

“HEAR THIS WORD AGAINST YOU”:
A FRESH LOOK AT THE ARRANGEMENT AND THE
RHETORICAL STRATEGY OF THE BOOK OF AMOS¹

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I. *Introduction*

In his 1961 commentary on the book of Hosea Wolff suggested that the larger literary units in Hos. iv-xi should be regarded as what he called ‘Auftrittsskizzen’,² i.e. sketches of the scenes of the prophet’s appearances,³ which were written down, in Wolff’s view, soon after the prophet had delivered his message. According to Wolff, each ‘Auftrittsskizze’ is a ‘kerygmatische Einheit’ featuring sayings combined in series (‘Spruchreihen’). A shared characteristic of these series is that the sayings they contain derive from the same public appearance of the prophet.⁴ Another important feature of some of these ‘Auftrittsskizzen’, which according to Wolff are the work of the prophet’s disciples,⁵ is that Hosea’s audience seems to have objected to his message and thereby occasioned a response by the prophet, which is now also part of the same ‘Auftrittsskizze’.⁶ Thus, the text presents us with what Davies has called “the cut-and-thrust of a prophet in debate with his

¹ This article is a revised version of a paper given at the Tyndale Fellowship Old Testament Study Group meeting, 8 June 1999. For a more extensive discussion of the points made here cf. K. Möller, *Presenting a Prophet in Debate* (PhD thesis; Cheltenham, 1999).

² H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton 1* ([1961] Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1990*), p. xxv.

³ Cf. the English translation of his commentary: *Hosea* (Philadelphia, 1974), p. xxx.

⁴ Wolff, *Dodekapropheton 1*, p. xxiv. The concept of ‘Auftrittsskizzen’ was taken up by Beuken who applied it to the book of Haggai (cf. W.A.M. Beuken, *Haggai-Sacharja 1-8* [Assen, 1967], pp. 204ff., 335; see also H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton 6* [(1986) Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1991?], pp. 3-6).

⁵ H.W. Wolff, “Haggai literarhistorisch untersucht”, in H.W. Wolff, *Studien zur Prophetie* (München, 1987), p. 135.

⁶ Wolff, *Dodekapropheton 1*, pp. xxiv-xxv.

audience”.⁷ Since in the majority of cases the audience’s objections have not been preserved by the tradition, the reader of Hos. iv-xi experiences what can be compared to listening to a phone call where all we hear is only one end of the conversation.

However, Wolff’s conception has not won universal approval. Davies, for instance, objects that “the facts which it is designed to explain can just as well be explained by envisaging a process whereby utterances on similar subjects were strung together as a convenient way of giving some order to the collections”.⁸ Thus, he prefers to think of “the main sections as collections of material with a similar theme or historical background, without insisting . . . on such a close connection in time between them as Wolff does”.⁹ In similar vein, Bons objects that Wolff construes what amounts almost to some kind of biographical sketch of the prophet’s ministry into which he then places the often rather disparate material.¹⁰

These objections to Wolff’s proposals are well taken. In particular, I accept Davies’ view that (most of) the passages in question are best understood as *collections* of oracles. Yet despite these criticisms, Wolff’s conception is a stimulating contribution to the study of the prophetic literature that reflects an intriguing observation concerning the effect generated by the text as it now stands. That is to say, I am especially interested in Wolff’s observation that certain parts of the book read like a debate between Hosea and his audience. However, whether this is in fact an adequate description of Hos. iv-xi need not concern us here as we are interested in the arrangement and the textual effect of the book of Amos.

II. *The arrangement of the book of Amos*

On a general level, scholars agree that the book of Amos consists of three major sections, i.e. the oracles against the nations in Am. i-ii, the so-called ‘words’ (Am. iii-vi) and the visions (Am. vii-ix). However, there is no agreement concerning the underlying *principles* for the arrangement of the book.¹¹ Some scholars are unable even to de-

⁷ G.I. Davies, *Hosea* (Sheffield, 1993), p. 103.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ G.I. Davies, *Hosea* (London, 1992), p. 35.

¹⁰ E. Bons, *Das Buch Hosea* (Stuttgart, 1996), p. 17.

¹¹ Cf. M.A. Sweeney, “Formation and Form in the Prophetic Literature”, in J.L. Mays et al. (eds.), *Old Testament Interpretation* (Edinburgh, 1995), p. 118.

tect any such principles at all. Thus, according to Mays, "there is no demonstrable scheme to the arrangement, historical, geographical, or thematic".¹² In similar vein, Stuart maintains that "it is not possible to infer either a strictly chronological or a strictly thematic ordering for most of the oracles."¹³ Thus, it would seem that the option preferred by Davies, i.e. to think of the arrangement of Hosea in terms of a thematic or historical ordering, does not work in the case of Amos. Yet many recent redaction-critical studies have stressed that the prophetic books in general are to be understood as what Zenger calls 'planvolle Kompositionen'.¹⁴ Thus, the question arises as to how the arrangement of the book of Amos is best described. Are there any underlying principles, and if so, what are they?

I believe that Mays and Stuart are right to maintain that the arrangement of Amos is not historical, geographical, thematic, or chronological.¹⁵ In my view, a better way forward is Hayes' observation that "the material in the book is best understood in terms of large rhetorical units".¹⁶ Or, to move beyond Hayes' view, the arrangement of the book, in my opinion, is best described as a rhetorical one, i.e. as being motivated by rhetorical interests. This is an option that is not usually considered, as is evidenced, for instance, by Gibson's recent book on *Language and Imagery in the Old Testament*. Despite his interest in rhetoric, Gibson does not ponder the possibility that rhetorical interests and principles might determine not only the choice of certain expressions but also the arrangement of the material. Instead, Gibson looks at the usual options for the arrangement of Amos—subject matter, date or a mixture of both—only then to revert to the familiar 'we don't know'.¹⁷

¹² J.L. Mays, *Amos* (Philadelphia, 1969), p. 14.

¹³ D. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (Waco, 1987), p. 287.

¹⁴ E. Zenger, "Eigenart und Bedeutung der Prophetie Israels", in E. Zenger et al., *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (Stuttgart, 1995), p. 297.

¹⁵ A number of scholars have attempted to demonstrate a chiasmic ordering of (parts of) the material; cf. e.g. W.A. Smalley, "Recursion Patterns and the Sectioning of Amos", *BT* 30 (1979), pp. 118-127; E.R. Wendland, "The 'Word of the Lord' and the Organization of Amos", *Occasional Papers in Translation and Textlinguistics* 2/4 (1988), pp. 1-51; D.A. Dorsey, "Literary Architecture and Aural Structuring Techniques in Amos", *Bib* 73 (1992), pp. 305-330; P. Bovati and R. Meynet, *Le livre du prophète Amos* (Paris, 1994); P.R. Noble, "The Literary Structure of Amos", *JBL* 114 (1995), pp. 209-226; D.U. Rottzoll, *Studien zur Redaktion und Komposition des Amosbuchs* (Berlin, 1996). Cf. Möller, *Presenting a Prophet in Debate*, pp. 42-46, for an assessment of these, in my view, unconvincing attempts.

¹⁶ J.H. Hayes, *Amos—The Eighth Century Prophet* (Nashville, 1988), p. 39.

¹⁷ Cf. J.C.L. Gibson, *Language and Imagery in the Old Testament* (London, 1998), p. 60.

In this article I intend to explore whether and in what sense the arrangement of the book can be described as a rhetorical one. In addition, we shall also look at the implications this has, or may have, for our reading of Amos. However, before we turn to these issues, let me illustrate, with the help of Am. iii, why I believe the arrangement of Amos to be a rhetorical one.

III. *The arrangement and rhetoric of Amos iii*

Because of form-critical considerations, Am. iii is usually thought to consist of five small units (i.e. vv. 1-2, 3-8, 9-11, 12, 13-15).¹⁸ However, in recent years there has also been a tendency to regard the chapter as one of the book's larger discourses.¹⁹ As such, it is bracketed by two declarations of divine punishment, each of which is introduced by *šim'û* (iii 1, 13) and uses the key word *pqd* to refer to Yahweh's judgement (iii 2, 14).²⁰ This arrangement suggests that the primary aim of Am. iii is to underline that Yahweh is indeed going to punish Israel for her sins. Martin-Achard remarks that "God's 'visit' . . . evoked at the beginning just as at the end of this collection (iii 2, 14) signifies in a concrete way a catastrophe without precedent for the northern kingdom."²¹

Some exegetes have rightly stressed the introductory character of Am. iii 1-2. Wolff, for instance, notes that in contrast to the other oracles of judgement in Amos, the threat of punishment in vv. 1-2 is not concrete, which he takes as an indication that the passage func-

¹⁸ Cf. H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten 2* ([1969] Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1985³), ad loc.; K. Koch et al., *Amos*, 3 vols. (Kevelaer, 1976); R.F. Melugin, "The Formation of Amos", in P.J. Achtemeier (ed.), *SBLSP 114/1* (Missoula, 1978), pp. 377-379; and F.I. Andersen and D.N. Freedman, *Amos* (New York, 1989), p. 369.

¹⁹ Cf. R. Gordis, "The Composition and Structure of Amos" [1940], in R. Gordis, *Poets, Prophets and Sages* (Bloomington, 1971), p. 217; Y. Gitay, "A Study of Amos's Art of Speech", *CBQ* 42 (1980), p. 294; J. Limburg, "Sevenfold Structures in the Book of Amos", *JBL* 106 (1987), p. 217; Dorsey, "Literary Architecture and Aural Structuring Techniques in Amos", pp. 308-311; Melugin, "Formation of Amos", pp. 376-377; Wendland, "The 'Word of the Lord' and the Organization of Amos", pp. 11-12; Koch et al., *Amos*, vol. 2, pp. 107-108. Those who disagree usually prefer to take iii 9-iv 3 as a self-contained unit; cf. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten 2*, p. 243; H. Reimer, *Richtet auf das Recht!* (Stuttgart, 1992); M.D. Carroll R., *Contexts for Amos* (Sheffield, 1992); J. Jeremias, *Der Prophet Amos* (Göttingen, 1995), p. 39; idem, "Amos 3-6", *ZAW* 100, Sup. (1988), p. 130. For a discussion of this view cf. Möller, *Presenting a Prophet in Debate*, pp. 57-60.

²⁰ Am. iii 2, 14 are the only verses in Amos where *pqd* is used.

²¹ R. Martin-Achard, "The End of the People of God", in R. Martin-Achard and S.P. Re'emi, *God's People in Crisis* (Edinburgh, 1984), p. 32.

tions as an introduction to a collection of oracles.²² From a rhetorical point of view, it is remarkable that the discourse in Am. iii opens with the paradoxical notion that Yahweh will punish Israel precisely because he has known only them of all the families of the earth (v. 2: *raq 'etkem yāda'tī . . . 'al-kēn 'epqōd 'ālēkem 'ēt kol-āwōnōtēkem*). This rather unexpected statement must have aroused the audience's curiosity and attracted their attention;²³ indeed, it must have left them looking at the speaker in utter dismay and disbelief. After all, according to Amos, God's people, those who Yahweh had let out of Egypt, will be punished in spite of, indeed because of (*'al-kēn*), all their privileges.²⁴

At the end of Am. iii, the theme of punishment resurfaces. Like vv. 1-2, the final unit also begins with *šim'ū* (v. 13). Ironically, however, Yahweh at this point is not talking to his people any more. Instead, he addresses foreigners (those mentioned in vv. 9-11) who are commanded to hear and testify against the people of Israel that Yahweh is going to punish them. The divine judgement is now described at greater length (vv. 14-15), and it is stressed that it is the 'Lord God, the God of hosts' (*'ādōnāy yhwš 'ēlōhē haššbā'ōt*) who is announcing it and who is going to carry it out (v. 13).²⁵ Thus, the discourse has come full circle and has ended on the same notion on which it also began. This *inclusio* seems to be intentional as it expresses the central message of the passage.

Lubsczyk accordingly stresses that the passage as a whole is a threat of judgement. Moreover, he also contends that all its individual parts fit well into its overall design.²⁶ However, if this is so, then the question arises as to how the function of the remaining units that are sandwiched between the two announcements of judgement (i.e. vv. 3-8, 9-11, 12) is best described. The first of these, Am. iii 3-8, is a series of rhetorical questions (vv. 3-6) leading up to the statement that God does nothing without revealing his plans to the prophets (v. 7). This statement, in turn, is followed by two further questions, "The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?" (v. 8).

²² Wolff, *Dodekapropheten* 2, p. 212; cf. also Hayes, *Amos*, p. 123; Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, p. 371; and Gitay, "A Study of Amos's Art of Speech", p. 295.

²³ Cf. Gitay, "A Study of Amos's Art of Speech" p. 300.

²⁴ T.J. Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah* (Chicago, 1990), p. 179; and G. Pfeifer, "Amos und Deuteriosaja denkformenanalytisch verglichen", *ZAW* 93 (1981), p. 442.

²⁵ R.S. Cripps, *A Critical & Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Amos* (London, 1929), p. 165, rightly calls this an 'effective climax'.

²⁶ H. Lubsczyk, *Der Auszug Israels aus Ägypten* (Leipzig, 1963), p. 46.

At first glance, the series of rhetorical questions in vv. 3-6 comes as a bit of a surprise after the announcement of punishment in vv. 1-2. Yet on closer inspection, there does seem to be a link between the two passages as indeed many recent interpreters have noted. This link is usually seen in the fact that Amos' audience apparently objected to his announcement of punishment questioning his authority and the validity of his message. Thus, Hubbard, for instance, surmises that "there must have been some formal protest lodged contesting both the negative promise and Amos' right to deliver it".²⁷ Similarly, Gitay notes that

the introduction, presenting the stunning issue of the people's punishment, needs confirmation. [. . .] The chain of rhetorical questions which follow the introduction stresses Amos' position and is intended to refute the basic opinion of the audience that God will not punish them.²⁸

Amos addresses these objections by asking questions himself thereby forcing the audience "to take an active role in the persuasion process."²⁹ The rhetorical questions lead up to a pre-climax in v. 6³⁰ referring to the Israelite belief that Yahweh is in the driving seat of all history (*'im-tihyeh rā'āh bā'ir wayhwah lō' 'āšāh*).³¹ From there, Amos moves on to point out that Yahweh would not punish his people without giving them a prior warning, which he does through the prophets (v. 7). The statement in v. 7 also explains how Amos came to know Yahweh's plans to punish his people by pointing to the divine revelation, which he

²⁷ D.A. Hubbard, *Joel and Amos* (Leicester, 1989), p. 148.

²⁸ Gitay, "A Study of Amos's Art of Speech", p. 300; cf. also S.M. Paul, *Amos* (Minneapolis, 1991), p. 105; W. Rudolph, *Joel, Amos, Obadja, Jona* (Gütersloh, 1971), pp. 151-152; Wolff, *Dodekapropheten* 2, p. 219; and Melugin, "Formation of Amos", p. 381. J. Jeremias, "The Interrelationship Between Amos and Hosea", in J.W. Watts and P.R. House (eds.), *Forming Prophetic Literature* (Sheffield, 1996), p. 182, thus rightly speaks of the 'legitimizing function' of the rhetorical questions.

²⁹ Y. Gitay, "Deutero-Isaiah", *JBL* 99 (1980), p. 197. On the persuasive effect of rhetorical questions cf. C.J. Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament* (Leiden, 1966), p. 23; and K.M. Craig, Jr., "Interrogatives in Haggai - Zechariah", in Watts and House (eds.), *Forming Prophetic Literature*, p. 230.

³⁰ Cf. Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, p. 184; Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, pp. 389-390.

³¹ Cf. S. Mittmann, "Gestalt und Gehalt einer prophetischen Selbstrechtfertigung (Amos 3,3-8)", *TQ* 151 (1971), p. 137; Rudolph, *Joel, Amos, Obadja, Jona*, p. 154; G. Pfeifer, "Unausweichliche Konsequenzen", *VT* 33 (1983), p. 345; and W. Eichrodt, "Die Vollmacht des Amos", in H. Donner et al. (eds.), *Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie* (Göttingen, 1977), p. 126.

claims to have received. In the concluding verse Amos underlines that he, being a prophet, can hardly remain silent when Yahweh has spoken (*'ādōnāy yhwah dībber mî lō' yinnābē'*). Indeed, he cannot but prophesy just as somebody who hears the roar of a lion cannot help being terrorised by it (v. 8).³²

The passage Am. iii 3-8 is followed in vv. 9-11 by a section that begins just as abruptly as the preceding one. Suddenly, and surprisingly, someone is to proclaim to the strongholds of Ashdod and Egypt to assemble and witness against Israel (v. 9). Rudolph is surely on the right track when he ironically characterises these witnesses as "Fachleute in puncto Bedrückung . . . , die den Samariern gleichwertige Leistungen bescheinigen müssen".³³ And Dearman notes that with Ashdod and Egypt two former oppressors of Israel "are called as witnesses . . . to see the capital city of Samaria now playing a similar role of oppression."³⁴ Therefore, declares Yahweh, they are to receive what amounts to poetic justice. "Die Häuser der Räuber werden selbst ausgeraubt."³⁵ Thus, at this point, the focus shifts back to the initial theme of punishment with vv. 9-11 serving to justify Yahweh's decision to chastise his people. Even heathen peoples, such as the Philistines and the Egyptians, would confirm the need for the divine judgement.

The next rhetorical (and form-critical) unit (v. 12), although being the shortest in the discourse, also has an important role to play. Using a pastoral image from the milieu of the shepherds,³⁶ Amos stresses that the punishment will be so severe that there will be no survivors. As the small remains of an animal that a shepherd was able to rescue from a lion's mouth only serve to confirm the loss of the animal,³⁷ so the worthless parts of what used to be luxurious furniture will only

³² Cf. A. Schenker, "Steht der Prophet unter dem Zwang zu weissagen . . .?", *BZ* 30 (1986), p. 250; Jeremias, "The Interrelationship Between Amos and Hosea", p. 182; and H. Gunkel, "Die geheimen Erfahrungen der Propheten" [1903], in P.H.A. Neumann (ed.), *Das Prophetenverständnis in der deutschsprachigen Forschung seit Heinrich Ewald* (Darmstadt, 1979), pp. 138f.

³³ Rudolph, *Joel, Amos, Obadja, Jona*, p. 163.

³⁴ J.A. Dearman, *Property Rights in the Eighth-Century Prophets* (Atlanta, 1988), p. 26.

³⁵ Wolff, *Dodekapropheten* 2, p. 233. Paul, *Amos*, p. 118, rightly notes that the 'punishment is in the form of *lex talionis*'.

³⁶ Cf. H. Weippert, "Amos: Seine Bilder und ihr Milieu", in H. Weippert et al., *Beiträge zur prophetischen Bildsprache in Israel und Assyrien* (Fribourg, 1985), p. 16.

³⁷ See Exod. xxii 13; 1 Sam. xvii 34-35; also CH § 266 (cf. J.B. Pritchard [ed.], *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* [Princeton, 1969³], p. 177); and Gen. xxxi 39.

serve to testify that there once must have been a group of wealthy people. Or, as Wolff puts it, “‘gerettet’ wird nur die Erinnerung an ein bequemes Leben.”³⁸ Again, the sudden shift to this illustration playing on the theme of rescue is best understood as the prophet’s reaction to some objections voiced by the audience against his message. These objections seem to have been triggered by Amos’ statement that an enemy will attack and overcome them and plunder their possessions (v. 11). This his audience denies: Yahweh will not let that happen; he will deliver them from their enemies. Amos, as Pfeifer points out,

greift die Rede von der Rettung auf und bestätigt sie, ja, es wird in dem bevorstehenden Gericht Gottes über Israel eine Rettung geben, aber was da gerettet werden wird, sind ein paar Trümmer ihres Mobiliars, die Zeugnis ablegen von dem Leben, zu dem sie einst gehört hatten [. . .] Diese ‘Rettung’ ist nur der Beweis der Vernichtung.³⁹

The discourse ends, as we saw earlier, with another announcement of punishment, in which it is stressed that all the luxurious houses of the oppressors shall be destroyed (v. 15). Moreover, as Paul correctly notes, “the destruction of the altar and its horns . . . symbolizes the end of the sanctuary, immunity, and expiation for the people.”⁴⁰ No more will it be possible then for an offender to grasp the horns of the altar and gain sanctuary (cf. Exod. xxi 13-14; 1 Kgs. i 50; ii 28).

To summarise, the discourse in Am. iii begins and ends on a note of judgement (vv. 1-2, 13-15). In between, we find three sub-units that serve to underline (a) that Amos’ message is in fact Yahweh’s word, which he has no choice but to proclaim (vv. 3-8), (b) that the divine judgement is completely justified (vv. 9-11), and (c) that the punishment will be a devastating one with no hope of survival (v. 12). These three sub-units are, as I have attempted to demonstrate, best understood as some kind of reflection of the debate between Amos and his eighth-century audience.

At this point, then, I want to broaden the discussion by suggesting that this notion of a debate between the prophet and his hearers is a useful concept for the interpretation of Amos in general. How, I shall

³⁸ Wolff, *Dodekapropheten* 2, p. 236; cf. also G. Pfeifer, “‘Rettung’ als Beweis der Vernichtung (Amos 3,12)”, *ZAW* 100 (1988), p. 271; and Paul, *Amos*, p. 120.

³⁹ Pfeifer, “‘Rettung’ als Beweis der Vernichtung”, p. 276; cf. also Rudolph, *Joel, Amos, Obadja, Jona*, p. 164; and Wolff, *Dodekapropheten* 2, p. 236.

⁴⁰ Paul, *Amos*, p. 124; cf. also G. Pfeifer, “Das Ja des Amos”, *VT* 39 (1989), p. 499.

attempt to explain presently. However, before we move on to look at the book of Amos as a whole, let me explain what I mean by finding, in certain passages, 'some kind of reflection' of the eighth-century debate between Amos and his audience.

IV. Wolff's 'Auftrittsskizzen' resumed

I want to come back, at this point, to Wolff's concept of 'Auftrittsskizzen'. I want to ask, that is to say, whether the reflection of the debate, which I deem to have discovered in the book, might not be the result of there being sketches of the prophet's public appearances, sketches that not only preserve Amos' words but also give us, by way of implication, some ideas of the audience's reactions. Wolff's awareness that in Hos. iv-xi we get some glimpses of what Davies has called 'the cut-and-thrust of a prophet in debate with his audience' does certainly appear to be an appropriate notion also for the interpretation of Amos. Yet it needs to be said that Wolff's concept of 'Auftrittsskizzen' does not quite work for the book of Amos either, at least not without substantial modifications.

Thus, I would like to point out that, as far as the book of Amos is concerned, it would be misleading to think of its material as *sketches* of the prophet's public appearances. Although this could perhaps be argued for some sections, on the whole this approach does not seem to be the best way forward. The oracles against the nations in Am. i 3-ii 15 could, conceivably, be seen as an example of an 'original' prophetic speech preserved in the book. However, whether this is actually the case would obviously, among other things, depend on whether one can make a case for all of them being Amos' original words. A discussion of that issue would lead us too far away from the present argument,⁴¹ and it need not concern us here anyway as I do not intend to make a case for these oracles being the *ipsissima verba* of Amos. Yet I should like to point out that it is certainly possible, if not likely, that Amos would have delivered oracles such as these serially since they do not make much sense when taken individually.

But as already said, generally speaking, I do not think that whoever was responsible for the final edition of Amos intended to produce

⁴¹ The amount of secondary literature on the oracles against the nations in Amos is vast; cf. G.F. Hasel, *Understanding the Book of Amos* (Grand Rapids, 1991), pp. 58f. n. 3, for a fairly up-to-date list.

some kind of biographical sketches of the prophet's ministry. Another brief look at Am. iii should confirm this. Gitay seems to be implying that Am. iii is one of the prophet's original speeches. He notes that "if we isolate the separate units of the pericope, it is clear that these units in themselves do not constitute complete statements."⁴² While I agree with the latter part of Gitay's remark, it must be stressed that from this it does not follow that what we have in Am. iii is an Amosian speech. Thus, although I believe that Amos is more likely to have made speeches rather than to have uttered merely small poetic oracles, as Gunkel and his followers believed,⁴³ it is less clear, to say the least, that his speeches have actually been preserved in the book.⁴⁴ Like most current interpreters, I prefer to think of the book in terms of a mixture of edited collections of oracles (taken perhaps from different speeches) as well as abstracts or summaries of prophetic discourses.⁴⁵ Dempster is therefore right in noting that "although Gitay presents a strong case, the text bears the signs of being carefully edited collections of different oracles."⁴⁶

A look at the visions-cum-narrative series Am. vii 1-viii 3 confirms this. Yet at first glance, one might be tempted to see precisely this passage as a good example for an 'Auftrittsskizze'. After all, here we have the prophet narrating his visionary experiences when he is suddenly interrupted by Amaziah—or so it would appear. On closer inspection, however, it seems rather unlikely that the text reflects the actual course of events.⁴⁷ Let us look briefly at what actually happens in Am. vii 1-viii 3 to see why I am hesitant about regarding the passage as an 'Auftrittsskizze'.

⁴² Gitay, "A Study of Amos's Art of Speech", p. 294.

⁴³ Cf. in particular Gunkel's seminal essay "Die Propheten als Schriftsteller und Dichter", in H. Schmidt, *Die großen Propheten* (Göttingen, 1923²), pp. 34-70.

⁴⁴ This has been suggested for the speeches of Micah by C.S. Shaw, *The Speeches of Micah* (Sheffield, 1993).

⁴⁵ Thus already R.L. Lewis, *The Persuasive Style and Appeals of the Minor Prophets Amos, Hosea, and Micah* (Diss., Ann Arbor, 1959).

⁴⁶ S. Dempster, "The Lord is His Name", *RB* 98 (1991), p. 179.

⁴⁷ That the text does provide an accurate account of the flow of events has been suggested e.g. by Gordis, "The Composition and Structure of Amos"; and J.D.W. Watts, "The Origin of the Book of Amos" [1955], in J.D.W. Watts, *Vision and Prophecy in Amos* (Macon, 1997), pp. 4f., who think that the clash with Amaziah marked the end of Amos' ministry in Israel, and that the remaining oracles in Am. viii-ix were delivered in Judah.

In vii 1-9, we witness Amos relating his first three visions before being informed in vv. 10-11 about Amaziah's dispatch to the king: "Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, 'Amos has conspired against you . . .'" (*qāšar 'āleḳā 'āmōs*). When the priest finally commands the prophet to leave the country (vv. 12-13), it is apparently presupposed that the king had agreed meanwhile with his official that "the land cannot bear Amos' words" (*lō' tūkal hā'āreš ləhākīl 'et-kol-dəbārāw*; v. 10). It is difficult to imagine that all this, Amaziah's dispatch to the king and the king's reply to the priest, could have happened between the reciting of the third and fourth vision. It is even more difficult to imagine that Amaziah, after having been told by Amos that because of his obstruction his wife was to become a prostitute, his children were to be slain and he himself was to die in exile (v. 17), that the priest would have listened patiently to Amos reporting yet another of his disturbing visions (viii 1-3) before then making sure that the prophet, eventually, does leave the country, as he had already kindly suggested earlier: "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there" (v. 12).

Where then does this leave us? Having discussed Wolff's concept of 'Auftrittsskizzen' and found it wanting, I said that, instead of sketches of the prophet's public appearances, what we have in the book of Amos is edited collections of prophetic oracles. This conclusion, however, does hardly break any new ground. Yet I still believe that Wolff was on the right track, and that his observations open up the possibility for a fresh understanding of Amos. As already indicated earlier, Wolff's reading of Hos. iv-xi as a debate between the prophet and his audience, which led him to think of the text in terms of 'Auftrittsskizzen', is a very useful concept also for the interpretation of Amos. Indeed, I should point out in this context that Wolff found what we might call the dialogical dimension of the text also in the book of Amos.⁴⁸

Let me then ask again where this leaves us. If Wolff is right to stress the dialogical dimension of the text, and if, at the same time, the book of Amos is an edited collection of prophetic oracles rather than a collection of 'Auftrittsskizzen', it would appear that it is the editors or redactors of the book who are responsible for the textual effect as it now emerges. That is to say, it is they who present us with the debate between Amos and his eighth-century audience.

⁴⁸ Cf. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten* 2, passim.

V. *The rhetorical strategy of the book of Amos*

Earlier on, I suggested that the arrangement of Amos is best described in rhetorical terms. At this point, I want to suggest furthermore that it reflects what rhetorical critics call the rhetorical strategy of the book. This rhetorical strategy, as found in the book of Amos, is best described, in my view, as the 'presentation of a prophet in debate'. That is to say, the editors or redactors of the book reproduced and arranged Amos' oracles in such a way so as to present readers with the debate between the prophet Amos and his eighth-century audience. Reading the book consecutively, that is, one gets the impression of a prophet struggling, and indeed failing, to persuade his addressees that they stand condemned in the eyes of Yahweh. Because of the people's horrible social wrongdoings together with a misplaced complacency, Amos argues, the deity is no longer willing to tolerate their behaviour but is about to punish them severely.

Amos is portrayed as bringing up a number of traditional beliefs and expectations on which the people relied, such as the Exodus tradition (ii 10; iii 2; ix 7) and the concept of the Day of the Lord (v 18-20), only to turn them on their head. In fact, in some cases it seems that these traditions were brought up not by Amos but by his audience in their attempt to belie the prophet's message. Moreover, passages, such as vi 3 and ix 10, that refer to those that "put far away the evil day" or are confident that "evil shall not overtake or meet us" confirm that Amos' audience found it difficult to come to terms with what Amos had to say about Yahweh turning against his own people.⁴⁹ Carroll R. summarises the problem well in noting that

the difficulty at 2:11-12 that God's people do not often listen to his words is reconfirmed in the following chapters. False readings of history and national realities (4:6-11; 6:13), hollow hopes (5:18-20), self-deluding confidence (6:1-3; 9:10), and politico-religious ambitions and jealousies (7:10-17) as well as abuses at the cult and in society, all blind the mind and make it impossible to comprehend what God is like and to discern where he is in history and where history itself is going.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Cf. K. Möller, "Rehabilitation eines Propheten", *European Journal of Theology* 6 (1997), p. 48.

⁵⁰ M.D. Carroll R., "God and His People in the Nations' History", *TynBul* 47 (1996), pp. 67-68.

As regards the rhetorical strategy of the book, I want to suggest that the portrayal of the debating prophet is the primary suasive means employed by the redactors to achieve their own persuasive aims.⁵¹ The book is thus best understood as an attempt to persuade its hearers or readers to learn from the failure of the prophet's audience to respond appropriately to his message. The recipients are induced therefore not to repeat the stubborn attitude and self-assured behaviour of Amos' original addressees. To achieve this rhetorical aim, those responsible for the book utilise the debate between Amos and his contemporaries in the context of their own debate with their audience. This construal of the function of the book is similar to du Plessis' understanding of the parables, advanced on the basis of concepts drawn from speech act theory, according to which

the primary function of the parables in the narrative world of the gospels is to establish Jesus, as the narrator of the parables, in an authoritative position towards his addressees. . . . The gospels report the relationship between Jesus and his addressees in order that the recipients of the gospels may enter into the same dependent relationship with Jesus . . .⁵²

The notion of a debating prophet is, of course, not a novelty. Form critics, for instance, have long recognised the existence of a prophetic speech form called 'disputation speech'. Graffy remarks that already "Gunkel maintains that differences of opinion between the prophets and others are the key to understanding many ideas of the prophets, even when a dispute is not presented explicitly."⁵³ Similarly, Wolff points out that the prophets' quotes of the views of their audiences reflect the antagonistic stance their contemporaries took towards the prophetic message.⁵⁴ In his commentary on Amos, Wolff notes that the disputations, which in his view derive from Amos himself, "wollen . . . die Zustimmung der Hörer zur prophetischen Unheilsbotschaft bewirken."⁵⁵ Begrich, investigating the disputation speeches in Deutero-Isaiah, interestingly regarded them "as a *literary imitation* of the

⁵¹ On rhetoric and persuasion cf. Möller, *Presenting a Prophet in Debate*, pp. 12-27, and the literature cited there.

⁵² J.G. du Plessis, *Clarity and Obscurity* (Diss., Stellenbosch, 1985), p. 5; as quoted in A.C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, 1992), p. 289.

⁵³ A. Graffy, *A Prophet Confronts His People* (Rome, 1984), p. 4.

⁵⁴ H.W. Wolff, "Das Zitat im Prophetenspruch" [1937], in H.W. Wolff, *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (München, 1973²), pp. 94-95. He speaks of a "Verkündigung im kontradiktorischen Sinne".

⁵⁵ Wolff, *Dodekapropheten 2*, p. 119.

controversies experienced by the prophet.⁵⁶ Even more interesting, however, is Begrich's observation that in the context of a discussion between a prophet and his hearers one often finds rhetorical questions and hymnic material. This was emphasised also by von Waldow, as again Graffy notes: "Like Begrich, von Waldow points out the frequent use of rhetorical questions to gain the people's assent . . . Like Begrich, he notes the use of well-known hymnic material to ensure agreement."⁵⁷ Building on the observations of Begrich and von Waldow, I believe that the hymnic sections in Amos are also best understood in a confrontational rather than a doxological setting as is often thought.

However, before I elaborate on this, I would like to point out that while the notion of a debating prophet is not a new one, my claim that the book of Amos *captures* or *presents* the debate between Amos and his original audience and utilises it as a rhetorical means of persuasion is different from traditional redaction-critical readings. Let me illustrate the differences by looking at two examples, the hymn fragments in iv 13; v 8-9; ix 5-6 and the Amaziah narrative in Am. vii.

VI. *A fresh look at the hymn fragments and the Amaziah narrative*

A. The hymn fragments (Am. iv 13; v 8-9 and ix 5-6)

The hymn fragments are often regarded as (post-)exilic editorial additions.⁵⁸ In typical redaction-critical fashion, Jeremias understands them as major adaptations of Amos' message, which are designed to adjust this message to a new historical situation some time after the

⁵⁶ This was noted by Graffy, *A Prophet Confronts His People*, p. 6; cf. J. Begrich, *Studien zu Deuterjesaja* (Stuttgart, 1938), pp. 42-47 (my italics).

⁵⁷ Graffy, *A Prophet Confronts His People*, p. 8; cf. H.-E. von Waldow, *Anlaß und Hintergrund der Verkündigung des Deuterjesaja* (Diss., Bonn, 1953), pp. 28-36.

⁵⁸ Cf. e.g. F. Horst, "Die Doxologien im Amosbuch", *ZAW* 47 (1929), pp. 45-54; G. von Rad, "Gerichtsdoxologie", in K.-H. Bernhardt (ed.), *Schalom: Studien zu Glaube und Geschichte Israels* (Stuttgart, 1971), pp. 28-37; J.L. Crenshaw, *Hymnic Affirmation of Divine Justice* (Missoula, 1975); W. Berg, *Die sogenannten Hymnenfragmente im Amosbuch* (Bern, 1974); Wolff, *Dodekapropheten* 2, passim; Jeremias, *Der Prophet Amos*, pp. xxi-xxii. Others, however, think of them in terms of old hymnic material that has been incorporated into the book by Amos or the earliest tradents of the book. For this view see, e.g., J.D.W. Watts, "An Old Hymn Preserved in the Book of Amos", *JNES* 15 (1956), pp. 33-39; Mays, *Amos*, p. 84; E. Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos* (Oxford, 1970), p. 133; Rudolph, *Joel, Amos, Obadja, Jona*, pp. 181-183; Hayes, *Amos*, p. 150; and Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, passim. T.E. McComiskey, "The Hymnic Elements of the Prophecy of Amos", *JETS* 30 (1987), pp. 139-157, thinks they were penned by Amos himself.

ministry of the prophet.⁵⁹ That is to say, following the lead of Horst,⁶⁰ Jeremias and others understand them as what has been called ‘doxologies of judgement’.⁶¹ According to this conception, their *Sitz im Leben* is the liturgical setting of exilic ‘penitential ceremonies’ (‘Bußgottesdienste’) in which they served as doxologies used by the congregation to acknowledge that Yahweh’s judgement was justified. Furthermore, according to Horst, the doxologies add a luminous dimension to the dark threats of the prophet.⁶²

This interpretation I find rather unconvincing. Although it is certainly possible to imagine a setting like the one proposed by Horst and others, there are no indications in the *text* that support, let alone demand, a doxological reading of the hymn fragments. Thus, for Jeremias’ claim that the passages in question extol God’s power and might as creator in order to encourage the people to return to him⁶³ there is no textual support whatsoever. In his exegesis of Am. v 8-9, Jeremias pounces on the fact that the positive statement ‘and turns deep darkness into the morning’ (*wəhōpēk labbōqer šalmāwet*) precedes the words ‘and darkens the day into night’ (*wəyôm laylāh heššik*; v. 8a). This, according to Jeremias, indicates that the text is meant primarily to encourage the discouraged to seek Yahweh.⁶⁴ However, given the subsequent lines, which allude to the Flood (v. 8b) and explicitly speak of destruction (*šōd*; v. 9), this interpretation seems rather unlikely. As it now stands, the hymn fragment starts off by emphasising the awesome power of Yahweh (v. 8), only then to hint that this cosmic power will be unleashed against some kind of human powers (cf. *‘āz* and *mibšār* in v. 9).

In an attempt to defend his doxological interpretation, Jeremias suggests that a later redactor added v. 9 in order to stress Yahweh’s destructive power.⁶⁵ Thus, at first, the text did not contain any part

⁵⁹ J. Jeremias, “Das Proprium der alttestamentlichen Prophetie”, in J. Jeremias, *Hosea und Amos* (Tübingen, 1996), p. 31.

⁶⁰ “Die Doxologien im Amosbuch”.

⁶¹ J.A. Thompson, “The ‘Response’ in Biblical and Non-Biblical Literature with Particular Reference to the Hebrew Prophets”, in E.W. Conrad and E.G. Newing (eds.), *Perspectives on Language and Text* (Winona Lake, 1987), pp. 255-268, comparing these hymns to the chorus in Greek tragedy and the chorus responses in Händel’s *Messiah*, regards them as the prophet’s antiphonal responses to Yahweh’s words.

⁶² Horst, “Die Doxologien im Amosbuch”, pp. 53f.

⁶³ Cf. Jeremias, *Der Prophet Amos*, p. xxii.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

of the hymn but only Amos' message of judgement. Then somebody inserted the 'nice bit', i.e. the praise of the creator (v. 8aα), in order to encourage the desperate exiles and to help them come to terms with their past. This, in turn, occasioned another redactor, apparently thinking the text was now too reassuring, to tighten things up again, which he did by inserting another gloomy piece (v. 9). Inventive though this interpretation is, I am not convinced that the scenario it envisages is at all likely. In fact, Jeremias even has to admit that already the older hymn stressed Yahweh's destructive power by alluding to the Flood (cf. v. 8b).⁶⁶

Against this doxological interpretation, I want to emphasise that Amos iv 13; v 8-9 and ix 5-6 are best understood as lending special force to Amos' message of judgement stressing, as they do, the destructive power of Yahweh. The first hymn fragment in iv 13 follows the ominous announcement that Israel is to meet her God who is portrayed as the one who "makes the morning darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth" (*'ōšeh šaḥar 'ēpāh wədōrēk 'al-bāmōtē āreš*). The implications of judgement are even more obvious in v 8-9 as we have already seen. They are still more pronounced in the third fragment, which follows on a passage that stresses that no one will be able to flee from the divine judgement (ix 1-4). Like the second fragment, it features an allusion to the Flood (v 8b; ix 6b) and stresses the cosmic dimension of Yahweh's rule (v 8a; ix 6a). Yet Am. ix 5-6 goes well beyond the second hymn fragment in its portrayal of the scope of the divine judgement. Whereas Am. v 8-9 speaks of Yahweh's destruction coming upon the strong (*'āz*) and the fortress (*mibšār*), thus denoting 'the military machine',⁶⁷ Am. ix 5-6 envisages a divine intervention on a more cosmic scale, causing all who live on the earth to mourn (*wə'ābəlū kol-yōšəbē bāh*).

Thus, it seems fair to say that, as one moves from one hymn fragment to the next, there is an intensifying portrayal of God's destructive power, just as the implications of this are spelled out most clearly in the third fragment with its notion of a global mourning. All this fits in well with our conception of the book as a presentation of the debate between Amos and his audience. In his struggle to convince the people that divine judgement will befall them, Amos is presented

⁶⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

⁶⁷ Cf. Carroll R., *Contexts for Amos*, p. 231.

as having employed increasingly drastic images of Yahweh, his power and actions and the implications this will have for those who are the targets of his punishment.

B. The Amaziah narrative (Am. vii 10-17)

The reading suggested here, i.e. the interpretation of the book of Amos in terms of a debate between the prophet and his audience, opens up the possibility of a fresh understanding also of those passages where there is considerable disagreement about their place and function in the book. In addition to the hymn fragments, this is true also for the Amaziah narrative in Am. vii 10-17. Far from being out of place in its present context, as some have thought,⁶⁸ it too has a crucial role to play in the presentation of the debating prophet. This was clearly seen by Eslinger who suggests that

the reader, like Amos himself, gains an education through the vehicle of this literary creation on the necessity of judgment. But only when Amaziah's intervention is left to stand where the author of the book put it is the reader able to see the education of Amos.⁶⁹

Thus, according to Eslinger, the intervention of Amaziah 'educates' Amos, i.e. it convinces him that the divine verdict in vii 9 is justified, that Yahweh is right to carry out the judgement against Israel and the house of Jeroboam. "Amaziah's interruption is the turning point in Amos' perception of the judgments foretold by the visions".⁷⁰ It "literally shoves aside Amos' intercession"⁷¹ and causes him finally to side with Yahweh and accept that punishment is inevitable.

I regard Eslinger's interpretation as a step in the right direction.⁷² Yet it does seem to be in need of further modification and correction.

⁶⁸ Cf. e.g. Rudolph, *Joel, Amos, Obadja, Jona*, pp. 249ff.; and J.A. Soggin, *The Prophet Amos* (London, 1987), pp. 125ff.

⁶⁹ L. Eslinger, "The Education of Amos", *HAR* 11 (1987), p. 55.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² For other interpretations of Amos vii 10-17 see L. Rost, "Zu Amos 7, 10-17", in *Festgabe für Theodor Zahn* (Leipzig, 1928), pp. 229-236; Gordis, "The Composition and Structure of Amos"; G.M. Tucker, "Prophetic Authenticity", *Int* 27 (1973), pp. 423-434; Z. Zevit, "A misunderstanding at Bethel", *VT* 25 (1975), pp. 781-790; P.R. Ackroyd, "A Judgment Narrative Between Kings and Chronicles?", in G.W. Coats and B.O. Long (eds.), *Canon and Authority* (Philadelphia, 1977), pp. 71-87; A.J. Børndalen, "Erwägungen zur Zukunft des Amaja und Israels nach der Überlieferung Amos 7, 10-17",

Thus, I would contend that it is Yahweh's assertion "I will never again pass them by" (*lō'-'ôšîp 'ôd 'ăbôr lô*; vii 8), not the intervention of the priest, that forecloses further intercession by Amos. Whereas in the first two visions, Yahweh allows Amos to see his destructive actions, thus causing him to burst out with his pleas for forgiveness (*səlah-nā'*; vii 2) or simply restraint (*hădal-nā'*; vii 5), in the third vision, Yahweh himself takes the initiative asking Amos what he sees. The crucial point is that Amos is not confronted with a picture of devastation but the image of Yahweh standing on a *hōmat 'ănāk* with an *'ănāk* in his hand (v. 7).⁷³ Thus, there is so far no reason for him to intervene. Later on, when Yahweh does spell out the punishment (v. 9), another act of intercession is precluded in that Yahweh had already declared explicitly that he would not be prevailed upon to spare Israel again (v. 8b). Thus, Amos does get an education, but it is Yahweh who does the educating, not the priest.

But what then is the function of the Amaziah narrative if it does not serve to 'educate' Amos, as Eslinger thought? As already indicated, I believe that the passage fits in well with our interpretation of the book in terms of a debate between Amos and his audience. Thus, Amaziah's actions are portrayed as a reaction to the words of Yahweh reported by Amos in vii 9. His announcement that the house of Jeroboam will be the victim of 'the sword' leads the priest to think of Amos as a conspirator (v. 10) and causes him to intervene in order to drive him out of Israel. Let me repeat that I am not suggesting that this intervention actually occurred between the third and the fourth vision. What I am saying is that the ordering of the material, as preferred by the redactors of the book, closely links Amaziah's intervention to Amos' conspiratory statement in vii 9.

in R. Albertz et al. (eds.), *Werden und Wirken des Alten Testaments* (Göttingen, 1980), pp. 236-251; G. Pfeifer, "Die Ausweisung eines lästigen Ausländers", *ZAW* 96 (1984), pp. 112-118; H. Utzschneider, "Die Amazjaerzählung (Am. 7,10-17) zwischen Literatur und Historie", *BN* 41 (1988), pp. 76-101; H.J. Stoebe, "Noch einmal zu Amos vii 10-17", *VT* 39 (1989), pp. 341-354; H.G.M. Williamson, "The Prophet and the Plumb-Line", in A.S. van der Woude (ed.), *In Quest of the Past* (Leiden, 1990), pp. 101-121; G. Sauer, "Amos 7,10-17 und mesopotamischer Briefstil", in J.J. Adler (ed.), *Haim M.I. Gevaryahu Memorial Volume* (Jerusalem, 1990), pp. 119-128; R.E. Clements, "Amos and the Politics of Israel", in D. Garrone and F. Israel (eds.), *Storia e Tradizioni di Israele* (Brescia, 1991), pp. 49-64; F.O. Garcia-Treto, "A Reader-Response Approach to Prophetic Conflict", in J.C. Exum and D.J.A. Clines (eds.), *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield, 1993), pp. 114-124.

⁷³ The meaning of *'ănāk* is not clear. Cf. M. Weigl, "Eine 'unendliche Geschichte'", *Bib* 76 (1995), pp. 343-387, for a detailed review of the solutions that have been suggested.

The present order of the material is rather intriguing in that it leads to an interesting question concerning the consequences of the priest's intervention. That is to say, is the fact that Amos is portrayed as continuing with the recital of the visions, despite the intervention of Amaziah who wants to rid the land of his presence, meant to indicate that the prophetic voice cannot be silenced so easily?

Whatever the answer to this question may be, concerning the function of the Amaziah narrative it should be noted that the priest's apparent refusal to take Amos' words as a divine message (compare *kā-kōh 'āmar 'āmōs* in vii 11 with *wayyōmer yhwēh* in v. 8) illustrates the problem Amos is facing. The people simply are not prepared to listen to his message; they do not accept his God-given authority. However, whereas throughout the book the audience's reactions to the prophet's ministry are mostly (though not always) implied, in vii 10-17 the reaction by one of its (more influential) members is reported in some detail. Finally, with the priest's actions the debate between Amos and his audience intensifies. Whereas up to this point, the people either simply ignored the prophet's warnings or else contradicted them, Amaziah is bent on preventing Amos from continuing with his subversive ministry.

VII. *Conclusions*

Based on Wolff's concept of 'Auftrittsskizzen', and especially his awareness of the 'dialogical dimension' in the books of Hosea and Amos, I argued that, at least in the case of the latter, the textual effect described as the 'cut-and-thrust of a prophet in debate' reflects a deliberate editorial move on the part of the redactors. That is to say, I suggested that the redactors intended to present to their readers an account of the prophet Amos struggling, and indeed failing, to persuade his eighth-century addressees that they stand condemned in the eyes of Yahweh. The book is thus best understood, in my view, as an attempt to persuade its hearers or readers to learn from the failure of the prophet's original audience to respond appropriately to his message. In particular, the recipients are induced not to repeat the stubborn attitude and self-assured behaviour of Amos' original addressees.

These claims I sought to corroborate by focusing on a few examples, i.e. Am. iii, the hymn fragments and the Amaziah narrative, all of which make perfect sense, I believe, when read as part of the debate that I deem to have found in the book. More than that, as far as the hymn fragments and the Amaziah narrative are concerned, I feel

inclined to say that the reading suggested here is perhaps better equipped to explain their place and function in the book than most traditional redaction-critical readings.

Let me end this discussion by pointing out that my reading of Amos does, of course, raise a number of historical (or diachronic) questions, which cannot be pursued in the present context. In particular, it would be necessary to consider who the readers of the book might have been. Who are those that are called upon to learn from the failure of Amos' original audience to be warned by the prophetic message? This query, in turn, raises further questions concerning the textual history of the book. Thus, in order to ascertain who the presentation of the debating prophet was aimed at, we obviously need to know when it was written. However, as already said, these questions could not be addressed in the present article,⁷⁴ the aim of which it was to outline a fresh reading strategy for the book of Amos.

Abstract

This article suggests a fresh understanding of the arrangement and the rhetorical strategy of the book of Amos. It proposes that its 'dialogical dimension' reflects a deliberate design by the redactors who intended to present 'a prophet in debate'. It is argued that the book is best understood as an attempt by the redactors to persuade their readers to learn from the failure of Amos' original audience to respond appropriately to his message. In particular, the recipients are induced not to repeat the stubborn attitude and self-assured behaviour of Amos' original addressees. Looking especially at Am. iii, the hymn fragments and the Amaziah narrative, this article seeks to demonstrate that their place and function in the book are best explained by interpreting them within the framework of the presentation of the debate between Amos and his eighth-century audience.

⁷⁴ Cf. Möller, *Presenting a Prophet in Debate*, *passim*, for further discussion.