Bonds of Love: Methodic Studies of Prophetic Texts with Marriage Imagery (Isaiah 50:1-3 and 54:1-10, Hosea 1-3, Jeremiah 2-3)

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CHAPTER 3

On Method

‘Aber auch “Prophet” ist eine leicht irreführende Übersetzung der nawi, der Kundgeber zwischen Himmel und Erde [...] “prophezeit” nicht, er hatte nicht eine feststehende Zukunft anzusagen, sondern seine Hörer vor die Alternative zu stellen’. 1

1 A synchronic approach

1.1 Introduction

How to read prophetic texts? 2 This chapter will deal with that question. It will not only sketch the methodological issues involved but also develop a model of interpretation and a set of instruments which are helpful for the analysis of prophetic poetry.

In principle my reading strategy will be synchronic. The final text is the point of departure for the analysis and is approached as an unified whole. This has several implications.

In the first place it means that the significance of the final text is not limited to small literary units but relates to the present sequence of units. To read a text synchronically entails reading it within its immediate literary context. This remark is related to form criticism, a method within the historical-critical school that has been very influential in the study of prophetic texts. Form critics focus on small literary units and the ‘genres’ that these units display. They have the tendency to regroup units according to literary genre, since meaning in their view is predominantly related to the genre of a text section. The side effect is that within form criticism the literary context of a text unit is relatively neglected. 3 In appreciation of form criticism it may be emphasized that form critics have focussed on the final text form in contrast to the atomizing tendencies of literary criticism. Form criticism is still valuable in giving a first orientation within a prophetic text. A problem with this method, however, is that texts are forced into

2. ‘Prophetic’ is used throughout this book as a designation for the texts which belong in the Hebrew canon to the Latter Prophets, i.e., the books Isaiah-Malachi.
a model into which they only partly or imprecisely fit. The specific characteristics of a text run the danger of being disregarded, as the correspondence of a text with a general model is the central point of interest.

In the second place, the adoption of a synchronic approach means that I will not work from a preconceived notion concerning the origins of a text. The assumption, for instance, that the book of Hosea dates from the eighth century, has the capacity of permeating the interpretation of the text in every detail – and has actually done so – and that means that one assigns an incomparably large influence to text-external factors. That is not what synchronic means. In a synchronic approach, a text is looked upon as a world in itself and as a system of elements which are meaningful in relation to one another rather than in relation to extra-textual reality, be this the reality of the author or of a historical situation. Here the influence of structuralism makes itself felt. In a structuralist perspective, meaning is sought in the function of elements within the text, in the relations of correspondence and contrast between these elements and thus in the patterns of structure within the text.\(^4\)

To state the same in a more general sense, I view the biblical texts primarily as presentation rather than as representation of a certain reality. This principle entails that no direct relation can be assumed between elements, persons and events in the text and extra-textual reality. There is nothing ‘behind’ the text that is in this stage indispensable for its meaning. The texts are not regarded as a secondary account of some primary revelation, an event in history or of the intention of the author. They do not inform us about ‘how things went’ but about ‘what is true and false, promising and devastating in the world of prophecy’. In some form this principle of seeing a text as a reality in itself rather than as a reflection of other realities is central to all synchronic approaches.

It is, finally, necessary to say a short word about the role of the reader. Synchronic studies occasionally are presented as objective and strictly text based. But structures do not simply emerge from a text. The contribution of a reader, who organizes several observations into patterns of structure, is always required. Hence, the synchronic studies presented here make no claim of being objective or final. The only claim made is that these interpretations are verifiable with respect to the underlying paradigm of interpretation and with respect to their primary point of orientation: the text. If they open up some new perspectives and offer some new insights into these ancient texts, the effort has been worth while.

### 1.2 Prophets or poets?

A synchronic approach has specific consequences for the study of prophetic texts. The person of the prophet, for instance, recedes into the background when studied as a literary character. It plays a minor role in many of the prophetic writings. Often the repeated identification of the speaker is absent and the prophet as a biographical figure is far from elaborated. This holds particularly for most of the twelve minor prophets but in another sense it also applies to Deutero-Isaiah.

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4. For an introduction to structuralism see Abrams, Glossary, pp. 103-107 and 280-282 (with further references).
From a literary perspective these prophetic writings consist of a collection of sayings which switch from one saying to another without any reference to the prophet.\(^5\)

For this reason Carroll has qualified the prophetic writings apart from their superscriptions as ‘anthologies’ and ‘poetic collections’. The material in these writings may occasionally be characterized as ‘oracular and visionary’ but in principle it is ‘poetic’ in nature.\(^6\) The books traditionally known as prophetic literature may thus more adequately be described as poetry. How can the character of this poetry be further defined? In the view of Carroll:

Describing the figures usually called “prophets” as poets is a relatively problem-free description in that there can be no disagreement that individuals such as Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah or Ezekiel were poets. The speakers of the oracles in the anthologies we call “prophetic” literature were clearly poets. That is indisputable. All other descriptions are highly disputable. [...] A common feature of these poetic collections is the open [...] hostility shown towards social institutions in ancient Israel. The fierce denunciation of every aspect of social and religious life, king and temple, sacrifice and prayer, worship and values, indicate that these poets were social critics operating with a high level of theory. They may even have been social reformers putting forward radical critiques of society and arguing for a serious change in the life of the people.\(^7\)

It is exciting to see how Carroll here rethinks the category of prophet with respect to the so-called prophetic writings. His focus on ‘individuals such as Amos and Hosea’ and his implicit identification of ‘speakers’ and ‘writers’ need to be reconsidered once one focuses on the final text instead of on realities beyond the text, but the views expressed here nevertheless imply a paradigm switch in the interpretation of prophetic texts.\(^8\) This switch involves a shift of attention from the prophet as person and speaker of oracles to the prophetic text as a literary work. The primacy of the figure of the prophet is replaced by that of the presentation and shape of the final text.

This entails that one has to redefine the prophetic character of these writings. At least, one must depart from the assumption that the prophetic element in these writings is vested in the idea that the texts faithfully reflect ancient oracles spoken by a historical prophet. Instead, it is to be sought in the presentation of

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5. Cf. R.P. Carroll, ‘Inventing the Prophets’, *IBS* 10 (1988), pp. 24-36. Carroll (p. 27) points out that apart from Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos and Jonah there is a ‘stark absence of internal naming of the speaker’ within the prophetic books. Without the names mentioned in the prefaces, most of the remaining prophetic books ‘would be anonymous’!


8. The term paradigm switch is borrowed from T. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (International Encyclopedia of United Science vol. 2 no. 2), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970\(^2\). In Kuhn’s definition a paradigm ‘stands for the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques and so on shared by the members of a given community’ in a particular field of science (p. 175).
the subsequent material as prophecy. In other words, by the introduction of a prophet or visionary functioning as intermediary between God and the people in the first lines of the book the reader is informed that what is to follow should be taken as an inspired word within the living tradition of prophecy, following the examples of Moses and Elijah. To borrow another phrase from Carroll, these books were *shaped* into the kind of book that the redactors believed, or wished, that a prophetic book should look like.\(^9\)

A significant impulse to the synchronic study of prophetic texts was the essay of Carroll on the superscriptions of prophetic books. In this article Carroll works from the assumption that the superscriptions are secondary to the body of prophetic material. He points out that in general the relation between the superscriptions and the following material is rather loose, due to the lack of the prophet's name and other information concerning the prophet within the body of material. This is not true for all prophetic books to the same extent, as the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos and Jonah contain narrative material concerning these prophets, but even in these books there are parts without a clear relation to the 'prophet' mentioned in the superscription.\(^10\) According to Carroll, this suggests that the superscription is not a summary of information that has been extrapolated from the body of material, but that in a number of cases the superscription has the effect of ‘inventing’ the biblical prophets. The editors who attached the prefaces to the collections were creative and constructive writers and actually ‘helped to invent the ancient prophets as biographical figures’.\(^11\)

That is a radical hypothesis which could change the study of prophetic texts completely. The view of Carroll implies, for instance, that the superscription of a prophetic text may be interpreted as a reading direction for what follows and as an indication of genre rather than as a piece of historically accurate information. Another implication is that one can no longer situate distinct text sections of a prophetic book within a biographical scheme, as though the text sequence corresponds to the sequence in which the prophet spoke his oracles. Both the sequence in a text and the idea of a prophet who spoke oracles are textual constructs which cannot be simply copied on to extra-textual reality.

Within the frame of his paper Carroll does not specify to which particular books the thesis that superscriptions ‘invent the prophets’ applies. His suggestion is that the whole theory needs more analysis and further pursuit. It seems to me that particularly the minor prophets are good candidates for testing the theory that the colophons are creative, editorial shapings which set the body of the book within a certain perspective.\(^12\) Although the views of Carroll have by no means gone unchallenged, it is interesting to note that a number of recent studies in the area of prophetic texts converge with what is set out above. Barstad in a survey article (1993) lists a number of studies which abandon the traditional focus on the

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12. The word ‘editorial’ may be put between brackets. While Carroll (‘Inventing’, pp. 25-27) works with the model of a collection that is already existent and a superscription added at a secondary stage, it is also conceivable that the body of material was composed in addition to and simultaneous to the superscription.
prophet as a historical figure and set out to interpret the texts from a text-immanent starting point, frequently with surprising and innovative results. The studies he mentions concern the books of Isaiah, Second Isaiah, Micah and Jeremiah, and according to Barstad 'share the common belief that there is little or nothing to be learnt about pre-exilic prophecy' on the basis of these books.\(^\text{13}\)

The last quotation illustrates that synchronic studies of prophetic texts can make a valuable contribution to diachronic questions as well. As a matter of fact, it is the conviction of the present writer that a primarily synchronic approach offers the best possible entrée for diachronic considerations.

1.3 Synchrony versus diachrony

What is the motivation for a synchronic approach instead of the traditional historical approaches? This question is often passed without notice but it offers the opportunity to recall some fundamental insights and decisions in relation to synchrony.

There are both principal and practical reasons for a synchronic approach to prophetic texts. In the first place there is a literary argument, which maintains that every text deserves attention in its present form. Content is not separately available but found in the interplay of form and content. Furthermore, in line with literary criticism in general, the text itself constitutes the primary setting from which the elements in the text may be understood. Attention to the connections between the text and extratextual reality belongs to another level of interpretation. Then we move into the sphere of authors, historical realities and revelations which may be reflected in the text but in principle lay outside the scope of the text. For this reason it is important to make careful distinctions between synchronic text study and the exploration of connections between the text and the extra-textual reality.

The genre of historical novels may serve to illustrate that the analysis of the text-internal reality needs to be strictly separated from the analysis of the text-external reality. This genre shows clearly that there should be an order of interpretation which moves with caution from one stage to another without confusion of the distinct stages and without a premature transferral of elements within the text to elements in the extra-textual reality. It constitutes a permanent warning to make no hurried identifications between the time in the text and the time of the text or between persons in the text and persons responsible for the text.

In the second place there is an historical argument for a synchronic approach. For the historian the mixture of historical inferences and literary observations that characterizes many existent interpretations of prophetic writings is highly

\(^{13}\) Barstad, ‘No Prophets?’, pp. 42–43. Barstad offers some points of critique with respect to the views of Carroll (pp. 44–60). He argues that there is still a good deal to learn about ancient Israelite prophecy 'from the so-called prophetic books of the Bible, even if the phenomenon found here is not identical with the phenomenon of prophecy in ancient Israel, which will have to be reconstructed' (p. 46). His point is that the prophetic books after all 'reflect the phenomenon of prophecy in the ancient Near East' in terms of the role and function of prophets within society (p. 52).
problematic. On what basis can it be assumed that there was an eighth century prophet named Hosea? The historian needs counterevidence from an external source to confirm this information before she can accept it as historically accurate. Since such evidence in the case of Hosea is not available, the historian will conclude that the historical reliability of Hosea 1:1 is, according to her standards, beyond verification. In other words, the historian will confess nescience with respect to this issue. That does not mean that the historical accuracy of the superscription must be totally ruled out: it will still be taken into consideration but as a hypothesis. That historical accuracy in the case of prophetic texts is an hypothesis rather than an evident truth is probably one of the best-hidden secrets in the field. However, the idea that the superscription of Hosea offers historically accurate information is an hypothesis and is one way to bridge the gap in historical knowledge about these writings and their origins. That gap is there and should be faced before being tacitly solved. In the words of Carroll:

We simply do not know who collected or wrote these [prophetic] books or even what the connections are between the putative speakers in these traditions and the colophons which introduce them. [...] All this ignorance reflects a nescience which scholars might more frequently acknowledge rather than passing on as if it were knowledge!14

A different hypothesis about the relation of text and history is also conceivable, and it can pave the way for another procedure for gaining historical knowledge in relation to the biblical texts. This is the hypothesis that the biblical writers skilfully made use of elements from history in order to present their material in a specific way, with a result that fulfilled a particular role in the literature, society or religion of ancient Israel. In this view the final text is the primary point of connection between text and reality and is regarded as the main access to historical matters.

It is important to dwell a moment on the distinctions between these two hypotheses, the one seeking to gain historical knowledge via the historical accuracy theory and the other via the historical roots of the final text. The fact of the matter is that they focus on a different sort of historical dimension. According to these approaches, biblical texts can have a historical dimension in more than one sense. The first hypothesis is concerned with the historical accuracy of the text and the way in which the text reports about previous events and persons existing in the world outside of the text. For the sake of realism a prophetic book in this view is usually not assumed to be historically accurate in its entirety but is said to possess at least an 'original core'. The second hypothesis is concerned with the historical setting of the text and the function of this text in the time and place of its origin. The distinction between these two approaches thus lies in the focus on historical elements within the text, on the one hand, and the focus on the historical aspects of the text, on the other hand.

Another nuance needs to be brought in. The fact that every text has its roots in a particular time and place in history is not neglected by the advocates of the first approach. Attention is paid to the final redaction and its historical setting as

well: these, however, are not attributed with primary significance when it comes to historical matters. The primary entrée to historical issues remains the assumption that the text displays 'some' form of historical accuracy. The origins of the text are thus not a matter of discussion and open research but of preliminary decisions, dependent on the primary assumption that the texts reflect historical events. The distinctions between the two approaches sketched here are thus not a matter of an unhistorical versus a historical perspective but rather are a matter of priority: where does one start in order to gain historical knowledge?

The question for the historian is which of these hypotheses is a more fruitful starting point in order to gain historical knowledge. Is that the starting point of a one-to-one relationship between text and reality? Or is it the starting point that a text, no matter how freely it deals with historical matters, is itself a historical product with roots in a particular time and place? A hypothesis is successful if it is appropriate to the material and is in some sense probable, if it can be tested and if it leads to controllable results.

It appears that the hypothesis of a one-to-one relationship between text and reality can only remain a hypothesis. It cannot be tested as to its probability and appropriateness. The free treatment of historical elements elsewhere in the biblical corpus is another complication, so that altogether this hypothesis is rather unsatisfying to the historian. That the text itself has an historical background is a solid fact. That texts can be studied for their historical background and function in a particular situation is clear as well. This hypothesis thus can lead to results which can be checked by careful comparison with elements in the texts. It gains in explanatory force from the fact that it can be applied to all texts from the biblical corpus and from the fact that groups of texts appear to display similar concerns and settings. For example, a number of prophetic and deuteronomistic texts seem to circle around the constitution of the post-exilic society, and different books fit into this picture, although it is still far from complete. That suggests that the hypothesis that something about history can be learned from the final text is fruitful and useful.

As a result, the final text seems the most viable starting point for historical considerations. In that sense there is also a historical argument for a synchronic approach to texts. This does not mean that synchronic approaches by definition have a bearing on diachronic issues. That is not and need not be the central interest of all such interpretations. But if progress is to be made in the field of history, it seems that it will come from a combination of synchronic and diachronic approaches, as two distinct stages in the process of interpretation.

15. The contradictory information about the killing of Goliath is a classical example of the disregard for historical accuracy and of the employment of elements from history for a literary purpose (cf. 2 Sam. 21:19 and 1 Sam. 17). Numerous other examples could be mentioned.

16. I am referring here to what may be called the 'sociological' form of historical criticism practised by among others Davies and Carroll, who place the emphasis on the function of the biblical literature in the society in which it originates. See P.R. Davies, In Search of 'Ancient Israel' (JSOTS 148), Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992, and the formative work of M. Smith, Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament, London: SCM Press, 1971.

17. According to Carroll, 'Inventing the Prophets', p. 31, the only source for solid historical knowledge lies in the final text and the utmost concern of the historical-critical scholar is to try to find out 'what the biblical writers were trying to do' in the production of their texts.
In this book I will usually provide a broad indication of the time setting in which I situate the texts under consideration. That is done for two reasons: the dialogue with other scholars necessitates that a stance is taken in these matters and in view of the majority of diachronical approaches it is illuminating to point out the new perspectives that emerge from primarily synchronic text interpretations.

2 Prophecy as literature: poetry and speech

2.1 Prophecy as poetry

Prophetic literature has essentially the form of poetry. With the exception of narrative sections in the books of Jeremiah, Jonah and Hosea, this general characterization seems to be appropriate. At this point it is important to develop a more precise understanding of the characteristics of the poetry found in prophetic texts.

Poetic texts at first sight can make a mysterious impression. There is a scarcity of words and a richness of ambiguity. Rapid switches and sudden transitions occur from one theme to another. Images tumble over each other and follow upon one another without a clear connection between them. As a result, meaning in poetry often is a complex and elusive matter and hard to grasp for inexperienced readers.

From a formal point of view, the presence of poetry is recognized by the feature of versification. Verse potentially brings along other features, such as parallelism, metre and rhyme. In Hebrew poetry not all of these features are equally evident, but versification is there and the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia reflects this in the layout of prophetic texts.

These two features of style and versification do not account completely for the characteristics of poetry. Poetry is more than a matter of style and versification: it is a distinct literary genre and as such it has a number of fundamental qualities which distinguish it from the other two classical genres, drama and narrative. In terms of genre two major features are characteristic of poetry. First, the speech situation in poetry is such that there is only one speaker. There is no alternation between various spokesmen, as in narrative or drama, and in most cases other actors are absent anyhow. The speaker presents the poem predominantly from one perspective and as a monologue. The implication is that the development of meaning can lie only in a variation of vocabulary and in changes and shifts made by the speaker within the text, and not in the interaction between different speakers and different actors within the text. Prophetic texts are somewhat atypical in this respect, as they have the character of a dialogue rather than a monologue and imply some interaction between speaker and audience (see below), but at the same time the speeches in prophetic texts come essentially from Yhwh and in that sense may be qualified as monologues.


Second, poetry does not have a story as its content. A story is technically defined as a series of logically and chronologically connected events. The absence of a story has a strong effect upon the character of poetry, since it implies the absence of a number of other story-related elements as well. Poetry thus lacks the presence of actors and events and must do without a clear sense of development as in drama or narration. In exchange for these missing elements, poetry usually shows many forms of figurative and innovative language which achieve a special rhetorical effect. To summarize these characteristics of poetry:

- Poetry is marked by a specific style that is reflected in a scarcity of words and a density of figurative language.
- Poetry contains no story and no actors apart from the main speaker. It does not display an evident progression in content, place or time between the situation at the beginning and at the end of the poem. In a sequence of poems, as found in prophetic texts, a development may be discernible but only in a quite specific sense, such as the notion of dramatic progression which will be employed with respect to Isaiah 40-55 indicates.
- Meaning in poetry does not lie in actions carried out by actors but in changes and transitions within the speech, such as shifts of topic, mood or perspective within the poem.

This is not a full description of the poetry in prophetic texts, but it provides a basic sense of how poetry differs from narrative texts. Meaning and development in meaning are not related to actions of the major characters but to changes in speech. A change from one perspective to another, from first person to third person speech, from one topic to another, or from one semantic field to another are significant clues for meaning. Things happen in another fashion in poetry than in drama and narration. Progression and development in a prophetic text often take the form of the repetition of a central theme in different wording and with slightly different nuances. The development is more of a gradually unfolding nature than of a linear one. In the enterprise of interpretation it is essential to examine in detail the correspondences and differences between one line and another and between one section and another. On the whole, these reflections sufficiently illustrate that poetry requires another approach than do narrative texts.

2.2 Prophecy as speech

Prophetic texts present a special kind of poetry – poetry which in its final shape has the form of speech and of direct address. The texts are full of language that does not only describe but also appeals, commands, exhorts, admonishes and comforts: Hear Israel! Go out from Babylon! For a brief moment I abandoned you but with great compassion I will gather you! How can you say: I am not

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20. See Luxemburg. *Literatuurwetenschap*, pp. 157, 222-236. A story is technically defined as ‘a series of logically and chronologically connected events’ (p. 195) and an event is the ‘transition from one state of affairs to another’ (p. 196).

defiled, I have not gone after the baals? Such forms of direct address, questions, imperatives and arguments are a prominent feature of prophetic texts.

These forms of direct address have a particular effect: they create the impression that the speaker in the text speaks directly to the contemporary hearer. The historical and spatial gap between the speaker and the contemporary audience seems to disappear and the latter receives the impression that he or she is the one that is addressed. The suggestion is that the speaker and the contemporary hearer are situated in a shared here-and-now and are involved in a speech exchange. The effect of such forms of direct address is thus that readers almost automatically become involved in the text.

The principle of the following interpretation is that if a text has the form of an address it must be studied as an address. That entails that prophetic texts should not be read as descriptions of situations but as forms of speech intended to appeal to an audience. The speech may be designed to confront, to correct, to encourage or to reorientate the audience. In every case an audience is implied and in every case a certain measure of interaction between the speech and the audience is evident. This audience so to say is the other half of the speech situation. This would suggest that the audience of the prophetic speeches is a category significant for the interpretation. The analysis of this audience, in terms of its initial and final position and specific profile, is an indispensable factor in the interpretation of prophetic texts. Such an analysis, I would claim, is complementary to the analysis of form and content and is an essential part of a synchronic analysis of prophetic texts.\(^{22}\)

Caution is necessary, however. Audience is a complex category and one must distinguish between various sorts of audiences. Strictly speaking, the ‘direct’ communication between the speaker in the text and the contemporary reader is imaginary: it is a literary effect created by the text and the consequence of a specific presentation of material. In principle, the addressee of the speeches in the text is primarily a textual category, which receives a particular shape, identity and profile in the text. In Isaiah 54, for instance, not simply any Zion but a particular Zion is addressed within a particular literary setting. This Zion is a fully literary character that is involved in a particular ‘drama’ and cannot be identified beforehand with any Zion in historical reality. Although the text may at times seem to address the contemporary reader and may seem to offer the opportunity for readers to step ‘into’ the text, the audience of prophetic speeches remains primarily a textual construct.

As a textual construct, however, the audience of a prophetic speech always has a specific profile. It is therefore appropriate to ask: what are the contours of this audience? The speech is supposed to have an effect on the audience. What is it supposed to do to this audience? The audience is not static. How does it change? Such questions contribute to the comprehension of a text since they focus on the communication between speaker and hearer which is a particularly vital element in these texts. Meaning in these texts is a matter of interaction between speaker and addressee rather than only a matter of form and content of speech.

\(^{22}\) In theory every text can be looked upon as a form of communication. In prophetic texts, however, this element of communication is prominently visible within the text.
Is such an analysis of the audience also relevant when one studies only a small section of prophetic texts? Yes. It remains important to analyze the audience in these cases and to pose the question: what is this text supposed to do to an audience? It subsequently remains for a contextual analysis to see how this ‘audience’ relates to other audiences in preceding or subsequent passages.

### 2.3 Different sorts of audiences

I have already hinted at the fact that it is impossible to identify the addressee within the text directly with the contemporary or the historical reader. The situation is more complicated. Forms of communication take place both *within* the text and *between* the text and the reader. Therefore it is necessary to make a distinction between different sorts of audience in and outside of the text. I distinguish three types of audience:

A. the primary audience of a prophetic speech  
B. the implied audience of a prophetic speech  
C. the contemporary reader.

These categories will be described in this order but it can be indicated in advance that the *implied* audience represents the most crucial addressee of prophetic speeches. This is the audience to which the speaker attempts to communicate something. For a large part this implied audience coincides with the primary audience. That does not apply in all cases, however, and that makes it necessary to distinguish this primary audience from the implied audience.

The term *primary audience* designates the most direct addressee of a prophetic speech. It coincides with the person or group that is spoken to in the text in the second person singular or plural. It frequently consists of Israel or of a group within Israel but may also consist of other entities, such as foreign nations or cities. In Hosea 2:8 it consists of a female person whose way is barricaded and who may be identified as the ‘wife’ of Yhwh (Hos. 2:4). In Isaiah 54:1 Zion is addressed, although no name is mentioned, and the city is conceived of as a female person who is brought from a state of ravage to a state of repopulation and reunion with Yhwh.

Two elements are characteristic for this primary audience. In the first place, the identity of this primary audience may vary from passage to passage. While the addressee in Isaiah 54 is a second person singular female, identifiable as Zion, the addressee in Isaiah 55 is a second person male plural. Such variation in address is quite frequent in Isaiah 49-55 but also occurs, for instance, in Jeremiah 2 and 3 in a rather subtle shifting between a male and a female addressee. The naming of specific addressees as ‘priests’ and ‘sons of Israel’ in Hosea 4:1 and 5:1 is a sign of a more outspoken variation.

A second characteristic of this primary audience is that it may vary in function. To address someone in direct speech does not imply that the addressee always fulfills the same role. A speaker may challenge and argue with an addressee but may equally announce actions that will be carried out with respect to this addressee. In the second case the addressee functions as object rather than as
partner in dialogue. In other words, either the persuasive or the performative aspect can dominate in the discourse. \(^{23}\) Jeremiah 2 is an example of the former, Hosea 2:4-25 of the latter. It is possible to recognize in these distinctions a correspondence to some of the major genres in prophetic speech as outlined by form criticism. In disputation and trial speeches speaker and addressee are engaged in a debate. This genre can be found, for instance, in Jeremiah 2 and Isaiah 50:1-3. In salvation oracles and proclamations of judgement, on the other hand, the addressee is predominantly object and part of the events with little choice. This pattern is recognizable in Hosea 2:8-15.\(^{24}\)

This last element is precisely what distinguishes the primary audience from the implied audience. While the primary audience can occasionally function as object within a prophetic speech, the implied audience is never only object. The latter is the audience that is addressed by the prophetic speech, even when the language temporarily is descriptive or when the primary addressee is part of a series of events. In such cases the implied audience is the audience that is confronted with the events that happen to the most immediate addressee.

This category of implied audience has to do with the fundamental character of prophetic texts. Prophetic speech is essentially not descriptive but communicative. It is speech to an addressee and that addressee is supposed to respond, to perceive things differently and to change. Prophetic words are appeals to take decisions, to move in a different direction, to envisage a different world. The addressee of such appeals is the implied audience. This audience often coincides with the primary audience but occasionally stands at a little more distance and consists of a community that somehow identifies with the implications of the described events for Israel. Thus on the level of the implied audience, descriptions of future salvation or judgement are never only descriptions. Such texts also have a rhetorical purpose, in the sense that they must convince Israel that it has a future or in the sense that they confront Israel with the fact that the nation's present is not as it should be, implying an appeal to change. Lastly, prophetic texts are not out to state how things are but how they could be. This aspect relates to the implied audience.

How can this audience further be described? The occurrence of the word 'Israel' in the text is a significant clue for establishing the profile of the implied audience. Most logically 'Israel' in some form constitutes the implied audience. In terms of what the text implies about its audience, one thus needs to be alert to how this community is depicted in the text. It may be characterized, for instance, as 'harlotrous', 'ravaged' or 'afflicted', and such qualifications offer significant information about the starting position of the text and thus about its meaning.

I view the implied audience entirely as an element within the text, that is always qualified in a specific sense. Even though it may bear a name that corresponds to realities outside the text, the 'Israel' that is addressed is not a

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\(^{23}\) The concepts 'performative' and 'persuasive' have different backgrounds. The notion of persuasion belongs traditionally to the field of rhetoric (cf. Abrams, Glossary, pp. 180-181). The idea that language and discourse can have a performative aspect is known from Hebrew grammar and has been brought to the fore in a new way in the speech-act theory of John Austin (Abrams, Glossary, p. 278).

\(^{24}\) The major prophetic genres have been described by C. Westermann, Grundformen prophetischer Rede (BEvT 31), München: Kaiser Verlag, 1978. See further chaps. 4-6 of this book.
historical category, in the sense that it exists prior to and apart from the texts. The texts provide a coloured picture of their audience that functions within a literary setting. The implied audience – as well as the primary audience – is thus a reality on the level of the text and a textual construct.

The implied audience may also be described in a more theoretical sense. This is done by Conrad in his book on Isaiah. Conrad defines the implied audience as a ‘theoretical construct implied or encoded in the text’ that represents ‘the interpretative process “invited by the text”’. In the view of Conrad, the oral character of the text leaves no doubt about the communication purpose of the text. This makes it indispensable to focus on the implied audience and on what the book itself divulges concerning the nature of the audience that it addresses, particularly since this implied audience may occasionally appear in the text, speaking as a first person plural (‘we’). Conrad’s conclusion is that the ‘audience of the book [Isaiah] is a community of survivors with minority status’. It is interesting to note that Conrad formulates this rather broadly. He focuses on a ‘community’ that is characterized in a particular way. This indicates that he also regards the implied audience as a textual rather than a historical category. In his treatment the implied audience is a synchronic category into which hearers of the present can enter.

This brings me to the final category mentioned above, the contemporary reader. The contemporary reader is in time far removed from the prophetic writings. This position of distance may imply that the exegete only wants to reveal the audience with which the text interacts for the sake of a historical quest. Yet in my perspective the contemporary reader also qualifies as audience. He or she may occasionally identify with the implied audience and recognize the issues of the text as issues for contemporary life. That does not imply that the contemporary reader must accept all aspects of the text as contemporary. Every reader must define his or her own position and decide what is meaningful in the text. In order for readers to do so, however, it is necessary to have sharp insight into the concerns and themes of the text and the sort of audience with which the text communicates.

Diagram of the communication within the text and between text and reader

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[A]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X priests you (Zion) you (2.masc.plur)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S = speaker Z = contemporary reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X = primary audience A = framing voice found in the superscription,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y = implied audience presenting the material</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.4 Other communication-oriented approaches

It is appropriate to situate my approach briefly among other communication-oriented approaches. In my reflections two forms of communication are central: the communication between speaker and audience within the text and the communication between text and reader. The category of the implied audience forms the bridge between the two forms of communication, although the contemporary reader does not by definition coincide with the implied audience.

This approach contrasts to the approach of Gitay who focuses on the element of persuasion in prophetic texts. In his view, the prophets shape their message 'in order to achieve a pragmatic goal, namely, to appeal to their listeners and to communicate effectively with them'. They or their texts want to persuade. This assessment induces Gitay to study Isaiah 1-12 from a rhetorical perspective. Rhetorical criticism is the study of the 'means of persuasion' and in this case it is the study of the communicative character of prophetic speech. I differ from Gitay in two respects. His approach is not strictly synchronic. He tends to identify the audience within the text with a historical audience that is already there and the speaker within the text with the historical prophet Isaiah. In the second place, his concentration on the element of persuasion in the text fails to do justice to performative aspects in the text and to the different sorts of audiences that are addressed in the text.

The threefold distinction between primary addressee, implied audience and contemporary reader is also found in the drama approach of Leene to Deutero-Isaiah. I will illustrate below how fruitful this distinction is with respect to Isaiah 40-55 (see chapter 4). The attractiveness of this threefold distinction lies in the fact that it makes it possible to give full weight to both the performative element, that something happens and takes place in the text, and to the persuasive element in prophetic texts, that something is communicated to an audience. In the second place, the distance between the contemporary reader and the implied audience is preserved, which reflects the awareness that neither in theory nor in practice can text-internal and text-external factors be simply identified. Such identification can result from the invitation to do so and from a willingness to do so but is not something to be taken for granted.

Finally, it should be clear that the distinction that I propose between three sorts of audiences is a theoretical model. I make no claims about the historical audience or about the original setting of the prophetic writings. The only interest behind the three categories of audience distinguished here is to take into account the speech dimensions and communication purpose of prophetic texts in a reflected manner.

29. Cf. Gitay, Isaiah, p. 6: 'Isaiah must take into consideration his audience's situation, their feelings, their political and religious attitudes which he is seeking to affect'.
3 A model of interpretation

Some practical tools are necessary for the interpretation of prophetic texts. The approach that will be followed here consists of five stages. Every stage is marked by a different outlook on the text and by the application of distinct tools:

- The first step is to make a subdivision of the text into sections
- The second step is to perform detailed word studies
- The third step is to search for identical or related words constituting a central motif in the text
- The fourth step is to find one or more central contrasts in the text
- The fifth step is to study the text from a communication perspective

In practice these steps do not always all have the same significance. When one deals with a longer prophetic text, the accent will be less on the details and more on the whole (steps 3-4). A shorter prophetic text, on the other hand, will provide more opportunity for a number of detailed word studies (step 2). Below every stage will be described more fully. A tacit assumption is that the context and literary setting of a text play a significant role in the interpretation as well. At this point, however, I will concentrate on the interpretation of a text unit within its own boundaries.

Stage 1: the subdivision of the text in sections

Various elements in a text may function as indications of the beginning or conclusion of a section. Two classes of such elements can be distinguished: linguistic and literary elements. Linguistic elements which mark a subdivision in the text can be verbal forms, macrosyntactic indications and remarkable word order. Literary elements that mark boundaries of sections in the text can be changes of address or of speaker, the appearance of opening or closing phrases, the distribution of key words, patterns of inclusion or chiasmus within the unit and numerical features. Last but not least, the Masoretic separation markers, the setumot and petuhot, can also be helpful indications of structure.

While the literary elements listed here require little comment, the interpretation of linguistic elements as indications of structure needs some elaboration. In this respect I use the work of Schneider as my point of orientation. Schneider maintains that it is appropriate to examine grammatical phenomena, such as the verbal system, clause types and conjunctions, as to their function within the text. Schneider regards these phenomena as means of structuring the communication between text and reader and as indications which provide the reader with a sense of orientation within the text.

In terms of the verbal system this has the following implications. Prophetic texts consist predominantly of discursive rather than narrative speech. In such texts yiqtol forms are the main tense. These forms indicate strong involvement

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between speaker and hearer with respect to what is being said.\textsuperscript{32} Qatal and weqatal forms are both secondary in discursive texts. These forms indicate perspective and refer either to the future (weqatal) or to the past (qatal). The weqatal forms usually appear in close connection to yiqtol forms and do not necessarily indicate a decrease in the involvement between speaker and hearer. Qatal forms, however, express that there is no intense communication between speaker and hearer. The speaker employs such forms in order to offer background information or to make a summarizing comment. Such forms, therefore, occur frequently in introductory and relative clauses.\textsuperscript{33} In light of this theory, a change in verbal forms may indicate a subdivision in the text.\textsuperscript{34}

Further a number of particles and phrases can have the function of marking the beginning or conclusion of a section. As examples of elements with a macrosyntactic function Schneider points to phrases such as וָֽיֶּ֖הְּגָּלֹ֣ת, הָֽיֶ֖הְּגָּלֹ֣ת and מִֽיָּמִ֣י לְ֑הוֹדֹת, which function as opening or transition signals in discourse.\textsuperscript{35} Interestingly, Schneider emphasizes the unfinished character of his reflections about macrosyntactic signals in discourse. He points out that in this respect the overlap between form criticism and linguistics needs further reflection.\textsuperscript{36} Form criticism has sorted out a number of phrases which regularly occur in prophetic speech to indicate the beginning or conclusion of a speech section, including phrases such as וַלָּאֵ֙ל מֵאָ֣מָר מֵאָ֣מָר מֵאָ֣מָר מֵאָ֣מָר מֵאָ֣מָר מֵאָ֣מָר מֵאָ֣מָר מֵאָ֣מָר מֵאָ֣מָר מֵאָ֣מָר מֵאָ֣מָר מֵאָ֣מָר מֵאָ֣מָר מֵאָ֣מָר מֵאָ֣מָר מֵאָ֣מָר מֵאָ֣מָר מֵאָ֣מָר מֵאָ֣מָר מֵאָ֣מָר מֵאָ֣m, מֵאָ֣m and מֵאָ֣m. These elements play a key role in defining the limits of the distinct genres and speech sections, but do not occur in discursive texts outside of the prophetic literature. In prophetic texts, however, such formulas frequently have a macrosyntactic function (see Hosea 2).

Finally, marked word order can be an indication of structure. Especially the occurrence of nominal clauses within a context with primarily verbal clauses calls for attention. Such clauses may have the function of concluding a section or introducing a side comment, particularly when in combination with a qatal form. By definition nominal clauses ‘do not report an event but contain a comment upon a noun’ and for this reason nominal clauses often mark a pause in the speech flow and function as a transition or a closing signal in a discursive text.\textsuperscript{37}

\textit{Stage 2: detailed word study}

The meaning of a word is a far more intriguing topic than it may appear at first sight. Words have several aspects which contribute to their significance and they


\textsuperscript{33} Schneider, \textit{Grammatik}, § 48.3.2.

\textsuperscript{34} Leene (\textit{Vroegere Dingen}, pp. 31-32) offers a helpful illustration of these interpretations of the imperfect and perfect tense in discursive speech. According to him yiqtol forms express an appeal to participation. The impact of these forms would be: look, what is happening! Mark what I am doing! Qatal forms serve to introduce new facts or to present side effects, comments and other elements of perspective. With respect to such qatal forms one may virtually add interjections such as ‘meanwhile’ or ‘and so it appears that’ in order to understand the emphasis laid within the text.

\textsuperscript{35} Schneider, \textit{Grammatik}, § 54.1.

\textsuperscript{36} See Schneider, \textit{Grammatik}, § 54.0.4 (footnote 3) and 54.2.4.

\textsuperscript{37} Schneider, \textit{Grammatik}, § 44.2.2.
can be looked upon from a variety of angles.\footnote{For this section see B. Kedar, \textit{Biblische Semantik: Eine Einführung}, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1981; S.C. Dik & J.G. Kooij, \textit{Beginselen van de Algemene Taalwetenschap}, Utrecht/Antwerpen: Het Spectrum, 1972, pp. 158-174 (chaps. 19-20).} Two major distinctions within the discipline of semantics may be recalled here. In the first place one can distinguish paradigmatic and syntagmatic aspects, or lexical and contextual components in the meaning of words. The lexical meaning is that given by the lexicon. The contextual meaning is that shaped by the specific literary setting in which the word occurs. Both give a different perspective on the word and are complementary aspects of the actual meaning of the word.

This suggests that one should not blindly follow the lexicon to discover the meaning of words. Lexica usually offer a broad set of possible meanings, which are necessarily abstract and imprecise. The interpreter needs to specify the intention of the word with help of the particular context in which the word occurs.

In the second place, one can distinguish between the meaning (sometimes: sense) and reference of a word. The meaning of a word is its semantic content based on the dictionary and the contexts in which it occurs. The reference of a word is constituted by the particular action or object that the word refers to within its context.\footnote{For this distinction see Dik & Kooij, \textit{Beginselen}, pp. 158-159.} Note that the term reference does not refer to elements in the extratextual reality but to the specific content and import of a word within the text. As illustration one may take the verb כָּבָד in Isaiah 50:2 in the phrase: ‘Why was no one there when I came?’. The lexical meaning of the verb is clear, but it is far from clear to what sort of ‘coming’ the verb refers in this verse. Does it mean ‘to come to trial’, ‘to come to stay’ or ‘to come to take away’? Can the location of this coming be established as being either in Zion or in Babylon? Such questions make a significant contribution to the comprehension of a word and go beyond the purely linguistic meaning of a word. These two general points show that the meaning of words in many ways surpasses the lexical meaning.

How is one to proceed in order to get more grip on a word and on its meaning potential? In this respect it is helpful to take a diversion into linguistics. Linguistically, language can be studied on four levels: phonology, morphology, semantics and syntax.\footnote{Cf. Abrams, \textit{Glossary}, pp. 103-107.} This distinction in levels corresponds to the components of a word: a word has sound aspects, form and grammatical aspects, content aspects and syntactic aspects. An important insight is that the meaning of a word is not only related to the content aspect of the word. Sound and syntax may be equally relevant for the meaning of a word, such as, for instance, when two lines are bound together by a parallelism. The parallelism indicates that the lines belong together and explain one another and in that sense it bears meaning.

A second insight within semantics is that the content aspect of a word is not as simple as it looks. The content aspect is always a combination of many components, depending on the angle from which it is approached. The word כָּבָד, for instance, means ‘man’ but has several semantic components such as ‘living’, ‘male’ and ‘personified’. The meaning of the word כָּבָד is thus of a composite nature. The word does not only carry the meaning that is the sum of all the semantic aspects, in this case the meaning ‘man’, but it also carries meaning in the sense of what sort of word it is, viewed from different perspectives. This linguistic
background provides us with an understanding of the different perspectives from which words can be viewed in order to establish its meaning potential.

Two guidelines may help to employ these insights in practice. First, it is helpful to investigate to which other words the word under consideration is related, both in the specific text in which it occurs and in general. One searches for closely related terms, not only on the level of content but on all of the four linguistic levels just mentioned. The aim is to find correspondences between this word and others in terms of:

- The sound of the word
- The morphological type of the word (noun or verb type, endings, conjugations)
- The syntax (parallelism)
- The content (synonyms, antonyms, related words, fixed word pairs)

It is clear that the category of content is one of the most important categories. Reflection upon the semantic environment of a word by exploring synonyms, antonyms and compatible words enriches one’s understanding of the word considerably. If one wants to explore the content aspect of the word still further, one may try to situate the word within a semantic field — a set of words and terms that are semantically related. This second guideline entails that one may ask questions such as the following:

- Which words are synonymous or compatible to the word in question?
- Which words are contrastive and opposite to the word?
- Which are the settings in which the word occurs and the connotations that it evokes?
- Is the word associated with a particular genre?
- What sort of word is it? Does the word relate to a particular area of human life, e.g., to agriculture or politics; does it fall into a specific category, such as toponyms or personal names; does it contain a specific element of meaning shared by other words in the same text?

The purpose of these explorations is to find connections between the word under consideration and other words in the text and thus to detect similarities and contrasts. The underlying assumption is that one can only find meaning in a text by finding elements of correspondence or elements of contrast among the various words. If particular words appear to share a common element of meaning or form a contrast, this may point to a central motif within the text.

It is clear that it is impracticable to make such an exhaustive semantic investigation for every word. The function of this list of questions is merely to stimulate the reader by pointing to the multidimensionality of words and to the manifold ways in which a word in a text can be meaningful. It remains important to state that the purpose of such an investigation is not only to increase the attention

41. The principle of F. de Saussure that all meaning is a matter of relation and difference is my point of orientation here. This claim of De Saussure has become a central feature of structuralist and semiotic approaches to literature (cf. Abrams, *Glossary*, pp. 105, 275-277).
for nuances of meaning in one word but also to encourage the search for elements of connection between words in the same setting. For it is only when one recognizes groups of words within a text with a common element of meaning that one can establish meaning in texts.

**Stage 3: groups of words in the text**

A text does not consist of words in isolation but of words in combination with each other. Without relationships and connections between words, there would be no coherence in the text. The links between words can be of two sorts – similarity or opposition. Both of these types of relations bring about coherence in a text. More specifically, coherence is a matter of the recurrence of elements of meaning within words. The reader, therefore, must look for words that bear a common element of meaning and bring these words together. It is thus essential to form groups of words. This can be done in three ways.

In the first place the reader can form groups of words that are identical. This means that a text is scrutinized for words that occur more than once and the most significant words to which this applies are recognized as being particularly meaningful. Following Buber, these words may be called ‘Leitworte’ or key words. The function of these words is to point to a central line of meaning within a text. The focus on key words is generally productive but in the absence of word repetition this strategy is inapplicable.

In the second place the reader can form groups of words that are not strictly identical but which do have correspondences in meaning. Such words with a close relation in meaning, whether synonymous or not, can indicate a prominent aspect in the text. The connection between such words may be of the kind that they have a common element of ‘joy’ or that they have a common relation to ‘the promised land’. Such groups of words may constitute a motif in the text. Motif is here defined as a key concept in the text which summarizes the common element of a group of different and yet related words.42

In the third place the reader can form groups of words by focussing on a certain general quality that words may have in common. This approach concentrates on sorts of words. For instance, the reader can take all words together that express movement, that refer to a time or place, that refer to a specific area of human life and so on. Together such words may express a particular accent in meaning and may point to a typical motif within the text as well.

**Stage 4: central contrasts in the text**

Semiotic approaches to literary texts work from the assumption that texts, like meaning in a more abstract sense, are composed around central oppositions. Awareness of such oppositions enables the reader to discern developments within the text. This idea of oppositions reflects the view that texts are not monotonous and one-dimensional entities but always include difference, change, movement.43

42. A group of words with a common semantic element may also be called an isotopy, cf. Lacene, Vroegere Dingen, pp. 27-30.

In this stage the reader must order all of the observations made so far and select a central theme or a few central thematic elements around which other meaning aspects can be arranged. A choice must be made between the elements that are most fundamental for the overall picture and elements that are less significant. It is vital that the central themes not be formulated in static terms ('God's power'). If one wants to do justice to the idea that there is a certain dynamic and a certain purpose of communication within the text, it is more appropriate to focus on contrasts within the text and to formulate the themes in the text in terms of a contrast. This may result in the formulation of themes such as 'from ravage to restoration', 'power or lack of power?' and so on. Such dynamic phrasings reflect that there are differences and oppositions in a text and offer the reader the possibility of becoming involved in the text.

Stage 5: study of the text from a communication perspective
In this stage the threefold distinction between the primary audience, the implied audience and the contemporary reader, as developed in sections 2.2 and 2.3 of this chapter, will be applied. On the basis of the foregoing stages and in view of central contrasts in the text, the communication purpose of the text with respect to the implied audience and the contemporary reader will be investigated. As regards the contemporary reader, no final claims will be made but only the possible effects of the text upon the reader will be indicated.

4 Translation and presentation of the material
Finally three remarks must be made about the presentation of the texts. I have provided new translations which are based on the principle that one Hebrew word is rendered as much as possible by one and the same English word. This may occasionally make the translation a little wooden but it has the advantage that word repetitions in Hebrew are reflected in the translation to the largest possible extent. On the other hand, sometimes variation is inevitable, as in the case of the verb בֵּית in Jeremiah 2-3, which occurs in this text with many shades of meaning.

Furthermore, I have taken the decision to translate the plural בַּנְיָן as ‘children’ rather than ‘sons’. This relates particularly to expressions such as בַּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (children of Israel) and בַּנֵי Judah (children of Judah), but the same practice will be followed for the word בְּנֵי in other construct states (Isa. 54:1, Hos. 2:1). An exception would have to be made for cases in which the word בְּנֵי occurs in juxtaposition to the word בְּנֵי (daughters) but such exceptions do not occur in the texts studied here. The reason for this translation practice lies in the desire to employ inclusive language when there is reason to interpret the original expressions in an inclusive sense. My argument is not that the word בַּנִּי means ‘child’ in expressions such as בַּנְיָן, but that it usually is intended to include both men and women in its point of reference, although only the male category is explicitly mentioned. By adopting this practice, I have no intention to obscure the patriarchal background of these expressions, but I wish to avoid perpetuating this element from the biblical texts in the translations of these texts. I am aware that
this is a matter of interpretation and principle, rather than of translation in the pure sense.\textsuperscript{44}

The translation of the text is presented in colons or poetic lines. This layout reflects the system of Masoretic accents and indicates the smaller units of meaning within the verse. It is helpful for the reader in order to gain a first understanding of the text.

\textsuperscript{44} For further comments upon the principle of inclusive language, see the preface of the NRSV (1989).