Who is the woman? Strategies of reading the woman in Hos 2:4ff[1]

I. Introduction

The question "who is the woman" in Hos 2 has puzzled biblical scholarship for a long time. Commentators have been discussing the historical prophet`s relationship to his "harloterous wife" as well as the relationship between the marital image in Hos 1, 2 and 3. While commentators usually have omitted the complex depiction of the woman in Hos 1-3 by cutting her out due to redaction critical analysis or relativizing her provocative capacity informed by bourgeois standards[2], feminist scholars have been focusing more closely on the depiction of the *woman* that oscillates between various images.

As much as feminist studies on the *woman* in Hos 1-3 are distinct from androcentric commentaries, also the results within feminist biblical scholarship differ. In the following, I will present the analysis of Marie-Theres Wacker and Yvonne Sherwood, in order to sketch out how different epistemological premises (such as notions of feminism, methodology, text, relationship between text and reader, relationship between text and interpreter) lead to diverse results of the same matter. Based on these observations, I plan to establish the case for an epistemological study on the reception history of Hos 1-3.

II. 1. Wacker's analysis of Hos 2:4ff

In her study Wacker employs a variety of methodologies including synchronic-structural analysis, literary criticism, kolometric and tradition-historical analysis as well as feminist criticism: According to Wacker's synchronic analysis, the final text of Hos 1-3 is presented as a rounded up composition that spans from the times of the kings (1:1) to the end of days (3:5). Wacker, however, emphasizes that only in this final composition the *woman* in Hos 2:4ff can be read as a metaphor for apostate Israel that is -in light of Hos 1:2- equated with the "children"/"land".

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[1] This paper is to be understood as a work in progress, which presents my initial questions in regard to my doctoral project, which I have only started in June 2009.

[2] Cf. Sherwood, Yvonne, The prostitute and the prophet. Hosea`s marriage in Literary-Theoretical Perspectives (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), chp. 1. Wacker, Marie-Theres, Figurationen des Weiblichen im Hoseabuch (Freiburg: Herder, 1996), chp. 2.

Focusing on the woman as subject she highlights different layers within the depiction of the *woman* in Hos 1-3. According to Wacker, it is possible to excavate traces of goddess worship and of religious practices of women from the different layers within the text. Wacker, furthermore, highlights that the final composition of Hos 1-3, has to be investigated in light of Hos 4-14, for Hos 1-3 serves as a secondary introduction to the prophetic speech (4-14*). Therefore she emphasizes that the sexual metaphoric has to be seen as critique of cultic and political practices that are in Hos 4-14 characterized as a misuse of patriarchal authority [3].

Based on her synchronic reading of the final composition, Wacker identifies the *woman* in Hos 3 as the perspective which the text assigns to the reader: Rejecting the prevalent, androcentric biased presuppositions that equate Hosea`s marriage with YHWH`s relationship to Israel described in Hos 2, Wacker highlights, that Hos 3 does not mention a reconciliation of the *woman* and her husband.[4] Focusing on the *woman* under the premise that she might be a separate literary entity, Wacker is able to point out that only the children – not the children and the *woman*- are affirmed to be reconciled (3:5). Thus, she points out that while the children (3:5), serve as a metaphor for the eschatological reconciled Israel. This means, that Israel in the image of the *woman* remains in the position of harlotry respectively apostasy. Hence, the addressee of the criticism and the final reconciling affirmation (4-14*) is Israel depicted in the image of the "harlotrous woman".

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[3] Wacker points out that in Hos 4-14, the root זנה is not specifically related to women, but denotes a misuse of patriarchal authority that refuses the "knowledge of God". As a social consequence of this misuse especially women and other people subjected to the authorities in Israel are victimized. Cf. Wacker chp VI. Esp. 2.2-2.4.

[4] Hos 3 rather presents two different images of Israel on the material level: 1. the image of the "children" as the addressees of an "eschatologischer Heilszusage" (v. 5) and 2. the woman as a representation of the addresees that are confronted with the prophetic speech (4-14). On the metaphorical level, in which Israel is depicted as a *woman*, Israel remains in the image of the harlot. Pointing out, that the verb ישׁב alludes to the characterization of harlots waiting for men (cf. Gen 38:14; Jer 3:2) Wacker undermines her observation. In contrast to Israel's depiction in the image of the "children", whose reversion to YHWH is described in v. 5, Israel, depicted as a *woman*, is kept in a waiting position. She is described as being stuck in the middle of a transition process (3:4): her former life is sought to be brought to deadlock by the speakers demand to ישׁב for "many days" as well as by the two prohibitions, which aim to inhibit her (sexual) activity (3:3). Her new life, however, has not yet started. Thus, the image of the unreconciled woman – as well as the introduction of the prophetic "I"- is seen as the link between Hos 1-3 and 4ff. Consequently, Wacker highlights that the perspective of the woman becomes the readers perspective in Hos 4ff.

In her diachronic literary analysis Wacker identifies various layers in Hos 2:4-25, which display various polemic engagements with the figuration of the feminine: According to Wacker Hos 1:2 appears to be the focal point in the final composition of Hos 1-3, to which 2:4ff and 3:1ff refer. According to Wacker's redaction critical analysis Hos 3:1-4* and Hos 1:2 is the product of the same author, who is at the same time regarded as the composer, who linked Hos 1-3 to Hos 4-14: In Hos 1:2 and 3 the woman is juxtaposed with the children. In this compositional layer both literary entities are seen as representatives of Israel. The differentiation between the *woman* and the children in Hos 3:2ff, with regards to the eschatological *Heilszusage*, only serves as link between Hos 1-3 and 4-14.

Comparing the depiction of the *woman* in Hos 2 to Hos 1:2 and 3, Wacker recognizes, that while Hos 3 and Hos 1:2 juxtapose the *woman* and the children on a metaphorical level as representations of the apostate "children"/"land", Hos 2 clearly presents a different picture of their relationship. On a synchronic level, she observes that in the course of Hos 2:4-25 the *woman* embraces more and more a level of reality that is distinct from the divine speaker as well as from the children: 1. Wacker notices that Hos 2:4ff presents an attempt to separate the children from the *woman*. In Hos 2:4ab *she* is explicitly characterized as their mother, while both, the relationship between the divine speaker and the children as well as the relationship between the divine speaker and the mother remains unclear. The speaker only states, that there is no relationship between him and the mother of the children (2:4cd). However, he calls the children up to take his side and plead against their mother (2:4ab). In Hos 2:25 the children are finally taken over by YHWH. 2. In 2:4cd the distance between the woman and the speaker is expressed: a) by the gender-specific polarity between "man" and "woman", which is supported on the syntactic level by an antithesis, b) by the reversal of a marital formula that expresses a non-existing relationship between the speaker and the woman. 3. While the children are directly addressed in 2:4ff the woman is only addressed indirectly. 4. Moreover, the threats against the woman appear in light of Hos 1* as a reversal of the life-giving role of the mother: while the mother in Hos 1 has given birth to three children and has been breast feeding them, she is threatened to be relocated in the state of her own birth and caused to die of thirst (2:5). 5. The observation that the *woman* belongs to a

reality that is distinct from the divine speaker and the children is also corroborated by the overt gaze on the woman's body that demonstrates the fascination with her otherness as well as the will to control her. 6. Wacker, furthermore, points out, that it is striking, that the paralyzing of זנה and נאף in Hos 1-3, which represent juridical terms for adultery, unlike the occurrence of זנה in Hos 4-14 - in which a misuse of patriarchal authority is criticized- hint to a critique of a female, who resists patriarchal control.

According to Wacker, all these observations suggest, that the level of the final composition of the book exhibits a conflict between YHWH and a competing female force. This female force, which is also prevalent in Hos 4-14,[5] is more and more alienated from the children/ Israel and replaced by YHWH.

In her diachronic analysis Wacker identifies Hos 2:4a-d.7*.10f to be the basic form of the text, which presents a lamenting-accusing proverb that has been included alongside with Hos 1*: While Hos 2:1-3 presents a *Heilszusage* addressed to the children/Israel, Hos 2:4 is distinct from the previous verses, for it shifts back to the image of a problematic family situation[6] in Hos 1*, that culminates in the speaker's call to the children. In a doubled imperative introduced by the verb ריב, the children, are request to plead against their mother (2:4ab). Hos 2:4cd, however, appears to be incoherent to Hos 2:4ab and e, for the speaker all of a sudden appears in the 1st person singular. Based on the recognition of an analogous structure in syntax and content, Wacker suggests, that Hos 2:4cd was formulated in analogy to Hos 1:9c-d[7], and therefore has to be regarded as a later addition. Also Hos 2:4e-5, is singled out, because Wacker perceives incoherences in regard of syntax, style and content: 1. the image of a mother (2:4ab) is turned into the image of a harlot (2:4e-5), 2. unlike Hos 2:4ab and 2:6: not the children (or their relationship to their mother) but the *woman*, depicted as a harlot, is the centre of interest. 3. incoherence is also noticed in literary style: 2:4e-e'.5a-b presents as a unit because of its poetic style, in which every verse is rounded off with an end rhyme. 4. According to Wacker also the phonetical arrangement which connects Hos 2:4ee',5ab, as well as the peculiar focus on

[5] Cf. Wacker, chp. 4 (esp. 263-297).

[6] Drawing up on Wünsche's distinction between ריב ב and ריב ל, Wacker, like Blankenbaker and Andersen/Freedman, argues – against Wolff- that Hos 2:4 does not allude to a juridical case, for the usage of the term ריב ב in the Hebrew bible rather points to conflicts within a family situation (Judg 6:32; Gen 31:36). Cf. Wacker 60.

[7] "For you are not my people and I am not your God".

the woman's body in 2:4e-5d hints to a later addition. On the basis of the criteria "coherence in pronounal references", Wacker, furthermore notices an incoherence between Hos 2:6-7b and the previous verses (2:4ab): 1. Instead of addressing the children in the 2nd person singular, the children are now explicitly named as "children" and spoken of in the 3rd person singular. 2. The deprivation of pity from the children causes another logic tension in regard of 2:4ff: The text presents mutual exclusive images: the children, who in Hos 2:4ab are drawn to *his* side are now all of a sudden pushed away from *his* side back to *her* side. 3. Beyond tensions in regards of content, Hos 2:6, moreover, is distinct from its immediate context, because it presents no poetic nor kolometric structure. Also Hos 2:7a-b is cut out: 1. Because of the enclitic personal pronoun in the 3rd person m. pl. that is distinct from the speech to the children in the 2nd person in Hos 2:4ab. 2. because of a thematic shift in Hos 2:7c-9[8], which is framed by inclusions (2:7c-d/9e-f) and 3. the introduction of new motifs that go beyond Hos 2:4-5.Wacker, furthermore, singles out Hos 2:8-9 due to tensions with regard to context: Hos 2:8 begins with the textmarker לָכֵן and addresses the *woman* in the 2nd person. Only v.9 draws up on the expression "run after her lovers", while the unit Hos 2:8-9 predominantly describes how the woman is prevented to do so, in order to make her come back to her first husband. In the following, Wacker recognizes a further tension between Hos 2:9 and 10 with regard to context: although v. 9 ends with the vision of a wife, who has already recognized her first husband as the better choice for her well-being, the real provider is only introduced in v.10. [9]

Based on her *formgeschichtliche* analysis, Wacker argues that Hos 2:4ab.7* and 10-11 originaly presents a lamenting-accusing proverb, for Hos 2:7b imitates a keen (Totenklage): according to Wacker the phonetical sequence הָוֹרָתָם and הֹבִישָׁה

can be seen as an imitation of the interjection הוֹ which occurs in keens (cf. Am 5:16). Thus, the attitude of the *woman* is characterized as something that leads to death. According to Wacker's *traditionsgeschichtliche* analysis the basic text of Hos 2:4-25 addresses the city of Samaria: Wacker argues 1. that the "mother" in Hos 2:4 has to be regarded as a self-contained literary entity, for she is distinct from her children, who are

[8] Wacker 64ff: thematic shift from the image of the "mother" to hope of return of the "wife".
[9] Ibid. 199.

called upon to plead against her. 2. Wacker suggests, that the basic text presents a *Streitrede* against the city of Samaria: This argument is based on the observation, that a) from a post-exilic Judahite perspective, Samaria respectively Ephraim serves as representation of apostate Israel throughout Hos 4-14 (cf. 6:7-7:2; 13:2-3; 14:1ff), b) Samaria is personified in a female image (14:1; cf. 10:14), c) Hos 10:14 presents the motif of a "mother with children", that has been annihilated in a war and Hos 14:1 imagines Samaria as a mother, whose children are smashed to pieces.

Drawing up on Knauf, de Pury and Römer's (1994) interpretation of an Iron age inscription from Tell-Dan, in which they argue in favor for the reading "House of Dod", Wacker argues, that the *woman* in Hos 2:4ff represents a city, which is understood as the lover of a tutelary deity, from which she receives her subsistence: Therefore, according to Wacker, the city personified in the image of a *woman*/ "mother" receives a kind of divine dignity, for she is drawn into the divine realm. According to Wacker, this proverb has been included from an early post-exilic, Judahite perspective, in which the basic text was extended, by the image of the harlot, introduced in Hos 2:4e. In her argument Wacker highlights the similarities between Hos 2:4ff and the description of a city in other Judahite texts: 1. the city of Jerusalem is presented in the image of a "mother" (Jes 50:1-2; cf. Ps 87:5) as well as is in the image of a "harlot" (Jes 1:21; Ez 16.23 and Jer 2-3), 2. she is divested in front of her lovers (Ez 16:36ff; 23:26,29) and finally forgiven (Jes 54; Ez 16:53ff): she is regarded as JHWH's redeemed bride respectively "wife". 3. the accusation of "whoredom" can be also applied to other cities like Samaria (Ez 23:1-10), Sodom (Ez 23:46ff) and Ninive (Nah 3:4). From a *traditionsgeschichtliche* perspective Wacker furthermore argues, that the extended image of the *woman*/ city in Hos 2:4ff hints to a monolatric, Judahite theology after 722 BCE, because: 1. the description of the city is developed according to the descriptions of Jerusalem and 2. the monolatric focus on JHWH is most likely derived from Jerusalem-traditions which have been already very early associated with the name YHWH [10]. Thus, the second layer of Hos 2:4ff can be seen as a self-critical Judahite adoption of a critique against Samaria, which has been adapted to a concrete situation in Judah. Wacker notes, that it is striking that, in contrast

[10] Wacker 324. Drawing upon Keel, Othmar, Sturmgott-Sonnengott-Einziger. Ein neuer Versuch, die Entstehung des judäischen Monotheismus historisch zu verstehen; in:BiKi 49 (1994), 82-92.

to its immediate context as well as to the occurrences of the verb זנה in Hos 4-14, where זנה is not associated with women´s bodies or sexuality, but serves as a critique of misused patriarchal authority that refuses the "da'at elohim", Hos 2:4e,5a-d,15b-d focuses flamboyantly and very concretely on a woman's body. Thus, Wacker argues, that the "woman" in Hos 2:4ff, who is requested to divest herself from her זנונים and נאפופים points to actual cultic practices of the (female) inhabitants of the city. Especially, the association of the entities "woman", "ornaments" and "cult", which appears also in Ez 16, undermines Wacker's hypothesis, that the second layer of Hos 2:4ff demonstrates a cultic conflict in Judah, in which women's cultic practices, which involved ornaments, are attacked in particular.[11] Wacker`s textual analysis is, furthermore, corroborated by her kolometric analysis: While Hos 2:4a-b represent a monokolon, which introduces Hos 2:4ff, Hos 2:4e-e' as well as 2:5:a-b and 2:5c-d each represent a bikolon, that is marked by the pairing of נאפופים/זנונים (2:4e-e'), מדבר/ארץ ציה (2:5c-d) as well as a pairing in content (cf. Ez 16). Hos 2:5e, however, which does not present a kolometric structure and points beyond the disrobement of the woman to her death, appears to be a secondary commentary.

Wacker, furthermore, suggests another compositional layer in which Hos 2:4cd and 2:7d belong together.[12] Both units – other than v. 6- present a kolometric structure[13], and refer back to Hos 1* in regard of the parallel structure in Hos 2:4cd and 1:9 as well as well as in regard of the marital metaphor.

Another compositional "mosaic" which hints to plural authorship, is identified by Wacker in Hos 2:16-17,18-25.[14] Hos 2:16f collides with Hos 2:5: while Israel is imagined

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[11] Wacker 324.

[12] Drawing up on Nissinen`s kolometric analysis and his notion of a "rolling corpus", Wacker, presumes that Hos 2:4ff incorporates various allusions and parts of quotations from different contexts, that, however, do no longer present indepent *formgeschichtliche* units.

[13] Hos 2:4cd presents a bikolon with parallels in syntax and content. Hos 2:7d presents a tetrakolon, which hints to an originally independent poetic text, that might have been a woman's song, which was included in Hos 2 by the introduction formula כי אמרה.

[14] Due to a an accumulation of textmarkers such as נאם יהוה (2:15d; 2:18b) as well as לָכֵן which refers to the analogous construction in 2:8 and 2:11 and introduces the passage 2:16f, that otherwise does not present an immediate follow-up to the previous verses, and the double introduction-formula "on this day" (2:18b.23b), as well as the shift in pronouns from the 3rd Person Sg. in 2:17 to the 2nd Person in 2:18, Wacker, recognizes a further "mosaic" in 2:16-17.18-25 that hints to a plurality of authorship. On the level of content V. 2:17 anticipates v. 19 and particularly v. 21-22. Hos 2:19 refers to the 3rd person sg. (cf. 2:17) and follows up 2:18 in regards of content. Hos 2:20 draws again up on the formula "on this day" in 2:18

as desert in Hos 2:5, Hos 2:16 presents Israel in the dessert. Reading Hos 2:16f, however, without its elements that refer to the guidance in the desert, such as משם (2:17a: from there) and שמה (2:17b: there), which refer back to the „guidance in the dessert" (2:16b), Hos 2:16-17 appears to be a composition which consists of three two-liners (not: bikola), which are each rounded up by end rhymes (2:16a.c/ 17a.a'/b.b'). Thus, Wacker argues, that the desert-motif is a later addition. Additionally, Wacker points out that, the reference to the "exodus from Egypt" in Hos 2:17b' in association with "the days of the youth" of a woman, is not explicitly accounted elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. The expression "day of her youth" (2:17b) rather draws up on marital language (cf. Jer 2:2; Spr 5: 18). V. 17 b' therefore is seen as a reinterpretation of marital language in salvation historical categories. Thus, it can be noticed, that Hos 2:16-17 consists of at least three layers, which are represented in different topoi: the reception of marital language (1), serves a basis for salvation historical interpretation (2) which is later extended by the insertion of the desert-motif. Thus, Wacker suggests, that the marital image in Hos 2:16f, that is later readopted and extended in the image of a marriage in paradise (2:18- 25), even though v.17 according to Wacker does not necessarily need a follow up, might hint to a "reflected/ remembered mythology"[15] which exhibits a conflict with goddess worship in post-exilic times, that is already addressed in Hos 2:4cd. In this regard Wacker, furthermore, notes that it is interesting that 1. Hos 2:25a shifts from Jisreel to the femininum and therefore refers back to Hos 2:19 respectively v. 17 and 2. Hos 2:25bff refers back to the children of Gomer in Hos 1:2-2:2 while it has no connection to its immediate context. According to Wacker the marital language as well as the reference to the marital metaphor in Hos 1* reminds of a ditheistic constellation.

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and presents another shift in pronouns to the 3rd person Pl., whereas 2:21f shifts again to the 2nd person femininum sg. Hos 2:23f presents the third reference to the formula "on this day" and presents a closed up topic, that is determined by the keyword ענה.

[15] Wacker borrows this term from Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, who uses this term in order to characterize the biblical engagement with goddess-traditions in the depiction of "Lady Wisdom"; cf. Schüssler-Fiorenza, Elisabeth, Zu ihrem Gedächtnis…Eine feministisch-theologische Rekonstruktion der christlichen Ursprünge (München: Kaiser, 1988), 180; cf. Schroer, Silvia, Die göttliche Weisheit und der nachexilische Monotheismus; in: Wacker, Marie, Theres/ Zenger, Erich, Der eine Gott und die Göttin. Gottesvorstellungen des biblischen Israels im Horizont feministischer Theologie (Freiburg: Herder: 1991), 168.

III. Sherwood analysis of Hos 1-3

Other than Wacker`s analysis, Sherwood's study on Hos 2 does not intend to fix the incoherencies within the text in order to establish coherent texts on a diachronic level, which offer linear messages, that culminate in one single plot. In contrast Sherwood highlights incoherencies in order to point out the capacity of the "Hosean" sign system to shock the reader and engage her/ him in a dialogue. Drawing up on Fish's comment on the movement of language in Hosea, Sherwood argues, "that the text [of Hos 2:4-25] resists logocentric expactations about plot and causality in the sense of a systematic, linear logic"[16]. Thus, she suggest that "the book should be read in 'another way' that accounts the 'fragmented feeling' experienced by the reader"[17]. To illustrate this, she argues e.g., that 1. the use of לָכֵן (2:8,11,16), which is usually translated "therefore" and seen as a structuring element, shows how the text defies Western models of deductive logic and causation by connecting opposites rather than complementary statements: In vv. 8 and 11 the use of לָכֵן suggests that sexual immorality of the *woman*/Israel leads to punishment[18], while in vv. 16-17 לָכֵן introduces an opposite consequence. For readers accustomed to "Aristotelian order" (= seeking to avoid contradictory statements) the translation "therefore", consequently, is misleading because it suggests that the text is advancing an argument and building upon it, whereas in fact the text retracts its own proposals and recoils upon itself, undecideably proposing punishment and reconciliation. Moreover, Sherwood notes, that it is striking, that while the *woman* is criticized of being seducible (2:7), forgiveness and renewal are expressed ironically, in the language of seduction (2:16ff).

Instead of focusing on "what the text means", Sherwood rather investigates "how the text means". She states, therefore, that focusing on linear propositions such as "Israel is apostate" or "YHWH disapproves of Israel" etc. was a reduction of the text`s strategy, which presents a counter-voice within the text. According to Sherwood, Hos 1-3 is as much about constructing signification as about Israels` apostasy and reunion with

[16] Sherwood 204.
[17] Ibid.
[18] "Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns"; "Therefore I will take back my grain […] and my wine".

YHWH. Thus, she points out how the text hints to its artificiality, for it overtly consists of a series of artificial elements: 1. the director`s voice is made visible: As far as the relations within the sign systems are concerned, everything depends on the whim of a sign-maker, who is YHWH (1:2.4ff,9; 2:4ff). Comparing Hos 1-3 to a Brechtian play, Sherwood points out how the text allows the audience to look behind the scene and therefore accounts for its artificiality. 2. The idea of a divinely ordained or natural meaning is defamiliarized in a text in which God himself creates bizarre and opposite meanings. In the strange sign language designed by YHWH there is no connection that cannot be made and no connection that cannot be broken. Drawing up on Saussure`s model of signification[19], Sherwood highlights, how the text of Hos 1-3 flamboyantly acts out some of the fundamental principles of semiotics, for the text defamiliarizes the "sign" by rejecting conventional links and creating unexpected pairings: a prophet is called up to marry a harlot (1:2); innocent newborns are rejected and mean alienation (1:2:4ff); the nation is recalled to its pure beginnings (2:16), but at the same time the ideal of a pure origin is deconstructed (2::5); Baal is condemned as a false god, yet YHWH is defined in terms associated with Baal (2:7,10ff,18); abstinence from adultery is equated with abstinence from Israelite religious practice (3:4). Thus, the illusion that there is always a rationale between signifiers and signifieds is disturbed by the manifestly irrational action of YHWH, who appears to be more motivated by passion than reason, and who causes signifiers to lurch precariously from one meaning to another. This however, suggests that signs are not given, but made. Therefore, it can be again noticed how the text debunks all illusions of realism and draws all attention to its artificiality.3. Sherwood also demonstrates how not only signification, but also history is subjectively and ideologically constructed. This becomes particularly manifest in the historical interpretation of Jezreel

[19] Sausurre`s semiotic theory: "Signification" is the process of interrelation or rather difference between signifier and signified. It comes into existence in the gap, which is filled by signifiers that are shaped by conventions, which again shape the signified and vise versa. The "signifier" is a sound-image (like woman of harlotry; land etc.) whereas the "signified" denotes a conceptual, mental image, not a priori to the equation. The union of both is a "sign". For the inaugural sign, however, there is no fixed bond between signifier and signified (except: onomapoetic words; symbols). That signs become convention is dependent on the internal relation between signifier and signified (= signification) and the external relation to other signs (which gives signs their value). "Signification" therefore denotes the internal relation between signifier and signified.Neither signifier or signified exists independently of the signifying equation: the signifier refers to something which can only be expressed through it, and the terms exist in mutual dependence (reciprocal relationship).

in Hos 1:4 which differs from 2.Kings 9-10. Whereas 2. Kings describes the events in Jezreel as a positive act of vengeance, Hos 1:4 describes the same event as a moral outrage to be avenged. Thus, the two mutually antipathic accounts suggest that histories are not given but made and that the sign Jezreel is a semiotic interpretation, an ideological emblem of an event, rather than a reconstruction. Sherwood, consequently, suggests that the text does not bring us closer to Israel´s real/ objective history, but helps to construct or deconstruct perceptions of that history by vying with various interpretations. Hos 1ff, thus, debunks the illusion that a text can provide unmediated access to the real historical referent and demonstrates how all texts are interpretations of history and therefore ideologically motivated.

Consequently, Sherwood focuses on Hos 1-3 in its function as a literary document that employs its own ideological rhetoric which differs from the message exhibited by the text`s strategy. Sherwood demonstrates how the *woman* in Hos 1-3 is presented as a representation of apostate Israel on the rhetorical level of the text, but at the same time exceeds this function. Drawing up on Derrida's notion of the antithetical, self-subverting movements of language, Sherwood accentuates once again how the text strategy presented in Hos 2 refuses Aristotelian logic. Thus, she highlights what Derrida calls *undecideables*, that is expressions and statements "which support both negative and positive premises"[20]. According to Derrida's definition, the *undecideable* is any term or motif that "escapes from inclusion in the philosophical (binary) opposition and which nonetheless inhabit[s] it, resist[s] it and disorganize[s] it but without ever constituting a third term, without ever occasioning a solution".[21] The *undecideable*, thus, "'produces a sense of indefinite fluctuation between two possibilities' but the two 'poles of reading' are not 'equally obvious'"[22]. Hence, Sherwood demonstrates how the *woman* in Hos 1-3 is constructed as the "ultimate undecideable"[23], for it presents a "subversive counter-voice who weans (and presumably suckles) the children that YHWH/Hosea rejects [1:4ff]

[20] Sherwood 204.
[21] Derrida, Jacques, Positions (trans. A. Bass; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 43.
[22] Sherwood 211.
[23] Ibid. 254.

and who intimates a certain lack in YHWH/Hosea that leads her to desert him for other lovers".[24]

On the level of text strategy the *woman*, therefore, is a provocative literary element in many ways: 1. Sherwood highlights how the depiction of the *woman* in Hos 1(-3), goes beyond her primary signifying function as an icon of idolatry as well as her second, indexical function, in that she causes, or gives birth to signs of punishment: a) The reference to the "woman of harlotry" as Gomer Bat Diblayim links her to a family history, that goes beyond the text as well a her signifying function; b) Gomer is not only depicted as a signifier for the "harloterous land", but also as a loving mother, who contradicts YHWH`s/ Hosea`s rejection of the children. Sherwood, thus, argues that the *woman* takes over the sympathy of the reader: whereas YHWH/Hosea rejects the newborn children – which according to Sherwood is on the level of semiotics a fairly unexpected reaction - Gomer presents a more natural respectively expected reaction. Sherwood undermines her argument by hinting to the striking linkage between the child-name Lo-Ruhama and the mentioning of the weaning of a child. She accentuates that weaning necessarily implies suckling of the child beforehand. Hence she argues, that the relatively detailed illustration of the child`s upbringing by Gomer in an otherwise stinted narrative frame lays a particular focus on the loving care exhibited by Gomer: Whereas the name Lo-Ruhama subverts Israel`s fundamental self-understanding, Gomer is depicted as the one who nourishes the children that YHWH/Hosea rejects.

2. Other than in Hos 1 and 3, where the signifiers (harlot, adulteress, children and lover) and the signified (the land, the house of Jehu, the house of Israel, king and leader, sacrifice and pillar, ephod and teraphim) are clearly distinct, for every statement about the signifier is followed by an explanation of what is signified, it can be observed that signifier (woman) and signified (land) merge in Hos 2. Sherwood, however, highlights how the *woman*-signifier in Hos 2 nonetheless exceeds the signified: a) In Hos 1:2 the אשת זנונים is clearly subordinated to and used as a signifier of, the "harloterous land", but in Hos 2:5 the same motifs, the *woman* and the land, co-exist in a far more complex and ambiguous relationship. The male threat combines starkly physical terms such as "nakedness", "birth", "thirst" with "wilderness", "parched land", but no longer

[24] Ibid.

subordinates the *woman* to the land in a clearly demarcated signifying relationship. According to Sherwood, this is more than a mere anthropomorphism: the *woman* does not simply embody the land, but dominates the passage: "*She* will be like a parched land and *she* is the focus of the sentence; if any element in this passage is subordinated it is the 'wilderness' and the 'parched land', which are virtually used as signifiers for *her*."[25] b) Also in Hos 2:3-17[26] the *woman* outgrows her role as mere signifier, and is graphically described in details that far exceed its semiotic function: in Hos 2:8-9, the speaker does not merely say that he will prevent his wife from pursuing her lovers, but goes as far as to describe the means of entrapment he will use (thornbushes and walls), which according to Sherwood "can have no possible equivalent at the level of the signified".[27] Similarly, the threat in Hos 2:12-13, that the woman will be stripped in front of her lovers and trapped in her jealous husband`s hand, according to Sherwood, "makes the corresponding threat, that JHWH will terminate Israel`s festivals rather timid by comparison"[28], for the signifier is described in far more detail than the signified. c) Sherwood furthermore points out that the level of the signifier has the overt lure of pornography: in a sequence the *woman* is stripped three times, her breasts and genitalia exposed (2:5,11,12). However, it is hard to find any direct analogy at the level of the signified.

Thus, Sherwood suggests that, Hos 2 presents a compelling drama of pursuit (2:9), seeking (2:9), slaying (2:5), trapping (2:8), and seduction (2:16) on the level of the signifier (woman), that threatens to dwarf by contrast the signified (Israel`s situation). Sherwood, consequently, argues that Hos 2 does not merely embody "idolatry" as "harlotry" but highlights and exploits the analogy by focusing relentlessly on the *woman*`s body: The stark physicality of the signifier is foregrounded, and human life is reduced to its very essence: nakedness, sex, thirst and passion. Sherwood identifies this objectification of the woman as a rhetoric strategy shaped by a particular male ideology. Referring to quotations of a curse from a vassal treaty of Esarhaddon[29] as well as a treaty

[25] Sherwood 137.
[26] Sherwood's counting of verses is according to the KJV and differs from Wacker`s.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid. 138.
[29] "May [the gods] spin you like a spindle whorl, may they use you like a woman in sight of their enemy" (J.B. Pritchard [ed.]., Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament [trans. E. Reiner; Princeton: Princton University Press, 2nd edn 1955], 533.

between Ashnurnirari V of Assyria and Mati'ilu of Arpad[30], Sherwood suggest, that the characterization of Israel as a harlot, who is punished in a violent way, on the level of text`s rhetoric is playing on male fears of the woman "other"[31], in order to impose its rhetorical argument on the audience.

At the same time Sherwoood, however, points to the danger of this imagery which might "lure the reader`s attention away from the 'real' meaning of the text"[32]. According to Sherwood the "real meaning" of the text, is no fixed meaning, but evokes from the text`s strategy: On this level of text the sign system irritates and offends the reader in order to provoke a reaction that engages the reader with the larger question of "da'at elohim". Sherwood, thus, criticizes androcentric commentaries, by arguing that "a commentator, who refuses to identify with Gomer, becomes a "resisting" rather than a acquiescent reader, because he resists the symbolic role assigned to the readers" and "in resisting identification with the woman, androcentric commentators support the ideology presented by the rhetoric of the text but resist the symbolic roles" [33] assigned to the reader.

Rejecting kyriarchal[34] premises of interpretation, in which the androcentric reader/interpreter is equate with YHWH/ Hosea`s perspective, Sherwood furthermore, demonstrates, how the text strategy subverts the kyriarchal rhetoric presented in the text: Highlighting what Derrida calls "violent hierarchies"[35], Sherwood presents how "violent hierarchies" are established in the rhetorical strategy of Hos 2 and deconstructed by the text strategy, for statements are connected on the one hand, but contrast each other on the other hand. Sherwood identifies the three *violent hierarchies* 1. "innocence and deviance" [of Israel], 2. "YHWH and Baal", and 3. "Love and Hate". On the level of rhetoric these

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[30] "If MKati'ilu sins against this treaty with Ashnurnirari […] may Mati'ilu become a prostitute , his soldiers women, may they receive [a gift] in the square of their cities like a prostitute (ANET, p. 540, trans D.J. Wiseman).

[31] Sherwood 263.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid 264.

[34] This term is borrowed from Schüssler-Fiorenza. Other than the term "patriarchal", it shifts the emphasis from male gender to social hierarchies and domination over others in general. I consider this term as a more accurate description of the phenomenon, since Sherwood is criticizing unequal power structures rather than men in general.

[35] Derrida`s term "violent hierarchy" refers to statements that include two "poles of reading" and therefore deconstruct each other. However, they are not "equally obvious" for the statements are violently subordinated to a specific ideology that is presented in the rhetoric of a text. Cf. Derrida, Jacques, Dissemination (trans. B. Johnson; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 225.

violent hierarchies are constructed in order to ensure the "orthodox" belief- system. In the following, I will only focus on the description of one of the three *violent hierarchies*, in order to present Sherwoods` procedure: In the *violent hierarchy* "innocence-deviance" the motif "nakedness" becomes the focal point. The woman is stripped three times (2:5,11,12). Sherwood notes, that in this motif, the innocence of beginning (alluded to in v.5) is the covert sense that is practically engulfed in the idea of nakedness as titillation, cruelty and pornography. In Hos 2:11 the male speaker threatens to take back his wool and his flax, which were to cover her genitalia and in Hos 2:12 he threatens to "uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers". Sherwood, thus, points out how "nakedness" refers to infant purity and degeneration at the same time. From the moment that YHWH threatens to strip the woman as in the day of her birth, and connects birth and deconstruction "nakedness" escapes from and disorganizes the related binary oppositions of beginning-ending, innocence –knowingness, tenderness-cruelty. Moreover, Sherwood highlights that the *undecideability* is compounded, when the naked woman is paraded in front of her lovers: "the act implies (moral) disapproval and (sexual) approval, because her judge is also her voyeur. Denunciation and titillation collide: The female is pitied, abused, lusted after and condemned. She is a naked baby and an object of lust"[36]. Thus, the provocative image of the *woman* again gives rise to conflicting emotions and becomes the linchpin of *undecideability*. She becomes the focus of the tension between restoration and punishment, endings and beginnings. As an *undecideable* the woman marks the point of that which can "never be mediated, mastered, sublated or dialecticized"[37]. *She* is in other words, the chief element that causes the text to equivocate, flounder and turn back on its own rhetoric. Similarly "wilderness" (המדבר) is the setting for a nightmare and for a second honeymoon. On the one hand המדבר is an image of extreme cruelty (2:5: abandonment an death by thirst) and the side for the glorious reunion of God and nation in which YHWH will speak tenderly to the woman's heart and she will speak lovingly to him "as in the days of her youth" (2:17). Sherwood therefore argues, that because this term speaks doubly in the text, it is a "hypocrite word,

[36] Sherwood 212.
[37] Derrida, Jacques, Dissemination (trans. B. Johnson; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 221.

an undecideable, a word never to be trusted in a simple univocal sense"[38]. According to Sherwood, it seems as if the text is virtually is trying to encourage this suspicion, "because if it wanted to preserve wilderness as a pure ideal, it would underplay, and not exaggerate, connotations of sterility, isolation and death"[39]. Thus, the collision of redemption and punishment in the *undecideables* "nakedness" and "wilderness" suggests that YHWH himself turns into an *undecideable*, who nurtures and abuses, strips and restores, deprives and seduces"[40].

In the rhetoric of the text violent *hierarchies* are designed to secure Israel's conviction and repentance based on a particular ideology. On the level of text strategy, however, the hierarchy accuser-accused is deconstructed, by "at least three loopholes in the text"[41]: 1. "Alongside the identification of divine power and patriarchy [from whose perspective man 'condemns the woman from a godlike superiority'] stands the deconstructive challenge of the text that audaciously forces a male audience into identification not with God but with a promiscuous woman"[42] and therefore challenges the "double standard" in which God and man versus Israel/sin and woman are equated. 2. From the verb ריב (2:4) it is impossible to discern who is accusing whom: "The hierarchy accuser-accuse is jeopardized by suggesting a prior, vital but invisible context, and which uses the imperative ריבו which means 'dispute' […] and can indicate any kind of confrontation from supplication to denunciation"[43], for it can be translated variously as "plead with", "reason with" and "accuse". Thus, the verb ריב becomes an *undecideable* because it "quite literally enters the dispute from both sides"[44] and therefore - in a *violent hierarchy*- not only supports the man`s criticism of the *woman*, but also a criticism of the male speaker from the *woman*`s perspective. Hence, the question of initiative is open to dispute. 3. The way in which Hos 2:4 marks the *woman* by and for sexual transgression is a graphic illustration of double standard: "The male partner in 'crime' [the male lovers] is

[38] Sherwood 213.
[39] Sherwood 214.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.313.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid. 314.

invisible and inculpable"[45]. However, the speaker`s fascination with the female body "betrays a guilty author who revels in female sexuality even as he condemns it"[46]

Sherwood, therefore, emphasizes, that "there is a difference between ideological affinity and objective fidelity to the text"[47]. Thus, Sherwood suggests that in the rhetoric of the text, the "angry God and the errant woman are versions of the same fear"[48]. Hos 1-3 therefore can be read as a reaction against the female and the divine: The text uses a metaphor, which firmly equates the man with the divine and the female with the sordid realm of humanity. Hence, it can be noticed, that employing *violent hierarchies* the text is anxious to establish the "authority of the father", which means that the link between the female and the divine must be broken if patriarchy is to establish undisputed power. Thus, the text`s ideological rhetoric suggest that being an אשת זנונים, which denotes a woman, whose sexuality is not under patriarchal control,[49] is bad and at the same time proclaims that being not obedient to the orthodox believe system suggested by the rhetoric of the text is condemned in the same way and lacks God`s approval. According to Sherwood "it is [therefore] also possible, that 'harlotry', or the female potential to escape male control, is not simply a metaphor for the *real* anxiety, which is the loss of divine approval, but rather that the two anxieties [anxiety of loosing control over the woman and anxiety of loosing God's approval as well as the anxiety of loosing control (over God/ woman)] are mysteriously intertwined"[50]. According to Sherwood "both the tenor of the metaphor (loss of divine approval) and the vehicle (loss of sexual control) betray a fear of male powerlessness and may be displaced images of the same essential insecurity."[51]Hence Sherwood concludes that "the text appears to be less a presentation of a univocal message than a sustained attempt at punning, and the retraction and affirmation of various words and ideas suggests that text deconstructs itself at a deeper, ideological level."[52]

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[45] Ibid 316
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid 264.
[48] Ibid 306.
[49] Ibid. 19 n.4.
[50] Ibid. 271.
[51] Ibid.
[52]Ibid. 204.

IV. Establishing an epistemological case

IV. 1 Summing up the results of Wacker and Sherwood`s reading of the *woman*

From my presentation of the two approaches Hos 1-3, it becomes obvious that these readings establish very different notions of the *woman*`s signifying functions: in Wacker`s study the *woman* is a figuration that exhibits engagements with the feminine on various diachronic levels: 1. *She* is an anthropomorphic representation of the city of Samaria, which is criticized for its misbehavior. Being the representation of her inhabitants, she is an entity that surmounts the human addressees in the image of their mother. At the same time *she* is imagined as the lover of a deity and therefore even more enters the divine realm. 2. *She* is the personified city of Samaria, which in post-exilic time serves as a self-critical reflection for the religious situation in Judah/Jerusalem. Built up on the image of the lover of a deity she is depicted as a harlot. Her apostasy is associated with concrete religious practices that involve ornamentation of women. 3. In the marital metaphor, *she* points to a "reflected/ remembered mythology"[53] of a ditheistic concept in which YHWH had a wife, who was more and more displaced. 4. In a salvation historical re-interpretation she represents Israel, as the community of the exodus. 5. On the level of the final composition of Hos 1-3, she serves as representation of the "harloterous land" and constitutes the reader`s perspective of the final composition of the book.

In Sherwood`s study the *woman*`s function is defined on two levels: 1. On the level of rhetoric: *She* functions as the role assigned to the implied audience, that is "unorthodox" Israel. Addressing the audience as a harlot, the rhetoric plays with the fear of the woman-other, in order to impose the "orthodox" religious perspective, that is thought to guarantee God`s approval, on the audience. 2. On the level of text strategy, the *woman`s* perspective, which is the perspective assigned to the reader, exhibits how the desire for human control and mastery is not only a problem for her but also impedes a proper knowledge of God. Like the depiction of God in Hos 1-3, the depiction of the

[53] See footnote 15.

woman- is understood as an *undecideable* that deconstructs the rhetoric of the text and in a never-ending process engages the audience with the question of "daat Elohim".

IV. 2 Epistemological questions

IV. 1. Different epistemological frameworks

These two different readings of the *woman* in Hos 1-3, that present very different results, raise the epistemological question, how different presuppositions in the epistemological framework cause different readings and therefore different results. Thus, I suggest, that it can be noticed that the two works not only exhibit different notions of feminism, but also a different notion of methodology, text, relationship between text and history as well as text and reader. These differing presuppositions lead to different questions, different treatment of the text and consequently to different results.

IV.1.1 Feminism

In regard to feminist critique it can be noticed, that both works start from a perspective that regards women as subject. Both works highlight androcentric biased readings that establish an alliance between God, Hosea and the androcentric interpreter against the *woman.* They argue, that this leads not only to a rejection of the role assigned to the reader, but also to equitation of God and man as well as woman, Israel and sin. Both works also point out how, equating androcentric perspective with God`s perspective, furthermore, obscures the critique against patriarchy respectively the desire of human mastery with which the book of Hosea is concerned. Refusing the role of the *woman*/ reader, therefore leads to a relativization and elimination of the complex and provocative function of the *woman* in Hos 1-3.

Nevertheless, a different notion within feminism and the potential of feminist criticism can be recognized: Wacker defines "feminist studies" as "theoretic-scholarly" and "contemporary critical-practical oriented quest"[54], which arises from the distress of

[54] Wacker 23.

being marginalized as women in contemporary societies and seeks to contribute to overcome this current state. Consequently, she sees the task of feminist criticism in reconstructing, remembering and restablishing marginalized and corrupted traces of the feminine. Sherwood, however, puts more emphasis on a the feminist notion of a complex, pluralistic and fragmentary nature of human existence that consists of contradictory elements and a variety of viewpoints. Consequently, she is interested in highlighting the potential and function of incoherences in Hos 1-3. Other than Wacker, Sherwood states, that feminist scholars do not have to "read against the grain of the text"[55] for the text`s rhetoric is deconstructed by its text strategy.

IV.1. 2 Methodology

In regard to methodology it can be recognized how the different notions of within feminist criticism are intertwined with methodology: Wacker perceives the images of harlot and mother as mutual exclusive images and focuses on how the image of a negative harlot corrupts the positive image of the mother. Sherwood, however, points out how the connection of seemingly mutual exclusive images serves to create a sense of *indecideability*. Therefore she highlights the productive function of the *woman* that serves an *undecideable* within the text`s strategy, for she provokes the engagement of the reader and gives rise to "the meaning" of the text.

Nevertheless, differences can be also recognized in the presuppositions of the methodologies, which are applied by Wacker and Sherwood: Following the notion of redaction criticism, that tensions within the text have to be avoided and fixed, Wacker attempts to establish coherent texts, such as Hos 2:4ab.7*.10f, which follow a linear logic and can be assigned to a particular *Sitz im Leben*. In the manner of redaction criticism, Wacker, furthermore, searches for coherence in pronounial references, kolometric and poetic structure, themes and motifs, as well as elements of coherence in regard to other biblical texts and passages within Hos 1-3 that exhibit similar features in regard of syntax and themes. The connections established by Wacker, however, are disputable in the light of other redaction critical analysis of the same passage. So it would also be interesting to

[55] Sherwood 256.

investigate those different pressuppositions that lead to different redaction critical segmentations.

Beyond the notion of traditional redaction criticism, Wacker, however, also points to the limits of reconstructing the genesis of at text and particularly of dating the texts. She acknowledges, that the text presents only a lean fundament for textual reconstrucion based on philological considerations. Wacker, furthermore, recognizes, how the goal of feminist criticism to reconstruct an unspoiled image of the feminine, can not be achieved by sole redaction criticism. Thus, she additionaly employs a *hermeneutic of suspicion* as well as a *hermeneutic of rememberance*, in order to highlight what is left out.

Sherwood, in contrast dismisses the idea, that the text needs to be or even can be fixed. Acknowleding that "redaction criticism has had some important suggestions to make concerning Judean text editing of the text"[56], Sherwood argues in her meta-commentary analysis of approaches to Hos 1:2, that redaction criticism is solving "seeming *moral* corruption of the text [by ascribing it] to textual corruption"[57]. This however means, that tensions are avoided by reading the (moral) preferences of the interpreter into the text. In her survey of commentaries Sherwood demonstrates how redaction criticism has sanctioned the tendency to gloss over the difficult *woman* in Hos 1:2 with the support of an "objective" methodology: "Using the theory of a deuteronomistic redactor, critics such as Harper, Batten, Birkeland, Heermann and North have elided the phrase 'of whoredoms', as in Batten`s words, a 'clumsy gloss'. The elision, which is often based on spurious reasoning, allows the critic what North terms a 'Solution of Hosea`s Marital Problems by Critical Analysis'. [Thus,] the redaction critic preserves the wife in her original pure form without the 'harlotries', which [are] claim[ed] to be added." [58] In contrast to that, Sherwood points out that the text of Hos 1-3 resists a linear logic, for it does neither present coherent arguments nor a chronological interest, but rather points to its artificiality. Distinguishing between the rhetoric of a text and the text strategy, Sherwood points out how a notion of plurality, complexity and fragmentarity of reality that oscillates between contradictory statements is produced. However, Sherwood, also establishes coherence within Hos 1-3, when she stresses, that

[56] Sherwood 65.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.

the capacity of the sign-language to shock is a crucial part of the text`s meaning and therefore states, that "the only feature that unites the signs inn the text is their tendency to bring in the unexpected."[59]

To sum up: It can be recognized that different readings exhibit a different sense of coherence, which evoke different meanings of a text. In order to describe these different senses of coherence, it would be necessary to search for scientific devices that help to describe more precisely how these different senses of coherence and meanings are established within various feminist and other approaches to Hos 1-3.

IV. 1. 3 Text

Comparing the two different studies of Wacker and Sherwood it becomes furthermore obvious, that they exhibit not only a different sense of what produces coherence within a text, but also different notions of text. Drawing up on reader-response criticism, Sherwood states, that "the reader […] is 'never not in a context'"[60] and that interpretation always is a displacement of the text, for what is perceived as the text comes only into being through the reader. Based on her meta-commentary analysis Sherwood demonstrates with regards to Hos 1:2 how the distinction between art/fiction and scholarly commentary is blurred up, for both are seen as reactions to the provocative nature of the text[61] Thus, she perceives the text as a literary document and focuses on the living dimension of a self-subverting play that is presented to an audience, in order to provoke engagement and thus evoke meaning. In her studies she wants to demonstrate that the text neither has a fixed meaning nor that there is an "obvious" or "natural" reading of the text. Therefore, she presents her own reading, which is based on a semiotic analysis from a feminist perspective as well as a distinction between the rhetoric of a text and the text`s strategy, in order to demonstrate how Hos 1-3 can be read alternatively by focusing on the text`s strategy rather than on the text`s rhetoric.

Wacker, in contrast, distinguishes various levels of the text within categories that define it 1. in light of its genesis as a historical literary document as a "rolling corpus", 2.

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[59] Ibid. 149.
[60] Ibid. 78. The inclusion in the quote is cited from Fish, Stanley, "Normal Circumstances, Literal Language, Direct Speech Acts, the Ordinary, the Everyday, the Obvious, what Goes without Saying, and Other Special Cases", Inqiry 4 (1978), 637.
[61] Cf. Sherwood chp. 1.

as a historical document that textualizes historical facts, and 3. as a text that is part of the scripture and still relevant to religious communities and therefore also to women.
According to these categories Wacker, employs different methodologies, such as redaction, literary and feminist criticism. However, it can be noticed that the notion and treatment of these categories of text are again influenced by the presuppositions mentioned above. Thus, it would be interesting to search for epistemological devices and literary theories on the "nature of text" that help to outline various notions of "text" presented by Wacker and Sherwood.

VI.1.4 Relationship between text and history

The different understanding of the nature of the biblical text, furthermore, exhibits a different understanding of the relationship between history and text: Although Wacker acknowledges the difficulties in reconstructing diachronic layers of a text based on philological and structural observations, she, nevertheless attempts to excavate (traces) of diachronic layers. This, however points to the understanding that history can be reconstructed from a historical literary text. Moreover, it can be noticed that history is regarded as something that can be thoroughly methodologically distinct in past, present and future. The attempt of reconstructing various layers within a text, furthermore, demonstrates a notion of original text. It is assumed that the original text does not only give access to the past, but also bears characteristics of authority for the present. This authority, however, can only be challenged by reconstructing respectively remembering other "historical texts", which are not available in a written form, but might have informed the biblical text in the sense of a "reflected mythology". Thus, the focus of Wacker`s study is on the historical past. Nevertheless, Wacker also recognizes the limits of methodologies that attempt to objectively reconstruct the past as well as the responsibility of critical engagement with tradition that exhibit damaged images of human existence.

As distinct from Wacker, Sherwood does not understand history as something that can be objectively reconstructed from a literary text like Hos 1-3. She rather emphasizes, that the text itself demonstrates how histories are constructed and that the text itself

accounts for its artificiality. Thus, Sherwood understands history in a more general sense as something that denotes human engagement in a particular historical setting.

VI.1.5 Relationship between text and interpreter

Wacker understands her analysis and reconstruction of the genesis of Hos 1-3 "at best only [as] well-reasoned hypothesis"[62], for the texts presents only a lean fundament. However, the application of literary and redaction criticism exhibit a particular understanding of the relationship between text and interpreter, that suggests that the texts objective meaning exists independent from the reader. This, furthermore, implies that the text can be accessed by "objective" methodology in order to excavate an "objective" facts with regards to meaning or intention of the original text(s). The interpreter, therefore, is assumed to occupy a neutral position from which not only the text`s meaning but also historical events can be approached.

Sherwood, in contrast, highlights how it is impossible to separate text and interpreter. In her reading, which is based on her semiotic analysis, Sherwood, demonstrates how the text deconstructs itself by distinguishes between the rhetoric of a text and the text's strategy. Sherwood, however, does not claim that her reading – like any other reading- is free from ideology. Therefore, she emphasizes that she is "attacking commentaries on Hos 1:2 not because they are erroneous, but because they are dominant and legitimate that dominance with untenable claims of 'objectivity'"[63] Furthermore she states that a "readers of a […] text are [always] conditioned by their own perspective" and "no absolute standard of legislation can be enforced"[64] Thus, she argues that the text has no fixed meaning and that there is no "obvious" or "natural" reading of the text.[65] Therefore, texts come only into existence by readings.

V. Conclusion

[62] Wacker 188. (German: "Begründete Hypothesen")
[63] Sherwood 38.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid 39.

Having pointed to different notions in regard of epistemological premises (such as notions of feminism, methodology, text, relationship between text and reader, relationship between text and interpreter), I suggest that it would be worthwhile to attempt an epistemological study on the reception history of Hos 1-3. This undertaking is part of my larger doctoral project in the frame of an interdisciplinary research group that works on "Canonicity, Gender and Critique: The Hermeneutics of Feminism and Canon-Transfomations". In my larger project "Feminist hermeneutics and the transformation of Hos 1-3" (Working title), I plan to investigate, based on an epistemological study on the reception history of Hos 1-3, how (feminist) interpretations can be seen as part of the canonizing process.

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