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Prophecy and Gender Instability:
A Queer Reading of Hosea's Marriage Metaphor

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An abstract of a thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

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Traditional historical-critical interpretations of Hosea 1–3 usually describe a heartbroken Hosea hurt by his cruel wife, and feminists have challenged the androcentrism of such interpretations and of the text itself. Critics in both camps, though, often view gender as a binary and assume heteronormativity, but I aim in this paper to deconstruct the gender structures of the prophecy, arguing in conversation with traditional, feminist, and queer criticism, while drawing on insights from queer theory. By employing a queer reading, I assert that gender in the marriage metaphor of these chapters is unstable and characters often destabilize themselves. I show the instability of gender by looking specifically at three personas in the metaphor: the men, the woman, and Yahweh. First, the depiction of Hosea's male readership as a promiscuous woman is a method not only for revealing their apostasy from Yahweh worship to Baal worship, but also as a way to shame them by feminizing them. Using the trope of the promiscuous woman to describe them affronts their status as males, who should be naturally superior to women according to the thinking of the time. Second, Gomer as a character is in turn masculinized by her role as the representative of a body of males and thus is erased as she becomes the mere window through which the reader sees the accused males. The female's voice, then, becomes indistinguishable from the male's as he tries to exclude what has been a part of him all along. Finally, this marriage metaphor also challenges Yahweh's masculinity, but the irony is that Hosea 1:2 reveals that it is Yahweh himself who initiates the metaphor, thus making Yahweh the challenger of his own masculinity.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Background and Thesis

The prophetic tale of Hosea's marriage to an אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים[1] in chapters 1–3 has inspired responses that range from admiration to derision. The debate is so vast in its reactions that R. E. Wolfe says of the book that "there is no other book in the Bible about which such a large percentage of what is written is untrue."[2] Feminist critics in recent decades have gone against the tide of so-called "traditional" readers of the past by seeing the story of the prophet and his wife not as a tragic love story but as the story of a frustrated husband/Yahweh attempting to exert violent control over his wife/people. Where before has been commentary from only Hosea/Yahweh's point of view that commends the accusation and punishment of a wayward wife/people, now readers of multiple genders and multiple vantage points have felt free to challenge traditional readings. Much of this challenge has come from feminist scholarship; my thesis proposes to offer a challenge from a queer perspective.

Though Hosea uses many metaphors, that of marriage stands out in chapters 1–3 as the most sustained and most violent metaphor. The metaphor is complex: Hosea, at the command of Yahweh, marries a promiscuous woman who represents the land and whose

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[1] This term will be discussed in chapter 4. I am rendering it as "promiscuous woman."

[2] Roland Emerson Wolfe, *Meet Amos and Hosea* (New York: Harper and Row, 1945), 81; qtd. in Yvonne Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet: Hosea's Marriage in Literary-Theoretical Perspective* (JSOTS 212; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 38.

children also represent the land (1:2), which in turn is metonymy for the people of Israel who live on the land. The promiscuous ways of the wife portray the unfaithful ways of Israel, and her children are given names that speak words of condemnation to Israel. In the chapter 2, Hosea/Yahweh batters his wife/people but then seduces her/them in the wilderness, and the whole story is quickly summarized again in chapter 3.[3] This poetic narrative is not a strict allegory but a collection of abstract brushstrokes in which the wife and the people overlap and the prophet and his God are often indistinguishable. This metaphor is rife with questions simply waiting to be asked. For instance, what does it mean for Hosea's male audience to be represented by a promiscuous woman? What does it mean for Gomer to be a poetic stand-in for a disobedient nation of men? How does this metaphor characterize the God who claims control over the people involved in it? What rules of gender does this marriage metaphor construct and/or tear down?

In response to questions such as these, I argue in this paper that gender boundaries are unstable in this text. I show this instability in three phases, as I look at the men in the metaphor, then the woman, and finally Yahweh. First, the depiction of Hosea's male readership as a promiscuous woman is a method not only for revealing their apostasy from Yahweh worship to Baal worship, but also as a way to shame them by feminizing them. Using the trope of the promiscuous woman to describe them affronts their status as males, who should be naturally superior to women according to the thinking of the time. Second, Gomer as a character is in turn masculinized by her role as the representative of a body of males and thus is erased as she becomes the mere window through which the

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[3] Some also see Hosea 3 as a second marriage metaphor or another episode in the original marriage metaphor's story, but such explanations are unnecessary in my mind. For more information, see H. H. Rowley, "The Marriage of Hosea," in *Men of God: Studies in Old Testament History and Prophecy* (London: Nelson, 1963), 66–97.

reader sees the accused males. The female's voice, then, becomes indistinguishable from the male's as he tries to exclude what has been a part of him all along. Finally, this marriage metaphor also challenges Yahweh's masculinity, but the irony is that Hosea 1:2 reveals that it is Yahweh himself who initiates the metaphor, thus making Yahweh the challenger of his own masculinity.

Reading Queerly

The method I use here is a queer reading. Defining "queer" is no easy task. Before the 1990s, the term was mostly used as a derogatory term for gays and lesbians, but it has since been appropriated by activists and academics for more positive uses. For example, it quite frequently is an umbrella term meant to include lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people; in this way, it stands for non-normative sexualities and genders. However, the relationship between the word "queer" and the populations it includes is always changing. Another possible initialism is LGBTQ, the final letter of which stands for "queer"; this usage seems to say LGBT people might be queer, but queer goes even beyond those identities to refer to other people who do not fit into the categories that "LGBT" indicates, such as asexual or intersex individuals. The length of these queer initialisms can vary greatly,[4] but often the word "queer" both is a substitute for these ever-growing series of abbreviations and is included in these initialisms to cover any overlooked populations. Thus, in popular usage, the term "queer" is constantly in flux

[4] For example, one particularly sesquipedalian initialism is LGBTIQA2Z, which stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual/ally, two-spirit, and zhe/zhers (a suggested gender-neutral pronoun). The final "A2Z" serves two purposes: including oft-forgotten populations like asexuals and two-spirited people, but also referencing the phrase "A to Z," which, much like "queer," indicates inclusivity of others who do not fall under the preceding labels.

but generally denotes a catch-all category for people who identify as having genders, sexes, or sexualities that differ from the societal norm(s).

The academy has resignified the word "queer" in a different way from popular culture, not as much for the purpose of labeling populations as to speak of challenges to sex and gender norms. In the past few decades, a queer theoretical discourse has formed that draws from many disciplines, including literature, psychology, history, anthropology, and sociology. In the domains of Jewish and Christian studies, both theology and biblical studies have begun to take part in queer discourse. For instance, theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid sees queer theology as a theology "whose permanent intent is instability" and whose "aim is not to reflect any normative project while allowing a creative process made of the interactions of different orders to happen."[5] For her,

> To do a Queer reading of the Scriptures may loosely follow a deconstruction pattern. [. . .] However, sexual deconstructive re-readings of the Bible are problematic because they need to be continually queered further. Basically, we need to do that in order to try to avoid assimilationist trends in biblical interpretation, working around some basic understandings from Queer Theory.[6]

Thus, queer readings draw on the larger queer theoretical discourse in order to read the Bible anti-normatively—that is, a type of reading that challenges existing norms and does not establish new ones. The goal is "to scandalise, that is, to be a stone on the road to force theologians to stop, fall down, while pausing in their pain and thinking during the pause."[7] Likewise, for Patrick Cheng, a queer theological reading is "a self-conscious embrace of all that is transgressive of societal norms, particularly in the context of

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[5] Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 27.

[6] Ibid., 80.

[7] Ibid., 35.

sexuality and gender identity" and "to engage with a methodology that challenges and disrupts the status quo."[8] Queer theological interpretation sets itself up as the other in opposition to the norm: "To name theology as queer in this sense is to invoke 'queer' as the strange or odd, the thing that doesn't fit in."[9] This anti-normative approach poses an intentional challenge to previous traditional readings of the Bible, always looking for or creating a disruption.

Queer readings in the realm of biblical studies follow an anti-normalizing trajectory similar to that of queer theology and generally fall into two different categories, which Macwilliam calls "inward-looking" and "outward-looking."[10] An inward-looking reading might consist of a positive reading of a text for particular communities, most likely LGBT communities. For instance, Ronald E. Long's introduction[11] to *The Queer Bible Commentary* rereads the so-called "clobber verses" that have often be used to denigrate queer people, explaining that they need not be interpreted in destructive ways.

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[8] Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology (*New York: Seabury, 2011), 6.

[9] Gerard Loughlin, "Introduction: The End of Sex," in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 7. Loughlin's comment demonstrates the ironic position queer readers find themselves in. Traditional critics have often excluded feminist readings as if they are not serious scholarship, even though many feminist interpreters write to be part of the larger discourse. This exclusion is highly problematic (more on this in the next chapter). Queer interpretation, however, has tended more to embrace its own queerness and otherness, emphasizing the fact that it is different from the norm, from the traditional. The dilemma, then, is this: If queer hermeneutics is separate and other, will more traditional critics listen? And if it speaks with and to traditional criticism, is it still queer? I have no answer to these questions, except to say that I try in this paper to find a middle ground, both challenging traditional readings but also speaking to and among them.

[10] Stuart Macwilliam, *Queer Theory and the Prophetic Marriage Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible* (Oakville, CT: Equinox, 2011), 2. What follows here is a very brief summary of Macwilliam's division between inward-looking and outward-looking. He cautions against applying the distinction too strictly, though, for if queer hermeneutics is truly queer, it will not have fixed boundaries or stable binaries like this.

[11] Ronald E. Long, "Introduction: Disarming Biblically Based Gay-Bashing," in *The Queer Bible Commentary* (eds. Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West, Thomas Bohache; London: SCM, 2006), 19–35.

In addition, in her article[12] in *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible,* Mona West raises Lamentations as an important voice for people affected by the AIDS epidemic. The two scholars differ in their methods—Long exegetes his texts while West uses hers to interpret today's issues—but both provide affirming readings for LGBT people.

On the other hand, an outward-looking reading "looks beyond the ghetto in order to invest the insights of those on the margins with generic transformative value."[13] Such a reading uses "the insights of queer theory as a contribution to that general effort to wrest the Bible from the grip of heteronormativity."[14] While this effort might have the additional beneficial effect of affirming LGBT people, this view looks beyond one particular community in order to question the very nature of gender, sex, and sexuality—for all people, not merely LGBT people. Ken Stone sums it up well:

> 'queer commentary on the Bible' might be better understood, in my own estimation at least, as a range of approaches to biblical interpretation that take as their point of departure a critical interrogation and active contestation of the many ways in which the Bible is and has been read to support heteronormative and normalizing configurations of sexual practices and sexual identities.[15]

This type of reading not only questions the assumed heteronormativity of a text, but it also questions any other assumptions of fixed categories, such as homosexual, male, and female. Whereas inward-looking works in biblical studies have tended to be by LGBT people for LGBT people, anyone from any sexual orientation, sex, or gender is welcome

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[12] Mona West, "The Gift of Voice, the Gift of Tears: A Queer Reading of Lamentations in the Context of AIDS," in *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible* (Ken Stone, ed.; New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 140–51.

[13] Macwilliam, *Queer,* 2.

[14] Ibid., 54.

[15] Ken Stone, "Queer Commentary and Biblical Interpretation: An Introduction," in *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Ken Stone; New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 33.

to challenge notions of normalization in an outward-looking reading. My reading of Hosea aims to be this type of queer commentary. In this paper, I challenge norms and question structures in the text by bringing the Bible into conversation with queer theory.

This quest to challenge norms is a multidisciplinary effort, namely employing insights from biblical criticism and queer theory. My reading owes a debt to scholars of the historical-critical method, especially in placing the text in its cultural context of ancient Israel. In addition, queer readers rely heavily on feminist interpretation, which paved the way beforehand in questioning notions of gender. Queer interpretation combines these biblically-based fields with the diverse realm of queer theory. For example, in this paper, I rely on queer theorists like Leo Bersani and Judith Butler and proto-queer theorists like J. L. Austin and Michel Foucault. All of these thinkers come together with their various disciplines to inform queer interpretation.

Results of a Queer Reading

The drive to question structures results in encountering or exposing a text's instability. A queer view in biblical studies recognizes that every text is unstable; with regard to Hosea, for instance, "the *marriage metaphor* is compromised within the biblical text itself," always already deconstructed, always already undone: "'forbidden' gender relationships are implicit in the deep structures of its language."[16] To queer a text is not to *make* it queer but to *find* it already queer: "This Bible is queer. [. . .] We are not dealing here simply with 'queer' interpretation of the Bible; the Bible is always already queer."[17]

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[16] Macwilliam, *Queer,* 3, italics in original.

[17] Teresa J. Hornsby and Ken Stone, "Already Queer: A Preface," in *Bible Trouble: Queer Reading at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature), xii.

Queer interpretation does not seek to twist the text or fit it into a queer mold—rather, a queer hermeneutic sees the text as inherently twisted, always queer before, during, and after interpretation. The interpreter need not construct this queerness, but only perceive it and describe it.

Queer biblical studies is thus met with the problem of how to communicate the instability inherent in texts. If a reader looks at a text and finds a feature of instability, does that reader stabilize it or normalize it by writing about it? On the contrary, the conclusions found in queer articles, books, and theses are not final interpretations but mere moments of interpretive possibility. A queer interpreter is the viewer of Schrödinger's cat[18]—inside the box, the cat exists in the fluctuating simultaneity of death and life, but when the observer opens the box and sees the event, it resolves and produces a result. A single moment of seeming clarity arises when a person views the event. A queer reader approaches a text that is also fluctuating, and the resulting reading is not a final description of what it is, but rather what it can be, or what it is at this moment. When another person opens the box, the cat might appear in a different state, and when another interpreter reads Hosea, he or she may find other conclusions. Because the text is unstable, no interpretation is stable. Michel Foucault describes his book *History of Madness* as an "object-event," [19] and this reading of Hosea is the same: an event that rises

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[18] For those who do not know the reference, Schrödinger's cat refers to a thought experiment introduced in Erwin Schrödinger, "Die gegenwärtige Situation in der Quantenmechanik," *Naturwissenschaften* 23 (1935): 807–849. A simple explanation can be found in E. Brian Davies, "Schrödinger's Cat," in *Science in the Looking Glass: What Do Scientists Really Know?* (New York: Oxford, 2003), 199–202. This thought experiment, which Schrödinger actually proposed as a reductio ad absurdum to show the counterintuitiveness of quantum physics, has been influential not only in quantum physics but also in postmodern philosophical theory.

[19] Michel Foucault, *History of Madness* (ed. Jean Khalfa; trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa; Kindle Digital Edition; New York: Routledge, 2006), xxxviii.

from its environment, takes shape in the world, and then sinks back into obscurity. Hornsby and Stone similarly present queer commentary in an "'ocean to wave' model," where the interpretation originates in chaos, finds a moment of truth, and then recedes back into chaos.[20] A queer reading sees both the text and its own interpretation as grounded in inevitable instability.

Despite (or perhaps because of) its necessarily unstable nature, a queer reading knows many of the results of its inquiry beforehand; Macwilliam calls these "queer anticipations."[21] Among his predictions are "gender play" and "raped males," along with "dilemmas of masculinity."[22] One such dilemma of masculinity or type of play appears in the text's homoeroticism, i.e., erotic or romantic affection between members of the same sex or gender. This does not refer to homosexuality, for terms like "gay" and "lesbian" are recent identities that queer theory has exposed as constructs, not immutable transhistorical realities—nothing we can truthfully call a gay man or a lesbian exists in

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[20] Hornsby and Stone, *Bible,* xii.

[21] Macwilliam, *Queer,* 27.

[22] Ibid., 34–40. Macwilliam's mention of raped males is especially important considering the assumed heteronormativity even in authors who otherwise are very aware of issues of sex and gender. For instance, Rut Törnkvist (*The Use and Abuse of Female Sexual Imagery in the Book of Hosea: A Feminist Critical Approach to Hos 1-3* [Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1998], 67 n. 199) takes issue with Renita J. Weems' ("Gomer: Victim of Violence or Victim of Metaphor?" *Semeia* 47 (1989): 90 n. 10) decrying the "physical and sexual exploitation of *anyone"* (italics in original). Törnkvist rebukes Weems' inclusivity in using the word "anyone" instead of "women," believing that only women are sexually exploited in the Bible: "Again a declaration of equality in the name of inclusiveness. When the biblical texts express sexual abuse and exploitation it concerns exclusively abuse of females." This is certainly not true. She forgets Jeremiah's portrayal of himself as the object of Yahweh's seduction (Jer. 20:7) and ignores the attempted rape of male strangers by the men of Sodom and the seduction of Lot by his own daughters (Gen. 19). In addition, I argue in this paper that Hosea 2 depicts a homoerotic relationship between Yahweh and the male audience, which would make the seduction scene of 2:16–25 a case of metaphorical male seduction. By being open to the possibility of sexually exploited males and other queer anticipations, queer commentary can read texts better and challenge heteronormative impulses.

the Bible.[23] A queer reading does, however, focus on challenges to societal norms, and Hosea's marriage metaphor provides ample ground to see homoeroticism as one such challenge. Loughlin states, "It may seem a small point, but one of the achievements of queer theology is to have found the Bible—Jewish and Christian—empty of homosexuality, but full of queer intimacies."[24] Seeking homoeroticism is important because it opens new possibilities in interpretation where they were previously precluded. It produces a necessary counter-voice: Jennings asserts that "the countercoherence produced by this reading is actually more coherent than that generated by readings simply supposing that Israel's literature is without homoerotic elements or aspects."[25] A queer reading therefore aims to be more honest with the text by not simply assuming that no homoeroticism exists. Homoeroticism is possible, and in Hosea 1–3 it is even likely due to the slipperiness of the metaphor.

In addition to opening up space for homoeroticism, the unstable nature of the text and the interpretation raises the question of the queer reader's relationship to the text. First, I take as my object in this paper the book in its final form,[26] but this final form is an

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[23] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* vol. 1: *An Introduction* (trans. Robert Hurley; New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 43, offers 1870 as a possible date for the beginning of homosexuality as a concept. Arising in the context of German psychoanalysis, the term "homosexual" (and its more colloquial synonyms "gay" and "lesbian") thus cannot honestly be used to describe anyone before the nineteenth century.

[24] Loughlin, *Queer,* 18.

[25] Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Jacob's Wound: Homoerotic Narrative in the Literature of Ancient Israel* (New York: Continuum, 2005), xii.

[26] I will use the final text as it appears in the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia,* and I will use the versification from that edition rather than the numbering from English versions. Throughout this paper, translations from the original Hebrew will be my own unless otherwise noted.

unstable construct. Source criticism has offered many possible genealogies for this text;[27] however, I will not try to parse one source from another but rather will take the text in its unstable and conflicting entirety. Because of its unsure composition, I (at least attempt to) omit any mention of the author(s)[28] or his/their intentionality. I join with Macwilliam in his "receptionist view of the *marriage metaphor*": "I too am happily complicit in this postmodern penchant for author-assassination."[29] The author(s) is/are unknown, so the intentions are unknown—what is left is merely the reader and the text.

However, among the text's varied viewpoints, one often comes to the fore (often with the appearance of authorial intention). For example, the book of Hosea wants its (male) readers to relate to the male voice; drawing from feminist critics, though, I look for counter-themes that allow the female to speak. This movement of challenging what might appear to be the text's intention does not require me to read against the text but

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[27] E.g., William J. Doorly (*Prophet of Love: Understanding the Book of Hosea* [New York: Paulist Press, 1991], 62–64) argues that the first oracles written were accusations against Israel of substituting trust in Yahweh for trust in "foreign political alliances," and accusations of Baalism arose later through three subsequent redactions. Gale Yee (*Composition and Tradition in the Book of Hosea: A Redactional Critical Investigation* [New York: Scholars Press, 1987]) provides even more information.

[28] Traditional critics have generally held that the violent and emotional language of the book of Hosea could only come from a real Hosea who had actually experienced the tragedy of a promiscuous wife. E.g., Francis L. Andersen and David Noel Freedman (*Hosea* [AB; New York: Doubleday, 1980], 46) assert that "in the case of Hosea it seems clear that the theological imagery arises out of his personal tribulation," and Walter Brueggemann ("The Recovering God of Hosea," *HBT* 20 [2008]: 7) states, "[A]s all interpreters observe, Hosea's utterance arises from his personal experience." However, his broad statement is not true: feminist challenges to a historical Hosean authorship notwithstanding, even Graham I. Davies (*Hosea* [OTG; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993], 21), who also writes from a historical-critical perspective, notes that "the evidence in these chapters is insufficient to enable Hosea's biography to be written with any certainty." This lack of evidence is important also for Sharon Moughtin-Mumby's reading of the text, as she calls on interpreters "to abandon this 'quest for the historical Hosea'" because prophetic sign-acts are not about the prophet who performs them but about the act itself (*Sexual and Marital Metaphors in Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008], 213). In any case, my queer reading of the text is a postmodern literary reading and is not concerned with whether Hosea was a historical prophet or not.

[29] Macwilliam, *Queer,* 67.

instead to read an understated theme in the text against a dominant theme. The prophecy holds within itself its own counter-voices, the keys to its own undoing. Views that challenge the dominant voice are always already in the text. In postmodernity, after all, "there is nothing outside the text."[30] This queer reading, then, is an encounter with the text; what this interpretation reveals is what has been in the text all along. This is an exegesis of the various voices in the text. Because every encounter with the text is different, I do not claim to know exactly what its original audience(s) saw in it or how they read it. I will make suggestions, but I will not argue exactly how much instability the original readers saw or how much can only be seen by today's queer readers.

In sum, the aim of a queer reading is to destabilize the text, or more accurately, to present it as always already unstable. This thesis will trace Hosea's instability through four main chapters. Chapter 2 provides more introductory material, specifically a brief primer on metaphor and on how previous interpreters have viewed it in regard to this text. The next three chapters constitute my main argument and explore how Hosea's marriage metaphor affects the characters it involves. Chapter 3 turns an eye to the human male in the metaphor and explores themes of feminization and homoeroticism. Chapter 4 looks at the female—her repression, her deconstructive counter-voice, and her ultimate dissolution into the male in the logic of constitutive exclusion. Chapter 5 moves to Yahweh and shows him as both emasculated and the instigator of his own emasculation. I close with a conclusion that offers opportunities for further exploration.

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[30] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak; Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 163.

CHAPTER 2: METAPHOR AND INTERPRETATIONS

Introduction

Hosea 1–3 revolves around this metaphor: Israel is a woman who has been unfaithful to her husband Yahweh. To be sure, this text is laden with metaphor, but too many scholars "have focused on *what* the text means rather than *how* it means."[31] The interpretive quest has frequently been to identify the end goal of the meaning and not the winding paths the meaning takes to reach its end (if it even has one). These scholars have assumed stability when the metaphor is unstable. This queer reading exploits the possibilities in the metaphor, tracing its movements of meaning. Thus, before proceeding directly to interpretation, some brief comments are in order about both the use of metaphor terminology and the intimate relationship between a critic's view of metaphor and his or her interpretive stance.

Metaphor: Different Terms and Different Views

The terminology used of metaphors in Hosean scholarship varies. First, a metaphor can be conceived of in semiotic or specifically Saussurean[32] terms as composed

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[31] Sherwood, *Prostitute,* 85, emphasis mine.

[32] Some scholars draw from Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (ed. Perry Meisel and Han Saussy; trans. Wade Baskin; New York: Columbia University Press, 2011). For an extended discussion on a semiotic view of metaphor with reference to Saussure, see Sherwood, *Prostitute,* 83–149.

of the signifier (Hosea and Gomer) and a signified (Yahweh and Israel).[33] The signifier and the signified come together in a sign act (the marriage) to constitute the sign (the metaphor itself). The degree of frequency in using this terminology varies greatly. Some authors, like Sherwood, use semiotic terms with great care and much explanation, but others, like Galambush, use the terms sparingly and without connecting them to the larger body of semiotic work. Second, many scholars use language from metaphor theory, a subset of semiotic discourse. I. A. Richards[34] regards metaphor as the interaction of the vehicle (the characters who represent, i.e., Hosea and Gomer) and the tenor (the characters represented, i.e., Yahweh and Israel).[35] Richards' terms have the benefit of being specific to metaphor discourse, but they also emphasize the interaction of the elements of a metaphor. The metaphor in Hosea cannot be reduced to a simple arithmetic statement that says, for example, Gomer equals Israel. This kind of substitution obscures the interaction of Gomer and Israel and looks at *what* the metaphor means rather than *how* it means. Rather than a set of terms that narrowly identifies one element as the signified and another as the signifier, metaphor theory's terms allow signification to flow both ways and even double back on itself. While each set of terminology has advantages and disadvantages, I prefer to use "tenor" and "vehicle," terms specifically from metaphor theory, rather than terms from the broader field of semiotics. Quotations,

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[33] Examples of scholars who use this terminology include Julie Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel: The City as Yahweh's Wife* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992); Susan E. Haddox, *Metaphor and Masculinity in Hosea* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2011); Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual*; Allan Rosengren, "Knowledge of God According to Hosea the Ripper: The Interlacing of Theology and Social Ideology in Hosea 2," *SJOT* 23 (2009): 122–126; and Sherwood, *Prostitute*, among others.

[34] I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936).

[35] Examples of scholars who use tenor/vehicle terminology include Haddox, *Metaphor*; Macwilliam, *Queer*; Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual*; Sherwood, *Prophet*; and Törnkvist, *Use,* among others.

however, may contain terms like "signifier" and "signified," in keeping with each author's original words.

The way in which the vehicle and the tenor interact is a matter of debate. Paul Ricoeur has identified at least two views on their interaction in a metaphor: a "substitution theory," which sees meaning as transferring unidirectionally and with a certain amount of translation, and a "tension theory," which sees more mingling of meaning in the metaphor.[36] Sharon Moughtin-Mumby has identified a sharp divide between these two views of metaphor, corresponding to different domains in biblical studies: "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 toward interactive [. . .] views of metaphorical language [i.e., a tension view]."[37] These views of metaphor also frequently correlate along gendered lines, with the traditional substitutionary view tending toward androcentrism (and unaware of it) and the tension view tending to read from other viewpoints and with more self-awareness about the reading process.

In a substitutionary view, meaning transfers in only one direction. Hosea represents Yahweh, and Gomer represents Israel. Thus, Yahweh's divinity should not make Hosea seem more divine, and the male Israelite audience represented in Gomer should not lead to homoeroticism in making Gomer male. The flow of meaning is strict in this view and cannot deviate for fear of producing dangerous results. Critics qualify the transfer of meaning to avoid dangerous readings: Hosea represents Yahweh, and though

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[36] Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language* (trans. Robert Czerny; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 4.

[37] Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual,* 3.

Hosea is violent toward his wife, this violence need not be transferred back to Yahweh. It is as though "sexual and marital metaphorical language can be 'translated', leaving these connotations behind."[38] The appearance of violence undergoes a transformation as it passes from the vehicle to the tenor, ultimately becoming not spousal abuse but the righteous judgment of God.

Another unfortunate characteristic of the traditional substitutionary view is its all-too-common androcentrism. Traditional critics have tended to be male and have often related to Hosea/Yahweh's viewpoint, highlighting the sadness the male feels due to his marriage to a promiscuous woman. Regarding this view, Törnkvist states, "The receivers of Hosea's message are supposed to identify with him on all levels, against the wife, who is not given any chance to highlight her perspective or to tell her story."[39] This androcentrism is malicious not only because of its sexism but especially because of its subtlety: "Traditional (male) critics contrast feminist criticism unfavourably with their own alleged impartiality. [. . . T]heir scholarly enterprise involves a performance of gender the operation of which remains so concealed that it appears to be 'natural'."[40] The masculine voice—Hosea's, Yahweh's, and traditional critics'—is thought to be the default, whereas the female voice—Gomer's, Israel's (as the wife), and most feminist critics'—becomes the other, a situated reading that is different from "real" criticism. Sherwood argues vehemently against this artificial and denigrating distinction: "A detailed analysis of male *readings* exposes the myth, as Esther Fuchs puts it, of the

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[38] Ibid., 4.

[39] Törnkvist, *Use,* 140–1.

[40] Macwilliam, *Queer,* 36.

'objective phallacy',[41] the fallacious distinction between commentary and reading, objective androcentrism and subjective feminism, in which the first term is privileged and the second subordinated."[42] The perceived naturalness of androcentric readings is clearly seen when feminist scholars write from a traditional critical perspective. For instance, Carole R. Fontaine has written two articles on Hosea: the first, "Hosea," in which she writes from a traditional viewpoint, and then "Response to 'Hosea'," in which she employs a feminist counterargument.[43] She dislikes the traditional approach she took in her original article: "the article did not adequately reflect the research or findings of the author [i.e., herself] at the time, and certainly no longer represents the approach I would now take if asked to write on Hosea."[44] Writing from a traditional perspective allowed her to be published in a more widely read book, but it skewed her own interpretation toward androcentrism. Moving toward a feminist interpretation allowed her, in her view, to read the text better and more honestly. Furthermore, feminist writer Rut Törnkvist accuses fellow feminist Renita Weems, saying she "identifies emotionally with the male characters Hosea and Yahweh."[45] In Törnkvist's view, Weems is so thoroughly trained to

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[41] Esther Fuchs, "Contemporary Biblical Literary Criticism: The Objective Phallacy," in V. L. Tollers and J. Maier, eds., *Mapping the Biblical Terrain: The Bible as Text* (Bucknell Review; Toronto: Bucknell University Press, 1990), 134–42.

[42] Yvonne Sherwood, "Boxing Gomer: Controlling the Deviant Woman in Hosea 1–3," in *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (ed. Athalya Brenner; New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 102, emphasis in original.

[43] Her tradition article appears in *The Books of the Bible,* vol. I (ed. B. W. Anderson; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1989), 349–58, but it is republished in Athalya Brenner, ed., *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 40–59, where it is immediately followed by her second article (pp. 60–69).

[44] Fontaine, "Response," 60.

[45] Törnkvist, *Use,* 68.

read from a male perspective that even when she writes a feminist interpretation, she cannot escape the male viewpoint. The androcentrism that traditional Hosean scholarship exhibits can be so pervasive that even feminists are drawn into it.[46]

Feminist, queer, and other postmodern approaches generally use the tension view of metaphor, in which meaning can transfer in multiple directions and generally without the need to translate it into more benign terms. The pieces of the metaphor are more closely associated in this view, for, as Max Black has famously said, "[i]f to call a man a wolf is to put him in a special light, we must not forget that the metaphor makes the wolf seem more human than he otherwise would."[47] In fact, as the tenor and the vehicle interact, new meaning arises: "the co-presence of the vehicle and tenor results in a meaning (to be clearly distinguished from the tenor) which is not attainable without their interaction."[48] The metaphor is used perhaps to portray God as having an intimate relationship with Israel, like a husband may have with his wife; but the metaphor can provide more meaning than what a reader might think the author intended. Thus, if Hosea is violent or emasculated, then to an extent so is God. Simultaneously, if God is the unquestionable authority, then so is Hosea: "if God is male, then the male is God"[49]—a prospect that causes obvious distaste in feminist critics. As their characteristics transfer

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[46] Throughout this chapter, I use "traditional" and "androcentric" interchangeably. Certainly, androcentrism does not characterize the historical-critical method as a whole, and it does not invalidate many of its findings. However, when applied to Hosea, traditional criticism has been almost uniformly androcentric. Thus, while in the context of other biblical books the terms might not correlate, in the context of Hosea, they are—almost without exception—unfortunately equivalent.

[47] Max Black, "More about Metaphor," in *Metaphor and Thought* (ed. Andrew Ortony; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 44, qtd. in Macwilliam, *Queer,* 3.

[48] Richards, *Philosophy,* 100, qtd. in Macwilliam, *Queer,* 65.

[49] Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), 19, qtd. in Sherwood, *Prostitute,* 282.

back and forth, this view of the metaphor blurs the lines between Yahweh and Hosea, so that the former may seem not entirely divine, and the latter not completely human. Neither person is wholly himself. Indeed, the text lends itself to such an unstable reading, for Yahweh and Hosea are indistinguishable for much of ch. 2. Fokkelien Van Dijk-Hemmes suggests that the two are actually one "complex character which has been constructed in chapter 1 and which we could name Yhwh/Hosea."[50] The human vehicle and the divine tenor are so entwined "that the two stories essentially become one."[51] The reader cannot tell who is speaking or who is being spoken about. This ambiguity makes it not a strict allegory[52] but a collection of abstract brushstrokes in which the prophet and his God are often inseparable. Scholarship has thus had to wrestle with the unpleasant implications of the close association between the story's male personas.

What is more, feminists and other readers who use a tension view of metaphor often question the naturalness of traditional criticism's androcentrism. Androcentric readings "refuse to see and recognize disastrous and oppressive images of God."[53] It is difficult for them to see God as completely unaffected by Hosea's violent behavior. Whereas in substitutionary theory, meaning is translated into a more acceptable form as it moves from vehicle to tenor, tension theory will not allow such a neat transition: "Sexual violence [. . .] cannot be dismissed by claiming that it is only 'metaphorical', as if

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[50] Fokkelien Van Dijk-Hemmes, "The Imagination of Power and the Power of Imagination: An Intertextual Analysis of Two Biblical Love Songs: The Song of Songs and Hosea 2," *JSOTS* 44 (1989): 83.

[51] Gale Yee, "Hosea," in *Women's Bible Commentary* (eds. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe; rev. ed.; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 211.

[52] Törnkvist, *Use,* 48: "allegory is merely a code in which the allegorical element stands in for the literal, rather than the complex system of interactions that is a metaphor."

[53] Törnkvist, *Use*, 64 n. 188.

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."[54] The fact that violence is "only 'metaphorical'" no longer excuses it. In addition, a feminist view might point out the irony of androcentric interpretations, that reading Hosea from the male's point of view is exactly the opposite of the dominant voice of the text wants. To be sure, the prophecy is directed to an audience who are to see themselves as the female, not the male. The metaphor feminizes the male Israelite audience[55] rather than empowering them through some sort of male identification.

The disagreement between the substitutionary view and the tension view of the interaction between the vehicle and the tenor lays the ground for most of the disagreement in interpretation. The following two sections will trace the use of these views in both traditional and feminist interpretation, using two problematic elements in the text as test cases: Hosea's marriage and his violence.

Traditional Interpretations

Most traditional scholarship on Hosea (following the substitutionary view) has focused on at least two aspects of Hosea's marriage metaphor that make it controversial: God commands Hosea to marry a promiscuous woman (an action that would typically be emasculating, if not outright sinful), and Hosea/God violently and publicly strips the woman in ch. 2. Regarding the woman's unfaithfulness, androcentric readings have typically placed initiation of the woman's infidelity after the moment of their marriage,

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[54] Cheryl J. Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 119; qtd. in Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual,* 2.

[55] More on this in the next chapter.

reading the text from the male point of view (Hosea and Yahweh's) and romanticizing his feelings of pain and abandonment as the cuckolded husband, or such readings have attempted to erase Gomer's transgressions altogether. Epitomizing the former tendency are C. H. Toy, who sees the book as the "romantic history of a man wounded in his deepest feelings through an ill-fated marriage,"[56] and G. Farr, who believes "there was only one woman for Hosea's life; she was truly his wife and the marriage was originally for love."[57] Brueggemann tells the story with an artistic flourish:

> Only one who has experienced this kind of humiliation can indict Israel as a people which cherishes harlotry (4:10), as infected with a spirit of harlotry (4:12), so that they cannot return (5:4). The revulsion and disdain he feels, the scorn alternating with mortification, are the tones of a man who has trusted boldly and been betrayed, who has loved deeply and been abandoned. [. . .] But the man who has suffered most deeply and most innocently is also the man who most clearly knows the power of costly redemption. This is the faith of a giant of a sufferer, a man who had been through it, loving the unlovely, pursuing one who seemed not to want him, trusting himself to the untrustworthy.[58]

Likewise, Andersen and Freedman see the story as that of a "relationship between an unfaithful wife who has deserted her husband, and an angry but heartbroken husband."[59] Hosea in this view is a tragic character who falls madly in love with a beautiful wife, and this wife later acts like a harlot and breaks his heart.

L. W. Batten represents the opposite view in his address to the 1928 meeting of the then Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis, in which he advocated for acquitting

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[56] C.H. Toy, "Notes on Hosea 1–3" *JBL* 32 (1913): 77; qtd. in Sherwood, *Prostitute,* 56.

[57] G. Farr, "The Concept of Grace in the Book of Hosea," *ZAW* 70 (1958): 100 n. 3; qtd. in Sherwood, *Prostitute,* 56.

[58] Walter Brueggemann, *Tradition for Crisis: A Study in Hosea* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1968), 108. He seems oblivious here to the misogyny of Hosea/Yahweh's treatment of Gomer/Israel; however, his later article, "The Recovering God of Hosea," takes this violence into account with more nuance.

[59] Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea,* 117.

her of her infidelity and placing "a long overdue halo about the head of one heretofore adjudged worthy of stoning for her sins."[60] Similarly, other readings have attempted to view the marriage as a dream or simply a metaphorical invention in order to erase any hint that Yahweh's prophet might marry an אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים.[61] All these readings maintain Hosea as the faithful and benevolent husband, while Gomer shifts from heartbreaker to saint to even non-existent (as a dreamt fantasy or only a hypothetical wife) in order to counter the claim that God would purposefully bid his prophet to marry an unfaithful woman.

The obvious theological motivation behind these readings of Hosea's marriage is to preserve Yahweh as innocent and uncontradictory, for a God who commands his priests not to marry sexually defiled women (Lev. 21:7) should not command his prophet to do so. These readings flatten and homogenize the character of Yahweh, not allowing him to vary between books in the canon, when in reality the author of this prophetic book may have envisioned a slightly different sort of God. In addition, these readers are guided by a substitutionary view of metaphor, so that an attribute of Hosea might transfer to God but not vice versa, and an attribute of Hosea might translate from a negative vehicle (public stripping) into a more benign divine tenor (righteous punishment). If Hosea is marrying an already unfaithful woman, an interactive view of metaphor might transfer divine meaning into Hosea, making his unholy union with a deviant woman into an unholy union between Yahweh and deviance embodied. Traditional critics have recognized this possibility and thus read substitutionally out of fear—if these tension-

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[60] L. W. Batten, "Hosea's Marriage and Message," *JBL* 48 (1929), 257; qtd. in Sherwood, *Prostitute,* 58.

[61] See Sherwood, *Prostitute,* 60–4.

metaphor possibilities are allowed into interpretation, critics' *a priori* theological stances are destabilized. These commentators thus maintain Yahweh's innocence in two ways: by interpreting the marriage as initially faithful (with either Gomer becoming unfaithful later or, in Batten's view, not at all) and by reading the metaphor as a substitution, where God's divine qualities do not indicate immediate divine association with Hosea's broken marriage.

A second major source of controversy is Hosea/Yahweh's violent stripping of Gomer/Israel in ch. 2. Traditional androcentric readings have generally recognized that this act is indeed violent, but they often try to excuse it or justify it. For example, Wolff asserts that "Yhwh himself must take severe measures against her; he would rather not!"[62] In such a scenario, Yahweh is forced by his own divine law to enact punishment, but no one has explained what law he might be responding to. The only punishment option for adultery in Torah is death, not stripping (Deut. 22:22), and the prophecy itself does not establish any new laws that Yahweh might be obeying. Seeing the difficulty in this position, others attempt to describe a punishment that fits the crime:

> Just as in the past the errant wife has sought out her lovers and eagerly disrobed in their presence for the purposes of sexual gratification, so now she will be forcibly exposed in the same situation. The subtlety of the talion here is essentially that what she did secretly and for pleasure will now be done to her openly and for disgrace.[63]

For Andersen and Freedman, the woman clearly deserved her punishment, so the violence need not be questioned. Similarly, for Yee, her punishment is deserved because it is in fact self-inflicted at the level of the tenor, as the "woman's disgraced naked body becomes

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[62] Hans W. Wolff, *Hosea* (Hermeneia; trans. Gary Stansell; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 34.

[63] Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea,* 249.

a metaphor for God's punishment of the élite and their exploitative land-use projects."[64] The male leaders of Israel misused the land and had to live with the results of the barren land they created. The violence is again justified. The substitutionary view of these commentators holds that Hosea as the vehicle enacts appropriate punishment against Gomer in the form of stripping in 2:3, while Yahweh as the tenor enacts (or at least allows) appropriate punishment against Israel in the form of drought, also in 2:3. The meaning of Hosea as the husbandly authority translates to Yahweh, who is positioned as the divine authority, and the meaning of stripping translates to the drought. In this view, these meanings cannot be organized otherwise—inasmuch as Hosea cannot be culpable for Israel's drought, Yahweh cannot be charged with Hosea's sexual abuse. This is a neat and tidy structure that maintains an innocent God, but scholars of late have questioned this using the tension view of metaphor.

Feminist Interpretations

Feminist critics have taken up Hosea 1–3 to show how the structure of the traditional reading fails. In both of the aforementioned points—the nature of the marriage and the appearance of violence—feminists like Fontaine routinely find traditional critics to be frustratingly forgiving of a misogynistic book: "the only thing I disliked more than the prophet and his god were the writings of modern commentators."[65] Feminist critics tend to interpret the text using the tension theory of metaphor, where meaning is not unidirectional, and more meaning can transfer than what one might believe the author

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[64] Gale A. Yee, "She is Not My Wife, and I Am Not Her Husband': A Materialist Analysis of Hosea 1–2," *BibInt* 9 (2001): 375.

[65] Fontaine, "Response," 60.

intended.

The point of whether Gomer starts acting promiscuously before or during her marriage to Hosea is largely untreated in feminist literature, which, already assuming that the God of the book need not be entirely innocent, often has no trouble attributing a dishonorable or sinful marriage to a command of God. The general lack of discussion betrays the (in my mind, correct) assumption that the text sees Gomer as premaritally promiscuous. When her premarital sexual purity is mentioned in the literature, it is usually to show the androcentric biases of previous traditional interpreters. Thus, Fontaine explains that due to "discomfort with the sexual activity reported there [i.e., in the text]," traditional critics have failed to notice or have even ignored the fact that "the text explicitly states that the prophet married Gomer *on purpose*, that is, because of her harlotry."[66] Sherwood also finds the erasure of Gomer's premarital promiscuity troubling: "Attempts to remove or improve Gomer are so ingenious and creative that they seem to have more in common with midrashic storytelling than with the quasi-scientific objective ideal."[67] A premaritally pure Gomer is another *a priori* decision in traditional criticism, made in order to protect the male from impurity. In order to keep Yahweh pure, traditional critics have wanted an undefiled marriage as well. However, Fontaine suggests that the historical facts of Gomer's sexual status ("What *really* happened?") are not even the most important concerns; she offers instead, "What does it *mean* within the text's ideological construction of reality, and what might it mean about the realities of women's

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[66] Fontaine, "Response," 62 and 63, respectively.

[67] Sherwood, "Boxing," 102.

lives, then and now?"[68] Feminists have generally relied on a tension view of metaphor that allows guilt to flow multidirectionally, thus allowing guilt from this impure marriage to transfer to Yahweh. Therefore that first question is largely untreated or taken for granted in feminist literature, in lieu of the second question, the construction and meaning of the marriage metaphor.

As feminists have explored meaning, the violence in the text and the ideologies communicated by such violence have also been of great concern. While the vast majority of feminist critics would use a tension view of metaphor, some have been surprisingly forgiving toward the violence Hosea depicts. For example, Weems recognizes that the book portrays Yahweh as violent but calls the metaphor "insight[ful]" and "ingenious" and maintains that readers "must also maintain this diversity of metaphors [including spousal abuse] in order to do justice to the richness of human experience."[69] Yee asserts that Gomer is indeed guilty, and she worries that the violent imagery of Hosea 2 might portray real-life domestic violence as acceptable when readers disregard the line between reality and metaphor, but she ultimately echoes a sentiment identical to Weems': "Because of the variety of human religious experiences, various metaphors are needed to represent them."[70] However, while this is perhaps a plausible explanation, it still does not justify the violence in most other feminist critics' minds.

Indeed, the violence in the prophecy is "very explicitly a case of domestic

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[68] Fontaine, "Response," 63, emphasis in original.

[69] Weems, "Gomer," 87, 90, and 101, respectively (the last quote being originally italicized in its entirety, but presented here without italics). She expands on her thoughts in *Battered Love,* but they remain mostly in this same forgiving vein.

[70] Yee, "Hosea," 212.

abuse,"[71] and in an age where readers are more aware of cases of battered women,[72] this part of the metaphor is in their view (and in mine) simply inexcusable. Sherwood calls it "ethically questionable,"[73] and Carroll deems it "the moral equivalent of garbage."[74] For Keefe, it makes Yahweh "a most terrifying deity" and a "war god,"[75] and Setel compares the stripping of 2:3 to pornography, which "use[s] objectified female sexuality as a symbol of evil."[76] Likewise, Fontaine notes that "only when Israel is willing to live under the 'shadow' of God's patriarchal power is favor and fruitfulness to be restored."[77] Törnkvist has one of the most stinging critiques of Hosea's violence and the traditional responses to it:

> The blindness to the despotic side of God, portrayed as the classical wife-batterer

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[71] Naomi Graetz, "God is to Israel as Husband is to Wife: The Metaphoric Battering of Hosea's Wife," in *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (ed. Athalya Brenner; New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 131.

[72] The comparison between abuse of women in the ancient world and battered women today has become a common topic among feminist writers. Renita J. Weems' *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995) is a notable example, using the word "battered" to illustrate the comparison.

[73] Sherwood, *Prostitute,* 14.

[74] Robert P. Carroll, "Whorusalamin: A Tale of Three Cities as Three Sisters," in *On Reading Prophetic Texts: Gender-Specific and Related Studies in Memory of Fokkelien van Dijk Hemmes* (ed. Bob Becking and Meindert Dijkstra; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 78; qtd. in Macwilliam, *Queer*, 57 n. 21. Carroll speaks specifically of Ezekiel, but the context is similar enough to apply this evaluation equally to Hosea as well.

[75] Alice A. Keefe, "Hosea's (In)Fertility God," *HBT* 30 (2008): 41.

[76] Drora T. Setel, "Prophets and Pornography: Female Sexual Imagery in Hosea," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. Letty M. Russell; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 86. Setel, one of the first feminists to turn a critical eye to Hosea, is clearly a product of anti-pornography factions of second-wave feminism, so a comparison to pornography is not a neutral comment about frequency of sexual content but rather a condemnation of it on ethical grounds. Similarly, Teresa J. Hornsby ("'Israel Has Become a Worthless Thing': Re-Reading Gomer in Hosea 1–3," *JSOT* 82 [1999]: 116 n. 2) agrees with the label of pornography, and although "labeling something pornographic should not necessarily be a negative ascription," this text is indeed "negative pornography."

[77] Fontaine, "Response," 64.

> in the metaphors used, is, in my opinion, a very clear indication of an admiration of a theology of death and destruction, and of the acceptance of an omnipotent god with the right to kill.
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> 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, where Yahweh acts like a controlling, jealous wife-batterer. On the contrary, they shut their eyes to these negative traces, and prefer to rename them, calling torture and battering "chastening", control and manipulation, and sexual abuse mingled with tenderness when it suits the male party, "love".[78]

All of these views represent the tension theory, where the metaphor's meaning can proceed beyond perceived authorial intention to indict God.

Feminist scholarship has successfully revealed that there is room in the text of Hosea 1–3 for other viewpoints:

> In biblical studies feminist criticism has set a precedent for heated debate between the reader and the text that is largely unrepresented in earlier criticism. Feminist criticism represents a new departure in which the critic is no longer expected to comply with and endorse the text's assumptions, but can debate with those assumptions from the perspective of her own culture.[79]

While some feminist critics are forgiving toward the text and maintain the charges lodged against the main female character, others do well to question the structures of power and gender that the book presents. They rightly challenge the presumed supremacy of the masculine voice and call violence what it truly is. Queer scholarship too has taken advantage of the same "departure" and "debate" that Sherwood mentions by pushing the challenge to the text even further. I turn now to discussing queer interpretations of Hosea. At this point, I leave behind the two interpretive test cases with which I have discussed traditional and feminist scholarship—Hosea's marriage and violence—for two reasons:

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[78] Törnkvist, "Use," 64 and 64 n. 188, respectively.

[79] Ibid., 302 n. 214.

queer scholarship on Hosea is presently too scant to make generalizations like these, and its concerns move beyond questioning male dominance to questioning gender itself. This final section explores the trajectories of queer interpretations and the place of my own interpretation within them.

Queer Interpretations

Four queer readings of Hosea have been published, and all follow in feminism's footsteps in assuming a tension view of metaphor. Their focuses draw a great deal from feminist contributions, but queer readers have tended to place more emphasis on constructions of gender and sexuality in the text rather than the nature of Hosea and Gomer's marriage or the text's misogynist violence. For example, Ken Stone has demonstrated that Hosea/Yahweh's own masculine gender is questioned by Gomer/Israel's belief that it is another who has provided for her/them—if the man cannot provide for his wife, then he is less of a man. Stone goes against androcentric views of Hosea that relate to and find empowerment in the male, arguing instead that "the rhetorical strategies deployed by the book of Hosea rely to a very significant degree on the mobilization of male fears of emasculation, of being feminized."[80] Theodore Jennings reads the marriage as a "transgendering" of Israel that does not intend to shame them, but rather to illustrate God's love.[81] However, he also sees Hosea as a misogynistic text in which Yahweh's condemnation of Asherah (along with her poles or pillars) are a denial of phallic "sex toys" to a sex-obsessed woman. Michael Carden reveals a male readership represented by

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[80] Ken Stone, "Lovers and Raisin Cakes: Food, Sex and Divine Insecurity in Hosea," in *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Ken Stone; New York: Sheffield, 2001), 130.

[81] Jennings, *Jacob's*, 136–46.

a female individual, and he proceeds to show that the text "collapses the boundary between YHWH and Baal"[82] and ultimately—in an overly optimistic and possibly utopian reading—collapses the institution of marriage itself as it demonstrates the ancient Near Eastern theme of sacred marriage between heaven and earth.[83] Most recently, Stuart Macwilliam has read the text with some mention of Eve Sedgwick and Judith Butler, and he, following Carden, sees Israel's masculinity as jeopardized by their representation as a woman. In addition, Macwilliam argues that "Hosea is unmanned" by having to be commanded to marry rather than taking the initiative for his own marriage.[84] Macwilliam shows a Hosean text that undermines its own constructions of masculinity.[85]

While these readings have looked at the metaphors used for Yahweh in the text, less has been said about how the marriage metaphor itself actually characterizes Yahweh. The works of Stone, Jennings, Carden, and Macwilliam are invaluable contributions to the conversations of queer hermeneutics and biblical studies, but much remains to be discovered or deconstructed in the text. All four have shown how the male audience's gender is challenged, and I wish to show additional ways this happens. None of these

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[82] Michael Carden, "The Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets," in *The Queer Bible Commentary* (ed. Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West, and Thomas Bohache; Kindle Digital Edition; London: SCM, 2006), 448.

[83] Ibid., 439–41.

[84] Macwilliam, *Queer*, 127.

[85] Another notable contribution, which happens not to fall under the categories of feminist or queer readings, is the recent book by Susan Haddox, *Metaphor and Masculinity in Hosea*. Her book comes from the still nascent field of masculinity studies. In it, Haddox looks at metaphorical imagery, both gender-based (like the marriage in chs. 1–3) and non-gender-based (such as parent and child or sickness and healing). Her conclusions find traces of masculinity even in non-gender-based imagery, but this is a masculinity in jeopardy, as the "rhetoric in Hosea consistently works against the masculinity of the audience" (155). Haddox is another important voice that deconstructs the masculine gender, much as this queer work aims to do.

readings, however, focus on textual challenges to femininity; thus, in this paper not only do I problematize masculinity, but I show the female voice coming through and ultimately disappearing into the masculine as the male voice uses the female voice to constitute itself. Finally, while Carden explores some aspects of how the metaphor affects Yahweh, I expand this point to show the undermining of Yahweh's masculinity, and at his own hands. These four queer projects show inconsistencies and challenges in gender and sexuality, and I wish to follow the tension theory of metaphor further and push it along a queer trajectory, showing the instability of gender in Hosea.

Conclusion

Major divisions have arisen in biblical criticism between traditional and feminist interpretations, mostly along the lines of their respective views of metaphor. My queer reading follows feminism's preference for the tension view, so that the text is not a collection of fixed characters and actions but rather unstable and shifting characters and actions. In the following three chapters I explore the possibilities that the tension view affords with respect to sex, gender, and sexuality, beginning with the male audience.

CHAPTER 3: MALE AS FEMALE

Introduction

One of the primary ways the text displays its unstable gender structures is by metaphorically casting the male Israelite audience as a female. The prophecy does not explicitly state to which gender it is addressed, or if it is to one specifically, but most scholars have concluded that males are generally assumed to be the primary if not sole intended audience. Mary Joan Winn Leith points out, "In patriarchal Israel, women were not full partners in the covenant"[86] and thus were not people capable of breaching the covenant. Julie Galambush, in a study of Ezekiel's similar marriage metaphor, agrees with her in noting that it was only males "who constituted the legal community of Israel."[87] As a result, the actions of women matter less to the prophecy because women are less capable of breaching the nation's covenant with the divine—they are legally prohibited from participation by their gender and thus by extension are excluded from the readership of this prophecy whose goal is to restore a faithfulness to Yahweh in which women cannot partake. The intended readership, then, is primarily or possibly even

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[86] M. J. Winn Leith, "Verse and Reverse: The Transformation of the Woman Israel in Hosea 1–3," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (ed. Peggy L. Day; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 97.

[87] Galambush, *Jerusalem,* 35. Galambush writes primarily about Ezekiel, but she includes some analysis of Hosea, and in any case, the basic fact of gender instability is the same in the marriage metaphor of each book. Therefore, her comments relate directly to any analysis of marriage metaphors in the Hebrew Bible.

exclusively male. This male audience is represented in the metaphor of Hosea 1–3 by Gomer, a promiscuous woman. Men become a woman in this prophecy, and this "imagery gives rise to surprising queer moments of slippage" as it shows just how unstable gender is in the text.[88]

Having established that this gender slippage[89] exists, we move to the question of what this means for the men involved to be represented by a female. Galambush herself sees it as a "'dead' metaphor," whose "gender-reversal [. . .] was probably not even consciously perceived by its users,"[90] and Francis Landy deems it "meaningless" because "the shift in gender of the men corresponds to no social or sacred reality."[91] While it may be unlikely that Hosea's prophecy actually changed the power structures related to gender in the text's original *Sitz im Leben,* this cross-gendering still has significant meaning. I argue for two implications of the feminine representation of men in this metaphor: First, the metaphor feminizes the men in order to shame them and lead them to return to Yahweh. *Contra* Galambush, I claim this feminization is not a sub-theme revealed by deconstruction but instead is the dominant theme itself, meant to be noticed by the male audience—a theme that so many traditional androcentric scholars have missed by reading the book from Hosea's viewpoint (as mentioned in the previous chapter). Second, presenting men as a woman in a relationship with men yields opportunities to find homoeroticism in the text—specifically, a same-sex relationship between the male audience and Yahweh and a even a relationship between Hosea and

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[88] Carden, "Book," 433.

[89] Jennings, *Jacob's,* 146 n. 26.

[90] Galambush, *Jerusalem,* 35 n. 31.

[91] Francis Landy, *Hosea* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 155.

himself.

Feminization

First, the metaphor shames the Israelite male audience by feminizing them, by casting them as a woman. The very act of their representation as a woman is an insult to their masculinity and thus also to their "privileged position in this society."[92] It removes them from the top level of the social hierarchy. Carden describes this hierarchy implicit in the text thus:

> This hierarchy is one based on penetration. Men are the ones who penetrate and they stand at the top of the hierarchy. Below them are women and below women are eunuchs, female virgins, hermaphrodites and boys. At the bottom are the monstrous—penetrated men and penetrating women. Men can penetrate everyone in the lower levels of the hierarchy without loss of status.[93]

By casting men as a woman, it makes them vulnerable to penetration; they no longer have high status in the realm of this metaphor, but rather are "monstrous" due to their their status at the bottom. Instead of being the sower who owns a field, they become the field itself, i.e., property into which seed can be planted.[94] Male Israelites had "to to see themselves in ways they have never imagined before: powerless, weak, defiled, undependable, possessed—in a word, female."[95]

In contrast, Jennings does not see it necessary to read shame out of this act of feminization. He agrees that the metaphor "transgender[s]" and "feminize[s]" Israelite men, but he emphasizes that they remain men even when they are in "metaphorical

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[92] Yee, "Hosea," 207.

[93] Carden, "Book," 437.

[94] Carden, "Book," 437 notes that the metaphor of the man as sower of seed and the woman as the field is implicit throughout the Hebrew Bible. Cf. Stone, "Lovers," 132.

[95] Weems, *Battered,* 80.

drag."[96] In his view, instead of feminizing men with the express purpose of shaming them, the writer feminizes them in order to show the relationship, specifically that between Yahweh and his male devotees, which has been violated by Baal worship. If casting them as a woman were shaming, argues Jennings, that would indicate that femininity is also shaming, but femininity is not an accusation with which the text of Hosea charges them. Their accusation is "something like promiscuity," for which the remedy is marital (or religious) faithfulness; they are not accused of femininity, for which the remedy would be masculinization.[97] Nowhere does the text instruct the audience to act less like women and more like men. However, this view romanticizes the marital relationship while diminishing the power relations in play, assuming that in this text there could be a sort of feminization that did not entail loss of honor. After all, in such "a male, phallocentric perspective, feminization in itself is a degradation."[98] These chapters "play on male fears of the woman as 'other'."[99] Stone even goes as far as to call the metaphor's work the "mobilization of gender terror."[100] In a male reader's view, this metaphorical move must be "unthinkable"[101] and "unnatural, outrageous."[102] Men, who belong on top, are placed at the bottom by this metaphor; this is nothing but shame to

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[96] Jennings, *Jacob's*, 133, 135, and 134, respectively.

[97] Ibid., 146, n. 26.

[98] Törnkvist, *Use,* 130. This can still be seen among many male commentators today: "'woman' is still a term of abuse when applied to men, and male readers of the text still take offence and resist the textual audacity that equates all people with the humiliating role of the female" (Sherwood 263).

[99] Leith, "Verse," 98.

[100] Stone, "Lovers," 130.

[101] Weems, *Battered Love,* 80.

[102] Macwilliam, *Queer,* 92.

them.

Beyond the shaming act of feminization itself, the metaphor succeeds in shaming Israelite men because it employs the trope the woman who is inherently sexually depraved and a perpetual fornicator. From the second verse of the book, the reader can see that the vehicle in the metaphor is not merely a woman, but is an אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים, a woman characterized by her promiscuity (more on this in the next chapter). T. Drorah Setel was one of the first feminist readers to point out the existence of this trope here, as she notes that "it is clear throughout the book that his [the author's] underlying concern is to contrast Yahweh's positive (male) fidelity with Israel's negative (female) harlotry." [103] Though certainly not all women are promiscuous, Hosea specifically uses the image of the woman as the whore. Thus, in the context of this prophecy, feminization is not only insulting to the male audience because it makes them a woman, but also because it makes them the very worst type of woman. This trope of the woman as whore is a clear example of "objectified female sexuality as a symbol of evil." [104] Men in ancient Israel often perceived a need to control female sexuality because if it was left unchecked, it would become perverse. Gomer is such a woman who has resisted male control, and her rebellion has manifested itself in promiscuity. She needs a male to prevent her from achieving this deviance. Not only is being a woman abhorrent to the Israelite male audience because they metaphorically lose their high status as males in this cultural hierarchy, but being a whore entails promiscuity and thus disgrace.

This Israelite whore has many parallels with Leo Bersani's description of the

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[103] Setel, "Prophets," 93.

[104] Ibid., 86.

trope of the Victorian prostitute, who is characterized by her inability to be controlled and her insatiable sexual appetite. The female's promiscuity is so extreme that she must be walled in to prevent her from meeting with her paramours (2:8). When she finds herself sequestered, only then does she decide to return to her husband—if she cannot find sex with her lovers, she may as well get it with her husband (2:9). Bersani explains, "Promiscuity is the social correlative of a sexuality physiologically grounded in the menacing phenomenon of the nonclimactic climax."[105] The female cannot be satisfied sexually and continues to seek a lover at every turn. The Victorian prostitute, much like this אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים named Gomer, seems to be incapable of reaching climax in intercourse. Her sex drive is insatiable; she "spread[s her] legs with an unquenchable appetite for destruction."[106] This unchecked excess of promiscuity achieves two results: first, it spreads disease, which Bersani reveals is a major concern with regard to the Victorian prostitute, though Hosea makes no mention of it. Second, both Hosea's promiscuous woman and Bersani's Victorian prostitute use their sexuality to upset the social order. Gomer's sexual behavior challenges her husband's control over her and challenges her society's expectations of her. To be compared to this type of woman is horrifying to the male Israelite audience. To be a woman is to be a field rather than the sower, but this trope casts Israelite men as fields that unceasingly crave to be sowed while never growing

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[105] Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" in *AIDS: Cultural Analysis, Cultural Activism* (ed. Douglas Crimp; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 211.

[106] Ibid. Bersani also explains how this trope is used to shame men. Specifically, the media often portrayed gay men during the beginnings of the AIDS as sexually insatiable, a description which recalls this trope. Their sexual behavior is like females: it slips into deviancy without proper management.

anything.[107] There could hardly be a more appalling image to represent men in this culture.

Having identified the male audience's feminization and the misogynistic trope it employs, I want to make two ironic moves. First, Israel's feminization is not entirely evil. Jennings' previously mentioned concern is correct in that feminization is not portrayed in Hosea as the problem; the text does not accuse the men of being too feminine, but accuses them of acting in a spiritually promiscuous manner. Feminization is a problem for the men, but not a problem for the text at all—rather, far from being the problem, it is unexpectedly the very solution to their problem of following Baal. By showing the male audience the horror of their Baal worship—the same horror of a whore chasing after her lovers—the text means for the audience to change. If they see the shame they are causing themselves, they will return to Yahweh; their dishonor should lead to their benefit.

Second, even though their feminization should prompt them to leave Baal for Yahweh, their return to Yahweh does not lead to their remasculinization. Along these lines, Leith agrees that Israel's feminization is meant to shame, calling it a "negation of Israel's manhood,"[108] but she also raises the point that Israel remains a woman even during the reconciliatory seduction scene of 2:16–25, when Israel's males should theoretically be restored to their position of honor: "Yet at the end of the tale, Israel is still a woman; no sex change has occurred to restore Israel's manhood. [. . .] It is now

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[107] The trope of the promiscuous woman is quite obviously a destructive image for women. Sherwood, *Prostitute,* 312 adds, however, that this characteristic is ironically both encouraged and discouraged for the female in Hosea's metaphor: "Women who are frantic with desire for their lovers are not antithetical to the male ideal but are another version of it." The sort of woman that an Israelite man wants as a wife is "frantic with desire" for him. This desire is dangerous, so he must control it, at once requiring it and condemning it.

[108] Leith, "Verse," 104.

acceptable for Israel, if only metaphorically, to be a woman." Macwilliam also takes up this problem and posits a model of three movements in the prophetic marriage metaphors of Jeremiah and Hosea.[109] This tripartite structure consists of a first movement with "Loyal Bride," a second with an "Adulterous Wife," and a third with a restored "Loyal Wife." Hosea 1:1–2:15 exhibit mostly second-movement traits (with a possible exception of 2:17 as remembering the past first movement), and 2:16–25 moves into the third movement, in which the relationship between Yahweh and Israel seems to be restored, but Israel remains a woman in the metaphor. Macwilliam laments that this scene is typically read in negative terms, as reinforcing female submission and male domination; on the contrary, he sees in the seduction scene a challenge to the heteronormativity of the text and further evidence of its unstable gender structures.[110] The fact that feminization is negative for Israelite men depends on "the 'naturalness' of clearly segregated genders." [111] That these men remain a woman in the third movement questions the "naturalness" of their gender structures: "it shows how the terms of the *marriage metaphor* subvert notions of normality in gender roles." [112]

To be a woman in Hosea is at first insulting and shaming, but later it is acceptable. When Israel's metaphorical promiscuous sexual energy is contained and directed to Yahweh, it can be celebrated. Thus, the masculinity of the Israelite males is insecure in this text, and the meaning of femininity is also slippery and unstable. It is unclear what gender the characters are when ch. 2 closes, or even what gender itself means. Are they

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[109] Macwilliam, *Queer,* 94–5.

[110] Ibid., 128–9.

[111] Ibid., 129.

[112] Ibid., italics in original.

still women? Are they still a promiscuous woman, or have they changed to another type of woman? These structures of gender and sexuality defy explanation and categorization.

Homoeroticism

In addition to the men's feminization and shaming, the metaphor opens up space to find homoeroticism in the text. Weems was one of the first critics to notice this, noting that the metaphor asks "men to imagine themselves in an erotic relationship with God."[113] This God is no gender-neutral deity in this passage, but rather is the husband to the wife Israel. Eilberg-Schwartz also recognizes the same-gender nature of this relationship: "God is imaged in relationship to individual men."[114] While I question the presence of individuality here, these men are certainly in an erotic relationship with God and thus in a "homoerotic dilemma."[115] Hosea the husband accuses his wife Gomer (2:4, 7, 12), and the prophecy asks the male reader to identify with this accused woman. As the husband threatens to publicly strip his wife and then sequester her (2:5, 8), males are asked to imagine themselves as recipients of this treatment. As the husband leads his wife into the wilderness and seduces her (2:16–25), it is male Israelites who are made to view themselves as the object of Yahweh's romantic advances, and it is men who will "know Yahweh" (2:22 [וְיָדַעְתְּ אֶת־יְהוָה]). The sexual language is hard to miss—here men are said to do nothing less than have metaphorical intercourse with Yahweh.

The marital relationship between Yahweh and his people is an implicit challenge

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[113] Weems, *Battered,* 80.

[114] Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus and Other Problems for Men and Monotheism* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1994), 99.

[115] Ibid.

to heteronormativity in two ways: the men's gender is changed, and this very interchangeability shows gender's instability. First, Eilberg-Schwartz ironically sees the fact that men take on the female role of Yahweh's wife as enabling the text "to preserve the heterosexual complementarity that helped to define the culture"[116]—the men become a woman in order to maintain heteronormativity. This is patently silly, for the very fact that men can become the woman in a relationship with another male shows that heteronormativity is not stable. Not only does this insight read modern understandings of sexuality into an ancient context, but also if men can be represented by a wife, then this text subverts the very gender roles it assumes of its readers. Ancient Israel's supposed heterosexual construct collapses when the participants can move from one gender to another.

Second, this interchangeability nullifies any appearance of heteronormativity. Jennings also sees possible homoerotic readings in this metaphor, arguing that the metaphor does not change the actual sex of the male audience represented in it, but rather it has merely "dressed them as female," so that "the result is not so much the depiction of a conventional heterosexual relationship but one between a male and his transvestite beloved."[117] Macwilliam sees Jennings' reading as "too dependent on a fixed view of gender identity"; he would rather prefer to view a male Israelite in this metaphor as "someone of ambiguous sexual identity."[118] However—while I question whether a

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[116] Ibid., 3.

[117] Jennings, *Jacob's,* 165. The context of this quotation is a discussion of marriage metaphors in Ezekiel, but the participants (male Israelites and Yahweh) are the same, so I assert that the result is the same. Ezekiel's uses of his marriage metaphor differ in a number of ways from those of Hosea, but the fact referenced here is completely relevant to both books.

[118] Macwilliam, *Queer,* 48.

"conventional heterosexual relationship" actually exists—the very idea that men can take the place of a wife shows that sexual identity throughout this metaphor is fluid. Men are women, and women are men: gender and sex are entirely unstable concepts whose borders are permeable.[119]

Homoeroticism can also be seen in the prophet Hosea himself as one of the men represented in the metaphor. Thus, at the level of the vehicle, Hosea is a male Israelite who takes a wife at the command of Yahweh; at the level of the tenor, Hosea remains a male Israelite, who is thus indicted by the accusation of promiscuity with the rest of the nation. Hosea is in a precarious position here, as he "condemns the woman from a godlike superiority but is also forced to identify with her."[120] Hosea in the vehicle has the husbandly authority to condemn and control his wife, but Hosea in the tenor is subject to that same condemnation and control from the part of Yahweh. Hosea as husband of Gomer is upset by his wife's behavior and longs for her to be faithful to him, and Hosea as an Israelite is a constituent member of the population that the wife he so desires represents. His desire is thus self-desire; his love is self-love. Hosea the vehicle desires Hosea the tenor—it is essentially a homoeroticism of metaphorical masturbation. One could wonder how secure his accusation is if he is included among the very people he accuses. To what degree has he participated in Baal worship? If he has not personally worshipped Baal, to what extent does the worship of other Israelite males implicate him?

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[119] Ibid., 136–7 also explains how this "ambiguous sexual identity" develops in the text grammatically by the use of different genders for pronouns, a fact which casts gender ambiguity on the pronouns' referent. This appears less in Hosea than in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the other books Macwilliam explores, but he argues (pp. 153–154) that the phenomenon does indeed appear in 2:20, and thus the gender of Israel/Gomer remains ambiguous.

[120] Sherwood, *Prostitute,* 313.

In addition, Hosea appears to have a divided self as he (as the dominant male voice, in the vehicle) seeks to control and subjugate himself (as a member of a resistant people, in the tenor). It appears that his own self-love goes unreciprocated. The male position of power thus deconstructs itself in this moment of homoeroticism. The prophet has no moral authority to make his case if he portrays himself as one of the people he accuses.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown the effects of the book's marriage metaphor on the human male, both the male audience and the character Hosea. This metaphor portrays these men as the wife of a man who represents God. Such a portrayal yields a patriarchal structure in which the men are metaphorically removed from the high position and placed in a low one. This placement is achieved by feminization, which both shows them their place in relationship to God and shames them because they allegedly followed other gods. This feminization is both a negative in dishonoring them but also a positive in pushing them to return to Yahweh. In addition, their feminization does not end with their union with Yahweh. Thus, the masculine gender is destabilized by an equally shifting and unstable vision of feminization. Secondly, with men taking the female role in this marital relationship, the text yields multiple possibilities to find homoeroticism. Ultimately, the mere fact that men can take on this female role exposes the fluidity of gender in the book, and the homoerotic possibilities show further unmet gender expectations. The male gender here is unstable.

CHAPTER 4: FEMALE AS MALE

Introduction

Many critics, like Weems and Carden, have treated the place of men as the people represented in Hosea's marriage metaphor, but fewer have commented on the reverse side of this metaphor—Gomer's role as the vehicle for male representation. A view toward a female voice is very important because it is so scarcely done. As I argued in the last chapter, the intended audience of the book is male Israelites, the legal constituency of the nation; however, the fact remains that for thousands of years women have also been among the readers and listeners of Hosea. Feminism in the past few decades has embraced the position of the female reader, but too frequently even feminist critics do not go beyond Gomer's circumstances to find her voice. Thus, here I attempt to catch a glimpse of her voice, but, like the male voice in the last chapter, it will dissolve into indistinguishability as gender distinctions fade, succumbing to inevitable instability. In this chapter, I will explore the prophecy's marriage metaphor from the point of view of the female, i.e., Gomer as the vehicle and a feminized Israel as the tenor. As a result of the metaphorical intermingling between the vehicle and the tenor, especially in ch. 2, any consistency in using the terms "Gomer" or "Israel" is impossible; thus, I will often use "the female" to refer to both or either, leaving space for ambiguity.

After briefly exploring the identity of the female as an אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים, this chapter

will discuss the instability of the female's gender in three interpretive stages. The first stage consists of viewing the female as an object, i.e., subjugated and oppressed by Hosea/Yahweh. The second stage reverses that, showing cracks in the foundation of patriarchy and finding the female's agency. In the third stage, I question the male-female binary produced by the previous stages and argue that rather than having the nature of opposing forces, the male and the female exhibit constitutive exclusion, where one excludes the other but is simultaneously constituted by both the other and the very act of othering. Of these three stages, I do not view one stage as more valid than the others. The final stage is not more valid than the first two. The female voice is repressed by the male voice, it resists the male voice, and it dissolves into the male voice—all simultaneously. They exist together in tension. The purpose of this chapter is not to provide a single final interpretation of the complexities of gender in prophetic literature, but rather to provide more interpretive possibilities.

Aiding me in these three readings of the female is Michel Foucault's *History of Madness,* which explores the division between reason on the one hand and unreason or madness on the other. An expansion of his doctoral dissertation, this book was published in French in 1961 with an abridged English version in 1964. Only in 2006 did the English-speaking world receive an unabridged translation, and thus its arrival into Anglophone queer theoretical discourse has been long delayed. Though it only briefly mentions homosexuality and does not treat problems like sexism, it does expose societal structures of exclusion and for that reason is an important dialogue partner. Foucault traces the treatment of the mad and views on madness through multiple periods in European history, focusing mostly on the classical and modern ages. He questions

Descartes' assumption when Descartes excludes himself from the category of the madman by his ability to think in a certain way.[121] Foucault argues that this mode of thinking—which can be called reason—establishes itself by the act of excluding the mad. Both categories—the sane and the mad, reason and unreason—have no substance in and of themselves, but rather they are produced by the act of exclusion. I claim that this movement of constitutive exclusion is also at work in the gendered power relationships of Hosea.

The Identity of the Female

In order to determine the point of view of the female in the text, she must first be identified. Her identity is subject to much debate. The dominant view of the last century has been to label Gomer a cult prostitute:

> She could not have been simply a woman of unknown promiscuous tendencies; that would not serve as conscious obedience to the command. A common prostitute would satisfy the public symbolism, but not as eloquently as one whose sexual promiscuity was a matter of the very harlotry of Israel in the cult of Baal. The more likely category is that of sacred prostitutes.[122]

These sacred prostitutes were supposedly "professionals who served as cultic personnel at the shrines where fertility rites were practised."[123] As members of the Baal cult, they supposedly took part in Canaanite sex rites "in which young virgins offered themselves to the divinity and expected fertility in return."[124] Israel was so enveloped in the Baal cult that Gomer appears as nothing out of the ordinary, merely an "average, 'modern' Israelite

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[121] See Foucault, *History of Madness,* 44–7.

[122] James Luther Mays, *Hosea: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 26.

[123] Ibid., 75.

[124] Wolff, *Hosea,* 14.

woman."[125] As a typical Israelite woman, Gomer's "prostitution in the Baal cult was the very epitome of Israel's apostasy."[126] These commentators draw from verses like 4:14 that seem to indicate the existence of these cult prostitutes, and then they identify Gomer as one of that number, a depraved woman worshipping a false god through sexual activity.

This identification fails in many ways. First, no commentator who takes this view has recognized the irony of God's command for Hosea to bear children with Gomer—for if she is a cult prostitute, Yahweh is commanding Hosea to take part in the very act that Yahweh condemns Israel for, i.e., sex with a cult prostitute in order to please a deity. Second, with this interpretation "commentators tend to overplay the sexuality of the Baal cult and underplay the sexuality of Yhwh,"[127] who seduces his metaphorical wife Israel and leads her into the wilderness so that she may "know" him (2:16–25). If the assumption is that Baal is a false god because he is associated with sexuality, then Yahweh is equally false. Third, and perhaps most importantly, cult prostitution in Baal worship simply has no historical basis: "No substantive textual or archaeological evidence exists to verify that such a class of prostitutes ever existed or that such sexual rites were ever performed."[128] The idea of cult prostitution is quickly losing favor among scholars because it appears to be based on misreadings of biblical texts and ancient Greek histories. If the concept is present at all in Hebrew Bible, it is likely libel intended to portray Baal in negative terms and Yahweh in positive terms by comparison. The

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[125] Ibid., 14–15.

[126] Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea,* 125.

[127] Sherwood, *Prostitute,* 234.

[128] Yee, "Hosea," 126–7.

conclusion must be that Gomer was not a cult prostitute.

Doorly offers a unique alternative interpretation of Gomer's identity. Rather than simply assuming that she is a prostitute (cult or otherwise), he suggests, "It is *possible* that the sentence which identifies her as a woman of harlotry [Hosea 1:2] means only that she was an Israelite." [129] While this is an encouraging departure from interpretations involving cult prostitution, this identification is equally unlikely, for it reverses the metaphor. Doorly proposes that because Israel is called harlotrous, then individuals who are portrayed as harlotrous represent Israelites. Thus, Gomer is called harlotrous only to indicate that she belongs to a people who practices (figurative) harlotry. In actuality, however, this metaphor functions in the opposite way. Israel's portrayal as harlotrous is dependent upon Gomer's harlotry (if harlotry is indeed her crime). The nature of Israel's sin can only be qualified as harlotry if it is cast in harlotrous metaphorical terms. The author could have just as easily used a different metaphor: if the prophet were told to adopt misbehaving children, the children would not merit the description of "misbehaving" because they are Israelites; rather, Israelites would merit such a description because they are being represented by misbehaving children. What's more, Gomer is not the only Israelite in the book—presumably, if Gomer is harlotrous because she is an Israelite, then Hosea is equally harlotrous and equally an Israelite. Ultimately, Doorly's suggestion does not fully explain the material and does not take us closer to identifying Gomer.

The key to determining who Gomer is lies in the cryptic designation אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים, which is a highly controversial term. The verbal form of the root זנה is often traditionally

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[129] Doorly, *Prophet,* 53, italics in original.

translated as "commit fornication" or "be a harlot,"[130] and the noun form (זֹנָה/זוֹנָה, the qal active participle) as "prostitute."[131] Phyllis Bird questions these glosses. The assumption implicit in these meanings, according to Bird, is that the noun contains the default meaning and that the verb derives its meaning from the noun. Thus, the noun is "prostitute," and the derived verb is "to act like a prostitute," i.e., "to be a harlot." Bird's suggestion is to reverse the derived meaning so that the verb is primary. In her view, the root is "a general term for extramarital intercourse," so the noun is one who acts in a promiscuous way, from which the translation "prostitute" for the noun would be one (but certainly not the only) possible derived meaning.[132] If this is the case, then Hebrew does not have its own dedicated word for "prostitute," but rather uses זנה in its nominal form to refer to "a professional or habitual fornicator."[133] As a result, if the word זוֹנָה were applied to Gomer, this would not necessarily make her a professional prostitute. Notably, זוֹנָה is in fact not used, so she is not a prostitute of any kind—rather, the more obscure אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים is her designation.

This construct phrase אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים positions Gomer as a woman who possesses or enacts the qualities indicated by root זנה. This prophecy seems to be the first to use זנה in this way. The abstract plural זְנוּנִים makes her a woman characterized by prostitution,

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[130] Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, "זנה," *BDB,* 275–6.

[131] Phyllis A. Bird, "'To Play the Harlot': An Inquiry into Old Testament Metaphor" in *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 223.

[132] Ibid., 226.

[133] Ibid., 222.

by promiscuity, by unfaithfulness; the translations vary widely.[134] Glosses such as "prostitute" (CEB, NLT) and "whore" (MSG) are wholly inaccurate because she is not a professional זוֹנָה but rather a woman characterized by promiscuity, one who is "habitually promiscuous."[135] Some scholars[136] debate this conclusion, but I follow Bird and read Gomer as a promiscuous woman. It is thus not a cult prostitute or an "average Israelite" that Hosea is instructed to marry, but someone who acts and who will continue to act promiscuously.

The Female as Object

It is troubling that Yahweh is the one who calls her an אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים. The text provides no indication that she agrees with the identity 1:2 bestows on her, and her lack of agreement demonstrates her powerlessness. Would she call herself an אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים? The text does not say. She has no authority to name herself but is instead caught up in a masculine power system—a system which uses naming as a method of control and subjugation. Törnkvist treats at length this question of who has the power to name: "Naming is exercising power, and thus the terminology chosen is in no way value-

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[134] Translations include "promiscuous woman" (NIV2011, TNIV), "promiscuous wife" (Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea,* 3; HCSB), "woman of promiscuity" (Keefe, "Hosea's," 21), "woman/wife of promiscuity" (Bird, "To Play," 225), "wife of promiscuity" (Yee, "Hosea," 209), "adulterous wife" (NIV1984), "harlotrous wife" (Mays, *Hosea,* 21), "unfaithful woman" (NCV; Weems, "Gomer," 90), "woman of unfaithfulness" (Törnkvist, *Use,* 118), "wife of whoredom(s)" (ASV, ESV, KJV, NJPS, NRSV), "wife of harlotry" (NASB, NKJV, RSV; Setel, "Prophets," 90), "woman of prostitution" (Hornsby, "Israel," 118–9), "prostitute" (CEB, NLT), and "whore" (MSG).

[135] Yee, "Hosea," 209.

[136] For example, Sherwood (*Prostitute,* 19 n. 4) prefers "promiscuous woman," "prostitute," and "wife of harlotry" in order to maintain ambiguity, and Jennings (*Jacob's,* 139) does not see a difference between promiscuity and prostitution in this context, both being equally negative valuations.

neutral."[137] Moreover, "defining is a matter of power and gender, and of whom is given the right to define."[138] She expounds with a quote from Andrea Dworkin, who argues that "men, because they are intellectually and creatively existent, name things authentically. Whatever contradicts or subverts male naming is defamed out of existence; the power of naming itself, in the male system, is a form of force."[139] By portraying Gomer as a promiscuous woman, the masculine voice casts her as out of control, lawless, and dangerous. The label אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים questions her full value as a person and denies her freedom to use her sexuality as she would without being castigated.

Yahweh identifies her as a woman whose unchecked sexuality endangers male dominance and in so doing identifies her as one who needs a man to rein her in. The world of this text is the world of patriarchy, or, as Törnkvist calls it, a world ruled by a "phallocracy" or even a "phallocrazy."[140] The voice that owns the phallus also owns the discursive authority, which he uses obsessively and crazily to control the female voice. Theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid also explains the nature of Gomer's label well: "In reality, we do not have stories of prostitutes as such in the Bible, neither in the Hebrew Scriptures nor in the New Testament. [. . . T]he prostitute did not have an explicit life in a constituted narrative about prostitution; she was configured only as a piece of religious and political propaganda."[141] The identity of this promiscuous woman is not a neutral,

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[137] Törnkvist, *Use*, 26.

[138] Ibid., 27.

[139] Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (London: The Women's Press, 1981), 18; qtd. in Törnkvist, *Use,* 27 n. 53.

[140] Törnkvist, *Use,* 34.

[141] Althaus-Reid, *Queer,* 95–6.

objective fact—rather, it is a production of the male voice that labels her as one out of control, over whom he must exert his patriarchal and phallocratic power.

Coming through this male voice are two instances in which the female voice is permitted to speak: 2:7 and 2:14, both in which she expresses her desire for her lovers and their gifts. However, it is the male voice that reports her speech, and the male voice quickly puts different words in her mouth, words of fidelity to him (2:9, 18). In the first half of ch. 2, the male threatens to cut off her longing for her paramours with a hedge and a wall so that she may not find them (2:8). Without the ability to meet her lovers, the male predicts (or presumes) that she will decide to return to him (2:9). Later, he threatens to destroy the agricultural gifts from her lovers in order to separate her from them (2:14). These brief moments in which the female voice appears are interspersed with and surrounded by male suppression, and the whole chapter draws to a close with the male's seduction of the female as he leads her into the wilderness and tells her what to call him: "my husband" or "my man" (2:18). Here even the female voice that resists male control is entirely subject to it, and the male drowns out the female in his quest to control.

The near absence of the female voice in the text is evidence of the larger problem of female intelligibility. The world of this prophecy is one in which males have the power of naming and, more generally, the power of discourse itself. The female voice cannot be allowed to speak because this would upset the text's balance of power. If she were allowed to speak or, even worse, if she were to name herself, she would be exerting her power and posing a challenge to the masculine structure. This is unthinkable for the male speaker. The act of communication is almost completely denied to the female. To allow the female to speak is to permit an empowered or even powerful female to exist, and in

this masculine context, this is a contradiction in terms. If the female were to speak, this contradiction would make her unintelligible. Her decision to name herself what she will makes no sense to the patriarchal mindset in which only a male like Yahweh has the power to name; her lack of authority to decide her own name is unnoticed and taken for granted by this phallocratic system. If she were to speak out against the abuse enacted against her, she could not be heard because her voice is denied.

By virtue of this unintelligibility, a split occurs between the male and the female, between the namer and the named, between the one with the power to speak and the one denied such power. Foucault's project in speaking the voice of madness records a similar split between the voice of reason and that of unreason. Between those two, he says,

> There is no common language: or rather, it no longer exists; the constitution of madness as mental illness, at the end of the eighteenth century, bears witness to a rupture in a dialogue, gives the separation as already enacted, and expels from the memory all those imperfect words, of no fixed syntax, spoken falteringly, in which the exchange between madness and reason was carried out.[142]

Likewise, a "rupture in dialogue" occurs between the male and female in Hosea. The female voice cannot be understood in a context where speaking and masculinity are combined into one locus of power. What dialogue might have existed before can now be called "imperfect words," but even those are unstable, "of no fixed syntax, spoken falteringly." The female voice, suppressed by its designation אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים, is reduced to silence.

The Female as Subject

As I showed in chapter 2, Yahweh's command that Hosea marry this אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים

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[142] Foucault, *History of Madness,* xxviii.

has been a notorious interpretative problem for many male (and a few female) readers. James Limburg is compelled to ask the question "How did Hosea feel about all this?" [143] Even the feminist writer Weems is concerned about Hosea's emotions, noting that Hosea 1–3 does not "provide the reader with any clue as to what the prophet felt about what he was commanded to do, or how he felt about the woman Gomer." [144] Most readers, especially those writing from traditional androcentric vantage points, worry about the prophet's feelings and never Gomer's. Too often, readers have related Hosea's feelings to male readers, to the detriment of female readers and the female voice, who are largely ignored. Weems briefly adds that it appears that "Gomer quietly acquiesced to Hosea's overtures," [145] but this exposes the lack of Gomer's expressed feelings without questioning what those feelings might be. This is one of the major problems of Hosean interpretation: *hardly anyone asks Gomer.* She is an object that Hosea comes to possess as a result of a divine imperative, not an agent who has emotions and chooses her life.

However, though her viewpoint is still very frequently lost, many feminist writers have glimpsed some of this character's voice. The silence to which the female voice is reduced is also a silence that can be questioned. Perhaps it is a silence that speaks. Foucault calls *History of Madness* an "archaeology of silence," [146] that is, a search in the written records for points in which silence speaks. For him, the goal was to find and recount the experience of the mad in a system that excludes unreason and denies even the power of language to the mad. In this section, the goal is to find traces of the female voice

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[143] James Limburg, *Hosea–Micah* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 8.

[144] Weems, "Gomer," 90.

[145] Ibid.

[146] Foucault, *History of Madness,* xxviii.

in this male system. This search is an exercise in both reconstruction and deconstruction, an impossible act of rendering the unintelligible intelligible. In this second interpretive stage, I read in order to locate the unspoken voice.

This search for female subjectivity can begin by treating the sentences of which the female is the grammatical subject. A number of such instances appear in chapters 1–3: for example, the female "conceived" (וַתַּהַר) and "gave birth" (וַתֵּלֶד) in 1:3, 6, 8; "weaned" (וַתִּגְמֹל) in 1:8; "acted promiscuously" (זָנְתָה) and "spoke" (אָמְרָה) in 2:7; and "pursued" her lovers (רִדְפָה) in 2:9. With the first two—conception and birth—she is not necessarily an active agent. Yahweh commands Hosea to have children with Gomer, so he must go into her, whether she wants it or not. In addition, she has no choice over whether his fertilization of her womb is successful and presumably limited control over whether that child survives up until birth. These verbs do not demonstrate agency; on the contrary, promiscuity, speaking, and pursuit can. The female's desire for lovers other than Hosea/Yahweh shows her independence. Regardless of the male's wishes, she will not restrain her affection to merely him, and she does not immediately bind herself to his rules. Indeed, as she "pursues" men (2:9), the roles of subject and object are reversed from the expected societal positions: "Not only is 'woman' the subject of the verb, but man (in the form of her lovers) is the object: woman is the pursuer and man the pursued, and man replaces woman as the 'object of desire'."[147] She acts promiscuously and—even if the male's words do eventually overpower hers—she courageously speaks about her action, challenging the patriarchy that would keep her silent, expressing her desire as her own. The final nullification of her words and the reversal of her actions do not remove all

[147] Sherwood, *Prostitute,* 311.

traces of those words and actions. The text records the remnant of her agency.

Furthermore, even when she gives up the pursuit of her lovers (2:9), this is her decision, and the male is threatened: "Her motivations are based in material self-interest and not repentance for her past misdeeds."[148] Her own "motivations" and "self-interest," and not Hosea/Yahweh's exerted force, lead her to come back to him. It is this fact, that the male can only control the female's body and not her will, that upsets him the most. In the first half of ch. 2, before Hosea/Yahweh's wilderness seduction, it does not matter how much he tries to control her, because his efforts cannot change her desire. This shows both the rage she inspires in him and the power his rage reveals in her: "The idea that the main/male voice cannot tolerate a rival self and seeks to subjugate and eradicate it suggests that every sign of female powerlessness in this text, and every offence to the feminist reader, can be read deconstructively as evidence of women's power."[149] The very idea that the woman is challenging his authority is a threat to his masculinity, for in the ancient world, "control of female sexuality is partially constitutive of manhood."[150] When she sees other men, he is less of a man. Hornsby summarizes well the state of this powerful female and maddened male: "She obviously attracts many affluent suitors; she is autonomous in that she chooses to go away or to stay; her presence evokes such desire that a man [God] is willing to resort to cruelty, lawlessness, perhaps even self-humiliation just to have her."[151] Even through this misogynistic text, the female's voice appears.

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[148] Haddox, *Metaphor,* 65.

[149] Sherwood, *Prostitute,* 306.

[150] Stone, "Lovers," 120.

[151] Hornsby, "Israel," 117, brackets in original.

The Female as the Male

Two facts are certain: the female is subjected by the male, but the female also arises to some extent from that subjugation as an active subject. The problem is that the female's agency does not erase her subjugation, and it definitely does not change the system of male dominance: "The danger in creating such female Counter-Voices is that they may not subvert the androcentric tradition overtly reflected in the text; indeed they may serve to underscore the gender division, that polarizing binary where the male is dominant and the female dominated." [152] These searches for a repressed female voice and a deconstructive female subject assume a gender binary, but this binary is merely a construction—a construction that I here aim to expose. In this third stage of interpretation, the female is always already the male; the two are inseparable. The mutually inclusive relation between the male and the female shows itself in three ways: in the production of the female, in the erasure of the female, and in the male's constitutive exclusion of the female.

The male voice produces the female for a metaphorical purpose. This has already been seen in the male's power to name Gomer an אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים; Yahweh establishes her as a woman characterized by promiscuity, whether she is or not and whether she agrees or not. The aim behind this characterization is not to present the female's reality but rather the nation's apostasy. Her reality is sacrificed for and produced by the metaphor: "the character of the marginal was produced by the gesture of segregation itself." [153] She becomes an אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים not necessarily because that is what she truly is, but for the

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[152] Macwilliam, *Queer,* 32.

[153] Foucault, *History of Madness,* 79.

express purpose of excluding her. She is given her designation for metaphorical purposes: she "is presented in the text, not as a strictly *fictional* character, but as one whose only significance is her role as a symbol."[154] The male voice constructs a fictional character in 1:2 that is both a character and a symbol. Her presence in the text is not merely historical or narratival but also polemical. Macwilliam describes this process well: "Many feminist commentators find offence in what they consider to be the insistent emphasis on the female as the model of immorality—a sponge to soak up male guilt. The queer point of view does not deny the offensiveness, but it sees it as not an incidental *effect* of the metaphor but a deliberate *device* intrinsic to the metaphorical process."[155] In order for the male to present male guilt, he constructs an other on which he can place that guilt. This is the irony of Gomer's representation of Israel: the metaphor that, as I argued in the last chapter, challenges Israel's masculinity by representing the people in female terms is the same metaphor that the male produces to keep his masculinity untarnished. If Israel's guilt is placed on a man, it dishonors his masculinity, so the male voice constructs a female character on which to place his guilt. This action that dishonors men is at the same time an effort to save their honor by transferring sin onto an אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים they produce. Gomer, without the ability to name herself, is a ready target for male sin.

However, just as the female voice is a production in order to represent male sin, so also is she erased by her role as representer. The metaphor transfers male sin to the female, but "it is in fact the men who are behaving badly."[156] The woman becomes

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[154] Galambush, *Jerusalem,* 46 n. 55.

[155] Macwilliam, *Queer,* 95.

[156] Ibid., 94.

merely a "looking glass" through which the male audience is seen.[157] Gomer is "masculinized" and "immasculated" (i.e., made masculine) by her position as vehicle of the metaphor.[158] Indeed, "the so-called female is a male in metaphorical drag."[159] The female's erasure is evidenced in the pronouns in ch. 2, which reveal the female disappearing to reveal the male. In 2:19, the third-person feminine singular is used: "I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth [מִפִּיהָ]"; however, in the very next verse, the third-person masculine plural slips in: "I will make for them [לָהֶם] a covenant."[160] The antecedent of both of these pronouns is Israelite men, as represented by Gomer. Feminine pronouns do not occur consistently throughout the text, and even when the female does appear, it is really men that the text is talking about. Her femaleness is used as a symbol for sin, but simultaneously it disappears entirely, revealing the men and their sin, who have been there all along.

These two metaphorical results—female production and female erasure—show the complex relation between the male and female. One cannot exist without the other. The nature of male and female here is similar to the relationship between reason and unreason in Foucault's *History of Madness*. Unreason finds itself inside of reason: "Unreason is not *outside* reason, but precisely *in* it, invested and possessed by it";[161] likewise, reason finds itself inside of unreason: "There lies the primary and most apparent

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[157] Sherwood, *Prostitute,* 255.

[158] Ibid., 289.

[159] Jennings, *Jacob's,* 134.

[160] This observation comes from Macwilliam, *Queer,* 153-4.

[161] Foucault, *History of Madness,* 345.

paradox of unreason: an immediate opposition to reason, whose only content can be nothing other than reason itself."[162] Similarly, male and female each paradoxically contain the other. This can be seen both in the authority the male has to possess and name the female (thereby including her as a produced extension of his own guilt) and in the female representation of men (thereby including them metaphorically within herself). Male and female become intimately connected in the metaphor: "However separate the two domains may appear, everything of importance in the first domain finds its counterpart in the second. Which is to say that the division can only be thought of in relation to the forms of unity whose appearance it authorises."[163] These are two genders that appear separate, like reason and unreason, but are paradoxically connected.

The point at which the two connect is the point of their production. Foucault states of the separation of madness from reason, "The gesture that divides madness is the constitutive one"[164] —this productive gesture is a constitutive gesture. Gender in this text is a production of the one in power. The male and the female do not exist as empirical realities taken from the world outside the text and inserted into its story; instead, human persons are inserted into the text and engendered in order to display positions of power. One voice constructs an image of masculinity that rules over the other(ed) voice, which is produced as an image of femininity. But the female exists in relation to the male as evil is to good: the male is not male without the female to constitute its opposite. The text does not begin with an essential male but rather constructs one as what is the not-female,

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[162] Ibid., 185.

[163] Ibid., 172.

[164] Ibid., xxviii.

simultaneously constructing a female that is the not-male. Yahweh produces Gomer as the אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים while producing himself and Hosea as the not-אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים. Without the female to represent his own opposite, the male does not exist. If the male cannot define his sexual purity as that which is over against female sexual impurity, then his purity does not exist. Inasmuch as the word "darkness" has no meaning part from "light," so the male has no meaning apart from the female. Ultimately, the nature of their relationship is one of constitutive exclusion. The male excludes the female from himself in order to erect and maintain his position of power, but that power has no meaning without its opposite, the powerless. His effort to show himself separate and different from the female reveals his dependence upon her for his own identity. In this interpretive stage, gender distinctions fail entirely. One depends upon the other, and both are functions of the efforts to enact power.

Conclusion

This chapter has moved through three stages of interpretation—the female as object, the female as subject, and the constitutive exclusion of both male and female. This conclusion at this point is not an ending point or a goal, for all three interpretations can and should be held in tension with one another. Feminist critics are correct in exposing the misogyny in Hosea and its glorified mistreatment of women, even in the act of naming Gomer an אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים. Feminist critics are also correct in locating a deconstructive female voice—or at least its remnants. In this queer reading of those themes, I have shown that these are valid and, importantly, that they are related. Subjection, objectification, patriarchy, oppression—all of these are functions of a

metaphor that produces males with power and females without it. As a result of this gesture of production, the males and females find themselves in the other and are in reality part of one unity. In this slippery metaphor, male and female become indistinguishable and inseparable, and gender is revealed to be unstable.

CHAPTER 5: YAHWEH'S MASCULINITY

Introduction

Having previously looked at the human male and the human female in Hosea's marriage metaphor, this chapter focuses on the effects the metaphor has on Yahweh. I argue that though Yahweh tries to establish himself as a dominant masculine God, his masculinity falters. By not being able to control his metaphorical wife's sexuality and preventing other males from copulating with her, he proves himself to have an unstable masculinity. In addition, the very fact that it is Yahweh who initiates the metaphor in the first place shows that it is Yahweh himself who undermines his own masculinity. Both of these aspects of Yahweh's unmanning in the text can be read alongside the performativity notions of Judith Butler and J. L. Austin.

Yahweh's Masculinity is Undermined

This analysis treats the gender performance of Yahweh in light of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble,* which provides an excellent dialogue partner in teasing out the undoing of Yahweh's gender. Butler begins by looking at the category of "woman" and arguing that feminist representations of the people in that category poorly represent them and end up excluding others who need representation. This misrepresentation occurs because the "woman" category is a cultural construct, not a fact based on an inherent identity or essence. The feminine gender, along with any gender, is an unstable construct and not "an

attribute of a person." [165]

Butler's view of gender can be illustrated as a series of moments; along this series, "*regulatory practices* of gender formation" appear.[166] Moment by moment, a person (consciously or not) follows regulatory gender practices and acts out the qualities of a particular gender. The many appearances of gender across this series of regulated moments serves to produce a coherent view of a person's gender: "*woman* itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing." [167] For example, if a person wears typically feminine clothing, walks in a typically feminine fashion, or uses typically feminine hand motions, she is perceived as having a female gender. One instance of feminine performance does not construct her female gender—rather, a series of these regulated practices produces a supposedly coherent picture of a gendered person.

Butler exposes this series as incoherent—one's actions, one's performance, and one's gender will inevitably be inconsistent. Across this series of moments governed by regulatory gender practices, a moment will occur that does not fit a person's dominant picture of gender. When a female-gendered person acts in a typically masculine way, her female gender is shown to be just that: an act. This whole series of gendered events, then, can be described as "'incoherent' or 'discontinuous'" [168]—indeed, the very idea that one can act in masculine or feminine ways proves gender itself to be performative. One

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[165] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (2nd ed.; New York: Routledge, 1999), 14, emphasis in original.

[166] Ibid., 23, emphasis in original.

[167] Ibid., 43, emphasis in original.

[168] Ibid., 23.

performs masculinity or femininity. In fact, "*gender* is not a noun."[169] A person cannot *be* a gender or *have* a gender; one must *do* a gender. It is not based on a prediscursive reality but is an unstable series of practices that people perform—and perform inconsistently. If a person deviates from a culture's pre-scripted and prescriptive plan, the person leaves the "matrix of intelligibility."[170]

This Butlerian description of gender applies to Hosea as well. The book portrays Yahweh as a masculine deity who performs his masculinity in culturally appropriate ways, such as taking a metaphorical wife (Israel) and demonstrating his sexual prowess by seducing her (2:16–22). However, his gender—like everyone's—is ultimately unstable. Butler predicts that gender will show itself to be incoherent, and Yahweh's exemplifies this well as his gender falters.

One of the main ways Yahweh's gender falters appears in his inability to successfully control his wife Israel. Generally speaking, control of women was often perceived of as a regulatory practice to preserve men's masculinity and honor in the ancient world: "The wife's primary contribution to the household was her sexuality, bearing legitimate sons to carry on the family name and keep land and property in the household. The sexuality of wives and daughters was therefore carefully guarded and controlled."[171] Deut. 22:13–29 provides guidelines for how a male should enact this control. A daughter had to be a virgin at the time of her marriage; if she was not, then she was not marriageable and thus not economically profitable to her father. If a husband

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[169] Ibid., 33, emphasis in original.

[170] Ibid., 24.

[171] Yee, "Hosea," 210.

falsely accused his new wife of not being a virgin, and her parents could provide proof of her premarital virginity, then the husband had to pay one hundred silver shekels to her father in order to restore his honor in protecting his daughter's sexual purity (v. 19); if she was found not to be a virgin, the penalty was death (vv. 20–21). Male control of female sexuality passed from the father to the new husband at the marriage, at which point the bridegroom took on the responsibility of keeping her pure; if she slept with another man, both she and her paramour had to die (v. 22). The specific control over female sexuality can be seen in the double standard with regard to the husband: if he slept with another man's wife or fiancée, he and the woman had to die (v. 22), but if he slept with a virgin, his honor was not impugned, and he need not die. He simply had to purchase her from her father for fifty silver shekels (vv. 28–29). The extent to which Hosea is informed by Deuteronomic law is debatable, but these examples show the general cultural mindset in which control of female sexuality lies in men's hands, and men's masculinity is partially dependent on their ability to successfully manage that control.

The thought behind these laws had two goals: to protect the woman from other males and to contain the woman's own sexuality.[172] First, the husband had to protect his wife from other males because his only method for obtaining male heirs was by means of a woman: If it is found that another man has been with her, if one male impregnated another's wife, a paternity dispute would result. Such a dispute would yield the dual effects of the family problem of land inheritance and the honor problem of not having provided protection and control over the wife's sexuality. Thus, by another man's violation of his wife, a husband's own masculinity was violated. If he cannot keep other

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[172] Stone, "Lovers," 127.

men away from his wife, he himself is less of a man. Second, society often saw female sexuality as tending to be promiscuous and insatiable, so men had to manage it. This management included "various strategies, such as insisting that women remain veiled in public, segregating them, restricting their social behavior, to keep their women (and by extension, themselves) honorable."[173] If a woman's "social behavior" escaped her husband's control, and especially if she became unfaithful to him (as she was thought especially prone to do due to her female sexual insatiability), she became dishonorable and brings shame to her husband. She violated his attempts to control her, and his lack of management ability dishonored him. If he cannot keep his wife away from other men, he himself is less of a man. Thus, "control of female sexuality is partially constitutive of manhood."[174] These two actions—containing her sexuality and protecting her from other males—are the actions that Yahweh must perform successfully and continuously in order to have a stable masculinity.

In the endeavor to control his metaphorical wife, Yahweh as husband fails, and thus his masculinity is challenged, for she is a rebellious wife who "acts promiscuously" (2:7). Hosea 2 presents a Yahweh who demands that his wife "put away her promiscuities from her face" (2:4), lest she face severe punishment. Despite how Yahweh pursues her, she states, "I will go after my lovers" (2:7). In a desperate bid to regain control over his unruly wife, he threatens to strip her (at the level of the vehicle) and devastate her land with drought (at the level of the tenor) (2:5). If this does not work, he will physically surround her with thorns so that she may not seek her lovers (2:8).

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[173] Ibid.

[174] Stone, "Lovers," 130.

Later Yahweh reiterates his threat to strip her in front of her paramours (2:12). Here Yahweh is desperate as he lacks control over his wife and reaches out punitively in order to gather some sense of power.

Although it is perhaps unclear that Hosea's culture would have recognized this, according to the culture's own rules, his lack of control betrays his faltering masculinity: though he will finally overpower her in the end of the chapter, for a period of time he can neither protect her from other males nor contain her promiscuous sexuality. Sherwood calls this struggle for control an example of "patriarchy in process rather than patriarchy as an established and unassailable system."[175] Indeed, "[t]he idea that the main/male voice cannot tolerate a rival self and seeks to subjugate and eradicate it suggests that every sign of female powerlessness in this text, and every offence to the feminist reader, can be read deconstructively as evidence of women's power."[176] If the female can rebel to the extent that the male needs to struggle for control, then his masculinity is diminished. Even if he will ultimately overcome, she has still posed a threat because she has succeeded in escaping his grasp and has been unfaithful to him. When this marriage metaphor places Israel in the role of disobedient wife and Yahweh as the cuckolded husband who is forced to threaten and to wrestle his adulterous wife for dominance, it presents him as a husband of questionable masculinity.

Yahweh's lack of control over Israel's female sexuality and his lack of ability to protect her from competing males constitute one example of his undermined masculinity, but Stone, Sherwood, and Macwilliam, present two other ways this occurs: by Israel's

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[175] Sherwood, *Prostitute,* 208.

[176] Ibid., 306.

mistaken attribution of her gifts and by Yahweh's command in 1:2 to marry an unfaithful woman. First, the ability of a man to provide for his wife is connected to his status as a man. When the female voice in 2:7 attributes "bread," "water," "wool," "flax," "oil," and "drink" to her "lovers," this offends Yahweh, for it was really he who provided them, not the Baals. Thus, according to Stone, he is "compelled, as a point of honor, to respond angrily and assertively to this sort of misattribution of provisioning ability."[177] His honor is dependent upon maintaining that it is he who provides goods for his wife and not another man. By robbing Yahweh of the credit for provision, the woman also diminishes his manhood by portraying him as a husband who does not provide, forcing her to go to others for goods. Sherwood adds that apart from the woman's misattribution, Yahweh challenges his own masculinity by insisting that he provided the items in question when they are, in fact, "strongly associated with a domestic context and with the activities of women."[178] It is ironic that the God who must so forcefully argue his male dominance does so by asserting he provided such culturally (stereo)typically feminine items as these, and ultimately to have those feminine items not even attributed to him.

Second, Macwilliam argues Yahweh's undermined gender on the basis of Hosea's masculinity. One's masculinity was dependent upon his ability to maintain his wife's sexuality exclusive to himself in order "to ensure a verifiable patrilinear succession."[179] If a man's wife is violated sexually, a resulting child is of questionable paternity, and the husband's manhood is undermined by his inability to prevent the conception of "progeny

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[177] Stone, "Lovers," 129.

[178] Sherwood, *Prostitute,* 318.

[179] Macwilliam, *Queer,* 113.

[who] cannot be unquestionably his."[180] However, Hosea does not meet this masculine expectation in two ways: the woman whom Yahweh commands Hosea to marry is already violated, and the text is ambiguous as to the parentage of Hosea's children. First, Gomer is promiscuous before the marriage even takes place. Some scholars take the description of his wife as an אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים in 1:2 as "proleptic in nature, its full content not realized until years later with the deterioration and effectual collapse of the marriage relationship,"[181] but, as I showed in chapter 2, this is theologically motivated wishful thinking. Hosea is told to marry Gomer *because* she is promiscuous; he is not the heartbroken romantic fooled by a cruel woman, as traditional scholars have tended to say. Rather, Gomer "is already harlotrous at the point of marriage"[182] and "is always already promiscuous and a prostitute."[183] Hosea's marriage will therefore inevitably have children who have ambiguous or possibly outright adulterous paternity. Second, the text confirms their ambiguous parentage. Jezreel, the prophet's first child, is said to be born לוֹ ("to him," 1:3), signaling that the child might legitimately be his. The births of the next two children, Lo-Ruhama (1:6) and Lo-Ammi (1:8), carry no such specification, so it is unclear who fathered the children. Indeed, Yahweh's very command that Hosea marry is followed by a command to have "children of promiscuity," so illegitimate children are part of God's plan, not an unexpected surprise. By his very obedience to Yahweh's orders, Hosea "becomes less than a man," one whose "manliness has been subverted, whose

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[180] Ibid.

[181] Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea,* 116.

[182] Sherwood, *Prostitute,* 209.

[183] Jennings, *Jacob's,* 141. I disagree with the translation "prostitute," but the point of Gomer's premarital promiscuity stands.

virility has been negated."[184] He has neither protected his wife from other males' advances nor secured a definite lineage.

Macwilliam's comments here deal only with Hosea's masculinity, not Yahweh's. However, near the end of his exploration of the "unmanning" of Hosea, Macwilliam offhandedly "wonders about a Yhwh whose rôle as masculine partner has been to some degree paralleled by a human husband whose masculinity is under question."[185] I assert that through this association, Yahweh is to some degree also "unmanned." This prophecy employs an "intertwined metaphor,"[186] especially in Hosea 2, where Israel and Gomer become interchangeable or indistinguishable at points, and Hosea and Yahweh similarly blend into one another. Some authors even speak of the pair as one unit, referring to them as Hosea/Yahweh.[187] If Gomer's promiscuity diminishes Hosea's manhood, then so also does Israel's unfaithfulness diminish Yahweh's. Hosea's ability to have his own secure heirs is undermined by the God who commands the marriage, and Yahweh's metaphorical representation by Hosea undermines his masculinity by virtue of association.

In this story, Yahweh performs in a successfully masculine way by taking a wife and seducing her, but instances of challenged masculinity cast doubt on the stable masculinity (and thus authority) he presumes to have. In the moment in which his wife is copulating with another metaphorical male, he cannot stop her. In the moment in which his wife is misattributing his gifts, he cannot prevent it. In the moment in which he

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[184] Macwilliam, *Queer,* 113.

[185] Ibid., 114.

[186] Ibid.

[187] See, e.g., Sherwood, *Prostitute,* 214 n. 275, and Carden, "Book," 445. As mentioned, this paper deals with *gender* instability, but this close association also deconstructs the identities of *divine* and *human*.

represents himself in the metaphor with Hosea, he cannot halt the transfer of Hosea's challenged masculinity. Throughout this prophetic story, gender is a feature that Yahweh performs, and the fact that he ultimately cannot perform his gender successfully and consistently shows that it is unstable.

Yahweh Undermines His Own Masculinity

The marriage metaphor originates from the commanding utterance of Yahweh in 1:2, but before analyzing this command, a theoretical framework for understanding utterances is necessary. J. L. Austin provides such a foundation. Austin's linguistic analysis has been very influential in queer theoretical discourse due to its emphasis on performance; Butler's concept of *gender* performance is surely inspired by Austin's *linguistic* performance. In *How To Do Things With Words,* he divides utterances into two types: constative statements, which are often descriptions but always have a truth value, and performative sentences, in which "the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action."[188] Thus, for some sentences, to say something is to do something; common examples are "I do" said at a wedding and "I bequeath" in a will, and common types are "*contractual* ('I bet') or *declaratory* ('I declare war') utterances," among others.[189] Such statements do not describe the situation in which they occur, but they

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[188] J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words* (2nd ed.; eds. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà: Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 5. This distinction is necessarily reductive. In fact, performatives can be constative and constatives can be performative: a performative sentence will, under the right circumstances, theoretically become true by the successful occurrence of the action it performs, and all sentences do something, so every utterance is performative in some way. Austin's later work shows how this binary breaks down. That said, the concept of a performative sentence will suffice as a foundation to understand how an utterance can do something.

[189] Ibid., 7.

rather (attempt to) affect that situation in some way. Not being descriptions and thus lacking truth value, a performative sentence is not true or false but rather felicitous or infelicitous. A broken promise or a promise made deceptively is an infelicitous performative, which does not do what it seems to do. Austin's theory is much more complex than what has been said here, but it will serve our purpose to note that sentences have the potential to perform. What is said can become more than its constitutive words, having an actual physical result.

Returning to the biblical text, in all of these aforementioned examples of undermined masculinity, it is significant to note that Yahweh's challenged masculinity is a result of the metaphor that Yahweh himself initiates. The actors in the metaphor are identified and are assigned roles in 1:2, which contains a command that the character Hosea take a promiscuous wife and have children characterized by her promiscuity because the land has acted unfaithfully toward Yahweh. The verse attributes this command to "a word from Yahweh" (דְּבַר־יְהוָה). Thus, since Yahweh gives the command, then Yahweh establishes the metaphor—the same metaphor that challenges his masculinity. Without this metaphor, Yahweh is not a husband, and Israel is not an promiscuous wife. The inevitable conclusion is that by setting up this metaphor, Yahweh undermines his own masculinity. Yahweh himself portrays Israel as a wife he cannot control, Yahweh himself presents Israel as a wife who does not recognize his own provision, and Yahweh himself establishes the metaphor that associates the "unmanned" cuckold Hosea with Yahweh. With the marriage metaphor, this male God undoes his own masculinity. His metaphor is performative—it does not (merely) describe, but rather it *enacts* the undoing of his own gender. Not only does it have the intended results of both

Hosea's marriage to Gomer and the metaphor based on it, but this metaphor that was meant to shame Israel also carries the unintended consequences of emasculating the speaker of the utterance, Yahweh himself.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that Hosea portrays Yahweh as a God of challenged masculinity who actually challenges his gender himself. His metaphorical wife Israel is beyond his control, and she seeks and falls prey to other males' advances. He fails as a man in his inability to prevent her cuckoldry. In addition, his close metaphorical connection (and often indistinguishability) with Hosea, who has children of unknown paternity, in turn shows Yahweh's masculinity to be insecure, just as Butler predicts of all gender. What is more, Yahweh undermines his own masculinity by establishing the metaphor, seen as an Austinian move of performativity. I do not here wish to deconstruct the notion of Yahweh's divinity, but his often indistinguishable relationship with his prophet and his faltering gender can challenge his very intelligibility as an individual. If Yahweh undoes himself as a gendered being, in what other ways might he undo himself? These many points of deconstruction "may allow us a space for alternative, even queer, scenarios that involve surrender, rather than the embrace, of the structures of agonistic masculinity."[190] Butler and Austin have provided such space to see the undoing of gender in this text.

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[190] Stone, "Lovers," 139.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Gender in Hosea is cloudy. This analysis has shown Hosea's gender instability in three ways: the men are unmanned by their representation as a woman, the woman is immasculated by being a stand-in for these men, and Yahweh's masculinity is undone by his lack of control and by his very own action in establishing the metaphor itself. Thus, the picture of Hosea now is not a black-and-white portrait of a heartbroken prophet and a lascivious wife, but a mottled grey vision of a non-male male and a non-female female. This paper has not clarified the nature of gender in Hosea, but obfuscated it.

This logic of undoing gender shows the ultimate dissolution of gender in the book. If the men's masculinity is questioned, then perhaps they are genderqueer. The female persona's gender becomes genderqueer as well with its close metaphorical association with men. Yahweh too loses a firm grip on his gender. Though the concept of heterosexuality is anachronistic, with these unstable genders in this prophecy, any expectation that of a stable male-female marriage disappears.

The text has the potential to mean more and to mean in different ways than what the original or expected audience(s) perceived. A reading that questions gender structures shows male readers that they are not always dominant, and that sometimes the text wants them to relate to the female. Female readers can find a voice that challenges patriarchal or "phallocrazy" systems. Intersex or genderqueer readers can find themselves in a text that (consciously or not) defies a stable gender binary, where no one gender exists in and of

itself. The challenging of gender questions strict boundaries, especially boundaries drawn through systems of power.

Unfortunately, there is no way to know how much of this instability the original audience(s) may have seen. Surely, the male readership took offence at being represented as a promiscuous woman, but it is unlikely they would have recognized the unstable gender of the God to whom the book calls them to return. The text itself too often seems happily unaware of its own instability: Yahweh, who has failed to control his wife, arrives at 2:16–25 with his gender intact. He takes Israel into the wilderness and seduces her. Israel capitulates, saying, "You are my God" (2:25), and Yahweh wins. A seemingly stable result emerges from the preceding chaos, and it is as if the chaos has never existed.

But besides being the final point in ch. 2, this is also the logic of a queer reading. This has been an encounter with the fluctuating chaos of Schrödinger's cat: unobserved, it is an indistinguishable and undecided mixture of cat and gas, but observed, it produces a fixed result, either a living or dead cat. The fixed result of this queer reading is multiple pages of black-and-white text, a thesis positioned within and against a theoretical discourse, and an argument neatly divided and categorized between the very genders that it aims to deconstruct. The dissolution of gender in Hosea ends in resolution, and this analysis must have a resolution as well. Perhaps this is the nature of instability—it is itself unstable, and it might resolve at any point.

This conclusion does not erase the chaos though. This chaos and instability is always the grounding of what we perceive as stability. If the male audience finally repents and turns to Yahweh, this does not change the fact that they followed Baal before. If the female persona relents from her lovers, this does not change the fact that she has

loved others besides her husband. If Yahweh is eventually victorious, this does not change the fact that he had to struggle to attain his victory. The destination at the end of Hosea 2 does not erase the chaotic journey the text took to get there. This paper has aimed to show the chaos in that journey.

And this journey can continue, as this prophecy provides ample opportunity for further research. This paper has aimed to show the book's instability along the axis of gender and sexuality, but the book has other axes to deconstruct. If gender is unstable in the book, then so is parentage. The children, Jezreel, Lo-Ruhamah, and Lo-Ammi, bear names that represent Israel's apostasy, but the names of the latter two are revoked in 2:3, and they are provided with new, more positive names. Who are these children in this metaphor then, if their identities are constituted by Israel's apostasy and prophesied reconciliation? Their names and identities are unstable.

In addition, if gender is unstable, then so is divinity. The permeable metaphorical boundary between Hosea and Yahweh in ch. 2 can be said to collapse the division between God and humanity. How much of ch. 2 is Yahweh's words, and how much is Hosea's? What is the difference between the two? The human and the divine meet and intertwine. Furthermore, Yahweh's self-designation as "Baal" in 2:18 dissolves the barrier between Yahweh and the other gods he fears so much. Who is Yahweh, then, if he punishes his people for following Baal—a name he also he calls himself?

Indeed, more can even be said along this axis of gender and sexuality. This paper's conclusion does not aim to be conclusive. A queer reading must always be queered further, lest it ossify and become a constitutive part of the normativity it aims to overthrow. My description of Hosea's instability is by no means the final word on the

matter. This paper is yet another wave in the ocean—crashing here and yielding space for another wave to arise.

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