VISION AND POETIC SPEECH IN AMOS

by

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My intention in this paper is not to examine the conventions and techniques whereby biblical poetry is defined and ordered, but its capacity for subversion, its stylistic openness. The subject is the anti-poetic in poetry, its artlessness. The passages on which I focus may not perhaps be considered poetry: they are visions, communicated simply. Yet precisely as visions, reported barely, naively, they contribute to the poetics of Amos. What is the relation between the prophet's awe and linguistic beauty?[1] How is the incommensurable accommodated in a language that touches on silence?

Like the companion piece by Lyle Eslinger, this essay is a literary-critical approach to the text. It assumes the methodological priority of literary over historical investigation, the aesthetic wholeness of the text over its hypothetical evolution. At the same time, like Eslinger's essay, it finds interrelations between passages commonly assigned to different literary strata. This suggests that the criteria for these differentiations need to be revised.

Every detail lends itself to interpretation, as Meir Sternberg has shown with respect to biblical narrative, and Robert Alter to biblical poetry.[2] The point of parallelism is not the equivalence but the dynamic

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1. Geller (1984, pp. 211–12) points out an ancient tension between poetry and prophecy, linguistic craftsmanship and divine inspiration, which he holds is resolved through the word they have in common (p. 220). Heschel (1962, pp. 388–9) maintains this opposition, suggesting, for example, that their concern is with "the message rather than the form." Recent literary studies (e.g., Alter, Holladay) have shown this contrast to be simplistic. Further, there is an ongoing distinction between those who define poetry formalistically and those who find it in a peculiar kind of message.

2. The literature on literary approaches to the Bible is now vast. For an overall survey, and a compendium by some of the finest practitioners, see Preminger and Alter. The great virtue of Sternberg's book, in my view, is the brilliance of its local analyses, its attention to every detail of the text. See also Alter 1981, p. 27. Alter has both demonstrated in practice and density of biblical poetry, and discussed theoretically its "astonishing degree of 'informational storage'" in his *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (p. 113). For a demonstration of the intricate composition of very large texts, see J. Fokkelman's massive work on Samuel (1981, 1986).

tension between versets. In Amos 7:7–9, for example, Jacob and Isaac are not simply synonyms for Israel; each brings with it a cargo of national and theological associations. A reader—any reader—has to bear these in mind.

Intention has long bedevilled discussion of literary and biblical discourse. Again, one may cite Sternberg:

> As interpreters of the Bible, our only concern is the "embodied" or "objectified" intention . . . such intention fulfills a crucial role, for communication presupposes a speaker who resorts to certain linguistic and structural tools in order to produce certain effects on the addressee; the discourse accordingly supplies a network of clues to the speaker's intention (Sternberg, 1985, p. 9).

A reader constantly constructs and relates to an author with a complex of intentions, conscious or unconscious. These are modified according to the reader's historical awareness (which in turn would depend on variables such as the dating of the final form of the text).[3] For example, for Amos, Jacob and Isaac would have been associated with the patriarchal narratives;[4] even if these played no part in his thinking, they would still be available to us.

This brings us to the issue of free play. Modern biblical interpretation tends to be parsimonious, to confine itself to the minimum that can be said with certainty about the text. Recent literary criticism, in contrast, considers the text to be indeterminate, and the interaction of reader and text to be creative, a play developing the manifold possibilities of each.

My use of the term "reader" might require explaining. Though influenced by reader-response criticism, I do not mean something like Riffaterre's (1978) "super-reader," nor the process whereby the reader might come to comprehend the text. I refer instead to the implied reader, whose participation the text invites, and the text's strategies for influencing that reader.[5]

3. Cf. Sternberg's sage comments (1985, p. 21), and Alter (1981, p. 13). Rosenberg has attempted an ambitious and in my view successful synthesis of literary and historical approaches in his *King and Kin* (1986).

4. Cf. especially the programmatic introduction to Barthes' *S/Z* (1974).

5. The reference to the Akedah (p. 8) would be especially appropriate if, as according to standard source-critical theory, Gen 22 emanates from the E source and thus the Northern Kingdom. This is a very controverted issue; cf. most recently Whybray (1987). The influence of patriarchal narratives on northern prophetic traditions is well-known, e.g., on the Elijah-Elisha cycle, on Hosea; Brueggemann (1969: pp. 387–390) has examined the impact of the Jacob-Esau traditions on Amos 7:1.6, though he differs from me in his focus on the legal connotation of the word *qaton* 'small'.

I

Vision 1

kōh hirʾanī ʾădōnāi yhwh   Thus showed me my Lord YHWH (7.1)

For the first time God and the prophet are silent; what God shows is beyond words, a subliminal reality. Rhetorically, the lapse of divine speech suggests the exhaustion and supercession of language; its focus switches to the mode of prophetic autobiography, introducing the prophet's "I," albeit as object, for the first time in the book. Metaphor, (locusts, fire) speaks for itself, signifies without the medium of language; what we experience therein is the advent of poetry. The autobiography begins with this encounter. The five-fold repetition of the visionary encounter between 7:1 and 9:6 suggests not only progression, the sequence, but elucidation, each vision equivalent to and modifying its predecessors. The metaphors of locusts and fire, for example, are realized at the destructive climax in 9:6ff. Inset into this frame are other autobiographical modes: prophetic conflict and the prophetic call. Lyle Eslinger clearly shows the interrelations between these episodes: I am interested in how narrative prose acquires poetic significance. The first half of this paper will concentrate on the sequence of visions, the second on the parenthetical passages.

> Behold, he was fashioning locusts
> at the beginning of the late planting—
> Now, the late planting is after the king's mowings.
> And when it was about to finish devouring the grass
> of the land I said . . . (7.1–2)

God's fashioning locusts recalls the doxology in 4:13: *yōṣēr hārîm ûbōreʾ rûaḥ* (Who forms mountains and creates the wind').[6] In contrast to the mountains which he forms (*yoṣēr*) with their immense shapes, the winds which he creates (*bōrêʾ*) with their ungraspability, the locusts are mass-produced and intricate; the attention to detail and vast numbers express divine destructive determination. The temporal marker about the royal mowings has evident ironic effect.[7] The locusts eat the grass,

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6. Story (1980, p. 78) notes that characteristic of Amos is the use of participles to initiate doxologies; this would provide another link between these and the vision sequence.

7. Coote (1981, p. 92) sees an implicit social criticism in the reference to the king's mowings, emanating from what he calls Stage A of the book (Amos as social critic), which is superseded by that of total annihilation, characteristic of Stage B. Wolff (1977, pp. 291–92), considers it to be a later gloss. Even more than a reference to oppression the specification of royal ritual evokes the predictability of the court calendar from the perspective of divine doom, an irony rendered more acute if the royal mowings connote

which sustains life and covers the earth; if God creates topography and air, and a small creature that undoes creation, the destruction of grass restores us to the beginning of the second creation narrative where the lack of grass initiates the story. (Gen 2.5) Amos says:

> My Lord YHWH, forgive, pray;
> How will Jacob survive?
> He is so small[8] (7:2)

Again we have a reversion: from Israel to Jacob, national to personal. It is as a child that Jacob is recollected, "a simple man, dwelling in tents" (Gen 25:27), before his crooked adventures.[9] And God responds appropriately:

YHWH relented concerning this: "It shall not be," said YHWH (7:3).

Vision 2

> Thus showed me my Lord YHWH:
> Lo, summoning to contend by fire was my Lord YHWH!
> It consumed the great deep,
> and was devouring the fields.
> I said, "My Lord YHWH, cease, pray!
> How will Jacob survive?
> He is so small."
> YHWH relented concerning this:
> "Also this shall not be."
> said my Lord YHWH (7:4-6).

The second vision is parallel to the first; there is the same sequence of events in much the same formulation. Parallelism in longer units, especially in a visionary context, resembles parallelism within the line; like

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sympathy between the king and nature. The royal mowings, moreover, are metaphorically subverted by the locusts.

8. One could read either 'raise' with LXX (supposing an original *yaqim*)—in which case *mi* would mean 'who' and refer implicitly to God—or retain *yāqûm*, interpreting it as 'endure' or 'remain'; *mî* would then mean 'how' (Wolff, 977), or else Jacob would be in opposition ("Who will endure/remain, Jacob"). Brueggemann (1969, pp. 392-394) reading it *yāqîm*, argues that it relates directly to Israel's helpless, dependent status as *qātōn* 'small'.

9. Wolff (1977, p. 297) rejects cultic or critical associations with Jacob as founder of Bethel or as the target of Hosea's polemic, in view of the motive clause "for he is small" that in turn corresponds to Amos' role as protagonist of the poor (cf. Coote, 1981, p. 92). Brueggemann (1969, pp. 386-392) sees in the adjective *qātōn* a reference to Jacob's status as younger brother, and hence to YHWH's special favor in granting him the birthright, one from which YHWH cannot renege.

Pharaoh's dreams, duplication serves to confirm, amplify and unify the message. Equivalence and contrast comprise the nexus of poetry. Locusts and fire, for example, are contrasting and complementary images of destruction: the fire that would devour everything, even locusts, and undo God's handiwork. Against the similar background, differences emerge; the second vision intensifies the first through its very secondariness, and through its slight but therewith obtrusive variations. The fire consumes the *těhōm rabbāh* 'the great deep', evoking a more inclusive realm of destruction, and an even more primordial entity than grass; the elemental conflict of fire and water, and the paradox of chaos confounded, are likewise implicated. The motif of disputation[10] complements that of creation; if God's care in forming locusts could be seen as pseudo-doxology, summoning fire as God's advocate is adversarial, matching praise with condemnation, two elements often in conjunction. As Lyle Eslinger shows, in the dialogue, *sělah* 'forgive' is replaced by *hǎdal* 'cease', by the overwhelming imperative to stop, even if Israel is past forgiveness; in the divine retraction, *gam zô^ʾt* 'Also/even this' is inserted, emphasizing God's cumulative magnanimity and possibly its limits. Here, too, the variations are both ominous and urgent.[11]

Visionary discourse always has a surreal, hence, poetic quality. The words are simple, direct, impassioned and unadorned, exhibiting elementary parallelism and rhythmical balance. The poetic quality derives, however, not from formal properties, but from the focus on the prophet's voice *in extremis* as it emerges from its web of indictment and prognostication. This voice separates itself from that of God, to protest against the horror of what it sees; its struggle with that of God, a struggle of concession and silence, is the dramatic and poetic climax of the book. The prophet is witness and spokesman, for the smallness and innocence of Jacob. God's unexpected reprieve grants the prophet immense persuasive power and a place in the line of great intercessory prophets; God is recalled to his own memory. At the same time, the divine retraction is provisional, itself rhetorical. This appears in the transition from the first to the second visions, where God's change of heart is reversed; once

10. Wolff (1977, p. 298) follows Hillers in arguing for a redivision of the word-divider to read *lěrěbîb ^ʾēš* 'to a rain of fire' for *lārîb baes*. Coote (1981, p. 92) points, however, to the motif of disputation concerning the guilt or innocence of Jacob (cf. Wurthwein, 1950, p. 31, n. 44 for the reading *lhbš* or *lšbib^ʾš*).

11. Wolff (1977, p. 303) points out that the contrast between "Forgive" and "Cease" is yet more forcible given the identity of the other words. Brueggemann (1969, pp. 395–397) interprets both *sělah* 'forgive' and *hadal* 'cease' as confident appeals to YHWH's responsibility in the covenant relationship (cf. Eslinger, 1987).

again he resolves to destroy Israel. And once again, using the same
words, Amos, now inexplicably, succeeds in revoking that decision.

Vision 3

> Thus he showed me:
> Lo, my Lord was standing on a wall checked with a plumbline,
> And in his hand a plumbline.
> YHWH said to me, "What do you see, Amos?"
> And I said, "A plumbline."
> My Lord said, "Behold, I set a plumbline in the midst of my people Israel,
> I will pardon it no more.
> The high places of Isaac shall be made desolate,
> And the sanctuaries of Israel laid waste,
> And I will rise up against the house of Jeroboam with the sword" (7:7–9).

The verse tightens (at least in MT),[12] and concentrates on the figure of
YHWH, in his hand a plumbline.[13] The plumbline is not a straight-
forward instrument of destruction, unlike locusts and fire; it thus poses
an enigma corresponding to its function of testing and to the question
God asks. The question, "What do you see, Amos?" is both ironic, since
Amos only sees what God shows him, and intimate, especially with the
use of the personal address; thus God steals the initiative in the dialogue,
effectively depriving Amos of the possibility of intercession. It draws
from Amos an obvious, perhaps too obvious, answer that elicits the
divine judgement. From the disputation in vision 2 we turn to God's
identity as the one who plumbs the human heart, the *qereb* 'midst' of his
people Israel. Robert Coote has suggested a pun between *'ănak* and

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12. Most commentators assume that *'ădōnāi YHWH* or YHWH has been misplaced
after *wĕhinnēh* 'and behold' (Niditch, 1980, p. 21; Wolff, 1977, p. 293), and translate in
accordance with the LXX, that presupposes an identical wording with 7:1 and 7:4. But this
levelling (typical of LXX) perhaps conceals an intensification as well as a rhetorical shift,
abbreviating the formula to focus on YHWH as symbolic actor. Niditch's adoption of
ανηρ from some of the LXX versions would suppose a contrast between the figure
standing on the wall and YHWH, who sets a plumbline in Israel. According to the
interpretation given in the vision, however, the figure signifies YHWH.

13. *'ănak*, which occurs only in this passage in the Hebrew Bible, remains very obscure.
'Plumbline' is still the most popular translation (cf. Niditch, 1980, p. 22; Wolff, 1977,
p. 300). Brunet's suggestion that it means 'tin', and is a metonym for a bronze sword in v.
9, seems very unconvincing, especially given its function as an instrument for determining
judgement in v. 8. A problem with the interpretation of *'ănak* as 'plumbline', neatly solved
by Wolff and Niditch through deletion, is the first occurrence of *'ănak* in *ḥomat 'ănak*, a
construct, 'a wall of *'ănak*', generally expanded into 'a wall built with a plumbline' (RSV
Craigie, 1984). Possibly two meanings (e.g., *'ănak* as a plumbline and as the material from
which the wall is made) are juxtaposed.

$^{\circ}\check{a}n\bar{o}k\hat{\imath}.$[14] It is himself, as plumbline, that he places there. The judgement proceeds through five phases, the last three, as Susan Niditch suggests, composing a rough parallelistic tercet,[15] marking the transition from visionary immediacy to formal oracle. The judgement, however, encounters divine pathos; the plumbline, God's "I" as tester and standard, is set in "*my* people Israel." Thereby God takes over the intercessory ground of the prophet. Michael deRoche argues the multiple connotations of the word $^{\circ}abr$ in Jer 8:13; here I suggest $l\bar{o}^{\circ}$ $^{\circ}\hat{o}s\hat{\imath}p$ $^{\circ}\hat{o}d$ $^{\circ}\check{a}b\hat{o}r$ $l\hat{o}$ means not only "I will pardon him no more," but "I will pass through for him no more."[16] Instead of God's passage, in covenant and theophany, there is a plumbline. The pathos is compounded in the next verse; "The high places of Isaac shall be made desolate" takes us further back on the ancestral chain, from the child Jacob to the miraculous child Isaac, the laughter that will be desolated;[17] the specification of the *bāmôt yiśḥāq* 'the high places of Isaac', suggests the sacrifice or Binding of Isaac, the revocation of the divine promise. Thence the verse moves expansively to the present "The sanctuaries of Israel laid waste," to the object of Amos' polemic, the sanctuaries which are still genuinely God's sacred places; therewith God will destroy his holiness in Israel. Then the parallelism focuses in good Alterian fashion: the passive verbs become active, the

14. See Coote (1981, p. 92). Coote's other suggestion, that it might mean "I am about to set you" (reading *'nk* as *ennak*) seems more dubious, requiring the insertion of an energic suffix and an *aleph* (cf. Petersen, 1981, pp. 77–78 for a long defense).

15. See Niditch (1980, pp. 26–27). She ascribes to the tercet 'metrical imbalance' (p. 27), without apparent justification; its pattern of 3.3, and (climactically) 4 units seems quite regular, even granting the appropriateness of metrical criteria (cf. Kugel, 1981). Her attempts to perceive parallelism in v. 8 through re-arrangement do not meet with great success, as she herself admits.

16. DeRoche (1980, p. 287). The connotation 'pass away' which deRoche finds there, however, is not applicable in our verse. One should note the conjunction of the verbs *'SP* and *BR* is common to both passages. For the theophoric connotation of *'BR* cf. Crenshaw (1968, p. 206 and 1975, pp. 39–41), where he rejects the common rendering 'forgive' in favor of 'pass by'. It does not seem necessary, however, to eliminate either one of these readings.

17. Apart from 7:15, the form *yiśḥāq* only occurs in Ps 105.9 and Jer 31:26. Ackroyd (1977, p. 74) argues that the spelling variant may be late, but in view of the paucity of references and their uncertain dating this suggestion seems tenous. Terrien (1962) and Wolff (1977, p. 302) both see a connection with Beersheba as the nucleus of the Isaac traditions, and as a cultic center in Amos 5:5 and 8:14; Terrien (p. 113) speculates on an association between Amos, Beersheba, and Edomite wisdom; Wolff envisages these passages as a polemic against devotees of Beersheba, who hypothetically regarded Isaac as their eponymous ancestor. This, however, does not fit the context of 7:9 and 7:16, the doom against "my people Israel," its sanctuaries and king.

divine subject becomes explicit.[18] The diffuse plural, destructive *yeḥĕrābû*
('will be laid waste') materializes as a 'sword', *ḥereb*. "The house of
Jeroboam" likewise has a dual significance; Jeroboam recalls his name-
sake, Jeroboam I, and hence Israelite separatism and cultic autonomy.[19]
Included in the doom are not only Jeroboam's dynasty but the entire
monarchy. The passage is rounded off, as Niditch says, with a word play
between *yeḥĕrābû* and *ḥereb*; this in turn rhymes with the earlier *bĕqereb*
'in the midst (of my people Israel)', both to enclose the divine judgement
in a rhyming and fatal circle, and to link the sword to its ultimate
victim.[20] The repetition of the root *ḥrb* in the final position recalls that
of the word *ʾănāk* in the first half of the vision; both are long sharp
dividing lines, and instruments of God's judgement. The sword, then, is
a transformation of the metaphor of the plumbline.

Vision 4

> Thus showed me my Lord YHWH:
> Lo, a summer basket!
> He said, "What do you see, Amos?"
> I said, "A summer basket."
> YHWH said to me, "The end comes to my people Israel,
> I will pardon it no more.
> The songs of the palace (or temple) shall wail in that day,
> declares my Lord YHWH
> Many are the corpses everywhere
> He has cast hush (8:1-3).

The fourth vision, after a gap, is parallel to the third, just as the
second is to the first. As in the latter pair, repetition is confirmatory and
highlights significant differences, especially after the interlude with
Amaziah (7:9-17) that focuses attention even more closely on Amos.
Each vision is puzzling and deceptive; the builder's tool which in the

18. Cf. Alter (1985, p. 10 ff.). The climactic intensification is well analyzed by Wolff
(1977, p. 295).

19. See Coote (1981, pp. 22 and 60-61). I am not persuaded by Coote's suggestion that
Amos should be dated after the reign of Jeroboam II. That Jeroboam II did not in fact die
by the sword is not material evidence, especially given 7:9. That the Assyrians are not
explicitly mentioned (p. 20) need not imply the imminence of the threat any more than its
absence. Ackroyd (1977, p. 78) argues that the story is correlated with that of the man of
God who prophesied against Jeroboam I at Bethel in 1 Kings 13, as the result of a re-
attribution of the narrative by a Deuteronomic editor (cf. also Ahlstrom, 1981).

20. Cf. Niditch (1980, p. 27). Some critics attach 7:9 to 7:10-17 on grounds of lexical
correspondences (Ackroyd, 1977, pp. 72-74 and references therein) or regard it as a later
expansion by the Amos school of an otherwise complete vision (Wolff, 1977, p. 295).

third vision is in fact used for demolition, and the ultimate harvest in the fourth. Once again, Amos is called to witness, acting as God's foil, giving him occasion for an interpretive judgement not open to persuasion or second thoughts; it is a dialogue in appearance only. In this case, however, Amos' words *qĕlûb qāyiṣ* 'A summer basket/end' are themselves transformative, the hinge upon which the passage turns. In his mouth the vision becomes ashes. A divine stratagem induces the prophet unwittingly to condemn his people through the duplicity of language. In any event, Amos' apparently redundant quasi-automatic response carries an enormous weight of rhetorical significance. From being the one who intercedes for Jacob, Amos bears the word of his destruction. However, the repetition of the phrase, *ᶜammî yiśrāᵓēl* 'my people Israel', indicates that it is God's people also. The pathos is compounded by the pastoral image of the summer basket,[21] a vision of felicity, Israel's ideal fulfillment and actual delusive prosperity.

The final tercet matches that of the vision of the plumbline, i.e., three verses communicate universal catastrophe, except that, as Niditch (1980, p. 38) shows, they cannot be equalized, even at the cost of wholesale deletion. Instead they taper, from the immensely long first line, delineating the wailing of the songs (I prefer MT *šîrôt* to the common emendation *šārôt*)[22] to the abrupt termination of the concluding trisyllable *hišlîk has*, 'He has cast hush'.[23]

A curious thing has happened. God has virtually withdrawn as subject. The end comes by itself to Israel, as if by natural attraction, in contrast to the plumbline he has set in its midst in 7:10. But in this last tercet he has also withdrawn as speaker. The purely formal notation *nĕᵓûm ᵓādōnāi YHWH* 'declares by Lord YHWH', totally redundant in itself, rightly eliminated by Wolff, Niditch etc.,[24] nevertheless reintroduces scribal discourse, if only as biblical quotation marks. Who says, "declares by Lord YHWH"? Not YHWH, surely. In the last versets God fades out

21. It makes little difference whether one translates *qayiṣ* as 'harvest' with Niditch (1980, p. 25; cf. Wolff, 1977, p. 317), or, more conventionally, as 'summer'.

22. Cf. Wolff (1977, p. 317), Niditch (1980, p. 36), Hammershaimb (1970, p. 120). Wolff argues that *šîrôt* as a plural for song is unattested elsewhere; it is, however, common in post-biblical Hebrew (cf. Kugel, 1982). Discomfort with the personification of song may be suspected; it does, nevertheless, yield a more precise image (i.e., "Song itself wails").

23. Niditch (1980, p. 36) reads MT *hišlîk* 'he has cast' as the imperative *hašlîk* 'throw (them)'; Hammershaimb (1970, p. 121) suggests the passive *hošlak* 'is flung', the subject being 'the multitude of corpses'. Wolff (1977, p. 317) retains *hišlîk*, seeing it as impersonal.

24. See Wolff (1977, p. 317) and Niditch (1980, p. 36). Both note that the formula occurs three times in ch. 8 and only twice elsewhere in the book.

entirely. "Many are the corpses everywhere" could be spoken by any-body; the most appropriate subject for *hišlîk has*, 'He has cast hush', is YHWH. This would correspond to his active emergence at the end of the third vision, "And I will rise again the house of Jeroboam with the sword." In that case, he speaks of himself in the third person, a common distancing, objectifying device; or else his voice is entirely reintegrated with that of Amos; the dialogue is at the end and the silenced prophetic voice reemerges in that of God.[25]

The concluding tercet grants an internal perspective to the compre-hensive account in the third vision. God rises up against the house of Jeroboam with the sword, and the sanctuaries are laid waste; we now see the bodies, hear the songs turn to wailing and then silence. The same trajectory and pathos brings the harvest to an end.[26]

Whereas the relationship between the first and second visions is clear, that of the third and fourth is more ambiguous. The plumbline represents God's judgement, while the summer basket is that which is destroyed, and which seduces Amos' gaze with its pastoral promise. The focus shifts to the victims and to Amos, who utters the word of dissolution. There is possibly a critical stance, as pathos turns from God to the victims. A number of critics have pointed to the connection between the verb *ʾsp* in *lōʾ ʾôsîp ʿôd ʿăbôr lô* 'I will pardon it no more' and the *hag hāʾāsîp*, 'the ingathering of the autumn festival', when the year is renewed, and songs are sung in joy.[27] The basket would then symbolically contain the ingathering of the fruit, to be offered and eaten in the festival. In Deuteronomy 26, bringing the first fruit to the sanctuary is accompanied by a declaration of thanksgiving for the gift of the land.[28]

25. Wurthwein (1950, pp. 28–35) describes the process from resistance to acceptance similarly, using depth-psychology with considerable finesse, but too readily interpreting it in terms of Amos' actual biographical development (cf. Barton, 1980, p. 11).

26. Wolff (1977, p. 318) attributes this verse to the same level of redaction as 7:9 (which he terms 'The Old School of Amos'). Melugin (1978, p. 387) attributes both to a Deutero-nomic level, on the grounds of their polemic against sanctuaries. Niditch (1980, p. 39, n. 24), however, argues that it is an integral component of 8:1–3, on the basis of style, content, and theme. Ackroyd (1977, p. 73) adduces, as evidence that it is an addendum, the reference to 'that day' in 8:3b. The force of this argument is not clear to me, since 'that day' is patently aligned with 'the end' in 8:2.

27. Niditch (1980, p. 39) notes too the association of the harvest festival with ritual mourning. Cf. Coote (1981, p. 93), and compare deRoche (1980, pp. 280–2).

28. Cf. Mayes' argument that Deut 26:5 and 10–11 are pre-Deuteronomic (1981, pp. 332–33). See Von Rad (1984, p. 4) for the original thesis; it has generally been abandoned, cf. the exhaustive discussion in Gottwald (1979, pp. 85–92) who regards the 'credos' as "late surviving forms" of a type developed in premonarchical times. It should be noted that the ritual in Deuteronomic 26:5 ff. is not to be simply identified with that of the Feast of Weeks

Here, ironically, the basket precipitates a declaration of the end of its occupation.

The two pairs of visions are parallel structures, linked by the introductory formula, the vision, and the dialogue that develops from it. They comprise a narrative sequence, from averted threats to impending doom, realized in the fifth vision; pattern, however, imposes a certain identity, as each pair reveals and is a parable for the divine-human encounter. YHWH sets a plumbline in Israel, but the judgement is a foregone conclusion, and has been made throughout the book. The movement is from the obvious external perils to the internal dangers against which there is no defense, in which people put their trust: the state institutions, the presence of God in their midst, and the bountiful harvest, the current prosperity. In the first pair Amos is moved to protest, and YHWH relents; in the second God takes the initiative. Amos is reduced to being a mouthpiece for the vision, to rhetorical impotence. Thus the second pair renders ironic the first: Amos' power is illusory, divine magnanimity a heuristic blind. However, through being evoked as an individual, intercessory voice at the heart of the vision, Amos witnesses as a separate consciousness to God's thought and pain. In the fourth vision, the nullified voice is the hinge for the transition from blessing to silence. The prophet's voice is then powerful, his attention is essential to God, yet he is trapped.

After another long interlude (8:4–14), in the fifth vision the structure crumbles. *kōh hirʾanî ʾădōnāi*, 'Thus showed me my Lord', is replaced by the straightforward *rāʾîtî*, 'I saw' (9:1). It is coupled with the third through its visualization of God standing. Parallel to the wall as a metaphor for Israel is the center of the sacred edifice, the altar. The prophet is addressed, but only in the imperative: it is he, as witness and intercessor, who must initiate judgement. But he does find a response, in grief:

> And my Lord YHWH of hosts, who touches the earth and it melts,
> And all its inhabitants grieve . . . (9:5).

II

Between the third and fourth visions there is a confrontation between the priest of Bethel and Amos. Lyle Eslinger sees in this a crisis of

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(*contra* McConville, 1984, p. 111); it would seem to refer to any fruit at any season, cf. Exodus 22:28a, that enjoins the dedication of the first fruits of vat and granary; the specification *loʾ tĕʾahēr*, 'do not delay', as well as the variety (cf. Numbers 17:28) suggests that the offering is not confined to any one season (cf. Erling, 1986, p. 472, Milgrom, 1976, pp. 60–61, and n. 256).

conversion; Amos is persuaded by Amaziah's hostility to change inter-
cession into accusation. Thus he perceives the relationship between the
vision sequence and the Amaziah episode as one of continuity; the latter
is vital to what he calls the education of Amos. For the first time we see,
as fact rather than accusation, the corruption of Israel, directed ironically
at the one who intercedes on its behalf. Israel damns itself, through the
mouth of its most sacred functionary. Whether the episode had the same
decisive effect in the fictive biography of Amos is, I think, less clear,
since one cannot distinguish Amos' sentiments in 8:4–14 from those of
God or those earlier in the book. Further, the episode's insertion between
parallel visions emphasizes their equivalence as much as their difference.
Alongside continuity we have contrast. Thus Eslinger is right to draw
attention to the ironic disjunction between the Amaziah episode and its
context.

In the visions Amos is alone with that which compels him to speak
prophetically. The visions dramatize an inner conflict (Amos the person
versus Amos the prophet) which is itself a reflex of the external one
(God versus Israel). Amos himself, through communicating God's word,
attracts rejection from God's representative, the priest. The encounter
with the priest should correspond to that with God: instead it reverses it.
The priest attempts to sever the communication with the sacred that is
his task to preserve. The interconnection develops through the ironic
repetition of phrases. Amaziah accuses Amos of conspiring *bĕqereb bêt
yiśrā'ēl* "in the midst of the house of Israel" (7:10);[29] God has just shown
Amos the plumbline that he has set "in the midst (*bĕqereb*) of my people
Israel." Amos, as the witness to the corruption of Israel, is that plumb-
line; therein Amaziah only sees conspiracy. If the plumbline tests
straightness, Amaziah beholds therein deviousness. Moreover, it is his
conspiracy, as the distorted messages show. YHWH says *lō' 'ôsîp 'ōd
'ăbōr lô* 'I will pardon them no more'; Amaziah tells Amos *ûbêt'-ēl lō'
tôsîp 'ōd lĕhinnābe'* (v. 13) 'and in Bethel prophesy no more'. The
withdrawal of divine favor and passage (*'ăbōr*) is unwittingly reciprocated
by the attempted suppression of his message. YHWH, however, has
chosen Amos to prophesy "to *my* people Israel" (7:15). Lyle Eslinger
notes the inversion of the pair Isaac/Israel in 7:9 in Amos' judgement in
7:16. The desolation of the sacred sites decreed by YHWH is recom-
pensed and thereby confirmed by the silencing of the prophetic word. If
"the high places of Isaac" recalls the binding of Isaac, hence divine

29. Coote (1981, p. 61) proposes that the phrase might allude to Deuteronomic ambi-
tions for reunifying the northern and southern kingdoms, as attempted under Josiah; this,
however, seems very odd in the mouth of Amaziah.

pathos and the transformation of death into blessing, *lo³ taṭṭîp ⁽al bêt yiśḥâq* 'Do not preach (lit. drip) over the house of Isaac' (7:16) links the prophetic function metaphorically to fertility;[30] its suppression will lead to natural dessication, convert miraculous seed into sterility. Finally, in the second vision fire consumes the *heleq*, the leased land (7:4); here the priest's land will be divided (*tĕḥullāq*); inheritance as it were, inherits dissection.

Biblical characters are constantly misquoting each other; that Amaziah fabricates Amos' speech is in no way anomalous, and communicates, as Eslinger shows, self-fulfilling dramatic irony. It is, however, still more subtle: it introduces us to the wonderfully nuanced world of biblical prose. Every distorted message reveals an aspect of the character and motivation of the speaker. As Craigie (1984, p. 178) points out, Amos' presence at the Bethel against which he preaches would not be agreeable to a sacred establishment (cf. also Spiegel, 1976); his prophecy that "the high places of Isaac will be desolated, and the sanctuaries of Israel laid waste" threatens its very existence. Yet there is not a word of this to the king. Amaziah, through his concealment, presents himself as a purely disinterested subject; to this end he exaggerates Amos' prediction against crown and kingdom. The threat against the dynasty becomes one against the king himself; Israel's exile is at best an inference from the devastation of its sanctuaries. That which is calculated to interest the king is magnified; that which is of less moment to him, and which will betray Amaziah's own motives, is glossed over. Amaziah, ironically, is the arch-conspirator.

The connection between Amaziah's words and the message to the king is indeterminate. In any event, Amaziah seems to play a double game, warning Amos of the king's wrath while simultaneously awakening it, or possibly forestalling royal indifference or perspicuity.[31] He may or may

30. Some commentators take it for granted that Amaziah was acting on Jeroboam's instructions (Craigie, 1984, p. 179, Hammershaimb, 1970, p. 115); others (Tucker, 1973, p. 427, Ackroyd, 1977, p. 82, n. 41) assert that the point is of no interest to the narrator. Wolff (1977, p. 311) sees in Amaziah's preempting the king's response a conflict between his loyalty as a royal official and his respect for prophetic authority; cf. also Wurthwein, 1950, pp. 19-20. However, the only positive evidence in the text for his evaluation is the verb QŠR 'conspire'. Mays (1969, p. 136) thinks Amaziah did not wish to create a martyr. As against Tucker and Ackroyd, I would suggest that the message to the king generates a loose end in the narrative, that would be redundant if not significant. See Sternberg, 1985, pp. 186 ff. for the theory of gaps in biblical narrative.

31. Overholt (1979, p. 525) cites parallel passages (Judah 5:4, Psalms 68:9, Amos 9:13) to illustrate the life-giving connotation of the expression; in Micah 2:6-11 it is used satirically for the quieting effect of pseudo-prophecy.

not believe in the conspiracy theory,[32] that reduces prophecy to a political weapon, or that a prophet's principal motive is hunger, as suggested by the parallelistic sneer "And eat there bread, and there prophesy" (7:12). The imputation of the capacity to be suborned sketches in Amaziah's mental framework: the establishment hierophant's prejudice against marginal and, in his terms, parasitic spiritual claimants. Most revealing is his justification "For it is the king's sanctuary, a royal house" (7:13), the subordination of cult to royal authority (cf. Coote, 1981, p. 108). The prediction that the sanctuaries of Israel will be destroyed in 7:9 is thus retrospectively sanctioned by its chief guardian. Similarly, the name of the place is humanized and politicized: Bethel is paired with *bêt mamlākāh*, 'a royal house'. (cf. Eslinger, 1987).

Amos' reply symmetrically matches Amaziah's injunction *ḥōzeh lēk bĕraḥ lĕkā* 'Seer, go, flee . . .' with YHWH's command *lēk hinnābēʾ ʾel ʿammî yiśrāʾēl* 'Go and prophesy to my people Israel' (7:15). The reminiscence of his call, "And YHWH took me from behind the flock", echoes God's commission of David and pastoral responsibility.[33] Two sets of authority are thus set against each other. Similarly, Amos' self-identification as a *bōqēr* 'cattle-breeder' suggests an allusion to the prophetic/divine function of investigation (BQR); this is compounded by the threefold repetition of *ʾănōkî*, corresponding to the threefold repetition of *ʾānāk* in the third vision.

The interrelationship of the prose narrative section and the visionary frame is established phraseologically and thematically; discourse with Amaziah ironically parodies that with YHWH. The narrative is contained within and subordinate to the visionary encounter its priestly protagonist cannot recognize. For prose and poetry are, at the same time, mutually exclusive. The visionary immediacy of "Thus showed me YHWH" is replaced by a neutral objective report, identifying personages through official epithets: "And Amaziah priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam, king of Israel. . . ."[34] The encapsulated time of the visions, in which the same breath says "summer" and "end," judges and is measured against

32. Zevit (1975) argues that Amaziah's use of the word *ḥōzeh* 'visionary' indicates that he thought him to be an agent of the Judean king. Even if semantically Zevit is right (cf. Hoffman, 1977), it would not prove that Amaziah believes his allegation.

33. Cf. Mays (1969, p. 139). Coote (1981, pp. 124–125) notes the pastoral idealization of David in 9:11, in what he calls the C Stage of the book. Its roots could be found here, which Coote regards as part of the B stage. Ackroyd (1977, p. 83) draws the parallel with 2 Sam 7:8, as a literary convention, without thereby thematically connecting Amos and David.

34. It is unnecessary to see in the otherwise redundant label evidence that 7:10–17 is an insertion into the text, possibly from a longer prose narrative, and a Judean perspective

the contingent time and concerns of priest, king, and narrator. Amos's private experience is but one incident in the temporal flow, to be evaluated according to its truth, its motivation, its expediency. The experience, however, is of the falsity of that evaluation. The prose account then augments the sense of pathos and shortsightedness of "my people Israel," a people that lives by humdrum, human time, and that can only interpret the vision in those terms. Prose and poetry are both rhetorical strategies of exposure, each declaring the other to be fallacious.

Moreover, in the struggle between Amaziah and Amos the weapons are rhetorical. If, in the visions, poetic immediacy and urgency is expressed through language that is rhetorically unmarked, the prose interlude is extremely formal, with an abundance of parallelism. Thereby each side asserts its authority. Amaziah says, ceremoniously, *kî miqdaš melek hûʾ û-bēt mamlākā hûʾ* 'For it is the king's sanctuary and a royal house'; Amos upstages him with his fourfold parallelism:

lōʾ nābîʾ ʾānōkî
wĕlōʾ ben nābîʾ ʾānōkî
kî bōqēr ʾānōkî
ûbôlēs šiqmîm

I am not a prophet
nor the son of a prophet
but a cattle-breeder
and a gatherer of sycamore figs.[35]

He undercuts Amaziah's rhetoric also through a reversal of its technique: if Amaziah's self-aggrandizement in inflated language is derived from royal patronage, Amos' parallelism is a progressive self-denigration that reflectively impugns Amaziah's claims. A cowherd can speak as well as a priest, and may equally well be chosen by YHWH. The royal sun is supplanted by YHWH's commission. Here, I think, Amos' actual words are significant: *lōʾ nābîʾ ʾānōkî wĕlōʾ ben nābîʾ ʾānōkî* 'I am not a prophet nor the son of a prophet'. In context, they do not refer solely to professional status or terminological distinction.[36] They are rather concerned with identity, hence the repeated stress on the word *ʾānōkî*. In

(Ackroyd, 1977, p. 75; cf. Coote, 1981, p. 22; and Wolff, 1977, p. 308), since it functions as a stylistic marker.

35. Wright (1976), in his very interesting analysis of *bôlēs šiqmîm*, suggests a possible function of gashing the figs to enable them to ripen; another possibility he raises, derived from Aquila, would be to read the root as BLS 'to find out' thus providing a parallel with *boqer* (Zalcman [1980] proposes emending *bōqēr* or *dôqēr* 'piercing').

36. For the argument as to whether there is a technical difference between *ḥōzeh* 'visionary' and *nābî* 'prophet' and likewise whether Amos' sentence is to be read positively or negatively, see most recently Petersen (pp. 51 ff), Zevit, and Ackroyd (p. 83). Against

himself, Amos is not a prophet, it is not a personal accomplishment or an innate gift; nothing can bestow it except YHWH. The denial of self-value disarms institutional pride; at the same time it calls into question the individual voice that responds to the visions. As himself, Amos is not a prophet; as himself, he protests; yet the protest itself is part of the prophetic experience.

The second interlude (8:4–14) is a potpourri of motifs from the visions and the book as a whole. It serves to summarize its indictment, and thus prepares for, as well as postpones the climactic vision. To explore the complex inter-relationships, e.g., the transformation of the smallness of Jacob in the visions to its pride/excellence in 8:7, is not my business here. Nor do I wish to touch on Eslinger's thesis of narrative continuity with the visions. For it is clear that the biographical mode lapses; the book reverts to its characteristic style. What does interest me is a parallel movement. In 8:3, the songs turn to wailing and silence; in 8:10 to lamentation. The movement from song to silence is completed in the next utterance (8:11–13) in which there is a fruitless search for the word of YHWH. The word *has* "Hush" in 8:3 occurs also in 6:10, where it suppresses the name of YHWH, so that blasphemy should not be heard; this in turn results from recognition of his responsibility for decimation. In 8:3 it is YHWH, not a survivor, who has cast a silence whose primary referent is death, but which may also include appalled onlookers.[37] In 8:11–13, the inaccessible word of YHWH is that which has spoken throughout the book; it anticipates its own cessation. The indifference or suppression it encounters is replaced by longing. YHWH has spoken to a people that cannot hear; now they will seek a voice that is absent. Parallel to this is the inset story of the prophet, whose voice asserts itself and whose power turns out to be illusory; it is subtly transformed into a voice of condemnation, a foil for that of God; and is allowed no reaction to the divine imperative in 9:1. Amaziah's attempted suppression of the divine word will then be recompensed by its ultimate failure, and, as representative of YHWH, ironically imitates YHWH.

The rhetorical progression, "not a hunger for bread, nor a thirst for water, but for hearing the words of YHWH," suggests that the meta-

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the latter view, see Hoffman (pp. 209–211), who argues that *lo'* as an independent clause never expresses absolute denial, and cites a parallel in Zech 13:5.

37. Niditch (1980, p. 40) interprets *has* as a counter-charm to prevent YHWH from noticing that he had left any survivors. One could surmise less specifically that any word has to be silenced, since it might or would evoke the name of YHWH, the ultimate perpetrator. The two interpretations converge, in that the effect of Niditch's counter-charm is to exclude YHWH from Israel.

phorical hunger for the words of YHWH is the ultimate famine, that physical hunger and thirst are themselves a metaphor. Without the words of YHWH the land is sterile, and people wander from shore to shore, itself a figure for its lack of direction and instability; Amos' well-worn image, put in the mouth of Amaziah, *wĕlōʾ taṭṭîp ʿal bēt yiśḥāq*, 'And do not 'drip' over the house of Isaac' compounds the latter's fictive folly by appropriating the correlation between fertility and divine speech. The words of YHWH suggest both moral order and vitality, whose absence heralds entropy.

The visitation of famine is the culmination of the series of destructive threats in 8:9-10; the marker *hinnēh yāmîm bāʾîm*, 'Behold the days come', turns it into an aftermath, but also grants it intensity, as if a new pocket of eschatological time, and a new paragraph, were needed to communicate it. As such, however, it is stereotyped; famine pales before the darkening of the sun at noon, etc. The harbinger of a cliché leaves the reader unprepared for its surprising transformation. The use of natural catastrophe to chastise moral turpitude is familiar; torment with frustrated repentance and the thirst for God is not.

This, I think, is unique in prophetic literature: if a people is past forgiveness it is generally also beyond repentance. Contrition is invariably followed by restoration; so much so, that Isaiah is instructed to preach so that the people should not understand, lest they repent and be healed (6:10). For a change of heart, especially one induced by YHWH, not to be allied with reconciliation is paradoxical. Even in Amos, the expected pattern is found in 5:4 and 5:6: "Seek me and live" and "Seek YHWH and live"; inevitable doom is mitigated by ever-present possibility.[38] Even more to the point, in the parallel sequence in 4:6-11, intensifying disaster is accompanied by the refrain, *wĕlōʾ šabtem ʿāday nĕʾûm yhwh*, 'Yet you did not turn back to me—declares YHWH', suggesting that, if they had, the series of calamities would have been interrupted.[39]

Incomprehension is betrayed satirically by prospecting for the words of YHWH, as if they could be located spatially. Only the thirst (*ṣmʾ*)

38. Many critics (e.g., Blenkinsopp, p. 90; Coote, 1981, p. 85) attribute these expressions of hope to a later stage of composition, largely on grounds of incompatibility. Cf. Gottlieb (1967, p. 433), who regards it as pre-Deuteronomic, Huffman (1983, pp. 113-114), Wolff (1977, p. 231).

39. Brueggemann (1965, p. 1) cites Reventlow *Das Amt des Propheten* (pp. 75 ff.) as arguing that the sequence is modelled after the convenant curses in Leviticus 26. Coote (1981, p. 78) compares the refrain in Isa 5:25-10:4 ("For all this his anger has not returned"), cf. Crenshaw (1968, pp. 212-213).

reveals the place where they could be found (*mṣ*ʾ). The words of YHWH imitate Israel; listening to them Israel realizes itself as a people, fulfilling its function according to 2:11: "And I raised up prophets from among your sons, and Nazirites from among your young men." The interconnections are reinforced by 8:13, in which the young men (*baḥûrîm*) who were raised as Nazirites, and should give strength and encouragement, faint of thirst; they are paralleled by the 'beautiful virgins' (*habbětûlôt hayyāpôt*), individualizations of the virgin daughter of Israel of 5:2 who will fall and no longer rise. There her face is coupled with its remedy, "Seek me and live" (5:4); here, however, the same quest causes the virgins' collapse.

Amos, as prophet, hence the ideal Israel, open to God's word, is silenced by Amaziah, and thus exemplifies the fate of the prophets according to 2:12, "And to the prophets you said 'Do not prophesy'." But this is proleptic of the ultimate silencing of the voice. He thus expresses the voice and its extinction, the silence it meets and the desire it evokes, the divine knowledge of Israel that singles *it* out for destruction, and the thirst for knowledge of God that completes its downfall. He speaks for the relationship of Israel and God, for the harvest, that is also the word of its dissolution. The solitude of the voice speaks for those that seek it in its absence, for its failure, and for the desolate knowledge of God that destroys what it knows and chooses.

This brings me to my concluding problem: the relationship between spoken language and prophetic experience. The controlling metaphor of the book is the lion roaring in 1:2, one that all the words attempt to interpret, to accommodate in a human, beautiful language, in the perennial poetic task of articulating the inarticulate, crossing the threshold of horror and wonder. In 3:4 and 3:8 the metaphor returns; the lion roars over its prey and induces fear; in 3:8b the sequence is capped by the restoration of vehicle to tenor: "My Lord YHWH has spoken, who can but prophesy?" The prophet, then, by extension from 3:4, is God's prey; the parallelism with 3:8a suggests fear as a corresponding reaction. The passage from lion roaring to God speaking, from fear to prophecy, is both an intensification and implies transformation: out of the prophet's immense fear he prophesies. But his function is split, since he also amplifies YHWH's speech, finds words for it. Thus divine hunger is heard through him. The prophets are YHWH's servants, charged with his message, to them he reveals his secret (3:7).[40] The secret hints at

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40. Many critics (e.g., Wolff, 1977, pp. 181, 186–7; Mays, 1969, pp. 61–62, Melugin, 1978, pp. 381-82) argue that 3:7 is a Deuteronomistic insertion, as evidenced by its prosaic

concealment, which the prophets betray but only through mysterious language, a language that is silent. Its connection with YHWH's mono-poly of evil in the city (3:6) is endorsed by the word ʿśh and the subordinating ki that link 3:6 and 3:7. Prophecy in turn, in the context of its parallel term 'fear', has two aspects: it involves a loss of self, dramatizing the prophet as God's prey; at the same time it affirms the prophet as the only one who is truly and courageously conscious. The rhetorical question, "My Lord YHWH has spoken, who can but prophesy?" ironically evokes the unexpected answer: no one prophesies except Amos, the deportee, who alone fulfills Israel's prophetic purpose.

In 4:13 the doxology links the wonder of creation and speech: that which forms mountains and creates wind tells us our speech and thought.[41] Thus all speech has a prophetic quality, dictated by YHWH. The parallelism proceeds through ever-increasing degrees of subtlety, to the preverbal roots of speech. The parallelism has three aspects: equiva-lence, that which speaks is also that which shapes and creates the universe; progression, speech as consummation; and contrast, speech as responsive to creation, recognizing in the unchanging mountains that which shapes them, naming the origin of the ever-moving wind, and finding therein its own origin also. It emerges from wonder, that everything is mysterious, identical, yet patterned. Finally, speech is that which makes us most ourselves, identifies us as personalities, yet it is also independent of us, a narration at one remove from us. As poetry, the language used to express this wonder uses the simplest formal ingredients to generate vast implications: the balance of phrases, ele-mental metaphors, and liturgical resonance. The poetic achievement is modified in two ways. In the first, by the context: the doxology is contiguous with a disputation between God and Israel and God's lament

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style, its theology and terminology. Coote (1981, pp. 59–60) assigns the whole passage to the B stage of composition, and links it sequentially with 7:1–9:6, in which the prophetic warning is fulfilled. Gitay (1980, pp. 304–5) defends the integrity of 3:7 in the sequence as a rhetorical aside, justifying the authority whereby Amos makes his paradoxical assertions. 3:7 is foregrounded by its unexpectedness (Gitay calls on Alter, Fish, and Ingarden in rejecting the conventional identification of the unexpected with the extraneous).

41. The literature on the doxologies is vast. Story (1980, p. 61) refers the subject of śēḥô 'his thought' to man and not God; Crenshaw (1975, p. 69) assumes that it is God's thought that is revealed. Wolff (1977, p. 223) notes the ambiguity, before attributing the thought to God, on the basis of the parallel with 3:7. This in itself is not a convincing argument: 4:13 need not be equivalent. However, the parallel with the previous lines, "Who forms mountains and creates wind," would suggest that śēḥô is analogous to mountain and wind in being the object of creative activity. Consequently, I incline to refer the possessive to man.

over Israel. This renders it apparently context-free, an isolated fragment, set against and transcending the admonitory sequence;[42] at the same time, it contrasts linguistic discord with continuity, creative celebration with grief. Similarly, in 5:8–9 the doxology is framed by the voices of the street that are deaf to it.

The second way in which the poetic achievement is modified is through abstraction: the images for God that become more mythological (treading on the backs of the earth) finally dissolve into pure acknowledgement: "YHWH God of Hosts is his Name!"[43] The name adds to the description an ineffability; as climax, it is both equivalent to and subverts the affirmation, as if finally all one can say of YHWH is the name.

Correspondingly, in 3:3–8 the appearance of poetic coherence belies a disintegration of the poetic structure, as each question repeats and renders ambiguous its antecedent. The relationship of YHWH and Israel is one of destructive knowledge (3:2), conversation (3:3), a predator (3:4), a trap (3:5), and so forth.[44]

In the sequence of visions (7:1–9:3), the voice of the prophet attains independence, only to be turned into a cipher and to be relinquished, foreshadowing YHWH's ultimate silence. At this juncture, where the metaphor shows itself without the mediation of words, where Amos' cry, out of horror and wonder, is both very intense and without formal control—transmuted, however, through sophisticated distancing devices, such as parable—we reach the limit of poetry: what can be said of our contact with everything trans-human. The pathos and tension is greatest in Amos' fatal naming of the things he sees: *ʾănāk, kĕlûb qayiṣ*. Things ordinary yet which belong to the 'other' domain. In being named, with all their unknown significance, they are drawn into the human orbit; conversely, in the vision the visionary recognizes things from his world with different eyes. As poetry, they take us to the beginnings of

42. There are different views of the relationship of the doxologies to their context. Story (1980, pp. 72 ff.) sees them as a contrast, offsetting indictment with a hymn. For various attempts to date the doxology either before or after Amos see Crenshaw (1975, p. 150).

43. Crenshaw's attempt (1975, pp. 75–111) to see the refrain as evidence of a late date because of its use in prophetic anti-idolatrous polemic is unconvincing.

44. For the relationship of 3:2–3 see Gitay (1980, p. 295) as against Melugin (1978, pp. 380–1), etc. Gitay assumes that the series of rhetorical questions emphasizes the prophet's case and the ineluctability of punishment. More important, it conceals, through quasi-logical bravado, a series of sidesteps and revisions. The dialogue of God and Israel is specified as a roaring hunger, which turns into a trap in which vehicle and referent are totally obscure. Likewise, the shofar in 3:6 is ambiguous: it is both that which warns against the danger, and a metaphor for the prophet which speaks for the danger itself.

language. I will conclude with an analogous moment in twentieth-century poetry:

> Und höher, die Sterne. Neue. Die Sterne des Leidlands.
> Langsam nennt sie die Klage:—Hier,
> siehe: den Reiter, den Stab, und das vollere Sternbild
> nennen sie: Frucktkranz. Dann, weiter, dem Pol zu:
> Wiege; Weg; Das Brennende Buch; Puppe; Fenster

> And higher, the stars. The new stars of the land of grief.
> Slowly the lament names them:—Look, there:
> the Rider, the Staff, and the larger constellation
> called Garland of Fruit. Then, further up toward the Pole:
> Cradle; Path; The Burning Book; Puppet; Window.

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(Rilke *The Duino Elegies X*. tr.
Stephen Mitchell)

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