‘GOD IS AN EARTHQUAKE’:
DESTABILISING METAPHOR IN HOSEA 11*

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ABSTRACT
This study suggests a method for examining the rhetorical function of metaphor. Using an ‘interanimation’ theory to examine word placement in Hosea 11, it demonstrates that words work together to ‘construct’ a metaphorical space in which inadequate world views are destabilised and new world views are constructed. The inadequate ‘world’ in Hosea 11 is a view of God devolved from source domains such as images (like the impotent Ba’als) or kingship (like the despotic Egypt or Assyria). In place of these inadequate and inflexible worlds, the poem creates a flexible world based on the source domain of kinship (God as an angry but grieving parent; Israel as a disobedient but beloved child). The metaphorically constructed world of kinship allows the possibility of continuing relationship.

IN 1999 JAMES AMADOR WROTE AN ARTICLE REVIEWING THE YEARS SINCE Wilhelm Woejler published his article “Where is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?”1 Amador noted the general failure of the posited explosion of new “methodologies, theoretics and critical analytics” that Woejler had predicted would be sparked by the new world of rhetorical criticism.2 He suggested that, disappointingly, “biblical rhetorical criticism could fairly be described as simply one more tool for biblical historical criticism, foregoing its unique ability not only to approach discourse in a variety of ways to discern multiple aspects of persuasion, but also its function as criticism.”3 One of the possible fruitful areas of engagement that the article then goes on to explore is the place of

* The Presidential Address delivered to the Fellowship for Biblical Studies in Melbourne, 9 November 2006.
3 Ibid. 195; italics Amador’s.
metaphor, specifically, and metaphor construes reality by creating a ‘point of view’ and affecting how we respond to that constructed reality.

This study arises from two motivating interests: one, in the nature and role of metaphor, especially its rhetorical power; the other, in theology. Language about God is metaphorical, which does not define, but opens up interpretive possibilities. Hence, these two motivating interests are interwoven, as exploration of the nature of God is exploration of the nature of metaphor. This study of Hosea 11, therefore, engages with a text that presents a metaphorical world in which God suffers and is less than secure in God’s own characterization. It attempts to find a method for examining the rhetorical power of this metaphoric ‘reality.’

The nature of metaphor and its permeation of language and thought processes have been thoroughly discussed in studies by, among many others, Lakoff and Johnson (in the ‘secular’ world), and Ricoeur and Soskice (in the world of theology). They need not be rehearsed again here. The main interpretive key for this study in examining the function of metaphor in the construction of reality will be an interanimation theory of metaphor, coupled with some of the tools developed in the field of rhetorical criticism. The interanimaive view stresses that there is only one subject to a metaphor: “It is only by seeing that a metaphor has one true subject which tenor and vehicle conjointly depict and illumine that a full ... interanimative theory is possible.” The tenor is the underlying subject of the metaphor. The vehicle is that which presents it. This allows room for multiple vehicles, without trying to insist on multiple subjects.

An interanimative theory of metaphor allows space for meaning to be construed from a number of interwoven elements. Metaphor is not simply a matter of some words being used ‘metaphorically’ (i.e., as stylistic devices), but rather creates meaning by how a “complete utterance is construed in its context of uttering,” effecting a particular reference. The meaning of the metaphor, there-


9. Soskice, Metaphor and Religious Language 43ff. Soskice takes the term “interanimation” from I. A. Richards. Soskice’s use of “interanimation” is similar to Ricoeur’s use of the term “interaction.” See, for example, Ricoeur, The Rule of Metaphor.

10. Soskice, Metaphor and Religious Language 47.

11. Soskice, Metaphor and Religious Language 53. See also Ricoeur’s discussion of metaphor as discourse (semantics), rather than substitution of words in intralinguistic relationships (semiotics). Ricoeur speaks of metaphorical statements, to move the focus from word (a thing “not being given its proper name”) to sentence (discourse which has a metaphorical sense and reference, and is addressed to a hearer). Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory 46–47; see also The Rule of Metaphor 65–66.

fore, cannot be reduced to an aggregation of the sense of individual words. The associated semantic field of a term, that is, the extralinguistic context that adds to the meaning-making process, can be described as its “domain of experience.” Within this term are included the multiple dimensions of experience that produce coherence in how we find and express understanding: bodily functions, interactions with the environment and interactions with other people—in other words, common human experience and, particularly in biblical literature, common memory of story and tradition.

In exploring Hosea 11 we will note that the tenor, God, is referred to by various vehicles. Rather than reading the poem as a series of metaphors, however, we will see that the major vehicle draws from one source domain (that of kinship) to create a metaphorical ‘world.’ Subsidiary vehicles that draw on different domains (for example, the animal kingdom), are used to support the construction of the metaphor. Rather than a simple metaphor (“God is ...”), the whole metaphor is intricately formed by the interanimation of words throughout the whole text. This means that experiences and understandings shared between text and reader (‘commonplaces’) are brought into play, both by direct reference and at a more subliminal level. The result is a constructed being-in-the-world, a common space that invites a reader to enter through common experience and memory. This study will use the term ‘metaphorical construct’ to differentiate between an understanding of metaphor as interaction between two subjects, and as a much more complex interanimation of numerous words that convey experience and memory to create new meaning (‘second degree reference’). Ricoeur speaks of a “metaphorical statement” to move focus from the word to the sentence. ‘Metaphorical construct’ moves the focus beyond the sentence, to suggest that metaphorical discourse, particularly in prophetic poetry, is constructed (and gains its rhetorical power) by a whole complex of words, images and references. While part of the metaphorical construct is the use of one or more vehicles to give meaning to a ‘tenor,’ this study
Rhetorical Analysis of Hosea 11

(In the following translation we have retained the Hebrew word order and indicated through hyphens where several English words represent a single Hebrew word.)

Stanza 1

1. When a-child was-Israel I-loved-him
   and-out-of-Egypt I-called MY-SON.

2. They-called them
   so they-walked with-them.
   To-the-Ba'als they-sacrificed,
   and-to-idols they-burned-incense.

Strophes

1. 1

2. 2

Ricoeur speaks about metaphor as the "tension between two terms in a metaphorical utterance" (Interpretation Theory 50). This study imagines this tension as creating a space in which opposing parties may meet on common ground, while paradoxically having that ground destabilised and re-imagined.


Stanza 2

5. He-returns to-the-land of-Egypt,
   AND-ASSYRIA HE-HIMSELF is-his-king;
   for they-refuse to-return.

6. And-whirls the-sword through-his-cities
   and-destroys his-defences;
   and-it-devours [htlk] because-of-their-schemings.

7. And-my-people are-bent to-turn-from-me;
   and-to Ba' al they-call
   HE-HIMSELF altogether not lifts-them-up.

Stanza 3

8. How can-I-give-you-up, Ephraim?
   surrender-you, Israel?
   How can-I-give-you-up like-Admah,
   treat-you like-Zeboim?
   Changes-itself within-me my-heart,
   altogether aroused [is]-my-compassion.

9. Not I-will-execute my-fierce anger,
   not turn to-destroy Ephraim;
   For God AM-I MYSELF, and-not-a-man,
   in-your-midst the-Holy-One
   and-not I-will-come into-the-city.

Stanza 4

10. After YHWH they-shall-go;
    like-a-lion HE-WILL-ROAR.
    Indeed HE-HIMSELF WILL-ROAR,
    and-they-will-come-trembling HIS-SONS from-the-West.

11. They-will-come-trembling like-a-bird out-of-Egypt,
    and-like-a-dove from-the-land OF-ASSYRIA;
    And-I-will-return-them to-their-homes.
    —Proclamation of YHWH.
The poem in Hosea 11 can be broken into two distinct and contrasted sections, each emphasizing a different aspect of the poet's message. Stanza 1 begins with a mood of sorrow, looking back over the beginning of God's relationship with Israel as based on God's love. The second strophe contrasts God's call with the call of the Ba'al and the apostasy of the people (there is also a contrast between the intimate "my son" of strophe 1b, and the more impersonal "they" of strophe 2). There are hints of qinah metre in strophes 3 and 4, echoing the lamenting nature of God's speech following the pivotal "but it was I-myself" of strophe 3a. The frame of מָיוֹן ("I loved him") in strophe 1 and מָיוֹן ("of love") in strophe 4 surrounds six verbs which speak of God's tender care for Israel, giving a picture of Israel surrounded from childhood by God's love, which manifests itself in the nurturing action of a parent. The central point of this stanza, strophe 3a, makes the assertion that, despite Israel's being called away by the Ba'al, it is emphatically God who was always the subject (and centre) of the love and care experienced by Israel.

Stanza 2 moves from lament to judgment and anger, the even structure and metre of the strophes using urgent verbs in a present mood to state the judgment decreed for Israel because of its refusal of "return" to God. Strophe 5 involves a chiasm using בִּלְשָׁן ("turn") and word play between מָיוֹן and מָיוֹן ("Assyria") to make the point that it is Israel's refusal to return (to God) which will lead to its return (to Egypt/Assyria). Comparison is invited with the use of emphatic pronouns: he himself, Assyria (מִלְשֹׁן), is decreed as Israel's king, not God (מִלְשֹׁן, "I-myself"). The picture of Israel at cross-purposes with God is emphasised by the chiasm-within-a-chiasm, Egypt/Assyria within "return." Strophe 6 expresses harsh judgment with the use of correspondingly harsh gutturals. In strophe 7 the folly of Israel is compounded. Not only do the people insist on turning from God, they also "call" (מִלְשֹׁן) to Ba'al, in a reversal of strophe 2a (in which "they" [the Ba'al] call Israel). Here, ironically, Israel's "call" to Ba'al only highlights his emphatic powerlessness to "lift them up." It is also a tragic reversal of strophe 1b in which we read, "I called my son." The return to intimate address in strophe 7a, "my people," echoes "my son" in strophe 1b.

In stanzas 3, the move to lament is now better installed, with the change to qinah metre echoing the vocabulary of lament (יָנָה) in strophe 8 (v. 8). Israel is addressed directly here, for the first time. The definite tone of judgment in stanza 2 changes to the uncertain, open-ended questioning of lament in this stanza.

14 The MT unamended in v. 7 reads "God-Above," presumably one of Hosea's many plays on the word "Ba'al."


16 Janzen's discussion of this verb is very helpful (J. G. Janzen, "Metaphor and Reality in Hosea 11," Semeia 24 (1982) 7–44). He notes its link to Deut 29:23, the "overthrowing" of the cities of the plain being likened to an earthquake. See also Gen 19:21, 25, 29; Jer 20:16; Lam 4:6; Amos 4:11, which all use this verb in connection with the destruction of the "cities of the plain." Also Jon 3:4, threatening the "overthrow" of Nineveh. Brueggemann and Eideval both comment on the picture presented here of YHWH's inner being depicted as a landscape in the throes of an earthquake. See W. Brueggemann, Old Testament Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 39–41; and G. Eideval, Grapes in the Desert (ConBOT 43; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1996) 179.

17 Janzen, "Metaphor and Reality in Hosea 11" 29.
describes the future action of God based on what has been demonstrated to be God’s character in the preceding stanzas. The name YHWH forms an inclusio for this stanza, suggesting that Israel’s hope lies within the person of Israel’s God. Within the frame of YHWH, the middle lines (strophes 11d and 12a) have the words הָיוּ ("sons") and מָלַךְ עִבְרֵי ("out-of-Egypt") juxtaposed, recalling the juxtaposition of בָּנָי and מָלַקְתָּן in the opening verse. This stanza provides a climax to the poem by the use of the root בָּלָה ("return") in its fifth occurrence in the poem (strophe 12c, v. 11). This has God as the subject and Israel ("his sons") as the object in the word “I will return them.” The three occurrences of the verb with Israel as subject give a picture of Israel constantly turning (possibly to the point of dizziness; cf. 7:11). In this last strophe, however, God returns them to stability (כָּבַד הַלֵּב).

The placement of emphatic pronouns provides a structure that also reflects the content of the passage, יִהְיוּ ("I myself") appears in strophes 3a (v. 3) and 10c (v. 9). Equidistant between these are the first two occurrences of יִהְיוּ ("he himself"), strophes 5b [v. 5] and 7c [v. 7]). "I myself" is used both times to emphasise the nature of God. On the first occasion, the adjoined הָיוּ is best translated as "but" ("But 1 …"); allowing the pronoun to introduce a forcible contrast to what has just been mentioned, namely, the Ba’als and idols to which Israel sacrificed. Hence, the contrast is set up between the Ba’als and idols on the one hand, and God on the other, who is then seen teaching the infant Israel to walk; healing, drawing them with human and loving cords, lifting them tenderly to the cheek, and feeding them. The assumption is that the Ba’als and idols performed none of these actions (in fact, after ‘calling them,’ they are not the objects of any positive actions whatever; on the other hand, they are shown as impotent in strophe 7c).

The second occasion of "I myself" also sets God up in contrast, this time to מָלַק, "man." It has been argued by various scholars that this is best translated as "a man," rather than the generic "man" (or "humankind") usually denoted by כָּבַד. In other words, the contrast is usually drawn either between God and humankind in general, or God and males. However, the contrasts set up

when we examine the occurrences of יִהְיוּ, "he himself."

The first occurrence of יִהְיוּ sits in the middle of strophe 5 (v. 5), at the centre of the chiasm formed by יִהְיוּ.

The pronoun is used here to highlight Assyria. In parallel with “Egypt,” Assyria refers to the oppressor, the one who places Israel in slavery ("Egypt") is mentioned first, thus recalling strophe 1b, “out of Egypt,” which carries the association of slavery on to the parallel ("Assyria"). This strophe follows the first stanza’s descriptions of God as nurturer and healer to Israel, the one who called Israel out of Egypt, and thus out of a situation of oppression and slavery.

Next, in strophe 7c (v. 7), יִהְיוּ is used emphatically to show the impotence of Ba’al in response to the call of Israel. God has already been described (in strophe 4c) as like one who “lifts” (וּלֵך) an infant to the cheek. Here, Ba’al is described as altogether (וֹלֵך) unable to “lift” (וּלֵך) “my people” when they call to him. In sharp contrast, YHWH’s lament in strophe 8 (v. 8a–d) is followed by the statement “My compassion is altogether (וֹלֵך) aroused.” After this second (וֹלֵך) comes the statement of purpose arising from the arousal of YHWH’s compassion, and the יִהְיוּ, which contrasts YHWH with מָלַק.

This gives a pattern of “I” … “he” … “he” … “I” in which “I” is quite definitely contrasted with two very specific examples of “he”: firstly, the oppressive power of Assyria; secondly, the impotence of Ba’al. If the contrast needs any further underlining, this is given with the final use of יִהְיוּ (emphasised by its attachment to יִהְיוּ in strophe 11c (v. 10). Here, instead of a despotic or impotent ‘other,’ we have a picture of the saving, powerful action of God, who “himself” roars and returns “his children” to their homes. It is clear that the structure of this poem places key words and repetitions in a way that both enhances the rhetoric, and helps construct a particular metaphorical world (also for rhetorical affect).

In summary, from this preliminary study, the underlying common domain of experience in this passage can be seen to be that of kinship. References to “children” (יִהְיוּ, v. 1; מָלַק, v. 10) frame the passage, but an abundance of more subtle language reinforces this as the broad field from which meaning is constructed. Within this domain, various aspects are highlighted at different points, depending on the effect required. Drawing from the domain of kinship,

18 See, for example, Schüngel-Straumann, who argues that the contrast set up here is quite specifically between God and man (that is, the male gender): “Obviously Hosea wants to set ‘El-conduct and ‘ish-conduct over against each other. Yahweh rejects male behaviour for himself, but not (genuine) human behaviour! If the essence of male (‘ish) conduct is justice, punishment, anger, consequence, then Yahweh’s behaviour is completely different, i.e., measurelessly without consequences! Rather than being concerned with his pride, his rights or male ‘face-saving,’ Yahweh is concerned with saving his relationship, something which more frequently and strongly describes women than men.” H. Schüngel-Straumann, “God as Mother in Hosea 11,” TJ 34 (1987) 3–86. By contrast, see Kreutzer’s argument that Hosea frequently uses מָלַק, rather than יִהְיוּ, generically (S. Kreutzer, “Gott als Mütter in Hosea 11?” TJ 169 (1989) 123–32).

19 The first occurrence of מָלַק is nine strophes from the first occurrence of יִהְיוּ (taking strophe 4c as two cola). There are seven strophes between this and the second occurrence of יִהְיוּ, then nine strophes until the second occurrence of מָלַק.
goes back a long way. In this episode, Israel is a disobedient child, and YHWH is a grieving parent.

Hosea 11 is an intricately structured unit that builds a metaphorical world through the interanamnesis of words. The poem displays a clear rhetorical purpose that is supported by the particular choice and arrangement of words (that is, structuring by rhetorical devices such as framing, repetition, intertextual references, etc.). In brief, the poem confronts the reader with an inadequate worldview, and destabilises this view by raising commonly known themes and using them in unexpected ways. It constructs a metaphorical world from a common domain of experience to allow a meeting place between speaker and audience, from which the inadequate worldview can be opened up to new possibilities. These particular words, in this particular structure, are necessary to build this metaphorical construct because they interanimate each other through association of story, memory, historical reality, and common human experience.

**METAPHOR: DESTABILISATION AND CONSTRUCTION**

The rhetoric of the metaphor constructs a world, paradoxically, by destabilising as well as by building. It portrays a worldview that is demonstrated to be inadequate. It then constructs a common ‘space’ that suggests a better ‘world.’ Within this space, further destabilisation can then occur, without the threat of total collapse. These movements interweave, occurring simultaneously rather than chronologically.

**Destabilisation of an Inadequate Worldview**

The worldview addressed by the text appears to be inadequate for several reasons. Israel is presented as failing to recognise (to “know,” strophe 3, v. 3) the source of liberation, nurture and guidance as being God. Instead, they have been worshipping altogether impotent idols. The idols signify inadequacies at both religious and political levels, as they are associated in the wider context with a corrupt ruling class. References to “Ba’al” are relatively rare in Hosea, perhaps surprisingly, so the use of the term (and the “Ba’als,” strophe 2c, v. 2) is significant. Keefe notes that when Hosea wishes to refer to a specific Canaanite god, he uses the term “Ba’al-Peor.” Otherwise, references to “Ba’al” or “the Ba’als” appear to be closely associated with idols, especially the Yahwistic bull icon of official religion. Links between the idols, especially the


21 For example, Hos 2:8; 4:17 (in a context that refers to Beth-Aven and, possibly ironically, likens Israel to “a stubborn heifer”); 8:4 (which links the making of idols

with the royal cult); 10:5 (parallels “the calf of Beth-Aven” with “their idolatrous priests”); and 13:2 (“People are kissing calves”). See H. W. Wolff, *Hosea* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974) 140, for a discussion on the identity of the “calf” or “bull” as the one set up in Bethel by Jeroboam I (1 Kgs 12:29), and according to Kings, still officially worshipped down to Hosea’s time (2 Kgs 10:29; 14:24; 15:9, 18, 24, 28).

22 Hos 8:4, continuing with a diatribe against the calf of Samaria.

23 Note the similarity between Hos 7:7 (“All their kings have fallen none of them calls on me”) and 11:7 (“To Ba’al they call but he does not raise them up at all”).
well known that it need not be repeated here in full. Not only is the story mentioned, but it is told here in terms of a family drama ("When Israel was a child, I loved him and out of Egypt I called my son") to highlight love of kin as the basis for the relationship.

This domain is strengthened by the depiction of God by means of the vehicle of lamenting parent. The use in the first and last stanzas of possessive suffixes (יהי and יָהְבָּה) place parenthood (a commonly shared experience) as the framework for the rest of the poem. Hence, the decision-making process presented in stanza 3 cannot be heard or read as a purely juridical matter. Rather, the reader is reminded of the pain of needing to discipline a beloved but disobedient child.

In support of this domain, and naming it explicitly, is the final statement of the poem, "I will return them to their homes" (strophe 12c, v. 9). This places ‘home’ as the site of restoration, over above ‘land’ or ‘nation’ or any other politically allied site. Likewise, the opening cola ("When Israel was a child, I loved him ... my son") suggest the domain of the home, the proper and safe dwelling place of children, as the site of salvation at Israel’s beginnings.

**Suffering and the Destabilisation of God**

The metaphorical construct has a powerful rhetorical effect. *God is a loving, nurturing parent* (stanza 1), who is open to grief and therefore chooses to overturn the common expectation and to act out of compassion (stanza 3) to save and restore (stanza 4). The construction of a world in which a new, more adequate view of God, and of God’s interaction with Israel, might be formed, depends on the image of God as open to suffering because the relationship is one of kinship, and also the image of God as harbouring ambiguities within God’s own character. *God as a lion who threatens to devour* (13:8) can also be *God the lion who leads the children home* in this poem, but devouring is still a possibility (11:6). The choice of not executing “my fierce anger” (11:9) is a real and difficult one. Because of this painful ambiguity, any view of God as legalistically punitive is destabilised. God appears to consider various characterisations in God’s response to Israel. Like the Ba’als, one response could be impotence; like Assyria/Egypt, another could be overpowering destruction; and like a man, yet another response could be to demand the satisfaction of honour in righteous anger. Finally, God appears to identify more closely with an earthquake: to allow a personal upheaval to shatter these possibilities and to return both God and Israel to the family home. The metaphor has achieved its effect by first demonstrating, then destabilising, all other possibilities. Space is now created for a future for both God and Israel.