

Creation Motifs in Hosea

Kirsten Abbott

I

From a feminist perspective, the book of Hosea is a work that raises significant questions regarding gender and power. This investigation begins with a certain suspicion of how Hosea uses images to powerful rhetorical effect, in a way which can be disempowering and oppressive for women.¹ I am particularly interested in exploring the intersection between gender and power in Hosea as it is manifested in Hosea's use of creation imagery, most notably in Hosea 2.18-25 [2.16-23].²

The motifs and imagery associated with creation narratives are not the dominant symbolic components in the book of Hosea. However references to creation ideas, and imagery of God as Creator, do appear at key moments in the work.³ The central text under investigation is Hosea 2.20,23-25 [2.18, 21-23], while two other texts which contain specific creation references, Hosea 4.3 and 8.14a, will also be assessed. Analysis of the way in which ideas of God as creator interact with the surrounding material, in particular the marriage metaphor used for God and Israel, suggests that the rhetorical impact of creation imagery in the book of

¹ Given that this investigation is focused on the final form of the book of Hosea, I will use the term "Hosea" as a convenient shorthand for the presumed authors and redactors behind the final form of the text, and simply note that this term is not identical with the Northern prophet of the eighth century BCE.

² Verse numbers are for the Hebrew text throughout; where the English verse numbering differs, the English verse numbering is given in square brackets. Hebrew verse numbers are retained for my English translations.

³ Although creation traditions have not customarily been considered by biblical critics to have formed an important part of Israelite religion and literature before the exilic period, there has been a relatively recent shift to an awareness of the presence of creation ideas in earlier parts of the First Testament, such as Hosea. David L Petersen, "The World of Creation in the Book of the Twelve," in *God Who Creates: Essays in Honor of W. Sibley Towner* (ed. William P. Brown and S. Dean McBride; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 206-207.

Hosea is far from neutral. The following examination of these passages points to how creation imagery makes absolute Hosea's argument for monolatry, and when such imagery is presented in gendered terms, consequently reinforces hierarchical social relationships.

The book of Hosea presents a multitude of interpretive problems, such as textual difficulties, a complicated redactional history, and the influence of various socio-historical contexts.

Roughly speaking, Hosea lived in the Northern Kingdom in the eighth century BCE. The book which bears his name probably originated in an eighth to seventh century collection of his sayings, reworked in a deuteronomistic redaction in Judah during the time of Josiah in the seventh century, and again during the Babylonian exile of the sixth century. The details of the book's authorship and redactional history are still debated.⁴ This article is focussed on the final form of the text.

II

Hosea 2.18-25 [2.16-23]; focussing on 2.20, 23-25 [2.18, 21-23]

- 2.18 And so on that day, (oracle of YHWH)
you will call me "My husband" and you will not call me "My Baal" anymore.
- 2.19 And I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth,
and they will not be remembered by their name anymore.
- 2.20 And I will make a covenant for them on that day
with the animals of the field, and with the birds of the air,
and the creeping things of the ground;
and bow and sword and war I will break from the earth;
and I will make them lie down in safety.
- 2.21 And I will betroth you to me forever,
I will betroth you to me in righteousness, in justice,
in loyalty and in compassion,

⁴ Gale A. Yee, "The Book of Hosea: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *New Interpreter's Bible* (ed. Leander E. Keck et.al.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 199.

- 2.22 and I will betroth you to me in faithfulness,
and you will know YHWH.
- 2.23 And so on that day, I will answer – oracle of YHWH –
I will answer the heavens and they will answer the earth
- 2.24 and the earth will answer the grain, the wine and the oil,
and they will answer Jezreel.
- 2.25 And I will sow her for myself in the earth.
And I will have pity on Not-Pitied,
and I will say to Not-My-People, “You are my people”
and he will say “My God.”

Hosea 2.18-25 [2.16-23] describes the renewal of the relationship between YHWH and Israel. Form critically, the passage follows the series of three accusations and judgments (the last a surprise ending) in 2.4-17 [2.2-15], and consists of a series of sayings describing the promise of restoration of the bond between YHWH and Israel.⁵ It is set in the larger literary context of the marriage metaphor explored in Hosea 1-3, and is structured around the metaphor of the renewal of the marriage relationship (2.18 [16], 21-22 [19-20]) and the restoration of the family (2.25 [23]).⁶ Some significant creation imagery is interpolated into this passage.

⁵ Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea* (trans. Gary Stansell; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 46-47.

⁶ When I use the term “marriage metaphor”, I note the complex issues and ongoing discussion regarding the exact nature of this trope. For example, was there a real marriage, or was it “only” a metaphor; was the target of Hosea’s criticism Israelite idolatry, or political and economic “harlotry”? I approach the imagery of the prophet’s marriage in terms of metaphor, because it functions symbolically in the text and in interpretations of the text. I tend to agree with Keefe, and Yee, that the metaphor is likely to have been directed at the political elite and oppressive social structures, rather than the imaginatively reconstructed lurid fertility cults and sacred prostitution of some traditional commentary. For discussion of Hosea 1-3 from feminist perspectives, see 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; The Feminist Companion to the Bible 8; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 126-145; Alice A. Keefe, “The Female Body, the Body Politic and the Land: A Sociopolitical Reading of Hosea 1-2,” in *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (ed. Athalya Brenner; The Feminist Companion to the Bible 8; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 70-100; Alice A. Keefe, *Woman’s Body and the Social Body in Hosea* (JSOTSup 338, Gender, Culture, Theory 10; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); Mary Joan 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, 1989), 95-108; T. Drorah Setel, “Prophets and Pornography: Female Sexual Imagery in Hosea,” in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. Letty M. Russell; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 86-95; Yvonne Sherwood, “Boxing Gomer: Controlling the Deviant Woman in Hosea 1-3,” in *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (ed. Athalya Brenner; The Feminist Companion to the Bible 8; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 101-125; Yvonne Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet: Hosea’s Marriage in Literary-Theoretical Perspective* (JSOTSup 212, Gender, Culture, Theory 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); Fokkelen van Dijk-Hemmes, “The Imagination of Power and the Power of Imagination,” *JSOT* 44 (1989): 75-88; Renita J. Weems, “Gomer: Victim of Violence or Victim of

Hosea 2.20 [2.18] paints an idyllic picture of the covenant with the wild animals. Not only is the relationship between God and his⁷ people restored, but the relationships between the whole of creation are restored as well.⁸ Keefe points out that it is probably anachronistic to approach Hosea's use of *bĕrît* "covenant" solely in deuteronomistic terms.⁹ It may thus be appropriate to read the idea of covenant in a broader sense of solidarity and order in this verse. It is a return to the ancient harmony, an eschatological moment (signified by the phrase *bayyôm hahû* "on that day") reminiscent of the culmination of creation on the sixth day (Genesis 1.30)¹⁰ and also of the renewing and reordering of creation after the Flood in Genesis 9.1-17.¹¹ Hosea imagines a future world remade in a vision of universal peace. The three orders of animals correspond to Genesis 1.30, representing the whole of the created order. Where the animals have been an instrument of judgment (2.14 [2.12]), now they are signifying the restoration of peace and abundance.¹² Similarly, the end of threat from the natural world (2.20a [2.18a]), is matched by the end of the threat of war (2.20b [2.18b]; cf. 1.7). "I will break from the earth" is a literal rendering; the idea is probably along the lines of "abolish".

Tucker argues that Hosea 2.20 [2.18] does not depict an eschatological transformation of the

Metaphor?" *Semeia* 49 (1989): 87-104; Gale A. Yee, "'She Is Not My Wife and I Am Not Her Husband': A Materialist Analysis of Hosea 1-2," *BibInt* 9 (2001): 345-383.

Keefe argues that the marriage metaphor is better approached as a family metaphor, including the children as important parts of the metaphorical relationship. Keefe, *Woman's Body and the Social Body in Hosea*, 18-24. Either way, the metaphorical imagery is still in the service of a gendered, hierarchical, and dualistic model of reality.

⁷ I use the gendered pronoun for God deliberately here, as Hosea's imagery for God is masculine.

⁸ Compare Isaiah 11:6-9; Ezekiel 34.25-31.

⁹ Keefe, *Woman's Body and the Social Body in Hosea*, 105-111.

¹⁰ Wolff, *Hosea*, 50-51.

¹¹ Please note, I make no claim here of direct literary dependence between Genesis and Hosea (in either direction). However common themes and strands are evident and the intertextual connections are certainly interesting.

¹² James L. Mays, *Hosea: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1969), 49.

relationships between humans and animals; that is, it is not a return to a primeval paradise. Instead, he sees in the promise simply a return to order and culture, the state before judgment, within history.¹³ Nevertheless, whether it shows God controlling nature within the world as it is, or transforming nature at the end of the age, Hosea 2.20 [2.18] depicts a creator God who has ultimate power over nature. The rhetorical effect as it interacts with the marriage metaphor is not significantly altered either way.

Hosea 2.20 [2.18] is sandwiched between images of the betrothal of YHWH and the woman/Israel (2.18-19, 21-22 [2.16-17, 19-20]), initiated by YHWH. These images are concerned with establishing the right order of the relationship. This juxtaposition of creation imagery with marriage imagery does not seem to be accidental, but a deliberate extension of the marriage metaphor into cosmic dimensions.

Much biblical scholarship has interpreted the fertility imagery used to describe YHWH in Hosea 2.23-25 [2.21-23] (especially the possible sexual connotations of 25a [23a]), in a way that attempts to draw a sharp contrast with the fertility imagery associated with the woman or the people (standing for the sexualised pagan cult).¹⁴ The association of fertility and nature motifs with YHWH in the book of Hosea has traditionally been interpreted as polemical, as an appropriation of (and resultant emasculation of) the mythology of Baal.¹⁵ Keefe presents extensive arguments for the view that the gendered metaphors of Hosea 1-2 are not best read as describing masculine, historical, nature-dominating Yahwism over against the feminine,

13 Gene M. Tucker, "The Peaceable Kingdom and a Covenant with the Wild Animals," in *God Who Creates: Essays in Honor of W. Sibley Towner* (ed. William P. Brown and S. Dean McBride; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 215-225.

14 See Keefe, *Woman's Body and the Social Body in Hosea*, especially 42-53.

15 For example, Wolff, *Hosea*, xxvi, 34, 54; Mays, *Hosea*, 7-15, 41, 52-53.

natural, “Canaanite” fertility cult, but rather as polemic against the avaricious official cult and royal power.¹⁶ The strict dichotomy between “Israelite” and “Canaanite” religious thought and practice cannot be maintained in contemporary approaches to biblical criticism. Rather, fertility and provision were probably part of Hosea’s understanding of YHWH.

Hosea 2.23-25 [2.21-23] shows YHWH initiating the provision of food and drink, and the fertility of the earth. The repeated use of *nh* “answer”, (alternatively “respond” or “attend to”), suggests that these interconnected natural processes find their origin in YHWH. This connects with the recurrent question of who is the provider in the rest of chapter 2 (2.7,10 [2.5,8]), and reverses the previous withdrawal of provisions (2.11,14 [2.9,12]). The words *haššāmāyim* “the heavens” and *hā’āreṣ* “the earth” indicate that YHWH’s initiative has a universal scope. The object of the phrase *ûzēra tihā li bā’āreṣ* “And I will sow her for myself in the land/earth”, is somewhat opaque, possibly referring to the woman or the earth (or both?), but the phrase seems to have sexual and fertility connotations (cf. the sexual imagery of *wēyāda’att ’et-yhwh* “and you will know YHWH” 2.22 [2.20]; *yizrē’e’l* “God sows”, “God inseminates” 2.24 [2.22]). Schwartz makes the point that an understanding of procreation as monogenesis (that is, the male plants the seed and the female is merely the vessel) produces a monotheistic “doctrine of possession, of a people by God, of a land by a people, of women by men.”¹⁷ In Hosea 2.23-25 [2.21-23], particularly when read in conjunction with 2.4-22 [2.2-20], the feminised objects of YHWH’s action (woman/people/earth) are placed in a position of utter dependence. The male God has the

16 Keefe, “The Female Body,” 70-100; Keefe, *Woman's Body and the Social Body in Hosea*, 66-103.

17 Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 71.

power of life and death. The male God is the one who controls resources and fertility.¹⁸

In both the creation motif and the marriage metaphor in Hosea 2.18-25 [2.16-23], God is the one who acts. God's power and authority are unchallenged. The woman and the earth are acted upon, passive and voiceless, speaking only via the words of YHWH, which are strongly identified with the words of Hosea.¹⁹ The metaphor of the restoration of the patriarchal order, of the submission of the wife and the reappropriation of the family, is made to coincide with the restoration of creation to a state of paradise. Cosmic order and social order are intertwined in a way that reinforces the gendered hierarchy of each. The marriage metaphor is not "just" a metaphor, as if it were some harmless poetic image.²⁰ Here we see clearly how creation traditions can be made to serve patriarchal, monolatrous polemic.

By associating imagery of God as creator/provider with that of God as husband, Hosea 2.18-25 [2.16-23] increases the power differential between gendered ideas of righteousness/wholeness/fertility/maleness/God over against sin/barrenness/femaleness/land/people. The primary marriage metaphor of Hosea is reinforced and enlarged to a cosmic scale through the use of creation imagery. The alliance between the metaphorical "husband" and the theological concept "creator/subject" makes the identification between the metaphorical "wife" and the theological concept "created/object" increasingly absolute. By

18 Compare the divine control over female fertility depicted in, for example, Hosea 9.11,14,16.

19 What the woman says in Hosea 2 is entirely dictated by the male narrator. This is in contrast to the change in the first person in the Song of Songs, a work with which Hosea 2 shares much imagery. For a comparison of Hosea 2 and the Song of Songs, see van Dijk-Hemmes, "The Imagination of Power and the Power of Imagination." For an interesting alternative interpretation of Earth's voice in Hosea 2, see Braaten's approach from the perspective of Earth. Laurie J. Braaten, "Earth Community in Hosea 2," in *The Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets* (ed. Norman C Habel; The Earth Bible 4; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 185-203.

20 Graetz, "God Is to Israel," 126-145.

making a theological point in gendered metaphorical terms, the theological ideas become gendered accordingly, in a way that has been repeated and expanded by generation after generation of androcentric interpretation.

III

Hosea 4.1-3; focussing on 4.3

- 4.1 Hear the word of YHWH, o children of Israel,
for YHWH has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land,
for there is no faithfulness and no loyalty and no knowledge of God in the land.
- 4.2 Cursing, lying, murder, stealing and adultery have broken out
and bloodshed follows bloodshed.
- 4.3 Therefore the earth will mourn and all its inhabitants will waste away,
along with the animals of the field and the birds of the air,
and even the fish of the sea will disappear.

The one who re-creates and provides in Hosea 2.18-25 [2.16-23] is also the one who destroys. Hosea 4.1-2 describes all sorts of crimes spreading across the land, and 4.3 delineates the consequences of this breaking of covenant obligations to YHWH and to the social order. The judgment (introduced by *'al-kēn* “therefore”) is one of absolute severity – it is the very undoing of creation. Hosea 4.1-3 is the introduction to the second major part of the book of Hosea (chapters 4-14), and may be seen as encompassing, in its global perspective, the various themes of the many oracles that follow it.

Hosea 4.1-3 has traditionally been interpreted as a prophetic judgment speech, utilising a judicial form of announcement (4.1a), indictment (4.1b-2) and sentence (4.3).²¹ This has usually been approached in terms of covenant theology. There seems to be a relationship

²¹ For example, Wolff, *Hosea*, 65-69.

between Hosea 4.2 and some form of the Decalogue (Exodus 20.17; Deuteronomy 5.6-21).²² Yet in Hosea 4.1-3 covenant traditions, with which Hosea is more usually associated, stand in a direct relationship to creation traditions. As Brueggemann points out, there has been an emphasis by previous generations of interpreters on covenant theology (as distinctively Israelite) over against creation theology (as “Canaanite”).²³ This has led to a passage such as Hosea 4.1-3 being read through the interpretive lens of the failure to observe the covenant requirements and the resulting punishment, rather than seeing the larger theological context of the distortion of the ethical order of creation and its inevitable destructive implications. This is not to say that the “lawsuit form” is absent, but rather that the wider context of creation theology has been ignored or downplayed.²⁴ The interpretation of the word *rîb* “controversy; lawsuit” may be better approached as a dispute than as a courtroom scene.²⁵ As in the previous passage, *hā’āreṣ* may be read as “the land” or “the earth”, and it is possible that the meaning is not fixed but that the corruption of Israel brings about the disintegration of creation on a cosmic scale.²⁶

Deroche suggests that the reversal of the order of creation for the three classes of animal (cf. Gen 1.30)²⁷ and the use of the word *’sp* “disappear; be extinguished” points to this being more than a threat of punishment. The rupturing of the relationship with God and within

22 The exact nature of the relationship is uncertain.

23 Walter Brueggemann, “The Uninflected *Therefore* of Hosea 4:1-3,” in *Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States* (ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert; vol.1 of *Reading from This Place*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 231-249. Compare the associated observations on the traditional approach to fertility imagery above.

24 Brueggemann, “The Uninflected *Therefore* of Hosea 4:1-3,” 239-242.

25 Michael Deroche, “The Reversal of Creation in Hosea,” *VT* 31 (1981): 409.

26 Following Brueggemann, “The Uninflected *Therefore* of Hosea 4:1-3,” 241.

27 Once again, this is not a claim of literary dependence, but a recognition of possible common strands of tradition, although Deroche suggests that Hosea may have known the P strand of the Pentateuch. Deroche, “The Reversal of Creation in Hosea,” 407-408.

society leads to the undoing of creation.²⁸ The three classes of living things, the animals, the birds and the fish, represent metonymically the entirety of creation. The inclusion of the fish may extend the scope of this destruction even beyond that of the Flood (Genesis 6-9), where the fish were not destroyed.²⁹ Similarly, Brueggemann suggests that the simple *'al-kēn* “therefore” of 4.3, and the absence of a specified active agent of the desolation, do not describe the judicial sentence and intervention of YHWH, but indicate an important and unspecified connection, which, through the lens of “creation theology”, invites awe before the mysterious way human actions may undo the order of things.³⁰

Hosea’s use of creation imagery in 4.1-3 is different to the gendered presentation of 2.18-25 [2.16-23]. Here the creation tradition reinforces on a cosmic scale the importance of keeping the covenant stipulations, but does not present the same complex interactions with gendered metaphors. To fail to keep in proper, ordered relationship with YHWH and within society is to precipitate the undoing of creation. Ideas of God as creator are used to great rhetorical effect to make a point about the importance of ethical, ordered relationships (both with YHWH and within the community), and the dire consequences of Israel’s glut of sins. The underside of Israel’s covenant with the creator is the extreme destruction which attends the inevitable failure to observe its terms.

IV

28 Deroche, “The Reversal of Creation in Hosea,” 400-409. Compare Zephaniah 1.2-3.

29 An observation made by ibn Ezra. A. A. Macintosh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Hosea* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 133-134.

30 Brueggemann, “The Uninflected *Therefore* of Hosea 4:1-3,” 241-242.

Hosea 8.14a

¹⁴ ‘Israel has forgotten his Maker...’

Hosea 8.14a makes reference to YHWH’s creative act in the form of an indictment of Israel’s faithlessness towards and forgetfulness of the one who created it, and in ironic counterpoint to the “made” things Israel worships in 8.4-6.³¹ A key point is that the object of creation in this passage is first and foremost Israel (cf. Deuteronomy 32.6,15-18).³² The relationship between creator and created is again understood as one that demands loyalty from the subordinate creature. Read in the context of the chapter as a whole, the connection between covenant relationship and creation (8.1,14) is repeated.

Hosea 8 echoes many of the motifs of Hosea 2, such as “knowledge of God” (8.2; cf. 2.22 [2.20]); “silver and gold” (8.4; cf. 2.10 [2.8]); Ephraim going after “lovers” (8.9; cf. 2.7,9 [2.5,7]); and the constitutive exodus event (8.13; cf. 2.16-17 [2.14-15]). It is interesting that this reference to God as creator is again related to motifs of faithlessness and promiscuity. In chapter 8, the rhetorical effect of the creation motif serves to highlight Israel’s dependence on YHWH for its very existence, and thus underline the severity of Israel’s betrayal of the covenant relationship. As in the other references examined above, covenant and creation are not best read as separate and opposed traditions, but rather as different dimensions of the relationship between God and the world.

The notion of God as the maker of Israel is intimately associated with the complex

³¹ Göran Eidevall, *Grapes in the Desert: Metaphors, Models and Themes in Hosea 4-14* (Coniectanea Biblica, Old Testament Series 43; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1996), 138-139.

³² Petersen, “The World of Creation in the Book of the Twelve,” 207.

relationship between monotheism, gender, land and violence. Schwartz makes a persuasive connection between violence and particular forms of monotheism. She argues that the process of collective identity formation, that is, the process of drawing boundaries between us and Other, is inherently violent.³³ Monotheistic identity is often constructed as that which can be owned and contained (“You are my people”), bound up with possessing land, and often figured as sexual fidelity.³⁴ Becoming unfaithful (by breaking the covenant) means becoming “Other”, becoming alienated not just from YHWH and from the land, but from the collective identity that requires possession by God and possession of land and women for its construction. Schwartz’s analysis suggests that the creation images in the three passages analysed above are not isolated metaphors working towards unrelated rhetorical ends, but are instead facets of the same preoccupation with possession, land, power, and identity.

V

The images of YHWH the creator presented in the book of Hosea incorporate ideas of legitimate and absolute power, control over provision, and the potential for destruction if the created object is “unfaithful”. These images of legitimate power, control and obligation interact with covenant understandings in a way which makes YHWH’s claim on Israel absolute, pre-empting any argument.

Creation motifs and ideas are not Hosea’s primary mode of expression. However, creation traditions are part of Hosea’s repertoire of imagery and metaphor, and he uses them (albeit

³³ Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain*, 4-13.

³⁴ Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain*, 18, 62-76.

only occasionally) to great rhetorical effect. As we have seen, the intersection of marriage metaphor and creation theology in Hosea 2.18-25 [2.16-23] works on a variety of levels. When addressed to a male, patriarchal elite in Ancient Israel, it was presumably a very effective combination. I suggest that, at least in part, the creation imagery also functions to make absolute the gendered hierarchical dualisms present in the text. As Yee says, “Feminizing men in a marital relation with a male God reinscribes the ideological and social links among women, subordination, shame and sin into the text.”³⁵ I would add that with the incorporation of creation imagery, the “husband’s” power over the “wife”, that is, the national God’s power over the (feminised) political elite of Israel, becomes the absolute, unchallengeable power of the creator of the whole world, power over fertility, existence and holding back the chaos. This is no sentimental love story. Femaleness is identified with passive object, acted upon and voiceless. Maleness is identified not only with the socially constructed power of the husband, expressed in metaphor, but also with the absolute power of the creator/provider, which, although it is expressed in poetic imagery, is not really a metaphor, but a theological idea that claims to be true in a way that the marriage metaphor does not. The book of Hosea might say that God is only metaphorically a husband, but claims that God actually is the creator and provider (and potential destroyer). By using creation imagery, the argument for monolatry is given unsurpassable authority. And consequently, the unequal power relationships between women and men are reinforced.

Similarly, albeit without the complex gender issues of Hosea 1-3, in Hosea 4.1-3 and Hosea 8, the covenant obligations of obedience to the Decalogue-like commandments of Hosea 4.1-

³⁵ Yee, “‘She Is Not My Wife and I Am Not Her Husband’,” 370. Also see Weems on the reification of the marriage metaphor. Weems, “Gomer,” 87-104.

2, and fidelity to YHWH, are given cosmic force with creation (and uncreation) language. In Hosea 4.1-3, behaving in accordance with YHWH's requirements is absolutely necessary, lest creation be unmade. In 8.14a, the accusations of chapter 8 are underlined by the reminder of allegiance required to the source of collective identity.

This investigation began with a suspicion that creation theology and imagery are not neutral concepts, especially for a work as full of complex issues of power and gender as Hosea's book. The analysis of key texts above indicates that Hosea uses creation imagery not only to broaden his range of poetic resources, but also to place YHWH, and himself as the spokesman of YHWH, in a position of absolute moral right. It is important that such rhetorical strategies, particularly as they impact the relationship between power and gender, are thoughtfully considered. For example, is the imagined covenant with the animals (2.20 [2.18]) conveying a benevolent promise, or reinforcing a controlling patriarchal social structure, or doing something else altogether? In other words, is "benevolence" a life-giving theological concept for disempowered people, or a strategy for control? I am inclined to doubt the motives of a text that so wholly controls the voices of the recipients of this beneficent covenant and betrothal (2.18-25[2.16-23]). Especially in its position immediately following the misogynistic violence of 2.4-15 [2.2-13], the apparently wonderful promise of blessing and peace reinforces the association of the female with passive, dependent object. The use of creation imagery in Hosea 4.1-3 and 8.14a is less problematic. It does still serve to reinforce Hosea's point, but is not so entwined with the marriage metaphor.

Given that the book of Hosea is still read and used as sacred scripture, it is vitally important

to engage with and critique Hosea's rhetorical strategies. Hosea's use of creation imagery can be interpreted in a life-giving way, in that it shows the importance of human action in affecting the fate of creation, and calls the reader to participate in restoring the order of creation.³⁶ Yet the intersection of creation imagery with the marriage metaphor in 2.18-25 [2.16-23] must be approached with extreme caution. The gendered power differential in the book of Hosea, absolutised by Hosea's use of creation motifs, cannot be safely ignored.

Bibliography

- Andersen, Francis I., and David Noel Freedman. 1980. *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Bible 24. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.
- Ben Zvi, Ehud. 2004. "Observations on the Marital Metaphor of YHWH and Israel in its Ancient Israelite Context: General Considerations and Particular Images in Hosea 1.2." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 28, 363-384.
- Braaten, Laurie J. 2001. "Earth Community in Hosea 2." In *The Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets*. Edited by Norman C. Habel. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 185-203
- Brueggemann, Walter. 1995. "The Uninflected *Therefore* of Hosea 4:1-3." In *Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*. Edited by Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert. Vol.1 of *Reading from This Place*. Edited by Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert. Minneapolis: Fortress, 231-249.
- Deroche, Michael. 1981. "The Reversal of Creation in Hosea." *Vetus Testamentum* 31, 400-409.
- Eidevall, Göran. 1996. *Grapes in the Desert: Metaphors, Models and Themes in Hosea 4-14*. Coniectanea Biblica, Old Testament Series 43. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell.
- Graetz, Naomi. 1995. "God Is to Israel as Husband Is to Wife: The Metaphoric Battering of Hosea's Wife." In *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*. Edited by Athalya Brenner. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 126-145.
- Keefe, Alice A. 1995. "The Female Body, the Body Politic and the Land: A Sociopolitical Reading of Hosea 1-2." In *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*. Edited by Athalya Brenner. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 70-100.

³⁶ Brueggemann and Braaten provide helpful readings from an ecological perspective. Brueggemann, "The Uninflected *Therefore* of Hosea 4:1-3," 231-249; Braaten, "Earth Community in Hosea 2," 185-203.

_____. 2001. "Woman's Body and the Social Body in Hosea." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 338, Gender, Culture, Theory 10. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

Landy, Francis. 1995. *Hosea. Readings: A New Biblical Commentary*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

Leith, Mary Joan Winn. 1989. "Verse and Reverse: The Transformation of the Woman, Israel, in Hosea 1-3." In *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*. Edited by Peggy L. Day. Minneapolis: Fortress, 95-108.

Macintosh, A. A. 1997. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Hosea*. International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.

Mays, James L. 1969. *Hosea: A Commentary*. Old Testament Library. London: SCM Press.

Petersen, David L. 2000. "The World of Creation in the Book of the Twelve." In *God Who Creates: Essays in Honor of W. Sibley Towner*. Edited by William P. Brown & S. Dean McBride. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 204-214.

Schwartz, Regina M. 1997. *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Setel, T. Drorah. 1985. "Prophets and Pornography: Female Sexual Imagery in Hosea." In *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*. Edited by Letty M. Russell. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 86-95.

Sherwood, Yvonne. 1995. "Boxing Gomer: Controlling the Deviant Woman in Hosea 1-3." In *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*. Edited by Athalya Brenner. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 101-125.

_____. 1996. "The Prostitute and the Prophet: Hosea's Marriage in Literary-Theoretical Perspective." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 212, Gender, Culture, Theory 2. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

Stuart, Douglas. 1987. *Hosea – Jonah*. Word Biblical Commentary 31. Waco, Texas: Word Books.

Tucker, Gene M. 2000. "The Peaceable Kingdom and a Covenant with the Wild Animals." In *God Who Creates: Essays in Honor of W. Sibley Towner*. Edited by William P. Brown & S. Dean McBride. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 215-225.

van Dijk-Hemmes, Fokkeliën. 1989. "The Imagination of Power and the Power of Imagination." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 44, 75-88.

Weems, Renita J. 1989. "Gomer: Victim of Violence or Victim of Metaphor?" *Semeia* 49, 87-104.

Wolff, Hans Walter. 1974. *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*. Translated by Gary Stansell. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress.

Yee, Gale A. 2001. "'She Is Not My Wife and I Am Not Her Husband': A Materialist Analysis of Hosea 1-2." *Biblical Interpretation* 9, 345-383.

_____. 1996. "The Book of Hosea: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections." In *New Interpreter's Bible Vol 7*. Edited by Leander E. Keck et.al. Nashville: Abingdon, 195-297.