

Wood, Joyce Rilett

Amos in Song and Book Culture

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James R. Linville
University of Lethbridge
Lethbridge AB Canada

This book is an updated version of the author's 1993 Toronto School of Theology dissertation. A methodological introduction and a conclusion frame five chapters. In the introduction, Rilett Wood describes her work as continuing the long history of literary, form, and redactional criticism while employing more objective criteria and taking into account biblical texts as literary wholes. A unique two-edition diachronic interpretation of Amos is proposed. A good discussion of the structure and features of the final book is offered. On the other hand, only a minimum of discussion of the criteria and textual features that support the diachronic analysis is given, even though she holds that the reviser's technique of repeating phrases from the original sometimes makes the task of delineating the editions difficult. Building on the long-held belief that biblical prophecy was originally both an oral and written phenomenon, Rilett Wood holds that Hebrew prophecy "originated in the performing arts" (17).

In the first chapter, Rilett Wood identifies seven interrelated poems that she describes as Amos's original compositions. Later she describes this cycle as following four "acts," each of two or three "scenes." The second chapter describes how a subsequent, postmonarchic writer retained the original poems but made numerous additions, resulting in a ten-part structure. The first six parts correspond to the initial six poems, while the last poem is expanded and distributed across two parts. Two additional structural elements close the book. The following chart summarizes the two compositions' structures.

	FINAL STRUCTURE	ORIGINAL POEMS
ONE	1:1–2:16	1:1a, 3-8, 1:13–2:3, 6–8, 13–16
TWO	3:1–15	3:1a, 2–6, 9–11
THREE	4:1–13	4:1–5

FOUR	5:1–9	5:1–2, 4–7
FIVE	5:10–27	5:10–12, 18–20, 21–24
SIX	6:1–14	6:1–7, 12–13
SEVEN	7:1–17	7:1–9; 8:1–3a, 4–6, 9–10
EIGHT	8:1–14	
NINE	9:1–6	
TEN	9:7–15	

Each poem is interpreted according to its internal structure, themes, and role in the sevenfold cycle. The meaning and rhetorical force of the additions are examined in the light of the final form of the book. For Rilett Wood, Amos’s reviser held the prophetic poet in high esteem but was still an author reshaping the original composition with a running commentary to address a very different historical era.

The third chapter, “Prophecy As a Performing Art and the Emergence of Book Culture,” describes the venue of the original song cycle as the *marzēah* feast, which Rilett Wood finds described in the sixth poem. She claims that this feast was a counterpart to the seventh and sixth century B.C.E. Greek poetic symposia, a “proximate and explicit analogy,” which demonstrates that “early prophetic poetry is performance poetry” (103). She finds many points of contact between Amos and several Greek poets (e.g., Archilochus, Callinus, and Solon). She calls attention to Amos’s well-developed tragic plot, literary features implying an active performer, and the addressing of a “double audience,” that is, the implied audience of the poem and the poet/performer’s actual audience. This last point is surely a distinction more biblical critics should recognize. According to Rilett Wood, what sets Amos apart from his contemporaries is his complaint that the *marzēah* fails to express grief over the tragic fate of the northern kingdom some two generations earlier.

Amos’s original poetry, therefore, is dated to seventh-century Jerusalem and the reign of Manasseh, not eighth-century Israel. She writes that after the fall of Jerusalem, the “cycle lost its former appeal, and interest in the performance of tragedy came to an end” (113). The educated elite now placed accent on the production of books and not solo or choral performance of poetry. The reviser made Amos out to be a “larger than life” eighth-century figure in agreement with the contemporary orthodox history of prophecy (114). Amos’s tragic song cycle, called a “dramatic monologue both for entertainment and to effect a change in his audience” (100), became a postmonarchic book with a comedic plot structure.

Rilett Wood's fourth chapter outlines Amos's innovative use of tragedy, his employment of earlier prophetic ideas, and his sense of history. Greek counterparts, and especially Homer's *Iliad*, provide analogies to the Day of YHWH. The comparison proceeds under the headings of "The Day of Battle," "Evil in a City," "Days of Captivity," "Day of Choice," "Day of Darkness," and "Thrusting Aside the Evil Day."

The final chapter distinguishes between early performing prophets and later orators. Among the former was Hosea, who refers back to Amos in Hos 9:1–8. Micah acted out the response of Amos's audience. Jeremiah, called the last of Judah's performing prophets, composed five dramatic speeches (Jer 30–31) that provide a resolution to Amos's harsh conception of the Day of YHWH. Isaiah is also among the performers and was one of Amos's influences. He is described as "a singer of solo song or lyric monody," with some similarities to Sappho and Alcaeus (214).

The later orators were "solo speakers who address their listeners directly, speak for them in fact, and demand unity of response" (184). The tradition started with Nahum, who repudiates Jeremiah's reversal of Amos's Day of YHWH. The changing political circumstances and various responses to previous prophecies are the subject of up to a few pages on each of Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Ezekiel, Joel, and Obadiah. The DtrH reflects a deep interest in the prophets, although the historian depicted "types rather than historical individuals" (194). Amos, therefore, is the man of God in 1 Kgs 13. This unflattering portrait is responded to in the reviser's work on Amos, in particular in Amos 7. Other DtrH texts important in this dialogue are 1 Kgs 8 and 2 Kgs 17; 23.

Rilett Wood says that while the reviser does not describe Amos as performing the kind of symbolic acts known from other prophetic texts, the reviser "does talk about his performance" and the audience reaction (in 7:10b). He converts the original performance text "into biography and history" (216). In the closing paragraphs, Rilett Wood reflects on the relationship between prophetic and poetic inspiration and reaffirms that both Hebrew and Greek poetic traditions "made the same transition from song culture to book culture" (217).

Rilett Wood's proposed structure of the finished book of Amos is insightful, as is her accent on Amos as a polished product of a process of rewriting. Yet her book is deeply flawed due to the lack of sufficient argumentation on almost every point, including the identification and delineation of the original seven poems so crucial to her thesis. For example, she considers the oracles against Tyre, Edom, and Judah (Amos 1:9–12; 2:4–5) secondary because of their change in structure and emphasis. She does not relate her work to those who have made similar arguments in the past. She merely claims that these arguments are stronger than the alternative, advising the reader to consult the summary in J. Nogalski, *Literary Precursors to the Book of the Twelve* (BZAW 217: Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993), 89–97. Rilett Wood herself describes the reviser as repeating Amos's

own language to develop a “single unified text” by “smoothing out and homogenizing the text” (53). Lack of methodological reflection makes her diachronic analysis as subjective as those she earlier criticized.

There have been a number of studies comparing biblical historical writings to Greek examples, yet Rilett Wood does not help her case by refusing to argue that Greek poetry is more comparable with biblical prophecy than the well-known prophetic texts from Mari and Assyria. Moreover, the relevant Greek passages are often only described or quoted very briefly, and no thoroughgoing history of Greek poetic traditions is provided. A number of the parallels (e.g., Amos and Solon both complain about injustice) are of little consequence. The simplistic level of comparison and the claim that Manasseh’s Jerusalem was rich enough to support comparable artistry hardly refute the common view that Amos’s oracles stemmed from Israel in the eighth century. While many will agree that the book of Amos was updated in the postmonarchic period, linking the update to a movement from “song” to “book” culture that occurred in both Greece and Judah is a proposal that needs considerably more historical and cross-cultural unpacking than is provided. In sum, this book fails to meet the standards of discussion and argumentation usually expected of historical work into the Hebrew Bible.