: the word does have an identity. Certainly this is a plural identity, an open texture, as we said; but this identity is nevertheless sufficient for it to be identified and reidentified as the same in different contexts. . . . But this plural *identity* is also a *plural* identity. This is why, in the game of the word and of the sentence, the 'initiative' of meaning, as it were, passes over again to the sentence. The passage from the potential to the actual requires the mediation of a new sentence, just as the potential meaning issues from the sedimentation and institutionalization of previous contextual values.<sup>151</sup>

Indeed, the centrality of context for our purposes leads me to venture beyond the convenient understanding of sentence as metaphorical frame. Such a restricted understanding is useful for most discussions, and might be understood as the 'immediate frame'. It seems to me, however, that the broader context of a metaphorical focus also has the potential to influence metaphorical meaning profoundly, and thereby should be acknowledged as a 'wider frame'.<sup>152</sup> If we take a simplistic metaphor in a form that Black would recognize, 'Karen is an elephant', this should illustrate the point. The focus,

<sup>150</sup> Kittay (1987: 106).

<sup>151</sup> Ricoeur (1978: 130, emphasis original).

<sup>152</sup> Black (1979: 24) extends his theory in a later article to allude to a concept similar to this 'wider frame'. He writes, 'A "statement", in my intended sense, will be identified by quoting a whole sentence, or a set of sentences, together with as much of the relevant verbal context, or the nonverbal setting, as may be needed for an adequate grasp of the actual or imputed speaker's meaning.'

'elephant', has a considerable range of associated commonplaces in English-speaking cultures. While we might say that the strongest associations are largeness, weight, or ungainliness, there are numerous others, such as wrinkled skin, large ears, a long nose, or even those introduced by well-known phrases such as 'elephants never forget', 'white elephants', or 'elephant graveyards'.

If 'Karen is an elephant' were to appear independent of a wider context, or frame, then its meanings would be wholly dependent on the reader, who would perhaps rely on his or her default frame. Once the metaphor appears within a broader context, however, this wider frame works to encourage the reader to perceive certain associations. One context might encourage associations of wrinkled, leathery skin; another might encourage associations of a desire to die in a place of choice; while yet another might encourage associations of a formidable memory. The 'actual' (Ricoeur) meanings of 'Karen is an elephant' still ultimately lie with the reader. For a start, we cannot assume that the reader will respond to the encouragement of the frame. (Will she or he take the role of co-operative reader or resistant reader, for instance? A discussion to which we will return.<sup>153</sup>) Even if the reader does respond to this encouragement, it is likely that numerous meanings will be actualized alongside those specifically promoted. Nevertheless, it seems important to recognize the significant influence that a wider frame can exert on metaphorical meaning, especially when this frame is a skilfully composed literary masterpiece, as can be found within the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible. Metaphorical meaning is impossible to control completely, but context can prove a powerful influence.<sup>154</sup>

(2) So far, we have confined ourselves to a discussion of the way in which immediate and wider metaphorical frames strive to influence and organize the associated commonplaces that a metaphorical focus might bring with it. The second feature I wish to highlight goes further than this to suggest that the wider frame of a metaphorical word also has the vital power to introduce *new associations*. Black writes:

<sup>153</sup> Cf. Shields (2004: 77), who cites Booth (1978: 63): 'To understand a metaphor is by its very nature to decide whether to join the metaphorist or reject him, and that is simultaneously to decide either to be shaped in the shape his metaphor requires or to resist.'

<sup>154</sup> Richards (1936: 126): 'The mind will always try to find connections and will be guided in its search by the rest of the utterance and its occasion.' Published in 1936, Richards's work is challenged by recent theories, but remains a strong influence for its interest in the influence of context upon metaphorical meaning. Cf. Black (1962: 29): 'recognition and interpretation of a metaphor may require attention to the particular circumstances of its utterance.'

In a poem, or a piece of sustained prose, the writer can establish a novel pattern of implications for the literal uses of key expressions, prior to using them as vehicles for his metaphors. . . . Metaphors can be supported by specially constructed systems of implications, as well as by accepted commonplaces; they can be made to measure and need not be reach me downs.<sup>155</sup>

This recognition of context's power to introduce fresh associations is key to this investigation.

A return to 'Karen is an elephant' should illustrate the point. If a novel were to devote its opening to a portrayal of elephants as violent and vicious, then the later introduction of a character with the words 'Karen is an elephant' might spark associations of violence. Conversely, if a novel were to open with the depiction of elephants as gentle and tender, then the introduction of its heroine with the same sentence could encourage associations of tenderness. These associations may not be *commonplaces* (indeed, they are antitheses), nevertheless, it is conceivable for a wider frame to introduce such associations. A striking illustration is the influence of 'The Elephant and the Blind Men' on the 'elephant' focus. In this well-known story, blind men are set before different parts of an elephant's body and asked to describe an 'elephant'. Unsurprisingly, they offer different descriptions. The popularity of this story has led to 'elephant' being used to describe numerous complex and multifaceted concepts, from God to technology (a quick search of the internet will suffice). Yet the novel associations encouraged have little relation to the associated commonplaces of 'elephant' we discussed earlier. It appears that well-crafted literature has immense potential to introduce to (or even force upon) the reader associations that she or he may not have previously held. To summarize, the wider frame of a metaphorical focus is a vital force on the creation of metaphorical meaning. In the first instance, it has the power to organize the associated commonplaces that a focus might bring with it. Second, and perhaps more importantly, it has the potential to introduce other less common, or even previously unknown, associations. These two characteristics are central to this exploration.

### Living, dead, and dormant metaphor

Before advancing beyond this basic discussion, it is worth noting that our account has so far been limited to 'living' metaphorical language. Metaphor theory has suggested that we can also encounter 'dormant', or even 'dead'

<sup>155</sup> Black (1962: 43). He continues: 'These implications usually consist of "commonplaces" about the subsidiary subject, but may, in suitable cases, consist of deviant implications established *ad hoc* by the writer.'

metaphor.<sup>156</sup> ‘Dead’ (‘frozen’) metaphor is essentially once living metaphor that has become an accepted part of everyday language (even lexicalized), and is thereby no longer recognized as metaphorical.<sup>157</sup> As Goodman daringly suggests, ‘What was novel becomes commonplace, its past is forgotten, and metaphor fades to mere truth.’<sup>158</sup> We say that rivers ‘run’, for instance, along with taps and fences. Grey writes, ‘[W]hen talk first arose of rivers running it must have sounded bizarre. It might well have been objected, when the metaphor was green and fresh, that rivers cannot run: they have no legs.’<sup>159</sup> Yet, with the death of the metaphor, we are no longer aware of the ‘logical absurdity’<sup>160</sup> of such a phrase. Perhaps on the path towards this plight (or prize) are ‘dormant’ metaphors: expressions so commonly employed that we are no longer conscious of their metaphorical quality, but which, in an instant, can be roused. Such is the lightness of their sleep, indeed, that dormant metaphors can awaken with the slightest prompt. Grey provides a neat illustration of an undesired waking in the memorable words of US President Ford: ‘Solar technology cannot be introduced overnight!’<sup>161</sup> Galambush offers a compelling example with biblical echoes:

If the Lord is my shepherd . . . the Lord may feed, carry, chase or chasten me, but he may not kill me and eat me, even though that is one of the things that real shepherds do. If, however, I choose to employ this latent but ordinarily inactive potential, then the familiar metaphor of the Lord as shepherd, which had through long use ceased to be provocative or ‘reorienting’, is suddenly new and, in this case, disturbing.<sup>162</sup>

We observed earlier that traditional approaches have a tendency to read the prophetic uses of ‘prostitution’ as a metaphorical focus as metonymical. Phrases such as ‘Israel has prostituted away from YHWH’ are frequently interpreted to mean that Israel has engaged in ‘cultic prostitution’. In my view, such an approach is strongly related to reading living metaphors as if they were dormant or even dead. Paradoxically, prostitution metaphors do seem to resign themselves to the plight of dormancy in prose works, such as *Leviticus*, *Deuteronomy*, or *Kings*, where ‘prostitution’ appears to be merely a standard term for unacceptable cultic practice. In my view, however, there are no signs of such inertia in the prophetic uses of this popular metaphorical

<sup>156</sup> Beardsley (1981: 112–13). Black (1979: 25) suggests ‘extinct’, ‘dormant’, and ‘active’ metaphor, but is himself interested in ‘metaphors needing no artificial respiration’.

<sup>157</sup> Ricoeur (1978: 99).

<sup>158</sup> Goodman (1968: 80).

<sup>159</sup> Grey (2000).

<sup>160</sup> Beardsley (1958: 138).

<sup>161</sup> Grey (2000).

<sup>162</sup> Galambush (1992: 8). While Galambush illustrates a different point (influenced by Lakoff and Johnson (1980)), the example remains useful for our purposes.

focus when it is read within its various wider frames. If the above discussion has been restricted to living metaphor, then this is because it is my firm contention that the prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language is neither dead nor dormant. It is not even dozing. Instead, such metaphors and similes are vigorously alive and forcefully working to organize and even to create associations and perceptions of YHWH, 'Israel', 'Judah', and the political situations in which these nations find themselves during the periods leading up to and following their respective defeats by the Assyrian and Babylonian empires.

### THE COOPERATIVE READER AND THE RESISTANT READER

It may have become apparent that such an approach depends for the most part on taking the role of what we might call the 'cooperative reader' over against that of the 'resistant reader'. By 'cooperative reader', I do not mean to introduce the concept of an 'ideal reader', which for many has unrealistic connotations. Sherwood protests, "The ideal reader is provoked into action only when the text fails to supply the information given and so "engages the reader's imagination". But this arrangement is both too comfortable and theoretically untenable, because real readers are provoked not only by absences in the text but by "fixed points" that they find offensive."<sup>163</sup> In response to such concerns, I wish to clarify that this study is in no way concerned with such an 'ideal reader', nor does it seek to present an objective, privileged reading. A cooperative reader may overlook nuances, and will almost certainly highlight certain aspects of the text more than others according to her or his interests or desires; yet she or he nevertheless seeks to respond faithfully to the text as far as is possible, and thus remains distinct from the resistant reader.

Such a proposal inevitably leads us into the thorny debate over the relationship between text and reader. If the way in which the focus and frame of metaphor interact to create meaning remains something of a mystery, so does the way in which text and reader interact to create readings.<sup>164</sup> While such a discussion is far beyond this study, it is worth clarifying that, like many other approaches, this exploration finds itself in the grey area between the two

<sup>163</sup> Sherwood (1996: 33–4).

<sup>164</sup> Sherwood (1996: 28) herself notes that even committed reader-response critics find their arguments 'undercut by a sense of the text.' Cf. pp. 25–39.

extremes, where text and reader meet.<sup>165</sup> Iser provides two useful images for our purposes, which seem to me to speak of a recognition that, while it is the reader who creates a reading, there is nevertheless some contribution on the part of the text. Perhaps most memorably, Iser speaks of the ‘gaps’ of the text within which the reader works:

One text is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential, for each individual reader will fill in the gaps his own way, thereby excluding the various other possibilities; as he reads, he will make his own decision as to how the gap is to be filled. In this very act the dynamics of reading are revealed.<sup>166</sup>

However, he also speaks of there being ‘stars’ in a text (Sherwood’s ‘fixed points’), from which different readers will create different ‘constellations’ (their readings): ‘the “stars” in a literary text are fixed; the lines that join them are variable.’<sup>167</sup> Iser writes:

The author of the text may, of course, exert plenty of influence on the reader’s imagination—he has the whole panoply of narrative techniques at his disposal—but no author worth his salt will ever attempt to set the whole picture before his reader’s eyes. If he does, he will very quickly lose his reader, for it is only by activating the reader’s imagination that the author can hope to involve him and so realize the intentions of his text.<sup>168</sup>

Iser’s words are a useful guide for our purposes. In the first instance he highlights the way in which literary works engage to ‘activate the reader’s imagination’: a characteristic we will repeatedly encounter within the prophetic books, with their use of devices which seek to provoke a response, such as rhetorical questions, word-play, patterned structures, and, of course, metaphorical language. In the second instance, Iser also recognizes the way in which texts ‘exert plenty of influence’ on that imagination. It is primarily in this aspect that the interests of this study lies, as we seek to trace the ways in which the prophetic texts strive to exert such an influence. If this study is

<sup>165</sup> Iser (2000: 189): ‘The literary work cannot be completely identical with the text, or with the realization of the text, but must lie halfway between the two.’

<sup>166</sup> Iser (2000: 193).

<sup>167</sup> Iser (2000: 195). Cf. Sherwood (1996: 32). Barton (2002) provides an accessible discussion of how far reader-response theory might be useful within biblical criticism, distinguishing between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ versions (p. 147). In the ‘hard’ version, ‘the reading of texts is an attempt, not to *discover* a meaning that is hidden until the necessary skills are applied, but to *construct* a meaning. The interpreter is a creator’ (p. 148). The ‘soft’ version (illustrated by Iser) allows for the idea that ‘the text is at least a partner in the production of meaning, not a *tabula rasa* on which the reader is free to write his or her own interpretation’ (p. 150). Barton presents the ‘soft’ version as a useful resource for reading biblical texts (p. 151).

<sup>168</sup> Iser (2000: 195).

concerned with taking the role of ‘cooperative reader’, this is not about creating a superreader;<sup>169</sup> nor does it mean to suggest that such a reader will produce a privileged reading. Rather, this cooperative reader will be concerned with identifying those ‘stars’ in the texts which seem to shine most brightly and to suggest a path that might be traced between them.

To reiterate the point, this exploration of sexual and marital metaphorical language in no way seeks to be objective; nor could it be characterized as such. For a start, we are concerned with reading metaphorical language within its wider literary frames, and the boundaries of such frames are necessarily subjective, even where there are strong and considered reasons for their identification. Perhaps most importantly, however, the readings offered will highlight the centrality of certain ‘stars’ in the texts, hence the reference to those ‘which seem to shine most brightly’. The sheer breadth of this study does not allow for a comprehensive presentation of each prophetic book as an introduction to the metaphorical wider frame. Such an approach would in any case obscure the discussion with detail, rather than shed any light on the prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language. Instead, this exploration seeks to call attention to those aspects (or ‘stars’) of each prophetic text which seem to be distinctive, so as to highlight that text’s characteristic nature and to explore the unique meanings of its metaphorical language. In *The Story of King David*, Gunn speaks of an approach which similarly seeks to recognize its subjectivity and yet claims fidelity to the text.

In the end the test of the value of the interpretation is whether it enables the reader to see the text in ways that are new to him and her. Do the critic’s guidelines uncover patterns of meaning which open the text to a deeper or more comprehensive reading? Do they lead to an appreciation of the way in which the work is an integrated whole? I reiterate: the process of literary criticism is essentially an empirical one. The reader tests the theory by ‘trying it on for size’ in his or her reading.<sup>170</sup>

This, then, is the background against which my decision to take the role of cooperative reader should be understood, as one who seeks to respond to the influence that a given text strives to exert on the meanings created by the reader. In my view, this role is not in conflict with the role of resistant reader; indeed, we might say that these roles are complementary. For in exploring the various assumptions, beliefs, and associations that a given passage seems to encourage, or even force, the reader to adopt, we might say that the reader simultaneously uncovers the resources to resist such encouragement. There are occasions, most notably during our exploration of the notorious *Ezekiel*

<sup>169</sup> Cf. Darr (1994: 30), who seems to conjure such a ‘superreader’.

<sup>170</sup> Gunn (1982: 87–8, citation p. 88).

16 and 23, when we will temporarily adopt the role of resistant reader in response to the disturbing nature of these chapters, whose patterned structures provide rich potential for resistant readings.

## A LITERARY-HISTORICAL APPROACH

The influence of literary theories on this exploration should, by this point, be clear. Like Galambush, Darr, Weems, Baumann, and Abma, however, my aim is to combine literary interests with an awareness of the broad socio-cultural and historical context in which the prophetic books emerged, and so this study can also be characterized as a literary-historical approach.<sup>171</sup> I use the word 'broad' advisedly, to emphasize that a detailed reconstruction of the precise socio-cultural and historical settings of particular passages is beyond my concern. For a start, the historical backgrounds of the prophetic books forming the basis of this study (*Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel*) are currently the focus of fierce debate far beyond the scope of this monograph. For our purposes, it is instead important simply to recognize that these books emerged in a socio-cultural and historical setting other than our own, in the areas they refer to as 'Israel' and 'Judah', during the periods leading up to and following the respective defeats of 'Israel' and 'Judah' by the Assyrian and Babylonian empires.

Feminist readings have vividly illustrated the disconcerting consequences of reading sexual and marital metaphorical language in our current climate with little reference to such a setting. My belief is that recognizing this broad socio-cultural and historical context goes some way to helping us respond to such problems, by providing an insight into why the prophetic books might use such offensive language. There may currently be fierce debate; but most agree that these works generally emerged during a period of uncertainty and

<sup>171</sup> Some may wish to characterize this study as a rhetorical-critical approach. Certainly it shares certain similar interests and aims with such approaches so long as they are broadly defined, for instance by Kessler (1980: 9): 'The paucity of historical information has been a subconscious source of frustration for biblical critics, easily leading to the temptation to make all sorts of unwarranted assumptions. . . . Responsible literary criticism must steer clear of such assumptions: the only certainty given to us is "the work itself" and we must therefore devote most of our attention to it.' To my mind, however, this would nevertheless be a misleading description for this exploration. Kessler himself (1982: 14) encourages the use of the term to describe synchronic studies only, admitting, 'The basic problem with rhetorical criticism is that English literary critics are by no means agreed as to what that well-worn term "rhetoric" signifies or ought to signify' (1982: 1). Perhaps most importantly, within metaphor theory, a 'rhetorical' approach tends to imply a substitutionary approach to metaphor, and is thus an inappropriate description for our purposes.

upheaval, apparently in response to perceived threats to Yahwistic worship in the face of certain pressures. It seems helpful to recognize that, in this broad setting, the prophetic books do not seek merely to entertain, but rather to convince their audiences/readers of the vital message that—contrary to all appearances—YHWH is in control. If the explicit and violent metaphorical language of the prophetic books has the potential to shock and appal, then, by their own account, so do the messages they strive to convey. This is not to suggest in any sense that such a setting justifies the prophetic use of offensive language; but rather that it goes some way to explaining why these works resort to such controversial and provocative words.<sup>172</sup>

In addition to this, it seems to me important to recognize that the prophetic works emerged within an unfamiliar culture. This recognition of ‘otherness’ not only prepares us to encounter associations that might be different from our own, but also perhaps to resist those associations which are inappropriate. It has often been assumed that, in order to approach writings from outside our own socio-cultural setting, we must cultivate a familiarity with the cultural climate in which they emerged in order to understand their metaphorical language. Darr writes:

Knowledge of culturally defined associated commonplaces is essential, especially in the case of implicit secondary predicates, for construing figurative uses of language. Competent North American readers encountering an ‘A is B’ metaphor like ‘time is money’, for example, are able mentally to sift through associations with both ‘time’ and ‘money’ to determine which are appropriate: unlike U.S. currency, time is not associated with green paper rectangles or round pieces of metal, but it can be ‘spent’ or ‘wasted’, and its use or misuse has economic consequences.<sup>173</sup>

To my mind, however, the challenge lies precisely the other way round. The quandary for current readers is that the prophetic books are extremely adept at making their associations clear to us.<sup>174</sup> *Ezekiel* 16 and 23, for instance, coerce the reader to assume that it is acceptable for a husband to beat and even kill his wife when she has prostituted, so as to make sense of

<sup>172</sup> Yee (2003: 133): ‘I have tried to situate the pornographic imagery of Ezekiel 23:1–35 historically in the collective trauma of disgraced priestly elite males, who suffered colonization, conquest, and exile during the first quarter of the sixth century B.C.E. This is not to condone or excuse the prophet’s pornographic symbolization of the nation, but rather to contextualize it.’ Cf. Dille (2004: 176).

<sup>173</sup> Darr (1994: 41). Her third chapter is subtitled ‘Associations with Females’, where a first step involves ‘recovering stereotypical associations’ (p. 86). Cf. Darr (1995: 138–9). Baumann (2003: 33) also speaks of the ‘context-embeddedness’ of metaphors, similarly devoting a chapter (pp. 39–55) to the ‘concrete’ (p. 30 n. 13) language of ‘marriage, adultery, “harlotry”’ in the Old Testament. Cf. Yee (1992: 197–8), Dille (2004: 7, 177–8).

<sup>174</sup> Cf. Exum (1996: 103): ‘Pinning down specific meanings for rare words, however, is not crucial for our understanding of these passages for their misogynistic import is clear enough.’

YHWH's actions. If such abhorrent associations were not so clear, these narratives would hold little terror. We could remain oblivious to past meanings of their metaphorical language, introducing our own associations to create new meanings. However, this is unfortunately not the case. The powerful wider frames of *Ezekiel* 16 and 23 mean we are not able to avoid the negative associations they encourage, even if we are oblivious to their cultural context. It is for this reason that the prophetic books are so offensive and potentially damaging. My concern to read the prophetic books within their socio-cultural and historical setting, then, is not motivated by a desire to reconstruct the associations of sexual and marital metaphorical language, but rather seeks to provide an appropriate context for their already starkly apparent, and objectionable, associations.

Finally, we could say that reading the prophetic books within their broad socio-cultural and historical setting provides us with an invaluable insight into their persuasive potential. Until recently, many adopted the view of Baal worship so colourfully portrayed in the Hebrew Bible. It was only with the discovery of extra-biblical sources—for instance, the Ras Shamra writings—that we became aware of just how partisan (and even deliberately distorting) a depiction the biblical account is. Other developments in scholarship have similarly highlighted the power of writings in the Hebrew Bible to orient (and reorient) their audiences'/readers' perspective. We have recently become acutely aware, for instance, of how slippery the term 'Israel' can be.<sup>175</sup> We could say that an alertness to the broad socio-cultural and historical context of the prophetic books thus also provides some insight into their persuasive power. It is for these reasons, along with others that will become clear, that this study adopts what I term a literary-historical approach.

### Associated commonplaces and socio-historical reconstruction

The above discussion raised an important point concerning the historical reconstruction of associated commonplaces. While adopting a literary-historical approach, this study will not devote time to reconstructing what marriage, adultery, and prostitution might have involved within the prophetic books' broad socio-cultural and historical setting. If historians are becoming increasingly aware of the difficulties involved in reconstructing the specific background to biblical passages, with limited external sources available, even Stienstra recognizes the issues involved: 'An apparent problem is caused by the fact that the Old Testament is the main source of information for the donor

<sup>175</sup> P. R. Davies (1992).

field, while it is also the object of analysis with respect to the marriage metaphor.<sup>176</sup> The detailed reconstruction of the sexual and marital mores underlying the prophetic books would involve a monograph in its own right, and is certainly beyond the scope of this study. Perhaps more importantly, however, such an approach does not adequately recognize the observations of metaphor theorists that associated commonplaces are not necessarily based in fact or practice.

Black writes, ‘From the expert’s standpoint, the system of commonplaces may include half-truths or downright mistakes (as when a whale is classified as a fish); but the important thing for the metaphor’s effectiveness is not that the commonplaces shall be true, but that they should be readily and freely evoked.’<sup>177</sup> Indeed, he adds with words that are particularly telling for this study: ‘(Because this is so, a metaphor that works in one society may seem preposterous in another . . .).’<sup>178</sup> Do elephants really have long memories, for instance? They are certainly not as slow and lumbering as associated commonplaces suggest. Abma writes:

One must be cautious not to overstress the connections between human marriage and the metaphorical marriage between Yhwh and Israel. In the interaction view of metaphor, the tenor, in this case the relation of Yhwh and Israel, as depicted elsewhere has its own characteristics. These may influence the notion of marriage and deflect it in a particular direction, highlighting some elements and disregarding others. A metaphor always allows some freedom to depart from the rules that apply to the domain of the vehicle.<sup>179</sup>

Those using historical reconstructions to inform their understanding of the associated commonplaces of the popular ‘prostitution’ focus have often become aware of the problem. For the focus seems to have associations of unfaithfulness within certain frames; yet most agree that literal prostitution in the texts’ broad socio-cultural and historical setting would not have involved such unfaithfulness. Galambush tackles the problem innovatively by introducing the idea that ‘a woman’s illicit sexual activity (for which she is not paid)’ is a ‘first level metaphor’: ‘The woman in question is not a literal prostitute,

<sup>176</sup> Stienstra (1993: 70). Kamionkowski (2003: 45) insists that ‘we understand [the biblical marital metaphor] to the extent that we have knowledge regarding husband–wife relationships in ancient Israel’, and yet recognizes that ‘two caveats must be raised here: our knowledge of the past is limited, particularly with regard to ancient Israel. . . . Furthermore, it is imperative to bear in mind that our reconstruction of marriage in the biblical period is, to some extent, based upon and enforced by the biblical marital metaphor which has the power to structure our conceptual view of the marriage institution.’ Cf. Bird (1989: 78).

<sup>177</sup> Black (1962: 40). Soskice (1985: 41).

<sup>178</sup> Black (1962: 40).

<sup>179</sup> Abma (1999: 12–13). While I disagree with the particular examples Abma provides, her point holds true.

but she does literally engage in sexual intercourse, and in a manner that implicitly involves more than one man, both one with authority over her and one without that authority.<sup>180</sup> According to Galambush, it is on this ‘first level metaphor’ that the ‘second level metaphor’, which alludes to ‘worship of gods other than Yahweh’, is based.<sup>181</sup> To my mind, however, such a complex approach to metaphorical language is unnecessary, and does not take full account of cognitive approaches. Instead, we might say that unfaithfulness is a historically inaccurate, but nevertheless apparently frequent, association/associated commonplace of the prostitution focus (perhaps even introduced by the prophetic books themselves).<sup>182</sup>

So far, we have two strong reasons to be wary of attempting a systematic, historical reconstruction of marriage, adultery, and prostitution. Perhaps the most compelling reason, however, is that it is simply unnecessary for our purposes. The vast majority of associations of interest to this exploration (whether commonplace or new) can be perceived through paying attention to the focus’s immediate and wider frames. For we are not concerned with establishing *all* possible associated commonplaces, but rather those which are specifically encouraged by the prophetic passage in question, as we adopt the role of the cooperative reader. We have already spoken of the power of the prophetic works to encourage, or indeed force, such associations on the reader (some may indeed wish that such associations might only be found within the mists of time). Thus an outline of the historical practices of marriage, adultery, and prostitution is not only a complex venture, it is a superfluous one.<sup>183</sup> Not only is it likely that the associated commonplaces of our metaphorical foci will differ from a reconstructed socio-historic background, the prophetic books have proved themselves more than capable in most instances of assisting the cooperative reader in perceiving the associations of interest to this study. It is worth clarifying at this point that to suggest the associations that a text might encourage is not to return to a substitutionary approach. In the words of Black, “‘Explication”, or elaboration of

<sup>180</sup> Galambush (1992: 27–31, citations on p. 29).

<sup>181</sup> Galambush (1992: 29–30). Cf. Abma (1999: 138 f.).

<sup>182</sup> Frymer-Kensky (1992a: 149) notes that there are ‘deviances from Israelite norms of marriage’ within prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language. She argues that *Jeremiah* ‘declares this difference explicitly: even though a human husband who has divorced his wife cannot take her back after she has remarried someone else, God stands ready to take back Israel’. Furthermore, in *Jer* 3: 6–10 and *Ezek* 23 YHWH marries two sisters, ‘though Israelite men may not do so’ (p. 149).

<sup>183</sup> *Contra* Stienstra (1993: 70): ‘The historical context that will be sketched in the following pages is necessary for gaining insight into the donor field (“husband”); without this knowledge, it is impossible to attempt the analysis of the biblical marriage metaphor. She herself later acknowledges, ‘The metaphor may take unexpected turns, and one of the purposes of this study is to uncover it where it may not be expected to occur’ (p. 70).

the metaphor's grounds, *if not regarded as an adequate cognitive substitute for the original*, may be extremely valuable. A powerful metaphor will no more be harmed by such probing than a musical masterpiece by analysis of its harmonic and melodic structure.<sup>184</sup>

## A DIACHRONIC APPROACH

Finally, if this study is similar to those of Abma, Weems, Baumann, Galambush, and Darr, in so far as it takes a literary-historical approach to prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language, it differs significantly in its diachronic approach, which distinguishes between apparent layers of the prophetic books. This approach is not driven by an attempt to locate an 'original' text (if ever such existed),<sup>185</sup> nor by an endeavour to determine which passages are the 'authentic' words of historical prophets. Rather, the motivation is to demonstrate the significance of literary context for an understanding of prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language. My aim is to explore the way in which prophetic texts work as a wider frame, organizing associations and introducing new associations to their sexual and marital metaphorical foci. To this end, it makes sense to consider passages separately where they display a marked difference in themes, motifs, structure, or metaphorical language: for the character of prophetic writing can change dramatically through the course of a single book. Few will be surprised to find that *Isaiah's* use of metaphorical language is strikingly different in chapters 1–39 and 40–55, for instance. Similarly, the use of sexual and marital metaphorical language in the narratives of *Hosea* 1 and 3 is notably different from its employment in the poetic *Hosea* 4–14. I hasten to add at this point that, for the most part, I am not concerned to distinguish between individual verses of prophetic books, unless a particular instance is so out of character that such acknowledgement seems important.<sup>186</sup> In summary, the broad approach of this study is to differentiate between levels of the prophetic books where critical scholarship amasses to suggest for a number of reasons that such passages are most likely distinct.

<sup>184</sup> Black (1962: 46, emphasis mine).

<sup>185</sup> McKane (1986), for instance, has famously suggested that there is no single 'original' version of *Jeremiah*.

<sup>186</sup> We will find one such notable exception in *Hosea* 3, where the threatening language of 3: 4 is followed by the incongruously positive words of 3: 5. In such a case, where it appears that a later addition is forcibly working to reinterpret a previous level of the text, it makes sense for our purposes to distinguish between these levels, at least in the first instance.

Sherwood contends, 'The problem with redaction criticism is that it can look suspiciously like the scholar's own editing. . . . The redactionist's scissors are potentially all powerful and he can cut and paste a text until its ideology is a reprint of his own.'<sup>187</sup> A reading which perceives different levels within a text need not be characterized so negatively, however. Certainly the reader's perception of such levels will reflect her or his broader reading of the text, as Sherwood suggests, but it is not clear to me how this differs from other aspects of reading, where we seek to find a path between the given 'stars' of which Iser speaks.<sup>188</sup> Reflecting on how these stars might relate over different levels can be a crucial part of the task, particularly in complex writings like the prophetic books. We might even say that such readings allow the 'constellations' we trace to become three-dimensional. Certainly, such an approach is not intended to negate the importance of reading the prophetic books in their final form.

I stress at this point that, although historically oriented, this exploration has no interest in the attempted reconstruction of authorial meaning. It is partly for this reason that I italicize the names of biblical books throughout, to clarify that I speak of the written words of the book, rather than of the words of a supposed historical prophet: a clarity which is notable missing in many treatments of the prophetic books. Where the prophet's name appears in normal type, this will indicate the prophetic character, rather than a historical figure, unless specifically indicated.<sup>189</sup> While some might take issue with phrases such as '*Jeremiah* encourages', arguing that books cannot take such actions, it seems to me vital to recognize that texts do indeed have the power to encourage the reader to perceive certain meanings. Indeed, they continually strive to do so.<sup>190</sup> As we have seen, the reaction of the reader to such encouragement will vary significantly; but this does not mean that we should downplay the text's potential power. If this study is not concerned with authorial meaning, nor is it concerned with a precise dating of prophetic books. As we have seen, it seeks simply to recognize that these books emerged in a different socio-cultural and historical setting than our own.

In *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (1998), Barton speaks of four characteristics often associated with historical-critical approaches: an interest in 'genetic questions', the quest for 'original meaning', a concern for 'historical reconstructions', and an affectation of 'disinterested

<sup>187</sup> Sherwood (1996: 65–6).

<sup>188</sup> Iser (2000: 195).

<sup>189</sup> Cf. Carroll (1986: esp. 55–64).

<sup>190</sup> Cf. Kamionkowski (2003: 49): 'The text "imposes a shape on the chaos" of the destruction of Jerusalem by delineating characters and events, and putting them into a narrative plot. Further, the text elicits specific responses from its audience.'

scholarship'.<sup>191</sup> He argues that such a presentation is stereotypical, and that these characteristics are not as inherent to historical-critical approaches as some have suggested. This is true of this particular investigation. Although concerned to read the prophetic books within their broad socio-cultural and historical setting, this exploration is not concerned with 'original meaning', or with 'historical reconstructions'. It certainly would not wish to portray itself as 'disinterested'. Moreover, where this investigation does seek to distinguish between distinct layers of the prophetic books, its interest lies not in authorship or date, but rather in differences in literary style and metaphorical language. Although a 'historical', diachronic approach, therefore, this investigation should not be understood in opposition to literary approaches; rather, it attempts to harness the potential of both historical-critical approaches and literary theory, seeking to shed further light on the complex area of prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language.

#### THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Sexual and marital metaphors and similes appear throughout the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible, sometimes fleetingly, at other times in forceful concentration. The popularity of such language means that we are not able to discuss all instances, particularly as our aim is to explore the metaphorical language within its distinct wider frames. Thus, we will concentrate on the five prophetic texts that most would consider central to the discussion: *Hosea* 4–14, *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4, *Isaiah*, *Ezekiel* 16 and 23, and *Hosea* 1–3. While this means that there are passing examples that we will not explore (in *Micah*, *Malachi*, *Nahum*, and *Ezekiel* 22, for instance),<sup>192</sup> this concentration does enable us to explore all those texts where prophetic sexual or marital metaphorical language is prominent and sustained. In this way, it will achieve the aims of this monograph, which are, first, to call attention to the sheer variety and innovation of the prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language, so often reduced to allusions to 'the marriage metaphor' or 'cultic prostitution'; and second, to highlight its considerable persuasive force once set free of such restraints.

<sup>191</sup> Barton (1998).

<sup>192</sup> Cf. Baumann (2003: 203): 'Outside *Hosea*, prophetic marriage imagery is only used in a few places in the Book of the Twelve. These few passages are brief and unconnected.'

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## *Hosea 4–14*

*Hosea 4–14*'s innovative use of metaphor and simile stands unrivalled in the Hebrew Bible. For this reason alone it is an appropriate place with which to begin our exploration. One might expect this study to begin with *Hosea 1–3*. After all, this is likely to be the earliest text in the Hebrew canon to use sexual and marital metaphorical language. Certainly it is *Hosea 1–3* that springs to mind for most when 'the marriage metaphor' is mentioned.<sup>1</sup> However, these three short chapters are also among the most controversial in the Hebrew Bible, and it therefore seems fitting to postpone their discussion until later. Perhaps more importantly, when it comes to sexual and marital metaphorical language, *Hosea 1–3* has frequently stolen the limelight from other prophetic texts. Thus it seems appropriate first to allow the distinctive voices of these other texts to be heard in their own right. In the words of G. I. Davies, 'To counterbalance the influence which 1–3 have had on previous perceptions of Hosea, there is much to be said for looking first at chs. 4–14.'<sup>2</sup>

### HOSEA 4–14: THE WIDER FRAME

Many agree that *Hosea 4–14* is distinct from chapters 1–3 in style and language. Eidevall stresses, 'From the point of genre analysis there are considerable differences between *Hosea 1–3* and the remainder of the book,'<sup>3</sup> while Morris observes that 'Scholars have agreed on only one organizing principle: a sharp division exists between chs. 1–3 and 4–14.'<sup>4</sup> For our

<sup>1</sup> Baumann (2003: 85) calls *Hosea 1–3* the 'primal text' of 'the prophetic marriage imagery'.

<sup>2</sup> G. I. Davies (1993: 22).

<sup>3</sup> Eidevall (1996: 8–10).

<sup>4</sup> Morris (1996: 104). Cf. J. Day (2001: 572), G. I. Davies (1993: 102–3). Wolff (1974: pp. xxix–xxxi) finds a tripartite structure: 1–3, 4–11, 12–14. In my view, however, his stylistic reasons for dividing chapters 4–14 are not sufficient. Morris (1996: 101–31) suggests that chapters 12–14 are distinct due to their more positive character, arguing for a 'progression from judgement to possible redemption', climaxing in chapter 14 (p. 116). However, such a 'progression' seems to me unsurprising in this poetry which seeks to present punishment as

purposes, the decision to discuss these texts independently is best justified by their strikingly different use of metaphorical language. We will return to a discussion of their relationship following our exploration of *Hosea* 1–3.

### Metaphorical language in *Hosea* 4–14

*Hosea* 4–14 is far from conventional in its use of metaphorical language, with its arresting and audacious character rapidly becoming clear to the reader on approaching the text. Not only is this prophetic poetry remarkable for its concentration of metaphor and simile,<sup>5</sup> it also boasts an impressive range of foci. Israel is a stubborn heifer (4: 16), a luxuriant vine (10: 1), and a child (11: 1); Ephraim is a cake not turned (7: 8), a wild ass (8: 9), and a dried root (9: 16); judgement is an eagle (8: 1), old age (7: 9), and wind (4: 19), while YHWH is like a lion (5: 14), an evergreen cypress (14: 9), a leopard, and a wild beast (13: 7–8).<sup>6</sup> Kruger states, ‘No other Old Testament prophetic book depicts Yahweh in such shockingly bold and unrivalled images as *Hosea*.’<sup>7</sup> Eidevall, struck by the paradox of Israel as ‘grapes in the desert’ (9: 10), singles out this simile as the title of his monograph.<sup>8</sup> It is within the context of this startlingly varied metaphorical language that we encounter *Hosea* 4–14’s sexual and marital metaphors, and an exploration of this distinctive wider frame will therefore provide us with an invaluable perspective.

Creativity is a hallmark of *Hosea* 4–14’s metaphorical language. Fisch highlights 13: 6, where YHWH ‘pastures’ his flock, by no means an unusual portrayal.<sup>9</sup> Yet in 13: 7, in response to Israel’s actions, YHWH suddenly and unexpectedly becomes a lion, a leopard, and a she-bear; the very animals from which a flock should be protected: ‘The violence of the imagery is matched by the violence of the transition.’<sup>10</sup> The portrayal of Ephraim in 13: 13 witnesses

bound up with renewal. Cf. Eidevall (1996: 208): ‘The book of *Hosea* ends with a hopeful vision, 14: 2–9 (= Eng. 14: 1–8), which provides a sharp contrast to the preceding discourse unit. It was once customary to treat this “happy ending” as a late appendix to the book of *Hosea*. Although the question of authorship is still open to debate, contemporary exegesis has—in my opinion, correctly—abandoned the position that its optimism necessarily makes this passage “secondary”. This vision of future repentance is clearly consonant with the equally hopeful passages 5: 15–6: 3 and 11: 8–11 . . . Hos 14: 2–9 should be regarded as an integral part of the discourse.’

<sup>5</sup> Wolff (1974: p. xxiv), Macintosh (1997: p. lxiii).

<sup>6</sup> This study uses MT versification, which differs from the English (LXX) in *Hosea* 12 and 14. Alternative English references will not be provided, as this makes for complicated reading. Readers should note that the English versions remain one verse behind MT in these chapters.

<sup>7</sup> Kruger (1988: 150).

<sup>8</sup> Eidevall (1996: 149).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Ps* 23: 1, 80: 1.

<sup>10</sup> Fisch (1988: 152). *Contra* Andersen and Freedman (1980: 635): ‘The simile is hackneyed . . . but there is theology in it.’

an equally imaginative use of metaphor: ‘Pangs of childbirth come for him:| He is an unwise son;| For at the proper time, he does not present himself| At the mouth of the womb.’<sup>11</sup> Wolff and Eidevall comment on the distinctiveness of such imagery, where Ephraim is a foetus, rather than a mother.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps even more striking, however, is 13: 13’s implicit message. The immediate metaphorical frame is accusatory (‘Bound up is Ephraim’s guilt’, 13: 12), encouraging negative associations such as pain and danger for ‘pangs of childbirth’. Yet, if we read the metaphor within the wider frame of *Hosea* 4–14, which speaks not only of destruction, but also of future renewal, then we might also become aware of more positive associations: the potential for life and hope, if only Ephraim is to become wise.<sup>13</sup> Ricoeur observes, ‘To varying degrees, every sentence . . . has an implicit suggested secondary signification.’<sup>14</sup> We could say that this inherent characteristic of language is found to an extreme within *Hosea* 4–14.

### Simile and metaphor in *Hosea* 4–14

Our discussion so far has touched on a number of similes, and we will take this opportunity to discuss the complex relationship between simile and metaphor. Some continue to be influenced by Black’s earlier work, insisting on an essential distinction between metaphor and simile that runs deeper than formal difference. They argue that simile possesses neither the same potential for impact as metaphor, nor the same abundant possibilities for meaning. In his introduction to American poetry, DiYanni suggests that ‘simile is more restricted in its comparative suggestion than is the metaphor’.<sup>15</sup> Such sharp distinctions between metaphor and simile are now rare, with most insisting that certain similes share much of metaphor’s potential. Ricoeur and Kittay suggest that we should understand the ‘like/as’ of simile as itself metaphorical, with Ricoeur speaking of simile as ‘weakened metaphor’.<sup>16</sup> Soskice usefully distinguishes between ‘illustrative similes’ (‘the sun is like a golden ball’) and ‘modelling similes’ (*Madame Bovary*’s, ‘Human language is like a cracked kettle on which we beat out tunes for bears to dance to, when all the time we are longing to move the stars to pity’).<sup>17</sup> For Soskice, if metaphor does not

<sup>11</sup> Lit. ‘at the breaking forth of children’. Cf. Wolff (1974: 221).

<sup>12</sup> Wolff (1974: 228), Eidevall (1996: 206).

<sup>13</sup> *Contra* Macintosh (1997: 544): ‘Death is the sole date which awaits the nation.’

<sup>14</sup> Ricoeur (1978: 91).

<sup>15</sup> DiYanni (1994: 40).

<sup>16</sup> Ricoeur (1978: 248), Kittay (1987: 19).

<sup>17</sup> Soskice (1985: 58–9). Cf. Rushdie (1995: 10): ‘In the winter, when the valley shrank under the ice, the mountains closed in and snarled like angry jaws around the city on the lake.’

involve simple comparison, neither does ‘modelling simile’, which ‘models’, or moulds, thought: ‘[A]s regards simile, we say that if any opposition in terms of cognitive function is to be made, it should be made not between simile and metaphor, but between illustrative simile and modelling simile or metaphor.’<sup>18</sup> Even Black reneges on his position, to admit that the ‘like’ of simile can be ‘mere stylistic variation upon the metaphorical form.’<sup>19</sup> Thus we might say that certain similes share much of the potential of metaphor, while lacking the significant opportunity to become lexicalized.<sup>20</sup>

If recent metaphor theory inclines towards reducing the distinction between metaphor and simile, with many (like myself) referring to both metaphor and ‘modelling simile’ as ‘metaphorical language’, *Hosea* 4–14 does not straightforwardly comply with such a position. Indeed, this prophetic poetry appears to characterize the difference between metaphor and simile as crucial. Although the poetry repeatedly employs metaphor to speak of Israel, Ephraim, and various others, Kruger observes that the poetry consistently shies away from using metaphor to describe YHWH, instead using simile.<sup>21</sup> *Hosea* 4–14 seems emphatically to insist that, where YHWH is concerned, there *is* a difference between metaphor and simile, witnessing a strong reluctance to suggest that anything can *be* YHWH, making explicit the idea that objects or beings can only *be like* God. Having said this, where *Hosea* 4–14 ventures beyond an ‘A = B’ form of metaphor, metaphorical depictions of YHWH do appear. In 13: 4, YHWH ‘pastures’ Israel. The explicit metaphor ‘YHWH is a shepherd’ may not be used, but we have seen that metaphor cannot be limited to such crude forms.<sup>22</sup> It seems that *Hosea* 4–14’s metaphorical language defies recent literary theory: not only does it insist that simile is distinct from metaphor, it persists in recognizing metaphor only in an ‘A = B’ form. Nevertheless, *Hosea* 4–14 reinforces the claims of Ricoeur, Soskice, Kittay, *et al.*; for this prophetic poetry’s inventive and daring similes hardly fall into Soskice’s category of ‘illustrative simile’. Its arresting depictions of YHWH as like a lion, leopard, she-bear, and wild beast in 13: 7–8 alone attest to this. We might even say that this poetry’s distinction between metaphor and simile is theological rather than theoretical in character (if one can make such neat distinctions). *Hosea* 4–14 may be keen to distinguish between forms of

<sup>18</sup> Soskice (1985: 58–61, citation p. 60).

<sup>19</sup> Black (1979: 31). Cf. Landy (2001: 273). However, Black still believes that ‘in discursively comparing one subject with another, we sacrifice the distinctive power and effectiveness of a good metaphor’ (1979: 31).

<sup>20</sup> Soskice (1985: 61–4), Kittay (1987: 296–8), Eidevall (1996: 30–1).

<sup>21</sup> Kruger (1988: 149).

<sup>22</sup> Soskice (1985: 50).

metaphorical language in theory, but in practice it employs its metaphors and ‘modelling similes’ in strikingly similar and creative ways.

### Metaphorical language and fertility/sterility in *Hosea* 4–14

The natural world provides a rich resource for much of *Hosea* 4–14’s metaphorical language. If this language has the potential to bring associated commonplaces of life and fertility, however, the wider frame within which such foci lie dramatically reverses these, encouraging associations of sterility and death.<sup>23</sup> In 8: 7 YHWH contends, ‘Standing grain has no head!’, and, even if it were to yield, ‘Strangers would devour it!’<sup>24</sup> In 13: 15 he threatens, ‘His fountain shall dry up, | His spring will run dry!’<sup>25</sup> while in 9: 16 he insists, ‘Their root is dried up, | They will produce no fruit!’ Through such language *Hosea* 4–14 not only speaks graphically of judgement, which is also depicted in fire (8: 14), wind (4: 19), and old age (7: 9); it simultaneously creates an implicit polemic against Baalism (or at least against the Baalism that the text projects<sup>26</sup>), which promises fertility, yet will be proved impotent when only sterility is found.

If *Hosea* 4–14 uses metaphorical language to herald impending judgement, it also seeks to re-reverse such language in 14: 6–9, where similes of new life and fertility illustrate Israel’s redemption: ‘He shall blossom like the lily’ (14: 6); ‘They shall blossom like the vine’ (14: 8).<sup>27</sup> Indeed, *Hosea* 4–14 concludes with perhaps the most audacious simile in the Hebrew Bible: YHWH as a tree (14: 9), an image not only brimming with associations of fertility, but possibly also with allusions to the goddess Asherah.<sup>28</sup> If metaphor

<sup>23</sup> DeRoche (1981: esp. 409) suggests that 4: 1–3 reverses creation. However, his argument depends on the existence of a recognized ‘P’ creation tradition (p. 408), which is a significant assumption.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. M. O’Connor (1987: 239–53, esp. 245–6) for a discussion of *Hosea* 4–14’s ‘even-if’ imagery as ‘pseudo-sorites’ (paradoxes).

<sup>25</sup> Reading *יבש* (‘it will dry up’) instead of MT’s *יבוש* (‘it will be ashamed’). Cf. Wolff (1974: 222).

<sup>26</sup> There is an increasing awareness that the Baalism portrayed in *Hosea* is polemical, and that there are difficulties involved in reconstructing historical practices from the poetry. For a challenging perspective on Baalism in *Hosea*, see Keefe (1995, 2001).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Eidevall’s discussion (1996: 243–6) of ‘the fertility/sterility code’ and the similar reversal and re-reversal of creation imagery in *Amos*. Cf. Gillingham (1992: 168–9, 180–1).

<sup>28</sup> J. Day (1986: 404; 1992: 486), Keel (1998: 56), Buss (1984: 76). The continuing debate over whether the ‘tree’ is a stylized cult object (J. Day 1986: 404; 1992: 486; Olyan 1988: 1; Hadley 2000: 206), or living (Binger 1997: 141; Keel 1998: 38; J. E. Taylor 1995: 42, 51; Kletter 1996: 76–7; Buss 1984: 76; Smith 1990: 81–4; Frymer-Kensky 1992a: 155) is beyond the scope of this study. However, since the discovery of Ugaritic texts, which speak of a goddess, Athirat (Asherah), most agree that ‘asherah’ is not only an object/shrine/tree in the Hebrew Bible, but also the

theorists like Soskice seek a ‘modelling simile’ with impact comparable to metaphor, this is a strong contender.<sup>29</sup> The sheer audacity of this prophetic poetry, however, is perhaps best exemplified by the word-play reinforcing such associations. ‘I am like a luxuriant cypress’<sup>30</sup> is introduced by the phrase, ‘It is I who answer and help him’ (אני עניתי ואשרנו). Innocuous words in English, but in Hebrew so suspiciously close to stating ‘I am his Anat and his Asherah’ that Wellhausen notoriously emends MT to this reading.<sup>31</sup> Thus this daring text combines ‘modelling simile’ and word-play to communicate a barely disguised polemic against the worship of these goddesses. Far from mere visual aids, metaphor and simile in *Hosea* 4–14 are powerful tools of persuasion.

### Metaphorical language, repetition, and intratextuality in *Hosea* 4–14

With the harnessing of repetition, *Hosea* 4–14’s metaphorical language increases in complexity and impact. Foci are reused, interacting with different frames to create strikingly different meanings. Such an intratextual approach to language works to disorient and reorient the reader, encouraging a perception of causal connections where they may not previously have seemed apparent. ‘Dew’ (טל) and ‘morning mist’ (ענן בקר) feature together as foci twice in the poetry: first to describe the people’s sin (6: 4: ‘Your loyalty is like the morning mist (ענן בקר),| And like the early dew (טל) that goes away’<sup>32</sup>);

symbol of a goddess. *Contra* Lemaire (1977) and Lipiński (1972). Wolff (1974: 237) and Mays (1969: 189–90) understand the simile in 14: 9 to refer to the ‘tree of life’ as depicted in *Gen* 3: 22. Macintosh (1997: 577) argues that the tree represents Ephraim, not YHWH. Eidevall’s suggestion (1996: 220) that the simile presents YHWH as the ideal king seems tenuous.

<sup>29</sup> Fisch (1988: 148): ‘God himself will, astonishingly, be seen to compare himself to a tree—the only time in scripture that he does so! . . . How are we to understand these paradoxes? If it is a problem for the biblical theologian, it is no less a problem for the student of literature.’

<sup>30</sup> Reading רענן as ‘luxuriant’, rather than ‘evergreen’ with Winton Thomas (1967). Cf. Andersen and Freedman (1980: 647): ‘The emphasis is not on the colour, but on the abundance of foliage.’ *Contra* Mays (1969: 189): ‘The metaphor’s accent is on the fir’s constant greenness.’

<sup>31</sup> Wellhausen (1963: 134). This emendation proved popular. Cf. Duhm (1910: 47), Fohrer (1974: 89), Weinfeld (1984), Dietrich and Loretz (1992: 173). Most, however, now think it unlikely that 14: 9 refers so directly to the goddesses, instead perceiving word-play. Morris (1996: 129–30): ‘As an emendation, it requires some imagination; as an intentional wordplay, it is no more than one should expect from *Hosea*.’ Cf. J. Day (1980: 315; 1986: 404–5), Macintosh (1997: 581), Wacker (1995: 224–7), G. I. Davies (1992: 308). Olyan (1988: 21) takes an extreme position: ‘a fanciful and unfounded emendation. In this text, Yahweh is the luxuriant cypress of Israel. . . . It seems unlikely that Anat or Asherah is even suggested here, let alone mentioned.’

<sup>32</sup> Understanding משיבים to modify the noun rather than the verb, with Andersen and Freedman (1980: 427), so that ‘early rain’ is in parallel with ‘morning cloud’.

and second to speak of their punishment (13: 3: ‘Therefore, they shall be like the morning mist (עִן־בֶּקֶר),| And like the early dew (טל) that goes away’). Through such repetition *Hosea* 4–14 implies that Israel’s troubling future is an inevitable, unavoidable, and indeed deserved consequence of their actions. As Morris writes, ‘The punishment not only fits the crime, it equals the crime.’<sup>33</sup>

Such a use of metaphorical language is frequent within the prophetic books (we will encounter it time and time again in this study) and is neatly summarized by Barton: ‘The prophets like to show that divine punishment takes the form of tit for tat. Little of this, I think, should be seen as the prophet’s attempts to devise punishments suitable for the crime; rather it is a matter of presenting the crime in such a way that it becomes manifest that it merits the coming punishment.’<sup>34</sup> Yet *Hosea* 4–14 is not content to rest with such an apparently conventional pattern, pressing the rationale further to suggest that the people’s crimes not only equal their impending punishments, but that their punishments are intrinsically bound up with future renewal. ‘Dew’ (טל) appears for a third time in 14: 6, as YHWH promises, ‘I will be like the dew (טל) to Israel’, and it is perhaps here that we can begin to appreciate the powerful impact of a frame on metaphorical meaning. For here ‘dew’ seems to have associations of freshness and life-giving potential, while its previous associations in 6: 4 and 13: 3 were of fleeting, ephemeral transience.<sup>35</sup> It is not that *Hosea* 4–14 ‘forgets’ language, as Fisch suggests (‘The transitoriness of the dew forgotten and only its freshness and blessedness remaining’<sup>36</sup>), but rather that this radical text strives forcefully to *transform* language, just as Israel is to be transformed. Morris writes: ‘This key word traveling through sorrow to anger to forgiveness is one of the many microcosms of the book.’<sup>37</sup> Through inventive metaphorical language, *Hosea* 4–14 insists that the catastrophes facing Israel have renewal as their purpose.

<sup>33</sup> Morris (1996: 59–60). Cf. Landy (1995: 158): ‘the transitoriness of the people’s affections which occasions God’s despair in 6: 4 is transferred to their own evanescence.’ *Contra* Andersen and Freedman (1980: 633): ‘What is unusual about these similes [13: 3] is the lack of clear connection between the sin and its punishment.’

<sup>34</sup> Barton (1990: 61).

<sup>35</sup> G. I. Davies (1992: 305): ‘Here (unlike 6: 4; 13: 3) dew is an image not for transience but for refreshment and blessing.’

<sup>36</sup> Fisch (1988: 147).

<sup>37</sup> Morris (1996: 69). Cf. Landy (1995: 81): ‘The dew is a symbol of transformation in *Hosea*: from being an epitome of impermanence it becomes an image for God himself (14: 6).’ Eidevall (1996: 213) sounds a warning note of the problems to come: ‘Through its bold “re-use” of the dew motif, 14: 6aA successfully contrasts human shortcomings with divine well-doings. This dew simile fails, however, to represent the saving love of YHWH as permanent. For this reason, it has to be supplemented by the simile in v. 9.’ We will return to the question of whether *Hosea* 4–14 does indeed succeed in its attempts to ‘turn’ language later.

We might even characterize this prophetic poetry as ultimately optimistic, seeking to recognize the difficult events facing Israel (indeed, presenting them as a deserved consequence of their behaviour), yet looking beyond these to envisage a hopeful future made possible by corrective discipline.

Nor is this the only instance where *Hosea* 4–14 draws on the transformative potential of metaphorical language to create such causal connections. The poetry plays with the associations of ‘bird’, ‘dove’, and ‘lion’, in similar fashion. In 7: 11–12, Ephraim is ‘Like a dove (כיונה), easily deceived and senseless’, so YHWH will ‘spread my net over them,| Like a bird (כעוף) of the air, I will bring them down’; indeed, ‘Ephraim, like a bird (כעוף),| Their glory will fly away’ (9: 11).<sup>38</sup> Still, it is the people’s bird-like nature that will eventually save them: ‘They will come fluttering like a bird (כצפור) from Egypt,| And like a dove (כיונה) from the land of Assyria’ (11: 11).<sup>39</sup> Similarly, YHWH threatens, ‘I will be like a lion (כשחל) to Ephraim,| And like a young lion (ככפיר) to the house of Judah’ (5: 14); ‘I will be to them like a lion (כלביא) |... I will devour them like a lion (כלביא)’ (13: 7–8). Nevertheless, it is YHWH’s lion-like roar that will call the people home: ‘Like a lion (כאריה) he will roar,| When he roars,| Then his children will come trembling from the west’ (11: 10).<sup>40</sup> Through such an intratextual reuse of foci and reversal of metaphorical meaning, this inventive poetry seeks to develop the popular ‘tit for tat’ technique into a pattern wherein the people’s crime not only fits their punishment, but their punishment holds the key to their future.

<sup>38</sup> G. I. Davies (1992: 188–9): ‘Israel has acted like a bird, and so Yahweh . . . will treat her like a bird.’ However, he does not perceive the redemptive causal connection with 11: 11.

<sup>39</sup> Reading יחררו (‘they tremble’) as a poetic description of a bird’s fluttering wings, which plays on 11: 10’s children ‘trembling’ (יחררו) home, while encouraging associations of fear. Cf. Landy (1995: 143): ‘The fearsomeness of the lion does not, apparently, intimidate the birds, whose normal trepidation is intimidated by the word “tremble”. Whether they tremble for fear or awe, or whether the verb simply evokes their flight (NJPS, “fluttering”) is indeterminate.’ Landy (1995: 143) and Macintosh (1997: 468) similarly understand 11: 11 to reverse 7: 11.

<sup>40</sup> אריה is ‘lion’ in 11: 10, while שחל is used in 5: 14 and 13: 7. Despite this variation in vocabulary, the repeated motif still seems to encourage a causal connection; *contra* Mays (1969: 158), who suggests that it is only the different term for ‘lion’ in 11: 10 that allows the roar to be positive. Macintosh (1997: 468–9) misses the point completely, suggesting that 11: 10’s lion imagery is secondary, as roaring is ‘solely connected with judgement and punishment’. Cf. G. I. Davies (1992: 265), who argues that YHWH’s roaring can only be positive if it is a redaction dependent on later depictions of YHWH roaring against the nations (*Jer* 25: 30, *Joel* 3: 16, *Am* 1: 2). As Eidevall (1993: 83) insists, ‘Reversal of this type is a characteristic feature in the book of *Hosea*. The choice of metaphors might thus be explained as a kind of deliberate intratextual allusion, although the meaning of their combination [‘lion’ and ‘birds’ in 11: 10–11] remains opaque.’ Cf. Andersen and Freedman (1980: 591): ‘This roar of a lion is a reversal of the usual effects of the voice of Yahweh.’

### Metaphorical language and word-play in *Hosea* 4–14

If the above examples provide a glimpse into the inventiveness of *Hosea* 4–14's metaphorical language, the full impact of its daring complexity becomes clear only when we explore the way in which metaphor becomes tangled with word-play. Morris offers a compelling presentation of *Hosea* as a book saturated with word-play.<sup>41</sup> He writes, 'It is hard to imagine another book in which wordplay is such a pivotal device', suggesting at least seventy examples, over sixty of which appear in chapters 4–14.<sup>42</sup> While such an exhaustive study is beyond the scope of this investigation, a basic awareness of *Hosea* 4–14's distinctive use of word-play alongside metaphorical language provides an invaluable perspective on our discussion of this prophetic poetry's sexual and marital metaphors.

Like metaphorical language, word-play is frequently used in *Hosea* 4–14 to imply a causal link between Israel's crime and impending punishment. In 8: 11, YHWH charges Ephraim for having 'multiplied altars for sinning (לְהַטָּא)', threatening that these altars will therefore become 'altars for punishment (לְהַטָּא)'. By playing on the polysemy of הַטָּא ('guilt'/ 'punishment'), 8: 11 thus suggests that Israel's punishment is merited.<sup>43</sup> In 12: 9 Ephraim brags, 'I have found wealth for myself!' (מִצַּאתִי אֶן לִי). Yet, just words later, in an almost identical phrase, he states, 'They have not found guilt in me' (לֹא יִמְצְאוּ לִי עֹן). The repetition of מִצַּא ('to find') and לִי ('myself/my'), combined with the word-play between אֶן ('wealth') and עֹן ('guilt'), creates an almost identical phrasing, exposing the incongruity of Ephraim's claim. According to this prophetic poetry, it is not possible that Ephraim's wealth is guiltless, as wealth and guilt are clearly bound up with each other, even formally.<sup>44</sup> In the words of Morris, 'When the punishment equals the sin, justice—at least poetic justice—is served.'<sup>45</sup>

Word-plays can also be intratextual in this elaborate text. Chisholm suggests that Israel's 'wandering' (נִדְדוּ) in 7: 13 is later punished by the people being made into 'wanderers' (נִדְדִים) in 9: 17.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps most strikingly, however, the

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Good (1966: 38): 'The entire poem is a masterly connection of interwoven motifs and metaphors.' Fisch (1988: 139): 'Throughout Hosea words re-echo, the second occurrence often providing an antithesis, or else . . . a momentary flash of meaning to clarify what would otherwise be totally obscure.' Rudolph (1966*b*) speaks of word-play as foundational to *Hosea*.

<sup>42</sup> Morris (1996: 78). Cf. pp. 149–51 for word-play statistics.

<sup>43</sup> Morris (1996: 86), Chisholm (1987: 46). G. I. Davies (1992: 207) notes, 'The same phrase of two words is repeated in the Heb., but it is unlikely that it means the same both times.' However, he does not reflect on the significance of this word-play.

<sup>44</sup> Morris (1996: 87): 'Ephraim's wealth is inseparable from his iniquity and guilt. Ephraim is hoist with his own petard.'

<sup>45</sup> Morris (1996: 86; cf. pp. 87–8).

<sup>46</sup> Chisholm (1987: 46). Cf. Morris (1996: 86).

root **שוב** ('to turn/return') appears and reappears in *Hosea* 4–14 no fewer than twenty times in a variety of different contexts with significantly different meanings, once again weaving together Israel's crime, punishment, and future renewal. Israel's 'deeds do not permit them| To *return* to their God' (5: 4); 'they do not *return* to YHWH their God' (7: 10). Thus, YHWH will '*Return* his deeds upon him' (4: 9); 'According to his deeds, he will *return* to him' (12: 3); and 'His reproach his Lord will *return* to him' (12: 15). Indeed, the people shall '*return* to Egypt' (8: 13); Ephraim will '*return* to Egypt' (9: 3); YHWH will '*return* you to tents' (12: 10); and, in what Fisch calls 'the "turning" to end all turnings',<sup>47</sup> YHWH will even 'go and *return* to my place' (5: 15). Yet YHWH nevertheless promises, 'I shall not *turn* to destroy Ephraim' (11: 9); 'My anger has *turned* from him' (14: 5); and 'They shall *return* to dwell in his shade' (14: 8). Indeed, as the poetry reaches its climax in chapters 12–14, YHWH repeatedly calls for Israel to turn as he has turned: 'And you shall *turn* with your God' (12: 7); '*Return* Israel to YHWH' (14: 2); '*Turn* to YHWH' (14: 3).<sup>48</sup> It seems that 'to turn' (**שוב**) is central to *Hosea* 4–14, metonymically representing the prophetic poetry's insistent 'turning' of language.<sup>49</sup>

*Hosea* 4–14's metaphorical language and word-play appear in combination to powerful effect, as the poetry repeatedly uses word-play to justify and underscore its metaphorical language. Indeed, it is perhaps this that enables the text to use such astonishing and varied metaphorical foci, while maintaining credibility. Take, for instance, the repeated word-plays on Ephraim (**אפרים**), where 'the punning of the vocables spurts out in all directions'.<sup>50</sup> The name frequently appears with **רפא** ('to heal'): Assyria is not able to heal (**לרפא**) Ephraim (5: 13); YHWH would 'heal (**רפא**) Israel,| But Ephraim's corruption is revealed' (7: 1); and Ephraim does not know that Yhwh has healed them (**רפאתים**) (11: 3). Yet word-plays on Ephraim also spark a variety of provocative metaphorical language. In 8: 9 Ephraim is a 'wild ass' (**פרא**); in 9: 11 'their glory, like a bird, will fly away' (**כעוף יתעופף**); in 13: 15, although Ephraim 'flourishes' (**יפריא**), he will be dried up; and in 9: 16 even Ephraim's etymology ('fruitful') is dramatically reversed, as the people 'will produce no fruit (**פרי**)'.

<sup>47</sup> Fisch (1988: 142): 'Here we have a turning away that seems to negate the very possibility of repentance.' Eidevall (1996: 90) interestingly suggests the opposite: 'The utterance in 5: 15 is multifaceted and paradoxical. What appeared at first sight to be a description of a lion's withdrawal, turned out to be a withdrawal of an altogether different kind. . . . YHWH's withdrawal can thus be interpreted as part of a divine strategy to provoke repentance.'

<sup>48</sup> Cf. 6: 1: 'Come let us return (**נשובה**) to the Lord.' Is this a superficial attempt to 'turn' (Mays 1969: 94–5; Wolff 1974: 119), or an 'ideal response from the people in an imagined future' (Eidevall 1996: 92)?

<sup>49</sup> Eidevall (1996: 240–1) speaks of the 'rhetoric of reversal'. Cf. Morris (1996: 87–8).

<sup>50</sup> Fisch (1988: 145). Macintosh (1997: p. lxiv) notes the word-plays, but does not reflect on their implications. Assyria (**אשור**) and Israel (**ישראל**) also spark word-plays, but not metaphorical language in the same way as Ephraim. Cf. Morris (1996: 122–5), Fisch (1988: 152).

Perhaps the most concentrated word-plays on the name, however, are found in 7: 3–7, which speaks of the ‘corruption of Ephraim’, repeatedly reiterating the phoneme **אף**, which not only recalls the name, but also speaks of ‘anger’.<sup>51</sup> The people are ‘adulterers’ (**מנאפים**), whose ‘baker (**אפה**) does not need to stir the flame’ (7: 4); indeed, ‘their baker (**אפהם**) sleeps at night’ (7: 6).<sup>52</sup> The word-plays on ‘anger’ (**אף**) in this passage are so strong that many have even read this last instance of ‘their baker’ (**אפהם**) as ‘their anger/passion’ (7: 6).<sup>53</sup> The Jerusalem Bible similarly reads ‘adulterers’ (**מנאפים**) as ‘enraged’ (**אנפם**); 7: 4). Thus in 7: 3–7 word-play works powerfully to reinforce the metaphorical language of political intrigue and violence already pervading the passage, suggesting that it is not reasoned thinking that motivates the unstable politics of the time, but rather anger.<sup>54</sup> Once again *Hosea* 4–14 justifies the negative future facing Israel, suggesting that the crimes of which the people are accused run so deep that they are inherent in the nation’s very alias name, Ephraim.<sup>55</sup>

If *Hosea* 4–14 strives to present the punishment of the nation as inevitable through such word-plays, it continues with its radical proposal that this punishment is corrective. Fisch writes: ‘Salvation seems to come to Ephraim as a result of the ambiguities lodged in that amazing name.’<sup>56</sup> YHWH’s last words to Ephraim in 14: 9 are ‘From me your fruit (**פריך**) comes.’<sup>57</sup> Morris observes, ‘By ch.14, the puns have been redeemed: every negative connotation has been wiped away, and Ephraim, the chameleonic name, yields a blessing after all.’<sup>58</sup> Indeed, it is noteworthy that ‘Ephraim’, with its potential for both positive and negative associations, is unique to chapters 4–14, appearing nowhere in the far more negative *Hosea* 1–3: a point which will gain significance following our discussion of the relationship between these passages in the final chapter.

For now, it is enough to recognize just how creative and complex is *Hosea* 4–14’s combined use of word-play and metaphorical language. Indeed, word-play is used not only to justify metaphorical language and to create

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Morris (1996: 93). Morris also hears a similar play with the phoneme **עיר** in 7: 3–7, bringing to mind **עיר**, the city, which he characterizes as the place of ‘sin’ (pp. 93–5).

<sup>52</sup> Landy (1995: 90) notes the word-plays on Ephraim, but does not comment on the play on ‘anger’. He provides an alternative reading of the passage, which also emphasizes implicit meanings (pp. 92–5).

<sup>53</sup> Wolff (1974: 107), Mays (1969: 104), Eidevall (1996: 110), G. I. Davies (1992: 185). Cf. Syriac and Targum.

<sup>54</sup> Morris (1996: 94): ‘the effect of the passage as a whole is to create a sub-text regarding anger.’ Even Macintosh (1997: 255–7), who does not note the word-plays, refers to 7: 3–7 as the ‘climax’ of *Hosea* 4–14’s indictment of Ephraim’s leaders.

<sup>55</sup> Morris (1996: 149–51), Fisch (1988: 146).

<sup>56</sup> Fisch (1988: 145).

<sup>57</sup> Morris (1996: 90), Macintosh (1997: 579), Wolff (1974: 237), G. I. Davies (1992: 309).

<sup>58</sup> Morris (1996: 126; cf. p. 90).

causal connections, but also to create unexpected meanings. In 10: 11 YHWH threatens, ‘I will harness (ארכיב) Ephraim, Judah must plough,| Jacob must harrow (ישדר) for himself.’ If the explicit force of this language is that YHWH’s leniency has come to an end (he will no longer ‘spare her fair neck’), then word-play works to suggest the implications for Israel. Morris notes the way in which the agricultural foci ‘harness’ (ארכיב) and ‘harrow’ (ישדר) resonate with echoes of battle and destruction.<sup>59</sup> רכב commonly appears in the context of warfare (cf. 14: 4),<sup>60</sup> while שדר is strikingly reminiscent of שדד, ‘to ruin, or destroy’ (cf. 7: 13, 10: 2).<sup>61</sup> Morris writes, ‘The effect of the two wordplays is to create a secondary scene behind the agriculture one, a scene of violence and desolation.’<sup>62</sup> Through such word-play, this poetry not only suggests that YHWH’s clemency has come to an end, but also that the ‘yoke’ belatedly forced on Israel will entail war and devastation. Indeed, just verses later, the passage speaks explicitly of battle (10: 14), while LXX reads ‘chariots’ for בדרכך (‘in your ways’) in 10: 13.<sup>63</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting interaction of metaphorical language and word-play in *Hosea* 4–14, however, features in 10: 1. At face value (and in English translations) 10: 1 presents a positive portrayal of Israel: ‘Israel is a luxuriant (בוקק) vine,| He bears (ישוה) fruit for himself.’ Yet metaphorical meaning in *Hosea* 4–14 is deceptive, and internal word-plays work to undermine this superficially positive meaning. Morris notes that בוקק and ישוה are unexpected in this context. בוקק does not appear again with such positive force in the Hebrew Bible, generally having the sense of ‘emptiness’, ‘void’, or ‘waste’ (KJV even reads, ‘Israel is an empty vine’),<sup>64</sup> while שוה appears nowhere elsewhere, but sounds suspiciously like שוא (‘nothingness’, ‘worthlessness’, or even ‘devastation’ and ‘ruin’).<sup>65</sup> Such seditious word-play conspires to subvert the outwardly positive meanings of 10: 1 in what we might characterize as a metonym of *Hosea* 4–14’s wider message: Israel’s prosperity is only skin-deep, within lie the seeds of emptiness and waste.<sup>66</sup> Landy suggests that this

<sup>59</sup> Morris (1996: 96). <sup>60</sup> Indeed the noun, מרכב, is a ‘chariot’.

<sup>61</sup> Morris (1996: 96). Cf. Landy (1995: 132–3).

<sup>62</sup> Morris (1996: 96). It is notable that ‘Judah’ does not involve word-play in 10: 11, as many already understood this nation to be an editorial addition. Cf. Mays (1969: 145), Emmerson (1984: 83–6).

<sup>63</sup> Cf. RSV; G. I. Davies (1992: 248).

<sup>64</sup> Cf. *Isa* 24: 1, *Nah* 2: 3, *Jer* 19: 7. Andersen and Freedman (1980: 549) suggest that 10: 1 should read, ‘He (YHWH) made Israel a luxuriant vine’, as vines are usually feminine, while בוקק is masculine. Still, the ambiguity of the passage remains.

<sup>65</sup> Morris (1996: 91–2). Cf. Ben Zvi (2005: 207–8).

<sup>66</sup> *Contra* van Leeuwen (2003: 370): ‘The participle *bōqēq* can hardly mean here “plundering”, as in *Nah*. Ii 3 (2) or “emptying”, as in *Isa*. xxiv.’

word-play ‘points to an underlying theme of the passage: the hollowness of Israel’s prosperity, rituals, politics and language’.<sup>67</sup> Yet we might say that 10: 1 simultaneously calls attention to Israel’s *potential* to be ‘luxuriant’ and ‘bear fruit for himself’, as once again *Hosea* 4–14 suggests that Israel can be renewed, if only the people will ‘turn’ from their self-destructive behaviour.

For Morris, 10: 1’s word-play leads to ambiguity, ‘which describes not only the reality of Israel’s sporadic obedience but also God’s ambivalence toward his people’.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, Morris argues that ambiguity pervades *Hosea* 4–14 as a defining characteristic:

Ambiguous meaning . . . permits meaning to play against meaning in such a way as to put all meanings in question. Is Ephraim a luxuriant vine or a vain and empty fruit (10: 1)? Will Ephraim plow and reap its harvest, or will it reap war and desolation for its idolatry (10: 11)? . . . The answer to each of these questions remains suspended in paronomastic limbo. In *Hosea*, meaning is frequently ambivalent, and what could be more appropriate in a book where Israel’s fate remains unresolved at the end (see 14: 9) and where God’s own thoughts and feelings are turned over within him (11: 9)?<sup>69</sup>

Morris’ interest in the ambiguity of *Hosea* 4–14’s metaphorical language is shared by many, highlighting an important aspect of this text to which we will return in our later reflections. For now, however, it is enough for us to recognize the complexity of this prophetic poetry, and the perilous games it plays with language, as it dares to tread the fine line between sense and nonsense in order to convey its vital message: Israel’s punishment is utterly deserved and, indeed, the very act that will bring about the nation’s renewal. It is in the midst of this arresting, disorienting, and provocative use of metaphor and simile that *Hosea* 4–14’s sexual and marital metaphorical language appears.

#### SEXUAL AND MARITAL METAPHORICAL LANGUAGE IN HOSEA 4–14

*Hosea* 4–14’s sexual and marital metaphorical foci are not as varied as we might expect from this adventurous text: by far the most prominent focus is ‘prostitution’. The provocative use of this motif, however, certainly lives up to the reputation of this prophetic poetry. Traditionally (and perhaps surprisingly, given this text’s extreme proclivity towards metaphorical language), *Hosea* 4–14’s allusions to ‘prostitution’ have often not been understood metaphorically, but rather ‘literally’, as references to ‘cultic prostitution’.

<sup>67</sup> Landy (1995: 124).

<sup>68</sup> Morris (1996: 92).

<sup>69</sup> Morris (1996: 97).

Mays insists, ‘The harlotry of the priests is both theological and literal.’<sup>70</sup> In the Introduction, I suggested that this approach could be characterized as understanding ‘prostitution’ as a metonym, rather than a metaphor, for wider unacceptable cultic practices. I broadly defined metonymy as ‘the use of a word or phrase, strongly related to a whole, to stand in for that whole’. The frequent use of ‘10 Downing Street’ to represent the Prime Minister was one example. Another illustration might be the phrase, ‘Tim lingered in Beth’s mind all day’, where clearly Tim does not physically remain in Beth’s mind, but rather a memory of him continues.

Closely related to metonymy is ‘synecdoche’, where a part (species) is used to stand for a whole (genus), or vice versa. ‘Hand’ might stand in for ‘sailor’, for instance (‘There are three hands on deck’). While the relationship between metonymy and synecdoche is debated, most cognitive theorists would agree that both differ strikingly from metaphor in the confines that can be placed on their meaning. Soskice writes:

Instances of metonymy and synecdoche point one directly to the absent term; it would be a failure in comprehension if, on hearing the phrase, ‘the White House said today’, one wondered if shutters and doors opened like mouths; or of, on hearing that ‘twenty sails entered the harbour’, one wondered how the sails got there without the ships. Metonymy and synecdoche function as oblique reference and as such they, if any of the tropes, fit the bill for being primarily ornamental ways of naming.<sup>71</sup>

In other words, an important characteristic of metonymy and synecdoche is that they *can* straightforwardly be paraphrased or translated, in direct contrast to metaphor and ‘modelling simile’. We could spend some time pondering whether *Hosea* 4–14’s ‘prostitution’ motif, when interpreted as an allusion to ‘cultic prostitution’, should be considered *metonymic*, as we have suggested, or *synecdochic* (this would probably depend on the specific brand of ‘cultic prostitution’ in question). However, such a discussion seems to me to be redundant. *Hosea* 4–14’s ‘prostitution’ motif is neither metonymic nor synecdochic, but rather metaphorical, flaunting many characteristics of this poetry’s innovative and creative use of metaphorical language.

The people’s ‘prostitution’ in 4: 12–13 and 9: 1 illustrates the point well. Prepositions work alongside the metaphorical focus to underscore the idea that those ‘prostituting’ are in relationship with YHWH: the people do not simply ‘prostitute’, but rather ‘prostitute *from beneath/from upon*’ their God. *Hosea* 4: 12–13 reads, ‘And they prostitute from *beneath* (מתחת) their God!| Upon the mountain-tops they sacrifice,| And upon the hills they burn offerings,| *Beneath* (תחת) oak, and poplar, and terebinth...’; while 9: 1

<sup>70</sup> Mays (1969: 71).

<sup>71</sup> Soskice (1985: 57).

seethes, ‘For you have prostituted *from upon* (מעל) your God!| You have loved hire| *Upon* (על) every threshing floor’<sup>72</sup> Such instances move far beyond straightforward allusions to ‘cultic prostitution’, even if we were to suppose this hypothetical practice to have sparked the language, as associations of separation, estrangement, and even unfaithfulness are created. Indeed, there is a striking similarity between these allusions to ‘prostitution’ and *Hosea* 4–14’s wider use of metaphorical language. In both 4: 12–13 and 9: 1 the metaphorical focus appears within a frame where repetition works to validate its suitability. The reiteration of תחת (‘beneath’) in 4: 12–13 justifies the characterization of the burning of offerings as ‘prostitution’,<sup>73</sup> while the repetition of על (‘upon’) in 9: 1 confirms that the people’s actions on the threshing floor are the same.<sup>74</sup> Not only does this underscore the metaphorical character of prostitution in these passages (as ‘prostitution’ surely cannot be a literal denotation for the *burning* of offerings), it also emphasizes just how lively this metaphorical motif is in *Hosea* 4–14. The meanings of 4: 12–13 and 9: 1 cannot be straightforwardly translated, or easily paraphrased.

We could even say that it is the act of translating these verses into English that has enabled many to understand this ‘prostitution’ to be metonymic. In striving to iron out the idiosyncrasies of the poetry, most harmonize the very repetition that might interact with the metaphorical focus to create distinctive meanings. The NRSV, for instance, simply reads:

... and they have played the whore, forsaking their God.  
They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains,  
and make offerings upon the hills,  
under oak, poplar, and terebinth,  
because their shade is good.

(*Hosea* 4: 12–13)

... for you have played the whore, departing from your God.  
You have loved a prostitute’s pay on all threshing-floors.

(*Hosea* 9: 1)

<sup>72</sup> Understanding דגן (‘grain’) to begin the following line.

<sup>73</sup> על (‘upon’) is also reiterated in 4: 12–13; we could say that the prepositions form a chiasm (‘beneath’/‘upon’/‘upon’/‘beneath’). While the ‘prostitution’ focus is related to all these indictments, it is most closely bound up with Israel’s behaviour *beneath* (תחת) the trees. Bird (1989: 84) notes that the preposition תחת is ‘even more sexually suggestive’.

<sup>74</sup> Many assume that the actions on the threshing floor include unacceptable sexual practices, due to their reading of the ‘prostitution’ motif as metonym. Cf. Andersen and Freedman (1980: 523): ‘Although sexual activity is not described in what follows. It is possible that harvest festivities would be accompanied by promiscuous recreation at the work site itself... The question arises whether threshing floors in the country become rustic shrines by their being dedicated to such activities and whether statues of symbols of the gods were exhibited there.’ Cf. Wolff (1974: 154).

Nor is this unusual. Indeed, only Bird seems to show an awareness of the significance of this repetition, seeking to recreate it in English.<sup>75</sup> It is hardly surprising, then, that the ‘prostitution’ of 4: 12–13 and 9: 1 is treated by many as if it were metonymic. We might say such translations drain the metaphors of vitality, leading to their appearance as dead ‘lexical entries’.<sup>76</sup> It is for this reason that this exploration is so concerned to stress the importance of reading metaphorical foci within their distinctive literary frames, working to revitalize *Hosea* 4–14’s ‘prostitution’ motif by underscoring its close affinities to the poetry’s otherwise provocative and lively metaphorical language.

Tendencies to harmonize *Hosea* 4–14’s ‘prostitution’ motif are also reflected in translations of the Hiphil forms of זנה (‘to prostitute’) in 4: 10 and 5: 3. זנה usually appears as a simple, active Qal in the Hebrew Bible (‘they have prostituted’). Hiphil verbs, however, do feature (*Exodus* 34: 16, *Leviticus* 19: 29, *2 Chronicles* 21: 11, 13), with a causative force (‘they have caused x to prostitute’, or ‘they have encouraged x to prostitute’). Given the clear causative sense of these Hiphil verbs, it is of interest that most insist that the Hiphil forms in *Hosea* 4–14 cannot be causative, frequently conforming them to the simple Qal verbs elsewhere in the text. Macintosh writes, ‘Since . . . the Qal is used elsewhere (e.g. 1: 2 and 2: 7), it is probably best to regard the use of the Hiphil as expressing “action in some particular direction” . . . and hence, in this case, “they have abandoned themselves to promiscuity”’.<sup>77</sup> Even he admits such a sense is ‘peculiar’, however, suggesting that it might be ‘dialectal’.<sup>78</sup> Responses such as this are due in part to the lack of a clear object for the Hiphil in 4: 10. This is perhaps not as surprising within a poetic text, however, as many suggest. Certainly it is worth exploring the possible force of causative Hiphils of זנה in 4: 10 and 5: 3.

<sup>75</sup> Bird (1989: 84, emphasis original): ‘the people have *znh-ed from under* their God by “offering” *under* trees.’ Cf. p. 81. Many recognize that מתחת (‘from beneath’) is unusual in 4: 12, but do not perceive word-play. Cf. Macintosh (1997: 151), Wolff (1974: 85), Andersen and Freedman (1980: 367, 523).

<sup>76</sup> Macintosh (1997: 152–3) notes nothing distinctive about 4: 12: ‘Here is a classic definition from the eighth century BC of apostasy as promiscuity and whoredom, a definition taken up and developed by most subsequent prophets and especially by Jeremiah and Ezekiel.’

<sup>77</sup> Macintosh (1997: 147). Eidevall (1996: 58): ‘The Hiphil forms seem to carry the same sense as the Qal forms.’ *HALOT* i. 275 agrees that the Hiphil can have the force of ‘to encourage to commit fornication’ in *Lev* 19: 29; *2 Chr* 21: 11, 13; and *Exod* 34: 16. However, in *Hos* 4: 10, 18, 5: 3, it simply suggests ‘to commit fornication’; (alt. 1. to instruct in fornication).’ *DCH* iii. 123 is comparable, suggesting the first meaning of the Hiphil is ‘as qal, prostitute oneself, commit fornication’, citing *Hos* 4: 18, 5: 3, 4: 10, 4: 18, only willing to conceive that Hiphil might also have the thrust of ‘prostitute, lead into prostitution (including religious infidelity)’ in *2 Chr* 21: 13, *Lev* 19: 29, and *Exod* 34: 16.

<sup>78</sup> Macintosh (1997: 147).

In 4: 10, הִזְנוּ appears at the end of a passage accusing the priests of deliberately leading the people into sin so that they themselves might profit. To my mind, if the priests are causing the people to sin in this context, then it makes sense that they are also causing (‘encouraging’) the people to ‘prostitute’:<sup>79</sup> ‘The sin of my people they devour;| And for their guilt they are greedy!|<sup>80</sup> So it will be like people, like priest,| I will punish him for his ways| And return his deeds upon him;|<sup>81</sup> They will eat but not be satisfied!| They will encourage prostitution (הִזְנוּ), but not increase!| For they have forsaken YHWH to hold fast to prostitution!’ (4: 8–10). The causative reading of the Hiphil allows us to read ‘They will encourage prostitution, but not increase’ in parallel with ‘They will eat but not be satisfied’; with the priests as the subject of both threats.<sup>82</sup> We could even read ‘increase’ (יִפְרְצוּ) as a word-play between ‘increasing in number’ (as a consequence of ‘prostitution’) and ‘increasing in wealth’, as the priests are warned that they will no longer gain as a result of encouraging the people to sin.

If the priests are condemned for ‘encouraging prostitution’ in 4: 10, it seems to me that this message is echoed in 5: 3. Wolff has already argued for a causative reading of the Hiphil, הִזְנוֹתָ, in 5: 3, underscoring the possibilities. However, he understands Ephraim to be the subject of the verb: ‘For you, Ephraim, taught whoredom,| Israel is defiled.’<sup>83</sup> Given the uncertain thrust of this accusation, however, it seems more likely that Ephraim should be understood as the object of the Hiphil, so that we can read Ephraim and Israel in parallel as the objects of defilement by others: ‘I knew Ephraim;| And Israel was not hidden from me. | But now you have led Ephraim into prostitution (הִזְנוֹתָ),|<sup>84</sup> Israel has been defiled!’ (5: 3).

<sup>79</sup> Wolff (1974: 82) argues that זָנָה cannot be causative in 4: 10, as there is no object. Yet such an explicit object is unnecessary. The causative can be rendered ‘they have caused prostitution’ or, perhaps better, ‘they have encouraged prostitution’. If we are to ask whom the priests encourage to prostitute, then the context clearly implies the people. Such an elliptical reference to the object is hardly unusual in Hebrew poetry. Cf. G. I. Davies (1992: 121): ‘The Hiphil of *zānāh* . . . is elsewhere causative. . . . It might therefore here mean “they shall make (their women) act as prostitutes”’. However, Davies, in his desire to see the people as the subject rather than the priests, suggests that this might be a reference to fathers making their daughters ‘cultic prostitutes’, which seems to me unlikely.

<sup>80</sup> MT graphically reads: ‘And for their guilt they lift up (each one) his throat (יִשְׂאוּ נַפְשׁוֹ)’.

<sup>81</sup> In my opinion, it is likely that these words refer to the ‘priesthood’ as a collective singular, although some argue that a specific priest is envisaged. We will come to this shortly.

<sup>82</sup> Mays (1969: 71): ‘The sin of eating refers back to v. 8.’ Cf. Andersen and Freedman (1980: 362). *Contra* G. I. Davies (1992: 121) and Wolff (1974: 81), who believe that it is the people who will ‘eat and not be satisfied’. This seems to me unlikely, given that it is the priests who ‘devour’ the people’s sin in 4: 8.

<sup>83</sup> Wolff (1974: 94).

<sup>84</sup> We should perhaps not be too surprised that the definite object marker (אֵת) is not used here: it is often absent in poetry (cf. *Exod* 34: 16; *2 Chr* 21: 11, 13).

Macintosh considers the possibility of such a reading, yet rejects it, due to the unclear identity of the masculine singular ‘you’.<sup>85</sup> The desire for such clarity, however, would negate the possibility of reading much of the poetry in the prophetic books. If we were to ask to whom this indictment might be addressed, then the passage’s introduction in 5: 1 usefully indicates three groups as possibilities (the priests, the establishment,<sup>86</sup> and the royal house), and it is possible that one from among these is implied.<sup>87</sup> Given the strikingly similar accusation in 4: 10, the most likely contender is the priests, and it is therefore of interest to note that כהן appears in the singular in 4: 4–9 (cf. 4: 4). Whether כהן refers to a specific priest<sup>88</sup> or is a collective singular (‘priesthood’)<sup>89</sup> is debated, although the latter seems more likely. Either way, it appears that this כהן is the most likely identity of the mysterious ‘you’ in 5: 3, revealing a provocative message that powerfully echoes 4: 10 and indeed much of *Hosea* 4–14: it is the leadership, and particularly the priesthood, of Israel who are responsible for the people’s outrageous behaviour.<sup>90</sup> Once again, we witness attempts to smooth over the idiosyncrasies of *Hosea* 4–14, betraying a significant underestimation of this inimitable prophetic poetry.<sup>91</sup> The ‘prostitution’ motif of *Hosea* 4–14 is not as clichéd and formulaic as traditional translations and commentaries suggest. Indeed, the examples we have seen so far are trivial compared to this poetry’s daring metaphorical language, which is consistently reflected in other appearances of the ‘prostitution’ motif.

<sup>85</sup> Macintosh (1997: 182).

<sup>86</sup> MT reads ‘House of Israel’, but many argue that in this instance the phrase refers to the establishment rather than the people more generally. Cf. Macintosh (1997: 176), Rudolph (1966a: 116), Mays (1969: 80).

<sup>87</sup> *Contra* G. I. Davies (1992: 141): ‘The “you” here is singular, so it could not refer to the totality of those addressed.’

<sup>88</sup> G. I. Davies (1992: 117), Mays (1969: 67), Wolff (1974: 77), Andersen and Freedman (1980: 381). It is of interest that Mays (1969: 66–72) nevertheless frequently refers to ‘the priesthood’ in his discussion.

<sup>89</sup> Stuart (1987: 89). Macintosh (1997: 135–6) believes that ‘priest’ can be a collective singular in the ‘vocative case’.

<sup>90</sup> Landy (1995: 55–6). Yee (2003: 90): ‘Hosea singles out the nation’s leaders for rebuke and condemnation.’ While the priests appear in the plural just two verses earlier in 5: 1, such changes from singular to plural are not unusual in poetic texts, particularly where collective singulars are involved. Cf. *Hos* 4: 8–10.

<sup>91</sup> A Hiphil infinitive absolute construction of זנה also appears in 4: 18 (הזנה הזנה). However, most agree that 4: 18 and its wider context is corrupt; thus it seems inappropriate to put much weight on the verse. Cf. Mays (1969: 76), Andersen and Freedman (1980: 373–9). Having said this, a possible reading is ‘they have indeed encouraged prostitution, they surely love disgrace because of their rulers’, where the subject of the first ‘they’ is the leadership, while the subject of the second is the people. *Hosea* 4–14 once again holds the rulers responsible for the people’s sin.

### ‘Prostitution’ and word-play in *Hosea* 4–14

Perhaps most strikingly, *Hosea* 4–14 frequently uses the ‘prostitution’ motif alongside word-play, encouraging a variety of different meanings for the focus. The accusation in 4: 10 is intensified by word-play: ‘they have forsaken YHWH to commit to (לשמר) prostitution!’<sup>92</sup> While שמר generally means ‘to keep/guard’, it can have specific nuances of commitment, often to a religious practice. Not only is this a popular sense in prose passages (*Deuteronomy* 5: 12, 29: 9; *1 Kings* 11: 11), שמר is used with this force in prophetic poetry (*Amos* 2: 4, *Isaiah* 56: 4–6, *Jeremiah* 16: 11). Perhaps most notably, the term appears with such a thrust within *Hosea* 4–14: ‘Commit to (שמר) loyalty and justice,| And hope for your God’ (12: 7). If we read 4: 10 in this light, then YHWH’s accusation becomes heavily sardonic: the people have ‘forsaken’ him to commit themselves (לשמר) to ‘prostitution’! Wolff writes, ‘To devote themselves to fornication . . . apparently is not without an ironic undertone.’<sup>93</sup> Thus, *Hosea* 4–14 once again ‘turns’ language, drawing on a verb commonly used to describe devotion to YHWH and instead using it to describe devotion to, of all things, ‘prostitution’, underscoring the incongruity of Israel’s actions.

Possibly the most striking word-plays in combination with the ‘prostitution’ motif, however, are the sexual innuendoes reverberating through this audacious poetry. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there remains little trace of such innuendoes in traditional translations. Nevertheless, there are a number of examples in the Hebrew which, while subtle, seem unlikely to be coincidental. In 4: 12–13 we find צל (‘shade’) used within the context of an indictment of ‘prostitution’: ‘And they prostitute from beneath their God!| Upon the mountain-tops they sacrifice,| And upon the hills they burn offerings,| Beneath oak, and poplar, and terebinth,| Because its shade (צלה) is good.’ In the *Song of Songs* 2: 3, it is within the shade (בצל) of an apple-tree that the female delights to rest (וישבת), and in *Hosea* 14: 8 it is in YHWH’s shade (בצל) that Israel will rest (ישבי). Yet in 4: 12–13, it is beneath the shade (צלה) of trees that the people ‘prostitute’ (ויינו), burning offerings and sacrificing. The irony is cutting.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Reading 4: 11’s זנות with 4: 10. Cf. LXX, Wolff (1974: 72).

<sup>93</sup> Wolff (1974: 82). Macintosh (1997: 148) notes the unusual use of שמר in 4: 10, but assumes a ‘usage peculiar to Hosea’. DeRoche (1983b: 197): ‘The verb *šmr* not only connotes the act of doing, but also the desire to do. Thus, the Israelites were not only guilty of fornication, Hosea maintains, they even enjoyed the act.’

<sup>94</sup> Mays (1969: 74): ‘The concluding remark at the end of v. 13a about “the pleasant shade” has a sarcastic ring.’ Buss (1984: 74): ‘Hosea mocks ritual actions . . . doing so in part through understatement. The people sacrifice under the terebinth “because its shade is good” (4: 13)—what a superficial advantage!’

In 5: 3 and 6: 10 sexual innuendoes resound as Israel is accused of being ‘defiled’ in the context of accusations of ‘prostitution’. **טמא** can mean ‘to be/ become unclean/defiled’ according to the cult more generally, but it can also carry the more specific meaning of ‘to be *sexually* unclean or defiled’ (cf. *Leviticus* 18). We could say that these potential sexual connotations and the sexually charged focus interact to create striking sexual innuendoes, as 5: 3 contends, ‘But now you have led Ephraim into prostitution (הזנית)| Israel has been defiled (נטמא)!’; while 6: 10 accuses, ‘In the house of Israel, I have seen horror! There is Ephraim’s prostitution (זנות לאפרים)| Israel has been defiled (נטמא)!’<sup>95</sup> A similar case may also be found in 9: 1, where **אהבת** (‘you have loved’) appears in parallel with ‘prostitution’: ‘For you have prostituted from upon your God! You have loved (אהבת) hire| Upon every threshing floor’<sup>96</sup> **אהב** appears elsewhere in *Hosea* 4–14 without sexual associations, perhaps most obviously in 11: 1, ‘When Israel was a child I loved him’ (ואהבהו).<sup>97</sup> Yet the verb can of course take sexual nuances,<sup>98</sup> and when **אהבת** comes into contact with the ‘prostitution’ motif in 9: 1, it is perhaps inevitable that these are aroused.<sup>99</sup>

If such sexual innuendoes seem discreet by *Hosea* 4–14’s provocative standards, 4: 12 perhaps better lives up to the poetry’s reputation, as the priest(hood) is once more indicted for the state of the people:<sup>100</sup> ‘He asks his stick (בעצו); And his rod (ומקלו) reveals to him! For a spirit of prostitution has misled them,| And they prostitute from beneath their God!’<sup>101</sup> Bird comments, ‘The charge of seeking oracular guidance by illicit means is couched in language that suggests both idolatry/apostasy (“tree” and “rod” as cult objects associated with other gods or illicit cult) and sexual activity (“tree” and “rod” as phallic symbols). The sexual innuendo of the opening bicolon is reinforced by the use of *znh* in the following.’<sup>102</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Wolff (1974: 106) understands 6: 10 to be a gloss drawn from 5: 3 in response to the similarities between these verses. This seems unnecessary.

<sup>96</sup> Understanding **דגן** (‘grain’) to begin the following line.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. *Hos* 9: 15, 10: 11, 12: 8.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. *Esth* 2: 17; *Song* 1: 3, 4, 7, 3: 1–4; 2 *Sam* 13: 1, 4, 15.

<sup>99</sup> Similar innuendoes may feature in *Hos* 4: 18 and 8: 9. Although textually corrupt, it remains significant that the cutting accusation, ‘they love disgrace’, in 4: 18 appears in the context of ‘prostitution’. Such sexual associations may also be awakened in **אהב** in 8: 9, just verses before the accusation of ‘prostitution’ in 9: 1, as this provocative poetry describes Ephraim’s ‘going up to’ Assyria as ‘hiring’ (התנו) ‘lovers’ (אהבים), playing with the potential political and sexual associations of the term.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Andersen and Freedman (1980: 364): ‘It is “the priest” who makes inquiry by means of his stick and whose staff speaks to him.’

<sup>101</sup> Reading MT’s **עמי** (‘my people’) from 4: 12 at the end of 4: 11. Cf. Andersen and Freedman (1980: 343, 365).

<sup>102</sup> Bird (1989: 83). Ginsberg (1967: 74) even argues that 4: 12 refers to a phallus-shaped idol here. Macintosh (1997: 152) reacts: ‘The view that both words **עץ** **מקלו** denote phallus/penis... is most unlikely to be correct.’ Both extremes underestimate this poetic text; it seems more likely that the poetry confronts us with contemptuous, dismissive word-play.

It is even possible that with such brash innuendo *Hosea* 4–14 refers derogatively and misleadingly to the worship of Asherah, who many now agree may have been symbolized as a tree.<sup>103</sup> If this is the case, then this prophetic poetry has truly succeeded, as many still understand 4: 12 to describe unimportant cultic apparatus, rather than a living goddess.<sup>104</sup> Even those who see a reference to Asherah here often continue to perceive her in terms of a lifeless pole, as the polemical nature of the words is all but concealed by the passage of time.<sup>105</sup>

Perhaps the most controversial sexual innuendo of *Hosea* 4–14, however, is the use of ידע ('to know') in 5: 3–4. A central expression in this poetry, the lack of 'knowledge of God/YHWH' is a pivotal accusation against the people (4: 1) and their priest(s) (4: 6), while it is precisely such 'knowledge' that is most desired by YHWH (6: 6). The specific force of the expression in *Hosea* 4–14 is debated, but G. I. Davies suggests that it is something like a 'recognition of himself (God), his actions and his demands'.<sup>106</sup> At any rate, its primary meaning is unlikely to be sexual. In 5: 3–4, however, the use of ידע in an *inclusio* around Israel's 'prostitution' brings its infamous sexual nuances dramatically to life.<sup>107</sup> 'I knew (ידעתי) Ephraim;| And Israel was not hidden from me.| But now you have led Ephraim into prostitution,| Israel has been defiled!| Their deeds do not permit them to turn to their God.| For a spirit of prostitution<sup>108</sup> is in their midst,| And they do not know (לא ידעו) YHWH!' This provocative poetry plays with the outrageous suggestion that YHWH has had sexual intercourse with the people;<sup>109</sup> and the even more scandalous

<sup>103</sup> See earlier discussion. The suggestion of male sexual organs does not preclude such an allusion to Asherah, but rather highlights the pejorative character of these innuendoes. *Contra* Olyan (1988: 20): 'If the asherah were meant, one would expect the word to occur here.'

<sup>104</sup> G. I. Davies (1992: 124).

<sup>105</sup> Wolff (1974: 84), Macintosh (1997: 151–2), Mays (1969: 73).

<sup>106</sup> G. I. Davies (1992: 33), Mays (1969: 63–4).

<sup>107</sup> Cf. *Gen* 4: 1, 17, 25; 19: 8; 24: 16, 38; 26; *Num* 31: 17, 18, 35; *Judg* 11: 39, 19: 25; *1 Sam* 1: 19; *1 Kings* 1: 4. *Contra* G. I. Davies (1992: 141): 'The parallel verb points clearly to the straightforward meaning know.'

<sup>108</sup> Wolff (1974: 85, 100) suggests that רוח need not refer to an 'indwelling spirit', but can be 'an overwhelming force which comes on the people from the outside' (cf. *Isa* 19: 14, 29: 10). Interestingly, Wolff sees this spirit as 'embodied in the priesthood', which reflects the idea promoted in this study: that *Hosea* 4–14 presents the priests as responsible for 'leading Ephraim into prostitution'.

<sup>109</sup> Hempel (1939), Korpel (1990: esp. 125, 133–4, 217–25), and Frymer-Kensky (1992a: 144; 1992b: 1146) argue that sexual behaviour is never attributed to YHWH in the Hebrew Bible. Satlow (2000: 23) argues that this is one of the reasons why Greek-speaking Jews in the Hellenistic and early Roman periods were uneasy with 'the biblical marital metaphor': 'it presents God and Israel in too intimate a bond. The marriage-covenant metaphor implies a sexual intimacy with God that would have made these authors uncomfortable.'

message that the people no longer desire such a relationship, but rather prefer to engage in ‘prostitution’.<sup>110</sup>

*Hosea* 4–14 is a truly daring text, especially where its metaphorical language is concerned, with its audacious use of metaphor and simile in combination with word-play pushing the boundaries of acceptable language. In such a context, the insistence of *Hosea* 4–14 on using only similes to refer to YHWH becomes even more striking. Most importantly for this study, however, this poetry’s allusions to metaphorical prostitution can hardly be called dormant. We might say that it has been possible for traditional translations and commentaries to read this motif ‘literally’ only because they have been so determined to smooth out the quirks and idiosyncrasies of this focus’s vital frame that they have succeeded in smothering it. A reading of the ‘prostitution’ motif within its distinctive contexts, however, soon reveals that it can be as lively as this poetry’s wider metaphorical language, forcefully striving to reorient the reader’s perspective.

### Wider sexual and marital metaphorical language in *Hosea* 4–14

*Hosea* 4–14 strays only briefly beyond the pervasive ‘prostitution’ motif to flirt with wider sexual or marital metaphorical language. It is therefore striking that even these fleeting metaphors reflect and contribute to the distinctive, playful rhetorical strategies of this audacious prophetic poetry. First, in the midst of 7: 3–7 with its persistent plays on ‘Ephraim’ and recurrent repetitions of the phoneme אַף (‘anger’), we have seen that the people are accused in 7: 4 of being ‘adulterers’ (מִזְנוּפִים). As we shall discover, ‘adultery’ is a far more unusual metaphorical focus in the prophetic texts than many assume, and its

<sup>110</sup> Cf. 4: 15, which has often been considered secondary for its reference to Judah, while others (led by Wolff 1974: 89) wish simply to omit ‘Judah’. Emmerson (1984: 77–80) interestingly argues that ‘let not Judah become guilty’ is editorial, leaving ‘If you, Israel, play the harlot, do not enter into Gilgal, nor go up to Bethaven, nor swear, “As Yhwh lives.”’ ‘In short,’ she argues, ‘Hosea’s words are to be understood, not as an absolute prohibition of worship at Bethel and Gilgal, but as the prohibition of worship there as long as Israel remains guilty of “harlotry”’ (p. 80). While the difficulties surrounding 4: 15 caution us against placing too much weight on this verse, it is tempting to take Emmerson’s suggestion and also to read בֹּא (‘to come’) and עֲלֶה (‘to go up’) as having sexual innuendoes: ‘Do not come (תִּבְאֹר) to Bethel or go up (תַּעֲלֶה) to Beth-aven, nor swear (תִּשְׁבַּע) “As Yhwh lives.”’ בֹּא (‘to come’) is a common euphemism for sexual intercourse (cf. *Gen* 6: 4, 16: 2; *Deut* 22: 13; 2 *Sam* 12: 24, 16: 21, 20: 3), while עֲלֶה (‘to go up’) describes cattle mating in *Gen* 31: 10–12 (cf. the animalistic sexual metaphors of *Jer* 2: 23–4 and *Ezek* 23: 20). שְׁבַע (‘to swear’) frequently occurs in the *Song* (2: 7, 3: 5, 5: 8, 9, 8: 4) to speak of a lover’s oath. Perhaps *Hos* 4: 15 ominously warns that, while Israel continues to ‘prostitute’ herself, the people will be denied access to YHWH as a lover.

presence here is therefore notable. It is striking, then, that the associations created within this literary frame move far beyond a straightforward allusion to Israel breaking a marriage contract, as connotations of fiery heat and passion (oven, heat, baker) are introduced, as well as undercurrents of anger. Indeed, we could say that it is precisely because so little attention is called to the straightforward literal sense of ‘adulterers’ (מנאפים) that the Jerusalem Bible instead reads אנפם (‘enraged’), leaving the unusual metaphorical focus behind. It seems that this poetry’s accusation of ‘adultery’ lives up to its reputation for invention and innovation.

Second, in 5: 7, the people are charged with having ‘dealt treacherously’ (בגדו) with YHWH, even bearing ‘foreign children’ (בני זרים). The accusation of having ‘deceived’ or ‘dealt treacherously’ resonates with associations of betrayal and unfaithfulness, with the hint of ruthlessly purposeful behaviour. For our purposes, the real interest of 5: 7, however, lies in its scandalous assertion that the people have borne ‘foreign children’ (בני זרים). This phrase is frequently translated as ‘illegitimate children’ within Bibles and commentaries, almost certainly reflecting the desire to find allusions to a marriage relationship between the people and YHWH, which are otherwise rare within *Hosea* 4–14.<sup>111</sup> While such a rendering is perhaps justifiable in this particular context, it has the effect of concealing a striking word-play, which is far more typical of this exceptional poetry. For זור (‘strange/foreign’) appears elsewhere in *Hosea* 4–14 to describe Ephraim/Israel’s fate: ‘Foreigners (זרים) have devoured his strength and he does not know it!’ (7: 9); ‘foreigners (זרים) will devour it. Israel will be swallowed up’ (8: 7–8). Paying attention to this word-play, we see the ‘tit for tat’ device raising its head once more, as the responsibility for Ephraim/Israel’s fate of being consumed by ‘foreigners’ (זרים) is placed with the people and characterized as utterly deserved: after all, it is they who have borne ‘foreign children’ (בני זרים). *Hosea* 4–14 may be tempted away from its ‘prostitution’ motif only rarely,<sup>112</sup> but when it is attracted by wider sexual or marital metaphorical language, even these passing

<sup>111</sup> This is perhaps partly due to echoes with the children of *Hosea* 1: a narrative in which ‘the marriage metaphor’ is often presumed to reign, and to which we shall turn in the final chapter.

<sup>112</sup> Some might wish to include the description of Assyria and the nations as Ephraim’s ‘lovers’ (אהבים) in 8: 9 as a further example of *Hosea* 4–14’s wider sexual/marital metaphorical language. Whether ‘lovers’ is metaphorical here, however, is debatable: some might argue that אהב is instead a technical term which has gathered sexual innuendoes within the literary context (see earlier discussion). If we were to include it among our examples, however, it is clear that this accusation similarly takes an active part in this poetry’s daring and inimitable use of word-play, with the text playing on both the political and emotional/relational meanings of אהב, and the literary context arousing sexual associations.

metaphors reflect and engage in the innovative and distinctive persuasive strategies of this playful and creative prophetic poetry.<sup>113</sup>

### A meeting of metaphor and metonym: *Hosea* 4: 13–14

Alert to *Hosea* 4–14's innovative use both of 'prostitution' as a metaphorical focus and its wider sexual/marital metaphorical language, we are perhaps now better equipped to approach the most difficult and controversial appearance of the motif within this text. Still a purple passage for the debates over 'cultic prostitution', it is possibly in 4: 13–14 that the sheer potential of *Hosea* 4–14's persuasive force is most vividly illustrated. For in this passage all strategies at the poetry's disposal combine to rail against its rivals and turn the reader against them, as metaphor and metonym meet. A comparison of a traditional translation (RSV) and my own reading provides a useful basis for the discussion.

Therefore your daughters play the harlot,  
and your brides commit adultery.  
I will not punish your daughters  
when they play the harlot,  
nor your brides when they commit adultery;

for the men themselves go aside with harlots,  
and sacrifice with cult prostitutes,  
and a people without understanding shall come  
to ruin.

(*Hosea* 4: 13b–14, RSV)

Therefore your daughters will prostitute,  
And your daughters-in-law commit adultery!<sup>114</sup>  
I will not punish your daughters when they  
prostitute,  
Nor your daughters-in-law when they commit  
adultery.

For the men offer/go aside with 'prostitutes',  
And sacrifice with holy women.  
And a people without understanding will be  
ruined!

(*Hosea* 4: 13b–14, my translation)

Traditionally, readings have advocated what we might call a 'literal' understanding of 'prostitution' throughout 4: 13–14, perceiving a causal link between the actions of the women and the men. There has been some disagreement over whether the daughters' 'prostitution' in 4: 13 involves 'common'

<sup>113</sup> זור also appears in 8: 12's accusation by YHWH. The precise thrust of this verse is disputed, with MT's singular תורתִי ('my law') causing some confusion. Andersen and Freedman (1980: 501) suggest that the 'king and princes' are here 'considered pagans' (כמו־זר נחשבו), noting that they are the subject of all other plural verbs in the unit. Macintosh (1997: 325) proposes: 'Though I write for him the principal requirements of my law, they are considered as those of an alien god.' By far the majority, however, believe that YHWH accuses the people here of understanding 'the multitude of my laws' (usually read as plural, following Greek α) as a 'foreign thing'. Cf. Wolff (1974: 133), G. I. Davies (1992: 207), Mays (1969: 122), Stuart (1987: 127). This seems the most likely translation. However we translate 8: 12, it remains clear that this accusation is also bound up with the poetry's 'tit for tat' device.

<sup>114</sup> Translating כלה as 'daughter-in-law', rather than 'bride', to maintain the parallel with 'daughter' (as women for whom fathers are responsible). Cf. Andersen and Freedman (1980: 369).

prostitution or promiscuity,<sup>115</sup> or involvement in ‘cultic prostitution’ itself.<sup>116</sup> Most traditional readings agree that the ‘prostitution’ of 4: 14 refers to sexual practices related to the cult, whether formal or informal. It seems to me, however, that such readings strongly underestimate the complexity of this prophetic poetry’s language and persuasive force, indeed meekly submitting to it. In my opinion, this passage confronts us with an intertwining of metonymical and metaphorical prostitution, echoing the ‘tit for tat’ arguments that we have experienced elsewhere.

My first point is hardly controversial. With many, I hold that the women’s ‘prostitution’ and ‘adultery’ in 4: 13 are not metaphorical, but rather threaten literal liaisons as an inevitable consequence of the men’s actions.<sup>117</sup> Within the broad socio-cultural and historical context of a society reliant on the continuation of the male bloodline, the prostitution of daughters and the adultery of daughters-in-law would pose a significant threat to social order.<sup>118</sup> The literal prostitution and adultery of 4: 13 thus work as metonyms for the social disintegration that will result from the men’s dealings with ‘prostitutes’ in 4: 14: ‘poetic justice’ is served once more. Yet who, then, are the ‘prostitutes’ with whom the men associate? Until recently, most agreed that זנות (‘prostitutes’) were to be understood literally and used to interpret the parallel קדשות (‘holy women’), leading to the translation of the latter as ‘cultic prostitutes’.<sup>119</sup> With the recent decline of confidence in the hypothesis of ‘cultic prostitution’, however, it seems to me that we should consider an alternative reading.<sup>120</sup> It is my contention that the ‘prostitutes’ of which 4: 14 speaks are metaphorical.<sup>121</sup> Not only does *Hosea* 4–14 display

<sup>115</sup> Rudolph (1966a: 112), Landy (1995: 62), Andersen and Freedman (1980: 369), G. I. Davies (1992: 125).

<sup>116</sup> Most (in)famous is Wolff (1974: 86–7), who creates the idea of ‘Canaanite bridal rites’ from the words of Herodotus, who states that every Babylonian woman must have sexual intercourse with a stranger once in her life.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Bird (1989: 85): ‘The structure of the argument is clear: what the men do has consequences in their daughters’ behavior.’

<sup>118</sup> Prostitution seems to have been tolerated in ancient Palestine as the profession of disenfranchised women. Adultery, or the sexual promiscuity of daughters intended for marriage, however, is a completely different matter, sanctioned nowhere in the Hebrew canon. Cf. Camp (1985: 118–19).

<sup>119</sup> Most notoriously, Wolff (1974: 87–8): ‘The first usage of the term “temple prostitutes” (קדשות) clearly refers to the actions of the cultic officials. The same word is used for the professional prostitutes in Dtn 23: 18, with whom the “sacral marriage” is officially celebrated by the priests in the cult.’ Cf. Andersen and Freedman (1980: 370), G. I. Davies (1992: 126), Mays (1969: 75). Macintosh (1997: 157–8) believes קדשות to be cult women, whose ‘inclinations rendered them willing partners in the orgiastic practices described’.

<sup>120</sup> Bird (1997), Fisher (1976), Oden (1987), Westenholz (1989), Hillers (1985), Frymeyer-Kensky (1992a: 199–202).

<sup>121</sup> Bird (1989: 87–8) argues that the juxtaposition of קדשות with זנות is a case of ‘false inference’, or ‘a polemical misrepresentation of a cultic role that did involve some form of sexual

a marked penchant for metaphorical language, its ‘prostitution’ motif is consistently metaphorical elsewhere, as we have seen (excepting 4: 13, whose literal character is almost certainly prompted by the ‘poetic justice’ pattern). Galambush writes, “The charge against the men, that they “split off with prostitutes” and sacrifice with “holy women”, is usually interpreted as describing literal sexual activity. There is no reason, however, to depart at this point from reading the accusation of prostitution as metaphorical, as elsewhere in the book.”<sup>122</sup> It is as difficult to prove a word to be metaphorical as it is to disprove an historical theory such as ‘cultic prostitution’ once it has taken hold. This is ‘precisely the trap that grammar sets.’<sup>123</sup> Yet, it is possible to present an alternative reading of 4: 13–14 that not only frees us from dependence on this dubious hypothesis, but better reflects this prophetic poetry’s inimitable style.

If traditionally the allusion to זנות (‘prostitutes’) has been a guide by which to understand the parallel קדשות (‘holy women’), this reading will take directly the opposite approach. In my opinion, the equivalence between ‘holy women’ and ‘prostitutes’ in 4: 13–14 is so ‘incongruous’<sup>124</sup> or ‘logically absurd’<sup>125</sup> that it provokes a metaphorical understanding of the latter. We might even say that, where קדשות is prematurely translated as ‘cultic prostitutes’, an even more lethal trap is set for the uninitiated reader than that of grammar alone, as there is no longer any hint that a metaphor may be at large. To my mind, 4: 13–14 confronts us with slanderous metaphorical language, where ‘holy women’ are labelled as ‘prostitutes’ for not conforming to desired cultic practice. יפרדו (‘they divide’) in 4: 14 has often been translated as ‘they go aside with’, a phrase hinting at sexual intimacy.<sup>126</sup> Yet scholars such as Stuart have recently argued that the parallelism between יפרדו and ‘they sacrifice’ in 4: 14 suggests that the verb might instead have a technical meaning, related to the ‘division’ of sacrifices.<sup>127</sup> The continuing debate perhaps suggests that in 4: 13–14 we are confronted once again with sexual innuendo, as the prophetic poetry encourages one meaning of יפרדו through its parallelism with sacrifice, while at the same time promoting sexually nuanced meanings through the sexually charged context.

activity, but was not understood by the practitioners as prostitution’, or even ‘a perverted remnant of an earlier Israelite or Canaanite cult, perpetuated in a perverted Israelite cult’.

<sup>122</sup> Galambush (1992: 50).

<sup>123</sup> Ricoeur (1978: 252), drawing on Turbayne (1962: 14).

<sup>124</sup> Kittay (1987: 24).

<sup>125</sup> Beardsley (1958: 138).

<sup>126</sup> Andersen and Freedman (1980: 370), Wolff (1974: 87).

<sup>127</sup> Stuart (1987: 83). Cf. Andersen and Freedman (1980: 370).

Thus 4: 13–14 scandalously presents ‘holy women’ as ‘prostitutes’ and sacrificing with them as ‘prostitution’.<sup>128</sup> Indeed, it contends that any interaction with them, ‘tit for tat’, will lead to the prostitution of daughters and the adultery of daughters-in-law, an inevitable road towards social breakdown.<sup>129</sup> In this controversial poetry’s own words: ‘And so a people without understanding will come to ruin.’ *Hosea* 4: 13–14 strongly reflects other examples of *Hosea* 4–14’s forceful and inimitable use of metaphorical language in powerful combination with word-play, sexual innuendo, and the ‘poetic justice’ pattern. To understand such a passage as a straightforward reference to ‘cultic prostitution’ seems to me to underestimate grossly the complexity and persuasive power of this prophetic poetry, surrendering uncritically to its compelling force.<sup>130</sup>

## REFLECTIONS

*Hosea* 4–14’s distinctive use of the ‘prostitution’ focus provides an impressive introduction to prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language, starkly exposing how far theories of ‘cultic prostitution’ have underestimated this poetry’s audacious use of ‘prostitution’ as a metaphorical focus. Far from being limited to straightforward allusions to a historical practice, ‘prostitution’ gathers a wide range of associations within this provocative poetry, including those of separation, estrangement, unfaithfulness, incongruous behaviour, unacceptable cultic practice, and cultic defilement.

In addition to demonstrating to us just how lively the prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language can be, *Hosea* 4–14 also introduces the

<sup>128</sup> Baumann (2003: 103) speaks of the קדשות as “‘handmaids of God,’ whom the text defames as cult prostitutes, thus disqualifying them for their cultic service’. Cf. Bird (1989: 87): ‘Through this pairing and ordering the reader is meant to understand that *qēdēšōt* are equivalent to prostitutes. But this directed reading is clearly polemical; it tells us what the prophet thought about the *qēdēšōt*, but it does not give us any reliable information about the function or activities of these women, except that they must have been a recognized presence at the rural sanctuaries in Hosea’s day.’

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Bird (1989: 86): ‘To summarize, the men are accused of cultic impropriety, the women of sexual impropriety. (The women’s offense is obvious; the men’s is “under cover.”) It may be sexual activity that defiles the men’s worship, but it is worship that is the central concern of the periscope, as the verbs show.’

<sup>130</sup> Wolff (1974: 88) cites Bleeker (1932): ‘Nothing can better denote the degeneration of the worship services in Israel than the word קדשות’. Even those who are aware of the problems surrounding the hypothesis of ‘cultic prostitution’ can submit to the force of this poetry. Macintosh (1997: 158) questions traditional readings, but still suggests that קדשות might be ‘women with loose morals’ whose ‘inclinations rendered them willing partners in the orgiastic practices’.

difficulties raised by prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language for current readers. Surprisingly little has been written on the problematic nature of *Hosea* 4–14, even by feminist critics, perhaps due to this poetry's lack of female personification and explicit sexual violence. Yee highlights the inaccuracy of 'cult-prostitute' as a translation of קדשה, stressing, 'Although in the prophet's mind their rituals involved sexuality, it would be a mistake to accept this at face value', but she does not comment on the wider implications of this biblical presentation of 'holy women' for current readers.<sup>131</sup> It seems to me, however, that *Hosea* 4–14 is an acutely problematic text for its controversial depiction of these 'holy women' as 'prostitutes', a portrayal that seems particularly difficult in the light of recent debates over the role of women as priests and bishops within the Church.<sup>132</sup>

As this poetry draws to an end, we could say that it seeks to redeem its negative sexual metaphorical language, just as it continually 'turns' metaphorical language and motifs throughout. *Hosea* 14: 6–9 repeatedly draws on what we might call recognized love-language to speak of Israel's renewed relationship with YHWH, as we encounter a garden setting and familiar motifs such as wine, vines, vineyards, and lilies.<sup>133</sup> Indeed, the verbal similarities with the *Song of Songs* are striking.<sup>134</sup> While the *Song* 4: 11 sings, 'And the fragrance (וריה) of your garments| Is like the fragrance (כריח) of Lebanon',<sup>135</sup> *Hosea* 14: 7 echoes, 'And his fragrance (וריה) shall be like Lebanon'; where the woman in the *Song* goes in 6: 11 'to see whether the vine (הגפן) had blossomed (הפרחה)' and in 7: 13 again with her lover 'to see whether the vine (הגפן) had blossomed (פרחה)', *Hosea* 14: 8 promises, 'they shall blossom (יפרחו) like the vine (כגפן)'; and, finally, as the woman in the *Song* 2: 3 delights 'to rest (ישבתי) in his shade (בצלוי)', so *Hosea* 14: 8 pledges, 'They shall return, to rest (ישבי) in his shade (בצלוי)'.<sup>136</sup> We could say that 14: 6–9 echoes with love-language in

<sup>131</sup> Yee (1992: 197).

<sup>132</sup> Cf. Frymer-Kensky (1992a: 202): 'The whole tradition of considering ancient pagan religion sexy and its women cultic functionaries as sex partners is a myth. It speaks more about its adherents than it does about the ancients. It is born of conflicted attitudes towards sexual activity in Western civilization, of the inability to think of roles for women priestesses in any arena other than sexual.'

<sup>133</sup> Cf. G. I. Davies (1992: 306–7), Eidevall (1996: 213–16). Wolff (1974: 234): 'The imagery of these verses is reminiscent of the motifs found in love songs.' Fox (1985: esp. 267–92) and White (1978) provide comparisons of the *Song of Songs* and Egyptian love-poetry, identifying certain motifs that we might characterize as love-language. Cf. Good (1966: 60–1), who argues that 14: 2–9 seeks 'to reverse the picture presented by ch. 13 in many of the same words'. Eidevall (1996: 210) provides a list of the 'lexical reversals'.

<sup>134</sup> Landy (1995: 172) notes that these verses 'are close to the language of the *Song of Songs* and are thus a fitting erotic coda to the book, this is how God's love manifests itself'.

<sup>135</sup> Lebanon echoes as a motif throughout the *Song* (3: 9; 4: 8, 11, 15; 5: 15; 7: 5).

<sup>136</sup> Maintaining MT's בצלוי ('his shade'). Some prefer to emend 14: 8 to בצילי ('my shade'), so that YHWH's voice can be heard.

this way not only to emphasize the positive nature of these closing words, but also to redeem its earlier use of ‘prostitution’ to describe Israel’s guilt. Fisch certainly reflects, ‘The love of God has marvellously found its voice, turning this prophecy into a kind of Song of Songs, flooding it with tears, with dew and rain.’<sup>137</sup>

If *Hosea* 4–14 does seek to ‘turn’ its ‘prostitution’ motif into love-language, however, we are left with the question of whether such a reversal is possible. Andersen and Freedman are clearly convinced: ‘All the horror of the preceding judgements is cancelled by the ardour of this promise. It is Yahweh’s last word, and it is a word of life.’<sup>138</sup> Wolff is even more vociferous: ‘His is the earliest example of Luther’s “Where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation”. The prophet irresistibly transports his audience into the climate and atmosphere of a life of complete wholeness. . . . In this sense, our text anticipates somewhat the miracles of Jesus recorded in the New Testament.’<sup>139</sup> *Hosea* 4–14 is extraordinary poetry, demonstrating an impressive ability to play with metaphorical meaning, ‘turning’ language to convey its vital message that the destruction facing Israel is restorative rather than vengeful in purpose. As we will see in the final chapter, such a technique is not designed simply to impress, but rather responds to the profoundly negative message otherwise presented by *Hosea* 1–3, by which this prophetic poetry is inspired, but which it valiantly seeks to redeem. To push the limits of language and meaning is a dangerous game, however, and *Hosea* 4–14’s play is perhaps the most perilous of all. Indeed, concerns about the stability of this prophetic poetry have frequently been expressed.

Earlier we spoke of Morris’s disquiet about the extreme ambiguity introduced to the poetry by word-plays such as the ‘luxuriant/empty’ (בויקק) vine of 10: 1. He continues, ‘To force words and passages by wordplay to bear more than one meaning, is to release those words from their conventional moorings and to allow meaning itself to spin free. Meaning becomes unstable and discourse breaks through the normal limits of discursive speech. A word that can mean anything is dangerously close to a word that means nothing.’<sup>140</sup> There are those who believe that *Hosea* 4–14 is skilful enough to maintain control of its multiplying meanings. Eidevall observes, ‘At times, this literary

<sup>137</sup> Fisch (1988: 156). Cf. Morris (1996: 114): ‘The word [“love”] no longer refers to Israel’s promiscuous love, rather to God’s true, but ignored love for Israel. . . . As the book begins, Israel’s relationship with God is characterized as harlotry, adultery and unworthy love; but by the end, harlotry and adultery have been forgotten, and the love that remains is not Israel’s diverse infatuations but God’s enduring and forgiving love.’

<sup>138</sup> Andersen and Freedman (1980: 646).

<sup>139</sup> Wolff (1974: 238).

<sup>140</sup> Morris (1996: 96–7).

universe may appear to be threatened by “chaos” in the form of disturbing discontinuities, but it nevertheless constitutes a well-structured “cosmos”.<sup>141</sup> Indeed, Eidevall believes that the text succeeds in its battle for salvation: ‘In a final magnificent reversal of all reversals, the passage 14: 6–9 envisages not only a return from exile, but a return to the ideal beginning—to paradise.’<sup>142</sup> Fisch echoes: ‘Not only can the people be turned about, transformed, but language can be redeemed, can “turn”, can reveal its unseen potentialities. . . . Hosea plays in earnest, if he turns images and words inside out, it is because he has a purpose. . . . “Inspiration” comes to the prophet as he manipulates words, and if we can in our turn disentangle the complexities of his language, we may come near to recovering some part of that same “inspiration”.’<sup>143</sup> Yet neither Eidevall or Fisch explains how *Hosea* 4–14 avoids ‘chaos’, or indeed how we might ‘disentangle the complexities’ of such language.

Certainly Landy is unconvinced by Fisch’s assertion that ‘in the tempest of contradictory meanings, the only rock we can hold onto is the words themselves’.<sup>144</sup> He responds, ‘It is not clear to me what Fisch means, in what sense a word is a rock. What grants continuity is presumably the sound of the word, that subsists through the permutations of its meaning. But this is to assume that a word itself is a unitary phenomenon that exists independently of the meanings assigned to it. A word is in fact inherently unstable, tending to break up into its component phonemes and distinctive features.’<sup>145</sup> Indeed, it is perhaps Landy who exposes *Hosea* 4–14’s instability most ruthlessly as he repeatedly illustrates the prophetic poetry’s tendency to undercut itself.

Displacement, deferment and concealment: the metaphors of the book pursue each other in metonymic chains, accumulating associations, cancelling each other out. Each metaphor is unstable, not only because it is displaced by others, but because it is implicated in the process; each metaphor is a usurper. . . . This makes the search for an original and pure language interminable, since every word used on that search becomes ambivalent, unreliable.<sup>146</sup>

If all art seeks to make sense out of discordant reality, *Hosea* is an extreme case of a work whose task is to extract meaning from the collapse of meaning. The immense destructiveness with which it is charged, and which is manifested in the shattering of

<sup>141</sup> Eidevall (1996: 243).

<sup>142</sup> Eidevall (1996: 242).

<sup>143</sup> Fisch (1988: 146). Cf. Buss (1969: 140): ‘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.’

<sup>144</sup> Fisch (1988: 153).

<sup>145</sup> Landy (2001: 283).

<sup>146</sup> Landy (2001: 285).

language, is framed by the hope of reconstruction. Hence every metaphor is ambivalent, riven by opposing agendas.<sup>147</sup>

Landy's reflections on the ambiguity and instability of *Hosea* 4–14's language raise vital questions for this exploration. Earlier we spoke of the risks that this prophetic poetry takes with language, as it strives to walk the tightrope between sense and nonsense, threatening to undercut its own message with its sharp wit. Can a text maintain meaning in these circumstances? Can it privilege its message of redemption over its threats of dire catastrophe? Indeed, can it redeem the humiliating dismissal of holy women from the cult (with words which implied that they were only ever sexual objects) through the later use of love-language? It certainly seems problematic that these women remain dismissed, and that the 'beloved' (Israel) remains masculine even throughout the 'love-language' of 14: 6–9.<sup>148</sup> It seems that the reversals of *Hosea* 4–14 may not be as successful as Wolff, Andersen and Freedman, and, indeed, Eidevall, and Fisch assume—a problem that will continue to haunt us throughout this exploration of prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language.

<sup>147</sup> Landy (2001: 275).

<sup>148</sup> Landy (1995: 172): 'One would expect Israel to be the female partner; grammatically, however, it remains obstinately masculine, as are most of the images. The masculinity is presumably inclusive, comprising Israel as male and female subject. Nevertheless, the elimination of the feminine persona has the effect of desexing the passage.' Eidevall (1996: 213): 'Some scholars have suggested that Israel is portrayed as the bride of YHWH in this passage. For several reasons this is unlikely. There are no linguistic indications in 14: 6–9 that the nation is represented as a female. Some features in the text, such as the consistent use of masculine verb forms and suffixes, suggest the opposite. . . . There are no hints whatsoever that the nation is pictured as a woman.'

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*Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4

If *Hosea* 4–14 illustrates the limitations of reading the popular ‘prostitution’ motif in terms of ‘cultic prostitution’, *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 highlights the inadequacy of reading prophetic sexual and marital metaphors and similes as straightforward allusions to a marriage relationship between YHWH and the nation/city. Indeed, this prophetic poetry underscores just how diverse and varied sexual and marital metaphorical language can be and how inadequate is the traditional characterization ‘the marriage metaphor’. Our exploration of *Jeremiah* will focus on chapters 2: 1–4: 4, as it is here that the concentration of this book’s sexual and marital metaphorical language lies,<sup>1</sup> and most agree that these verses form a distinct unit.<sup>2</sup> Most of the passage is poetic in character, but there are also prose reflections, as is typical in what McKane calls the ‘rolling corpus’ of *Jeremiah*.<sup>3</sup> We will turn to these prose passages later, but for now will concentrate on the poetry of 2: 1–4: 4, with its distinctive use of metaphorical language, repetition, and, above all, incessant rhetorical questions.

JEREMIAH 2: 1–4: 4: THE WIDER FRAME

Whereas metaphorical language boldly takes centre stage in *Hosea* 4–14, it is not the single outstanding feature of *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4. But if this prophetic poetry does not share *Hosea* 4–14’s concentration of metaphor and simile, its metaphorical language can nevertheless be so daring as to rival even that

<sup>1</sup> Galambush (1992: 57), Weems (1995: 52), Baumann (2003: 106), van den Eynde (2001: 91). Where ‘prostitution’ and ‘adultery’ appear elsewhere in *Jeremiah*, they seem to be literal references: 5: 7; 7: 9; 9: 1 [ET 9: 2]; 23: 10, 14, 29: 23. The only two exceptions are 13: 20–7 and 31: 31–4. As the sexual and marital metaphors and similes of *Jeremiah* are otherwise concentrated in 2: 1–4: 4, however, we will focus on this passage, enabling us to explore this metaphorical language within its literary frame.

<sup>2</sup> Abma (1999: 234), Holladay (1986: 62), DeRoche (1983a: 367), Carroll (1986: 115). Some understand 4: 3–4 to begin or move towards a new section. Cf. Untermann (1987: 30–2) for a discussion.

<sup>3</sup> McKane (1986).

audacious text. This is particularly true of 2: 1–4: 4's sexual and marital metaphors, as we will see, but can also be illustrated by its wider metaphorical language: Judah is a stumbling young camel (2: 23), a choice vine, and 'stinking weeds' (2: 21); although she scrubs herself with soap, Judah will never be clean (2: 22). The poetry also has its share of 'modelling similes': the people's sword is like a ravaging lion (2: 30); Judah is like a desert-dweller (3: 2); her leaders will be like a shamed thief (2: 26). Indeed, *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 might even briefly show more audacity than *Hosea* 4–14 in its use of metaphor, rather than simile, to speak of YHWH, 'fountain of living waters' in 2: 13. For a deeper appreciation of this prophetic poetry's metaphorical language, however, we must explore further the wider frame in which they appear, with its repetition and insistent rhetorical questions, which combine to present the distinctive portrayal of Judah as ridiculous and absurd.

### Repetition in *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4

Repeated phrases and motifs pervade *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4, but for our purposes the repetition of הלך ('to walk') and דרך ('way') is of particular interest, deftly introducing the poetry's caricature of Judah as senseless and purposeless.<sup>4</sup> The 'walking' motif appears no fewer than seven times in chapter 2 alone. In 2: 2, Judah 'walks after' YHWH in her 'bridal days', and YHWH 'helps them to walk' in the wilderness in 2: 6.<sup>5</sup> Yet the people are accused of 'walking after' worthlessness in 2: 5, uselessness in 2: 8, and the Baals in 2: 23,

<sup>4</sup> Abma (1999: 239–42) provides further examples of 'key words'.

<sup>5</sup> Here and elsewhere in *Jer* 2: 1–4: 4, 'Israel' is an ideal name for Judah (excepting the prose passages, which distinguish between the two nations). Carroll (1986: 128): 'It is unnecessary to make the phrases "house of Jacob", "house of Israel" refer to Israel rather than to Judah and to treat the discourse as extracts from Jeremiah's early preaching to the northern clans (contra Albertz 1982 and many commentators). The rhetorical nature of the material hardly permits such an interpretative precision and the demise of Israel in 722 allowed the Judaeans state to use its epithets freely without opposition.' Cf. Driver (1906: 18), Leslie (1954: 30). *Contra* Holladay (1986: 93), who believes that 'Israel' refers to the Israelite nation even within poetic passages, and Shields (2004: 8), who follows McConville (1993: 29–33) to maintain that, outside the prose passage 3: 6–11, 'Israel' refers 'to the historic designation which encompasses both the Northern Kingdom and Judah'. Cf. Abma (1999: 235–6), Biddle (1990). There is some disagreement over whether the female in *Jer* 2: 1–4: 4 is nation or city: the poetry alternates between referring to Jerusalem (2: 2), 'Israel' (2: 14), and Judah (2: 28). Galambush (1992: 53–4) is adamant that the female is Jerusalem, following her interest in 'The City as Yahweh's Wife' (the subtitle of her monograph). Cf. Biddle (1990: 70–1). Abma (1999: 246) is keen to understand the female as nation, due to the references to the wilderness period and foreign alliances. It seems to me that *Jer* 2: 1–4: 4 creates a female personification precisely so that it can move between these different possibilities. Galambush (1992: 54) admits, 'Jerusalem seems to stand for city, state and members of the state simultaneously'. For our purposes, we will call the female 'Judah'.

and they even threaten to ‘walk after’ strangers in 2: 25!<sup>6</sup> And all of this while YHWH is ‘helping them to walk’ in ‘the way’ (2: 17).<sup>7</sup> Judah seems to be doing a lot of walking, apparently after anyone, or anything. Complementing this caricature are the numerous ‘ways’ (דרכים) in which Judah ‘walks’. In 2: 17 YHWH helps Judah to walk in ‘his way’, but by 2: 18 the people are on ‘the way’ to Egypt and to Assyria.<sup>8</sup> In 2: 33 Judah is once more ‘on her way’ to seek love, while in 3: 2 she sits ‘on the way’ waiting for ‘them’. Then in 3: 13 Judah is accused of ‘scattering her ways to strangers’, while in 3: 21 the sons of Israel are accused of having ‘twisted’ their ‘ways’. Once again, the overriding impression is that Judah is wandering aimlessly, going this way and that down different paths, while refusing to follow the one path she apparently *should* walk down, that of YHWH. We might even say that this prophetic poetry exposes her ‘waywardness’. This impression is made explicit in 2: 36, where Judah is accused of ‘flitting about’ and ‘doubling her ways’,<sup>9</sup> while 2: 23 vividly illustrates the issue: ‘Look at your way in the valley!| Know what you have done!| A hasty young camel, twisting her paths!’ According to *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4, Judah is a young she-camel, unsteady on her feet, careering this way and that, with neither logic nor purpose.<sup>10</sup> Through this combination of repetition and

<sup>6</sup> 2: 25 may form an *inclusio* with 2: 2, where Judah ‘loves’ and ‘walks after’ YHWH rather than strangers. Cf. DeRoche (1983a: 368). All references to Judah’s walking appear within 2: 2–25, and it is possible that this *inclusio* closes the motif (until its reintroduction by the prose 3: 6–11). Cf. Galambush (1992: 55).

<sup>7</sup> Holladay (1986: 95): ‘The third colon ... ironically parallels the second: he did not abandon you but led you at the very time he was leading you, you abandoned him.’ DeRoche (1983a: 368) speaks of ‘a series of parallel and contrasting images’ created by the repetition of הלך in *Jeremiah* 2: ‘Whereas Israel has committed adultery by following the Baals, Yahweh has remained true to his people by continually leading them.’ LXX omits הלך from 2: 17, and some believe it to be dittography of 2: 18. Cf. Bright (1965: 9), Janzen (1973: 10). However, Holladay (1986: 52) argues that this is influenced by LXX’s desire to eliminate a tricola, arguing that the instance is not close enough to 2: 18 to suggest dittography. הלך also features two further times in the poetry in ways that do not obviously contribute to this rhetorical technique (3: 1, 12).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. the repetition of preposition ל in 2: 18. Holladay (1986: 95): ‘one may expect that the piling up of six occurrences of ל in the four cola is deliberate, giving an impression of constant scurrying and rearranging now that Judah is out from under Yahweh’s patronage.’

<sup>9</sup> Understanding תולי as a form of אול, ‘to go about’. Carroll (1986: 139) suggests ‘to gad about’. McKane (1986: 49, 54–5) translates 2: 36 as ‘What a trifling matter you make it to alter your course’, understanding תולי as a Hiphil of זלל (‘to make light of’) following the Versions. Cf. Holladay (1986: 111). It seems to me that the force of אול better reflects this poetry’s wider themes.

<sup>10</sup> There has been some debate over whether 2: 23’s allusion to Judah as a camel should be interpreted sexually. Bailey and Holladay (1968) insist that the camel language is not sexually loaded, but rather ‘the perfect illustration for all that is “skittery” and unreliable’. Cf. Jones (1992: 90–1), Lundbom (1999: 281), Abma (1999: 225), Chapman (2004: 122). Others disagree, stressing that the image occurs alongside the allusion to Judah as a wild-ass on heat in 2: 24. Cf. Leslie (1954: 32), Carroll (1986: 133), McKane (1986: 45–6), Bauer (1999b: 31, 33). Some even omit the reference to Judah as ‘wild ass’, so that 2: 23–4 can be understood as a description of a camel on heat. Cf. Driver and Miles (1937/8: 98 f.). Such an emendation seems unnecessary, even if פרה is an unusual spelling of פרה and the gender is unusually feminine (perhaps

metaphor, we gain a first taste of this poetry's characteristic portrayal of Judah as senseless, out of control, and quite simply ridiculous.

The wilderness motif weaving through *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 contributes further to this unflattering portrait. Twice in the opening words, YHWH speaks of the wilderness as a place where Judah was reliant upon him. In 2: 2, her 'bridal days' are 'when you walked after me in the wilderness| In a land not sown'; while in 2: 6 wilderness dangers are magnificently recalled. According to this prophetic poetry, it is YHWH who guided the people through a hostile wilderness, bringing them safely to a 'garden land' (2: 7). Having established the wilderness as a prompt for Judah's dependence on YHWH, the poetry proceeds to use the motif to expose the irony of Judah's response. In 2: 24, she is a 'wild ass, accustomed to the wilderness', while in 3: 2 she is 'like the desert-dweller in the wilderness'. Not only does Judah incongruously continue to live in the 'desert and pit land' (2: 6) despite having been rescued from there, she has become 'accustomed' to, or even 'an expert with regard to' (למד, 2: 24) that wilderness. The sheer irrationality of such behaviour is underscored in YHWH's words of disbelief, 'Have I been a wilderness to Israel?| Or a land of deep darkness?| Why do my people say, "We will wander,| We will not come to you anymore?!"' (2: 31).<sup>11</sup> The irony is cutting. YHWH is neither 'wilderness' nor 'deep darkness'; it was he who rescued the people from these in 2: 6. Yet Judah inexplicably remains content to wander/roam/be free there rather than 'coming to' YHWH, a charge that complements her indiscriminate 'walking' and contradictory 'ways'. In the words of McKane, 'If his hand on Israel had been oppressive, her declaration of independence would have been understandable. In the circumstances, however, her resolve to break free of Yahweh and disavow her allegiance is mystifying and inexplicable.'<sup>12</sup>

influenced by the female personification). McKane (1986: 45–6), Holladay (1986: 53, 100–1), Lundbom (1999: 281–2) defend MT. Bailey and Holladay's observations of the associations of unreliability and 'skittery' behaviour seem appropriate within the literary context. At the same time, the female gender of the camel, combined with the intimate positioning of this allusion alongside that of the 'wild ass' does seem likely to arouse sexual associations. There seems to me no reason why all these associations may not be in play here.

<sup>11</sup> רדנו is difficult, as the verb appears rarely (*Gen* 27: 41, *Ps* 55: 3, *Hos* 12: 1). While in *Genesis* it seems to have the meaning of 'to break loose or free', its force is unclear in *Psalms* and *Hosea*, and the latter may even be corrupted. Here in *Jer* 2: 31, LXX reads 'we will not be ruled over', while KJV proposes 'we are Lords'. BDB 923 suggests 'wander restlessly, roam', while *HALOT* iii. 1194 proposes, 'to roam about freely', citing Zürcher Bibel's (1931) 'we wander freely' and NRSV's 'we are free'. Most translate 'we are free', using the parallel 'we will not come to you' as a guide. Cf. Lundbom (1999: 292), Jones (1992: 94), although Bright (1965: 16) admits that this translation is 'a guess'. Holladay (1986: 55) proposes 'we have roamed', arguing that 'Arabic *rāda* is common and the meaning ("walk about, prowl") fits the context admirably'. Cf. Driver (1906: 12): 'We roam at large.' While the precise force of the verb is unclear, its general sense that Judah wishes to be free from constraint and to wander (probably aimlessly, given the context) is apparent.

<sup>12</sup> McKane (1986: 52).

### Rhetorical questions in *Jeremiah 2: 1–4: 4*

With 2: 31, we are introduced to *Jeremiah 2: 1–4: 4*'s characteristic use of rhetorical questions as the ridicule of Judah is taken to another level. Traditionally, the relentless questioning in combination with the appearance of רִיב, 'to accuse' (2: 9, 2: 29), has led many to characterize chapter 2 as a lawsuit or divorce proceedings.<sup>13</sup> Jones speaks of 'a solemn lawsuit, in which Judah is accused as an adulterous woman might be accused, of infidelity',<sup>14</sup> while Holladay alludes to 'a covenant lawsuit initiated by Yahweh against his people'.<sup>15</sup> The problems generated in assuming that *Jeremiah 2: 1–4: 4* as a whole revolves around 'adultery' will become clear presently. For now, even the passage's characterization as a 'lawsuit' is problematic. Carroll notes: 'An examination of the relevant passages in the light of the supposed pattern will reveal at best a fractured pattern, and, in relation to Jer. 2, a misleading analysis.... It is unnecessary to reconstruct an imaginary courtroom procedure in order to provide a social setting for the *rib* metaphor of conflict between Yahweh and Israel.'<sup>16</sup> Indeed, DeRoche launches a sustained attack on the evocation of 'prophetic' or 'covenant lawsuits' wherever רִיב appears, arguing for a complete abandonment of the terms.<sup>17</sup> In reference to *Jeremiah 2: 5–9*, he observes, 'Yahweh contrasts his devotion to his people with their unfaithfulness to him. At the end of the oracle, Yahweh decides to contend (*ryb*) with Israel, although he does not describe how he will go about it. However, *nowhere does he suggest that a third party hear his accusations and render a decision*. He proceeds to conduct his grievance against Israel by himself'.<sup>18</sup>

The observations of DeRoche, Carroll, and countless others joining the protest against the search for 'lawsuits' in the prophetic books provide a useful starting point for our own exploration.<sup>19</sup> While this poetry is keen to

<sup>13</sup> Such readings frequently follow Gunkel's form-critical work on prophetic lawsuits, which suggests that this language derives from legal practice. Cf. Gunkel's introduction to Schmidt (1923: p. lxiii). Würthwein (1952) and Hesse (1953) alternatively propose a cultic origin. Huffmon's (1959) suggestion that the רִיב motif emerged from international relations has proved particularly popular. Cf. Harvey (1962), Limburg (1969), Westermann (1967: 199–200).

<sup>14</sup> Jones (1992: 80). Cf. Brueggemann (1998: 34), Abma (1999: 247), Diamond and O'Connor (1996: 303).

<sup>15</sup> Holladay (1986: 73). Cf. Bright (1965: 16).

<sup>16</sup> Carroll (1986: 117). Carroll even renders רִיב as 'squabbling', within the context of a family (p. 123).

<sup>17</sup> DeRoche (1983c: 568, cf. pp. 563–74) insists, 'The word *rib* does not in itself indicate a judicial process. It is a more general term indicating only that one party has a grievance against another. It does not indicate the process by which the grievance is solved.'

<sup>18</sup> DeRoche (1983c: 570, emphasis mine).

<sup>19</sup> Daniels (1987) argues that we should not even conceive of the 'rib-oracles' as a 'special group' or a 'separate genre' (p. 340). Cf. Lundbom (1999: 257–8).

present YHWH's angry charges against Judah, in my opinion the characterization of *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 as a lawsuit is misleading. For a start, the countless questions ranged against Judah provide no opportunity for a defence.<sup>20</sup> As rhetorical questions, by definition they are not asked 'in order to request information or to invite a reply, but to achieve a greater expressive force than a direct assertion.'<sup>21</sup> Certainly, to characterize rhetorical questions simply as aids to evoke a courtroom setting is seriously to underestimate these powerfully persuasive devices, which strive insistently to lure the reader into adopting unexpected assumptions. In the words of Labuschagne, rhetorical questions are '[o]ne of the most forceful and effectual ways employed in speech for driving home some idea or conviction. . . . The hearer is not merely listener: he is forced to frame the expected answer in his mind, and by doing so he actually becomes a co-expresser of the speaker's conviction.'<sup>22</sup> We might say that *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4's rhetorical questions are the equivalent of *Hosea* 4–14's 'tit for tat' device, working to present a causal link between Judah's behaviour and punishment, amassing in concentration relentlessly to underscore her senselessness.<sup>23</sup>

Brueggemann and Lundbom draw attention to a particular form of rhetorical question, which Brueggemann dubs the 'double rhetorical question with *h-'m*' and which Lundbom distinguishes as *Jeremiah's* 'signature' (2: 14, 2: 31, 3: 5).<sup>24</sup> Two rhetorical questions are asked, followed by what Lundbom calls 'a troubling vexation': 'This vexation is either about something incongruous that the prophet observes, or else it has to do with the weakened condition of the people facing war and imminent defeat.'<sup>25</sup> Brueggemann argues that such 'double rhetorical questions' seek to defend 'conventional wisdom'. He writes: 'The ground and cause of trouble is not a failure or collapse of conventional wisdom. Rather Israel's acting out of character and

<sup>20</sup> *Contra* Holladay (1986: 73), who curiously claims, 'Rhetorical questions directed to the defendant were part of ordinary rhetoric in legal procedure (Judg 8: 2, 11: 12, 25) and may have been characteristic of a "pre-trial encounter"' Cf. Westermann (1967: 112–15). This seems to depend on the similarly questionable assumption that *Judges* 8 and 11 speak of a lawsuit. Cf. DeRoche (1983c: 568).

<sup>21</sup> Abrams (1993: 271).

<sup>22</sup> Labuschagne (1966: 23). Shields (2004: 38) observes that rhetorical questions 'draw the audience/reader into dialogue'.

<sup>23</sup> Barton (1990: 61). The 'tit for tat' device itself features in *Jer* 2: 1–4: 4, although less prominently than in *Hosea* 4–14. For instance, רעה ('evil/misfortune') is used both to describe the people's 'wickedness/evil' (2: 3, 13, 19; 3: 2, 5) and the 'misfortune/evil' that will therefore befall them (2: 27, 28). Cf. Weems (1995: 56): 'The prophet constructed his rhetoric not only to draw a direct parallel between the woman's sin (shameless, loose behaviour) and her punishment (exposed and shamed) but to insist that her punishment was reasonable and inescapable.'

<sup>24</sup> Brueggemann (1973: 358), Lundbom (1999: 131). Cf. Holladay (1986: 93).

<sup>25</sup> Lundbom (1999: 131).

inconsistently with conventional wisdom has brought the trouble.<sup>26</sup> Such a defence (or even creation) of ‘conventional wisdom’ may certainly be a significant consequence of these rhetorical questions. To my mind, however, Brueggemann does not sufficiently emphasize the latter part of his observation: that it is Judah’s failure to act according to commonly accepted wisdom that is the concern of this poetry. Indeed, it appears that the concentration on one particular strain of rhetorical question has drawn attention away from what is conceivably their primary significance. ‘Double rhetorical questions with *h-’m*’ number only three amongst a wide variety of rhetorical questions in *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4, which seem to me to share the common cause of ruthlessly exposing the absurdity and irony pervading Judah’s actions.<sup>27</sup>

In 2: 14 (a ‘double rhetorical question with *h-’m*’) YHWH demands, ‘Is Israel a slave? Or is he a home-born servant?| Why has he become war-spoils?’ In the wake of the first two questions, the final question stresses that Judah should never have become war-spoils. Yet her behaviour, running to Egypt and Assyria to form political alliances, suggests that the people nevertheless see themselves in this way, perhaps thereby even *creating* such a fate for themselves. In this way, the poetry not only strongly critiques Judah’s subservience, but simultaneously ridicules her behaviour as incongruous.<sup>28</sup> In 2: 5 a solitary rhetorical question combines with the הלך (‘walking’) motif and a word-play worthy of *Hosea* 4–14, as YHWH asks, ‘What injustice did your ancestors find in me| That they became distant,| And walked after futility (ההבל)| And became futile (ויהבלו)?’<sup>29</sup> Once again the rhetorical question works within the wider context to demand the assumption that no injustice can be found in YHWH.<sup>30</sup> *Jeremiah* 2: 5 insists that the fathers have rejected Yhwh for no sensible reason whatsoever. Nor does their irrationality end there, for they have inexplicably left YHWH to follow הבל (*Qoheleth*’s vapour-like ‘vanity’, ‘nothingness’, ‘futility’, ‘worthlessness’). The choice of הבל over YHWH heightens the implausibility of the fathers’ actions: why turn away from a just God, for no reason than to walk after ‘futility’? The pointlessness of this decision is underscored by the ‘tit for tat’ word-play, which maintains that in following ‘futility’ the fathers inevitably themselves became ‘futile’. The sheer audacity of this prophetic poetry is perhaps only

<sup>26</sup> Brueggemann (1973: 361).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Long (1976: 387): ‘The rhetorical questions are not didactic. They do not instruct. They rather lay a rhetorical basis for indictment.’

<sup>28</sup> Lundbom (1999: 275): ‘This oracle highlights the folly of forsaking Yahweh.’

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *2 Kings* 17: 15.

<sup>30</sup> Holladay (1986: 85) interestingly resists this rhetorical question to propose: ‘Though the question is rhetorical, the fact that Jrm perceives Yahweh to be raising it at all suggests a kind of capacity of kenosis . . . on God’s part, a (theoretical) willingness to admit fault.’ As we will see, the answers to *Jer* 2: 1–4: 4’s rhetorical questions are not always as straightforward as the poetry implies.

fully recognized, however, with an appreciation of the word-play perceived by Bright, who suggests that **הבל** is used precisely for its echoes of **בעל** ('Baal'),<sup>31</sup> introducing an implicit polemic against this rival god and exposing the 'futility' of his worship.

Like *Hosea* 4–14, *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 uses intratextuality to gather force for its rhetorical questions, as 2: 13 dramatically sets the stage for one of YHWH's most scathing derisions of Judah in 2: 18. The poetry itself seems to draw attention to 2: 13, preparing its cosmic witnesses in 2: 12 for disbelief at Judah's actions:

Be devastated, O heavens, at this!  
 Be horrified! Be utterly desolate/dry!<sup>32</sup>  
 Oracle of YHWH  
 For my people have committed a double wrong  
 They have forsaken me,  
 Fountain of living water,  
 To hew for themselves cisterns:  
 Broken cisterns that hold no water!

(*Jeremiah* 2: 12–13)

The irrationality (and recklessness) of such behaviour hardly needs elucidation,<sup>33</sup> yet its sheer absurdity becomes fully apparent only with 2: 18's contemptuous questions: 'And now what do you gain from being on the way to Egypt,| To drink the water of the Nile?| And what do you gain from being on the way to Assyria,| To drink the water of the Euphrates?'<sup>34</sup> Not only has Judah left a fountain of living, or 'running', water to build broken cisterns;<sup>35</sup> she is now wandering back and forth searching for water (recalling

<sup>31</sup> Bright (1965: 15). Cf. Lundbom (1999: 259), Carroll (1986: 123–4), Holladay (1986: 86). Cf. the similar word-play on 'Baal' in 2: 11.

<sup>32</sup> We might read a word-play on **חרב** ('dry'/'desolate') here. While the sense of 'desolate' is encouraged by the parallel **שׂמם** ('horrified'), **חרב** may also echo a call to the heavens to give no water, so that the absurdity of Judah's rejection of 'living water' in a time of drought will be exposed. Lundbom (1999: 267): 'Perhaps the heavens are expected to be so shocked at Israel's apostasy that they will not give rain.' Holladay (1986: 91): '[T]he idea of "drought" leads in the direction of the dry land implied in v 13. . . . The heavens are to be dry, since the people have made themselves dry.'

<sup>33</sup> Domeris (1999: 256): 'The people are accused of forsaking fountains of living water for broken cisterns (2: 10–13), an act which no one in their right mind would undertake.'

<sup>34</sup> **שׂהר** refers to the Nile in *Isa* 23: 3. **נהר** ('the River') is the Euphrates in *Isa* 8: 7: Lundbom (1999: 273).

<sup>35</sup> Holladay (1986: 92–3): 'rarely has an ethical dative . . . carried so much irony—they dig the cisterns for themselves and for their own benefit, while the spring which they abandoned produces water of itself. . . . And the ultimate irony is that Yahweh took the people through the (dry) desert and brought them into the garden land, only to see them digging away foolishly in an enterprise that will only lead to dryness once more.'

the ‘walking’ and ‘way’ motifs), rather than returning to that still available and abundant source. In the words of Shields, ‘the way in which Israel has gone about making foreign alliances is unnatural or absurd.’<sup>36</sup>

Rhetorical questions saturate *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4.<sup>37</sup> The sheer deviousness of this prophetic poetry, however, can perhaps best be witnessed in 2: 11, where YHWH demands, ‘Has any (other) nation exchanged its gods?| (when they are not gods),| But my people have exchanged their glory for No-Profit!’<sup>38</sup> *Jeremiah* 2: 11 claims that not only do the people act in direct contradiction to what any other nation might do, they go further in their disregard of ‘acceptable’ behaviour. If other nations would never exchange their gods (however illusory), these people have not only willingly replaced YHWH, ‘their glory’, they have actually traded him for ‘no profit’ (בלוא-יועיל), or even ‘uselessness’ (perhaps another jibe at Baal).<sup>39</sup> McKane observes, ‘Israel’s behaviour is doubly incomprehensible: it is unnatural in that it conflicts with the religious habits of men in general who do not exchange their gods as one would a product in the market place, but who revere them and cling to them, even though they have no reality.’<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of 2: 11, however, is that the answer presupposed by this rhetorical question is far from reasonable, even if it is demanded by the context. If this question were to be asked genuinely, many might answer in the affirmative (whilst perhaps questioning the validity of the suggestion that other nations might see their gods as ‘non-gods’). Carroll notes, ‘It is highly improbable that no other social group ever changed its beliefs or gods. That is just the hyperbole of preaching.’<sup>41</sup> Indeed, he pointedly observes that this is exactly what *Jeremiah* itself calls for this particular ‘nation’ to do: ‘to change their baalistic understanding of Yahweh to a different concept of him. In a manner of speaking, this was a change of gods.’<sup>42</sup> Within the inexorable logic of *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4, however, it seems

<sup>36</sup> Shields (2004: 12).

<sup>37</sup> Bauer (1999b: 37) speaks of ‘the audience being overwhelmed by rhetorical question after rhetorical question’. Cf. Weems (1995: 53).

<sup>38</sup> Reading with MT ‘its glory’ (כבודו). There has been some suggestion that 2: 11 should read ‘my glory’ (כבודי), having been emended by scribes because the idea that YHWH’s glory might be exchanged was offensive. Cf. Bright (1965: 15), Abma (1999: 223), Carroll (1986: 125–6). Holladay (1986: 50) and Lundbom (1999: 267) provide a discussion and defence of MT.

<sup>39</sup> Bright (1965: 15), Lundbom (1999: 262), Holladay (1986: 89).

<sup>40</sup> McKane (1986: 34). Shields (2004: 12): ‘The implication is that it is unnatural and absurd to worship these gods “that are not gods”, for such “gods” have no power.’

<sup>41</sup> Carroll (1986: 126). Leslie (1954: 28) observes: ‘Jeremiah here tacitly ignores the well-known syncretism in the religions of pagan nations wherein local deities from one country are absorbed into the pantheon of another.’ Nevertheless, he succumbs to the poetry’s persuasive force: ‘Still he was basically right, for when such nations exchanged their national gods for others, or worshipped the latter alongside the former, it was no real exchange, because they were kindred nature deities, and accordingly, from Jeremiah’s viewpoint, unprofitable, powerless nonentities.’

<sup>42</sup> Carroll (1986: 127).

that such an assumption can be slipped past many a reader, battered by the incessant series of rhetorical questions. Certainly, McKane seems convinced by 2: 11's rationale. Holladay likewise insists, 'Trading people like the Cypriots and the tribe of Kedar are masters of barter and exchange, but they certainly do not exchange their own gods for others.'<sup>43</sup> Holladay even surrenders to the poetry's portrayal of YHWH's rival, 'will-o'-the-wisp Baal, who claimed much but brought nothing to the worshiper'.<sup>44</sup> It is perhaps here that we can begin to appreciate the power of this poetry's rhetorical questions, as they strive to shape our thoughts, encouraging (or even forcing) acquiescence where there might normally be none.<sup>45</sup>

Judah's directionless absurdity before the unwavering faithfulness of YHWH presents itself as the major theme of *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4, weaving through repetition, word-play, and rhetorical questions.<sup>46</sup> This prophetic poetry defends YHWH's actions and Judah's predicament with an argument that is perhaps best summed up by yet another rhetorical question: 'Have you not done these things to yourself, | Through your leaving YHWH your God | When he was helping you to walk in the way?' (2: 17). Judah can blame no one for her coming humiliation; her own senseless actions and decisions are the sole cause for her lamentable prospects.<sup>47</sup> It is within this wider frame of theodicy through relentless ridicule and inexorable irony that the sexual and marital metaphorical language of *Jeremiah* appears.

## SEXUAL AND MARITAL METAPHORICAL LANGUAGE IN *JEREMIAH* 2: 1–4: 4

*Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 has perhaps suffered more than any other prophetic text from unfavourable comparisons of its sexual and marital metaphorical language with *Hosea* 1–3. K. M. O'Connor states: 'Jeremiah did not create this

<sup>43</sup> Holladay (1986: 90).

<sup>44</sup> Holladay (1986: 91).

<sup>45</sup> Another demonstration of *Jer* 2: 1–4: 4's forceful influence can be witnessed in the tendency of commentators to mimic its characteristic style. Apparently rhetorical questions are contagious! Cf. McKane (1986: 43), Lundbom (1999: 268), Jones (1992: 87), Holladay (1986: 101, 113), Bright (1965: 23).

<sup>46</sup> Shields (2004: 9) speaks of *Jeremiah* 2's 'argument from absurdity'. Domeris (1999: 253–6) explores the way in which 'antilinguage', including ridicule, sarcasm, and parody, pervades *Jeremiah*.

<sup>47</sup> Brueggemann (1998: 48): 'Through her own stupid actions, Judah is rejected. Her life, apart from the intervention of Yahweh as her advocate, is in profound jeopardy.' Holladay (1986: 95): 'The point of the question here is: Do not blame others for these events, you only have yourself to blame; it is your abandonment of Yahweh that has caused all your trouble.'

[marriage] metaphor, but borrowed it from the prophet Hosea.<sup>48</sup> Galambush repeatedly uses phrases such as ‘Jeremiah expands on Hosea’s suggestion’ and ‘the book of Jeremiah makes effective use of the already traditional metaphor of Jerusalem as Yahweh’s wife.’<sup>49</sup> Clements writes: ‘The language is stark and the imagery has become rather conventional in the wake of the earlier prophecies of Hosea. There is therefore a certain lack of originality about it.’<sup>50</sup> Indeed, commentaries habitually read details from *Hosea* 1–3 into *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4. In reference to *Jeremiah* 3: 2, Leslie writes: ‘They pursue rituals wherein, as Hosea vividly describes them (Hos. 4: 13b–14), harlotry and cultic prostitution are practiced in the name of religion, both by men and women. . . . As Hosea had led Jeremiah to see it, “For a spirit of harlotry has led them astray, and they have left their God to play the harlot” (Hos. 4: 12b).’<sup>51</sup> Stienstra responds to 2: 6 and 2: 11 (neither of which involve explicit marital or sexual language) with the words, ‘With our knowledge of Hosea, we may safely assume that we have an instance of IDOLATRY IS ADULTERY here. It should have become clear by now, however, that we need knowledge of the marriage metaphor in order to interpret these isolated verses and passages and we may consequently assume that the prophet expected his audience to be thoroughly familiar with it.’<sup>52</sup> Such an approach betrays a unwarrantable lack of appreciation for *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4’s distinctiveness.<sup>53</sup> My aim is to provide a taste of this poetry’s unique sexual and marital metaphorical language, illustrating the way in which it intertwines with its relentless rhetorical questions and the pervasive theme of Judah’s absurdity.

The rhetorical question of 2: 32 provides a convenient starting point: ‘Does a virgin forget her ornament?| Or a bride her sashes?| But my people have forgotten me,| Days without number!’ It has come as a surprise to many that 2: 32 does not speak of a bride and groom to describe the relationship between Judah and YHWH. Indeed, some do not even notice that this is not the force of 2: 32. Boadt writes, ‘Yahweh had taken Israel as such a bride and yet she has

<sup>48</sup> K. M. O’Connor (1992: 171). Weider (1993) devotes a monograph to the exploration of *Hosea* 1–3’s influence on *Jeremiah*. Schulz-Rauch (1996) understands *Jeremiah* to be reliant on *Hosea*, but is keen to stress that the imagery within *Jeremiah* itself has a distinctive character (p. 54). Cf. Diamond and O’Connor (1996: 307): ‘Jeremiah reads an old metaphor and writes a new narrative.’

<sup>49</sup> Galambush (1992: 53, 57). Dille (2004: 156): ‘As in Hosea, Jeremiah’s characterization of YHWH as husband is that of a wronged husband who seeks his wife’s repentance and subsequent reconciliation.’

<sup>50</sup> Clements (1988: 87). Cf. Jones (1992: 82), Driver (1906: 6). Rooke (2000: 35): ‘This is perhaps the least coherent of the major occurrences of the metaphor.’

<sup>51</sup> Leslie (1954: 35; cf. p. 25). Cf. Lundbom (1999: 301).

<sup>52</sup> Stienstra (1993: 165). Cf. Holladay (1986: 123).

<sup>53</sup> There is some awareness of this. Bons (1999: 213) witnesses to the ‘creativity’ of *Jeremiah* 2–3, while exploring the resonances with *Hosea* (pp. 212–17); and, in discussing ‘the female metaphor’, Turner (2003: 194–5) describes how the prophet Jeremiah ‘creatively expands its potential. The multivalent dimensions of the metaphor are explored.’

simply turned her back on him,<sup>54</sup> while Leslie observes, ‘Although it is contrary to nature for a bride to forget her wedding gown and adornments, Israel, the Lord’s bride has done yet worse. Now for many a day she has forgotten her Lord.’<sup>55</sup> Yet, as Holladay insists, ‘The verse does not say, “Can a virgin forget her fiancé, a bride her bridegroom?” This is the comparison one would expect to fit the terrible conclusion, “But my people have forgotten me.” Instead Jrm has the bride’s attention not on the bridegroom but on her own finery.’<sup>56</sup> In other words, although the bride may be Judah, and the sashes, YHWH, a bride does not have a relationship with her sashes! *Jeremiah* 2: 32 simply cannot be characterized as an instance of ‘the marriage metaphor’, but is rather more idiosyncratic, reflecting the distinctive style and themes of the prophetic poetry in which it is set. In characteristic fashion, this prophetic poetry combines metaphorical language with rhetorical questions to expose the incongruity of Judah’s actions. In the words of Barton:

[Jeremiah] conveys throughout his oracles a sense of half-choked fury at the absurdities of his contemporaries’ conduct. The tendency in his day to worship gods other than Yahweh, which we now know was not widely felt to be wrong in pre-exilic Judah, he presents as a ludicrous breach of every natural sense of loyalty, even as an offence against common sense: ‘Can a maiden forget her ornaments or a bride her attire.’<sup>57</sup>

Nor is this the only instance where this poetry’s marital metaphorical language fails to toe the line. In 3: 20 YHWH rails, ‘Surely a woman has deceived her lover;| Thus you have deceived me, house of Israel!’ Assumptions about ‘the marriage metaphor’ have strongly shaped traditional readings of this verse, with many translating רַעַךְ as ‘husband’.<sup>58</sup> Untermann refers to 3: 20 as ‘the image of the unfaithful wife’,<sup>59</sup> while Jones simply states, ‘This serves to link the passage with the theme of the faithless wife in 3: 1’.<sup>60</sup> Yet ‘husband’ is not the most obvious translation for רַעַךְ, which generally tends more broadly to mean ‘companion’, and in the *Song* speaks of the unmarried male ‘lover’.<sup>61</sup> McKane

<sup>54</sup> Boadt (1982: 27).

<sup>55</sup> Leslie (1954: 33). Cf. Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard (1991: 41).

<sup>56</sup> Holladay (1986: 109). Cf. Lundbom (1999: 292), McKane (1986: 53).

<sup>57</sup> Barton (1990: 59).

<sup>58</sup> K. M. O’Connor (1999a: 283). Carroll (1986: 151) suggests ‘husband’, but in his commentary speaks of ‘a husband-lover’ (p. 153). Lundbom (1999: 318) admits that the most likely translation is ‘companion’, but assumes, ‘Here the “companion” is in all probability the woman’s husband.’

<sup>59</sup> Untermann (1987: 24, 28). K. M. O’Connor (1999a: 283).

<sup>60</sup> Jones (1992: 104).

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Driver (1906: 18), Bright (1965: 20), Shields (1995: 70; 2004: 120). It is unlikely that the lovers are married in the *Song*, as they continually seek each other (3: 1–5, 5: 2–8, 6: 1) and the male is described as ‘peeping’ through a window to catch a glimpse of his lover (2: 9). Most strikingly in 8: 1 the female expresses a wish for her lover to be ‘like a brother’, so that ‘if I met you outside I could kiss you and they would not despise me’. Cf. Fox (1985: 231–2), Bloch and Bloch (1995: 3), Exum (2005: 79).

recognizes this, yet, still wishing to preserve YHWH as ‘husband’, suggests, ‘As a woman deceives her husband *for her lover’s sake*’, or ‘Like the faithlessness of a wife *because of her paramour*’, introducing an entirely new character.<sup>62</sup> In my opinion, such readings confine 3: 20 to a predictable meaning that little becomes this prophetic poetry. If 3: 20 wished to allude to YHWH as Judah’s ‘husband’, it could have done so. Instead, it opts for the more provocative focus, ‘lover’, whose legal relationship to the woman is not the primary concern.<sup>63</sup> *Jeremiah* 3:20 accuses Judah not of committing adultery, but rather of deception, emphasizing associations of betrayal and emotional unfaithfulness, rather than the breaking of a marriage contract.<sup>64</sup> Limiting this language to the confines of ‘the marriage metaphor’ greatly reduces its impact.<sup>65</sup>

Assumptions that *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 is ‘about’ the ‘marriage metaphor’, however, are strong, with this ‘default frame’ exerting a powerful influence on interpretations of other metaphors and similes within scholarship. *Jeremiah* 3: 4 provides a pertinent example. In this verse, YHWH recalls Judah crying out, ‘My father! You are the intimate companion of my youth’ (אלוהי נערי). Within the context of *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4, many assume that the ‘companionship’ here must be that of marriage. *Proverbs* 2: 17 is repeatedly cited, which speaks of ‘the strange woman’, who ‘forsakes the companion of her youth (אלוהי נעוריה)’. As Fox admits, however, אלוהי does not mean ‘husband’ in the other contexts in which it appears. While he prefers the translation ‘mate’ in *Proverbs* 2: 17, he is aware that elsewhere the intimacy of an אלוהי is not that of a marriage partner. In *Micah* 7: 5, he suggests אלוהי is ‘best friend’;<sup>66</sup> in *Psalms* 55: 14, he notes that אלוהי ‘is collocated with *meyuddā’i* “my (close) acquaintance”’.<sup>67</sup> To these instances, we might add *Proverbs* 16: 28, where many translate אלוהי as ‘friends’,<sup>68</sup> and *Proverbs* 17: 9, where most agree that אלוהי means ‘friend’ or ‘companion’ with no connotation of marriage partner.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>62</sup> McKane (1986: 79). Cf. Ehrlich (1912: 247), Leslie (1954: 37).

<sup>63</sup> Shields (1995: 70): ‘The various English translations of v. 20 obscure the continuing reference to Israel as daughter by translating *iššā* as “wife” rather than “woman” and *mēre’āh* as “husband” rather than the more usual “companion” or “friend”, which also indicates close association, and in the case of *r’h* III, an object of desire.’ Cf. Peake (1910: 113).

<sup>64</sup> Carroll (1986: 153): ‘Yahweh displays the frenetic outrage of a man betrayed by his woman.’

<sup>65</sup> *Contra* Galambush (1992: 57), who describes 3: 20 as a ‘simple explication’ of ‘the marriage metaphor’. K. M. O’Connor (1999b: 389) refers to *Jer* 2: 1–4: 2 as ‘a metaphorical and narrative drama of the broken family’, where YHWH features as ‘broken-hearted and abandoned spouse, dumbstruck and enraged by the collapse of a relationship in which he thinks he has done everything possible to make the marriage flourish’.

<sup>66</sup> Fox (2000: 120): ‘the intimacy implied by *rēa’* in the first line is raised to a higher degree by *’allūp* in the second: don’t trust *even* your *’allūp*, your best friend.’

<sup>67</sup> Fox (2000: 120).

<sup>68</sup> Murphy (1998: 124).

<sup>69</sup> Whybray (1994: 256). Murphy (1998: 126) translates ‘companion’, and refers to ‘the amicable relationship’ (p. 129).

It seems that *Proverbs* 2: 17 is far from typical in its suggestion that ‘companion’ might refer to a husband. The influence of the ‘marriage metaphor’ on readings of *Jeremiah* 3: 4, however, has clearly attracted commentators to *Proverbs* 2: 17 to the exclusion of all other references. This is despite the manifest difficulties that such a reading generates within *Jeremiah* 3: 4. For here, Judah calls YHWH the ‘companion (אֱלוֹהַי) of my youth’ in the same breath as calling him ‘My Father’.<sup>70</sup>

Many show an awareness of this difficulty, yet their commitment to ‘the marriage metaphor’ leaves them unsure about how to react. Galambush recognizes that ‘reference to the husband as father occurs only here.’<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, she suggests, ‘The woman calls Yahweh, “My father, the companion of my youth” (v 4), apparently in an attempt to get him to restore her as his wife.’<sup>72</sup> Shields observes that a ‘father–daughter metaphor’ ‘disrupts the husband–wife metaphor used in the remainder of vv. 1–5.’<sup>73</sup> Still she asserts, ‘There may be several reasons for such a use. Considering the rest of the quotation of the people, “you are the husband of my youth”, perhaps the term is one of deference used between a young woman and an older man.’<sup>74</sup> McKane writes, ‘We have to ask whether the Israelites are described as Yahweh’s children (following Duhm). We have to ask whether the husband–wife figure is giving place to a teacher–pupil figure or whether we are still to think of Yahweh *qua* husband as the teacher (so Volz and Hyatt). The reference is then to the *husband* in his capacity as instructor of the young wife.’<sup>75</sup> Holladay even proposes omitting ‘father’ (‘there is no parallel in the OT for “my father” as “my husband”’), creating the more acceptable marital language, ‘Is not “my mainstay” what you have called me? “You are the companion of my youth”.’<sup>76</sup> A far more straightforward solution, however, is to lose אֱלוֹהַי נַעֲרִי, ‘the companion of my youth’, from the binds of ‘the marriage

<sup>70</sup> Cf. *Jer* 3: 19 where DeRoche (1983a: 371) translates אָבִי as ‘my husband’, following HALOT i. 1, whose translation is itself based solely on *Jer* 3: 19 with no further explanation. De Roche also cites ‘a similar usage in certain dialects of classical Arabic’ (p. 371). In his arguments, DeRoche is strongly influenced by ‘the marriage metaphor’, which he believes ‘serves as a powerful tool in picturing Israel’s past and present relationships with Yahweh’ (p. 375).

<sup>71</sup> Galambush (1992: 56).

<sup>72</sup> Galambush (1992: 56).

<sup>73</sup> Shields (2004: 44).

<sup>74</sup> Shields (2004: 44). ‘The marriage metaphor’ exerts a strong influence on Shields. In her introduction, she writes: ‘The combined picture the imagery of Jeremiah 2 presents is that of God, as the husband of Israel, competing against rivals for his wife’s allegiance’ (p. 11). She continues, ‘The metaphors themselves set up the marital imagery through which Israel’s relationship to YHWH will be played out in much of ch. 3’ (p. 16). Shields calls attention to the movement away from such ‘marital imagery’ at the end of *Jer* 3: 1–4: 4 towards the language of ‘father–daughter’. For her, the allusion to YHWH as ‘my father’ in 3: 4 is ‘proleptic’, creating ‘a slippage between the husband–wife metaphor, which dominates vv. 1–5, and a father–daughter metaphor, which is introduced in 3: 19’ (p. 44).

<sup>75</sup> McKane (1986: 61–2). Cf. Jones (1992: 98). Bauer (1999b: 55) alludes to the ‘husband/father’.

<sup>76</sup> Holladay (1986: 115).

metaphor’, to understand it in parallel to ‘My Father’ to speak, in this particular instance, of the relationship between father and child.

Nor is the influence of ‘the marriage metaphor’ on *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 confined to 3: 4. Assumptions that this prophetic poetry is concerned with ‘the marriage metaphor’ even influences readings of metaphors and similes with no clear relation to the portrayal of YHWH as husband of Judah. In relation to 2: 13’s charge that Judah has left YHWH, ‘fountain of living water’, Brueggemann states, ‘The metaphor is water, but behind it lies the metaphor of marriage.’<sup>77</sup> Similarly, when YHWH demands, ‘What injustice did your ancestors find in me| That they became distant . . . ?’ (2: 5), Holladay moves immediately to discuss marriage and divorce:

Behind the present shocking question are two sorts of expressions. First there is the expression for the basis of divorce, Deut 24: 1 . . . ‘because he has found in her some indecency’. But of course in Israelite society a wife may not divorce her husband in the way a husband may divorce his wife: so in Jrm’s metaphor it is a shocking thing that Israel should consider divorcing her husband Yahweh (compare 3: 1).<sup>78</sup>

It seems that assumptions about ‘the marriage metaphor’ pervade readings of *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4,<sup>79</sup> and yet there is nothing to suggest that marital metaphorical language governs this prophetic poetry to this extent.<sup>80</sup> Even its sexual and marital metaphorical language does not conform to such limited expectations, as we have seen. If we are to identify a dominant and sustained theme in *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4, it does not rest in ‘the marriage metaphor’, but in the relentless ridicule of Judah.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Brueggemann (1998: 35).

<sup>78</sup> Holladay (1986: 85, cf. p. 92). Cf. Jones (1992: 88). K. M. O’Connor’s reading of *Jeremiah* (1999a) is strongly influenced by what she calls ‘the broken household metaphor’. She even finds echoes of this metaphor within *Jer* 4: 5–6: 30’s ‘battle poems’ (p. 282): ‘The portrait of God in these poems is primarily that of military general, but even while orchestrating the battle, God’s speech betrays the anger and grief of the abandoned husband’ (p. 284).

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Leick (1994: 147), who notes a similar phenomenon in Assyriology: ‘The persistent obsession of Assyriologists with the Sacred Marriage meant that practically every text with a sexual content was considered to refer to the goddess’ wedding. This overemphasis of a marital context needs to be redressed.’

<sup>80</sup> Abma (1999: 215): ‘The marriage imagery in *Jeremiah* 2–4: 4 is by far not as sustained as in *Hosea* 1–3 but comes to the fore in an impressionistic fashion.’ Galambush (1992: 53): ‘*Jeremiah* uses the image of Jerusalem as Yahweh’s wife often, but not in a sustained way. . . . An address may begin by depicting the city as a woman and conclude depicting her as a camel (2: 23–24).’ *Contra* Zipor (1995: 90): ‘As in *Hosea* the first prophecies of *Jeremiah* contain a retrospective of a ruined marriage (chs. 2–3). Many of the sequences of metaphors are related explicitly or implicitly to the cycle of “Scenes from a Marriage”. . . . In this chapter we have the phenomenon of a metaphor within a metaphor: the prophet is speaking of the unfaithful with metaphors (an untamed animal, a restive camel), and appears to forget that the hated-beloved woman, with whom he is settling accounts, does not really exist and is only a metaphor.’

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Diamond and O’Connor (1996: 291), who understand ‘the broken marriage metaphor’ in *Jeremiah* 2–3 to be a ‘root metaphor’, ‘engendering and organizing a network’. Baumann (2003: 106) refers to ‘the narrative of YHWH’s “love” story in *Jeremiah*’.

This is not to say that marital imagery never appears among the varied sexual and marital similes and metaphors of *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4. *Jeremiah* 2: 2 also features ‘bride’ as a metaphorical focus, and this time Judah is indeed YHWH’s bride: ‘I have remembered in your favour the faithfulness of your youth,| The love of your bridal days;| When you walked after me in the wilderness,| In a land not sown.’<sup>82</sup> Most are content to limit 2: 2 to a straightforward reference to a marriage relationship between YHWH and Judah, but in doing so they perhaps underestimate the impact of this verse. Stienstra simply writes: ‘Here we are, indeed in the midst of the marriage metaphor. Jerusalem, representative of the people of Israel, should remember her happy bridal days with YHWH. The implication is clear, those days are gone.’<sup>83</sup> Thompson confines his comments to a comparison with *Hosea*: ‘One is reminded at once of the imagery of Hos. 1–3 where the husband–wife relationship between Hosea and Gomer is a picture of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. In the days of the wilderness wandering Israel was Yahweh’s bride.’<sup>84</sup> As Carroll hints, however, the implications of 2: 2 may reach beyond this: ‘The language and images may reflect the influence of the Hosea tradition ( . . . ), but their real force is derived from what follows . . . a stark contrast is set up by this poem between the idyllic origins of the community and its recent experience.’<sup>85</sup> Indeed, we could go further, for 2: 2 not only sets up the contrast that is to follow. The words ‘I remember in your favour’ also implicitly warn of the angry accusations that are to follow.<sup>86</sup> Thus an apparently positive marital metaphor is unexpectedly used to emphasize the inappropriate nature of Judah’s actions: the loving, obedient, ‘bride’ will unthinkably turn to ‘prostitution’. In one fell swoop, 2: 2 strives to present

<sup>82</sup> BDB 483 suggests ‘thy betrothal’ for כְּלוּלִיתִי. McKane (1986: 27): ‘There is no use of כְּלוּלָה in Biblical Hebrew which requires the sense “betrothed”, and a narrower sense of the word is “a young girl on her wedding day”, “a bride”; suggesting ‘bridal days’. Cf. Bright (1965: 9). HALOT ii. 477–8 suggests ‘bride’, ‘daughter in law, or even ‘newly married woman’, depending on the context. DCH iv. 419 suggests ‘daughter-in-law’, ‘bride’, or ‘young wife’.

<sup>83</sup> Stienstra (1993: 162–3).

<sup>84</sup> Thompson (1980: 163). Cf. Holladay (1986: 83), Galambush (1992: 53–4), Jones (1992: 82).

<sup>85</sup> Carroll (1986: 119). Cf. Abma (1999: 214): ‘This positive image of the close bonds between Yhwh and Israel, fresh as in a honeymoon period, functions as a motto for the subsequent controversy concerning the disloyalty of Israel.’ Jones (1992: 82–3): ‘All the greater her fall from grace.’ Weems (1995: 54): ‘The prophet’s oracles deliberately open with this imagery of Israel’s former devotion so as to set in his audience’s mind the criteria by which Israel’s present behaviour would be gauged.’ Bauer (1999a: 299): ‘Israel as the loving bride of cherished memory . . . provides background contrast for the present picture of Israel as prostrate and promiscuous woman.’

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Bauer (1999b: 22): ‘while functioning as a climax for happy memories, this “going after” (לְכַתֵּךְ אַחֲרַי) already foreshadows the change to come. By the same vocabulary, Israel will be accused of going after her lovers, idols, other gods, or acting promiscuously, of committing adultery.’ She explains: ‘the image of Israel as the loving bride of cherished memory provides continuity while building up to the discontinuity in preparation for the accusations to come.’

YHWH as merciful (he is willing to remember a time when his relationship with Judah was positive) and Judah as callous and remiss. It not only works to justify YHWH's wrath, but also to suggest that YHWH (unlike Judah) is acting more than reasonably. The strongest influence on the marital metaphorical language of *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 is not 'the marriage metaphor', or the allegedly ubiquitous *Hosea* 1–3. It is the distinctive style of this prophetic poetry itself, with its persistent theme of Judah's senselessness.<sup>87</sup>

### 'Prostitution' in *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4

If *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4's marital metaphors are more diverse than is often assumed, so are its accusations of 'prostitution'. We have already witnessed the way in which *Hosea* 4–14's 'prostitution' motif defies traditional readings. *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4's 'prostitution' metaphors similarly break free of theories about 'cultic prostitution', reflecting the characteristic style of the poetry within which they proliferate.<sup>88</sup> In 2: 20 YHWH continues his derision of Judah: 'Long ago you broke your yoke, | You tore off your cords | And you said, "I will not serve!"<sup>89</sup> | But upon every high hill | And under every luxuriant tree<sup>90</sup> | You are bending over, prostituting!' According to 2: 20, Judah has demanded freedom, insisting that she will not serve YHWH, and yet has inexplicably turned to 'prostitution', 'bending over' (צעה) and in *that* way 'serving' others.<sup>91</sup> The word-play between 'bending over' to 'prostitute' and 'bending over' to bow submissively is graphic, but frequently passed over by commentaries and translations. The NEB's colourful 'sprawled in promiscuous vice' fails to convey the irony,<sup>92</sup> as does McKane's 'like a prostitute, Israel is lying down and stretched out, ready to receive her lovers.'<sup>93</sup> Lundbom goes

<sup>87</sup> Shields (2004: 13) argues that *Jeremiah* 2's gendered imagery as well as its metaphorical language seek to 'portray the people's behavior as offending the natural order'. Shields understands the language of 'overstepped' boundaries to pervade 2: 1–4: 4 (pp. 13–14).

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Shields (1995: 67 n. 13): 'The alternation of masculine and feminine forms of address signifies that the metaphors do not refer literally to sexual cultic practice, but rather that promiscuity is a general metaphor for non-allegiance to YHWH.'

<sup>89</sup> Reading K, אעבד ('I will not serve'), rather than Q, אעבור ('I will not transgress'). Cf. Holladay (1986: 52–3), McKane (1986: 40).

<sup>90</sup> Reading K, רענן as 'luxuriant' rather than 'evergreen'. Cf. Winton Thomas (1967).

<sup>91</sup> צעה is used to 'tilt' a vessel in *Jer* 48: 12, to 'stoop' under a burden in *Isa* 51: 14, and perhaps to 'bend forward/backward' in power in *Isa* 63: 1 (although here צעה is often emended to צעד, 'marching'). Cf. BDB 858. HALOT iii. 1040–1 elsewhere suggests 'fettered' (*Isa* 51: 14) or 'to tilt (wine vessels), be a cellarman' (*Jer* 48: 12, *Isa* 63: 1) for צעה, but in *Jer* 2: 20 proposes 'to spread oneself, lie down'. To 'bow' or 'bend', capturing the essence of 'tilting', seems an appropriate translation here in 2: 20.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Holladay (1986: 53): 'There you are sprawling, whoring.'

<sup>93</sup> McKane (1986: 41).

so far as to write: ‘You bend backward a whore! . . . The reference is to sexual intercourse, probably in a standing position. Egyptian paintings show standing women, bent over backwards, with hands on the floor, awaiting intercourse’,<sup>94</sup> yet no one seems to pick up on the word-play created by **צעה**, even among those who maintain the translation ‘bowed down’. Jones even understands the metaphors in v. 20 to be utterly distinct: ‘The first image is the composite one of the slave who, like a stubborn beast, breaks his yoke. . . . The second image is that of the harlot (vv. 20, 22), bowed down.’<sup>95</sup> Galambush comes closest to perceiving the word-play (‘the woman is depicted as “bending over” as a prostitute’), but still does not make the link with Judah’s refusal to serve explicit.<sup>96</sup>

In my view, the difficulties in perceiving the word-play on **צעה** are not coincidental, but instead are closely bound up with the assumption that 2: 20 simply speaks of ‘cultic prostitution’.<sup>97</sup> Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard insist, ‘When Jeremiah says “you lay prone, as a prostitute”, he is not using metaphorical language: the language is literal.’<sup>98</sup> As in *Hosea* 4–14, we might say that the tendency to harmonize translations of the ‘prostitution’ motif propagates this approach, by eliminating the very features which might suggest that ‘prostitution’ has broken free of its hypothetical etymology to take on a life of its own. The references to ‘every high hill’ and ‘every spreading tree’ certainly suggest that Judah’s ‘prostitution’ in 2: 20 involves unacceptable cultic practices (cf. *1 Kings* 14: 23, *2 Kings* 17: 10, *Ezekiel* 6: 13, 20: 28). Yet there is nothing to suggest that these practices must involve ‘cultic prostitution’. Indeed, the accusation gains power once it is loosed from this assumption. The depiction of Judah ‘bending over, prostituting’ is ironic and explicit. Not only does she break her vow not to serve, but her ‘serving’ becomes

<sup>94</sup> Lundbom (1999: 277). Cf. Chapman (2004: 121): ‘bent over as a whore’.

<sup>95</sup> Jones (1992: 89). Cf. DeRoche (1983a: 370).

<sup>96</sup> Galambush (1992: 55).

<sup>97</sup> K. M. O’Connor (1992: 170) finds ‘the marriage metaphor’ in 2: 20: ‘Though the word translated “whore” (2: 20) probably refers to a promiscuous unmarried woman, the broken bridal relation of 2: 1–3 indicates that adultery is the woman’s sin. The former bride has now broken free of her covenant relationship.’ Cf. Dille (2004: 155): ‘These verses do not explicitly describe YHWH as a husband, but the language of marital infidelity implicitly depicts YHWH as the husband of an unfaithful wife.’ Such readings are highly unusual, however. Most are content to reflect on the possibilities of ‘cultic prostitution’. Even Stienstra (1993: 163) agrees that the metaphorical language of 2: 20 is not related to ‘the marriage metaphor’: ‘We have grown used to the idea that whenever Jerusalem or Israel is compared to a harlot, we must be dealing with an instance of the marriage metaphor, but this need not necessarily be true.’ Cf. Abma (1999: 240): ‘The elements of “impermissible and outrageous behaviour” and “idolatry” stand in the foreground. Although the word “harlotry” certainly indicates that the relationship between Yhwh and Israel is undermined through the conduct labelled as “harlotry”, the notion of an existing marriage relationship does not seem to be presupposed in Jeremiah 2: 20.’

<sup>98</sup> Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard (1991: 37). Cf. Leslie (1954: 31) and Holladay (1986: 98).

indiscriminate ('on every high hill ...'). While exposing the way in which Judah's actions defy her own words, 2: 20 simultaneously introduces associations of degradation and humiliation to the poetry's 'prostitution' motif.<sup>99</sup>

The ruthless exposé of Judah's ludicrous behaviour continues with 3: 2–3: 'Upon paths you have sat waiting for them,| Like the desert-dweller in the wilderness,| And you have polluted the land with your prostitutions and wickedness!| So the showers have been withheld,| And there are no latter rains,| But you have the forehead of a prostitute;| You refuse to be ashamed!' The forehead is mentioned elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible in the context of stubbornness, and many agree that this is a key to understanding this accusation.<sup>100</sup> Shields writes: 'The connotations of stubbornness, haughtiness, refusal to acknowledge culpability, brazenness, or any combination of the four, are evoked.'<sup>101</sup> Bauer reflects, 'The image connotes hardness, resistance to change, stubbornness.'<sup>102</sup> According to 3: 3, Judah's 'prostitution', with the associations of 'stubbornness' and 'shamelessness' that this context encourages, has had the direct consequence of water deprivation. Yet still Judah will not return to YHWH.<sup>103</sup>

Perhaps the most well-known use of metaphorical prostitution in this prophetic poetry, however, is to be found in 3: 1: 'If a man sends his wife away,<sup>104</sup> |And she goes from him| And belongs to another man,| Will he return to her again?<sup>105</sup>

<sup>99</sup> This translation of 2: 20 presupposes that שברתי and נתקתי are archaic second feminine singular verbs, following LXX. Cf. Holladay (1986: 52), Carroll (1986: 130), Lundbom (1999: 275). These verbs can also be read as first person forms, however: 'Long ago I (YHWH) broke your yoke,| I tore your cords,| And you said, I will not serve. . . .' Cf. Abma (1999: 224). In my view, the translation in the main text seems more likely. Nevertheless, it is worth emphasizing that the absurdity of Judah is still highlighted in 2: 20 even if the verbs are understood to be first person. The verse would then suggest that Judah has determined never to serve again in response to the freedom YHWH has given her, but is now inexplicably 'prostituting' and 'serving' *this* way. Either way, her actions are ridiculous.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. *Isa* 48: 4, *Ezek* 3: 7–9. Lundbom (1999: 302): 'Here is the stubborn whore who refuses to be humiliated or to exhibit shame.' Jones (1992: 98): 'This is an allusion to the resolute obstinacy that appears on the face of those who habitually defy the standards of society. There is no pretence of fidelity, only shame.' *Contra* Kruger (1983: 109 n. 10): 'This phrase is not a figurative description of the wife's unabashed and stubbornness. . . but refers to something visible on her face testifying to her licentiousness.' Holladay (1986: 115): 'It is possible that it refers to some kind of phylactery worn by a prostitute.'

<sup>101</sup> Shields (2004: 57).

<sup>102</sup> Bauer (1999b: 53).

<sup>103</sup> Ortlund (1996: 92) alludes to her 'impertinent wilfulness': 'She has lost the capacity to reflect, to respond, or even to care.'

<sup>104</sup> The introductory לאמר ('Saying') is difficult, but may refer back to 2: 1, 'The word of YHWH came to me, saying' Cf. Abma (1999: 229). הן can mean 'if' when introducing a hypothetical situation (cf. *Hag* 2: 12).

<sup>105</sup> Holladay (1986: 113) provocatively suggests that 'the meaning of the verb here suggests a kind of humbling action on Yahweh's part, as if Israel is the stable one and Yahweh contemplates moving back to her'. The wider context of *Jer* 2: 1–4: 4 unfortunately militates against such an understanding of Judah as 'stable', however.

[Would not that land| Be utterly polluted?] Yet you have prostituted with many lovers| And (would) return to me(?)! Oracle of Yhwh.’ Debates over whether 3: 1 refers specifically to the law preserved in *Deuteronomy* 24: 1–4 will doubtless continue, but are superfluous for our concerns.<sup>106</sup> For, notwithstanding this discussion, the responses demanded by 3: 1’s characteristic rhetorical questions concerning this situation are provided: the man would certainly not return to his wife, for, if he did, ‘the land would be utterly polluted’.<sup>107</sup> Once again, *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 presents the conclusions of a ‘rational’ person and, once again, in the face of such rationality, we are presented with Judah’s incongruous behaviour. Judah has not simply acted like a wife who has left her husband for another man, she has actually ‘prostituted’ and with many lovers.<sup>108</sup> According to 3: 1, Judah has already done worse than the hypothetical wife.

This prophetic poetry is not content to stop here, however, as YHWH rages, ‘Yet you have prostituted with many lovers| And (would) return to me(?)!’ The second half of 3: 1 has posed more of a challenge to readers, leaving scholarship divided. Many insist that, like the previous responses, the response to this rhetorical question must be ‘no’: such a return would be incongruous. Holladay comments, ‘it is against the law for a wife to return to her first husband after a second marriage—how much more impossible for Israel to imagine returning to Yahweh after her affairs with the Baals!’<sup>109</sup> Lundbom echoes, ‘This is an argument from the lesser to the greater, i.e., if such and such is the case, *how much more* is something else the case.’<sup>110</sup> There are some, however, who suggest that the second half of 3: 1 may be more complex. For YHWH’s words in 3: 1b are not necessarily a question (‘And would return to me?’): they could instead be interpreted as a statement: ‘And/ But return to me!’ It is striking that elsewhere in *Jeremiah* (including 3: 12–13) the people are called precisely to return to YHWH. For Fishbane this ambiguity in the text is crucial, as 3: 1 embodies the ‘tension’ within *Jeremiah* ‘between the legal impossibility of return and the religious possibility of

<sup>106</sup> Galambush (1992: 56), Brueggemann (1988: 39–41), Hobbs (1974), Long (1976), and Fishbane (1985: 307–12), believe that 3: 1 refers to a law preserved in *Deut* 24: 1–4. Holladay (1986: 112): ‘Since Hosea 2 also presupposes the Deuteronomy passage (see Hos 2: 9), Jrm is doubtless stimulated by both here.’ Westbrook (1986) questions connections to *Deut* 24: 1–4, suggesting a financial reason for this prohibition. Martin (1969) provides a detailed discussion, concluding that whether *Jeremiah* is dependent specifically on the *Deuteronomy* passage or on an older tradition ‘must remain an open question’ (p. 90). Shields (2004: 24–5) assumes ‘a shared tradition as the background to both’, providing an intriguing reading of *Deut* 24: 1–4 as an intertext with *Jer* 3: 1–5.

<sup>107</sup> Shields (2004: 38): ‘The question draws forth the expected response, “Of course the husband may not return to the wife again; of course the land would be defiled”.’

<sup>108</sup> Lundbom (1999: 301): ‘The pronoun repeats for emphasis.’

<sup>109</sup> Holladay (1986: 113).

<sup>110</sup> Lundbom (1999: 301, emphasis original). Cf. van den Eynde (2001: 92). Lundbom cites *Jer* 12: 5, 25: 29, and 49: 12 as other instances of such an argument.

repentance and divine remission.’<sup>111</sup> Shields agrees, insisting, ‘As a question [3: 1b] is a sarcastic utterance . . . As a statement, it foreshadows the appeals of the rest of the chapter.’<sup>112</sup> Indeed, Shields calls attention to the way in which, just verses later, in 3: 12–13, ‘the prophetic “no” of vv. 1–11 is turned into a “Yes” ’ as this explicit call to return presents a ‘transgression of the previous intertexts’ (and the law).<sup>113</sup>

Other readings of *Jeremiah* 3: 1 reflect the ambiguity and tension that Fishbane and Shields call to our attention. Abma initially comments, ‘While the first situation already calls for the answer “no, he cannot return to her again”, the second situation invites even a stronger negative response, “no, impossible!” The sheer impossibility of Judah’s repentance is underscored.’<sup>114</sup> Despite such strong words, however, she continues, ‘At the same time, the point of the comparison does not seem to lie in the impossibility of repentance, but rather seems to lie in the exceptional character of God’s marriage with Israel, in which, despite legal barriers, repentance is yet possible. . . . Against all odds, Yhwh will take Israel back.’<sup>115</sup> Lundbom similarly insists, ‘In the argument here an emphatic “No!” is clearly anticipated: Israel cannot return.’ Yet he also continues ‘. . . at least not for now and not under the present circumstances.’<sup>116</sup>

The ambiguity of *Jeremiah* 3: 1 is striking and compelling, as this prophetic poetry exploits fully the lack of need for a formal marker for rhetorical questions in Hebrew.<sup>117</sup> The wider literary frame of YHWH’s call to repentance

<sup>111</sup> Fishbane (1985: 310). He explains: ‘while, on the one hand, it would appear that both interpretive possibilities are made superfluous by the Pentateuchal legal analogy, which prohibits the return of a wife who has married another man, the law has its source in the same god who repeatedly advocates the repentance of Israel elsewhere in the Book of Jeremiah’ (1985: 310).

<sup>112</sup> Shields (2004: 42–3). Cf. Bauer (1999b: 48–9), who suggests that the gender dynamics of 3: 1–5 also promote ambiguity as it becomes unclear whether the male or the female must return: ‘Who is returning to whom?’, she asks (p. 49), noting that LXX understands Judah to do the returning.

<sup>113</sup> Shields (2004: 93).

<sup>114</sup> Abma (1999: 248).

<sup>115</sup> Abma (1999: 248–9). Cf. Baumann (2003: 109), who echoes, ‘This expresses the impossibility of a second chance for the marriage between YHWH and Israel after a divorce has been completed,’ continuing, ‘at any rate if this marriage has to be subject to the rules for human marriages. Despite the behavior of the “wife,” in 3: 7 YHWH hopes for her return . . . for the moment the consequences remain uncertain in the text.’

<sup>116</sup> Lundbom (1999: 301–2). Lundbom illustrates here how the assumption that *Jeremiah* must follow the ‘story’ of ‘the marriage metaphor’ can create problems, commenting, ‘The issue is complicated, because it is not clear that Yahweh ever divorced Israel, even though a threat of divorce was made (cf. Isa 50: 1).’

<sup>117</sup> Cf. the later discussion of *Isa* 50: 1. In this sense, we could say that rhetorical questions are comparable to metaphor, which also lack a formal marker. Fishbane (1985: 310): ‘There are no contextual reasons to prefer one to construe it as a question rather than a declaration. Each seems equally apropos.’

in *Jeremiah* leaves open the possibility that this phrase might just, against all odds, be(come) an appeal to Judah to return. At the same time, the relentless list of rhetorical questions within which these words appear forcefully encourages the reader to perceive a rhetorical question, exposing and ridiculing Judah's expectation that she might return to YHWH. Any woman would realize—through common sense—that her husband would not take her back after involvement with another man. If we take the citation as accepted law, such a return is even illegal. Nevertheless, in the face of her countless liaisons and 'prostitutions' 'with many', Judah is expecting YHWH to welcome her in! How absurd! Thus, once again, *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4's 'prostitution' motif contributes to the mockery of this senseless and hopeless female.<sup>118</sup>

In the face of these involved and complex rhetorical strategies, McKane illustrates a substitutionary approach to metaphor in his reading of 3: 1, as he reduces the liveliness of the 'prostitution' motif within this provocative context to mere metonym:

The sexual imagery seems to be more than a metaphor for idolatry (Targ., Kimchi) and to have a special appropriateness to the nature of Israel's unfaithfulness. Her involvement in sexual rites associated with the Canaanite cult lends such a particular appositeness to the sexual imagery that it is more than a metaphor for idolatry which could be replaced without loss by another metaphor not involving sexual imagery.<sup>119</sup>

McKane might believe that he is increasing 3: 1's impact through such a reading, yet instead he imposes severe restrictions on metaphorical meaning, binding the metaphor to a hypothetical practice and obscuring the countless associations such as pollution, excess, abandonment, faithlessness, and (of course) absurdity, that its distinctive frame introduces. Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard similarly demonstrate how far this prophetic poetry can be underestimated as they 'substitute' 3: 1's words with language of marriage and covenant:

The metaphor of faithfulness is expressed once again in marital language (v 20), resuming the principal theme of the chapter (cf. 3: 1–5). As a wife had been faithless toward her husband, so too had the 'House of Israel' (...) been totally unfaithful. Both metaphors, that of God as parent and God as husband, reveal different dimensions of the covenant faith.<sup>120</sup>

Given such stereotypical readings, it is perhaps no wonder that *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4's sexual and marital metaphorical language has been considered 'conventional' and lacking in 'originality'.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Long (1976: 386): "didactic question" is hardly an apt description for v. 2–5, which develop invective and accusation, ending with a final, abrupt charge, full of sarcasm and disgust."

<sup>119</sup> McKane (1986: 63).

<sup>120</sup> Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard (1991: 64).

### Wider sexual and marital metaphorical language in *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4

*Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4's sexual and marital metaphorical language is by no means limited to descriptions of YHWH as 'lover', Judah as 'bride', and the persistent charge of 'prostitution'.<sup>121</sup> Perhaps one of the more infamous descriptions exploring wider sexual metaphorical language is 2: 24: 'A wild-ass used to the wilderness| In the craving of her desire she pants after a scent.<sup>122</sup>| It is her season—who can turn her back?<sup>123</sup>| All who seek her will not grow weary;| In her month they will find her!' Brenner highlights the rarity of this metaphorical language for its harnessing of animal sexuality.<sup>124</sup> Unsurprisingly, many feminist readers find this language particularly objectionable. For Brenner, the animalistic imagery heightens the text's 'pornographic qualities', perhaps particularly because this female animal is 'fabulous' ('It is not natural for a female animal to be in heat continually'<sup>125</sup>).<sup>126</sup> Exum contends, 'Jer 2. 23–24 masks male fear of and fascination with female desire by crudely caricaturing the woman as a young camel or wild donkey on heat,'<sup>127</sup> while K. M. O'Connor protests, 'Animal imagery merges with harlot imagery to label female sexuality as wild, disgusting, and uncontrollable.'<sup>128</sup> In 2: 24 Judah is portrayed as insatiable in her desire to make alliances with other nations and gods, appearing all but indifferent to her partners' identity. We could even say the allusions to animal sexuality encourage associations of a strong, irrational instinct, reinforcing the poetry's portrayal of Judah as driven by a blind, apparently senseless, force.<sup>129</sup>

If *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 repeatedly illustrates the absurdity of Judah's behaviour, I believe that an appreciation of the significance of this theme as a wider

<sup>121</sup> Cf. Weems (1995: 53): 'Jeremiah piled sexual image upon image and punctuated his message with rhetorical questions which may have been the poet's way of attempting to overwhelm the senses of his audiences.'

<sup>122</sup> Reading Q, **פְּרָה וּפְשָׁה**, here **פְּרָה**, 'ass', is usually masculine in the Hebrew Bible, and this might account for the confusion in gender. Cf. Holladay (1986: 53). **נִפְשָׁה** has the sense of 'desire' elsewhere (cf. *Deut* 18: 6; 1 *Sam* 23: 20; *Song* 1: 7, 3: 1–4, 6: 12).

<sup>123</sup> **הַאֵנָה** is unique, but most agree that it means 'her season (of heat)'. Cf. Lundbom (1999: 282).

<sup>124</sup> Brenner (1993: 182–3): 'The animalization of the metaphorized woman-in-the-text is . . . an innovation, an original contribution to biblical pornographic lore.' Cf. *Ezek* 23: 20, *Jer* 5: 8.

<sup>125</sup> Brenner (1993: 192).

<sup>126</sup> Brenner (1993: 183).

<sup>127</sup> Exum (1996: 107). Cf. n. 10.

<sup>128</sup> K. M. O'Connor (1992: 170). Cf. Bauer (1999b: 33): 'The choice of imagery serves a purpose. . . . Women have often been portrayed as unable to control their sexual impulses. . . . Thus, this depiction of female sexuality here as uncontrolled and uncontrollable serves the purpose of assigning responsibility for the indictment to follow.'

<sup>129</sup> Holladay (1986: 102): 'An animal caught by the instinct of mating is helpless, but Israel should not have become prey simply to her blind instinct to rebel.'

frame for the poetry's sexual and marital metaphorical language can shed a great deal of light on what is perhaps the most audacious sexual metaphor of all in 3: 2: 'Lift your eyes to the bare places and look!| Where have you not been raped (שגלת)?!| Upon paths you have sat waiting for them,<sup>130</sup> | Like the desert-dweller in the wilderness!' Many might object to 'rape' as a translation of שגל. The shocking impact of this term to describe Judah's behaviour was clearly too much for some ancient readers, as the Qere, 'Where have you not been lain with?' (איפה לא שכבת), retains sexual associations, but is notably less graphic. Traditional English translations betray a similar tendency to avoid crude language, frequently preferring the Qere. RSV reads, 'Where have you not been lain with?'; while Lundbom and Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard suggest, 'Where have you not been laid?'<sup>131</sup> McKane suggests, 'Is there any place where you have not fornicated?', eradicating the violence (and the distinctiveness) of the imagery.<sup>132</sup> Even where translations adopt the Ketib, they tend to translate שגל as 'to ravish', which can have associations of violence, but in recent years has perhaps also come to have more positive associations, suggesting some consent on the part of the female. Leslie reads, 'Where have you not been ravished?,'<sup>133</sup> but nevertheless comments, 'Jeremiah daringly paints the picture of Israelite worshipers as harlots waiting beside the road to entice their paramours.' And so Judah becomes active in her 'ravishing'.<sup>134</sup> Thus, by various ways and means, translations and readings of 3: 2 strive to reduce the shocking impact of the use of שגל as a metaphorical focus.

There are exceptions. Some seek to maintain what they understand to be the obscene nature of שגל. Chapman suggests, '“Look up to the hills and see, where have you not been *fucked?*”';<sup>135</sup> while Gravett echoes, 'As a way to express the offensive nature of the verb in any of its four occurrences, it could be most accurately translated into English as “fucked”'.<sup>136</sup> For others, however,

<sup>130</sup> Cf. Holladay (1986: 114), who (fascinated by *Hosea* 1–3's influence on *Jer* 2: 1–4: 4) writes: 'is there an ironic echo here of ישב ל "sit for, stay at home for" in Hos 3: 3? One has the impression that the Hosea passage implies that Gomer must sit rather than lie with Hosea; here, by contrast, Israel is depicted as sitting waiting for partners to lie with.'

<sup>131</sup> Lundbom (1999: 302), Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard (1991: 49). Cf. Abma (1999: 229), Carroll (1986: 140), Jones (1992: 97), Weems (1995: 55).

<sup>132</sup> McKane (1986: 58). Unfortunately, McKane does not give his reasons for this translation, although it may be influenced by his understanding of the following poetic line. He writes: 'Israel is a prostitute who sits at the roadside touting for custom and she is likened to the Bedouin who sit at the edge of the road soliciting trade' (p. 60). Cf. the Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition of the Bible: 'Where thou hast not prostituted thyself'

<sup>133</sup> Leslie (1954: 36). Cf. BDB 993: 'Where hast thou not been ravished?'

<sup>134</sup> Leslie (1954: 35).

<sup>135</sup> Chapman (2004: 122, emphasis original), although she continues: 'It is difficult to know from our historical distance whether the English profanity “fucked” captures the essence of the Hebrew or goes beyond what Jeremiah might have said.'

<sup>136</sup> Gravett (2004: 289).

even these translations do not go far enough, as they fail to recognize the violence inherent in שגל. Holladay writes, ‘It is likely that the connotation here is not simply that of sexual intercourse expressed crudely, but of ravishment. Though Israel seeks lovers, she is ill-treated by those who take her.’<sup>137</sup> Bauer insists, ‘The metaphor depicts sexual violence. שגל carries the connotation of forced sexual intercourse.’<sup>138</sup>

Such observations are significant. Every other time a verbal form of שגל appears in the Hebrew Bible its force is violent, provoking the Qere, שכב (‘to lie with’). In *Deuteronomy* 28: 30, *Isaiah* 13: 16, and *Zechariah* 14: 2, שגל is consistently used to describe rape (for our purposes, a violent sexual act against the will of the female), and in each case this rape features within a threat directed towards men, striving to deter them from their actions.<sup>139</sup> The sheer brutality of שגל is perhaps best illustrated, however, through its appearance in *Isaiah* 13: 16 alongside the threat that children will be ‘dashed to pieces’: ‘Their infants will be dashed to pieces before their eyes. | Their houses will be plundered | And their wives raped (תשגלונה).’<sup>140</sup> It seems that within the Hebrew Bible שגל is used precisely for its potential to shock. The translation of the Ketib of 3: 1 as ‘Where have you not been raped?’ is therefore legitimate, indeed recommended, on linguistic grounds.<sup>141</sup>

Nevertheless, some might find this translation problematic, as the resulting question seems preposterous: ‘Where have you not been raped?! Upon waysides you have sat (waiting) for them.’ It might even provoke a rhetorical question worthy of *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 itself: ‘Who in their right mind would sit around by the side of a road waiting to be raped?’ In my view, however, it is precisely in this absurdity that the crux of 3: 2 lies. We have seen how *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 consistently depicts Judah as a ridiculous nation. We could say that 3: 2 is a further example of this, but one whose language is significantly more

<sup>137</sup> Holladay (1986: 114). *HALOT* iv. 1415 suggests ‘be raped’ for the Niphal form of שגל in *Isa* 13: 16, although for the Pual (or passive Qal form) of שגל in *Jer* 3: 2, the dictionary suggests ‘to be ravished’.

<sup>138</sup> Bauer (1999b: 50). She suggests the translation ‘raped’. Cf. Baumann (2003: 107–8, esp. n. 10; 117). Even Gravett (2004: 289), who does not agree that שגל should be translated as ‘raped’ in *Jer* 3: 2, admits that this is the only instance within her understanding of the Hebrew Bible where ‘this word not raise the spectre of sexual violence’.

<sup>139</sup> Bauer (1999b: 51) insists, ‘In all cases the context is one of sexual violence. Woman is violated.’

<sup>140</sup> The noun שגל appears twice in the Hebrew Bible, in *Neh* 2: 6 and *Pss* 45: 10, alluding to the consort/queen of a king. At first sight, this may seem to sit uneasily with our argument. It is likely, however, that this term is unrelated to the Hebrew שגל. *HALOT* iv. 1415 notes that the noun is a loan-word from the Akkadian *ša ekalli*. Cf. Mankowski (2000: 137–8), Parpola (1988). With thanks to Prof. Kevin J. Cathcart for his assistance in this matter.

<sup>141</sup> Baumann (2003: 117): ‘The corresponding verb שגל is in the *pu’al* and thus gives no indication of who the rapist is.’ She suggests, however, that it may be the ‘lovers/boyfriends’ of 3: 1, even though this allusion is from within the prose passage.’

shocking (and offensive) for its sexual violence. If we were to ask why *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 might level such an accusation at Judah, then it is possible that 3: 2 alludes to her search for political alliances, hinted at in 2: 18 and 2: 36–7.<sup>142</sup> Although, as Bauer observes, ‘the violator remains anonymous’,<sup>143</sup> we might say that 3: 2 suggests that, in waiting for aid from these countries, Judah has in essence been waiting to be ‘raped’. The absurdity, and tragedy, of the situation is compounded by the fact that she does not even realize that she has been violated in this way (at least according to this text: we do not hear her own account of events). While this poetry portrays Judah as determined to see these nations as ‘lovers’ (3: 33), at the same time it insists that she has been forced into these relationships and compelled to pay homage against her will.<sup>144</sup> It seems that once again *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 is intent on ruthlessly exposing the irony of Judah’s situation, forcing her to accept ‘reality’.<sup>145</sup> Indeed, we could go further, to say that implicit within this powerful metaphor is a chilling warning of what will come, as the nations for whom Judah waits will return to ‘rape’ and pillage.<sup>146</sup> Judah’s blissful ignorance and senseless exposing of herself to this very real threat emphasizes the foolishness of this ridiculous female.

<sup>142</sup> Holladay (1986: 112): ‘Does Jrm imply that Egypt will rape Israel as Amnon took advantage of Tamar?’

<sup>143</sup> Bauer (1999b: 51).

<sup>144</sup> *Contra* Shields (2004: 53): ‘Israel’s behavior is pictured as predatory, targeting and accosting anyone who passes.’

<sup>145</sup> Brueggemann (1988: 32) summarizes *Jeremiah* 2 as ‘an assault on Judah’s imagination, requiring Judah to see its actual situation differently, to understand the causes of that situation and its inevitable outcome’.

<sup>146</sup> Many understand Judah’s ‘prostitution’ in 3: 2 to be an allusion to ‘cultic prostitution’ rather than a metaphorical allusion to political alliances. This is partly due to the reference to שָׁפִימֹת (‘bare places’). Cf. Bauer (1999b: 50). The meaning of שָׁפִימֹת (and its Ugaritic cognate *špm*), however, is debated. McKane (1981b) provides a detailed discussion, concluding that the traditional translation, ‘high places’, is probably inaccurate, arguing that ‘open country’ or ‘countryside’ is more likely. Nevertheless, he maintains elsewhere (1986: 59): ‘They are the high places, which are centres of idolatrous worship.’ Lundbom (1999: 302) similarly admits, ‘These are bare, treeless hills used as lookout points’, while continuing to claim, ‘They are likely the “high hills” of 2: 20, where Canaanite fertility worship was going on.’ Cf. Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard (1991: 49). The translation ‘high hills’ is perhaps itself influenced by the command שִׂאֵי עֵינֶיךָ (‘lift your eyes’). Yet the phrase does not necessarily mean that Judah is commanded to look upwards, as is often assumed. In *Isa* 49: 18, it appears to mean ‘Pay attention!’ and may even have the sense of ‘Stop looking down!’ (i.e. ‘Stop being so self-involved!’). The latter would certainly suit the wider context of *Jer* 2: 1–4: 4, underscoring Judah’s lack of awareness of what is going on around her. There remains some question as to whether 3: 2 is concerned with cultic or political matters. Some prefer a cultic reading of the passage, while avoiding assumptions about ‘cultic prostitution’. Cf. van den Eynde (2001: esp. p.96). Others combine a cultic reading with a political reading. Cf. Carroll (1986: 142). My main concern is that we do not simply assume that the land can only be ‘polluted’ by the cult. *Contra* Galambush (1992: 84): ‘The verb *znh* seems to be used in Jeremiah exclusively of infidelity with idols.’ It seems to me that this particular passage is concerned, at least in part, with critiquing unacceptable political alliances, as elsewhere in *Jer* 2: 1–4: 4 (2: 18, 36–7). Cf. Holladay (1986: 114).

An exploration of *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 highlights the strikingly varied and diverse nature of this poetry's sexual and marital metaphors and similes. These conform neither to the assumed mould of 'the marriage metaphor' nor to the reconstructed 'etymology' of 'cultic prostitution', but rather strongly reflect the characteristic style and persuasive strategies of this inimitable text, contributing to the theme that pervades almost every verse: Judah has acted irrationally, recklessly, and ludicrously. In *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4, Judah's 'prostitution' is directionless and ridiculous. She will prostitute with anyone, anywhere, even sitting around waiting to be raped! Compare this to other prophetic books, and the contrast is clear. We have seen how *Hosea* 4–14 uses its 'prostitution' motif to discredit 'holy women', introducing a causal link between the people's predicament and their actions, while leaving the responsibility firmly at the feet of her priests and other leaders. There is no ruthless exposé of Israel as a ludicrous nation in *Hosea* 4–14 (indeed, we might say that this prophetic poetry is concerned primarily with the potential for renewal). While the sexual and marital metaphorical language of *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 is diverse, it is also at the same time strongly distinctive, echoing the scornful theme of this prophetic poetry.

#### SEXUAL AND MARITAL METAPHORICAL LANGUAGE IN *JEREMIAH* 3: 6–11

If so far we have concentrated on the poetry of *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4, within these chapters also lies a passage of prose material with sexual and marital metaphorical language: 3: 6–11.<sup>147</sup> Most consider this prophetic prose to be distinct from the poetry, even if the relationship between the two has been the subject of significant debate.<sup>148</sup> For our purposes, the striking differences in style, theme, and metaphorical language are reason enough to consider these passages separately. It is worth noting, however, that 3: 6–11 has its own introduction (3: 6), and the characters 'Turncoat Israel' and 'Deceitful Judah' are introduced for the first time in this passage.<sup>149</sup> While regarding 3: 6–11 as distinct from the poetry of 2: 1–4: 4, this exploration is concerned with their strong relationship within

<sup>147</sup> *Jer* 3: 15–18 and 3: 24–5 are also prose passages within 2: 1–4: 4, but will not feature in this discussion due to their lack of sexual and marital metaphorical language.

<sup>148</sup> Cf. Thiel (1973, 1981) and Weippert (1973). Holladay (1986: 81): 'These verses are very late: the passage shares no characteristic with the conventional prose of Jer except for the short phrase "with all her heart"... Its point of view contrasts with that of the Deuteronomistic historian.' Carroll (1986: 145): 'Its place here may be due to a Deuteronomistic editor (Hyatt, Holladay, Thiel), though there is little evidence of Deuteronomistic clichés in the passage.'

<sup>149</sup> Schmitt (1996: 101) argues that 'Israel' and 'Judah' are insertions, hoping to maintain cities alone as the 'wives' of YHWH, and Israel as masculine. To restrict metaphorical language to these preconceived understandings seems inappropriate and unnecessary.

the ‘rolling corpus’ of *Jeremiah*.<sup>150</sup> Indeed, with McKane and Kaufman, we might call 3: 6–11 a meditation, or ‘peshet’, on the prophetic poetry.<sup>151</sup>

For the purposes of this study, the most significant aspect of the relationship between 3: 6–11 and the poetry of 2: 1–4: 4 is the prose passage’s tendency to recall and reflect on particular words, phrases, and motifs that appear within the poetry.<sup>152</sup> The prominent ‘walking’ motif reappears: ‘She is walking (הלכה) upon every high mountain’ (3: 6); ‘And she also went (ותלך) and prostituted’ (3: 8). YHWH’s accusation in 3: 1, ‘Would not that land be utterly polluted (החנה תהנה)?’, is echoed in 3: 9, ‘She polluted (ותחנה) the land’. Indeed, the ‘stone’ and ‘tree’ with which Judah ‘commits adultery’ in 3: 9 are almost certainly inspired by 2: 27: ‘Who say to the *tree*, “You are my father”, | And to the *stone*, “You are the one who gave birth to me”.’<sup>153</sup> In this way, 3: 6–11 repeatedly draws upon the poetry of 2: 1–4: 4 as a rich resource for its own metaphors and motifs. If some might therefore suggest that 3: 6–11 should not be considered distinct from its poetic context (cf. Bright<sup>154</sup>), there are nevertheless striking differences in the ways in which these motifs are used. For a start, 3: 6–11 speaks of both Israel and Judah, while the poetry concentrates on Judah alone.<sup>155</sup> Most significantly, the insistent ridicule of Judah that so characterizes 2: 1–4: 4’s poetry appears nowhere in 3: 6–11. Where the ‘walking’ motif appears in this prophetic prose, it does not work as a repeated device to expose Judah’s indiscriminate following; nor is it complemented by the ‘way’ motif. Moreover, if the worshipping of ‘the stone’ and ‘the tree’ in the poetry is polemical and derogatory in 2: 27,<sup>156</sup> then in 3: 6–11 these ‘items’ feature as straightforward descriptions of false worship. Indeed, while the divorce of a man and wife in 3: 1 is presented as a hypothetical

<sup>150</sup> Cf. McKane (1986: esp. pp. l–liii). Galambush (1992: 56) notes that these verses ‘paint a vignette that is related to but distinct from the foregoing personifications of Jerusalem’. Cf. Jones (1992: 99): ‘[T]he passage is woven subtly into the theme of the chapter as a whole.’ Shields (1995: 68 n. 16) insists that these verses are ‘an extension and interpretation of vv. 1–5’, which should not be assumed to be the work of a different author.

<sup>151</sup> McKane (1981*a*), Kaufman (1987). Biddle (1990: 93–7) provides a thorough redaction history of 3: 6–11.

<sup>152</sup> Bauer (1999*b*: 56–7): ‘Different in style and language from the preceding section, the structure of the poetic prose passage provides continuity in vocabulary and imagery.’ McKane (1986: 68): ‘Whoever composed vv. 6–11 borrowed his ideas and quarried his vocabulary from surrounding passages.’ Cf. Thiel (1973: 88), Lundbom (1999: 306), Holladay (1986: 116).

<sup>153</sup> Reading K, ילדתי.

<sup>154</sup> Bright (1965: pp. lv–lxxxv, esp. pp. lxx–lxxiii; 1951; 1955) maintains a Jeremian authorship in the tradition of older scholarship. Cf. Cornill (1905), Giesebrecht (1907).

<sup>155</sup> Carroll (1986: 145): ‘Failing to understand that “Israel” in the discourse refers to Judah, the later exegete, influenced by the views behind Ezek. 16: 51–52, offers some thoughts on the relative merits of northern Israel and Judah.’

<sup>156</sup> Note the use of the definite article. Cf. Lundbom (1999: 284–5), who argues that the items are reversed, as the tree (Asherah) brings life as ‘mother’ and the stone is a male fertility symbol as ‘father’. Lundbom insists that ‘the reversal is simply to make them look stupid’ (p. 285).

situation, in 3: 8 YHWH *has* sent Israel away and even given her a certificate of divorce.<sup>157</sup> Thus 3: 6–11 repeatedly draws on the motifs and vocabulary of the prophetic poetry, but employs them quite differently.<sup>158</sup>

As we might expect, the sexual and marital metaphorical language of 3: 6–11 reflects such characteristic tendencies. This prophetic prose is not interested in the diversity of metaphorical language that we find in the poetry. Instead, it homes in on the ‘prostitution’ motif (perhaps due to its popularity elsewhere), while introducing the complementary ‘adultery’ focus. Moreover, in stark contrast to the poetic passages, 3: 6–11’s metaphorical language is bland and descriptive, with its wider frame providing little vitality.

She is walking upon every high mountain and to every spreading tree and has prostituted<sup>159</sup> there. (*Jeremiah* 3: 6)

But Deceitful Judah, her sister, did not fear and she also went and prostituted. (*Jeremiah* 3: 8)

But her prostitution was so trifling that she polluted the land and committed adultery with the stone and with the tree. (*Jeremiah* 3: 9)

We could even say that metaphorical prostitution is all but dead in 3: 6–11, strongly echoing the focus’s deathly appearances in prose works such as *Leviticus*, *Numbers*, *Deuteronomy*, *Judges*, and *Chronicles*, where ‘prostitution’ formulaically describes engagement in unacceptable cultic practices (with no improvisations), to the point that we might expect to find ‘prostitution’ defined as ‘apostasy’ in lexicons.<sup>160</sup>

If a person turns to mediums and wizards, prostituting after them . . . (*Leviticus* 20: 6)

This people will rise and prostitute after the strange gods of this land. (*Deuteronomy* 31: 16)

They did not listen to their judges; for they prostituted after other gods and bowed down to them. (*Judges* 2: 17)<sup>161</sup>

Cf. Domeris (1999: 257): ‘By turning the imagery around, Jeremiah caricatures the worship of the people. They are so stupid that they cannot even discern male from female.’

<sup>157</sup> Cf. Bauer (1999b: 57).

<sup>158</sup> Shields (2004: 88–9) focuses on the relationship between 3: 6–11 and 3: 1–5 as intratexts, highlighting the way in which 3: 6–11 not only ‘absorbs’ the poetic text, but also ‘transforms’ and ‘transgresses it’, with ‘the hint that YHWH would have taken Israel back (v. 7), raising the possibility of return in a way that vv. 1–5 seem to exclude’. Cf. Bauer (1999b: 59): ‘Such promise literally undermines the prohibition of return after divorce invoked earlier (3: 1–5; cf. Deut 24: 1–4).’

<sup>159</sup> Reading a third person feminine singular, whilst MT unexpectedly changes to a second person feminine singular verb. Cf. Holladay (1986: 58).

<sup>160</sup> Cf. BDB 275: ‘1. be or act as a harlot . . . metaphorically of a land given to harlotry.’ HALOT i. 275 provides as a second definition: ‘to be unfaithful in a relationship with God’. DCH iii. 121: ‘of Israel generally, usu. **יָנַח אַחֲרַי** whore after, i.e. seek for illicit sex, in ref. to worship of foreign gods.’

<sup>161</sup> Cf. *Lev* 17: 7; *Judg* 8: 27, 33; 1 *Chr* 5: 25; 2 *Chr* 21: 11, 13, etc. This similarity may be of interest to those exploring the possible relationship between *Jeremiah*’s prose passages and Deuteronomistic writings.

Even Galambush characterizes these ‘extraprophetic’ metaphors as ‘for all intents and purposes “dead”’.<sup>162</sup>

If metaphorical death is the fate of *Jeremiah* 3: 6–11’s ‘prostitution’ motif, we could say the same of its ‘adultery’ focus. *Jeremiah* 3: 8 states: ‘And I saw that because Turncoat Israel committed adultery, I sent her away.’ Contrary to the assumptions of many, metaphorical adultery is rare within the Hebrew Bible.<sup>163</sup> It is not even to be found among the diverse sexual and marital metaphorical language of *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4’s poetry.<sup>164</sup> Its appearance in 3: 6–11 is therefore worth further consideration. Although this exploration is not concerned with tracing the development of prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language, the strong similarities between 3: 6–11 and *Ezekiel* 23 are worth mentioning.<sup>165</sup> Not only does the latter similarly involve two sisters, it portrays Judah’s behaviour as *worse* than Israel’s (23: 11, 23: 19): an unexpected assertion that also features in *Jeremiah* 3: 6–11 (3: 11). Perhaps most significantly, however, we encounter the unusual use of ‘adultery’ as a metaphorical focus in *Ezekiel* 23: 36–49 (23: 37, 45), which we will consider later to be a distinct passage within *Ezekiel* 23. It is possible that, just as *Jeremiah* 3: 6–11 draws upon the vocabulary and motifs of the poetry within which it lies, it also draws upon passages extraneous to *Jeremiah*, one of which could be a version of *Ezekiel* 23: 1–49, or something similar.<sup>166</sup>

A significant feature of *Ezekiel* 23: 36–49’s ‘adultery’ focus that has so far tended to escape notice—and that we will explore further in due course—is its associations of child sacrifice, appearing twice within the context of this practice (23: 37, 45). If this seems unlikely, it is worth noting that child sacrifice,

<sup>162</sup> Galambush (1992: 37).

<sup>163</sup> *Contra* Goodfriend (1992a: 85): ‘Adultery is used as a metaphor for apostasy in several prophetic books (Hosea 1–3, Jer 2: 23–25; 3: 1–13, Ezekiel 16; 23).’

<sup>164</sup> Outside 2: 1–4: 4, adultery is referred to as a ‘sin’ in *Jeremiah*, but these seem to be references to literal adultery, albeit with religious implications (5: 7; 7: 9; 9: 2; 23: 10 14; 29: 23). It is also striking that these references all speak of the activity of men. Cf. Baumann (2003: 116).

<sup>165</sup> Cf. Holladay (1986: 81). McKane (1986: 68–9) highlights the similarities between 3: 6–11 and *Ezek* 16: 51–2, but the theme of Judah being worse than Israel is also found in *Ezekiel* 23. Cf. Carroll (1986: 145). Lundbom (1999: 308) perceives affinities with both *Ezekiel* 16 and 23. Shields (2004: 91) suggests the ‘intertextual play’ between *Jeremiah* 3: 6–11 and *Ezekiel* 23 (and 16) as a subject for ‘further study’.

<sup>166</sup> Holladay (1986: 116) and Hyatt (1956: 826) understand *Ezekiel* 16 and 23 to have influenced *Jeremiah* 3: 6–11. Some believe the influence to be the other way around. Cf. Galambush (1992: 82), Zimmerli (1979: 482), Bright (1965: 26), Block (1997: 732). For our purposes, the precise nature of the relationship between these texts is of no great concern. However, the combination of *Jeremiah* 3: 6–11’s reliance on the poetry of 2: 1–4: 4 and the similarities between 3: 6–11 and the deathly ‘prostitution’ of texts such as *Leviticus* suggests that 3: 6–11 could be a late reflection. Moreover, there is nothing within *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4’s poetry to provoke the introduction of Israel to 3: 6–11, whereas the two sisters are prominent throughout *Ezekiel* 23. There seems to be more evidence to suggest that *Jeremiah* 3: 6–11 was influenced by a version of *Ezekiel* 23 that included 23: 36–49, than to suggest that *Ezekiel* 23: 36–49 drew on this formulaic prose text.

like adultery, could be perceived as a troubling threat to the male bloodline. Even without this possible explanation, however, we have seen that literary context has the potential to introduce unusual associations to a metaphorical focus. But if ‘adultery’ is bound up with child sacrifice in *Ezekiel* 23: 36–49, the focus has no such connotations in *Jeremiah* 3: 6–11. Here ‘adultery’ seems simply—and, as we will see, unusually—to be synonymous with ‘prostitution’. It seems that both ‘prostitution’ and ‘adultery’ appear as shadows of themselves in this prophetic prose. Such corpse-like metaphors contrast starkly with the animated metaphorical language of *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4’s poetry.

## REFLECTIONS

Investigations of prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language have rarely focused on *Jeremiah*, which is often characterized simply as a stepping-stone by which ‘the marriage metaphor’ passes from *Hosea* 1–3 to *Ezekiel* 16 and 23.<sup>167</sup> An exploration of *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 suggests that such a view is unwarranted. Within these chapters, we find a diversity unparalleled in the Hebrew Bible. On the one hand, in the prophetic poetry an assortment of sexual and marital metaphors and similes interweave with wider metaphorical language, repetition, and insistent rhetorical questions ruthlessly to expose the stupidity of Judah. On the other hand, we are presented with the pallid prostitution and adultery metaphors of 3: 6–11, where we perhaps witness the movement of these foci towards lexicalized descriptions of unacceptable worship. We might even say that *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 emphasizes the importance of recognizing different layers of a prophetic text for the purposes of this study. To harmonize prematurely the metaphorical language of these prose and poetic passages would only serve to cloud their context and dull their imaginative impact.

The persuasive impact of *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4’s poetry is impressive, particularly where it combines its forceful rhetorical questions with sexual and marital metaphorical language. Once again, however, the power of this text raises a number of concerns for current readers. Like *Hosea* 4–14, *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 seeks to redeem its negative portrayal of Judah. Weems writes: ‘At the same time that the prophet construed his audience’s behaviour as abominable and shameless, he also used romantic imagery to reassure them of something equally astounding: namely, that after a period of punishment, God stood

<sup>167</sup> Zimmerli (1979: 336) refers to ‘Hosea’s view of history, which undoubtedly through Jeremiah influenced Ezekiel’s preaching in chapters 16 and 23’. Cf. p. 482.

prepared to forgive Israel and to begin their relationship anew.<sup>168</sup> Stienstra suggests that 2: 1–4: 4's negative language might be redeemed by the later description of Judah as 'Virgin Israel' in 31: 3–5: 'This is an image not just of forgiveness, but of total rehabilitation.'<sup>169</sup> Words of shame and contrition which indicate a desire to start the relationship anew are even found in the (probably later) closing words of 3: 21–5.<sup>170</sup>

As we have seen in our discussion of *Hosea* 4–14, however, it is not necessarily as easy to reverse language as Weems and Stienstra suggest. Shields calls attention to the way in which *Jeremiah* 3: 1–4: 4's positive language is reserved exclusively for males: 'The possibilities for repentance and restoration are all addressed to sons rather than to wives/daughters,'<sup>171</sup> she observes. Indeed, by the time we reach *Jeremiah* 4: 1–4, all allusions to females disappear:

The final allusions to the patriarchal covenant and to circumcision make an undeniably exclusively male statement. Although the circumcision is radicalized (it is circumcision of the heart), it is nonetheless an exclusively male metaphor which effectively bars women from a place in structuring identity, descent or kinship. Women, by definition, are excluded from the positive symbols of this text.<sup>172</sup>

It seems that the redemption of *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 is not as straightforward as many would hope. While this passage has a positive impulse, the female, Judah, is excluded from such 'redemption.'<sup>173</sup> The emphasis on 'shame' and 'dishonour' also raises real questions about how far this passage might be considered 'redemptive' at all, as the repenting people wail, 'Let us lie down in our shame and let our dishonour cover us' (3: 25).<sup>174</sup> We might even wish that the female personification (however problematic) would continue, with Judah maintaining her refusal to bow to YHWH's demands, and thus at least retaining some dignity.

If the lack of redemptive female imagery in *Jeremiah* 3: 1–4: 4 is challenging, it is not the only difficulty confronting readers. There have been many objections to this prophetic poetry's lurid description of Judah as a camel and a wild-ass on heat.<sup>175</sup> Yet it is perhaps the portrayal of Judah's experience of sexual violence that is particularly disturbing. Scholars are divided over

<sup>168</sup> Weems (1995: 58).

<sup>169</sup> Stienstra (1993: 170).

<sup>170</sup> Shields (2004: 124–35), following Westermann (1981: 62) speaks of this as a 'liturgy of repentance'.

<sup>171</sup> Shields (2004: 123).

<sup>172</sup> Shields (2004: 158). She continues, 'The entire symbolic world of the discourse operates to marginalize women and women's interests. Yet, while there is a way out for men (change of behavior/circumcision of the heart), there is no redeeming escape for women' (p. 154).

<sup>173</sup> Bauer (1999b: 62): 'Practically and symbolically, the female is excluded.'

<sup>174</sup> The people's words in 3: 25 echo YHWH's earlier call to Judah to 'acknowledge her guilt' in 3: 12–13.

<sup>175</sup> Brenner (1993: 182–4), Exum (1996: 107), K. M. O'Connor (1992: 170), Bauer (1999b: 33). See earlier discussion.

whether forced sexual intercourse in the Hebrew Bible can be described as ‘rape’. Brenner is insistent that ‘the ‘concept of “rape”, as defined in western legal systems, is non-existent in biblical language as we have it.’<sup>176</sup> Others are committed to using the language of rape, while remaining conscious of the socio-cultural and historical differences involved. Gravett insists:

Women and men in these cultural settings might not understand or process their experiences in the same way as twenty-first-century persons endure rape and all of its repercussions, but using a modern word to bring these ancient texts into focus does link some common reactions in both settings—the sense of physical violation, the feelings of shame and being outcast, the loss of self and place in the culture—however different the reasons for such responses.<sup>177</sup>

Washington reminds us that rape ‘is a site of contested meanings’ even in today’s Western societies,<sup>178</sup> and warns us against unconsciously colluding with those who would seek to explain rape away and to blame its victims.

Conventional historical and social-scientific critics . . . are generally reluctant to impose contemporary norms of sexual consent anachronistically onto the biblical texts. This scruple deprives criticism of its ability to identify the forced sexual subjugation of women in biblical narratives as rape. The result is that the simultaneous inscription and erasure of rape that occurs in biblical texts is perpetuated in scholarly biblical interpretations.<sup>179</sup>

Drawing on the work of scholars such as Gravett and Washington, it seems to me important to name Judah’s experience of sexual violation as ‘rape’. There are, of course, socio-cultural and historical distinctions between the world we live in and the world portrayed in the Hebrew Bible, and these must be

<sup>176</sup> Brenner (1997*b*: 136–7).

<sup>177</sup> Gravett (2004: 298.) Cf. pp. 298–9. Pressler (1994: esp. 111–12). Others are keen to emphasize the similarities between rape then and now. Bal (1993: 193): ‘Historical differences within the idea—and experience—of rape are important. But these differences remain of the order of the “difference within,” the contradictions and tensions that emerge when, lest the argument become fully relativist and sceptical, historicization cannot fully account for experience.’ Cf. Thistlethwaite (1993): ‘Is the Israelite worldview so different after all from modern views of rape in war? It is different, but in more subtle ways than we may suspect at first glance. It is a difference that rape in war is a crime. It is also true that the ancient Israelites knew that rape is not about sex but about control, about power’ (p. 72); ‘the biblical writers do not write of rape as a sexual act: rape is a theft of sexual property. Rape is a serious crime threatening the unity of the whole community, it is not “passion” or “lust.” We learn that though in some ways different, the biblical view is consistent with modern efforts to define rape as assault’ (p. 73).

<sup>178</sup> Washington (1997: 356).

<sup>179</sup> Washington (1997: 356–7). He continues, ‘Popular, legal, and clinical discourses of rape are widely deployed to generate and legitimate violent masculinity and to blame the victims of sexual assault. Biblical scholars often unwittingly reinscribe these norms about gender, domination, and sexual violence.’ Cf. Bauer (1999*b*: 161): ‘As the reality of rape is denied in translations and interpretations, erasure surrounds the textual witness and the raped women.’

acknowledged. While we continue to use terms such as ‘father’ and ‘son’ in translations, however, notwithstanding the manifest distinctions between the associations of these terms in Western societies and their associations within the Hebrew Bible (as we do in *Jeremiah 2: 1–4: 4*), to my mind we can use the language of ‘rape’ despite the distinctions in associations involved there. In any case, as I discussed in the Introduction, it is always worth taking time to explore the associations of any language we encounter within its specific literary context, rather than relying on our ‘default context’ to create its meanings.

If we consider the ‘rape’ (שגל) of Judah, we could say that the term gathers associations of promiscuous behaviour in *Jeremiah 3: 2* through its renaming as ‘prostitutions’ (in the plural) with the nameless ‘them’ (similarly in the plural). It also gathers associations of wrongdoing and uncleanness through its presentation as ‘wickedness’ (רעה) that somehow has the power to ‘pollute (חנף) the land’. Some might say that the reactions to Judah’s rape in the text are not as distant from the reactions that some victims of rape experience today as we might like to think. Indeed, it is striking that the accusation that Judah was somehow ‘asking for it’ resonates throughout the passage, for instance in the words ‘you have sat waiting for them.’ We might ask whether tradition has exacerbated the problem through the toning down of the description of Judah’s experience in the Qere reading, mirroring the experience of many flesh-and-blood women, where unconsented sexual intercourse is not named as ‘rape’ but called by other names instead. Bauer is certainly aware of the echoes between the rape of Judah in *Jeremiah 3: 2* and women’s experience today: ‘To add insult to injury (and yet reinscribe social conventions), the tone of the question indicts the woman for acting promiscuously. Underscoring this blaming, the next colon accuses the woman of sitting in wait “for them,” the men for the sexual encounters, suggesting that as the aggressor she invited the violation. Again the woman is blamed for the rape.’<sup>180</sup> Reading *Jeremiah 3: 2* alert to such issues can be a disturbing experience, as the force of the prophetic poetry’s rhetoric of absurdity strongly encourages the reader to participate in ridiculing Judah for being raped, rather than having compassion for her. It is Judah who ends up on trial, rather than her attackers.

Nor is Judah given any opportunity to defend herself, or tell her own story in the midst of this prophetic poetry’s ruthless rhetorical questioning. We have seen a number of scholars speak of chapter 2 as a ‘lawsuit’; perhaps this text would be less problematic if Judah were given the opportunity to answer the charges arraigned against her.<sup>181</sup> It is possibly here that the richest

<sup>180</sup> Bauer (1999b: 51).

<sup>181</sup> Carroll (1986: 138): ‘It might be illuminating to have access to the community’s account of the matter, but that is not possible because ideology makes all opposition silent.’

resource lies for those wishing to resist the forceful assumptions of this text, however. For Judah's words *are* cited in some instances by YHWH.<sup>182</sup> Shields calls attention to the complexities involved in listening to Judah's voice, stressing that this 'opposing voice' is 'manipulated and controlled by the prophet/YHWH. The quotations are chosen and used in such a way as to place the audience in an even more damning position.'<sup>183</sup> Nevertheless, it remains striking that the glimpses we get of Judah's words in *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 present us with a very different female to the one presented in the rest of this prophetic poetry. This is indeed an 'opposing voice', and it presents us with a remarkably consistent impression of Judah's attitude towards the accusations against her. Judah insists, 'I am not defiled,| I have not gone after the Baals!' (2: 23); 'I am innocent;| Surely his anger has turned from me'; 'I have not sinned' (2: 35).<sup>184</sup> Her words are backed up by her demeanour as she betrays no signs of guilt: 'you refuse to be ashamed!' (3: 3). Indeed, we could say that in 2: 25 we are presented with a frustrated female ready to give up on her relationship with YHWH, acutely aware that he is unable to tolerate her behaviour, and yet conscious that this is indeed how she wishes to live. 'It is hopeless: No!<sup>185</sup>| For I have loved strangers;| So after them I will go!' Baumann is concerned that when Judah speaks, 'it is only in supposed quotations that establish her compulsive pursuit of the Baals and make it clear that she lacks any sense of guilt (2: 23, 25).'<sup>186</sup> We might ask, however, whether this lack of guilt must be viewed so negatively. What if Judah does not perceive herself to be guilty? What if she does not understand herself to be in a 'marriage' relationship with YHWH?<sup>187</sup> Indeed, it is striking that Judah does not once use sexual or marital metaphorical language herself to speak of her relationship with YHWH, but rather cries in frustration, 'My Father,| You are the companion of my youth; Will he be angry forever,| Will he keep on to the end?!' (3: 4–5). We could begin to wonder whether it is Judah who

<sup>182</sup> Cf. Bauer (1999b: 161): 'is it too much to hope for that some of these female voices may echo whispers of resistance?'

<sup>183</sup> Shields (2004: 49). Baumann (2003: 126): 'In all this, as also in Hosea, the woman, or personification of the woman, cannot speak for herself.'

<sup>184</sup> Cf. the people's complaint against YHWH's behaviour in 2: 29 and adamant plea in 2: 31: 'We are free, we will come to you no more!'

<sup>185</sup> Reading נואש as a Niphal participle with an indefinite subject ('It is hopeless'). Cf. *Jer* 18: 12, *Isa* 57: 10. Judah's לֹא ('No!') is addressed directly to YHWH, as she rejects his advances. Cf. *Judg* 12: 5, *Hag* 2: 12.

<sup>186</sup> Baumann (2003: 125). Cf. Shields (2004: 46–7): 'YHWH's answer in v.5b... illustrates the manipulative and double-faced nature of Israel's request... Thus Israel's words and actions are portrayed as being incongruent and hypothetical.'

<sup>187</sup> Baumann (2003: 125) admits: 'The text speaks about her from an exclusively male perspective; her own voice, her own will, even as regards her "marriage" to YHWH, is not recorded.'

has misconstrued her relationship with YHWH, or YHWH who has misconstrued his relationship with Judah. As we listen to Judah's voice in this way, we begin to get the impression that YHWH's characterization of her as inconsistent and irrational is perhaps premature. Judah certainly seems to know her own mind, even if it does not cohere with YHWH's perspective.<sup>188</sup>

The alternative characterization of Judah lying within *Jeremiah 2: 1–4: 4* raises significant questions about the portrayal of her behaviour. It seems that, if we resist the overriding force of this prophetic poetry's persuasive language, listening instead to the voice of Judah, however quiet, we begin to form quite a different impression of her, as a female who seeks to act independently, self-sufficient with regard to YHWH, and confident of what she desires out of life. As we focus on this alternative portrayal of Judah, we may begin to see her rape in 3: 2 as altogether less ridiculous and more demanding of compassion.

We have spoken of *Hosea 4–14*'s extreme propensity to undercut its own arguments. We could say that *Jeremiah 2: 1–4: 4* also displays such a tendency in its inclusion of Judah's 'opposing voice'. Nor is this the only way in which this prophetic poetry undermines itself. The text's bold use of rhetorical questions may also hold within it the potential for its own unravelling. We have already seen that, while YHWH's rhetorical question in 2: 11, 'Has any (other) nation exchanged its gods?', expects the response, 'No', YHWH himself ironically expects Judah 'to change their baalistic understanding of Yahweh to a different concept of him'.<sup>189</sup> Carroll also calls attention to 2: 31, where YHWH demands, 'Have I been a wilderness to Israel?| Or a land of deep darkness?', despite the fact that in the previous verse he has admitted to 'smiting' his children. He insists, 'In view of v. 30 . . . the question in 31b might well be answered in the affirmative! A god who destroys his people is a thick darkness, a desert and a demonical force. Small wonder that the people should shun him!'<sup>190</sup> It seems that *Jeremiah 2: 1–4: 4* presents the reader with valuable opportunities to resist its assumptions: not only through

<sup>188</sup> Diamond and O'Connor (1996: 310): 'What would happen if female Israel told the story? Would she tell of her husband's verbal abuse, his foolish jealousy, his despicable exaggerations. . . . What we do know about this metaphorical woman, though, is that she makes a moral and religious choice. She does not return to him despite the safety and social status a return might provide. She refuses to speak the words he demands of her: "Only acknowledge your guilt. . . ." (3: 13). She will not accept blame for the failure of the marriage, and she will not reject the gods and goddesses whom she loves. She accepts the price of her autonomy.'

<sup>189</sup> Carroll (1986: 127).

<sup>190</sup> Carroll (1986: 138). Shields (2004: 166) calls attention to the way in which *Jer 3: 1–4:4*'s imagery of circumcision also 'itself contains the seeds of its own undermining': 'While circumcision symbolically excludes women, there remains a need for women and female–male sexuality for reproduction. The symbolic system cannot completely dominate or control women's place and reproductive power, however much it may seek to do so.' Cf. p. 160.

listening to the suppressed female voice, but also through taking care to treat the text's questions as open and genuine, not surrendering uncritically to their persuasive force. This is surely a resource to be taken seriously by those seeking to grapple with the difficulties of prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language.

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*Isaiah*

*Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 is not alone in its varied use of sexual and marital metaphorical language. *Isaiah* also confronts us with a striking range of metaphors and similes, which perhaps even more fiercely defy characterization as ‘the marriage metaphor’. Since Döderlein (1775), the distinction between *Isaiah* 1–39 and 40–66 has been widely recognized, so that even Childs, who argues for a holistic reading of *Isaiah*, repeatedly refers to chapter 40 as ‘a prologue’.<sup>1</sup> Following Duhm (1892), many have also distinguished between *Isaiah* 40–55 and 56–66, particularly in response to the distinctive style, theology and message of chapters 40–55, which contrasts sharply with the often disjointed nature of chapters 56–66, although the works are strongly related.<sup>2</sup> It may come as no surprise, then, that my presentation of *Isaiah*’s sexual and marital metaphorical language reflects an understanding of the book as three discrete but interrelated parts, with chapters 40–55 emerging as a particularly distinctive voice.

SEXUAL AND MARITAL METAPHORICAL  
LANGUAGE IN *ISAIAH* 1–39

If in previous chapters we have taken time to explore the wider contexts of sexual and marital metaphorical language, such an approach seems inappropriate for our discussion of *Isaiah* 1–39. For there is no sustained theme underpinning *Isaiah* 1–39’s sexual and marital metaphorical language, perhaps

<sup>1</sup> Childs (2001: 294, 297). Consensus is such that Barton (1995: 9) feels able to write in a basic guide: ‘There is such widespread agreement that chs. 40–66 are the work of a later prophet or prophets that this will not be discussed here at all.’

<sup>2</sup> Brettler (1998: 98–9): ‘Scholars have long felt a disjunction between the material in chs. 40–55 and that following ch. 56, while noting that several themes and rhetorical usages connect the two units. Older scholarship has stressed the disjunctures; some of the newer studies emphasize the continuity, in some cases, attributing the similarities between *Isaiah* 40–55 and 56–66 to a school of Second *Isaiah* who completed the book’ Whybray (1975: 38–9) and Westermann (1969: 8–9) represent a traditional perspective. Seitz (1996), Liebreich (1955–6), Gruber (1983: esp. 353–4) emphasize the continuities between *Isaiah* 40–55 and 56–66.

reflecting wider observations that this is a composite text.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, there are only two isolated occurrences of sexual metaphor,<sup>4</sup> both involving the popular ‘prostitution’ focus, despite the poetry’s more frequent tendency to personify cities as female.<sup>5</sup> The first of these features within the first chapter, however, promoting its prominence and perhaps even preparing us for the book as a whole, where sexual and marital metaphorical language later abounds.<sup>6</sup>

Thus in 1: 21 YHWH laments, ‘How she has become a prostitute,| The faithful city,| Once filled with justice!’ For many this brief glimpse of ‘prostitution’ ends here and is frequently passed over as incidental.<sup>7</sup> Yet the indictment continues, ‘Righteousness spent the night (לַיָּל) with her,| But now murderers!’ English translations generally render לַיָּל as ‘to lodge’,<sup>8</sup> or ‘to dwell’,<sup>9</sup> but the verb can have the more specific meaning of ‘to spend the night’ (*Genesis* 19: 2, 28: 11; *Judges* 19: 13, 15; *Job* 24: 7) and is particularly suggestive in *Song* 1: 13: ‘A bundle of myrrh is my lover to me,| Between my breasts, he shall spend the night (לַיָּל)’. We could say that the sexually charged frame of 1: 21 has the power to heighten such sexual associations, creating a provocative word-play and enlivening the metaphor. Darr speaks of ‘a suggestive phrase given the

<sup>3</sup> Coggins (2001: 435), O. Kaiser (1983), Ackroyd (1987).

<sup>4</sup> In *Isa* 3: 26 we are confronted with the desolate scene of Jerusalem sitting on the ground ‘emptied out’ (נִקְתָּה). NRSV strikingly presents Jerusalem as ‘ravaged’ here, bringing sexual associations to נִקְתָּה. This is perhaps in part due to 3: 26’s proximity to the sexually charged account of YHWH’s punishment of literal women in 3: 24. Sexual associations for 3: 26 are certainly possible in this literary context; nevertheless, they are less explicit than the NRSV would suggest. This metaphorical language is therefore not a primary concern for our purposes.

<sup>5</sup> See Schmitt (1997), Darr (1994: 124–64), and Berges (2001: 56–64) for discussions of *Isaiah* 1–39’s personification of cities as females.

<sup>6</sup> Many view *Isaiah* 1 as an introduction not only to *Isaiah* 1–39, but also to the book as a whole. Cf. Fohrer (1962), Sweeney (1988: 21–3; 1996: 72), Coggins (2001: 436). Williamson (2006: 9–10) draws on Carr (1993: esp. 71–5) to call for a closer definition of ‘introduction’, stressing that the first chapter can be understood neither as a summary of the book, nor as the first half of an *inclusio* with chapter 66. Instead, Williamson understands it to be an introduction ‘in the sense of an appeal to the reader to repent in the light and on the basis of all that is to follow; it prepares the reader’s frame of mind at the start of the book rather than anticipating what is to come’ (p. 10). The appearance of the metaphorical focus of ‘prostitution’ in *Isaiah* 1 is nevertheless striking, particularly as this book is later to brim with an astonishing diversity of sexual and marital metaphorical language with a markedly more positive force.

<sup>7</sup> Chapman (2004: 91–2) simply notes the absence of the name ‘Daughter Zion’, then states that ‘the infidelity theme of the marriage metaphor is introduced here’. She turns back to 1: 21 only to suggest a possible relation to *Zeph* 3: 1 (p. 98). Schmitt (1997: 97–8) is unusual, understanding 1: 21 to be ‘perhaps the most memorable appearance of the idea of city as woman in the whole of *Isaiah* 1–39’. Calling attention also to 1: 8, where Jerusalem is ‘left like a booth in a vineyard’, he writes, ‘There is no extended picture of Jerusalem as a woman in chapter 1, but the two images of whore and daughter together set the stage of the rest of *Isaiah* 1–39. The whore image is a harsh critique; the daughter image suggests affection.’

<sup>8</sup> Watts (1985: 13), RSV.

<sup>9</sup> Wildberger (1991: 59). Leupold (1977: 66), Kissane (1960: 16), Blenkinsopp (2000: 5).

preceding charge of harlotry, yet she goes on to suggest that the innuendo is 'blunted by its subject', 'righteousness'.<sup>10</sup> It seems to me, however, that 1: 21 may audaciously suggest that not only did Jerusalem used to 'spend the night with righteousness', but also that her 'prostitution' is now with 'murderers'. While we disregard the possible innuendo, the brief encounter with 'prostitution' in 1: 21 is reminiscent of the deathly metaphorical language of *Leviticus*, *Deuteronomy*, *Joshua*, and *Judges*. Once it is recognized, however, the metaphor rouses forcefully into action.

It is in part for this reason that I take issue with Galambush and Baumann. Galambush writes:

This scant personification depends for its effect on the reader's previous familiarity with the personification of Jerusalem as Yahweh's wife. The mere epithet 'faithful city' suffices to tell the reader which city this is, to whom she owes fidelity, and in what capacity: her fidelity is not that of a son or slave, but of a wife. The reader must recognize the epithet 'faithful city' as a reference to Jerusalem the faithful wife in order to appreciate Yahweh's accusation of infidelity. With remarkable economy, Isaiah extends the conventional metaphor. Simply by replacing 'faithful' with 'whorelike' he achieves the turn from the commonplace to the shocking.<sup>11</sup>

Baumann echoes: '[T]he titling of Jerusalem as a "whore" in 1: 21 is a unique instance that can scarcely be understood in this passage apart from the well-known texts from other prophetic books; thus it is probably an allusion to them.'<sup>12</sup> It is not clear to me, however, why the reader must be familiar with 'the marriage metaphor' in other prophetic texts to understand this accusation. The second half of 1: 21 alone makes the disastrous change in the city's behaviour starkly apparent, as her partner changes from 'righteousness' (singular) to 'murderers' (plural). Even if the reader were unfamiliar with the portrayal of Jerusalem as wife of YHWH, it seems to me that 1: 21 would be meaningful. We might even say that assumptions about 'the marriage metaphor' unduly complicate the indictment; if זָבָה has sexual associations in 1: 21, then it is *righteousness's* relationship with Jerusalem that is compromised, not YHWH's.

Perhaps more seriously, in their haste to present 1: 21 as dependent on other texts, Galambush and Baumann overlook the distinctiveness of this metaphorical language. While the sexual and marital metaphors and similes we have already encountered have been diverse, they have nevertheless tended

<sup>10</sup> Darr (1994: 138).

<sup>11</sup> Galambush (1992: 52). Cf. Darr (1994: 138), who argues that the reader must be 'informed by extratextual knowledge of Israel's religious traditions' to understand the 'prostitution' in 1: 21 to speak of infidelity. Such associations are, however, clear from the opposition of 'prostitute' and 'faithful city' in 1: 21 itself.

<sup>12</sup> Baumann (2003: 178). Indeed, she believes 1: 21 to be a later redactional insertion within *Isaiah* 1–39, reflecting *Isaiah* 56–66 (ibid.).

to speak of unacceptable cultic practice, the worship of other gods, or the nation's political manoeuvrings. In 1: 21 'prostitution' likewise speaks of infidelity (Jerusalem is no longer the 'faithful city'), but, more unusually, it also speaks of social decline, a peculiarly prominent concern of *Isaiah* 1–39.<sup>13</sup> Some show an awareness of the distinctive nature of 1: 21's accusation of 'prostitution'. Scott notes, 'The figure here is not, as in Hosea, that of an unfaithful wife, but of evil character in general.'<sup>14</sup> Wildberger observes:

[Hosea] used the accusation of 'whoring' to pass judgement on those who fell away from Yahweh by going to the Canaanite deities with the sexual cults. But Isaiah does not accuse Jerusalem of 'whoring' in this sense. The point of comparison for him is rather that of faithlessness... and the fact that the inhabitants of the city had put themselves up for sale, so that זונה (whoring) and נאמנה (faithfulness) correspond to each other in an adverse relationship.<sup>15</sup>

Darr comments:

[B]iblical charges of adultery/prostitution against indigenous cities generally are motivated by misplaced reliance: Israel depends on other deities, or forms alliances with other nations, rather than looking to Yahweh for support and protection. Compared to such traditions Isa 1: 21, with its emphasis upon Jerusalem's contaminants, is unusual. It is possible, of course, that prostitution (and adultery) metaphors were routinely applied to a wider swath of policies and practices than the biblical literature suggests. But for the critic whose objective lens permits interpreting Isaiah 1 within the larger work, this use of prostitution imagery is distinctive.<sup>16</sup>

Following our exploration of *Hosea* 4–14 and *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4, we might question some of the details of these observations, but it remains significant that it is on encountering *Isaiah* that many readers become alert to the possibility that 'prostitution' metaphors do not always fit the mould. For this mould will be shattered in *Isaiah* 40–55, of which there are echoes here, as 1: 26 reverses 1: 21,<sup>17</sup> with words that foreshadow the transformations to come: 'Afterwards, you shall be called City of the Righteous,| The Faithful City.'

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Williamson (2006: 136), who insists that the characterization of Zion as 'whore' must not be defined 'too narrowly'. In addition to suggesting associations of idolatry and 'political unfaithfulness' (cf. chs. 30–1), he also perceives connotations here of 'perversion of justice' (cf. 1: 23).

<sup>14</sup> Scott (1956: 176). Cf. Herbert (1973: 30–1), O. Kaiser (1983: 42).

<sup>15</sup> Wildberger (1991: 64). Cf. Oswalt (1986: 105).

<sup>16</sup> Darr (1994: 139–40).

<sup>17</sup> There is some debate over the dating of *Isa* 1: 21–6. Williamson (2006: 129–32) attributes 1: 26 to a redactor (the compiler of *Isaiah* 1), who is seeking to reverse the negative 1: 21. Baumann (2003: 178) believes 1: 21–31 as a whole to be a later editorial insertion within *Isaiah* 1–39, reflecting *Isaiah* 56–66. Such discussions are beyond the scope of this exploration. Whenever it was written, the desire displayed by 1: 26 to overturn 1: 21's negative description of Jerusalem as 'prostitute' is striking, echoing other attempts (editorial or otherwise) within this exploration.

Sexual metaphor features only once again in *Isaiah* 1–39, as ‘prostitution’ reappears in 23: 15–18 in unusual guise.<sup>18</sup> If 1: 21 is frequently dismissed as mundane, few could deny the peculiarity of 23: 15–18. For a start, it is a foreign city, Tyre, who ‘prostitutes’,<sup>19</sup> and the associations of ‘infidelity’ that are so prominent in 1: 21 are hardly apparent, as the frame’s interest in trade strongly encourages associations of selling oneself for gain. The real uniqueness of 23: 15–18’s ‘prostitution’, however, lies in the possibility that this passage condones, even encourages, such behaviour. YHWH’s words about Tyre are undeniably taunting, but still he encourages her to return to that profession. This is almost certainly only possible because neither Judah nor Israel are the subject, and any profit will go to YHWH’s people.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the idea that ‘prostitution’ might not be *inherently* unacceptable is startling. For whereas literal prostitution seems to have been tolerated while it involved ‘the professional prostitute’, with ‘no husband nor sexual obligation to any other male’,<sup>21</sup> nowhere else in the prophetic texts does this historical reality impact on the associations of the metaphorical focus.

Kissane is willing to consider the possibility: ‘The figure does not mean that Tyre’s trade was reprehensible or immoral.’<sup>22</sup> Wildberger even goes so far as to comment that ‘Israel was allergic, throughout its history, when it came to cultic prostitution. But common prostitution was apparently tolerated.’<sup>23</sup> Oswalt struggles with the idea that ‘prostitution’ may not be wholly negative, observing, ‘*she will prostitute herself*’ seems to be strange language if God has delivered her from destruction.<sup>24</sup> Thus he suggests that Tyre’s prostitution may be against YHWH’s wishes,<sup>25</sup> even though this seems unlikely in the context. More interestingly, he also considers that ‘the full negative meaning of the term [“to prostitute”] may not be intended here’.<sup>26</sup> Taking refuge in a substitutionary approach to metaphor, Oswalt insists that ‘it is necessary to

<sup>18</sup> The unusual nature of 23: 15–18’s accusation of ‘prostitution’ leads Baumann (2001: 99; 2003: 178) to assume that this passage is also a post-exilic addition to *Isaiah* 1–39. While the dating of this text is beyond our concern, it is notable that this accusation is sufficiently idiosyncratic to provoke such a response.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Nah* 3: 4–7, where Nineveh is cast as a ‘prostitute’.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Baumann (2003: 92 n. 29): ‘Contrary to Deut 23: 29, the “prostitute’s wages” are here dedicated to YHWH or belong to him as something “holy”; this seems to be possible because Tyre is personified as a foreign woman.’ She observes, ‘By this use of the wages as a gift to YHWH the negative connotation of the “whore” is softened here.’

<sup>21</sup> Bird (1989: 77). Bird speaks of ‘the professional prostitute’ as ‘tolerated but stigmatised, desired but ostracized’ (p. 79). Cf. Schulte (1992), who argues that *זנ* has not always had negative associations.

<sup>22</sup> Kissane (1960: 255).

<sup>23</sup> Wildberger (1997: 434–5, 436). Cf. Brenner (1985: 78).

<sup>24</sup> Oswalt (1986: 436).

<sup>25</sup> Oswalt (1986: 436–7).

<sup>26</sup> Oswalt (1986: 437).

remember again that prostitution is a figure here and that there is nothing intrinsically immoral about trade or business.<sup>27</sup> Yet cognitive approaches would contend that, if 23: 15–18 uses ‘prostitution’ to speak of a business that is not ‘intrinsically immoral’, then this inevitably suggests that there is ‘nothing intrinsically immoral’ about prostitution either.<sup>28</sup> In short, 23: 15–18 is striking for its willingness to encourage associations for ‘prostitution’ that are at the very least not inherently negative.<sup>29</sup> Sexual metaphorical language in *Isaiah* 1–39 may be rare, but it is far from conventional.<sup>30</sup> Yet it still pales in comparison to the startling sexual and marital metaphors and similes of *Isaiah* 40–55.

### ISAIAH 40–55: THE WIDER FRAME

If *Hosea* 4–14’s metaphorical language is inimitable for its twists, turns, and intertextuality, and if *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4’s poetry is remarkable for its relentless ridicule of Judah, then *Isaiah* 40–55’s sexual and marital metaphorical language is unique for its unusually optimistic theme. While the vast majority of prophetic sexual and marital metaphors and similes are persistently negative, those in *Isaiah* 40–55 consistently speak of encouragement, hope, and renewal. Similarly, while this poetry is pervaded with rhetorical questions, these appear as part of what we might call the theme of transformation, rather than the scornful derision of Judah, as in *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4. It is within this theme of transformation that *Isaiah* 40–55’s sexual and marital metaphors and similes appear; so it is to this theme that we shall first turn.

### The theme of transformation in *Isaiah* 40–55

It is widely recognized that a main concern of *Isaiah* 40–55 is to introduce a God with transforming might, whose overpowering desire is to return exiled ‘Israel’.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the centrality of this concern is such that we might take it as

<sup>27</sup> Oswalt (1986: 437). Cf. Young (1969: 140).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Black (1962: 44): ‘If to call a man a wolf is to put him in a special light, we must not forget that metaphor makes the wolf seem more human than he otherwise would.’

<sup>29</sup> *Contra* Hauck and Schulz (1968: esp. 587), Leupold (1977: 371), North (1964: 173), Goodfriend (1992b: 509).

<sup>30</sup> Darr (1994: 157): ‘The conclusion’s unfortunate consequence is to turn Yahweh and Israel into Tyre’s pimps.’

<sup>31</sup> As in *Jer* 2: 1–4: 4, the ‘Israel’ of *Isaiah* 40–55 will be treated as an idealization, and will be understood to allude to the exiled people.

a principal theme. In *Isaiah* 40–55, YHWH is Creator, with the potential to transform the world.<sup>32</sup> This God has proved his ability to provide and rescue through the ‘Exodus’: ‘And they thirsted not;| Through the deserts he led them,| Water from rock| He made flow for them;| And he would cleft rock| And waters gushed forth!’ (48: 21).<sup>33</sup> He repeatedly promises to defy natural order again for the benefit of his people: for instance, in the celebrated lines of 40: 4, where ‘Every valley shall be lifted up,| And every mountain and hill made low;| And the uneven ground shall be level| And the rough places a plain.’<sup>34</sup>

This theme of transformation is developed throughout *Isaiah* 40–55 in different directions. Clines, for instance, speaks of the ‘topsy turvy world’ of chapter 53.<sup>35</sup> A particularly significant characteristic for our purposes, however, is illustrated by the transformation of the blind and the deaf in 42: 18. YHWH does not claim that the blind will be *healed*, and thus no longer blind, but rather declares that the impossible (oxymoronic) will happen: *the blind will see*. ‘Hear you deaf!| And look you blind, to see!’ (42: 18).<sup>36</sup> If this seems unlikely, YHWH also promises, ‘When you walk through fire you shall not be burned,| And a flame shall not consume you’ (43: 2). YHWH pledges neither to remove Israel from the fire, nor to dampen its flames. Rather, he claims the impossible: in him, fire loses its power; the people will walk through, but not be burned, a remarkable image vividly explored by *Daniel* 3.<sup>37</sup> In *Isaiah* 40–55, YHWH is a God unlimited by the natural world and its causal structures, a God of transformations. We might even say that this theme of transformation lies in direct contrast to the ‘poetic justice’ pattern so prominent in other prophetic books. *Isaiah* 40–55’s God is not confined to ‘tit for tat’ arguments, forced to respond negatively to negative actions, and positively to positive

<sup>32</sup> *Isa* 40: 26–8; 42: 5; 45: 7–8, 11–12, 18.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *Isa* 51: 9–10.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Isa* 42: 15–16, 43: 16–21, 49: 9–12, 50: 2–3, etc. Von Rad (1965: 240) stresses the relationship between redemption and creation in *Isaiah* 40–55: ‘creation is the first of Jahweh’s miraculous historical acts and a remarkable witness to his will to save... Jahweh is Israel’s “creator” in the sense that he called this people in its whole physical existence into being, yet he is creator in particular because he “chose” Israel and “redeemed” her. When the prophet speaks of Israel’s “creation”, however, he is thinking of the historical acts which the Exodus tradition had ascribed to the God of Israel, and especially of the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea. In Deutero-Isaiah “to create” and “to redeem” (בָּרָא) can be used as entirely synonymous.’ Cf. North (1964: 13), Whybray (1975: 31, 50), Westermann (1969: 25).

<sup>35</sup> Clines (1976: 61).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Oswalt (1998: 130): ‘The opening challenge is startling. How can the blind see and the deaf hear? Nevertheless this is what they are commanded to do.’ Westermann (1969: 109–10): ‘The dominant note in these imperatives is not, then, as many commentators think, that of censure or accusation, but of a hidden promise... To take the summons here as simply or substantially an accusation is a misunderstanding of the entire oracle.’ *Contra* Baltzer (2001), who stresses only the negative aspect of this imagery (p. 149), insisting that Israel remains blind and deaf (p. 163). Cf. Watts (1987: 131).

<sup>37</sup> Von Rad (1965: 245), Baltzer (2001: 157), Oswalt (1998: 138).

deeds.<sup>38</sup> He is determined to shape events and the natural world however he sees fit for his purposes.<sup>39</sup>

If YHWH can transform the natural order, he also has the power to transform his people. Such is the rationale of this daring poetry.<sup>40</sup> In *Isaiah* 40–55, YHWH repeatedly confronts negative perceptions of Israel, vowing to revolutionize his people’s reputation among the nations. *Isaiah* 49: 7 promises: ‘Thus says YHWH,| The Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One,| To one who despises himself,<sup>41</sup> to one who abhors a nation,<sup>42</sup> To a servant of rulers:| “Kings shall see and rise,| Princes, and they shall bow down| Because of YHWH who is faithful!”’ Perhaps even more significantly, the poetry challenges Israel’s *self-perception*: ‘Why do you say, O Jacob,| And speak, O Israel,| “My way is hidden from YHWH,| And by my God my justice is disregarded?”| Have you not known?| Have you not heard?| The God of Ages is YHWH;| Creator of the ends of the earth!’ (40: 27–9).<sup>43</sup> Thus *Isaiah* 40–55 provokes Israel to allow its self-understanding to be transformed by the God who creates, and thus is not limited by creation. This theme of transformation reverberates throughout *Isaiah* 40–55. YHWH even calls for a response from beleaguered Zion: ‘Awake, awake! Put on| Your strength, O Zion!| Put on your beautiful garments,| O Jerusalem, the holy city!| For there shall no more come into you| Any uncircumcised or unclean.<sup>44</sup> Shake yourself from the dust! Arise,| Take your seat, Jerusalem!<sup>45</sup> Loose the bonds from your neck,| Captive daughter Zion!’ (52: 1–2).<sup>46</sup> We could even say that Zion is portrayed as holding *herself* captive

<sup>38</sup> Barton (1990: 61), Morris (1996: 86).

<sup>39</sup> Oswalt (1986: 40): ‘Because God is independent of his world as creator, he is able to break into the apparently endless chain of cause and effect and deliver his people from the seemingly inevitable consequences of their sin.’

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Schökel (1987: 178): ‘A free and glorious future seems impossible. For God, however, nothing is impossible. The creator of the universe will transform nature, renew her and recreate her. The God of history will create a new era in historical time. This God, creator of the world, and of a people, is the ultimate guarantee of hope.’

<sup>41</sup> MT’s *לבוז-נפש* is debated. Many suggest an emphatic and passive translation, ‘to one deeply despised’. North (1964: 190), Westermann (1969: 212). It seems to me, however, that, within the context of *Isaiah* 40–55’s theme of transformations, the phrase may speak of the people’s self-perception: ‘to a self-despiser’ (i.e. ‘to one who despises himself’), or, even, ‘to one self-despised’, if a passive is preferred with 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>. Cf. LXX: *τὸν φαυλίζοντα τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ*. See also Kissane (1943: 128).

<sup>42</sup> Understanding *גוי*, ‘nation’, to speak of ‘Israel’ (cf. *Isa* 1: 4, 26: 2, 65: 1, 66: 8), so that the descriptions of the people are in parallel. *Contra* those who emend MT to read ‘abhorred by peoples’, e.g. Baltzer (2001: 312).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *Isa* 41: 14–16.

<sup>44</sup> This may even be a case of sexual innuendo. Cf. *Gen* 6: 4, 16: 2; *Deut* 22: 13; 2 *Sam* 12: 24, 16: 21, 20: 3, etc.

<sup>45</sup> MT’s *שָׁבַי* is literally ‘sit’. Cf. LXX: *κάθισον*. Oswalt (1998: 361): ‘sit suggests the image of someone prostrate in the dust who picks himself up to sit on a seat of some sort’.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *Isa* 51: 17, 52: 9.

in *Isaiah* 40–55 by perceiving herself as hostage to Babylon; similarly, she is bereaved while she remains in mourning.<sup>47</sup> If only Zion can find the will to respond, she can be free; Babylon has no power to hold her.<sup>48</sup>

### Rhetorical questions in *Isaiah* 40–55

Rhetorical questions proliferate in *Isaiah* 40–55 to complement powerfully this theme of transformation, as they forcefully encourage the reader to become ‘a co-expresser of the speaker’s conviction’.<sup>49</sup> If in *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 rhetorical questions are harnessed to ridicule Judah, then in *Isaiah* 40–55, they seek to comfort the people.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, we could say that *Isaiah* 40–55 takes rhetorical questions to another level, displaying a characteristic tendency to provide the answers itself.<sup>51</sup> This unusual technique allows the poetry to introduce new, perhaps startling, concepts as if they were well established; presenting a rhetorical question as if the answer were perfectly obvious, while at the same time guiding the reader towards the desired, often entirely unexpected, conclusion. In 50: 2, YHWH demands, ‘Is my hand too short to deliver?| Or have I no strength to save?’ If such questions seem daring, if not reckless, given the current state of the people, answers are swiftly provided: ‘Behold by my rebuke I dry up sea,| I make rivers a desert...’ Similarly, in 49: 24 YHWH demands, ‘Can the prey be taken from a mighty one?| Or a tyrant’s captive be rescued?’<sup>52</sup> and promptly responds, ‘Indeed, a mighty one’s captive shall be taken,| And a tyrant’s prey be rescued.| For I will contend with those who contend with you;| And I will save your children!’ (49: 25). If it appears that Israel is not trusted to assume the right responses to these

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Whybray (1975: 32–3).

<sup>48</sup> The influence of ‘the marriage metaphor’ can be found even here. Ackerman (1992: 167) reflects: ‘One is tempted to suggest that Jerusalem’s beautiful garments in 52: 1 are wedding garb. Certainly marriage imagery is dominant in other sixth-century Isaianic poems that rejoice in Jerusalem’s restoration: 49: 7–26; 54: 1–10; and 62: 1–12.’ *Isaiah* 40–55 and 56–66 are concerned not only with marital imagery, however, but with a whole range of sexual and marital metaphorical language and beyond.

<sup>49</sup> Labuschagne (1966: 23). Kuntz (1997: 127–9) insists that ‘any brash claim that *Isaiah* 40–55 is saturated with rhetorical questions is likely to be dismissed as an instance of rhetorical overkill’, but admits that they ‘do constitute an integral part of the fabric of Deutero-*Isaiah*’s discourse’, and discusses their various forms.

<sup>50</sup> *Isaiah* 40–55 uses rhetorical questions to ridicule rivals (44: 10, 45: 9–11), but never Israel or Zion.

<sup>51</sup> Kuntz (1997: 128–9) worries about whether these questions can be viewed as rhetorical, although they clearly are. Classical Greek rhetoric even has a name set apart for them: *anthypophora*.

<sup>52</sup> Reading ערײן for צדיק with 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>, Syriac, and Vulgate. Cf. 49: 25, where the nouns are repeated.

questions, requiring substantial prompting, it is perhaps because these responses demand a belief in the impossible, in the God of transformations.

### SEXUAL AND MARITAL METAPHORICAL LANGUAGE IN ISAIAH 40–55

It is within this prophetic poetry, with its distinctive theme, that *Isaiah* 40–55's sexual and marital metaphorical language emerges. The poetry's female personification of Zion moves far beyond such imagery.<sup>53</sup> Darr calls attention to the language of 'daughter' and 'mother', as well as 'wife', suggesting that in *Isaiah* 40–55 we encounter the 'family of God'.<sup>54</sup> Sawyer is keen to stress Zion's wider prominence, even claiming her to be as significant a figure as the celebrated Servant.<sup>55</sup> A discussion of this wider personification of Zion is beyond our scope, but a recognition that Zion is more than sexual object in *Isaiah* 40–55 is an appropriate note on which to begin this exploration of the poetry's sexual and marital metaphorical language, which provides something of an oasis within the prophetic texts.

*Isaiah* 54: 5 entices us with possibly the most direct reference to YHWH as 'husband' in the Hebrew Bible: 'For your husband is your maker; YHWH Sabaoth is his name.' Paradoxically, however, this most unambiguous 'marriage

<sup>53</sup> There has been some debate over whether *Isaiah* 40–55's female personification should be identified as 'Zion/Jerusalem', as she remains unnamed in 54: 1–6. Sawyer (1989) emphasizes her anonymity, wishing to compare her to the Servant. Certainly there is a fluidity about 'Zion' in *Isaiah* 40–55: she can represent the people as well as the city. It seems to me, however, that this flexibility is a trademark of all personifications. The resonance between the unnamed female in 54: 1–6 and Zion in 49: 14–23 ('barren', 'bereaved', 'bride') strongly encourage her identification as 'Zion' throughout. Cf. Darr (1994: 177), North (1964: 247), Whybray (1975: 184), Jeppesen (1993: 110), Callaway (1986: 64), Willey (1997: 231), Baltzer (2001: 429). Following Robinson (1911: 8), Beuken (1974) believes that this is a case of 'corporate personality' (pp. 29–30). The woman in *Isaiah* 54 has a 'multiple identity' with 'three manifestations of ancestress, wife and city', which 'simply embody the three major phases of the history of this one people Israel' (p. 70). Rogerson (1985, 1992) provides a useful critique of this now largely discredited concept.

<sup>54</sup> Darr (1994: 177–82).

<sup>55</sup> Sawyer (1989: 89). Cf. Korpel (1996). Sawyer's work is noteworthy for the attention it draws to the 'Zion songs', even if his assumption that a 'story' can be traced throughout the book is problematic. There is growing debate over the relationship between the Servant and Zion. Wilshire (1975) goes so far as to suggest that 'the servant is the city' (p. 358), while Willey (1997: esp. 221–8) regards the figures as parallel, but separate. Jeppesen (1993: 124) concludes that the Servant and Zion imagery are 'twisted into each other', but 'not identical', while Berges (2001: 70) speaks of 'the identification, up to a certain degree, of both figures'. K. M. O'Connor (1999a: 282) believes that Zion has 'comparable status' with the Servant in *Isaiah* 40–55, although this poetry employs her for 'different rhetorical purposes'. Cf. van der Woude (2004). Steck (1989) provides a detailed comparison.

metaphor' appears in a procession of diverse sexual and marital metaphors and similes in 54: 1–6, which just as unambiguously break this fragile mould.<sup>56</sup> *Isaiah* 54: 1–6's defiance of traditional assumptions begins with its very first metaphor, as Zion is astonishingly presented as 'barren': 'Cry out barren one, who has not borne!| Burst forth a cry and shriek,| You who have not been through labour!| For the children of the devastated will be more| Than the children of the married!' (54: 1).<sup>57</sup> Stienstra illustrates the problem: 'In what we have seen of the marriage metaphor so far, YHWH's wife is not barren, she has borne Him children. This is indeed a vital aspect of the marriage metaphor and there is not really enough evidence to abandon it here.'<sup>58</sup> Indeed, 54: 1 so affronts Stienstra that she rejects it as a 'marriage metaphor', classifying it instead as 'the metaphor of the barren woman'.<sup>59</sup> She clarifies: 'It does not seem to be good policy to postulate departures from the marriage metaphor, as it has been established on the basis of fairly long, coherent passages (such as Hosea 1–3 and Ezekiel 16), unless the textual evidence forces us to, as it does in Isa. 50,1. Here, however, we may assume a different metaphor to have been employed.'<sup>60</sup> If Stienstra's reaction seems extreme (if not bemusing), it nevertheless sets the scene for traditional reactions to *Isaiah* 40–55's sexual and marital metaphors and similes.<sup>61</sup> Many strive to smooth over this poetry's non-conformist language, echoing similar reactions to *Hosea* 4–14 and *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4. As we will see, however, in *Isaiah* 40–55 such approaches meet their match. Even 54: 1 tests traditional assumptions more than Stienstra perceives, as 'more than the children of the married one' suggests that Zion might be unmarried, despite the close proximity of 54: 5.

If this seems unlikely, 54: 4 is utterly unexpected, as Zion is bewilderingly portrayed as a 'widow' just one verse before she is assured that YHWH is her husband: 'Do not fear, for you will not be put to shame;| And you will not be

<sup>56</sup> 54: 1–6 is closely related to the following verses, but distinguished by a different voice, structure, and use of sexual and marital metaphorical language. Cf. Abma (1999: 93, 95), Watts (1987: 236), Beuken (1974: 32).

<sup>57</sup> Callaway (1986: 59–72) argues that these verses draw on 'the barren matriarch tradition' from *Genesis* and beyond, stressing *Isaiah* 40–55's unusual emphasis on Sarah as 'almost a "type" for Jerusalem' (p. 71). *Isaiah* 40–55 certainly seems to have thrived on drawing on such traditions (cf. Sommer 1998). As we saw in the Introduction, however, the search for such etymologies is beyond the interests of this monograph.

<sup>58</sup> Stienstra (1993: 172).

<sup>59</sup> Stienstra (1993: 173).

<sup>60</sup> Stienstra (1993: 172).

<sup>61</sup> Knight (1984: 182) mentions nowhere that Zion is 'barren', simply commenting, 'These [children] are to be born from the reunion of Yahweh and Israel: for Yahweh has now brought home his Bride in triumphant love.' Cf. Abma (1999: 95–6), who, uncomfortable with the metaphorical language, presses forward to 54: 5: 'Indirectly the theme of marriage is also anticipated.'

dishonoured because you will not be humiliated. | For the disgrace of your youth you will forget; | And the reproach of your widowhood (אלמנותיך) you will remember no longer!<sup>62</sup> It is perhaps the context of this rare metaphorical focus that leads many to overlook its potential impact.<sup>63</sup> Certainly few have registered its implications for the ‘story’ of ‘the marriage metaphor’. *Isaiah* 54: 4 audaciously claims that Zion’s husband, which traditional scholarship would expect to be YHWH, is dead! Baumann takes refuge in ‘the marriage metaphor’: ‘Here in *Isaiah* 54, the title “widow” was probably chosen to allude to Lam. 1, and not to the marriage metaphor, since YHWH as the “husband” of Jerusalem certainly did not die.’<sup>64</sup> Kissane, typifying a substitutionary approach, instantly moves to ‘translate’ the provocative language: ‘The reproach of thy widowhood is the final disaster of the exile, when Jahweh cast her off;’<sup>65</sup> ‘Sion had been the spouse of Jahweh, but proved unfaithful and was divorced. Now in her state of barrenness and widowhood she will have more children than she had before she was divorced.’<sup>66</sup> The assumption that Zion’s ‘widowhood’ must speak of separation or divorce is common among traditional readings. Westermann states: ‘God takes the woman forsaken and grieved in spirit back again and she once more has a husband,’<sup>67</sup> while Scullion notes that ‘The marriage relationship between Israel and her God, apparently broken, will be restored in full.’<sup>68</sup>

Few are willing to consider that Zion is presented as ‘widow’ in 54: 4. Indeed, many insist that אלמנה must have a wider literal reference than a woman whose husband has died precisely because it appears in this context. Cohen argues that אלמנה is ‘a once married woman who has no means of financial support and who is thus in need of special protection.’<sup>69</sup> Galambush insists, ‘The vassal city is “widowed” only because she once was “married”, that is,

<sup>62</sup> אלמנותיך, ‘widowhood’, and צלומיך, ‘youth’, are plural in MT. A singular reading might be more appropriate as a description of Zion, but the plural is shared by 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>. Abma (1999: 87) reads them as ‘abstract plural forms’.

<sup>63</sup> Watts (1987: 237) fails to comment on 54: 4, focusing on 54: 5. North (1964: 249) and Blenkinsopp (2002: 362–3) do not mention ‘widowhood’.

<sup>64</sup> Baumann (2001: 108 n. 76).

<sup>65</sup> Kissane (1943: 196). Cf. Young (1972: 363–4), Oswalt (1998: 418).

<sup>66</sup> Kissane (1943: 196). Cf. Leupold (1977: 240).

<sup>67</sup> Westermann (1969: 273).

<sup>68</sup> Scullion (1982: 125). Knight (1984: 182) vividly illustrates the strength of assumptions about ‘the marriage metaphor’ and the influence of *Hosea* 1–3 on readings of 54: 4.

<sup>69</sup> C. Cohen (1973: 77). Cohen relies heavily on the definition of the apparent parallel *almattu* in a Mesopotamian legal text. Cf. Driver and Miles (1935: 225). Cohen insists that ‘the “widowed” city motif seems to refer to a once independent city which has become the vassal of another state’ (pp. 78–9). Cf. C. Cohen (1972), Baltzer (2001: 440). Even the Mesopotamian legal document, however, notes that the woman’s husband must have died for her to be a widow. Hiebert (1989) also draws on Mesopotamian literature to argue that an אלמנה is a woman whose husband has died, and who has no sons or father-in-law to take responsibility for her: ‘the widow’s connection to the kinship structure was severed.’ For her definition also, however, the husband must have died. Hiebert notes that an *almattu* in Middle Assyrian laws could include a

under the protection of the male god. Her vassaldom is the consequence, not of her god's death, but of his having removed his patronage and consequently his protection.<sup>70</sup> Despite this apparent consensus, however, there is no positive support for this reading in the Hebrew Bible; indeed, there is only evidence against it. גרושה is the usual term for 'divorcée', and a number of texts distinguish between אלמנה and גרושה. *Leviticus* 21: 14 states, 'A widow (אלמנה) or a divorcée (גרושה) or a defiled prostitute, these he must not marry; for he may only marry a virgin from his people,' while *Ezekiel* 44: 22 insists, 'They shall not take for themselves a widow (אלמנה) or a divorcée (גרושה).'<sup>71</sup> *2 Samuel* 20: 3 is a solitary instance where women are described as 'widows' (אלמות) when their husband has not died: ten of David's concubines are 'confined until the day of their death, living widows'. Yet these women are concubines, not wives; and their treatment is presented as unusual. Indeed, many translations read 'living as widows', formally marking the metaphorical character of the description.<sup>72</sup>

If Kissane, Westermann, Scullion, Galambush, *et al.* insist that אלמנה ('widow') cannot be limited to the description of a woman whose husband has died, it seems that this must be almost entirely motivated by the controversial *Isaiah* 54: 4 itself, along with similar metaphorical language in *Isaiah* 47: 8–9, *Lamentations* 1: 1,<sup>73</sup> and *Jeremiah* 51: 5.<sup>74</sup> While most traditional scholars skirt the difficulties of 54: 4, it is Stienstra who once again notices and struggles with the metaphorical language, perhaps vocalizing the silent concerns of others.

It seems impossible to say that anyone could be the widow of YHWH, one of the most fundamental characteristics of the Deity being immortality. On the other hand, the references both to the shame of her youth and to YHWH taking back his repudiated wife... seem to indicate that if we are to interpret this phrase as referring to real

woman whose husband has been missing for two years as 'a prisoner of war' (p. 128). This does not seem to me to be an exception to this understanding of widowhood, though, but rather a law that treats the woman *as if* her husband had died.

<sup>70</sup> Galambush (1992: 43). Darr (1994: 180): 'the disgrace of widowhood foregrounds the vulnerability of being without a protector or provider.' Dille (2004: 136): 'It refers to a formerly married woman who has lost her male protector and provider.'

<sup>71</sup> Cf. *Lev* 22: 13, *Num* 30: 10, *Ezek* 44: 22.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. R. P. Gordon (1986: 294), Hertzberg (1964: 369), NIV.

<sup>73</sup> Such echoes have led some to believe that *Lamentations* is one of *Isaiah* 40–55's sources. Cf. Gottwald (1954: 44–6, 115), North (1964: 19), Dille (2004: 135), K. M. O'Connor (1999a). Newsom (1992) argues that 'when Second Isaiah takes up aspects of *Lamentations*, he engages dialogically the voice of the Judahite community' (p. 75), reflecting, 'There is a harmoniousness, almost an antiphonal answering of the lament' (p. 76). Willey (1997) provides a detailed discussion of *Isaiah* 40–55's resonances with *Lamentations*.

<sup>74</sup> The 'widowhood' focus has also been interpreted broadly in these passages. Cf. Fuerst (1975: 216), Harrison (1973: 207). Commentators, understandably, seem less troubled by *Jer* 51: 5, which insists, 'Israel and Judah have *not* been widowed by their God, YHWH Sabaoth!' Nevertheless RSV and NRSV translate here אלמן as 'forsaken'.

widowhood within the framework of the marriage metaphor, YHWH was the husband in question. It is of course possible to construct a story in which another man figures as first husband, but in the light of everything we have seen, this is extremely unlikely.<sup>75</sup>

Eventually Stienstra chooses to interpret אֵלְמָנָה ‘in a very broad, non-literal sense’,<sup>76</sup> thus ‘substituting’ the metaphor: ‘we may say that the “widow” is the desolate woman of v. 1, who has never borne children, and who will not be enabled to achieve the fulfilment of her widowhood.’<sup>77</sup> If Stienstra thereby sidesteps 54: 4, she is at least aware of the threat it poses to her understanding of ‘the marriage metaphor’, in stark contrast to Kissane, Westermann, and Scullion. Beuken also demonstrates an awareness of the problem, noting that ‘[the woman] cannot at the same time be unmarried, widow and deserted.’<sup>78</sup> However, he concludes, ‘these images are applicable to the woman only according to their common feature: she has to live without husband though her age requires such a one . . . and though she has been married.’<sup>79</sup> Even Abma, with her cognitive approach to metaphor, is quick to ‘translate’ the language, understanding 54: 4 to refer to ‘the post-marital status of the woman.’<sup>80</sup> While there is little biblical support for understanding the term ‘widow’ in such broad terms, however, we should perhaps dare to consider that 54: 4 speaks of Zion as a woman whose husband is dead; and while we take a cognitive view of metaphor, we should resist the temptation to substitute more comfortable language.

How, then, are we to understand 54: 1–6, where in successive verses Zion is ‘barren’, ‘mother’, ‘widowed’, ‘wife’ of YHWH? Common sense demands that this is impossible. If we read this sexual and marital metaphorical language within its wider frame, however, perhaps this is the very thrust of the revolutionary poetry. The passage’s metaphorical language is bewildering, contradictory, and nonsensical, but also clearly reflects the theme of transformation pervading *Isaiah* 40–55. Westermann captures the concept in relation to Zion’s ‘barrenness’.

<sup>75</sup> Stienstra (1993: 173).

<sup>76</sup> Stienstra (1993: 174).

<sup>77</sup> Stienstra (1993: 174).

<sup>78</sup> Beuken (1974: 35–6).

<sup>79</sup> Beuken (1974: 36). Cf. Baltzer (2001: 440): ‘“the woman” cannot be unmarried, a widow, and forsaken at one and the same time.’

<sup>80</sup> Abma (1999: 98). She explains, ‘The text focuses on the present misery of Zion and the present reversal of this situation. In this light the images of “girlhood” and “widowhood” may constitute a parallel pair and provide two descriptions of a central point, the miserable situation of Zion.’ Abma briefly considers taking the image of ‘widowhood’ seriously, but asks, ‘If Zion is a widow, does this mean that her husband—Yhwh—is temporarily dead and rises from the dead when remarrying her?’, noting Steck’s (1989) vigorous refutation. To my mind, Abma does not take adequate account of the context of this metaphorical language: 54: 1–6 is concerned with Zion’s *self-perception*, not the abstract concept of a dying and rising deity.

To those who hear it, the summons, ‘Sing, O barren one,’ must have sounded extremely paradoxical. The word <sup>a</sup>*qārā* suggested expiry beyond recall. How could a barren woman be summoned to sing? This was both meaningless and pitiless. But these are the exact feelings of shock which Deutero-Isaiah wishes his metaphor to evoke, for he has something undreamt of and quite incredible to proclaim.<sup>81</sup>

It seems to me that this is the case throughout 54: 1–6, as YHWH strives once again to transform Zion’s self-perception. In her current predicament, Zion, perhaps unsurprisingly, sees herself as ‘barren,’ ‘childless,’ ‘widowed.’<sup>82</sup> Yet YHWH, God of transformations, is not restricted by such superficial reasoning, and insists that she is none of these things. The procession of sexual and marital metaphorical language in 54: 1–6 is not concerned with creating a consistent portrayal of Zion, as many presume. It is seeking to acknowledge Zion’s self-understanding and transform it.<sup>83</sup>

It is within this context of astonishing transformations that 54: 5 appears, as a concept as incomprehensible as the suggestion that barren Zion has children: ‘For your husband is your maker,| YHWH Sabaoth is his name!| And your redeemer is the Holy One of Israel,| God of the whole earth, he is called!’ So far, 54: 1–6 has concentrated on Zion’s transformation; now YHWH breaks into this vision of the future.<sup>84</sup> Few, however, recognize the

<sup>81</sup> Westermann (1969: 272). Cf. Childs (2001: 429): ‘The emphasis on the prophetic words falls on removing the shame, confusion and stigma of Zion by an act of divine intervention.’ Abma (1999: 85): ‘The text circles around a reversal of Zion’s fortunes.’

<sup>82</sup> Whybray (1975: 34–5): ‘To the exiles it must have seemed that Israel’s defeat by Babylon was due to the defeat of Yahweh by the Babylonian gods. Yahweh, whom Israel had regarded as its invincible protector, had been unable to withstand the attack of the Babylonians, and had so shown himself to be powerless before their gods.’ Whybray does not relate this to the ‘widowhood’ focus, however, continuing, ‘He was in fact discredited, and nothing more could be gained from serving him.’

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Brettler (1998), who calls attention to the phenomenon of what he calls ‘incompatible metaphors for YHWH in *Isaiah* 40–66’, listing ‘warrior, king, shepherd, master, father, husband and mother’ (p. 120). He explains: ‘These chapters offer this broad range of metaphors, sometimes using contradictory metaphors in single contexts, to reinforce one of the major themes of this prophetic composition: the incomparability of YHWH’ (p. 120). Dille (2004: 15, emphasis original) acknowledges, ‘not all the metaphorical language of Deutero-Isaiah can be forced into a single, consistent metaphor. Rather, there are multiple metaphors functioning here, inconsistent yet coherent metaphors, whose coherence is demonstrated by the agile interweaving of the separate strands into a single textual unity. By the interweaving of metaphors, *the text creates coherences* not previously evident.’ She goes on to suggest, however, that ‘the structuring metaphor of marriage that is clearly present in 50: 1–3 and in 54: 1–8 informs our reading of 49: 14’, arguing that the reference to YHWH as ‘Adonay’ ‘conveys, for Deutero-Isaiah, the meaning “husband”’ (p. 139). Childs (2001: 428, cf. p. 439) cautions, ‘the reader is not to look for any strict consistency within the variety of imagery.’ Given this, it is disappointing that he does not comment further on the ‘widowhood’ focus, simply speaking of ‘the abandoned wife, who bears *the shame and reproach* of widowhood’ (p. 439, emphasis mine).

<sup>84</sup> *Contra* Torrey (1928: 423–4), who draws on 54: 1–6 to suggest that *Isaiah* 34–66 is set later and in Palestine. He reflects: ‘This is one of the poems in which it is especially evident that no

element of surprise, nor comment on the rarity of ‘husband’ as a metaphorical focus.<sup>85</sup> Beuken shows some awareness, observing, ‘It would be illogical to point out to the woman who has just been called unmarried and widow (4) the unique qualities of her husband and kinsman.’<sup>86</sup> It seems to me, however, that this ‘illogicality’ is central to 54: 5 with its theme of transformations.<sup>87</sup> Abma notes, ‘The contrast between the close affinity to Zion implied in the former lines, and the sovereignty over heaven and earth in the latter, catches the eye and heightens the effect of the major statements that Yhwh will act as “marriage partner” and as “redeemer” for Zion (vs. 51 and 5c).’<sup>88</sup> She even remarks that ‘the verb “to marry” calls for special attention. ‘It is not a common idea that Yhwh will marry Israel.’<sup>89</sup> For Abma, however, the surprise lies in the idea that YHWH is *newly* marrying Zion; and she stresses the importance of reading בעליך as a present participle (‘the one marrying you’, rather than ‘your husband’). If we are to translate בעליך in this way, however, then we must similarly translate עשיר as ‘the one (newly) making you’, an unlikely suggestion given the prominence of YHWH as Creator from the beginning in *Isaiah* 40–55.

Abma and Beuken at least perceive the rarity of an explicit marital metaphor in the prophetic books. Such an awareness is unusual.<sup>90</sup> North restricts his observations to grammatical notes,<sup>91</sup> while Scullion simply writes: ‘The marriage relationship between Israel and her God apparently broken will be restored in full.’<sup>92</sup> The imagination of most is caught more by the language of ‘maker’ than ‘husband’. Knight writes, ‘imagine being married to Almighty God, the Creator of the stars—and having children of the union! The language of the biblical revelation is scandalous indeed.’<sup>93</sup> Oswalt rejoices, ‘Who is this

“prophet of the Babylonian exile” is writing. . . . These words would be a pitiful mockery if they were addressed to a city actually in ruins. On the contrary, it is plain from the poet’s language that Jerusalem is already enjoying a considerable measure of material well-being.’ This reading seems utterly to miss the point of the poetry.

<sup>85</sup> 54: 5 is particularly striking for its use of בעל (‘Baal’) for ‘husband’. This is almost certainly possible only because ‘Baal’ is no longer a threat by the time *Isaiah* 40–55 emerges. Cf. Wacker (1996: 247), Baumann (2003: 185). The plural participle form of בעליך is unexpected, but possibly agrees with אלהים, ‘God’. North (1964: 246) suggests that the alternative spelling aims partly to avoid strong anthropomorphism, partly to avoid association with Baal’.

<sup>86</sup> Beuken (1974: 43–4). He thus follows Köhler (1923: 158–66, esp. 64) to insist that ‘maker’ should be the subject of the first statement (‘Your maker is your husband’, rather than ‘Your husband is your maker’).

<sup>87</sup> Even Beuken (1974: 43–4) admits to an element of ‘surprise’ in 54: 5.

<sup>88</sup> Abma (1999: 99).

<sup>89</sup> Abma (1999: 99).

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Whybray (1975: 185), Baumann (2003: 189).

<sup>91</sup> North (1964).

<sup>92</sup> Scullion (1982: 125).

<sup>93</sup> Knight (1984: 183).

husband of hers? He is no ordinary person. He is the Maker of the whole earth. Having made her, he knows her intimately and has the affection that only a Creator could have for his creation. Beyond that, etc. . . .<sup>94</sup> Childs begins promisingly, ‘God is then described with a series of powerful names: Maker, husband, Redeemer, and Holy One of Israel’, but simply concludes: ‘The terms are all familiar from the earlier chapters, but call to mind the nature both of the savior and salvation that have been developed since chapter 40.’<sup>95</sup>

It seems that the tendency of traditional scholarship to find ‘the marriage metaphor’ everywhere has desensitized many to the potential impact of 54: 5. Thus, paradoxically, where a marriage metaphor finally appears, its significance is passed over. Indeed a principal concern seems to have been to locate this metaphorical language within the ‘story’ of the love relationship between YHWH and his wife.<sup>96</sup> Stienstra notes, ‘This is, once again, a passage that is best interpretable in the light of the marriage metaphor, as we have described it so far.’<sup>97</sup> Sawyer responds with words almost certainly influenced by a traditional reading of *Hosea* 1–3: ‘God is represented as behaving like a remorseful husband, pleading with his wife to trust him and take him back . . . He sets aside all hardness and pomposity, the frightening manifestations of his power . . . and comes to her on bended knee as it were, to plead with her to let bygones be bygones and start again.’<sup>98</sup> We might wonder which text he is reading! Certainly, it is difficult to reconcile Sawyer’s humble, ‘remorseful’ God with the God of transformations we see striding through *Isaiah* 40–55, intent on revolutionizing the self-perception and situation of Zion.

If 54: 1–6 has already tested traditional readings of sexual and marital metaphors, then the ordeal continues as the parade of metaphorical language strides on: ‘For like a woman forsaken,| And grieved in spirit, YHWH has called you.| Or the wife of one’s youth when she has been rejected’ (54: 6). Most understand אֵשֶׁת נְעוּרַיִם to refer to a first wife (cf. *Proverbs* 5: 18, *Malachi* 2: 14–15), but 54: 6 is nevertheless debated. On the one hand are those who understand 54: 6 to speak of divorce. Baltzer notes, “‘A forsaken woman”

<sup>94</sup> Oswalt (1998: 419).

<sup>95</sup> Childs (2001: 429).

<sup>96</sup> An alternative approach, which seems even more problematic is that of Baltzer (2001: 429–31), who speaks of ‘the scene of the “sacred marriage” in chap. 54’. Baltzer is aware that this reading leads to ‘difficulties and inherent tensions in the text’, but insists that these are ‘often productive and lead to a new understanding’ (p. 431), displaying a substitutionary drive to ‘translate’ the metaphorical language.

<sup>97</sup> Stienstra (1993: 173).

<sup>98</sup> Sawyer (1989: 95). Darr (1994: 181): ‘Whether our reader would have construed Yahweh’s words precisely as Sawyer understands them cannot be known, of course. But it is clear that this description of what Jerusalem has endured, and of what Yahweh desires beyond her punishment, cannot be discerned apart from the poem’s marriage metaphor; the two are one.’

(אשה עזובה) belongs terminologically to the divorce sector.<sup>99</sup> Stienstra asserts, ‘it has become clear from the context that YHWH has indeed divorced, or at least forsaken, His wife in the past. Note that Second Isaiah (as does Jeremiah) actually states that YHWH has divorced his wife.’<sup>100</sup> On the other hand are those who insist that no such divorce has taken place. North, Brettler, and Abma propose that the final line be understood as a rhetorical question: ‘Yet who can disown the bride of his youth?’<sup>101</sup> ‘But can a wife of one’s youth be cast off, says your God’;<sup>102</sup> ‘A wife of youth, would she be rejected?’<sup>103</sup> Box reads the statement as an emphatic negative (‘Yea, the wife of my youth shall not be rejected’),<sup>104</sup> while Knight insists, ‘as in 50: 1, he did not divorce her; yet he had to find some way of making her discover the blessedness of the married state.’<sup>105</sup> McKenzie illustrates the considerable influence of *Hosea* 1–3, ‘The thought of these verses echoes Hos ii 4–25. The prophet toys with the idea of divorce. Yahweh has abandoned Israel, but it is only a temporary separation. The prophet boldly represents Yahweh as yielding to a fit of anger.’<sup>106</sup>

The debate over whether YHWH has divorced Zion in 54: 4 strongly echoes the disputes surrounding 50: 1, to which we shall turn presently. For now, the significance of this discussion lies in the shared assumption that metaphorical language in 54: 1–6 must be understood within the framework of a love-story between YHWH and Zion, which seems to me unfounded.<sup>107</sup> Some even seek to read 54: 4 typologically, with the metaphorical language referring to particular periods in the biblical story.<sup>108</sup> As Abma insists, however, ‘The images in vs. 4 do not present a historical survey of events, but present with

<sup>99</sup> Baltzer (2001: 443). Baltzer betrays his assumptions: ‘A woman can be sent away for unfaithfulness. That was the mode of argument in *Hosea* and in *Ezekiel* 16 and 23.’

<sup>100</sup> Stienstra (1993: 174).

<sup>101</sup> North (1964: 66, 250).

<sup>102</sup> Brettler (1998: 113).

<sup>103</sup> Abma (1999: 85, cf. p. 88). Leupold (1977: 241).

<sup>104</sup> Box (1908: 277). Cf. Volz (1932).

<sup>105</sup> Knight (1984: 183): Cf. Blenkinsopp (2002: 363): ‘the prospect is for the reestablishment of a broken marital relationship (54: 6a) rather than a marriage (5a).’

<sup>106</sup> McKenzie (1968: 139). Cf. North (1964: 250). Oswalt (1998: 420): ‘Here we think automatically of the story of *Hosea* ...’

<sup>107</sup> *Contra* Baumann (2001: 107 n. 75): ‘Only in the context of the prophetic marriage metaphor can this passage be understood; otherwise these allusions do not make sense.’ Elsewhere, Baumann (2003: 190) finds in *Isaiah* a biography: ‘The development of the “woman” with her various concretions proceeds in the book of *Isaiah* like the course of a woman’s life in ancient Israel ... The third part of the book presents a third journey through this biography.’ Cf. Ackerman (1992: 167): ‘the primary imagery is not that of a wedding but rather of a marriage gone sour that now experiences reconciliation. Thus Jerusalem/Zion is described as a wife who was previously abandoned and left barren by her husband, Yahweh, but who is now reclaimed by a deity who promises untold progeny and everlasting love.’

<sup>108</sup> Mulenburgh (1956: 635), North (1964: 258), Whybray (1975: 185).

rhetorical force a complete reversal between the past and present plight of Zion.<sup>109</sup> To my mind, it seems vital to recognize that 54: 1–6 is not concerned with telling a story, but is instead caught up in this prophetic poetry’s daring reversal of Zion’s self-perceptions and theme of transformation. The debates over whether 54: 6 assumes a divorce between YHWH and Zion utterly disregard this revolutionary frame. In 54: 1–6 the reader is confronted with a procession of sexual and marital metaphors and similes, which join forces to drive home *Isaiah* 40–55’s persistent emphasis on YHWH’s transforming power. It is hardly surprising that this radical sequence is closely followed by magnificent proof of YHWH’s strength (cf. 54: 11–12).

*Isaiah* 49: 14–23 confronts us with another succession of metaphors and similes, and this time the foci range far beyond sexual and marital language.<sup>110</sup> Echoes reverberate between 54: 1–6 and 49: 14–23, where Zion is ‘forsaken,’ ‘barren,’ ‘childless,’<sup>111</sup> and YHWH similarly defies expectations to revolutionize her self-perception, vowing to leave ‘the land of your destruction’ even ‘too narrow for your inhabitants’ (49: 19).<sup>112</sup> The surprise and confusion anticipated of Zion in 49: 21 are poignant:<sup>113</sup> ‘Then you will say in your heart,| “Who bore these for me?| I am childless and barren,| A captive and turned aside,<sup>114</sup>| So who has raised these?| Behold, I was left alone,| Where

<sup>109</sup> Abma (1999: 92). Cf. Childs (2001: 429): ‘The renewed call for a response is then illustrated by two similes: a grieving wife who has been forsaken and a first wife once young who has been cast off for another. The desolation portrayed is clearly shaped by the misery of the exile, but there is no evidence that two different historical periods are being symbolized.’

<sup>110</sup> Oswalt (1998: 301) similarly understands 43: 14–23 as a unit. Baumann (2001: 105) notes, ‘This is not the marriage metaphor in a strict sense because there is no mention of a husband.’

<sup>111</sup> McKenzie (1968: 113) surprisingly understands this passage to speak of Zion’s ‘widowhood’ (perhaps due to the influence of LXX which renders ‘barren,’ גלמודה, as ‘widow,’ χήρα, while he ignores the allusion in 54: 1–6. Cf. Kissane (1943: 133). Young (1972: 288): ‘Zion regarded herself as a widow; as a matter of fact, her Husband, the Lord, had not forsaken or forgotten her.’ While the ‘widowhood’ focus is not explicit in this passage, as Zion’s bereavement more obviously refers to her children (Whybray 1975: 145), the willingness to perceive such metaphorical language is striking, even if it is interpreted broadly.

<sup>112</sup> Jeppesen (1993: 112): ‘By playing upon the mother–child imagery Yahweh repudiates her lament.’ Dille (2004: 143): ‘Not only does YHWH remember Zion, but he will reverse her own forgetful state and restore her children.’ Van der Woude (2004: 110): ‘This entire passage has one goal: to convince Zion that the LORD has compassion on her.’ Willey (1997: 203–4) calls attention to the resonances between *Isaiah* 49 and *Jeremiah* 13: ‘In all these cases, imagery that was used to communicate devastation is here reversed to sum up restoration’ (p. 203).

<sup>113</sup> Linafelt (1997: 354–6) understands *Isa* 49: 14–26 as a ‘direct answer’ to *Lamentations*, particularly those passages speaking of the death of children (1: 11, 16; 2: 11, 18–19, 20–2): ‘Zion can only repeat to herself in stunned amazement, “Who bore these for me...” ...for the children were truly “dead” to Zion. ... This accounts for Zion’s stunned disbelief at the news of their return; such a thing is unimaginable’ (pp. 355–6).

<sup>114</sup> LXX omits this phrase, and some delete it on metrical grounds, but the broken rhythm may be emphatic. Cf. Oswalt (1998: 302).

were these?"<sup>115</sup> Resonances of 54: 1–6 can perhaps also be perceived in 49: 18's bridal simile: 'Lift up your eyes all around and see;| All of them have gathered and come to you!| As I live, says YHWH,| You shall put all of them on like an ornament,| And you shall bind them on like the bride!'<sup>116</sup> Here, however, there is no explicit suggestion that YHWH is Zion's husband.<sup>117</sup> *Isaiah* 49: 18 is far more mysterious than this, with the spotlight on her 'ornamental' children.<sup>118</sup> Perhaps the most striking image of 49: 14–23, however, appears in the rhetorical questions, 'Can a woman forget her breast-feeding baby;| Have no compassion on the child of her womb?' (49: 15).<sup>119</sup> Given the female personification, we might expect this tender portrayal to speak of Zion. Yet astonishingly the verse continues, 'Even if these should forget,| I will not forget you.'<sup>120</sup> The poetry stops short of directly portraying YHWH as a breast-feeding or pregnant mother, with the distinction between 'these' and 'I' insisting that YHWH is even more compassionate. Nevertheless, it comes startlingly close.<sup>121</sup> *Isaiah* 49: 15 is neither a sexual nor

<sup>115</sup> Dille (2004: 144) compares *Isa* 23: 4.

<sup>116</sup> Some read 'builders' for בנייה in 49: 17 with the Versions, instead of MT's 'children' (cf. 54: 13, 62: 5): Kissane (1943: 132), RSV, NRSV. We will retain MT due to the prominence of children elsewhere in this context (49: 20–1). Cf. Baltzer (2001: 324), North (1964: 193, 195). Whybray (1975: 144) suggests a deliberate word-play; Dille (2004: 142 n. 52) speaks of a 'poetic undertone', while Oswalt (1998: 307) refers to Zion's 'builder-sons'.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Baumann (2001: 103): 'In vv. 17–18, the metaphorical speech of marriage is not easy to recognize.' Still she insists: 'The connection between land or city on the one hand and wife on the other hand can be found in most of the prophetic marriage metaphor's texts.'

<sup>118</sup> Dille (2004: 142): 'The focus is on the children (the people), not on the physical city.' *Contra* Watts (1987: 189), whose focus remains YHWH and Zion's marriage: 'She is shown to be Yahweh's beloved wife, no longer abandoned, in that she has borne so many children.'

<sup>119</sup> מרחם ('have no compassion') is awkward. Whybray (1975: 143–4) proposes 'a loving mother' in parallel with אשה ('woman'), noting that 'these' suggests more than one subject. Most, however, follow LXX to read 'not to take pity' or 'to have no compassion'. Cf. Blenkinsopp (2002: 308), Kissane (1943: 132). Either way, the language is unexpected. Sommer (1998: 37) believes that *Isaiah* 40–55 is drawing on *Jer* 2: 32: 'the later prophet repeatedly uses these words and images to encourage where the earlier one had chastised' (p. 38).

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Van der Woude (2004: 110–11): 'The LORD is personally involved in this project. . . . This pericope is impressive, for it clarifies that it is not just an unidentifiable group that is going to comfort Zion, but the LORD himself. *He* is her personal guarantor.'

<sup>121</sup> Schmitt (1985) believes that YHWH is portrayed as mother here and in *Isa* 42: 14, 45: 10, and 66: 13. Dille (2004: 129) suggests: 'Verses 14–15 are one of the few texts in the Hebrew Bible where God is imaged as a mother,' although later she qualifies: 'But YHWH is not so much equated with a mother as shown to be more compassionate than a mother' (p. 149); 'YHWH is either the model mother or something better than a mother' (p. 176). Ackerman (1992: 167) insists, 'As profound as the love of a human mother is for her child, Yahweh the divine mother transcends even this in Yahweh's love for the city.' Berges (2001: 68) reflects, 'It is interesting to see that in the response of YHWH (*Isa*. 49: 15) the female image—now as mother—is applied to himself. The personification of Zion as a woman is so strong that God is presented in a female image.' Baumann (2001: 114) stresses that 'no other book in the Old Testament comes closer to female imagery of YHWH than Second *Isaiah* does'. For further allusions to YHWH as (or more than) mother in *Isa* 49: 15, see Brettler (1998: 116), Linafelt (1997: 355), McKenzie (1968: 113), Roberts (2003: 58, 60), Van der Woude (2004: 110).

a marital metaphor, but it presents a forceful challenge to traditional characterizations of ‘the marriage metaphor’, if YHWH is to be so closely associated with nursing women.<sup>122</sup>

In 47: 1–15 Babylon takes centre stage, and so we encounter the only negative sexual metaphors of *Isaiah* 40–55.<sup>123</sup> For this prophetic poetry is concerned not only with Zion’s predicament, but also with the future of her nemesis, ‘virgin daughter Babylon’.<sup>124</sup> In 47: 1–2 the (sarcastically characterized) ‘delicate and dainty’ Babylon is thus ordered to ‘sit in the dust’: ‘Take millstones and grind meal! Remove your veil,<sup>125</sup> Strip off your skirt, uncover your legs! Pass through rivers!’ The ‘virgin’ is threatened with a terrible transformation. as YHWH threatens, ‘Your nakedness will be uncovered,| Indeed your shame will be seen!’ (47: 3). It is difficult to see how Galambush can comment that ‘Queen Babylon’s sexual integrity is never impugned’.<sup>126</sup> Certainly Baltzer comments, ‘The sexual connotation of the verb “expose” (גלה, v. 2), which has already been used twice, is now plain’;<sup>127</sup> while Franzmann takes care to name the terrifying experience: ‘[U]ndressing for the purpose of slave-work changes abruptly to stripping for the purpose of uncovering her nakedness and exposing her shame, that is, stripping as prelude to rape.’<sup>128</sup>

Just as *Isaiah* 40–55 is concerned with Zion’s self-perception, it seems that this poetry is also concerned with the self-perception of ‘Virgin Babylon’. Yet while Zion’s self-esteem is misguidedly low, that of her nemesis—at least according to the text—is unwarrantedly high.<sup>129</sup> She boasts, ‘I will be Gebirah for ever’ (47: 7),<sup>130</sup> ‘I am and no one else!’ (47: 8, 47: 10), in words that

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Baumann (2003: 180–1): ‘YHWH, on the other hand, is not only [Jerusalem’s] husband, but also treats her as if he were her mother.’

<sup>123</sup> Baumann (2003: 192) insists: ‘In contrast to other allusions to metaphors of sexual violence, here the context of marriage is abandoned because the proclamation of sexual violence is against a foreign power.’ We might note that the marital imagery is not as prominent as she suggests elsewhere either.

<sup>124</sup> Jeppesen (1993: 114) observes that ‘Zion is a kind of counterpart of Babylon’. Franzmann (1995) provides a detailed reading of *Isaiah* 47, arguing that the image of Babylon as ‘woman’ is developed ‘into the realms of psychology, social roles and personal identity’, like the image of Zion (p. 3). His suggestion (p. 16) that this poetry may present a ‘certain predetermined format for understanding the totality of a woman’s life by the shorthand reference to three life-stages’ (virgin-daughter, wife/mother, childless widow) seems entirely unnecessary, however. He himself admits that in *Isaiah* 47 the terms ‘are not discrete’ (p. 16).

<sup>125</sup> IQIsa<sup>a</sup> replaces ‘veil’ with ‘skirts’, increasing the violence of the imagery.

<sup>126</sup> Galambush (1992: 43).

<sup>127</sup> Baltzer (2001: 270). Cf. Scullion (1982: 86).

<sup>128</sup> Franzmann (1995: 12). Cf. my discussion concerning the use of the language of ‘rape’ in translations at the close of Ch. 2.

<sup>129</sup> Westermann (1969: 191): ‘It is Babylon’s attitude of arrogant self-assurance that is the real object of the divine chastisement.’

<sup>130</sup> גבירה (*Gebirah*) is often translated as ‘Queen’, or ‘Mistress’, but these renderings do not convey adequately the royal and religious supremacy bound up in the title. *Gebirah* seems to

dangerously echo YHWH's repeated assertion, 'I am YHWH and there is no one besides me' (45: 5, 6, 18).<sup>131</sup> Indeed, in stark contrast to the defeatist Zion, Babylon self-confidently assumes: 'I will not dwell a widow;| And I will not know childlessness!' (47: 8). In the familiar transformations of *Isaiah* 40–55, however, YHWH soon demolishes this high self-esteem, with a certain degree of relish:<sup>132</sup> 'Both these things shall come upon you| In an instant, in one day;| Childlessness and widowhood, their entirety| Shall come upon you,| With the abundance of your sorceries| And the great might of your enchantments!' (47: 9).

*Isaiah* 47: 9's 'widow' language attracts similar responses to the 'widowhood' focus of 54: 4. Young asks, 'In what sense may Babylon be said to have become a widow? The term would imply the loss of what was essential to her position as mistress of the nations. . . . She who sits secure as mistress of the nations, and is confident in her boasting will be so degraded and fall so far that she may be compared to the married woman who has lost her husband and must live as a widow.'<sup>133</sup> Whybray notes, 'The point is that widowhood and loss of children were the two greatest calamities which would happen to a woman in the ancient Near East, especially if they happened together.'<sup>134</sup> As with 54: 4, however, it is perhaps worth taking the metaphorical language seriously.<sup>135</sup> The poetry does not clarify who must 'die' for Babylon to be 'widowed', but those who perceive 'widowhood' to speak of 'divorce' are confronted with the same problem.<sup>136</sup> Contenders could be Marduk, several gods, or even the 'sorceries' and 'enchantments' of which 47: 9 speaks. This is simply not the concern of this poetry, however, as the spotlight remains firmly on the devastating implications of this 'widowhood' for the 'Virgin', with no mercy

have been some kind of political, or cultic office. Ackerman (1993), Andraesen (1983), Brenner (1985: 18–32), and Durand (1991) provide discussions of the גְּבִירָה in biblical texts.

<sup>131</sup> Baltzer (2001: 274–5): 'At the heart of the indictment is "Babylon"'s claim to be divine. The assertion that she is eternal is part of this. . . . The predicate "eternal" belongs to God alone. "Babylon" should remember this with heart and head.' Cf. Oswalt (1998: 245). Franzmann (1995: 11): 'she has failed to recognize that she is an agent of Yahweh.'

<sup>132</sup> Oswalt (1998: 241): 'The language of the poem is harsh, almost brutal. Babylon has lorded it over the world as though it were somehow her right, but now she must come face to face with reality.'

<sup>133</sup> Young (1972: 238). Cf. C. Cohen (1973: 79): 'Here it is clear that dwelling as an *'almānāh* is the opposite of dwelling securely (*lābēṭāh*). . . . She who once had many vassals will herself be a vassal.' Kissane (1943: 103) understands Babylon's 'widowhood' as 'destruction'.

<sup>134</sup> Whybray (1975: 122). Cf. Westermann (1969: 192), Oswalt (1998: 248): 'Having imaged Babylon as a woman, Isaiah is simply being consistent with the image, choosing the worst things that could happen to a woman in the ancient Near East to convey the character of Babylon's coming loss.' In response to such comments, Franzmann (1995: 15) observes, 'One wonders whether they have forgotten the rape of the woman.'

<sup>135</sup> Franzmann (1995: 15) is unusually willing to consider that 'Babylon's husband and children will be killed', understanding her 'widowhood' to convey 'extreme loss and desolation'.

<sup>136</sup> Baltzer (2001: 276) suggests: 'In a polytheistic environment, "widowhood" means that a city's tutelary deity has left the goddess representing the city.'

or compassion encouraged. *Isaiah* 47: 9 forcefully promises that the very things from which Zion is rescued in 54: 1–6 and 49: 14–26 will befall her nemesis.<sup>137</sup> The God who has power to raise valleys and level mountains, will raise and level the self-perceptions of Zion and Babylon. We might even say that he will secure a role reversal.<sup>138</sup>

While 47: 1–15 is almost certainly designed to bring hope and comfort to the reader as well as to Zion, these words nevertheless create acute problems for current readers. Even if YHWH's aggression is directed at an enemy, the passage reinforces negative stereotypes of female sexuality, condoning sexual violence against women. While this prophetic poetry redeems one female, it punishes another in the same, brutal way.<sup>139</sup> Baumann insists, 'YHWH as "a warrior-rapist" is a very frightening image of God, and by no means more positive than YHWH as a battering and raping husband.'<sup>140</sup> The command for Babylon to 'sit in silence and go in darkness' is chilling for its echoes not only of the silence of the female elsewhere in the prophetic texts, but also with the responses of flesh-and-blood women to such violence.<sup>141</sup> Things are rarely as they seem as far as *Isaiah* 40–55's sexual and marital metaphorical language is concerned; and this unfortunately extends to the poetry's apparently positive treatment of women. This is a regrettable and troubling outburst in the otherwise affirmative and redeeming text. It seems that *Isaiah* 40–55 is determined to confound all assumptions and expectations.

And so we come to what is perhaps the most well known of all *Isaiah* 40–55's sexual and marital metaphorical language in 50: 1: 'Where is this certificate of

<sup>137</sup> Willey (1997) also stresses the echoes between *Isa* 47: 1–7 and *Lamentations*: 'Daughter Babylon's humiliation is imagined point for point as Jerusalem's was in *Lamentations*' (p. 167).

<sup>138</sup> Whybray (1975: 164): 'Queen and slave-girl are to exchange roles.' Baltzer (2001: 270): 'Babylon is experiencing what Israel experienced with the exile. . . . Its message is the reversal of values: the mistress becomes the slave.' Biddle (1996: esp. 129–33) highlights the parallels, concluding, 'In sum, the Babylon portrayed in *Isaiah* 47 is the polar opposite of the Jerusalem depicted in *Isaiah* 49: 51–52; and 54 in a number of ways. Her haughtiness contrasts with Zion's humility, her bleak future with Zion's glory, her momentary dominance with Zion's lasting covenant relationship with Yahweh.' Cf. Dille (2004: 143): 'These modes of reversal and contrast are utilized throughout the Zion songs of Deutero-*Isaiah*: the desolate places become too crowded, the oppressors will be oppressed, the accusers will be accused, the wilderness will be like Eden (51: 3), the scattered will be gathered, the widow will be married (54: 5), the barren woman will have many children (54: 1).' For Willey (1997: 171), the 'reversal of roles with Babylon that was initiated in *Isaiah* 47' is completed when Zion is raised up in 52: 1–2.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Baumann (2003: 186, 194): 'At the expense of another guilty "woman" the prophetic text can here develop a positive image of Jerusalem as YHWH's "wife"; 'the past suffering of the one stands in the scales against the predicted suffering of another.'

<sup>140</sup> Baumann (2001: 101). Cf. Baumann (2003: 195): 'It is true that the concrete act of violence is expressed in passive form . . . but in v. 3b YHWH is clearly the initiator of the act.' Franzmann (1995: 13): 'What is most shocking in this case is that Yahweh appears to be the one who acts. Yahweh the warrior-rapist takes inexorable vengeance against Babylon.'

<sup>141</sup> Cf. E. Seifert (1997: 298).

your mother's divorce| With which I sent her away?| And who are my creditors to whom I sold you?| Behold, because of your guilt you were sold,| And because of your rebellion I sent your mother away!' There is some debate over whether 50: 1's questions should be considered as genuine or rhetorical. Westermann and Stienstra perceive two genuine questions, assuming that a divorce has taken place. On the one hand, Westermann is motivated by form-critical interests and his perception of 50: 1 as a trial speech:

Verse 1c gives rejoinder to the charge. This does not dispute the fact of repudiation. Since this is a legal process, the point at issue is whether the accused action's was justified. And this is what the rejoinder avers: I was so obliged to act—because of Israel's transgression . . . This shows that, contrary to the opinion of many recent editors, the repudiation of the mother and the selling of the children signifies Israel's destruction as a nation.<sup>142</sup>

Our discussion of *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 has demonstrated that alleged 'lawsuit' speeches need not necessarily preclude rhetorical questions, however, even according to many form-critics.<sup>143</sup> It has also starkly highlighted the limits of such a search for trial settings.<sup>144</sup> Stienstra's belief that 50: 1's questions are genuine stems from the observation that a rhetorical question 'seems untenable in the light of verse 2 ("your mother was put away for your trespasses").<sup>145</sup> Many, however, would agree that YHWH's explanation in 50: 2 does not admit to a 'divorce' in these words, but instead insists that Israel's mother was sent away due to her 'rebellion' *rather than* because she was 'divorced'.

For most readers, then, 50: 1's questions are rhetorical. Abma writes:

The point of the question is then to emphasize that such a letter of divorce does not exist. Arguments in support of this position are the parallelism with the second question in vs. 1de, which points to another nonexisting reality ('creditors') and the internal logic of vv. 1–2 in which Yhwh seems to seek rapprochement to Israel rather than to underline the definiteness of the present alienation.<sup>146</sup>

Knight asserts: 'What God is saying here to Zion's children—in the plural—is this: "I didn't divorce your mother (when I sent Zion into exile) and the proof of that is that she can show no certificate to that effect"',<sup>147</sup> while Blenkinsopp

<sup>142</sup> Westermann (1969: 224).

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Holladay (1986: 73): 'Rhetorical questions directed to the defendant were part of ordinary rhetoric in legal procedure (Judg 8: 2; 11: 12, 24–25) and may have been characteristic of a "pre-trial encounter".'

<sup>144</sup> Abma (1999: 67): 'The problem with the label "trial speech" is that it is too monolithic and leaves no room for the possibility that the questions in vs.1 may constitute a word of salvation as well.'

<sup>145</sup> Stienstra (1993: 171).

<sup>146</sup> Abma (1999: 72). Yet she curiously goes on to say that divorce is not officially denied in 50: 1, confusing the issue. Cf. Baumann (2003: 183).

<sup>147</sup> Knight (1984: 143). Cf. K. M. O'Connor (1999a: 289): 'YHWH implies that the divorce is no longer in force or never took place. Their mother did not cause their suffering, they did.'

insists, ‘The point is not that the separation is only temporary because no bill of divorce was handed over (as in Whybray 1975, 148–9), but, rather, that the accusation is simply false.’<sup>148</sup> In the light of our wider exploration of *Isaiah* 40–55, we will join this majority.<sup>149</sup> As with metaphor, there is no grammatical feature to prove a question to be rhetorical.<sup>150</sup> However, the repeated use of rhetorical questions throughout this prophetic poetry strongly suggests that in 50: 1 we encounter this characteristic device once again.

Indeed, if we read 50: 1 in this way, the verse strongly reflects *Isaiah* 40–55’s pervasive theme of transformation, and a radical reversal of Zion’s self-perception as YHWH demands Zion’s divorce certificate, thereby directly confronting her self-understanding as a divorcée. We might even say we have a further example of *Isaiah* 40–55’s tendency to allow YHWH to answer his own rhetorical questions.<sup>151</sup> For, while his answer is not direct, in 50: 1 YHWH nevertheless presents Zion with an alternative perspective on the horrors she has suffered: it was not divorce that led to her estrangement, but rebellion and guilt.<sup>152</sup> We could even say that the debates over the existence of 50: 1’s certificate of divorce are a consequence of the radical response demanded by the question, as once again YHWH seeks to defy expectations, turning Zion’s world upside down. Such a revolutionary re-working of reality calls for a subsequent demonstration of YHWH’s power, summoning a further phalanx of rhetorical questions (50: 2–3).<sup>153</sup>

*Isaiah* 40–55 exposes the reader to a startling array of sexual and marital metaphors and similes, wrestling to reorient Zion’s perspective, while also posing a significant challenge to traditional scholarship. If *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 and *Hosea* 4–14 break the mould of ‘the marriage metaphor’, we could say that *Isaiah* 40–55 shatters it. The force of *Isaiah* 40–55 is such that many recognize that traditional assumptions cannot be sustained. Childs insists, ‘The reader is

Berges (2001: 69): ‘God fiercely contests their charges that he divorced their mother and sold them into debt slavery.’

<sup>148</sup> Blenkinsopp (2002: 315), Whybray (1975: 148), North (1964: 19, 198), Baltzer (2001: 333–4), and Kissane (1943: 139) argue Zion and YHWH were separated, not formally divorced. Baumann (2001: 105) joins Willey (1997: 202) and Darr (1994: 66, 176) to argue that Zion is estranged from YHWH but not divorced. Torrey (1928: 390): ‘it is important to notice that everything turns on the distinction between a “divorce” or “sale” that is irrevocable, and one that can be recalled. Zion was given no formal writing of divorce; she can therefore be taken back.’

<sup>149</sup> Cf. McKenzie (1968: 112), Watts (1987: 192), Leupold (1977: 189), von Rad (1965: 250), Young (1972: 295), Dille (2004: 153, 162).

<sup>150</sup> See earlier discussion of *Jer* 3: 1 in Ch. 2.

<sup>151</sup> Watts (1987: 192).

<sup>152</sup> Childs (2001: 393).

<sup>153</sup> Cf. Abma (1999: 77). In contrast, Baltzer (2001: 335) is confused to find these words following 50: 1: ‘Many commentators find themselves at a loss with the beginning of v. 2.’

not to look for any strict consistency within the variety of imagery;<sup>154</sup> Baumann notes, ‘the marriage imagery in the book of Isaiah appears not to be as homogeneous as in the other prophets.’<sup>155</sup> Even Stienstra, so fully committed to ‘the marriage metaphor’, is forced finally to concede that ‘Second Isaiah does not usually apply the marriage metaphor in a coherent, consistent way’ in the face of this prophetic poetry’s radical and revolutionary metaphorical language.<sup>156</sup>

### SEXUAL AND MARITAL METAPHORICAL LANGUAGE IN *ISAIAH* 56–66

The distinctive theme pervading *Isaiah* 40–55 lies in stark contrast to the diverse character of *Isaiah* 56–66, leading many to understand these chapters as a composite collection of reflections.<sup>157</sup> As with *Isaiah* 1–39, an exploration of the wider frame of this poetry seems inappropriate, and so we will move immediately to a consideration of 57: 3–10 and 62: 1–5, where sexual and marital metaphorical language features in such different ways.<sup>158</sup> If *Isaiah* 56–66 is distinct from 40–55 for its diversity, it is vital to recognize its strong similarities to the poetry by which it has been inspired. Zion’s female personification continues to be prominent, and even the theme of transformation reappears in 62: 1–5, as we shall see. Thus this exploration reflects wider scholarship, which similarly witnesses to a tension between the differences between these bodies of poetry and the strong sense of continuity between them.<sup>159</sup>

While *Isaiah* 56–66 is generally well preserved, 57: 3–10 unfortunately competes for one of its most textually corrupt passages.<sup>160</sup> The reader is confronted with an acute problem in the very first verse. MT of 57: 3 reads something like: ‘And you (m.pl.), draw near,| Children of a sorceress,| Seed of an adulterer! And she prostitutes (f.sg.) [or] and you prostitute (m.sg.)

<sup>154</sup> Childs (2001: 428).

<sup>155</sup> Baumann (2003: 177). We might question whether ‘the marriage imagery’ might even be ‘homogeneous’ elsewhere.

<sup>156</sup> Stienstra (1993: 171).

<sup>157</sup> Emmerson (1992: 12), Whybray (1975: 42), Weiser (1961: 207), Hanson (1975: 32–208, esp. 41), Achtemeier (1982).

<sup>158</sup> Galambush (1992: 59) confines any observations on *Isaiah* 56–66 to a footnote, a fate to which these chapters are often consigned.

<sup>159</sup> Brettler (1998: 99): ‘despite the multiplicity of voices heard in chs. 40–66, these chapters are closer to each other in many ways, including the use of figurative language for YHWH, than to most of chs. 1–39.’ Biddle (1996: 126) calls attention to the ‘focus upon feminine personifications of cities’ in *Isaiah* 47–66.

<sup>160</sup> Here I take 57: 3–10 to be a distinct unit, although clearly related to other areas around it. Cf. Hanson (1975: 187).

(רתונה).<sup>161</sup> *רתונה* is clearly difficult, and most emend the text.<sup>161</sup> Many follow the Versions (LXX, Vulgate, Syriac, Symmachus) to change the verb to the noun *ונה*. The RSV and many commentaries read something like ‘You children of a sorceress, You offspring of an adulterer and a whore.’<sup>162</sup> Childs further alters the text to read plural nouns: ‘You sons of a sorceress, you offspring of adulterers and harlots.’<sup>163</sup> Some even wish to emend the masculine *מנאף*, ‘adulterer’, to the feminine, ‘adulteress’, so that the three nouns, ‘sorceress’, ‘adulteress’, and ‘harlot’, can speak of the same female.<sup>164</sup> Others retain a verb but follow 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> to emend MT to a third person plural form. Watts proposes, ‘But as for you (masc pl), come near, you sons of a witch, seed of an adulterer, and commit fornication.’<sup>165</sup> It seems that there is little agreement over 57: 3, other than that MT’s *רתונה* is almost certainly corrupt. Thus, while I generally hesitate to interfere with texts at such a close level, there seems little choice in this instance, especially as the word in question is of prime importance to this study and cannot simply be overlooked.

If we must disrupt 57: 3, however, my instinct is not to emend *רתונה*, but rather to consider it as a gloss on *מנאף*, ‘adulterer’. McKenzie notes that ‘it is rare in prophetic literature that so many abusive epithets are found in a single line.’<sup>166</sup> Perhaps more importantly, if we temporarily disregard the controversial word, then ‘children of a sorceress’ and ‘seed of an adulterer’ lie in parallel, reflecting the parallelism of the last two lines of 57: 4.

And you, come here,  
*Children of a sorceress,*  
*Seed of an adulterer!* [...]
   
Whom do you mock?  
 Against whom do you open your mouth  
 And stick out your tongue?  
*Are you not children of rebellion,*  
*Seed of deceit?*

(57: 3–4)

<sup>161</sup> Oswalt (1998: 472) unusually maintains ‘seed of an adulterer and (one who) has prostituted herself’, commenting, ‘The sequence of a noun in construct (“seed”) and a finite verb is unusual but not impossible.’ Cf. Scullion (1972: 110), who argues that MT’s *רתונה* is a participle, or a relative clause without the relative *אשר*. These suggestions, however, are unlikely. Even Oswalt later emends the difficult phrase to write, ‘Their mother is a sorceress, or witch *and a prostitute*, and their father is an adulterer’ (p. 476, emphasis mine). If ‘one (who has) prostituted herself’ describes the mother, as Oswalt suggests, then 57: 3 becomes even more curious, with the description of the father awkwardly interrupting two descriptions of the mother.

<sup>162</sup> McKenzie (1968: 156), Kissane (1943: 217), Leupold (1977: 273), Hanson (1975: 188), Baumann (2003: 186).

<sup>163</sup> Childs (2001: 460).

<sup>164</sup> Ackerman (1992: 164). This reading from *The Women’s Bible Commentary* ironically makes the text more problematic from a feminist perspective.

<sup>165</sup> Watts (1987: 252–3). Cf. Pope (1977: 580).

<sup>166</sup> McKenzie (1968: 157).

We might speculate that the popular accusation of ‘prostitution’ has been added to 57: 3–10 as an explanatory gloss on the rare ‘adultery’ focus. Yet, paradoxically, even rarer is the resulting dual appearance of the foci, ‘prostitution’ and ‘adultery’, which are not as synonymous in the prophetic texts as many assume.<sup>167</sup> In our discussion of *Jeremiah* 3: 6–11 in Chapter 2, we mentioned that the ‘adultery’ focus appears twice in *Ezekiel* 23: 36–49 in the context of child sacrifice (23: 37, 45). Intriguingly, this is also its context here, as YHWH rails in 57: 5, ‘You slaughter your children in the wadi-valleys, under the clefts of cliffs!’ We might say that in both *Ezekiel* 23: 36–45 and *Isaiah* 57: 3–10, ‘adultery’ and child sacrifice are somehow bound up together, bringing associations of the practice to the focus. While metaphorical associations are not always explicable, we have seen that they are perhaps not entirely unexpected in this instance, given the threat that both adultery and child sacrifice pose to the continuation of the male bloodline (at least from this particular Yahwistic perspective).

If traditional scholarship has remained unaware of the repeated appearance of the ‘adultery’ focus within the context of child sacrifice, it is perhaps because attention has been lured away by the possibilities of sexual innuendo in 57: 3–10, as scholars seek to read the passage in terms of ‘fertility rites’. We might even say that they have artificially created innuendoes in some instances in their desire to find references to ‘cultic prostitution’. In 57: 5, הַנְּחָמִים is regularly translated ‘you who burn with lust’, despite חָמָם elsewhere simply meaning ‘to grow hot’.<sup>168</sup> McKenzie reads, ‘You who are inflamed with passion under great trees and under every spreading leafy tree’,<sup>169</sup> while Kissane suggests, ‘Ye that lust among the terebinths’.<sup>170</sup> As Stavrakopoulou observes,

this is to overload the expression with a sexual connotation which is not inherent in the Hebrew terminology. The majority of commentators derive הַנְּחָמִים from חָמָם, which is employed to describe the heat of animal conception in Gen. 30: 38–39. However, in all other biblical occurrences, חָמָם is used in the context of being or becoming warm or hot by means of fire, natural heat, or clothing. Its assumed connotation of lust is unattested elsewhere.<sup>171</sup>

<sup>167</sup> *Contra* Abma (1999: 206). Other exceptions are *Hos* 2: 4 and 3: 1 (to which we will turn in the final chapter) and the dormant *Jer* 3:9.

<sup>168</sup> Cf. BDB 328. Cf. *Ex* 16: 21; *1 Kings* 1: 2; *Eccl* 4: 11; *Isa* 44: 15–16, 47: 14; *Job* 31: 20; etc.

<sup>169</sup> McKenzie (1968: 156). Cf. RSV, Westermann (1969: 321), Oswalt (1998: 472). Leupold (1977: 273) reads אֱלִים as ‘gods’ rather than ‘oaks/terebinths’: ‘You who burn with lust over the idols.’ Cf. Watts (1987: 252, 258). J. E. Taylor (1995: 40) suggests a deliberate word-play: ‘To the Hebrew ear, it was precisely as if the great trees were called “gods”’.

<sup>170</sup> Kissane (1943: 218). *HALOT* i. 328 suggests ‘to be warm’ or ‘to grow warm’ for חָמָם more generally, but in *Isa* 57: 5, due to the Niphal, and perhaps more significantly the influence of *Jer* 2: 23, it proposes ‘on heat, ruttish... (cult-prostitution)’. *DCH* iii. 255–6 suggests ‘be or become warm, be or become hot, warm oneself’. For the Niphal form in *Isa* 57: 5 it suggests ‘inflare oneself’ with the ‘wicked’ as the subject (p. 256).

<sup>171</sup> Stavrakopoulou (2004: 174–5).

Given the thrust of **הנחמים** elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, it seems that 57: 5 should be translated something like, ‘You who warm yourselves among the terebinths,| Beneath every green tree,| Who slaughter your children in the wadi-valleys,| Under the clefts of cliffs!’<sup>172</sup> There are no obvious sexual associations here at all: indeed, 57: 5 seems far more concerned with the practice of child sacrifice. Stavrakopoulou suggests, ‘the poet is describing a scene in which worshippers are gathered around or near a fire. That this fire may be a sacrificial pyre is suggested by the second half of the verse, which accuses the people of slaughtering the children in the wadis, under the clefts of the rocks, and the allusions to the *mlk* practice.’<sup>173</sup> We could even imagine this poetry indicting the people for callously seeking to warm themselves by the means of their own children’s deaths. *Isaiah* 57: 5’s language is elusive, but there seems little justification for the repeated allusions to ‘lust’ and ‘passion’ that we find within commentaries. These explicitly suggestive translations are perhaps stimulated by following references to ‘luxuriant trees’ (57: 5) and ‘high hills’ (57: 7), reminiscent of *Jeremiah’s* use of the motifs in sexually loaded contexts (2: 20, 3: 6, 3: 13, etc.).<sup>174</sup> However, these trees and hills also appear in contexts with no hint of sexual associations, perhaps most significantly, in the context of child sacrifice in 2 *Kings* 16:4.<sup>175</sup> To my mind, 57: 5 is not concerned with ‘lust’ at all, but with the sacrifice of children.

The suggestive readings of **הנחמים**, however, set the tone for many translations of 57: 3–10, with sexual innuendoes reverberating through commentaries, particularly with the entrance of the female Jerusalem in 57: 6. The reference in 57: 7–8 to Jerusalem’s ‘bed’ (**משכב**) has perhaps unsurprisingly provoked considerable interest. Muilenburg writes, ‘The practices of the immoral sex cult are quite clearly in the mind of the writer,’<sup>176</sup> while McKenzie suggests, ‘The allusion to the fertility couch resembles Jer ii 20.’<sup>177</sup> Hanson believes that **משכב** speaks of the Temple, ‘which they have built to a gigantic bed of prostitution, a brothel upon Mt. Zion,’<sup>178</sup> while Oswalt stresses: ‘[The prophet] returns now to the imagery of prostitution. . . . The heavily sexual orientation of the Canaanite religion meant that ritual prostitution was a

<sup>172</sup> Some may prefer a passive translation of the Niphal: ‘You who are warmed among the terebinths. . . .’

<sup>173</sup> Stavrakopoulou (2004: 259).

<sup>174</sup> Leupold (1977: 275): ‘Setting up the bed in these places implies preparation for the practice of the rites of the fertility-cult.’ McKenzie (1968: 157): ‘The verse alludes to the fertility rites conducted on the high places, using terms found elsewhere.’ Oswalt (1998: 476–7).

<sup>175</sup> Cf. 2 *Kings* 17: 10; 2 *Chr* 28: 4; *Ezek* 6: 13, 20: 28.

<sup>176</sup> Muilenburg (1956: 666).

<sup>177</sup> McKenzie (1968: 158). Frymer-Kensky (1992a: 264 n. 27) alludes to ‘the old image of the adulteress setting up her couch on a high and lofty hill, perpetually unable to gratify her lust’.

<sup>178</sup> Hanson (1975: 200).

fundamental part of worship. Thus it is not merely imagery when it is said that those who went to the high places to offer their *sacrifices placed their bed* there.<sup>179</sup> Despite such adamant suggestions, however, it is not clear to me that the sexual associations of **משכב** in 57: 7 are as strong as scholars insist. In this particular context, associations of ‘fate’ and ‘destiny’ seem more powerful, as 57: 3–10 repeatedly refers to Jerusalem’s ‘portion’ (**חלק**) and ‘lot’ (**גורל**) (57: 6). **משכב** perhaps also has echoes of a ‘deathbed’ (cf. *Ezekiel* 32: 25, 2 *Chronicles* 16: 14).<sup>180</sup> Certainly it seems to have this meaning in 57: 2, where the upright lying on their ‘beds’ parallels the perishing of the righteous. Reading 57: 8 with this word-play between Jerusalem’s ‘fate’ and ‘deathbed’ in mind, this prophetic poetry seems to suggest that through sacrificing her children, Jerusalem hastens her own death. Sexual associations may lurk in the background, but they are certainly not the only (or even main) force of **משכב** as Muilenburg, McKenzie, and Hanson suggest.<sup>181</sup> Instead, 57: 3–10 seems to underscore, to use an English turn of phrase, that Jerusalem has made her ‘(death)bed’ and so must now lie in it, as the popular ‘tit for tat’ patterning surfaces once again.

If **משכב** has stimulated overt sexual innuendoes within scholarship, 57: 8’s **יד** (‘hand’) has provoked even more imaginative readings. Döderlein is usually credited with the idea that **יד** is a euphemism for the male sexual organ in 57: 8, but many have followed suit. Westermann suggests, ‘You loved their bed, you looked on the hand (their nakedness),’ noting, ‘“hand”, probably as representing *membrum virile*.’<sup>182</sup> Oswalt notes: ‘The point is that Israel has become so infatuated with her idol lovers that she has lost all sense of restraint.’<sup>183</sup> Yet **יד** appears nowhere else within the Hebrew Bible with such a thrust, instead frequently representing strength (its most likely meaning

<sup>179</sup> Oswalt (1998: 478). Cf. Leupold (1977: 275). Ortlund (1996: 80) speaks of ‘wildly orgiastic and ultimately futile worship of false gods’.

<sup>180</sup> Cf. Stavrakopoulou (2004: 257), who speaks of ‘a grave which is repeatedly visited and enlarged, details reminiscent of the archaeological evidence indicating that sacrificial precincts were often expanded to make room for new burials’.

<sup>181</sup> In addition to the inclusion of the ‘prostitution’ motif, the persistently lurking presence of ‘the marriage metaphor’ may also be partly responsible for the sexualizing tendencies of many interpretations. Cf. Baumann (2003: 187): ‘Jerusalem is confronted with one of the typical reproaches of the prophetic marriage imagery, not found in Isaiah to this point: She has set her bed on the mountains . . . and has purchased partners for her nightly couch (57: 6–8). Here there is an echo both of acts of adultery and of the payment of “prostitute’s wages” used by Ezekiel. . . . The woman buys lovers for herself instead of being paid for her services (Ezek 16: 34, 41).’

<sup>182</sup> Westermann (1969: 323). Cf. Leupold (1977: 273), Duhm (1892). Pope (1977: 580). Delcor (1967) alludes to a Ugaritic parallel, but provides little evidence. Cf. the Syriac Peshitta: ‘where you saw their nakedness’, although the Versions generally seem confused by 57: 3–10.

<sup>183</sup> Oswalt (1998: 480).

in 57: 8).<sup>184</sup> Even BDB asserts, ‘a phallus thou beholdest; this favoured by context but without support in Heb. usage’.<sup>185</sup>

Those who wish to read יד euphemistically are challenged by its reappearance in 57: 10. Muilenberg observes: ‘An obscure line, Ginsburg reads, perhaps correctly, “Thou hast gotten thy crouching lust”’.<sup>186</sup> Westermann is similarly keen to preserve the sexual euphemism, although he concedes, ‘The meaning of “you found life for your hand” is unknown. It could be an allusion corresponding to v. 8 (similarly Ginsberg).’<sup>187</sup> Others, however, are less convinced. Whybray observes that many emend MT to read ‘you found a sufficient livelihood for yourself’ (די היתך).<sup>188</sup> Even Oswalt stops short of reading sexual innuendo here:

Again, an enigmatic phrase appears: *life in your hand you found*. There seem to be two possibilities, both closely related. The more overtly sexual one is to read *hand* euphemistically, as in v. 8. Thus a person whose potency is flagging manages to find some new stimulation and go on for another round. The major argument against this reading is that the subject is still feminine, as it has been since v. 6. To read *hand* euphemistically in this case is most certainly a mixed metaphor. Thus it seem better to take it as a more general reference to strength . . . The sense would be much the same, but less specifically sexual.<sup>189</sup>

Delcor similarly hesitates, ‘Admittedly, translating יד simply by “the virile member” presents some difficulty here since the reference is to Israel personified as a prostitute; unless we are to suppose that the poet’s thought veered from his metaphor to the reality: i.e. the Israelite who practises sacred prostitution.’<sup>190</sup> It seems to me that there is little defence for reading יד as a sexual euphemism in either 57: 10 or 57: 8; this is simply creative reading on the part of scholarship. Indeed, the overwhelming desire to perceive sexual innuendo, whatever the odds, is perhaps best exposed by Watts, who, while rejecting יד as a euphemism for a penis in 57: 8, still suggests, ‘in fantasy *she envisioned a hand*, perhaps that of a lover stroking sensuously’.<sup>191</sup>

<sup>184</sup> Kissane (1943: 225), Whybray (1975: 205). Stavrakopoulou (2004: 257–9) similarly rejects such a *double-entendre*, drawing on the centrality of ‘the Hand motif’ in the iconography of the Phoenician-Punic *mlk* sacrifice, coupled with the depiction of two hands on a stele from the ‘Stele Temple’ at Hazor, to argue that יד refers ‘to both a burial monument and the Hand motif depicted upon it’ (p. 259).

<sup>185</sup> BDB 390. HALOT ii. 387 maintains ‘penis’, arguing that, with הוה (‘to see’), יד suggests ‘an obscene act’. DCH iv. 82 notes ‘perhaps penis’ in *Isa* 57: 8, or suggests emending יד to יד: ‘love’. It even contemplates understanding ‘penis’ to be the meaning of a secondary root.

<sup>186</sup> Muilenberg (1956: 668).

<sup>187</sup> Westermann (1969: 324).

<sup>188</sup> Whybray (1975: 206).

<sup>189</sup> Oswalt (1998: 481).

<sup>190</sup> Delcor (1967: 235).

<sup>191</sup> Watts (1987: 258, emphasis original).

This imaginative approach to translation does not even end here; various other possibilities for ‘double-entendre’ have been suggested within *Isaiah* 57: 3–10. Muilenburg suggests that ‘memorial’ (זכרון) in 57: 8 might be another phallic symbol, as it shares the same consonants with ‘male’ (זכר).<sup>192</sup> Oswalt interprets ‘You sent messengers far off’ in 57: 9 as ‘Israel, gorgeously dressed and richly perfumed, minces towards her chosen lovers, unaware that they will strip her bare and violate her. But one lover is not enough; having been fixated on desire for desire’s sake, she must have more and more lovers’ (cf. *Ezekiel* 23: 41).<sup>193</sup> Even these, however, pale in comparison with Watts’s reading of 57: 9. MT reads something like ‘You journeyed to “the *mlk*” (המלך) with oil; you multiplied your perfumes.’ Debate continues over how *mlk* should be understood here, but for our purposes it is enough to note that most would agree that the reference, whether to a god or a sacrifice, almost certainly continues 57: 3–10’s persistent theme of child sacrifice.<sup>194</sup> Watts obliterates any such allusions, however, instead creating two hypothetical verbs, suggesting, ‘When you roused yourself (שרר) by rubbing (מלל) with oil;| When you increased your (fem. sg.) perfumes’, concluding, ‘an apparent reference to masturbation’.<sup>195</sup> Ironically, he comments, ‘If this sentence is as erotic as it seems possible, it is understandable that translations should tend to soften the sexual imagery’.<sup>196</sup> It seems that Watts’s imagination has truly been caught by this passage.

*Isaiah* 57: 3–10 is a problematic text, but it is hard to deny that its sexual associations have been dramatically heightened in translation, often even artificially through additions and emendations. Jerusalem appears as a personified female in verses 6–10, but this alone cannot justify such overtly sexual readings: female personification is prominent throughout *Isaiah* 40–66, while

<sup>192</sup> Muilenburg (1956: 667). Cf. Hanson (1975: 200). Stavrakopoulou (2004: 257): ‘The explicit reference to a memorial monument (זכרון) recalls the burial markers and stelae of the *mlk* rite.’

<sup>193</sup> Oswalt (1998: 480).

<sup>194</sup> Scholarship is divided over מלך. Heider (1985) and J. Day (1989) believe that it refers to a god. Eissfeldt (1935), Smelik (1995), and Stavrakopoulou (2004) argue that *mlk* is a sacrificial term. There is also debate over what child sacrifice might have involved (cf. above and Weinfeld 1972*b*). Heider (1992) provides a useful introductory discussion. It is enough for us to note that the biblical texts strongly associate (ה)מלך with child sacrifice (cf. 2 *Kings* 23: 10; *Lev* 18: 21, 20: 2–5; *Jer* 32: 35).

<sup>195</sup> Watts (1987: 253) contends that ותשרי (‘you journeyed’) is from שרר: ‘A third root meaning postulated only for some nouns (BDB, 1004) is related to שרר (BDB, 1057), also only postulated for nouns. They mean something like “become raised, excited, be firm”. The latter can refer to genitals’ (p. 254). He suggests that למלך should be pointed as a verb from מלל ‘to rub’ (p. 255). Kissane’s reading (1943: 225) of 57: 9 is tamer, but still sexually loaded. Following the Versions and influenced by *Jer* 4: 30, he suggests that ותשרי (‘you journeyed’) should be emended to ‘thou didst deck thyself’: ‘In this case the figure is that of a harlot adorning herself to attract her lovers.’

<sup>196</sup> Watts (1987: 255).

Zion's sexuality is not always the focus of attention.<sup>197</sup> Indeed, Sawyer remarks on the 'discordant' nature of chapter 57 in *Isaiah* for its explicit use of sexual language in the context of Zion.<sup>198</sup> This is not to preclude the possibility of sexual innuendoes in 57: 3–10, but simply to contest that the primary concern of this passage is neither 'cultic prostitution' nor other sexual rites, as is so often assumed, but rather the unacceptable practice of child sacrifice. Earlier, I suggested that רתונה ('and you/she prostitute(s)!') might be a later gloss, perhaps attracted by the unusual appearance of the 'adultery' focus (certainly it makes little sense in its present form and destroys the parallelism of 57: 3). Perhaps the overtly sexual readings we have witnessed represent an unconscious response to this inclusion, as this powerful focus transforms the wider frame of 57: 3–10, provoking innuendoes while diverting attention away from the poetry's primary concern with child sacrifice. If this is the case, then 57: 3–10 forcefully illustrates the ability of the 'prostitution' focus to arouse the imagination of readers.

And so we turn to 62: 1–5, the last passage in *Isaiah* to feature sexual or marital metaphorical language, where *Isaiah* 40–55's influence is clearly apparent as we re-encounter the compelling theme of transformation. *Isaiah* 62: 4 promises that 'Desolation' will miraculously become 'My-Delight-Is-In-Her', while 'Devastation' will become 'Married'. This clear marital metaphor, almost certainly inspired by 54: 5, is significant for its comparative rarity. Just as commentators overlook 54: 5, however, so do they fail to remark on 62: 4. Westermann's comments begin, 'Yahweh as Israel's bridegroom or wedded lord occurs particularly in Hosea, Jeremiah and Ezekiel,'<sup>199</sup> while Whybray simply observes, 'This image, a variation on the theme of the city Jerusalem as Yahweh's spouse, has its origins in a Semitic concept of the procreator god who fertilizes the land.'<sup>200</sup> McKenzie at least notes, 'The image of the marriage of Yahweh and Zion is somewhat altered from its earlier use . . . there Yahweh receives the wayward spouse back into the home, here there is a remarriage,'<sup>201</sup> but even he fails to register the element of surprise intrinsic to 62: 4 and its (re)evocation of YHWH, God of transformations. Watts shows a particular lack of awareness that 62: 4 might speak of YHWH's miraculous power, complaining that the 'new' names in 62: 2 show a 'crass emphasis on status and material prosperity': 'There is no hint of praise to Yahweh or recognition of his lordship.'<sup>202</sup>

<sup>197</sup> Here, with Biddle (1996: 139), we distinguish between *Isaiah*'s transformed 'Zion' and 'old Jerusalem'.

<sup>198</sup> Sawyer (1989: 93).

<sup>199</sup> Westermann (1969: 376).

<sup>200</sup> Whybray (1975: 248).

<sup>201</sup> McKenzie (1968: 185).

<sup>202</sup> Watts (1987: 313).

If 62: 4 is thus often overlooked, 62: 5 has caused considerable controversy. MT seems to read, 'For as a young man marries a virgin,| So shall your sons marry you;| And like the rejoicing of the bridegroom over the bride,| Will your God rejoice over you!' Here we have a striking 'modelling simile', where the relationship between Zion and YHWH is likened to that of a bride (כלה) and, uniquely, a 'bridegroom' (חתן). Yet this language has also often been passed over, eclipsed by the unexpected suggestion that Zion might marry her own sons. Some respond to this difficulty by interpreting the metaphor loosely. Watts suggests, 'It undoubtedly calls for Jews to be united, in spirit at least, with Jerusalem.'<sup>203</sup> Others assume bad preservation of the text. *BHS* advises that the text be re-pointed to read 'builders', or emended to read the singular 'builder'. *Isaiah* 62: 5 then conveniently reads something like the translation offered by NRSV ('For as a young man marries a young woman,| So shall your builder marry you'), echoing *Psalms* 147: 2's description of YHWH as 'the Builder of Jerusalem'.<sup>204</sup> Yet, as Oswalt notes, it is 'significant that he is nowhere called so in Isaiah, whereas the idea of Zion's children possessing the land does occur (Isa. 49: 20; 54: 3, cf. also 14: 1; 60: 21). Further, all the ancient witnesses support MT.'<sup>205</sup>

A main force behind emendations of 62: 5 is once again the influential 'marriage metaphor'. McKenzie neatly illustrates the point: 'The emendation of Heb. "sons" to "builder" in vs. 5 is demanded by the context; it is not only because of the harsh mixture of metaphor, but principally because the "sons" could only be the Israelites, while the spouse elsewhere in the context is Yahweh.'<sup>206</sup> Stienstra observes, 'Within the framework of the marriage metaphor, the reading "builder" is far more appropriate than "sons";'<sup>207</sup> strongly critiquing Watts's defence of MT: 'The marriage metaphor dictates that exactly the opposite is true. Jerusalem being married by her sons is not an image that can really be called fitting, whereas YHWH (re-)marrying His wife and wiping out the past in the process is in perfect agreement with the rest of the passage.'<sup>208</sup>

*Isaiah* 62: 5 is a puzzling verse. While the prophetic texts are not as restricted in their use of sexual and marital metaphorical language as Stienstra

<sup>203</sup> Watts (1987: 313). Cf. Frymer-Kensky (1992a: 177): 'Clearly this bond is not like a human family, for father and son do not marry the same woman, Oedipus notwithstanding. But Zion goes beyond human family patterns. She is a mystical figure of love for the people of Israel.'

<sup>204</sup> Cf. Baumann (2003: 189).

<sup>205</sup> Oswalt (1998: 577). Baumann's reading (2003: 189) is particularly notable for emending the 'children' away, and then observing: 'The marital image is strongly accented again... but there is a difference between the texts inasmuch as in *Isaiah* 62 Jerusalem's children no longer play a part.'

<sup>206</sup> McKenzie (1968: 185). Cf. Kissane (1943: 282).

<sup>207</sup> Stienstra (1993: 176).

<sup>208</sup> Stienstra (1993: 177).

suggests, this nevertheless remains an exceptionally unusual metaphor. Why would 62: 5 promise Zion that she will be married by her sons, and what might this mean? Is it simply a loose or evocative use of metaphorical language, as Watts suggests? If so, it is curious as a fleeting reference, as it was hardly acceptable practice in the text's broad socio-cultural and historical setting for sons to marry their own mother. Moreover, such a reading is dangerously close to substitutionary approaches to metaphor. Another possibility, which seems to my mind more likely, is that in 62: 5 we are presented with a word-play. Slotki suggests: 'Bearing in mind that the original Hebrew root, *baal*, signifies both "espousal" and "possession", the prophet, it may be suggested, is here merely playing with the word, and the rendering might be, "as a young man espouseth a virgin, so shall thy sons possess thee".'<sup>209</sup> Leupold similarly perceives a 'double meaning' of בעל ('marry' and 'take possession of'/'become master of'): 'So the incongruous picture of sons marrying a mother does not appear in the original, but rather the children will fulfil their obligation in the family.'<sup>210</sup> Oswalt notes that all the Versions translate בעל as 'to dwell with, in' (*Joshua* 24: 11, *Numbers* 21: 28, etc.), suggesting 'your sons will dwell in you [or, keep you]'.<sup>211</sup> בעל means not only 'to marry', 'to possess', or 'to dwell', however, but also 'to rule over' (cf. *Isaiah* 26: 13, where the suffix similarly appends the verb).<sup>212</sup> Thus we might read 62: 5 as 'For as a young man marries (יבעל) a young woman;| So shall your sons rule over you (יבעליך)! It seems that multiple meanings are possible for בעל; and perhaps this is why the provocative focus is used. Word-play links these concepts to create an impression of cause and effect, and thus the pervasive 'tit for tat' dynamic reappears once more.<sup>213</sup> Unfortunately, however, this persuasive strategy is utterly lost in translation, leaving the simile incongruous. Thus 62: 5 completes Zion's transformation, providing a fitting end to the book as a whole, inspired by the compelling theme of chapters 40–55. She who was 'Devastated' and 'Desolated' will finally be 'My Delight is in Her' and 'Married'; ruled by her own people in their own land, rejoiced over by YHWH, as a bride is celebrated by her bridegroom.

## REFLECTIONS

*Isaiah* intensifies the prophetic challenge to traditional conceptions of sexual and marital metaphorical language. Those who maintain 'prostitution' to be

<sup>209</sup> Slotki (1949: 302). Cf. Schmitt (1985: 563).

<sup>210</sup> Leupold (1977: 331).

<sup>211</sup> Oswalt (1998: 581).

<sup>212</sup> BDB 127. HALOT i. 142.

<sup>213</sup> Barton (1990: 61).

‘cultic prostitution’ in other prophetic texts abandon their position in the face of *Isaiah* 1: 21 and 23: 15–18; and the challenge that *Isaiah* 40–55 poses to ‘the marriage metaphor’ is so overwhelming that even Stienstra is momentarily stopped in her tracks. Sexual and marital metaphorical language is astonishingly varied in *Isaiah*, particularly in chapters 40–55, where contradictory metaphors collide, as the prophetic poetry strives to communicate its startling theme of YHWH, God of transformations.

*Isaiah*’s metaphorical language is not only striking for its diversity, however; it is also unique for its markedly positive character and the hope it brings to readers alert to its implications for the present time. In *Isaiah* 40–66, we are greeted by Zion, a personified female, who suffers no violence or threats, but only promises of healing, whose presence reaches far beyond the realms of sexuality and marriage that we have explored. She is a figure who has been compared to the Servant, who suffers, yet does so with meaning and dignity.<sup>214</sup> Brenner even suggests that it is Jerusalem who speaks with a startlingly assured voice, with words usually attributed to the Servant, in response to YHWH’s insistence in 50: 1 that there are no divorce papers: ‘Lord YHWH has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he awakens—wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. Lord YHWH has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward . . .’ (*Isaiah* 50: 4–5).<sup>215</sup> So positive is *Isaiah* 40–55’s portrayal of Zion that some see within this poetry a response to the negative sexual and marital metaphorical language of other prophetic books. K. M. O’Connor believes that *Isaiah* 40–55 actively critiques such negative metaphors, deliberately re-visioning the ‘story’ she sees behind them. Indeed, she speaks of Second Isaiah as ‘the most remarkable episode in the story of this broken household’, in which ‘Zion’s husband not only takes her back, he confesses blame for their long separation (54: 5–8). . . . He abandoned her, in his fury he hid from her, not the other way around.’<sup>216</sup> Chapman similarly finds within *Isaiah* 40–55 a dramatic reinterpretation of what she calls ‘the Jerusalem-as-woman metaphorical complex’,<sup>217</sup> suggesting that in this poetry, ‘We no longer hear that the Exile was the just and deserved punishment of

<sup>214</sup> Cf. Van der Woude (2004), who argues that Zion—along with the Servant—is a role model to the group addressed in *Isaiah* 40–55. Just as Zion is courageous in articulating her doubts, fears, and questions in this prophetic poetry, this group is also encouraged to return to YHWH despite their own doubts and fears (p. 115).

<sup>215</sup> Brenner (1997a).

<sup>216</sup> K. M. O’Connor (1999a: 292). She contends that this defiant prophetic poetry ‘greatly diminishes, even discounts, Zion’s culpability. God, not she, is on the defensive. Second Isaiah reconfigures the understanding of the exile when he diminishes Zion’s culpability and lays it at her divine husband’s door’ (pp. 293–4).

<sup>217</sup> Chapman (2004: 60).

a feminized Jerusalem who had played the whore with Assyria and Babylonia. Instead, we see persistent and disturbing questions surface in Deutero-Isaiah's admissions on behalf of Yahweh.<sup>218</sup> Turner believes that, in this astonishing text of transformations, it is not only Zion who is transformed, but also her relationship with YHWH: 'Zion, who has been accused of wrongdoing, is now the accuser. Following her accusation, Yahweh is given new names; no longer is Yahweh the enemy. Yahweh is the comforter. Yahweh redeems.'<sup>219</sup> For readers such as these, *Isaiah* 40–55 presents a treasure trove of redemptive possibilities.

Unfortunately, however, *Isaiah* is not devoid of thorny material for women. 'Prostitution' raises its menacing head as an indictment in 1: 21, and some may find problematic the assumption that for a female to be without children is wholly negative (49: 21, 54: 1).<sup>220</sup> Brenner observes that Zion 'as woman or city/land community, has no significant autonomy, no life without the male's good will.'<sup>221</sup> YHWH's apparent desire to force Tyre back into 'prostitution' in 23: 15–18 is disquieting, particularly in the current climate as we face a rise in sex trafficking; and the negative and violent language with which 'Virgin Babylon' is threatened in 47: 1–15 is troubling in the midst of the otherwise astonishingly positive *Isaiah* 40–55. *Isaiah* 57: 3–10 also presents a daunting challenge to feminist readers. For while this passage begins with accusations against the people more generally, in vv. 6–10 these turn to indictments specifically against the personified female, and by v. 13 it is Jerusalem who is left to 'cry out'.<sup>222</sup> Perhaps even more problematic is the way in which

<sup>218</sup> Chapman (2004: 171). These admissions include: 'that Jerusalem "has received double for all her sins" (40: 2), that Jerusalem's destruction has resulted because Yahweh, her presumed protector, had abandoned her and hidden his face from her in a moment of "overflowing wrath" (54: 7–8). Finally, there is the accusation of Yahweh's sleeping on the job implicit in Deutero-Isaiah's call: "Awake, awake, O arm of Yahweh" (51: 9).'

<sup>219</sup> Turner (2003: 204). Cf. Baumann (2001: 115–18), who suggests that *Isaiah* 40–55 be read intertextually alongside 'the prophetic marriage metaphor', as 'objections' that seek to 'transform' it. Baumann is influenced by the work of the Hedwig-Jahnow-Forschungsprojekt (1994), which speaks of the importance of resisting texts which reinforce justifications for violence. In her later monograph, Baumann (2003: 26 n. 91) qualifies: 'I would no longer go as far as this article . . . when it speaks of a "liberating reading" of such texts. Nevertheless, it seems to me now as then both possible and meaningful to seek for biblical counter-voices, "objections" against the texts of violence.'

<sup>220</sup> Cf. Oswalt (1998: 418): 'A childless woman was a failure, someone who had apparently committed some sin or had at least been judged unworthy of bearing a child. This all her life was an agony of humiliation.'

<sup>221</sup> Brenner (1997a: 146).

<sup>222</sup> Cf. Ackerman (1992: 163–4): 'The prophecies accusing the personified Jerusalem of apostasy indict all the city's inhabitants and not just the women. Still, the personification of the apostate city as female troubles a feminist consciousness.' *Isa* 57: 3–10 is particularly problematic for Ackerman, as she emends 57: 3 to describe Jerusalem as a 'sorceress', 'adulteress', and 'harlot' (p. 163), while we have seen this to be unnecessary. On my reading, it is at least the 'father' who is the 'adulterer', while the 'mother' is a 'sorceress'.

Jerusalem is treated by scholars who assume that, as a female, her crimes must be sexual, and thus heighten the possibilities for sexual innuendo, even emending the text to fulfil their desires.

Perhaps the darkest shadow that 57: 3–10 casts over *Isaiah*, however, is its impact on the theme of transformation. Biddle asks who is the personified female in 57: 3–10 and concludes that it is ‘the old Jerusalem’, Zion’s *alter ego* (cf. Babylon in 47: 1–15).<sup>223</sup> For Biddle, the reappearance of ‘old Jerusalem’ ‘problematizes’ Zion’s restoration: ‘Instead of the gloriously restored Zion, the disloyal, immoral, untrustworthy harlot has resurfaced. The Jerusalem whose transgressions motivated Yahweh’s displeasure in the days of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Lady Zion’s alter ego, has reappeared.’<sup>224</sup> According to Biddle, 66: 22 and 65: 17 alleviate the problem, through their introduction of the concept of a ‘new Jerusalem’: ‘Jerusalem will not be restored, but replaced: a new heaven, a new earth, a new Jerusalem.’<sup>225</sup> It is certainly comforting that 57: 3–10 is not the image of Zion with which *Isaiah* leaves us: the last sexual/marital metaphor of this book is 62: 5 (‘For as a young man marries a virgin,| So shall your sons marry you;| And like the rejoicing of the bridegroom over the bride,| Will your God rejoice over you’), while 66: 10–13 speaks of Zion’s ‘motherhood’. Yet this desire for the redemption of 57: 3–10 perhaps evokes troubling echoes of *Hosea* 4–14’s and *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4’s attempts to reverse negative sexual and marital metaphorical language, and the instability this can create. We might even begin to ask whether *Isaiah* 40–55’s ‘topsy turvy world’,<sup>226</sup> which creates so much promise in the eyes of readers such as K. M. O’Connor, Chapman, and Turner, is itself inherently unstable, as, in its haste to reverse Zion’s perceptions, it gives voice to negative characterizations of this forsaken city.<sup>227</sup>

It seems that no prophetic text daring to harness sexual or marital metaphorical language is without its problems, even the overwhelmingly and unabashedly optimistic *Isaiah*. Having lingered on the difficult aspects of this poetry, however, it seems important to re-stress the message of hope that *Isaiah* brings to women and all those who seek equality. If this poetry does strive to privilege any one impression of Zion, then it is a positive one,

<sup>223</sup> Biddle (1996: 137–8).

<sup>224</sup> Biddle (1996: 139).

<sup>225</sup> Biddle (1996: 139).

<sup>226</sup> Clines (1976: 61).

<sup>227</sup> Baumann (2001: 115–18) is aware of the instability created by *Isaiah* 40–55’s desire to transform. In considering whether this prophetic poetry can be understood to be a response to the negative sexual and marital metaphorical language to be found elsewhere in the prophets, she reflects: ‘In spite of Second Isaiah’s progress in transforming the metaphor, the “old” form is still present in the Scriptures—allowing sexist, pornographic and misogynist interpretations. Even though Second Isaiah provides us with a new interpretation of the marriage metaphor, it is quite possible to go back to the old metaphor’ (p. 120).

and in this sense *Isaiah* is set apart from other prophetic texts. This poetry may have its problems, but it is still an oasis of hope and a breath of fresh air within the prophetic corpus, where Zion rises as a positive role model for both women and men.<sup>228</sup>

<sup>228</sup> Cf. K. M. O'Connor (1999a: 294): 'She is a figure of healing, transformed from a devastated, shamed, and abandoned woman to a central member of the family with her children bursting out around her and her husband loving and protecting her. She is the future; her new life is already imagined. Capital city, monarchical center, and divine dwelling place, her revivification and restoration lures the exiled people homeward. Her bitterness is turned into song, her despair to joy, her somnolence to awakesness. She is already standing to receive them.'

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*Ezekiel 16 and 23*

As we approach the formidable *Ezekiel*, it is time finally to lay to rest the assumption contested throughout this exploration that in the prophetic books there is a definable entity that we can call ‘the marriage metaphor’, consisting of a recognizable story of YHWH’s relationship with the nation, or city. For in *Ezekiel 16 and 23*, we might say that traditional models of ‘the marriage metaphor’ are confronted with something of a pincer movement. While readings of the sexual and marital metaphorical language of *Hosea 4–14*, *Jeremiah 2: 1–4: 4*, and *Isaiah 40–55* shatter the traditional mould by refusing to sit neatly within a story of YHWH’s relationship with the nation/city, at first glance *Ezekiel 16 and 23* seem to provide this crucial and sought after love-story. There are even grounds to insist that the females are married to YHWH throughout these narratives, as they ‘become his’ (16: 8, 23: 4), bearing his children (16: 20, 23: 4). Certainly, Greenberg suggests that *Ezekiel* presents ‘the adulterous wife of Hosea and Jeremiah with a biography’.<sup>1</sup> *Ezekiel’s* apparent lifeline to traditional readers, however, is an ambush. This book does not provide us with a single story of YHWH’s relationship with the nation, but with two (chapters 16 and 23). Defenders of ‘the marriage metaphor’ are thus arguably left in a worse predicament: for which story should they now choose? Nor, according to many, might either of these be safely understood as ‘love-stories’, a discussion to which we shall return. For now, however, we will focus on the two plots presented in *Ezekiel 16 and 23* to clarify why they should be characterized as two distinct stories rather than the elaborated repetition of a single story, as is often assumed.<sup>2</sup>

Discussions of the relationship between *Ezekiel 16 and 23* have traditionally focused on two main distinctions between the narratives. First, the difference in characterization is frequently noted, with Jerusalem as the sole female

<sup>1</sup> Greenberg (1983: 299). Cf. Allen (1994: 236), Darr (1992*b*: 105), Galambush (1992: 80), E. Seifert (1997: 259), Baumann (2003: 142), Kamionkowski (2003: 92), Chapman (2004: 66), Schöpflin (2005: 101).

<sup>2</sup> Baumann (2003: 153) speaks of ‘the double narrative of the marriage’. Elsewhere (1999: 562) she writes: ‘Ezekiel has the most elaborate and sophisticated version of the prophetic marriage metaphor in the Old Testament. Strictly speaking, he does not give us one version of it, but two.’ Cf. Schmitt (1996: 98): ‘in both passages Ezekiel lays out the history of Jerusalem.’

interest in *Ezekiel* 16 (until 16: 43b–58, which is almost certainly a later reflection), while in chapter 23 we are introduced to the infamous sisters, Oholah and Oholibah. Clements notes that ‘Chapter 23 . . . closely parallels that of the foundling child in chapter 16, only this time it concerns two evil sisters’,<sup>3</sup> while Block observes that ‘After reading ch.16, the student of Ezekiel’s prophecies may have concluded that the marriage metaphor has been exploited to the limit. But here it reappears with a new twist: Yahweh has two wives.’<sup>4</sup> A second distinction usually registered is the divergent emphasis on the females’ cultic or political crimes, with chapter 16 emphasizing the former and 23 stressing the latter. While this difference is apparent in the text as it stands, some have been tempted to exaggerate the contrast, attributing political crimes in chapter 16 to an editor and characterizing chapter 23’s cultic crimes as secondary. Brownlee illustrates the approach well:

It seems probable that chap. 16 concerned originally cultic and sexual infidelity to the Lord alone and that the element of international alliance and intrigue was lacking. The latter is dealt with at great length in chap. 23 in a nearly pure form, largely separate from the charge of cultic offences. Hence it seems likely that there was originally a contrast in subject matter between chaps. 16 and 23, and this to a large extent remains. Chap. 16 majors in dealing with cultic infidelity and chap. 23 majors in dealing with international intrigue as a form of unfaithfulness to the Lord.<sup>5</sup>

Thus many sharpen the superficial distinctions between *Ezekiel* 16 and 23, almost certainly in an attempt to explain why a single prophetic book might include two narratives so similar in character. While this is an important question, to which we shall return, it seems to me that such an approach does not adequately address the problem. For a start, the creation of neatly classifiable narratives by the excision of any material thwarting the hypothesis, with no other evidence to hand, seems to me suspicious. Perhaps most importantly, however, even after such ruthless surgery, the relationship between the narratives is still not as straightforward as such approaches propose. *Ezekiel* 16 and 23 do not share roughly the same plot, with some later mutual influence, the one focusing on Jerusalem and her cultic offences, the other introducing Samaria and focusing on the sisters’ political crimes. Rather, there are significant differences between the stories, which are of far deeper interest.

<sup>3</sup> Clements (1996: 106).

<sup>4</sup> Block (1997: 731). Block notes four further differences between the chapters, but these are similarly superficial (p. 729).

<sup>5</sup> Brownlee (1986: 221). Cf. Zimmerli (1979: 347–8, 481), Wevers (1969: 133, 178). Allen (1994: 234), Schöpflin (2005: 110).

Perhaps most significantly, there are substantial distinctions in the presentations of the females' beginnings and initial meetings with YHWH: precisely those places where we might expect even variations of the same story-line to correspond. In *Ezekiel 16* we meet Jerusalem as a baby, the offspring of a Hittite and an Amorite, born in Canaan and abandoned at birth. In *Ezekiel 23* we are introduced to Oholibah (Jerusalem) as a young girl, growing up in Egypt with her sister, Oholah (Samaria). While this variation could theoretically result from the two stories concentrating on different stages of the female's life, such an explanation does not withstand the differing presentations of her first encounter with YHWH. In *Ezekiel 16* YHWH encounters Jerusalem as a baby, rescues, cleans, and raises her, and seems to marry her when she reaches puberty (certainly he believes he owns her: 16: 8). In *Ezekiel 23* YHWH also states that he eventually owns the two sisters (23: 4), but this is only after they have been sexually active with the Egyptians (23: 3).<sup>6</sup> Thus, while both narratives stress that the females end up with YHWH, the story of how they come to be with him, and whether they have been sexually involved beforehand, differs significantly.<sup>7</sup>

The point I wish to make is not that *Ezekiel 16* and *23* are utterly unrelated. A marked characteristic of the book, in Davis's words, is its 'fond replaying of themes'.<sup>8</sup> I simply wish to stress that, while a consistent narrative plot structures both chapters, we cannot easily speak of *the* story of YHWH's relationship with the nation/city. There seem to be two distinct story-lines, diverging at significant points. If the differences between *Ezekiel 16* and *23* were limited to the number of females involved and the tension between the political and cultic nature of their crimes, then we might be able to maintain the hypothesis of a single traditional story-line with slight variations. However, this is simply not the case. *Ezekiel 16* and *23* differ substantially at crucial points of the story—birth and encounter with YHWH—and it seems to me that they do so for significant reasons.

<sup>6</sup> Galambush (1992: 111 n. 57): 'The claim that the women were sexually used before any alliance with Yahweh is unprecedented in the prophets.' Galambush recognizes that 'the claim of primal infidelity' in chapter 23 'is inconsistent with the story in chap 16 of Jerusalem's founding youth', but insists that 'it is entirely consistent with the implication of the story of chap 16 that Jerusalem was bad from the start'. It seems to me, however, that the distinction is significant; Jerusalem's youth pales in comparison to that of Oholibah. Chapman (2004: 121) displays a similar inclination to call attention to the differences between the narratives, while seeking to bring consistency to them: 'Ezekiel 23 provides a different angle on Jerusalem's adolescence. No longer has Jerusalem spent her childhood sprouting innocently like a plant in the field. Instead, she and her sister have spent their adolescence whoring in Egypt. . . . What Ezekiel 16 achieved through foreign parentage and abandonment, Ezekiel 23 achieved through Yahweh's willingness to marry a promiscuous whore.'

<sup>7</sup> Baumann (2003: 145): 'Jerusalem as a young woman in Egypt does not correspond to the other descriptions of the history of YHWH with that city in the Old Testament.'

<sup>8</sup> Davis (1989: 95). Cf. Greenberg (1983: 26), Block (1997: 24).

Before turning to what I believe is the main influence behind the differing story-lines of *Ezekiel* 16 and 23, we should briefly consider a possible contributing force. It is conceivable that *Ezekiel* 23's Oholibah is not Jerusalem at all, but rather the nation, Judah.<sup>9</sup> Without the identifying influence of 23: 4 (which could be a later gloss), we might already be tempted to understand Oholibah in this way. For it is not clear why *Ezekiel* 23 claims that the *city* spent time in Egypt, while this would make far more sense in the *nation's* history. If we take Jerusalem in chapter 16 also to be a metonym of the Temple (a concept that will become important in the closing reflections), then this may even explain why the chapter stresses her *cultic* crimes, while the broad emphasis in chapter 23's history of the nation is on her *political* crimes.<sup>10</sup> This would certainly be one way to explain the stark differences, but strong similarities, between the histories of *Ezekiel* 16 and 23: The strongest argument against this proposition is the name Oholibah, traditionally rendered 'My tent is in her'.<sup>11</sup> Many now question this reading, however,<sup>12</sup> and, even if we wish to maintain the hypothesis, we could argue that the Temple (if this is the 'tent' in question) resides within Judah, as well as specifically in Jerusalem. Thus Oholah and Oholibah could represent the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. But even if this alternative identification of Oholibah explains why *Ezekiel* lays out two different stories for Jerusalem and Oholibah in chapters 16 and 23, this does not alleviate the problems facing those who wish to understand a single story lying behind 'the marriage metaphor'. They are still faced with the problem of whose story they should then choose: who is the *real* wife of YHWH?

As I see it, even if we accept the above hypothesis, the most convincing explanation of the divergences between *Ezekiel* 16 and 23 is that, like the other prophetic books we have explored, the emphasis of these narratives is on the message they strive to convey, not on an abstract, hypothetical background story of *the* relationship between YHWH and city/nation. Many observe that *Ezekiel* offers unusual and alternative histories, not only in chapters 16 and 23, but also in other narratives, such as chapter 20. Davis writes, 'No one ever

<sup>9</sup> This goes directly against the grain of Galambush's work (1992), which insists that YHWH's wife must be city not nation, as she believes the 'marriage metaphor' to be dependent on the belief that cities are consort to their male patron god. As we have seen, however, prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language cannot be limited to such a hypothetical 'etymology'.

<sup>10</sup> For Jerusalem in *Ezekiel* 16 as Temple, see Galambush (1992: 81), Bloch (1955).

<sup>11</sup> Eichrodt (1970: 322), Galambush (1992: 111).

<sup>12</sup> Wevers (1969: 180): 'The traditional explanation of the names Oholah as "her tent" and Oholibah as "my tent is in her" cannot be based on MT, and is not over lucid.' Cf. Klein (1988: 89), Biggs (1996: 69), Zimmerli (1979: 483–4), Allen (1990: 48). Cooke (1936: 249) takes the name as an allusion 'to the tents set up on the high places for religious prostitution'.

recounted Israel's past as Ezekiel does; he presents the most radical revisioning of the tradition, going back to the beginning of the nation's history, and allowing it to be a consistent record of rebellion and apostasy'; 'what he achieves is a deliberate and thorough reconceptualization of Israel's past and present'.<sup>13</sup> Block comments,

Ezekiel paints a picture of Israel's history that is shockingly revisionist. . . . In these chapters [16, 20, 23] the prophet derives his sermon material from history, but it is a story unlike anything found in the historiographic writings of the OT. At times he sounds like Hosea; at times like Jeremiah. But he forces the audience to wrestle with the reality of their past by driving their images to the extreme, and intentionally skewing and distorting their sacred traditions.<sup>14</sup>

While it is hardly controversial to claim that *Ezekiel* employs history as a powerful theological medium, few have reflected on the ramifications for traditional conceptions of 'the marriage metaphor'. If *Ezekiel* is the one prophetic work using narrative plot to structure its sexual and marital metaphorical language, but even *these* plots are not suitable candidates for 'the story' of 'the marriage metaphor', then where is this Holy Grail of a story to be found? It is certainly and notoriously not clear in *Hosea* 1–3, as we shall see. Thus the pincer movement is complete. The combined attack of *Ezekiel* 16 and 23, with their double plot, and the other prophetic books, with their marked lack of a straightforward story-line, leaves no ground for the hypothesis that there was a single, recognized marriage metaphor conveying an established story of the nation/city's relationship with YHWH. This is not to say that the prophetic texts using sexual and marital metaphorical language must have done so entirely independently, without reference to one another. These texts could have been aware of each other and even borrowed from each other at times. *Jeremiah* 3: 6–11 shows possible signs of having been influenced by a version of *Ezekiel* 23: 36–49, for instance, as discussed earlier. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that the 'prostitution' focus that appears so frequently in the prophetic texts does so only coincidentally. My contention is simply that in the period during which the prophetic books were written there was no pre-existing, recognized concept of 'the marriage metaphor' consisting of a number of given features which are deliberately recalled whenever sexual or marital metaphorical language is employed.

<sup>13</sup> Davis (1989: 105–6).

<sup>14</sup> Block (1997: 462). Cf. Klein (1988: 72), Halperin (1993: 144), Darr (1992b: 109), McKeating (1993: 80), Zimmerli (1979: 336–7), Greenberg (1983: 303; 1997: 462), Baumann (2003: 142). Yee (2003: 124): 'Ezekiel is quite selective in his rehearsal of the nation's history.'

## EZEKIEL 16 AND 23: THE CHALLENGE

If we are no longer to read *Ezekiel's* sexual and marital metaphors and similes within the 'default frame' of the elusive (illusive) 'marriage metaphor', then it seems to me vital to read them within their distinctive wider frames. With this proposal, we move once more into the realm of cognitive approaches to metaphor, leaving behind substitutionary approaches and their claim that metaphorical language can be 'translated', perhaps this time with some regret. For *Ezekiel* is the most problematic of all prophetic books for its sexual and marital metaphorical language, notoriously the most extreme and offensive in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>15</sup> Galambush writes: 'Ezekiel 16 is somehow more offensive than the same metaphor in Hosea and Jeremiah. The metaphor occurs in many forms in the Hebrew Bible, but only Ezekiel 16 was banned from public reading (*Meg.* 4: 10).'<sup>16</sup> Darr insists: 'Ralph W. Klein is simply incorrect when in his recent book he remarks that Ezekiel's indictment "proves almost to be vulgar!" It *is* vulgar.'<sup>17</sup> Indeed, many are adamant that *Ezekiel* 16 and 23 should be exposed as 'pornography'.<sup>18</sup> Sexually explicit phrases proliferate through these narratives, perhaps most infamously in 23: 20: '[She] lusted after their "concubines" there, whose flesh was like the flesh of asses; and whose flood was like the flood of stallions.'<sup>19</sup> Greenberg observes that 'lurid

<sup>15</sup> Shields (2001: 137).

<sup>16</sup> Galambush (1992: 102). Cf. Gowan (1985: 66), Exum (1996: 108), Block (1997: 466), J. B. Taylor (1969: 133), Halperin (1993: 146).

<sup>17</sup> Darr (1992*b*: 105). Cf. Klein (1988: 82). Blenkinsopp (1990: 78) speaks of the 'painful and embarrassing ... often disgusting detail'.

<sup>18</sup> Van Dijk-Hemmes (1993) focuses on *Ezekiel* 23, drawing on Setel (1985) to argue that the 'preservation of male domination through a denial, or misnaming, of female experience' evident throughout *Ezekiel* 23 is pornographic (pp. 170–1). Cf. Brenner (1996), Galambush (1992: 104–5 nn. 39, 40, 42, 44, 45), Exum (1996), Baumann (2001: 91), Tarlin (1997: 175), Törnkvist (1998: 18), L. Day (2000: 205), Satlow (2000: 15), Yee (2003: 111). In the face of such responses by current readers, Smith-Christopher (2004) is keen to call attention to this narrative's implications for male readers from the socio-cultural and historical setting of *Ezekiel* 16. He contends that 'the image of the stripped and humiliated Jerusalem may not have "titillated" the male hearers at all, but rather shocked them precisely because it reminded them of their own treatment at the hands of the Babylonian conquerors!' (p. 155).

<sup>19</sup> פְּלוּגָה is probably a foreign loan-word, appearing elsewhere to describe female concubines (פְּלוּגָה: *Gen* 25: 6, 36: 12, etc.). This is the only time the term is used to describe men, which has caused some confusion. Greenberg (1997: 471) and Davidovich (2005: 202) suggest that this verse might allude to Oholibah's desire to be a concubine to the Egyptians. But most understand the term—however unusual—to refer to men, translating it as 'lovers' (*HALOT* iii. 929, Zimmerli 1979: 474) or 'paramours' (Allen 1990: 42; Eichrodt 1970: 317). For *Ezekiel* 16 to use a normally feminine term to describe men whom it wishes to insult and belittle seems entirely in character. The translation 'concubines' is therefore to be recommended, to my mind. Some emend MT's 'their lovers' to read 'her lovers'. Cf. Zimmerli (1979: 474), Eichrodt (1970: 317).

images and shocking language serve to sustain this long, verbose diatribe: fornicating with male images, slaughtering children for them to eat, spreading legs for every passerby, “your ‘juice’ was poured out”, a bloody object of fury and passion, “hack you with their swords”.<sup>20</sup> Brownlee writes: “‘Spreading your legs’ is a metaphor so gross it can hardly be called a euphemism. It is more like an obscene gesture.”<sup>21</sup> Ortlund speaks of ‘a repulsive caricature of womanish, sybaritic lechers with gigantic penises overflowing with semen. One need not ask, What is wrong with this picture? No subtlety is intended.’<sup>22</sup> Yet it is perhaps the undercurrent of warranted sexual violence and depiction of the female as a necessarily polluting force that is more chilling. Darr finds *Ezekiel* 16’s assumption that sexual violence ‘can be a means toward healing a broken relationship’ particularly concerning.<sup>23</sup> We noted in the Introduction how recent literary-historical contributions, with their clear cognitive appreciation of metaphor, tend to stray towards substitutionary approaches at certain times. It is telling that they demonstrate a marked retreat from a cognitive position when confronted with the formidable *Ezekiel*. Abma does not even attempt a reading of this prophetic book,<sup>24</sup> while Galambush’s insistence that we must search for the ‘etymology’ of ‘the marriage metaphor’ to explain *Ezekiel’s* language is hardly consistent with cognitive approaches.

While this retreat in the face of *Ezekiel* is understandable, perhaps even tempting, metaphorical language is unfortunately not as easy to tame as substitutionary theories propose. A veritable tidal wave of feminist readings in recent years has powerfully underscored the potential implications of reading *Ezekiel* 16 and 23. Indeed, if any doubt remains as to whether the negative sexual metaphorical language of these narratives should be seen to impact on women outside the text, we simply have to read the book itself.

Such an emendation seems unnecessary: ‘their’ could refer to the Egyptians. Alternatively, if any emendation is to be made, in my view, it should be towards a feminine plural suffix, פלגשיהן: the ‘concubines’ could be those involved earlier in Egypt with both Oholibah and her (now murdered) sister, Oholah.

<sup>20</sup> Greenberg (1983: 296). Shields (2001: 138) notes: ‘Virtually all the English translations of this passage gloss over and tone down the ways in which body parts are named. They also subdue the violence of the imagery.’

<sup>21</sup> Brownlee (1986: 233). Cf. Allen (1994: 240). Halperin (1993) argues that *Ezekiel’s* extreme language and ‘more or less pathological convictions about female evil’ (p. 161) are projections of an ‘Oedipus complex’ (p. 164), heightened by disturbing childhood experiences: ‘Something must have gone dreadfully wrong in Ezekiel’s upbringing’ (p. 164). Halperin’s psychological/psychoanalytical exploration of *Ezekiel’s* unconscious is far beyond the scope of this study, which is not concerned with what might have sparked metaphorical language (whether historically or unconsciously) but with the language itself within its literary context. That such a study might be written, however, underscores just how disturbing *Ezekiel* 16 and 23 are, as well as other parts of this prophetic book. Cf. Klostermann (1877), Broome (1946).

<sup>22</sup> Ortlund (1996: 125).

<sup>23</sup> Darr (1992a: 189).

<sup>24</sup> Abma (1999: 5).

Even *Ezekiel* seems to recognize its cognitive power, disturbingly suggesting in 23: 48 that its violent punishment for ‘prostitution’ should act as a caution to women:<sup>25</sup> ‘Thus I will put an end to lewdness in the land, that all women may take warning and not commit lewdness as you have done.’ Similar intimations underlie 16: 41 (‘And they shall burn your houses and execute judgement upon you in the sight of many women’) and 23: 10 (‘And she [Oholah] became a byword to the women when judgement was executed upon her’). Some read ‘women’ here as a metaphorical allusion to other nations/cities;<sup>26</sup> but the city/nation is not described as a ‘woman’ in this way in any other text (female personifications tend to be implicit, with nations remaining nations, and cities, cities). Thus most agree that these ‘women’ are of real flesh and (potentially spilt) blood. Eichrodt writes: ‘the body of the executed is cut in pieces, as an example to warn and frighten all the women spectators.’<sup>27</sup> Klein notes that ‘Yahweh offers a moralistic lesson to all women, who are warned not to mimic the depravity of Oholah and Oholibah.’<sup>28</sup> Törnkvist notes that ‘real women should be frightened and take warning, otherwise the same horrors could overcome them too (Ez 23: 44–48).’<sup>29</sup> Perhaps most telling, however, is Rabbi Eliezer’s response to *Ezekiel* 16, as expressed by Halperin.

<sup>25</sup> Carroll (1996: 76): ‘The careful reader of the two discourses will already have noticed that at a number of points in the discourses “real women” seem to enter the discourses.’ Baumann (2003: 164): ‘In Ezekiel 23: 48 it is expressly emphasized that the punishment of the textual “women” is meant to have a deterrent effect on *all* women. . . . In a certain way this verse confirms the thesis of feminist exegetes who do not reduce the treatment of the “woman” solely to the symbolic or poetic level.’

<sup>26</sup> Wevers (1969: 129), Brownlee (1986: 238), Allen (1994: 242).

<sup>27</sup> Eichrodt (1970: 209).

<sup>28</sup> Klein (1988: 91–2). Cf. Exum (1996: 109–10), Block (1997: 503, 764). Shields (1998: 93): ‘The text continually slips in and out of the metaphorical world. . . . Problematically, the text also slips out of the metaphoric relationship into the reality of cultural attitudes regarding gender in its discussion of male–female relations as well: in v 10 Oholah is to become a byword to “the women”’ Cf. Shields (2001: 145–6). For many the shift from female personification to real women is so dramatic that the chilling words are attributed to later editors. Cf. May (1956: 188), Darr (1992b: 115), Blenkinsopp (1990: 99), Zimmerli (1979: 492). However, there seems no reason to believe these words to be secondary: their disturbing message unfortunately does not sit uneasily with *Ezekiel* 16 and 23’s portrayal of female sexuality as inherently defiling. If *Ezekiel* seems to witness a strikingly cognitive view of metaphorical language with such assertions, then this is interestingly echoed in an apparent awareness of the ‘is/is not’ character of metaphorical language (Ricoeur 1978: 7). *Ezek* 16: 31 insists that Jerusalem has ‘prostituted’, but simultaneously asserts: ‘you were not like a prostitute, because you scorned payment.’

<sup>29</sup> Törnkvist (1998: 18). Galambush (1992: 105) seeks to reconcile the two perspectives: ‘The act of exposing Jerusalem before other women serves a double purpose. First, at the level of the tenor, Jerusalem’s shame will mean humiliation before other city-states. . . . Second, at the level of the vehicle, the public exposure of the adulteress served not only to transfer shame from the cuckolded husband onto the publicly humiliated wife, but also had an effect on the women.’

The ancient rabbis were hardly inclined to criticize their Scriptures. Yet they found the obscenity and cruelty of Ezekiel 16 hard to stomach. The Mishnah, Megillah 4: 10, attributes to Rabbi Eliezer (ca. A.D. 100) the ruling that this chapter must not be read publicly in the synagogue. One unfortunate, we are told, began to read from it in Rabbi Eliezer's presence: Son of man, proclaim to Jerusalem her abominations (16: 2). 'Why don't you go out', Eliezer said to him, 'and proclaim the abominations of your mother?'<sup>30</sup>

It seems that long before cognitive theories about metaphor emerged, this rabbi was well aware of *Ezekiel* 16's implications for women.

This is not to suggest that *Ezekiel* 16 and 23 are alone in the problems they present for women; much of what might be said about these narratives is applicable to wider prophetic sexual and metaphorical language. Still, the problem seems more acute in *Ezekiel*, not only because of the extremity of the language, but because of the way in which this language is harnessed. In *Ezekiel*, sexual and marital metaphorical language does not emerge tangled with other metaphors and similes, as a single thread in a wider fabric of themes like in other prophetic books. This prophetic prose crams sexual and marital metaphors and similes into two narratives that through a tightly gripping structure maintain an inconceivable density of violent and explicit invective for an implausible length of time.<sup>31</sup> If with Iser we believe that the reader finds meaning in the 'empty places' of the text, we might say that *Ezekiel* is claustrophobic.<sup>32</sup> For there is little space for the reader in *Ezekiel* 16 and 23; certainly there is scarce room for creative reading.

Earlier we saw that the problem with prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language is not that we are unaware of their underlying associations, but rather that they are made all too apparent by their wider frame. While this is true of all the prophetic books, it is arguably most evident in *Ezekiel* 16 and 23. The sheer density of language makes the narratives' assumptions explicitly clear, pushing and even breaking the limits of where the reader feels comfortable to go. Even the most resistant reader, cramped and constricted, is all but forced to take assumptions against his or her will, often resulting in the birth of unwanted meanings. And unlike van Dijk-Hemmes, I do not allow that the sexual and marital metaphorical language of *Ezekiel* is problematic only for women. She proposes that, while for women there is no escape from the negative implications of *Ezekiel* 16 and 23, men have the opportunity to

<sup>30</sup> Halperin (1993: 142). Cf. Zimmerli (1979: 349).

<sup>31</sup> Greenberg (1983: 297) writes of ch. 16: 'Choice of language thus combines with climactic structure and antithesis to produce a sensational effect that does not flag despite the length of the passage.' Cf. Galambush (1992: 79).

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Rosenberg (1987: 199): 'the parabolic addresses in chapters 13–24 seem crabbed and claustrophobic'; Iser (1971, 2000: 193).

identify with the powerful male god, YHWH.<sup>33</sup> It seems to me, however, that many men may not be grateful for such an opportunity; it might also be disturbing (albeit in different ways) to be forced against one's will to assume the role of the aggressor and abuser of women.<sup>34</sup>

In summary, *Ezekiel* 16 and 23 are for me the most difficult passages in this study to read cognitively. Like the other literary-historical approaches, the temptation is to retreat to a substitutionary reading, or even to avoid the book altogether. Yet *Ezekiel's* sexual and marital metaphorical language cannot be passed over in an investigation of this kind; nor can its cognitive potential be denied. My aim in this chapter is therefore to read the metaphorical language of these narratives within their vital frame, exploring further the assumptions and messages they strive powerfully and aggressively to force upon the reader, whilst taking every opportunity to consider how they might also be resisted.

### THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

*Ezekiel* 16 and 23's autonomy is noted by many, and we might say that we need look no further than the limits of these chapters for the wider frame of their sexual and marital metaphorical language. Nevertheless, we will briefly explore features of the book, which will provide us with an invaluable perspective. Davis powerfully highlights the significance of *Ezekiel* as written prophecy, maintaining that there are fundamental differences between oral and written communication.<sup>35</sup> While oral communication relies on 'non-verbal indicators' to explicate meaning ('gestures, intonation, facial expression, mode of dress, props, and especially upon the historical experience and situational understanding common to the speaker and the audience'),<sup>36</sup> such

<sup>33</sup> Van Dijk-Hemmes (1993: 176). Cf. Exum (1996: 123).

<sup>34</sup> Van Dijk-Hemmes (1993: 176) notes that male readers may alternatively wish to identify with the 'righteous men' who judge Jerusalem (v 45). However, this seems equally problematic. Cf. Loades (1998: 82): 'it is arguable that men as well as women suffer spiritual and other forms of damage when the symbolism is false or mistaken.' On the other hand, Exum (1996: 103) points out: 'Male readers (if the commentaries are any example . . .) do not find it difficult to identify with the divine perspective portrayed in these texts and thus to defend a righteous and long-suffering God for punishing a wayward and headstrong nation.' Cf. Swanepoel (1993: 84), who manages to find in *Ezekiel* 16 'a magnificent mercy, regardless of filth and vileness; and then the love of Yahweh in spite of the evil of human beings'.

<sup>35</sup> Davis (1989: 30–45). Most now agree that the words of *Ezekiel* were created as written, rather than oral, prophecy. Cf. McKeating (1993: 13): 'Ezekiel seems to have been the first prophet extensively to commit his words to writing. (So, at least, many scholars have concluded.) Much of his prophecy, therefore, is likely to have been conceived as literary communication from the beginning.' Cf. Galambush (1992: 80).

<sup>36</sup> Davis (1989: 31).

assistance is not available in written communication. Thus, where written communication wishes to influence meaning, it must devise and harness alternative aids in written form.<sup>37</sup> Davis also argues, however, that, while the aim of oral communication is to convey the intention of the speaker ('to miss the meaning is generally judged to be negligent or perverse listening, not a creative act of interpretation'<sup>38</sup>), written communication has a certain 'autonomy' ('the text is able to enter situations and to address readers unknown to its author'<sup>39</sup>). Indeed, according to Davis, autonomy is a primary motive for written communication: 'Often the fact that the text can escape or outlive the situation which gives it rise is precisely the reason for writing.'<sup>40</sup> These two observations are crucial for this exploration. While written texts have the capacity to move beyond authorial intention, with the reader intrinsic to creation of meaning, written communication nevertheless possesses the crucial capacity to harness implicit aids to meaning. For our purposes, these might be characterized in *Ezekiel* as the dense, repetitive language of which I have spoken, combined with the book's proclivity for extended metaphorical language and love of patterning structures.

### Extended metaphorical language in *Ezekiel*

*Ezekiel* is known, even infamous, for its extensive, elaborate, and often extreme metaphorical language. An idiosyncrasy of the book is its devotion of lengthy narratives to the development of metaphors. Following a marked lack of interest in *Ezekiel*'s metaphorical language, increasing attention has been paid in recent years to its unusual character, reflecting the boom in metaphor studies more generally. Galambush traces the essential contours of this growing concern,<sup>41</sup> but for our purposes, I would like to focus on three recent investigations.

First, Galambush herself provides a useful discussion of the distinction between allegory and what she calls *Ezekiel*'s 'narrative metaphor'. While *Ezekiel*'s distinctive and repetitive use of metaphorical language has traditionally been referred to as 'allegorical',<sup>42</sup> Galambush draws on Frye to argue that, while the book might display 'allegorizing tendencies', its metaphorical language cannot straightforwardly be understood as allegory *per se*.<sup>43</sup> She writes: 'Allegory is generally understood as a narrative in which each element

<sup>37</sup> Davis (1989: 31).

<sup>38</sup> Davis (1989: 31).

<sup>39</sup> Davis (1989: 32).

<sup>40</sup> Davis (1989: 32).

<sup>41</sup> Galambush (1992: 11–20).

<sup>42</sup> Zimmerli (1979: 334, 482). Cf. Greenberg (1983: 220–1), although Greenberg himself speaks of the limits of 'allegory' to describe *Ezekiel* 16.

<sup>43</sup> Galambush (1992: 10). Cf. Frye (1974).

represents something or someone else in the real world, so that a point for point correspondence can be drawn between the allegory and its referent.<sup>44</sup> To declare *Ezekiel's* language allegorical, the reader must therefore redefine 'allegory' so far as to make the term misleading, if not purposeless.<sup>45</sup> As alternatives to this problematical word, Galambush recommends 'extended', 'sustained', or 'narrative metaphor' (the latter being her own preference).<sup>46</sup> This contribution is useful both for its rejection of a notoriously deceptive term and for its insistence that *Ezekiel's* distinctive language is metaphorical. For the language with which *Ezekiel* confronts us is not as neat or accessible as we might expect from a full-blown allegory; instead, as Galambush herself observes, 'Ezekiel's extended metaphors have the complexity and indeterminacy generally understood to characterize metaphor.'<sup>47</sup>

Newsom argues that such complexity is key to *Ezekiel's* power.<sup>48</sup> For Newsom, *Ezekiel's* extended narrative metaphor works forcefully to engage the reader, encouraging personal investment. Adopting a strongly cognitive approach ('Metaphor derives much of its convincing power because it does not allow its hearers to be passive, but requires them to participate in the construction of the metaphorical meaning'<sup>49</sup>), she provides a case-study of *Ezekiel* 27, with her strongest example being Tyre, the ship, in 27: 3b–4. For Newsom, the painstaking attention paid to the development of this extended metaphorical language encourages the reader to become 'deeply committed to its power to give insight into the reality of Tyre's situation.'<sup>50</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Galambush (1992: 10).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Durlusser (1988: 22): 'allegory is not metaphor piled upon metaphor in the form of a story, but is rather one extended and consistent metaphor that is, to varying degrees, maintained throughout the narrative.' Even Durlusser seems uncomfortable with the term, however: 'I opt on occasion throughout this dissertation to use the term "metaphorical narrative" instead of allegory.' In her work on *Jer* 3: 1–4: 4, Shields (2004: 78–80) similarly attempts a redefinition of allegory, noting that 'many, if not most allegories function as extended metaphors, that is they have the same qualities of ambiguity and polyvalence that metaphor does' (pp. 78–9). Beyond this discussion, however, she frequently prefers the terms 'extended metaphor' (pp. 80, 83, 86, 87, 90), 'narrative metaphor' (pp. 82, 86, 87), or 'extended narrative metaphor' (p. 91) to speak of *Ezekiel's* language.

<sup>46</sup> Galambush (1992: 11).

<sup>47</sup> Galambush (1992: 11).

<sup>48</sup> Newsom (1984), Davis (1989: 92–5). *Contra* McKeating (1993: 13): 'Ezekiel by his complexity loses directness and blunts the cutting edge of his imagery.' Cf. Soskice (1985: 22): 'Brevity is for the most part a virtue of metaphor and it is rare that one escapes the confines of a few sentences'; 'When a metaphor is so much extended, it runs the risk of allowing the reader to forget what is being talked about.' *Ezekiel* 16 and 23 betray few of the symptoms highlighted by Soskice. While the language is notoriously difficult to analyse as far as tracing tenors and vehicles is concerned, few readers would claim that the overall impact and message of *Ezekiel* 16 and 23 is unclear. We might even say that its force is uncomfortably apparent.

<sup>49</sup> Newsom (1984: 153).

<sup>50</sup> Newsom (1984: 157).

After the long slow description of the construction of the ship and its staffing, Ezekiel simply takes the ship to sea and sinks it in a single, sudden verse (v. 26). Immediately the sense of the fragility of the ship dominates the connotations present to the reader. The metaphoric schema through which the readers have been organizing their ideas of Tyre's wealth and power is itself reordered. . . . Ezekiel's rather risky rhetorical strategy seems worthwhile, since the more one has become committed to the metaphor initially, the more powerful is the reordering of its connotations.<sup>51</sup>

Davis reinforces Newsom's argument, similarly insisting that the elaborate nature of *Ezekiel's* metaphorical language works powerfully to engage the reader. She argues that *Ezekiel's* development and repetition of metaphors create echoes reverberating through the book, presenting a challenge for the reader: 'Readers need to exercise the responsibility conferred upon them by the author if they are not to feel let down and therefore less interested in the text and the viewpoint it promotes.'<sup>52</sup> Davis does not explicitly refer to *Ezekiel* 16 and 23, but few would deny that echoes resonate between these narratives, reinforcing their impact. Davis concludes, 'Ezekiel's fond replaying of themes gives his readers an opportunity to develop their own mastery of his symbol system. Thus they become able to fill in the gaps in the text and their attention is rewarded with an enhanced appreciation of its fine effects and cumulative impact.'<sup>53</sup> While highlighting the benefits of *Ezekiel's* unusual and idiosyncratic use of metaphorical language, however, she remains keenly aware of the risk inherent in its complexity ('a mastery of the rules only gives the reader a better understanding of what a difficult game this prophet has set'):<sup>54</sup> a risk we will encounter shortly. Thus Galambush, Newsom, and Davis combine to suggest that *Ezekiel's* distinctive use of 'narrative metaphor' works effectively to present a challenge to the intellectually flattered reader. Such an appreciation of the relationship between this metaphorical language's complexity and its persuasive force provides us with an invaluable background for our exploration of *Ezekiel* 16 and 23.

### Narrative structure in *Ezekiel*

*Ezekiel* is not only distinctive for its penchant for extended metaphorical language; it is also set apart for its passion for narrative patterning. A fascination with structure is palpable throughout the book, highlighted by Greenberg and Allen.<sup>55</sup> Perhaps the most important recent discussion for the purposes of this study, however, is Eslinger's work on chapter 20, which

<sup>51</sup> Newsom (1984: 157).

<sup>52</sup> Davis (1989: 92).

<sup>53</sup> Davis (1989: 95).

<sup>54</sup> Davis (1989: 95).

<sup>55</sup> Greenberg (1983, 1997); Allen (1994). Cf. Boadt (1980, 1986), Parunak (1980).

stresses the importance in the narrative of what he calls ‘panels’,<sup>56</sup> These are essentially ‘repeating parallel segments’, to which the reader is alerted through repeated vocabulary, phrases, and actions.<sup>57</sup> In *Ezekiel* 20, panels work to depict Israel’s history as cyclical as the narrative revolves through periods of ‘(1) rehearsal of the acts of Yahweh; (2) covenantal arrangements; (3) rebellion and its purification; (4) divine wrath, exile and return; and (5) godly face saving’, to begin the cycle again.<sup>58</sup> Eslinger’s discernment of such panels is significant, not only because it calls attention to *Ezekiel*’s interest in patterning, but because it is my belief that similar panels structure *Ezekiel* 16 and 23, to which we shall now turn, taking with us these insights into this unusual book’s extended metaphorical language and passion for narrative structure.

### EZEKIEL 16

The outstanding structural feature of *Ezekiel* 16 for most recent scholarship is the ‘halving pattern’, which features throughout the prophetic book. Greenberg writes, ‘The “halving” pattern consists of the following: a theme, A, is propounded in the first, usually longest part of an oracle; it is followed by a second theme, B, which is somehow related to the first theme (by skewing or developing an aspect of it); B characteristically ends, or is followed by a coda with elements of A and B intermingled.’<sup>59</sup> In the case of *Ezekiel* 16, Greenberg presents a division of the chapter into three main sections: A (16: 3–43); B (16: 44–58); C (16: 59–63).<sup>60</sup> This division is not a new proposal: traditional scholarship has long spoken of the same three main passages, often attributing them to different authors, although, like Greenberg, most stress that B and C are not discontinuous, but rather reflections on the earlier material.<sup>61</sup> A main influence on this consensus division of *Ezekiel* 16 is the distinct thematic material of the three sections: while A focuses on the relationship between Jerusalem and YHWH; B switches attention to Jerusalem and her sisters; and C is primarily concerned with covenant language.<sup>62</sup> Even more

<sup>56</sup> Eslinger (1998: 98–9).

<sup>57</sup> Eslinger (1998: 98). Cf. Allen (1992), who perceives in *Ezekiel* 20 ‘a consecutive scheme of five series of elements that saw history repeating itself and finally turning into a grim destructive parody of the repetition’.

<sup>58</sup> Eslinger (1998: 99).

<sup>59</sup> Greenberg (1983: 25). Cf. Block (1997: 23).

<sup>60</sup> Greenberg (1983: 292). Cf. Galambush (1992: 61–3, 91 n. 2).

<sup>61</sup> Zimmerli (1979: 334), Allen (1994: 232–3), Block (1997: 464), Eichrodt (1970: 214, 216).

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Zimmerli (1979: 333), Greenberg (1983: 292). Cooke (1936: 159) divides 16B further, into 16: 44–52 and 53–8 as the latter seems to ‘hold out the prospect of a restoration’.

importantly for our purposes, while A confronts us with a daunting intensity of sexual and metaphorical language, there is a striking absence of such language in B and C. It seems that while these narratives are reflections on A, they mirror imaginations caught by themes and language other than our interests (namely, the family history of Jerusalem (B) and the covenant (C)). This exploration will therefore focus on the ‘core narrative’, 16A.<sup>63</sup>

### *Ezekiel 16A: the wider frame*

If the disturbing nature of 16A’s explicit story-line has been underscored, this exploration will focus on the implicit meaning that this narrative works forcefully to convey, which has the potential to be even more unsettling. We have spoken of *Ezekiel*’s passion for patterning, so it will come as no surprise that structural patterns pervade 16A. Repetitions and reiterations appear throughout, capturing the attention of many. L. Day observes: ‘YHWH’s actions are strikingly parallel to those he had noted that she [Jerusalem] had earlier been denied, as emphasized by repeated vocabulary.’<sup>64</sup> Galambush is not alone in perceiving a chiasmic pattern to the narrative, ‘tracing first Jerusalem’s ascent from a state of blood-covered rejection to the “perfection” gained from Yahweh’s attentions’ in 16: 1–14, and then ‘Jerusalem’s slide back into a state of rejection and bloody death’ in 16: 15–43.<sup>65</sup> Readers have also perceived echoes of ‘possession’ and ‘control’ pulsating through the narrative. L. Day observes: ‘Emotional terminology—love, compassion, affection, concern, or the like—never appears. . . . It is clearly important to YHWH that he possess the young woman.’<sup>66</sup> Galambush speaks of a ‘power struggle between

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Kamionkowski (2003: 92–3 n. 1), who similarly takes 16: 1–43 as the ‘focus’ of her research. Our reading will take 16: 43b as the introduction to 16B, creating an *inclusio*: ‘Have you not committed lewdness in addition to all your abominations?’ (16: 43b); ‘You bear the penalty of your abominations’ (16: 58).

<sup>64</sup> L. Day (2000: 208). Cf. Greenberg (1983: 295–6): ‘Contrasts are highlighted by the use of repetition. . . . A series of six (or seven) verb clauses details the gifts God made to the woman . . . ; six corresponding sentences relate how she spent them—and her children—on her “male images”’.

<sup>65</sup> Galambush (1992: 90). Cf. Baumann (2003: 138). Block (1997: 472) similarly perceives a chiasmic structure, this time within 16: 6–22b $\beta$ , where ‘the bestowal of each of Yahweh’s good gifts is answered by a contemptible act of infidelity’. Kamionkowski (2003: 92–3) alternatively finds three sections in 16A (16: 1–14, 15–34, 34–43), which tell ‘a story of gender reversal’. In 16: 1–14, we encounter ‘the ideal state’, where ‘the male figure has total control of the situation while the female character is utterly dependent on the male’; in 16: 15–34, we are confronted with ‘the breakdown of the ideal state, where the female becomes male and the male becomes female’, while in 16: 34–43 we are presented with the restoration of ‘masculinity to its proper domain: masculinity belongs to biological men’.

<sup>66</sup> L. Day (2000: 209). Runions (2001) also understands 16A to be concerned with power and control, although her reading focuses on the way in which YHWH competes with Jerusalem’s lovers, who share ‘the same object of desire, the woman Jerusalem’ (p. 167).

Yahweh and his wife',<sup>67</sup> while Kamionkowski similarly sees power seething through the narrative, referring to 'constant shifts in power between male and female, power and powerlessness, aggression and passivity'.<sup>68</sup>

These observations about the patterning pervading 16A and the associations of power which this narrative gathers are a crucial starting point for my exploration. For it seems to me that the structural patterning of 16A strikingly reflects the panelling that Eslinger perceives in *Ezekiel 20*. If attention is paid to the repetitions proliferating within 16A, this narrative can be characterized as consisting of four consecutive panels, working forcefully to convey a battle for control between YHWH and Jerusalem. In Panel 1 (16: 3–5) we are confronted with a scene of utter chaos and desolation, where no one has control. Jerusalem is a helpless infant, 'thrown out into the open field' (16: 5) with no other character present. As the reader passes from Panel 1 to Panel 2 (16: 9–14), Jerusalem passes from being utterly uncared for ('No eye pitied you enough to do any one of these things in compassion for you', 16: 5), to being firmly under the control of YHWH ('And you became mine', 16: 8).<sup>69</sup> This taking of control is expressed by YHWH doing to Jerusalem, the pubescent, in Panel 2 precisely what was not done to her as a baby in Panel 1.<sup>70</sup>

**Panel 1 (16: 3–5): 'Chaos'**<sup>71</sup>

1. Jerusalem's navel cord is not cut (16: 4)
2. She is not washed with water (16: 4)
3. She is not rubbed with salt (16: 4)
4. She is not wrapped in cloths (16: 4)

**Panel 2 (16: 9–14): YHWH takes control**

2. Jerusalem is washed with water by YHWH (16: 9)
3. She is anointed with oil (16: 9)
4. She is clothed luxuriously (16: 10)
5. She is given countless ornaments (16: 11–13)
6. Her clothing is rich, and she is given choice food (16: 13)

<sup>67</sup> Galambush (1992: 90). Shields (2001: 144): 'The very terms used in vv. 10–12, "I clothed you...I bound you...and covered you...I adorned you...I put on..." are connected to words of binding and chaining. This story actually imposes that the very attributes which enable a woman to produce and sustain life must be controlled so that her life-producing capacity is available only to one man, her husband. Apart from his control, her body and her sexuality are dangerous.'

<sup>68</sup> Kamionkowski (2003: 92). Responding to 16: 1–14, Kamionkowski observes: 'The female is completely passive while the male has *full control* over every aspect of the female's life... She is utterly dependent upon him for life, love and material sustenance' (p. 110, emphasis mine). Kamionkowski shows an acute interest in the dynamic of power running through this narrative; her primary focus, however, remains the gender ambiguity with which she believes the narrative to be concerned (p. 132).

<sup>69</sup> Malul (1990) even suggests that YHWH officially adopts Jerusalem.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. L. Day (2000: 208).

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Galambush (1992: 92): 'She is entirely outside the boundaries of the ordered world and on the brink of the ultimate "exclusion", death.'

Indeed, YHWH goes further, to ‘spread his robe’ over Jerusalem to cover her nakedness<sup>72</sup> and to make a ‘covenant’ (ברית) with her.<sup>73</sup> We might even say that YHWH’s actions are excessive, perhaps warning us of the obsessive behaviour to follow, as the salt of 16: 4 becomes oil in 16: 9, and the cloths of 16: 4 become embroidered cloth, fine linen, and rich fabric in 16: 10.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Scholars are divided over whether 16: 8’s spreading of a robe is a symbolic gesture, or involves sexual intercourse (cf. *Ruth* 3: 9). Allen (1994: 238), Hugenberger (1994: 304 f.), Kruger (1984), and Blenkinsopp (1990: 78) assume that the language is symbolic; while Brownlee (1986: 225), Wevers (1969: 94 f.), Eichrodt (1970: 201 f.), Pope (1977: 393; 1995: 392–4), Zimmerli (1979: 333–53), Eilberg-Schwartz (1994: 111), and Kamionkowski (2001: 124–3; 2003: 107–8) believe that 16: 8 speaks of sexual union. Hempel (1939), Korpel (1990: esp. 125, 133–4, 217–25), and Frymer-Kensky (1992a: 144, 1992b: 1146) argue that sexual behaviour is never attributed to YHWH in the Hebrew Bible. It certainly seems that YHWH fathers Jerusalem’s children in the text, however, even if the sexual language is not explicit (16: 20–1). Shields (2001: 148 n. 37) calls attention to the way in which most commentators are more interested in the ‘covenant’ between YHWH and Jerusalem than in YHWH’s sexuality. But, as she notes herself, this is no doubt encouraged by the way in which, where YHWH is involved, ‘the sex act is glossed over by euphemisms’ (p. 148). ‘The body of the male figure is completely obscured,’ she observes, ‘while the female figure is repeatedly exposed’ (p. 149).

<sup>73</sup> There is some dispute over whether 16: 8’s ‘covenant’ (ברית) alludes to marriage. Hugenberger (1994: 306–9) is keen to see a connection, referring to *Mal* 2: 10–16. Cf. Baumann (2003: 59). Galambush (1992: 94) insists: ‘Whether or not marriages were sworn either ordinarily or in special circumstances, and whether or not the “spreading the garment” constituted marriage, the combination in v 8 of Yahweh spreading the skirt, swearing and entering a covenant, and declaring that Jerusalem is “his”, may be understood to constitute marriage.’ Cf. Zimmerli (1979: 340). Pope (1995: 394). Greenberg (1983: 278) alternatively understands 16: 8 to speak of the Sinaitic covenant.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Chapman (2004: 120): ‘Yahweh surpassed the expectations of a husband.’ E. Seifert (1997: 262–8) calls attention to the disturbing possibility that in 16: 8 YHWH is portrayed as a foster father having sexual relations with his foster daughter. Cf. Baumann (2003: 161), Galambush (1992: 94 n. 16). There is some disagreement over whether such an action would have legally counted as incest in the broad socio-cultural and historical setting of this text. Shields (2001: 141) calls attention to the lack of reference to father/daughter incest in *Leviticus* 18–20. Brenner (1994: 121–2) observes that such incest is portrayed as ‘immoral’ in *Gen* 19: 30–8 and is banned in the Hammurabi Code (section 154), but notes that the punishment is ‘far lighter than any biblical punishment for incest: he has to leave the city’ (p. 136). Acting as foster father during the period in which *Ezekiel* 16A emerged would undoubtedly have involved playing a very different role from that played by foster fathers/carers today. Nevertheless, Seifert’s reading of YHWH’s actions remain chilling for their echoes of the abuses experienced by flesh-and-blood children in foster care in recent years. It is in part her discomfort with the possibility of such incest that moves Runions (2001: 160–3) to raise a quite different possibility: that the relationship between Jerusalem and YHWH in 16A is not that of husband and wife, but that of father and daughter. She insists that ‘to read the relationship between the woman and the deity as a sexual relationship is either to ignore the obvious parental imagery of vv. 1–13 (where the deity cares for the baby, washes it, clothes it, and feeds it) or to tacitly condone incest. It seems to me that the features portraying a parental relationship between Yahweh and the woman are very prominent, more so than features which are possibly sexual’ (p. 160). Thus Runions argues that the covenant in 16: 8 could refer to adoption rather than to a sexual/marital relationship, stressing that פָּרַשׁ כַּנִּיף (‘to spread a wing/skirt’) might simply be ‘a sign of protection’ (p. 161). Runions admits that the children whom Jerusalem bears for YHWH in 16: 20–2 are problematic for her argument, but argues that ‘Jerusalem could be read as an adopted daughter, providing the deity with offspring’ (p. 163). Runions’s reading is not convincing as a whole. Her desire to make YHWH father/mother, not husband/lover, forces her to explain away a number of elements of 16A, such as

Nor does 16A's panelling end here. The ominous words, 'But you trusted in your beauty, and prostituted because of your fame, and lavished your prostitutions on any passer-by!' (16: 15), herald Panel 3, in which Jerusalem systematically takes YHWH's gifts and distorts them.<sup>75</sup> Once again, the actions of the previous panel are repeated in the same sequence; but this time, Jerusalem is the instigator, and each act is followed by the relentless accusation of 'prostitution', to whose significance we shall return.<sup>76</sup>

**Panel 2 (16: 9–14)**

YHWH takes control

2. Jerusalem is washed with water (16: 9)
3. She is anointed with oil (16: 9)
4. She is clothed luxuriously (16: 10)
5. She is given countless ornaments (16: 11–13)
6. Her clothing is rich, and she is given choice food (16: 13)

**Panel 3 (16: 15–29)**

Jerusalem's bid for independence

*Jerusalem prostitutes* (16: 15)

4. Jerusalem takes her garments to make high places (16: 16)

*Jerusalem prostitutes* (16: 16)

5. She takes her gold, silver, and jewels to make images of men (16: 17)

*Jerusalem prostitutes* (16: 17)

6. She takes her garments and choice food and gives them to images of men (16: 18–19)

*Jerusalem's prostitution is not enough* (16: 20)<sup>77</sup>

7. She takes her children and slaughters them for 'them' (16: 20–1)

*In her prostitutions, she does not remember her youth* (16: 22)

8. She builds a 'mound' and lofty place (16: 24)<sup>78</sup>

*Jerusalem prostitutes* (16: 25)

9. *Jerusalem prostitutes* with Egyptians (16: 26)

10. *Jerusalem prostitutes* with Assyrians (16: 28)

11. *Jerusalem prostitutes* with Babylonians (16: 29)

the children. Her willingness to challenge the reign of 'the marriage metaphor' is, however, welcome. For the relationship between YHWH and Jerusalem in this narrative is certainly not so clear as strong proponents of 'the marriage metaphor' would wish.

<sup>75</sup> J. B. Taylor (1969: 137): 'The very things which God had given Israel become the means of her downfall.' Allen (1994: 239): 'What Yahweh had given in vv 10–13aa, his consort now grabbed and perverted.' Shields (2001: 144): 'Here the woman systematically undoes everything which Yahweh has done for (or to) her.' Cf. Greenberg (1983: 296) as well as Block (1997: 472) and Galambush (1992: 62, 96) cited above.

<sup>76</sup> L. Day (2000: 223) calls attention to the way in which YHWH 'verbally abuses the woman Jerusalem, saturating his speech with the derogatory זונה "whore" and תונותיך "your prostitutions" or "your whorings"', observing that 'Included in a batterer's abuse tactics are name calling and derogatory statements' (p. 220).

<sup>77</sup> In this instance, the charge of 'prostitution' appears within the indictment, rather than before it, perhaps emphasizing the horror of her actions.

<sup>78</sup> גב ('mound') seems to be some sort of raised place, but its precise translation is unclear. גב and רמה (16: 24) are usually taken as synonyms for במות, 'high places' (16: 16). Cf. Vaughan (1974: 29 f.). The Versions interestingly suggest 'brothel' for גב (cf. Brownlee 1986: 217), but this seems unlikely, given its close relationship with במות and רמה, even if 16A does strive to associate cultic practice with 'prostitution'.

Many comment on the abrupt change in 16: 15, as Jerusalem emerges from her passive state to seize control of the situation. Galambush writes: ‘Throughout her rise from bloody near-death to cleansed and ritually adorned perfection, Jerusalem has remained passive while Yahweh has been active. . . . In vv 15–34 the situation is reversed. Yahweh maintains control only by virtue of his role (through Ezekiel) as the narrator; within the narrative Jerusalem is the active party, and Yahweh is passive.’<sup>79</sup> Kamionkowski echoes: ‘Beginning with v. 15 the story takes a radical turn, again reflected in the language. From the first verse of this section, the woman is described with active verbs. We no longer hear about her state of being, or how she is acted upon; rather, she acts.’<sup>80</sup> In Panel 3, Jerusalem treats her male images, and the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Babylonians in precisely the same way as YHWH treated her in Panel 2. Just as YHWH gave Jerusalem gifts as a precursor (or lure) for sexual favours, so does Jerusalem do to her ‘lovers’.<sup>81</sup> This is even made explicit by YHWH, ‘You gave your gifts to all your lovers and bribed them to come to you from all around with your prostitutions!’ (16: 33).<sup>82</sup> We might say that in Panel 3 we are presented with a dramatic attempt by Jerusalem to wrest control from YHWH, challenging him as if she were a rival.<sup>83</sup>

For feminist and other would-be resistant readers, the prospect of Jerusalem seizing control from YHWH might be appealing. Darr observes that one of the ‘objectionable’ features of 16A is that ‘the prophet depicts “female sexuality” as the object of male possession and control’.<sup>84</sup> It seems, however, that the mature Jerusalem does *not* see herself as an ‘object’, inferior to YHWH; nor does she sense a lasting obligation to the male who has taught her all she knows.<sup>85</sup> Seeking independence, Jerusalem follows faithfully the model set for her by her teacher as she sets out to take command of the situation, using her sexuality and resources to assume the role of ‘prostitute’ in what we could call

<sup>79</sup> Galambush (1992: 95). Cf. L. Day (2000: 215): ‘As a batterer does, YHWH desires passivity and submission from his female partner; he begins to fault Jerusalem precisely at the point when he perceives that she begins to break out of her compliance and becomes active.’

<sup>80</sup> Kamionkowski (2003: 116).

<sup>81</sup> L. Day (2000: 211): ‘YHWH first had sex with Jerusalem and only then, after the act, gave her gifts. Now he finds that she has sex with others, then likewise afterwards bequeaths them gifts.’

<sup>82</sup> נָתַתְּ is unique to 16: 33, but most are agreed that it refers to ‘gifts’, ‘presents’, or ‘payments’. Cf. Zimmerli (1979: 329), Greenberg (1983: 285).

<sup>83</sup> The narrative could be even characterized as a thinly veiled assault on Zionist theologies. Cf. Carroll (1996: 82). Kamionkowski (2003: 127): ‘This female is aggressive, asserts power and independence . . . she is playing the role of God, inverting the “natural order”, or rather, the divine order, by exhibiting male gender characteristics.’

<sup>84</sup> Darr (1992a: 189).

<sup>85</sup> Pope (1995: 394–5): ‘Modern alienists could find some rationale for Jerusalem’s strong antipathy to her husband. In some contemporary societies this marriage would be regarded as statutory rape. In any event Jerusalem was not happy with her husband.’

a business-like manner.<sup>86</sup> L. Day writes: 'If YHWH's statements about Jerusalem are accurate, one would expect that he would be flattered that she had learned the technique from him!'<sup>87</sup> The internal logic of this narrative is almost certainly that Jerusalem has seriously misunderstood her relationship with YHWH. Zimmerli speaks of 'the senselessness of Jerusalem's immoral conduct',<sup>88</sup> while Allen alludes to a 'new independence, a wrongful self-confidence'.<sup>89</sup> Yet it is tempting to defy these assumptions, proposing instead that Jerusalem knows exactly what she is doing, acting with refreshing initiative to gain autonomy.

This reading has disturbing echoes of its own with flesh-and-blood women who have left controlling relationships in fear of violence and been forced to turn to prostitution to survive. We are perhaps in danger of romanticizing this 'business', particularly with the belief that the female remains in control. We could argue that here in 16A Jerusalem has actively chosen 'prostitution';<sup>90</sup> but this narrative is, after all, from YHWH's perspective. Ultimately, the idea that life as a 'prostitute' might appear to be an improvement for Jerusalem perhaps only underscores the deeply problematical nature of this prophetic narrative. Yet, despite its problems, this perhaps remains the most fruitful ground for resistant reading within the troubling 16A.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Kamionkowski (2003: 113): 'she takes her allowance to start her own business!' Smend (1880: 98) speaks of a self-governed woman, alluding to *Gen* 42: 6. The description of Jerusalem as *אִשֶׁה זוֹנָה שְׁלֵטָה* is significant here. While no one is clear about the precise thrust of *שְׁלֵטָה* (it appears only in *Ezek* 16: 30), many agree that within this context the adjective resonates with power. BDB 1020 suggests 'domineer, be master of'; *HALOT* iv. 1523–4 advocates 'mighty'. Greenberg (1983: 284) proposes 'headstrong': 'lit. "ruling"; i.e. who does what she pleases, being subject to no-one'; Zimmerli (1979: 328) translates 'arch-harlot'; Brownlee (1986: 234) offers "'Unabashed harlot"... or possibly, "An uncontrollable harlot wife"'. J. C. Greenfield (1982) draws on Elephantine texts to argue that a *שְׁלֵטָה* is a financially independent woman, while Halperin (1993: 146) translates *שְׁלֵטָה* as 'economically independent', commenting, 'Men therefore cannot control her, as they can ordinary harlots, through her need for money. On the contrary, she is able to pay her lovers (verses 31–4). Yahweh helpless to dominate her, can only solace himself by punishing her.'

<sup>87</sup> L. Day (2000: 211). She explains: 'YHWH is accusing Jerusalem of performing those very same actions he performed with regard to her... he watched and waited for her to be of age. He found her, visible, in an open public area... As he, a traveller passing by... found in her an available partner, so he blames her for giving attention to those similarly passing by... As he disregarded ancestry and had relations with a foreign... stranger, so he now castigates her for having relations with foreigners... He "took" her as she is now supposedly taking others. Even the order of the exchanges are the same. YHWH first had sex with Jerusalem and only then, after the act, gave her gifts. Now he finds that she has sex with others, then likewise afterwards bequeaths them gifts' (pp. 210–11).

<sup>88</sup> Zimmerli (1979: 345).

<sup>89</sup> Allen (1994: 239).

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Kamionkowski (2003: 123–5) who concludes that *אִשֶׁה זוֹנָה שְׁלֵטָה* 'refers to a woman who is not only a prostitute out of necessity, but by her own choice. Financially and socially she is not only independent, but is a position to oversee or even dominate others.' She concludes: 'The woman of Ezekiel 16 revels in her independence.'

<sup>91</sup> Runions (2001) valiantly seeks to reclaim the term 'prostitute', drawing on Girardian theory to argue that, like Rahab and Tamar elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, Jerusalem as

This thesis is primarily concerned with the role of the cooperative reader, however, so we must return to the conclusions actively encouraged by the structure's stranglehold on the story. Block neatly illustrates the position:

Fundamental to Jerusalem's harlotry was a misplacement of confidence. Instead of committing herself to her divine husband, she placed her confidence in her beauty. . . . For Jerusalem the newly found beauty and fame were intoxicating. In her inebriation she lost all sense of history, perspective, and propriety; the temporal and ephemeral replaced the eternal; the gift displaced the giver. . . . Preferring the parasitism of her clients to the generosity of her divine Benefactor, she shares her privileges and Yahweh's expression of love with men who care only for her body. In a litany of specific crimes . . . this ungrateful woman 'takes' Yahweh's good gifts and abuses them for her own prideful and vain purposes.<sup>92</sup>

Indeed, 16A leaves little breathing space for our resistant reading. While Jerusalem's *coup* could be seen as admirable, her business plan betrays the deep flaw that she will make no money (16: 34). Allen writes, 'scorn is poured out on its failure to play out the metaphorical role consistently. . . . Jerusalem, Yahweh's consort, gained nothing from her infidelity. . . . The "adulterous wife" (v 32) who rushed into affairs (v 34, "not solicited") had taken on a role she could not handle properly to her own advantage.'<sup>93</sup> Swanepoel underscores the power of the narrative as he astoundingly speaks of this as the most shocking aspect of 16A: 'Maarsingh is surely referring, among others, to this section when he says of the book Ezekiel, that there are parts that chill one to the bone. . . . That you pay your men instead of them paying you is surely the summit of immorality.'<sup>94</sup> Allusions to Jerusalem's callous 'slaughtering' of her children ('the only context in Ezek. 16 which allows us to see how Jerusalem behaves as a "mother"')<sup>95</sup> also work forcefully to turn the

'prostitute' in 16A is 'an important salvific figure'. For she is 'a surrogate victim for the violence that should properly be directed at the nations' (p. 168). For Runions, this approach 'transforms the figure of the woman by rendering her a heroine of sorts and it brings the image of prostitution from the despised margin to the valued center' (p. 169). This is a compelling reading, which brings Jerusalem dignity even in the midst of the dreadful ending to 16A.

<sup>92</sup> Block (1997: 488).

<sup>93</sup> Allen (1994: 241). Baumann (2003: 143): 'what is at stake in 16: 33, 34, 41 is not Jerusalem's guilt, but rather the absurdity of her behavior in paying the "whore's wages" (ארתן) to her lovers.'

<sup>94</sup> Swanepoel (1993: 89). Shields (2001: 145): 'The final image in v. 34 stresses Jerusalem's contrariness and the extremity of her overstepping of sexual boundaries: rather than being paid, like a prostitute, she actually pays her clients for sex.' Ortlund (1996: 112) seems not to perceive the undercurrents of a power struggle: 'A common whore at least has the incentive of monetary gain for submitting herself to degradation. But here is a harlot who seeks no advantage for herself. Compelled by appetite alone, she has no motivation but sheer desire. If she gains nothing she does not care. She is glad to be possessed for its own sake. Uncommon harlotry (verse 34)!'

<sup>95</sup> Darr (1992*b*: 104).

reader against her, especially given the ironic echoes with her own beginnings.<sup>96</sup> Certainly, within the wider context of the book Jerusalem's actions are unacceptable: her assumption that YHWH is redundant flies in the face of what Joyce calls *Ezekiel's* 'radical theocentricity', which is 'of an order difficult to parallel anywhere in the Old Testament'.<sup>97</sup> Unfortunately, for Jerusalem, her early relationship with YHWH does come with strings attached; and the cooperative reader waits with bated breath for YHWH's response, sensing that her bid for freedom is not the end of the story.

The perception that a response will indeed come is in part due again to the narrative's powerful structuring. 16A's panels are what we might call 'staircase panelling' (not dissimilar to the 'staircase parallelism' of the *Psalms*), working forcefully to drive the narrative forwards. The initial action(s) of the previous panel are not repeated, while each panel goes further than its predecessor. Thus Panel 1 consists of actions 1–4, Panel 2 of actions 2–6 and Panel 3 of actions 4–11. This onward momentum combines to suggest the imminence of Panel 4. Such staircase panelling stands in stark opposition to *Ezekiel* 20's panels, where the same actions recur repeatedly, with only minor alterations, reflecting what Eslinger understands as a cyclical view of history.<sup>98</sup> In 16A, history is precisely *not* cyclical, but rather moves relentlessly forward, gathering pace.<sup>99</sup> By the end of Panel 3, the initially effusive commentary on Jerusalem's behaviour descends into a curt catalogue of 'prostitutions', as the female runs out of gifts to overturn, taking initiative in her actions, as 16A moves inexorably towards crisis.<sup>100</sup>

Thus, following the extended diatribe lying between the panels in 16: 30–4, we advance to Panel 4, where YHWH heralds the continuation of the battle for control with the chilling words, 'Therefore, prostitute, hear the word of the Lord' (16: 35). Perhaps the most striking structural feature of Panel 4 is that YHWH does not react to Jerusalem's actions systematically. Instead, he strikes in sweeping punishments, avenging two or three of Jerusalem's

<sup>96</sup> Greenberg (1983: 293): 'forgetful of her bloody plight as a baby, from which she had been saved. Her filicide evokes her own verging on death, when, naked and bloody, she was a victim of her own parents' cruelty.'

<sup>97</sup> Joyce (1989: 105, cf. pp. 89–105). Allen (1994: 241): 'All is subsumed under the prophetic single-minded concept of Yahweh's theological authority, which Judah resists at the cost of its ruin.'

<sup>98</sup> Eslinger (1998: 118).

<sup>99</sup> Greenberg (1983: 296) alludes to a 'climactic structure'.

<sup>100</sup> L. Day (2000: 209–10): 'Throughout the section, YHWH confuses religious idolatry with errant sexual expression. What he describes are religious actions . . . but he can only evaluate them as "prostitution" (various forms of the root נָזַח run throughout this discourse).' Allen (1994: 239–40) writes of 16: 20–1: 'The next installment is devoted to a fresh development that is regarded as the ultimate outrage. . . . This new "taking" does not correspond precisely to a gift bestowed by Yahweh, though mention of sons and daughters smoothly follows the marriage of v 8.'

offences with single actions, even using her own lovers as his instrument of vengeance, suggesting a certain resourcefulness on his part while underscoring the blind intensity of his anger.<sup>101</sup> Greenberg speaks of ‘an outpouring of accumulated rage, heaping up items of indictment and measures of punishment.’<sup>102</sup> The familiar ‘tit for tat’ pattern rears its head once more, but this time in extremity, as Jerusalem’s crimes are tangled together in YHWH’s rage as he wrests control from Jerusalem.<sup>103</sup> Swanepoel, perhaps rather hopefully, stresses that ‘Yahweh is in full control of the punishment (vv. 36–8)—notice the large number of first-person verbs.’<sup>104</sup> Tarlin speaks of ‘the triumphant pleasures of male sadism as the text gleefully details the assertion of mastery over would-be rebellious woman via the infliction of humiliation and pain.’<sup>105</sup> Thus Jerusalem’s giving away of her garments (16: 16, 18) and liaisons with the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Babylonians (16: 26–9) are punished by her ‘nakedness’ being ‘exposed’ before them (16: 37).<sup>106</sup> The same giving away of her garments (16: 16, 18) and gold, silver, and jewels (16: 17) is also punished by the stripping of her clothes and taking of her beautiful objects, as she is left naked and bare (16: 39).<sup>107</sup> Jerusalem’s construction of a mound and lofty place (16: 24) is punished by their destruction (16: 39). And finally, the murder of Jerusalem’s children (16: 20) is punished by her being judged ‘with the judgements of adulteresses and women who shed blood’ (16: 38).<sup>108</sup> As Baumann observes, ‘YHWH’s

<sup>101</sup> L. Day (2000: 218): ‘With such graphic descriptions it is difficult not to see YHWH as enjoying how Jerusalem is beaten and broken, or at the very least finding satisfaction in her physical injury.’

<sup>102</sup> Greenberg (1983: 296; cf. 1987: 145). Dempsey (1998: 69): ‘The authorial voice that shaped the text portrays Yhwh as someone who is controlling, possessive, angry, and abusive.’

<sup>103</sup> Barton (1990: 61), Morris (1996: 59).

<sup>104</sup> Swanepoel (1993: 90). Pope (1995: 395): ‘As the wronged husband, YHWH was hurt but kept himself under control.’ Cf. Weems (1995: 73): ‘God seems to be out of control.’

<sup>105</sup> Tarlin (1997: 175). Cf. Ortlund (1996: 114, emphasis mine): ‘Yahweh’s beloved has antagonized him to such an extent that his jealous anger stirs him to act with *redemptive* punishment.’

<sup>106</sup> Allen (1994: 242): ‘The first stage of Jerusalem’s punishment fits the crime by involving her international lovers.’ Block (1997: 502): ‘Her fate or fortunes have come full circle.’ Baumann (2003: 154–5), Yee (2003: 131), and Washington (1997: 355) are committed to naming this treatment as rape.

<sup>107</sup> The power of ‘the marriage metaphor’ is such that, under the influence of *Hos* 2: 5, Zimmerli (1979: 346), notes even here that ‘in this way, Yahweh accomplishes indirectly the divorce whereby he declares that he “regards himself as free from the obligation to clothe the woman”’. This desire to find a divorce in 16A seems incongruous, given that Jerusalem is dead by the next verse.

<sup>108</sup> P. L. Day (2000, 2004) insists that *Ezekiel* 16 does not necessarily ‘accurately depict the appropriate and lawful punishment for adultery in ancient Israel’ (2000: 309) in its portrayal of stripping. While some of Day’s arguments are problematic—e.g. she assumes that the people

punitive action is legitimated.... The punishments of the “woman” in 16: 39 correspond, even in specific details, to her previous “conduct.”<sup>109</sup> Zimmerli writes: ‘God needs no angel from heaven; he judges men [and we might add ‘women’] through that which they have chosen for themselves in their own godless love.’<sup>110</sup> Thus, in just half the actions, YHWH uses Jerusalem’s lovers to re-reverse and revenge all eight of her ‘perversities’ and also her persistent ‘prostitution.’<sup>111</sup> He even threatens to double the punishments, leaving Jerusalem dead and her body mutilated. Only then, as control is well and truly restored to YHWH, with no opposition left to face, will YHWH be ‘calm and no longer angry’ (16: 42): a disquieting end to this narrative for its echoes of domestic abuse. L. Day comments, ‘a remarkably quick turnabout, if we did not know the battering model.’<sup>112</sup> Shields observes: ‘As with the rhetoric of the abuser in spousal abuse, the victim is entirely at fault and has caused this rage and violence. The battery itself satisfies the abuser’s rage and is followed by a calm which lasts until the next episode.’<sup>113</sup>

of Jerusalem are instead being punished for a breach of covenant (2000: 308; 2004: 69)—her insistence that there are not sufficient grounds in *Ezekiel* 16 for us to assume that stripping was a typical punishment for literal adultery seems sensible. Cf. Phillips (1981: 17). Yee (2003: 131) believes that the similarities between Ashurnasirpal’s ‘military barbarities’ and *Ezek* 23: 25–7 suggest that ‘memories of trauma, more than the sentences for adultery, lie behind Ezekiel’s depiction of Oholibah’s chastisement’.

<sup>109</sup> Baumann (2003: 155). She goes on to outline specific details of those correspondences (pp. 155–6). Ortlund (1996: 117): ‘The sentence is just.’

<sup>110</sup> Zimmerli (1979: 489–90).

<sup>111</sup> Shields (2001: 150) highlights the way in which YHWH’s employment of the lovers to ‘punish’ Jerusalem makes the domestic violence seem ‘more extreme’: ‘Rather than being done in private, as most spousal abuse is done, the battery here is public. . . . Equally disturbing is the fact that having the lovers carry out the retribution deflects attention from the one who is ultimately responsible.’

<sup>112</sup> L. Day (2000: 215). Day explores the way in which *Ezekiel* 16 follows the ‘three-stage cycle through which an abusive relationship travels’: (1) a ‘gradual escalation of violence’; (2) ‘the acute violent incident’; (3) ‘a period of calm’ (pp. 214–15). At this point in the narrative, she notes, ‘He takes the relationship back to its former state, before the abuse (and, if this were an actual battering relationship, to the beginning of the cycle again)’ (p. 216). Others are aware of the echoes of Jerusalem’s state before meeting YHWH. Kamionkowski (2003: 152): ‘God forces her into a position of complete powerlessness and passivity just as she had been at the beginning of our story—the helpless, naked, powerless woman wallowing in her own blood brings us back to the helpless abandoned infant, wallowing in her blood, utterly dependent upon God.’ Cf. L. Day (2000: 212). Brownlee (1986: 238): ‘Here we have the reversal of her birth and of that original divine blessing (v. 6): “Though bloody, live.”’

<sup>113</sup> Shields (2001: 149). Exum (1996: 114): ‘physical assault paves the way for the abused woman’s reconciliation with her abusive spouse. Abuse is thus complexly and confusingly linked with love in a pattern that consistently challenges woman’s sense of worth and self-esteem.’

## Panel 3 (16: 15–29)

Jerusalem's bid for independence

*Jerusalem prostitutes* (16: 15)

4. Jerusalem takes her garments to make high places (16: 16)

*Jerusalem prostitutes* (16: 16)

5. She takes her gold, silver, and jewels to make images of men (16: 17)

*Jerusalem prostitutes* (16: 17)

6. She takes her garments and choice food and gives them to images of men (16: 18–19)

*Jerusalem's prostitution is not enough*

(16: 20)

7. She takes her children and slaughters them for 'them' (16: 20–1)

*In her prostitutions, she does not*

*remember her youth* (16: 22)

8. She builds a 'mound' and lofty place (16: 24)

*Jerusalem prostitutes* (16: 25)

9. *Jerusalem prostitutes* with Egyptians (16: 26)

10. *Jerusalem prostitutes* with Assyrians (16: 28)

11. *Jerusalem prostitutes* with

Babylonians (16: 29)

## Panel 4 (16: 35–43)

Control is restored to YHWH

- A. YHWH gathers all her lovers and uncovers Jerusalem's nakedness to them (16: 37)

- B. Jerusalem is judged with the judgements of adulteresses and women who shed blood (16: 38)

- C. Her mound and lofty place are destroyed (16: 39)

- D. Her clothes are stripped, her beautiful objects are taken, and she is left naked and bare (16: 39)

- E. Her lovers bring up a mob against her (16: 40)

- F. They stone her and cut her to pieces (16: 40)

- G. They burn her houses and execute judgements upon her (16: 41)

- H. YHWH makes Jerusalem stop 'prostituting' (16: 41)

A powerful dynamic of control flows through 16A's staircase panelling. The implicit suggestion that Jerusalem has attempted to rival YHWH reinforces the horror of her behaviour in the context of this book's 'radical theocentricity'. Yet, like any powerful, but implicit, literary device, the harnessing of such a strong structure by 16A is a risky strategy, for, like metaphorical language, it cannot ultimately itself be controlled. We have already encountered one opportunity for resistant reading; in addition, we might say that the narrative's relentless drive forwards through staircase panelling creates the potential for structural irony. For in Panel 4, YHWH's actions continue past the point of the previous panel, and the reader is perhaps therefore left expecting the next movement—for Jerusalem to rise like a phoenix from the ashes. We might even say that, within the present ordering of the book, it is unsurprising that Oholah and Oholibah emerge in chapter 23 to take up the mantle of the dying Jerusalem.

If 16A's creation of such a powerful structure is a risky business, however, staircase panelling is not the only structural device harnessed by the narrative; and we might say that its tangled web of other devices work forcefully to maintain a stranglehold on the reader's imagination. For 16A is pervaded with structural patterns, weaving through the panels to create a sense of inevitability even while the dramatic action unfolds. The narrative is littered with chiasms. YHWH encounters Jerusalem 'flailing/kicking (מתבוססת) in her blood' in 16: 6, then in 16: 7 she is described as naked and bare; while in 16: 8 YHWH covers Jerusalem's nakedness and then in 16: 9 he washes her of her blood.

- A Jerusalem is struggling in blood (16: 6)
- B Jerusalem is naked and bare (16: 7)
- B Jerusalem's nakedness is covered (16: 8)
- A Jerusalem's blood is washed away (16: 9)

Later in the narrative, YHWH condemns Jerusalem's nakedness (16: 36) and the blood of her children (16: 36); then two verses later threatens to bring the blood of wrath upon her (16: 38), leaving her naked and bare (16: 39).

- A Nakedness of prostitution (16: 36)
- B Blood of children (16: 36)
- B Blood of wrath (16: 38)
- A Left naked and bare (16: 39)

We might even say that these chiasms revolve around 16: 22 ('when you were naked and bare, flailing in your blood'), which appears halfway between them, bringing both motifs together in what we might call a mirroring device. Unaware of such patterning, Brownlee is puzzled by the appearance of the nakedness motif before the sentence of punishment in 16: 37–8 ('Can it be, however, that the lecherous men need to see the body of the whore in order to make positive identity of her?').<sup>114</sup> Yet such chiastic structures pervade 16A. In 16: 25, Jerusalem builds high places, then 'prostitutes' with every passer-by. A catalogue of her 'prostitutions' with the nations ensues; then in 16: 30–1 the refrain of her 'prostitution' is repeated, this time with her building of a mound and lofty place following.<sup>115</sup>

- A Jerusalem builds herself high places (16: 25)
- B She prostitutes her beauty to every passer-by (16: 25)
  - 9. She prostitutes with the Egyptians (16: 26)
  - 10. She prostitutes with the Assyrians (16: 28)

<sup>114</sup> Brownlee (1986: 236–7).

<sup>115</sup> Block (1997: 472), Greenberg (1983: 293), and Galambush (1992: 100–1) perceive further chiastic patterns.

11. She prostitutes with the Babylonians (16: 29)
- B Jerusalem's deeds are those of a prostitute (16: 30)
- A She has built a mound and lofty place in every square (16: 31)

Numerical patterns are also popular. In 16: 6–8, YHWH 'passes by' Jerusalem twice, and then this is mirrored by Jerusalem's twice prostituting with 'every passer-by' (16: 15, 25).<sup>116</sup> Thus Jerusalem once again faithfully follows the pattern set for her by YHWH.<sup>117</sup>

**YHWH as instigator**

1. YHWH passes by Jerusalem flailing in blood (16: 6)
2. YHWH passes by Jerusalem at the age for love (16: 8)

**Jerusalem as instigator**

1. Jerusalem 'lavishes' her prostitution with every passer-by (16: 15)
2. Jerusalem offers herself to every passer-by, multiplying her prostitution (16: 25)

Other numerical patterns include the refrain of Jerusalem's failure to remember her youth, which occurs twice in the narrative: once at its midpoint and once at the end, summarizing Jerusalem's crimes and impending punishment.

1. 'And in all your abominations and your prostitutions you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, flailing in your blood' (16: 22)
2. 'Because you did not remember the days of your youth, but enraged me with all these things, then, behold, I have returned your deeds upon your head' (16: 43a)

Finally, in Panel 3, six of Jerusalem's steps in her bid for freedom are characterized as 'prostitution', as three cultic 'prostitutions' are followed by three political 'prostitutions'.

**Cultic**

1. She makes her garments into high places (16: 16)
2. She makes her gold, silver, and jewels into images of men (16: 17)
3. She builds a mound and lofty places (16: 24)

**Political**

1. She prostitutes with the Egyptians (16: 26)
2. She prostitutes with the Assyrians (16: 28)
3. She prostitutes with the Babylonians (16: 29)

<sup>116</sup> Galambush (1992: 97).

<sup>117</sup> While many puzzle over why YHWH takes no action the first time he passes by Jerusalem, this seems significant for the hope it might bring to 'exilic' readers. Even where YHWH seems absent, he is watching and waiting for the opportune moment to act: YHWH will pass by once more.

The observant reader might point out that Jerusalem also commits two further cultic actions: the giving away of her food and garments (16: 18–19) and the sacrificing of her children (16: 20–1); but it seems significant in the light of the other numerical patterns that these actions are not characterized as ‘prostitution’, but are rather *worse* than this.

16A criss-crosses with countless patterns, which combine to create what we might call a ‘netting device’ over the narrative. Some may contend that such patterns are coincidental, or fortuitous, and they may have a point. For perhaps the most striking feature of 16A is its insistent reiteration of vocabulary that reverberates through the unfolding narrative. ‘Nakedness’ and ‘blood’ are prominent motifs throughout, as are Jerusalem’s mound and lofty place, and the ‘prostitution’ and ‘abominations’ with which she is indicted. We could even say that the dense, repetitive nature of such language encourages us to see patterns that are not necessarily deliberate; indeed, perhaps this is the very power of the narrative. 16A’s tangled, obsessive reiteration of vocabulary makes patterns of cause and effect echo throughout, as the story twists towards its inexorable end where YHWH is in full control.<sup>118</sup> Shields writes: ‘Throughout this text power resides in one person: Yahweh. It is his power that the woman challenges by her actions, causing shame, and it is his power that is reasserted through punishment. The extremity of the punishment reaffirms both his power and his honor. . . . His power, in the end, is absolute.’<sup>119</sup> Kamionkowski objects: ‘Power does not reside in only one character throughout the story—if this were the case, there would be no conflict, no tension, and certainly no story. What is so remarkable about this text is that God does not have all the power! . . . the center of the story expresses a much more volatile, chaotic relationship—one in which the deity does not have full control and in which wife Jerusalem is not completely submissive.’<sup>120</sup> Yet, caught tangled within *Ezekiel* 16A’s ‘netting device’, we can perhaps understand Shields’s perspective. Jerusalem may take initiative to free herself, but she—and the resistant reader—face forceful opposition as the ‘empty places’ of the text constrict, leaving no space into which to speak her alternative story of the events.<sup>121</sup> 16A’s infinite patterning works to weave a tight net around its possible meanings,

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Greenberg (1983: 292, 296) and Allen (1994: 235) for further structural patterns.

<sup>119</sup> Shields (2001: 148).

<sup>120</sup> Kamionkowski (2003: 130).

<sup>121</sup> Shields (2001: 140): ‘the woman never speaks in this passage. She is therefore never constituted as a separate subject apart from Yahweh’s speech and view.’ L. Day (2000: 214): ‘Disbelief in Jerusalem’s side of the story is extreme: her perspective is not even given. An external listener does not even have the opportunity to believe her.’

constricting imagination.<sup>122</sup> This is the stranglehold and claustrophobia of the narrative. And this is the context for *Ezekiel 16*'s sexual and marital metaphorical language.

### Sexual and marital metaphorical language in *Ezekiel 16A*

16A swarms with sexual and marital metaphorical language. By far the most prominent metaphorical focus is 'prostitution' (זונה), which, as Block suggests, 'functions as the *Leitwort* of the oracle'.<sup>123</sup> Before we turn to this popular motif, however, we should first explore further 16A's rarer charge of metaphorical 'adultery' (16: 32, 38).

The 'adultery' focus is something of a puzzle in the prophetic texts. It does not appear frequently enough to allow us to trace any clear patterns, yet attracts our interest by repeatedly appearing within the context of child sacrifice. The close relationship between 'adultery' and child sacrifice is perhaps most clear in what I will later identify as 23B (23: 36–49). In 23: 37, YHWH insists: 'For they have committed adultery and blood is on their hands; with their idols they have committed adultery! Even their children, which they bore for me, they have "made pass over" (העבירו) for them for food.'<sup>124</sup> Verse 37 makes a clear link not only between 'adultery' and child sacrifice, but also between child sacrifice and the idea that 'blood is on their hands'. Scholarship is divided over whether the historical practice of child sacrifice involved the slaughtering of the victim before burning by fire,<sup>125</sup> but *Ezekiel 23: 36–49* is certainly keen to associate child sacrifice with such blood. *Psalms 106: 37–8* provides an interesting parallel, where YHWH claims, 'And they sacrificed (ויזבחו) their sons and daughters to "the demons", and shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed (זבחו) to the idols of Canaan, so the land was polluted with blood.'<sup>126</sup>

<sup>122</sup> Shields (2001: 150): 'Both the structure of this piece and its identification of Yahweh as the husband conspire to keep the reader from questioning male privilege, male dominance, even male rape and abuse.'

<sup>123</sup> Block (1997: 465).

<sup>124</sup> There is some debate over what this 'passing over' (a Hiphil, causative, form of עבר) might have involved, and a vague and more literal rendering therefore seems appropriate. Cf. our discussion of *Isa 57: 3–10*. Heider (1985: 366–7) attributes the language of 'eating' to 'Ezekiel's well-known proclivity to literalize the metaphors of earlier prophets'.

<sup>125</sup> Stavropoulou (2004: 235) is willing to consider the possibility, while Heider (1985: 374) vigorously refutes it.

<sup>126</sup> Interestingly, 'prostitution' (ויזנו) appears as a metaphorical focus in *Ps 106: 39*, despite the fact that, in line with this discussion, we might expect 'adultery' to appear in this context of child sacrifice. This usefully underscores the point that I am by no means seeking to suggest that 'adultery' must always have associations of child sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible; or that it is

So when *Ezekiel* 23: 45 goes on to reiterate, 'And righteous men will judge them with the judgement of adulteresses and the judgement of women who shed blood; because they are adulteresses and blood is on their hands,' we might also presume this to be an allusion to child sacrifice. Certainly Oholah and Oholibah shed no other blood in *Ezekiel* 23.

If in *Ezekiel* 23: 36–49 'adultery' and child sacrifice are thus closely bound up with each other, the rare 'adultery' focus also appears within a wider frame of child sacrifice in *Isaiah* 57: 3–10, as we have seen. It therefore seems to be of some significance that Jerusalem's 'adultery' focus in 16: 38 is associated with the shedding of blood: 'I will judge you with the judgements of adulteresses and women who shed blood, and bring upon you blood of wrath and jealousy.' Certainly, the only blood that is shed in 16A, other than Jerusalem's own, is that of her children, as YHWH explicitly accuses Jerusalem of child sacrifice in 16: 20: 'And you took your sons and daughters, whom you had borne to me, and sacrificed them (ותזבחים) to them for food. As if your prostitutions were not enough! You slaughtered (ותשחטי) my children and gave them as a "passing over" (בהעביר) for them!' This repeated relationship between child sacrifice and metaphorical adultery is noteworthy for its appearance in three different passages across two prophetic books. *Ezekiel* 23: 36–45's allusions to child sacrifice and 'adultery' are almost certainly closely bound up with their appearance in 16A, as we shall see; but there is no obvious textual relationship between *Ezekiel* 16 and 23 and *Isaiah* 57: 3–10 that might likewise account for such similar associations. With metaphorical adultery featuring so infrequently in the Hebrew Bible, it is not possible to draw any strong conclusions. However, given its rarity, the proportion of instances in which this focus fraternizes with child sacrifice is striking, perhaps even hinting that such associations may have become an associated commonplace of the focus, a possibility that may be of keen interest to those concerned with this practice.<sup>127</sup>

impossible to introduce such associations to other metaphorical foci, such as 'prostitution'. Metaphorical language simply does not work in that way. Nevertheless, it remains striking that the 'adultery' focus, given its rarity, appears in the context of child sacrifice in three different prophetic texts.

<sup>127</sup> Freedman and Willoughby (1998: 117–18) also note the close relationship between metaphorical adultery and child sacrifice in the prophetic books, particularly focusing on *Isa* 57: 1–6 and *Ezek* 16: 35–43; 23: 43–9. They assume, however, that this link derives 'from the prophetic notion that violation of Israel's marriage with Yahweh is seen most clearly in cultic prostitution and child sacrifice', even claiming, 'It is quite possible that the children sacrificed were the very children begotten in cultic intercourse.' For them, the relationship between the terms is bound up entirely with reconstructed fertility rituals. As discussed, such a reliance on potential 'etymologies' is an unnecessarily limiting way to approach metaphorical language.

As if to prove that metaphorical foci cannot be limited to commonplaces, however, 16: 32 breaks the mould, providing no hint of such associations, as YHWH rages, ‘Adulterous wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband!’ The indictment seems to highlight Jerusalem’s unfaithfulness, encouraging sexual associations through ‘take’ (תָּקַח), while suggesting that Jerusalem has broken a legal bond with YHWH.<sup>128</sup> The appearance of ‘adultery’ in close proximity to ‘prostitution’ (16: 31, 33) might provoke interest among those who insist with Abma that ‘The verb נָאֵף (“to commit adultery”) is a synonym of the verb זָנָה (“to commit harlotry”)’.<sup>129</sup> Close attention, however, reveals this metaphorical language to elude expectations once again, as Jerusalem’s ‘adultery’ is instead associated with her *not* being like a prostitute. But perhaps the most interesting aspect of 16: 32 is that YHWH’s outburst interrupts 16: 31–3, which would otherwise confront Jerusalem with the coherent charge: ‘Yet you were not like a prostitute, scorning payment! [...] To all prostitutes they give gifts, but you, you give your gifts to all your lovers, and bribe them to come to you from all around for your prostitutions!’ We might even wonder whether the ‘adultery’ accusation of 16: 32 has been added to explain why this ‘prostitute’ demands no payment for her liaisons.

If 16A’s ‘adultery’ focus is an intriguing blend of mystery and suggestion, the more insistent charge of ‘prostitution’ is less subtle. The cultic nature of many of Jerusalem’s actions perhaps inevitably arouses repeated allusions to ‘cultic prostitution’ within traditional scholarship. May writes, ‘The term harlotries here . . . as in Hosea and often elsewhere, carries the connotation of association with sexual rites of the Canaanitish cults. . . . Jerusalem became, as it were, a sacred prostitute in the cult in which the sacred marriage was an important part of the cultic practices.’<sup>130</sup> Biggs observes, ‘Jerusalem was involved in cultic apostasy, setting up shrines in prominent places, and furnishing them for cultic prostitution. The harlotry referred to (v. 15) covers both the wanton disregard of God and the cult, and actual cultic prostitution.’<sup>131</sup> It seems to me, however, that 16A’s ‘prostitution’ motif moves well beyond any such hypothetical ‘etymology’. For a start, Jerusalem is accused of ‘prostituting’ with Egyptians, Assyrians, and Babylonians (16: 26–9), charges which clearly cannot speak of ‘cultic prostitution’. Perhaps more importantly, within this powerful wider frame, the familiar ‘prostitution’ focus takes on

<sup>128</sup> Cf. *Lev* 20: 14, 17, 21, where תָּקַח has sexual connotations.

<sup>129</sup> Abma (1999: 206).

<sup>130</sup> May (1956: 145).

<sup>131</sup> Biggs (1996: 16). Cf. Brownlee (1986: 228, 232–3), Eichrodt (1970: 207), Blenkinsopp (1990: 78).

unusual associations, three of which are worth exploring further for their distinctiveness.

First, associations of cultic uncleanness reverberate through the narrative, as the 'prostitution' focus repeatedly appears alongside allusions to Jerusalem's 'abominations' (תועבות).<sup>132</sup> While תועבות often describes unacceptable cultic practices more generally (*Exodus* 8: 22; *Deuteronomy* 7: 25–6, 17: 1–2), the term can also speak of unacceptable sexual practices (*Leviticus* 18, 20:13).<sup>133</sup> Within the overtly sexual frame of 16A, such connotations are heightened. Block speaks of a 'general shift of meaning apparent in the present prophecy: Hereafter it will refer to Jerusalem's spiritual harlotry with foreign nations.'<sup>134</sup> If Jerusalem's 'abominations' appear overtly sexual in character, her 'prostitutions' reciprocally gather associations of cultic unacceptability. Such associations are not unique to 16A; 'prostitution' appears alongside 'defilement' (טמא) in *Hosea* 5: 3, 6: 10 and *Ezekiel* 23: 7, 13, 30 to similar effect. Yet they seem particularly strong in 16A, perhaps due to the repeated allusions to blood, with its powerful potential as a polluting force, flowing through the narrative (16: 6, 9, 22, 36, 38). Galambush observes,

Ezekiel exploits fully the unique ability of the female body to exhibit not only the defilement of adultery, but also every type of blood pollution, from menstruation and childbirth to murder. The woman is depicted graphically and repeatedly as unfaithful. . . . She is also, however, characterized by pollution with every type of unclean blood. At birth she is left in the unclean blood of her mother's womb. Upon reaching puberty, she apparently remains in the impurity of her menstrual blood, until washed by her own husband. Finally she incurs blood guilt through the murder of her own children.<sup>135</sup>

16A's fascination with female blood is one of its more disturbing features. Galambush argues that the prominence of the motif is bound up with an

<sup>132</sup> Baumann (2003: 147) notes: 'About a third of the Old Testament instances of תועבות are found in Ezekiel, and a fourth of those in ch.16 alone.'

<sup>133</sup> Note the provocative reference to child sacrifice within the sexually charged setting of *Lev* 18: 21.

<sup>134</sup> Block (1997: 471).

<sup>135</sup> Galambush (1992: 102–3). Halperin (1993: 161): 'Blood is a standard preoccupation of Ezekiel's, as a glance at a concordance will show.' Shields (2001: 142) points out: 'Each of these types of blood is associated with the female gender alone. In addition, each type of blood causes contamination which require ritual cleansing. Such references to blood emphasize the woman's body and associate that body with uncleanness.' There is some disagreement about the nature of the blood which YHWH washes off Jerusalem in 16: 9. Irwin (1943: 161) cannot conceive that *Ezekiel* would portray YHWH as being in contact with menstrual blood; Chapman (2004: 120) believes that this is 'the blood of a virgin following her first intercourse'; while Galambush (1992: 94 n. 16) argues that it is Jerusalem's birth blood, within which she is left until sexual encounter. However we are to understand this blood, in the words of Galambush (p. 94 n. 16), 'the image is disturbing'.

impulse to explain YHWH's disconcerting desertion of the sanctuary: 'Ezekiel's charge that Jerusalem is irredeemably polluted with unclean blood explains the necessity for Yahweh to abandon the city.'<sup>136</sup> Yet the assumption and reinforcement of the idea that the female body is *inherently* defiled by blood, and that female sexuality is *inherently* defiling, is deeply problematic for current readers, setting 16A apart from the other prophetic texts.<sup>137</sup> Shields writes: 'By repeatedly connecting women with uncleanness, the text places women completely outside the boundaries. No longer do women represent the limits of society, they seem to be excluded completely.'<sup>138</sup>

'Prostitution' in 16A is not only bound up with cultic pollution. This tightly woven narrative also encourages associations of misunderstanding, as it forces the assumption that Jerusalem has misinterpreted her circumstances. Within *Ezekiel's* 'radical theocentricity', Jerusalem's audacity in perceiving herself to be free to act in the same way as YHWH is deeply misguided. This perception is reinforced by the characterization of her actions as 'prostitution', while YHWH's similar actions are given no such a label. The associations of ignorance that this encourages are further exaggerated by the refrain that Jerusalem has 'not remembered the days of her youth' (16: 22, 43) and the suggestion that she has not even understood the conventions of prostitution correctly (16: 31–4). The overriding impression of deeply misguided behaviour surrounding Jerusalem's 'prostitution' in 16A may seem familiar following our discussion of *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4's theme of senselessness, but there are significant differences. In *Jeremiah*, Judah's sexual behaviour is portrayed as haphazard and random, perhaps most notoriously in 2: 24 ('A wild ass used to the wilderness; In the lust of her desire she pants after a scent'). In 16A, Jerusalem's sexual activities are ruthlessly deliberate, even systematic, as she calculatingly works through her catalogue of lovers, seeking to reverse and mimic YHWH's actions.

Perhaps most important for this exploration, however, is the impact of 16A's powerful dynamic of control on its 'prostitution' motif. It seems significant that within this narrative 'prostitution' itself seems to take on associations of power, with the female's sexuality becoming a weapon to be unleashed in the battle against YHWH.<sup>139</sup> Such associations are perhaps even reflected in commentaries and articles, as Greenberg describes 16A as 'an extended metaphor of the nymphomaniacal adulteress'; Blenkinsopp refers to Jerusalem as the 'nymphomaniac bride'; Allen comments, 'There is an impression of nymphomania, as Jerusalem grows increasingly promiscuous';

<sup>136</sup> Galambush (1992: 103).

<sup>137</sup> Galambush (1992: 102).

<sup>138</sup> Shields (2001: 146).

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Kamionkowski (2003: 119): 'It is only in Ezek. 16: 15 that a female is subject of [שפס], a verb that has strong connotations of aggression, power and violence.'

Yee speaks of ‘the nymphomaniacal wife Jerusalem’; while Bisschops alludes to her as ‘a chronic nymphomaniac’.<sup>140</sup> Perhaps these readers have perceived the implicit dynamic of control coursing through 16A, to characterize Jerusalem as one who engages in sexual activity to gain power, rather than for enjoyment or intimacy. 16A may draw on a popular metaphorical focus, but its use of ‘prostitution’ as a motif is far from typical.

### EZEKIEL 23

And so we turn to 16A’s ‘sister narrative’, *Ezekiel* 23. Like chapter 16, chapter 23 is first and foremost characterized structurally by the ‘halving pattern’, which presents us with the ‘core narrative’, A (23: 1–35), followed by the ‘dependent narrative’, B (23: 36–49), which further explores certain features of this core narrative.<sup>141</sup> Both 23A and 23B feature sexual and marital metaphorical language; indeed, we might say that it is such language that has sparked the interest of the later narrative. In stark contrast to 23A, on which it builds, however, 23B demonstrates no signs of an overriding structure. Instead, this passage seems to be an often disjointed collection of sayings,<sup>142</sup> some of which appear to have suffered from textual corruption.<sup>143</sup> For instance, 23: 42–3, is notoriously difficult to piece together.<sup>144</sup>

### *Ezekiel* 23B

There are a number of interesting characteristics of 23B, but particularly worth highlighting is 16A’s considerable influence on its vocabulary.<sup>145</sup> Certainly 23B is shaped by 23A, as the infamous *Oholah* and *Oholibah* of

<sup>140</sup> Greenberg (1983: 292), Blenkinsopp (1990: 76, 78), Allen (1994: 240), Yee (2003: 2), Bisschops (2003: 123). Cf. also Goodfriend (1992a: 85), Wevers (1969: 119), Darr (1992b: 103), Block (1997: 465). ‘Nymphomania’ is also sometimes used to describe the sisters’ actions in *Ezekiel* 23 (Allen 1990: 41; Greenberg 1997: 488). As we shall see, however, 23A is perhaps more bound up with uncontrollability than this desire for control.

<sup>141</sup> Zimmerli (1979: 480) and Block (1997: 730) divide the chapter similarly for redactional reasons. Cooke (1936: 256) believes that 23: 36–49 is distinct, but still written by the prophet Ezekiel. Greenberg (1997: 488–9) introduces A as 23: 1–34 and B as 23: 36–49, understanding v. 35 as a ‘footnote’. Galambush (1992: 123) perceives a coda (C), 23: 46–9, weaving 16 and 23 together; but elements of both these chapters are already strong in 23B.

<sup>142</sup> Allen (1990: 48).

<sup>143</sup> Wevers (1969: 186), Block (1997: 756).

<sup>144</sup> Greenberg (1997: 486): ‘The passage may well be corrupt’; ‘rendering is guesswork’. Wevers (1969: 187) dismisses 23: 43 as ‘untranslatable’. Cf. Zimmerli (1979: 492).

<sup>145</sup> Cf. Block (1997: 756), Zimmerli (1979: 491). Some also speak of *Jer* 3: 6–11’s influence on *Ezekiel* 23B. Cf. the discussion of this prose reflection in Ch. 2, which suggests that the influence

that narrative reappear, and 23: 38 features 23A's 'defiling' (טמא) motif.<sup>146</sup> Yet the impact of 16A is also considerable. The narrative's characteristic references to 'abominations' (16: 2, 22, 36) and 'blood' (16: 6, 9, 22, 36, 38), which are absent in 23A, reappear (23: 37, 45). Even more strikingly, the rare 'adultery' focus features in both narratives (16: 32, 38; 23: 37, 45); indeed, YHWH's threat in 23: 45 is strikingly reminiscent of 16: 38. Section 23B introduces its own motifs and themes, such as an explicit interest in the sanctuary and sabbaths (23: 38),<sup>147</sup> but it is nevertheless clearly influenced by 16A: an observation of some significance, as it may go some way to explaining the perception that *Ezekiel* 16 and 23 share strong similarities, when there are otherwise deep-seated differences between them. Nevertheless, beyond the interest that 23B provokes concerning the relationship between 23A and 16A, and the striking 'adultery' language we explored earlier, it is difficult to establish patterns in this narrative's sexual and marital metaphorical language owing to its disjointed nature. But it is perhaps this that most clearly sets 23B's sexual metaphorical language apart from that of 23A. For the absence of a strongly identifying theme alone contrasts sharply with 23A's distinctive sexual and marital metaphorical language.

### *Ezekiel* 23A: the wider frame

Section 23A reveals a similar interest in repetition to 16A. Eichrodt writes: 'Exact repetition of the same words to describe the Assyrians as those used in the previous passage serves to underline the fact that Judah was induced by similar motives and used similar means to carry out the same self-willed policy as Northern Israel.'<sup>148</sup> Block notes: 'The first phase of the case against Oholibah is intentionally cast as a rerun of Oholah's life. Oholibah watches her elder sister, but instead of heeding the warning of her fate, she deliberately patterns her own behaviour after her.'<sup>149</sup> Indeed, in this narrative we are once again confronted with a panelling structure. While 16A is distinctive for its use of staircase panelling, however, 23A has more in common with the cyclical panelling of chapter 20, as outlined by Eslinger.<sup>150</sup> Actions continually repeat, calling attention to three main panels sweeping through the narrative. Most striking of all is 23A's relentless return to Oholah and Oholibah's catastrophic

might be in the other direction: for a start, the metaphorical language of 16A, 23A, and 23B is vibrantly alive, while similar language used of two sisters in *Jer* 3: 6–11 is dormant.

<sup>146</sup> Greenberg (1997: 493): '[B] skews the main theme of A, while at the same time resuming, not merely at the end, as is the usual case, but throughout, various elements of A in heightened or developed form.'

<sup>147</sup> Galambush (1992: 84).

<sup>148</sup> Eichrodt (1970: 324).

<sup>149</sup> Block (1997: 743).

<sup>150</sup> Eslinger (1998). Cf. Allen (1992).

early experience, where in Egypt men ‘press their breasts’ and ‘handle their virgin bosoms’ (23: 3, 8, 19–21). This refrain becomes what we might call 23A’s ‘anchor’, to which it always returns, ultimately preventing the females’ story from moving onwards. As Oholibah recalls her Egyptian experience in 23: 19–21, Block observes: ‘Now she has come full circle. As she recalls her youth in Egypt, the mature woman’s addiction takes her back to where it all began, only with intensified energy.’<sup>151</sup> Blenkinsopp writes: ‘Israel’s “original sin” in Egypt returns to haunt her throughout the history.’<sup>152</sup> In Panel 3, Oholibah may prostitute with the Babylonians as well as the Assyrians, and her longing for ‘the days of her youth in Egypt’ may be considerably more graphic than that of her sister, but the narrative is explicit that she will nevertheless face the same brutal fate as Oholah: ‘I will place her cup in your hand’ (23: 31–3). Even as the panels lengthen and the ‘prostitutions’ multiply through Panels 2 and 3, this serves only to intensify the narrative rather than to drive it onwards. The reader senses that the story will always return to that momentous incident in Egypt, which cannot be forgotten by Oholah and Oholibah, nor, it seems, by YHWH.<sup>153</sup>

Panel 1 (23: 2–4) Both sisters	Panel 2 (23: 5–10) Oholah	Panel 3 (23: 11–35) Oholibah
Oholah and Oholibah ‘prostitute’ in Egypt (23: 3)	Oholah ‘prostitutes’ while she belongs to YHWH (23: 5)	Oholibah sees Oholah and is more corrupt in her lusting and ‘prostitutions’ (23: 11)
	She lusts after Assyrians (23: 5–6)	She lusts after Assyrians (23: 12)
	She defiles herself with idols <sup>154</sup> (23: 7)	YHWH sees that she is defiled (23: 13)
	Recollection of Egypt (23: 8)	She lusts after Babylonians (23: 14–16) Recollection of Egypt (23: 19–21)
	She is delivered to the Assyrians (23: 9)	She is delivered to her lovers (23: 22–5) They cut off her nose and ears and survivors <sup>155</sup> (23: 25)

<sup>151</sup> Block (1997: 746).

<sup>152</sup> Blenkinsopp (1990: 100). Allen (1990: 46): ‘The motif of “the Egyptian affair” is broached in v 3. It plays a strong structural role: it recurs in the climactic v 27, and thus provides an *inclusion* that binds the piece together. Furthermore, it marks the end of accusatory sections, at vv 8 and 21.’ Cf. Greenberg (1983: 489).

<sup>153</sup> Greenberg (1997: 489): ‘what rankles YHWH most is their reversion time and again to their “original sin”, the affair with Egypt.’

<sup>154</sup> Baumann (2003: 146) notes that ‘גלול’ is a contemptuous word for “idols”, recalling how Krüger (1989: 178) ‘translates it as “pieces of shit”’.

<sup>155</sup> 23: 25 clarifies that אחריתך are Oholibah’s children (‘survivors/those left’). Cf. Zimmerli (1979: 476).

	Assyrians uncover her nakedness (23: 10)	They seize and kill her children (23: 25) <sup>156</sup>
They bear sons and daughters (23: 4)	They seize her children (23: 10)	They strip her jewels and clothing (23: 26)
		They leave her naked and bare, uncovered (23: 29)
	Assyrians kill her by sword (23: 10)	She will drink the 'cup' of her sister (23: 31–4)

Alongside this cyclical panelling, 'tit for tat' patterning perhaps inevitably features as YHWH yet again brings about 'poetic justice' on the females. The sons and daughters born to Oholah and Oholibah in 23: 4 are seized in 23: 10 and burned in 23: 25; the breasts that are pressed in 23: 3, 8, and 21 are torn by Oholibah in 23: 34;<sup>157</sup> and the nakedness that is flaunted in 23: 18 is uncovered violently in 23: 26 and 29.<sup>158</sup> Block even speaks of a 'role-reversal' between YHWH and Oholibah's lovers in 23: 22–7 and of the 'tables being turned' on Oholibah.<sup>159</sup> In stark contrast to the tightly woven netting structure of 16A, however, there are few other structural patterns in 23A; and it seems to me that this relative simplicity is not coincidental.<sup>160</sup> Section 23A's cyclical panelling alone works forcefully to create a comparable stranglehold on the reader. Throughout the narrative echoes the sense that Oholah and Oholibah are trapped by their past, powerless to resist its implications. Kamionkowski calls attention to the way in which the sisters are 'completely flat characters',<sup>161</sup> as 'the same verbs are repeated over and over again' through the 'colorless, repetitive nature of the women's (in)activities'.<sup>162</sup> The impression

<sup>156</sup> Note that in Panel B Oholah's nakedness is first uncovered and then her children are seized (23: 10), while in Panel C Oholibah's children are killed first (23: 25) and then her clothes are stripped (23: 26), leaving her naked and bare (23: 29). The actions may be out of order, but nevertheless the parallel is striking.

<sup>157</sup> Yee (2003: 133): 'Oholibah's crazed behavior is dreadfully manifested in oral and mammary self-mutilation: she will gnaw the cup's broken shards and use them to tear out her breasts (Ezek 23: 34). The mouth that imbibes the cup is gashed; the breasts foreign men once enjoyed are lacerated. The abhorrent images of Oholibah's bleeding mouth and gory breasts bring us full circle in the course of her promiscuous life.'

<sup>158</sup> Baumann (2003: 159): 'YHWH is no longer, as in Ezek 16, the one who directly performs the rape, but "only" the judge who passes sentence on the "woman" Jerusalem and leaves the carrying out of the punishment to the ex-lovers or the קהל'. Shields (1998: 92–3): 'Clearly, Yhwh is behind the punishment, claiming responsibility for giving her into the hands of her lovers, but Yhwh is just as clearly out of sight. He has the lovers do his work for him, and the violence associated with the punishment is horrific. . . . This punishment goes beyond a legal response to Oholah's actions; it is *revenge*.'

<sup>159</sup> Block (1997: 749, 754).

<sup>160</sup> Davis (1989: 63) and Allen (1990: 46) note the 'chiastic inversion' (ABCD/BADC) patterning of the description of the Assyrians in 23: 5–12.

<sup>161</sup> Kamionkowski (2003: 141).

<sup>162</sup> Kamionkowski (2003: 141).

is compounded by their mute silence throughout.<sup>163</sup> We could even say that the simplicity of this structure leaves less room for resistant reading than does 16A, as the potential for structural irony diminishes. Even were 23A to continue, the overriding impression is that the story will always return to that dreadful event in Egypt. It is here that 23A's dynamic of uncontrollability becomes apparent, as the sisters' inability to escape from the cycle into which they are forced leads them to act wildly and unrestrainedly, as they lose all sense of personal responsibility, consequences, and control.

The implications of 23A are puzzling in the light of other biblical texts. This prophetic narrative seems to suggest that Israel/Samaria and Judah/Jerusalem are irredeemably tarnished by their time in Egypt. Yet this is a suggestion that flies in the face of the exodus story, echoing through other prophetic books and beyond as a tale of liberation, pervaded with hope for the future.<sup>164</sup> According to 23A, with its 'negative twist on the exodus traditions',<sup>165</sup> Israel/Samaria and Judah/Jerusalem had no potential for holiness, or forgiveness, from their 'defiled' beginnings, but were doomed to repeat their past.<sup>166</sup> This strikingly distinct presentation of the people's history, characterized by the 'radical theocentricity' of which Joyce speaks, powerfully highlights the Yahwistic crisis reflected in 23A and in *Ezekiel* as a whole.<sup>167</sup> Confronted with the task of providing an apologetic for YHWH in the face of the destruction of Samaria and Jerusalem, it seems that this book will go to extreme lengths to vindicate its God.

Perhaps even more problematic are the implications of 23A's cyclical panelling for current readers. Van Dijk-Hemmes argues that in this prophetic narrative we are confronted with the 'misnaming of female experience'.<sup>168</sup> She contends that the description of Oholah and Oholibah's sexual experience as 'prostitution' is misleading, as even the narrative itself describes the sisters as passive in the act. She translates 23: 3, 'There their breasts were squeezed,

<sup>163</sup> Cf. Shields (1998: 89): 'the very structure of the chapter objectifies the women: the reader can only view them through the speech and eyes of Yhwh. Granted no speech, they have no identities apart from those constructed for them by Yhwh. Thus they are never constituted as separate subjects.'

<sup>164</sup> Yee (2003: 123) observes: 'the indictment is not about the Egyptians sexually molesting the sisters as children, which would have a historical referent in their economic exploitation of the Hebrews (Exod 1: 1-14). Instead, the indictment is levelled at the two nations themselves, described later as enjoying this sexual abuse so much that they become exceedingly licentious in their adult life.'

<sup>165</sup> Yee (2003: 123).

<sup>166</sup> Darr (1992b: 108) writes: 'Israel can neither take comfort from, nor base hope upon, its historical relationship with God, for its history is one of continuing human betrayal which, for Ezekiel, fully merits its fate.'

<sup>167</sup> Joyce (1989: 89-105).

<sup>168</sup> Van Dijk-Hemmes (1993), drawing on Setel (1985). Van Dijk-Hemmes argues that this exposes *Ezekiel 23* as pornographic material.

there the teats of their maidenhood were pressed; or, literally: There they (masculine; see also *v.* 8) pressed the teats of their maidenhood' (23: 3), arguing that such experiences can hardly be described as 'prostitution', given the sisters' passivity and young age.<sup>169</sup> She concludes: 'It would have been more adequate to describe the events during the sisters' youth as "They were sexually abused in Egypt, in their youth they were sexually abused".'<sup>170</sup> The call to rename Oholah and Oholibah's 'prostitution' as 'abuse' gains strong validity when we recall that 23A evokes the Hebrews' enslaved time in Egypt, for which 'abuse' or 'rape' seems far more appropriate language than 'prostitution' and 'lust'.<sup>171</sup> Indeed, we could go further to protest that 23A presents the sisters' abusive experience as permanently 'defiling'. The 'radical theocentricity' of this narrative seems to force the conclusion that an abusive relationship in childhood can mark the abused person(s) for life with no hope of escape: a conclusion which most would wish to resist. It is perhaps here that 23A becomes even more disturbing than 16A with its stark insistence that Oholah and Oholibah's dreadful experiences in Egypt have impacted them permanently, with no hope of redemption. As Baumann puts it, 'The goal is killing, and not "merely" humiliation or breaking the spirit. In Ezekiel 23 there is no chance for repentance, but only death and the complete destruction of the "women".'<sup>172</sup> According to this disturbing narrative, the fate of Oholah and Oholibah is inevitable, even deserved: 'a cup of horror and desolation' indeed (23: 33).<sup>173</sup>

<sup>169</sup> Van Dijk-Hemmes (1993: 172).

<sup>170</sup> Van Dijk-Hemmes (1993: 173). Kamionkowski (2003: 119) echoes: 'the sexual act describe here is not consensual sex, it is rape'; 'The woman offers nothing; she is taken, and this is her crime' (p. 143). Cf. Washington (1997: 355), Exum (1996: 109). Yee (2003: 123) speaks of 'the Egyptians sexually molesting the sisters as children'.

<sup>171</sup> Ortlund (1996) seems to recognize the 'childhood' of these 'girls', but nevertheless appears to suggest that they enjoyed this abuse, speaking of 'their first experiences with harlotry and their unresisting loss of virginity' (p. 119 n. 50): 'Israel learned early the pleasures to be had in seductive approaches by foreigners... as girls they began their careers of easy availability for casual sex. They had always hankered after debased and debasing pleasures. But still, Yahweh graciously took the sisters to be his wives' (p. 119). Incongruously, Ortlund is more concerned with the idea that YHWH may have taken two wives than with the suggestion of sexual abuse, which he does not touch on, instead insisting, 'It would be unfair to the author for the reader to pour every conceivable entailment into the author's language... Rather than corrupt the biblical vision of Yahweh, this language enhances one's sense of his personal love and generous care for his people' (pp. 120–1 n. 51).

<sup>172</sup> Baumann (2003: 159).

<sup>173</sup> Some believe 23: 31–4 to be a later addition. Cf. Zimmerli (1979: 490). Even if this is the case, the poem forcefully encapsulates the implications of 23A. Greenberg (1997: 490): 'It develops a new figure—"the cup" and has its own plot; yet it carries forward and fuses splendidly the dual trend of vss. 28–30 to focus on Oholibah's feelings and assimilate her to her sister.'

### Sexual and marital metaphorical language in *Ezekiel* 23A

It is within this wider frame of cyclical panelling with its negative associations that 23A's sexual and marital metaphorical language appears, and, as we might by now expect, this frame exerts a forceful influence on its metaphorical associations. By far the most prominent sexual focus of 23A is 'prostitution', appearing seventeen times in just thirty-five verses. Before we turn to 23A's 'prostitution' motif, however, it is worth first exploring the more unusual metaphorical focus of 'lust' (עֵגֶב).

עֵגֶב is virtually unique to 23A, appearing nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible except for *Jeremiah* 4: 30, which betrays other signs of 23A's influence.<sup>174</sup> Some might anticipate difficulties in ascertaining the associations of this unusual focus, given the lack of other witnesses to even its literal meanings. However, the impact of עֵגֶב within 23A is troublingly clear, another indication of context's power over metaphorical meaning. Commonly translated as 'to lust' (NIV, NRSV, NJB) or 'to dote on' (KJV, RSV), עֵגֶב in 23A has strong associations of uncontrolled desire and explicit sexuality. Baumann writes: 'As it is used by Ezekiel, it appears that the focus of the word lies on sexual desire';<sup>175</sup> 'unique to Ezekiel 23 is the accent on the woman's desire, set more strongly in the sexual realm, by the use of the verb עֵגֶב'.<sup>176</sup> The appearance of the motif in the infamous Egyptian refrain in 23: 19–21 particularly encourages associations of sexual abandonment and even animal instinct: 'when she lusted (וּתְעַגְבָה) after their lovers there, whose flesh was like the flesh of asses; and whose flood was like the flood of stallions' (23: 20). Galambush observes: 'The life of Jerusalem becomes a case study in abnormal lust.'<sup>177</sup> Block writes: 'Ezekiel describes this lust with crude, bestial imagery. . . . Her passion of the *bāšār* (lit. "flesh") of the donkey, and the *zirmâ*, "semen", of horses is uncontrolled'.<sup>178</sup> With such extreme language, it is perhaps unsurprising that many find 23A offensive. Van Dijk-Hemmes comments: 'The depiction

<sup>174</sup> Both *Jer* 4: 30 and *Ezek* 23: 40 picture a female, decked in ornaments with painted eyes. Such echoes, in combination with the use of the otherwise unique root עֵגֶב, suggest that *Jer* 4: 30 has been influenced by a version of *Ezekiel* 23. Cf. the possible influence of 23B on *Jer* 3: 6–10 discussed in Ch. 2. Kamionkowski (2003: 136) speaks of the term as 'a central *Leitwort* of the unit'.

<sup>175</sup> Baumann (2003: 151). She continues: 'Since עֵגֶב and its derivatives do not appear outside the passages cited in Ezekiel and Jeremiah, it is impossible to give a completely clear explanation of their meaning, as distinct from אָהַב. We may, however, suspect that these words contain a clearly more dramatic sexual component.'

<sup>176</sup> Baumann (2003: 153). Cf. Kamionkowski (2003: 136): 'It appears paired with זָנָה throughout this chapter which has clearly influenced the common translation of "lust?." Kamionkowski argues that 'an Arabic cognate at least suggests that עֵגֶב denotes desire and yearning, that is, emotion, while זָנָה is oriented towards behavior' (pp. 136–7).

<sup>177</sup> Galambush (1992: 117).

<sup>178</sup> Block (1997: 747).

of Oholibah's desire in terms of the size of (animal-like) male members seems not just an example of mere misnaming of female experience, but an actual distortion of it. Instead of reflecting female desire, this depiction betrays male obsession.<sup>179</sup> Perhaps most importantly for our purposes, however, we begin to see the impact of 23A's dynamic of uncontrollability on its metaphorical associations.

If 23A's 'lust' motif is striking for its crude distinctiveness, its 'prostitution' motif is strewn brazenly across the narrative. Shields writes: 'The narrator appears quite literally to be obsessed by whoring.'<sup>180</sup> The associations encouraged for this popular focus in 23A are extraordinarily wide, as the sisters' 'prostitution' reverberates through the prophetic prose. The verb even appears with men as its subject, as the Egyptians 'pour out their prostitutions' upon Oholibah (23: 8); and the noun repeatedly appears in the plural as if to stress the inconceivable number of liaisons (23: 7, 8, 11, 14, 18, 19, 29, 35). Galambush speaks of 'the consistency, the wilfulness, and the remarkable excesses of Jerusalem's infidelity'.<sup>181</sup> Perhaps unexpectedly, given the assumption that 23A is concerned with Oholah and Oholibah's political crimes, 23A's 'prostitution' motif even has associations of cultic uncleanness. Nor can this be attributed to the influence of 16A, as they are primarily encouraged by the narrative's 'defilement' (טמא) motif, a term striking for its absence in 16A.

The 'defilement' (טמא) motif is prominent in 23A, frequently appearing alongside the 'prostitution' focus in indictments against Oholah and Oholibah (23: 7, 13, 17, 30). We have already seen accusations of 'prostitution' and 'defilement' working together elsewhere to forceful effect in *Hosea* 5: 3 and 6: 10. In 23A the interplay between these motifs works powerfully to highlight the cultic unacceptability of the sisters' actions. Of particular interest for this exploration are the Niphal forms of טמא, which describe the impact of the sisters' 'prostitutions' in 23: 7, 13, 30. Translators disagree as to whether these Niphal forms should be translated passively or reflexively; indeed, single translations often vary between the two. NRSV translates נטמאה in 23: 13 as 'she was defiled', but נטמאה in 23: 7 and נטמאת in 23: 30 as 'she defiled herself'. Wevers likewise suggests reflexive translations in 23: 7 and 30, but a passive rendering in 23: 13,<sup>182</sup> while Allen translates the verbs in 23: 7 and 13 reflexively, but offers a broadly passive rendering in 23: 30.<sup>183</sup> This may

<sup>179</sup> Van Dijk-Hemmes (1993: 175).

<sup>180</sup> Shields (1998: 87).

<sup>181</sup> Galambush (1992: 117).

<sup>182</sup> Wevers (1969: 180–1, 185). Cf. Eichrodt (1970: 317–18).

<sup>183</sup> Allen (1990: 42). Interestingly, however, Allen maintains Oholibah's complicity in this last passive action with 'let yourself be'. Greenberg (1997: 471–3), Block (1997: 737, 742, 753), and Zimmerli (1979: 472, 473, 477) are consistent in their translation of the Niphal verbs as reflexives.

seem an unimportant matter, but behind this translational choice lies the significant question of whether Oholah and Oholibah's 'prostitutions' in 23A are characterized as defilement *by others* or *defilement by their own initiative*. If van Dijk-Hemmes stresses the passivity of their early sexual experiences, which are nevertheless 'misnamed' as 'prostitution', we might ask, are their mature experiences active or passive?

The wider Hebrew Bible is of little assistance in addressing this issue, as similar disagreements surround translations of Niphal forms of טָמְאָה elsewhere (cf. *Numbers* 5: 13, 14, 27, 28). If we turn to *Ezekiel* 23: 17, where טָמְאָה appears in active forms, then we might say that Oholibah's sexual experiences are characterized passively, as the Babylonians 'defile' her (Piel) so that she 'becomes unclean' (Qal). However, 23A elsewhere emphasizes the sisters' *active* seeking of sexual liaisons. Oholah 'gives' her 'prostitutions' to Assyria in 23: 7, while Oholibah specifically summons the Babylonians in 23: 17. In 23: 27, 29, and 35, the accusation of 'prostitution' repeatedly parallels the term זָמָה, which elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible can refer to 'plans' or 'purposes', as well as to 'wickedness'.<sup>184</sup> If such a close relationship between the two terms brings strong sexual connotations to the term זָמָה, reflected in its frequent translation by commentaries as 'lewdness' in 23A,<sup>185</sup> reciprocally, we could say that associations of planning are brought to Oholibah's 'prostitutions', as the narrative encourages the reader to assume activity on the part of the female. Yet, despite such encouragement, we have seen that by this point Oholah and Oholibah's sexuality is already out of their control, forever determined by the experiences 'of their youth'. It seems that there is a certain ambiguity over whether the sisters' 'defilement' is active or passive in 23A, and it is perhaps here that we begin to see the disturbing implications of this narrative's 'prostitution' and 'defilement' motifs in full force.

On the one hand, the description of the sisters' 'prostitution' as passive 'defilement' underscores their inability to break the cycle in which they have been caught up, reflecting the narrative's dynamic of uncontrollability. On the other hand, the potentially reflexive force of their 'defilement' suggests that they are nevertheless active in their 'prostitutions', and therefore accountable. Section 23A's suggestion that 'prostitution' 'defiles' is perhaps already a difficult enough assumption for many to stomach. If, however, we accept

<sup>184</sup> Cf. *Lev* 18: 17, *Prov* 24: 9. DCH iii. 115 provides as a second definition of זָמָה: 'plan, planning, device, with evil intent (except Jb 17:11)'. Some note the distinctive form of 'prostitutions' (זָמָה) in 23: 27, comparing the narrative's usual תְּנוּנָה, concerned that a ת may be missing from the beginning (*Ezek* 43: 7, 9). Cf. Zimmerli (1979: 476 n. 27a). This may simply be stylistic, however, and the sense remains disturbingly clear. Cf. Allen (1990: 44), Block (1997: 749 n. 105).

<sup>185</sup> Wevers (1969: 184, 186), Block (1997: 749, 754), Carley (1974: 157–8). Zimmerli (1979: 476–7) suggests 'immorality'. Allen (1990: 42) suggests 'lasciviousness'. The term also appears repeatedly in 23B (23: 44, 48, 49), where it is translated similarly in commentaries.

that the 'defilement' of the sisters is presented as both passive and reflexive, the motif perhaps becomes even more disquieting, with its implicit suggestion that Oholah and Oholibah encourage their 'defilement', however passive it might be.<sup>186</sup> We could even say that this disturbing narrative plays with the idea that Oholah and Oholibah, so deeply marked by their abusive sexual experiences in Egypt, have an underlying desire for their abuse to continue at the hands of others. As van Dijk-Hemmes puts it: 'The audience, which has already been required to perceive the metaphorical maiden's abuse as harlotry, is now seduced into viewing this abuse as something Oholah had enjoyed so much that she could not do without it for the rest of her life!'<sup>187</sup> This is an association which mirrors uncomfortably the accusations often aimed at victims of child abuse.<sup>188</sup>

It is perhaps as we face this darkest aspect of 23A that the potential for resisting its force finally becomes apparent. For as we join van Dijk-Hemmes to lay bare the attempts of this prophetic narrative to 'misname' Oholah and Oholibah's experience, we are provided with the opportunity to deny its assumptions, naming these sisters' experiences for what they are: repeated violent and sexual abuse at the hands of Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and even the hands of YHWH. If there is a sense of helplessness in the face of such a narrative, we can at least vehemently defy the words of Block: 'The women introduced here are not to be pitied.'<sup>189</sup>

The associations of cultic uncleanness that 23A encourages for its 'prostitution' motif are powerful and disturbing. Perhaps of most interest to this particular exploration, however, is the impact of this narrative's simple but effective cyclical panelling, with its forceful dynamic of uncontrollability on the metaphorical motif's associations. Working alongside the 'lust' motif with

<sup>186</sup> Cf. Shields (1998: 92): 'The *Niphal* verb form . . . could be translated either reflexively or passively. I would argue here that the ambiguity serves the passage well. It is clear later on that Oholibah's lovers defile her (v 17), but these are actions which would also defile oneself (cf. v 47 where the sentence for whoring is meted out to the sisters). Since *she* is the one punished, the reflexive connotation should be read together with the passive.'

<sup>187</sup> Van Dijk-Hemmes (1993: 174). Cf. p. 173: 'According to the illogical, arbitrary way in which Ezekiel 23. 3 conveys this message, Israel's sin in Egypt actually consisted of its being oppressed. Such a statement's lack of logic can apparently be made acceptable by the transformation of a people into metaphorical women. The sexual molestation inflicted upon these women serves, therefore, as a metaphor for the people's slavery in Egypt. Within an androcentric framework women can easily be seen as guilty of their own abuse.' Cf. E. Seifert (1997: 272).

<sup>188</sup> *Contra* Davidovich (2005: 194–5), who dismisses van Dijk-Hemmes's claim of child abuse on the grounds that it is Oholibah 'who initiates the contact with the Egyptians'. His reading shows a lack of understanding of the wider implications of child abuse for the future lives of the children concerned. Cf. Ortlund (1996: 122): 'One envisions a breathless Oholah eagerly awaiting her sexy Assyrian boyfriends, only to be raped by them when they arrive. Tragic, gullible, Israel—now the topic of ridicule among the nations.'

<sup>189</sup> Block (1997: 733).

its associations of unrestrained desire and animal instinct, 23A's inescapable cycle and relentless recollection of the Egyptian experience encourages us to view Oholah and Oholibah's 'prostitution' as beyond their control. Associations of uncontrollability are further developed through the sisters' desperate pursuit of power among lovers. Descriptions of the Assyrians and Babylonians abound with associations of authority and strength: they are 'warriors clothed in purple, governors and commanders, all of them desirable young men, cavalry riding on horses' (23: 5–6);<sup>190</sup> 'the choice men of Assyria all of them' (23: 7); 'girded with belts around their loins, turbans on their heads, officers all of them' (23: 15).<sup>191</sup> Yet the sisters' search for control is futile, leading them only further into the cycle of uncontrollability into which they are spiralling. Galambush suggests that Oholibah has *more* control than 16A's Jerusalem, as she 'participates in ogling and objectifying, thus usurping and implicitly challenging the omniscient and objectifying gaze of the males'.<sup>192</sup> She insists that 'Jerusalem has gone from being the naked or lavishly dressed object of men's gaze to being, in chap 23, through her own gaze, a sexual objectifier of men'.<sup>193</sup> Yee writes: 'Power is an aphrodisiac that irresistibly captivates Oholah'.<sup>194</sup> It seems to me, however, that Oholibah in 23A is both beyond the control of any male and also beyond her own control, governed only by her dreadful past.<sup>195</sup> Another unique motif comes into play at this point, as *יקע/נקע* is used repeatedly to describe the consequences of the sisters' 'prostitution' (23: 18, 22, 28), as their desperate actions achieve only 'estrangement' and 'alienation', rather than the power they seek. Oholah and Oholibah do not once consider attempting to wrest control for themselves as Jerusalem did in 16A; instead, they seek it through their lovers, ironically perpetuating the cycle of sexual subjugation and uncontrollability in which they are trapped.

<sup>190</sup> *קרובים* is difficult, but most translate 'warriors', or 'soldiers', related to *קרב*, 'battle'. Cf. Zimmerli (1979: 472), Allen (1990: 43). Brenner (1982: 146) suggests that *תכלת* is a 'vague colour marker' (p. 146), 'running from heliotrope to deep-sea blue to violet or even green' (p. 148), but basically 'dark' (p. 146).

<sup>191</sup> *שלשים* ('officers') is literally 'third men', probably of a chariot. Cf. Zimmerli (1979: 473). Ortlund (1996: 124): 'Roused to desire, by this striking display of virile manhood wielding awesome military power, she invites the Babylonians to be her lovers.'

<sup>192</sup> Galambush (1992: 115–16). Cf. Block (1997: 738): 'whereas ch. 16 had described Yahweh's harlotrous wife capitalizing on her own exceptional beauty, here the emphasis is entirely on the physical attractiveness of her lovers.'

<sup>193</sup> Galambush (1992: 116).

<sup>194</sup> Yee (2003: 125).

<sup>195</sup> Ortlund (1996: 125): 'One conclusion is inescapable: she is incorrigible. She has never learned, and she never will. . . . So, mercy accomplishes nothing. Judah's privileges are pearls cast before swine. . . . What really compels her is vulgar, worldly spectacle.'

## EZEKIEL 16A AND 23A: 'SISTER NARRATIVES'

The associations of uncontrollability that 23A encourages for its 'prostitution' motif are striking for their distance from what we might call the focus's 'associated commonplaces'.<sup>196</sup> They become even more interesting, however, when we compare them to the associations encouraged by 16A. In the Introduction, I suggested that metaphorical frames have the power to introduce *new* associations. We might say that 16A and 23A vividly illustrate this potential, encouraging unexpected (even opposing) associations of control and uncontrollability for their 'prostitution' motifs through powerful paneling structures.

The stark contrast between 16A and 23A's sexual and marital metaphorical language provokes questions about their relationship. Throughout this discussion, I have spoken of these narratives as 'sister narratives', and this was not simply to stress their similarities. Like many sisters, we might say that 16A and 23A display a striking tendency towards sibling rivalry. While on the surface they might look similar, sharing certain features and characteristics, underlying such similarities are profound differences. Nor do these differences lie in superficial distinctions, such as the number of females featured, or in their cultic versus political orientation; they go far deeper than this. We have already noted the striking differences between the stories they present. In addition, whereas 16A condemns Jerusalem for not remembering her youth, Oholah and Oholibah in 23A are condemned for such memories; whereas 16A presents the people's history as linear, 23A depicts it as cyclical; and, perhaps most importantly for our purposes, while in 16A sexual metaphorical language is bound up with control, in 23A the same 'prostitution' focus has strong associations of uncontrollability. Such profound differences may raise questions of authorship, but of more interest to this exploration is the potential impact of two such sister narratives, engaged in fully fledged sibling rivalry, within a single prophetic book. Significantly, one aspect shared by 16A and 23A is their 'radical theocentricity', and it is perhaps here that they lay their differences aside to powerfully join forces. As a combination, 23A and 16A work to present YHWH as ultimately in control whatever the circumstances. The females are culpable for looking back to their youth (23A) and for not looking back to their youth (16A); for trying to take control (16A) and for being out of control (23A); they are even liable for patterning their

<sup>196</sup> Even most traditional commentators agree that the motif in 23A does not speak of 'cultic prostitution'. Zimmerli (1979: 482): 'there are no longer in mind here, as in Hos 2, Jer 3 and Ezek 16, the immoral practices with the local Canaanite Baals.'

behaviour after YHWH (16A). We might even suggest that 16A and 23A are powerfully complementary, working together to defend YHWH against any possible eventuality, leaving the blame for the appalling state of the nation with the broken and battered people.<sup>197</sup>

## REFLECTIONS

*Ezekiel* 16 and 23 confront current readers with acute problems not only for their explicitly offensive, even pornographic language, but also for their disturbing assumptions that female sexuality is inherently defiling, and that victims of sexual abuse are set on an inescapable and destructive path. Perhaps equally disquieting is the power of these narratives over traditional readings, which seem more than willing to comply with their dreadful propositions.<sup>198</sup> Eichrodt writes of 16A: 'If here, and still more in ch. 23, he indulges in frantic exaggerations as he pictures the more indecent and disgusting features of harlotry, we must recognize that this is solely due to the fury of a mind in agony with unbearable suffering. It has seen smashed to pieces its most cherished possession, its ideal of a pure people of God; so it must heap mockery upon that picture and caricature it out of all recognition in order to avoid bleeding to death at its feeling of inward degradation.'<sup>199</sup> Eichrodt even feels able to summarize the violent narrative with the words 'Israel is brought face to face with her God and his wonderful will to love, and thus brought to recognition of the full depth of her guilt.'<sup>200</sup>

Nor is this approach limited to older scholarship. In his 1997 commentary, Block shows a strong awareness of the issues: 'How does one respond to such troublesome portrayals of God? How does one respond to disturbing texts like this in the twentieth century context of the Holocaust and the current epidemic of violence against women?'<sup>201</sup> Yet, having considered various responses, Block

<sup>197</sup> Cf. Joyce (1989: 125). Chapman (2004: 125): 'The result of Jeremiah and Ezekiel's detailed profane, and sexually explicit description of Jerusalem's unnatural and insatiable lust was that Yahweh was cleared of any guilt regarding her conquest. . . . In all of these activities, Yahweh is presented as the justifiably enraged husband of Jerusalem, rather than the defeated military rival of Assyrian, Egypt or Babylon.' Yee (2003: 122): 'Avoiding blame by ducking behind a woman's body, Ezekiel thereby absolves simultaneously his own institutional complicity in the sins of the nation and that of the male elite class to which he belongs. Blame falls metaphorically on bodies of women.'

<sup>198</sup> Cf. L. Day (2000: 224–9).

<sup>199</sup> Eichrodt (1970: 212).

<sup>200</sup> Eichrodt (1970: 210). Chapman (2004: 124): 'In the midst of all this whoring behavior, Ezekiel wondered at Jerusalem's inexplicable ingratitude to Yahweh, her perfect husband.'

<sup>201</sup> Block (1997: 468).

goes on to present the familiar defence that, if YHWH is male, then Israel must be female, even concluding, 'That he was agitated is not surprising; this was the natural response of a spurned husband. . . . Yahweh is perfectly justified in bringing Jerusalem's conduct down on her own head';<sup>202</sup> 'The hell that awaited her was not the creation of some demonic force or external power, but of her own making. . . . [T]he harshness of divine judgment can be appreciated only against the backdrop of his grace. If the text had begun at v. 36, one might understandably have accused God of cruelty and undue severity. But the zeal of his anger is a reflex of the intensity of his love.'<sup>203</sup> Block is by no means alone in conceding to the terrible force of *Ezekiel* 16 and 23. J. B. Taylor joins him to stress, 'the reader of these verses must appreciate that this is the language of unspeakable disgust and must try to recognize Ezekiel's passion for God's honour and his fury. . . . The feeling of nausea which a chapter like this arouses must be blamed not on the writer of the chapter nor even on its contents, but on the conduct which had to be described in such revolting terms.'<sup>204</sup> Biggs even finds himself able to write: 'Chapter 16 as a whole was a powerful and moving sermon of hope for the exiles. It identified the reason and rightness of their punishment, which enabled the exiles to recognise why they were in exile; it proclaimed God's continuing care for the people, the desire that they should repent, and readiness to forgive and restore them when they repented.'<sup>205</sup> Gowan speaks of this chapter as 'one of the Bible's strongest statements about unconditional election based solely on the grace of God';<sup>206</sup> Clements alludes to 'a message of the enduring power of divine love'.<sup>207</sup> We might hardly recognize the narratives of which these authors speak.<sup>208</sup>

<sup>202</sup> Block (1997: 503).

<sup>203</sup> Block (1997: 504).

<sup>204</sup> J. B. Taylor (1969: 170–1). Cf. Blenkinsopp (1990: 78): 'The story of the nymphomaniac bride expresses this conviction in violent language, at the risk of sickening the reader, in order to set over against it the saving will of God and the possibility of renewal.'

<sup>205</sup> Biggs (1996: 16).

<sup>206</sup> Gowan (1985: 66).

<sup>207</sup> Clements (1996: 70).

<sup>208</sup> Cf. L. Day (2000: 224–9), who explores the responses of commentators Brownlee (1986), Hals (1989), Blenkinsopp (1990), Clements (1996), and Block (1997) to *Ezekiel* 16. She notes: 'They place the blame squarely upon the woman's shoulders, not even questioning whether that is its rightful place'; 'These five commentators speak overwhelmingly of the love and grace of YHWH as the chief trait of his character. . . . YHWH is generous, amazingly gracious, and working for the best for the woman; he is a husband whose love knows no bounds.' Interestingly, Day suggests that these commentators could themselves be understood to be within an 'abusive relationship' with the text/YHWH. 'The words and concerns of these scholars unexpectedly echo in certain ways the characteristics of battered women before they choose to leave their relationships' (p. 227). Among the examples she provides: 'these commentators do not find YHWH's abusive actions in this text to be problematic' (p. 227); 'As battered women do, they believe that YHWH's calm and generous behavior is more indicative of his character than his cruel and abusive behavior (p. 229). She concludes, 'they speak with a female voice' (p. 230). With Day, we might wonder whether these commentators will eventually find the words one day also to articulate the violence of this text.

Despite such spirited defences, *Ezekiel* 16 and 23 remain deeply problematic for those taking a cognitive approach to metaphorical language. There are not even any serious attempts to reverse negative sexual and marital metaphorical language in this troubling work. Block is adamant that the closing words of 16C redeem 16A, even if it is a later reflection on the narrative.<sup>209</sup> Eichrodt similarly writes: ‘In the statement that the covenant is an institution which even God himself cannot overthrow, we catch a glimpse of the New Testament fulfilment by which the covenant is to be brought into effect; it witnesses to a power of divine love, as yet hardly discernible.’<sup>210</sup> Yet we might ask how far such a passage might be called redemptive, given that Jerusalem must remain ‘ashamed’, ‘confounded’, and ‘shamed’, never even opening her mouth again in response to her ‘forgiveness’ (16: 63).<sup>211</sup> As in *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4, we might wish that Jerusalem had maintained her defiance in the face of YHWH rather than undergo such humiliation.<sup>212</sup>

It is Galambush, however, who most clearly underscores the lack of any attempt to redeem Jerusalem, Oholah, or Oholibah in *Ezekiel*, stressing that, when the Temple is rebuilt in chapters 40–8, it is no longer personified as a female. For Galambush, the identification of Jerusalem as Temple in *Ezekiel* 16 is crucial, explaining why Jerusalem must die in this narrative when she survives in other prophetic texts:

If Yahweh’s temple is, symbolically, a female body, then that temple is always in risk of pollution, either through menstruation or through illicit sexual activity. Ultimately, the metaphor of Jerusalem as wife is itself a problem, always threatening to transform Yahweh’s marriage into a marriage between the Holy and the unclean. Ezekiel therefore depicts Yahweh as ultimately driven to destroy his hopelessly polluted temple.<sup>213</sup>

<sup>209</sup> Block (1997: 463).

<sup>210</sup> Eichrodt (1970: 220).

<sup>211</sup> L. Day (2000: 207): ‘How unnecessary, and indeed inaccurate, is the pronouncement that Jerusalem is to be prohibited from opening her mouth, when she has never yet been provided with an opportunity to do so.’ Odell (1992) argues that the silencing of Jerusalem seeks to deny any grounds for complaint against YHWH. However, this does not alleviate the problems of 16C’s ‘redemptive’ language. Shields (2001: 146 n. 31) observes: ‘When one considers the explicitness and vulgarity of Ezekiel’s language, perhaps the comment is not so curious after all. Perhaps the “mouth” in v. 63 may be the “mouth” which Jerusalem “opens” to all her lovers. If this is the case, the implications are intriguing and unsettling. Although she is denied speech, she acts with her other “mouth” in the very way which is most threatening to patriarchy. According to v. 63, then, after the horrific punishment, she may never desire to open that “mouth” again.’

<sup>212</sup> Carroll (1996: 81–2): ‘Whorusalamin’s savage sufferings have redeemed the future, but at such a cost that modern readers must wonder about the equity of such suffering being required as the grounds of restoration.’

<sup>213</sup> Galambush (1992: 88, cf. pp. 106, 128, 150). For Jerusalem as Temple in *Ezekiel* 16, cf. Galambush (1992: 78), Bloch (1955: 198–9). Darr (1992*b*: 104) observes: ‘Descriptions of her fine accoutrements invoke cultic associations.’

If Jerusalem must be destroyed, then it is also impossible for her to feature in the future of the nation: 'Once the dynamics of temple pollution have been fully explicated in terms of female sexual pollution, with its attendant danger of polluting the male, no personification of the temple as Yahweh's sexual partner could be tolerated.'<sup>214</sup> Thus, when the Temple is rebuilt in the restoration chapters, 40–8, Jerusalem, the female, is not revived like the celebrated 'dry bones' of *Ezekiel 37*. Galambush stresses:

Only Jerusalem, the chastened and forgiven wife, is absent from the scene. The new city is described as inanimate stone, and its private parts bear no reminders of their former, sexual signification. Yahweh's prophecy that, having been purified, Jerusalem would never open her mouth again (16: 63) is fulfilled, albeit ironically. She does not open her mouth because, no longer portrayed as a woman, she cannot. The restored city is faithful, but only because the elimination of the city's female persona has made infidelity impossible.<sup>215</sup>

It seems that *Ezekiel 16* and *23*'s sexual and marital metaphorical language is problematic on every conceivable level, with the other prophetic texts paling in comparison to these violent narratives, which strive so brutally to force their negative assumptions about women on to the reader.<sup>216</sup> Given the lack of any redemptive language within this book, we might even say that we must abandon our attempts to cooperate with these narratives, nurturing any opportunities for resistant reading, however fragile they might be.

They lie on their side on the ground, Jerusalem, Oholah, and Oholibah: mute, dumb, and silent. And there they become prophets.<sup>217</sup> The hurricane, the earthquake, and the fire of Ezekiel's invective continue; they speak the still voice of sheer silence.<sup>218</sup> And in this book of the dumb,<sup>219</sup> sign-acting

<sup>214</sup> Galambush (1992: 151).

<sup>215</sup> Galambush (1992: 147–8). Baumann (2003: 166) echoes: 'With the metaphorical "killing" of the city "woman" Jerusalem there is no longer any figure present who can appear as a metaphorical counterpart to YHWH, his partner or equal.'

<sup>216</sup> Shields (2001: 138): 'Whereas the earlier oracles (in Hosea and Jeremiah) retain some of the positive aspects of the metaphorical husband/wife relationship between God and Israel, Ezekiel 16 represents a completely negative and vituperative portrayal of Israel.' Darr (1992*b*: 117) speaks of the importance of reading the disturbing language of *Ezekiel 16*, *20*, and *23* alongside 'conflicting texts' that work to expose their difficulties, introducing *Job* as an important foil to these narratives with its insistence that the innocent can suffer along with the guilty. Cf. Baumann (2003: 236).

<sup>217</sup> Cf. *Ezek 4*: 6–8.

<sup>218</sup> Cf. *1 Kings 19*: 11–13.

<sup>219</sup> Cf. *Ezek 3*: 26. Kamionkowski (2003: 70) characterizes Ezekiel as the 'speechless' prophet. She even understands this speechlessness to render this prophet 'female' (though not in a positive sense, but rather in the sense of passivity and powerlessness). 'Ezekiel's speechlessness fits into a broader picture of a powerless prophet . . . the speechlessness motif fits logically into a general prophetic expression of emotional impotence. The prophet is unable to find his own voice just as he is unable to control his own body. God controls his movement, his lack of

prophet, they sign-act the lives of abused women and children, defiantly 'speaking' their silence into the sacred texts of tradition.<sup>220</sup> Ezekiel, the watchman,<sup>221</sup> continues unabated, shouting out his sure and certain theology. And the voice of God lies silent and wounded, outside the city walls, which are broken, with blood spilling out from the midst of them.<sup>222</sup> Ezekiel does not notice that the spirit of YHWH has passed to them from him.<sup>223</sup> He is too caught up in the confidence of his anger. He has forgotten that the prophet is the one who, silently, sign-acts. And these silent female prophets bring to all who have been abused dignity and a place in the tradition.

movement and his words. While Jeremiah could still find a voice to argue with God and to lament his situation, Ezekiel is past the point of protest; he is a thoroughly passive male.' Cf. Glazov (2001: 220): 'Ezekiel's most characteristic feature is "stoic silence".'

<sup>220</sup> Cf. Dempsey (1998: 61): 'The silent voice of Jerusalem throughout the story is deafening'; 'Jerusalem's silence looms large; there is more that needs to flow from the mouth of the prophet and the pen of the author' (p. 76).

<sup>221</sup> Cf. *Ezek* 3: 17, *Song* 5: 7.

<sup>222</sup> Cf. *Ezek* 22: 3, *Gen* 4: 10.

<sup>223</sup> Cf. *1 Kings* 22: 20–5. Tarlin (1997: 180–2) strikingly portrays Ezekiel as an exiled prophet-priest who (outside *Ezekiel* 16, 23 and the oracles against the nations) is forced by YHWH 'to undergo the fall of the southern kingdom in his own body'. He writes: 'The all-sufficient priestly body is subjected to famine, shorn of its hair, and reduced to muteness and paralysis' (p. 182). We could say that Jerusalem, Oholah, and Oholibah take on this prophet's mantle in *Ezekiel* 16 and 23.

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*Hosea 1–3*

And so we approach the climax of this exploration of prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language as we come to *Hosea 1–3*, around which so much of the debate revolves, but whose tangled reception history presents the interpreter with a daunting challenge.<sup>1</sup> Few passages from the Hebrew Bible can compete with the divergent interpretations these three short chapters have generated.<sup>2</sup> Rowley speaks of ‘a bewildering variety of views’, Mays of ‘a bewildering variety of theories’, and Fensham of ‘a bewildering amount of solutions’.<sup>3</sup> My aim in postponing the discussion of *Hosea 1–3* until now has been to provide some perspective on these difficulties through familiarization with the striking diversity of sexual and marital metaphorical language in the prophetic texts. For, if *Hosea 1–3* is a controversial work, it seems to me that its controversies have for the most part been created by the adoption of four broad assumptions, which have demonstrated an impressive capacity to complicate this prophetic text, and which I will confront to offer a fresh reading. The first assumption is the belief that the story-line in chapters 1 and 3 must follow the same path as allegedly parallel stories in other prophetic books; the second is the conviction that we can find ‘missing details’ from chapters 1 and 3 within the poetic chapter 2; the third is the perception that chapters 1 and 3 speak of the prophet’s personal life; and the fourth is the consensus that in these two narratives Hosea represents YHWH, while Gomer represents Israel.

*HOSEA 1–3 AND FOUR PERVASIVE ASSUMPTIONS***Assumption 1**

The first two assumptions are founded on the belief that *Hosea 1* and *3* lack necessary details that can be unearthed elsewhere. In the first instance, it is supposed that these ‘missing details’ can be traced within other prophetic

<sup>1</sup> Galambush (1992: 44).

<sup>2</sup> McCurdy (1909: 371) even claims that *Hosea 1* is the most diversely interpreted prophetic chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Rowley (1963: 66), Mays (1969: 23), Fensham (1984: 71).

books. It is commonly held that in *Hosea* 1–3 we are presented with the ‘original’ story of ‘the marriage metaphor’ and that other prophetic books allude to this allegedly recognizable story, albeit with variations. Wolff repeatedly alludes to *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel* in his discussion of *Hosea* 1–3.<sup>4</sup> Holladay writes of *Jeremiah* 3: 1: ‘The first five cola of the poem set forth a legal case of divorce modeled on Deut 24: 1–4. Since *Hosea* 2 also presupposes the Deuteronomy passage (see Hos 2: 10), Jrm is doubtless stimulated by both here.’<sup>5</sup> Kamionkowski comments on the markedly different *Ezekiel* 23: 1–3: ‘The same material that takes up an entire chapter in *Hosea* 1 is condensed here into a few verses.’<sup>6</sup> Many have drawn on the supposed relationship between *Hosea* 1–3 and these other prophetic texts to assume that, where chapters 1–3 are unclear, we can look to these texts to reconstruct the story. In order to defend *Hosea* as father of the ‘children of prostitutions’, Stienstra turns to *Ezekiel* 16: 20–1,<sup>7</sup> while Gordis insists that Israel’s relationship with YHWH in *Hosea* 1–3 must have initially been ‘one of complete fidelity and trust’ because this is the case according to *Amos* and, most importantly, ‘*Hosea*’s spiritual descendant, *Jeremiah* (2: 1–3).’<sup>8</sup>

While at face value this approach might seem valid, the previous chapters of this study suggest that it does not withstand a close investigation of the texts. Such a story-line is not a main concern of *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4; 4 or *Hosea* 4–14; it is impossible to maintain in *Isaiah* 40–55, and differs significantly between *Ezekiel* 16 and 23. Indeed, it appears highly unlikely that there was any such uniformly recognized story as ‘the marriage metaphor’ when these prophetic works emerged. Thus *Jeremiah*, *Ezekiel*, and *Isaiah* are of little help

<sup>4</sup> Wolff (1974): ‘How this topic was later treated can be seen in Jer 3: 6 ff and Ezek 16: 23’ (p. 15); ‘*Jeremiah* was the first after *Hosea* to thoroughly reflect upon this problem, and then *Ezekiel*’ (p. 63).

<sup>5</sup> Holladay (1986: 112).

<sup>6</sup> Kamionkowski (2003: 136). Cf. Schöpflin (2005: 109–10), who in commenting on *Ezekiel* writes: ‘The metaphor of Israel viz. Jerusalem as YHWH’s beloved spouse, who becomes disloyal to her husband by playing the whore, is modelled on *Hosea*, continuing, ‘*Ez. xvi* works out the details inherent in the image of the unfaithful wife’ (p. 110).

<sup>7</sup> Stienstra (1993: 109). Cf. Stuart (1987: 48), who writes in regard to *Hos* 2: 5: ‘Here the parallels to *Ezek. 16* are strong. At birth, Israel was a helpless abandoned infant, on whom Yahweh has graciously bestowed his loving protection. Now in her maturity, she has forgotten his love and openly cheated on him. But though she does not realize it, she has been utterly dependent on him all along and he can quickly return her to helplessness by abandoning her (cf. vv 6(4), 8(6), 10–14 (8–12)).’ Kruger (1983) repeatedly takes details from other prophetic texts to cast ‘light’ on *Hos* 2: 4–9 (p. 110). Thus the stripping of the females in *Ezekiel* 16 and 23 and *Isa* 47: 2–3 suggests that YHWH’s stripping of Israel in *Hos* 2: 5 ‘has to be connected with the public humiliation of an unchaste woman (Israel) because she has violated the marriage alliance by her promiscuous conduct’ (p. 112).

<sup>8</sup> Gordis (1971: 233). Gordis is also influenced by *Hos* 2: 16, although this text does not allude to an initial relationship. Cf. Ortlund (1996: 51 n. 9): ‘The important thing is that the *Hosean* analogy should fit the larger reality of adulterous Israel in relation to Yahweh.’

in reconstructing the alleged ‘missing details’ of *Hosea* 1 and 3. For a start, to which ‘story’ should we look in order to determine whether Gomer is pure before she ‘married’ Hosea? *Jeremiah* 2: 2, where Judah is initially pure; *Ezekiel* 16A, where, while Jerusalem is tainted, there is some form of ‘honeymoon period’; or *Ezekiel* 23A, where Oholah and Oholibah are ‘defiled’ from the very beginning? Or where should we look to ascertain whether Hosea divorces Gomer? *Jeremiah* 3: 8, where Judah is divorced; *Ezekiel* 16 and 23, where the females are killed; or *Isaiah* 50: 1, which is adamant that such a divorce never took place? When readers look to other prophetic texts to reconstruct *Hosea* 1 and 3, it seems that they simply choose the passage which best fits their own argument and fail to mention the rest. Even if they sense that there are details missing from *Hosea* 1 and 3 (an issue to which we will return), the belief that these can be reconstructed from other prophetic books seems ill-founded. We should release readings of *Hosea* 1–3 from the assumption that its story-line and details must correspond to those of other prophetic books: there is no pre-ordained path that these narratives, or, for that matter, the poetry of *Hosea* 2, must follow.

### Assumption 2

This brings us to the second assumption, that the ‘missing details’ of the narratives in *Hosea* 1 and 3 can be found in the poetic chapter 2 (shorthand for MT’s 2: 4–25 throughout this discussion). Most recognize that a distinction should be made between the narrative and poetic chapters. While the former concentrate on what we might call the prophet’s ‘sign-acts’, the latter speaks metaphorically of the relationship between YHWH and Israel.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, we could characterize *Hosea* 2 as a poetic theological reflection on the sign-act narratives. Limburg observes: ‘Reading through these first chapters, one almost has the sense of reading a story interrupted by a long middle section containing sayings.’<sup>10</sup> Even Rowley observes a shift in focus between the narratives’ focus on Hosea and Gomer and *Hosea* 2’s interest in Israel.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the assumption is still widespread that the narrative and poetic chapters tell essentially the same story and can legitimately be harmonized

<sup>9</sup> Simundson (2005: 12): ‘Since chapter 1 tells about Hosea’s marriage to Gomer, one might assume that Hosea is the speaker who will reject and shame his wife. At least by 2: 8, it is clear that the speaker is actually God.’

<sup>10</sup> Limburg (1988: 1–2).

<sup>11</sup> Rowley (1963: 70). Cf. Exum (1996: 104): ‘In ch. 2, the indictment of the unfaithful women slips into an indictment of the land personified as harlot.’

into a single account.<sup>12</sup> Rowley refers to ‘the account that can be pieced together from Chapters 1 and 2’;<sup>13</sup> Andersen and Freedman claim that chapters 1–2 ‘provide the best aid available for the interpretation of c 3’;<sup>14</sup> Yee states that ‘The tragic human story of the prophet interconnects with the metaphorical tale of Yahweh and Israel, so that the two stories become essentially one’;<sup>15</sup> while Waterman repeatedly uses details of chapter 2 to explicate chapter 1: ‘It is plain then what Gomer had done when Israel is made to say, “I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink”.’<sup>16</sup>

Such comments represent a common approach, where details from *Hosea* 2 are taken to inform chapters 1 and 3, and vice versa; and in my view it is this that has led to many of the dilemmas facing interpreters.<sup>17</sup> This is not to say that *Hosea* 1–3 should not be read as a whole, but rather to suggest that we should carefully consider the relationship between the narratives and the poetry. G.I. Davies writes:

It is largely ch. 2 which is responsible for what I take to be a widespread reading of ch. 1 and ch. 3. Chapter 2 portrays the whole relationship between Yahweh and Israel as a marriage broken and restored, and the narratives which flank it have been assumed to

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Satlow’s (2000: 14) summary: ‘God commands Hosea to marry a prostitute, bear children with her, and then send her away, thus re-enacting the tumultuous relationship between God and Israel: God “married” Israel by means of the covenant, Israel was unfaithful to this covenant by means of her “whoring”, and God sent her away. In later, happier times, God will return to his people... (Hos 2: 18).’

<sup>13</sup> Rowley (1963: 73). He also dismisses an alternative reading with the words, ‘It is Chapter 2, however, which stands most obstinately in the way of this view, and it would be necessary not merely to isolate Chapter 1 from Chapter 3, but also from Chapter 2, which is most intimately connected with what goes before’ (p. 86). Cf. pp. 88, 90. Gordis (1971: 230) similarly assumes that chapters 1–2 to form a single ‘account of the incident’. Weems (1989: 90): ‘in chap. 2, fortunately, the reader gets a glance into what was in fact the stormy nature of the prophet and his wife’s relationship.’ Cf. Bird (1989: 81), who comments on reading *Hos* 1: 2, ‘The meaning of the charge is revealed only in chapter 2, to which it points and on which it depends.’

<sup>14</sup> Andersen and Freedman (1980: 292). They also claim that 2: 4–25 ‘presents realities behind formalities, i.e. an account of Hosea’s family experience interwoven with the experience of Yahweh and his people’ (p. 117). Even they admit, however, that ‘not all problems can be solved therewith, and on the whole it is better to deal with c 3 as an independent unit’ (p. 292).

<sup>15</sup> Yee (1992: 199). Cf. Simundson (2005: 21): ‘[*Hosea* 2: 4–15] spells out more clearly the details of Hosea’s marriage as a metaphor for God’s relationship with Israel.’

<sup>16</sup> Waterman (1955: 103). Cf. Kruger (1999: 93): ‘Chapter 2, again, cannot be properly understood without 1, 2b–9. In this latter passage the conclusion of the marriage relationship, as well as the birth of the children, is recorded... The stage is now set for the marriage metaphor to unfold progressively from 2, 4 onwards. The following sequence can be reconstructed from the metaphorical details.’ Vogels (1988) draws on *Hos* 2: 21–2 and 2: 5 to identify the recipient of the payment in 3: 2 as Gomer, and its nature as a ‘bride price’. He claims that ‘What Hosea decides to do is an exact parallel with the betrothal.’

<sup>17</sup> Macintosh (1997: pp. lxxix, 126), Stienstra (1993: 102–3), McKeating (1971: 83), Weems (1995: 49).

combine to make a similar story. It may seem that ch. 2 only makes sense if Hosea's marriage, separation and reconciliation were there in the background to suggest the pattern. But this is not so. It is important to remember that, for all its continuity of imagery, ch. 2 includes several sharp transitions and even an outright contradiction.<sup>18</sup>

We will taste the fruits of reading *Hosea 2* as a discrete poetic reflection on the sign-act narratives presently.

If readers have supposed that there are details missing from *Hosea 1* and 3, which must be reconstructed for a reading of these narratives, it is my belief that such a search is prompted by a third assumption, that these narratives tell the story of Hosea's personal life. In order to provide a background for this discussion, we will briefly discuss prophetic sign-act narratives more broadly. For *Hosea 1* and 3 present the reader with a string of sign-acts reminiscent of those performed by other prophetic figures.<sup>19</sup> While the prophetic sign-act narratives are diverse, reflecting their individual literary context, they nevertheless share two important features that will be explored in two excursuses.

### Excursus 1 into prophetic sign-act narratives

First, to my mind, a striking feature of prophetic sign-act narratives is that their focus does not lie on the prophet, or any other character, but remains firmly on the action itself, or the object on which the sign-act is performed. When Isaiah is commanded to walk around naked for three years as a 'sign and a portent' that the Egyptians and Ethiopians will be led into captivity (*Isaiah 20: 2–6*), little is said about the prophet. Indeed, there is a notable lack of concern with his reaction or the details of how he carries this action out. The narrative's interest instead lies in the prophet's nakedness and bare feet, for it is these that illustrate YHWH's message. This lack of interest in the prophetic figure is typical of sign-act narratives. To take another example, *Ezekiel 4: 4–8* is not concerned with the prophet, but with his act of lying on his side to illustrate the punishment of Israel and Judah. In some instances, the narrative is concerned with the *object* involved in a sign-act. In *Ezekiel 4: 1–3*, the brick and the picture drawn upon it is the focus of attention, while in

<sup>18</sup> G. I. Davies (1993: 91). Cf. Toy (1913), who argues that chapter 2 is distinct from the narratives in chapters 1 and 3, although he also believes these narratives to be 'independent productions, connected organically neither with chap. 2 nor with each other' (p. 76).

<sup>19</sup> Stacey (1990: 97–8): 'There is widespread agreement that the marriage to Gomer must be understood as prophetic drama.' Cf. Mays (1969: 22). Wolff (1974: 10) refers to sign-act narratives as *memorabilia*, but argues that *Hosea 1–3* is distinctive for its 'development into a collection of *memorabilia*'.

*1 Kings* 11: 29–31 f., the spotlight is on Ahijah’s torn cloak. However, there remains little interest in the identity or feelings of the prophet. Perhaps one exception is *Ezekiel* 4: 12–17, where Ezekiel reacts strongly to the command that he must eat a cake baked on human dung. Yet here the prophet’s words are strikingly unexpected following his previous silence, and Zimmerli speaks of ‘the novel form of a dialogue with Yahweh within a sign-action’.<sup>20</sup> We could even say it is in the prophet’s vocalized reaction—and YHWH’s surprising response—that a meaning of the sign-act lies, as the dialogue alludes to the possibility of YHWH’s receptivity to the people even in exile. *Ezekiel* 4: 12–17 may reveal an interest in the prophet’s response, but it is distinctive for doing so. Even in *Ezekiel* 24: 15–27, where the prophet’s wife dies and Ezekiel is commanded not to mourn, we are given no insight into the prophet’s true feelings, as the narrative revolves solely around the message the prophet seeks to convey.<sup>21</sup>

Sign-acts involving the naming of children, which are of particular interest for our purposes, also show a marked lack of concern for the characters involved, maintaining a firm focus on the implications of the child’s name. In *Isaiah* 7: 14–17, while we are informed that the mother is an עלמה (itself a notoriously controversial description: ‘virgin’/‘young woman?’),<sup>22</sup> we are given no further details about the child’s parents. The mother remains unnamed, and we are unaware of the father’s identity; instead, the name ‘Immanuel’ takes centre stage.<sup>23</sup> The child’s actions are mentioned (‘he will eat curds and honey before he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good’, 7: 15), yet only in so far as they give insight into the significance of ‘Immanuel’, to provide a time-scale.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, in *Isaiah* 8: 1–4, we are told that Isaiah is the father of the child, and his mother is a נביאה (another controversial description: ‘prophetess’/‘prophet’s wife?’<sup>25</sup>). Yet the narrative

<sup>20</sup> Zimmerli (1979: 171).

<sup>21</sup> Friebl (1999: 332) suggests that YHWH’s permission to ‘groan in silence’ may hint at the prophet’s underlying emotions, but the narrative gives no indication that Ezekiel takes advantage of this concession. As Friebl acknowledges, ‘The prophet’s personal feelings were subordinated to the task of communicating a message to his audience’ (p. 332). Friebl later claims that some prophetic sign-acts ‘involved deep emotional attachments, such as those which anticipated the city’s siege and destruction... because the depicted judgements involved the prophet’s friends and relatives who resided in Jerusalem’ (p. 426). However, he provides no evidence. Certainly the sign-act narratives give no indication of the prophet’s emotions.

<sup>22</sup> Watts (1985: 98–100).

<sup>23</sup> *Contra* Stacey (1990: 116), who argues that *Isa* 7: 14–17 is not a ‘prophetic drama’, but ‘a prophecy of action that might be taken by someone else in the future’.

<sup>24</sup> There have nevertheless been disagreements as to how much time must elapse. Cf. Oswalt (1986: 213–14).

<sup>25</sup> Oswalt (1986: 223) and Zipor (1995: 84) understand נביאה as ‘prophetess’, while Childs (2001: 72) and Watts (1985: 111 n. 3a) suggest ‘prophet’s wife’. Skinner (1954: 72) suggests that ‘Isaiah’s wife is so called, not because she herself possessed the prophetic gift, but because the

provides no further details, and is certainly not concerned with the relationship between the prophet and **גְּבִיָּאָה**. Instead, the name ‘Mahershalalhashbaz’ (‘The spoil speeds; the prey hastens’) is central.<sup>26</sup> Thus we might say that the significant element of prophetic sign-act narratives is the action itself, the object on which the action is performed, or the name lying at the centre of the sign-act. In the vast majority of cases, these narratives show no concern with the identity, personal life, or reactions of the prophet concerned, or indeed with any of the other characters involved.

### Assumption 3

The above observations provide an invaluable background to *Hosea* 1 and 3, for it is often presumed that the personal life of the prophet, Hosea, is intimately woven with the sign-acts he is called to perform. Limburg writes:

For no other prophet were professional calling and personal life so closely linked as for Hosea. He understood the heartache caused by the actions of his young wife as a parallel to the hurting in the heart of God. The three children who grew up in the village and played in its streets also shared the prophet’s task, as walking visual aids in the service of the prophetic message of doom. For Hosea there was no separation between office and home, vocation and family life. No doubt that is why he spoke with such passion. The pain in the heart of the prophet became a parable of the anguish in the heart of God.<sup>27</sup>

Rowley states: ‘I am persuaded that the call of Hosea was a sustained one, beginning in a moment before his marriage with Gomer indeed, but growing clearer and deeper through the experiences that followed until at least he perceived the full message entrusted to him.’<sup>28</sup>

husband’s designation is transferred by courtesy to the wife’. Cf. Brenner (1995: 22). Reynolds (1935) seeks to reconcile the positions, albeit giving the ‘prophetess’ a limited role: ‘without attributing to her any of the Isaianic oracles that survive, or exaggerating the scope of her influence, we may still find ourselves able to concede the probability that Isaiah’s wife was a prophetess in her own right.’

<sup>26</sup> Baumann (2003: 177): ‘At YHWH’s instruction he—like Hosea—gives these children symbolic names (7: 3; 8: 3). Apart from these bare notices, however, we know nothing of Isaiah’s married life.’

<sup>27</sup> Limburg (1988: 10, cf. p. 6). Simundson (2005: 7–8): ‘Just as Hosea felt rejection, betrayal, hurt, and anger at the unfaithfulness of his spouse, so God reacts in similar ways to Israel’s breaking of the covenant. As Hosea was able to reconcile with his faithless wife, so was God. Hosea could empathize with God because of his own experience. . . . His own life gives content to the message he speaks. . . . And then his life becomes a living symbol, an acted out parable.’ Cf. Brenner (1996: 63): ‘Did Hosea’s mission shape his marital life or did his unfortunate marital life shape his prophetic destiny?’

<sup>28</sup> Rowley (1963: 97). Gordis (1971: 245): ‘[Hosea] had undergone a soul-shattering experience. Twice he turned to it during his subsequent career and found in it appropriate guidance

Reams of research have been dedicated to reconstructing Hosea's personal life from these three chapters.<sup>29</sup> Countless attempts have been made to ascertain the relationship between Hosea and the woman/women involved. Numerous hypotheses have been offered for what might have taken place during the period between chapters 1 and 3. In the face of such dedication, *Hosea* 1–3 continues to perplex scholars, with not one interpretation succeeding to unravel the tangle of problems created. Recently, there has been a growing recognition that the sparse character of these narratives simply may not provide us with the necessary details to solve the mystery of Hosea's personal life. Davies stresses that 'the evidence in these chapters is insufficient to enable Hosea's biography to be written with any certainty, and this is clearly not the purpose with which these chapters were put together',<sup>30</sup> while Wolff insists that, 'the focus of attention is not upon the prophet's life; rather of central importance is the words of Yahweh that make a claim on Hosea and his family'.<sup>31</sup> As early as 1913, Toy wrote: 'The romantic history of a man wounded in his deepest feelings through an ill-fated marriage that saddened his life and colored his thought seems to me to have no foundation in the text';<sup>32</sup> echoed by Ward in 1966: 'I believe that the mystery is insoluble and that scholarly preoccupation with the enigma of Gomer has distracted attention from the primary task of interpreting what these chapters actually say'.<sup>33</sup> Von Rad concedes that 'the book . . . has extremely little help to give us about the prophet himself'.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, the fruitless search continues, even among those cited here.

It is time to abandon this 'quest for the historical Hosea'. No other sign-act narrative concentrates on the personal life of a prophet in the manner expected of *Hosea* 1–3; and the failure of scholars to recover the 'missing details', notwithstanding the volume of scholarship, appears to confirm that

for his people. So long as there still was hope for the nation, he utilized his personal tragedy to dramatize the theme of Divine chastisement, Israel's repentance and God's forgiveness.' Cf. Baumann (2003: 131): 'the book of Jeremiah lacks the biographical point of contact, the prophet's marriage, that is present in Hosea. Consequently the marriage imagery in Jeremiah is in the process of becoming totally independent . . . it can no longer be explained or excused, as is occasionally attempted with regard to Hosea, by supposing that it reflects "bad experiences" of the prophet in his marriage.' Ortlund (1996: 50) speaks of 'Hosea's own heartache as a husband married to an adulterous woman.'

<sup>29</sup> Rowley (1963) provides the classic account of this search. Cf. Schmidt (1924), Batten (1929), Robinson (1935), Eybers (1964–5), Bitter (1975), and Schreiner (1977), among countless others. Even Macintosh (1997: 116), who recognizes that *Hosea* 1–3 does not provide a biography, still believes that the narrative is interested in Gomer.

<sup>30</sup> G. I. Davies (1993: 21). Ben Zvi (2005: 56): 'This narrative is not presented to its intended readers as one about historical or biographical events.'

<sup>31</sup> Wolff (1974: 11). Cf. Stuart (1987: 11), Macintosh (1997: 9), Bons (1999: 222).

<sup>32</sup> Toy (1913: 77).

<sup>33</sup> Ward (1966: 10).

<sup>34</sup> Von Rad (1965: 138).

*Hosea* 1 and 3 are simply not concerned with the life of this prophet, but with the sign-acts so brutally conveying YHWH's vital message.<sup>35</sup> In the words of Clements:

The traditional view that Hosea's wife Gomer proved unfaithful, that he divorced and subsequently remarried her at God's command, and found in this a sign of God's enduring love for Israel, goes far beyond the text given. Such a view is really the result of a methodologically unsatisfactory procedure. It establishes a reconstruction of what the prophet's experience is thought to have been, and then proceeds to use this to interpret the message. To understand the message itself must be our first concern.<sup>36</sup>

### Excursus 2 into prophetic sign-act narratives

The second significant feature of sign-act narratives on which I would like to reflect is that the prophet rarely takes a consistent representative role. Shorter sign-acts can give the impression that the prophet stands for a specific person or group of people. Stacey comments: 'Often his representative capacity is prominent. Isaiah personates and represents refugees in Isa. 20; Jeremiah personates Edom, Ammon and Moab (Jer. 27), and Israelites of the future (Jer. 32: 6–15). Often the prophet personates Yahweh. Ahijah tears the cloak as Yahweh tears the kingdom (1 Kings 11: 29–31); Ezekiel divides up his hair as Yahweh divides up the people (Ezek. 5: 1–17).'<sup>37</sup> To my mind, however, this impression is coincidental. The sign-acts cited by Stacey are all markedly short, involving only one straightforward action. Where there is only one person performing the action and one person (or group) implicated in the message, it is hard to see how such a sign-act could fail to suggest a direct parallel. Where the sign-act narrative lengthens, or involves more people, however, such a representative relationship consistently breaks down.

In *Jeremiah* 13: 1–7, for instance, the prophet performs a sign-act in which he wears, hides, and then finds a spoiled linen loincloth. While we could say that Jeremiah represents Judah when he wears the loincloth, such a correlation breaks down once it is also he who hides and then finds it. This is brought into even sharper focus where sign-act narratives involve a number of characters. In *Jeremiah* 32: 6–15, Hanamel tells Jeremiah to buy his field, 'according to the word of YHWH' (32: 8). Jeremiah signs the deed, but it is Baruch who is commanded to take the deeds, put them in an earthenware jar, and bury them. Three different characters are involved in this sign-act, and it is simply not possible to work out who each of them represents. The same is true of the

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Ben Zvi (2005: 93): 'Clearly the intention of Hosea 3 is not to provide a historically reliable (auto)biography of Hosea. His actions are important because they are symbolic.'

<sup>36</sup> Clements (1975: 29). <sup>37</sup> Stacey (1990: 219).

sign-acts revolving around Jeremiah's scroll in *Jeremiah* 36: 1–32. It is not obvious exactly how many actions are involved, but it is clear that it is not possible to maintain a one-to-one correlation between the characters involved and those to whom the message is addressed. In short, it is simply not possible to maintain a representative role for the prophet, or any other characters, in the longer prophetic sign-act narratives.<sup>38</sup> Friebel shows some awareness of the issues in his discussion of *Ezekiel*:

At times [Ezekiel] assumed more than one role while performing concurrent actions: while lying on his side and eating, Ezekiel performed in the role of the people, yet while looking at the iron griddle and besieged model city he performed in the divine role (Ezek. 4: 4–8); while shaving his head he assumed both the role of the people, by being the one being shaved, and also the divine role, by doing the shaving (Ezek. 5: 1). The role shift also occurred in the sequential performances: in the activities with the baggage, Ezekiel performed as the Jerusalemites going into exile, but when digging through the wall, as the Babylonian besiegers (Ezek. 12: 1–16); when crying out and wailing (Ezek. 21: 17), he displayed the emotions the people should have, but when clapping (Ezek. 21: 19, 22), the divine emotive behaviour.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the apparent difficulties, Friebel continues to speak of the prophet assuming the diverse roles of people, YHWH, besiegers, etc., throughout the sign-act narratives, attributing the resulting tangle to 'a stylistic feature' of *Ezekiel*.<sup>40</sup> In my view, however, the belief that the prophet plays a representative role in longer sign-act narratives is better abandoned, as once again the narrative's focus lies firmly on the action, rather than the characters involved in that action. Indeed, *Jeremiah* 43: 8–13, where the prophet buries stones at the entrance of Pharaoh's palace, provides an interesting example of a *shorter* sign-act where the prophet similarly fails to play a clear representative role.

#### Assumption 4

The above observation is clearly significant for a reading of *Hosea* 1 and 3. For a main assumption underlying readings of these sign-act narratives has been that Hosea must represent YHWH, and Gomer must represent Israel. Abma writes, 'Hosea is to marry a woman of flesh and blood who *personifies* the people';<sup>41</sup> Baumann speaks of 'the "woman/wife" Israel in the text, who can

<sup>38</sup> This is also perhaps true of parables in the Hebrew Bible. Cf. Nathan's parable in 2 *Samuel* 12, where it is not possible to sustain a point-for-point correspondence to actual events.

<sup>39</sup> Friebel (1999: 453).

<sup>40</sup> Friebel (1999: 453).

<sup>41</sup> Abma (1999: 141, cf. pp. 119–20). Cf. Galambush (1992: 52), Sherwood (1996: 134–8). Wacker (1996: 27) speaks of the way in which Hosea represents God. Yee (2003: 103): 'It is difficult to separate the stories of Hosea and Gomer and YHWH and Israel.'

scarcely be distinguished from the wife Gomer';<sup>42</sup> Frymer-Kensky states that 'Hosea's difficult relations with his wife are to be a dramatic parallel to the relations of Israel with God'.<sup>43</sup> Even in *Hosea 2*, Rowley states, 'it is clear that Gomer here represents Israel.'<sup>44</sup> Yet there seems to me no reason to assume that this must be the case; and the witness of other longer sign-act narratives suggests that such a representation would be unlikely.<sup>45</sup> Releasing *Hosea 1* and *3* from this assumption has significant implications. Most have understood Hosea's supposed 'marriage' to Gomer, 'woman of prostitutions', in 1: 2–3 as a direct parallel to YHWH's 'marriage' to Israel, often leading to prolonged speculation over when Gomer's infidelity might have taken place.<sup>46</sup> If it

<sup>42</sup> Baumann (2003: 94).

<sup>43</sup> Frymer-Kensky (1992a: 145). Cf. Ortlund (1996: 72): 'the larger reality of Yahweh's marriage to Israel is said to be symbolized through the human relationship, creating the presumption that only one marriage is in view.' Bird (1989: 80): 'The prophet is to represent by his marriage and family life Yahweh's relationship to Israel as a relationship subverted by Israel's promiscuous behaviour.' Dearman (1999: 101) finds symbolic roles for the entire 'family': 'Hosea as husband and father = YHWH; Gomer = land/nation committing harlotry; Jezreel = Israel; Lo-Ruhamah = Israel; Lo-Ammi = Israel; unnamed mother = wife of YHWH; adulteress = Israel.' Cf. Connolly (1998: 56): 'In chs. 1–2, Hosea uses an extended metaphor of marriage that places Yahweh and Hosea himself in the role of husband, and Israel and Hosea's wife in the role of unfaithful wife. . . . Chapter 1 shows us that the function of the prophet's entire family is to mirror the relationship of Yahweh and Israel.' The combination of the assumptions that the entire family is representative and that *Hosea 2* is 'about' the same 'story' as *Hosea 1* can cause significant complications. Even Wolff (1974: 33) recognizes this: 'Do not both mother and children represent Israel? Do Israelites take sides against Israel? Here the collective idea, in its various forms, noticeably breaks down.' Cf. Galambush (1992: 48): 'To the extent that the land itself represents the people . . . Hosea's children are redundant, since the people are represented by both Gomer and her children. In 2: 4 (Eng 2: 2) the problem becomes compounded when the children (the people) are told to plead with their mother (the land, which represents the people). How are the people to "convince" the land to change its ways, if its "sin" is only a metaphoric representation of their own?' Galambush takes this to mean that the woman in *Hosea 2* cannot be a personification of the land, but of the city (p. 49). To my mind, however, readings of Gomer and Hosea as representative as a whole are quite simply unnecessary.

<sup>44</sup> Rowley (1963: 88, cf. pp. 86, 72). Andersen and Freedman (1980: 124) show some awareness of the limitations of such an approach: 'There are not two levels running parallel. Hosea's love for his wife is "like" Yahweh's love for his people. The similitude is vast, and equations are not to be sought in minute details. We only have to mention the fact that either the wife or the children can represent Israel in order to indicate that a near scheme is not possible.' Yet they still insist that 'In Hosea's parable, there is in effect one story' (p.125).

<sup>45</sup> *Contra* Landy (1995: 22), who recognizes that the prophet's role is not representative in other sign-act narratives, but insists that *Hosea 1* is different: 'Only Hosea among the prophets "plays" God.' It remains unclear, however, why this narrative must be so different. Ben Zvi (2004: 378) recognizes that the representation would be unusual for a prophetic text, yet still maintains the reading: 'Unlike other instances of the marital metaphor (e.g. Jer. 3: 6–10), the text here and in *Hosea 3* asked the intended readers to imagine two clearly individualized human partners playing as it were the roles of the deity and Israel in the metaphor.'

<sup>46</sup> Stienstra (1993: 102) believes that *Hosea 2* outlines the act of infidelity. Wolff (1974: p. xxii): 'We can only infer that one day Gomer, having committed adultery, left Hosea and become the legal wife of another man.' Kamionkowski (2003: 146): 'If God's relationship to

occurred before the marriage, then Israel must have been unclean before her relationship with YHWH; but if it took place afterwards, then why does it not appear in the narrative? A conundrum indeed. Mays writes: ‘Hosea is to seek out a woman who has deserted him. The story of that desertion and how and under precisely what conditions Gomer lived when Hosea receives the divine command is unknown—the embarrassment of this reconstruction.’<sup>47</sup> Yet, if Hosea and Gomer do not play representative roles for YHWH and Israel in this narrative, the problem disappears.

### HOSEA 1–3: AN APPROACH

In previous chapters we began by first familiarizing ourselves with the wider context of prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language so as to highlight the way in which that metaphorical language reflects and responds to its distinctive wider frame. This chapter will take a different approach in response to the unique challenge of *Hosea* 1–3 and its tangled reception history. My aim in the following discussion is to offer a fresh reading of *Hosea* 1–3, which stands free of the four broad assumptions outlined. First, I will release chapters 1 and 3 from the necessity to reflect the sexual and marital metaphorical language of other prophetic books; second, I will not assume that these narratives share the same details as the poetic chapter 2; third, I will not be concerned if they show little interest in Hosea’s personal life; and fourth, I will reject the supposition that Hosea must necessarily represent YHWH, and Gomer, Israel.

In addition to the rejection of these assumptions, a main influence on this reading is the way in which I will understand chapters 1–3 to interrelate, as I take a diachronic approach. In the first instance, with many others, I will understand the unexpectedly positive announcements in 1: 7, 2: 1–3, and 3: 5 to be later additions seeking to alleviate the otherwise disturbing message of the sign-act narratives.<sup>48</sup> My reasons for this will become clear through the

Israel parallels Hosea’s marriage to Gomer, it is safe to assume that when YHWH “married” Israel, she was already a woman/nation of ill repute. Therefore in both *Hosea* 1 and *Ezekiel* 23, it should come as no surprise that the woman’s character is not radically altered by her marriage to YHWH.’

<sup>47</sup> Mays (1969: 56).

<sup>48</sup> For the purposes of this discussion we will use MT’s versification (rather than the English, which follows LXX), as this allows for easier dialogue with the important secondary scholarship. Alternative English references will not be provided, as it seems to me that this makes for difficult reading; but it should be borne in mind that MT is always two verses ahead of English translations in *Hosea* 2 and one verse ahead in *Hosea* 12 and 14.

course of the reading; but it is fair to say that even those taking a synchronic approach find these verses, in the words of Landy, ‘a surprise’.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps more uncommon is my understanding of the way in which 2: 4–25 relates to chapters 1 and 3. We have already seen the importance of recognizing the distinctiveness of this poetic chapter over against the sign-act narratives. This reading will explore the idea that this poetic work seeks to reflect on the implications of the sign-act narratives in unique directions. In other words, *Hosea 2* is itself an interpretation of chapters 1 and 3, concerned with their consequences for YHWH’s relationship with Israel, whose conclusions should not necessarily guide our reading of the narratives, but are of considerable interest in their own right.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, if these verses are a poetic interpretation of *Hosea 1* and 3, then we will perceive two diametrically opposed responses. The first can be found in 2: 4–15 (2A), which continues the narratives’ wholly negative outlook on Israel’s future; the second can be found in 2: 16–25 (2B), where the text takes a radical U-turn to create an optimistic perspective. My reasons for this reading will become clear; but, once again, it is notable that even synchronic readings are aware of the volte-face in v. 16.<sup>51</sup> Any datings for these different levels are beyond the scope of this reading, which seeks to respond to textual issues, rather than locate the book of *Hosea* against specific socio-historical backgrounds; nevertheless, these levels certainly seem to represent different interests and visions for Israel/Judah’s future, which may be a subject of interest to those concerned with dating the text.<sup>52</sup>

## HOSEA 1

*Hosea 1*’s character as a sign-act narrative is essential to its identity, for within this chapter the reader is confronted with four closely related sign-acts.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Landy (1995: 27, cf. pp. 26, 50). In a basic introduction to *Hosea*, G. I. Davies (1993: 80) characterizes these as consensus additions. Abma (1999: 148–50) struggles with the change of tack in 1: 7 in view of her synchronic approach.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Budde (1922), who, for different reasons, argues that chapters 1 and 3 were originally a consecutive account into which chapter 2 was incorporated to reflect on the relationship between YHWH and the people. *Contra* Yee (1987), who believes that chapters 2–13 are original and that chapter 1 has been added by a redactor.

<sup>51</sup> Abma (1999: 185): ‘verses 16–17 mark a turning point within *Hosea 2*: 4–25.’

<sup>52</sup> Yee (1987: 1–25) provides a review of literature on the possibilities of redactional activity in *Hosea*.

<sup>53</sup> Weeks (1999: 167): ‘The chapter does not portray a situation which develops symbolically then, but a string of single, symbolic actions.’

## Sign-act 1

With barely an introduction (itself almost certainly editorial),<sup>54</sup> we are catapulted into the first action; and so the controversy begins: ‘Go, take for yourself a woman of prostitutions and children of prostitutions; for the land has actually prostituted away from YHWH!’ (1: 2). The translation seeks to reflect MT’s elusiveness, for in 1: 2 we are notoriously faced with three major questions. Does the command to ‘take’ (לקח) a woman mean that Hosea must marry her, or have sexual relations with her?<sup>55</sup> Related to this, should אשה be understood as ‘wife’ or ‘woman’?<sup>56</sup> Finally, what is the force of the plural ‘prostitutions’? In my opinion, it is the lack of clarity surrounding these three words that is largely responsible for the disagreements raging over this first sign-act. At the same time, it is perhaps unsurprising that 1: 2 is sparse in detail when it comes to the woman’s identity and relationship with Hosea, given its setting within a sign-act narrative. While such elusiveness is frustrating for those who wish to learn more about the personal life of Hosea, or are concerned with biblical ethics,<sup>57</sup> perhaps we should take such silence as a hint that this is simply not where the interest of this narrative lies. To my mind, the common belief that Hosea *must* marry Gomer in 1: 2 betrays numerous assumptions: that the prophet must represent YHWH; that *Hosea* 1 must reflect *Hosea* 2 in which YHWH speaks of marriage; and that the narrative must also echo other prophetic books which purportedly speak of such a marriage. In my opinion, however, it is precisely these assumptions that have led to the entangled state of *Hosea* 1–3 in current scholarship. *Hosea* 1, like other sign-act narratives, is elusive in regard to the above issues because it is simply not interested in the personal life of the prophet. Through rationing detail, this narrative encourages the reader to keep her or his attention firmly fixed on the issues of real importance: the four sign-acts that will convey the ‘word of YHWH’ (an encouragement that has notably been resisted by many).<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Wolff (1974: 1–2), G. I. Davies (1992: 43), Macintosh (1997: 1 f.).

<sup>55</sup> The word has a similar semantic range in English and Hebrew. Fensham (1984: 72), Macintosh (1997: 8), and Baumann (2003: 93) understand לקח לך as ‘marry’. G. I. Davies (1992: 50; 1993: 90) argues that this is unnecessary, citing other instances where it refers to extra-marital sex, in *Lev* 20: 14, 17, 21.

<sup>56</sup> The Hebrew encompasses both, and interpretations reflect the way in which לקח לך is understood.

<sup>57</sup> Limburg (1988: 9): ‘The questions come flooding to mind: Was this woman an ordinary streetwalker, of the sort described in Genesis 38: 13–19 or Proverbs 7? Was she one of the prostitutes associated with the worship of Baal (Hos. 4: 14)? Was the woman perhaps a former prostitute who promised to quit her profession? *How did Hosea feel about all this?*’ (emphasis mine). Fascinating as these questions are, the text answers none of them.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Mays (1969: 23): ‘The very genius of the formal, repetitive style is that it excludes almost everything which does not serve the pattern of command and interpretation.’ Clements (1975: 30): ‘In these narratives, it is indisputable that the message has controlled and determined

*Hosea* 1's restraint in character portrayal comes particularly into focus with the reference to אִשֶׁת זְנוּנִים.<sup>59</sup> Readers are still undecided as to what this unusual phrase might mean. Some argue that it is a variation of אִשֶׁת זִנָּה, the usual term for a prostitute.<sup>60</sup> Others understand Gomer to be a 'cultic prostitute',<sup>61</sup> one who has taken part in supposed 'Canaanite bridal rites',<sup>62</sup> or even one who has simply engaged in the 'Canaanite fertility cult'.<sup>63</sup> Still others wish to reject the idea that זְנוּנִים might refer to prostitution altogether, arguing that the phrase should be understood to mean something like 'wife of promiscuity',<sup>64</sup> 'wife (or woman) of harlotry',<sup>65</sup> 'promiscuous woman',<sup>66</sup> 'wife of whoredom',<sup>67</sup> 'woman of unfaithfulness',<sup>68</sup> 'woman of fornications',<sup>69</sup> or 'woman of loose sexual morals'.<sup>70</sup> Many, irrespective of their understanding of זִנָּה, characterize זְנוּנִים as 'a plural of intensity', underscoring just how pervasive is Gomer's 'prostitution' (perhaps the most convincing observation to date).<sup>71</sup> The issue is complicated by the reappearance of

the account of the events, so that the prophet's action and experience are to be understood from the message, and not vice versa. To proceed in the reverse direction in the case of *Hosea*'s marriage and children has frequently led to a failure to grasp the true nature of the message which is actually given.

<sup>59</sup> *Contra* Ben Zvi (2004: 379): 'The text explicitly underscores that Hosea knows well the character of his wife.'

<sup>60</sup> Schmidt (1924: 245), Robinson (1935: 301 f.), and G. I. Davies (1992: 48). Davies is also open to Wolff's suggestion (p. 51).

<sup>61</sup> Mays (1969: 26).

<sup>62</sup> Most famously, Wolff (1974: esp. 13–15): 'She whom Hosea is to marry is therefore not an especially wicked exception; she is simply representative of her contemporaries in Israel' (p. 15). Cf. Rudolph (1966a: 42–3) and Macintosh (1997: 124–5) for a critique. Indeed, this theory, like that of 'cultic prostitution', has lost much of its support.

<sup>63</sup> Waterman (1955: 103): 'Gomer had expressed her determination to participate in the regular worship of Yahweh of that time. Nor is there anything to indicate that she was assuming to do this in any unusual manner, such as becoming a temple devotee or sacred prostitute. On the contrary, she was only presuming to do what countless daughters, brides, wives, and husbands were doing in the practice of the official religion.'

<sup>64</sup> Frymer-Kensky (1992a: 145). Yee (1992: 197): 'Her adulterous acts are evaluated pejoratively as being "like a harlot", although she is not a prostitute by profession.' Cf. Yee (2003: 99). Sherwood (1996: 19–20 n. 4) states: 'I shall use the translations "promiscuous woman", "prostitute" and "wife of harlotry" in order to do justice to Gomer's ambiguous status in the text.'

<sup>65</sup> Leith (1989: 97): 'a nebulous term, unique to Hosea, which does not connote professional prostitution.'

<sup>66</sup> Andersen and Freedman (1980: 116, cf. pp. 157–63). Ben Zvi (2005: 36).

<sup>67</sup> Baumann (2003: 86).

<sup>68</sup> Törnkvist (1998: 118).

<sup>69</sup> Keefe (2001: 18).

<sup>70</sup> Bird (1989: 80). Cf. Wacker (1996: 41).

<sup>71</sup> Abma (1999: 141), Bauman (2003: 91), Yee (1992: 197), Mays (1969: 26), Joüon and Muraoka (1993: 136 g). Cf. the use of the plural in *Ezek* 16: 15, 33, 34; 23: 7, 8, 11, 14, 18, 19, 29, 35; *Hos* 4: 12, 5: 4. זְנוּנִים does not appear alongside אִשֶׁה (woman/wife) in any of these cases, however, which is perhaps the most puzzling aspect of the phrase in *Hosea* 1.

the adjective later in the same verse to describe Gomer's children (ילדי זוננים: 'children of prostitutions'), increasing the enigma.<sup>72</sup> The sparse narrative provides little assistance in our search to understand this unusual phrase, perhaps surprisingly considering the apparent uniqueness of its form. Even the explanation of what Hosea does in order to fulfil the command is of little help: 'So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim and she conceived and bore him a son.'<sup>73</sup> Following these words, the spotlight moves immediately on to the three following sign-acts. This in itself seems significant, however, as the narrative's determined movement away from such detail suggests that it is not here that its message lies, despite the linguistic, historical, and ethical questions the verse raises (cf. *Isaiah* 8: 1–4).<sup>74</sup> Thus, we might say that all the reader must understand fully in 1: 2 is that the prophet is commanded to 'take' a woman, who is somehow closely bound up with 'prostitutions', and to produce children, also intimately associated with 'prostitutions', in order to convey the imperative message on which the focus of this narrative lies: 'the land has actually prostituted away from YHWH!'

If Hosea sign-acts YHWH's relationship with the land through sexual liaison with Gomer, some might argue that the prophet therefore represents YHWH, and Gomer, Israel. But to my mind, the temptation to draw such conclusions is best avoided. As we have witnessed, while the prophet can appear representative in shorter sign-acts, this inevitably breaks down once the narrative lengthens beyond a single, straightforward action. We might say that it is hardly surprising that those who have sought to maintain a representational understanding of the prophet and woman throughout the lengthy *Hosea* 1–3 find themselves entangled in complexities. For the purposes of this reading, then, Hosea does not represent YHWH, nor does Gomer represent Israel: rather the act of sexual encounter between Hosea and this 'woman of prostitutions' conveys the horror of Israel's 'prostitution' away from YHWH.

<sup>72</sup> Wolff (1974: 15) suggests that the children are so called because they are born as a result of their mother's participation in a pagan cult. Andersen and Freedman (1980: 168) argue that the term reflects 'family solidarity', or Gomer's belief that the children are a reward from the Baals. Bird (1989: 80) notes that 'the mimicking construction of the paired terms and the linkage without an intervening verb suggest that the author intended to claim for the children the same nature as their mother'. Sherwood (1996: 125) observes that 'the association of children and harlotry, innocence and sexual promiscuity, has jarred with commentators', and she explores various other responses.

<sup>73</sup> This reading has no interest in possible etymologies for 'Gomer'. While many have been suggested, the lack of consensus itself illustrates how different this name is from those names in *Hosea* 1 which do carry significant meaning. *Contra* Abma (1999: 142), Wolff (1974: 16–17), Mays (1969: 26–7).

<sup>74</sup> Bird (1989: 81): 'The function of the sign-act is to shock, and intimate, and confound—and more particularly to point forward to the explanation that follows.'

The intense concentration of 1: 2–3 on the message of its sign-act is striking, with particulars scarce. Unfortunately, however, the interests of scholarship have often been diverted by the fierce debates raging over who Gomer might have been and the nature of her relationship with Hosea. Many commentators express shock and indignation at the possibility that YHWH might command a prophet to engage in a sexual act with a woman so strongly associated with ‘prostitutions’.<sup>75</sup> Yet, for *Hosea* 1, it is not here that the outrage lies, but rather in the message the sign-act seeks to convey. *Hosea* 1: 2–3’s elusiveness regarding the nature of Gomer’s ‘prostitutions’ and relationship with the prophet contrasts sharply with the hard-hitting accusation that ‘the land has actually prostituted away from YHWH!’ (1: 2). The use of the infinitive absolute (‘actually’) highlights just how serious is this charge. Nevertheless, most remain unmoved by the outrageous indictment. Accusations of ‘prostitution’ echo through the prophetic books, perhaps desensitizing readers. It is worth remembering, however, that *Hosea* 1–3 is thought to be the first canonical writing to present ‘prostitution’ as a charge; it may even have been the first to do so more widely. There is certainly every reason to believe that this narrative seeks to shock.

What, then, is the ‘prostitution’ with which the land is charged? It is here that *Hosea* 1 is strikingly distinctive. In other prophetic books where ‘prostitution’ appears as a metaphorical focus, the charge is substantiated. In

<sup>75</sup> Davidson (1899: 421) characterizes the problem well: ‘It has been supposed that Hosea allied himself with a woman already known as a sinner, with the view of reclaiming her. It is very difficult to believe either that the prophet should do such a thing, or that he should represent himself as commanded by God to do it’ Readings of *Hosea* 1 and 3 as an allegory (Ibn Ezra, Maimonides, Kimḥi) or dream (Rashi, DeWette) have long been dismissed. Cf. Rowley (1963: 79–82). However, many still respond by seeking to ‘explain this language away’. See Rowley (1963: 74, pp. 74–81 for examples). Cf. Bons (1999). Toy (1913: 79) suggests that the ‘symbolic actions’ may be ‘pure inventions’. Waterman (1918) insists that the expression of YHWH’s command in 1: 2 must be ‘reminiscent’ (pp. 197–8), and that Gomer’s ‘prostitution’ consists of her ‘being religious in the conventional way of the time’ (p. 200). His comment that ‘The prophets did unusual things, but never did they commit an act involving moral turpitude’ (p. 196) is particularly striking. Cf. Waterman (1955: esp. 103–5). Fensham (1984: 71): ‘It seems better to accept that Gomer had some association with the fertility cult.’ Pfeiffer (1941: 569) argues that Gomer is characterized as an אִשֶׁת זְנוּנִים simply because she is a northern Israelite. Rudolph (1966a) notoriously excises זְנוּנִים as a retrospective redaction. Wolff (1974: 13–17) suggests that Gomer is so described because, like most women of that period, she has been involved in ‘Canaanite bridal rites’. Cf. Stuart (1987: 12). Macintosh (1997: 8) believes the description of Gomer to be the work of a redactor and retrospective, while J. Day (2001: 572) and Andersen and Freedman (1980: 116, 165–6) believe the description to be ‘proleptic’. Mitchell (2004: 125) suggests that it is the paradoxical ordering of the verse—symbolizing the paradoxical nature of *Hosea* as a whole—that has caused so much contention: ‘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.’ Sherwood (1996: esp. 40–82; cf. 1995) provides a fascinating exploration of different reactions to YHWH’s unexpected command, which characterizes such approaches as ‘resistant readings’ (p. 262).

*Ezekiel* 23: 5, an aspect of Oholah's 'prostitutions' is her alliances with Assyria ('Oholah prostituted while she was mine and lusted after her lovers, the Assyrians'), while in *Jeremiah* 2: 20, Judah is accused of 'prostitution' for her unacceptable worship ('But upon every high hill| And under every luxuriant tree,| You are bending over, prostituting!'). In stark contrast, *Hosea* 1 presents us with the allegation of 'prostitution' with little corroborating evidence. Moreover, we have witnessed the forceful ways in which the other prophetic texts encourage distinctive associations for their 'prostitution' motifs. *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 promotes associations of senselessness, while *Ezekiel* 16A and 23A forcefully introduce associations of control and uncontrollability. In stark contrast, there is no such strong encouragement in *Hosea* 1. There are nuanced hints, however, to which (given the elusiveness of this text) we should pay close attention.

*Hosea* 1: 2 states: 'the land has actually prostituted *from after* (מֵאַחֲרַי) YHWH'. There are a number of cases elsewhere in which מֵאַחֲרַי is used to speak of people moving 'from following after' YHWH to worship other gods (*Deuteronomy* 7: 4; *Numbers* 14: 43, 32: 15; *Joshua* 22:16, 18, 23, 29). Some therefore hear echoes of unacceptable worship or 'idolatry' in *Hosea* 1: 2. Galambush, for instance, suggests that 1: 2 is 'referring obliquely but specifically to the worship of Baal'.<sup>76</sup> This is possible, given *Hosea's* interest in the people's worship of Baal(s) elsewhere (2: 10, 15, 19), yet such associations are not explicit. Indeed, there are equally numerous cases, where the worship of other gods is not invoked by מֵאַחֲרַי (1 *Samuel* 24: 2; 2 *Samuel* 2: 22, 26, 30, 11: 15; *Amos* 7: 15; 1 *Chronicles* 17: 7), and others have therefore been content to suggest that in combination with מֵאַחֲרַי, 'prostitution' takes on associations of movement away, or separation, from YHWH without identifying towards whom that movement might be. Landy suggests that 'in *Hosea* the whorishness is a figure for a primary estrangement'.<sup>77</sup> In addition to this, Bird argues that the infinitive absolute construction זָנָה תִּזְנֶה ('has actually prostituted') in combination with the repetition of the noun זְנוּנִים ('promiscuity, fornication') reinforces 'connotations of repeated, habitual, or characteristic behaviour'.<sup>78</sup> Beyond these possibilities, however, there is no further apparent encouragement of metaphorical associations for the land's 'prostitution' in *Hosea* 1.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Galambush (1992: 46).

<sup>77</sup> Landy (1995: 22). Cf. Bird (1989: 81).

<sup>78</sup> Bird (1989: 80).

<sup>79</sup> The absence of such associations has, perhaps unsurprisingly, encouraged many to turn to *Hosea* 2 for more information. Further connotations for *Hos* 1: 2 suggested by Bird (1989: 81) include 'the notion of infidelity, which is supplied by the context and made explicit here by *Hosea's* inventive construction'. She continues; 'the expression that explains the usage is found in 2: 5 (cf. 13), where the charge of fornication (*zānētā 'immām* "their mother *znh*-ed") is interpreted by the quotation, "For she said, 'I will go after ('*aḥārē*) my lovers' ".

This is not to suggest that this ‘prostitution’ can therefore speak *only* of estrangement and habitual behaviour: metaphorical language simply cannot be contained in this way. It does remain striking, however, that *Hosea* 1 does not appear actively to promote wider associations for its ‘prostitution’ focus in the forceful manner that we witnessed in other prophetic texts. In contrast to those sustained efforts, it is as if for *Hosea* 1 these few sparse words are sufficient to convey the impact of YHWH’s scandalous accusation.

In the aftermath of this outrageous charge, the narrative moves on immediately to the birth and naming of the children. Debate over the next three sign-acts has been restrained in comparison to the heated discussions that continue to rage over 1: 2–3. Indeed, the children seem to disappear to the sidelines in many commentaries, whose interest lies firmly in the relationship between Gomer and the prophet.<sup>80</sup> Yet in the narrative, the children are of prime importance, appearing as early as 1: 2 with their unusual appellation, ‘children of prostitutions’, and from 1: 3 taking centre stage.<sup>81</sup> Hosea and Gomer themselves recede into the background as *Hosea* 1 continues in three further sign-acts to introduce what we might call the legacy of the land’s ‘prostitution’. It is worth noting that YHWH commands the prophet to name the three children, whereas in other instances in the Hebrew Bible, this appears to be a mother’s role,<sup>82</sup> strengthening the sense that these acts of naming are no ordinary events, but rather prophetic sign-acts of unusual import.

### Sign-act 2

With the naming of the first child, *Hosea* 1 commences on a path that will lead to the ‘undoing’ of Israel’s apparent self-identity, as the three naming sign-acts work through three dreadful reversals. And so, in the second sign-act, the prophet is commanded to call his first child ‘Jezreel’, a name which sounds suspiciously like ‘Israel’, but whose distortion dramatically conveys YHWH’s perception of Israel as perverse and perverted:<sup>83</sup> ‘Call his name Jezreel; for in

<sup>80</sup> This is powerfully illustrated by Rowley (1963), who barely mentions the children in his seminal article, except where they are of interest in reconstructing the relationship between Hosea and Gomer. Mays (1969) devotes more pages to his discussion of Hosea and Gomer than to the children, while the weight in *Hosea* 1 lies the other way around.

<sup>81</sup> Keefe (1995: 96) stresses that ‘the children of harlotry are as much a key to the meaning of the trope as the mother’s activity’. However, her insistence that this is a ‘family metaphor’ (p. 97) perhaps goes too far.

<sup>82</sup> Wolff (1974: 17). This is, unsurprisingly, an issue of difficulty for feminist readers. Törnkvist (1998: 121): ‘Implicit in the text is the unquestioned and accepted premise that women and children can be taken, acted upon, by males.’ Cf. Sherwood (1996: 298).

<sup>83</sup> Landy (1995: 24–5): ‘The imperfect homophony suggests an identification, but also acts as an irritant.’ Keefe (1995: 97) speaks of ‘Jezreel, which sounds so hauntingly like Israel, first-born son of Yahweh’. Cf. Macintosh (1997: 18), Abma (1999: 133).

a little while, I will repay the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel' (1: 4). As we move beyond what we might call the resonant impact of 'Jezreel', we find that this first name is perhaps the most complex for current readers, for it also appears to have historical associations and thus involves some degree of reconstruction. The variety of explanations offered for the meaning of this child's name reflect the difficulties involved, but also witness to the significance and force of this sign-act.

In the first instance, 'the blood of Jezreel' has been understood as a condemnation of Jehu's violent overthrow of the house of Ahab, as narrated in *2 Kings* 9–10. It is of interest to note that in *2 Kings* this *coup* is commanded by YHWH, and in bloodthirsty terms: 'You must strike down the house of Ahab, your Lord, so that I might avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of YHWH, on Jezebel' (9: 7); 'the whole house of Ahab must perish' (9: 8). We cannot know whether *Hosea* 1: 4–5 disagrees with *2 Kings* 9: 1–10: 31 over YHWH's attitude towards the *coup*; or whether *Hosea* simply proposes that Jehu deserves punishment despite his actions on behalf of YHWH.<sup>84</sup> It is, however, clear that in 1: 4–5 YHWH vows to avenge the blood of Jezreel and to destroy Jehu's house, however unfair and unexpected this might appear to those familiar with the *2 Kings* narrative.<sup>85</sup> If 1: 4 is concerned with condemning Jehu's *coup*, many have argued that 'Jezreel' also signals the end of the dynasty founded on that *coup*, which remains in power when *Hosea* 1 is set (1: 1). Abma writes: 'Jehu is the first representative of this dynasty and the implication of the mention of his name is that the royal house is connected with blood in its *totality* and from its *roots*.'<sup>86</sup> Nor does the impact of 'Jezreel' end here. 1: 4–5 continues: 'And I will bring the kingdom of the house of Israel to an end. And it shall come to pass on that day that I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel.' It seems that 'Jezreel' has far-reaching consequences, like the names of his siblings to come.

There has been some disagreement as to how 1: 4's מַמְלֶכֶת should be understood. Wolff stresses that it speaks of conceptual kingship, not the Northern Kingdom: 'This threat then means that with the destruction of

<sup>84</sup> Sherwood (1996: 123): 'Hosea's sign "Jezreel" does not mimic history but recreates history by radical reinterpretation: after passing through Hos. 1: 3, Israel's "history" will never be the same again.'

<sup>85</sup> Andersen and Freedman (1980: 178–81) reject the idea that children must pay for the crimes of their fathers. McComiskey (1993) suggests that 1: 4 is 'supreme irony', as Jehu's dynasty will end as it began, in bloodshed. While his attempts to prove this through a study of פָּקַד עָלָיו ('repay') in the Hebrew Bible will not convince all, there does seem to be a certain irony here. We might even add that Jehu's charge of 'prostitutions' against Jezebel in *2 Kings* 9: 22 makes the apparent disagreement between this narrative and *Hosea* 1 particularly ironic.

<sup>86</sup> Abma (1999: 144, cf. pp. 143–6), Wolff (1974: 18).

Jehu's dynasty comes the end of the entire monarchy in Israel.<sup>87</sup> Andersen and Freedman insist: 'The nation will be spared but it will be deprived of its king for a long time.'<sup>88</sup> There are others, however, who believe that the implications of 'Jezreel' do not rest even here, but that *ממלכות* does signal the fall of the Northern Kingdom.<sup>89</sup> Certainly, as we read 1: 4 in the light of the Assyrian defeat of Samaria, such echoes are haunting. Thus we might say that the impact of the name 'Jezreel' ripples outwards in ever widening circles of terrible destruction: from *coup*, to dynasty, to kingship, perhaps even to kingdom.<sup>90</sup> There are some who even speak of the positive echoes created by the name's etymology, 'God sows.'<sup>91</sup> Certainly these are powerfully awakened later in 2B, but at this point this meaning lies dormant;<sup>92</sup> or at least, if God is to sow anything, it is only violence and bloodshed.<sup>93</sup> We might even say that in this sense 'Jezreel' in *Hosea* 1 implies negation, like the names that follow.

### Sign-act 3

Thus *Hosea* 1 advances to the third sign-act, where Hosea and Gomer's daughter is named to convey an even more damning message: 'Call her name No-mercy,<sup>94</sup> for I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel that I should actually forgive them' (1: 6).<sup>95</sup> We might say that in this sign-act

<sup>87</sup> Wolff (1974: 19). Cf. G. I. Davies (1992: 55), Macintosh (1997: 14), Mays (1969: 27). The condemnation of kingship as a flawed power structure is developed further in *Hosea* 4–14 (5: 1, 8: 4, etc.).

<sup>88</sup> Andersen and Freedman (1980: 184). Andersen and Freedman (p. 185) and Wolff (1974: 19) believe that v. 5 is secondary. Little weight is given to 1: 5 in this reading, however, and a discussion seems superfluous.

<sup>89</sup> Stuart (1987: 29). Cf. pp. 28–30 for a wider discussion of the significance of Jezreel.

<sup>90</sup> Fisch (1988: 144): 'The name with its dread echo will reach out to embrace the scattering of the Northern Kingdom.'

<sup>91</sup> Andersen and Freedman (1980: 173): 'The name Jezreel thus conjures up two opposite ideas—the beneficence of God in fruitfulness of plants, animals, and people, and the crimes and atrocities of the Israelite kings (Gelston, 1974).'

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Abma (1999: 147).

<sup>93</sup> Fensham (1984: 74): 'In this case, however, it ("God sows") is not meant as positive, but something like the sowing of destruction, thus a malediction.' Keefe (1995: 97). Fisch (1988: 144).

<sup>94</sup> *רַחֲמָה* has provoked some debate, as an unusual verbal form. Andersen and Freedman (1980: 188) argue that 'Since the form is not used anywhere else, it is possible that it was invented for this case; multiple inferences should not be drawn from grammar.' Stacey (1990: 105) proposes 'She finds no mercy', insisting that 'the verb is not a passive participle as the RSV translation [Not pitied] implies'. Wolff's 'There is no mercy' (1974: 20) lacks the sharp impact of the Hebrew.

<sup>95</sup> MT's *כִּי-נִשָּׂא אִשָּׁה לַיהוָה* is difficult. Stuart (1987: 31) proposes 'for I have been utterly betrayed by them'; Macintosh (1997: 21) suggests 'Indeed I will annihilate them completely', drawing on *Job* 32: 22). Wolff (1974: 8–9) believes that we should read the phrase elliptically

we can begin to perceive the potential impact of this sparse narrative when unhindered by the tangle of hermeneutical problems. If the first sign-act is obscured through the controversies over the ‘woman of prostitutions’, while the second is complex for its reliance on historical allusions, in this third sign-act we can finally witness the narrative’s stark simplicity in the timeless force of the name ‘No-Mercy’. The uncompromising message of *Hosea* 1 is that YHWH has withdrawn any possibility of mercy, or pity, from Israel. Indeed, the hard-hitting impact of this sign-act seems to have been too great for some, as the following words are almost certainly a later addition, striving to bring some sense of hope to the narrative: ‘But I will have mercy on the house of Judah and I will save them, by YHWH their God. And I will not save them by bow, or by sword, or by battle, by horses, or by chariots . . .’ (1: 7).<sup>96</sup>

### Sign-act 4

Even with this abrupt warning that YHWH has removed his promise of mercy from Israel, the reader is unprepared for the devastating message that the third child’s name is to carry. There is a momentary lull, as Gomer weans No-Mercy, bringing an air of suspense to this otherwise fast-paced narrative. Abma writes: ‘As a calm before the storm, it provides a pause before the birth of the third child whose name forms the climax of the entire chapter.’<sup>97</sup> And then, in 1: 8, Gomer bears another son, and the prophet is commanded to perform his fourth sign-act, with the appalling words that in all probability

(‘instead I will withdraw it from them completely’). Törnkvist (1998: 119) reads ‘for I will truly bring against them’, following Nyberg’s suggestion (1941: 110) that *וּנְשָׂא לְ* is similar to *וּנְשָׂא עִוֶן* in *Hos* 14: 3. Landy (1995: 25) insists that we must ‘recognize the puzzle’ that both forgiveness and exile are offered; Abma (1999: 122) proposes ‘Let alone that I would forgive, yes forgive them!’ (cf. pp. 126–7). Despite the lack of consensus, all agree that the impact of this verse is negative, apart from Landy, who seeks out such tensions. My reading is similar to Abma’s ‘modal translation’, which rejects emendations but maintains a negative thrust, following the previous negative clause.

<sup>96</sup> Emmerson (1984: 89) insists that 1: 7 must be secondary: ‘It interrupts the sequence of the passage, and both in form and in content is inappropriate to its context.’ Cf. Mays (1969: 29), Wolff (1974: 20). Abma’s synchronic approach (1999: 148–50) struggles to make sense of 1: 7 within the literary context. We could understand the addition as a further reaction against Jehu’s bloody *coup*: according to this author, YHWH does not save through violent warfare.

<sup>97</sup> Abma (1999: 151). Sherwood (1996: 147) takes advantage of this pause to focus on the love Gomer shows to ‘No-Mercy’. For, if Gomer weans her daughter, she must also have breastfed her: ‘Gomer-bat-Diblayim does not speak but makes a silent dissident gesture which reasserts the voice of normality and reason. . . . Hosea and Yhwh have the power to create the dominant signifying structure, but Gomer’s action seems more appropriate, and the mother, the *other*, poses a real counter-challenge for the sympathy of the reader.’ We will return to the possibilities raised by Sherwood’s reading later.

at one time ended the shocking sequence of events in *Hosea* 1: ‘Call his name, “Not-My-People”. For you are not my people. And I, I-Am-Not to you!’ (לֹא־אֱהִיָּה לְכֶם)<sup>98</sup> (1: 9). In these few simple words, the relationship between YHWH and Israel is shattered.

There has been some debate over whether *Hosea* witnesses a ‘covenant theology’, with בְּרִית (‘covenant’) itself appearing in 2: 20, 6: 7, 8: 1, 10: 4, and 12: 2, although nowhere within *Hosea* 1 itself. While this debate remains beyond the scope of this particular study, it is worth noting that where the idea of covenant does appear, it seems distinct from the more worked-through covenant theology of *Deuteronomy*. *Hosea* 2: 20 describes a covenant with birds and animals; 10: 4 speaks of covenants between humans; and 12: 2 of covenants with Assyria and Egypt. Notwithstanding this, the words ‘You are not my people’ reverberate for many with the reversal of what seems to be covenant language found throughout the Hebrew Bible (cf. *Exodus* 6: 7; *Deuteronomy* 29: 12 (ET; 29: 13) *Jeremiah* 24: 7, 30: 22, 31: 33; *Ezekiel* 37: 27).<sup>99</sup> We will return briefly to the relationship between *Hosea* 1–3 and covenant language later, but for now we might say that it is clear, whether we perceive echoes of covenant language or not, that in this fourth sign-act we are presented with the end of YHWH’s relationship with the people of Israel.<sup>100</sup>

If this were not disturbing enough, 1: 9 goes on to utter what are perhaps the most unsettling words within the Hebrew Bible: ‘And I, I-Am-Not (לֹא־אֱהִיָּה) to you.’ YHWH speaks the unspeakable and reverses his own name.<sup>101</sup> When YHWH reveals his name in *Exodus* 3: 14, it is as אֱהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֱהִיָּה. However we choose to translate this phrase, it seems that according to *Exodus* יְהוָה (YHWH) is bound up with the verb הָיָה (‘to be’), echoed here in *Hosea*.<sup>102</sup> The implication of the *Exodus* narrative is that, in revealing his name to Moses, YHWH reveals something of himself (even if this revelation is paradoxically bound up

<sup>98</sup> Even MT has a Maqqeph underscoring the closeness of the words, לֹא־אֱהִיָּה. Cf. Stuart (1987: 33–4), Mays (1969: 29). Wolff (1974: 9) suggests ‘And I—I-Am-Not-There for you’, arguing that this is a ‘formula of divorce’, under the influence of 2: 4 (p. 21). Cf. Fensham (1984: 74), who similarly argues that the name of the third child ‘may point to a divorce’, an unlikely suggestion, given that the words are ‘Not my People’.

<sup>99</sup> Macintosh (1997: 27): ‘It sets forth the reversal of the terms of the covenant by which Yahweh adopted his people.’ Abma (1999: 151): ‘the reversal of the divine name signifies a nadir . . . God resigns as Israel’s covenant partner.’ Cf. Stuart (1987: 7, 33), Mays (1969: 29–30), Wolff (1974: 21), Andersen and Freedman (1980: 197–8), Simundson (2005: 18). It is likely that the echoes of covenant theology in *Hosea* have been a substantive influence on positive readings of chapters 1–3.

<sup>100</sup> Buss (1984: 75) notes the paradox that, while naming usually recognizes family relationships, in *Hosea* 1 the names terminate the relationship.

<sup>101</sup> Landy (1995: 18–19): ‘Hosea envisages a negativity in God, a reversion of his “I am” into “I am not”, a dark ground from which God speaks.’ Mitchell (2004: 121) speaks of ‘a new, negated divine name, Lo-Ehyeh’.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Wolff (1974: 21–2), Mays (1969: 29–30), Andersen and Freedman (1980: 197–9).

in mystery<sup>103</sup>). Indeed, the revelation is presented as the foundation of the Hebrews' exodus from Egypt that becomes so crucial to the self-understanding of many texts in the Hebrew Bible. Here in *Hosea* 1: 9, however, the divine name is reversed, and we might say revelation thus revoked. YHWH claims no longer to be 'I Am' to Israel, with all that this entails.<sup>104</sup>

While it is almost certainly with the chilling reversal of the divine name that this sign-act narrative ended at one time, it is perhaps unsurprising that the incongruously optimistic words of 2: 1–3 have been added.<sup>105</sup> For without these, *Hosea* 1 contends for one of the most pessimistic narratives in the Hebrew Bible. Even YHWH's prophet is rejected along with the people for whom he mediates, as the sense of climax reached with the fourth sign-act is reinforced by a dramatic transformation in the prophet's role.<sup>106</sup> In the first three sign-acts, Hosea takes a mediating role between YHWH and the people, with Israel spoken of in the third person.<sup>107</sup> Yet in this fourth and final sign-act, YHWH's words are addressed directly to Israel (second person masculine plural), implicating even the prophet in the nation's sins and rejection.<sup>108</sup> We might even say that it is significant that in the second sign-act narrative in chapter 3, the prophet speaks in his own voice. It is as if an irrevocable transformation has taken place in the way in which Hosea is from this point to relate the word of YHWH. He can no longer remain an impartial mediator of the threats directed to the people by YHWH, but is caught up in them, compelled to respond in the first person. Indeed, in *Hosea* 3 we shall see that the prophet is involved in the message he relays in a way that is unprecedented in the Hebrew Bible. Many puzzle over why *Hosea* 1 and 3

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Buber (1968: 59–60).

<sup>104</sup> Sherwood (1996: 248–51) presents the reversal, or 'deconstruction', of the divine name as 'Yhwh's Tour de Force': "“Problematic” and “difficult” are in fact incredibly restrained adjectives for a text that shockingly subverts the most fundamental logocentric conventions.' For Sherwood, 1: 9 'deconstructs the voice behind the text, the transcendental certainty that is Yhwh himself. . . . As deity and speaker of the text Yhwh is the ultimate transcendental signified, but, like the text itself, he is impossible to conceive of as a single entity and is fragmented, even to the extent that his very existence is at one point (1: 9) placed “under erasure”' (pp. 250–1).

<sup>105</sup> Landy (1995: 27): 'like 1: 7, 2: 1–3 is a surprise.' Most diachronic approaches attribute 2: 1–3 to the hand of a redactor: Macintosh (1997: 33–5), J. Day (2001: 572–3), Mays (1969: 30–1), Wolff (1974: 9), Andersen and Freedman (1980: 199), G. I. Davies (1992: 60). *Contra* Stuart (1987: 37), who argues for the originality of these verses, as they reflect the juxtaposition of curses and blessings in covenant treaties.

<sup>106</sup> Landy (1995: 27) suggests that, in reversing *Exodus*'s divine name, Hosea becomes 'an anti-Moses': 'the Exodus, and with it the entire prophetic vocation is cancelled out.'

<sup>107</sup> In 1: 2, YHWH speaks of 'the land' prostituting; in 1: 4 he threatens to bring an end to 'the house of Israel'; and in 1: 6 he vows no longer to show mercy to 'the house of Israel'.

<sup>108</sup> Abma (1999: 151) notes the abrupt change of address, but simply attributes it to 'a frequent phenomenon in prophetic texts'. Mays (1969: 29) believes the direct address is 'due to the tenacity of terms in a formula fixed in its usage as a declaration addressed to the people'.

speak in different voices.<sup>109</sup> It is tempting to understand this as the portrayal of a prophet who struggles to relate the word of YHWH, while rejected by that same God, and forced to share in the implications of the message he acts out.

### *Hosea 1: a summary*

Thus *Hosea 1* confronts us with a narrative in four movements, whose sign-acts convey four damning messages. The first communicates the initial outrageous message, ‘the land has actually prostituted from after YHWH’, through the unexpected liaison of the prophet with a ‘woman of prostitutions’. The following sign-acts work through what the implications of this estrangement are, through the naming of the resulting ‘children of prostitutions’. First, Jehu’s dynasty, indeed Israel’s kingship, whose perversion is formally indicated by the distorted name ‘Jezreel’, will be brought to an end; perhaps even the kingdom will face military defeat. Second, YHWH will no longer show mercy to Israel. Third and finally, Israel are no longer YHWH’s people: the divine name is reversed, and God’s presence is withdrawn, even negated. While this reading of *Hosea 1* may seem simplistic, it is my belief that this sparse narrative is as straightforward as this. There is no reason for us to assume that Hosea and Gomer must play representative roles, or to speculate how these roles might play out through the rest of *Hosea 1–3*. As we have seen, sign-act narratives simply do not work in this way. Nor is there any reason for us to suppose that essential details are missing that must be reconstructed from elsewhere. No other narrative in the Hebrew Bible is as complex as the tangled *Hosea 1–3* with which traditional scholarship presents us; nor need this narrative be. *Hosea 1* is a bare narrative, whose brevity conveys a devastating message.

We might even pause at this point to consider Ferber’s observations about responses to another prophetic poet, Blake. He writes: ‘Sometimes Blake’s meaning is blazingly obvious, yet it is so startling or threatening (. . .) that out of resistance to it the reader may go back over it in search for ironies or subtexts that subvert the plain sense, sooner wallowing in a slough of comfortable difficulties than going forth to meet the simple, disturbing assertion.’<sup>110</sup> *Hosea 1* is similarly ‘startling’ and ‘threatening’, and as ‘simple’ as it is ‘disturbing’. We might even say that it is ironic that Hosea has been called ‘the

<sup>109</sup> Most assume that this indicates a different authorship. Cf. Mays (1969: 24), Macintosh (1997: 95). Cf. Weeks (1999).

<sup>110</sup> Ferber (1991: p. x).

prophet of love.<sup>111</sup> For while 2: 1–3 strives to redeem the narrative, it is unlikely that this reversal is original, and it is suffused with an impression of desperation. Indeed, such is the negativity of *Hosea* 1 on this reading that we may wish to rethink the relationship between this book and *Amos*. While *Amos* is usually characterized as the more negative of the two prophetic books dedicated to supposedly contemporaneous figures, it appears that *Hosea* 1–3 competes for that distinction.<sup>112</sup> Certainly, on this reading, their shared message of disaster is closer than many might have presumed. Nor does the negativity of *Hosea* 1–3 end with *Hosea* 1.

### HOSEA 3

In its present state, the text continues with *Hosea* 2: 4–25, in its strategic position between the two sign-act narratives as interpretative poetry. For the purposes of this reading, however, we will turn first to *Hosea* 3, as the second sign-act narrative.<sup>113</sup> The relationship between *Hosea* 1 and 3 has been the subject of considerable debate. Rowley writes: ‘here is one of the major difficulties which complicate the whole discussion of the prophet’s marriage.’<sup>114</sup> Is *Hosea* 3 a continuation of *Hosea* 1?<sup>115</sup> Or is it a presentation of the same account from a different perspective?<sup>116</sup> As we might expect by this

<sup>111</sup> Doorly (1991) even names his book *Prophet of Love*. Limburg (1988: 15), reflecting on Hosea as ‘the prophet of God’s love’, concludes: ‘The third love is that of the Lord who loves Israel even when the people reject this love. . . . This kind of love originates in the heart of God (Deut. 7: 6–8), is exemplified on the cross (John 3: 16), illustrated in the parable of the Waiting Father. . . . This is the kind of love that keeps on loving no matter what. This is the divine love that provides the *cantus firmus* for the Book of Hosea.’ Cf. Fontaine (1995*b*: 60): ‘By the time I had finished writing on the so-called “Prophet of Love”, the only things I disliked more than the prophet and his god were the writings of modern commentators about Hosea.’

<sup>112</sup> Wolff (1977: 113) speaks of ‘the uniquely sombre message of Amos concerning the end of Israel’: ‘how sparse are such mitigations in the book of Amos compared to the rest of prophetic literature.’ Cf. Auld (1986: 9), Fontaine (1995*a*: 40). Interestingly, Harper (1905: pp. clix ff.) regards the positive sayings of *Hosea* as ‘unquestionably from exilic times’, seeing the prophet as wholly one of ‘doom’.

<sup>113</sup> *Contra* Abma (1999: 212), who assumes chapters 1–2 to be a unit.

<sup>114</sup> Rowley (1963: 71).

<sup>115</sup> Rowley (1963), Weiser (1974), Wolff (1974), von Rad (1965: 140–1), Mays (1969), and Ortlund (1996: 72) believe that *Hosea* 3 speaks of Gomer. Fohrer (1970), Toy (1913: 77), and Rudolph (1966*a*: 88) believe that a different woman is involved. Andersen and Freedman (1980: 117) characterize chapter 3 as ‘a historical footnote or postscript to the extraordinary monologue in c 2’.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Eissfeldt (1965), Ackroyd (1962), Gordis (1971: 242), McKeating (1971: 89), Stacey (1990: 107), Abma (1999: 212). Some even argue for the deletion of עוֹד (‘again’) in 3: 1, taking it as an editorial addition. Cf. Rowley (1963: 71 n. 2). Macintosh (1997: 113) believes that *Hosea* 3 is an early account preserved by the prophet, while *Hosea* 1 is a later retrospective account.

point, neither narrative clarifies the relationship, especially as far as Hosea's personal life is concerned.<sup>117</sup> While it seems unlikely that *Hosea* 3 repeats the events of *Hosea* 1 from a different perspective (for reasons that will become clear), it is unsurprising that the time-scale between the accounts is not clarified, given their character as sign-act narratives. Thus we might say that *Hosea* 3 begins a new episode of sign-acts, with its own introduction ('And YHWH said to me again'<sup>118</sup>), which simultaneously refers back to the first narrative in continuation of YHWH's disturbing message ('again'). With these words, 3: 1 also brings to mind the last words spoken by YHWH to the prophet in 1: 9: 'You are not my people and I, I-Am-Not to you!' Following YHWH's rejection of the prophet alongside his people, it makes sense that YHWH must readdress and reinstate his prophet. The significance of *Hosea* 3's change to first person narration also bears reiterating. Not only does this highlight this narrative's distinction from *Hosea* 1, we could say that it is also indicative of the prophet's irresistible draw into the action that we shall witness.

### Sign-act 5

In 3: 1, then, the prophet is commanded to perform his fifth sign-act: 'Go, love a woman *who loves* (אהבת) a companion (רע)<sup>119</sup> and *is committing* adultery. Just as YHWH loves the children of Israel, though *they turn* to other gods and *love* raisin-cakes.' For the purposes of this translation, אהבת is understood as an active participle ('who loves'), rejecting MT's passive vocalization (no consonantal changes are necessary).<sup>120</sup> For the four participles in 3: 1 (in italics) work

<sup>117</sup> We are given no indication whether the woman of *Hosea* 3 is the same woman as in *Hosea* 1, although there seems to me no good reason to suppose that she must be; *contra* Abma (1999: 211), who argues that the appearance of a second woman in *Hosea* 3 'would undermine the idea that Israel is Yhwh's one and only partner, ostensibly one of the central tenets of the marriage metaphor'. Cf. Rowley (1963: 84–5): 'The main difficulty which stands in the way of the view that Chapter 3 concerns a different woman is that in that case both of these women, Gomer and the other, symbolise the wayward people of God. . . . Israel is symbolised by the bride in most cases.'

<sup>118</sup> There is some debate over whether we should read 3: 1 as 'And YHWH said to me again, "Go! . . ."' or 'And YHWH said to me, "Go again! . . ."' (with translations depending on how *Hosea* 1 and 3 are believed to relate). Rowley (1963: 71) comments: 'the Hebrew accents make it possible to take the word "again" either with the words that precede or with those that follow. . . . It may therefore be agreed that this word cannot be pressed into the service of any theory.' Ben Zvi (2005: 79) argues for both possibilities, with עור serving 'double duty'. What is clear is that a distinction is marked with what has gone before.

<sup>119</sup> רע is used to describe a male lover in *Jer* 3: 20 and *Song* 5: 16. Elsewhere it can also be used of simply a friend, or companion: *Gen* 38: 12, 20; *1 Sam* 30: 26. In *Hos* 3: 1, רע appears to be a 'lover', but it seems appropriate to avoid such a rendering, given the centrality of אהב (also 'love') to the structure and force of 3: 1.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Ibn Ezra in Rowley (1963: 68 n. 4).

in a loosely chiasmic pattern, and the other three participles are all active.<sup>121</sup> Even if this chiasm is not accepted, **אהבת** must at least be understood to parallel the ‘turning’ to other gods. Either way, an active vocalization seems more likely than MT’s passive. Whether we understand the first participle of 3: 1 as active or passive, however, the command of YHWH remains: the prophet must love a woman who commits adultery, in order to demonstrate the love of YHWH for the children of Israel.<sup>122</sup>

In contrast to *Hosea* 1’s cryptic charges of ‘prostitution’, chapter 3 makes its initial case against Israel clear: the ‘children of Israel’ have turned to other gods.<sup>123</sup> The more specific charge of loving ‘raisin cakes’ (**אשישי ענבים**), however, has caused problems, as their significance is uncertain. **אשישות** (feminine), or **אשישים** (masculine, as in 3: 1) appear four other times in the Hebrew Bible, but in such different situations that it is impossible to draw any conclusions (moreover, in each case **ענבים**, ‘grapes’, with which the term appears in 3: 1 is absent). In *2 Samuel* 6: 19 and *1 Chronicles* 16: 3, a ‘raisin-cake’ (**אשישה**) is given to each person following David’s sacrifice, and some have argued that they may have cultic significance. Yet in the *Song of Songs* 2: 5 they simply seem to be a delicacy: ‘Refresh me with apples, sustain me with raisin-cakes (**אשישות**), for I am sick with love.’<sup>124</sup> Some have suggested on the strength of this verse that the cakes might be an aphrodisiac, but it seems hardly likely that the woman here is begging for a stimulant, but rather for the opposite! Interestingly, in contrast to the *Song*, the loss of raisin cakes of Kir-Hareseth (**אשישי קיר-חרשת**) is mourned in *Isaiah* 16: 7 in the time of famine, suggesting to some that they may have been viewed as a necessity. Others have attempted to explain the significance of these raisin-cakes by drawing parallels with the ‘cakes (**כונים**) for the queen of heaven’ in *Jeremiah* 7: 18 and 44: 19.<sup>125</sup> However, there is no etymological relationship between the words, or any

<sup>121</sup> LXX also witnesses an active participle here (*ἀγαπῶσαν*). Cf. Vulgate. However, LXX also prefers to read **אהבת רע** as ‘a woman who loves evil’ (*πονηρὰ*), rather than ‘a companion’, probably because of the unexpectedness of YHWH’s command.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Macintosh (1997: 94): ‘These words do not of themselves reveal whether the initiative in the affair lay with the woman or her lover.’

<sup>123</sup> Landy (1995: 48) also notes the contrast, but argues that 3: 1 ‘supplements 1: 2 by making explicit the analogy with God’s love for Israel and by specifying the nature of the latter’s prostitution’. *Contra* Landy, I do not believe that the sign-act narratives should be understood to be in parallel in this way; moreover, it seems to me important to recognize that 3: 1 speaks of adultery and not of prostitution. We will turn to focus on the distinction between these metaphorical foci in *Hosea* 1–3 presently.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. HALOT i. 95, which suggests ‘(expensive) nourishing food’ for **אשישה** in *2 Sam* 6: 19, *Song* 2: 5, and *1 Chr* 16: 3. Regarding the raisin-cakes of *Hos* 3: 1, HALOT simply states ‘cultic’, providing no evidence.

<sup>125</sup> Mays (1969: 57) and Wolff (1974: 61) provide brief discussions of the significance of ‘raisin-cakes’.

other evidence to suggest that the cakes should be understood as ‘idoltrous’ cultic offerings.<sup>126</sup> Like many other aspects of *Hosea* 3, the ‘raisin-cakes’ of 3: 1 therefore remain a mystery.

If there are uncertainties surrounding our reading of 3: 1, however, this does nothing to prepare us for the prophet’s interpretation of YHWH’s command. For the command to ‘love an adulteress’ so far seems to be the most straightforward element of the narrative, if not the most positive sign-act we have encountered in *Hosea* 1–3. The fascinating problem of *Hosea* 3, however, is that the prophet does not perform the sign-act commanded by YHWH in a way we might expect.<sup>127</sup> Instead, he does something that is at first sight completely different: ‘So I bought her for myself with fifteen silver coins and a homer of barley and a lethech of barley. And I said to her, “You will live as mine for many days. You will not prostitute and you will not be with a man; even I will not be with you!”’ (3: 2–3).<sup>128</sup> We will return to the particulars of this translation of 3: 3 later. For now, our interest lies in how this sign-act fulfils YHWH’s directive. Few commentators have picked up on the apparent disparity between YHWH’s command and the prophet’s action.<sup>129</sup> To my mind, however, this is a crucial feature, and one which may further explain the unexpected choice of a first person narrator.

It is unlikely that the prophet simply disobeys YHWH; there is certainly nothing in the text to suggest this. If we return to 3: 1, however, a closer look

<sup>126</sup> Landy (1995: 49) playfully suggests that if these cakes are not cultic foods, then ‘the conjunction of other gods and raisin cakes juxtaposes the sublime and the ridiculous. Again, both possibilities suggest a comic touch; God’s love interacts with their desire for comfort food, as well as their continual straying away.’

<sup>127</sup> *Contra* Weems (1989: 90): ‘Here again we observe the obedient prophet acting without protest on behalf of the deity.’

<sup>128</sup> There has been significant discussion of the precise meaning of אִכְרָה. Vogels (1988) provides an overview. Most agree that the verb ‘has something to do with “I acquired her”, “I gained her”’ (p. 413). G. I. Davies (1992: 101) insists that ‘bought remains the only philologically plausible meaning’. Cf. Andersen and Freedman (1980: 298) and Wolff (1974: 56).

<sup>129</sup> Andersen and Freedman (1980: 293) argue: ‘The opening command of c 3, to “love” a woman, is not fulfilled in the chapter: 3: 3 is altogether obstructive and negative, and what it achieves is not described, at least on the human level.’ They conclude that *instead of* loving the adulteress, the prophet is forced to take alternative action. Wolff (1974: 58) notes that ‘More is accomplished than the command indicates and the interpretation goes beyond the previous symbolic action.’ Cf. Mays (1969: 54–5). Weeks (1999) observes that the prophet’s response in 3: 3 ‘goes beyond’ God’s command, as Hosea ‘tells the woman that she will remain faithful, promising to do the same himself’ (p. 168). He reflects: ‘There is no suggestion that Hosea is acting at God’s command here, and his symbol, unlike God’s, is a symbol of fidelity and hope. When he speaks for himself in the first person, here, then, Hosea is also acting in his own right, not as divine spokesman or agent’ (p. 168). While a thought-provoking suggestion, it seems to me more likely that the prophet’s unexpected action in *Hosea* 3 is an *interpretation* of God’s command to ‘love’ (albeit a radical one), rather than an unrelated movement on the prophet’s own part. Moreover, the hope that Weeks sees in such a reading is not so apparent to me: the symbol rather seems to be one of deprivation.

at YHWH's command reveals that it is not as straightforward as it seemed at first sight. YHWH does not direct Hosea to love a woman who commits adultery, but rather to love the woman *as YHWH loves Israel*. It is here that the chilling nature of *Hosea 3* becomes apparent. For it seems that this narrative is concerned with the question of what it means for YHWH to 'love' his people.<sup>130</sup> For this damning work, YHWH's love is best demonstrated by buying a woman and forcing her to live in celibacy. The ensuing explanation, interestingly from the mouth of Hosea, rather than YHWH, is a devastating blow, with a barely veiled threat of impending political defeat and destruction of the cult: 'For the children of Israel will live for many days without king, without prince, without sacrifice, without altar, without ephod, or teraphim' (3: 4). According to this prophet, YHWH's 'love' is not a tender love; nor is it a love of forgiveness and redemption, as is so often presumed.<sup>131</sup> Hosea's understanding of YHWH's 'love' for Israel is that it is revealed in punishment and loss.<sup>132</sup> It will result in the destruction of both cultic and political leadership, and even traditional access to divine help.

In the present form of the narrative, the threat is followed by the consoling words of 3: 5: 'Afterwards, the children of Israel will return and seek YHWH their God and David their King, and they will tremble before YHWH and his goodness in the latter days.' Like the words of hope and reconciliation in 1: 7 and 2: 1–3, however, these are almost certainly a later addition by an editor, no doubt shocked by the narrative's dark portrayal of YHWH and starkly pessimistic outlook. We have seen that Hosea is frequently referred to as 'the

<sup>130</sup> G. I. Davies (1992: 99): 'The root *'hb* (love) occurs no less than four times in this verse and is clearly its keynote.' Cf. Siebert-Hommes (2001: 168): 'The verb *אהב*, "to love", is a key word in Hosea. The root occurs 19 times and runs like a thread through the book.'

<sup>131</sup> *Contra* Macintosh (1997: 96), who speaks of *Hosea 3* as illustrating 'Yahweh's immense love for wayward Israel'; Ortlund (1996: 75): 'through all the agony required for the cleansing to be thorough, nothing will be able to separate her from the love of Yahweh'; Wolff (1974: 60): 'The love of God is undeserved love'; Mays (1969: 58): 'he was to love this woman with a love that reflected Yahweh's love for Israel—a love that was both exclusively jealous and passionately generous, a love that closed the door on her sin and opened the door for her return to her husband'; G. I. Davies (1993: 86): 'there is nothing in vv. 3–4 which is incompatible with an ultimately loving intention.' Cf. Buber (1949: 113). Andersen and Freedman (1980: 294) note that *Hosea 3* has 'no ending to assert that love conquers all', but instead of understanding this chapter to therefore redefine 'love', they suggest that 'the hoped-for reconciliation was no more than a hope, a hope grounded in unquenchable love, like Yahweh's love for Israel'.

<sup>132</sup> Rudolph (1966a: 92) argues that YHWH's love in *Hosea 3* is ironic, and that this chapter is wholly one of judgement. Sherwood (1996: 304) contends that, instead of being ironic, in *Hosea* 'love is deconstructed, placed under erasure, by the outworking of that love, which is confinement' (p. 305). I am similarly hesitant about speaking of *Hosea's* 'love' as 'ironic', believing that this narrative instead strives to present a wholesale reinterpretation of what 'love' might mean.

prophet of love'.<sup>133</sup> The centrality of this theme within *Hosea* 3 perhaps justifies such a characterization, with אהב ('love') appearing three times in the first verse. In adopting such a description, however, we must perhaps be prepared for our own understanding of 'love' radically to be altered.

*Hosea* 3's reinterpretation of YHWH's 'love' as one that punishes and demands obedience is striking for its echoes of אהב ('to love') in narratives concerned with covenant imagery. In *Deuteronomy*, for instance, the prominent motif of אהב seems to carry similar associations of demanded obedience and threatened punishment (cf. 11: 1, 13–17; 30: 16–20).<sup>134</sup> While we could say that the prominence of these associations elsewhere makes them unsurprising in *Hosea* 3, it is likely that this sign-act narrative pre-dates *Deuteronomy*.<sup>135</sup> Thus the question of *Hosea* 1–3's possible use of covenantal language as metaphor surfaces once again. It is hard to deny the apparent overtones of such language in *Hosea* 3, even if the imagery is not as developed as elsewhere. Having said this, the assumption by many that *Hosea* 3's use of אהב as potential covenant language means that this root no longer has associations of emotional feeling appears misplaced.<sup>136</sup> It seems to me that multiple meanings of אהב are essential to its force in *Hosea* 3. The shocking message of this narrative is that the relational love of YHWH, which can be acted out through a prophet's 'love' of a woman, is intrinsically bound up with obedience, the absence of which will result in dire punishment.

<sup>133</sup> Mays (1969: 54) calls chapter 3 'The way of love'. Alonso-Schökel (1967: 191) refers to Hosea as 'a great poet and prophet of love'.

<sup>134</sup> Weinfeld (1972a: 368) contends: 'It should be admitted that there is a fundamental difference between the conception of love in Deuteronomy and that of Hosea. "Love of God" in Deuteronomy is... predominantly the loyalty of Israel, the vassal, to God, the sovereign, whereas in Hosea and Jeremiah the love has an affectionate connotation as in love between husband and wife.' Ironically, Weinfeld continues: 'But this is true only with regard to the love of Israel towards God; where the love of God towards Israel is concerned there is almost no difference between Hosea and Deuteronomy. The love of God towards Israel in Deuteronomy is certainly not loyalty, and although no connotation of conjugal love can be ascribed to it, it has without doubt the meaning of affectionate love.' Thompson (1977) stresses the covenantal overtones of אהב. Lohfink (1963) calls attention to the similarities between אהב in *Hos* 9: 15 and *Deuteronomy*, drawing on Moran (1963). Cf. Wolff (1974: 60). Abma (1999: 113): 'Hosea is not a book "on its own", but may be understood as a recapitulation of concerns and promises from the covenant tradition.'

<sup>135</sup> This is the case even on the most conservative datings for *Deuteronomy*. Cf. von Rad (1966: 26), Weinfeld (1972a: 7). *Contra* Moran (1963), Stuart (1987: pp. xxxi–xlii, 15–19).

<sup>136</sup> *Contra* Baumann (2003: 60): 'There are some clear linguistic parallels between marriage- and berit- imagery when the texts speak of "loving"... "Loving" is to be understood not so much as the expression of an emotion, but rather as the maintenance of loyalty and fidelity to an agreement. In Deut 5: 10 and similar expressions אהב, "loving", is parallel to "keeping YHWH's commandments".' Cf. Wallis (in Bergman, Halder, and Wallis 1974: 113): 'Hosea's use of the concept of love to express his understanding of God's nature reflects the original meaning of the word 'ahabh as love between husband and wife.'

## Sign-act 6

If the prophet's actions in 3: 3–4 are an unexpected fulfilment of YHWH's command, this is not the only unusual feature of *Hosea* 3. Not only does Hosea not 'love a woman who commits adultery' in the way we might expect, but in 3: 3 the prophet orders the woman to perform a further sign-act. The command is even introduced in the same way as YHWH's commands in 1: 2 and 3: 1, illustrating the considerable responsibility with which Hosea has been charged. As prophet of YHWH, it now seems that he is able to order his own sign-acts, with the authority to vocalize his own interpretations of YHWH's perspective. The prophet no longer simply mediates the word of YHWH in *Hosea* 3, but rather speaks in his own voice, which is nevertheless characterized as God's will.<sup>137</sup> Hosea's role as prophet in chapter 3 is unusual for its proactive nature, and certainly distinct from his role in the first sign-act narrative.

And so we return to 3: 3, the prophet's command to the woman, which has caused so much controversy. The range of opinions on what this verse might mean can seem overwhelming; Andersen and Freedman concede that 'it is regrettable that this crucial verse is so difficult'.<sup>138</sup> It is my belief, however, that many of the difficulties perceived are once again bound up with unwarranted suppositions about the sign-act narrative, which remains elusive and elliptical. Indeed, by this point, the questions and contradictions gathered by readings seeking to trace the story of Hosea's personal life and marriage relationship are reaching breaking point.

The words of 3: 3–4 are almost poetic; certainly they are strongly structured:

You will live as mine (תשבי לי) for many days.

You will not prostitute and you will not be with a man (ולא תהיי לאיש);

Even I will not be with you (וגם אני אליך)!

For the children of Israel will live (ישבו) for many days

Without king, without prince, without altar,

Without pillar, without ephod, or teraphim.

(*Hosea* 3: 3–4)

<sup>137</sup> Weeks (1999: 169): 'It is as though, in his role as prophet, we see Hosea speaking and acting side-on; and then in chapter 3, speaking as himself, he suddenly turns to face us.' Abma (1999: 208): 'Hosea 3 does not depict Yhwh as an active agent or a performer of the judgement, but as being relatively separate from the events.' Landy (1995: 17) observes that in 3: 3–5 there is 'perhaps some individual initiative', although he also sees the possibility in Hosea's choice of Gomer as 'woman of prostitutions' in chapter 1 (p. 23). Ben Zvi (2005: 87): 'Significantly, a human monologue is considered an integral part of YHWH's word (see Hos 1: 1) just as a divine monologue (Hos 2: 3–25) is. Explicit human words become YHWH's word within this discourse and for those who accept it.' Cf. p. 78.

<sup>138</sup> Andersen and Freedman (1980: 300).

There has been considerable disagreement over the force of **לִי תִשְׁבֵּי** in 3: 3, although most agree that the phrase is in parallel with Israel's fate in 3: 4. Some argue that **לִי תִשְׁבֵּי** means 'to wait for', citing similar constructions in *Exodus* 24: 14, *Judges* 16: 9, and *Jeremiah* 3: 2, thereby reflecting a perception of hope within the narrative. Ward suggests that Israel's 'waiting' in 3: 4 might be in parallel with 'afterwards they shall return' in 3: 5.<sup>139</sup> Driven by a similar motivation, Abma proposes that **יִשָּׁב** has the sense 'to sit down' in 3: 3–4,<sup>140</sup> seeking to create a 'contrast' with the people's 'repentance' (**יִשְׁבוּ**) in 3: 5: "'to sit" is passive but "to repent" is to rise to one's feet and seek action.'<sup>141</sup> Wolff and Davies understand the verbs to have the force of 'to remain, or stay (in)' (cf. *Leviticus* 12: 4), probably under the influence of *Hosea* 2: 8, where YHWH threatens Israel that he will restrain her ('I will hedge up her way with thorns and build a wall against her') so that he can renew the relationship (at least in their view).<sup>142</sup> Certainly they are keen to maintain the positive 3: 5 despite its difficulties.<sup>143</sup> Indeed, all these suggestions strive to introduce hope into *Hosea* 3, by pointing forwards to 3: 5, an attempt that seems inappropriate for this diachronic reading, which understands 3: 5 to be a later addition, whose aim is precisely to bring such an optimistic perspective to the text.<sup>144</sup> They also seem unnecessarily to complicate the narrative with their nuanced meanings. For our purposes, then, I will understand **יִשָּׁב** in 3: 3 and 3: 4 to take the more straightforward meaning of 'to live',<sup>145</sup> taking **לִי תִשְׁבֵּי** to be an elliptical phrase that reflects the common use of the preposition **ל** to describe possession: 'as mine'.<sup>146</sup> And so in 3: 3 the prophet buys a woman and

<sup>139</sup> Andersen and Freedman (1980: 301). Ward (1966: 50). Ward himself admits that in *Judg* 16: 12 **יִשָּׁב** seems to take the sense 'to wait' even without the preposition, suggesting that it is the literary context that encourages this meaning rather than the grammatical construction itself.

<sup>140</sup> Abma (1999: 208).

<sup>141</sup> Abma (1999: 209–10).

<sup>142</sup> Wolff (1974: 62) even suggests that the verb has the force of 'to be completely resigned to household duties'. Cf. G. I. Davies (1992: 102).

<sup>143</sup> Wolff (1974: 62–3), G. I. Davies (1992: 102–5), and Macintosh (1997: 108) believe 'and David their king' and 'in the days to come' are Judean glosses, but nevertheless wish to retain 3: 5, despite its unexpected positive character. This is almost certainly because they wish chapter 3 to be concerned with a positive 'love'. Cf. G. I. Davies (1992: 98): 'Wolff has shown that the keyword love in v. 1 requires a sequel that involves the full restoration of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel (cf. also 2: 15).'

<sup>144</sup> Certainly, 'David their king' and 'YHWH their God' seem particularly out of place (leading Wolff, Davies, and Macintosh to delete them). Even without these, however, 3: 5 seems incongruous given the otherwise bleakness of *Hosea* 3.

<sup>145</sup> Rejecting Macintosh's (1997: 103) 'she will remain mine', as this seems to suggest that the woman was Hosea's in the first instance. Certainly Macintosh understands Gomer to be Hosea's wife (pp. 102–3).

<sup>146</sup> Macintosh (1997: 103); *contra* Andersen and Freedman (1980: 305), who argue that the phrase should simply be translated 'and I also', to render 'You will act in a certain way and I also will act in the same way.' This is influenced by their conclusion that the prophet does not undertake YHWH's command. Cf. Sherwood (1996: 128–9 n. 155).

commands her to ‘live as his’ so as to perform the following sign-act that illustrates how Israel will ‘live’ in the future.

The second problem with which 3: 3–4 confronts us is how to understand *וּלֹא תִהְיֶינָה לְאִישׁ וְגַם־אֲנִי אֶלֶיךָ*. There has been some consensus that the first three words should be translated something like ‘you shall not belong to a man’.<sup>147</sup> Yet most also agree that *לְהִיָּה לְ* has connotations of sexual intimacy, when it appears elsewhere in the context of a man’s relationship with a woman (*Judges* 15: 2, *Ruth* 1: 13, *Leviticus* 21: 3, *Deuteronomy* 24: 2, *Jeremiah* 3: 1, *Ezekiel* 16: 8, 23: 4).<sup>148</sup> It is for this reason that we will read ‘to be with a man’, which has similarly sexual connotations in English. It is of interest to note, however, that *לְהִיָּה לְ* in the contexts mentioned above refers not only to a sexually intimate relationship, but more specifically to marriage. We could say that this is because any acceptable sexual encounter with a woman in the Hebrew Bible must appear in the context of marriage; otherwise it is referred to as ‘prostitution’ or ‘adultery’. Many reject such a translation, as they assume that the woman (as Gomer) is already married to Hosea.<sup>149</sup> Yet, as we continue, it is worth bearing in mind that the phrase can have this more specific meaning of marriage, even if it is preferable to maintain the elusive nature of the Hebrew in the context of this narrative. *וְגַם־אֲנִי אֶלֶיךָ* has caused even more problems. Indeed, some suggest that *לֹא אֶלֶיךָ* (‘I will not come’) should be restored, having been lost by *homoeoteleuton*, to produce something like ‘and neither will I [have intercourse] with you’.<sup>150</sup> In my opinion, such a textual emendation is unnecessary; the elliptical phrasing of 3: 3 should hardly surprise us by this point, and the negative *לֹא* can simply be carried over from just three words before to read ‘even I shall not be with you’.

Having wrestled with these translation difficulties, what are the implications of *Hosea* 3’s two sign-acts, which, like those of *Hosea* 1, are distinct yet interrelated? It is often supposed that the woman’s adultery in *Hosea* 3 is committed against the prophet.<sup>151</sup> Yet there is no suggestion in the narrative itself that Hosea is married to this woman when YHWH commands him

<sup>147</sup> Ward (1966: 51), Andersen and Freedman (1980: 291). Wolff (1974: 56) reads ‘another man’, assuming that Hosea is married to the woman, whom he understands to be Gomer.

<sup>148</sup> Andersen and Freedman (1980: 301), Törnkvist (1998: 166): ‘The woman shall not be sexually available to any man. She will be in a sort of quarantine.’

<sup>149</sup> Andersen and Freedman (1980: 301): ‘It can refer to belonging to a man in marriage (cf. Ezek. 23: 4), but this simply does not fit the situation.’

<sup>150</sup> Wolff (1974: 56, 62). Cf. G. I. Davies (1992: 102).

<sup>151</sup> Macintosh (1997: 101), Stienstra (1993: 123), Wolff (1974: 60). This rests on the assumption that Hosea is a representative of YHWH and that chapter 3 must follow the pattern set in *Hosea* 2. Abma (1999: 208): ‘one should not interpret this verse [3: 3] as referring exclusively to Hosea and his partner, while assuming that the shift to Israel and Yhwh is made only in the next verse (vs. 4). Such a strict distinction between Yhwh and Israel, on the one hand, and Hosea and his partner, on the other hand, cannot be made.’

to ‘love an adulteress’.<sup>152</sup> In my view, it is more likely that 3: 1–2 tells of a sign-act in which an adulteress is bought by the prophet in order to perform a further sign-act in 3: 3.<sup>153</sup> Thus the prophet commands the woman to remain celibate for ‘many days’: she must neither prostitute nor ‘be with a man’. While ‘prostitution’ speaks of sexual encounters with negative overtones and social stigma, we might say that *היה לאיש* (‘to be with a man’) has positive connotations of intimacy and union, witnessed by its use elsewhere to depict marriage relationships, as well as sexual overtones. The prophet’s veto on sexual activity for the woman is absolute, with the two extremes of ‘prostitution’ and ‘being with a man’ working to express a whole.<sup>154</sup> We could even suggest that *היה לאיש* does imply marriage here, as a recognized opposite of prostitution. Thus 3: 3 would prohibit the woman from either prostituting or marrying: from engaging in either unacceptable or acceptable sexual activity.<sup>155</sup> Either way, the prohibition on the woman’s sexual activity is all-embracing: she may not become intimate even with the man who has bought her.

Once more, then, we are confronted with the profoundly negative message of *Hosea* 1–3. This second sign-act narrative presents us with a dramatic portrayal of Israel’s future, in which she is removed from the God with whom she is in relationship and restrained from other possibilities of intimacy and support. Even Macintosh, who finds an overall positive message, notes in regard to 3: 4 that ‘The tone of the oracle is menacing and stern.’<sup>156</sup> The reiteration of *אין* (‘without’) five times underscores the impression of absolute loss and isolation. We could even say that the purchase of the woman by the prophet in 3: 2 acts out the way in which Israel will be ‘bought’ by Assyria through suzerain ‘protection’, eventually bringing about her loss of all

<sup>152</sup> This is only the case if we assume the woman to be Gomer from *Hosea* 1, which itself causes problems. Mays (1969: 56) admits: ‘Hosea is to seek out a woman who has deserted him. The story of that desertion and how and under precisely what conditions Gomer lived when Hosea receives the divine command is unknown—the embarrassment of this reconstruction.’ Wolff (1974: p. xxii): ‘We can only infer that one day Gomer, having committed adultery, left Hosea and become the legal wife of another man.’

<sup>153</sup> From whom she is bought is, typically, left unclear. It seems important to recognize that the woman here is an *adulteress* and not a prostitute; *contra* Rudolph (1966a: 89), who believes that the sign-act involves the prophet buying a *prostitute* and locking her up to symbolize punishment. G. I. Davies (1993: 86) criticizes Rudolph on these grounds: ‘Hosea knew very well what the word for [prostitute] was (cf. 2: 12; 8: 9–10; 9: 1).’

<sup>154</sup> Macintosh (1997: 105): ‘She is not to indulge in promiscuous sexual encounters nor to enter again a more permanent relationship with another man.’

<sup>155</sup> Macintosh (1997: 103): ‘The phrase *ל היה*, as Lev 21: 3 and Ezek 16: 8 indicate, denotes a more formal relationship (including marriage).’ Cf. Toy (1913: 77), who argues that the woman in chapter 3 is ‘not allowed to be wife to her (unnamed) purchaser or to any man’, although he assumes she is a slave-girl.

<sup>156</sup> Macintosh (1997: 107).

known support structures.<sup>157</sup> In the wake of the shocking reversals of *Hosea* 1's sign-acts, a dreadful future is set out before Israel in *Hosea* 3. This is hardly the romantic narrative spoken of by commentators, where Israel is redeemed by her God, despite Macintosh's assertions that 'All this is an expression of Hosea's caring love and is a reflection of Yahweh's love for Israel, a love which expresses itself in correction and discipline.'<sup>158</sup> God's 'love' in *Hosea* 3 is neither gentle nor tender; it is a wrathful love, which demands punishment in the absence of obedience. It is with this threat that *Hosea* 3 probably at one time ended. But as we might expect, the disturbing negativity of this narrative is once more counterbalanced, by the addition of 3: 5, with whose nervously optimistic words the narrative now ends: 'Afterward the Israelites shall return and seek YHWH their God, and David their king; they shall come in awe to YHWH and to his goodness in the latter days.'<sup>159</sup> We will return to discuss further such additions in due course.

### Sexual and marital metaphorical language in *Hosea* 3

For now, *Hosea* 3 leaves us with interesting questions about its sexual and marital language. To begin with, it is not even clear whether we should understand this language to be metaphorical. In contrast to chapter 1, where 'prostitution' is clearly metaphorical ('for the land has actually prostituted away from YHWH!'), in chapter 3 the references to adultery, prostitution, and 'being with a man' appear within sign-act commands. One way of

<sup>157</sup> *Contra* Rowley (1963: 90), who must again create extra details (this time from his own imagination) in order to explain 3: 2's reference to money: 'If, for instance, she (Gomer) had sold herself, or had been sold, into slavery to pay her debts, her creditor, or the purchaser who had satisfied her creditor, would need to be compensated.' Also *contra* Tushingam (1953), who argues that the money compensates the cult from which Gomer has been rescued, and Wolff (1974: 61), who suggests that she may have been a 'personal slave' (Budde 1922) or 'cult-prostitute' (Schmitt 1989).

<sup>158</sup> Macintosh (1997: 104).

<sup>159</sup> Cf. Clements (1975: 30): 'Hosea's action towards the woman of *Hosea* 3, whether or not she is Gomer, is primarily a sign of divine discipline and judgement, as *Hosea* 3: 3–4 makes plain. *Hosea* 3: 5 must be a redactional addition, reinterpreting the action in accordance with the development in the direction of hope in *Hosea* 2, or the threatening names of chapter 1.' Macintosh (1997: 109–12) is insistent that 3: 5 is not an addition. Like Wolff (1974: 63), he understands 'David their king' and 'in the days to come' to be short glosses added by a Judean redactor. Cf. J. Day (2001: 573–4), G. I. Davies (1992: 104–5), Mays (1969: 59). To my mind, however, it seems likely that these positive words, like all others in these negative sign-acts, are later additions; *contra* G. I. Davies (1992: 102), who argues that a message of hope is implicit in *Hosea* 3 due to the phrase 'many days' (3: 3, 3: 4). It seems to me that, like other prophetic oracles, phrases such as this become positive only with hindsight. To be threatened with the absence of a king, etc. for 'many days' does not to my mind sound intrinsically hopeful. Cf. Barton (1995: 73 f.) for a similar discussion in reference to *Isaiah* 1–39.

illustrating the problem is to consider that an essential feature of metaphorical language is that it is recognizable for the ‘logical absurdity’ or ‘incompatibility’ that its literal meanings create within the immediate context.<sup>160</sup> But the references to adultery, prostitution, and ‘being with a man’ in *Hosea 3* can be understood literally, and are thus in this sense quite different from metaphorical language. At the same time, however, sign-act narratives challenge the reader to find literal *and* further meanings in their actions, and we might say that these further meanings are metaphorical. One way of characterizing this is to say that *Hosea 3* provokes the reader to consider in what way Israel is *like* an adulteress or in what way Israel will be *like* a woman prohibited from prostitution and ‘being with any man’. In this sense, we might say that sign-acts bear similarities to similes, as the comparison made between Israel and the woman is highlighted formally, albeit through their context in sign-acts rather than by the particle כִּי (‘as/like’). But if these sign-acts are comparable to similes, they are ‘modelling similes’, possessing the forceful potential of metaphor to ‘mould’, or create, new meaning.<sup>161</sup> There is clearly more work to be done on the complex issue of how far sign-acts might be understood to be metaphorical. For the purposes of this study, though, we will cautiously treat the sexual and marital language of *Hosea 3* as broadly metaphorical, while bearing in mind its distinctive quality.

Nor is this the only unusual feature of *Hosea 3*’s use of sexual and marital metaphorical language. As we have seen through the course of this exploration, it is uncommon to find ‘adultery’ and ‘prostitution’ as metaphorical foci within the same text. Yet within *Hosea 3*, the prophet is commanded to find ‘a woman who commits *adultery*’; but when he addresses this woman, he speaks of ‘*prostitution*’. Most do not perceive this to be a problem: Abma writes: ‘The verb פָּהַג (‘‘to commit adultery’’) is a synonym of the verb זָנָה (‘‘to commit harlotry’’) and this makes the two commands in *Hosea 1: 2* and *Hosea 3: 1* strikingly similar.’<sup>162</sup> Yet Abma’s proposal does not accurately

<sup>160</sup> Beardsley (1958: 138), Kittay (1987: 24).

<sup>161</sup> Soskice (1985: 58–61).

<sup>162</sup> Abma (1999: 206). It becomes clear on pp. 139–40 that this belief rests on her understanding of Israel’s ‘prostitution’ as ‘leaving the partner of the existing covenant and of becoming intimately involved with partners outside it’. Cf. Macintosh (1997: 119). Baumann (2003: 1) believes that ‘prostitution’ here and there is used as equivalent to ‘adultery’. She does note, however, that ‘One notable difference between זָנָה and פָּהַג is that זָנָה is used almost exclusively for the actions of women or female personifications, whereas פָּהַג can also be committed by men. In addition, זָנָה often takes on the metaphorical significance of worshipping foreign gods, something not so frequently found in the case of פָּהַג’ (pp. 43–4). Sherwood (1996: 129) assumes that ‘In Hos. 3.1 the signified of adultery is harlotry’. Cf. Freedman and Willoughby (1998: 117): ‘the term seems to have coalesced with *zānā*, and both words became synonymous with Israel’s immorality and infidelity toward Yahweh. The distinction between violation of a marriage contract and sexual intercourse for pay was lost, and both terms developed into an expression of flagrant disobedience toward the covenant between Israel and God.’

reflect the use of roots נָאֵף and זָנָה in the Hebrew Bible. In the first instance, literal adultery and prostitution are clearly distinct. While adultery is an act of sexual intercourse by a married woman, prostitution is an act of an unmarried woman.<sup>163</sup> Nowhere in the Hebrew Bible is זָנָה used to describe the unfaithful actions of a married woman. *Hosea* 4: 13—one of the few times the roots appear together in the Hebrew Bible—illustrates the distinction well: ‘Therefore your daughters prostitute (תִּזְנֶינָה) and your brides commit adultery (תִּנְאֲפְנָה).’<sup>164</sup>

A similar distinction seems to exist between ‘prostitution’ and ‘adultery’ as metaphorical foci. To begin with, ‘adultery’ is rare within the prophetic books, with most passages employing the more popular focus, ‘prostitution.’<sup>165</sup> Moreover, where metaphorical ‘adultery’ does feature, it tends to have a different thrust from metaphorical prostitution, even when used within the same wider frame. We have seen, for instance, how in *Ezekiel* 16A, 23B, and *Isaiah* 57: 3–10 the ‘adultery’ focus curiously seems to have associations of child sacrifice. There are only two places in the Hebrew Bible where ‘adultery’ and ‘prostitution’ are used in close proximity with no clear distinction between their associations. The first is *Jeremiah* 3: 8–9, where we have seen that the metaphorical language appears to be dormant, borrowed from other writings. The second is *Hosea* 2, whose fusing of the foci is, as we shall see, a response to their appearance together in *Hosea* 3. It is, of course, not impossible for the foci ‘adultery’ and ‘prostitution’ to share similar associations. We might say that the overlapping interest of the literal roots in unacceptable sexual activity suggests an innate potential; and in any case, similar associations could be introduced by a powerful wider frame. In practice, however, ‘adultery’ and ‘prostitution’ rarely appear together, and it is unusual for them to share similar associations. It is certainly not a given that they can be understood ‘synonymously’, as Abma assumes.

Nor does it appear that ‘adultery’ and ‘prostitution’ are synonymous in *Hosea* 3. For, as we have seen, the motifs appear within the context of two distinct sign-acts. In the first, the prophet is commanded by YHWH to love a woman who commits adultery (נָאֵף) in order to act out the way in which YHWH ‘loves’ Israel (3: 1). In the second, the prophet charges the woman with her own sign-act, where she must not engage in prostitution (זָנָה) or ‘be with’ (הָיָה לָּ) any man, including the prophet himself. On this reading, it is difficult to see where Abma finds the synonymy of which she speaks. Indeed,

<sup>163</sup> Cf. Bird (1989: 77), Hornsby (1999: 118–20).

<sup>164</sup> *Contra* Andersen and Freedman (1980: 369), who even here curiously seem to understand נָאֵף and זָנָה to be all but synonymous.

<sup>165</sup> *Contra* Goodfriend (1992a: 85): ‘Adultery is used as a metaphor for apostasy in several prophetic books (*Hosea* 1–3, *Jer* 2: 23–5; 3: 1–13, *Ezekiel* 16; 23).’

not only do these roots appear to have distinct literal meanings in *Hosea* 3, but their metaphorical associations also appear to be distinct. In 3: 1, *מִנְאִפֶּת* (‘who commits adultery’) is used to describe further a woman ‘who loves a companion (*רַעַע*)’ and who will take part in a sign-act for Israel’s ‘turning to other gods’ and ‘loving raisin cakes’. We might say that such a frame encourages associations of infidelity and disloyalty for the ‘adultery’ focus. In contrast, *זִנָּה* (‘to prostitute’) appears within the immediate frame of 3: 3–4, where explicit associations of infidelity are not as apparent. Instead, these verses seem more concerned with abstinence from all sexual activity. We could even say that the frame encourages associations of selling oneself for gain. For the woman’s abstinence from ‘prostitution’ explicitly sign-acts Israel’s impending lack of political and cultic support, as she will find herself ‘without king, without prince, without altar, without pillar, without ephod or teraphim’ (3: 4).<sup>166</sup> Perhaps these traditional areas of support are thus characterized as enticements to ‘prostitute’ from which Israel will be forced to abstain. Indeed, it is perhaps for this reason that the narrative speaks of ‘prostitution’ (*זִנָּה*) rather than ‘adultery’ (*נִאֲרָה*) in 3: 3. While the latter could theoretically take on associations of selling oneself for gain (if its wider frame worked hard to encourage them, or the reader were inclined to perceive them), the ‘prostitution’ focus is far more disposed to such associations; indeed, we might say that they are an associated commonplace. It appears, then, that in *Hosea* 3, as elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, *נִאֲרָה* and *זִנָּה* are distinct in meaning, both literally and metaphorically. Their characterization as ‘synonymous’ fails to attend to their diverse meanings within this narrative and also elsewhere within the Hebrew Bible.

### *Hosea* 3: a summary

Like *Hosea* 1, *Hosea* 3 is an elusively elliptical narrative, whose lack of detail has been the source of frustration for many. It is also a narrative characterized by unexpected turns of events. First, there is a dramatic shift to first person narration following the rejection of Israel and the prophet in *Hosea* 1’s final sign-act. Second, the prophet does not at first sight fulfil YHWH’s command to ‘love a woman *who loves* a companion and *commits* adultery’, but rather

<sup>166</sup> Cf. Landy (1995: 49), who argues that in 3: 1 ‘Israel’s adultery is a metaphor for her turning to other gods’, while in 3: 4 ‘prostitution is paralleled with the institutions of state and worship. . . . The other gods then would seem to be identified with a false mode of worship and human rulers. Without these institutions, Israel would become destitute; the dominant word in v. 4 is “without”.’ Earlier, however, Landy equates *Hosea* 1’s ‘prostitution’ with *Hosea* 3’s ‘adulteress’ (p. 48).

buys a woman. Third, the prophet commands this woman to perform her own sign-act, which dramatically acts out the impending exile of Israel. Fourth, the narrative is striking for its use of both adultery and prostitution, not only as literal words, but also as what we might tentatively characterize as metaphorical foci.

There is more to *Hosea* 3 than first meets the eye. In my opinion, the unexpected dynamics of this sign-act narrative have not been adequately explored within traditional scholarship, leading to superficial readings which are at the same time over-complex and overloaded with assumptions and unanswered questions. Indeed, one of the more interesting features of *Hosea* 3 that has so far been overlooked is its willingness to grapple with what it means to be a prophet. For in *Hosea* 3, Hosea is given a uniquely active role, no longer speaking ‘the word of YHWH’, but rather projecting his own voice, challenged to communicate his own interpretation of YHWH’s relationship with Israel. Most importantly, however, *Hosea* 3 is a narrative which wrestles with the question of what it might mean for YHWH to ‘love’ Israel. According to this profoundly negative prophecy, YHWH’s ‘love’ for Israel is no longer to be a love of forgiveness and mercy, but will demand punishment and loss. There is no suggestion in *Hosea* 3 that the children of Israel are remorseful, or that they desire to turn back to YHWH, contrary to the suppositions of many. Instead, according to this narrative, the ‘prostitution’ of the land will be forcibly ended through the removal of all her supports, which, it appears, were responsible for leading her astray. Hosea may be ‘the prophet of love’, but not in the sense that those traditionally using this designation envisaged.<sup>167</sup> Once more it seems that the relationship between *Hosea* 1–3 and the more notoriously pessimistic *Amos* demands further consideration.

## HOSEA 2

Between chapters 1 and 3 we find the poetry of *Hosea* 2: 4–25, which we have characterized as a theological reflection on the sign-act narratives, concerned with their implications for an understanding of the relationship between YHWH and Israel.<sup>168</sup> This poetic work is distinct from *Hosea* 1 and 3 in a

<sup>167</sup> Cf. Ward (1966: 58): ‘The bittersweet story so often told about Hosea’s agony over Gomer’s infidelity, his mounting indignation and her eventual expulsion, and his helplessness before a deathless love that led him to take her back against reason and law, is a pure fabrication.’

<sup>168</sup> *Contra* Andersen and Freedman (1980: 117): ‘2: 4–25 portrays the actual situation of the prophet and his family already foreshadowed and assumed by the opening command to the prophet.’

number of significant ways. For a start, it does not revolve around the prophet's actions; indeed, Hosea is mentioned nowhere in the chapter, with the focus instead being YHWH and Israel in a manner typical of other poetic prophetic texts.<sup>169</sup> Its use of metaphorical language is also quite different, as we shall see. For the purposes of this reading, *Hosea 2: 4–25* itself can be understood as consisting of two main parts: 2: 4–15 (2A) and 2: 16–25 (2B). There is a clear break between these passages, with 'oracle of YHWH' appearing as a concluding formula in 2: 15. Most importantly, however, 2A shares the profoundly negative outlook of chapters 1 and 3, while 2B is strikingly optimistic in character.<sup>170</sup> Thus, while *Hosea 2A* and 2B are closely related, they present discrete reflections on the sign-act narratives, working powerfully to promote often unexpected interpretations, which have impacted strongly on readings of *Hosea 1–3*. Indeed, the strength of *Hosea 2: 4–25*'s impact on scholarship provides an insight into why these poetic reflections might take their pivotal position between the two sign-act narratives.

### *Hosea 2A*

*Hosea 2A*'s negative outlook is starkly apparent from the beginning: 'Contend with your mother! Contend| That she is not my wife,| And I am not her husband!' (2: 4).<sup>171</sup> There has been considerable debate over whether 2: 4

<sup>169</sup> Cf. G. I. Davies (1992: 64–5). Stienstra (1993: 102–3) comments that 'interpreters (and translators) are by no means agreed on the point at which the irate husband (who speaks) ceases to be Hosea and becomes YHWH'. Yet there is no indication at all in *Hosea 2* that Hosea speaks of his own marriage; rather, these words are presented as the poetic reflections on YHWH's relationship with Israel in the voice of YHWH himself.

<sup>170</sup> Macintosh (1997: p. lxxviii): 'v. 15 sealed with the formula "Oracle of Yhwh", marks the end of a unit. . . . In the section which immediately follows (v. 16–25; EV 14–23) the soliloquy continues, yet the mood changes. Coercion and threats of punishment are replaced by the theme of coercion through love. The language takes on a lyrical beauty.' Cf. J. Day (2001: 573); *contra* Mays (1969: 45 f.), who understands 2: 18–25 to be separate from 2: 15–17.

<sup>171</sup> There is some disagreement over the identity of *Hosea 2*'s 'mother'. Galambush (1992) and Schmitt (1989, 1995: esp. 125 f.; 1996) insist that the female in *Hosea 2* is the city Samaria. But their arguments are based on hypothetical reconstructions of how this metaphorical language emerged, rather than on *Hosea 2* itself, which presents the female as the *land*, which, like city, is grammatically feminine (esp. 2: 5). Cf. Keel (1998: 52): 'The passage clearly has in view the land and not just a city. The products given by Yahweh to Jerusalem and Samaria respectively in, for example, Ezekiel 16 and 23 are not agricultural products as in *Hosea 2* but works of handicraft and trade befitting an important city.' Dearman (1999) provides a critique of Schmitt's argument, but his own reading is complicated by a number of the assumptions outlined above. For our purposes, we will call *Hosea 2*'s 'mother' 'Israel'; a personification of the land, which, like other personifications, can also encompass the people. Some might argue that 'Land' would be a more accurate name, as the female is nowhere explicitly identified as Israel, while this name has masculine associations elsewhere. It seems to me, however, that this text has a specific territory in view, and the traditional 'Israel' indicates this adequately. It also seems

speaks of YHWH's divorce of Israel.<sup>172</sup> The resonances of ריב ('to accuse/ contend') with legal language have led some to hear a court summons for divorce proceedings.<sup>173</sup> Yet most nevertheless conclude that *Hosea* 2: 4 ff. cannot be fully characterized as 'a reconstruction of a legal process',<sup>174</sup> insisting that a divorce does not take place.<sup>175</sup> Gordon points out that Israel is not threatened with the expected death penalty for her adultery,<sup>176</sup> while Wolff argues: 'There follows, however, not a corresponding order for her punishment, but an admonition which is to spare her the punishment. . . . It is noticeable that Yahweh's purpose is not rejection but reconciliation.'<sup>177</sup> The contradiction noted by scholars between the apparent use of legal language and the lack of finality in *Hosea* 2 may itself suggest that too much stress has been laid on the use of ריב as judicial language related to divorce proceedings in 2: 4.<sup>178</sup> Indeed, to my mind, the debate over YHWH's potential divorce of Israel misconstrues the impact of 2: 4. As we will see, 2A is strongly influenced by the sign-act narratives between which it lies, and it seems to me that it is this influence that provokes these words. Reversals are an essential characteristic of *Hosea* 1, and it appears that 2A seeks to continue this reversal theme poetically. The force of 2: 4 is not that YHWH is in the process of divorcing Israel, but that Israel is quite simply *not* YHWH's wife, just as Israel is 'Not-My-People'; and YHWH is not Israel's husband, just as YHWH is 'Not-I-Am' in *Hosea* 1. It is not even clear in 2: 4 that it is YHWH who decides to negate this metaphorical relationship, as we shall see. We will return to the question of what it might mean for YHWH and Israel to be 'not husband and wife' presently. For now it is enough to recognize the impact of the themes and motifs of the sign-act narratives on 2A.

important to give this nameless female a proper name. *Contra* Whitt (1992), who understands the 'mother' to be Asherah, whom YHWH divorces as Hosea strips her statue during an annual agricultural festival (pp. 58–9). Whitt's argument is tenuous at best. Cf. Schmitt (1995) for a detailed critique.

<sup>172</sup> Phillips (1981: 16) assumes that this is 'the appropriate formula' for the husband to pronounce to 'secure the divorce'. Wacker (1996: 117 n. 77) argues against this.

<sup>173</sup> Wolff (1974: 33) speaks of a 'reciprocal divorce formula'. Cassuto (1973: 122–3) draws on Babylonian and Talmudic texts as evidence, while Whitt (1992: esp. 58) refers to the Elephantine papyri. Rudolph (1966a: 65) understands 2: 4 as a reversed marriage formula.

<sup>174</sup> Wolff (1974: 32).

<sup>175</sup> Excepting Friedman (1980: esp. 203), who insists that Israel is divorced here and remarried in 2: 16–17, and Whitt (1992), who believes that YHWH divorces Asherah.

<sup>176</sup> C. H. Gordon (1936: 279).

<sup>177</sup> Wolff (1974: 33). Cf. Stuart (1987: 47), McKeating (1971: 83), J. Day (2001: 573). Stienstra (1993: 86, 103) is initially adamant that 2: 4 speaks of a divorce, but later reduces this to a threat of divorce (pp. 104–5). Cf. Hugenberger (1994: 232), who argues that 2: 4a is an 'imminent and well-deserved threat of divorce'. Andersen and Freedman (1980: 221–4) argue emphatically that YHWH cannot divorce Israel, due to covenantal assumptions.

<sup>178</sup> Cf. Andersen and Freedman (1980: 127, 219, 224), G. I. Davies (1992: 70), and our earlier discussion of *Jer* 2: 1–4: 4.

The influence of *Hosea* 1 and 3 continues with the appearance of ‘prostitution’ and ‘adultery’ as metaphorical foci: ‘That she put aside her prostitutions (זונוניה) from upon her face,| And her adulteries (ונאפוניה) from between her breasts’ (2: 4). As in 1: 2, ‘prostitutions’ appears in the plural; whereas the impact of chapter 3 can be witnessed through the rare dual appearance of the ‘prostitution’ and ‘adultery’ foci (‘adulteries’ is also uniquely plural here).<sup>179</sup> It is not clear in 2: 4 whether the powerful word pair should be understood synonymously, or whether the dual accusation seeks to encompass all forms of unacceptable sexual liaisons.<sup>180</sup> However, we might say that the latter is more likely in view of the distinct use of these roots literally and metaphorically elsewhere. Indeed, it is unfortunate that the meanings of this word pair are not elaborated further, for while the ‘prostitution’ focus reappears in 2: 6–7, ‘adultery’ is absent from the rest of 2A. This is perhaps in itself significant, as it seems that the use of these distinct foci as a word pair is unsustainable. Despite the dual appearance of ‘prostitution’ and ‘adultery’ in 2A, only one focus is explored to any considerable degree, and it is ‘prostitution’ that once again proves more popular.

Following this twofold charge, 2A initiates a series of threats against Israel. The use of such sexual and marital language in the context of violence has proved problematic for many. Brenner warns that ‘womanly readers may find the confrontation with such a text painful’.<sup>181</sup> Graetz insists that ‘we see that our text details very explicitly a case of domestic abuse’,<sup>182</sup> while Yee observes that ‘chap. 2 pushes the marriage metaphor to dangerous limits, whereby Yahweh’s legitimate punishment of Israel for breach of covenant is figuratively described as threats of violence against the wife’.<sup>183</sup> Certainly, this prophetic poetry is aggressively negative in its portrayal of Israel’s future. Having said this, there is a significant feature that sets 2A’s sexual metaphorical language apart from other prophetic texts. As the poetry progresses through its catalogue of threats to end in Israel’s death, the female personification noticeably recedes. In 2: 5, the female personification is clearly apparent: ‘Lest I will strip her naked;| And make her like the day of her birth.’ Yet the threat continues: ‘So I will make her like the desert;| And I will make her like dry land;| And so

<sup>179</sup> נאפוניה is unique to *Hos* 2: 4. Like *Ezekiel* 16A and 23A’s repeated references to Jerusalem, Oholah, and Oholibah’s plural ‘prostitutions’ (16: 15, 33, 34; 23: 7, 8, 11, 14, 18, 19, 29, 35), these ‘abstract’ plural forms could be said to emphasize the inconceivable number of liaisons involved. G. I. Davies (1992: 70) speaks of ‘an intense, enduring quality’.

<sup>180</sup> There is nothing to suggest, however, that 2: 4 speaks of physical marks, emblems, or jewellery. *Contra* Wolff (1974: 40), Kruger (1983: 109–10).

<sup>181</sup> Brenner (1995: 29). Cf. van Dijk-Hemmes (1989).

<sup>182</sup> Graetz (1995: 131).

<sup>183</sup> Yee (1992: 195).

I will kill her with thirst.<sup>184</sup> While Israel is undeniably still feminine when she dies, it seems significant that we are not confronted here with an explicit description of YHWH killing a physical woman.<sup>185</sup> Certainly when we compare *Ezekiel* 16A and 23A, with their explicitly violent descriptions, the contrast is striking: ‘They will bring up a mob against you, and they shall stone you and hack you to pieces with their swords’ (16: 40); ‘They will cut off your nose and your ears’ (23: 25). There is no hint of violence on this scale against the woman in *Hosea* 2A. The stripping and exposing of the woman in 2: 5 is problematic; yet it is noteworthy that the poetry appears uncomfortable with continuing this violence to the point of explicitly killing the woman, as the female personification fades.<sup>186</sup> We might even say that it recoils. The instability introduced by 2A’s wavering female personification has led to problems, with readers speaking of difficulties in following what Richards would call 2A’s ‘tenor’ and ‘vehicle’.<sup>187</sup> Perhaps such problems are welcome, however, in light of the relief they bring to the wider issues involved in the use of violent sexual and marital metaphorical language.

In 2: 6 we experience once again *Hosea* 1’s influence on this poetic reflection, as we re-encounter the infamous ‘children of prostitutions’ (בני זוננים). Indeed, these are once again rejected by YHWH (‘I will have no mercy’), powerfully echoing the name of the second child in 1: 6. At this point, however, 2A moves beyond the limits of *Hosea* 1 to develop poetically what it might mean for these children to be ‘children of prostitution’, and for the land to be ‘a prostitute’. If the first sign-act narrative provides no evidence for its dreadful accusation of ‘prostitution’, and only hints at associations, 2A adamantly lays out the reasons for YHWH’s charge. In this poetry, Israel’s ‘prostitutions’ lie in her search for lovers and her belief that it is these that provide for her (2: 7). We might even say that 2A encourages associations of

<sup>184</sup> Stuart (1987: 48): ‘The normal punishment for adultery in ancient Israel was either burning (Gen 38: 24; Lev 21: 9), or stoning (Deut. 22: 23–4). These are not mentioned at all in the passage, because the several punishments that are described relate primarily to Israel as a land.’ Cf. Baumann (2003: 95), Wacker (1996: 62–3), Macintosh (1997: 43), Abma (1999: 171). Galambush (1992: 48) draws on this to argue that 2A’s female is Samaria (pp. 49–52): an argument which seems to me to labour an unnecessary point, based on her desire to pin down the ‘etymology’ of this metaphorical language.

<sup>185</sup> *Contra* Connolly (1998: 58), who assumes that Gomer is behind this text: ‘This is a real woman; it is easy to forget that she stands for all of Israel.’ If Gomer were the female, this text would be even more problematic: ‘The punishment, supposedly to Israel, is expressed exclusively through ch. 2 as punishment of a real, human wife by a real, human husband. It is violent punishment, physically abusive, and can be accurately visualized’ (p. 58).

<sup>186</sup> Yee (2003: 105) comments on the polyvalence of נבלתה (‘shame’|‘disgrace’) later in 2: 12, which she argues can refer ‘to the woman’s genitalia, the lewdness of sexual behavior, or the woman/land’s deterioration’. Cf. 2: 14, where YHWH’s brutal punishment of ‘Israel’ is directed towards vines and fig-trees which will become forest.

<sup>187</sup> Galambush (1992: 45).

selling oneself for gain. Thus the poetic 2A develops its metaphorical language beyond its use in the bare *Hosea* 1, perhaps drawing on chapter 3, where such associations are lurking. Echoes of *Hosea* 3 can also be heard in 2: 8, as Israel is restrained from ‘prostituting’: ‘Therefore, behold, I am hedging| Your way with thorns;<sup>188</sup> | And I will build a wall against her,| So her paths she cannot find.’<sup>189</sup> Indeed, it is perhaps from 2: 8 that commentators receive the impression that the prophet locks the woman away in chapter 3, or commands her to ‘remain, or stay (in)’.<sup>190</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting and distinctive feature of 2A for the purposes of this study, however, begins in 2: 9: ‘Then she will say, “Let me go| And return to my first husband;| For it was better for me then than now!”’ It has often puzzled commentators that Israel’s decision in 2: 9 to return to her husband is followed by the angry charge in 2: 10, ‘For she did not know| That it was I who gave to her| The grain, and the wine, and the oil;| And silver I lavished upon her,| And the gold that they used for Baal!’ Indeed, her supposed return does not result in the cessation of YHWH’s anger and threats, which continue in 2: 11. Vriezen suggests that YHWH’s harsh reaction implies that Israel’s repentance cannot have been genuine,<sup>191</sup> while Wolff argues that 2: 11 must refer back to Israel’s decision in 2: 7 to go after her lovers.<sup>192</sup> Andersen and Freedman stress that 2: 10 is discontinuous with 2: 9, insisting that 2: 10–11 is an independent unit, perhaps referring back to 2: 7,<sup>193</sup> while Rudolph likewise rearranges the text, suggesting that 2: 8–9 was originally located after 2: 15.<sup>194</sup> Abma takes a rather different approach, proposing that Israel’s return to YHWH does not take place at all: ‘the text refers to repentance as a fantasy of Yhwh and as a future possibility.’<sup>195</sup> While scholars

<sup>188</sup> The slippage between second and third person feminine suffixes (‘your way’/‘against her’/‘her paths’) does not seem out of character in this poetry, as YHWH’s anger against the people, represented by Israel as land and personified female, escalates.

<sup>189</sup> גדרה is difficult. Literally ‘her wall’, many understand the feminine suffix to have an objective force in this context: ‘a wall against her’. Cf. Macintosh (1997: 150–1), Andersen and Freedman (1980: 237). Kruger (1999) provides an exploration of different interpretations of *Hos* 2: 8 as: (1) ‘an integral part of the marriage metaphor’, (2) ‘part of a political metaphor’, (3) ‘part of the religious-mythological metaphor’, and (4) ‘intertextually’. Through this exploration, he illustrates the way in which the reader’s interests or ‘default context’ influence her or his interpretation of metaphorical language. Kruger argues that 2: 8 ‘resonates’ on at least these four different levels.

<sup>190</sup> Macintosh (1997: 104) is explicit about this influence.

<sup>191</sup> Vriezen (1941). Cf. Clines (1979: 87). Macintosh (1997: 53) defines her decision as ‘essentially selfish’. Stuart (1987: 49) suggests that the problem is that ‘the Israelites felt no urgency to return to Yahweh’.

<sup>192</sup> Wolff (1974: 36).

<sup>193</sup> Andersen and Freedman (1980: 240–1).

<sup>194</sup> Rudolph (1966a: 69).

<sup>195</sup> Abma (1999: 175). Stienstra (1993: 114), following Lippl (1937: 30) and Andersen and Freedman (1980: 239), argues that ‘there was no second husband; the lovers were only pseudo-husbands’.

have thus taken different routes to explain how the negative words of 2: 10–11 can follow the return of Israel to her ‘first husband’ in 2: 9, the one feature they do have in common is the consensus that the verses seem strangely discontinuous.

Perhaps there is a more straightforward answer to the problem of 2: 8–11, which our abandonment of the traditional model of ‘the marriage metaphor’ frees us to consider. The above responses all assume that YHWH must be Israel’s ‘first husband’, but, in my view, *Baal* is a more likely contender for the husband of whom Israel speaks.<sup>196</sup> On this reading, Israel responds to YHWH’s restrictions in 2: 8 by deciding to return to her ‘first husband’ as he hoped. To YHWH’s horror, however, she understands this husband to be not YHWH, but Baal (cf. 2: 10, 2: 15).<sup>197</sup> This would certainly explain YHWH’s angry lament in 2: 10 that this land does not know who provides for her.<sup>198</sup> It also explains YHWH’s violent reaction to Israel’s decision in 2: 11, and indeed throughout the remainder of 2A.<sup>199</sup> It might even shed

<sup>196</sup> Abma (1999: 176) observes that this ‘first husband’ is not referred to as *בעלה הראשון*, as in *Deut* 24: 4, but rather as *איש הראשון*. This also seems to me to be significant, albeit for different reasons. The powerful irony of 2A would fade if Israel referred to Baal as *בעל* (‘Baal/husband’), as her miscomprehension would not be so starkly apparent. The impact of 2: 9 is that Israel mistakenly understands Baal (‘husband’) to be her husband (*איש*): a word-play later reversed by 2B.

<sup>197</sup> There has been considerable disagreement over 2A’s allusions to Baal(s) (*בעל[ים]*). Following the references to *בעלים* in the plural in 2: 15 and 2: 19, some consider the singular ‘Baal’ in 2: 10 to be a gloss (Wolff 1974: 37; Mays 1969: 41; Andersen and Freeman 1980: 256–8). The Hebrew Bible elsewhere refers to individual Baals, however (*Judg* 3: 3, 8: 33, 9: 4; 1 *Kings* 16: 31–2; 2 *Kings* 11: 18), and such gods are also commonly subsumed into the single dismissive category ‘Baals’ (*Judg* 2: 11, 8: 33, 10: 10; 1 *Kings* 18: 18; 2 *Chr* 17: 3, 24: 7, 28: 2, etc.). It seems to me likely that 2A similarly speaks of ‘Baals’ in sweeping generalizations, almost certainly as a pejorative device to undermine their individuality, while also alluding to a single contender as Israel’s mistaken ‘husband’ in 2: 10 in order to increase the impact of the accusation. Cf. Törnkvist (1998: 153), Bird (1989: 82–3). Others have sought to find an identity for the Baals beyond that of other gods. Thompson (1977) and Yee (1987: 305–6; 2003: 104–5) believe that Baal(s) should be understood as Israel’s foreign allies and trading partners; Keefe (1995: 93) insists that they represent Israel’s adoption of latifundal agriculture and inappropriate alliances; Bechtel (2004: 205) suggests that they are a metaphor used by Deuteronomists ‘to represent and denigrate the non-deuteronomists, who perceive YHWH’s power differently’. Such debates are beyond the scope of this monograph, particularly as their arguments rely on a number of other suppositions. Suffice it to say in this context that, even if 2: 10 were deleted, and whatever their historical identity, ‘Baal(s)’ remain the most likely contender as Israel’s ‘first husband’ in 2: 9.

<sup>198</sup> Many are willing to conceive of such confusion on Israel’s part, even if they believe her ‘first husband’ to be YHWH. J. Day (2001: 573): ‘This indicates that in Hosea’s time YHWH could be called “Baal” and was in danger of being confused with him.’ Landy (1995: 37): ‘If the passage accuses Israel of a category mistake—Yhwh is its husband, not Baal—it propagates the Baalization of Yhwh it denounces.’ Dille (2004: 154): ‘Chapter 2 reflects an inability to discern whether the fertility of the land comes from Ba’al or from YHWH.’ Cf. Macintosh (1997: 79–80), Mays (1969: 49), Abma (1999: 190), Wolff (1974: 49), Andersen and Freedman (1980: 244), Sherwood (1996: 224–5), Ben Zvi (2005: 74).

<sup>199</sup> Sherwood (1996: 203–53) suggests that the inconsistencies in YHWH’s behaviour as ‘first husband’ undermine the text: ‘Even as the text claims that Israel’s “first husband” was “better”

further light on the dramatic opening of 2A: ‘Contend with your mother! Contend| That she is not my wife| And I am not her husband!’ (2: 4).<sup>200</sup> Most have assumed that it is YHWH who decides to abandon the metaphorical depiction of himself and Israel as husband and wife in 2: 4. But perhaps YHWH is responding to a conviction already held by Israel.<sup>201</sup> We could even suggest that YHWH is forcibly contending that he *is* Israel’s husband, seeking to rouse her from her ignorance (reading ב ריב, ‘contend with’, as ‘challenge’): ‘Challenge your mother! Challenge| That she is not my wife| And I am not her husband!’ All efforts to reason or contend with Israel, however, are in vain; according to this text, she is utterly corrupt and without understanding.<sup>202</sup> On this reading, it is hardly surprising that this text holds out no hope for forgiveness. According to this damning poetry, the land is to be desolated and all that YHWH has given her destroyed (2: 14), for Israel has indeed utterly ‘forgotten’ (שכח) YHWH for the Baals, her lovers (2: 15).<sup>203</sup>

2A confronts us with a strikingly distinctive use of sexual and marital metaphorical language, breaking free from traditional assumptions about ‘the marriage metaphor’, as Baal is presented as the ‘first husband’ of Israel, at least from her perspective. Drawing on the sign-act narratives to blend and dramatically recast their themes and motifs in sustained sexual and marital metaphorical language, we might characterize 2A as an attempt to reflect more expansively on the meaning and implications of these elusive sign-act narratives. The poetry’s power can be witnessed in numerous commentaries, where the imaginative expansions and interpretations of 2A are read back into *Hosea* 1 and 3. For all the differences between these sign-act narratives and 2A, however, one element that remains constant is their profoundly negative

(2: 9), it expresses fear that Israel is irrevocably “captivated” by Baal. Alongside the picture of a self-assured deity who knows that Israel will return to him, the text presents a jealous and insecure husband who turns to violence in desperation. The tensions of the divine–human metaphor lead to a bizarre situation in which the deity who confidently asserts his superiority is also a rather pathetic figure who lashes out in anger and threatens to strip, to slay’ (pp. 222–3). We could say that the reading of Baal as ‘first husband’ demonstrates an even greater capacity on the part of the text to undercut its argument. If Israel perceives Baal to be her husband, the airing of Israel’s voice within the text provides the potential for YHWH’s allusions to grandeur to be undermined even further.

<sup>200</sup> It may also explain why 2B later insists, ‘You will no longer call me “My Baal”!’ (2: 18).

<sup>201</sup> Cf. Andersen and Freedman (1980: 124): ‘the wife has decisively left her husband; the husband absolutely refuses to leave her.’ Sherwood (1996: 313–15) suggests that there are ‘two colliding voices’ in 2: 4, ‘both arguing for separation and both claiming the initiative’.

<sup>202</sup> Macintosh (1997: 49) characterizes Israel’s sin as ‘lust and self-interest, by a desire to have both worlds’. We could say, however, that Israel has chosen one world; it is simply one that does not involve YHWH.

<sup>203</sup> Törnkvist (1998: 147) reminds us to be alert to and wary of the rhetoric of 2A: ‘The woman’s desire for her beloved and her self-evident right to daily means such as food and clothing, expressed as bread and water, oil and drink and wool and flax, is made ridiculous, and misnamed and described as gifts which her many lovers are supposed to give to her.’

perspective on Israel's future. Indeed, it is only with 2B that a positive outlook breaks into *Hosea* 1–3, as the powerful combination of these pessimistic works is at last dramatically reversed and recontextualized.

### *Hosea 2B*

*Hosea 2B*'s radically optimistic perspective on Israel's future is clear from the start, as chapter 2 takes a striking U-turn.<sup>204</sup> 'Therefore, behold, I am seducing her!| And I am leading her into the wilderness| So I can speak reasonably to her' (2: 16).<sup>205</sup> The deft reuse of 'therefore' gives the distinct impression that these verses continue the (negative) 'therefores' of 2A.<sup>206</sup> There can be few 'therefores' in the Hebrew Bible, however, which involve such a volte-face.<sup>207</sup> Clines observes:

The third לכן ('therefore') speech is entirely out of character; it is not a judgment speech at all, and must be seen as a delightful reversal of the expected, a bold rejection of the causal nexus between sin and punishment... Thus vv. 16–17 are entirely unexpected—and illogical, given the nexus of sin and punishment, or even the impossibility of un-living the past. Yahweh's answer to Israel's ignoring him will be to turn the clock back and let her begin her history with him all over again.<sup>208</sup>

<sup>204</sup> Abma (1999: 185): 'Verses 16–17 mark a turning point within *Hosea* 2: 4–24.' Cf. Wolff (1974: 41), Andersen and Freedman (1980: 262), Leith (1989: 101), Ben Zvi (2005: 64).

<sup>205</sup> דברתי על-לבה is usually translated as 'to speak tenderly to her'. However, it is possible that the expression might also be rendered 'to speak reasonably/sense to her'. לב is often best understood as 'mind' rather than 'heart', as it is here that thoughts are conceived. Moreover, where we find על-לב דבר elsewhere, it can equally be understood as 'to speak reasonably'. In *Gen* 50: 21, Joseph 'speaks reasonably' to his brothers, convincing them that he has indeed forgiven them; in 2 *Sam* 19: 8 (ET; 19: 7), Joab urges David to 'speak reasonably' to his servants, despite the recent death of Absalom; in *Ruth* 2: 13, Ruth thanks Boaz for 'speaking reasonably' to her, as he advises her to glean only from his fields; and in *Isa* 40: 2, YHWH commands his prophet to 'speak reasonably' to Jerusalem, explaining that she has already served her punishment. Other examples also seem to allow for this sense, which highlights not only the gentleness of the expression, but also the wisdom lying behind the words. Cf. Bal (1988: 90), who understands the phrase in *Judg* 19: 3 not to mean 'to speak kindly to her', but rather 'to persuade her, rationally': Here in *Hos* 2: 16, we might say that YHWH leads Israel in to the wilderness to reason with her and restore her perspective, which is so clearly lacking. For those who wish to maintain the traditional reading of the expression, however, this does not impact on my overall argument; indeed, we might say that this only increases the positive impression of 2B.

<sup>206</sup> Certainly few see 2: 16 as the beginning of a distinct piece, wishing to see a positive message in the 'original' words of the prophet Hosea, perhaps due to 3: 1's command to 'love'. Toy (1913: 6) even speaks of the 'smooth flowing style of chap. 2'. Cf. Emerson (1984: 14–15).

<sup>207</sup> Landy (1995: 38): 'the logical connection ["therefore"] is surprising; nothing prepares us for the indictment to be followed by anything other than punishment.' Sherwood (1996: 205): "'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.'

<sup>208</sup> Clines (1979: 86).

For Clines, the third ‘therefore’ of *Hosea* 2 presents the reader with ‘a theologically creative and profound move that in effect negates the validity or effectiveness of punishment as a response to sin.’<sup>209</sup> Within the logic of this passage, however, we might say that 2: 16 does not ‘negate’ the validity of punishment, but rather insists that this punishment, cast in terms of wilderness, is *restorative*.<sup>210</sup> This imaginative poetry suggests that YHWH’s furious threats of abandonment throughout *Hosea* 1–3 should be interpreted as a call to the wilderness, whose harsh and isolated environment is also a traditional setting for Israel’s encounter with YHWH. As Mays writes, “‘Wilderness’ is more than a place; it is a time and situation in which the pristine relationship between God and people was untarnished and Israel depended utterly on Yahweh. . . . As a place, the wilderness is bare and threatening (v. 3) but as an epoch in the history of God and Israel it represents a point of new beginning.”<sup>211</sup>

This emphasis on wilderness is striking, following *Hosea* 1 and 2A’s focus on the importance of the land and 2A’s threats that Israel will become ‘wilderness’ and ‘dry land’ (2: 5). This optimistic poetry insists that YHWH’s destructive impulse towards the land is not simply driven by revenge, but seeks to present her with a new beginning. In the words of Buss, ‘This then becomes a happy irony which points to the fulfillment of the divine goal, in which the comic element is stronger than the tragic.’<sup>212</sup> Indeed, according to 2B, Israel is not to be forcibly removed from the land, but is rather *in the process of being seduced* by YHWH (the active participle is striking). The Piel (intensive) form of פתה in the Hebrew Bible often has negative connotations of deception or enticement.<sup>213</sup> The Qal (simple) form of the verb appears in *Hosea* 7: 11 to describe Ephraim as ‘like a dove, easily deceived (פּוֹתֵה) and senseless (אֵין לֵב)’. We could even suggest that 2B speaks of YHWH ‘luring’ the senseless Israel into the desert, notwithstanding her

<sup>209</sup> Clines (1979: 86).

<sup>210</sup> Ben Zvi (2005: 64): ‘The imagery of punishment carries in itself that of a new ideal future.’

<sup>211</sup> Mays (1969: 44). Cf. Abma (1999: 186): ‘The reminiscences of the pattern of exodus—wilderness period—entrance into the land are strong and form the backbone of these verses.’ Cf. Leith (1989: 100): ‘In the Hebrew Bible, the wilderness has two faces: it can be threatening or benign. As the inhospitable land of thorns and drought, it is chaos. . . . But God also found Israel in the wilderness (Hos. 9: 10), cared for Israel there, and made the covenant there. . . . (Hos. 13: 5), *Hosea* 2: 3 suggests Israel was born in the wilderness.’ For Leith, 2: 16 ‘suddenly transforms the “chaotic” wilderness into the “ordered” wilderness of God’s election’ (p. 101).

<sup>212</sup> Buss (1984: 76). Cf. Abma (1999: 188): ‘The positive perception of the wilderness period in *Hosea* 2: 16–17 is remarkable in two ways. In the first place it is at odds with other portrayals of this period which focus on the rebellion of the people against Yhwh. . . . In the second place, this means that the wilderness period comes out as the most positive event in the national past.’

<sup>213</sup> Baumann (2003: 93–4): ‘The verb פתה, “deceive” or “prevail upon” contains clearly negative aspects; it can also mean “dissemble” or “incite to foolishness.”’

belief that Baal is her husband.<sup>214</sup> The overridingly positive character of 2B, however, promotes strongly positive associations for the focus, encouraging us to understand YHWH's actions in 2: 16 as resolutely affirmative.<sup>215</sup>

Through this powerful introduction, 2B thus recasts YHWH's threats of punishment and forsakenness as promises of a renewed relationship. The wilderness theme is developed further in 2: 17, which clarifies Israel's expected reaction: 'And she will respond there as in the days of her youth,| As on the day when she came up from the land of Egypt' (2: 17). Such a positive interpretation is striking for its radical difference in perspective: nowhere else in *Hosea* 1–3 is such a restorative understanding of Israel's reproof encouraged. It is also notable for its hold on the imaginations of readers. For this optimistic outlook has caught the attention of scholarship, to the extent that it has deeply coloured readings of *Hosea* 1–3, enabling commentators to perceive in this overwhelmingly negative work an overriding positive message of redemption.<sup>216</sup> We shall return to this idea later, but for now it is worth noting Wolff's comments on the threat in 3: 4 that Israel is about to lose all political and cultic support, where he explicitly recognizes the impact of 2B on his reading: 'Politically and culturally, Israel will be virtually driven back into the desert (cf. 2: 8, 11–15).'<sup>217</sup>

2B's valiant attempts to reappropriate the otherwise pessimistic *Hosea* 1–3 are evident not only in its harnessing of the wilderness as a motif. This prophetic poetry also embarks on a series of reversals, which both continue and compete with the reversal themes of chapters 1 and 3.<sup>218</sup> *Hosea* 2: 17 insists that Achor, 'Valley of Trouble', will become a 'Doorway to Hope'.<sup>219</sup>

<sup>214</sup> Even the generally conservative Simundson (2005: 26), reflects: 'The word "allure" ... could be translated in a way that emphasizes force or coercion, such as "seduce" ... It means to overwhelm one's resistance. This is very daring language to use for the God/human relationship ... Is God leading Israel out into the wilderness to force himself upon an unwilling partner? He decides against this, but we might continue to wonder.

<sup>215</sup> Stuart (1987: 53): 'The language is passionate. "Seduce" (מפתיה) means to romance, entice, allure.' Cf. Landy (1995: 40), Törnqvist (1998: 154–7). Clines and Gunn (1978: 21) insist that 'the fact that *pittâ* is often used in a "bad" context (of persuading someone against his will or by using deceit) does not itself prove that the verb involves deception. One clear case where Yahweh is said, without hint of criticism, to be about to *pittâ* Israel (Hos. ii 16) might be thought to be enough to show that the verb has no automatic connotation of duplicity.' Some readers may disagree that *Hos* 2: 16 is such a 'clear case'.

<sup>216</sup> Cf. Ortlund (1996: 67–8): 'God will more than match the seductions of the Baals with his own prevenient grace, proving himself an irresistible lover ... He will manifest his love in winning ways, and she will be his.'

<sup>217</sup> Wolff (1974: 62, emphasis mine). Cf. his comments on 3: 3: 'Hosea's wife experiences nothing more than his words and his presence, just as in the desert the wife, Israel, having being denied the pleasures of fertile Palestine, only later received the vineyards from Yhwh' (p. 62).

<sup>218</sup> Cf. Andersen and Freedman (1980: 264).

<sup>219</sup> Landy (1995: 40) also notes the reversal of wilderness into vineyards in 2: 17. Cf. *Josh* 7: 24–6 for a 'historical' etymology of Achor as 'Valley of Trouble'. Abma (1999: 187) proposes that

Most important for our purposes, however, are the reversals which overturn specific threats from the sign-act narratives. Central among these is 2: 18, which contends that YHWH will indeed be Israel's husband through a dramatic word-play on בעל ('Baal/master/husband') and איש ('man/husband'), whose significance is underscored by the divine seal, 'oracle of YHWH': 'And it will come to pass on that day,| Oracle of YHWH,| That she will call me "My husband" (אִישׁי),| And she will call me| No longer "my husband/Baal" (בַּעֲלִי): Thus 2B reverses the dreadful words of 2: 4, 'She is not my wife| And I am not her husband!'

Indeed, we might say this promise sets off a string of related reversals: no longer will Israel believe Baal to be her 'first husband' (2: 9), but YHWH will 'remove the names of the Baals from her mouth' (2: 19); no longer will she forget YHWH (2: 15), but Israel will finally know (יָדַע) him (2: 22: a word with strong sexual associations within this frame).<sup>220</sup> The perception of 2A's transformations as *reversals*, rather than the decision of YHWH to *take back* his wife is central to an appreciation of the poetry, perhaps most powerfully underscored through the repeated use in 2: 21–2 of the unusual focus אִרְשׁ ('to betroth').<sup>221</sup> Here no desire to return to a previously idealistic relationship is expressed; instead, it seems that a fresh bond is envisaged.<sup>222</sup> Abma writes, 'The key word in these verses is אִרְשׁ. . . . The use of this particular word expresses that the new relation between Yhwh and Israel is not looked upon as a reunion or as a return to a previously existing marriage, but as a completely new beginning! A fresh start is made, past failures are erased and Israel and Yhwh are depicted at the dawn of a new bridal time.'<sup>223</sup>

the echoes with the unsuccessful entrance into the Promised Land suggest that Israel 'once again stands on the brink of the entrance into the Promised Land'. Wolff (1974: 43) argues that the sound of 'Achor' is more important, with its echoes of עָכָר 'to bring misfortune.'

<sup>220</sup> Macintosh (1997: 84) explicitly notes this last reversal and the potential sexual associations: 'Hosea sails close to the wind.' Landy (1995: 18): 'For Hosea what matters ultimately is knowledge of God, which will consummate the betrothal of God and Israel in 2: 22.' He notes later that 'this is the only time in the Hebrew Bible in which the woman is subject of sexual knowledge, albeit through the man's eyes. . . . God's fantasy of being known, of a complementary relationship, again reverses the story of the Garden of Eden, where the woman's desire for knowledge threatens divine supremacy' (p. 45). Cf. Eilberg-Schwartz (1994: 110); *contra* Abma (1999: 192): 'To "know" someone in the biblical sense is to discern his or her distinctiveness and to know what makes someone special.' Cf. Andersen and Freedman (1980: 284).

<sup>221</sup> Baumann (2003: 93): 'In the context of the prophetic marriage imagery Hosea is the only author who speaks of a betrothal.'

<sup>222</sup> Cf. Ben Zvi (2005: 73).

<sup>223</sup> Abma (1999: 191). Stienstra (1993: 121): 'it almost seems as if her virginity will be restored.' Ortlund (1996: 70): 'a fresh betrothal, as if Israel were starting out again as a pure virgin'. *Contra* Friedman (1980: 200), who characterizes this as a remarriage, following the divorce in 2: 4.

Like the rest of 2B, 2: 21–2 presents the new relationship in words of contrast and reversal. In 2A, the gifts confirming Israel's relationship with her 'husband' are bound up with fertility: bread, wine, grain, and oil (2: 7, 10, 14). While this theme of fertility continues to pervade 2B (cf. 2: 24), the gifts which express YHWH's relationship with Israel in this text are 'righteousness, justice, faithfulness, mercy and truth'.<sup>224</sup> This is a striking development, as we move from the concept of relationship with YHWH providing physical gifts and fertility in 2A, to the idea that the relationship might also bring more ethical, spiritual, and abstract benefits in 2B. A second significant group of reversals in 2B are those of the names of the 'children of prostitutions'. *Hosea* 2: 24–5 radically reinterprets 'Jezreel' as a promise of hope by awakening its positive etymological meaning ('God sows') with the words, 'And I will sow her for myself in the land' (2: 25). Even the gender of 'Jezreel' is reversed by this revolutionary poetry, as the motif is released from being the name of a specific male child, to represent the female Israel.<sup>225</sup> In the wake of this promise, the names so dreadfully characterized by negative reversal in chapter 1 are re-reversed: 'And I will have mercy on No-Mercy;| And I will say to Not-My-People, "You are my people";| And he will say, "My God"' (2: 25).<sup>226</sup> It appears that there is nothing that cannot be renewed and reappropriated according to this exceptionally optimistic poetic writing.<sup>227</sup> However bleak Israel's future might look according to *Hosea* 1, 3, and 2A, 2B is insistent that all will be well and that YHWH is ultimately concerned with Israel's welfare.

### *Hosea* 2B and 4–14

*Hosea* 2B's interest in reversals and the wilderness motif are strongly reminiscent of *Hosea* 4–14. As we saw in the first chapter, the reappropriation and reversal of metaphorical language is a prominent feature of this poetic text.

<sup>224</sup> Abma (1999: 192).

<sup>225</sup> Cf. G. I. Davies (1992: 90), who observes: 'Modern commentators and versions have thought that him would be more natural, since Hosea's child Jezreel was a boy (1: 3–5). Wolff [1974: 54], who does not emend the text, assumes a lacuna between vv. 22 and 23, supposing that a reference to Jezreel's mother has fallen out by homoeoteleuton. Neither of these expedients is necessary or justified: with the shift in meaning of Jezreel it was natural to use the feminine pronoun, which had represented Israel through most of ch. 2.' Sherwood (1996: 246): 'Formerly associated with a male, it suddenly acquires a female gender, and the displacement suggests that even the most fundamental metaphor of the text's rhetoric, the gendered metaphor of man and wife, is not immune to the forces of deconstruction.' Cf. Landy (1995: 31).

<sup>226</sup> Tribble (1978: 39–40) emphasizes the impact of **חַוֵּה**, which can mean 'womb': 'Withdrawing love from the baby girl, Yahweh closes the womb of compassion. . . . Although she came from the womb of harlotry, this little girl will return to the womb of mercy.'

<sup>227</sup> Macintosh (1997: 88): 'Here then Hosea sets forth the massively powerful redemptive activity of his God.'

Wilderness is also prominent, both in the language of sterility and also as a place of encounter with Israel: ‘Like grapes in the wilderness| I found Israel’ (9: 10); ‘It was I who knew you in the wilderness,| In the land of drought’ (13: 5).<sup>228</sup> Wilderness is even alluded to as a threat in 12: 10: ‘I will make you live in tents again.’ In 2B, wilderness is bound up with Israel’s time in Egypt (‘As on the day when she came up from the land of Egypt’, 2: 17), while *Hosea* 4–14 repeatedly speaks of a return to Egypt (8: 13, 9: 3, 11: 5). A further distinctive hallmark of *Hosea* 4–14, the ‘knowledge of YHWH’ (5: 4, 6: 3, 8: 2, 13: 4), similarly resonates with 2: 22’s promise, ‘And you will know YHWH.’

A significant difference between 2B and *Hosea* 4–14 is the repeated threats levelled against Israel in *Hosea* 4–14, which are strikingly absent in 2B. As we saw in the first chapter, however, the reversals, word-plays, and other devices pervading *Hosea* 4–14 work to suggest that threats of judgement are closely bound up with hope for the future. Punishment and renewal are two sides of the same coin for this prophetic poetry. In relation to the threat that Israel will be returned to ‘live in tents’ mentioned above, for instance, Macintosh comments that 12: 10 should be understood ‘both in terms of punishment and redemption. . . . The element of punishment is perceived in the nation’s (no doubt) painful reduction to the simple and unsophisticated life which she had known before in the days following the exodus. Yet freed from the chains of her sins and vices, there is born the possibility for her to revert to the attitude of trustful dependence upon Yahweh, and thus be led back purified to the land which he had given.’<sup>229</sup> While threats are notably absent from 2B, this poetry seeks to reverse *Hosea* 1, 2A, and 3, which are negative enough by anyone’s standards. Thus we might say that *Hosea* 4–14 and 2B share a recognition that Israel’s punishment is necessary, coupled with the desire to cast this punishment as the path to renewal: a theme notably lacking elsewhere in *Hosea* 1–3.

The similarities between *Hosea* 2B and 4–14 are striking, as is their shared effort to reappropriate the negative outlook pervading the rest of chapters 1–3 within a more positive framework. We could even say the strength of echoes suggests a similar authorship.<sup>230</sup> The voice behind *Hosea* 4–14 could be responsible for shaping 1–3, weaving 2B into the material so as to introduce an element of hope and renewal into this otherwise wholly negative, yet inspirational, work.<sup>231</sup> In this way 2B prepares the reader of *Hosea* 1–3 for 4–14,

<sup>228</sup> תלאבות is unique to 13: 5, but the parallel ‘wilderness’ suggests the force ‘drought’. Cf. Wolff (1974: 220), G. I. Davies (1992: 289–90).

<sup>229</sup> Macintosh (1997: 501).

<sup>230</sup> Marti (1904) believes that chapter 2 cannot be separated from 4–14, although he argues that the whole chapter is related.

<sup>231</sup> Cf. G. I. Davies (1992: 68), who argues that 2: 21–3 may have been added to create a ‘comprehensive presentation of Hosea’s message of salvation’.

which is presented as a continuation of the sign-act narratives, as the poetic voice takes up the prophetic mantle of ‘Hosea.’<sup>232</sup> We might even say that the words preceding 2A, ‘Say to your brothers, “My people!”; And to your sisters, “Shown mercy!”’ (2: 3) have been added by this editorial poet. For they seem out of place with both chapter 1 and 2A, yet resonate with the reversal themes pervading 2B, and especially with the reversal of the children’s names with which the poetry closes in 2: 25. Thus 2: 3 and 2: 25 could be an *inclusio* to the poetry of chapter 2, increasing the impression that a positive outlook weaves through *Hosea* 1–3.<sup>233</sup> An interesting parallel to this understanding of *Hosea* lies in Williamson’s argument that the author of *Isaiah* 40–55 is also the editor of *Isaiah* 1–39.<sup>234</sup> *Isaiah* 1–39 is similarly a predominantly negative text to which the radically positive *Isaiah* 40–55 has been added. Williamson identifies a number of passages in *Isaiah* 1–39 that are strongly reminiscent of *Isaiah* 40–55 and may have been woven into the earlier material by the author of *Isaiah* 40–55 as a foreshadowing of the message of hope and transformation that will follow.<sup>235</sup> It is possible that we are witnessing a similar process of composition in *Hosea*, as the poet of *Hosea* 4–14 weaves a message of renewal into the negative chapters 1–3 so as to prepare the reader for the

<sup>232</sup> Morris (1996: 112) speaks of chapter 2 as a ‘microcosm of chs. 4–14’: ‘the introductory section of the book has not only provided the significant words [grain, new wine, oil, silver, etc.] but also their forthcoming pattern in the lyrical plot.’ Landy (1995: 12) similarly understands chapter 2 as a microcosm of *Hosea* as a whole, but suggests that ‘the discursive and fluid poetic idiom of ch. 2 contrasts markedly with the compression and fracture that characterize the style of succeeding chapters (4–14)’. Landy also contrasts 2: 16–25 with 14: 2–9, arguing that the former is ‘historical’ while the latter is ‘mythological’ (pp. 169–70).

<sup>233</sup> While some might suggest that 2: 1–2 could also be understood as part of such an *inclusio*, due to its positive nature and interest in the reversal of the children’s names, there are several reasons which to my mind make this unlikely. Perhaps most importantly, 2: 1–2 has a prose, passive quality (‘it shall be said to them’), which is out of character with the poetic, active 2B and 2: 3 (‘Say to your brothers, “My people!”’). Wolff (1974: 25) admits that ‘The imperative verb in v. 3 seems abrupt’. Emmerson (1984: 95) argues that 2: 2 ‘is only loosely connected with v. 3 by means of the external link provided by the association of the symbolic names. . . . That the link is an external one, is evident from the fact that the final words of v. 2 conclude the announcement of salvation and bring it to a dramatic close. The marked difference of form of v. 3, a command addressed directly to an unspecified audience, indicates its separate origin.’ In addition, both 2: 3 and 2: 25 address personifications (even if Jezreel becomes feminine in 2: 25 and No-Mercy and Not-My-People become plural in 2: 3), while 2: 1–2 speaks of the people of Israel more generally. Even LXX appears to note a distinction between 2: 1–2 and 2: 3, with 2: 3 beginning chapter 2, as our proposal for an *inclusio* suggests. Interestingly Wolff (1974: 25–6) stresses the similarities between 2: 1–3 and 2: 25, arguing that 2: 1–3 has been moved from the end of chapter 2 to their current situation ‘to exhibit immediately the entire range of tension in the prophet’s message’. He also notes a distinction between 2: 1–2 and 2: 3, but surprisingly suggests that it is 2: 1–2 that has more in common with 2: 18–25 than 2: 3.

<sup>234</sup> Williamson (1994).

<sup>235</sup> Williamson (1994: 241): ‘in order to locate his message in relation to the earlier and continuing words of God with Israel he included a version of the earlier prophecies with his own and edited them in such a way as to bind the two parts of the word together.’

reversals and promises to come.<sup>236</sup> The negative elements intrinsic to *Hosea* 4–14 are not apparent in 2B, but we might say that this poet is not concerned to replicate 4–14 within 2B itself, but rather seeks to use this poetry to introduce to *Hosea* 1–3 as a whole the concept that YHWH's punishment and renewal are inextricably interwoven.

### READING THE FINAL FORM OF HOSEA

Whether we understand 2B and *Hosea* 4–14 to share the same authorship or not, 4–14 certainly seems to have assisted 2B's assimilation into *Hosea* 1–3. Few question the dizzying U-turn in 2: 16, where the negative 2A transforms into the positive outlook promoted by 2B.<sup>237</sup> This is almost certainly due to the influence of chapters 4–14, where such reversals are rife. The memorable (if not complex) 11: 8–9 has proved to be particularly significant in this regard, where YHWH follows his threats of violence with the words: 'How can I give you up, O Ephraim;| Hand you over, O Israel?<sup>238</sup>| My heart/mind overturns within me,<sup>239</sup>| While my remorse kindles;<sup>240</sup>| I will not carry out my fierce anger;| I will not turn to destroy Ephraim,| For I am God| And no

<sup>236</sup> The unbendingly positive attitude of 2B, with its insistent use of reversals and the wilderness motif is also strikingly reminiscent of *Isaiah* 40–55. We have already seen how the theme of transformation, with its focus on the reversals of Jerusalem's self-perception, is central to *Isaiah* 40–55. The portrayal of exile as a second wilderness is also prominent from the very beginning, with the celebrated words, 'In the wilderness prepare the way of YHWH' (40: 3). The parallels between the interpretative strategies of *Isaiah* 40–55 and *Hosea* 2B and 4–14 are striking and worth further exploration.

<sup>237</sup> Landy (1995: 31) recognizes the dilemma as a 'principal problem': 'how to reconcile—if one may—the violence and obsessiveness of the first part of the chapter with the blissful tour-de-force of the second'. He provides no straightforward answer, but emphasizes the dissonance, speaking of the 'persuasive effect, always undercut, of the narrative of ch. 2' (p. 47). Clines (1979: esp. 88–97) stresses the continuity of concepts within 2: 4–25, while demonstrating that this passage is concerned with 'opposites'. To my mind this tension is no accident, but a testimony to the ingenuity of the way in which 2B weaves into *Hosea* 2 to create a whole.

<sup>238</sup> אֶמְנֹךָ seems to have the force of 'to hand over/deliver' here (cf. *Gen* 14: 20, *Prov* 4: 9). Cf. G. I. Davies (1992: 261–2).

<sup>239</sup> לֵב can refer to either 'heart' or 'mind', but seems to invoke both the mental and emotional here. Cf. G. I. Davies (1992: 262): this 'could refer to mental disorientation . . . or to a change of purpose'. Andersen and Freedman (1980: 588): 'as if the contrary will to save and will to destroy gave Yahweh a mind divided against itself, within which the indecisive debate is raging'.

<sup>240</sup> יחד ('together') is difficult to render in English, but 'while' gives the impression that the 'overturning' of YHWH's heart/mind and the 'kindling of his remorse' are simultaneous. נחומים has a similar sense of 'remorse' elsewhere in *Isa* 57: 18 and *Zech* 1: 13. Cf. Wolff (1974: 201).

mortal!’ These are among the most well-known words in the book, *Hosea*.<sup>241</sup> In response to them, many have perceived in *Hosea* a God who wrestles painfully with the idea of punishing his people, swinging from anger to redemption with little warning. Wolff writes: ‘God is pictured struggling with himself.’<sup>242</sup> Mays comments, ‘In 11: 8 and 13: 14 the tension between Yahweh’s anger at Israel’s rebellion and passion breaks out into an agonizing struggle with himself’;<sup>243</sup> while Fisch echoes: ‘This is the accent of “divine bafflement”, of God’s struggling with himself.’<sup>244</sup>

Within such a context, the abrupt change of tack at the beginning of 2B appears entirely in character, even within the overwhelmingly negative *Hosea* 1–3.<sup>245</sup> Some recognize explicitly the influence of 11: 8 on their understanding of 2: 16–17 as harmonious with the rest of *Hosea* 2. Clines observes: ‘Could the mood of this poem [2: 4–17], then, be one of divine indecision—which issues in an unexpected and unconditioned act of grace? One would hardly imagine so were it not for the other glimpses *Hosea* gives us of God “struggling with himself” (6: 4; 11: 8).’<sup>246</sup> Wolff writes: ‘The most peculiar feature of *Hosea*’s proclamation we find in the lawsuit speeches, in which his God not only struggles with Israel but with himself as well; indeed he calls his own decisions into question (2: 4–17 [2–15]; 6: 4; 11: 8 *f following vv* 1–7).’<sup>247</sup>

<sup>241</sup> Macintosh (1997: 460): ‘The central importance of the words of this verse has long been recognized. Thus George Adam Smith (p. 297) describes the passage as “the greatest in *Hosea*—deepest if not highest of his book—the breaking forth of that inexhaustible mercy of the Most High”.’

<sup>242</sup> Wolff (1974: 199, 201). Morris (1996: 69): ‘A sentence of harsh and seemingly irrevocable judgment is followed by a tender appeal for Israel’s return. Indeed, two of the most bitter announcements of punishment (10. 14–15 and 14. 1)...immediately precede God’s most tender speeches to his beloved Israel (chs. 11 and 14).’

<sup>243</sup> Mays (1969: 14). Cf. McKenzie (1955: 299): ‘None of the prophets so thoroughly “humanized” God as Os; the conflict of emotions which Os has portrayed in God is the divine counterpart to the conflict of his own emotions that lies behind ch. 1–2.’

<sup>244</sup> Fisch (1988: 142). Cf. Wacker (1996: 308).

<sup>245</sup> Macintosh (1997: 91): ‘Here the joy matches precisely the depths of darkness and horror implied by Yahweh’s repudiation of the covenant (Lo-Ammi, 1: 9) and of his removal of the efficacy of his name (“I will not be [Yahweh] for you”, 1: 9). The contrast makes a fitting and powerful climax to the chapter and is a testimony to the skill of the author.’ Cf. pp. 117–18 and G. I. Davies (1993: 34).

<sup>246</sup> Clines (1979: 87, emphasis mine). Siebert-Hommes (2001: 172–3) comments on the relationship she perceives between *Hosea* 2 and 11, both of which speak of ‘love and compassion’ and depict YHWH’s relationship with Israel using metaphorical language. Regarding *Hos* 2: 16 and 2: 25, she comments: ‘Here, too, God’s compassion is aroused (cf. 11: 8): “I will allure her and speak to her heart” (2: 16), “I will have mercy on her” (2: 25).’

<sup>247</sup> Wolff (1974: p. xxviii, emphasis mine). Mays (1969: 44) also recognizes a change in direction in 2: 16–17, yet still believes that these verses belong to the same unit as 2: 4–15: ‘There is no logical line of continuity between the three sections. . . . Yet this third announcement fulfils and completes the other two and brings to consummation the pleading with which the sequence opened.’ Cf. Stuart (1987: 54), Macintosh (1997: 69–70, 461–2).

*Hosea* 2B's striking ability to appear harmonious even within such a negative text contrasts starkly with other editorial additions such as 1: 7, 2: 1–2, and 3: 5, which remain out of tune for their difference in form and tone, despite the assistance of 2B and 4–14 in assimilating their incongruously optimistic message.

*Hosea* 4–14's influence on *Hosea* 1–3 does not end here, however. The prophetic poetry has worked in powerful combination with 2B to encourage readers to find even within *Hosea* 1, 2A, and 3 the positive message of hope, redemption, and love we have witnessed throughout our discussion. Wolff writes of chapter 3: 'The chapter's theme is stated unequivocally by the fourfold 'to love' (אהב) in v. 1. This underscores Yahweh's love as a model for Hosea's love; it stands in contrast to the fickle lovers for whom His love remains true. . . . The efficacious power of God's love is manifested in the fact that it does not choose the cheap and easy way for itself.'<sup>248</sup> Rowley presents a remarkably positive reading, which pays tribute to the force of 11: 8:

[T]he prophet, who from beginning knew the waywardness of Gomer as God must have known the waywardness of Israel, yet loved her with a love that could not give her up, and realised that if he so loved a woman who ill requited his love, and loved her until he won her back to himself, not alone by buying her from slavery, but also by winning her affection and loyalty, God must love Israel with a love transcending his own for Gomer. When he puts into the mouth of God the words: 'How can I give thee up, Ephraim? How can I hand thee over, Israel? . . . I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim', he perceives that judgement is no more the last word of God than it had been his own last word to Gomer.<sup>249</sup>

The combined impact of *Hosea* 4–14 and 2B on readings of *Hosea* 1–3 is of crucial interest to this exploration as it witnesses to the powerful impact that a wider frame can have on metaphorical meaning. We might say that these optimistic texts strive to reappropriate the pessimistic sign-acts and metaphorical language of *Hosea* 1–3 by widening the frame of such negative language, creating a work in which abrupt U-turns from negative to positive become characteristic, and even expected.<sup>250</sup> Fisch illustrates the potential results:

Paradoxically, we discover God's unconditioned love only through the negating of it. . . . In the sign Lo-Ammi we discover the trace of its opposite. Negation is itself negated. Through the language of denial, God's over-mastering love is manifested. It

<sup>248</sup> Wolff (1974: 63–4).

<sup>249</sup> Rowley (1963: 94–5).

<sup>250</sup> Readings such as Rowley's and Wolff's are also often strongly influenced by what we might call the even wider frame of the Christian New Testament. Rowley (1963: 97): 'Like Another, he (Hosea) learned obedience by the things he suffered.' Wolff (1974: 22): 'The account anticipates from afar the events of the New Testament.'

cannot be overcome, nor can the name Ammi be eradicated. The attempt to eradicate it simply establishes it and confirms it... Ammi, we might say, proves to be more powerful than its opposite.<sup>251</sup>

Given such readings, it seems that *Hosea* 2B and 4–14 have been remarkably successful in achieving their aim.<sup>252</sup> We might even suggest that traditional readings, such as those of Wolff and Rowley, are not ‘wrong’ in their characterization of *Hosea* 1–3 as a positive work, but simply less diachronic and ‘historical’ or ‘objective’ than they suggest.<sup>253</sup>

## REFLECTIONS

If traditional approaches celebrate the redemptive power of *Hosea* 2B and 4–14, not all are so convinced by their efforts. Graetz’s reaction to 2B vocalizes the disquiet of many: ‘The reader who is caught up in this joyous new betrothal and renewed covenant overlooks the fact that this joyous reconciliation between God and Israel follows the exact pattern that battered wives know so well.’<sup>254</sup> A torrent of objections continues to gather force among feminist readers. Yee observes: ‘The third part of the husband’s strategy to control his wife is the most insidious one because the implications of such a strategy for actual battered wives tend to be ignored, as the reader becomes caught up in the joyous reconciliation between Yahweh and Israel. After the wife has been suitably punished, after she has endured various kinds of abuse, the husband will seduce his wife.’<sup>255</sup> Exum stresses, ‘In this vision of

<sup>251</sup> Fisch (1988: 144–5) exemplifies a synchronic reading of the text. He adds, ‘the dread words of absence and negation are healed and are restored to their benign significations’ (p. 157); ‘It is a poetry of love and estrangement, but neither can be entertained without the other. That is the special agony of Hosea... Images of love carry with them their dark antithesis. Images of anger are menaced and arrested by memories of devotion’ (p. 140).

<sup>252</sup> Cf. Yee (1987: 44): ‘In the end, the redactor creates a new tradition out of the old.’

<sup>253</sup> This is an increasingly common criticism of traditional historical-critical approaches, reflected in the related critique that the problem is often not that such approaches are historical in character, but rather that they are often not historical enough. Cf. Barton (1998: 15–16): ‘[historical] criticism has scarcely ever been historical enough... it has usually been far too influenced by commitments lying outside scholarly detachment.’ Sherwood (1996: 38): ‘I shall be attacking commentaries on Hos. 1: 2 not because they are erroneous, but because they are dominant, and legitimate that dominance with untenable claims to objectivity.’

<sup>254</sup> Graetz (1995: 141). Frymer Kensky (1992a: 146) contends that ‘From the point of view of modern society, this is a pathological relationship’, commenting that ‘There is a profoundly disturbing aspect to this marriage, particularly to modern eyes that do not accord punitive rights to husbands... the metaphor rests on the assumption that the husband has the right to punish the wife.’

<sup>255</sup> Yee (1992: 199, cf. pp. 195, 200).

reconciliation, the woman's lot is to be submissive and silent, which keeps her in the role of victim within the marriage relationship.<sup>256</sup> Connolly contests:

this reconciliation seems capricious and forced on the woman. On the tail of numerous threats of stripping, starving and imprisonment, the phrase 'I am going to seduce her' (2: 16) gives the reader a shudder rather than a glimpse of hope. Even the tender promise of the husband that he will 'speak to her heart' (2: 16) is placed under suspicion by the preceding violence. Rather than comforting the woman, would not such sudden gentleness confuse her? It sounds like the cycle of abuse in which, when the abuser apologizes and shows love, the abused is made to forget the violence and act as though it never happened.<sup>257</sup>

Sherwood is similarly unconvinced: 'The effect of the text is circular rather than linear: the positive is deconstructed in Hos. 1: 4–9, the negative is deconstructed in 2: 1, 3, 2, but any attempts to re-establish the positive as the unequivocally dominant meaning lead back, inevitably, to the deconstruction of blessing in Hos. 1: 4–9.'<sup>258</sup>

Such responses to 2B's valiant attempts echo other reactions to the endeavours to redeem negative sexual and marital metaphorical language that weave through the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible. Traditional scholarship may rejoice in the (often secondary) reversals, but recent scholarship is more hesitant. In many cases, we might say that they offer too little, too late; certainly *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel's* attempts to 'redeem' seem only to increase the females' humiliation. In other texts, the 'positive' reversals are forever shadowed by their antithesis, powerless to escape their dark past.<sup>259</sup> Sherwood

<sup>256</sup> Exum (1996: 112). Cf. Landy (1995: 42): 'by eliminating all undesirable words, he will grant her unconditional freedom, whose outcome is determined by himself. He wishes her to be a robot and not a robot at the same time.'

<sup>257</sup> Connolly (1998: 62). Interestingly the relationship between *Hosea* 2 and 11 works in reverse for Connolly, making the latter problematic. She explains: 'the husband/wife relationship has made its mark. It must stick in the reader's mind as setting the tone of punishment and intolerance for the rest of the book. . . . Just as the reconciliation in ch. 2 is undermined, as we have seen, any future shows of gentleness are similarly drowned in a sea of violence. For instance, there is the heartwarming parental image in ch. 11. . . . For a moment this is true, but then Yahweh/the parent says: "Since he has refused to come back to me, the sword will rage through his cities. . . ." (11: 5–6). Constantly in *Hosea* the question of punishment and reconciliation is confronted, and the same destructive answer is reached' (pp. 63–4). For Connolly, 'The book is never able to go beyond its violent image of God. . . . *Hosea* says in a beautiful phrase, "I am God, not man, | the Holy One in your midst, | and I shall not come to you in anger' (11: 9). But the important lesson of this phrase is forgotten by *Hosea*' (p. 65).

<sup>258</sup> Sherwood (1996: 247).

<sup>259</sup> Most have similarly moved away from understanding the resonances between *Hosea* 2 and the *Song* somehow to redeem this prophetic book's negative sexual and marital language, instead drawing on this overwhelmingly positive love-poetry to expose and critique the troubling *Hosea* 2. Landy (1995: 152) contrasts *Hosea* 2's portrayal of aggression against the female with the violent episode in chapter 5 of the *Song*: 'Whereas in *Hosea* the voice is male and

insists: 'A double negative is not simply equivalent to a positive statement; similarly, according to the grammar or logic of this text, calling a child Not-Not-Loved or Not-Not-My-People is not the same as calling them Loved or My People.'<sup>260</sup> Many agree. The vision of YHWH seducing battered Israel may be compelling; but it appears that, in weaving itself so deeply into the texture of *Hosea* 2, 2B, far from solving the problems of *Hosea* 1–3, only further contributes to them. Indeed, *Hosea* 1–3 remains a troubling text for a whole panoply of reasons. In addition to the difficulties of *Hosea* 2, the dark and bare narratives of chapters 1 and 3 are also disturbing. Here flesh-and-blood women and children are used as mere visual aids; a mother's hope to name her children is forcibly taken away; an unnamed woman is bought, with her price named, in a chilling echo of the growing trade in sex slavery today;<sup>261</sup> a dreadful vision of God's 'love' is offered;<sup>262</sup> and throughout these narratives we hear not even a whisper of the voices of these women and children.

*Hosea* 2B may not hold the power to redeem *Hosea* 1–3, but there are glimmers of hope for those wrestling with this text's disturbing implications for women. The women and children of *Hosea* 1 and 3 never speak, but Israel is given voice no fewer than three times in chapter 2. As with Judah's voice in *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4, her words remain under the control of YHWH throughout:

articulates a fantasy that passes from the sadistic game to voyeuristic exposure, in the Song of Songs it is female and expresses her outrage; we do not know what the watchmen feel and the ordeal permits the celebration of the beauty of the woman's lover and thus her own eros.' Van Dijk-Hemmes (1989: 86) contends that *Hosea* 2 quotes/distorts the woman's love-songs, and suggests that 'By re-placing the "quotations" back into the love-songs from which they were borrowed' (i.e. the *Song*), 'the vision of the woman in [Hosea 2] is restored'. The *Song* remains a powerful resource for those seeking a different perspective within the Hebrew Bible. Cf. Exum (2000: 26), Ostriker (2000: 43). See also Brenner (2004: 78).

<sup>260</sup> Sherwood (1996: 247–8). *Contra* G. I. Davies (1992: 90): 'The names of Hosea's other two children are also turned, by a "negation of negation", into bearers of hope.' Sherwood (1996: 247): 'To assert that Israel is unequivocally, positively, loved and pitied, is to repeat the naive complacency of Israel, which the text sets itself against and determinedly deconstructs.' She also insists that 'Reading deconstructively, the reader can no longer see the "wilderness" simply as a symbol of the time in which the "pristine relation between God and his people was untarnished" [citing Mays], because it is the site for the most dismal ending (death by thirst and deprivation) as well as the most promising of beginnings (a love affair)' (p. 214). Cf. Landy (2001: 285–94), who powerfully highlights the instability inherent in 2B's presentation of wilderness as redemptive within the wider context of the book of *Hosea*.

<sup>261</sup> We can be thankful that this woman is at least not forced into a sexual relationship.

<sup>262</sup> Fontaine (1995b: 63–4): 'I knew that the kind of "love" represented by Hosea and his god did not seem very much like my idea of love. The silenced and humiliated Gomer, abused into submission during her supposedly "honeymoon"-like reunion with her master... That these violent means so easily pass for "love" in the eyes of the ancient author, audience and modern interpreter is a telling commentary on societies.' Törnkvist (1998: 65): 'the faithfulness of God could be more adequately described as the violent behaviour of a notorious wife-batterer, torturer and manipulator.'

it is he who reports her speech. And it is striking that in each instance Israel is quoted only so that her own words can set her up for further furious remonstrations.<sup>263</sup> Nevertheless, it remains worthwhile to take care to listen to this opposing voice within the text. In 2: 7 Israel insists, ‘Let me go after my lovers, who provide my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink!’; in 2: 9 she exclaims, ‘Let me go| And return to my first husband;<sup>264</sup> For it was better for me then than now!’; and in 2: 14 she stresses, ‘These are my wages, which my lovers have given to me!’<sup>265</sup> In paying attention to this voice, we could say that we encounter an assertive female who is thoroughly unimpressed by YHWH’s claim on her, determined to take control of her life, and actively make her own choices. Indeed, as with Jerusalem in *Ezekiel* 16A, we could say that we catch a glimpse of a female who understands her ‘prostitution’ not with the negative associations that this prophetic text encourages for that term, but as business.<sup>266</sup> As Sherwood observes (although she attributes the words to Gomer rather than Israel), ‘[she] is a thoroughly modern miss . . . as she speaks of wages her voice seems to merge with the voices of contemporary prostitutes: “I have something they want and I give it to them for a price. It’s a mutual thing, an agreement.”’<sup>267</sup> Furthermore, if we adopt the reading of *Hosea* 2: 4 suggested earlier, we could argue that it is *Israel* who has taken the initiative to break the relationship with YHWH, leaving him to plead for her return, rather than YHWH who is banishing his passive wife. On this reading, the relationship between YHWH and Israel remains a deeply unhealthy and damaging one, and Israel is left playing the far from ideal role of ‘prostitute’, underscoring just how problematic is this troubling text even for resistant readers. Nevertheless, Israel at least shows herself to have maintained a sense of initiative and personal resourcefulness in removing herself from an abusive domestic situation.<sup>268</sup>

<sup>263</sup> Cf. Sherwood (1996: 301): ‘Hosea 1–3 traps the woman’s voice in inverted commas and allows her to speak only within the parameters of (mis)quotation.’

<sup>264</sup> We continue to understand Israel to believe this ‘first husband’ to be Baal. See previous discussion of 2: 9.

<sup>265</sup> Sherwood (1996: 319).

<sup>266</sup> Cf. Hornsby (1999: 128).

<sup>267</sup> Sherwood (1996: 320). Cf. Fontaine (1995b: 66): ‘Perhaps Gomer was a “harlot” and proud of it. What would we find out about the meaning of harlotry if we could hear her voice instead of the male author who construes meaning for her?’

<sup>268</sup> Some go further, drawing on their imagination to *create* a voice for Gomer. Balz-Cochois (1982a, 1982b) gave Gomer an early voice, even if now it appears hesitant and uncertain. Cf. Sherwood (1996: 276–82) for a forceful critique. Fontaine (1995b: 67–9) offers ‘Proceedings of an Alternative Covenant: “Gomer’s” Testimony’, with charges such as ‘Divorce, my daughters! Divorce your tradition,| for its god is not a true mate,| and why should you stay his whore?’ (p. 68). Magonet (2002) takes Gomer back before the scroll is written, giving her an honest and unashamed voice: ‘I enjoyed my sexuality. That what I did was clandestine and forbidden gave it an extra thrill. . . . And to tell the truth . . . from time to time I felt a sense of triumph to satisfy a man who needed more than he could receive at home!’ (p. 117). Cooper and Goldingay (2002) present a

Through paying attention to Israel's voice, however quiet, in *Hosea* 2, activity and initiative can thus be returned to the female.<sup>269</sup> Sadly, Gomer does not speak in *Hosea* 1, but we do hear in 1: 8 that she weans her second child, and here lie the seeds for further hope within this disquieting narrative. For Sherwood, this provides a welcome glimpse into a competing discourse: 'Weaning implies a prior act of suckling, a gesture of love, that counters the father's harsh decree,' she explains; 'Not Loved, from another perspective, manifestly is loved, so the negatively depicted harlot is also a suckling and nurturing mother.'<sup>270</sup> She continues:

Gomer-bat-Diblayim does not speak but makes a silent dissident gesture, which reasserts the voice of normality and reason. The final ironic twist is that the main paternal text is radical and deviant, and it is the *transgressive* semiotic, the sign of love given by the mother, which quietly reasserts the voice of reason by reacting to the newborn child in the expected manner.<sup>271</sup>

We could even say that in Gomer we encounter another silent female prophet within the prophetic texts, whose mute sign-act presents us with a more compelling, resonant, and perhaps even more appropriate image of God's love for the people.

*Hosea* 1–3's tendency to give voice and visibility to perspectives other than its own provides rich resources for current readers wrestling with the difficulties of this troubling text. This is not the only benefit of such an inclination. Sherwood calls our attention to the way in which YHWH's authority in *Hosea* 1–3 is continually undercut by these competing voices and perspectives.<sup>272</sup> 'Even though they are contained in reported speech and parody,' she explains, 'rival voices still have the power to relativize the dominant voice . . . suggesting that there is no ultimate truth in this text but only competing ideologies.'<sup>273</sup> Once these 'rival voices' are combined with *Hosea* 1–3's disorienting reversals of names and language, we could say that the text is terminally destabilized.<sup>274</sup> Sherwood writes:

modern, perhaps more timid Gomer, whose words disturbingly witness to the cycle of violence she is caught up in as she meets the Marriage Counsellor with Hosea. Cf. Bird (1998: 130): 'Imaginative reconstruction to fill the silences in the text with unseen or unheard women can bring recognition of the limits and biases of the sources so they are not read unconsciously as inclusive.'

<sup>269</sup> Cf. Exum (1996: 128): 'If the voice of the other is always already inscribed within patriarchal discourse, then women are not simply objects, and by taking a subject position of their own (no less shifting and unstable than the male subject position), they cease to be powerless.'

<sup>270</sup> Sherwood (1996: 146–7).

<sup>271</sup> Sherwood (1996: 147).

<sup>272</sup> Sherwood (1996: 318).

<sup>273</sup> Sherwood (1996: 318).

<sup>274</sup> Cf. Simundson (2005: 12): 'A swing back and forth from doom to hope, rejection to redemption, occurs in both chapters 1 and 2 . . . This movement back and forth is a little confusing.'

The idea of a divinely ordained or natural meaning is defamiliarized in a text in which God himself creates bizarre and opposite meanings. For in the strange sign-language designed by Yhwh there is no connection that cannot be made, and no connection that cannot be broken. . . . There is nothing natural, dependable or stable about the meanings created; rather the sign-language is a kind of game with the audience, in which meaning itself is defamiliarized and expectations are invented.<sup>275</sup>

Sherwood presents *Hosea* 1–3 as a volatile text, where no meaning is stable, no message is permanent, and no voice can be privileged over against another, reminding us of the extreme tendency towards instability of which Morris and Landy spoke in reference to *Hosea* 4–14. She writes: ‘All texts can be deconstructed, but *Hosea* 1–3, almost perversely, seems to lay bare the basis of this deconstruction.’<sup>276</sup> It seems that 2B and 4–14 play a treacherous game in their desperate attempts to redeem the (already precarious) negative prophetic words by which they have been inspired. And it is not clear whether their risk pays off. If their combined efforts leave the book of *Hosea* teetering uncertainly on the brink of meaning and meaninglessness, however, perhaps there is hope for feminist readers after all. For while these texts were almost certainly not written with this aim in mind, they may nevertheless achieve a positive end by undermining, subverting, and perhaps thereby even diffusing *Hosea* 1–3’s disturbing language.

<sup>275</sup> Sherwood (1996: 119–20). She reiterates, ‘The curse, Not My People, is neither erased, nor allowed to dominate. . . . The implied former term, My People, is not triumphantly reestablished, as New Critical commentators suggest, but is displaced in another term, ‘Sons of the Living God’. The effect of displacement, as in Derrida’s texts, is to deny any perspective privilege, and to allow no single name to achieve permanent unequivocal status. . . . There is no name that cannot be deconstructed by a rival name in the text’ (p. 243). Mitchell (2004: 122): ‘This pattern creates the perception of a continual shifting between positive and negative, with one anticipating the other since it is impossible to invoke the negated term without mention of the positive term at one and the same time.’

<sup>276</sup> Sherwood (1996: 214): ‘The collision of redemption and punishment in the undecidable nakedness and wilderness suggests that Yhwh himself turns into an undecidable, who nurtures and abuses, strips and restores, seduces and deprives.’ Cf. Landy (1995: 20): ‘Hosea is a poetry of despair, a vision of death as well as hope. It balances ambiguities, leaving itself open . . . always, elsewhere, perhaps.’

## Conclusions

Metaphor is one of the most powerful, if not subversive, tools of persuasion. Such an understanding of metaphor has been central to this monograph, concerned with the sexual and marital metaphorical language of the prophetic texts of the Hebrew Bible. The aims of this study have been twofold: first, to call attention to the remarkable diversity of the prophetic sexual and marital metaphors and similes, so often reduced to allusions to ‘the marriage metaphor’ or ‘cultic prostitution’; and second, to highlight the considerable ability of this language—when set free of such restraints—to reorganize our thoughts, introducing associations and assumptions that we would perhaps not ourselves have imagined, or even desired.

The scene was set for this exploration in the Introduction. First, we considered the often unrecognized impact of approaches to metaphor on readings of the prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language. In particular, we noted the gulf widening between traditional and feminist readings, shaped by the differing substitutionary and cognitive approaches to metaphor underlying the surface of the debate. Second, a practical and consciously simplified approach to metaphorical language was outlined, providing us with a vocabulary. Lying firmly on the cognitive side of the debate, this approach gave strong emphasis to ‘context, context, context’, preparing us for the rest of the monograph, where the vitality of literary context was repeatedly underscored, not only for the detection of metaphor, but also for the creation of metaphorical meaning.

In the following five chapters, we drew on this approach to read the prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language with fresh eyes. Moving in turn through *Hosea* 4–14, *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4, *Isaiah*, *Ezekiel* 16 and 23, and *Hosea* 1–3, we paid attention to the way in which scholarship has tended to read the prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language within the default contexts or ‘frames’ of ‘the marriage metaphor’ and ‘cultic prostitution’. The stifling influence of these frames for metaphorical meaning was highlighted, and readers were encouraged instead to read these diverse metaphors and similes within their distinctive literary frames (both immediate and wider), in and through which they have the potential to rise vividly to life.

Having experienced this awakening, each chapter closed with reflections on how we might respond to this powerful, often disquieting language that we find in the Hebrew Bible.

Chapter 1 opened with an exploration of *Hosea* 4–14’s adventurous metaphors and similes, highlighting their provocative, innovative, and often disorienting character. We then turned to traditional scholarship’s starkly contrasting treatment of this prophetic poetry’s ‘prostitution’ motif, noting the repeated allusions to ‘cultic prostitution’, the tendency to harmonize metaphors featuring the ‘prostitution’ motif in translation, and the habitual passing over of characteristic word-plays, ‘tit for tat’ devices, and other innovative strategies, such as the unusual use of the Hiphil form of זנה (‘to prostitute’). We saw how this approach led to significant aspects of *Hosea* 4–14’s message being overlooked. We also observed how the underestimation of *Hosea* 4–14’s metaphorical language had led many to respond unquestioningly to this poetry’s powerful rhetoric, with commentaries casting ‘holy women’ (קדשות) as (cultic) prostitutes. In the face of this, we explored a reading of *Hosea* 4–14’s ‘prostitution’ motif within its distinctive and striking literary context, with its subversive twisting and turning of language. Within this vital wider literary frame, the ‘prostitution’ motif came dynamically to life, reflecting the poetry’s wider metaphorical language, and involving itself in the poetry’s characteristic plays and strategies. In our closing reflections, we saw that *Hosea* 4–14’s controversial ‘prostitution’ motif and libellous depiction of ‘holy women’ (קדשות) is redeemed for some by chapter 14’s startlingly positive love-language, with its echoes of the *Song of Songs*. At the same time, we noted that this prophetic poetry’s extraordinary tendency to twist and turn language leaves others viewing the text as unstable and liable to turn even such positive echoes on their head.

In Chapter 2, we turned to *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4, in which we encountered Judah as an absurd and senseless female, remorselessly ridiculed through the poetry’s characteristic use of repetition, word-play, and incessant rhetorical questions. It was here that we first began to experience the powerful influence of ‘the marriage metaphor’ on readings, with many insisting on finding husband/wife imagery throughout *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4, even when YHWH is cast as ‘father’. We also witnessed the continuing influence of ‘cultic prostitution’ on readings of the poetry’s ‘prostitution’ motif, with all references to ‘prostitution’ being presumed to be straightforwardly literal, while word-plays and other rhetorical strategies were once again passed over. In addition, we saw how many allowed *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 to form their assumptions through its incessant rhetorical questions, offering little or no resistance, even where they would normally not agree. We observed how the combination of these approaches left many believing *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 to be less

innovative than other prophetic books in its use of sexual and marital metaphorical language. Freeing ourselves from the restrictive frames of ‘the marriage metaphor’ and ‘cultic prostitution’, we turned to read this prophetic poetry’s sexual and marital metaphorical language within its vital literary context. We encountered a strikingly innovative and forceful text whose ‘prostitution’ motif plays a lively part in the relentless ridicule of Judah alongside the poetry’s distinctive repetition, word-plays, and rhetorical questions. In 2: 20 we witnessed the absurdity of Judah insisting on the one hand that she will serve no one, but then in the next moment bending over or ‘bowing’ to ‘prostitute’, and thus ‘serving’ in that sense. We also explored *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4’s startling wider range of sexual and marital metaphors, where Judah is compared to a ‘camel on heat’, and even accused of waiting to be ‘raped’ (שגל). A discussion of the prose passage *Jeremiah* 3: 6–11 and its dormant sexual and marital metaphors followed. Here, the bland, generally descriptive language highlighted just how vivacious are the metaphors and similes of *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4’s poetry. The chapter closed with reflections on the difficulties that *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 presents for current readers alert to its implications for women. Perhaps most disturbingly, we discussed the possibility that in this text Judah is raped, derided, given no opportunity to tell her story, and then assumed to be responsible for that rape by readers. Having called attention to the echoes with reactions to rape in today’s society, we observed the importance of naming Judah’s experience as ‘rape’ despite the socio-cultural and historical differences involved. We also experienced the value of listening for competing voices within the text, amplifying Judah’s hidden voice in *Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4 to discover there a female who is far more self-possessed and coherent than this caricaturing prophetic poetry would suggest.

In Chapter 3, we moved our focus to *Isaiah*. Having discussed *Isaiah* 1–39’s fleeting but surprising uses of the ‘prostitution’ motif—where YHWH encourages Tyre to ‘prostitute’, for instance, potentially bringing positive associations to the focus—we turned to *Isaiah* 40–55 and its astonishing theme of transformation. Here we encountered YHWH as God of immense power, ready to turn all things ‘topsy turvy’,<sup>1</sup> including Zion’s self-perception. In the face of numerous processions of often bewildering transformations of the beleaguered Zion, we saw readers struggling to maintain a coherent story for ‘the marriage metaphor’. Indeed, we witnessed many finally abandoning this default frame, at last aware that this poetry defied their categorizations. Freeing ourselves from this restrictive mould, we saw Zion’s astonishing moves from barren woman to prolific mother, from widow to

<sup>1</sup> Clines (1976: 61).

beloved wife, resonate with the wider literary context of *Isaiah* 40–55 and its compelling theme of transformation. Moving on from the overwhelmingly positive *Isaiah* 40–55 to chapters 56–66, we found in 57: 3–10 quite a different passage, acting as something of a breeding ground for those desiring ‘cultic prostitution’. Here we encountered a display of the power of this default frame as we witnessed the extraordinary sexualization of this passage. We saw how references to ‘bed’, ‘hand’, and ‘warming oneself’ become deeply erotic for many simply through their proximity to the (perhaps editorial) allusion to metaphorical ‘prostitution’. In our closing reflections, we noted that *Isaiah*’s sexual and marital metaphorical language was not without its problems. In addition to the remarkable sexualization of 57: 3–10, we called attention to the depiction of YHWH as keen to sell the female, Tyre, into sex slavery in 23: 15–18, and the disturbing thirst for sexual violence against ‘virgin daughter Babylon’ in 47: 1–15. Nevertheless, we emphasized the vitality of celebrating the emergence of the female Zion within *Isaiah* 40–55 as a positive role model, alluded to in language comparable to that of the Servant: a sight otherwise unknown among the prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language of the Hebrew Bible, and one to be treasured.

In the fourth chapter, we witnessed theories about ‘the marriage metaphor’ and ‘cultic prostitution’ truly meeting their match in the face of the infamous *Ezekiel* 16 and 23. For, while we finally located a story for ‘the marriage metaphor’, at the same time we came upon a sister narrative, undermining the assumption that there exists a single plot in the Hebrew Bible for the tale of YHWH’s relationship with Jerusalem/Zion/Israel/Judah. Moreover, in these narratives, we saw *nations* ‘prostitute’, a metaphor which few seek to limit to literal references to a cultic practice. In the face of these challenges, we found scholars struggling for coherence, even emending the narratives to bring some sense of consistency to the relationship between their suppositions and the texts before them. Moreover, we witnessed many limiting the horror of *Ezekiel* 16 and 23, continuing to assume a happy ending to the ‘love-story’ between YHWH and the ‘rightfully’ punished Jerusalem, Oholah, and Oholibah, despite there being no such happy ending—or such love—in these troubling texts. Turning to read *Ezekiel* 16 and 23 with fresh eyes, we encountered two deeply disturbing narratives: one bound up with control and a power struggle between YHWH and Jerusalem, the other with uncontrollability and the tragic tale of two sisters marked for life by their abusive experiences as children. Within these differing literary frames, we witnessed ‘prostitution’ taking on strikingly different associations, bound up in turn with control and uncontrollability. And we experienced ‘radical theocentricity’ at its most powerful, as the devastating combination of these sibling narratives presented the ultimate defence of God, leaving the responsibility

for the dreadful fate of the nation with the broken and battered people. Responding to these narratives presented a daunting challenge. We explored the opportunity for rereading Jerusalem as a confident, assured female in *Ezekiel* 16A: able and willing to stand up to YHWH and take control of her own destiny, imitating the actions of the male who taught her all she knew. At the same time we recognized the complications inherent in such a reading, where Jerusalem enters the less than ideal 'business' of prostitution, and where the narrative's furious reaction to Jerusalem's *coup* remains disquieting. The stranglehold of structure left no space for such rereading in *Ezekiel* 23A. Here instead we saw the importance of renaming Oholah and Oholibah's experience as child abuse and of resisting the attitude of readers such as Block, with their insistence that these sisters 'were not to be pitied'.<sup>2</sup> The chapter ended with a 'midrash', drawing deep on the resources of the Hebrew Bible to question where is the 'voice of God' within *Ezekiel* 16 and 23, focusing particularly on the story of Elijah, where God speaks not in the hurricane, earthquake, or fire (with which the furious invective of the prophet, Ezekiel's, words resonate), but in the 'still voice of sheer silence'. Thus Jerusalem, Oholah, and Oholibah became female prophets, silently sign-acting their own message and bringing dignity and a place to abused women and children in the biblical tradition.

In the fifth and final chapter, we reached the climax of this exploration as we approached the most familiar text for prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language: *Hosea* 1–3. Here, in the unnecessarily tangled and extraordinarily complicated reception history of these three short chapters, we witnessed the full implications of assuming the default frames of 'the marriage metaphor' and 'cultic prostitution'. We saw details being added, removed, distorted, remodelled, even invented, in the attempt to bring these chapters into line with suppositions bound up with these default frames. The chapter began by tackling four pervasive assumptions: (1) the belief that the story-line in *Hosea* 1 and 3 must follow the same path as allegedly parallel stories in other prophetic books; (2) the conviction that we can find 'missing details' from chapters 1 and 3 within the poetic chapter 2; (3) the perception that chapters 1 and 3 speak of the prophet's personal life; and (4) the consensus that in these two narratives Hosea represents YHWH, while Gomer represents Israel. We then turned to encounter a fresh reading of *Hosea* 1–3, released from these four assumptions. We encountered *Hosea* 1 as a bare, sparse, and overwhelmingly negative narrative, containing four prophetic sign-acts, each signalling the withdrawal of YHWH from the land. We experienced *Hosea* 3 as equally pessimistic, where the prophet—left to

<sup>2</sup> Block (1997: 733).

interpret the nature of God's 'love' for the people in a fifth sign-act—presents it as a 'love' bent on destruction and punishment; and where—in a sixth sign-act—an unnamed woman is forced to act out the land's loss and utter isolation. We then turned to the two poetic reflections, 2A (2: 4–15) and 2B (2: 16–25). We saw 2A continue this profoundly pessimistic perspective, reflecting on what these sign-acts might mean for YHWH's relationship with Israel, and justifying YHWH's wrathful punishment of this female who is so perverse that she believes Baal to be her first husband. And we witnessed the daring efforts of 2B to overturn the overwhelming negativity of these passages, with its wistful portrayal of a new betrothal between YHWH and Israel, combined with a string of reversals, whose transformative impulse convinced many, particularly when read alongside the memorable portrayal of YHWH torn within himself in 11: 8–9. At the same time, we saw that such attempts only compounded the horror of this text for others, who perceived the emergence of a cycle of violence, where the violent husband becomes gentle following his outburst (until the female disobeys again). In the face of the disquieting *Hosea* 1–3, we witnessed the importance of paying attention to the female voice, however slight, amplifying Israel's voice in *Hosea* 2 to encounter a self-assured female, keen to disentangle herself from the vociferous claims of YHWH in order to gain her own independence, presenting herself as a business woman who has worked for her wages, even perhaps taking the initiative herself to leave YHWH. Once again, however, we remained aware of the troubling echoes of even this resistant reading with those who have left an abusive relationship only to be forced into 'prostitution' to survive. Perhaps more positively, we contemplated the possibility of a fourth female prophet—Gomer—as with Sherwood<sup>3</sup> we imagined this woman performing the silent 'dissident' action hinted at in *Hosea* 1: 8's reference to weaning, as Gomer breastfeeds No-Mercy, thus presenting us with an alternative sign-act of God's love for the people.

A theme that repeatedly emerged throughout these discussions was the inability of the prophetic texts to reverse their own negative sexual and marital metaphorical language. We saw that each prophetic book attempted such a reversal in its own way, whether through the 'turning' of language in word-plays (*Hosea* 4–14), the introduction of 'forgiveness' for the female (*Jeremiah* 2: 1–4: 4), the rebuilding of the Temple (*Ezekiel*), or the seduction of the female (*Hosea* 1–3). Yet we saw how in each of these cases such attempts created their own problems, rendering these texts highly unstable. Indeed, we saw how even the highly positive *Isaiah* 40–55 became troubling through such attempts at redemption, with its string of bewildering transformations

<sup>3</sup> Sherwood (1996: 146–7).

combining with its willingness to consider violence against the female (Babylon) to leave the reader unsure of what might happen next. We could say that this inability to redeem is where the heart of the problem lies for the prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language. At the same time, however, we witnessed that it is precisely here that the most powerful resource for tackling these texts is to be found. For, as we saw in our final chapter, as we left the book of *Hosea*, teetering uncertainly on the brink of meaning and meaninglessness, these books have inherent within themselves the ultimate response to their own dreadful language: their astonishing tendency to undermine themselves, unravelling their own assumptions and rhetoric, leaving themselves all but impotent.<sup>4</sup>

Sexual and marital metaphorical language is a compelling and disturbing subject lying within the Hebrew Bible's most celebrated prophetic books. It is vital that research in this area continues. My hope is that the ground covered in this monograph will stir up debate within Hebrew Bible scholarship. Some may be challenged to reread the prophetic passages involving sexual and marital metaphorical language: both those discussed within this monograph and the isolated references beyond its remit. Some may be provoked to reflect on the broader implications of the rereadings suggested within these pages for our conceptions of *Hosea*, *Jeremiah*, *Isaiah*, and *Ezekiel* as a whole. Others may find themselves motivated to reflect on how we might gather resources to respond to the presence of such troubling texts in the Hebrew Bible. Yet others may be encouraged to wonder which other metaphors and similes in the Hebrew Bible might also be being stifled by unnecessary default frames, such as the metaphorical language of 'covenant'. My hope is that many will be challenged to increase scholarship's awareness of the influence of underlying metaphor theories on our readings. Some may even be motivated to write their own metaphor theory particular to the unique challenges and contexts of the remarkable range and diversity of metaphors and similes proliferating within the Hebrew Bible.

Above all, however, my hope is that readers will have been sufficiently challenged to abandon the term 'the marriage metaphor' and release the stranglehold of assumptions about 'cultic prostitution' from prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language. Set free from discussions about 'cultic prostitution', we have witnessed the popular 'prostitution' focus take on an astonishing range of different guises in the prophetic text, repeatedly liaising with different literary frames to breed a striking variety of associations, including animal instinct, ruthless entrepreneurship, absurdity, nymphomania, cultic

<sup>4</sup> Shields (1998) highlights the way in which even the formidable *Ezekiel* 23 contains within itself the seeds of its own undermining.

defilement, lust, misunderstanding, the desire for control, and uncontrollability, to name just a few. Released from this suffocating constraint of 'the marriage metaphor', we have seen prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language rise vibrantly and forcefully to life. Some might argue that 'the marriage metaphor' has been endorsed by its long tradition within scholarship and has thus *become* a valid context within which prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language might be read. This may be true. Yet it is my hope that this monograph has demonstrated that those continuing to adopt this 'tradition' at least need to recognize its hypothetical character and defend the benefits of its use. For it seems to me that, like the 'salesman' playing the role of metonym for 'the American Dream' in Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, 'the marriage metaphor' has been shown to be founded on a romantic and unsustainable ideal, unable to survive reality.<sup>5</sup> To conclude, this monograph strongly encourages readers to take their leave of both 'the marriage metaphor' and 'cultic prostitution', paying attention instead to the distinctive literary contexts of prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language, where diverse sexual and marital metaphors and similes find startlingly innovative and vibrant meaning.

<sup>5</sup> Miller (1976).

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## *Index of Authors*

- Abma, R. 3 n., 4 n., 8 n., 9, 17, 18, 19 n.,  
21–2, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27–8, 29, 30, 41, 44,  
45 n., 46, 80 n., 81 n., 82 n., 84 n., 88 n.,  
94 n., 95 n., 97 n., 98 n., 100, 103 n.  
127 n., 128 n., 130, 131 n., 132, 134,  
135 n., 140, 141 n., 144 n., 162, 186,  
215–16, 218, 220 n., 221 n., 224 n., 225,  
226 n., 227, 228 n., 229 n., 231, 232 n.,  
236 n., 237 n., 238, 239 n., 242, 243,  
249 n., 251 n., 253 n., 254 n., 255–6 nn.,  
256, 257 n.
- Abrams, M. H. 85 n.
- Achtemeier, E. 142 n.
- Ackerman, S. 125 n., 134 n., 136 n., 138 n.,  
143 n., 153 n.
- Ackroyd, P. R. 118 n., 231 n.
- Adler, E. J. 23 n., 27 n.
- Albertz, R. 81 n.
- Allen, L. 156 n., 157 n., 159 n., 161 n.,  
162 n., 163 n., 168, 169 n., 172 n., 173 n.,  
175, 176, 177 n., 178 n., 183 n., 188–9,  
190 n., 191 n., 192 n., 196–7, 199 n.
- Alonso-Schökel, L. 236 n.
- Andersen, F. T. 50 n., 54 n., 55 n.,  
56 n., 60 n., 63 n., 64 n., 65 n., 66 n.,  
68 n., 72 n., 73 n., 74 n., 77, 79, 209,  
216 n., 220 n., 221 n., 222 n., 225 n.,  
226, 228 n., 229 n., 231 n., 234 n., 235 n.,  
237, 238 n., 239 n., 243 n., 245 n.,  
247 n., 250, 251 n., 252 n., 253 n.,  
255 n., 256 n., 260 n.
- Andreasen, N.-E. 138 n.
- Auld, A. G. 231 n.
- Bailey, K. E. 83 n.
- Bal, M. 112 n., 253 n.
- Baltzer, K. 123 n., 124 n., 126 n., 128 n.,  
130 n., 133–4, 136 n., 137, 138 n., 139 n.,  
141 n.
- Balz-Cochois, H. 266 n.
- Barr, J. 9, 23
- Barton, J. 39 n., 47–8, 55, 85 n., 91 n., 117 n.,  
124 n., 151 n., 178 n., 241 n., 263 n.
- Batten, L. W. 213 n.
- Bauer, A. 82 n., 88 n., 93 n., 95 n., 98, 100,  
102 n., 104, 105, 107 n., 108 n., 111 n.,  
112 n., 113, 115 n.
- Baumann, G. 17, 18–19, 21–2, 23, 24, 25, 26,  
29, 30, 41, 42 n., 46, 48 n., 49 n., 75 n.,  
80 n., 94 n., 100 n., 104 n., 109 n., 114,  
119, 120 n., 121 n., 128, 132 n., 134 n.,  
135 n., 136 n., 137 n., 139, 140 n., 141 n.,  
142, 143 n., 146 n., 150 n., 153 n., 154 n.,  
156 n., 158 n., 160 n., 161 n., 163 n.,  
170 n., 172 n., 176 n., 178–9, 187 n.,  
191 n., 192 n., 194, 195, 204 n., 212 n.,  
213 n., 215–16, 219 n., 220 n., 236 n.  
242 n., 249 n., 254 n., 256 n.
- Beardsley, M. C. 31, 37 n., 74 n.,  
242 n.
- Ben Zvi, E. 2 n., 7 n., 10 n., 16, 60 n., 216 n.,  
220 n., 232 n., 237 n., 251 n., 253 n.,  
254 n., 256 n.
- Berges, U. 118 n., 126 n., 136 n., 141 n.
- Bergman, J. 236 n.
- Beuken, W. A. M. 126 n., 127 n., 130, 132
- Biddle, M. E. 8 n., 9 n., 81 n., 107 n., 139 n.,  
142 n., 149 n., 154
- Biggs, C. R. (1996:) 159 n., 186, 202
- Binger, T. 53 n.
- Bird, P. A. 10 n., 15, 44 n., 63 n., 64, 68,  
73 n., 75 n., 121 n., 209 n., 216 n., 220 n.,  
221 n., 223, 243 n., 251 n., 267 n.
- Bisschops, R. 189 n.
- Bitter, S. 213 n.
- Black, M. 3, 4 n., 5, 12 n., 25, 31, 32, 33, 34,  
35–6, 37 n., 44, 45–6, 51, 52, 122 n.
- Blake, William 230
- Bleeker, L. 75 n.
- Blenkinsopp, J. 16 n., 118 n., 128 n., 134 n.,  
136 n., 140–1, 161 n., 163 n., 172 n.,  
186 n., 188, 189 n., 191, 202 n.
- Bloch, A. & C. 91 n.
- Bloch, R. 159 n., 203 n.
- Bloch, D. I. 16 n., 109 n., 157, 158 n.,  
160, 161 n., 163 n., 169 n., 170 n.,  
173 n., 177, 178 n., 181 n., 184,  
187, 189 n., 190, 191, 192, 195,  
196 n., 197 n., 198, 199 n., 201–2,  
203, 273
- Boadt, L. 6, 90–1, 168 n.
- Bons, E. 93 n., 213 n., 222 n.
- Booth, W. 35 n.
- Box, G. H. 134 n.

- Brenner, A. 1, 2, 15 n., 16 n., 102, 111, 112, 121 n., 138 n., 152, 153, 161 n., 172 n., 199 n., 212 n., 248, 265 n.
- Brettler, M. Z. 117 n., 131 n., 134, 136 n., 142 n.
- Bright, J. 82 n., 83 n., 84 n., 87, 88 n., 89 n., 91 n., 95 n., 107, 109 n.
- Broome, E. C. 162 n.
- Brownlee, W. H. 16 n., 157, 162, 163 n., 172 n., 173 n., 175 n., 179 n., 181, 186 n., 202 n.
- Bueggemann, W. 84 n., 85–6, 89 n., 94, 99 n., 105 n.
- Buber, M. 229 n., 235 n.
- Budde, K. 218 n., 241 n.
- Buss, M. J. 53 n., 67 n., 78 n., 228 n., 254
- Callaway, M. 126 n., 127 n.
- Camp, C. 73 n.
- Carley, K. W. 197 n.
- Carr, D. 118 n.
- Carroll, R. P. 2 n., 13 n., 16, 47 n., 80 n., 81 n., 82 n., 84, 87 n., 88, 91 n., 92 n., 95, 98 n., 103 n., 105 n., 106 n., 107 n., 109 n., 113 n., 115, 163 n., 174 n., 203 n.
- Cassuto, U. 247 n.
- Cathcart, Kevin J. 104 n.
- Chapman, C. R. 82 n., 97 n., 103, 118 n., 152–3, 154, 156 n., 158 n., 172 n., 187 n., 201 n.
- Childs, B. S. 117, 131 n., 133, 135 n., 141–2, 143, 211 n.
- Chisholm, R. B. 57
- Clements, R. E. 16 n., 90, 157 n., 202, 214, 219 n., 241 n.
- Clines, D. J. A. 123, 154 n., 250 n., 253, 254, 255 n., 260, 261, 271 n.
- Coggins, R. 118 n.
- Cohen, C. 128
- Cohen, G. 8 n., 23 n.
- Cohen, J. L. 11 n.
- Connolly, T. J. 216 n., 249 n., 264
- Cooke, G. A. (1936: 159 n., 169 n., 189 n.
- Cooper, G. 266–7 nn.
- Cornill, C. H. 107 n.
- Craigie, P. C. 91 n., 97, 101, 103, 105 n.
- Darr, K. P. 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23 n., 24, 25, 29–30, 40 n., 41, 42, 46, 118–19, 120, 122 n., 126, 129 n., 133 n., 141 n., 156 n., 160 n., 161, 162, 163 n., 174, 176 n., 189 n., 193 n., 203 n., 204 n.
- Davidovich, T. 161 n., 198 n.
- Davidson, A. B. 222 n.
- Davies, E. W. 14 n.
- Davies, G. I. 49, 54 n., 55 n., 56 n., 57 n., 59 n., 60 n., 65 n., 66 n., 69 n., 72 n., 73 n., 76 n., 210 n., 213, 218 n., 219 n., 220 n., 226 n., 229 n., 234 n., 235 n., 238, 239 n., 240 n., 241 n., 246 n., 247 n., 248 n., 257 n., 258 n., 260 n., 261 n., 265 n.
- Davies, P. R. 43
- Davis, E. F. 158, 159–60, 165–6, 167 n., 168, 192 n.
- Day, J. 2, 4, 11, 49 n., 53 n., 54 n., 148 n., 222 n., 229 n., 241 n., 246 n., 247 n., 251 n.
- Day, L. 16, 161 n., 170, 171 n., 173 n., 174 n., 175, 177 n., 178 n., 179, 183 n., 201 n., 202 n., 203 n.
- Day, P. L. 178–9 nn.
- Dearman, A. 216 n., 246 n.
- Delcor, M. 146 n., 147
- Dempsey, C. J. 14 n., 178 n., 205 n.
- DeRoche, M. 53 n., 67 n., 80 n., 82 n., 84, 85 n., 93 n., 97 n.
- Diamond, A. R. P. 84 n., 90 n., 94 n., 115 n.
- Dietrich, M. 54 n.
- Dijk-Hemmes, F. van 13 n., 161 n., 165 n., 193–4, 195–6, 197, 198, 248 n., 265 n.
- Dille, S. J. 15, 32 n., 42 n., 90 n., 97 n., 129 n., 131 n., 135 n., 136 n., 139 n., 141 n., 251 n.
- DiYanni, R. 51
- Döderlein, J. C. 117, 146
- Domeris, W. R. 87 n., 89 n., 108
- Doorly, W. J. 231 n.
- Drinkard, J. F. 91 n., 97, 101, 103, 105 n.
- Driver, G. R. 82 n., 128 n.
- Driver, S. R. 81 n., 82 n., 83 n., 90 n., 91 n.
- Duhm, B. 54 n., 69 n., 117, 146 n.
- Durand, J.-M. 138 n.
- Durlesser, J. A. 167 n.
- Ehrlich, A. B. 92 n.
- Eichrodt, W. 159 n., 161 n., 163, 169, 172 n., 186 n., 190, 196 n., 201, 203
- Eidevall, G. 31–2, 32 n., 49–50, 51, 52 n., 53 n., 54 n., 55 n., 56 n., 58 n., 59 n., 64 n., 76 n., 77–8, 79
- Eilberg-Schwartz, H. 172 n., 256 n.
- Eissfeldt, O. 148 n., 231 n.
- Emmerson, G. I. 60 n., 70 n., 142 n., 227 n., 254 n., 259 n.
- Erlandsson, S. 11 n.
- Eslinger, L. 168 n., 169, 171, 177, 190

- Exum, J. C. 2 n., 13, 15 n., 42 n., 91 n., 102, 111 n., 161 n., 163 n., 165 n., 179 n., 194 n., 208 n., 263–4, 265 n., 267 n.
- Eybers, I. H. 213 n.
- Eynde, S. van den 9 n., 80 n., 99 n., 105 n.
- Fensham, F. C. 11 n., 206, 219 n., 222 n., 226 n., 228 n.
- Ferber, M. 230
- Fisch, H. 50 n., 54 n., 55, 57 n., 58, 59, 77, 78, 79, 226 n., 261, 262–3
- Fishbane, M. 99 n., 100
- Fisher, E. J. 10 n., 73 n.
- Fitzgerald, A. 8 n., 22
- Fohrer, G. 54 n., 118 n., 231 n.
- Follis, E. R. 8 n.
- Fontaine, C. 10 n., 14 n., 231 n., 265 n., 266 n.
- Fox, M. V. 76 n., 91 n., 92
- Franzmann, M. 137 n., 138 n., 139 n.
- Frazer, J. G. 10
- Freedman, D. N. 50 n., 54 n., 55 n., 56 n., 60 n., 63 n., 64 n., 65 n., 66 n., 68 n., 72 n., 73 n., 74 n., 77, 79, 185 n., 209, 216 n., 220 n., 221 n., 222 n., 225 n., 226, 228 n., 229 n., 231 n., 234 n., 235 n., 237, 238 n., 239 n., 242 n., 243 n., 245 n., 247 n., 250, 251 n., 252 n., 253 n., 255 n., 256 n., 260 n.
- Friebel, K. G. 211 n., 215
- Frye, N. 166 n.
- Frymer-Kensky, T. 10 n., 15, 45 n., 53 n., 69 n., 73 n., 76 n., 145 n., 150 n., 172 n., 216, 220 n., 263 n.
- Fuerst, W. J. 129 n.
- Galambush, J. 9–10, 14 n., 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 29, 30, 32, 37, 41, 44–5, 46, 74, 80 n., 81 n., 82 n., 90, 92 n., 93, 94 n., 95 n., 97, 99 n., 105 n., 107 n., 109, 119, 128–9, 137, 142 n., 156 n., 158 n., 159 n., 161, 162, 163 n., 164 n., 165 n., 166–7, 168, 169 n., 170–1, 172 n., 173 n., 174, 181 n., 223, 246 n., 249 n.
- Gelston, A. 226 n.
- Giesebrecht, F. 107 n.
- Gillingham, S. 53 n.
- Ginsberg, H. L. 68 n.
- Glazov, G. Y. 205 n.
- Goldingay, J. 266–7 nn.
- Good, E. M. 57 n., 76 n.
- Goodfriend, E. A. 109 n., 122 n., 189 n., 243 n.
- Goodman, N. 33, 37
- Gordis, R. 207 n., 209 n., 212 n., 231 n.
- Gordon, C. H. 247
- Gordon, R. P. 129 n.
- Gottwald, N. K. 129 n.
- Gowan, D. E. 161 n., 202
- Graetz, N. 13 n., 14 n., 15 n., 248, 263
- Gravett, S. 103, 104 n., 112
- Greenberg, M. 156, 158 n., 160 n., 161–2, 164 n., 166 n., 168, 169, 170 n., 172 n., 173 n., 174, 175 n., 177 n., 178, 181 n., 183 n., 188, 189 n., 190 n., 191 n., 194 n., 196 n.
- Greenfield, J. C. 175 n.
- Grey, W. 37
- Gruber, M. I. 10 n., 117 n.
- Gunkel, H. 84 n.
- Gunn, D. M. 40, 255 n.
- Hackett, J. A. 10 n.
- Hadley, J. M. 53 n.
- Halder, A. O. 236 n.
- Halperin, 160 n., 161 n., 162 n., 163–4, 175 n., 187 n.
- Hals, R. M. 16 n.
- Hanson, P. 142 n., 143 n., 145, 146, 148 n.
- Harper, W. R. 231 n.
- Harris, R. 10 n.
- Harrison, R. K. 129 n.
- Harvey, J. 84 n.
- Hauck, F. 122 n.
- Heider, G. C. 148 n., 184 n.
- Hempel, J. 172 n.
- Henshaw, R. A. 10 n.
- Herbert, A. S. 120 n.
- Hertzberg, H. W. 129 n.
- Hesse, F. 84 n.
- Hiebert, P. S. 128 n.
- Hillers, D. R. 10 n., 73 n.
- Hobbs, T. R. 99 n.
- Holladay, W. L. 6 n., 80 n., 81 n., 82 n., 83 n., 84, 85 n., 86 n., 87 n., 88 n., 89, 90 n., 91, 93, 94, 95 n., 96 n., 97 n., 98 n., 99, 102 n., 103 n., 104, 105 n., 106 n., 107 n., 108 n., 109 n., 140 n., 207
- Hornsby, T. J. 243 n., 266 n.
- Huffmon, H. B. 84 n.
- Hugenberger, G. P. 172 n., 247 n.
- Hyatt, J. P. 106 n., 109 n.
- Ibn Ezra, Abraham 222 n., 232 n.
- Irwin, W. A. 187 n.
- Iser, W. 39, 47 n., 164 n.

- Janzen, J. G. 82 n.  
 Jeppesen, K. 126 n., 135 n., 137 n.  
 Johnson, M. 37 n.  
 Jones, D. R. 82 n., 83 n., 84, 89 n., 90 n., 91, 93 n., 94 n., 95 n., 97, 98 n., 103 n., 107 n.  
 Joüon, P. 220 n.  
 Joyce, P. 177, 193, 201 n.
- Kaiser, O. 118 n., 120 n.  
 Kamionkowski, S. T. 10 n., 14 n., 23 n., 44 n., 47 n., 156 n., 170 n., 171, 172 n., 174, 175 n., 179 n., 183, 188 n., 192, 194 n., 195 n., 204 n., 207, 216 n.  
 Kaufman, S. A. 107  
 Keefe, A. 10 n., 16, 53 n., 220 n., 224 n., 226 n., 251 n.  
 Keel, O. 53 n., 246 n.  
 Kelley, P. H. 91 n., 97, 101, 103, 105 n.  
 Kessler, M. 41 n.  
 Kissane, E. J. 118 n., 121, 124 n., 128, 129, 130, 135 n., 136 n., 138 n., 141 n., 143 n., 144, 147 n., 148 n., 150 n.  
 Kittay, E. F. 31, 32 n., 33–4, 51, 52, 74 n., 242 n.  
 Klein, R. W. 159 n., 160 n., 161, 163  
 Kletter, R. 53 n.  
 Klostermann, A. 162 n.  
 Knight, G. A. F. 127 n., 128 n., 132, 134, 140  
 Köhler, L. 132 n.  
 Korpel, M. C. A. 8 n., 69 n., 126 n., 172 n.  
 Kruger, P. A. 50, 52, 98 n., 172 n., 207 n., 209 n., 248 n., 250 n.  
 Kuntz, J. K. 125 n.
- Labuschagne, C. J. 85 n., 125 n.  
 Lakoff, G. 37 n.  
 Landy, F. 52 n., 55 n., 56 n., 59 n., 60–1, 66 n., 73 n., 76 n., 78, 79, 216 n., 218, 223, 224 n., 227 n., 228 n., 229 n., 233 n., 234 n., 237 n., 244 n., 251 n., 253 n., 255 n., 256 n., 257 n., 259 n., 260 n., 264 n., 265 n., 268  
 Leeuwen, C. van 60 n.  
 Leick, G. 94 n.  
 Leith, M. J. W. 220 n., 253 n., 254 n.  
 Lemaire, A. 54 n.  
 Leslie, E. A. 81 n., 82 n., 88 n., 90, 91, 92 n., 97 n., 103  
 Leopold, H. C. 118 n., 122 n., 128 n., 134 n., 141 n., 143 n., 144 n., 145 n., 146 n., 151  
 Lewy, J. 8 n.  
 Liebreich, L. J. 117 n.  
 Limburg, J. 84 n., 208 n., 212, 219 n., 231 n.  
 Linafelt, T. 135 n.
- Lipiński, E. 54 n.  
 Lippl, J. 250 n.  
 Loades, A. 165 n.  
 Lohfink, N. 236 n.  
 Long, B. O. 86 n., 99 n., 101 n.  
 Loretz, O. 54 n.  
 Lundbom, J. R. 82 n., 83 n., 84 n., 85, 86 n., 87 n., 88 n., 89 n., 90 n., 91 n., 96–7, 98 n., 99, 100, 102 n., 103, 105 n., 107 n., 109 n.
- McComiskey, T. E. 225 n.  
 McConville, J. G. 81 n.  
 McCurdy, J. F. 206  
 McFague, S. 4 n., 23 n.  
 Macintosh, A. A. 11, 16, 50 n., 51 n., 54 n., 56 n., 58 n., 59 n., 64, 66, 67 n., 68 n., 69 n., 72 n., 73 n., 75 n., 209 n., 213 n., 219 n., 220 n., 222 n., 224 n., 226 n., 228 n., 229 n., 230 n., 231 n., 233 n., 235 n., 238 n., 239 n., 240, 241, 242 n., 246 n., 249 n., 250 n., 251 n., 252 n., 256 n., 257 n., 258, 261 n.  
 McKane, W. 46 n., 80, 82 n., 83, 88, 89, 91–2, 93, 95 n., 96, 101, 103, 105 n., 107, 109  
 McKeating, H. 8, 160 n., 165 n., 167 n., 209 n., 231 n., 247 n.  
 McKenzie, J. L. 134, 135 n., 136 n., 141 n., 143, 144, 145, 146, 149, 150, 261 n.  
 Magdalene, F. R. 14 n.  
 Magonet, J. 266 n.  
 Maier, C. 14 n.  
 Maimonides 222 n.  
 Malul, M. 171 n.  
 Mankowski, P. V. 104 n.  
 Margalit, B. 8 n.  
 Martin J. D. 99 n.  
 May, H. G. 163 n., 186  
 Mays, J. L. 6 n., 8 n., 10, 11, 16 n., 54 n., 56 n., 58 n., 59 n., 60 n., 62, 65 n., 66 n., 67 n., 69 n., 72 n., 73 n., 206, 210 n., 217, 219 n., 220 n., 221 n., 224 n., 226 n., 227 n., 228 n., 229 n., 230 n., 231 n., 233 n., 234 n., 235 n., 236 n., 240 n., 241 n., 246 n., 251 n., 254, 261, 265 n.
- Miles, J. C. 82 n., 128 n.  
 Miller, A. 276 n.  
 Mitchell, M. W. 222 n., 228 n., 268 n.  
 Moran, W. L. 236 n.  
 Morris, G. 49 n., 54 n., 55, 57, 58 n., 59, 60, 61, 77, 124 n., 178 n., 259 n., 261 n., 268  
 Muilenburg, J. 134 n., 145, 146, 147, 148

- Muraoka, T. 220 n.  
 Murphy, R. E. 92 n.  
 Neher, A. 27 n.  
 Newsom, C. A. 129 n., 167–8  
 North, C. R. 122 n., 123 n., 124 n., 126 n.,  
 128 n., 129 n., 132, 134, 136, 141 n.  
 Nyberg, H. S. 227 n.  
 O'Connor, K. M. 13 n., 15 n., 84 n., 89–90,  
 91 n., 92 n., 94 n., 97 n., 102, 111 n.,  
 115 n., 126 n., 129 n., 140 n., 152, 154,  
 155 n.  
 O'Connor, M. 53 n.  
 Odell, M. S. 203 n.  
 Oden, R. A. 10 n., 73 n.  
 Olyan, S. M. 53 n., 54 n., 69 n.  
 Ortlund, R. C. 98 n., 146 n., 162, 176 n.,  
 178 n., 179 n., 194 n., 198 n., 199 n., 207 n.,  
 213 n., 216 n., 231 n., 235 n., 255 n., 256 n.  
 Ostriker, A. 265 n.  
 Oswalt, J. N. 120 n., 121–2, 123 n., 124 n.,  
 128 n., 132–3, 134 n., 135 n., 136 n.,  
 138 n., 143 n., 144 n., 145–6, 147, 148,  
 150, 151, 153 n., 211 n.  
 Parpola, S. 104 n.  
 Parunak, H. V. 168 n.  
 Peake, A. S. 92 n.  
 Pfeiffer, R. H. 222 n.  
 Phillips, A. 179 n., 247 n.  
 Pope, M. H. 146 n., 172 n., 174 n., 178 n.  
 Pressler, C. 112 n.  
 Rad, G. von 141 n., 213, 231 n., 236 n.  
 Renger, J. 10 n.  
 Reynolds, C. B. 212 n.  
 Richards, I. A. 4 n., 14, 32, 35 n.  
 Ricoeur, P. 5 n., 6–7, 11 n., 12, 25, 31, 32, 34,  
 35, 37 n., 51, 52, 74 n., 163 n.  
 Ringgren, H. 8 n.  
 Robinson, H. W. 126 n., 213 n., 220 n.  
 Rogerson, J. W. 126 n.  
 Rooke, D. W. 93 n.  
 Rosenberg, J. 164 n.  
 Rowley, H. H. 206, 208, 209, 212, 213 n.,  
 216, 222 n., 224 n., 231, 232 n., 241 n.,  
 262, 264  
 Roy, A. 33 n.  
 Rudolph, W. 57 n., 66 n., 73 n., 220 n.,  
 222 n., 231 n., 235 n., 240 n., 247 n., 250  
 Runions, E. 170 n., 175–6 nn.  
 Rushdie, S. 33 n., 51 n.  
 Sanderson, J. E. 14 n.  
 Satlow, M. 69 n., 161 n., 209 n.  
 Sawyer, J. F. A. 126 n., 133, 149  
 Schmidt, H. 84 n., 213 n., 220 n.  
 Schmitt, J. J. 8 n., 106 n., 118 n., 136 n.,  
 151 n., 156 n., 241 n., 246 n., 247 n.  
 Schökel, L. A. 124 n.  
 Schöpflin, K. 156 n., 157 n., 207 n.  
 Schreiner, J. 213 n.  
 Schulte, H. 121 n.  
 Schulz, S. 122 n.  
 Schulz-Rauch, M. 93 n.  
 Scott, R. B. Y. 120 n.  
 Scullion, J. J. 128, 129, 130, 132, 137 n., 143 n.  
 Seifert, E. 14 n., 139 n., 156 n., 172 n., 198 n.  
 Seitz, C. 117 n.  
 Setel, T. D. 5 n., 20, 161 n., 193 n.  
 Sherwood, Y. 13 n., 14 n., 29 n., 38, 39, 47,  
 215 n., 220 n., 221 n., 222 n., 224 n.,  
 225 n., 227 n., 229 n., 235 n., 238 n.,  
 242 n., 251 n., 252 n., 253 n., 257 n.,  
 263 n., 264, 265 n., 266, 267–8, 274  
 Shields, M. E. 14 n., 35 n., 81 n., 85 n., 88,  
 89 n., 91 n., 92 n., 93, 96 n., 98, 99 n., 100,  
 105 n., 107 n., 108 n., 109 n., 111, 114,  
 115 n., 161 n., 162 n., 163 n., 167 n.,  
 171 n., 172 n., 173 n., 161 n., 162 n.,  
 163 n., 167 n., 171 n., 172 n., 173 n.,  
 176 n., 176 n., 179, 183, 184 n., 187 n.,  
 188, 192 n., 193 n., 196, 198 n., 179, 183,  
 184 n., 187 n., 188, 192 n., 193 n., 196,  
 198 n., 203 n., 204 n., 275 n.  
 Siebert-Hommies, J. 235 n., 261 n.  
 Simundson, D. J. 208 n., 209 n., 212 n.,  
 228 n., 255 n., 267 n.  
 Skinner, J. 211 n.  
 Slotki, I. W. 151  
 Smelik, K. A. D. 148 n.  
 Smend, R. 175 n.  
 Smith, George Adam 261 n.  
 Smith, M. 53 n.  
 Smith-Christopher, D. L. 161 n.  
 Sommer, B. D. 127 n., 136 n.  
 Soskice, J. 3 n., 4 n., 5 n., 31, 32 n., 33 n.,  
 44 n., 51–2, 54, 62, 167 n., 242 n.  
 Stacey, W. D. 211 n., 214, 226 n., 231 n.  
 Stavrakopoulou 144 n., 145, 146 n., 147 n.,  
 148 n., 184 n.  
 Steck, O. H. 126 n., 130 n.  
 Stienstra, N. 2, 4, 7, 16, 43–4, 45 n., 90, 95,  
 97 n., 111, 127, 129–30, 133, 134, 140, 142,  
 150–1, 152, 207, 209 n., 216 n., 239 n.,  
 246 n., 247 n., 252 n., 256 n.

- Stuart, D. 66 n., 72 n., 74, 207 n., 213 n.,  
222 n., 226 n., 228 n., 229 n., 236 n.,  
247 n., 249 n., 250 n., 255 n., 261 n.
- Swanepoel, M. G. 165 n., 176, 178
- Sweeney, M. 118 n.
- Tarlin, J. W. 161 n., 178, 205 n.
- Taylor, J. B. 161 n., 173 n., 202
- Taylor, J. E. 53 n., 144 n.
- Thiel, W. 106 n.
- Thistlethwaite, S. B. 112 n.
- Thompson, J. A. 95 n., 236 n., 251 n.
- Törnkvist, R. 13 n., 14 n., 15 n., 16 n., 20 n.,  
161 n., 163, 220 n., 224 n., 227 n., 239 n.,  
251 n., 252 n., 255 n., 265 n.
- Torrey, C. C. 131 n., 141 n.
- Toy, C. H. 210 n., 213, 222 n., 231 n.,  
240 n., 253 n.
- Trible, P. 257 n.
- Turbayne, C. M. 31 n., 74 n.
- Turner, M. D. 93 n., 153, 154
- Tushingam, A. D. 241 n.
- Untermann, J. 80 n., 91
- Vaughan, P. H. 173 n.
- Vogels, W. 209 n., 234 n.
- Volz, P. 134 n.
- Vriezen, T. C. 250
- Wacker, M.-T. 14 n., 54 n., 132 n., 215 n.,  
220 n., 247 n., 249 n., 261 n.
- Wallis, G. 236 n.
- Ward, J. M. 213 n., 238, 239 n., 245 n.
- Washington, H. C. 112, 178 n., 194 n.
- Waterman, L. 209, 220 n., 222 n.
- Watts, J. D. W. 118 n., 123 n., 127 n., 128 n.,  
136 n., 141 n., 143, 144 n., 147–8, 149,  
150, 151, 211 n.
- Weeks, S. D. E. 218 n., 230 n., 234 n., 237 n.
- Weems, R. 16, 17, 18, 19 n., 21, 22, 24, 25, 26,  
28–9, 30, 41, 46, 80 n., 85 n., 88 n., 95 n.,  
102 n., 103 n., 110–11, 178 n., 209 n., 234 n.
- Weider, A. 93 n.
- Weinfeld, M. 23 n., 54 n., 236 n.
- Weippert, H. 106 n.
- Weiser, A. 142 n., 231 n.
- Wellhausen, J. 54 n.
- Westbrook, R. 99 n.
- Westenholz, J. G. 10 n.
- Westermann, C. 84 n., 85 n., 111 n., 117 n.,  
123 n., 124 n., 128, 129, 130, 131 n.,  
137 n., 138 n., 140, 144, 146, 147, 149
- Wevers, J. W. 157 n., 159 n., 163 n., 172 n.,  
189 n., 196, 197 n.
- White, J. B. 76 n.
- Whitt, W. D. 247 n.
- Whybray, R. N. 92 n., 117 n., 123 n.,  
125 n., 126 n., 131 n., 132 n., 134 n.,  
135 n., 136 n., 138, 139 n., 141, 142 n.,  
147, 149
- Wildberger, H. 118 n., 120 n.,  
121
- Willey, P. T. 126 n., 129 n., 135 n.,  
139 n., 141 n.
- Williamson, H. G. M. 118 n., 120 n., 259
- Willoughby, B. E. 185 n., 242 n.
- Wilshire, L. E. 126 n.
- Winton Thomas, D. 54 n., 96 n.
- Wolff, H. W. 8 n., 49 n., 50 n., 51, 53 n.,  
54 n., 58 n., 59 n., 63 n., 64 n., 65,  
66 n., 67, 68 n., 69 n., 70 n., 72 n.,  
73 n., 74 n., 75 n., 76 n., 77, 79, 207,  
210 n., 213, 216 n., 219 n., 220 n.,  
221 n., 222 n., 224 n., 225–6, 227 n.,  
228 n., 229 n., 231 n., 233 n., 234 n.,  
235 n., 236 n., 238, 239 n., 240 n.,  
241 n., 247, 248 n., 250, 251, 253, 255,  
256 n., 257 n., 258 n., 259 n., 260 n.,  
261, 262, 263
- Woude, van der A. 126 n., 135 n., 136 n.,  
152 n.
- Würthwein, E. 84 n.
- Yamauchi, E. 10 n.
- Yee, G. A. 9 n., 13 n., 15 n., 16 n., 42 n.,  
66 n., 76, 160 n., 161 n., 178 n., 179 n.,  
189, 192 n., 193 n., 194 n., 199, 201 n.,  
209, 215, 218 n., 220 n., 248, 249 n.,  
251 n., 263
- Young, E. J. 122 n., 128 n., 135 n., 138, 141 n.
- Zimmerli, W. 11 n., 109 n., 110 n., 157 n.,  
159 n., 160 n., 161 n., 163 n., 164 n.,  
166 n., 169 n., 172 n., 174 n., 175, 178 n.,  
179, 189 n., 191 n., 194 n., 196 n., 197 n.,  
199 n., 200 n., 211
- Zipor. M. A. 211 n.

# *Index of Biblical References*

## OLD TESTAMENT

### *Genesis*

4: 1 69 n.  
4: 10 205 n.  
4: 17 69 n.  
4: 25 69 n.  
6: 4 70 n., 124 n.  
14: 20 260 n.  
16: 2 70 n., 124 n.  
19: 2 118  
19: 8 69 n.  
24: 16 69 n.  
25: 6 161 n.  
27: 41 83 n.  
28: 11 118  
30: 38–39 144  
31: 10–12 70 n.  
36: 12 161 n.  
38: 13–19 219 n.  
38: 24 249 n.  
38: 26 69 n.  
42: 6 175 n.  
50: 21 253 n.

### *Exodus* 123 n.

1: 1–14 193 n.  
6: 7 228  
8: 22 187  
16: 21 144 n.  
24: 14 238  
32: 6 10  
34: 16 64, 65 n.

### *Leviticus* 119

12: 4 238  
18 68, 187  
18: 17 197 n.  
18: 21 148 n., 187 n.  
19: 29 64  
20: 2–5 148 n.  
20: 6 108  
20: 13 187  
20: 14 219 n.  
20: 17 219 n.  
21: 3 239, 240 n.

21: 9 249 n.  
21: 14 129  
21: 56 219 n.  
22: 13 129 n.

### *Numbers*

5: 13 197  
5: 14 197  
5: 27 197  
5: 28 197  
14: 43 223  
21: 28 151  
30: 10 129 n.  
31: 17 69 n.  
31: 18 69 n.  
31: 35 69 n.  
32: 15 223

### *Deuteronomy* 119

5: 12 67  
7: 4 223  
7: 6–8 231 n.  
7: 25–6 187  
11: 1 236  
13–17 236  
17: 1–2 187  
18: 6 102 n.  
22: 13 70 n., 124 n.  
23: 29 121 n.  
24: 1 94  
24: 1–4 99, 108 n.  
24: 2 239  
24: 4 251 n.  
28: 30 104  
29: 9 67  
29: 12 228  
30: 16–20 236  
31: 16 108

### *Joshua* 119

7: 24–6 255 n.  
22: 16 223  
22: 18 223  
22: 23 223

*Joshua (cont.)*  
 22: 29 223  
 24: 11 151

*Judges* 119  
 2: 11 251 n.  
 2: 17 108  
 3: 3 251 n.  
 8: 2 85 n., 140 n.  
 8: 27 108 n.  
 8: 33 108 n., 251 n.  
 9: 4 251 n.  
 10: 10 251 n.  
 11: 12 85 n., 140 n.  
 11: 25 85 n.  
 11: 39 69 n.  
 12: 5 114 n.  
 15: 2 239  
 16: 9 238  
 19: 13 118  
 19: 15 118  
 19: 25 69 n.

*Ruth*  
 1: 13 239  
 2: 13 253 n.

*1 Samuel*  
 1: 19 69 n.  
 23: 20 102 n.  
 24: 2 223

*2 Samuel*  
 2: 22 223  
 2: 26 223  
 2: 30 223  
 4 68 n.  
 6: 19 233  
 11: 15 223  
 12 215 n.  
 12: 24 70 n., 124 n.  
 13: 1 68 n.  
 15 68 n.  
 16: 21 70 n., 124 n.  
 19: 8 253 n.  
 20: 3 70 n., 124 n., 129

*1 Kings*  
 1: 2 144 n.  
 1: 4 69 n.  
 11: 11 67  
 11: 18 251 n.  
 11: 29–31 211, 214  
 14: 23 97

16: 31–2 251 n.  
 18: 18 251 n.  
 18: 18 f 251 n.  
 19: 11–13 204 n.  
 22: 20–5 205 n.

*2 Kings*  
 9: 1–10 225  
 9: 7 225  
 9–10 225  
 16: 4 145  
 17: 10 97  
 17: 15 86 n.  
 23: 10 148 n.

*1 Chronicles*  
 5: 25 108 n.  
 16: 3 233  
 17: 7 223

*2 Chronicles*  
 16: 14 146  
 17: 3 251 n.  
 21: 11 64, 65 n., 108 n.  
 21: 13 64, 65 n., 108 n.  
 24: 7 251 n.  
 28: 2 251 n.

*Nehemiah*  
 2: 6 104 n.

*Esther*  
 2: 17 68 n.

*Job*  
 24: 7 118  
 31: 20 144 n.

*Psalms*  
 23: 1 50 n.  
 45: 10 104 n.  
 55: 3 83 n.  
 55: 14 92  
 80: 1 50 n.  
 106: 37–8 184  
 147: 2 150

*Proverbs*  
 2: 17 92, 93  
 4: 9 260 n.  
 5: 18 133  
 7 219 n.  
 17: 9 92  
 24: 9 197 n.

*Ecclesiastes*

4: 11 144 n.

*Song of Songs* 264–5 nn.

1: 3 68 n.

1: 7 102 n.

1: 13 118

2: 3 67

2: 5 233

2: 7 70 n.

2: 9 91 n.

3: 1–4 68 n., 102 n.

3: 1–5 91 n.

3: 5 70 n.

3: 9 76 n.

4 68 n.

4: 8 76 n.

4: 11 76

4: 15 76 n.

5: 2–8 91 n.

5: 7 205 n.

5: 8 70 n.

5: 9 70 n.

5: 15 76 n.

6: 1 91 n.

6: 11 76

6: 12 102 n.

7 68 n.

7: 5 76 n.

7: 13 76

8: 4 70 n.

14: 2–9 76 n.

23: 3 87 n.

24: 1 60 n.

26: 13 151

29: 10 69 n.

34–66 131 n.

40–55 46, 117, 122–42, 149, 151, 152,  
153, 154, 156, 207, 259, 260 n.,  
271, 272

40–66 17, 148, 152

40: 2 153 n., 253 n.

40: 26–8 123 n.

40: 27–9 124

41: 14–16 124 n.

42: 5 123 n.

42: 14 136 n.

42: 15–16 123 n.

42: 18 123

43: 2 123

43: 14–23 135 n.

43: 16–21 123 n.

44: 10 125 n.

44: 15–16 144 n.

45: 7–8 123 n.

45: 9–11 125 n.

45: 10 136 n.

47 139 n.

47: 1–2 137

47: 1–7 139 n.

47: 1–15 139, 153, 154, 272

47: 2–3 207 n.

47: 3 137

47: 7 137

47: 8–9 129

47: 9 138, 139

47: 14 144 n.

48: 4 98 n.

48: 21 123

49: 7 124

49: 7–26 125 n.

49: 9–12 123 n.

49: 14 131 n.

49: 14–23 135, 126 n.

49: 14–26 135 n., 139

49: 15 136–7

49: 17 136 n.

49: 18 136

49: 19 135

49: 20 150

49: 21 153

49: 25 125 n.

49: 51–52 139 n.

50: 1 100 n., 127, 134, 139, 141, 208

50: 1–2 140

50: 1–3 17, 131 n.

*Isaiah*

1 120 n.

1: 21 15 n., 29, 118, 119–20, 121,  
152, 153

1: 21–6 120 n.

1: 26 120 n.

1–39 46, 117–22, 142, 241 n.,  
259, 271

3: 24 118 n.

3: 26 118 n.

7: 14–17 211

7: 15 211

8: 1–4 211–12

11–12 123 n.

13: 16 104

14: 1 150

16: 7 233

19: 14 69 n.

20 214

20: 2–6 210

23: 15–18 121, 122, 153, 152, 272

*Isaiah (cont.)*

50: 2 140  
 50: 2-3 123 n., 141  
 50: 4-5 152  
 51: 3 139 n.  
 51: 9 153 n.  
 51: 9-10 123 n.  
 51: 14 96 n.  
 51: 17 124 n.  
 52: 1-2 124, 139 n.  
 52: 9 124 n.  
 54 128, 139 n.  
 54: 1 127, 139 n., 153  
 54: 1-6 126 n., 127, 131, 133, 134, 135,  
     136, 139  
 54: 1-8 131 n.  
 54: 1-10 17, 125 n.  
 54: 3 150  
 54: 4 128, 129, 130, 134, 138  
 54: 5 126, 127, 131, 132,  
     133, 139 n.  
 54: 5-8 152  
 54: 6 133  
 54: 7-8 29, 153 n.  
 54: 11-12 135  
 54: 13 136 n.  
 56: 4-6 67  
 56-66 117, 120 n., 142-51, 272  
 57: 1-6 185 n.  
 57: 2 146  
 57: 3 143, 149, 153 n.  
 57: 3-4 143  
 57: 3-10 142-3, 144, 145, 146, 148, 149,  
     153, 154, 185, 243, 272  
 57: 4 143  
 57: 5 144, 145  
 57: 6 145  
 57: 6-8 146  
 57: 7 145  
 57: 7-8 145  
 57: 8 146, 147, 146, 148  
 57: 9 48  
 57: 10 147  
 57: 18 260 n.  
 60: 21 150  
 62: 1-5 142, 149  
 62: 1-12 125 n.  
 62: 4 149, 150  
 62: 5 136 n., 150, 151, 154  
 63: 1 96 n.  
 65: 17 154  
 66: 10-13 154  
 66: 13 136 n.  
 66: 22 154

*Jeremiah*

2-3 17, 29, 90 n.  
 2-5 15 n.  
 2: 1-3 97 n.  
 2: 1-3: 5 15 n.  
 2: 1-4: 4 48, 80-116, 117, 120, 122, 125,  
     127, 140, 141, 154, 156, 188,  
     203, 207, 223, 247 n., 265-6,  
     269, 270-1  
 2: 2 8, 81, 82 n., 95-6, 208  
 2: 2-3 6  
 2: 2-25 82 n.  
 2: 3 85 n.  
 2: 5 81, 86, 94  
 2: 5-9 84  
 2: 6 81, 83  
 2: 7 83  
 2: 8 81  
 2: 9 84  
 2: 11 88, 115  
 2: 12 87  
 2: 13 85 n., 86, 87, 94  
 2: 14 81 n., 85, 86  
 2: 17 82, 89  
 2: 18 82, 86, 87, 105  
 2: 19 85 n.  
 2: 20 96-8, 105 n., 145, 223, 271  
 2: 21 81  
 2: 22 81  
 2: 23 81, 82, 114, 144 n.  
 2: 23-24 70 n., 94 n., 102  
 2: 23-25 109 n., 243  
 2: 24 102, 188  
 2: 25 82, 114  
 2: 26 81  
 2: 27 85 n., 107  
 2: 28 81 n., 85 n.  
 2: 29 84, 114 n.  
 2: 31 83, 84, 85, 115  
 2: 32 90, 91  
 2: 33 82  
 2: 36 82  
 2: 36-7 105  
 3: 1 82 n., 91, 94, 99-100, 101, 207, 239  
 3: 1-4: 4 93 n., 115 n., 167 n.  
 3: 1-5 100 n., 108 n., 101  
 3: 1-13 109 n., 243  
 3: 2 81, 85 n., 83, 104 n., 105, 113, 238  
 3: 2-3 98  
 3: 3 98, 114  
 3: 4 93, 94  
 3: 4-5 114  
 3: 5 85  
 3: 6 145

- 3: 6–10 45 n., 195 n.  
 3: 6–11 81 n., 82 n., 106–10, 144, 160,  
 190 n., 271  
 3: 8 107, 108, 109, 208  
 3: 8–9 243  
 3: 9 107, 108, 144 n.  
 3: 12 82 n.  
 3: 12–13 99, 100  
 3: 13 82, 115 n., 145  
 3: 15 85 n.  
 3: 15–18 106 n.  
 3: 20 91, 92  
 3: 21 82  
 3: 24–5 106 n.  
 3: 25 111  
 3: 33 105  
 4: 1–4 111  
 4: 5–6: 30 94 n.  
 4: 30 195 n.  
 5: 7 80 n., 109 n.  
 5: 8 102 n.  
 5: 31 147 n.  
 7: 9 80 n., 109 n.  
 7: 18 233  
 9: 1 80 n.  
 9: 2 109 n.  
 12: 5 99 n.  
 13: 1–7 214  
 13: 20–7 80 n.  
 16: 11 67  
 19: 7 60 n.  
 23: 10 80 n., 109 n.  
 23: 11 109  
 23: 14 80 n., 109 n.  
 23: 19 109  
 24: 7 228  
 25: 29 99 n.  
 25: 30 56 n.  
 27 214  
 29: 23 80 n., 109 n.  
 30: 22 228  
 31: 3–5 111  
 31: 16–34 28  
 31: 31–4 80 n.  
 31: 33 228  
 32: 6–15 214  
 32: 8 214  
 32: 35 148 n.  
 36: 1–32 215  
 43: 8–13 215  
 44: 19 233  
 48: 12 96 n.  
 49: 12 99 n.  
 51: 5 129
- Lamentations* 139 n.  
 1 17  
 1: 1 129  
 1: 11 135 n.  
 1: 16 135 n.
- Ezekiel*  
 3: 7–9 98 n.  
 3: 17 205 n.  
 3: 26 204 n.  
 4: 12–17 211  
 4: 1–3 210  
 4: 4–8 210, 215  
 4: 6–8 204 n.  
 5: 1 215  
 5: 1–17 214  
 6: 13 97  
 12: 1–16 215  
 15–34 170 n.  
 16 15 n., 16 n., 17, 21, 25, 28, 40–1, 42,  
 48, 110, 127, 156–205, 207, 208  
 16: 1–14 170, 171 n.  
 16: 2 164, 190  
 16: 3–5 171  
 16: 3–43 (16A) 169, 170–96, 199, 200–1,  
 223, 243, 249, 273  
 16: 4 171, 172  
 16: 5 171  
 16: 6 181, 187, 190  
 16: 6–8 182  
 16: 7 181  
 16: 8 156, 158, 171, 181, 182, 239, 240 n.  
 16: 9 171, 173, 181, 187, 190  
 16: 9–14 171, 173  
 16: 10 171, 173  
 16: 11–13 171, 173  
 16: 13 171, 173  
 16: 15 173, 180, 182, 188 n., 220 n.,  
 248 n.  
 16: 15–29 173, 180  
 16: 15–34 174  
 16: 15–43 170  
 16: 16 178, 180, 182  
 16: 17 173, 178, 180, 182  
 16: 18 178  
 16: 18–19 173, 180, 183  
 16: 20 156, 173, 178, 180, 185  
 16: 20–1 172 n., 173, 177 n., 180, 183,  
 207  
 16: 20–2 172 n.  
 16: 22 173, 180, 182, 187, 188, 190  
 16: 23 109 n., 243  
 16: 24 173, 178, 180  
 16: 25 173, 180, 181, 182

*Ezekiel (cont.)*

16: 26 173, 180, 181, 182  
 16: 26–9 178, 186  
 16: 28 173, 180, 183  
 16: 29 173, 180, 182, 183  
 16: 30 175 n., 182  
 16: 30–1 181  
 16: 30–4 177  
 16: 31 182  
 16: 31–3 186  
 16: 31–4 188  
 16: 32 184, 186, 190  
 16: 33 174, 220 n., 248 n.  
 16: 34 176, 220 n., 248 n.  
 16: 35 177  
 16: 35–43 180, 185 n.  
 16: 36 181, 187, 190  
 16: 37 178, 180  
 16: 37–8 181  
 16: 38 178, 180, 181, 184, 187, 190  
 16: 39 178, 179, 180, 181  
 16: 40 180, 249  
 16: 41 180  
 16: 42 179  
 16: 43 188  
 16: 43a 182  
 16: 43b 170 n.  
 16: 43b–58 157  
 16: 44–58 169, 170  
 16: 51–2 109 n.  
 16: 59–63 169, 170  
 16: 63 203, 204  
 20 160, 204 n.  
 20: 28 97  
 21: 17 215  
 21: 19 215  
 21: 22 215  
 22 48  
 22: 3 205 n.  
 23 15 n., 17, 21, 28, 40–1, 42, 45 n., 48,  
 110, 156–205, 207, 208, 217 n.  
 23: 1–3 207  
 23: 1–35 (23A) 42 n., 189, 200–1, 208,  
 223, 249, 273  
 23: 1–49 109  
 23: 2–4 191  
 23: 3 158, 191, 192, 194  
 23: 4 109 n., 156, 158, 159, 192, 239  
 23: 5 223  
 23: 5–6 191, 198  
 23: 5–10 191  
 23: 7 187, 196, 198, 220 n., 248 n.  
 23: 8 191, 192, 196, 220 n., 248 n.

23: 9 191  
 23: 10 163, 192  
 23: 11 191, 196, 220 n., 248 n.  
 23: 11–35 191  
 23: 12 191  
 23: 13 187, 191, 196  
 23: 14 196, 220 n., 248 n.  
 23: 14–16 191  
 23: 15 198  
 23: 17 196, 197  
 23: 18 192, 196, 198, 220 n., 248 n.  
 23: 19 196, 220 n., 248 n.  
 23: 19–21 195, 191  
 23: 20 70 n., 102 n., 161, 195  
 23: 21 192  
 23: 22 198  
 23: 22–5 191  
 23: 22–7 192  
 23: 25 191, 192, 249  
 23: 25–7 179 n.  
 23: 26 192  
 23: 27 197  
 23: 28 198  
 23: 29 192, 196, 197, 220 n., 248 n.  
 23: 30 187, 196  
 23: 31–3 191  
 23: 31–4 192  
 23: 34 192  
 23: 35 196, 197, 220 n., 248 n.  
 23: 36–45 185  
 23: 36–49 109, 110, 144, 160, 184, 189,  
 190, 195 n., 197 n., 243  
 23: 37 109, 184, 190  
 23: 38 190  
 23: 40 195 n.  
 23: 41 148  
 23: 42–3 189  
 23: 43–9 185 n.  
 23: 44–48 163  
 23: 45 109, 190  
 23: 48 163  
 24: 15–27 211  
 27: 3b–4 167  
 32: 25 146  
 34–43 170 n.  
 37: 27 228  
 40–8 19, 203  
 44: 22 129

*Hosea*

1 46, 71, 206 n., 208, 209, 210,  
 214, 215, 217 n., 218–31, 247,  
 249, 252, 273

- 1-3 15 n., 17, 48, 49, 50, 89, 90, 94 n., 96,  
     103 n., 109 n., 110, 127, 128 n., 134,  
     206-68  
 1: 2 64, 219, 223 n., 229 n., 237, 242, 248  
 1: 2-3 222, 224  
 1: 3-5 257 n.  
 1: 4 225, 229 n.  
 1: 4-5 225  
 1: 4-9 264  
 1: 5 226 n.  
 1: 6 229 n.  
 1: 7 217, 227, 229 n., 235, 262  
 1: 9 228, 229, 232  
 2 208, 209, 216, 218, 223 n., 243, 245-60,  
     264, 265  
 2: 1 264  
 2: 1-2 262  
 2: 1-3 217, 229, 231, 235  
 2: 3 254 n., 259  
 2: 4 144 n., 247, 248,  
     252, 266 n.  
 2: 4-9 207 n.  
 2: 4-15 (2A) 209 n., 218, 246,  
     248, 249-50, 251, 252, 253,  
     256, 257, 258, 259, 274  
 2: 4-17 261 n.  
 2: 4-24 253 n.  
 2: 4-25 134, 218, 231, 246, 260 n.  
 2: 5 178 n., 207 n., 223 n., 246 n., 249,  
     254  
 2: 6 249  
 2: 6-7 248  
 2: 7 64, 249, 250, 257, 266  
 2: 8 208 n., 250, 251, 255  
 2: 8-9 250  
 2: 8-11 251  
 2: 9 99 n., 250, 251, 252 n., 256, 266 n.  
 2: 10 223, 250, 251, 257  
 2: 10-11 250, 251  
 2: 11 250, 251  
 2: 12 240 n.  
 2: 14 252, 257  
 2: 14-15 8  
 2: 14-16 6  
 2: 15 223, 246, 250, 251,  
     252, 256  
 2: 15-17 246 n.  
 2: 16 207 n., 253, 254, 255 n., 260, 264  
 2: 16-17 254 n., 261 n.  
 2: 16-25 (2B) 218, 246, 251 n., 253,  
     254-5, 256, 257, 258, 259,  
     260, 262, 263, 265, 274  
 2: 17 255, 258  
 2: 18 209 n., 252, 256  
 2: 18-25 246 n.  
 2: 19 223, 251 n., 256  
 2: 20 228  
 2: 21-2 256-7  
 2: 21-3 258  
 2: 22 256, 258  
 2: 24 257  
 2: 24-5 257  
 2: 25 257, 259  
 2-15 261 n.  
 3 46, 208, 209, 210, 214, 213, 218,  
     229-30, 231-45, 252, 257, 258, 264,  
     265, 273  
 3: 1 144 n., 242, 244, 253 n.  
 3: 2-3 234  
 3: 3 103 n., 234, 237, 238, 239 n., 240,  
     241 n., 244  
 3: 3-4 237, 238, 239, 241 n., 244  
 3: 4 46 n., 238, 240, 241 n.,  
     244, 255  
 3: 5 46 n., 217, 235, 238, 241, 262  
 4-14 46, 48, 49-79, 81, 85, 87, 96, 97,  
     106, 110, 111, 115, 122, 120, 127,  
     141, 154, 156, 207, 226 n., 257-60,  
     262, 263, 268, 269, 270  
 4: 1 69  
 4: 4-9 66  
 4: 6 69  
 4: 8-10 65, 66 n.  
 4: 9 58  
 4: 10 64, 65, 66  
 4: 11 68 n.  
 4: 12 64 n., 68 n., 69, 220 n.  
 4: 12b-14 90  
 4: 12-13 62, 63, 67  
 4: 13 73  
 4: 13-14 72, 74, 75  
 4: 13b-14 72  
 4: 14 219 n.  
 4: 15 70 n.  
 4: 16 50  
 4: 18 64 n., 66 n., 68 n.  
 4: 19 50, 53  
 5: 1 66 n., 226 n.  
 5: 3 2, 64, 65, 66, 68,  
     187, 196  
 5: 3-4 69  
 5: 4 58, 220 n., 258  
 5: 7 71  
 5: 13 58  
 5: 14 50, 56  
 5: 15 58  
 5: 15-16: 3 50 n.  
 6: 1 58 n.

*Hosea (cont.)*

6: 3 258  
 6: 4 55, 261 n.  
 6: 6 69  
 6: 7 228  
 6: 10 2, 68, 187, 196  
 7: 1 58  
 7: 3–7 59, 70  
 7: 4 70  
 7: 6 59  
 7: 8 50  
 7: 9 50, 53, 71  
 7: 10 58  
 7: 11 254  
 7: 13 57  
 8: 1 50, 228  
 8: 2 258  
 8: 4 226 n.  
 8: 7–8 71  
 8: 9 50, 58, 68 n., 71  
 8: 9–10 240 n.  
 8: 11 57  
 8: 12 72 n.  
 8: 13 58, 258  
 8: 14 53  
 9: 1 62, 63, 68 n., 240 n.  
 9: 3 58, 258  
 9: 10 254 n., 258  
 9: 11 56, 58  
 9: 15 68 n.  
 9: 16 50, 53  
 9: 17 57  
 10: 1 50, 60, 61  
 10: 4 228  
 10: 11 60, 61, 68 n.  
 10: 13 60  
 10: 14 60  
 11: 1 50  
 11: 1–4 6  
 11: 3 58  
 11: 5 258  
 11: 5–6 264 n.  
 11: 8 261 n., 262  
 11: 8–9 260  
 11: 8–11 50 n.  
 11: 9 58, 61  
 11: 10 56  
 11: 10–11 56 n.  
 11: 11 56  
 11–12 56  
 11–15 255  
 12: 1 83 n.  
 12: 2 228  
 12: 3 58  
 12: 7 58, 67  
 12: 8 68 n.

12: 9 57  
 12: 10 58, 258  
 12: 15 58  
 13: 3 55  
 13: 4 6, 52, 258  
 13: 5 254 n., 258  
 13: 6 50  
 13: 7–8 50, 52, 56  
 14: 2–9 50 n.  
 14: 3 58  
 14: 4 60  
 14: 5 58  
 14: 6 53, 55  
 14: 6–9 53, 76–7, 79  
 14: 7 76  
 14: 8 53, 58, 67, 76  
 14: 9 50, 53, 59, 61  
 13: 12 51  
 13: 13 50–1  
 13: 14 261 n.  
 13: 15 53, 58

*Joel*

3: 16 56 n.

*Amos*

1: 2 56 n.  
 2: 4 67  
 7: 15 223

*Micah*

1 17  
 7: 5 92

*Nahum*

2: 3 60 n.  
 3: 4–7 17, 121 n.

*Haggai* 2: 12 114 n.

*Zechariah*

1: 13 260 n.  
 14: 2 104

*Malachi*

2 17  
 2: 14–15 133

## NEW TESTAMENT

*John (Gospel of John)*

3: 16 231 n.