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Introduction

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

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

¹ Brenner (1995: 26).

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

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

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

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

² J. Day (2001: 572). ³ Stienstra (1993: 97–8).

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁸ Black (1979: 19).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁵ Black (1962: 44). ¹⁶ Black (1962: 39–41).

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

¹⁸ Setel (1985: 91–2).

MAPPING THE FIELD

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

Traditional scholarship

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²² Stienstra (1993: 143, emphasis mine).

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

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

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

²⁴ McKeating (1993: 78).

²⁵ Abma (1999: 13–23) provides an overview.

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

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

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

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

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

²⁹ Barr (1961: 107–60, citation p. 109).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³⁵ Mays (1969: 25, emphasis mine).

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

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

³⁶ Erlandsson (1980: 102) speaks of 'harlotry in a double sense, since actual sexual intercourse was part of the cult (4:13 f.) and its idolatry meant faithlessness toward Yahweh (4:15)'.
³⁷ Cf. Fensham (1984: 73): 'Gomer is not a real prostitute, but only one who partakes in the prostitution of the fertility cult. It might be a case where practice and the metaphoric usage overlap.' Zimmerli (1979: 335): 'the reference to the unfaithful wife in Ezekiel is more than an allegorical image, simply chosen for aesthetic appeal. In it there lives the reality of the people. In Ezek 16 (and 23) the gap between the metaphor and the fact portrayed can easily disappear, and the reality referred to may arise directly out of the metaphor. The reality portrayed is not simply portrayed artificially, but is present with unusual power in the metaphor.'

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

³⁹ J. Day (2001: 574). Macintosh (1997: 157-9) seeks to redefine '*cultic prostitution*'; but his reading rests on similar assumptions.

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

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

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

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

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

Feminist scholarship

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

⁴¹ Graetz (1995: 127), K. M. O'Connor (1992: 171), Yee (1992: 199).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

continue to display signs of the substitutionary approaches to metaphor we outlined in regard to traditional readings. It is common to find references to sexual and marital metaphorical language as ‘the marriage metaphor’, even though this phrase undermines essential features of a cognitive approach.⁴⁸ The assumption that ‘the marriage metaphor’ was a recognized concept consisting of certain given features in the period in which the prophetic books were written is also prevalent. Bird speaks of *Hosea’s* expression, ‘zānâ + min / mē (away) from’, as being ‘dictated by the marriage metaphor to which Hosea has adapted his usage’;⁴⁹ K. M. O’Connor displays astonishment that *Jeremiah* involves details regarding the relationship between YHWH and his ‘wife’ that are absent in *Hosea*,⁵⁰ while Dille notes that ‘Deutero-Isaiah draws on an established tradition of YHWH as husband . . .’⁵¹ Frymer-Kensky even believes that ‘the marriage metaphor’ was in circulation prior to *Hosea* 1–3.⁵² It appears that there are traces of substitutionary approaches to metaphor still lingering among some feminist readings, despite their explicit commitment to cognitive methodologies.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁵⁴ Macintosh (1997: 117–18). Cf. Mays (1969: 58).

⁵⁵ Ben Zvi (2004: 365).

⁵⁶ Ben Zvi (2004: 367–77).