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Kelle, Brad E.

Hosea 2: Metaphor and Rhetoric in Historical Perspective

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Hosea 2 is an incredibly rich but puzzling text that is normally treated simply within the context of Hos 1–3, despite strong indications that the passage (or at least parts of it) originally formed an independent unit that was later integrated into the book of Hosea (J. Jeremias, *Der Prophet Hosea* [ATD 24.1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1983]).

In this revised version of his Emory Ph.D. written under the supervision of M. J. Buss and G. O’Day, Brad E. Kelle aims at doing justice to the complexity of Hos 2. He identifies four inherent difficulties that call for further examination: “1. the possible rhetorical situation(s) that gave rise to the text; 2. the extent of the rhetorical unit(s) within Hos 2; 3. the basic form(s) presupposed by and reflected in the text; and 4. the meaning and background of the chapter’s major metaphors” (2). Methodologically he combines rhetorical criticism and metaphor theory to gain new insights into the text of Hos 2. In contrast to previous works in rhetorical criticism, he is not concerned with a study of particular stylistics but employs the Aristotelian notion of rhetoric as the art of persuasion (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.2 [1355b]).

After two introductory chapters reviewing some aspects of previous scholarship on Hosea and setting out the theoretical framework for the investigation as far as classical rhetoric

and metaphor theory is concerned (here Kelle follows the insights gained by M. Black, I. Richards, G. Lakoff, and M. Johnson), the book is divided into two main parts. Part 1 investigates the metaphors used in Hos 2, while part 2 offers a close reading of the rhetoric of the chapter.

In the first part of his study, Kelle focuses on the marriage metaphor (ch. 3); the metaphors of the wife/mother, fornication, and adultery (ch. 4); and the metaphors of lovers and Baal(s) (ch. 5). He uses a wide variety of comparative material to argue against the influence of a Canaanite fertility cult in Hos 2 and is able to conclude that, in regard to the marriage metaphor, the primary image base for Hos 2 is to be found in ancient Near Eastern marriage and divorce practices (78). Furthermore, he argues that the wife of Hos 2 should be seen not as Israel but rather as Samaria, a concrete city. The language of adultery (נאף) and fornication (זנה) must then be seen as referring to political alliances. This view is further expanded in chapter 5, where Kelle treats the language of love and Baalism. On the basis of ancient Near Eastern treaty material, אהב in Hos 2 is seen not as a reference to the worship of other gods but to political allies. This view has, of course, implications for Kelle's treatment of Baal in Hos 2. He argues against the existence of (widespread) Baal worship in eighth-century Judah and proposes that בעל in Hos 2 also refers to political alliances but creates a comparison between them and religious apostasy (165). Therefore, he opts to translate בעל as "paramour" rather than "lover" or "partner."

In the second part of his study Kelle turns to the rhetorical context of Hos 2. Here Hos 2:1–25 is seen as a single unit—despite the problematic beginning with ויהיה in 2:1 and the obvious secondary additions introduced by ביום־ההוא in 2:18 and 2:23, which Kelle views as marking a "new section within the same discourse and a new address to or situation for the same addressee" (273). In a way, the rhetorical analysis confirms the results of the investigation in the metaphors. Hosea 2 emerges as a strong statement for loyalty to YHWH. As such, Hos 2 represents a "theological and metaphorical commentary on the political affairs of Samaria and their implications for the people of Israel and Judah at the close of the Syro-Ephraimitic war.... The text's genres, metaphors, and traditions find a suitable rhetorical-historical context in this set of circumstances yet work together to demonstrate how intimately the political and religious spheres intersect in the prophet's rhetoric and theology" (292).

Despite the detailed and carefully structured argument of the book, several questions remain. Kelle wants to explain the text's multifaceted structure by using insights gained from classical rhetoric. This is a fascinating idea and a methodological step that promises fresh insights into the biblical material. Unfortunately, in his treatment of rhetoric, Kelle relies almost exclusively on secondary literature; few primary sources are quoted, and there is no extensive treatment of the views on rhetoric in the ancient sources themselves.

Rather than offering an interpretive model derived from the sources, Kelle reads the text through the lenses of modern interpreters of rhetorical devices—his original intention is in danger of getting lost. Also, one misses the rich traditions of Greek legal oratory that could have yielded interesting insights into Hos 2:4–25, especially since Kelle is always aware of the legal ramifications behind the divine speech. Kelle is certainly right to stress the importance of the rhetorical-historical situation, but it remains questionable whether such an imagined situation is a static entity. Rhetoric can be fluid and can be updated or applied to different situations using rhetoric. There is really no need to postulate literary unity within a certain passage when one looks at it through the lenses of ancient rhetorical criticism. If rhetoric is defined as the art of persuasion, could it not be possible that later authors used similar devices to add new persuasive aspects to an older text?

I do agree with Kelle that one must try to locate the text in a historical situation, but since Hos 2 does not provide us with any historical allusions, one must ask what rhetorical intention is served here. Right from the outset the text is dated to the period of the so-called Syro-Ephraimitic war and linked to the affairs in Samaria: “Hosea 2 can fruitfully be understood as the prophet Hosea’s metaphorical and theological commentary on the political affairs of Samaria and their implications for both Israel and Judah around the time of the close of the Syro-Ephraimitic war (731–730 B.C.E.)” (20). This presupposition is never really questioned. While it is undoubtedly correct that some passages in Hosea relate to this event, Kelle never takes into account the possibility that Hos 2:4–25 could have been composed as a reaction to other (older) parts of the book (H. Pfeiffer, *Das Heiligtum von Bethel im Spiegel des Hoseabuches* [FRLANT 183; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999], 210–12)—this is especially surprising since he notes in his careful exegesis of the passage the many allusions to texts such as Ezekiel and Jeremiah. Also, the text itself is not set to any particular time within the prophecy of Hosea: “The intended readers are not asked to tie it to any singular historical event or circumstances” (E. Ben Zvi, *Hosea* [FOTL 21; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005], 71). I think a rhetorical analysis of the text under scrutiny is still possible, even if one does not opt for a concrete historical situation. Is it not a striking feature of Hos 2 that it can be placed, read, and understood in almost every historical situation? Kelle frequently notes this ambiguity in his analysis and political reading but then opts for a dating already given by the superscription in 1:1. If the biblical prophets (or at least the author of Hos 2) can be seen “as public orators, who used speech to address audiences in specific historical situations, in order to persuade them to some action on the basis of theological belief” (293), one must ask why Hos 2 is not more specific, since the book demonstrates in later parts (5:8–9:9) that such specific allusions are possible.

Nevertheless, Kelle should be thanked for drawing attention to the close relationship between religion and politics in ancient society in general and prophetic discourse in

particular. Furthermore, interpretive models derived from classical rhetoric promise to be an exciting new avenue of research for investigations into prophetic discourse, and one is grateful to Kelle for reminding us of the Greek interpretive framework.