Hosea: More Than a Metaphor

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Abstract
The book of Hosea uses the rich and unyielding metaphor of a broken marriage to demonstrate the extent to which Ephraim, Israel's Northern region had been unfaithful to God, her eternally faithful husband. This paper seeks to offer the reader a creative way of approaching its message from a contemporary standpoint. Furthermore, it will centre on the contentious male/female imagery that carries Hosea's prophecy. In so doing it will invite consideration, not of an often-assumed misogynistic deity but of a relational and wholly relevant God, tangled up with humanity in all its vulnerability and brokenness; God in our midst.

Keywords
Hosea, metaphor, Israel, male/female imagery

Set in a world on the brink of its demise,[2] the book of Hosea uses the rich and unyielding metaphor of a broken marriage to demonstrate the extent to which Ephraim, Israel's Northern region had been unfaithful to God, her eternally faithful husband. A theological reflection on the text, this paper seeks to offer the reader a creative way of approaching its message from a contemporary standpoint. Furthermore, and whilst acknowledging the book has the potential to yield many lines of enquiry, this paper will centre on the contentious male / female imagery that carries Hosea's prophecy. In so doing it will invite consideration, not of an often-assumed misogynistic deity but of a relational and wholly relevant God, tangled up with humanity in all its vulnerability and brokenness; God in the midst of us.

The methodology used here borrows from the author's background within the field of contemporary visual arts and thereby aims to provide a fresh perspective on which understanding can be built. This approach references recent debates within the field of gallery interpretation that have considered the shift made by many arts educators, from the pursuit of interpretative strategy that engenders a wholly personal, individualistic response to artwork, to a position whereby visitors are provided with enough information to generate meaningful understanding. As Cheryl Meszaros argued in 2007, 'People make their own meaning in and through their interactions with the world, but they do not do so in isolation from "received" ideas, language and traditions of meaning-making.'[3] Therefore, and whilst unashamedly noting that she writes as a woman whose own experience of

[1] The author would like to thank Knut Heim, David Allen and Nicola Slee for their comments during the development of this paper, but in so doing, acknowledges that any errors or omissions remain her own.

[2] Francis Landy, *Hosea* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press), 12.

[3] Cheryl Meszaros, 'Interpretation and the Hermeneutic Turn', *Engage: Journal of Gallery Education*, 20(2007), 17-22.

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God negates any understanding of God as misogynist, the author will summarise key Christian ideas, language and received tradition offered in response to Hosea in order to form a context in which one might make meaning from this difficult text.

The Development of a Prophecy

One of the Minor Prophets making up the prophetic literature of the Old Testament, the book of Hosea is a difficult, uncomfortable text, of whose author little is known. The limited biographical detail given in 1:1[4] and Hosea's description of events relating to the reign of Jeroboam II[5] through to the fall of the capital of Northern Israel, Samaria, do however, date the work from between 750 BCE to 722 BCE[6]. Given that this period was one of turbulence, the prophetic response appears to have provided guidance via a new interpretation of the Torah at a time of radical social change. In the case of Hosea, the defeat of Northern Israel in 721 BCE vindicated his graphic and allegorical description of its downfall.[7] This justification also indicates why his words have survived as a distinct component within Biblical canon; through its preservation, Hosea's prophecy could be authenticated as God given.[8] This observation does not contradict the suggestion that in the collecting and transcribing of these words, the material wasn't edited by those close to the prophets.[9] However, whether a series of small edits or a larger-scale shaping of the text, the resulting ability to locate Hosea's work within an historical timeline helped Israel to, as Gerhard von Rad described, 'realise that her present was based on an earlier series of creative events, a somewhat involved historical development'[10] as opposed to single, one-off events celebrated in distinct cultural settings. In this way, and in no small part due to the prophetic literature produced during this period, the nation starts to form its identity, articulating both its dynamic and ongoing relationship with God.[11] Read as Holy Scripture, the book of Hosea tells at once of God's intervention into a particular time and place and of his timeless truth expressed via rich metaphorical language and radical action;[12] an observation that engenders significant contemporary relevance.

Hosea - An Overview

Unlike other Old Testament writings that tend to describe God's relationship with Israel in terms of a master and servant, Hosea uses the altogether more private language of husband and wife.[13] Thus, set against the observation that in contrast to other Old Testament Prophets who report what God has said to them, Hosea delivers his oracles from God's perspective[14] and through this particular form, creates a text that challenges contemporary sensibilities about domestic relationships.

The book is most commonly described as falling into two distinct parts: chapters 1 to 3 and 4 to 14.[15] In the first part, Hosea's whole family is drawn as the

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[4] All Biblical references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version

[5] Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy, eds, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 217.

[6] John Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament*, Revised Edition (Oxford: Lion, 2000), 123.

[7] Bruce C. Birch, W. Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim and David L. Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 303.

[8] Birch, et al., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, 303.

[9] James L. Mays, *Hosea* (London: SCM, 1969), 15, and Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology Volume One* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1962), 71. James Mays has proposed that the collector of the material selected that which best described the relationship between Hosea's marriage, children, prophecy and historic context into the first three chapters, thereby introducing the prophet's message, before arranging further material in order to expand upon these domestic themes. Gerhard von Rad suggests a more subtle evolution of the text that ensured the prophet's words were contextually relevant to those living in more southerly regions.

[10] Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology Volume Two* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1965), 105.

[11] von Rad, *Old Testament Theology Volume Two*, 106-8 and 112-11

[12] von Rad, *Old Testament Theology Volume Two*, 130.

[13] Derek Kidner, *The Message of Hosea* (Leicester: IVP, 1976, reprint 2008), 45.

[14] Landy, *Hosea,* 22.

[15] A minority of commentators such as Landy (see *Hosea*, 12) suggest that chapters 12-14 should be addressed as a third and final section. Mays advocates the more commonly held two-part model in *Hosea,* 15.

unfaithful, sinning people of Israel.[16] God instructs the prophet to 'take a wife of whoredom', likening this act to Israel's whoredom in forsaking God (1:2) by worshipping the storm-god Baal (2:8). Hosea subsequently marries a woman named Gomer who bears him a son, Jezreel (1:4), meaning 'God sows' in Hebrew. Gomer conceives two more children, a daughter (1:6), who Hosea is instructed by God to call Lo-ruhamah (not pitied) and a son (1:9) to be called Lo-ammi (not my people). In this way, the children are given names that somehow separate them from their mother (1:6-9), or at least, from the normative and loving relationship one might expect a mother to have with her children.[17]

Chapter two sees Gomer leaving Hosea in search of other lovers and being brutally punished and humiliated for doing so, even her children excluded from God's pity (2:4). Hosea tells his children to 'accuse' their mother (2:2) before punishing her for her worship of idols.[18] When she finally decides to return to her first husband, he scorns her for once following the lovers who gave her wool, flax, oil and drink without understanding that it was he who provided these things in the first place (2:5-8). In chapter three, Hosea strips Gomer of any remaining dignity by buying her back from her lover for 'fifteen shekels, a homer of barley and a measure of wine' (3:2),[19] rendering Gomer a powerless object within a mercenary, financial transaction.[20]

The second part of the book, from chapter four onwards, explores this graphic imagery by illustrating how Israel has become the whoring wife to God's faithful husband. God indicts Israel, its leaders and its clergy for their lack of faithfulness (4:1), rejection of knowledge (4:6), for their corruption (7:3) and for their idolatry (8:4), for using insolent words (7:16) and for their dishonesty (12:7), declaring that the nation will be punished with desolation (5:9), bereaved of her children (9:12) and face the rage of the sword (11:6). The reprieve, when it finally comes, assures Israel of forgiveness if she looks back, remembers where she has come from (11:12 – 12:14) and ultimately returns to God (14:1).

The story is told in the language of Hebrew poetry, complete with refined use of the parallelism distinctive of this form. This is demonstrated by passages such as 11:1,

> 'When Israel was a child, I loved him,
> and out of Israel I called my son'

and 5:3,

> 'I know Ephraim,
> and Israel is not hidden from me;
>
> for now, O Ephraim, you have played the whore;
> Isreal is defiled'

In both examples, the repetition is clear to the point of being unusual in prophetic literature.[21] Likewise, the erotic nature implicit in the language is similar to that in Song of Songs, although we have no way of knowing whether Hosea influenced the production of that much later text.[22] In addition, as seen in 7:6, Hosea's command of visual imagery through the use of exacting metaphors is vast,

> 'For they are kindled like an oven, their heart
> burns within them;
> all night their anger smoulders;
> in the morning it blazes like flaming fire'

This verse concludes an oracle warning of the corruption within Israel's courts[23], the vivid image of

[16] Tristianne J. Connolly, 'Metaphor and Abuse in Hosea', *Feminist Theology: The Journal of the Britain and Ireland School of Feminist Theology*, 18(1998), 54-66 (56).

[17] Yvonne Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 117.

[18] Allan Rosengren, 'Knowledge of God According to Hosea the Ripper', *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*, 21(2007), 139-143 (140).

[19] Whether the woman referred to in chapters one and three are one and the same is a genuinely ambiguous issue and no consensus amongst contemporary commentators on this point has been reached. However, whether or not she is the same person does nothing to soften, undermine or negate the metaphors under discussion in this paper.

[20] Some commentators speculate that the price paid for Homer equates to the 30 shekel value placed on a slave in Exodus 21:32. However, this point had been disputed by writers such as Hornsby (1999, 123) who contest that the payment quoted here is simply that rendered to a prostitute for her service.

[21] Graham I. Davies, *Hosea* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 108.

[22] Landy, *Hosea*, 35

[23] Kidner, *The Message of Hosea*, 71

lust and the bursting flames of passion referencing the sinful lust described so graphically in chapter two. The fickle nature of Israel's love, better described as lust, is drawn with everyday pictures,

> 'Your love is like a morning cloud,
> like the dew that goes away early' (6:4)

The meaning of the metaphor is then clarified in a later verse (6:6),

> 'For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,
> the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings'

However, merely to focus on such technical detail is to neglect that which makes the text uncomfortable and perhaps unpalatable in contemporary eyes. This is poetry, which demands to be read with imagination; imagination that subsequently affects how one might react to the challenging nature of its content. Indeed, the density of the metaphor used by this prophet has generated a significant amount of theological debate about the nature of Hosea the man, the husband, the father, the metaphor and of course, God him or her self. How then, might the message of the book ultimately be interpreted as its brutal language appears to tell not only of marital breakdown but also of an abusive, violent relationship?[24]

Simply a Metaphor?

Looking more closely at this divinely inspired union, it is worth considering whether or not the marriage literally took place or whether it acted simply as an allegorical vehicle through which Hosea's message could be delivered. James Mays and Graham Davies agree that although the marriage is often considered to be a metaphorical conceit, we have no real evidence to suggest that the marriage didn't take place in the literal sense of the word.[25] Indeed, as noted by Norman Snaith, Hosea is a prophet who neither reports visions nor alludes to any type of ecstatic state, suggesting that he was fully aware of what he was saying and doing.[26] Likewise, there has been some disagreement as to whether Gomer was a prostitute before her marriage or whether she was referred to in this way because of her imminent unfaithfulness. Elizabeth Achtemeier suggests Gomer was a prostitute, a woman 'already known to be given to whoredom … neither a virgin or inclined to faithfulness when Hosea marries her'[27] as opposed to Snaith who concludes that in order to make sense of the narrative across the first three chapters, Gomer was 'pure at the time of her marriage', only becoming adulterous after her union with the prophet.[28]

However, the imagery inherent in the text, whether born of rich metaphor or historical narrative, speaks of a radical prophetic act.[29] There is no question that as a harlot, prostitute or indeed as an adulterous (or potentially adulterous) woman, Gomer would have been considered sinful[30] and the polar opposite of a prophet.[31] Indeed, Leviticus 21:6-8 instructs clergy not to marry defiled or divorced women or prostitutes and although the prophets had an identity distinct from that of the priest, as Holy men, it would appear sensible to suggest that the same rules would have applied. In this way, the language itself, metaphor or otherwise, speaks literally.[32]

Re-reading the Text

Whether one chooses to interpret the biographical detail of Hosea's life as reality or as allegory, the way that Hosea treats his wife and the way that Gomer responds to this treatment leaves the contemporary reader with certain problematic issues. Portraying Gomer as a signifier for Israel with Hosea acting as the complementary signifier for God only serves to

[24] Teresa J. Hornsby, 'Israel has become a Worthless Thing', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 82(1999), 115-128 (117).

[25] Mays, *Hosea*, 23 and Davies, *Hosea*, 79.

[26] Norman Snaith, *Mercy and Sacrifice*, (London: SCM Press, 1953), 18.

[27] Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets 1* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1996), 5.

[28] Snaith, *Mercy and Sacrifice*, 31.

[29] Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet,* 6.

[30] Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets 1,* 3.

[31] Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet,* 80.

[32] This is similar to Lakoff and Johnson's discussion of the metaphor 'Argument is War' where they assert that an argument is structured, understood, performed, etc. in terms of war: 'The concept is metaphorically structured, the activity is metaphorically structured, and, consequently, the language is metaphorically structured … The language of argument is not poetic, fanciful, or rhetorical; it is literal.' See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, revised edition 2003), 5-6.

heighten this discomfort. The way in which the text moves between the Hosea/Gomer metaphor to the God/Israel reality makes it difficult to distinguish between the two.[33] Allan Rosengren asserts, 'At the beginning of Hosea 2:4-25, Gomer signifies the land and the children signify the Israelites; but later, perhaps in verse 10, Gomer comes to signify the Israelites. And who is speaking in Hosea 2:4-25? Is it Hosea or Yahweh? Coming from chapter one, Hosea would be the obvious candidate but from verse 15 it is clearly Yahweh.'[34] Perhaps all one can conclude is that this is a genuinely ambiguous text; a text that negates an easy or even cursory reading.[35]

In her book *The Prostitute and the Prophet* (1996), Yvonne Sherwood also suggests that although the distinction between signified and signifier in chapters one and three is clear, the boundary between the two is a lot more blurred in chapter two[36]. Here, as well as signifying Israel the nation, Gomer the mother, wife and harlot 'does not simply embody the land but dominates this [2:5] passage.'[37] Looking at 7:6, it is the grammar within the metaphor that provides the evidence that the male/female imagery is far from clear-cut.[38] The Hebrew word for 'oven' is masculine yet the verb form for 'burn' is female. Likewise, the word for fire is masculine and for flame, female.[39] In 4:17, Israel is clearly referred to as male,

> 'Ephraim is joined to idols –
> let him alone'

Such imagery continues to the end of the book where in 12:14 God's judgement on Ephraim is expressed in specifically male terms:

> 'Ephraim has given bitter offence,
> so his Lord will bring his crimes down on him
> and pay him back for his insults.'

Whilst acknowledging the slippage between the male/female imagery, it is critical to remember that this marriage, real or otherwise, represents God's interaction with the world. To deny this would be to somehow create a get-out clause that averts the eye from the harsh and gritty reality of this text and from the difficult questions that it raises about the covenant relationship between God and Israel.[40] Not only does Hosea warn his wife that he will prevent her from pursuing her lovers but he describes exactly how he will go about doing this (2:6); the signifier is loaded with a lot more detail than that which is signified.[41] This expansive use of metaphorical language articulates something of the reality of this situation.[42] Therefore, does Hosea want to be read as a text advocating a submissive female role within a desirably patriarchal society as critics such as Allan Rosengren have suggested?[43] Writers such as Teresa Hornsby go to great lengths to oppose this reading with complex explanations as to Gomer's identity as a strong, autonomous and independent business woman.[44] Francis Landy counters by asserting that, 'Hosea is undoubtedly patriarchal literature: its God is male, its world is governed by male authorities and conventions and the prophet is male. Its use of female imagery is misogynistic…'[45]

Here it is vital to see the book as a complete text. As a whole, the book is focussed on contemporary, socio-political events.[46] It uses language that would have spoken to the people of the time about the political and personal situations in which they found

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[33] Rosengren, *Knowledge of God According to Hosea the Ripper*, 139.

[34] Rosengren, *Knowledge of God According to Hosea the Ripper*, 139.

[35] Knut Heim, 'Wordplay' in Longman and Enns (eds) *The Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry and Writings* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2008), 928.

[36] Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, 134.

[37] Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, 137.

[38] The author acknowledges that whilst outside the remit of this paper, a more comprehensive gender analysis that takes account of the considerable feminist literature in this area, is required in order to more fully explore this point, only briefly summarised here.

[39] Davies, *Hosea,* 91.

[40] Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet,* 81.

[41] Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, 138.

[42] See Lakoff and Turner, who suggest that metaphorical concepts enable a study of the real world that embraces human perception of reality, 'Since much of our social reality is understood in metaphorical terms, and since our conception of the physical world is partly metaphorical, metaphor plays a very significant role in determining what is real for us.' Lakoff and Turner, *Metaphors We Live By*, 146.

[43] Rosengren, *Knowledge of God According to Hosea the Ripper*, 139-143.

[44] Hornsby, *Israel has become a Worthless Thing,* 115-128.

[45] Landy, *Hosea*, 19.

[46] Landy, *Hosea*, 14.

themselves. In addition, as has been noted, the male/female imagery starts to break down as the narrative unfolds. To return to the text, 1:1 refers to Israel as 'son' as opposed to the female metaphors used in the following material of the first few chapters. Indeed, the description of Hosea in 11:3 reveals a typically maternal image of God, teaching Israel to walk, as a mother would guide a child.

> 'Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
> I took them up in my arms;
> but they did not know that I healed them.'

Suddenly the language becomes parental and even maternal, as opposed to fatherly.

A Message for Today

These observations throw the presumed misogyny of the opening chapters into a different light. To suggest that through Hosea God was propagating an oppressively patriarchal society is to assert that God somehow wished to oppress half of humanity; to subject half of his creation to the whims of the other and to create an unjust imbalance within the human race. Neither the Bible as a complete work, nor Christianity's experience of a loving God under whom all humanity is equal nor indeed, the author's experience of a God who has created both male and female in his or her own image, can support such a view. Furthermore, to describe someone as misogynous is to ascribe to them a negative personality trait. It therefore follows that to read the text in a simplistic way, without paying careful attention to its complex metaphors, leads to a frightening conclusion; not only is God misogynous but at some point during this period, God stopped being God.[47] As our discussion of the use of metaphor has shown, to take the text literally in this sense is to misunderstand.[48] To disregard the metaphor is to attest that our understanding of the world or indeed this text, is possible without abstract thought.[49]

Therefore, what message might Hosea have for contemporary society? Within the text, most vividly in chapter two, the vulnerability of the husband/wife, parent/child relationship is revealed. The imagery used is at once shocking and unfamiliar.[50] Gomer is stripped bare and exposed to her lovers (2:10); the names of Hosea's offspring portray them as forgotten, worthless children (1:6-9). But theologians have long suggested that Holy Scripture should retain a certain unfamiliarity – if the text becomes too familiar or over-interpreted, Christians are in danger of idolising it,[51] which, through his whoring wife metaphor, is precisely what Hosea warns Israel against. It is hard to suggest a contemporary metaphor that would shock in the same way – a female minister marrying a male sex worker? A male priest marrying a young female refugee? A marriage between a judge and a convicted paedophile? One could easily imagine these theoretical examples gracing the pages of a tabloid newspaper, generating many column inches of heart-rending debate, just as Hosea's marriage continues to engender debate. There would be no 'right' answer, no single interpretation of events that would hold more moral value than another.

Human relationships are messy, complicated, painful and often fickle. It is this imagery that cries out more loudly from the page than any semantic challenges about the exact nature of Gomer's harlotry or Hosea's marital status. Gomer's worship of idols (2:11), Israel's stubbornness (4:16), Ephraim's short-lived love (6:4), the nation's corrupt love of profit (7:16) all describe broken relationships, which could just as easily be mirrored in a friendship as in a marriage. In this way, the book is relational – there are two parties in these relationships, distinct yet mutually dependent. Indeed, God's distinctiveness from humanity is manifested in his presence within human relationships.[52] We are called to seek knowledge of God as broken, unfaithful, fickle people.

Hosea is a book in which God speaks through the prophet and his prophetic action[53] about his/her ongoing, risky and challenging love affair with humanity.[54] His love is more, not less, 'ardent and

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[47] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology – An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994, second edition 1997), 258.

[48] William C. Placher in Walter Brueggemann, William C. Placher and Brain K. Blout (eds), *Struggling with Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 36.

[49] Lakoff and Turner, *Metaphors We Live By*, 272.

[50] Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet,* 148.

[51] Walter Brueggemann, 'Biblical Authority: A Personal Reflection' in Brueggemann, Placher and Blout (eds), *Struggling with Scripture,* 5.

[52] Landy, *Hosea*, 18.

[53] Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets 1,* 14.

[54] Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets 1,* 4.

vulnerable' than our own.[55] In this way, God is caught up in the reality of the dysfunctional relationships that we have with each other and with him.[56] In speaking through Hosea's radical symbolic actions, the living God jolts the reader out of any comfortable, familiar reading of scripture. This is uncharted territory, God working at the very edge of our understanding of what it means to be in relationship with each other and with him.[57] We are called to seek greater understanding and to search out further knowledge of God (10:12). This search for understanding will be just as costly and potentially destructive as any sacrifice we could offer but we can always be assured,

'I am God and no mortal,
the Holy One in your midst' (11:9)

[55] Kidner, *The Message of Hosea*, 100.

[56] Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, 324.

[57] Kidner, *The Message of Hosea*, 14.

COSTLY GAIN OF LAMENT

Nancy C. Lee and Carleen Mandolfo (eds), *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008. £16.99. pp. xii + 274. ISBN: 978-1-58983-357-9).

This is a fine anthology of scholarly essays and original lament poems, which marks the culmination of nearly ten years of work by participants of the SBL session, 'Lamentation in Ancient and Contemporary Contexts' (1999). The book is segmented into four parts: In Part I, six scholars who have recently completed a commentary or a monograph on Lamentations give summaries of their works; the scholars highlight what they have tried to communicate with a helpful retrospective assessment of their own work. In Part II, three contributors briefly extend the horizon of lament beyond Lamentations. From the exilic 'transformation' of lament liturgy to the discussion of the body as a kind of rhetorical identity employed in lament, this section seeks to situate lament in the wider, apposite contexts of the Hebrew Bible. Part III occupies roughly half of the book, and the purview here explodes onto a whole different plane. From Archie Lee's strategic comparison of the biblical lament tradition with its Chinese counterpart to Wilma Bailey's study of the lament of the African-American women, from Borislav Arapović's gripping lament poems to William Morrow's discussion on resurgence of lament in Medieval Piyyuṭîm, eight diverse contributors present their insights on how ancient and modern 'lament traditions' around the world inform our understanding of the biblical lament tradition and vice versa. Part IV concludes the book with a reflective essay by a landmark scholar, Walter Brueggemann, who insightfully observes, '…lament, in its very utterance, is an act of resistance and defiance that interrupts doxology, that asserts an alternative reality, and that believes that out of the candid embrace of pain new social alternatives may be generated' (p. 223).

The collection covers an impressive array of approaches and periods; it is a truly international work, combining traditional critical-historical approaches to textual, cultural and historical studies with insights of psychology and anthropology. While the collection requires some familiarity with the nature of OT genres and poetry, this book is a helpful resource for all to learn about the points of consensus and divergence and the trajectory of the current scholarship on lament. This anthology is, however, more than just another academic work; it is an invitation to the gaze upon the rawness of life, an invocation to embrace its dolor, and 'a summons issued even to us' (p. 235) to break the deafening silence of the atrocious suffering of the world—in the hopes of a new reality.

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