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Finding the Voice of Gomer: Exploring Artistic Portrayals as Hermeneutic Opportunities

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Abstract

Die Arbeit untersucht feministische Interpretationen, welche den Stimmen Gehör verschaffen, die in biblischen Texten zum Schweigen gebracht wurden. Dadurch wird ein hermeneutischer Blick konstruiert, unter welchem die künstlerischen Darstellungen von Gomer und die Ehemetapher interpretiert werden können. Mit ausgewählten Kunstwerken, darunter frühmittelalterliche Manuskriptillustrationen, biblische Illustrationen von Barry Moser und Werken von Cody Miller, wird dargelegt, wie Kunstrezeption die Lücken in einem Text anspricht, der so wenig Raum für die Stimme von Gomer, der Frau von Hosea, lässt. Diese Kunstwerke stellen sie oft als zentrale Figur neben Hosea dar und bieten eine nuancierte Darstellung, die ein komplexeres Verständnis ihres Charakters ermöglicht und Raum für weitere Diskussionen öffnet. Das Ziel der Arbeit ist es zu untersuchen, inwiefern die künstlerischen Interpretationen mit dem Text in Resonanz stehen oder von ihm abweichen und die breiten Implikationen dieser Interpretationen für zeitgenössische Glaubensgemeinschaften und den theologischen Diskurs aufzudecken. Die Kunstrezeption kann diese Transformation weiter vorantreiben, indem sie Gomers Rolle neu interpretiert und imaginiert, um neue Perspektiven zu bieten, die ihre Erfahrungen und Handlungsfähigkeit in den Vordergrund stellen.

The thesis explores feminist interpretations that have amplified silenced voices in biblical texts, before trying to construct a hermeneutical lens through which artistic depictions of Gomer and the marriage metaphor can be interpreted. With selected artworks, including early medieval manuscript illustrations, Barry Moser's biblical illustrations, and Cody Miller's works, it attempts to see how art-reception addresses the gaps in a text that has so little room for the voice of Gomer, the wife of Hosea. These artworks often depict her as a central figure alongside Hosea with a nuanced portrayal that invites a more complex understanding of her character and opens space for further discussion. By examining how these artistic interpretations resonate with or diverge from the text, the research aims to uncover the broader implications of these interpretations for contemporary faith-based communities and theological discourse. Art reception can further this transformation by reinterpreting and reimagining Gomer's role, offering new perspectives that foreground her experiences and agency.

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Introduction

I'd like to open this thesis with the words that Noami Graetz does in her book 'Silence is Deadly: Judaism confronts wife-beating':

the One
who heals also
wounds

despite contrary claims that
one who wounds
could never heal
and one who heals
would never wound

nevertheless
"Hosea"

G. Crumley, *Judaism*[1]

The author of this paper initially intended to explore the themes of divine pedagogy in the book of Hosea as a treatise on God's unconditional love. However, a series of fascinating and intriguing lectures at Sincletica Monastic School, Montserrat, provided a timely theological confrontation. Traditionally informed interpretations had never prompted a closer examination of the figure in the shadows.

No figure in the shadows was recognized or acknowledged. Eventually, the 'male gaze' that had overlooked Gomer turned toward her with compassionate inquiry. Unseeing someone is also a kind of seeing—a selective, biased perception. I admit that I to have been complicit in 'turning a blind eye' to what we will explore later in this paper: the muted voices in the text. In the book of Hosea, the prophet speaks with divine authority. Accepting this traditional view makes it

[1] Graetz, Naomi. Silence Is Deadly : Judaism Confronts Wifebeating. Northvale, NJ: Aronson, 1998. p. iv

difficult to depart from established theological interpretations. One can only explore the gaps in a text by first recognizing that such gaps exist.

Traditional biblical interpretation needs to be questioned because, as Graetz shows in her work, it is not merely a matter of thought but has actual consequences for the community that draws inspiration from these scriptural texts. Graetz is one of many scholars (Caroline Blyth will be discussed in chapter 2) who have begun examining these texts through the lens of women experiencing sexual violence. These 'gaps' are not harmless voids that encourage a leisurely interpretative exercise; they have concrete repercussions within communities today as much as they did for those at the time of its inception. As a queer person, I was delighted to read that Caroline Blyth expanded her initial research to include problematic texts such as the one in the book of Hosea, addressing the experiences of victims of sexual violence not only among women but across the LGBTQ+ community.

Could the text, fragmented in its construction and content, provide answers to the problems it presents? If so, how can one access these answers? If not, what other tools are available to seek them? This thesis begins by examining the current discussion surrounding the book of Hosea, starting with its structure and thematic content. Chapter One explores these themes before focusing on Gomer. It then considers how feminist interpreters have challenged traditional methods of interacting with the text, creating space for the 'gaze' to shift toward others within it.

Chapter Two ventures to explore the nature and characteristics of silenced voices in a text, identifying other silenced voices present in biblical texts. By examining how other scholars have employed different hermeneutical techniques for two of such figures, we can establish a framework for analysing works of art depicting, the ‘book of Hosea’, Gomer or the marital metaphor. Finally, Chapter Three will engage with selected works of art to see how art reception has responded to these textual gaps. Some of the questions that we will explore is if art-reception opens spaces for broader interpretation in a way that the silenced voice of Gomer can be heard and if that has any bearing on the overall message of the book.

Chapter 1 Gomer in the Book of Hosea: Feminist Perspectives

1.1. Context

The Book of Hosea is a complex and rich prophetic work that provides valuable insights into the historical and spiritual context of ancient Israel. Before we undertake an inquiry into the subject of the thesis, it is necessary to understand the historical and socio-political context in which this book came to be written as well as a cursory introduction to the characters of the book. The historical background of the book of Hosea can be understood by examining the political and religious context of ancient Israel during the 8th century BCE. While there are limited external historical sources directly related to the events described in the book, scholars have pieced together information from various biblical texts and archaeological findings to provide insights into the period. During this time, the northern kingdom of Israel, also known as the Kingdom of Israel or Samaria, was experiencing political instability and was on the brink of collapse. The Assyrian Empire, under the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III, began to expand and pose a significant threat to the surrounding regions, including Israel. Tiglath-Pileser III invaded Israel around 734 BCE and imposed heavy tribute on the kingdom, effectively reducing its autonomy.[2] The religious situation in Israel during this time was marked by syncretism, where the worship of Yahweh, the God of Israel, was blended with the worship of pagan gods. The northern kingdom's kings, particularly Jeroboam II, encouraged the worship of golden calves and other Canaanite deities, leading to a departure from the exclusive worship of Yahweh as prescribed in the Mosaic covenant.[3] The prophet Hosea lived and prophesied in the Northern Kingdom of Israel during this tumultuous period. His ministry likely took place in the decades before the fall of Israel which occurred in 722 BCE. Hosea's prophetic messages were primarily directed towards the northern kingdom, denouncing its idolatry, social injustices, and moral decay. He called the people to repentance and warned them of the impending judgment if they did not turn back to Yahweh.[4] He did this with vehemence and as we acquaint ourselves with his person as he appears in the book of Hosea in the following section, we will also see how the language employed is both emphatic and vivid.

[2] Davies, Graham I. Hosea. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993. pp. 13-19
[3] Brown, S.L. The Book of Hosea. London: Methuen, 1932. pp. xi-xvii
[4] Heschel, Abraham Joshua. The Prophets. 1. Perennial classics ed. New York, NY: Harper, 2001.pp. 30-35

1.2.The Person of Hosea and his Message

In this section, our inquiry will begin with a look at the structural composition and content of the book. We will conduct an analysis of its constituent elements while acquainting ourselves with the characters and thematic content within its pages. Beginning with a preliminary survey of Hosea, the primary protagonist, we will then establish a foundational framework that will take us a step closer to understanding the discussion around the character of Gomer and the thematic discourse around her and around their marriage.

This book is a collection of roughly 25 years of prophecy and can be loosely divided into three sections. The first section (chapters 1 to 3), which has garnered the most attention from biblical interpreters owing to its controversial content, lays the groundwork for this prophetic treatise. The characters in the book introduced in this section are God, Hosea, Gomer (his wife) and his strangely named children: a son Jezreel (God scatters/sows), a daughter Lo Ruammah (no mercy) and another son Lo Ammi (not my people). The book begins with a command from God to Hosea to enter into marriage a woman who would become unfaithful to this marital commitment.

> 'When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take for yourself a wife of prostitution and have children of prostitution, for the land commits great prostitution by forsaking the LORD." So, he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.'[5]

This marital relationship introduced here serves as an analogy for God's covenantal relationship with Israel. Hosea's experience of betrayal and forgiveness is shown to reflect God's enduring love for His people despite their unfaithfulness in these chapters. It is where the marriage metaphor as such has been introduced and with it the problems with its content.

> 'The LORD said to me again, "Go, love a woman who has a lover and is an adulteress, just as the LORD loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes."

[5] Hosea 1:2-3 NRSVUE (All future biblical references are taken from New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise mentioned)

> So, I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer of barley and a measure of wine. And I said to her, "You must remain as mine for many days; you shall not prostitute yourself; you shall not have intercourse with a man, nor I with you."'[6]

The beginning of chapter 3 holds the second reference to her: Graham Davies, among others scholars, expresses regret that a lot of focus is laid on these chapters which in his opinion is unfortunate owing to the unclarity of the identity of the woman in the beginning and the end of this section (the two sets of verses above), the implications this has and the lack of information on the person Gomer was.[7] He thinks that it does not focus on the more important message which has been covered in the remainder of the book :

> 'But to understand the full breadth of his teaching and to grasp its revolutionary handling of the traditions and institutions of Israel it is necessary to look at the contents of these chapters along with those that follow them in the book. In fact, to counterbalance the influence which chs. 1-3 have had on previous perceptions of Hosea, there is much to be said for looking first at chs. 4-14.'[8]

Yet, it is in these very chapters that the information (and the lack of it) about the prophet and his wife is provided. The chapters 4-11 deal in a rather detailed way with the content of Hosea's general prophetic message. This pertains to references from the daily lives of the people, their political inclinations, and actions.

> 'By their wickedness they make the king glad,
> and the officials by their treachery.
> They are all adulterers;
> they are like a heated oven
> whose baker does not need to stir the fire
> from the kneading of the dough until it is leavened.'[9]

This central-section of the book focuses a lot on problems and events within a socio-political framework. Hosea's prophetic messages revolve around the themes of covenant, idolatry, and

[6] Hosea 3:1-3
[7] Davies, *Hosea*. p. 22
[8] Ibid. p. 22
[9] Hosea 7:3-4

judgment. He denounces the people of Israel for their spiritual adultery, as they have turned away from the worship of Yahweh and embraced pagan gods and practices. Through vivid and sometimes shocking imagery, Hosea portrays the consequences of Israel's sin, emphasizing the impending destruction and exile that will befall them because of their disobedience.[10]

> ‘They turn to that which does not profit;
> they have become like a defective bow;
> their officials shall fall by the sword
> because of the rage of their tongue.
> So much for their babbling in the land of Egypt’.[11]

The final chapters 12-14 widen the scope of the inquiry to look at Israel as a whole, it contains references to the history of Israel and brings together discussions on God and death. It is also the section that the book of Hosea is known for, chapter 11 which presents a feminine side of God especially with the imagery of feeding the infant. Schüngel-Straumann explores this in her book ‘Denn Gott bin ich und kein Mann‘(For I am God and no man). [12]Other versions translate it as Mensch (Human) or mortal. In her book, she discusses how ironical it is that within a book that contains such strong female/mother imagery, there is also such a strong discussion around patriarchal themes. This can be seen in the verses below:

> ‘When Israel was a child, I loved him,
> and out of Egypt I called my son.
> The more I called them,
> the more they went from me.
> they kept sacrificing to the Baals,
> and offering incense to idols.
> 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.
> I led them with cords of human kindness,

[10] Also in Brown, *The Book of Hosea : With Introduction and Notes*. See also Francis Landy, *Hosea*, Corr. repr. ed., *Readings, a New Biblical Commentary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2011).pp- 18-20
[11] Hosea 7:16
[12] Schüngel-Straumann, Helen. Denn Gott bin ich, und kein Mann: Gottesbilder im Ersten Testament - feministisch betrachtet. Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1996.

with bands of love.
I was to them like those
who lift infants to their cheeks.
I bent down to them and fed them'[13]

Further in the book, chapter 14 opens with a repetition of the theme of repentance that resounds in the book and invites the believer into a future that is not comparable, including motifs of return and prosperity. The rich content of the book encompassing the varied themes discussed above is enhanced with the poetic imagery it manages to make accessible to the reader. Since the composition of these chapters has been at through more than one author it is not surprising to find different points of emphasis, it also echoes the voices of many traditions.

Throughout the book, Hosea not only makes use of symbolic language but also employs wordplays to convey his message. Names of people and places carry significant meanings, often reflecting the spiritual condition and fate of Israel. The prophet employs vivid imagery from various aspects of life, such as agriculture, warfare, and family dynamics to illustrate the spiritual realities and consequences faced by the nation. The perception of the book as an incredible piece of prophetic-poetic literature, the person of Hosea and the lessons in divine love have been hailed by interpreters such as Heschel: 'Hosea has given us a supreme expression of the vision of the subjective God so typical for prophetic awareness.'[14]

As mentioned above, it is commonly agreed upon that the book's authorship cannot be traced to a single author but is an addendum of fragmented texts in the years that followed. Although this is the case, the coherent nature of the reflective prophetic discourse, is not affected. Among other attributes, it contains 'unity and multiplicity, … self-conscious, and complicated by the number of authorial (and readerly levels) inherent in the text'[15].

In summary, the Book of Hosea is a prophetic work that exposes the spiritual unfaithfulness of Ephraim/Israel and proclaims both judgment and hope. It highlights the enduring love of God, His longing for reconciliation, and the potential for restoration if His people turn back to Him. Through its powerful symbolism and poignant messages, Hosea's book serves as a timeless reminder of the consequences of sin and the redemptive nature of God's love. In the following

[13] Hosea 11, 1-4 NRSVUE
[14] Heschel, *The Prophets Vol 1*.p. 58
[15] Landy, *Hosea*. p. 14

section we turn our attention to the person Hosea took to be his wife, Gomer-bat-Diblaim, the subject whose voice in this paper sets out to investigate through artistic interpretations.

1.3.Gomer

In the last chapter of this paper (Chapter 3) we will be exploring artistic representations of Hosea and Gomer through the centuries and see if the artists whose artworks belong to different genres attempt a different retelling of the story of Gomer. To accurately represent a biblical figure in any artistic form and imbue it with a distinct character, it is imperative to first develop a comprehensive understanding of the figure. This involves acquiring relevant information from the available sources and subsequently delving into the nuanced aspects surrounding the biblical text. By doing so, the process of representing the figure becomes more approachable and manageable. This initial step ensures that the artist seeking a retrieval obtains accurate information about the figure's background, characteristics, actions, significance within the biblical context. However, a mere compilation of information is insufficient for a comprehensive understanding of the biblical figure. It is essential to find one's way deeper into the hints and intricacies surrounding the biblical text. This involves studying the historical and cultural context in which the figure existed, analyzing the language and literary techniques employed in the text, and examining the interpretations and commentaries provided by scholars throughout history.

By gaining a deeper understanding of the biblical figure, the artist can grasp the subtleties of their personality, motivations, and actions. This understanding allows the artist to imbue the representation with authenticity and integrity, ensuring that the artistic portrayal aligns with the character as depicted in the biblical narrative, but also recognizes the spaces in between that invite the perceiver to engage hermeneutically. Where there is a huge lack of information (as in the case of Gomer), it is the artists' challenge just as it is the textual interpreter's to allow themselves to be invited to all that remains unsaid within the text. In the next section we set out to do exactly that, namely explore the character of Gomer as she appears in text, tradition and reception.

1.3.1. Gomer in text and tradition

The character Gomer in the book of Hosea, overshadowed by the title and the overarching symbolic message, is intriguing to say the least. Upon first reading, one is confounded with the

task of interpretation of this book. The tendency as a reader, perhaps dictated by traditional nuances of the Old Testament biblical scholarship, is to be filled with utmost sympathy for the betrayed prophet, the divine (whose pronouns are used interchangeably with the prophet) and with scorn for his female disdainful lover. Take for instance chapter 2 alone, which consists most of the violent imagery:

> 'Rebuke your mother, rebuke her,
> for she is not my wife,
> and I am not her husband.
> Let her remove the adulterous look from her face
> and the unfaithfulness from between her breasts.
> Otherwise, I will strip her naked
> and make her as bare as on the day she was born;
> I will make her like a desert,
> turn her into a parched land,
> and slay her with thirst.
> I will not show my love to her children,
> because they are the children of adultery.'[16]

The text here is written in second person imperative and one has the impression that it is Hosea who is addressing the children (the reader feels spoken to in the first person as one of their children). Until the last verse (v.4) where the children are no longer spoken *to* but spoken *of*. And it follows in the same verses until verse 13: '…declares the Lord'

> 'I will punish her for the days
> she burned incense to the Baals;
> she decked herself with rings and jewelry,
> and went after her lovers,
> but me she forgot,"
> declares the Lord.'[17]

[16] Hos 2: 2-3 (NIV)
[17] Hos 2:13 (NIV)

This passage will be discussed at a later stage once again in the context of the sexually violent depictions it holds. For now, this paper will proceed with a discussion of her character and the preliminary discussion around it in this book of Hosea. Some scholars claim that her portrayal in the book of Hosea offers profound insights into the nature of divine love (or one can allow themselves to question concepts of divine love), the meaning of unfaithfulness, and the possibilities of restoration and reconciliation. The command of God to Hosea to marry her is also sometimes perceived as 'morally repugnant'.[18]Commentators of the book have called Gomer many things: the temptress, the whore, the wayward woman, a cult prostitute, etc. although there is a lack of evidence for many such claims especially her profession as a cult prostitute who participated in cult rituals. Keefe, among many others such as Phyllis Trible and Carol Fontaine claim it proven otherwise: "The scholarly assumption that sexual rituals were a prominent feature of Canaanite religion… can be nowhere independently substantiated"[19]

Outlining these observations and titles that she has been given (by various commentators) and expounding upon the challenges that these observations pose, 'The Prophet and the Prostitute' author and feminist critic Yvonne Sherwood has offered an elaborate analysis of how Gomer has been 'boxed'[20] by various traditions over centuries, by movements and readings that are struggling to come to terms with the problems of this scriptural text: the text is not only ancient but also fragmented, rendering it extremely difficult for study[21]. The other problems such as the marriage metaphor will be discussed further. It can be noted that the book does not offer much about the characters except their names, even in the case of her children. In their case the names that are chosen are symbolic to directly convey the message of Israel's (Or Ephraim as they are interchangeably addressed) disloyalty, and later used in the prophetic message announcing their doom and return. For instance, at the end of chapter 2 where the names and their meanings are elucidated:

> '[..]I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one.'
> I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people';
> and they will say, 'You are my God.''[22]

[18] Heschel, *The Prophets Vol 1*. p. 65
[19] Keefe, Alice A. "The Female Body, the Body Politic and the Land: a Sociopolitical Reading of Hosea 1-2." In A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets, 1995. p. 78
[20] Sherwood, Yvonne. "Boxing Gomer: Controlling the Deviant Woman in Hosea 1-3." In A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets, 1995. p. 101
[21] Sherwood, Yvonne. The Prostitute and the Prophet : Hosea's Marriage in Literary-Theoretical Perspective. Sheffield, England :: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996. p. 11.
[22]Hosea 2:23 NIV

We are not informed about the other aspects of this relationship, feelings, conversations, moods, etc.[23] Gomer has no choice to make; she is simply acted upon by God and his prophet… She is not invited to participate in shaping her own future.[24] In the second chapter, I will present other voices like Gomer's and argue for this absence of voice being indicative of the gap within the text that invites a reader (and eventually artists or any audience) to participate. I believe that that text will not lose its meaning, rather will broaden its horizon of understanding. I will also present arguments for and against this view from different scholars pertaining to this in the following chapter. At this point, it suffices to introduce these gaps and what these gaps are made up of. The lack of detail for the character somehow renders the character and intention beyond the reader's reach. It can be questioned if the author intended it this way. Scholars have attempted to find the choice of character by the author and even Hosea questionable:

> 'Hosea takes a wife, Gomer bat-Diblaim, and she bears a son. We do not know, of course, whether she is promiscuous, or even whether Hosea is attempting to fulfill the divine command. At least his choice of a particular woman suggests a measure of individual initiative. If Gomer is a 'woman of whoredoms', her social status seems to be intriguing. How did Diblaim accommodate himself to his miscreant daughter?'[25]

Abiding by Deuteronomical law, she would have been stoned, Francis Landy writes, further exploring the precariousness of this marital situation. With his psychoanalytic enquiry and use of poetic language, he enters into these gaps and asks the very questions that challenge the ideas of Hosea and Gomer that we have been accustomed to through traditional methods of interpretation. An example:

> 'It must have been difficult to be married to Hosea. Gomer tries to keep the family together while he insists on calling the children horrible names, on excoriating her as an example of Israel's infidelity, on provoking family quarrels. Perhaps she knows nothing of his fantasies; he sits in his room and writes at God's bidding – or listens- and she wonders that he is so brooding.' [26]

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[23] Hubbard, David Allen. Hosea: an Introduction and Commentary. Reprinted in this format. Nottingham, England Downers Grove, IL, USA: IVP Academic, 2009.p. 19.
[24] Reading Hosea—Micah: A Literary and Theological Commentary. By Terence E. Fretheim. Reading the Old Testament. Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2013. p. 15.
[25] Landy, *Hosea*.p. 23.
[26] Ibid. p. 23.

Scholars have debated the historical reality of Gomer versus her role as a literary addition meant to convey a theological message. Literary-critical scholarship doesn't leave much space for a different interpretation for Gomer either. It is commonplace to think of her as a literary device employed to drive home the point: God's faithfulness towards his people. This systematic exclusion in interpretation can have an impact on society, on communities that gather around scriptural texts. Some authors argue that she may have been a real woman chosen by God to fulfill a specific purpose in Hosea's life, while others see her as a symbolic construct representing Israel's spiritual unfaithfulness. [27]Authors such as Ibn Ezra (1089/93-1164), a distinguished poet and thinker who is popular in the Jewish world, Maimonides (also known as Rambam, 1135-1204), a Sephardic rabbi and an influential Torah scholar and Kimhi (1160-1235), a medieval rabbi, philosopher and grammarian hold the view that the marriage as such has not occurred in real life but is merely a dream or a vision. While others such as Hieronymus, the Targum authors and Rashi hold the view that it (the presence and story of Gomer) was a mere allegory. Quoting E.Sellin, Allwohn and Budde, Heschel makes the following arguments in favour of a literal reading[28]:

(a) that what is morally and religiously objectionable in actual practice becomes no more defensible by being presented as vision or parable;
(b) that no indication is given by the prophet that this is vision or parable and not fact;
(c) that the name Gomer bath Diblaim yields no symbolic significance;
(d) that no symbolic significance can be attached to the fact that the second child is a girl rather than a boy;
(e) that the literal view suits the realism of early prophecy better than the supposition that it is a product of literary imagination;
(f) that the prophets were accustomed to giving symbolic names to real children;
(g) that it would be strange for Hosea to tell such a story of his wife if false or, if he were unmarried, about himself; and
(h) that a real experience such as this furnishes the best explanation of Hosea's message – it was the outcome of the sufferings of his own heart. Most modern scholars accept the view that the narrative contains a report of actual events in the life of Hosea.

[27] Heschel comments that it has been considered a real event in Babylon Talmud, Pesahim 87a-b as also in M. Friedman, ed. Seder Eliahu, p. 187
[28] Heschel, *The Prophets Vol 1*., p. 65-66

Heschel provides enough grounds to assume that Gomer was not merely a literary figure. It is seen that Gomer stands as a complex and enigmatic figure, embodying both the brokenness of traditional perception and the challenges of storytelling. Although the name of Gomer yields no symbolic significance as such to the story within the text, the way her name has been perceived and understood provides an insight into biblical tradition and its reception. Perhaps it opens doors to newer insights into her character, story-telling or the way different lens have been employed in perceiving her role within the textual tradition. The next section will discuss some of the meanings and implications that her name provides looking for resonances within the Old Testament context.

1.3.2. The named and the unnamed

In the opening chapter of the book of Hosea, we witness a captivating scene where God, with great flair, commands the prophet Hosea to enter a matrimony of debauchery, where his spouse is to be ‚of whoredom'. The use of words derived from the enigmatic Hebraic root זנה (znh, whore, whoredom), denoting acts of fornication, harlotry, and unfaithfulness, occurs four times in the one verse talking about their marriage in Hosea 1:2 (quoted in section 1.1 above), explicitly highlighting the deliberate and troubling nature of this union as intended by the divine.[29] These allusions serve as a potent metaphor, skillfully employed to condemn Israel for its unfaithfulness towards God. It is through this divine edict that Gomer, the central character, steps onto the stage.

An obedient Hosea heeds divine command, yet the details surrounding Gomer's involvement remain shrouded in ambiguity. We are left yearning for a glimpse into Gomer's perspective, her acceptance of this unconventional summons, and the contextual backdrop that envelops her. Gomer has no agency in this matter; she is merely a passive recipient. She is not given the opportunity to have a say in shaping her own destiny. It is implied that she meets the qualifications laid out in the preceding verse, leaving us to surmise that she fulfills the required criteria, but we do not have confirmation of this. As readers, we silently, suppose or presume that she did.

[29] Gravett, Emily O. "The Risk of Retelling: Gomer-Bat-Diblaim, Biblical Retrieval, and the Male Gaze in The Prophet's Wife." Biblical Interpretation 27, no. 3 (2019): 436-61. p. 436

In the book of Hosea, as one can see in the case of his children, names hold considerable symbolic significance. Hosea bar Beeri and Gomer bat Diblaim, however, seem to have been spared from this indulgence. Gomer has no symbolic significance attached to her name and like her, Hosea, has nothing more about her appearance described in the scriptural text.[30] Nothing much about her origin or descent, location or tribe is mentioned, except the names of their fathers/families. In the case of Gomer, 'bat Diblaim' has also been given new meanings to talk about her character. By the change of a syllable, her name has been interpreted to mean daughter of figs to indicate her capacity for seduction, for instance.[31]

> 'Gomer. Rab said, [That intimates] that all satisfied their lust [gomerim] on her; the daughter of Diblayim: [a woman of] ill fame [dibbah] and the daughter of a woman of ill fame [dibbah]. Samuel said: [It] means she was as sweet in everyone's mouth as a cake of figs [debelah]. While R. Johanan interpreted: [It means] they all trod upon her as a cake of figs [is trodden].'[32]

Each of these imaginative interpretations have managed to sexualise or paint her as an evil figure. It might be interesting to ask at this point: Does this name have meaning within the biblical world, outside the book of Hosea? Can this shed some more light upon the nuances of this character, written as it is after the primary author within the Hebrew traditions? The Hebrew verb גָּמַר (Go-mer) means "to complete or finish" and appears five times in the book of Psalms (Psalm 7:9, 12:1, 57:2, 77:8, 138:8). Gāmar carries the meanings of ceasing, coming to an end, failing, perfecting, and performing. The ASV translation captures these nuances, while the RSV translates it as "fulfill" instead of "perfect" or "perform." This versatile word encompasses the idea of reaching a final state, whether it be accomplishing a goal, ceasing an action, or attaining perfection. It can refer to the abrupt termination of something that previously existed. Various interpretations have been proposed for the meaning of Gomer's name, given the theological significance of names in Hosea. The interpretation of her name as a substantive participle derived from the verb "to put an end" aligns well with the narrative context and the thematic thread of judgment and restoration throughout the book. In the Psalms, it is used both negatively, indicating the absence of righteousness and positively, highlighting God's

[30] Macintosh, A. A. A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Hosea. 1. publ. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997. p. 11
[31] Ibid.
[32] Pesahim 87a-b, quoted in: Ibid. Yvonne Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet : Hosea & Gomer's Marriage in Literary-Theoretical Perspective*,. p.46.

fulfillment of His undertakings in the lives of His faithful. Gomer is also mentioned in Genesis as the name of Japheth's son and in Ezekiel as one of the allies of Gog in an eschatological battle. [33]In these cases, the name 'Gomer' is ascribed to men. Does this have any implication for the meaning in the book of Hosea? It could be that although there is no specific meaning intented, that the name has no non-relevance in its choice of usage here since it has been mentioned twice already as other characters. I believe that the words with their roots contribute to the cognitive world of its usage. Perhaps its eponymous meaning in the book of Ezekiel (Gomer, Gamer, Gamar) as 'standing for the whole family'[34] too has some bearing on its usage in the book of Hosea. Perhaps to include her symbolic representation of the people of God/Israel – or to refer perhaps for the many familial metaphors employed in the book of Hosea?

Some authors have also noted symbolic resonances found in the names of Jeroboam II and Gomer. It suggests that Gomer's name, like Jeroboam's, serves as a figure representing the Lord's judgment upon the divided kingdoms.[35] This verb's meaning aligns with the context of Hosea 1, where the first child born to Gomer (Jezreel) symbolizes the end of Israel's division history. The breaking of the bow, associated with Gomer's child, signifies both judgment and restoration, representing the decisive breaking of Israel's military strength and the cessation of war. This act of ending also foreshadows the future restoration and peace depicted in the eschatological vision of new creation in Hosea 2:18[36] : 'And I will make for you a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety.'(NRSV)

To sum up the thoughts in the section above, we have explored how גֹּמֶר (Go-mer), carries multifaceted meanings that resonate with the narrative themes of judgment, restoration, and fulfillment found throughout the text. While specific meanings may not have been intended for Gomer's name in Hosea, its selection likely contributes to the cognitive world of its usage, enriching the symbolic landscape of the narrative. Furthermore, symbolic resonances found in Gomer's name, particularly when juxtaposed with Jeroboam II, suggest a broader significance in representing the Lord's judgment upon the divided kingdoms of Israel. This symbolism aligns with the thematic arc of Hosea, where the birth of Gomer's child symbolizes the end of Israel's

[33] Mitchell Dahood, "Note the Root Gmr in the Psalms," *Theological studies (Baltimore)* 14 (1953).pp. 595–597
[34] Online version of The Jewish Encycloopedia: GOMER - JewishEncyclopedia.com. Last accessed on 13.05.2024
[35] Don Collett, *The Identity of Israel's God in Christian Scripture*, ed. Mark Elliott, Mark Gignilliat, and Ephraim Radner, *Resources for Biblical Study Ser*. (:: Society of Biblical Literature, 2020), ibid., ibid.
[36] RSV. In some versions as 2:20

history of division and the eventual restoration and peace promised in the eschatological vision of new creation.

This exploration of Gomer's name and its multifaceted meanings opens doors for feminist interpretations of the text. The notion of her name meaning "to complete or finish" can be symbolic not only of her character within the narrative but also of the interpretive process itself. It suggests the possibility of an unfinished, unexplored territory within the text, inviting readers to engage in critical reflection and reinterpretation, particularly through feminist lenses. In this light, Gomer's name becomes an invitation to explore the untapped potential of feminist interpretations of Hosea and Gomer's story. It beckons us to consider how gender dynamics, power structures, and agency intersect within the narrative, prompting us to reevaluate traditional readings and unearth alternative perspectives. Within the scope of academic inquiry, her name serves as an invitation to expand the discourse, creating space for diverse voices and narratives to be heard and acknowledged.

I perceive this immersion into the implications of Gomer's name 'to complete or finish' as something that underscores the significance of interpretation of her story as an ongoing process. Just as Gomer's name suggests the idea of reaching a final state or achieving perfection, the interpretive endeavor itself is never truly complete. Instead, it points towards a continual exploration of the text's layers of meaning and the ongoing dialogue between past and present, tradition and innovation. Embracing the open-ended nature of interpretation invites us to embrace the complexity of the text and remain vigilant to the possibilities it offers for fresh insights and transformative understandings which we will undertake in the following sections. The next segment will discuss some feminist reflections on the book of Hosea which make an attempt to engage differently with the character of Gomer in the book. These views embrace a broad sense of analysis, even within the feminist framework. An overview through these interpretations will help widen the discussion made in the sections above on Hosea, note critical advancements in the exploration of the subject, point productive moments in the biblical text’s analysis and see if and why a modern interpretation needs to enter the seemingly absent portions of the text. How this has been already done can been seen with the interpretation of Gomer’s name and associations made with it in the previous sub-section.

1.4. Feminist readings

While trying to stay true to the constraints of biblical historical-critical research in the late 20th century, feminist authors have also been at this task, constantly trying not to make light of the imagery used in the book. What we can acknowledge is that the text necessitates a female reading because of its content and the bias it extrapolates from the very beginning.

1.4.1. Early feminist inquiries into text analysis of *Hosea*

This chapter embarks on a journey of exploration into the story of Hosea and Gomer, delving deep into the complexities of their narrative through the lens of hermeneutic interpretation. Through the scholarly endeavors of theologians such as Balz-Cochois and Weems, as well as critical reflections by scholars like Fontaine, we are invited to navigate through the intricate layers of meaning and significance inherent in this ancient text.

At the heart of our inquiry lies the question of how Gomer's character has been shaped and interpreted within the context of Hosea's prophecy. Balz-Cochois, for instance, presents a dialectical model that illuminates the contrasting perspectives of Hosea and Gomer, highlighting the equality of their viewpoints within a synthesized framework. Through this analysis, important themes and questions emerge, challenging traditional understandings and prompting us to reconsider our interpretations.

The exploration of Gomer's name, which serves as a catalyst for feminist interpretations, invites us to reevaluate gender dynamics, power structures, and agency within the narrative. As we navigate through the varying perspectives presented by scholars, we confront the limitations and biases inherent in traditional readings of the text, urging us to adopt a more inclusive and compassionate approach.

However, as we delve deeper into the complexities of Gomer's story, we are confronted with unresolved questions and open avenues for further exploration. How do we reconcile Gomer's agency with the patriarchal frameworks that dominate the text? What implications does her character hold for contemporary feminist theology? These questions, among others, remain at the forefront of our inquiry, guiding us towards a more comprehensive understanding of Gomer's role and significance within the narrative.

As we embark on this journey of interpretation, we are reminded of the inherent complexities and nuances embedded within the text, inviting us to engage with it with humility, sensitivity, and a critical eye. Through these efforts, an attempt is made to unearth the hidden voices and untold stories within the narrative, offering a more inclusive and compassionate reading of Gomer's story and, by extension, the countless silenced voices throughout history.

In her analysis of the story of Hosea and Gomer, Balz-Cochois, an evangelical theologian published her book on the subject in 1982[37] where she adeptly applies the 'Hegelian' dialectic model to present a nuanced exploration of their perspectives. It's a sort of a philosophical myth that this model has been attributed to Hegel, which isn't crucial for the discussion here. But again, it does relate to what interpreters read into a text and the expectations that are brought to it. By presenting a thesis in terms of an historical context and an antithesis from Gomer's standpoint, Balz-Cochois aims to highlight the equality of these two viewpoints within a synthesis.

In the thesis section, Balz-Cochois interprets the scriptural text in its historical context, suggesting that the book of Hosea confronts an Israelite-Canaanite syncretism that developed with the arrival of Israelites in Canaan. To this effect she employs a historical-critical exegesis. The dominant religious factor for Israelites was the bamah-cult, distinct from the agricultural and city-state religions known from Ugaritic sources. Gomer would thus belong the worshipping cult of Astarte and not Ashera. According to Balz-Cochois this is the reality referred to by the term ‚eshet zenunim', an idea that will be refuted by later scholars.

The antithesis section revolves around Gomer and offering an alternative perspective on the polemical presentation of the bamaí cult. Balz-Cochois portrays Gomer as a woman participating in the commoner cult both before and during her marriage to Hosea. This perspective involves a choice for Gomer against Hosea, reflecting a dangerous endeavor according to the author.[38] She claims that Gomer would have been aware of her power through her association with this cult-goddess Astarte and participation in her worship.

[37] Balz-Cochois, Helgard. Gomer : der Höhenkult Israels im Selbstverständnis der Volksfrömmigkeit ; Untersuchungen zu Hosea 4,1 - 5,7. Frankfurt am Main Wien [u.a.]: Lang, 1982.
[38] Boshoff, Willem. "The Female Imagery in the Book of Hosea. Considering the Marriage Metaphor in Hosea 1-2 by Listening to Female Voices." Old Testament Essays 15, no. 1 (2002): 23–41.

In the synthesis section, Balz-Cochois explores how a feminist hermeneutic can appropriate and interpret the material from the Book of Hosea. She emphasizes reconciliation, balance, and integration, moving away from radical criticism. Balz-Cochois visualizes a synthesis that integrates the feminine aspects presented by the book of Hosea with a more conventional male character in the depiction of God.[39]

She forays into a new integrated understanding of God and a redefined marriage bond, incorporating both feminine and conventional aspects. Balz-Cochois suggests that this approach creates possibilities for feminist readers of the Bible. It must be noted that the author's work was influenced by her experience studying in a traditional African community in Cameroon and some reviews do subject her work to this influence. There is no doubt that this research significantly advances the field of biblical studies by providing a new perspective on the prevalent Israelite religious practices in connection with the prophetic messages found in the Book of Hosea. By revisiting and reevaluating the commonly held notions surrounding religious practices, the study offers fresh insights that contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between prophecy and the religious landscape of ancient Israel.

> ‘As Balz-Cochois simultaneously proclaims and apologizes for Gomer's point of view, so her dramatization of Gomer affirms and deconstructs patriarchal structures. For if Gomer represents the disturbing power of female sexuality, she also endorses the rational-emotional, male-female hierarchy, and affirms patriarchy's worst parodies of woman as irrational and trivial. On one level she represents the antithesis promised: she worships Astarte, counters biblical prejudices about Canaanite culture, and perceives Hosea as eccentric, and Yahwism as essentially uninteresting and irredeemably male. Yahwism, she complains, is 'not interesting enough' and Yhwh is 'only a god for men'; reversing the judgment of the text, which describes her 'promiscuity' in unequivocally negative terms, she describes the desire to escape from an Israelite context, in which her sexuality is perceived as a threat which must be controlled.’[40]

This approach has opened avenues for further exploration and encouraged scholars to delve deeper into the complexities of the text, fostering ongoing discussions and inquiries within the academic community. But it can also be agreed that the research has left the nature of Gomer's

[39] *Ibid.*
[40] *Ibid*. Sherwood. p. 282

role in the context of Hosea's prophecy unresolved, although this uncertainty does not diminish the overall importance of the findings. One can see that despite the author's intentions, an inadvertent androcentric bias emerges, marginalizing Gomer's perspective within the broader discourse.

Even though she attempts to give due consideration to Gomer's voice, Balz-Cochois reinforces the notion that it is less legitimate and less serious than Hosea's viewpoint. This unintended consequence stems from a subtle distancing on the part of the feminist critic from Gomer's experiences and struggles, writes Sherwood in her critical remarks on Balz-Cochois' dramatization of the metaphorical marriage. I agree with Sherwood's critic. Consequently, the imbalance perpetuates patriarchal structures, hindering a comprehensive understanding of Gomer's role and significance in the text.[41]

Renita Weems, another Hebrew and Old-testament scholar also attacks the issue of sexual imagery in Gomer. Looking at R. Weems's contribution to the research, it is evident that her intention is to support Gomer and shed light on the victimization she endures throughout the text. Weems argues that Hosea does not harbour an inherent desire to harm or humiliate Gomer but suggests that he would resort to such measures if necessary, citing Deuteronomy 22:22[42]. Though Weems's aim is to present YHWH as a gracious figure, her feminist stance becomes unclear because she proceeds by implying that Gomer's stripping and humiliation could have been avoided had she complied with Hosea's demands to remove her provocative attire. This unintended implication reinforces the male perspective and places blame on Gomer, accusing her of "contributory negligence." Consequently, Weems aligns herself more emphatically with the male viewpoint than her androcentric predecessors, perpetuating a biased interpretation of Gomer's character.

While Balz-Cochois and Weems both set out with genuine intentions to challenge patriarchal structures and advocate for a more inclusive reading of Gomer's character, their analyses seem to perpetuate androcentric biases. The unintended marginalization of Gomer's perspective underscores the need for continued efforts to critically engage with the text, ensuring that the voices of marginalized characters are given due consideration and their experiences are approached with sensitivity and respect. The interpretation of Gomer's character also extends

[41] *Ibid*. Sherwood. pp. 279-282.
[42] Deuteronomy 22:22: If a man is found sleeping with another man's wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die. You must purge the evil from Israel.

beyond the biblical text. Various artists, theologians, and scholars have explored her significance in relation to themes of love, forgiveness, and the complexities of human relationships. Gomer's story invites reflection on the nature of narration, of scriptural violence and the use of characters in telling a story. Regardless of her historicity or her metaphorical role, Gomer's character serves as a powerful tool in the book of Hosea, highlighting various themes.

Moving further along this path of exploration taken by feminist theologians, it is to be noted that Gomer's greatest adversary in terms of traditional interpretation seems to be the stance of assuming her to be a solely literal figure. To this one can add the weight of traditional forms of reading this text. The implications of such an ensuing biblical interpretation fosters a kind of male[43] reading that does not allow an alternative voice, at least one which the text seems to intentionally leave out, to be heard.

> 'Clearly, the book exhibits a (male?) preoccupation, perhaps obsession, with things feminine and gender relations which are transformed into political and religious propaganda. The sociocultural impact of the androcentric views it contains cannot be underestimated.'[44]

In pointing out the limitations of the scope of biblical historical research that scholars are permitted to undertake, Carol Fontaine revisits her reflection of Hosea in a second article 'A response to Hosea' published about six years apart from her first one 'Hosea'.[45] Acknowledging both the 'limitations of space and historical critical focus' and 'feminist readings not being part of the agenda of editors or publishers' she writes that this reflection left her with a 'bad taste in the mouth and deep suspicion about my own motives for writing as a historical critic'.[46] One of the most infuriating things for her was that typical historical critical methods ,leave out the very questions that any sensible person would put to the text'. She points out that as scholars we might need to step outside the framework of the text, to deduce the deeper connotation of the events as well the characters. She calls for a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' and shows the wrong done by scholars in the use of extremely late texts to draw these inferences, many centuries

[43] Brenner-Idan, Athalya, and Fokkelien van Dijk Hemmes. On Gendering Texts : Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible. 1st ed. Leiden :: Brill, 1996. pp. 1-11.
[44] Brenner et al., *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*.Introduction, p. 28.
[45] Refer to first article 'Hosea' published in 1989 by Carol F Fontaine in B.W. Anderson (ed.), The Books of the Bible (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1989, I, pp. 349-58. Republished in ibid.
[46] *Ibid.*

after Hosea to understand and put together sexual cultic activities assumed to have been in practice centuries earlier.

Fontaine deepens the inquiry into Gomer's predicament, questioning whether she has been unjustly confined and 'framed' by the requirements of the marital metaphor. As we delve further into this topic in the subsequent chapters of this paper, we must confront the profound implications of how Gomer's story has been molded and narrated by those who have taken it upon themselves to depict her.

This line of inquiry naturally leads us to a simple yet profoundly unsettling question: Is it not a fundamental injustice to castigate a woman for engaging in behavior that, ironically, was the very reason she was chosen in the first place? The irony and inherent unfairness of this situation cannot be overlooked, prompting us to critically examine the societal norms and expectations that have placed Gomer in such a precarious position.

If we confine ourselves solely to the biblical text and its limited perspective, we find ourselves bereft of the voices that have been silenced and marginalized. The content of this book can tend to obscure alternative viewpoints and narratives, leaving one longing for the untold stories and unvoiced experiences. I agree with Fontaine:

> 'Inserting ourselves into the voids in the text will never be an approved historical-critical exercise, but it can be balm to the sore soul which has been dragged backwards through the shards of patriarchal language and metaphor one too many times.'[47]

This does not mean an arbitrary interpretation, but based on the limits of critical research and recent gender-based constructs. Going beyond what the text contains doesn't have to limit its understanding, rather it has the potential to breathe new life into it, helping the reader understand the text better. It might allow us to transcend the confines of patriarchal language and metaphor, which have often perpetuated oppressive narratives, and to construct a more inclusive and compassionate reading of Gomer's story. By filling these textual voids with our own perspectives and insights, we not only honour Gomer's agency but also offer a healing remedy for the wounds inflicted by the repetitive encounters with patriarchal frameworks. It is through these acts of interpretation and reclaiming narratives that we can seek to restore a sense

[47] Fontaine, Carole R. "A Response to "Hosea"." In A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets, 1995. p. 65.

of wholeness and justice to Gomer's portrayal and, by extension, to the countless silenced voices throughout history. In the following part of the chapter, our focus will turn to the very word that has been used to describe her i.e the context of the word ‘harlot’ and its ensuing associations.

1.4.2. Playing the ‘harlot’

This section delves into the complexities surrounding the interpretation of Gomer's 'harlotry,' as examined by scholars such as Phyllis Bird and Irene Riegner. Bird's analysis scrutinizes the literal and figurative usage of the term 'harlot' in ancient Israel, shedding light on patriarchal biases inherent in its portrayal. Meanwhile, Riegner proposes a reevaluation of the Hebrew stem 'znh' suggesting alternative readings that challenge traditional understandings. Through their meticulous examinations, we confront the intricacies of translation, metaphorical usage, and the portrayal of women within prophetic literature, paving the way for a deeper understanding of Gomer's narrative and its broader implications. Additionally, this section raises critical questions about the impact of these interpretations on our understanding of gender dynamics, religious practices, and the portrayal of marginalized voices within biblical scholarship, setting the stage for further exploration in subsequent chapters.

In her extensive research on Old Testament women and their representations Phyllis Bird, American feminist scholar in biblical hermeneutics emphasizes that there is a lack of clarity and consensus about Gomer’s ‘harlotry’[48]. She inquiries into the literal and figurative usage of the word harlot in the context of ancient Israel. Patriarchy fostered usage of the term harlot to show the guilt of harlotry almost always as being only that of the feminine. The male remained unscathed although being an active participant in this act. In her work, she delves into several issues regarding the translation and interpretation of the Hebrew root ZNH (eset zenunim = woman of whoredom) focusing on its metaphorical or figurative usage. There are problems that arise from translation and definition, the challenge of distinguishing between literal and figurative meanings, and the use of a metaphor that draws parallels between female behaviour and the collective conduct of Israel.

[48] Bird, Phyllis A. *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities : Women and Gender in Ancient Israel*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1997. pp. 75-94.

The conventional translation of "play the harlot" in the RSV (Revised Standard Version) is explored, replacing older terms such as "go awhoring" or "commit whoredom" found in the KJV (King James Version). Both translations center on a portrayal of the professional prostitute, but it remains uncertain whether this is an idiosyncrasy of English idiom or reflective of Hebrew understanding.

An important aspect to investigate is the relationship between verbal uses and the noun zona, which means "prostitute." Additionally, the meaning of the verb when used with a masculine subject raises questions. While many examples clearly involve metaphorical usage, such as describing the pursuit of other gods or participation in illicit cultic activities, there are instances where interpretations become strained, as in the case of Num 25:1[49]. The connection between prostitution and "sacred or cultic prostitution" is commonly assumed but lacks explicit biblical or ancient Semitic language support. Bird argues that the association between these concepts is specific to the Hebrew Bible and serves a polemical purpose. Due to the complexity of the topic, her essay provides a summary treatment of the root's primary meanings and a detailed examination of select texts in the book of Hosea, which showcase its early metaphorical usage and traces its early origins. Hosea is thus found to be one of the first instances where this metaphor occurs explicitly with a character Gomer who has adulterous tendencies *literally* existing. This idea is further explored in the work of Irene Riegner on the adventures of the stem *znh*.

Irene Riegner in her work *The Vanishing Hebrew Harlot*, proposes a substitution of the stem znh for the word harlot because of its cognitive proximity to two other words. Using ‘non-yahwistic praxis’ as a substitution she makes an effort to suggest (the implications of) an alternative reading. She enquires, ‘What portrait of Gomer and of Israelite women would emerge if I dispensed with Gomer’s sexual activity, cultic or otherwise?’ [50] Not only does this line of questioning paint a different picture but it also challenges the prejudices that a reader unconsciously holds in their engagement with the text.

She claims that when the stem is analyzed within its literary context, znh has three basic meanings, and she rejects the traditional position of earlier scholarship that depicted ancient

[49] While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. (1-2)

[50] Riegner, Irene E. The Vanishing Hebrew Harlot : the Adventures of the Hebrew Stem ZNH. New York, NY Washington, DC Baltimore, Md. Bern Frankfurt, M. Berlin Brussels Vienna Oxford: Lang, 2009.p. 120.

Near Eastern religious practices as "lewd sexual practices"[51] (p. 3). The stem signifies, first and most prominently, ‘non-yahwistic praxis’; second, the act of prostitution or promiscuity; and third, being an innkeeper. She defends this clearly articulated hypothesis supported by her expose on ancient Near Eastern evidence and on occurrences of the stem in the Hebrew Bible. A closer look at ancient Near Eastern texts will disprove the existence of religious rituals that engaged in some kind of sexual activity or cult-prostituion.[52]

She also explores social-legal terms that delineate a "class of life outside of patriarchal control" and analyzes Ugaritic texts to refute the claim that sexual elements are intrinsic to 'Canaanite' or Ugaritic rituals. The study delves into instances where "znh-praxis" lacks sexual connotations in non-Yahwist religious practices, highlighting the conflation of non-Yahwist rituals with sexual metaphors in prophetic literature.

The author contends that prophetic literature often metaphorically associates the worship of other gods with sexual imagery, contributing to the dehumanization and transformation of women into objects of repulsion or animals. This literary strategy aims to challenge prevailing religious practices, particularly when led by women. The analysis also reveals nuances in the meaning of the term "znh," encompassing both prostitution/promiscuity and the legal-social status of single women outside patriarchal control. One instance of such a substitution can be seen in this following text from Hosea 2:2 that she put away her harlotry from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts; (RSV) has been edited by using substitutions of the term ‘harlot/adultery’:

> Hos 2:
> ‘...and turn aside her "non-Yahwist religious praxis" from before her face and her "adulterous qualities" from between her breasts
>
> As he did in Hos 4.13b-4a, Hosea associates znh "non-Yahwist religious praxis" with znh adultery…. "her non-Yahwist religious praxis" with "adulterous qualities." It is not clear what is lying between Gomer's breasts or on her face. Andersen and Freedman suggest that these may be signs of Baal worship or of prostitution while Wolff attributes them to

[51] Ibid., p.3
[52] Scholz, Susanne. “The Vanishing Hebrew Harlot: The Adventures of the Hebrew Stem ZNH (Studies in Biblical Literature 73).” The Catholic Biblical Quarterly. Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2011. p. 593.

> emblems or physical disfiguration as a sign of Canaanite sexual rituals. However, if they are physical marks, they would have been difficult to remove. Moreover, Hosea notes that the women involved in non-Yahwist praxis wore jewellery to their celebrations (2.1Sa), so the phrase "adulterous qualities" points to jewellery, perhaps an amulet.'[53]

One sees the shift in understanding that occurs within the context of the metaphorical language used to describe the prophet's call for the cessation of "non-Yahwist religious praxis" and the removal of "adulterous qualities" associated with it. The comparison between "non-Yahwist religious praxis" and "adulterous qualities" suggests a relation between religious infidelity and physical adornments or symbols. The ambiguity surrounding what lies between Gomer's breasts or on her face adds complexity to the interpretation. Scholars like Andersen, Freedman, and Wolff offer different interpretations, suggesting that these may be signs of Baal worship, indicators of prostitution, emblems, or even physical disfigurations related to Canaanite sexual rituals.

Riegner claims that the reference to women involved in non-Yahwist praxis wearing jewelry to their celebrations in verse 2.1a provides a contextual clue, leading to the interpretation that "adulterous qualities" could symbolize jewelry, potentially in the form of an amulet. This interpretation aligns with the idea that these adornments represent aspects of the non-Yahwist religious practices Hosea is condemning.

Despite the technical nature of the book, it underscores the need to update the lexicography in the field of biblical scholarship. The work exposes long-standing biases in linguistic meanings and challenges anti-ecumenical, anti-feminine, and anti-sexuality fantasies associated with the term "znh." However, the author's epistemological stance, rooted in empiricism and scientific objectivity, limits acknowledgment of the contributions of feminist scholarship in bringing gender and sexuality to the forefront.[54]

While the book convincingly argues for a threefold understanding of "znh" to be incorporated into the lexicon of biblical Hebrew, it falls short in fully recognizing the impact and importance of feminist biblical studies in shaping the field. What impact can the addition to the lexicon

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[53] *Ibid*. p. 127.

[54] Scholz, Susanne. "The Vanishing Hebrew Harlot: The Adventures of the Hebrew Stem ZNH (Studies in Biblical Literature 73)." The Catholic Biblical Quarterly. Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2011.pp. 592–594. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43727721. Last accessed on 12.04.24

have on the reading of the text? Do these additional meanings and the proposed reading suggest that Gomer was indeed a victim of the metaphor, which took her need for belongingness to a non-Yahwistic cult of which she wanted to be a part, as Fontaine would claim, and subjected her worship to an ultimate sexual deviance?

It is evident that although various authors have set out to understand and interpret the story of Gomer, it has not been an easy task. That the task of interpretation is informed by tradition, and it has been increasingly harder to distinguish the voice of the male author from the deity whose message he has taken it upon him to convey. In the next chapter we will study other silenced voices in the biblical tradition with the intention to find corresponding patterns of silencing used in the literary style or composition. It might be insightful to understand the treatment of these voices by modern commentators to build a vocabulary that provides context for understanding how to approach our subject in terms of artistic interpretation.

Chapter 2: Silenced Voices in the Bible

In the preceding chapter, before delving into the interpretive realms shaped by the literal-critical and historical-critical methods employed by scholars in the previous decades, the contextual backdrop for the Book of Hosea has been looked at. Having scrutinized their perspectives, we proceeded to a comprehensive examination of Gomer, the central figure of this thesis. This examination included exploring the etymology of Gomer's name and its role in interpretative undertakings, questioning the adequacy of the existing biblical-historical and literary-critical methods, as well as reflecting on the overall methodology employed in the understanding of the book and her place in it. In the subsequent sections, the discourse will be extended to the contributions of select feminist theologians who focused on the story of Hosea and Gomer, while the development of different analytical methods has been traced. It was important to note how they have ventured beyond them in their research or the available methods of observation. The discourse helped seeing through the lens of theologians how widely the discussion on Gomer and *her* marriage has taken place and what the open questions still are.

But is Gomer an exception in the way her story has been narrated in the Old Testament or are there other figures perhaps who also share similar traits within this kind of storytelling? Indeed, there are a bunch of others who share this ‘silent voice’ that has been ascribed to Gomer, themes such as sexual violence, adultery and prostitution also being common to them.

Building upon these thoughts as foundation, this chapter embarks on an exploration of the muted voices within the Old Testament. Before venturing into how art-reception has held a hermeneutic space for the book of Hosea and its characters in chapter 3 of this thesis, it is necessary to propose a framework through which these silenced voices can be perceived. It does so by attempting to unveil nuanced perspectives that challenge conventional narratives. The focus here is to construct a framework that will invite the reader to traverse the narratives of other characters conspicuously absent of voice or agency within the biblical text, despite their pivotal roles. By adopting this approach, an immersive encounter with Gomer's story through the lens of those voices rendered silent in the old-testament narrative can be facilitated. This approach seeks to shed light on characters whose significance remains obscured and makes inquiries into familiar literary and interpretive patterns that occurs within the treatment of this character (or voice) in the narrative. This can only happen with a deeper, critically challenging engagement with the biblical text.

> ‘To accept the value statements of the text in utter passivity, without allowing oneself the freedom to reflect critically upon its claims and to question its assumptions is merely to foster a sense of complacency ... The task of the reader, therefore, is to engage in a vigorous dialogue and debate with the Hebrew Bible, resisting statements that appear to be morally objectionable, and taking a critical stance against what he or she may regard as the excesses of the biblical text.’[55]

Taking a cue from Davies’s idea of a dissenting reader, this chapter aims to lay the groundwork for a deeper comprehension of Gomer's character by drawing parallels with other silenced figures and ask questions such as: how does the context in which the story is situated aid the silencing of the voice? What methods are employed by the author (or the redacting authors) in doing so? By dissecting their narratives and situating them within their respective contexts, we will not only enrich our understanding of the silenced characters but also set the stage for the subsequent chapter, where the spotlight will once again be on Gomer in art-reception, now viewed through the kaleidoscope of these muted voices.

2.1. Perceiving silenced voices

Anita Dube’s exhibition titled Silence (Blood Wedding) created in 1997 is a collection of 13 pieces consisting of human bones that have been covered in red velvet with lace and beads. The title Blood Wedding partly refers to the blood-red tinted Kumkum, a turmeric-based powder that is worn by brides on the forehead on the day of their wedding as part of the rituals in India, where Dube has her roots. In the ‘Visual commentary on the Scriptures’ an initiative of Theology and Religious studies, King’s College, London, her exhibition is chosen as one of the lens through which Gomer and Hosea’s story can be engaged with. In the section ‘You will call me husband’ (taken from v. 17; see quote below) of the visual commentary, this thematic has been explored in detail. It also holds a reference to red-coloured bridal attire that is also customarily worn in India. The pieces in the exhibition have a splendour about them which is accompanied by the eeriness of death. They hold a brittle, bittersweet message when read with Hosea 2:16–20:

> ‘“In that day,” declares the Lord,

[55] Davies, E.W. The Dissenting Reader: Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible (1st ed.). London: Routledge. 2003. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315199191, pp. 46-47.

> "you will call me 'my husband';
> you will no longer call me 'my master.'
> I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips;
> no longer will their names be invoked.
> In that day I will make a covenant for them
> with the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky
> and the creatures that move along the ground.
> Bow and sword and battle
> I will abolish from the land,
> so that all may lie down in safety.
> I will betroth you to me forever;
> I will betroth you in righteousness and justice,
> in love and compassion.
> I will betroth you in faithfulness,
> and you will acknowledge the Lord.'[56]

This text, like the exhibition, holds within itself remnants of an intimacy that is marked by violence. In Dube's work, one can admire the ornamentals of a wedding, the grandeur and awe of it while haunting us with the message of silence and death. Wei Shieng Chieng comments how Dube's work shows both sides of a marriage that is often covered by an apparent 'happy ending', while holding something more beyond that which is visible:

> 'While Hosea and Gomer's marriage is often read as a victorious story of Hosea's/God's unconditional great love and forgiveness towards a whoring Gomer/Israel, Dube's work hushes that romanticized perspective and reveals there are often two (if not more) conflicting and possibly muted sides of a tale. We may find ourselves recalling that Gomer's response was scripted by God; words put into her mouth. In this sense, she is a silent presence.'[57]

One can see that contradictions about realities of life are juxtaposed here in Dube's work death and (second) life, both physical pain and aesthetic pleasure, both feminine coquetry and female

[56]Hosea 2:16–20
[57] Wei Shieng Chieng. 2018. 'You Will Call Me, 'My husband'' , in The Visual Commentary Of Scripture ed. by Ben Quash. London: The Visual Commentary on Scripture Foundation. [Accessed 3.3.2024] https://thevcs.org/gomer-and-hosea#you-will-call-me-my-husband

disfigurement. Almost the kind of contradiction that is characteristic of prophetic discourse and prophetic life. With ‘words put into her mouth’, Chieng refers to the phrases such as the ones used in v. 16, where the speaker isn’t really Gomer, but God/Hosea predicts that this is what her response will be because of the treatment meted out to her.

2.2. Portrayal of Names, No-names and Voices

The phrase 'silenced voices' carries within itself a profound dissonance, a kind of a poignant paradox that underscores the fundamental purpose of voice itself. At its core, a voice exists to convey, to articulate the thoughts, emotions, sentiments that inhabit the inner recesses of our being. Yet, when we speak of silenced voices, we find a profound contradiction: a stark departure from the very essence of what a voice represents. This is not the silence that is golden; it is not the serene hush of an untouched morning. No, this kind of silence is born from the usurpation of audible space, a quieting of voices by external forces. It is not the silence that arises from absence of sound in a word, the omission of a letter that renders it unspoken yet understood. Instead, it is an oppressive and withholding silence, a silence that muzzles expression and stunts the flow of discourse. Silenced voices betray or are betrayed the very essence of its existence.

In the Victorian era, the word 'silent,' when used as a noun in its plural form, carried with it a sombre connotation: it meant 'dead.' Here, within the context of literature, these silenced voices share a common thread of oppression. If they are silenced, they also call for an actor or a circumstance, a situation that has played an active role in silencing. Who are these actors or what are these factors that have not allowed an expression? Are these voices subdued and extinguished by the very act of authorship, relegated to the dead shadows of narratives? Across the vast tapestry of the biblical world, one can observe how these silenced voices emerge as consequences of diverse social and cultural circumstances.

> ‘Voice goes hand in hand with body symbolization, usually as an instrument of power. When analyzing a piece of literature one ‘listens’ to the voices in the text, not only the voice of the author or editor, but also the voices of the characters. Permitting a character

> in a story to speak is usually taken as empowering that character. On the other hand, to impose silence on a character may be a way of disempowerment .'[58]

What about the social and cultural circumstances that provide the context for the voice and body symbolization of Hosea and Gomer? It might be helpful to understand what role these aspects play within the narrative with reference to identification of the reader with the voices in the text. Landy suggests that the scriptural narrative takes extensive measures to distance itself from specific places, eras, and figures, possibly to avoid immediate association with Hosea. Citing Josipovicei, who observes a profound yearning in all prophets to break away from 'contingency-bound use of words, to the absolute state where all will be visible and unambiguous,'[59] Landy proposes that silence or perhaps mime, may prevail where words fall short, thus inducing an altered state. In this altered state, the spectators might grasp a sense of what it means to embody a divine essence, like Hosea or other prophets. He also goes on to say that the possibility of a female authorship (for the book of Hosea) exists, as is evidenced by homoeroticism within the text. While I agree with Landy, I see a certain danger here for it is this very distance that will invite the reader to identify with the one embodying authority in the text. Here is where the reader identifies himself with the voice of the prophet/God. This distance then does not allow the reader to ask the questions required by this text, rather it widens the chasm which already exists within the text.

Thus, in this intricate interplay of language, identification and storytelling, the notion of silenced voices echoes through time, reminding us of the myriad ways in which expression can be stifled, and the dissonance that arises when voices are constrained by the hands that hold the pen. If an author is writing about a factual event, the author holds the key to the story of this person through their storytelling. Every character is subject to the author's agency.

Some are rendered voiceless by the absence of a name within the story itself while many others who have been named have been bereft of their voice. While we won't go into details about the theological understanding of naming and what it means especially in the biblical world, it has been partially dealt with while looking at the meaning of Gomer's name in chapter 1. The discussion is sufficient to draw attention to different nuances of voicelessness.

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[58]Coetzee, J.H. "The 'outcry' of the Dissected Woman in Judges 19-21 : Embodiment of a Society." *Old Testament Essays* 15, no. 1 (2002): 52–63.
[59] Landy,p. 21

However, at this point I would like to introduce Reinhartz's definition for the functionality of proper names in the biblical text. Adele Reinhartz, a Canadian theologian, professor for New Testament and early Judaism and a feminist exegete at the university of Ottawa observes that proper names in a text play four functions: Firstly, the given name holds significance independently. Secondly, it serves as a foundation for qualifying the character. The proper name consolidates diverse pieces of related meaning that the name as a word refers to under a single category or label. Thirdly, by unifying the character and identifying the different traits used to build it, the proper name becomes a convenient reference for the character. And lastly, the proper name serves to differentiate one character from another. Characters such as Gomer, Dinah can be counted among those who have a name and exist as a character, fictional or otherwise, but who has no voice. We have already witnessed some of these functions with reference to Gomer in the first chapter where the later commentaries (Jerome, Midrash...) on her name have been discussed. But then there are also figures such as Jephthah's daughter, the nameless bride or the unnamed servant of Abraham who has neither name nor agency. Reinhartz notes that despite the anonymity of Jephthah's daughter, for instance, she has inspired commentaries, poetry, or art. These creative media offer her the space to tell her story, imputing feelings, and emotions to her existence.

And Gomer is not the exception. Perhaps before we set out to analyse what role art-reception plays in the 'retrieval' of Gomer, we can

a.) look for those silenced voice in the bible which have occupied a much earlier or broader space in theological discussions and
b.) identify approaches adopted by (feminist) scholars that have attempted a hermeneutics of suspicion in their own ways within their contexts.
c.) use this as a framework to see through the lens on how art reception has engaged with the voice of Gomer and conveyed it through different media.

The subsequent sections of this chapter will delve into the stories and contextual backgrounds of select characters from the bible, especially the Old Testament. The focus of this section is to narrow its scope to a handful of characters, a deliberate decision made to effectively explore and uncover the artistic reception of Gomer's voice. Within the next sections we will look at the stories of Dinah (Genesis 34) and Jephthah's daughter (Judges 19), one named and the other unnamed, both without agency and silenced voices. By concentrating on these two characters within the Old Testament tradition, this approach aims to examine Gomer's presence within the

contextual meaning provided by the existence and use of similar characters within similar narrative structures. Thus, the intention is to shed light on the nuanced contexts that contribute to the multifaceted nature of their portrayal and representation.

Anna Koplowitz-Breier argues that modern feminist midrashic tradition makes efforts to redefine how women in the Hebrew Bible are portrayed. This is done to make sure their feminist role within traditional Judaism is secured by opening a space for expression of that which otherwise has no place. Autonomy can be given when individuals have a voice that is backed by emotions and feelings. One needs to break through the traditional practices and open news ways of looking at the teachings of the Torah to respond to society's changing needs. She recognises that by applying a "hermeneutics of suspicion" feminists strive to uncover the underlying patriarchal biases within the text, acting as a counterbalance to the male-centered viewpoint ingrained in the narrative. This approach reveals prejudices and flawed structures, aiming to reclaim and amplify the voices marginalized and silenced in the text.[60] She goes on to add:

> 'In this way, they attempt to deconstruct the "politics of otherness" so frequently ascribed to gender relations within the text, to provide a fresh reading that opposes the misogynist and phallocentric value systems the author presents as "normative" or "universal." This hermeneutics is thus dedicated to exploring the "liberating or oppressive values and visions inscribed in the text by identifying the androcentric-patriarchal character and dynamics of the text and its interpretations."'[61]

In the stories to follow, we will see an example of these 'liberating or oppressive values and visions' that she speaks of. In the case of Dinah it will be the oppressive nature of sexual violence and rape, while it will be the nature and value of sacrifice in the story of Jephthah's daughter.

2.2.1. Dinah's Story – rape, rehabilitation and retrievals

The story of Dinah is mentioned in chapter 34 of the book of Genesis. She is introduced as the daughter that Leah had borne to Jacob. Jacob and his people had arrived in the city of Shechem

[60] Koplowitz-Breier, Anat. "A Nameless Bride of Death: Jephthah's Daughter in American Jewish Women's Poetry." Open Theology 6 (2020): 1 - 14.
[61] Ibid.

and made his dwelling there. The chapter then talks about Shechem who 'saw her, took her and raped her.'[62] What follows is stated quite simply:

> 'His heart was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob; he loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. And Shechem said to his father Hamor, "Get me this girl as my wife."'[63]

Then Hamor, the father of Schechem, approached Jacob with Shechem's proposition to take Dinah as his wife. The brothers Simon and Levi were outraged at the proposition. The story unfolds in continued, vengeful violence with the brothers of Dinah deceitfully accepting the proposal on the condition that every man of his city is circumcised. When the circumcision occurred and while '(all) the men were in pain' (v.25) on account of the circumcision, they were killed and plundered and 'all their women and children' (v.29) were taken away. The chapter closes by Dinah's brothers asking Jacob: 'Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?' (v.31) in defense of the killing and the plunder that thy let loose among Schechem and his people.

Yes, the complexity of the text can be agreed upon. It is vital to ask what the text tells the reader about Dinah's voice. What does the plot say about consent and violating boundaries? If there are literary patterns that are like Gomer's, they will be worth looking at through the lens of the treatment of similar events in this text. Also, how has this story been interpreted?

The word Dinah means judgement. Like Gomer's name, it is hard to see how it has relevance to the plot, so one can say that at least the function of being a distinct character (from the four functions of proper names elucidated earlier) is laid out. Dinah is presented as a desirable woman. The author does not present Dinah as a prostitute, neither is the narrative displaying any hint of it. Although the brothers in their conclusion are unanimous that she was treated like a prostitute, the narrative does not logically explain it. Dinah was raped and then her hand was sought for in marriage. No explanation is provided for this desire to marry her except that his heart was drawn to her, he loved her and spoke tenderly to her (v.3). And here is where the plot gets confusing. What can be seen in the story however is a strong male presence with Dinah, a sister and daughter who is not given autonomy. Although her character defines how the rest of the story unfolds, the story is not hers.

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[62] v.2 (NIV)
[63] Genesis 34:3-4

What can also be read plainly from the text is that Dinah has no agency. She has not been ascribed a single sentence to her - she is rendered voiceless. One notices a kind of absence that is characterized by exclusion and oppression. Landy is one among a few who (speaking about Gomer) argue that the intention of the biblical authors and redactors is not to keep the feminine voice silenced, but that this is a characteristic of prophecy where the clear and the unclear, and other similar contradictions have a meeting place. This presents a dilemma that resonates deeply within the realm of literary interpretation. On one hand, there's the inclination to understand and accept the context in which a piece was authored, recognizing the influence of socio-cultural norms and conventions of the time. This perspective suggests that the interpretation should adhere closely to the historical and cultural backdrop against which the text was created. Scholars such as M. Sternberg advocate for this approach, asserting that we must acknowledge the social constructs of the past and refrain from imposing contemporary sensibilities onto ancient texts. His claim is that there is no veracity to such an undertaking that adopts a perspective than that of the narrator. Even though it does not suit the palate of the reader, s/he must accept it; this silence that the author intends must be accepted. If one should insist, he says, then it ought to be a fiction-maker style reading leading to what Paul Noble would call 'feminist fictions.' He compares it to writing Dinah's secret journal. While Van Setters shares this opinion, he keeps the possibility slightly open, writing that he cannot invent something that 'social history suggests she doesn't have.'

On the other hand, there exists another school of thought that urges a more nuanced approach, one that delves into the gaps and silences within the text. This approach suggests that interpretation should not merely accept the surface narrative but should also strive to uncover the hidden voices and perspectives that may have been marginalized or overlooked. By reading between the lines and exploring the ambiguities left behind by authors and redactors, scholars can glean deeper insights into the text's underlying meanings and implications. In her article Blyth goes on to explain why, despite the views of Sternberg, Van Setters and Noble, she disagrees with this kind of approach. I think choosing to accept silence simply because of social history, with the knowledge that this text holds privilege, is both complacency and complicity.[64]

[64]J. Cheryl Exum, H. G. M. Williamson. Reading From Right to Left : Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of David J. A. Clines. T&T Clark; 2003. Accessed April 14, 2024. https://search-ebscohost-com.uaccess.univie.ac.at/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=243989&site=ehost-live

While Sternberg's perspective emphasizes the importance of respecting historical context, it can be argued that this stance risks overlooking the dynamic and interactive nature of literature. Carolyne Blyth expounds this thought further using the words of Wayne Booth: texts are not static entities but rather living documents that evolve through their engagement with readers across different contexts and time periods.[65] Booth even goes so far as to say that for a responsible reader, an ethical demand is imperative in which critical challenging of texts has room. As such, interpretation cannot be estranged from the subjective experiences and perspectives of the reader. Indeed, just as a piece of art reflects the society in which it was created, it also has the capacity to resonate with and provoke responses from contemporary audiences.

In essence, the debate surrounding textual interpretation encapsulates a tension between fidelity to historical context and the recognition of literature's capacity to transcend its origins. Ultimately, the task of the interpreter is to navigate this tension delicately, balancing respect for the past with an openness to the diverse meanings and interpretations that emerge in the present. This kind of hermeneutics holds the view that the text is not a dead piece of literature but is seen through the lens of the reader's world of experience.[66]

Having forayed into understanding the different possible approaches to the text, it might help to enquire what other themes are present within this story and if there are any parallels to the book of Hosea. As a first-time reader of this chapter in Genesis, it is hard to grapple with the violence of the expression 'he raped her' (v.2) being followed by 'he loved the young woman' and 'he spoke tenderly to her' (v.3). The terror of rape has been juxtaposed with being spoken tenderly to. It is a reminder of the confusing, sexually violent language one encounters in the initial chapters of the book of Hosea interspersed with words of affection:

> "'Otherwise, I will strip her naked
> and make her as bare as on the day she was born;
> I will make her like a desert,
> turn her into a parched land,
> and slay her with thirst.[67]"

[65] Ibid.
[66] Sternberg, Meir. The Poetics of Biblical Narrative : Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading. First Midland Book edition. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987. 463–88.
[67] Hosea 2:3

> " Therefore, I am now going to allure her;
> I will lead her into the wilderness
> and speak tenderly to her." [68]

It must be stated here, that 'rape', 'force' and sexual violence are not the only interpretations for the act performed by Schechem. There are also views where 'this rape story can be read as a love story.'[69] Van Wolde argues that it can be shown semantically that that the verb's basic meaning can also be interpreted as 'taking' in the sense of a spatial movement without the element of force. It can be understood along the lines of 'transfer to his own house' or 'getting.' This interpretation suggests that in the opening verses Dinah is acknowledged and seen as a person with integrity, as someone who assumes that she has her own perspective. She is treated with dignity by Schechem. Dinah's feelings can be deduced as being those of loving feelings for Shechem. This can be argued based on the information in the scriptural text that she stayed with him and did not leave the house. Thus, it argues that the perception of Schechem as a violent perpetrator is not false, but unwarranted. [70]

Blyth responds to this interpretation of Shechem's 'rehabilitation', as she calls it. She examines the use of preferred linguistic expressions to make it the narrators intended portrayal of Shechem clear. According to her this will add further clarity to issues of sexual violence and create room both for finding a voice within the text as well as traditions.[71]

> Instead, the Hivite prince is depicted as a man who has formed an intense and erotic emotional attachment to Dinah, which is essentially self-seeking, uncontrolled and utterly at odds with the ethico-religious standards of biblical Israel. Readers of this phrase would not necessarily have been intended to applaud the young prince for his emotional response here; rather, they would have been appalled at his selfish and self-

[68] Hosea 2: 14-15
[69] Ellen van Wolde, `Love and Hatred in a Multi-Racial Society: The Dinah and Shechem Story in Genesis 34 in the Context of Genesis 28—35', in J. Cheryl Exum and H.G.M. Williamson (eds.), Reading From Right to Left: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of David J.A. Clines (JSOTSup, 373; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), pp. 435-49 (438).
[70] *Ibid.*
[71] Blyth, Caroline. "Redeemed by His Love? The Characterization of Shechem in Genesis 34." Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 33, no. 1 (2008): 3–18. p.5.

> interested attempts to retain possession of something that he had no right to claim as his own.[72]

In many societies, the historical treatment of rape and its aftermath reflects a deeply entrenched system of patriarchal control and female subjugation. The notion that a rapist could absolve his crime by marrying his victim not only perpetuated the cycle of violence but also underscored the profound lack of agency afforded to women in such contexts. Forced into marriages under the guise of societal punishment, women were subjected to further indignity, their trauma compounded by the expectation to live with and potentially bear children for their assailants.

Given the complex layers of power dynamics and cultural norms at play, it becomes evident that interpreting texts through a singular socio-cultural lens is inadequate. Instead, alternative readings are not only warranted but imperative to uncover the silenced voices and marginalized perspectives within these narratives. The element of marriage is also present in this relationship and can be considered for discussion. Although it did not reach its fulfilment due to the violent intervention of the brothers, the prospect of marrying to and living with someone has experienced sexual violence with, would have been the rest part of the story.

Caroline Blyth adopts a hermeneutical approach that consists of reevaluating these texts through the lens of contemporary experiences of sexual violence and abuse. Drawing upon her background as a nurse working with abuse survivors and as a professor of religious studies, Blythe brings a nuanced understanding of the psychological and emotional repercussions of trauma to her analysis.[73]

By centering the experiences of survivors and victims, her approach challenges traditional interpretations and confronts the inherent biases embedded within religious texts. Her examination of the story of Dinah, for example, transcends traditional readings by foregrounding the perspective of rape survivors and shedding light on the pervasive nature of sexual violence across genders and sexual orientations.

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[72] *Ibid. p.13*

[73] Blyth, Caroline, *The Narrative of Rape in Genesis 34: Interpreting Dinah's Silence* (Oxford, 2010; online edn, Oxford Academic, 1 Sept. 2010), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199589456.001.0001, accessed 17 Apr. 2024.

Moreover, Blyth's inclusive approach extends beyond gender binaries to encompass the experiences of LGBTQI+ individuals and other marginalized communities who have historically been overlooked in discussions of sexual violence. By amplifying these voices and interrogating the intersections of gender, sexuality, and power, Blythe's work contributes to an understanding of the complexities inherent within biblical narratives and their implications for contemporary discourse on gender-based violence.

> ‘Instead, the rape event is focalized and given meaning solely through these androcentric voices of the narrator and his multiple male characters, while any representation of Dinah’s experience as a victim of sexual violence effectively remains little more than a narrative periphrasis. She is thus denied the power to enter into the patriarchal discourse and to challenge its narrow androcentric conception of sexual violence and its perpetual elision of women’s experiences of that violence. Her silence becomes nothing less than a form of oppression, the mark of her exclusion from honest representation within the text.’[74]

She proceeds to ask the question how one can aid her voice in finding expression, how can it be made heard? Quoting Patricia Laurence, she argues that to focalize on Dinah’s story through her own voicelessness we would have to understand it ‘not as an inevitable rhetorical feature of a patriarchal narrative but as a feature within that narrative, which contributes to and is intrinsic to her suffering, and which therefore may be a source of insight into her ordeal.’[75]

Although this approach does not fit into traditional methods of biblical research, it does present a hermeneutics that sees and identifies the corresponding characters in the contemporary world today. This form of reading between the (possible intersectional) gaps entails looking into an engagement with the persons in society of living communities who embody the experience made by the victims of violence and silence encountered in the text.

> ‘By appealing to the witnesses and testimonies of contemporary rape survivors, by listening to the voices of women who, like the character of Dinah, have their own narratives of suffering suppressed and ignored, we may be granted insight into the significance of Dinah’s own silence and the terrible suffering that lies hidden behind

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75 Blyth, Caroline. “Terrible Silence, Eternal Silence: A Feminist Re-Reading of Dinah's Voicelessness in Genesis 34.” *Biblical Interpretation* 17, no. 5 (2009): 483–506. https://doi.org/10.1163/156851508X401150.

> her voicelessness. Through the creation of such a rhetoric of silence, we as readers of Genesis 34 can generate 'a space in which we can, by the power of our own imaginings, stand in solidarity and empathy with Dinah, reflecting upon her fear, pain, and suffering.'[76]

The acknowledgment of contemporary rape survivors' narratives, particularly in juxtaposition with the character of Dinah in Genesis 34, offers a nuanced perspective on the significance of her silence and the underlying suffering it represents. Through an exploration of Dinah's suppressed voice and the parallels drawn with real-life testimonies, an understanding emerges regarding the profound trauma she endured. This rhetorical approach not only invites readers to empathize with Dinah's plight but also underscores the power of imagination in fostering solidarity and empathy. It is notable that early commentators on similar narratives, such as the story of Gomer, have recognized the role of imagination in hypothesizing about the experiences of marginalized figures. Thus, while acknowledging the potential dangers associated with imaginative interpretation, it becomes evident that such endeavours can contribute significantly to our comprehension and engagement with narratives of suffering and resilience.

> 'We may thereby begin to ask and suggest answers to questions that have heretofore so rarely been addressed in the interpretive traditions of this narrative. For example, we might ask, how would Dinah have felt about her imposed silence, about having no opportunity to share her story? How would the fact that her brothers appeared more concerned about family honour than about her well-being have affected her? What emotions would have enveloped her when, in the aftermath of her brutal assault, her rapist showered her with endearments, insisting that she was to become his wife? By focalizing the rape through Dinah's eyes, we enable her to transcend the patriarchal ideologies of the text to become the subject of her own discourse. Her suffering can thus be articulated despite, or to be more accurate, precisely because of her suppression within the text, as it is her very suppression that speaks out so clearly about the full horror of her experience.'[77]

In conclusion, by examining the narrative of Dinah's silence and suffering through a lens that prioritizes her perspective and experiences, we open doors to inquiries and interpretations that

[76] *Ibid.* 499
[77] *Ibid.*

have been largely overlooked in traditional readings. Delving into questions about Dinah's emotional state, her sense of agency, and the impact of familial dynamics on her well-being allows us to humanize her character and transcend the patriarchal framework of the text. Through this focalization, Dinah emerges as the subject of her own discourse, reclaiming her voice amidst the silence imposed upon her. By acknowledging the depth of her suppression within the narrative, we gain a clearer understanding of the profound horror of her ordeal and the resilience inherent in her ability to articulate her suffering. In exploring Dinah's story, we not only honor her individuality but also shed light on the broader intersectional complexities of gender, power, and agency within biblical narratives. In the next section, we will turn our attention to the nameless daughter of Jephthah and look at some hermeneutical approaches from the literary genre. One in which a complex theme such as sacrifice will be questioned in order to understand what role it plays in her agency an autonomy.

2.2.2 Jephthah's Daughter and the theme of 'sacrifice'

The story in the book of Judges chapter 11 opens with a note that Jephthah was a mighty warrior, his father mentioned by name, Gilead, and that his mother was a prostitute (no proper name here). The main characters in this chapter are Jephthah himself, Gilead's wife and the sons who drove him away, the Ammonites, the elders, and his daughter (unnamed). The focus of the story is the role Jephthah plays in his fight against the Ammonites and the vow he makes to God. That vow is where the daughter enters the narrative. Jephthah vows that if he has victory over the Ammonites, "whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering."[78] To her great misfortune, his daughter is the first one who comes out of the house. He does have the victory for which he had made the supplication and that meant he had to fulfil his vow. Upon his return home, the first 'whatever' happens to be his own 'daughter, dancing to the sound of timbrels' (v. 34). He felt devastated but stated emphatically that he 'cannot break the vow made to the Lord'. (v.35).

> '"My father," she replied, "you have given your word to the Lord. Do to me just as you promised, now that the Lord has avenged you of your enemies, the Ammonites. But

[78] Judges 11:31

> grant me this one request," she said. "Give me two months to roam the hills and weep with my friends, because I will never marry."
>
> "You may go," he said. And he let her go for two months. She and her friends went into the hills and wept because she would never marry. After the two months, she returned to her father, and he did to her as he had vowed. And she was a virgin.'[79]

The narrative of Jephthah and his daughter occupies a troubling space within biblical literature, encapsulating what Phyllis Trible aptly terms as 'Texts of Terror.' At its core lies a harrowing tale of sacrifice and patriarchal dominance, where a father's rash vow leads to the ultimate tragedy of his own daughter's life. In this section I would like to propose to look at two hermeneutical approaches. One is Katerina Koci's treatment of the theme of sacrifice and secondly Breier's essay on 'A Nameless Bride of Death: Jephthah's Daughter in American Jewish Women's Poetry' where she talks about the midrashic tradition (shortly referred to earlier) which attempt to give her a voice.

Katerina Koci's essay on the topic of sacrifice in the context of Jephthah's daughter delves into the heart of this narrative, probing the complex dynamics surrounding her. The central question she poses is both poignant and profound: 'is she (Dinah) merely a pawn in the hands of her tyrannical father, a silent victim of fate's cruel machinations? Or does she possess agency and autonomy, capable of making choices and bearing accountability for her own actions?'[80]

The dichotomy presented by Koci underscores the tension between agency and subjugation, autonomy, and coercion, that reverberates throughout the story. On one hand, the daughter's fate appears to be dictated by the whims of her father's vow, making her a powerless participant in a tragic drama orchestrated by patriarchal forces. Yet, on closer examination, her character emerges as nuanced and multifaceted, grappling with her own sense of identity and responsibility amidst the constraints of her circumstances.

By interrogating the complexities of Jephthah's daughter's agency, Koci invites readers to confront the pervasive themes of power and control that permeate the biblical narrative. Her

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[79] Judges 11:36-39

[80] Koci, Katerina. "Whose Story? Which Sacrifice? On the Story of Jephthah's Daughter." *Open Theology* 7, no. 1 (2021): 331–44. https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2020-0167.

analysis challenges traditional interpretations that reduce women to passive objects or mere conduits of male authority, instead advocating for a more nuanced understanding of their agency and resilience in the face of adversity. In the case of Gomer, there is no human sacrifice per se, but there is a sacrifice of her space and identity that attains the nature of a compromise. She too is expected to be a passive recipient in the whole drama.[81]

Koci's hermeneutical approach involves examining and comparing the aspect of sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter from the Greek mythology and Judeo-Christian perspective as laid out by Rene Girard. She finds it important to distinguish between the two traditions and see what role autonomy plays in both perspectives as far as sacrifice is concerned. To this effect she employs the Girardian distinction of sacrifice which helps examine if the aspect of autonomy applies to Jephthah's daughter to see who can be blamed or better said, held responsible. In the case of the sacrificial stories in Greek mythology, the actors cannot be held responsible because their destiny lies in the hands of gods and goddesses as opposed to their counterparts in the Judeo-Christian tradition who make decisions for themselves and are also responsible for the outcomes of those decisions.

Koci argues that what the daughter is doing, although it seems that she is being sacrificial, submissive, and heroic in her empathy, is blaming her father for his inadequacy in thinking and acting clearly. Koci helps the reader to see how she emerges not as a silent victim of her father's folly, but as a symbol of resilience and self-determination, reclaiming her voice and agency in the face of tragedy. The accountability extends further:

> 'For example, Jephthah and his daughter are not the only people who must be held to account – there is also the author–redactor. What if it is not the tyrannical father but the author who decided to commit the "literary murder" of Jephthah's daughter? If the daughter had not died, the comparison with the binding of Isaac would certainly be less provocative and controversial. From a purely literary point of view, we could say that Jephthah's daughter offers the author the opportunity to stage a "woman's satire on men who play God." However, if we consider Jephthah's daughter to be a real person, we must conclude that her story is indeed a "text of terror".'[82]

[81] *Ibid*
[82] *Ibid.* p. 341.

Continuing this search for who to blame, we can look at Cheryl Exum's analysis which suggests that the biblical author-redactor intentionally omits the name of Jephthah's daughter to highlight her action rather than her individual identity. The absence of her name serves to depersonalize her and focus solely on her sacrificial act. This anonymity, she claims, is maintained to distance the reader from any emotional connection or sympathy towards her, emphasizing her role only as a daughter within the narrative. She begins a discussion how 'word' plays a vital role in the text and its etymological meaning within the different spoken and unspoken scenarios in the plot. It is significant to note that in the said text the deity makes no verbal attempt to stop Jephthah as in the case of Abraham and his son Isaac. Or that Jephthah makes no attempt to negotiate (his vow) with the divine as he does in a few verses before when he negotiates his situation with the elders. He simply submits to the vow he made.[83]

Koplowitz Breier discusses a chosen set of five Jewish American women poetry as a revisioning of the story of Jephthah's daughter, making itself expressible in its anonymity. Contemporary women midrashim enter these gaps and maximize their hermeneutical opportunity:

> 'Although, like traditional midrash, they seek to fill in the gaps in the biblical text, they do so through contemporary feminine and feminist eyes, imputing emotions, and thoughts to the biblical women.'[84]

Hence, each of the five poets that Breier chooses opts to narrate the tale of Jephthah's daughter through their unique lens, offering insight into their emotions. Despite lacking explicit identification, their voices resonate, imbuing her with thoughts and sentiments, granting her agency to recount her narrative. In this manner, they uphold the tradition of Midrash by fleshing out the untold aspects, crafting female-centric interpretations. Through this endeavor, they carve a space within Jewish tradition, affirming the significance of women's voices, identities, and remembrance. The Daughters of Jephthah thus epitomize the yearning of Jewish American women and feminists to assert themselves, amplify their voices, and secure their position within religious customs and societal discourse.

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[83] Exum, J. Cheryl. "On Judges 11," in ed. Brenner, Athalya. A Feminist Companion to Judges. Sheffield, England :: JSOT Press, an imprint of Sheffield Academic Press Ltd, 1993.p. 131-132.

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[84] Koplowitz-Breier, Anat. p. 3.

Breier refers to two other hermeneutics (other than ‘of suspicion) proposed by Ostriker: the hermeneutics of desire, which involves interpreting texts through the lens of desire, particularly the desires and perspectives of marginalized or silenced voices, such as women. It emphasizes uncovering and understanding the desires of characters, authors, and readers within a text, especially those desires that have been suppressed or ignored by dominant narratives or interpretations. Indeed, it is the characters, authors *and* readers that offer the text the space it needs to breathe and exist. The hermeneutics of indeterminacy acknowledges the ambiguity and complexity inherent in texts, particularly regarding issues of identity, power dynamics, and interpretation. It recognizes that texts often contain multiple meanings and interpretations, and that these meanings may be fluid and subject to change based on different contexts and perspectives. The hermeneutics of indeterminacy encourages embracing uncertainty and openness in interpretation, allowing for a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of texts, particularly in relation to feminist concerns.

In that sense, she perceives her undertaking as a hermeneutics of indeterminacy, which also encompasses the other two approaches. I agree with Breier because I believe that the essence of this undertaking does not lie in the quest of a singular correct voice or interpretation and that is also not the point, even within the realm of feminist discourse. Rather, it's about acknowledging the inherent imbalance and inequity. It calls for understanding that there exists an unlevel playing field. Therefore, when advocating for feminist interpretations of characters like Dinah, Jephthah's daughter, or Gomer, the aim isn't to assert a definitive perspective but to emphasize their need for inclusion and representation. It's about affirming that they too deserve a voice, a broader narrative space within texts and interpretations, whether in literature, art, or other forms of expression. It's recognizing that their stories have often been overlooked, marginalized, or silenced, and advocating for their rightful place in the discourse, where their experiences and perspectives can be acknowledged, valued, and celebrated – because they have implications in the real world.

2.3 Visual Exegesis as a framework for a hermeneutics of indeterminacy

The narratives explored above, along with their treatment of silenced voices both within the text and its interpretation, offer profound insights into the ongoing debate surrounding accessibility to voices and the tools necessary to facilitate such accessibility. The various interpretations presented in these narratives, where characters are either named but voiceless or nameless yet vocal (albeit silenced), serve as a lens through which we can delve deeper into the narrative or adopt an entirely different perspective altogether as we engage with the text.

Through her engagement with survivors of sexual assault, Blyth provides readers with a pathway to comprehend the gaps within the story of Dinah's rape by juxtaposing them with the lived experiences of real victims. These experiences, which many readers may not have direct access to, highlight the marginalization endured (often due to gender) and the trauma of rape. Blyth's challenge to readers lies in bridging these gaps by listening to the voices of contemporary survivors, thereby facilitating a more equitable reading of the text. These voices serve as tools for articulating what the text suppresses, urging readers to confront the harsh reality of the experiences of others who have suffered similar fates, albeit within different historical and socio-cultural contexts. What framework can this mean for Gomer?

It's emphasized that rape or sexual violence is not merely an abstract concept or a literary device, despite its portrayal as such. In the first section of this chapter we have seen how Blyth draws from the raw reality of these experiences to transform rape from a mere plot device into a means of understanding the unspoken or perhaps un-screamed aspects of the narrative. By grounding the interpretation in the visceral reality of survivors' experiences, she challenges readers to confront the silenced voices within the text and within society, ultimately fostering a deeper understanding of the text and its implications. This is also largely seen in the inquiries she makes with the text. Although in the case of Gomer, rape is not the main theme, one cannot ignore the imagery of sexual violence and domestic abuse that is vividly present. Would this infer an engagement with the lived experiences of victims of domestic abuse for a deeper understanding of the character of Gomer? Perhaps. What this framework can ensure is that the marriage metaphor in the case of Hosea Gomer cannot be used as an example of an ideal marriage, in which a spouse leaves and comes back (or falters) and the partner swallows their pride and takes them back. This specific marriage metaphor cannot be employed without taking into the account the violent undertones and the intended silence of the character of Gomer. Potential themes that need questioning, like Koci’s literary exploration of the topic of sacrifice in the context of Dinah, would be ones such as betrayal, vengeance, disloyalty?

Girard's theory of sacrifice often involves the scapegoating mechanism, where a community projects its collective violence onto a victim to restore social order. If Gomer's story can be examined through the lens of sacrificial dynamics would be a worthy question to ask. Her experiences of exploitation, betrayal, and redemption can be seen as reflective of sacrificial processes within her societal context. For example, her involvement in prostitution may

symbolize her being used as a sacrificial victim to satisfy societal desires or to bear the consequences of Israel's unfaithfulness to God. Can her story be viewed as a critique of the oppressive systems that sacrifice individuals for the sake of maintaining social order or socially acceptable narratives?

Voice requires a medium, a conduit through which it can resonate and be heard. It cannot traverse the void of silence, the vacuum of contextual irrelevance, patriarchy, and the imposition of author-redactorship. In the presence of these stifling forces, individuals are robbed of their voices, and the text itself becomes riddled with gaps, silences that echo the oppression of those marginalized within its pages. Yet, readers, with their inherent desire to engage and understand, can endeavor to breach these barriers as we have seen in the sections above.

Through the transformative power of literary and artistic interpretation, readers harness the available resources to amplify the muted voices within the text. They strive to endow these silenced figures with agency, weaving narratives that transcend the constraints of their original context. Having briefly examined the recurring pattern of silenced voices in the two cases above, we can now turn our gaze towards the role of art reception in providing a space for these marginalized figures.

Through the interpretative lens of artists and audiences alike, sometimes silenced voices are resurrected from the depths of obscurity, given a platform to reclaim their narrative. It is within this space of creative interpretation that the silenced have a means to find their voice once more, their stories liberated from the shackles of patriarchal oppression and authorial dominance. In the next and final chapter, this will be the focus: exploring how art reception grants agency to the silenced. Through the act of interpretation, readers and artists alike become custodians of these voices, interpreters, and re-tellers of their stories. Whether they endure beyond the confines of the page or subscribe to the interpretations that traditional methods have laid out will be seen.

Chapter 3: Artistic Representations of Gomer and Hosea

Within the realm of art history, the exploration and interpretation of works of art have often delved into the depths of cultural symbolism, historical context, and the nuanced expressions of human experiences. This chapter embarks on a journey to examine the intriguing theme of Gomer, as depicted in selected works of art from the last centuries. In artistic interpretation, voices once marginalized or silenced can find resurgence, gaining platforms to assert their narratives anew. Through creative lenses, both artists and audiences (whether the receptive/interactive audience is the reader of a text, or a viewer of a piece of visual art) can contribute to this revitalization, liberating stories from the constraints of patriarchal hegemony and authorial dominance. Building upon the thematic discussions of preceding chapters, we now turn our focus to an exploration of specific artistic depictions of Gomer and Hosea, viewing them not merely as passive observers but as informed participants.

The character of Gomer, as portrayed in the biblical book of Hosea, has been represented in different forms. Although they are very few, they are present across different periods and cultures. Often overshadowed by the book's overarching message, Hosea and Gomer's story offers a wealth of visual and narrative possibilities for artistic interpretation. The previous chapters have shown how although the lens of biblical scholarship allows Gomer’s depiction as a temptress, a whore, or a mere literary tool, Gomer emerges as a complex figure that speaks to broader themes of human frailty, redemption and misuse of feminine imagery. The question is really, with which lens is this person and this story being seen in art-reception. Does artistic medium find a voice for her figure?

Drawing upon the discussions of iconographic analysis by Erwin Panofsky we delve into selected artworks spanning centuries, probing beneath the surface to uncover the rich tapestry of cultural symbolism, historical context, and nuanced human experiences embedded within. This chapter serves as a journey through the intricate landscapes of some artistic representation in the last centuries to shed light on the multifaceted dimensions of Gomer's narrative and the broader themes of agency, identity, and interpretation.

3.1 Layers of meaning

Erwin Panofsky, a renowned art historian, developed a method of iconographic analysis that involves three layers or stages of interpretation:

1. Pre-iconographic Analysis: This initial stage involves identifying the basic subject matter and visual elements depicted in the artwork. It includes perceiving recognizable figures, objects, and scenes portrayed in the artwork without interpreting their symbolic or allegorical meanings. At this stage, the focus is on describing what is visually observable in the artwork.

2. Secondary or Iconographic Analysis: In this stage, the interpreter delves deeper into the artwork to uncover the symbolic or allegorical meanings associated with the identified visual elements. This involves identifying the cultural, historical, religious, or mythological significance of the symbols and motifs present in the artwork. The goal is to understand the underlying narratives, themes, or messages conveyed by the artist through the use of symbolic imagery.

3. Tertiary or Iconological Analysis: The final stage of Panofsky's method involves placing the artwork within broader cultural, historical, and philosophical contexts to interpret its deeper significance. This includes considering the socio-political, religious, and intellectual ideologies prevalent during the time period in which the artwork was created. By contextualizing the artwork within its historical and cultural milieu, the interpreter aims to gain insight into the artist's intentions and the broader implications of the artwork.

Panofsky's three-layered approach to iconographic analysis provides a systematic framework for interpreting the complex layers of meaning embedded within visual artworks. It encourages scholars to move beyond mere description and to engage critically with the cultural and historical contexts that inform the creation and interpretation of art. This is the approach with which we will treat the artworks chosen for study in this paper.[85]

I agree with Exum too whose proposed questions for interactions with a work of art holds potential in bringing us a step closer to the questions interpreters have raised in the context of Gomer. Through these questions, we can enter a dialogue with this silenced voice. As ironical as it seems, that is exactly what stepping into the gaps and interacting with them entails. Any authentic interchange between a biblical artwork and the biblical narrative, should not focus on whether the artist's interpretation aligns precisely with the narrative text or diverges from it. Rather, we should explore questions such as: What elements of the biblical narrative does the

[85] Panofsky, Erwin. Ikonographie und Ikonologie : Bildinterpretation nach dem Dreistufenmodell. Köln: DuMont. 2006. ff. 10

visual representation highlight? What aspects does it downplay or overlook? Does the artist address gaps or unanswered queries within the text? Are there additions made to the biblical account by the artist? For instance, does the artist emphasize elements that hold less significance in the biblical rendition? Ultimately, does the visual representation shed fresh light on aspects of the biblical story, whether positively or negatively, revealing new dimensions of understanding?[86]

The work of any artist who intends to represent a biblical subject necessitates engagement with the text, in a visual exercise. This engagement brings symbols that the artist recalls from their own experience and associations, often amalgamating it within the context of that place and time. Finding Gomer's voice within these strokes is to enter the world of these artists and try to understand their intent and their theological associations.[87] In this chapter, we will explore how artists from diverse backgrounds and centuries have approached the subject of Gomer, creating works that serve as visual commentaries on her character, the biblical narrative, and the deeper truths it embodies. We will employ Panofsky's method of iconographic analysis, examining the visual symbols, cultural references, and historical context employed by these artists to enter spaces within the text. In the next sub-section we can inquire a little into the nature of these 'gaps'.

3.2 Gasps in text

Despite Gomer's lack of voice in the original text, artists across different milieu have taken it upon themselves to give her a visual presence by assigning her a face and a body. This act of visually representing her character speaks to the inherent need for a tangible and relatable form in storytelling. The body assumes a powerful symbolic role within the narrative, serving as a vehicle for conveying emotions, experiences, and societal expectations.

The artistic renderings of Gomer's character allow for the exploration of unspoken expressions and emotions that exist within the gaps of the original text. Artists have filled these gaps with their own interpretations, using different artistic mediums such as paintings, engravings, murals, and biblical illustrations that were intended to accompany the text. These visual representations serve as a form of artistic companionship, offering readers an additional lens

[86] Exum, J. Cheryl. Beyond the Biblical Horizon: the Bible and the Arts. 1st ed. Leiden:: Brill Academic Publishers, 1998. p. 2.
[87] *Ibid*

through which to perceive and engage with the written words. By examining the portrayals, brushstrokes and artistic choices employed in these depictions of Gomer, we can gain insights into the prevailing ideologies and societal attitudes that have influenced her portrayal. The interpretations conveyed through the visual mediums allow for a deeper understanding of the character and the context which didn’t allow it.

In essence, the act of giving Gomer a face and a body through artistic interpretation highlights the significance of visual representation in storytelling. It not only fills the gaps in the text but also provides a multi-dimensional and immersive experience for the reader. These artistic renderings offer a pre-given lens, a predetermined perspective, through which the text is read, enhancing the overall narrative, challenging and enriching the reader's engagement with the story.

Additionally, it is worth noting that while the gender of the artist is not extensively discussed, it can be an intriguing aspect to consider when examining the interpretations of Gomer's character. The gender of the artist may potentially influence their portrayal of Gomer, as it can bring forth certain perspectives, experiences, and biases that shape the artistic interpretation. The artist's own gender identity and lived experiences can influence how they depict Gomer's face and body, as well as the nuances and symbolism they incorporate. For instance, a female artist might emphasize aspects of Gomer's character that resonate with her own understanding of womanhood, addressing themes such as agency, objectification, or the constraints imposed by societal expectations. On the other hand, a male artist may bring his own perceptions and assumptions about femininity, potentially reinforcing or challenging existing gender norms.

By considering the possible influence of the artist's gender on the interpretation of Gomer's character, we can gain further insights into the complex interplay between the text, the artistic representation, and the broader socio-cultural context in which they exist. This perspective invites us to examine not only the subject matter itself but also the lens through which it is filtered, shedding light on the diverse range of perspectives that contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding Gomer's character. The next section deals with the specific artworks which will be studied. The first undertaking involves iconography from the medieval times in the form of biblical manuscripts. Following those there are two contemporary works from Barry Moser and Cody Miller.

3.3. Examination of various artistic interpretations of Hosea and Gomer

3.3.1 Illustrations in biblical Manuscripts

Manuscripts, handwritten texts or books, served as the primary form of written communication in medieval Europe until the introduction of the printing press in the 15th century. Typically, these manuscripts were bound volumes known as codices, constructed from sheets of parchment made from animal skin, with the finest quality manuscripts using vellum, a type of calfskin. These pages were stitched together and adorned with elaborate covers made from leather, gold, ivory, and occasionally precious jewels. The text within a manuscript was meticulously written by hand using ink, while illustrations and decorations were painted using tempera, a pigment bound by an egg base. Gold leaf was often applied for a gilded finish. While not all manuscripts were as intricately decorated, common features of medieval books included elaborate drop caps, marginalia, and decorative scripts. Initially, illuminated manuscripts primarily consisted of religious texts, but later expanded to encompass epic poems, histories, and allegorical tales. The creation of illuminated manuscripts was a collaborative effort involving various individuals. In Europe and the Byzantine Empire, the earliest evidence of illuminated manuscripts dates back to the 7th century CE. Manuscript production became a significant craft, with religious organizations, churches, and nobility commissioning devotional books. In Islamic Spain, classical works alongside religious texts were produced, preserving and expanding upon critical knowledge.[88]

Danièle Cybulskie, a medievalist writer, podcaster and professional speaker discusses some of the characteristics related to colours in illustrations in biblical manuscripts. In the early medieval period, it was literate and artistic monks, were well-versed with theology who were responsible for creating religious manuscripts for use within the monastries. In the later medieval period this included not only monks but also scribes and illuminators who would all form part of the process of readying the manuscript from binding to illumination.[89]

Within biblical manuscripts, these pictorial representations are done in a way that they are meticulously nestled within the intricate spaces of the biblical text, thereby holding a pivotal role in the interpretative process. They are in some sense quite literally filling the gaps within

[88] Christopher de Hamel, Making Medieval Manuscripts. Oxford: Bodleian Library 2018. pp. 176.

[89] https://mymodernmet.com/european-medieval-illuminated-manuscripts/. Last accessed on 23.05.2024

the text. Despite their literal insertion, the allocated space is remarkably compact, posing a profound challenge in encapsulating the complexity of a book like Hosea within such confined parameters. The space for a manuscript artist is quite small. This prompts a critical inquiry into the artistic strategies employed to condense and illustrate the multifaceted ideas inherent in the text. An examination of the purpose of illustration becomes imperative, delving into the nuanced layers of meaning encapsulated by the term. Attention is drawn to the specific artistic elements, such as the carefully chosen colors, background, characters, gestures, all of which contribute to the visual narrative. [90]

The illumination process marked the final stage in the creation of a manuscript before binding, a precaution against potential mishaps such as spilled ink or damage to the delicate paintings, including those with gold leaf. Some surviving manuscripts contain sketches for illumination that were never executed, suggesting the considerable expense associated with this stage, likely leading to incomplete illuminations due to budget constraints. This expense also explains why lavishly illustrated manuscripts were often reserved as prestigious gifts for royalty, the aristocracy, and religious institutions.

A significant factor contributing to the cost and value of illuminated manuscripts was the extensive time and effort invested in the drawing and painting process. Detailed examination reveals meticulous brushwork, with multiple layers applied to achieve rich colors, requiring drying time between each application to prevent blending or smudging. Celtic artists demonstrated their skill through intricate knotwork designs, demanding precision and patience. Moreover, the creation of paint in various hues necessitated the acquisition of diverse and sometimes rare ingredients, with red being a prevalent color due to its multiple applications, including inking important textual elements like saints' days.

In "Medieval Craftsmen: Scribes and Illuminators," Christopher de Hamel outlines several potential ingredients for red pigment, such as cinnabar, vermillion, and Brazilwood, each requiring processing, from mineral grinding to plant steeping, adding complexity to the painter's tasks. Similarly, other colours, including blue (the most expensive being lapis lazuli) and green, involved sourcing from minerals or plants, with each pigment requiring meticulous preparation before application.[91] The choice of writing instrument varied based on the illuminator's

[90] www.medievalists.net/ last accessed on 19.05.2024

[91] See also Pastoureau, Michel. Blue: The History of a Color. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018. https://doi-org.uaccess.univie.ac.at/10.1515/9780691251356

preference, with quill pens and brushes both utilized, the latter often crafted from fine fur for delicate work.

Figure 1 Bibliale Historiale 1372-73 70x69mm

Fig 1.[92] is the only illustration to be found for the book of Hosea, which limits the content that the artist has chosen. That it is franco-flemish can be seen from the blue-white-red frame that surrounds the icons. One can see that among all the characters mentioned in the book of Hosea and discussed at the opening of chapter 1, the only two chosen are Hosea and Gomer, and they occupy the central compositional space of this visual narrative. The composition of the frame is dynamically divided, with a dominant diagonal line separating the expansive depiction of the land from the intricate geometric pattern. While similar variations in colour are evident among other illustrations from the series, a consistent motif of the land's representation persists, as observed in this illustration. That the land is represented, is not something that stands out. There are other icons in the series that have representations of land in the background (see iconographic representations of Daniel, Joel, Amos, Nebuchadnezzar in the same source). What can be observed though is the role this land plays in the storytelling. The two trees leaning towards each other suggest a sense of completeness or unity, symbolizing a harmonious relationship, a coming together. Upon closer examination, the tree behind Hosea on the left exhibits a higher and robust root system, symbolizing his strong prophetic connection to the land and implying a sense of being grounded. The second tree on the right which is located

[92] Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts accessed online at: https://manuscripts.kb.nl/
Last accessed on 19.05.2024

behind Gomer bends towards the one on the left. The incline of the land and the tree could symbolize Gomer's gradual inclination towards Hosea's stability and solidity. Although the cracks in the land may not hold explicit symbolic meaning, the curved positioning of the part of the land on the right itself within the landscape appears deliberate, suggesting a sense of integration or enclosure within the environment: as safe space or an enclosed, restraining space.

> ‘Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns,
> and I will build a wall against her
> so that she cannot find her paths. (v.6)
> ‘And no one shall rescue her out of my hand. (v. 10)
> Therefore, I will now allure her
> and bring her into the wilderness
> and speak tenderly to her. (v.14)’’[93]

Hosea is depicted in a blue tunic and adorned with a red headgear, evoking the significance of his character. The use of blue, as mentioned above in additional to his shared central space is meant to draw attention to his character and emphasize its importance. His right arm extends in alignment with Gomer's left arm as if he were to point direction or cajoling her. His carefully rendered right foot steps out of the frame, inviting the viewer to share in his purpose and motion. The use of blue might also be suggestive of the divine whose voice he often represents in the text. The scene both serves as portrayal and a peek into what the artist thinks the central message of the icon is, which I figure is restoration. The threshold crossed seems to be an invitation for the viewer, to join Hosea in his endeavour, whether to reclaim Gomer or to draw her near or his attempt to keep her from going. As they walk their figures share equal height and directing their gaze towards each other, alignment of movement and intention at the same time. Gomer, dressed in a red tunic has donned another layer of fabric as a sign of stability and has a head gear as well. Her back is turned away from Hosea, indicating her disconnection from him as she does not face him directly. The expression on her face, particularly the furrowed brow, conveys a sense of questioning and discontent. Her inconspicuous dark or black shoe, partially concealed by her tunic unlike Hosea's fully visible foot, suggests a sense of movement, perhaps signalling her departure or intention to walk away. Notice how both right feet and right hands point in the same direction.

[93] Hosea 2

At the heart of this iconographic frame lies a portrayal that extends beyond the textual narrative. Here, both figures depict a proximity and movement that is not explicitly mentioned in the biblical text, at least not an event that has occurred but is yet to occur. It is a prophecy that Hosea makes. Does this hint at the dissonance found time and again in their story? The next illustration that I have chosen is from the same time period.

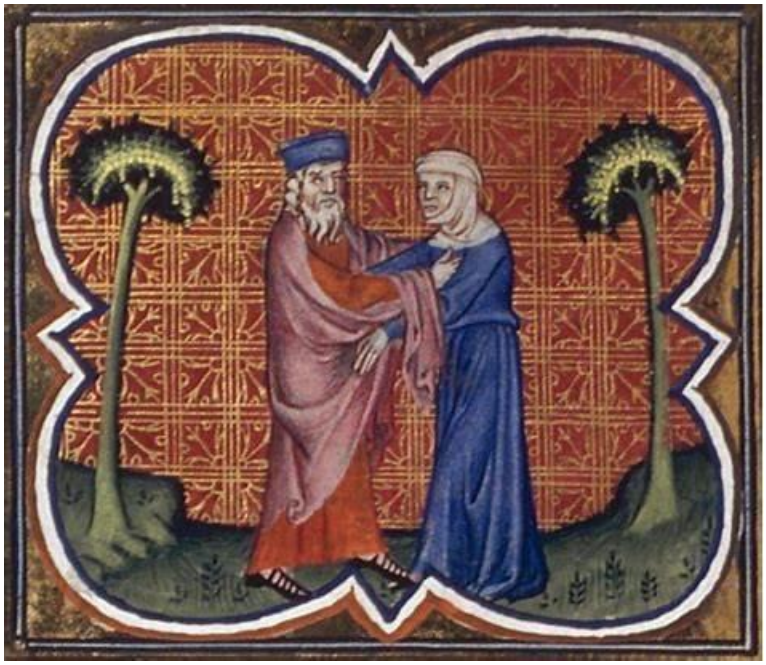

Figure 2 Hosea and Gomer. Charles V of France Bible ca. 1373 Parchment. 6 x 7.

In Fig. 2, originating from the same year, we encounter a similar gilded frame, once again serving as the sole illustration for the book of Hosea. A striking red background adorned with a gilded geometric pattern dominates the scene, a hallmark characteristic of the artist's style. Notably, the landscape occupies a relatively small portion of the frame, mirroring the artist's tendency to prioritize the figures within the composition. This deliberate choice sets the stage for the encounter between the central characters, Hosea and Gomer. Hosea's attire, resembling that of the prophet Ezekiel (see fig. 4) depicted elsewhere in the series, reinforces a visual continuity across the illustrations. Throughout the series, few prophetic figures, apart from Moses, have been portrayed with red attire. The inclusion of the prophet Jeremiah (see fig. 3), also adorned with a distinctive headgear and draped tunic, further enhances this thematic coherence. Intriguingly, the motif of trees reappears, standing tall at the same height as the characters, subtly framing the scene and offering a sense of symmetry and balance. The roots on the left seem more pronounced on the right bearing similarity to Fig. 1

In Fig 2(a), Hosea's garments seamlessly blend into the background, creating an illusion of unity between the figure, almost becoming one with the visual landscape. The inclusion of a blue headgear atop Hosea's head may symbolize his elevated or divine status, adding a layer of significance to his portrayal. Interestingly, a similar shade of blue is utilized for Gomer's garment, suggesting a subtle connection or parallel between the two characters.

Figure 3. Jeremiah Lamenting Destruction

Figure 4. Ezekiel.

Even though there is a good amount of gold in the background, the depiction is not entirely dominated by gold. It's as if the color palette is balancing. What strikes me is how the figure of Hosea seems to merge with the background. Yet, here, Hosea is adorned in a red tunic, accentuated further by the fabric draped around his shoulders, suggesting a sense of tranquility. In contrast, Gomer stands out prominently due to her blue attire, which, in my interpretation, evokes associations with the colors traditionally associated with the Virgin Mary. So, it's as if she has this sense of purity, akin to a state of virginity, and I interpret it with a sense of sympathy. The way they hold each other suggests a mutual embrace, with their focus directed more towards each other. In contrast, in the other depiction, there's a sense of restraint, perhaps signified by the hesitant hand. Hosea’s arms are welcoming while Gomer’s seem to be limp, somehow tired. It seems as if she is accepting and wanting to return. This version seems to convey that Gomer has an agency in the restoration of this relationship, it shows her willingness. The drape over her hand reminds me of dextrarum iunctio, the tradition of handclasping in marriage, which is often represent with a draped fabric around clasped hands. Marriage of the Virgin by the Master of the Legend of St. Gudule (1470-1490) is an example of it. To me the symbolic here appears to be a second marriage, a second union of them both. Perhaps ‘coming

to an end' or 'coming to a completion' in some sense, as Gomer's name would denote. This scene like the previous one is not present explicitly in any part of the biblical text and the comments about restoration made for the previous figure apply here too.

Additionally, the extended arms, evokes a distinct interpretation of reunion, reminiscent of images portraying the return of the prodigal son which reiterates the idea of reconciliation. In manuscript illustrations depicting the prodigal son, we often observe depictions of the returning son in a similar embrace, akin to the one portrayed in the manuscript under discussion. However, it's worth noting that such an intimate embrace is notably absent in other representations of them. This absence can be attributed to the nuanced symbolism associated with physical gestures; while placing a hand over someone's shoulder may imply dominance or subjugation, open and welcoming arms suggest a space of acceptance and invitation. It is his taking her back that will make his being a prophet complete. In this illustration, Gomer is depicted entering this welcoming space, evoking a sense of sympathy and suggesting the possibility of healing and redemption—a stark contrast to the portrayal in Cody's rendition which we will see below, where she appears to be severely castigated, perhaps to highlight her role as a beneficiary of grace.

Figure 5. Hosea with Gomer. Franco-Flemish, late 13th century. Marquette Bible

In this vivid depiction[94], a captivating blue framework envelops the scene, adorned with intricate motifs that add depth and symbolism to the composition. Within this initial framework stands Hosea, as he extends a reassuring hand on the shoulder of Gomer. The juxtaposition is like the use of the hand in figure 1. The backdrop, bathed in luxurious gold, exudes opulence and grandeur bringing a sense of significant timelessness to their story which will hold lessons for every context.

He is depicted wearing a red tunic, with a blue drape around his shoulder, but the drape has an inner layer of red. It is a small detail, but I think it is not insignificant. Additionally, touches of turquoise or green interwoven with red further enrich the tableau, evoking a sense of harmony and balance amidst the vibrant palette. His smile, subtly hinted at, conveys a sense of compassion and understanding, while the book he holds, perhaps symbolizing his role as a prophetic messenger. Additionally, touches of turquoise or green interwoven with red further enrich the tableau, evoking a sense of harmony and balance amidst the vibrant palette. Above Hosea, a halo asserts his divinity and prophetic stature. There it was almost half of his arm that was over her shoulder while here it is only his wrist. It doesn't seem that there is use of force. If at all there is an unwillingness on her part, it seems to be depicted by Gomer seems to be drawing away from his presence. Yet, despite his divine aura, the figure beside him leans away slightly, suggesting a subtle tension or distance in their relationship, adding complexity to the narrative portrayed. It is possible that before the reader takes over and is informed by the initial verses, the viewer-reader does not make the first association of Hosea with the voice/person of God who is not depicted in the image. In some illustrations (see fig 3.) the figures are embedded within the stylised initial 'V' for the opening verses of the book in Latin 'verbum Domini quod factum est' can be translated as 'the word of the Lord, that' as was also common practice at that time. Her movements are enclosed by Hosea on one side and the voice of God on the other, she leans away from him, but where can she go if she is 'boxed'[95] by this enclosed space?

In the following section we will look at a biblical illustration from the last century. The Pennyroyal Caxton Bible, which contains an illustration of Hosea and Gomer, chosen for study here.

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[94] https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/105V02

[95] Sherwood, Yvonne. "Boxing Gomer: Controlling the Deviant Woman in Hosea 1–3," 1995. p.101.

3.3.2 Barry Moser

Barry Moser is a renowned American artist, illustrator, and printmaker who has left a significant mark on the world of art and illustration. Throughout his career, Moser has garnered praise for his distinctive style and the depth of emotion he infuses into his works. This chapter explores Moser's illustration of Hosea and Gomer in the Pennyroyal Caxton Bible, delving into his unique style, thematic focus, and the impact he has made on the field of illustration.

One of the defining aspects of Moser's style is his mastery of wood engraving, a technique that he has employed extensively throughout his career. His wood engravings are characterized by meticulous detail, intricate linework, and a remarkable ability to capture the essence of his subjects. Moser's engravings often exhibit a delicate balance between light and shadow, creating a sense of depth and texture within his illustrations. Another notable aspect of Moser's style is his skill in portraying emotions and human expressions. Whether through subtle gestures, nuanced facial expressions, or the use of body language, Moser's illustrations have a remarkable ability to convey the inner thoughts and feelings of his subjects. This evocative quality breathes life into his illustrations, allowing viewers to connect on a deeper emotional level with the characters depicted.

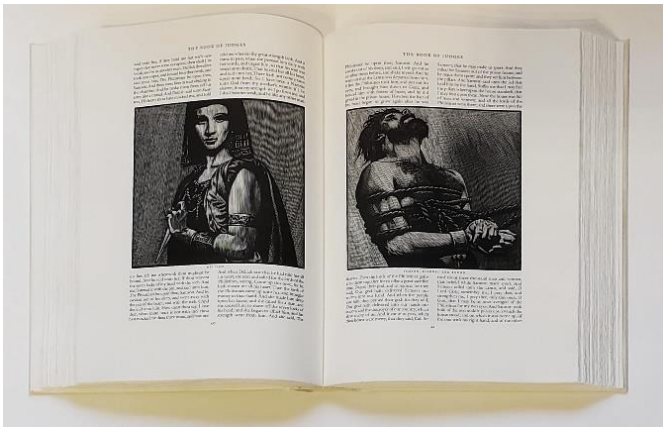

Figure 6. Sample page with illustrations, The Pennyroyal Caxton Bible

Barry Moser dedicated four intense years to creating the Pennyroyal Caxton Bible, a unique masterpiece in the 20th century. He collaborated with skilled craftsmen and scholars to meticulously illustrate every book of the Old and New Testaments. Moser's solo effort resulted in 232 engraved illustrations, varying in size from full-page to smaller part-page renditions. This labor of love demanded four years of unwavering commitment, with each day stretching twelve hours to achieve completion.

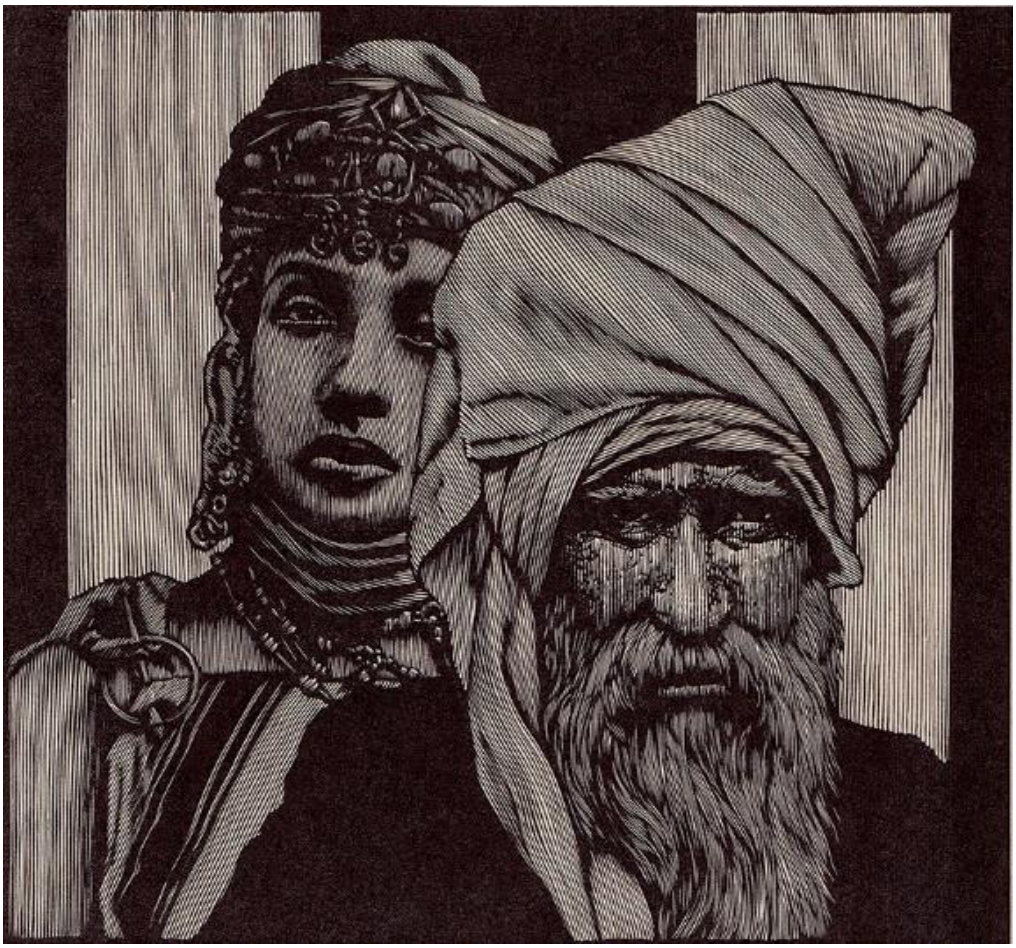

Figure 7. Hosea and Gomer, 7.25×7.25 in, Relief engraving (The PRC Bible)

When approaching the book of Hosea, Moser's artistic choices are deliberate and compelling. He depicts both the titular figure, Hosea, and Gomer, as central character in the narrative. Unlike other illustrations seen earlier, this engraving transcends mere scene-setting; it captures a poignant narrative moment. What sets this work 'Hosea and Gomer'[96]apart is the direct engagement it fosters with the viewer. Both Hosea and Gomer lock eyes with the observer, inviting them the unfolding drama. Hosea's gaze is penetrating and disturbing, imbued with a sense of inquiry and sincerity evident in the subtle furrow of his brow. Moser deftly manipulates light to emphasize this contrast: Hosea's features are illuminated, while Gomer's appear more subdued, enhancing the visual dialogue between the characters.

Hosea's plain tunic, devoid of texture or detail, stands in stark contrast to his elaborate headgear, which exudes grandeur and significance. This juxtaposition invites speculation: is the oversized headgear symbolic of Hosea's wisdom and age, or does it represent the weight of the prophetic message he carries, a burden paid for with personal sacrifice? Gomer, on the other hand, is

[96] www.moser-pennyroyal.com. Last accessed on 19.05.2024

adorned in opulent attire, her patterned tunic and ornamental headgear suggesting a life of luxury and indulgence. This portrayal diverges from previous artworks, prompting reflection on the price she may have paid for her freedom and involvement in the prophetic narrative. Her gaze, carried by tired eyes and tilted head convey a sense of introspection, hinting at inner turmoil and contemplation.

Moser's deliberate choices in attire and posture imbue the illustration with layers of meaning, inviting viewers to ponder the complexities of the characters' lives and the burdens they bear. The stark contrast between Hosea's simplicity and Gomer's extravagance underscores the thematic tension between duty and desire, faithfulness, and temptation, adding depth to the portrayal of these biblical figures.

Gomer's depiction is notable for its partial visibility: half of her left eye remains concealed, suggesting a sense of mystery or hiddenness. This obscured gaze prevents her from seeing fully, while also limiting the viewer's complete perception of her. However, her completely exposed lips hint at unspoken thoughts or words waiting to be voiced, adding an intriguing layer to her character. An interesting contrast emerges as Moser partially obscures Hosea's mouth, perhaps symbolizing an invitation for Gomer to speak, metaphorically calling her from the shadows. Unlike Moser's other illustrations, which boldly portray female nudity (See Rahab, Tamar, Oholah and Aholibah), Gomer's depiction is more restrained. Rather than exposing physical attributes, Moser chooses to reveal Gomer's eye and mouth, emerging from Hosea's shadow and engaging directly with the viewer, quite figuratively to a visual exegesis.

3.3.3 Cody Miller

The first one of a series of three paintings that depict the story of Hosea. Cody F. Miller, a versatile mixed media artist, delves into the theme of grace through his intricate works, employing techniques such as cut paper, printmaking, and painting. Miller's art mainly portrays individuals on a journey, grappling with the complexities of light and darkness as they seek a sense of belonging. Central to his work is the exploration of grace and he claims that he captures the essence of longing and hope, depicting individuals navigating through moments of pain and exile, yet holding onto the promise of return. With hands open, offering light amidst darkness, Miller's subjects embody resilience and the transformative power of grace, echoing Mary Oliver's profound sentiment that even darkness can be a gift. Through his art, Miller seeks to

illuminate the beauty found in moments of kindness, inviting viewers to contemplate the profound mysteries of life and human resilience.[97]

Figure 8 Hosea and Gomer

In Cody Miller's painting, "Hosea and Gomer," a striking interplay of light and shadow captivates the viewer. The focal point is Gomer, positioned at the center in vibrant red, evoking themes of passion, desire, and potentially moral ambiguity. Hosea, situated to the left, commands attention with his imposing stature and attire adorned in divine hues of blue and green, wielding a staff symbolizing biblical authority. While both his hands are visible, only one of Gomer's is showing her lack of agency? His gaze averts from Gomer, whose modern attire may symbolize contemporary relevance or a timeless narrative of human frailty. The composition's sharp strokes delineate the figures and objects with precision, while the ominous darkness on the right, embellished with skulls and metallic bones, adds a foreboding element to the scene.

[97] https://www.codyfmiller.com/pages/artist-statement

Gomer is positioned amidst this juxtaposition, seemingly pulled from the darkness towards the light. It is Hosea who embodies resilience, not Gomer. Her subjugation, symbolized by a deeply bowed head, emphasizes her profound need for grace. The greater the shame, the greater the grace. Symbolically, elements like the butterfly and the rose, located at her stomach, suggest a narrative of transformation and rebirth. Additionally, the presence of the butterfly further reinforces this motif of metamorphosis, while the placement of the butterfly between her legs adds another layer of symbolism. In essence, these elements collectively represent the interplay of three key characters: God, Hosea, Gomer and an unknown figure. The fusion of God and Hosea into a single entity echoes the role of the prophet as a conduit for divine communication, as depicted in the biblical text. Thus, through the visual language of the painting, Miller effectively communicates the intertwined destinies of these characters and the overarching themes of redemption and spiritual enlightenment. Indeed, what struck me the most was the stark contrast between the figures in the picture, particularly their coloration—some in black and white, suggestive of death, while others retain elements of vitality. However, it was the peculiar imagery surrounding the figure on the right-hand side that truly captured my attention. Upon closer inspection, there appears to be a curious amalgamation resembling both a sinister mouth with teeth and a form reminiscent of female genitalia—an unsettling juxtaposition that adds an eerie dimension to the composition. Additionally, my attention was drawn to the imagery on the right-hand side of Gomer, which bears a resemblance to pomegranates. This association brought to mind the myth of Persephone and Hades, wherein a ‘married’ Persephone consumes six pomegranate seeds, leading to her entrapment in the underworld for six months each year. Demeter's longing for her daughter's return is shadowed by Persephone's transformation, reflecting themes of change and unease. The pomegranate, symbolic of Persephone's journey and fertility, holds cultural significance across various traditions. Its seeds, resembling garnets, have medicinal associations and reflect the doctrine of signatures. This intricate fruit's symbolism extends to medieval tapestries, where it represents both captivity and fertility.

Figure 9. Gomer and Hosea

The description provided for this painting by the artist reads as follows:

> ‘Hosea’s wife Gomer had gone and sold herself as a slave. Hosea found out that she had also been intimate with a number of other men along the way.
>
> They’ve been home for a couple hours and Gomer sits there *not knowing what to say* or do. He pauses from his work when he hears her *say* his name, in this rasping broken voice. From *the way she says* it, it’s all he can do to keep from falling to pieces. Then for the first time in what seems like ages, he touches her. He lets her know that he’s in this thing for the long haul. At that moment, she knows that in his heart of hearts this old prophet really does love her.’[98]

The reversal of names in the title, "Gomer and Hosea," from the conventional "Hosea and Gomer," evokes the image of Gomer stepping forward to switch positions: is htis. Now, she occupies the space on the ‘other side of Hosea’. Does this suggest the story is being told from her perspective, or does it hint at her return? What does the play of light suggest—is her return still shrouded in darkness? However, the title's placement of Gomer first doesn't necessarily amplify her voice or provide her perspective. Instead, it seems to maintain Hosea's centrality in

[98] https://www.codyfmiller.com/products/gomer-hosea?_pos=2&_sid=92485061c&_ss=r. italics added for emphasis.

the story. Miller’s attribute for Gomer, particularly her utterance of Hosea's name, is significant. Yet, this moment, while dramatic, could be interpreted as a token gesture rather than genuine empowerment. By giving Gomer a voice, albeit briefly, Miller acknowledges her presence and emotions. However, the reassertion of Hosea's narrative dominance following this instance suggests a continued marginalization of Gomer's perspective. Thus, while Miller attempts to depict her agency, this effort may ultimately reinforce existing power dynamics within the narrative.

It's not just about the physical act of bringing someone close; it's about the intention behind the gesture. Cupping someone's face with both hands, for instance, conveys a sense of intimacy and care—a gesture that could easily be misconstrued in certain contexts as a "me too" moment. The composition seems designed to enclose the image, with his hand uncomfortably squeezed into the bottom line, creating a somewhat aggressive meeting of the hands. The placing of the hands could use a softer effect. Despite the physical contact, there's a sense of tenderness in this portrayal, yet it lacks the feeling of unity. Gomer's gaze extends beyond Hosea, and he, in turn, does not seem to be looking directly at her. This contrasts with the medieval depiction, where physical touch is absent, but love is represented symbolically in subtle ways. Unlike the overt displays of affection common in modern portrayals, medieval manuscripts often depict love through nuanced gestures, highlighting the delicacy of such moments of touch.

The deliberate placement of the hand in the contemporary depiction serves a dual purpose: it functions both as a compositional device to prevent the viewer's gaze from wandering off and as a stabilizing force amidst the downward visual flow. This is accentuated by the artist's use of a deep, intense background, contrasting sharply with the pale complexion of the figures, thus creating a striking counterpoint. This technique, known as counter form, capitalizes on the stark contrast between light and dark to enhance the visual impact of the composition.

3.4. Concluding remarks

In conclusion, our exploration of Gomer's character portrayed through various artistic mediums has shed light on the potential for opening up spaces for silent voices within the text. Throughout this journey, we've observed recurring themes such as betrayal and restoration, which have been symbolically represented through elements like the pomegranate or the

imagery of trees, resonating deeply with storytelling traditions. In Miller's modern portrayal of Gomer, there is an intriguing invitation to identify with the figure of Gomer, yet it comes with limitations. While his artistic rendition captures aspects of Gomer's essence, it also falls short in fully encapsulating the depth of her character. The portrayal seems to lack substance, leaving fundamental ideas about Gomer somewhat underexplored.

However, despite these limitations, the artistic interpretations of Gomer serve as a testament to the enduring fascination with her story and the complexity of her character. Through these artistic endeavors, Gomer's narrative continues to evolve and find new avenues of expression, offering fresh insights and perspectives on her journey of betrayal and redemption. In concluding our exploration, it's evident that portraying Gomer through artistic mediums grants her a voice that might have otherwise been overlooked. Throughout Chapter 2, we encountered themes such as sacrifice and restoration, symbolized by elements like the pomegranate or the trees, which have rich storytelling traditions. Miller's depiction of Gomer offers an invitation for identification, yet it falls short in capturing the depth of her character and the fundamental ideas associated with her. One can consider space and its 'taking' as described by Ellen van Wolde in the context of these images of Hosea and Gomer, particularly focusing on the symbolism of their hands. While there are numerous depictions of Hosea, images of Gomer alone are scarce. This raises the question: does Gomer become the subject of her own discourse? In some ways, she does; in many ways, she still doesn’t.

Van Wolde’s concept of space and its occupation can be applied to understand the dynamics between Hosea and Gomer as we ask who occupies the central, dominant position, reflecting his role as the prophet and the primary agent of action and grace. Gomer, on the other hand, is frequently depicted in relation to Hosea, her presence and identity shaped by her interactions with him.

The hands, a crucial element in many depictions, can symbolize power, agency, and subjugation. Hosea’s hands might be shown extending in forgiveness or holding Gomer’s hands in a gesture of grace and redemption. Gomer’s hands, however, might be shown in positions of supplication or acceptance, reflecting her need for grace and her subordinate position. The scarcity of images of Gomer alone underscores her marginalization and lack of independent agency in traditional depictions. Even when she does become a focal point, it is often within the context of her relationship with Hosea, not as an autonomous individual. This lack of

independent representation suggests that Gomer’s narrative is still largely controlled and framed by Hosea’s story.

Thus, while Gomer steps into the frame and begins to occupy space, suggesting a move towards becoming the subject of her own discourse, this process is incomplete. She remains, in many depictions, a figure defined by her need for redemption rather than as an independent subject with her own narrative agency. The interplay of light and shadow in these images further illustrates her journey from shame to grace, indicating that while she is stepping out of darkness, her return and transformation are still ongoing and not fully realized.

Analyzing the visual representation, we can observe elements highlighted from the biblical narrative, such as Gomer's role in the story and the dynamics of her relationship with Hosea. However, as we have seen, certain aspects were downplayed or overlooked, potentially diminishing the complexity of her character or the significance of certain events. The artists have addressed gaps or unanswered questions within the text by offering their interpretation or exploring themes that are not explicitly detailed in the biblical account. In some instances, the artists have introduced additions to the biblical narrative, whether intentional or not, which hold emphasizing elements that hold less significance in the original rendition. This can lead to a more nuanced exploration of the story as far as artistic representation is concerned, shedding fresh light on certain aspects, either positively or negatively.

Conclusion

The figure of Gomer belongs to a category of voices silenced by the author/redactor and traditional interpretive practices in text reception. Since the first feminists began challenging these methods and inquiring into the text to 'redeem' Gomer, considerable discussion has emerged. Despite this, a significant lacuna remains regarding the perception of Gomer within the book of Hosea and her contribution to the prophetic narrative. Early interpretations, particularly those surrounding her name or the unfounded claims of her involvement in cultic prostitution, verge on epistemic violence in addition to the sexual violence she is already subjected to. This is evident in the way various commentators have approached the epistemological context of her name.

We aim to establish a hermeneutical framework that facilitates a closer engagement with silenced voices, enabling a reoriented hermeneutic gaze toward the figures that artists have depicted. This engagement includes examining the treatment of Dinah's rape in Genesis 34 by scholars such as Blyth and Exum. Their empirical approach, reflecting the perspectives of sexual violence victims, helps readers relate to the character. Additionally, the literary theme of 'sacrifice' in the story of Jephthah’s daughter aids in exploring the autonomy and agency of the silenced figure. An enquiry was undertaken into whether these themes and ideas find resonance in art reception or if Gomer is once again silenced by the artist's brush.

A brief look at manuscript illustrations from the early medieval period, Barry Moser’s biblical illustrations, and Cody Miller’s work on Hosea and Gomer reveals that Gomer is not always silenced by the artist’s brush and yet the canvas requires more room for representation. The manuscript illustrations often keep Gomer as a central figure alongside Hosea. Recurring themes of restoration appear, and one notices that the artist, in keeping with tradition, is also often trying to convey thoughts beyond the text. She is not, at least always, depicted as someone subjugated by Hosea.

While Gomer begins to step into the frame and occupy space and moves within it, indicating a partial shift towards becoming the subject of her own discourse, this transformation remains incomplete. The persistent lack of independent representation highlights that her narrative is still largely overshadowed by Hosea’s, illustrating the ongoing journey from subjugation towards autonomy and grace. Art reception can further this transformation by reinterpreting

and reimagining Gomer's role, offering new perspectives that foreground her experiences and agency, throwing open more spaces for dialogue, more stories to be told.

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