

Hosea 1–2 and the Search for Unity

Matthew W. Mitchell

Department of Religion, Temple University,
Philadelphia, PA 19122-6090, USA

Abstract

Hosea's early chapters have borne the weight of much of the critical commentary and scholarly discussion of the book throughout the history of its interpretation. Although much of this attention has been the result of what Yvonne Sherwood has termed the 'critical obsession with Hosea's marriage', and its related assumptions about the biographical basis of this material, much of this scrutiny has also focused on the issues of genre and literary structure. Hosea is affirmed as a unified work of exceptional quality, in spite of the initial impression the text often gives of being comprised of distinct and loosely connected units whose meaning is obscured by an admittedly corrupt textual tradition. Chapters 1–2 are often described as a microcosm of this exceptionally subtle book, although this study's close examination of these chapters calls scholarly affirmations of Hosea's unity into question.

A metaphor's not supposed to tie things up and it's not supposed to be limiting.¹

The structure of the book of Hosea has long been a source of difficulty for biblical scholars.² Often commentators will provide lengthy disclaimers

1. Gillian Cooper and John Goldingay, 'Hosea and Gomer Visit the Marriage Counsellor', in Philip R. Davies (ed.), *First Person: Essays in Biblical Autobiography* (The Biblical Seminar, 81; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), pp. 119-36 (131).

2. Jerome (Hieronymus), *Commentarii in Prophetas Minores* (CChr Series Latina, 76; Turnolt: Brepols, 1969), Prologue (1): *Si in explanationibus omnium prophetarum sancti Spiritus indigemus aduentu, ut cuius instinctu scripsi sunt... Quanto magis in explanatione Osee prophetæ orandus est Dominus...?* ('If we stand in need of the

about the corrupt state of the text and the seemingly fragmented character of the work,³ citing Robert Lowth's 1787 assessment that the book bears more than a passing resemblance to the cryptic utterances of the Sibyl.⁴ This disclaimer aside, many of these commentators then proceed to announce that, in spite of these difficulties, Hosea is a work of remarkable subtlety that displays a discernible, if sometimes obscure pattern, noting that the book begins with a negative indictment of Israel in ch. 1, and ends with blessing in ch. 14.⁵ The seemingly disjointed structure of the book, and its 'disorientating or disturbing'⁶ effects upon its readers, have generally been attributed to the difference in genre between the book's early and later chapters,⁷ the former containing biographical information and the

presence of the Holy Spirit when interpreting all the prophets [as they were written at his instigation]...by how much more in the interpretation of the prophet Hosea should the Lord be called upon?'). Cf. the summary of reactions provided by Yvonne Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet: Hosea's Marriage in Literary-Theoretical Perspective* (JSOTSup, 212; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), pp. 11-12.

3. Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 24; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), p. 66: 'The text of Hosea competes with Job for the distinction of containing more unintelligible passages than any other book of the Hebrew Bible'.

4. Robert Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* (trans. G. Gregory; 2 vols.; London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1995), II, p. 96: 'There is therefore no cause to wonder, if in perusing the prophecies of Hosea, we sometimes find ourselves in a similar predicament with those who consulted the scattered leaves of the Sibyl'.

5. Gale A. Yee, *Composition and Tradition in the Book of Hosea: A Redaction Critical Investigation* (SBLDS, 102; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), pp. 51-52; Andersen and Freedman (*Hosea*) state that 'because of the many subtleties and intricacies in the text which are noted below, and which make it clear that the Book of Hosea is not a mere hodgepodge, extreme caution is advisable in dealing with materials where patterns are not discernible' (p. 66); Hans W. Wolff (*Hosea* [trans. Gary Stansell, Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974]) notes that, in spite of the 'peculiar way the sayings have been strung together' (p. xxx), 'three large complexes of transmission [chs. 1-3; 4-11; 12-14] are parallel to each other in that they each move from accusation to threat, and then to the proclamation of salvation' (p. xxxi).

6. Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, p. 15.

7. William Rainey Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1905), p. clxiii; Wolff, *Hosea*, pp. xxix-xxxii (esp. xxx and xxxi); Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, pp. 57-59. James Luther Mays (*Hosea: A Commentary* [OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969]) shares the view that the book 'falls into two easily recognized sections' and also sees disunity in chs. 4-14, as the section 'lacks the clear plan of the first' (p. 15). A.A. Macintosh (*A*

latter oracular utterances. The text's shifting between positive and negative tones (termed Yhwh's 'schizoid utterances' by one scholar⁸) has also presented difficulties to commentators, although this fluctuation between positive and negative oracles does not seem to be an obstacle to proclamations of the book's unity and subtlety any more than the corrupt state of the text or the disputes over the varying genres within the book.⁹ Indeed, as noted above, this vacillation has been deemed to be less an objection to the unity of Hosea than an important component of the book's subtlety and an integral part of its structure. Martin Buss, in his 1969 study of Hosea, thus claims that the book's use of negative imagery and negation is a synthesizing, as well as uplifting, element:

Hosea's prophetic word points to a reconciliation which incorporates, but goes beyond, a consciousness of personal reality with a sense of responsibility and alienation. In dialectical terminology, it is a negation of the negation. It does not ignore a condition of tension, but having pictured reality in the blackest terms possible, it goes on to announce a victory beyond.¹⁰

Literary studies of Hosea, such as those of Harold Fisch and Gerald Morris, have not treated the issues of unity or coherence very differently from the standard commentaries.¹¹ Gerald Morris's study of Hosea, in particular,

Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Hosea [ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997]) entitles chs. 1–3 'Hosea's Marriage' (pp. 113–26), and treats chs. 4–14 as a fragmentary collection of oracles from various times addressing a wide variety of circumstances.

8. Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, p. 236.

9. Harper (*Amos and Hosea*) consistently seems to see the bulk of the book as disjointed, as well as displaying a rather more somber tone than later commentators, describing the redaction of Hosean utterances as a putting together 'without chronological or logical relationship' (p. clxiii).

10. Martin J. Buss, *The Prophetic Word of Hosea: A Morphological Study* (BZAW, 111; Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1969), p. 140.

11. Harold Fisch, 'Hosea: A Poetics of Violence', in *idem*, *Poetry with a Purpose: Biblical Poetics and Interpretation* (Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 136–57; Gerald Morris, *Prophecy, Poetry and Hosea* (JSOTSup, 219; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996). Feminist readings of Hosea have, despite (or because of) their reaction against biographical readings of Hos. 1–3, tended to be almost exclusively concerned with chs. 1–3 and the figure of Gomer. See Phyllis Bird, '“The Harlot as Heroine”', *Narrative Art and Social Presupposition in Three Old Testament Texts*, *Semeia* 46 (1989), pp. 119–39; *idem*, 'To Play the Harlot': An Inquiry into an Old Testament Metaphor', in Peggy L. Day (ed.), *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), pp. 75–94; Gale A. Yee, 'Gomer: Victim of Violence or Victim of Metaphor?', *Semeia*

claims that the problem of structure within the book is not a problem at all, but simply a perceived problem because of erroneous genre classification. From a 'poetical' perspective, according to Morris, there is a marked unity to the book. Not a single chapter is void of the poetic devices of varying types of wordplay; in particular puns, 'root-play', and repetition.¹² Morris states that 'it is hard to imagine another book in which wordplay is such a pivotal device'.¹³ The prevalence of wordplay and repetitions which run throughout the entire book, such as the use of the root שׁוּב being juxtaposed with the root יָשַׁב,¹⁴ has simply been overlooked by scholars reading non-poetically. An inability correctly to identify the genre of the book of Hosea is thus the source of all errors. Morris states that

those critics who have found Hosea to be structurally incoherent are invariably applying to this poetic text the structural standards of rhetoric. Rhetoric, in order to persuade with clarity, requires coherence and logical transitions, standards which these same interpreters would not dream of imposing on a long lyric poem such as Whitman's "Song of Myself" or the Bible's Song of Songs.¹⁵

For Morris, the unity of Hosea is to be found in 'other features, previously ignored as rhetorically irrelevant'.¹⁶ Chapters 1–3 are an integral part of

47 (1989), pp. 87–104; Naomi Graetz, 'God is to Israel as Husband is to Wife: The Metaphoric Battering of Hosea's Wife', in Athalya Brenner (ed.), *The Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (The Feminist Companion to the Bible, 8; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 126–45; Rut Törnkvist, *The Use and Abuse of Female Sexual Imagery in the Book of Hosea: A Feminist Critical Approach to Hosea 1–3* (Uppsala Women's Studies; Uppsala: Uppsala Library, 1998); Teresa J. Hornsby, "'Israel Has Become a Worthless Thing": Re-Reading Gomer in Hosea 1–3', *JSOT* 82 (1999), pp. 115–28. Fokkelen Van Dijk-Hemmes ('The Imagination of Power and the Power of Imagination: An Intertextual Analysis of Two Biblical Love Songs: The Song of Songs and Hosea 2', *JSOT* 44 [1989], pp. 75–88) explicitly states: 'I do not conceive of Hos. 2, nor of its immediate context, chs. 1 and 3, as a direct reflection of the "real" life of Hosea' (p. 79).

12. Morris, *Prophecy, Poetry and Hosea*, pp. 45–100; cf. Fisch, 'Hosea: A Poetics of Violence', pp. 144–49.

13. Morris, *Prophecy, Poetry and Hosea*, p. 78.

14. Morris, *Prophecy, Poetry and Hosea*, p. 120. Morris lists other root-plays such as סוּר/סָרַר/יָסַר and their connection with יִשְׂרָאֵל, most notably in 4.16's כִּי כִפְרָה and סוּרָה סָרַר with repeated sibilants and the strong *resh* sounds pre-dominating. Morris adds 4.19's צָרַר (p. 122 n. 63) and one could also mention פָּרַה's strong connection with the various wordplays connected with the name אֶפְרַיִם (p. 125).

15. Morris, *Prophecy, Poetry and Hosea*, pp. 108–109.

16. Morris, *Prophecy, Poetry and Hosea*, p. 109.

the book as they serve to introduce many of the words and catch-phrases which will come to characterize later chapters, often by means of providing a lengthy list of the keywords.¹⁷ These links are only visible, he asserts, if one accepts the premise that Hosea is first and foremost a poetic text. This classification of a prophetic book as poetic is not a new suggestion, but Morris claims that biblical scholars have misunderstood the implications of designating Hosea as a book of poetry by continuing also to view it as rhetoric, a mixed genre designation he finds unlikely. He writes:

Those who identify biblical prophecy as rhetoric and then add blithely that it is poetry, have not perhaps considered how very odd such a connection really is. In terms of purpose especially, the two types of communication stand utterly opposed to each other. Rhetoric is equipmental language: it exists for an external purpose. Rhetoric seeks to persuade an audience of a proposition or a course of action.¹⁸

There is much to speak against the rather sharp and absolute separation which Morris makes between poetry and rhetoric, not least of all the confusion over terminology in biblical and non-biblical literary theory.¹⁹

17. Morris, *Prophecy, Poetry and Hosea*, p. 111: ‘These early chapters abound in lists. For instance, as described in some detail earlier, 1.7 includes a list of human means of salvation [root שׁשׁ, used twice in this verse]: bow, sword, war, horses and riders. The first three items on this list reappear in 2.20 and then separately several times in the main body of the book. The last two items, a formulaic word pair, disappear until 14.4, where “horse” reappears, again in conjunction with the verb root שׁשׁ.’

18. Morris, *Prophecy, Poetry and Hosea*, p. 42.

19. See George Aichele *et al.*, *The Postmodern Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), especially the chapters ‘Structuralist and Narratological Criticism’ (pp. 70–118) and ‘Rhetorical Criticism’ (pp. 149–86). They write, ‘poetics...most often appears as the preferred term in Hebrew Bible studies for what New Testament critics call narratology’ (p. 70). Even Aristotle writes of the commonality shared by poetry and rhetoric in matters such as concern for style (*Rhet.* 3.1.3–4): ‘It is clear, therefore, that there is something of the sort in rhetoric as well as in poetry’ (δηλον οὖν ὅτι καὶ περὶ τὴν ῥητορικὴν ἐστὶ τὸ τοιοῦτον ὥσπερ καὶ περὶ τὴν ποιητικὴν) (John Henry Freese [ed. and trans.], *The ‘Art’ of Rhetoric* [LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1947], pp. 346–47). J.J. Glück (‘Paronomasia in Biblical Literature’, *Semitics* 1 [1970], pp. 50–78), comments ‘we shall use the word “rhetoric” to denote literature intended mainly for oral delivery’ (p. 50 n. 2). This definition should serve as an indicator of the breadth of the term’s use in biblical studies, although it should be mentioned (*contra* Morris) that the distinction of rhetoric from poetry is not absolute now, nor was it so in ancient times. See Brian Vickers (*In Defence of Rhetoric* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988], pp. 59–62), and also Donald C. Bryant (‘Uses of

Yet more curious is the claim that the disunity most scholars find in a first glance at the book is a result of misreading the book as rhetoric, particularly since rhetorical criticism in biblical studies has often emphasized a focus on the text's final form as a unity.²⁰ More likely, this view is an admission that the book's present appearance is in some way not logical, and thus needs to be made so. This view parallels Andersen and Freedman's claim that, despite all appearances to the contrary, Hosea is not a mere 'hodgepodge'.²¹

Negation: 87

These studies of Hosea, regardless of their understanding of the book's structure, claim that a microcosm of this structure can be seen in the use of negation in its opening chapters. Despite the debates concerning the genre designation of Hosea's early chapters, Hosean scholarship has almost universally agreed that if there is a solution to the problem of Hosea's structure, it will be found through careful analysis of the book's opening chapters.²² The movement from judgment to blessing, condemnation to

Rhetoric in Criticism', pp. 1-14) and O.G. Brockett ('Poetry as Instrument', pp. 15-25) in Donald C. Bryant (ed.), *Papers in Rhetoric and Poetic* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1964), to see the depth of the debate which Morris chooses not to acknowledge with his 'utterly opposed' definitions. For the most extensive discussion of the rise of rhetorical criticism in biblical studies, see Roland Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis: An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric* (JSOTSup, 256; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 9-42.

20. Andersen and Freedman (*Hosea*), most notably, are at some pains to emphasize that their work is rhetorical criticism, and that their 'premise and point of departure are conservative, that the book is essentially the work of a single person, and that the text is basically sound' (p. 59).

21. Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, p. 66.

22. Francis Landy (*Hosea* [Readings: A New Biblical Commentary; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995]) writes that 'the narrative of ch. 1 is a prototype of that of the entire book... [W]e will also consider ch. 2 as a *mise-en-abyme*, or microcosm, of the whole' (p. 12); James Luther Mays (*Hosea: A Commentary* [OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969], p. 24) terms it a 'family' metaphor; Wolff (*Hosea*, p. 10) refers to it as 'by no means an allegory', but rather belonging to 'the literary genre of the *memorable*'; A.A. Macintosh (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Hosea* [ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997], p. 9) terms it 'a parable or sign (cf. the Hebrew word *mšl*)'; Andersen and Freedman (*Hosea*, pp. 124-25) describe it as 'not allegory in the strict sense' but 'prophecy' and thus can have a 'variegated' presentation; cf. Buss, *The Prophetic Word of Hosea*, pp. 34, 58. Morris (*Prophecy, Poetry and*

reconciliation, negative to positive, or negative to negated negative are all alleged to be implied in the transformation of the children's names from names of woe and exclusion to names of acceptance and inclusion. Yet, if one carefully analyzes the use of that basic term of Hebrew negation, לֹא, in Hosea's opening chapters, what sort of patterns or structure does one find?

The first two appearances of לֹא in the book of Hosea are in the name Lo-Ruhamah and in the explication of the name's significance: 'Call her name Not-Pitied, for Not-Again shall I pity the house of Israel' (Hos. 1.6). The naming of לֹא עַמִּי in 1.8 continues the pattern established with Lo-Ruhamah: 'Call his name Not-My-People, for you are not my people'. Verse 9 makes use of two negated names, one of which is intended for the son (Lo-Ammi), while the other is a play upon the divine name:

וַיֹּאמֶר קְרָא שְׁמוֹ לֹא עַמִּי כִּי אֶהְיֶה לֹא עַמִּי
וְאֵנֹכִי לֹא־אֶהְיֶה לָכֶם

The phrase לֹא־אֶהְיֶה could be understood as building upon the use of names previously encountered with the naming of Hosea's children. The literal meaning is 'I shall not be', and most commentators have understood this use of אֶהְיֶה as a divine name, with allusions to the story of the revelation of the divine name יְהוָה to Moses in Exod. 3.14.²³ The *maqquph* in the MT of Hosea, indicating that the negation and the verb are to be read with one stressed syllable, taken with the preceding examples of Hosea's children strengthens the interpretation of Hos. 1.9 as a new, negated divine name: Lo-Ehyeh.²⁴ Of the six appearances of the negative לֹא in the first

Hosea), as noted above, asserts that chs. 1–3 provide the lists of important key-words necessary for interpreting the remainder of the book (p. 111).

23. 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites: "Ehyeh has sent me to you"' (Exod. 3.14). Cf. Wolff, *Hosea*, pp. 21–22; Mays, *Hosea*, pp. 29–30; Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, pp. 197–99; G.I. Davies, *Hosea* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), pp. 59–60; Macintosh, *Hosea*, pp. 26–29; Fisch, 'Hosea: A Poetics of Violence', pp. 144–46; Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, pp. 248–51. Thus Willibald Kuhnigk (*Nordwestsemitische Studien zum Hoseabuch* [Biblica et Orientalia, 27; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1974]) argues on this basis against the critical apparatus of the BHS, writing 'Die Annahme dieses Wortspiels ist auch ein Argument gegen die BHS (u.a.), die für 'ehyeh lakem als probabiler legendum 'elohêkem notiert' (p. 5). See further Morris, *Prophecy, Poetry and Hosea*, pp. 128–29, on the form יְהוָה in ch. 13 as an allusion to 1.9, although compare BDB (p. 13) and GKC (pp. 475–76).

24. Wolff (*Hosea*, p. 21) observes: 'The last four words are comprehensible only when thus interpreted: "I am not" (לֹא־אֶהְיֶה; note the *maqquph*) functions as a predicate noun'.

chapter of Hosea, three appear as portions of names while two of the remaining occurrences appear in the explanations of the names' significance and meaning.

As the reader who is familiar with the naming of Hosea's children well knows, the anticipated positive forms of the children's names do eventually appear in 2.25, foreshadowed by a preliminary re-naming in 2.3. This structure establishes a pattern which is invoked in virtually every occurrence of the negative adverb **לֹא** in the first two chapters. For example, in 2.6 the phrase **לֹא אֲרַחֵם** is exactly the phrase used to explain Lo-Ruhamah's name in 1.6: 'Name her Lo-Ruhamah, for I will no longer pity them'. Yet, in 2.6, the verse intertwines the explanation of Lo-Ruhamah's name with other symbolic 'names' for the Israelites. The Israelites, represented symbolically by Hosea's children, Lo-Ammi and Lo-Ruhamah, alternate between being **יְלִדֵי זִנּוּנִים** (1.2), **בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל** (first appearing in 2.1), **בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִי** (2.1) and **בְּנֵי זִנּוּנִים** (2.6) within a short amount of space. This pattern creates the perception of a continual shifting between positive and negative, with one anticipating the other since it is impossible to invoke the negated term without mention of the positive term at one and the same time.²⁵

This pattern of removal of the negation from the names of the children (Hos. 2.3) is immediately followed by two more uses of the negative: 'Contend with your mother, contend: for she is Not-My-Wife (**לֹא אִשְׁתִּי**), and I am Not-Her-Man (**לֹא אִישָׁהּ**)' (2.4). The wording is similar to that found in the first chapter, with Lo-Ammi's name being formed in the same manner, with a negative attached to a suffixed noun:

Hos. 1.9:

כִּי אַתָּם לֹא עַמִּי
וְאֲנִכִּי לֹא־אֶחָדֶיהָ לְבָכֶם

Hos. 2.4:

כִּי הִיא לֹא אִשְׁתִּי
וְאֲנִכִּי לֹא אִישָׁהּ

25. Fisch ('Hosea: A Poetics of Violence', p. 145) also observes that names containing a negated term contain and thereby anticipate that term in its positive form, although he views the situation strictly dialectically: 'But all these names contain their own antitheses. In fact they are themselves antitheses, names that exist only by virtue of that which is denied. We are haunted by their contraries.' See also Grace I. Emmerston, *Hosea: An Israelite Prophet in Judean Perspective* (JSOTSup, 28; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), p. 15: 'hope is latent in the word of judgement... **לֹא** and **לֹא־רַחֲמָהּ** are constant reminders of a relationship now broken'.

The similarities between these two verses in terms of both content and syntax support the sense of a stylistic rather than accidental connection between the two. In 2.10, another similar sounding phrase occurs: **וְהִיא לֹא יָדְעָה כִּי אֲנִי נָתַתִּי לָהּ** ('And she did not know that it was I who have her...'). All the same elements, including the same parts of speech that occurred in the phrases in 1.9 and 2.4, are present, with merely the positions of the **אֲנִי** and **כִּי** being reversed in 2.10. Once again the phrases are alluded to later in the chapter in their positive forms (2.18, 22), although in a less direct manner this time. Hosea 2.25 also contains a direct play upon the names of the children, with removal of the negation, in a manner similar to that of 2.3 and foreshadowed by its phrase **לֹא־עַמִּי אַתֶּם**. The difference is that in 2.3 it is not Yhwh who is saying 'my people', but merely commanding it to the siblings.

The appearance of the positive forms of Lo-Ammi and Lo-Ruhamah in 2.25 is not an unanticipated occurrence following the similar pattern of phrases like 2.4's **וְאֲנִי לֹא אִישָׁהּ** and 2.10's **וְהִיא לֹא יָדְעָה**, both of which undergo reversals into their positive opposites through removal of the negation in an interwoven pattern. The pattern is already, at this point in the book, well established: the negated name or descriptor is followed in each case by its positive counterpart at a later point. In the case of the alternation between **לֹא אִישָׁהּ**... **לֹא אִשְׁתִּי** (2.4) and **תִּקְרָא אִישִׁי** (2.18), this pattern occurs within the series of negative/removal-of-negative initiated with the children's names in ch. 1 but not completed until the end of ch. 2. These patterns occur within the initial naming and re-naming of the children, foreshadowing it. The final re-naming of the children in 2.25 should occasion little surprise for the reader after seeing similar patterns at work with terms like 'my husband' and 'she is not my wife'.

If one lists the occurrences of **לֹא** in Hosea's first two chapters one finds that the use of negated names is closely followed by what appears to be the 'normal' use of the negative. The line between the use of names and the more usual and expected sequence of the negative followed by a verb is a very thin one. In the case of the names encountered in ch. 1, both Lo-Ruhamah and Lo-Ehyeh are, at the same time as being names, also examples of the rather ordinary syntactical sequence of **לֹא** followed by a verb.²⁶ Thus, it is not an exaggeration (*pace* Morris) to read the occurrences of **לֹא** which follow immediately upon and during its use in the naming and re-naming in ch. 2 with a particular force and emphasis which would not be present in these phrases in a different context.

26. GKC §152e (p. 479).

This pattern certainly challenges the attempts to read chs. 1–2 in an order other than the present one on the assumption that it is merely an accident of the book’s redactional history. Yet, to further confirm the importance of this pattern of alternation between positive and negative and the importance of giving special attention to the use of the negative adverb, examples can also be drawn from elsewhere in the book. Hosea 11.9 contains four occurrences of the negative **לֹא**. In this verse it is difficult not to see the negative as providing a link between the various elements of the verse, as well as with certain elements found elsewhere in earlier portions of the book:²⁷

לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה חֲרוֹן אַפִּי לֹא אָשׁוּב לִשְׁחַת אֶפְרַיִם
כִּי אֵל אֲנִכִּי וְלֹא אִישׁ
בְּקִרְבְּךָ קָדוֹשׁ וְלֹא אָבוֹא בְעִיר

I will not execute my fierce anger;
I will not again destroy Ephraim;
for I am God and no mortal [literally, ‘for God am I, and No-Man’],
the Holy One in your midst,
and I will not come in wrath.

In each bicolon the first word in the second stich is the negative adverb (with or without the prefixed –ו), and the word beginning the first stich of the first bicolon is also **לֹא**. The middle bicolon in particular brings to mind ch. 2, although in this bicolon and throughout the entire verse the negative signifies something positive: ‘For “El” am I, and “Lo-ish”’. The name of Yhwh is not just **לֹא-אֱלֹהִים** (1.9) but also **לֹא אִישׁ** (2.4; 11.9). The fact that the consonants of **לֹא** and **אֵל** are the same adds to this fluctuation of positive and negative phrasing, particularly in this stanza in which 13 out of the 18 words contain either an aleph or a lamedh, and in which the second word in five of the six cola contains an initial aleph. The verse is more effective for these reasons, but its success is far more heavily dependent upon the reader’s being attuned at this point in the book to this use of the negative, prepared by the use of the negative in the symbolic names and descriptions of the children and the wife (**אִשְׁתִּי וְנוֹנִים**, 1.2; **לֹא אִשְׁתִּי**, 2.4) in the early chapters of the book. The use of **לֹא** in a positive description first appears in 2.1 (in reference to the number of Israelites exceeding any possibility of being counted) and 2.18–19. In the latter verses it bears a

27. Andersen and Freedman (*Hosea*, p. 589) feel that this verse provides an instance of the asseverative use of **לֹא** (GKC §149 [pp. 471–73]), thus meaning ‘I will surely destroy’.

positive sense because it is an exclusion of the word/name בעל from both the woman's mouth and memory.

One reason that interpreters have found it difficult to understand Hosea is the regularity of this alternation. Yet, while most of the critical energies directed towards the image of the אִשָּׁה זִנִּיָּים have been concerned with either biographical interpretations of Hosea's marriage or with newer attempts to invert what Yvonne Sherwood has termed 'the critical obsession with Hosea's Marriage',²⁸ there has been far less energy expended on viewing the use of זִנָּה terminology as part of a wider use of terminology and imagery which defies expectations and creates ambiguity and contradiction.

The root זִנָּה in 1.2 is directed towards a description of Hosea's wife, or more precisely, to the woman whom he is commanded to marry. The point which has caused so much contention and critical excitement is the jarring nature of this union. Yhwh says, 'Go and marry a promiscuous woman' and Hosea does just that, a point which the vast majority of critics have found difficult to accept.²⁹ The reason for the difficulty is simply that the verse defies the reader's expectations: the proper sequence is for him to marry a woman and for her then to become promiscuous. Many of the commentaries are dedicated to showing that this sequence is what is 'really' there in the text because the present sequence is difficult to explain.

Hosea 2.16 states: 'Therefore³⁰ I am "alluring" her, and I shall take her to the *midbar* and I shall speak to her heart'. Yet, in the sequence in Hosea 2, the verb אָרַשׁ, used to indicate the act of betrothal, is not used until 2.21–22—three verses after 'my husband' makes its appearance in 2.18. From a logical perspective, the sequence of events is inverted. First the woman is denied the status of wife (2.4), although she is then paraded before her 'lovers' (2.12) and threatened with the punishment of death. These are not the actions one inflicts upon one who is not one's wife; but to be followed by the allurement, then the reinstatement of the title 'husband' before the act of 'betrothal' has the normal sequence of events all wrong. Particularly since it all begins with a call to the children to aid

28. Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, p. 55.

29. See Stephan Bitter, *Die Ehe des Propheten Hosea: Eine auslegungsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), pp. 181–82, for a summary of pre-critical (pre-nineteenth-century) views.

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

in the denial of the woman's status as wife, so that she is acknowledged as mother long before betrothal! Small wonder that attempts to relate ch. 2 to some sort of description of Hosea's domestic reality have been less than successful. While purely metaphorical language does not need neatly to arrange its components, the complete jumbling of the logical order of events, however metaphorical the language, is a striking device when viewed against the background of the text's careful balancing of negative symbols and descriptions with their positive counterparts outlined above.³¹ One could thus say that the paradoxes of Hosea lie at many levels, down to the very oddity of Yhwh's proving himself to be a provider by not providing, since Ephraim/Israel's fruitfulness only increases his distance,³² and that the first two chapters prepare the reader very well for engaging with a book that appears as anything but unified.

Conclusion

Yet, what of the questions of structure, the thesis–antithesis, reversal of fortune that Wolff, Buss, Andersen and Freedman, and various other commentators have noted? Or what of the genre question that so troubles Morris? Surely a close reading of chs. 1–2 resolves the issue of structural unity once and for all, showing that Hosea is unified even if one does not know how to describe that unity? Despite the importance of chs. 1–2 to the book as a whole, as is evidenced by the use of negation in Hosea 1–2, one finds oneself a trifle suspicious of all these views that easily summarize and categorize Hosea, resolving all the widely acknowledged problems with a new genre designation or assertions of even more intricate patterns

31. Once again, the 'over-reading' of the language in this chapter can lead one astray. Daniels (*Hosea and Salvation History*, p. 102) speculates on the use of שׂוּת as to the question of how the bride's father in this instance receives the מִוֶּהָר: 'Once the gift had been received, the girl or woman became the legal wife of the groom (Deut. 22.23–24) even though the marriage was not yet physically consummated (Deut. 20.7; 28.30). But who could be conceived of as Israel's father?' Cf. David J.A. Clines, 'Hosea 2: Structure and Interpretation', in his *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1967–1998, I* (JSOTSup, 292; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 293–313 (308), who writes: 'The allegory is necessarily defective at this point'. Daniels provides an example of reading too much into the metaphor of betrothal; to try to find out who the proud parents would be in a marriage of Yhwh and Israel is certainly to misunderstand the entire chapter on a very basic level.

32. Buss, *The Prophetic Word of Hosea*. Buss observes, 'in Hosea, culture and success as such—even as a gift of God—is paradoxically a problem' (p. 132).

to counteract the impression of confusion and disorder. To quote Yvonne Sherwood once again, the ‘image of reversal is rhetorically reassuring, showing how the opposite emotions are completely under the writer’s and Yhwh’s control, and it is also theologically reassuring, because, reading chronologically, blessing is Yhwh’s “last word”’.³³ One could add that it is interpretatively reassuring as well, since scholars of Hosea have resisted their initial reactions to the text and insisted upon its subtlety, intricacy, and unity in the face of all sorts of evidence of not just intricacy, but of a concerted and consistent ‘messiness’. Chapters 1–2 are certainly a preface to the book as a whole, but a disordered and jumbled preface to a work of disorder and ambiguity.³⁴

Yvonne Sherwood termed the scholarly scrutiny of Hosea’s marriage to be a ‘critical obsession’, but perhaps underlying that marital obsession is another obsession that is not in need of ‘inversion’, but negation: the search for unity. Whether Hosea is mapped as a ‘reversal of condemnation into blessing’, or recast as poetry so that its illogicality is downplayed (even as it is admitted), what has remained consistent in Hosean studies is that, despite differing notions of what constitutes ‘unity’ or what the characteristics of a ‘unified’ work are, Hosea, *despite all appearances to the contrary*, fits those criteria. Yet, surely Hosea 1–2, if one views it as a microcosm of the book’s structure as a whole, negates such comfortable conclusions in much the same manner that scholarly admissions of confusion and corruption continue to negate their assertions of unity and coherence.

33. Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, p. 236.

34. This observation is not motivated by an attempt to ‘deconstruct’ the text of Hosea into a set of unresolved binaries (*à la* Sherwood), although important literary insights could be gained from such approaches. There should be virtually no need since this book deconstructs itself in terms of everything from its imagery to its logic, and most especially with regards to its overarching message or meaning. Deconstructionist approaches also tend to impose as equally rigorous and strict a structural understanding as any synthesizing approach.

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