“Perhaps there is Hope”

Reading Lamentations as a Polyphony of Pain, Penitence, and Protest

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ABSTRACT

Lamentations consists of multiple speaking voices, expressing a variety of theological perspectives on the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE, and interacting dialogically. In seeking to clarify “the” theology of Lamentations, however, interpreters summarise its multiple theological perspectives into a single monologic message. Lamentations is read as either primarily a theodicy, highlighting penitence, or an antitheodicy, highlighting protest.

This thesis reads Lamentations as a Bakhtinian polyphony, attending to individual speaking voices and examining their theological perspectives in turn, as well as the interaction between them. Alongside this dialogic reading, the thesis engages theodic and antitheodic interpretations of Lamentations. It reveals the strategies interpreters employ in support of their theodic or antitheodic readings, observing that Lamentations is ultimately read in keeping with the theological position of the interpreter. Interpreters find in Lamentations either an affirmation or an accusation of the God of the text, according to their ideological commitments. Reading for theodicy, God is just and the message of Lamentations is one of necessary penitence, in order to reverse the devastating punishment that has been inflicted on Jerusalem. Reading for antitheodicy, God is cruel, even abusive, and the message of Lamentations becomes a demonstration of protest against divine injustice.

But the burden of Lamentations is also to express immense pain. While there are elements of both penitence and protest within its pages, I argue that collapsing the “theological message” of Lamentations into one of either protest or penitence does a disservice to the text. Lamentations is better read as a polyphony of pain, penitence, and protest.
PREFACE

This thesis follows the “Notes and Bibliography” style according to the Chicago Manual of Style Online (16th edition). In keeping with its recommendation, references in footnotes appear in shortened form (author’s surname, shortened title, page number). \(^1\) Full details are provided in the bibliography.

Hebrew text is from Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia. When citing the Hebrew I use the lemma form unless there is reason to include a pronominal suffix or full construct chain for the sake of discussion. Unless otherwise stated, translations of Lamentations are my own.

It is my usual practice to avoid gendered terms for YHWH. In this thesis, however, I use masculine pronouns intentionally, given the portrayal of YHWH as angry husband and male warrior in Lamentations.

This thesis was brought to submission by the grace of God, and with the help of many friends and supporters. My heartfelt thanks must go to the supervisory team extraordinaire. James Harding has brought his unique blend of meticulous academic attention and genuine pastoral care to the supervisory process. He is a sterling mentor, a trusted confidant, and, what's more, a true friend. Tim Meadowcroft has provided wise counsel, bringing a voice of reason to my more Eeyore-odic moments, and has always championed my cause. Thank you, and thank you, and thank you, both, again.

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The Dunedin branch of Women Writing Theology heard many of my ideas in their first frail forms. Thanks especially to the incomparable Judith McKinlay for all her support and encouragement. It is so very much appreciated.

Librarians at Ayson Clifford Library, Deane Memorial Library, Otago University Library, and Tyndale House Library have been a great help in locating and sourcing resources. Particular thanks go to Judy Fisher and her remote services team at Otago, for the prompt and reliable supply of books arriving on the doorstep while I was studying by distance.

I owe a great deal of gratitude to a number of people who read and commented on multifarious drafts of this thesis. The detailed attention and intelligent suggestions of Eric Repphun, Gareth Terry, Bill Rea, Nicola Hoggard-Creegan, Lynne Baab, and Martin Baldwin have made this a much better work. Special thanks to Bill Rea for sharing his thoughtful translations of Lamentations with me, and to Eric Repphun for his particular brand of critical encouragement that so sharpened my writing. Neill Ballantyne made a couple of key suggestions and provided friendship and fun throughout the final throes of thesis writing. Thank you. None of these are to blame, of course, for any defects that remain.

Two faith communities have played important roles in seeing me through the PhD process. Ponsonby Baptist Church in Auckland is truly a community of unmerged voices in action: thank you. Father Michael Wallace and All Saints’ Anglican Church in Dunedin provided much needed sustenance and support at crucial moments: thank you.

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Special thanks to my family for their love and all sorts of support: emotional, moral, financial, and every other kind possible. I couldn’t ask for a better bunch of people to belong to. Peter and Elvina, Jim and Joy, and Stephen and Roseanne are siblings of the highest order. And Jasmine and Fiorella are, of course, the light of my life and the delight of my eyes (and I know the imminent Baby Bier will be too).

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to my Mum, who in recent years has traversed her own path of despair and hope, and hope and despair. And to my Dad, who, every step of the way, has been with her there.

אָהלִּים נֶשׁ תַּכְוָה

(Lam 3:29b)
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>ASV</td>
<td>American Standard Version</td>
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<tr>
<td>BHQ</td>
<td><em>Biblica Hebraica Quinta.</em> Edited by R. Schäfer. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEV</td>
<td>Contemporary English Version</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCH</td>
<td><em>Dictionary of Classical Hebrew.</em> Edited by D. J. A. Clines. 6 vols. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993–</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESV</td>
<td>English Standard Version</td>
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<tr>
<td>GNB</td>
<td>Good News Bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Critical Commentary</td>
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<tr>
<td>IVP</td>
<td>InterVarsity Press</td>
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<tr>
<td>JBL</td>
<td><em>Journal of Biblical Literature</em></td>
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<td>JPSV</td>
<td>Jewish Publication Society of America</td>
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<td>KJV</td>
<td>King James Version</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
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<td>MS(S)</td>
<td>Manuscript(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MT</td>
<td>Masoretic Text</td>
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<td>NAC</td>
<td>The New American Commentary</td>
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<tr>
<td>NASB</td>
<td>New American Standard Bible</td>
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<td>NIV</td>
<td>New International Version</td>
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<td>NJBC</td>
<td><em>The New Jerome Biblical Commentary</em></td>
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<td>SBL</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature</td>
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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is both a reading of Lamentations, and a reading of readings of Lamentations. As a reading of Lamentations, it observes the internal dialogue within the book and explicates the multiple perspectives its speakers express. As a reading of readings of Lamentations, it engages the scholarly conversation around Lamentations, observing that commentators read the same text in divergent theological directions. Indeed, the poetic speakers in Lamentations themselves waver in their assessments of the nature and character of God, and their understanding of the relationship between suffering and sin. They move between acknowledging sinful complicity in their own destruction, and accusing YHWH for imposing excessive punitive measures, alternately. Can one of these perspectives be identified as the prevailing theology of Lamentations? Commentators take up one or other of these alternatives in their interpretations, indeed, in their monologisations, of the text.

Yet quite aside from any internal textual evidence, readers reach interpretive conclusions based on their prior theological commitments: commitments to either upholding, or critiquing, the text and the God of the text. For readers whose interests require God ultimately to be justified, the God of Lamentations is “righteous, just, powerful, kind, severe, compassionate, faithful, and willing to hear and answer prayer.”1 The entire book of Lamentations is read accordingly, as a theodicy. For readers seeking reason to reject the text and its God, however, this same God becomes “sinister and brutal, executing his punishment upon Jerusalem with violent abandon.”2 In refusing to justify the behaviour of a sinister, brutal God, they read Lamentations, in its entirety, as an antitheodicy.

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1 The adjective “severe” is Paul House’s only concession to the cloud of divine darkness that looms over Lamentations (House, Lamentations, 329).
Both these interpretative stances, however, monologise the text, which actually expresses elements of both theodicy and antitheodicy. To tease out the interaction between the two positions in Lamentations I employ the work of Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin.\(^3\) His conception of the polyphonic text, embodying the “dialogism of the idea,”\(^4\) provides the theoretical framework for reading the dialogic interaction of theological perspectives in Lamentations. Discussion of the scholarly commentary—my reading of readings of Lamentations—is then framed in terms of theodicy and antitheodicy, as defined by Zachary Braiterman.\(^5\)

The first chapter of the thesis comprises an overview of scholarship on Lamentations, establishing the parameters for discussion. It introduces the question of theology in relation to Lamentations, highlighting representative theodic and antitheodic readings. This chapter concludes that seeking “a” theology of Lamentations does a disservice to the text, given the multiple theological perspectives it presents. Consequently, I posit the need for an interpretive approach that allows multiple perspectives to be held together simultaneously. Chapter 2 then provides the theory for such an approach, explaining Bakhtin’s dialogism of the idea and the polyphonic text.\(^6\) I follow Boris Uspensky’s development of Bakhtin’s work on point of view\(^7\) to then outline an approach to Lamentations that is attentive to theological evaluative perspectives.

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4 A polyphonic text consists of embodied ideas interacting on equal terms, independent of authorial control (see Bakhtin, *PDP*, 78-100). See ch. 2 for further explication.

5 Theodicy is “the justification of God,” including “any attempt to justify, explain, or find acceptable meaning to the relationship that subsists between God (or some other form of ultimate reality), evil, and suffering” (Braiterman, *God After Auschwitz*, 19, 4). Conversely, antitheodicy is “any religious response to the problem of evil whose proponents refuse to justify, explain, or accept as somehow meaningful the relationship between God and suffering” (Braiterman, *God After Auschwitz*, 31). See ch. 1 for further explication.

6 Bakhtin, *PDP*, 78-100.

7 Uspensky, *Poetics of Composition*, 8-16.
Chapters 3 to 7 present readings of chapters 1 to 5 of Lamentations respectively. In chapter 3 I demonstrate how the two voices in Lam 1, whom I will call the Lamenter and Zion, engage each other dialogically. While the Lamenter opens with sentiments that can easily be construed theodically, Zion opens with antitheodicy protest. Each speaker’s stance, however, is mitigated and influenced by the other’s perspective as the chapter proceeds. As such, it is difficult to determine whether the chapter should be read theodically or antitheodically. A polyphonic reading allows both possibilities to be observed simultaneously.

Chapter 4 demonstrates how the Lamenter is recruited to Daughter Zion’s cause much more emphatically in Lam 2 than in the chapter before. The antagonistic stance toward YHWH in Lam 2 lends itself most easily to an antitheodicy reading. Reading Lam 2 mindful of its succession from Lam 1, however, mitigates the dominance of the antitheodicy. Holding the chapters together as a polyphony allows the antitheodicy potential of Lam 2 to sound, without silencing the confessions of Lam 1 that have preceded.

In chapter 5 I read Lam 3 as an internal dialogue exploring the source of, and solution to, suffering. In his ruminations, the speaker of the chapter (the נב.uniform) pits the “authoritative” discourse of tradition against the “internally persuasive” experience of suffering. This chapter also draws attention to theodic readings of Lam 3 (and thus the whole of Lamentations) that are based on the so-called “central” discourse of hope. I show how these readings are challenged by antitheodic counter-readings, that prioritise the protesting position of Daughter Zion over the penitent posture of the נב.uniform. Rather than being monologised for theodicy or antitheodicy, then, Lam 3 should also be construed polyphonically, so that both the penitence of the נב.uniform, and the earlier protests of Zion continue to sound simultaneously. Further, I challenge the very notion of “centrality” in

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8 Cf. Miller, “Reading Voices,” 393-408.
9 Cf. Mandolfo, Daughter Zion, 76; O’Connor, Tears of the World, 31-43.
Lam 3. Polyphonic works may have *multiple* centres, and I suggest one possible alternative for identifying centrality in Lamentations.

Chapter 6 reads Lam 4 as effecting a crucial transitional movement from the individual speaking voices of Lam 1, 2, and 3, toward the explicitly communal perspective of Lam 5.\(^\text{10}\) It draws attention to the tragedy that when one suffers in a community, all suffer, with the sins of some causing the spilling of innocent blood.\(^\text{11}\) The absurdity of innocents’ suffering in Lam 4 could tip the balance toward reading the chapter antitheodically, as infants and children, surely, did not deserve their pitiful fate.\(^\text{12}\) There are sufficient ambiguities, however, that neither theodic nor antitheodic reasoning convincingly wins the day in readings of Lam 4 for theology.

Chapter 7 reads Lam 5 as a desperate communal plea. Even as the community come together in prayer, however, this communal “we” continues to demonstrate theodic and antitheodic ambiguities. Vestiges of polyphony remain to be seen.\(^\text{13}\) Lamentations 5 also demonstrates a quintessentially “unfinished” quality, which contributes to an appreciation of Lamentations as a whole as an open ended, polyphonic text.

Throughout the thesis, these dialogic readings of each chapter are woven together with theodic and antitheodic assessments of Lamentations from the scholarly commentary.\(^\text{14}\) This meta-reading, bringing text and interpretation together to expose theodic and antitheodic reading strategies, is one of the


\(^\text{14}\) This survey is necessarily selective. House’s recent work is a key reference point at the theodic end of the interpretive spectrum (House, *Lamentations*; House, “Theology of Lamentations,” 26-51). Tod Linafelt, F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, and Mandolfo’s works have been invaluable in elucidating antitheodic outlooks (especially Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*; Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*; Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion*). Elizabeth Boase and Kathleen O’Connor have been excellent guides in reading for multiple perspectives, although their work is not without underlying theological preferences that do sometimes surface (Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom*?; O’Connor, *Tears of the World*).
distinctive original contributions of this thesis. It reveals that commentators tend toward reading Lamentations either theodically or antitheodically, in keeping with their prior interpretive predilections.

There are also interpreters, however, who, like me, are deeply troubled by the portrayal of YHWH and the gendered violence he enacts in Lamentations, but who continue to hold a theological commitment to the text and its God. The former stance might suggest an antitheodic reading is most appropriate, while the latter requires, ultimately, a theodic understanding of the text to be upheld. These twin desires can result in a certain amount of interpretive ambivalence, as readers wish, on the one hand, to accuse YHWH of terrible cruelty, and on the other, to champion YHWH. Reading dialogically alleviates this tension somewhat, allowing multiple, even opposing, theological evaluations of YHWH to be held together in an eternal, unfinalisable polyphony.

And yet, even when advocating reading for multiple perspectives, interpreters still tend to display an identifiable interpretive bias toward either theodicy or antitheodicy. Kathleen O’Connor, for example, rightly identifies multiple perspectives and voices throughout Lamentations. In her final analysis, however, she admits to a discomfort with strains of Lamentations that portray YHWH negatively. In an effort to retain some semblance of theodicy she suggests that “[m]aybe God’s silence veils God’s innocence rather than reveals divine calculated destructiveness. I want it to be so.” But in concluding her eloquent reading, O’Connor despairs that the book’s “speakers blame God unequivocally,” a monologic, antitheodic, pronouncement. I am not the only reader of Lamentations, then, who is terribly conflicted about the nature of the God the book presents.

17 O’Connor, *Tears of the World*, 123.
At this point it is perhaps appropriate to outline my own interpretative inclinations, owning up to my theological and ideological commitments at the outset. The genesis of this thesis was my desire to read the biblical text both critically, as a feminist biblical scholar, and faithfully, as a New Zealand evangelical Christian.\(^{18}\) I was interested in questions of hermeneutics, meaning, and authority in reading the Bible as Scripture. As my research progressed, however, the dialogic reading of Lamentations and meta-reading of readings of Lamentations came to the fore, and are now the major concern of the thesis.

Currently, while in theory I advocate reading Lamentations as a polyphony, such that no single perspective dominates, I admit that I am slightly more inclined to critique and protest YHWH’s behaviour in Lamentations than to work to defend him. There are certainly grounds for asserting theodic sentiments—Lam 3:21-24 springs to mind—but the melancholy bent of my personality, and my feminist ethics, indeed my feminist outrage, do, at times, show through. Throughout the thesis, then, my personal protests at the portrayal of the deity and his treatment of his “wife” Zion spark ethical questions related to gender, violence, innocent suffering, and reading and interpretation.

To negotiate the ethical dilemmas I look, in the first instance, to Irving Greenberg and Emmanuel Levinas for guidance.\(^{19}\) Greenberg’s assertion that “[n]o statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of the burning children”\(^{20}\) has been a sobering touchstone throughout the writing of this thesis. I find myself unable to justify a God who, as Lamentations portrays him, treats children with such gratuitous violence. Yet I am also unable to abandon my heritage with its traditions about the text, causing a certain amount of cognitive dissonance and consternation.\(^{21}\)

\(^{18}\) See further §8.1.

\(^{19}\) See especially Greenberg, “Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire,” 7-55; Levinas, “Useless Suffering,” 451-54; Levinas, “Transcendence and Height,” 11-32; and Levinas, Time and the Other, 68-71.


\(^{21}\) See further §8.1.
Levinas’ insistence that all are implicated in, and responsible for, the suffering of the Other,\(^\text{22}\) raises the question of ethical response to suffering. This response must not descend into the “justification of the neighbor’s pain,” for this—even when it is a traditional, religious justification, such as the notion that suffering is punishment for sin—“is certainly the source of all immorality.”\(^\text{23}\) And so Lamentations raises questions of ethics, morality, and response to the suffering Other. Moreover, it raises these questions in the absence of any acknowledgement from the one whose face and voice are most urgently sought—YHWH.

The thesis draws to a close—but not closure—in chapter 8, which reiterates the case for reading Lamentations as a polyphonic text. It asks where a reader might turn to try and discern the overall theological perspective on sin and suffering presented by Lamentations, if such a thing exists. It redraws the various perspectives within Lamentations to which interpreters appeal to bolster their own assessments of Lamentations as essentially theodic or antitheodic in character, finding neither position to be finally persuasive.

The thesis thus presents dialogic readings of each chapter of Lamentations, and of Lamentations as a whole, as polyphonic text(s). These readings are attentive to two major tendencies in approaching Lamentations: reading for theodicy and reading for antitheodicy. Interpreters who are invested in defending the text and the God of the text prioritise aspects of the text that lend themselves toward reading Lamentations as a theodicy.\(^\text{24}\) YHWH is just, and suffering is due punishment for sin. Interpreters seeking to reject the text and/or the God of the text prioritise aspects that allow the book to be construed antitheodically. YHWH is unjust, even evil, and Zion’s suffering demands a response of accusation and protest.\(^\text{25}\) Interpretive divergence is tied, in part, to gender

\(^\text{22}\) Levinas, “Transcendence and Height,” 17.
\(^\text{23}\) Levinas, “Useless Suffering,” 453.
\(^\text{24}\) E.g. House, Lamentations; Parry, Lamentations; and in a more nuanced manner, Thomas, “Poetry and Theology.” Theodic interpretations are discussed in more detail in ch. 1 and throughout the thesis.
\(^\text{25}\) E.g. Mandolfo, Daughter Zion; Stiebert, “Human Suffering and Divine Abuse,” 195-215; and
assumptions, regarding Zion (Lam 1, 2) and the suffering “man” (Lam 3), but in the end, both theodic and antitheodic stances monologise the text. Does Lamentations have a prevailing theological perspective? Instead of prematurely foreclosing the text into a single monologic message, whether theodic or antitheodic, Lamentations is better conceptualised as a polyphonic text.

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In a more measured manner, Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*. Antitheodic interpretations are also discussed in more detail in ch. 1 and throughout the thesis.
CHAPTER ONE
A LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the book of Lamentations, surveying recent scholarship and preparing the ground for posing the major question the thesis addresses: does Lamentations have a prevailing theological perspective? And if so, how can this be determined? The chapter considers the usual preliminaries: historical setting, date, provenance, author, and audience. It also outlines major poetic and structural elements of Lamentations: the acrostic, parataxis, parallelism, enjambment, and (ostensible) metre. On the basis of its structural and literary cohesion, I suggest that Lamentations can legitimately be read as a literary unity. Nonetheless, there are two major aspects of the text–genre and theology—that call this unity into question. Lamentations participates in multiple genres and includes a variety of theological evaluations. Interpreters highlight aspects of these theological perspectives selectively, in order to read Lamentations as a theodicy, or as an antitheodicy. But a reading of Lamentations that takes the text seriously should instead acknowledge and attend to the plurality of perspectives, within the literary unity. The scene is thus set for seeking an approach to Lamentations that enables reading diversity within unity, allowing both theodic and antitheodic interpretative possibilities to be held in tension.

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A number of commentators have been particularly instructive in these preliminaries. Berlin, Lamentations, and Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, are frequent points of reference. Westermann’s landmark commentary is a regular foil for discussion (Westermann, Lamentations); as is House’s commentary (House, Lamentations). Salters, Lamentations (ICC) and Parry, Lamentations, must be acknowledged for their recent contributions to a detailed critical reading of the text, and a distinctively theological reading, respectively. I am also indebted to Boase’s excellent monograph (Boase, Fulfilment of Doom?), and Mandolfo and O’Connor’s astute readings (Mandolfo, Daughter Zion; O’Connor, Tears of the World).
1.2 Historical Background to Lamentations

Lamentations most likely reflects the destruction of Jerusalem and her temple, and the exile of her nobility to Babylon, in 587/586 BCE, although there are no dates, names, or details to definitively tie the book to this period within the book itself. Lamentations does fit against this background, however, and I read it as such. This suggests a *terminus a quo* of 587/586 BCE, with a near-consensus of scholars surmising that the book arose soon after, given its vivid depictions of disaster. Fixing a *terminus ad quem* is slightly more difficult, but a number of scholars suggest the poems were complete by the edict of Cyrus in 538 BCE, given they make no mention of imminent return to Zion. If 2 Isaiah is dependent on Lamentations, this would suggest Lamentations was known as early as 550 BCE, and at latest 538 BCE. There are myriad further proposals for dating individual chapters, raising related questions regarding whether the

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3 Indeed, Babylon is not mentioned, and it is Edom at whom some of the most fierce invective is directed (4:21-22).


chapters originated separately, and if so, when and how they were collated. Commentators suggest that the poems arose in Judah, in close spatial proximity to Jerusalem. And while pathos does not necessarily imply proximity, Lamentations does demonstrate a concern for the plight of those left behind, rather than those taken into captivity. Extensive discussions of origins, however, are beyond the scope of this thesis. I read synchronically, and proceed with the working assumptions that events in Jerusalem surrounding 587/586 BCE were the impetus for Lamentations, that the poems arose sometime thereafter, and that they were probably complete as a collection by 538 BCE.

1.3 Author

The Septuagint and the Vulgate include prefaces ascribing Lamentations to the prophet Jeremiah, an association also made in the Peshitta and Targum

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11 See Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 3-6; and Berlin, Lamentations, 33-36; for overviews, and Dobbs-Allsopp, “Linguistic Evidence,” 2-11, for incisive critique of various dating methods. Westermann tackles the issues of dating each chapter, and the emergence of the book as a whole, with almost indecent enthusiasm, reviewing a range of explanations throughout the history of interpretation (Westermann, Lamentations, 24-85). He still concludes, however, that dating “all five songs in their proper chronological sequence is something that can never be determined with any degree of certainty” (Westermann, Lamentations, 56).

12 Salters, Jonah and Lamentations, 98; Salters, Lamentations, 9; Meek, “Lamentations,” 5; Westermann, Lamentations, 105; Newsom, “Response to Gottwald,” 75; Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 4; Hillers, Lamentations, 15; Westermann, Lamentations, 55, 105. Provan continues to insist that “nothing can be said. They all concern events in Palestine, of course, but that does not mean that any was written there” (Provan, Lamentations, 11).

13 As a catastrophe of national theological and political significance, “exile” looms large in the biblical record. The “myth of the empty land,” however, does not hold historically, with archaeological evidence suggesting that many Judahites remained in Palestine (Barstad, Myth of the Empty Land, 77; Carroll, “Myth of the Empty Land,” 79-93; Gottwald, “Social Class and Ideology,” 51). Lamentations thus provides an account of the exile from “the perspective of those who continued to reside in Judah” (Trudinger, “Lamentations as City and Land,” 41; cf. Middlemas, Templeless Judah, 37-42). Even then, scholars assume it was primarily the poor who remained behind (e.g., Gottwald, “Social Class and Ideology,” 51), with Westermann suggesting “the songs of Lamentations arose among simple folk” (Westermann, Lamentations, 106). But is the literary artistry of Lamentations consistent with these assumptions? Barstad challenges the notion that only the destitute remained, arguing from biblical and archaeological sources that life in Judah continued (Barstad, Myth of the Empty Land, 78). Indeed, he cites the literary quality of Lamentations as part of his argument that there was an entire “functioning society” in Judah during the “exilic” period (Barstad, Myth of the Empty Land, 19-20, emphasis original).

14 Καὶ ἐγένετο μετὰ τὸ αὐχαριστηθῆναι τὸν Ἰσραήλ καὶ Ἱεροσολύμη ἐρημωθῆναι ἐκάθεν Ἰερεμίας ελαίων καὶ ἑθύνομε τὸν ὄρην τοῦτον ἐπὶ Ἱεροσολύμη καὶ ἑτέροι.

15 Et factum est postquam in capituittem redactus est israel et ierusalem deserta est sedit ieremis propheta flens et planxit lamentatione hac in ierusalem et amaro anino suspirans et eulans dixit.

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Lamentations. The association is lacking in the MT, however, and the ascription does not occur in any known Hebrew manuscript. In the Hebrew Bible, Lamentations appears in the Writings, among the Megilloth. Jeremianic authorship has now been so thoroughly refuted that it “has for all intents and purposes been abandoned.”

Contemporary discussions centre instead on whether Lamentations is the product of a single, or multiple, authors. This is further complicated by the possibility of redaction, which may have taken place from the very earliest forms of the poems by any number of interested parties.

Proponents of single authorship advance arguments from observations of the literary and structural unity of the text, and from congruence in their dating of each chapter. Westermann, however, dismisses any suggestion of literary unity and single authorship, declaring that such a “thesis grows not so much out of the texts themselves as out of these individuals’ interpretation of the texts.” Quite aside from the question of authorship, this is a crucial point, and one to which I will return repeatedly. For now, suffice it to say that Westermann’s

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18 Westermann, Lamentations, 58. A minority, however, are reluctant to give up the possibility of Jeremianic authorship entirely (e.g., Heater, “Structure and Meaning,” 151; Huey, Jeremiah and Lamentations, 443; Ryken, Jeremiah and Lamentations, 752; Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 88n265; Wiesmann, Die Klagelieder, 54).
21 Single authorship is possible if the poems stem from the same period, from an eyewitness account (Salters, Jonah and Lamentations, 97–98). Advocates of single authorship include House, Lamentations, 301; Rudolph, Die Klagelieder, 196; Johnson, “Form and Message,” 60; Re’emi, Lamentations, 81. Gottwald suggests “at least” Lam 1–4 “are the work of a single poet” (Gottwald, Lamentations, 21).
22 Westermann, Lamentations, 57.
theses are just as likely to grow out of his interpretation of the text as anyone else’s.

Proponents of multiple authorship, on the other hand, cite perceived differences between chapters, and earlier and later datings of chapters, as evidence of multiple hands at work.25 And Renkema proposes that the chapters arose from within a community of authors,26 a distinct possibility if the Sitz im Leben of Lamentations is a mourning ritual at the site of the ruined temple.27 It is uncertain, however, whether the poems were composed intentionally for such an event, or whether they circulated independently and were collected consequently for liturgical use.28

Once again, then, determining the exact origins of Lamentations is impossible given the current evidence.29 This thesis is primarily a literary study, and I work with the MT as given in BHS. Rather than speaking of historical “author,” then, I employ terms from literary theory in order to discuss the text. For, as Berlin points out, speculating about origins and authors beyond a certain point becomes “meaningless.”30 She elaborates:

Given that there is no evidence on which to discover the actual author, what we are really doing, from a literary perspective, is

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26 The “temple singers” (Renkema, *Lamentations*, 45-46). Other possible writing communities include cultic prophets or the Jerusalem priesthood (Kraus, *Klagelieder*, 15; Kaiser’s Levitic temple singers; and Smend’s prophetic circles (see Westermann, *Lamentations*, 57).
reconstructing the implied author of the text, the image of authorship projected by the text. The implied author is a fictive persona, not a historical individual—a persona who is not quite the same as, but yet not wholly separable from, the speaking voices in the text. Just as in biblical narrative it is largely impossible to distinguish the implied author from the narrator, so in biblical poetry it is impossible to distinguish the implied author from the poet, the voice or voices that speak the poems.\textsuperscript{31}

The concept of the implied author is well developed in the study of biblical narrative, where scholars have adopted the distinction literary critics make between the “historical author”, that is, the actual writer of the work, and the “implied author”, which is the abstract authorial presence that stands behind all the dramatis personae, including a first person narrator. The implied author has no real existence; he is part of the text although not part of the story. It is he whom the reader perceives as being responsible for the selection and expression of events narrated.\textsuperscript{32}

Curiously, however, few scholars seem to have recognised that the concept of the implied author might be just as useful in the study of biblical poetry.\textsuperscript{33} The utility of the implied author is that it allows distinctions to be made between historical authors and redactors behind the text, implied authors who are

\textsuperscript{31} Berlin, \textit{Lamentations}, 32.


\textsuperscript{33} Exceptions of note include Biddle, \textit{Polyphony and Symphony}, 125; Berlin, \textit{Lamentations}, 32.
perceived by readers to be at work at the compositional level of a text, and poetic speakers within the text.

The lack of distinction between historical author, implied author, and speaking voice in studies of biblical poetry may be a hangover from the more general misconception that poetry is a direct expression of the thoughts and feelings of the poet. According to this understanding, the poet as speaker directly “expresses a state of mind or a process of thought and feeling.”34 This does not adequately distinguish, however, between the “poet” as an historical author, and the speaking “I” within the poem, simply assuming that what a poem says is what the historical poet says, autobiographically.35 For a multi-voiced work like Lamentations, this would require a new historical poet to be posited every time a new poetic speaker appears.36 Rather than equating speaking voice with the poet or author of a poem, I suggest with Blevins that the “stigma of an isolated lyric subject has to be tossed aside and the lyric self understood as primarily a generic feature, not as an actual, literal self.”37

Discussion of Lamentations is further complicated by a lack of clear terminology. Commentators speak of authors, poets, redactors, and narrators and, very occasionally, of implied authors.38 But they do so without clearly defining their terms. One commentator might call “narrator” what another calls “author” or “poet,” without making clear distinctions.39 Further, in some cases

34 Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, 97-98.
35 Blevins, “Introduction,” 11-12. Vice critiques Bakhtin for this same “common error of reading a poet’s lyric persona biographically” (Vice, Introducing Bakhtin, 75; cf. Todorov, Dialogical Principle, 65). The speaking “I” of a poem however, should not automatically be equated with the “poet himself” (Smidt, “Point of View,” 2-3; cf. Klawitter, The Enigmatic Narrator, ix).
36 As Lee’s oral-poetic methodology leads her to posit (Lee, The Singers of Lamentations, 198).
38 Berlin has worked extensively with biblical narrative and quite naturally imports the implied author concept to her work on Lamentations (Berlin, Lamentations, 32). Heim alludes to implied author, but without explicating the term (Heim, “Personification of Jerusalem,” 169).
39 E.g., for Eissfeldt the “poet” is the actual historical writer/author of the poem, that is, the historical person behind the poem (Eissfeldt, “Lamentations,” 502). Bergant also calls the historical author the “poet,” and distinguishes between the poet as “author,” and the “narrator” as the first speaking voice in Lam 1 (Bergant, Lamentations, 16). Dobbs-Allsopp
commentators assume identification of the historical author with one of the speaking voices, who is supposed to represent the “true” or “authorial” perspective, without always justifying this assumption. The tendency to assign one of the speaking voices in the text to the author is particularly evident in discussions of Lam 3, where the נב\'s perspective is often unquestioningly equated with that of the author. Uncritical identifying any single speaking voice with the authentic voice of the author, however, is deeply problematic.

As it stands, commentators generally agree that multiple speaking voices appear in the book of Lamentations. What is contested is how many voices speak in total, and where changes in speaking voice occur. What is confused (rather

40 E.g., Kaiser conflates “poet” or “author” with “narrator,” so that her “narrator” (the opening speaker of Lam 1) is the authentic voice of the “poet” or “author.” This “poet” or “author” then “becomes,” “puts on the mask of,” or “assumes the persona of” the female Jerusalem when Zion speaks (Kaiser, “Female Impersonator,” 166 and passim). Kaiser thus assumes the “narrator” is the “poet” with no mask on, i.e., the objective and true perspective in Lamentations. Similarly, Longman identifies the speaking voices as “poet,” “the Virgin Daughter of Judah,” and “the man who has seen affliction.” The opening voice is thus the actual authentic voice of the “poet,” while the other two personae are merely “vehicles” for his speech (Longman, Jeremiah and Lamentations, 329). Heim also conflates “author” with “narrator,” maintaining that the “narrator” (the opening speaker) presents the “(implied)” author’s perspective (Heim, “Personification of Jerusalem,” 169).

41 I.e., “discussions of the first-person singular voice in chapter 3 all too often merge the question of authorship with implied poet” (Berlin, Lamentations, 32). E.g., Landy assigns the term “poet” to the נב, assuming he represents the “author’s” “authentic voice” (Landy, Lamentations, 332). Lee equates the נב with Jeremiah, an historical author (Lee, The Singers of Lamentations, 46).

42 Miller’s 1996 dissertation claimed there was little interest in the shifting voices in Lamentations (Miller, “Poetry and Personae,” 18). This is surely no longer the case. In addition to published works attending to voicing (e.g., Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations; Boase, Fulfilment of Doom?; Mandolfo, Daughter Zion), there is a growing body of emerging research, including Miller’s own thesis, and Conway, “Speaking Voices in Lamentations.”

43 Assessments of the number and presence of speakers vary widely. E.g., Grossberg identifies “no fewer than five personae” (Grossberg, Centripetal and Centrifugal Structures, 88). Lanahan identifies five voices, a “reporter,” Jerusalem, a “veteran,” a “bourgeois,” and a “chorus” (Lanahan, “The Speaking Voice,” 42, 45, 47, 48). Provan identifies “no more than three” voices, “the main speaker (narrator), Zion, and the people of Zion” (Provan, Lamentations, 7). Boase identifies “[a]t least” four speakers, the narrator, the personified city, the community, and the “individual male sufferer” of Lam 3 (Boase, “Many Voices of
than contested, necessarily), is how these speaking voices relate to “author,” “poet,” or “narrator,” and indeed, how to define and distinguish these terms from the outset. I distinguish between three levels of speaking, each potentially expressing an autonomous point of view. First, there are speakers within the dialogic world of the poem. Second, there is an implied author, the figure perceived by readers to be at work in the compositional level of the text. Third, there is/are the historical author/s behind the text.45

Lanahan, in his seminal reading of Lamentations’ speaking voices, helpfully distinguishes between the search for an historical author, and the “attempt to identify the speaking voice” which is a “stylistic concern.”46 Lanahan uses the term “persona” as “the mask or characterization assumed by the poet as the medium through which he perceives and gives expression to the world.”47 In his conception, the “poet” has various masks that he wears in turn, to give expression to different aspects of the situation. But it is not entirely clear what Lanahan means by “poet” here. Is he referring to an historical author, or is his “poet” more akin to narrative criticism’s “implied” author?

Miller also employs the concept of a poet’s “mask” to distinguish between the “poet” and the “dramatic speaker” of a poem.48 He too observes the problematic of “an all too facile identification of the speaker with the author, especially when a first person speaker speaks. Miller draws on extra-biblical poetic studies to demonstrate a shift in discourse about poetry, from discussing what “the poet

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45 Lanahan, “The Speaking Voice,” 41. This is a compositional, rather than a structural, concern, given there are no visible clues like quotation marks to indicate a change in speaker.


47 Miller, “Poetry and Personae,” 19.

48 Bergant identifies four speakers, a narrator and Daughter Zion, a “strongman,” and the “poet himself,” whom she equates with the “author” (Bergant, Lamentations, 15-16). By “compositional,” I mean the level of ideas within the text—the play of dialogue, the rhetoric of persuasion, the impression of point of view—which goes beyond external, surface elements of a text. “Compositional” features, then, are distinct from more evident structural features of a text, like acrostic or metre (cf. Uspensky, Poetics of Composition, 8). These features appear on a sliding scale, from more structural, to more compositional, concerns. See further §1.5.
“suggested” to discussing what “the speaker says.” This allows him to describe
dramatic speakers as “a creation of the poem’s author,” which, “as such must
exist within the poem, even as the poet must have her existence outside of it.”
He is thus able to delineate between two levels of speaking in a poem, the “poet”
outside the text and the “dramatic speakers” within it. This is a helpful step.
Miller, however, uses poet and author interchangeably without recognising that
in biblical literature, historical authors are out of reach. Any concept of the
“poet” with which an interpreter works must thus necessarily be an implied poet
or author.

There are thus (at least) three levels of speaking at work in Lamentations. First,
there is the level of historical author/s. Historical authors are outside of, or
“behind” the text as the creator/s of the work, and cannot be determined with
certainty. But texts do have authors, and read as though they have authors. So at
the second level of speaking, readers and hearers gain an impression of an
implied author who appears to have written the work. This is the imaginary,
fictive persona who appears to be writing the poems, the “abstract authorial
presence” behind the speaking voices at the compositional level of the text. The
impression of the author gleaned from the text is not necessarily coextensive
with an historical author—though it may be—and nor is it to be automatically
equated with any one of the speaking voices within the text. It is a helpful
theoretical concept for speaking about the text, rather like the square root of -1,
\( i \), is a helpful theoretical concept for enabling negative numbers to be
manipulated. \( i \) is an imaginary number that does not really exist. Proposing that
the square root of -1 exists and calling it \( i \), however, allows for calculations that
have useful theoretical and real-world results to be made. Nobody for a moment
thinks it is “real,” it is just a helpful concept. So too the implied author. My
shorthand for the implied author in Lamentations is simply the “Poet.”

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49 Miller, “Poetry and Personae,” 19.
50 Miller, “Poetry and Personae,” 19.
51 Miller, “Poetry and Personae,” 19.
52 In like manner Polzin refers to the implied author of the Deuteronomistic History as the
“Deuteronomist” (Polzin, Moses and the Deuteronomist, 18). Similarly, Newsom provides an
than asking after the author’s point of view, then, it is this Poet-as-implied-author’s perspective to which I appeal when I pursue the prevailing perspective in Lamentations.\footnote{Another way of dealing with the unknowability of historical authors is to ask after the perspective of the “text” (cf. Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 134\textendash}179; Eco, \textit{Interpretation and Overinterpretation}, 25). For Eco, enquiring after the “intention of the text” avoids the twin perils of a “radical reader-oriented theory of interpretation” and theories in which “the only valid interpretation aims at finding the original intention of the author” (Eco, \textit{Interpretation and Overinterpretation}, 25). That is, he works with the “\textit{intentio operis}, as opposed to–or interacting with–the \textit{intentio auctoris} and the \textit{intentio lectoris}” (Eco, \textit{Interpretation and Overinterpretation}, 25). See further Eco, \textit{Limits of Interpretation}, 44-63. Reports of speech by enemies (2:16b,c), onlookers (2:15c; 4:15a?), children (2:12b), the nations (4:15c?), and once, possibly YHWH (3:57) also occur. These secondary voices, however, are always mediated by one of the primary speakers. See Bal, \textit{Narratology}, 51-56, for different levels of direct and indirect speech.

At the third level of speaking are the speakers within the poem-world. These are the constructed figures who interact within the text. Determining the identity of these speakers within the text is a literary-compositional question, not to be confused with determining an actual historical author. In Lamentations, rather than a single “narrator” reporting or constructing the story as in a conventional narrative text, there are a number of speakers. These include the opening third person speaker, who I will call the “Lamenter,” the female Zion, the “יָהוּדָה” of Lam 3, and the explicitly Communal Voice of Lam 5.\footnote{Reports of speech by enemies (2:16b,c), onlookers (2:15c; 4:15a?), children (2:12b), the nations (4:15c?), and once, possibly YHWH (3:57) also occur. These secondary voices, however, are always mediated by one of the primary speakers. See Bal, \textit{Narratology}, 51-56, for different levels of direct and indirect speech.} None of these voices is necessarily identifiable with an historical author’s point of view, or indeed with the Poet’s perspective. The perspectives of historical author, implied author/text, and/or poetic speaker may coincide, granted, but they need to be distinguished at the outset, at least, for the sake of sound methodology. The critical mistake to avoid, then, is prematurely equating the Poet’s point of view—the point of view of the text—with any one constructed point of view within the work. The speakers within the text, with the points of view they express, are literary entities.
1.4 Audience

As with speaking, multiple levels of audience may be distinguished for Lamentations. Literary theorist Peter J. Rabinowitz helpfully identifies four levels of audience implied by narrative texts: an actual audience, a hypothetical authorial audience (imagined by the author), a narrative audience (called upon to judge the events being narrated), and an ideal narrative audience (who accepts the judgements of the narrator). Each of these audiences, however, are in front of the text, thus not including the addressee within the text itself. Further, Rabinowitz develops his theory of audience in relation to the novel. While he notes that it could reasonably apply to drama and music, he takes no account of poetry. In my analysis, then, I identify three levels of audience. The first, the addressee within the poem-world, is overlooked by Rabinowitz. The second, historical level encompasses both his actual, and his hypothetical, authorial audience. The third level, the actual contemporary audience, may align with either his narrative audience, or his ideal narrative audience.

First, then, are the addressees of the poetry within the text. These are the intended recipients, often explicitly named, of each utterance within the poem-world, and include YHWH (1:9c, 11c, 20a; 2:20a; 3:55, 58 (‘), 59, 61, 64; 5:1, 19, 21), bystanders (כָּלָּהּ נַפְרָה הָדֶרֶךְ, 1:12a), the peoples (כָּלָּהּ נַפְרָה, 1:18b), Zion (2:13a, b; 18a; 4:22a), and Edom (4:21a, 22b). There is also sense in which the dialogue within Lamentations takes place in the public square, with utterances spoken out into the ether (e.g. Lam 1:1-9b, 10-11b). There is thus a further, unspecified general audience within the poem-world, of anyone who will listen.

A second level of audience consists of the historical hearers or intended audience of the poetry. These are not necessarily the same as the addressees

57 In Rabinowitz’ terms, there are two audiences here—an actual historical audience; and a hypothetical authorial audience (Rabinowitz, “Truth in Fiction,” 212-13).
specified within the poetry, but rather the audience for whom the poems were constructed (the hypothetical authorial audience); or at the very least, those who first heard and responded to them (the actual, historical audience). A possible intended, and indeed actual, historical audience may have been the gathered community in Judah, in the context of a memorial service at the site of the ruined temple. But establishing an historical audience, like establishing an historical author, is fraught with uncertainty and beyond the scope of this thesis, which is primarily interested in the voicings within the text itself.

Third, there is the ongoing, actual audience consisting of any reader or hearer who encounters the book of Lamentations. This contemporary audience may align either with Rabinowitz’ “narrative” audience, assessing and critiquing judgements expressed in the text, or “ideal narrative audience,” agreeing with and accepting the text’s perspective. This latter position becomes problematic, of course, when the text’s multiple perspectives are recognised. The utterances that are “directed at different audiences within the textual world of the book. . . . convey different, and often competing messages, and they struggle for the readers’ attention” and a judgement must be made as to which speaker’s perspective might be expressing the point of view of the text. In so doing, contemporary readers might come to align themselves with the onlookers within the text, positioned as “overhearers” of the laments, to whom the poetry’s internal entreaties to “look” and “see” also come to apply.

1.4.1 Excursus: The Superaddressee: YHWH and Bakhtin’s “Third”

Old Testament laments are, theoretically at least, “all addressed to God.” Westermann explains that they “were intended to be heard, first and foremost,

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58 Cf. §1.3 n. 27
62 Westermann, Lamentations, 91.
by the One to whom they were directed as prayer, by the One who is directly
addressed in them: God. But not all of Lamentations directly addresses
YHWH—at least, not within the poem-world. In Lam 4, for example, YHWH is
never once addressed. Further, while some utterances are directed to YHWH,
the internal witness of Lamentations—and a major source of theological tension
in the book—is the very contention that YHWH is neither present nor listening
at all. How, then, can it be understood that Lamentations is “addressed to God”?

While my primary exposition of Bakhtin’s work follows in chapter 2, it is useful
to explain his conception of the “superaddressee” here, in relation to the
assumed or implied audience of Lamentations. For Bakhtin, the “author of the
utterance, with a greater or lesser awareness, presupposes a higher
superaddressee (third), whose absolutely just responsive understanding is
presumed, either in some metaphysical distance or in distant historical time.”
This superaddressee is an assumed “overhearer” of every utterance.
Furthermore, they are an ideal hearer, such that “dialogue takes place as if
against the background of the responsive understanding” of this “invisibly
present third party who stands above all the participants in the dialogue.”

Bakhtin identifies a range of entities that could take this role, including “God,
absolute truth, the court of dispassionate human conscience, the people, the
court of history, science, and so forth.” In the Hebrew Bible, it is safe to
assume that YHWH would be the only acceptable option. In a sense, then,
YHWH may be implicitly assumed as a hoped-for hearer of Lamentations—the
superaddressee—even when he is not explicitly addressed. Indeed, the notion

Voices of Lament,” 4, 5.
64 Bakhtin, “Problem of the Text,” 126.
65 Bakhtin, “Problem of the Text,” 126.
66 Bakhtin, “Problem of the Text,” 126. Coates suggests that for Bakhtin himself, the super-
addressee must be God (Coates, *Christianity in Bakhtin*, 159-60). Green identifies a strong
resonance between the “super-addressee,” and God, as the potentially responsive listener to
every utterance (Green, *Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship*, 43).
that YHWH is ultimately the intended hearer of Lamentations is presupposed by much scholarly commentary.

1.5 Poetry and Structure

In terms of poetry and structure, I distinguish between external, surface structural-poetic elements such as acrostic, repetition, metre and so on; and deeper, compositional-poetic elements such as tone, mood, dialogue, and point of view. Dobbs-Allsopp makes a similar distinction, between “formal” and “thematic” principles in poetry. For Dobbs-Allsopp, formal principles comprise “the repetition of certain physical features of the poem—sounds, words, lines—or a relationship among such features,” while thematics result “from the organization or deployment of those elements of a poem that arise from the symbolism contained in the words—semantics, tone, etc.” Precise distinctions are, of course, artificial, and “form and theme—can only be artificially disentangled for the purpose of analysis, and as often as not overlap and bleed into each other and work together.” Rather than being strict binary categories, then, poetic features appear on a sliding scale, from more obvious external features such as the acrostic, to less obvious, deeper features, such as conceptual structure.

Scholarly discussion of poetry in the Hebrew Bible has tended to focus on its more formal external aspects. In modern biblical scholarship, the debate has been concerned with whether parallelism or metre is the defining feature of biblical poetry. Indeed, the qinah metre in Lamentations is sometimes cited as

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68 Cf. §1.3 n. 45.
69 Dobbs-Allsopp, “Poetry, Hebrew,” 555. In like manner, Berlin distinguishes between “surface” structure and “compositional” structure in narrative (Berlin, Biblical Narrative, 55). The same distinction may be made for poetry.
71 Cf. §1.3 n. 45.
72 See Grossberg, Centripetal and Centrifugal Structures, 3. Indeed, even determining what exactly constitutes biblical “poetry” is problematic. Differentiating biblical poetry from prose often circles around the debate as to whether parallelism or metre is Hebrew poetry’s distinguishing feature (Dobbs-Allsopp, “Poetry, Hebrew,” 553). The more basic question, contested since Lowth’s seminal lecture arguing that Hebrew poetry is metrical (Lowth,
evidence that metre does in fact exist in Hebrew poetry.\footnote{Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews, 31-36} As Berlin notes, however, “[q]uestions of poetic form and structure—types of parallelism, word patterns, acrostics, meter—have lost their urgency,” having been studied at length already.\footnote{Vance, The Question of Meter, 1.}

In contrast to structural-poetics, then, the deeper compositional-poetics are not always immediately obvious from a poem’s external form, or even in an initial line-by-line analysis. They require some teasing out, leading to greater indeterminacy and subjectivity in interpretation. This is perhaps, in part, why interpreters have preferred to focus on observable, measurable features. Compositional-poetics could include discussions of author/implied author, addressee, speaking voice/dialogue, and point of view/perspective. These compositional-poetics are, once again, central to discussions of narrative texts, but can also be applied, if a little differently, to poetry. It is these compositional-poetics, particularly dialogue and point of view, in which I am primarily interested. It will be useful, however, to briefly note the most important structural features in Lamentations before proceeding. These structural poetics unite the five chapters of Lamentations centripetally.\footnote{Berlin, Lamentations, x. Berlin herself focuses on metaphor, rather than the well worn paths of metre, acrostic, and so on (Berlin, Lamentations, ix).}

\footnote{Centripetal works display “a prevailing uniform structure and tight pattern,” while centrifugal works are characterised by “disparate figures and a predominantly loose composition” (Grossberg, Centripetal and Centrifugal Structures, 5). Grossberg surveys techniques that contribute to so unifying or scattering a poem (Grossberg, Centripetal and Centrifugal Structures, 8-13). In Lamentations, unifying features include the “prevailing theme, acrostic design, poetic meter, association of stanzas, perspectival shifts, verbal linking and echoing, historicity, imagery and closural devices” (Grossberg, Centripetal and Centrifugal Structures, 83). For Bakhtin, too, language is a “struggle between two embattled tendencies in the life of language.” One of these tendencies is centripetal, asserting unity and central control of the utterance; the other is centrifugal, dramatizing diversity and the leverage of the margin” (Reed, Dialogues of the Word, 15; quoting from Bakhtin, Discourse in the Novel, 272). Centripetal features contribute to overall unity, while centrifugal tendencies disrupt unity. According to Grossberg, these tendencies remain in tension throughout Lamentations such that it “finds a point of equilibrium near the midpoint on the centripetal/centrifugal scale” (Grossberg, Centripetal and Centrifugal Structures, 14).}
1.5.1 The Acrostic

An obvious organising structure in Lamentations is the acrostic form.\textsuperscript{76} In Lam 1 and 2 each three line stanza begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.\textsuperscript{77} Lamentations 3 retains the three line stanza, but triples the acrostic, such that every line in a given stanza begins with the same letter of the alphabet.\textsuperscript{78} Lamentations 4 returns to the stanza-wise acrostic, but with only two lines per stanza. Lamentations 5 abandons the acrostic but retains an alphabetic structure, having the same number of stanzas as there are letters in the Hebrew alphabet, 22 stanzas, each of one line.\textsuperscript{79} Scholarly attempts to determine the purpose or intent of the acrostic form include a primitive belief in the “magical” power of the alphabet,\textsuperscript{80} a mnemonic device used to aid memory or in teaching the alphabet,\textsuperscript{81} or simply an aesthetically pleasing literary device providing creative challenge.\textsuperscript{82} Most popular in regards to Lamentations is the notion that

\textsuperscript{76} Cf. Pss 9-10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145; Prov 31:10-31. Acrostics “perform a centralizing function” (Grossberg, Centripetal and Centrifugal Structures, 11).

\textsuperscript{77} But note the four line stanzas in 1:7 and 2:19.

\textsuperscript{78} The triple acrostic and line by line versification fools some commentators into thinking Lam 3 is actually longer than the other chapters. Mintz declares Lam 3 “three times the length of the chapters that flank it on either side” (Mintz, Horban, 33); while Longman remarks on “its extraordinary length” (Longman, Jeremiah and Lamentations, 340; cf. Ryken, Jeremiah and Lamentations, 752). This is nonsense. Lam 1 and 2 have 67 lines each; Lam 3 has 66 lines; Lam 4, 44 lines; and Lam 5, 22 lines. This raises serious questions as to just how closely these commentators have actually examined Lamentations!

\textsuperscript{79} Note that Lam 2, 3, and 4 reverse 2 and 5 from the usual alphabetical order, represented in Lam 1. This might be representative of an older order of the alphabet (Gordis, “Biblical Poetry,” 83); evidence that Lam 1 underwent a different compilation and transmission process (Eissfeldt, The Old Testament, 501); or that alphabetical order was not yet stable at the time of collection (Westermann, Lamentations, 98; cf. Provan, Lamentations, 4). Gous suggests the reversal is intentional, demonstrating innovation within structure (Gous, “Mind over Matter,” 79); while Heater believes it emphasizes the reversal of “Judah’s position of favored status with God and victory over her enemies” symbolically (Heater, “Structure and Meaning,” 159).

\textsuperscript{80} Jeremias, Das Alte Testament, 665; contra Salters, “magical” beliefs about the alphabet are not in evidence until mediaeval Judaism (Salters, Jonah and Lamentations, 89).

\textsuperscript{81} Munch, “Die Alphabetiche Akrostiche,” 708-10; contra Salters, who suggests the content of the acrostics in Lamentations is too graphic for purely pedagogical purposes (Salters, Jonah and Lamentations, 89; Salters, Lamentations, 19).

\textsuperscript{82} Westermann, Lamentations, 99; Gordis, “Biblical Poetry,” 83; Gordis, Lamentations, 124; Salters, Lamentations, 21.
the acrostic is deployed to capture the gamut of sin and suffering “from Aleph to Taw,”83 or to impose structure and order on a chaotic world.84

The intent or purpose for which the acrostic form was originally employed cannot be determined.85 Once present in the text, however, the acrostic form interacts with the content of Lamentations to great literary effect, providing structural unity and coherence.86 First, the acrostic clearly delineates the beginning and end of each poem, allowing ease of distinction between them.87 Second, the acrostic provides immediate connections between all five poems, marking them structurally as five poems that “fit” together.88 Third, the acrostic offers a stabilising force to counterbalance the depth of emotion expressed within the poems, providing comforting structure in a world that is otherwise out of control.89 This illusion of order is due in part to the acrostic’s predictability: the alphabet can be expected to progress in a particular manner from א to ג.90 Indeed, some commentators contend that the acrostic is the only source of progression and unity in Lamentations.91 For Westermann, for

83 De Wette first drew attention to “a certain completeness” of the acrostic (De Wette, The Old Testament, 532; cf. O’Connor, “Voices Arguing About Meaning,” 29; Gordis, Lamentations, 124; Ryken, Jeremiah and Lamentations, 739; Boda, “Lamentations,” 399; Boase, “Many Voices of Lament,” 7). Contra Westermann, to connote completion, all five poems would need to be acrostics (Westermann, Lamentations, 99). For Gottwald the acrostic signifies the completeness of grief and sin (Gottwald, Lamentations, 30). Salters, however, rejects the implication of a totality of sin, given few, if any, specific sins are mentioned (Salters, Jonah and Lamentations, 91).


85 See Salters, Lamentations, 17-21, for an overview.


87 Such boundary markers provide “autonomy and form” contributing to a “closed and centripetally oriented” text (Grossberg, Centripetal and Centrifugal Structures, 8).

88 Despite the reversal of כ and כ in Lam 2, 3, and 4; and even though Lam 5 is not an actual acrostic (cf. Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 17).


91 Dobbs-Allsopp speaks of the “otherwise chaotic and fragmentary verses of this poetry” (Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 18; cf. Eissfeldt, The Old Testament, 501). For Hillers, without the acrostic Lamentations “runs the risk of being monotonous and of lacking any clear progression of action or thought” (Hillers, Lamentations, 27). Not so! On the contrary, there is a clear progression through Lamentations, from a more individual, to a more communal perspective (see further §6.5). The acrostic is by no means the only organising
example, Lamentations has no thematic or conceptual structure or coherence, only the externally imposed organisation of the acrostic. Content is determined arbitrarily by form, and by the demands of starting successive lines with a particular letter of the alphabet. Because of the requirements of the acrostic, ideas are forced into positions where they do not sit naturally—or so the argument goes. According to Westermann,

[i]f one interprets the text according to the sequence of the verses, proceeding on a verse-by-verse basis and disregarding the changes that could have been introduced under the necessity of adhering to alphabetic form, one constantly runs the risk of inferring conceptual relationship between sections, lines or even clauses, where such are simply not present.

But what Westermann does not recognise is that, for a reader, conceptual relationships are now present precisely because the text finds itself in the current arrangement. The acrostic is now a distinctive part of the poems’ effect. Thus, a fourth, crucial effect of the acrostic is precisely that its predictability provides a clear progression through each poem, regardless of which ideas appear where. Successive lines that might seem unrelated conceptually are related sequentially, as they occur under the ordering of the acrostic. If the progression from one line to the next appears jarring, or disjointed, or indeed to directly refute the line before, then that is part of what makes a literary reading so intriguing. It is the task of the reader to then make sense of the “multiplicity

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92 Westermann supposes the acrostic is an arbitrary imposition, that forced earlier fragments into position. He imagines that “[s]uch a mechanical type of arrangement has no intrinsic connection with content” (Westermann, Lamentations, 99).

93 Westermann, Lamentations, 100. Gous bemoans this tendency to view the acrostic not “as a contributing factor, but rather as an impediment to the logical flow of thought” (Gous, “Mind over Matter,” 70). Instead, keeping within the strictures of the acrostic form can be considered part of the literary artistry of Lamentations (cf. Gous, “Mind over Matter,” 79; cf. Brandscheidt, Gotteszorn und Menschenleid, 33).

of interconnecting perspectives which are offset whenever there is a switch from one to another.”\(^95\) The acrostic thus contributes, in part, to the “prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text” which is then open to “the reader’s actualization of this potential through the reading process.”\(^96\)

### 1.5.2 Parataxis

Parataxis is the abutment of ideas that appear to be disjointed from one another, without any intermediate explanatory connections.\(^97\) Some commentators disparage the inherently paratactic nature of poetry in Lamentations, despairing of finding any conceptual coherence.\(^98\) But the juxtaposition of apparently unrelated ideas need not be regarded negatively. Rather, it contributes to the literary effect of Lamentations, opening up interpretive possibilities when adjacent lines abruptly change direction, abandon one perspective for another, or negate what directly precedes or follows. For example, 3:20, “I constantly bring it to mind and my spirits drop” (יהי ח baja ותבש די נפשי) is immediately followed by 3:21: “this I remind my heart and for this I hope” (איה אשנ יאדר לא יפר עלא ח נוחי) without any apparent reasoning for the transition. While NRSV makes an interpretive move, providing a smoothing “but” at the beginning of 3:21, there is no such particle in the Hebrew. The two lines, suggestive of completely opposite attitudes, simply appear consecutively, both within the 1 stanza. The juxtaposition of opposing ideas contributes to the overall effect of disorientation, confusion, and conflict in Lamentations. Parataxis thus need not be considered a hindrance to interpretation, but is an important part of the poetic effect. Expecting the text to present a coherent presentation of themes blinds interpreters to the possibilities of the polyphonic text, which does not move through ideas systematically.

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95 Iser, *Act of Reading*, 118.
96 Iser, *The Implied Reader*, xii.
98 E.g., Westermann, *Lamentations*, 73.


1.5.3 Parallelism

Parallelism is arguably the defining feature of biblical poetry and occurs throughout Lamentations, being particularly evident in Lam 5. In contrast to the paratactic juxtaposition of unrelated ideas, parallelism creates thematic and linguistic connections between adjacent lines or stichs, associating and extending ideas. For example, Lam 5:11 “Women are raped in Zion, young women in the towns of Judah,” provides the correspondences women (נשים) / young women (נשים) and Zion (ציון) / Judah (יהודיה). In Lamentations, then, parallelism, like the acrostic, serves to emphasise the connections between successive lines, acting centripetally.

1.5.4 Enjambment

Enjambment also serves to unify the poetic structure of Lamentations. Rather than exhibiting a parallel structure where successive lines mirror each other, enjambed lines carry a motif from one line and develop or expand upon in the next, such that “the syntax and meaning carry over line ends without a significant pause.” This is especially evident in Lam 3, where motifs repeat even across the acrostic boundaries of the strophes. Consider Lam 3:12 and 13:


durק קשתו ו𝒽טتسم לסהרא לוחן¹²

dברא במליהו ביני אלסהף¹³

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100 Parallelism and metre do not necessarily provide “a solely unidirectional centripetal orientation,” given they could draw attention to differences as well as similarities (Grossberg, *Centripetal and Centrifugal*, 10).

12(ָ) He bent his bow and set me as a mark for his arrow

13(ֳ) He shot into my vitals the quivers of his arrows

The theme of shooting arrows is carried across from the last line of the ָ stanza, to the first line of the ֳ stanza. Enjambment thus contributes to unifying the poetic structure, connecting theme, content, and thought across stanzas. It tightens connections between lines even across the acrostic’s own letter-limits.

1.5.5 Qinah metre

Budde’s influential work on metre identified a 3+2 rhythm predominating in chapters 1-4 of Lamentations. In this proposed qinah metre, lines consist of three stresses in the first stich and two in the second, such that each line dies away in a lamenting, sighing fashion, considered particularly appropriate for a funeral dirge. Use of the qinah metre might thus conjure associations of the dirge and of death. Since Budde’s initial observation, however, some critiques have been made. First, not every line of Lamentations conforms to the 3+2 pattern, with variations occurring within each chapter, and Lam 5 demonstrating a fundamentally different pattern of predominantly equal bicola. Second, the 3+2 pattern occurs elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible in non-lament literature, so that it is not exclusively associated with the dirge. Further, there is some doubt as to whether metre is a feature of Hebrew poetry at all. Current consensus tentatively accepts the qinah as perhaps the dominant, but not exclusive, rhythm in Lamentations.

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103 Cf. Berlin, Lamentations, 23; Gordis, Lamentations, 118; Grossberg, Centripetal and Centrifugal Structures, 85.
104 Hillers, Lamentations, 23.
105 Hillers, Lamentations, 18.
106 E.g., Deut 33:18; Ps 96:13b; Isa 1:10-12; 40:9-11; Song 1:9-11. See Berlin, Lamentations, 3; Shea, “Qinah Structure,” 103; Hillers, Lamentations, 18-19; Watson, Classical Hebrew Poetry, 98.
108 So Shea, “Qinah Structure,” 103; Salters, Lamentations, 16-17; House, Lamentations, 308; Gordis, Lamentations, 154; Hillers, Lamentations, 18, 22.
1.5.6 Conceptual structures

Despite the question mark over metre, the qinah in Lamentations still has its defenders. Indeed, Shea takes the qinah rhythm as programmatic for the book as a whole.\(^\text{109}\) That is, for Shea, Lamentations is intentionally framed around a 3+2 structure, with the first three longer chapter followed by the two shorter chapters. The macro structure of the book as a whole thus reflects the qinah rhythm of individual lines of poetry.\(^\text{110}\)

Commentators identify other conceptual structures in Lamentations, relating perceived structure to internal thematic content. Johnson, for example, divides each poem into two halves, a “fact half” and an “interpretation half.”\(^\text{111}\) Renkema offers an exhaustive analysis of each chapter and the book as a whole, proposing a structure of concentric rings.\(^\text{112}\) These and other attempts to identify a conceptual structure, however, seem at times a little forced, coming under the broad umbrella of readings that grow “not so much out of the texts themselves as out of these individuals’ interpretation of the texts.”\(^\text{113}\) It is possible to observe—or construct—any manner of conceptual structures, progressions, and thematic linkages in Lamentations. But being able to perceive some conceptual progression does not necessarily make such structures native to Lamentations.

Westermann rejects any contention that Lamentations is structured conceptually, arguing that it is based, like the lament Psalms, around an “underlying sequence of events.”\(^\text{114}\) Yet while Lamentations may be motivated by a sequence of events, its poems do not narrate those events, they express perspectives upon them. Lamentations is poetry, and does not tell a story as


\(^\text{110}\) Shea, “Qinah Structure,” 106. The qinah thus “tightens the work” (Grossberg, Centripetal and Centrifugal Structures, 85).


\(^\text{113}\) Westermann, Lamentations, 57; cf. Berlin, Lamentations, 6.

\(^\text{114}\) Westermann, Lamentations, 76.
such. It assumes familiarity with that story and weaves word-pictures around it.\(^{115}\) Lamentations thus does not have a plot-type movement. Instead, at the surface level at least, forward movement is provided by the acrostic marching steadily onwards from \(\aleph\) to \(\tau\). And at the compositional level, changes in speaker and their shifting perspectives provide forward movement,\(^{116}\) not too dissimilar to the ongoing momentum of a conversation.

### 1.6 Canonicity and Liturgical Use

Poetic and structural features working centripetally in Lamentations suggest all five poems can be considered together as a literary whole, and their use and reception throughout history confirm this assessment.\(^{117}\) Both Jewish and Christian traditions confirm this assessment, given the collection and location of the poems together in Scripture, and their ongoing use in liturgy. In Jewish tradition, Lamentations in its entirety is recited at Tisha B’Av, in commemoration of the destruction of both first and second temples and more recent tragedies in Jewish history, including the Shoah. While Lamentations tends to be (scandalously) overlooked in favour of cheerier bits of the Bible in the Christian tradition, it is used in Tenebrae, the service of shadows held in darkness on the evening before or early morning of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Saturday, in some Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant traditions.\(^{118}\)

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115 “The Hebrew writers used verse for celebratory song, dirge, oracle, oratory, prophecy, reflective and didactic argument, liturgy, and often as a heightening or summarizing inset in the prose narratives—only marginally and minimally to tell a tale” (Alter, *Biblical Poetry*, 27). Pss 78, 105, 106 do have a narrative aspect to their lyric, but these are “exceptions that confirm the rule” (Alter, *Biblical Poetry*, 27). Berlin suggests that “[i]f we did not know the history of the fall of Judah from other sources, we would have only the vaguest notion of how it happened” (Berlin, *Lamentations*, 1; cf. Dobbs-Allsopp, “Tragedy, Tradition, and Theology,” 44; Alter, *Biblical Poetry*, 28; Knight, *Lamentations*, 97).


118 See Westermann, *Lamentations*, 81-85; Westermann, “The Role of the Lament,” 20-38. There is gathering momentum for including lament more prominently in Christian worship (e.g., Brueggemann, “The Costly Loss of Lament,” 57-71). There is some resistance, however, from those who argue that lament forms gave way to more proper penitential prayer (e.g., Boda, “The Priceless Gain of Penitence,” 81-101).
Regardless of their origins, then—whether they circulated separately, and when and how they came together—the poems of Lamentations now appear together, in this order, and thus may be studied as all of a piece, as they have been for centuries. Within this literary and structural unity, however, there are features that have centrifugal effects, contributing to diversity in Lamentations.

1.7 Genre

Genre is one such scattering force in Lamentations, as the poems do not fit any classical form-critical descriptions precisely. Thus no single set of genre expectations is activated to unify them. Instead, they incorporate aspects of the individual and communal lament, as well as the funeral dirge.¹¹⁹ Lamentations 3 is most like an individual lament (cf. Ps 7), although elements of communal lament appear.¹²⁰ And Lam 5 is most like a communal lament, albeit with an extended complaint section, and without the usual requisite turn to praise.¹²¹ But Lam 1, 2, and 4 are more difficult, with elements of both the funeral dirge and the communal lament appearing in liberal measure throughout.¹²²

¹¹⁹ For individual and communal lament Psalm forms see Gunkel and Begrich, Psalms, 82-98, 121-98; and Westermann, Praise and Lament in the Psalms, 52-71, 165-213.
¹²² A key issue in earlier discussions of Lamentations and genre was the question of dependence on the Mesopotamian city lament. Kramer argued that the biblical laments are “a profoundly moving transformation of the more formal and conventional Mesopotamian prototypes” (Kramer, “Sumerian Literature and the Bible,” 185-204, 201; cf. Kraus, Klagelieder, 9-11); contra McDaniel, who argues against any Sumerian influence (McDaniel, “Alleged Sumerian Influence,” 198-209). Gwaltney posits a trajectory from Mesopotamian laments moving through to the biblical lament via the balag-ersemma (Gwaltney, “Near Eastern Lament,” 191-211). Westermann acknowledges parallels between Mesopotamian laments and biblical laments but proposes that any similarity is due to shared experience rather than literary connection (Westermann, Lamentations, 11-23, 20; cf. Berlin, Lamentations, 26-29); an argument Salters does not find convincing even while agreeing that that dependence is not finally demonstrable (Salters, Lamentations, 14). Hillers sees “evidence of some kind of connection,” arguing for a “city-lament” genre in Israel similar to that in ancient Mesopotamia (Hillers, Lamentations, 35, 39). Dobbs-Allsopp is the most vocal advocate of a direct link between Mesopotamian city-laments and Lamentations in recent scholarship (Dobbs-Allsopp, Weep, O Daughter of Zion, 1; Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 7, 9).
1.7.1. The Dirge in Lamentations

Hedwig Jahnow’s landmark work compared biblical laments with folk dirges and concluded that while Lam 1, 2, and 4 might incorporate elements of lament, they are predominantly dirges, funeral songs for the dead (cf. Ezek 19:1-9; 19:10-14; 27; 28:11-15; Is 14:4-21). Distinctive motifs of the dirge include:

- An opening cry of ah!, alas!, or the equivalent; a mournful cry as such (sometimes with direct address of the deceased); a summons to mourn (sometimes even addressed to inanimate objects); a proclamation that a death has occurred (sometimes with reference to the mode of death); a comparing of the former with the present state of things (the contrast motif), including a eulogizing of the deceased; a description of the mourner’s pain or of the general state of misery; reference to the effect all this is having on the bystanders; questions expressing bewilderment at what has happened.

These elements appear, in turn, in Lam 1, 2, and 4. The opening  הַנְשָׁנָה (1:1; 2:1; 4:1); summons to mourn (2:18-19); descriptions of misery (e.g. 1:12-15; 2:1-10; 4:1-10); bystander effect (1:7-8, 21; 2:15-16; 4:12); and contrast motif (1:1-9; 4:1-10), all attest to the dirge (qinah). But as Bergant asks, how can these be funeral songs for a dead entity when Zion still survives to cry out?

1.7.2 The Communal Lament in Lamentations

Countering Jahnow, Westermann argues that “in fact, it is the structure of the communal lament which underlies Lam 1, 2, and 4,” and that dirge elements are
secondary.126 Communal laments consist of a “direct address of God . . . a tripartite arrangement within the section consisting of the lamentation itself, and of a dual arrangement within the section containing the petitionary prayer,” that is, a petition first for attention, and then for intervention.127 These elements also appear in Lam 1, 2, and 4, with address to YHWH (1:9c, 11c, 20-22; 2:20-22),128 widespread descriptions of suffering, and petitions for both attention (e.g. 1:9c, 11c; 1:20; 2:20-22) and intervention (e.g. 1:21-22) evident.

1.7.3 Multiple Genres in Lamentations

No one genre prevails in Lam 1, 2, and 4, then, although aspects of the communal lament and the dirge appear throughout.129 Potential explanations for the combination abound.130 The key, however, is to recognise that “upon observation genres turn out to be anything but fixed and immutable.”131 Genres are generic, individual pieces of literature are not. Form-critical undertakings fall down upon precisely this point, and recent approaches to genre in Lamentations endeavour to reach “beyond form criticism.”132 In biblical studies more broadly there is a growing awareness that texts “do not ‘belong’ to genres so much as participate in them, invoke them, gesture to them, play in and out of them, and in so doing continually change them.”133 Explorations of genre in

126 Westermann, Lamentations, 5, 7, 10 and passim.
127 Westermann, Lamentations, 97-98. See Gunkel and Begrich, Psalms, 82-98.
128 Lam 4 contains no direct address to God, so petition must be implicit (cf. §1.4.1 above).
129 Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 37. Structurally, the Lamenter’s speech is more dirge-like, and Zion’s speech is more lament-like (cf. Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 213; Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 38; Gottwald, Lamentations, 37; Eissfeldt, “Lamentations,” 501-502; Gottwald, “Lamentations Reconsidered,” 166).
130 Since Gunkel, Begrich, and Jahnow’s “programmatic studies, scholars have tried in differing ways to account for the slippage in genre one finds in these poems” (Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 36). Some suggest other genres, including “Klage das zerstörte Heiligtum” (Kraus, Klagelieder, 9); “city lament” (Dobbs-Allsopp, “Tragedy, Tradition, and Theology,” 51); and an innovative “Jerusalem lament” (Berlin, Lamentations, 25).
132 Mandolfo, Daughter Zion, 55-77.
relation to Lamentations should thus not attempt a rigid, classification, but instead examine different genres’ “participation in terms of the rhetorical strategies of the text.” Berlin, for example, explains the rhetorical effects of the dirge and communal lament genre conventions that appear in Lamentations: “[l]ike a qinah, it mourns for an irreparable loss that has already occurred. At the same time, Lamentations pleads for the restoration of its people, as a communal lament does.”

Rhetorically, then, connotations of both dirge and lament are brought to bear on the reader. Newsom cautions, however, that the “reading contract established by invocation and recognition of genre should not be too rigidly understood. Authors often invoke generic models in order to deviate from them, and readers may resist the invitation to read in accord with genre conventions.” There is some discontinuity from established forms, perhaps contributing to the effect of uncertainty and unsettledness expressed in the content of the poems. Lamentations participates in existing genre conventions, but it also innovates within inherited strictures. Recognising both genre participation and innovation, but requiring a convenient shorthand for discussion, I will go on to refer to the poems of Lamentations as simply “laments.”

1.8 Theology and Lamentations

A second feature of Lamentations that disrupts unity arises when scholars attempt to determine its theology. There are two slightly different projects here.

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Text,” 87-108; Evans, “Hezekiah-Sennecharib,” 335-58; and Pfenniger, “Bakhtin Reads the Song,” 337. These readings are all informed by Bakhtin. While genre is not my primary focus, it is pertinent to note his influence in this area of biblical studies. See further Newsom, “Spying out the Land,” 447-50.

Newsom, The Book of Job, 12.


Newsom, The Book of Job, 12.

Berlin sees innovation to the extent that Lamentations comprises an entirely new form, the “Jerusalem lament” (Berlin, Lamentations, 25; cf. Pss 74, 79, 137; and possibly Pss 44, 69, 102). Mandolfo develops the discussion of generic innovation to argue that Lamentations reinvents the lament genre from the Psalms, as an unprecedented literary response to an unprecedented event in Israel’s history (Mandolfo, Daughter Zion, 55-77; see also Mandolfo, “Dialogic Form Criticism,” 69-90; cf. Salters, Lamentations, 13).
First, there are attempts to determine a theological tradition or *influence* that might constitute “the” theology of Lamentations. And second, and more contested, there are attempts to determine the theological *significance* that might constitute “the” theology, or message, of Lamentations for today.\(^{138}\) The two are often conflated, and are, admittedly, mutually interpenetrating. If a Deuteronomic theology of retributive punishment for sin is perceived to be the major theological influence on Lamentations, then the need to repent of sin will be seen as the main theological significance or message of Lamentations.\(^{139}\) But for the sake of analysis, I distinguish between influences on Lamentations—the theological traditions that have gone into shaping the text—and the theological significances of Lamentations, the messages readers perceive to be conveyed by the text. Both of these aspects of theology in Lamentations are plural.

### 1.8.1 Theological Influences on Lamentations: Multiple Traditions

Norman Gottwald first put theological matters on the agenda in modern study of Lamentations. His 1954 study identifies Deuteronomic theology as the primary theological influence on Lamentations.\(^{140}\) According to Gottwald, there was an inconsistency between Deuteronomic understandings of punishment and retribution, and the suffering experienced after Josiah’s reforms. If the people had indeed corrected their behaviour, why were they now suffering and exiled? There seemed, then, to be a “discrepancy between the historical optimism of the Deuteronomic reform and the cynicism and despondency evoked by these reversals of national fortune.”\(^{141}\) For Gottwald, then, “the theological significance of Lamentations consists in its bold and forthright statement of the problem of national disaster: what is the meaning of the terrible historical adversities that have overtaken us between 608 and 586

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\(^{138}\) Although my terms are different, this distinction is similar to Boase’s division between “Israel’s traditions as the key to the theology of Lamentations,” and “theology as it emerges from within the text” (Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom?* 9-12, 12-21).

\(^{139}\) E.g., House, *Lamentations*, 393.

\(^{140}\) Gottwald, *Lamentations*, 66; as expounded in, e.g., Jer 44.

\(^{141}\) Gottwald, *Lamentations*, 51.
It was this discrepancy, argued Gottwald, that Lamentations sought to address, theologically.\footnote{Gottwald, \textit{Lamentations}, 48.}

Bertil Albrektson then took up the question. He agreed broadly with Gottwald that Lamentations addressed a clash between history as it was being experienced, and theological tradition as it was understood.\footnote{Gottwald, \textit{Lamentations}, 49.} He disagreed, however, on the theological influence causing the dissonance. The tension was not because of any perceived unjust punishment after Josiah’s reforms. For Albrektson, the internal witness of Lamentations and the historical books confirmed that punishment was entirely appropriate.\footnote{Albrektson, \textit{Lamentations}, 215.} Rather, the tension to be resolved revolved around theological understandings of the inviolability of Zion.\footnote{Albrektson, \textit{Lamentations}, 218-19.} The promise that there would always be a king in the Davidic line,\footnote{Albrektson, \textit{Lamentations}, 223.} and the belief that YHWH dwells in Zion forever, combined such that “Jerusalem and the Temple” were “widely and passionately believed to be inviolable” (cf. Jer 7).\footnote{Cf. Mintz, \textit{Hurban}, 20. See Roberts, “Zion in Theology, 93-108.} For Albrektson, then, “it is this theological tradition of the inviolability of Zion which stands in unbearable contrast to the harsh historical reality after the fall of Jerusalem.”\footnote{Mintz, \textit{Hurban}, 20.} The theological issue Lamentations sought to address, for Albrektson, was how Zion could possibly have been violated.

Both Gottwald and Albrektson, then, initially read Lamentations as an exercise in theological meaning-making, an assumption that is itself problematic.\footnote{Albrektson, \textit{Lamentations}, 223.} Further, quite aside from the questionable ethics of demanding that suffering have meaning, both Gottwald and Albrektson identify a single theological
influence that Lamentations sought to address. But as Michael S. Moore points out,

The problem with both of these hypotheses is that both put forward the conviction, *a priori*, that a single theological focus point can not only be found in this mini-collection of laments over Jerusalem, but also that such a postulated focal point might then serve as the major theological trust [sic] of the book; all else is secondary.¹⁵¹

Positing such “a single theological focus tends, in the final analysis, to reduce and constrict the variegated impact of Lamentations’ broad theological thrust.”¹⁵² Multiple theological traditions participate in the backdrop to Lamentations, and since Gottwald and Albrektson commentators have increasingly recognised this. Indeed, Gottwald himself later acknowledged that his early work “too one-sidedly connected the book with Deuteronomic theology and morality.”¹⁵³ He identifies a variety of theological influences in Lamentations,¹⁵⁴ recognising that “no single tradition adequately accounts for the book, because, in the riptide of national collapse the streams of tradition were commingling and clashing, forcing new channels of thought and action.”¹⁵⁵

Deuteronomic theology does play a role in Lamentations, however, as one among these streams of thought and tradition. But of course, positing a single Deuteronomic theology, like positing a single theology of Lamentations, is itself problematic. Competing ideological voices also appear in Deuteronomy, and its

¹⁵⁴ Including “prophecy, Deuteronomistic thought, kingship traditions (Davidic/Zion), priestly theology, or wisdom teaching” (Gottwald, “Lamentations Reconsidered,” 171).
theological framework, too, is far from homogeneous. Commentators generally assume the Deuteronomistic history is part of the backdrop to Lamentations, but it is not clear, historically, that it predates Lamentations. Supposing a fully formed “Deuteronomistic” theology ready to bear down its influence upon the book of Lamentations, then, may evince some historical naivety. Reading synchronically, however, there are resonances with Deuteronomistic thought. Correspondence between the covenant curses threatened in Deuteronomy 28 and the situation bewailed in Lamentations is striking. For the purposes of this thesis, “Deuteronomistic” theology is understood to be characterised by a concern for retributive justice in the covenant context. That is, there are certain behaviours stipulated for the people of YHWH. Adhering to these results in blessing, disobeying results in punishment (Deut 28) specifically “famine and devastation, alienation from the land, persecution in exile.” In a Deuteronomistic framework the destruction of Jerusalem is “a deserved and necessary punishment for sin, a punishment whose magnitude is in proportion to the transgressions committed.” Note the introduction of the question of magnitude, or measure. This becomes a key factor in interpreters’ assessments of whether Lamentations should be read as a theodicy or an antitheodicy. If the measure of Zion’s sufferings is perceived to be in equal measure to her sins, then Lamentations can be read as a theodicy. If the measure of Zion’s sufferings is deemed to be of greater magnitude than her sins, it is difficult not to read, in her agony, an accusation against YHWH.

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156 Polzin, Moses and the Deuteronomist, 37-39; cf. Campbell and O’Brien, Unfolding the Deuteronomistic History, 3. Polzin does, however, conclude that there is an overall, monologic point of view, despite varying perspectives that are included (Polzin, Moses and the Deuteronomist, 72). See also Noth, Deuteronomistic History, 134-45, for theology in the Deuteronomistic History.

157 The Deuteronomist’s redactions are usually dated to the period of exile itself (see Noth, Deuteronomistic History, 9-10; contra Cross, “The Structure of the Deuteronomistic History,” 9). Lengthy discussions of the history of interpretation of the Deuteronomistic History are beyond the scope of this thesis. See Campbell and O’Brien, Unfolding the Deuteronomistic History, 1-37 for a recent overview.

158 Commentators who emphasise this covenant context include House, Lamentations, 32-22 and passim; Parry, Lamentations, 28 and passim; Longman, Jeremiah and Lamentations, 337 and passim; and Guinan, “Lamentations,” 559-560.

159 Mintz, Hubban, 19.


161 See further n. 179.

162 See further §1.8.2.1 and §1.8.2.2.
The Davidic or Zion theology identified by Albrektson also plays a role as one of the theological traditions participating in Lamentations. She identifies further influences from priestly traditions. She draws on Tikva Frymer-Kensky’s work on purity and impurity to argue that “[t]he concept of the defilement of the land from moral impurity lies behind much of the imagery in Lamentations” (cf. Lev 11-15; Num 19). And Jeffery Tigay highlights elements of wisdom discourse in Lamentations, for example “that suffering can benefit a person” (Lam 3:25-26 cf. Prov 3:11-12).

Prophetic ideology also contributes theological motifs to Lamentations. Attempting to identify a “prophetic” theology, however, is again problematic, as there is no single stream of thought to which the term can straightforwardly apply. Redaction of the prophetic books after the exile would further influence any prevailing theological tendencies the material may have previously displayed. Reading diachronically, there are various suggestions as to which direction influence might take. The difficulty is that a range of texts, written or

163 Commentators who emphasise the inviolability of Zion include Johnson, “Form and Message,” 69; Mitchell, “Lamentations 4 as Historiography,” 78; Mintz, Ḥurban, 3, 20-22; and Gous, “Survey of Research,” 191. Berlin acknowledges that “the view of Jerusalem’s inviolability is challenged by the destruction of Jerusalem,” but maintains that “Lamentations does not attempt to address the challenge” (Berlin, Lamentations, 110). Boda observes Zion theology but sees this combined with “a strong retribution theology that has been informed by the Deuteronomistic and prophetic traditions and accepts that the fall of Jerusalem has been caused by the covenantal rebellion of the people against Yahweh” (Boda, “Lamentations,” 408). Guinan, while highlighting covenantal connections, also notes the underlying Zion tradition (Guinan, “Lamentations,” 559). There is some contention that Zion theology was part of a “popular” religious belief rather than officially sanctioned religion (e.g., Tigay, “Lamentations,” 447), but see Stavrakopoulou ‘Popular’ Religion and ‘Official’ Religion,” 37-58, for the fluidity between the two.


165 Berlin, Lamentations, 20. Berlin takes pains to point out that moral impurity is distinct from ritual impurity, protesting that the menstruating woman in Lam 1:9, 17 has sometimes been misunderstood as morally impure as a function of her natural bodily processes. She does concede, however, that “ritual impurity can symbolize moral impurity” which may be the case here (Berlin, Lamentations, 21, emphasis original).


168 E.g. Wetter proposes Lam 2 is an early reaction to exile, with development and theological
oral, prophetic or otherwise, influenced the formation of the text.169 These are now all brought to bear upon the interpretation of Lamentations, even though diachronic priority is not unambiguously determinable. Reading synchronically, again, regardless of the direction of influence, there are strong prophetic resonances in Lamentations, including the relationship between sin and judgement, day of YHWH imagery (Isa 2:6-22; 13; 22:1-14; 34; Amos 5:18-20; Jer 46:3-12; Ezek 7:19; 13:5; 30:3; Zeph 1-3), and the personification of Zion as a woman (cf. Isa 1:8, 21-22; 3:25-4:1; 10:32; 16:1; 22:1-14; 37:22; Mic 1:13; 4:8,10.13; Jer 4:11-21, 29-31; 5:7-11; 6:1-8, 22-30; 8:10-12, 18-23; 10:17-21; 13:20-27; 14:1-6,17-18;15:5-9; 30:12-17; Ezek 16; 23; Zeph 3; Hos 1-3; 4:15; 5:3; 6:10; 9:1).170

As with genre, then, Lamentations participates in multiple theological traditions, including Deuteronomic understandings of retribution in covenant context, popular Davidic/Zion theology, priestly purity paradigms, prophetic motifs, and wisdom discourse.171 Of course, none of these theological influences are entirely independent of the others. In the interconnected expanse of the Hebrew Bible, theologies are never discrete, separate ideological systems, but are mutually implicating.172 These mutually implicating theological influences

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169 Cf. Harding, “Interpretive Indeterminacy,” 139.
170 Boase’s important monograph, while recognizing multiple theological foci in Lamentations, focuses especially on these three elements of prophetic theology and traces their development in Lamentations (Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 32-34).
172 For interaction between the prophets and Lamentations, see especially the intertextual studies by Boase, Fulfilment of Doom?; Tull-Willey, Remember the Former Things; and Mandolfo, Daughter Zion. For allusions to Lam in 2 Isa see Sommer, A Prophet Reads Scripture, 127-30; and Newsom, “Response to Gottwald,” 73-78.
may be thought of, synchronically at least, as the authoritative discourses in Lamentations, the dominant worldviews with which it engages dialogically.\footnote{See further §2.2.2.1 and §5.1.2.}

1.8.2 Contemporary Scholarship on the Theological Significance of Lamentations

While scholars generally accept, then, that multiple theological traditions participate in influencing Lamentations, the theological significance of Lamentations is not as widely agreed to be plural. Commentators still tend to make totalising summary statements regarding the theological message of Lamentations. While I hesitate to categorise in terms of binary polarities, recognising that this tendency is also an exercise in monologisation, I distinguish in this section between those who tend toward a theodic reading of Lamentations, and those who tend toward an antitheodic reading of Lamentations. Many of the interpreters with whom I engage in fact sit at various points on a spectrum, rather than falling strictly into one camp or the other. To forge a way forward, however, I loosely cluster my analysis thus. And while interpreters will often recognise that both theodic and antitheodic propensities appear in Lamentations,\footnote{Indeed, Boase notes that even the most theodic and antitheodic readers cannot help but recognise elements of the other perspective within the text (Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 17).} they will usually demonstrate a preference for one or the other. That is, interpreters read Lamentations either as primarily theodic, in defence of YHWH, or as primarily antitheodic, in defence of Zion.
1.8.2.1 Reading Lamentations as Theodicy: Suffering is the Measure of Sin

Theodicy is defined most simply as “the justification of God.”175 Zachary Braiterman extends this definition to “include any attempt to justify, explain, or find acceptable meaning to the relationship that subsists between God (or some other form of ultimate reality), evil, and suffering.”176 A theodic reading of Lamentations thus defends the justice, rightness, and goodness of YHWH, even in the face of the vast suffering and evil the book depicts. Theodic readings read for any note of hope and affirmation of YHWH’s goodness, diminishing the more violent portrayals of YHWH in Lamentations. This tends to be the way of more conservative commentaries and articles, whose readings emphasise sin and the covenant context, the centrality of Lam 3, and the ἀποκαταστάσεις as the epitome of faithful penitence. Indeed, Philip Ryken, in the Wheaton Preaching the Word series, claims explicitly that “Lamentations is a theodicy, an attempt to explain the ways of God to humanity.”177 Ryken goes on to contrast Lamentations with Job, that other monument to inexplicable suffering, asserting that “Job’s sufferings were undeserved, whereas Jerusalem deserved her desolation.”178 Similarly, John Bracke’s Westminster volume avows that “[a]t points in the book, it seems as if the Lord’s anger is ‘beyond measure,’ and with good cause, given the sin of Judah.”179

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175 Braiterman, (God) After Auschwitz, 19. The terms “theodicy” and “anti-theodicy” are not known in the OT itself. Brueggemann argues that the classic sense of theodicy—a (failed) moral, philosophical enterprise deriving from Leibniz’ response to the 1755 Lisbon earthquake, attempting to explain suffering in light of God—is completely foreign to the OT. For Brueggemann, Israel’s concern is to negotiate ongoing relationship with YHWH, rather than any explanatory philosophising (Brueggemann, “Aspects of Theodicy,” 265; cf. Ex 34:6-7). In this thesis I am interested in the way in which interpreters determine that particular utterances either defend or accuse YHWH, and it is in this sense that I characterise interpretations as theodic or anti-theodoc.

176 Braiterman, (God) After Auschwitz, 4.

177 Ryken, Jeremiah and Lamentations, 739.

178 Ryken, Jeremiah and Lamentations, 739.

179 Bracke, Lamentations, 239. The question of “measure” is a key hinge on which theodic and anti-theodic readings turn. If Zion’s sufferings are reckoned to equal her sins, then YHWH retains his justice, merely effecting appropriate retributive judgement (cf. the lex talionis, Ex 21:24; Deut 19:21). The question is whether there is sufficient “good cause” for the full measure of fury unleashed upon Jerusalem, or whether the measure of anger she has experienced is greater than the measure of her sins. There is a possible concession that Zion’s suffering exceeds allowable limits in Isa 40:2, where it is announced that she has served
This conviction that “the bitch had it coming to her” is thus a hallmark of theodic interpretation. One of the most forthright interpreters in this vein is Jože Krašovec. For Krašovec, YHWH must always be in the right a priori, such that Lamentations provides the logical explanation for Zion’s suffering as just punishment for sin. In his purview, Lamentations “penetrates to the real cause of the disaster clearly and unflinchingly. Everything has happened as a result of Israel’s guilt both past and present.” While acknowledging the immense suffering Lamentations expresses, Krašovec maintains that the Poet “insists, even at moments of extreme suffering, that the source of Israel’s present misfortune is, simply and solely, personal guilt; and he is thus an apologist for God’s righteousness and justice.” For Krašovec, then, “[i]t is a theological matter of principle that the Ruler of the whole world always does right, so even the tragedy of Jerusalem cannot seriously bring into question the correctness of God’s actions.” Such totalising theological statements demonstrate the predetermined stance he brings to the text, a stance that would defend YHWH at all costs.

In the New Jerome Biblical Commentary, Michael D. Guinan also indicts Israel and defends YHWH, asserting that “Israel has become enemy to Yahweh because of its sin; this is the real cause of the destruction.” He appeals to 1:18 to claim that “[T]here is no hint that this is unjust; in fact, Yahweh is righteous . . . (1:18).” Guinan does observe that “[t]he nature of the sin remains vague; specific details are not given.” This observation is sometimes used to support an antitheodicy interpretation, such that the non-specificity of

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181 Krašovec, “The Source of Hope,” 223. I wonder if Krašovec recognises the irony inherent in his choice of the verb “penetrate.”
186 Guinan, “Lamentations,” 559-60.
sin suggests suffering is perceived as punishment for sin that has no basis in reality.\textsuperscript{187} For Guinan, however, despite the vagaries, the prior actions of Zion “are all part of the one major sin: breach of covenant.”\textsuperscript{188} Zion’s suffering, then, is entirely appropriate.

Similarly, F. B. Huey, in the New American Commentary series, maintains that the events to which Lamentations witnesses “were God’s punishment upon a nation that had refused to heed the repeated warnings of the prophets of God’s coming wrath if they did not repent.”\textsuperscript{189} The stated aim of this commentary series is to demonstrate “the theological unity of each book and of Scripture as a whole.”\textsuperscript{190} As such, Huey assumes there is theological unity, and finds that unity in affirming God’s faithfulness and justice in imposing suffering as just desserts for sin. Huey makes no mention of possible alternative stances, affirming that “God is faithful and compassionate, not willing that any should perish (2 Pet 3:9, 1 Tim 2:4); but when all warnings are ignored, nothing remains but his judgment.”\textsuperscript{191} He extrapolates contemporary theological messages and applications such as “the wickedness of any people will eventually result in the disintegration of that society,”\textsuperscript{192} and “[w]e should never presume upon God’s mercy and compassion. The Book of Lamentations contains the implied warning that sometimes it is too late to weep and repent; nonetheless, God is always faithful.”\textsuperscript{193} Despite the landscape of Lamentations, littered, as it is, with dead children, Huey defends the faithfulness of God to the end.

\textsuperscript{187} E.g., Dobbs-Allsopp, “Tragedy, Tradition, and Theology,” 37.
\textsuperscript{188} Guinan, “Lamentations,” 559-60.
\textsuperscript{189} Huey, \textit{Jeremiah and Lamentations}, 446. Huey assumes the prophetic traditions and warnings were established prior to the book of Lamentations.
\textsuperscript{190} Preface to Huey, \textit{Jeremiah and Lamentations}, n.p. The editors’ preface declares that “all NAC authors affirm the divine inspiration, inerrancy, complete truthfulness, and full authority of the Bible. The perspective of the NAC is unapologetically confessional and rooted in the evangelical tradition” (Preface to Huey, \textit{Jeremiah and Lamentations}, n.p.).
\textsuperscript{191} Huey, \textit{Jeremiah and Lamentations}, 447.
\textsuperscript{192} Huey, \textit{Jeremiah and Lamentations}, 447.
\textsuperscript{193} Huey, \textit{Jeremiah and Lamentations}, 447.
Re’emi also affirms the total justice of YHWH. He reads Lamentations as “a confession of sin” that “witnesses to the truth of the utterances of such prophets as Amos” that “the whole nation was responsible before God for their disloyalty to the Covenant.” Re’emi maintains that Zion’s suffering has come about because God had “done what he purposed,” and does not find this purposeful infliction of suffering at all problematic. Rather, he determines that the “poet had thus laid his finger upon that ultimate reality which is true for all times and which we have seen exemplified in our generation in the Holocaust of Auschwitz,” that is, that, the people of Israel are delivered to death by God himself. Drawing parallels with Jesus (Acts 2:23), Re’emi utilises Lamentations to affirm that Auschwitz, too, is ordained by God; a sacrifice of God’s own child for the punishment of sins. I am not sure that Re’emi recognises the abhorrent absurdity of some of the assertions he makes. His theological presuppositions regarding the nature of YHWH blind him to the morally repellent nature of some of his statements.

Indeed, Post-Holocaust theodicy has seen a parting of the ways on precisely this point. Some Orthodox rabbis do explain the Shoah as God-imposed punishment, the logic of which impulse Cohen explains:

Since God wills all things, God willed the Holocaust. Because all things willed by God are good, the Holocaust too was good. Not just that good comes from the Holocaust, but that the Holocaust itself was good, as repentance, sacrifice, purification, sign, redemption, punishment, perhaps all of these, but ultimately good in itself.

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194 Re’emi, *Lamentations*, 76.
198 Cohen, “What Good is the Holocaust?” 176.
Irving Greenberg, however, rightly denounces such moves as “ugly” and “the devil’s work.”199 Immanuel Levinas similarly rejects any notion that the Holocaust might be part of the necessary plan or good intent of a just deity. Rather, he describes it as “the paradigm of gratuitous human suffering.”200 For Levinas, “the disproportion between suffering and every theodicy was shown at Auschwitz with a glaring, obvious clarity.”201 Attempts to uphold the justice of God at the cost of millions of lives are morally and ethically abhorrent. Indeed, justifying the pain of the Other by attributing it to the righteous hand of YHWH means, for Levinas, that theodicy is “certainly the source of all immorality.”202 And this same impulse, justifying Zion’s pain by subjugating it to the unassailable justice of YHWH, is evident in some of these theodicy readings of Lamentations.

Robin Parry’s recent theological commentary gives much greater due to the depth and expression of pain in Lamentations. He continues, however, to place Lamentations firmly in the covenant context of justified punishment for sin.203 He argues that the fact of sin and punishment is never questioned in Lamentations, because “the ‘why’ is already known—Israel has broken the covenant. Rather, the anguished questions behind Lamentations are, ‘Why punish so severely?’ and ‘How long until you save?’”204 While Parry does acknowledge that “the focus of Lamentations is not on the sin of the people but on their terrible suffering,”205 he sees covenant expectations of God’s continuing

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199 Greenberg, “Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire,” 444n32, 25. There is a sense in which “Auschwitz represents a theological point of no return” which has “ruptured traditional theological categories like theodicy” (Braiterman, (God) After Auschwitz, 5; cf. Levinas, “Useless Suffering,” 454). Blumenthal surveys a variety of responses to the Holocaust in Jewish theology, ranging “from the denial of the God of history and morality, to a repetition of the traditional theodicies, to asserting that the holocaust was God’s punishment of the Jews for the sin of modernization,” (Blumenthal, Facing the Abusing God, xv-xvi). For representative responses from a variety of viewpoints see further the essays in Katz (ed.), Wrestling with God.

200 Levinas, “Useless Suffering,” 162.

201 Levinas, “Useless Suffering,” 162.


203 Parry, Lamentations, 28.

204 Parry, Lamentations, 29, emphases original.

205 Parry, Lamentations, 29.
righteousness underpinning the entire thing.\textsuperscript{206} Thus for Parry, Lamentations does raise some painful and piercing questions about this righteousness because the severity and duration of the punishment appear to exceed the bounds of what is justified. However, such questions only make sense against a background theology which affirms the justice and righteousness of the Lord. The book is not saying that God is not really righteous because he has done what he has done. Rather, it is seeking to make God feel uncomfortable with what is happening and act to change the situation precisely because he is righteous.\textsuperscript{207}

For Parry, then, the scope of suffering only\textit{ appears} to exceed the bounds of what is allowed. The underlying expectation that YHWH is righteous is in\textit{ fact} the case. Thus the underpinning theological conviction controls interpretation, taking precedence over any contention within the book that suffering is unjust.

Paul House similarly affirms that “the Lord is righteous, just, powerful, kind, severe, compassionate, faithful, and willing to hear and answer prayer.”\textsuperscript{208} For House, YHWH in Lamentations is “fair, tough, caring, and ultimately faithful.”\textsuperscript{209} House, too, defends God’s faithfulness to the finish. Like Parry, House does observe the expression of pain in Lamentations. But he is unequivocal in insisting that Zion’s suffering is deserved punishment for sin.\textsuperscript{210} According to House, the “author” insists that “Israel’s pain stemmed from

\textsuperscript{206} I.e., “the righteousness of YHWH” is “[p]resupposed by the theology of sin and punishment” (Parry,\textit{ Lamentations}, 30).

\textsuperscript{207} Parry,\textit{ Lamentations}, 30, emphasis original.

\textsuperscript{208} House,\textit{ Lamentations}, 329. Given the vitriol regarding YHWH in, e.g. Lam 2:1-10, it strikes me as astonishing that the most incriminatory descriptor House employs is “severe.” I am inclined to suggest that while a strict teacher might be aptly described as “severe,” the adjective does not adequately encompass the brutality of a homicidal deity.

\textsuperscript{209} House,\textit{ Lamentations}, 280.

\textsuperscript{210} House,\textit{ Lamentations}, 303, and passim.
knowing that they had sinned against God and suffered the consequences of their actions, though this author also implies that the pain has been sufficient for the crime and hopes that relief should come soon.”  

House’s more recent essay continues to avow that YHWH in Lamentations is righteous and gracious beyond what the people deserve. For House, then, “[a]t its core, Lamentations’ theology depends on the expectation of outrageous acts of grace on Yhwh’s part.”

This conviction that there is a “core” in Lamentations is itself telling. The expectation is that there is a central, defining theology, a controlling story that can be discovered. In theodical readings of Lamentations, this relies on reading Lam 3, and especially 3:21-39, as determinative for the book and its theology as a whole. That is, by “making this connection between the confession of sin and the penitential hope of ch. 3, the theology of Lamentations becomes an orthodox expression of human culpability in the face of a righteous God.”

Recent commentators challenge this orthodoxy, resisting the impulse to make Lam 3 determinative for theology in Lamentations. Tod Linafelt identifies three biases in interpretation that have allowed the so-called central message of penitence to dominate. First, a male bias toward the man of Lam 3 over female Zion in Lam 1 and 2; second, a Christian bias toward reading the suffering man as analogous to Christ; and third, a bias toward reconciliation over confrontation. Linafelt finds the third of these to be especially pervasive, and argues that by focusing on guilt and sin, any question of the appropriateness of YHWH’s actions falls away. Linafelt’s analysis thus pinpoints the way in which

211 House, Lamentations, 300.
214 See further §5.4 and §8.2.4.1.
216 Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 5; cf. Lee, “Mothers Bewailing,” 197-98. Linafelt identifies Westermann, Provan, and Dobbs-Allsopp as distinctive for not capitulating to these biases.
“[t]he concept of guilt functions for interpreters as a way of retaining the notion of God as the author of the destruction . . . while nevertheless relieving God of any ultimate responsibility for the disturbing results.” Linafelt contends with such interpretations, arguing that while they might convince as long as Lam 3 remains in focus, they are not so persuasive when Lam 1 and 2 are brought to light. He shifts the focus to attend to Zion in Lam 1 and 2, highlighting her presentation of pain and protest over the impulse to interpret pain and advocate penitence. He offers an alternative model for “surviving” the horror of Lamentations: protest, rather than capitulation and submission. This is tied, not to the male זֶבַע’s speech, but to female Zion’s.

Much of the impetus for this shift in focus is derived from Westermann, who identified two trends in reading for theology after Gottwald and Albrektson: “either these laments offer some sort of explanation,” or “they point to a way out of a crisis.” But both these stances, according to Westermann, seek to make meaning out of suffering, devaluing the role of the lament as an expression of pure pain. Westermann rejects the impulse toward meaning-making, contending instead that “[t]he ‘meaning’ of these laments is to be found in their very expression.” This set the stage for Linafelt and others to think about

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219 Linafelt, “Presentation of Pain,” 268. Note though, that while Linafelt tends to equate Zion with protest and the suffering man with penitence, both speakers express aspects of both perspectives.

220 Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 17. Lamentations, “contrary to the consensus of biblical scholars, is more about the expression of suffering than the meaning behind it, more about the vicissitudes of survival than the abstractions of sin and guilt, more about protest as a religious posture than capitulation or confession” (Linafelt, “Presentation of Pain,” 279, emphases original). On protest as a category in Jewish literature see Laytner, *Arguing with God*, and Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God*.

221 Westermann, *Lamentations*, 76.

222 Cf. Levinas, “Pain is henceforth meaningful, subordinated in one way or another to the metaphysical finality envisaged by faith or by a belief in progress. These beliefs are presupposed by theodicy! Such is the grand idea necessary to the inner peace of souls in our distressed world. It is called upon to make sufferings here below comprehensible” (Levinas, “Useless Suffering,” 452).

223 Westermann, *Lamentations*, 81; cf. Linafelt, “Presentation of Pain,” 279. House objects, contending that “[w]hile it is wrong to treat laments as merely ‘a way to fix things,’ it is also wrong to treat them as a way to shout about pain with no further intentions” (House, *Lamentations*, 409).
Lamentations in terms of presentation of pain and protest, and to value lament *qua* lament rather than as an exercise in theological meaning-making.\textsuperscript{224}

But Westermann, at least, still assumes the sin and guilt of Zion, not as a theological issue to be worked out in relation to suffering, perhaps, but as an underlying assumption, taken as given.\textsuperscript{225} Boase and Linafelt both question this assumption, and see it as a threat to Westermann’s positive gains in valuing lament as lament.\textsuperscript{226} They, and others like them, continue to champion valuing lament as expression of pain, while critiquing Westermann’s unquestioned acceptance that Zion’s suffering is deserved punishment for sin. They resist reifying Lam 3 and bring the protesting figure of daughter Zion in Lam 1 and 2 into the light. Like Linafelt, further alternative readings challenge the assumption that “the” theological message of the book revolves around the submissive penitence of the יִשָׁרַיִם, and the acceptance of suffering as deserved punishment for sin from which one must repent. The conversation shifts from the central male יִשָּׁרַיִם, to the marginal female Zion, attending to her protesting countervoice in the text. These counter readings, including Linafelt’s as outlined above, can loosely be termed antitheodic.

\subsection*{1.8.2.2 Reading Lamentations as Antitheodicy: Suffering is not the Measure of Sin}

Antitheodicy, then, is “any religious response to the problem of evil whose proponents refuse to justify, explain, or accept as somehow meaningful the


\textsuperscript{225} I.e., “in Lamentations we hear the voices of those who . . . have already come to the awareness that Israel itself was to blame for this collapse. No one first needed to be brought to this awareness, in order thereby to awaken a sense of guilt” (Westermann, *Lamentations*, 79; cf. Hillers, *Lamentations*, 4; Parry, *Lamentations*, 29).

\textsuperscript{226} I.e., “[i]n his heavy emphasis on the acknowledgement of guilt, Westermann runs the risk of himself undervaluing the lament as a valid form of expression before God” (Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom?* 17; cf. Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 14).
relationship between God and suffering.” Antitheodicy undoes any sense of measure as an appropriate index of God’s work with humanity, insisting that some suffering is never justified, regardless of its precursors or origins in human sin. Rather than attempting to defend YHWH in the light of suffering, antitheodicy readings instead refuse “to justify, explain, or accept that relationship.” In reading Lamentations, this usually constitutes pointing out where YHWH’s actions are implicitly or explicitly questioned in the text and hence suggesting that these actions are beyond the required or just punishment of the people. Zion has received double for her sins (cf. Isa 40:1-3).

Johanna Stiebert is especially vocal in her antitheodicy accusations against YHWH. For Stiebert, God in Lamentations “is sinister and brutal, executing his punishment upon Jerusalem with violent abandon” in a divine abuse of power. While noting Zion’s sometime-admission of sin, Stiebert admits of “no evidence to substantiate the claim of 1:18: ‘YHWH is righteous.’ We see him only as brute: there is no indication of his capacity for pity (see also 2:2, 17, 21; 3:43), forgiveness, or mercy; there is no indication of his even hearing, let alone listening to Jerusalem’s pleas (3:8, 44).” Stiebert’s argument extends to asserting that, in light of YHWH’s inhumane and unjust actions in Lamentations, YHWH is “unforgiveable.”

Carleen Mandolfo is not as vociferous in her rhetoric, but also reads Lamentations primarily as antitheodicy. According to Mandolfo, YHWH is culpable and Zion’s suffering is undeserved. In her view, “Lamentations insists

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227 Braiterman, (God) After Auschwitz, 31.
228 Braiterman, (God) After Auschwitz, 4.
231 Stiebert, “Human Suffering and Divine Abuse of Power,” 212. If God is “unforgiveable,” the question becomes “whether God will survive, whether the people will follow their natural inclination to abandon the instrument of the torture” (Pyper, “Reading Lamentations,” 62). In a Post-Holocaust context, in which the Shoah, too, is “an unforgivable crime” (Stiebert, “Human Suffering and Divine Abuse of Power,” 212), the question of “whether God will survive” is live (cf. Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 345).
that extreme suffering is never justified, and is properly raged against. For the most part, the poet(s) resists the temptation to justify God’s actions and for that reason the book should be considered a kind of anti-theodicy.” Mandolfo’s “for the most part” hints at a concession that Lamentations does include efforts toward justifying YHWH, yet Mandolfo still comes down firmly within the antitheodoc camp. Mandolfo’s monograph, like Linfelt’s, shifts the gaze from the ḫāī in Lam 3, to Zion in Lam 1 and 2. She reads Zion’s protest in interaction with the prophets, demonstrating that Lamentations subverts genre expectations to resist prophetic portrayals of Zion as whore. Zion finds her voice, “talks back,” and reconstructs her own identity as a subject. Mandolfo finds in Zion’s speech accusations of YHWH that call for “the reassessment of both the logic and justness of God’s actions.”

While Mandolfo highlights Zion’s protest in interaction with prophetic voices from outside Lamentations, Kathleen O’Connor works with multiple testimonies within the book of Lamentations itself. These multiple testimonies, she contends, leave “voices and viewpoints unsettled, unresolved, and open-ended. Neither the hope of chapter 3 nor the rage and encroaching despair of the other chapters refutes or triumphs over the other.” For O’Connor, Lamentations is a “book of shifting voices” whose “testimonies nudge up against each other in disquieting tension and conflict.” Consequently, she recognises alternate stances that might be read in Lamentations: stances that justify YHWH, pointing to Zion’s sin; and stances that accuse YHWH. And yet, while O’Connor explores Lamentations in terms of these “contradictory testimonies” she concludes—if somewhat reluctantly—that “the predominant opinion among them

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234 Mandolfo, Daughter Zion, 79-102. See, e.g., the way in which Zion’s identity is constructed or “authored” in Hos 1-3, Jer 2; 4:30-31; Ezek 16; 23 and rebutted in Lam (Mandolfo, Daughter Zion, 87-101)
235 Mandolfo, Daughter Zion, 101.
236 O’Connor, Tears of the World, 14.
237 O’Connor, Tears of the World, 83.
is that God is cruel and violently abusive.”\textsuperscript{238} She contends that suffering in Lamentations ultimately outstrips explanations of pre-exilic prophets, which rely on human responsibility. The speakers in Lamentations never abandon human sin in their interpretations; they simply displace it, reduce its importance compared to their anger and accusation of God, who is blind, who turns against them, and who finally appears to have abandoned them.\textsuperscript{239}

For O’Connor, the “speakers blame God unequivocally.”\textsuperscript{240} In spite of her appeal to Lamentations as a multivoiced text holding a variety of perspectives together, in the end she reveals an underlying antithedodic inclination, highlighting the people’s protest and the abusing God.\textsuperscript{241}

Similarly, in his 1997 article, F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp nuances the admission of sin in Lamentations to take an antithedodic stance:

There is genuine acknowledgement of sin in Lamentations, but that is not the whole story, or even the most important part of the story. Whatever Judah’s sin may have been—in light of the catastrophe, its exact nature is no longer important, it in no way can justify the extent and degree of suffering she has experienced.\textsuperscript{242}

\textsuperscript{238} O’Connor, \textit{Tears of the World}, 110. On her reluctance, see, e.g., “if God really is violent and abusive as well as gracious and merciful, I want nothing to do with religion. If God’s character is both abusive and merciful, as the biblical texts maintain, then there is nowhere for the abused to turn” (O’Connor, \textit{Tears of the World}, 119).

\textsuperscript{239} O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1072.

\textsuperscript{240} O’Connor, \textit{Tears of the World}, 123.

\textsuperscript{241} O’Connor, \textit{Tears of the World}, 110-123.

Dobbs-Allsopp identifies a number of ways in which the admission of sin is overtaken by the enormity of suffering. First, “sin is referred to relatively infrequently when compared to the images of suffering that haunt every line.” Second, there is no definitive description of a specific sin. Third, “some of the confessions of sin are intentionally undermined contextually.” For example, the confession “we have transgressed and rebelled” (Lam 3:42) is immediately followed by “but you have not forgiven,” an accusation that YHWH has reneged on his covenant responsibilities. Dobbs-Allsopp thus declares that “the sin of Judah was not equal to her suffering.”

1.8.2.3 A Crisis in Interpretive Identity: Equivocation

These observations raise valid points that threaten a straightforward theodic reading of Lamentations. Very recent commentators, newly aware of issues raised by the antitheodic wave, now demonstrate a tendency to equivocate. In his 1994 commentary, for example, Robert Salters reads with a fairly straightforward theodic stance. He explains that “[t]he poet’s answer to the question ‘why?’ is in line with the Deuteronomic theology with which he was familiar. This great punishment had taken place because of sin. It was Yahweh’s

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[244] Dobbs-Allsopp, “Tragedy, Tradition, and Theology,” 37; cf. Stiebert, “Human Suffering and Divine Abuse of Power,” 197; Salters, Jonah and Lamentations, 90. Contra Gottwald, for whom the completeness of the acrostic indicates a desire to bring about “a total confession of sin” (Gottwald, Lamentations, 30). Salters argues that if Gottwald were correct, there should be a complete listing of sins. This, however, is lacking (Salters, Jonah and Lamentations, 91; cf. Tigay, “Lamentations,” 448; cf. Hos 4:4-5).


[247] E.g., “While great sadness pervades the book, and while the poet is evidently moved and sickened by the horrors of the situation, there is little sign of doubt displayed. . . . The poet remains loyal to Yahweh” (Salters, Jonah and Lamentations, 115); “The author never really questions the justice of Yahweh’s punishment on his people” (Salters, Jonah and Lamentations, 119); “It is, therefore, quite clear from the text of the five poems that Israel’s sin has led to this disaster” (Salters, Jonah and Lamentations, 114).
response to the sin of the people.”

In his 2010 work, however, while making some strong theodic statements, he more readily concedes the interpretive challenge raised by recognising the pervasive presence of suffering. That is, as in 1994, he purports that “all five poems agree that the catastrophe must be interpreted as Yahweh’s punishment for sin.” But by 2010 he observes that Lamentations “concerns itself, in the main, with the terrible sufferings which the people of Yahweh have experienced at the hands of Yahweh.” While highlighting “references to the disaster as punishment,” then, he also concedes that these “are vastly outnumbered by the descriptions of affliction.”

Johan Renkema’s 1998 commentary likewise takes a predominantly theodic stance. His 2003 article, however, is not quite so convinced, betraying some antitheodic tendencies in his reading. This confusion may be based in part on his unusual definition of theodicy, which requires a self-justification of YHWH. Elizabeth Boase rightly critiques this aspect of Renkema’s definition, which is not typical and precludes the possibility of theodicy in Lamentations out of hand, given that neither YHWH nor his agents, the prophets, ever speak. But Renkema, while stating that Lamentations does not go far enough towards theodicy, does make statements defending YHWH and indicating that Zion is to blame:

while the poets of Lamentations may have been aware of sin and guilt, they did not consider YHWH to be responsible for the disaster facing the people. The reason for their present situation of

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252 Renkema, *Lamentations*.
253 I.e., “a (self) justification of YHWH’s actions or aloofness in the context of (significant) human suffering” (Renkema, “Theodicy in Lamentations?” 410).
254 Boase, “Theodicy in Lamentations,” 451-52. Boase observes that Renkema himself does not adhere to his own definition, defaulting to a more usual understanding of theodicy as his article proceeds (Boase, “Theodicy in Lamentations,” 452).
misery was to be sought in their own hearts. Did this insight provide them with an adequate theodicy? Given their questions and laments, only in part.\(^{255}\)

Renkema’s statements that the “reason for their present situation” is “to be sought in their own hearts” would place him towards a more theodic end of the interpretive spectrum. And yet, he deems this explanation insufficient when weighed against the pervasive questions and laments.\(^{256}\) He also suggests the suffering of children and extent of the suffering “seemed to go far beyond any justifiable punishment for their sins (Lam 3:61-66).”\(^{257}\) While maintaining that “[a]t first sight, the theological statements found in the songs of Lamentations do indeed exhibit elements akin to theodicy, elements which appear to justify YHWH’s punishing behaviour,”\(^{258}\) Renkema does not, finally, affirm that Lamentations is a theodicy.

Mark Boda is more easily won over. He opens by acknowledging that while there is, in Lam 3, “a way forward through a penitential response to Yahweh’s grace,” this is “frustrated by the endurance of suffering,” with Lam 5 consisting of “erratic swings between confidence in Yahweh’s sovereignty and uncertainty over Yahweh’s grace.”\(^{259}\) At this juncture Boda seems to acknowledge that the penitence of Lam 3 is not, finally, persuasive. But in the ensuing theological discussion, Boda reveals a much more theodic stance. He does, again, acknowledge the differing perspectives:

At times the frustrated voice of the poets suggest that this pain, or at least its enduring quality, is purposeless, the result of an angry God whose wrath will never be satisfied (Lam 5:20, 22). At many

\(^{255}\) Renkema, “Theodicy in Lamentations?” 427.
\(^{256}\) Again stating that “[a]ny attempt to find an answer in the songs is far exceeded by the many laments and questions” (Renkema, “Theodicy in Lamentations?” 428).
\(^{257}\) Renkema, “Theodicy in Lamentations?” 427.
\(^{258}\) Renkema, “Theodicy in Lamentations?” 415.
\(^{259}\) Boda, “Lamentations,” 399.
places it is clearly seen as discipline for sin (Lam 1:5, 8-9, 14, 18, 20; 2:14; 3:39-42), even though the amount of suffering seems to be out of proportion to the sin of the people, pain at a level unknown to humanity (Lam 1:12; 2:20).  

It is the “seems” that betrays him, and then his theodic inclination gains momentum as he goes on:

The various poems consistently identify the supplicants as responsible for their own pain due to their rebellion against God. . . . Yahweh is regularly identified as playing an active role in the suffering that has been experienced, but this is carefully nuanced with the qualification that this action was justified because of the sins of the community.

Even as Boda recognises the difficulty of “[s]urviving the pain” of Lamentations, he avers that YHWH is vindicated. The people’s cry “ultimately involves not complaint (Lam 3:39) but self-examination, repentance and confession (Lam 3:40-42).” For Boda, “[s]trategies for surviving the present pain appear at various places in the poems. Key is accepting culpability for this suffering—that is, admitting one’s sins and even the sins of former generations (Lam 5:7, 16) and absolving Yahweh of any wrongdoing (Lam 1:16).”

Tremper Longman, too, gives a nod to issues raised by antitheodic interpretations, initially making both theodic and antitheodic statements about

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263 Boda, “Lamentations,” 407. Boda claims that “even when the lament is most bitter, there is always an admission of the culpability of the people” (Boda, “Lamentations,” 408), an assertion that I do not find sustained in the text (see, e.g., Lam 2:1-10).
Lamentations. For example, Lamentations “gives expression to the pain, suffering, disappointment, and anger of the survivors. . . . Though not a dominant tone, it also expresses the guilt and hope of these survivors.”264 This seems to be an admission that overall, the tone of guilt does not control the book as a whole. Longman further observes that Lamentations “has a different emphasis than the Deuteronomic historians or the prophets, who square, consistently, and constantly describe the suffering of Jerusalem as a result of guilt and sin.”265 While this would suggest that Longman sees the presentation of pain as dominant over an admission of guilt and sin, he later ventures that

The poet of Lamentations draws God’s attention to the extreme suffering of his people in order to draw empathy from him, perhaps even to suggest that the suffering has gone beyond what the sin deserves. However, the tone is not bitter and angry, but questioning. In addition, and here is where the recent interpretive innovations are clearly wrong, the book, in all its chapters, and in all of its “voices,” is well aware that the final blame lies on the people and their sin.266

Thus Longman concedes that readings highlighting the presentation of pain and protest “have correctly drawn our attention to the cry of pain and suffering in the book.”267 He rejects, however, any antithedive stance, locating “final blame” in the people.268 Ultimately, says Longman, there is “a deep and pervasive understanding that the people of God themselves have acted in a way that has led to their present suffering. It is not, after all, as if they had not been

264 Longman, Jeremiah and Lamentations, 332.
265 Longman, Jeremiah and Lamentations, 339.
268 “God moves against Jerusalem because of the people’s sin” (Longman, Jeremiah and Lamentations, 337).
warned.”269 These interpreters, then, observe antitheodic sentiments, but continue to uphold the text and its God, requiring YHWH ultimately to be just. Theodic theological presuppositions control their readings, and YHWH is allowed to get away with murder.

It is not only those who wish to defend both text and YHWH, however, who read the text as a theodicy. Deryn Guest reads Lamentations as a defence of YHWH, and a justification of his actions against Jerusalem on account of their sin.270 But rather than accepting this theodic judgement, she cites it as grounds to reject the text. Guest contends that the dangerous sentiments equating the female Zion with the cause of the catastrophe should be excised from the canon entirely.271 While she does observe signs of protest, that might, in their voicing of “resistance” hold some “hope for the female reader,”272 she questions whether the damaging effects of the female imagery can ever really be overcome.273 Rather, a text that scapegoats the female in order to let male perpetrators of violence remain unscathed “must be rejected.”274 Ironically, then, Guest, while coming from a very different ideological standpoint, agrees with the assessment of those conservative male interpreters who read the text primarily as an indictment of Zion, and a defence of YHWH. Unlike those interpreters, however, Guest does not assent to the ideology she perceives in the text. Rather, she “sees in Lamentations’ theology a clear affirmation of the city’s sinfulness, only to read against it.”275

Interpreters thus read the same content in Lamentations in different directions. This suggests that utterances within Lamentations are not inherently theodic

270 Guest, “A Recriminative Response,” 433 and passim
272 Guest, “A Recriminative Response,” 434. Contra Thomas, who contends that Guest does not adequately take into account the native protest element within Lamentations (Thomas, “Feminist Interpretation(s) and Lamentations,” 170).
273 Guest, “A Recriminative Response,” 439. See further 83.1.2.3.
275 Thomas, “Feminist Interpretation(s) and Lamentations,” 169.
nor antitheodic. Instead, they can be understood either way depending on the context that is brought to bear on a given utterance, and the prior predilections of interpreters.\textsuperscript{276} As Braiterman explains, “neither represent stable entities. Theodicy and antitheodicy are but second order, heuristic categories with which to evaluate the meaning of a given religious utterance.”\textsuperscript{277} Consequently, then, “both remain subject to intense interpretive play.”\textsuperscript{278} Contrast, for example, Guinan’s use of Lamentations 1:18 to prove that YHWH is indeed righteous,\textsuperscript{279} with Stiebert’s assertion that YHWH’s actions in Lamentations give “no evidence to substantiate the claim of 1:18: ‘YHWH is righteous.’ We see him only as brute.”\textsuperscript{280} This illustrates nicely Braiterman’s point that statements can be contextualised to buttress either theodic or antitheodic readings. For Stiebert, the extent of YHWH’s mistreatment of Zion in the context of Lamentations negates Lamentations 1:18. For Guinan, Lamentations 1:18 is a linchpin, a hermeneutical and exegetical key through which to read the rest of the book’s theology.

1.8.2.5 Theodicy or Antitheodicy? The Problem with Trying to Choose

A problem with both theedic readings and antitheodic readings is that both assume Lamentations has a single identifiable dominant theological significance. Is there such a monologic message? Or is Lamentations better understood as presenting a multiplicity of theological perspectives?\textsuperscript{281} If there are multiple views, might one of these be selected as the right or correct stance to take, and how might that be determined? In much of this discussion it becomes apparent that the sticking point is sin, and its relationship to suffering.

\textsuperscript{276} Cf. Braiterman, (God) After Auschwitz, 5.
\textsuperscript{277} Braiterman, (God) After Auschwitz, 5.
\textsuperscript{278} Braiterman, (God) After Auschwitz, 5.
\textsuperscript{279} Guinan, “Lamentations,” 560.
\textsuperscript{280} Stiebert, “Human Suffering and Divine Abuse of Power,” 198.
\textsuperscript{281} So Boase, “Many Voices of Lament,” 4; Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 23; O’Connor, Tears of the World, 14. Contra House and Longman, who reject the possibility that multiple theological perspectives are present, maintaining that all voices are in agreement that Zion’s suffering is due punishment for her sins (House, Lamentations, 323; Longman, Jeremiah and Lamentations, 339).
Dobbs-Allsopp explains that “[f]or most commentators, the significance of these two themes and their relationship to each other seems quite straightforward: the poet has taken over the prophetic concept of sin that attributes the catastrophe to Yahweh’s righteous judgment, and thus understands the ensuing suffering as deserved.” This straightforward acceptance of a relationship between sin and suffering as deserved is evident in theodric readings outlined above. But antitheodic readings challenge accepting suffering as just punishment, equal to Zion’s sin, asking whether, in fact, her suffering goes above and beyond what is warranted.

Theodic or antitheodic leanings thus lead interpreters to read the relationship between sin and suffering in Lamentations in particular ways. While many, if not all, the above readings do acknowledge, on the one hand, the culpability of Zion, and on the other, the extreme punishing action of YHWH, each tends to side with one as the real theological understanding of Lamentations. More recent acknowledgement of the value of the pain and protest elements ascribed to Zion has led to a recognition of potentially antitheodic content, even (grudgingly) amongst those who would prefer to read theodically. There is still reluctance, however, to allow these possibilities to gain a full hearing. But it is clear that selecting some central verses to define a theology for Lamentations can no longer go uncontested. Turning to attend to minority voices in Lamentations, and so redressing the balance of focus from Lam 3, to Lam 1 and 2, has thus been a crucial contribution to scholarship on Lamentations. At the same time, however, there is a sense in which readings that raise the register of Daughter Zion’s discourse, diminish the effect of hearing multiple voices in chorus. As Thomas observes,

If there has been an over-emphasis upon Lamentations 3—and the concomitant theodicy assumed in it for the theology of the book—

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283 Can suffering be measured, and so deemed to be commensurate to anything? The Lamenter seems to think not (2:13). Cf. n. 179.
to the neglect of the figure of Zion in Lamentations 1 and 2, then recently there has been an overemphasis upon the poems of Lamentations 1 and 2 from Linafelt to the present—and the concomitant “anti-theodicy” assumed with these chapters for the theology of the book—to the neglect of Lamentations 3.284

This is not to say that I want to see a return to reading Lamentations under the interpretive control of selected portions of Lam 3. Rather, I pursue an interpretation that, at least initially, allows all the voices in Lamentations to sound, reserving judgement as to which voice may be presenting the truth of the matter. This reading, in fact, contests the possibility of determining one truth altogether. I seek an interpretation that allows plurality in Lamentations to be held in tension. Further, I undertake this reading in light of all of Lamentations, including the voices of Lam 4 and 5, which, in much of the theological discussion thus far, have been put to one side.

1.8.2.6 Both Theodicy and Antitheodicy

As such, I seek a reading approach that allows both theodic and antitheodic possibilities in the text to be identified and explicated, without having to resolve them immediately into a single, consistent theological stance. A number of commentators conceptualise the text in ways that do allow disparate stances to be held together as a diversity among unity. These include psychological approaches, approaches that liken the text to another artistic genre, and approaches that employ some kind of metaphor for the text.

284 Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 22; cf. Longman, Jeremiah and Lamentations, 331; Parry, Lamentations, 167-68.
Paul Joyce, for example, proposes a psychological approach to Lamentations.\textsuperscript{285} He explains theological diversity in Lamentations as evidence of a move through various stages in the grief process, juxtaposing rapidly changing moods and conflicted emotions.\textsuperscript{286} David Reimer similarly reads Lamentations as a piece of grief work, aligning each poem with one of Elizabeth Kübler Ross’ five stages of grief.\textsuperscript{287} Hugh Pyper reads Lamentations through the lens of Freudian melancholia, such that “ambivalence between compassion for Zion as a victim and yet justification of the punishment for her lasciviousness . . . is read as a symptom of melancholia and so of an ambivalence which turns the anger of the survivor against the dead victim.”\textsuperscript{288} While these readings provide helpful frameworks for reading the text, I hesitate to bring insights from psychology to the biblical text without a thorough grounding in the discipline proper.\textsuperscript{289}

Turning to other artistic forms, Benjamin Morse likens Lamentations to a montage, a form he contends “allows the book’s inconsistencies and ambiguities to be better appreciated.”\textsuperscript{290} Montages juxtapose different, and at times contrasting, pictures for artistic effect. For Morse, likening Lamentations to montage demonstrates an “intentional disorder,” so that its “disarray” is a “positive feature” rather than a hindrance to coherence.\textsuperscript{291} Dobbs-Allsopp reads Lamentations in light of the literary genre of tragedy, which takes elements of


\textsuperscript{286} Joyce, “Lamentations and the Grief Process,” 308 and passim.

\textsuperscript{287} I.e., Lam 1 demonstrates denial; Lam 2, anger; Lam 3, bargaining; Lam 4, depression; and Lam 5, acceptance (Reimer, “Good Grief?” 542–59). This oversimplifies, however, monologising each chapter to a represent a single stage in the process.

\textsuperscript{288} Pyper, “Reading Lamentations,” 56. Cf. Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 141–43.

\textsuperscript{289} Advances in Psychology since Kübler Ross’ paradigmatic study are not always adequately taken into account when applying her, and other psychologists’, work to Lamentations. Indeed, Reimer himself notes some major critiques of Kübler-Ross’ work, but continues to work with her categories in any case (Reimer, “Good Grief?” 543–44).

\textsuperscript{290} Morse, “The Lamentations Project,” 127.

\textsuperscript{291} Morse, “The Lamentations Project,” 127. Cf. §1.5.1 n. 93
both blame and innocence seriously. The paradigm “tragedy” features a hero ambiguously coming to a sticky end for faults that may or may not be his or her own.292 In Lamentations, argues Dobbs-Allsopp, the tragic hero is the community, personified by Zion and the וְזֵיכָה.293 In this paradigm, there is on the one hand, “knowledge on the part of the hero that the situation of suffering in which he or she is embroiled resulted from his or her own actions.”294 But, “on the other hand, the hero knows there must be something more. His or her actions alone cannot account for the tragedy and suffering.”295 With the tragic framework, then, Dobbs-Allsopp accommodates the tension between just and unjust suffering.296 In his more recent commentary (2002), Dobbs-Allsopp gives sustained attention to theodicy and antitheodicy possibilities in Lamentations.297 He recognises that Lamentations “unquestionably contains identifiable theodic strains of thought.”298 As a result, he says, “it is no wonder that the dominant interpretive pose assumed by most critical interpreters of these poems has been overwhelmingly theodic.”299 But he continues to maintain that “to read Lamentations as theodicy is finally to misread Lamentations,”300 given that “[a]longside the theodic there appear decidedly more tragic or antitheodic sensibilities.”301

Jill Middlemas reads Lamentations according to the metaphor of a “violent storm,” working with formal and thematic features to argue that the momentary

292 Dobbs-Allsopp, “Tragedy, Tradition, and Theology,” 35; cf. Exum, Tragedy and Biblical Narrative, 10. That is, “the disaster that befalls the tragic protagonist may result from some sin or wrongdoing, a transgression deliberately pursued or innocently performed, a simple misjudgment, but in any case with the consequences out of proportion to the deed” (Dobbs-Allsopp, “Tragedy, Tradition, and Theology,” 35).
296 While Dobbs-Allsopp’s 1997 article does tend toward antitheodicy, the tragic paradigm acknowledges elements of both theodicy and antitheodicy.
300 Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 29.
301 Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 29.
quietness and trust in the centre of Lam 3 is the eye of the storm that rages in the surrounding chapters. That is, what appear to be two positions completely at odds with each other, a hope-filled outlook and one of despair, can coexist because the very nature of the book of Lamentations invites and supports both interpretations. Likened to a violent storm hovering over Jerusalem, the still centre finds itself encircled by raging winds just as the optimistic solitary figure of ch. 3 stands wind-blown among repetitive cries of complaint.\footnote{Middlemas, “The Violent Storm,” 96.}

What these psychological, artistic, and metaphorical readings have in common is the recognition that there are multiple views and moods in Lamentations, held together within a tight overall structure. They utilise meta-frameworks to make sense of tensions within the unified whole. This thesis continues in this vein, arguing that appealing to any one perspective expressed within Lamentations to provide a controlling “theology” or “message” is inconsistent with the book’s plurality. It will also show that in the presence of ambiguity, diversity, and plurality, interpreters will tend to identify within the text a single perspective with which they have affinity and read accordingly. My own gut reaction to the burden of Lamentations leaves me inclined to side with Zion against YHWH, an antithedetic tendency. Convinced that a reading approach needs to take into account the diversity of perspectives within the literary unity, however, I attempt to resist allowing this gut reaction to predetermine the outcome of my reading.\footnote{Cf. Eco, “The important thing is to prevent a single sense from imposing itself at the very outset of the receptive process” (Eco, The Open Work, 8).} I first attend to the multiple voices and their theological perspectives in Lamentations, exploring the interactions between them with the metaphor of dialogue, reading Lamentations as a polyphonic text.
I explore both the dialogue within the text, and the commentarial dialogue with the text in a hermeneutics of participation, disputation and altercation.

Recognising the presence of multiple speaking voices in Lamentations is nothing new.\textsuperscript{304} Since Lanahan’s initial study, there has been increasing interest in these speaking voices and the potential for reading their interactions, both within the book of Lamentations\textsuperscript{305} and with the wider biblical corpus.\textsuperscript{306} The distinctive feature of my work, however, is that I read all five chapters of Lamentations, attending to the individual voices and perspectives before assessing whether any one view is dominant. Further, I propose that the dialoguing voices in Lamentations can be taken as paradigmatic for a process by which theological interaction with Lamentations itself may proceed.

O’Connor tantalisingly hints at such an approach in a brief section entitled “entering the conversation.”\textsuperscript{307} She sees Lamentations as modelling a “theological process” in which

speakers furiously and bitingly challenge their inherited understandings of God in light of their experiences of catastrophe, destruction, and annihilation. They express and then reject the Deuteronomistic and prophetic views that their suffering is their own fault. . . . They challenge God to be the deity who sees and responds to their particular woes. . . . The speakers’ expressions of their experiences of pain, trauma, and loss offer a vigorous, critical, and “deconstructive” theology.\textsuperscript{308}

\textsuperscript{304} See, e.g., Lanahan, “The Speaking Voice,” 41-49.
\textsuperscript{305} See, e.g., Miller, “Poetry and Personae”; Miller, “Reading Voices,” 393-408; O’Connor, Tears of the World; Thomas, “Poetry and Theology”.
\textsuperscript{306} See, e.g., Boase, Fulfilment of Doom?; Mandolfo, Daughter Zion; Tull Willey, Remember the Former Things.
\textsuperscript{307} O’Connor, Tears of the World, 121-22.
\textsuperscript{308} O’Connor, Tears of the World, 121.
While provocative and powerful, O'Connor's theological treatise could engage more extensively with critical scholarship, and lacks an explicit methodological framework. I offer a reading of Lamentations sympathetic to O'Connor’s, also reading for multiple perspectives, all the while harbouring antitheodic sensitivities. To supply a methodological framework, I engage the work of Mikhail Bakhtin to provide the theoretical foundation for reading Lamentations dialogically.

Mandolfo likewise bases her dialogic reading of Lamentations on Bakhtin’s work, building a more theoretical and philosophical basis for her dialogic hermeneutic than O’Connor does.\textsuperscript{309} Like O’Connor, Mandolfo also anticipates the kind of hermeneutic approach I seek. Her stated aim is to develop a “dialogic theology,” in which “reading practices highlight the Bible’s multiple, conflicting, and complementary voices and thus insist on readings that refuse to privilege one point of view,” employing a “dialogic hermeneutic” to do so.\textsuperscript{310} While reserving judgement as to whether one voice or another is dominant, however, I do not go as far as Mandolfo’s preemptive move to “refuse to privilege one point of view.” Instead, I explore dialogic interactions and then ask if there might, in fact, be hints as to which view, if any, ought to be privileged, and for what reason.\textsuperscript{311} Mandolfo’s reading prioritises reading Lam 1 and 2 as an antidote to the scholarly bias toward Lam 3, and reading the portrayal of Zion in Lamentations as a foil to prophetic portrayals. I extend my dialogic reading to all of Lamentations, and all the poetic speakers, to focus on dialogic interactions within the book itself rather than with the prophets.

Boase also employs Bakhtin to read Lamentations as a polyphonic text. Her primary focus is the redeployment of prophetic motifs in Lamentations, although she also includes an excellent summary chapter on dialogic

\textsuperscript{309} Mandolfo, \textit{Daughter Zion}, 1-23.
\textsuperscript{310} Mandolfo, \textit{Daughter Zion}, 26.
\textsuperscript{311} See §8.2.
interactions within Lamentations itself. Like Mandolfo, Boase analyses how prophetic preunderstandings are subverted in within the text. In contradistinction to Mandolfo, Boase does not “refuse” to privilege one or other perspective, but simply accepts the presence of various perspectives as “unmerged viewpoints” that “coexist and interact with each other.” For Boase, there is no need for the interpreter to “refuse” to privilege any voice, for the “text itself” has “defied . . . attempts . . . to be captured in simple monologic statements.” While I come to a similar conclusion to Boase on the impossibility of determining a simple monologic statement to encapsulate Lamentations’ so-called “theology,” I also include an examination of where one could look for such a statement, assessing the possibilities. Further, while Boase explores the notion of Bakhtinian openendedness as a way in which Lamentations “anticipates future words, both divine and human,” she does not develop a hermeneutic from her approach, leaving the moment ripe to develop my own work in this direction. Interestingly, while Boase insists that Lamentations is a polyphony, she too demonstrates a tendency towards antitheodicy. My reading is sympathetic to Boase’s in this regard, wishing to let the voices of Lamentations speak in their plurality, but also tending antitheodically, if perhaps a little more self-consciously.

Finally, Heath Thomas takes the presence of conflicting theological stances in Lamentations more seriously than most. His 2007 PhD thesis reads Lamentations (after Umberto Eco) as an “open text.” Further, rather than

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313 Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom?* 240-43.
316 See §8.2.
318 Eco contrasts the “open work” with the “closed work.” Closed works “obsessively aim at arousing a precise response on the part of more or less precise empirical readers” (Eco, *Role of the Reader*, 8). Such works “apparently aim at pulling the reader along a predetermined path, carefully displaying their effects so as to arouse pity or fear, excitement or depression at the due place and at the right moment” (Eco, *Role of the Reader*, 8). They “seem to be structured according to an inflexible project” (Eco, *Role of the Reader*, 8). An open work, on the other hand, “offers the interpreter, the performer, the addressee a work to be completed”
prioritising either Lam 3, or Lam 1 and 2, Thomas reads all three chapters “in
course, synthetically.”\textsuperscript{319} Based on his thorough poetic analysis, Thomas
concludes that “theological presentation in Lamentations vacillates, opening
different theological horizons for the reader.”\textsuperscript{320} For Thomas, the question of
whether one theological stance is more evidently “correct” is not predetermined
by the text, but “[e]ach theological position is fully justifiable as the reader can
read—working through the text—YHWH as just, unjust, a source of hope, or a
source of despair.”\textsuperscript{321} Even a reading as nuanced as his, however, cannot fully
escape theological presuppositions about the text, its purpose, and its morality.
For Thomas, the interpretive choice given to the reader is simply a rhetorical
strategy, not an invitation to reflect on the actual justice or otherwise of YHWH.
He maintains that there is an ultimate theodic vision underlying Lamentations,
such that YHWH “a) remained a viable object of faith and potent to hear the
appeals presented in the poem and (b) would respond out of his just and
beneficent character to rectify potential injustice drawn out in the text, even if
the theological portrait painted the profile of an unjust deity.”\textsuperscript{322} For Thomas,
then, a prior understanding of YHWH as approachable, and the continuing
possibility of prayer, presuppose an ultimately theodic view of Zion’s reality.
Despite the openness of the text, and the diverging interpretive possibilities that
openness suggests, for Thomas, YHWH is in \textit{fact} just.\textsuperscript{323}

While I resist presupposing a theodic view, much of my work on Lamentations
with Bakhtinian dialogue is sympathetic to Thomas’ work on Lamentations with
Eco’s open text. There are some clear parallels between Bakhtin’s polyphonic

\textsuperscript{319} Thomas, \textit{The Open Work}, 19, emphasis original). Cf. the polyphonic versus the monologic work.
\textsuperscript{320} Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 22.
\textsuperscript{321} Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 220. Thomas’ dissertation is focused primarily on Lam 1-3
whereas I include all five chapters in my analysis. I await his forthcoming monograph, in
which he extends his reading to all five chapters of Lamentations, with interest.
\textsuperscript{322} Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 220. Lamentations thus “elicits interpretative choices from
its model reader, both in regards to its theology and meaning. The reader may follow an
interpretative horizon that strongly questions the deity through complaint, or affirms him by
confirming sin and rebellion of the people” (Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 222).
\textsuperscript{323} Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 220.
\textsuperscript{324} Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 221, 222.
text and Eco’s open work, although their terms and emphasis take difference nuances. Both Bakhtin and Eco enable Lamentations to be conceptualised as a diverse unity, a text that is pregnant with interpretive possibilities: polyphonic, rather than monologic; open, rather than closed. It is to Bakhtin's theory of the polyphonic text that I now proceed.
CHAPTER TWO: BAKHTIN, POLYPHONY, AND POINT OF VIEW

2.1 Introduction

In the literature review, I outlined my approach to Lamentations as a literary unity on the grounds of its structural and poetic coherence. I briefly surveyed features of the poetry such as the acrostic, qinah metre, and enjambment that act centripetally in Lamentations. Within that unity, however, I observed two key features that act centrifugally. First, Lamentations participates in multiple genres, incorporating aspects of dirge, communal lament, and individual lament forms. Second, Lamentations is influenced by multiple, mutually implicating theological traditions from Israel’s sacred history, including prophetic influences, Deuteronomic retributive theology, wisdom sayings, and priestly conceptions of purity. I suggested that Lamentations also expresses multiple theological perspectives. When reading for theological significance, commentators tend to interpret these perspectives either theodically or antitheodically, according to their assessment of the relationship between sin and suffering in the text. Theodic readers assert that Zion’s suffering is just punishment for her sin, vindicating YHWH. Antitheodic readers assert that nothing is deserving of the kind of pain Zion has undergone, and accuse YHWH of injustice, acting in excess of the measure of Zion’s sins.1 I outlined my desire for an approach to Lamentations that might, at least initially, hold both the admissions of sin and the accusations of injustice in tension. Finally, I suggested that one way to do this is with the paradigm of dialogue.

1 Cf. Harding on Job 4:12-21 (Harding, “Interpretive Indeterminacy,” 165).
I now sketch a methodological framework for reading Lamentations as dialogue. This is based on Russian literary theorist Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin’s *dialogism of the idea*, a theory in which *integral points of view* interact dialogically in polyphonic texts. I assess whether Lamentations comprises a polyphonic text, concluding that it can helpfully be read us such. I then develop an approach to assessing point of view in Lamentations based on Boris Uspensky’s development of the ideological, or evaluative, point of view in polyphonic texts.

### 2.2 Introduction to Bakhtin: Utterance, Dialogue, and Polyphony

Bakhtin has been widely influential in linguistics, philosophy, and literary criticism, and much in his work might bring richness to biblical studies. I am chiefly interested, however, in dialogue and polyphonic texts, and my discussion is primarily informed by Bakhtin’s exposition of the polyphonic novel in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (hereafter, *PDP*).

Even within this narrow selection of work, however, choosing a starting point is difficult. Bakhtin’s concepts rely less upon building blocks that may be laid in a particular order, as on a network of ideas that really ought to be presented simultaneously. This makes determining a linear sequence for explanation...

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somewhat forced and artificial. Bakhtin’s own “resistance to the notion of system,” to borrow a phrase from Carol Newsom,4 creates further complexities in attempting to untangle his work, which itself more closely resembles a multi-viewed dialogue than a cogent, analytical or linear argument. As Michael Holquist observes, Bakhtin has a “tendency to think through a central problem by coming at it in a number of different texts, each of which has its own particular way of bringing out nuances less apparent or even missing in the others.”5 Bakhtin himself readily admits his lack of system, confessing a “love for variations and for a diversity of terms for a single phenomenon. The multiplicity of focuses. Bringing distant things closer without indicating the intermediate links.”6

The lack of obvious organisation leads secondary scholars to attempt to discern a dominant feature or organising principle in Bakhtin’s work, in efforts to identify its “essential shape and emphasis.”7 Indeed, “dialogue” itself is often employed as one such organising principle.8 But the very assumption of overall coherence, and concomitant attempts to organise Bakhtin, seem to fly in the face of Bakhtin’s own advocacy of multiplicity and resistance to system.9 There are further difficulties in dealing with Bakhtin’s work that have been well canvassed elsewhere,9 but the upshot is that it “is not easy to introduce Bakhtin clearly, concisely and competently.”10

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7 Hirschkop, Aesthetic for Democracy, 118-19.
8 Green, How are the Mighty Fallen? 23; Nielsen, “Kant, Weber and Bakhtin,” 51; Holquist, introduction to Bakhtin, Speech Genres, xvii; Boase, Fulfilment of Doom?, 24.
9 Although, as Green asserts, “if his thought is complex and ever-shifting, it is also roughly coherent and develops largely in relation to its own past, as well now as in conversation with current critical discourse” (Green, How are the Mighty Fallen? 21). Morson and Emerson critique Todorov, Dialogical Principle; and Clark and Holquist, Mikhail Bakhtin for particularly extensive attempts to systematise Bakhtin’s work (Morson and Emerson, Prosaics, 7). Their Prosaics itself, ironically, has been called “[t]he best systematic study of Bakhtin’s notoriously unsystematic thought!” (Newsom, Book of Job, 266n52). For a summary of organisational approaches see Morson and Emerson, Prosaics, 2-7.
10 See Todorov, Dialogical Principle, xi-xii; Hirschkop, Aesthetic for Democracy, 126-40; Vice, Introducing Bakhtin, 7-10.
11 Green, How are the Mighty Fallen? 21; cf. Morson and Emerson, Mikhail Bakhtin, 1-8.
For a secondary scholar like myself, the pitfalls increase. Green admonishes that a “biblical scholar wishing to use Bakhtin responsibly will have to resign herself or himself to many patient and careful rereadings, of both Bakhtin’s own writings and the most germane secondary scholarship as well, with any feeling of smug competence receding against the far horizon.”¹¹ It is thus with no “smug competence” that I proceed, taking comfort from Green’s further assertion that it “is neither practical nor necessary for ‘secondary scholars’ to organize Bakhtin.”¹²

Indeed, I am not convinced that organizing and introducing Bakhtin “clearly, concisely and competently” should be my goal, given that neither Bakhtin nor Lamentations themselves present as conceptually unified, monologic systems. The problem I face, however, is aptly articulated by Gary Morson and Caryl Emerson when they state that “[b]ooks about thinkers require a kind of unity that their thought may not possess.”¹³ The present work is not a book, but a thesis. It is not about Bakhtin the thinker, but is a utilisation and extension of some of his ideas towards a reading of Lamentations as polyphonic text. Yet the requirement for unity for academic purposes remains. The PhD thesis requires an object of study to be explicated in terms of a coherent monologic system, with an overall argument that can discerned by those assessing its merit. This monologising genre is totally out of keeping with both Lamentations and Bakhtin.

In this thesis I challenge the monologising tendencies of interpreters, and the assumption that there is a clear “message” or theology waiting to be discovered in Lamentations. I advocate reading dialogically, holding disparate perspectives together in the unity of the text without closing down interpretive possibilities. Consequently, I question whether writing monologically, coherently, and

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¹¹ Green, Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship, 7. In terms of “germane secondary scholarship” I am indebted to those who have paved the way for my entrée to Bakhtin. Of particular note are Green, Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship; Vice, Introducing Bakhtin; and Newsom, “Bakhtin,” 20-27.


¹³ Morson and Emerson, Prosaics, 1.
authoritatively about polyphonic texts and dialogic thinkers is appropriate at all. But for the thesis form, at least, it is necessary to at least situate and develop dialogism in Bakhtin’s work in some kind of order. At the same time as I set out a framework for explaining my terms from Bakhtin, however, I draw on terms that will only be clarified as the discussion proceeds. This chapter, then, requires reflection both forward and backward for things to fall into place.\(^{14}\)

2.2.1 The Utterance in Bakhtin

I begin with Bakhtin’s notion of the utterance, and build a network for explicating dialogism around the concept of utterances in interaction.\(^{15}\) Utterance is, for Bakhtin, the basic unit of speech, that is, of language as communication. This is distinct from the word and the sentence, which are units of language outside of the context of speech communication.\(^{16}\) Utterance is thus “the fundamental unit of investigation for anyone studying communication as opposed to language alone.”\(^{17}\) In addition to individual utterances, types of utterances might be grouped together into what Bakhtin calls “speech genres.”\(^{18}\) That is, “each sphere in which language is used develops its own relatively stable types of these utterances.”\(^{19}\) Utterances and speech genres can both be either primary (simple); or secondary (complex), incorporating other utterances or speech genres within them.\(^{20}\)

\(^{14}\) Cf. Dobbs-Allsopp on “the need of lyric poetry to be read prospectively and retrospectively, vertically and horizontally” (Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 85). While not lyric poetry, my work also benefits from being read prospectively and retrospectively.

\(^{15}\) It is, of course, entirely possible to begin elsewhere. Clark and Holquist, for example, begin with “difference” and “dialogue” (Clark and Holquist, Mikhail Bakhtin, 9–10). Morson and Emerson begin by identifying three “Global Concepts,” prosaics (their coinage), unfinalizability, and dialogue (Morson and Emerson, Prosaics, 15–62). And Green takes the question “How does an author create?” as her starting point (Green, Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship, 32).

\(^{16}\) Bakhtin, “Speech Genres,” 73. Bakhtin builds on Saussure’s work on langue and parole (Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, 77). Bakhtin deems Saussure inadequate, however, on the grounds that in Saussure’s conception, language is disembodied from its social context of language as communication (Bakhtin, “Speech Genres,” 73–75). Utterance is thus “Bakhtin’s extension of what Saussure called the parole aspect of language (the speech act/utterance), but where utterance is made specifically social, historical, concrete, and dialogized” (Holquist, glossary to Dialogic Imagination, by Bakhtin, 433).

\(^{17}\) Holquist, Dialogism, 59–60.

\(^{18}\) Bakhtin, “Speech Genres,” 60.

\(^{19}\) Bakhtin, “Speech Genres,” 60, emphasis original.

Bakhtin describes five ways in which utterances are constituted. First, they are constituted by a change in speaking subject.\textsuperscript{21} Utterances are bounded, beginning and end, by a change in speaking voice.\textsuperscript{22} A corollary of this boundedness is that utterances can be any length, from a single word to a massive tome, provided they are bounded by a change of speaker.\textsuperscript{23} These “clear-cut boundaries of the utterance” are most obvious in actual (and when written, explicitly represented) dialogue, “where the utterances of the interlocutors or partners in dialogue . . . alternate.”\textsuperscript{24} Utterance boundaries then blur, depending on where, on a scale of reported direct speech to represented speech, an utterance within another utterance sits.\textsuperscript{25} For example, the reported utterance in “She said ‘I might come,’ ” is more clearly demarcated than in “She said she might come.” In utterances where there is no obvious demarcation, and no explicit introduction of one speaker by another (“she said”), determining boundaries becomes more difficult. In ancient biblical texts this is complicated by the lack of obvious devices like quotation marks. Commentators rely instead on changes of subject, point of view, addressee, and grammatical person to glean where there might be a change of speaker.\textsuperscript{26} These are less obvious, however, leaving the exact location of changes much more open to debate.\textsuperscript{27}

If utterances can be any length, and incorporate other, primary utterances within greater, secondary utterances, then each distinct speech by a given speaker within Lamentations could constitute an utterance. As will be seen in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Bakhtin describes speakers “relinquishing the floor,” finishing “as if with a silent \textit{dixi,} perceived by the listeners (as a sign) that the speaker has finished” (Bakhtin, “Speech Genres,” 72). He assumes that speakers determine finishedness, without considering the possibility that a speaker may be interrupted before s/he has finished, as happens in Lam 1.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Bakhtin, “Speech Genres,” 71, 77. Cf. Morson and Emerson, \textit{Prosacics,} 125. Bakhtin takes care to emphasise that a word or sentence alone does not comprise an utterance unless it fulfils this criteria of boundedness.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Bakhtin, “Speech Genres,” 72.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Cf. Voloshinov, “Reported Speech,” 149-75. Ambiguity of utterance boundary may be observed, for example, in Ps 109; Micah 1-3; Job 42:1-6; and throughout Jeremiah, where there is often uncertainty as to whether the prophet or YHWH speaks.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Cf. Biddle, \textit{Polyphony and Symphony,} 10. Shifts in Lamentations are “abrupt: they occur with no explicit announcement” (Grossberg, \textit{Centripetal and Centrifugal Structures,} 88).
\item \textsuperscript{27} See further \S 3.1.1.
\end{itemize}
chapters 3-7, however, determining the boundaries of utterances in Lamentations can be contested, with many and varied proposals put forward. Each chapter, and the book of Lamentations as a complete work, can be considered discrete utterances, bounded at beginning and end as indicated by the opening and closing of the acrostic and the book. Each book of the Bible, and the canon of the Bible in its entirety, could be considered distinct utterances.

The theological question at hand is whether the constituent utterances of each chapter, each book, and the canon, adhere to a monologic canonical ideology or principle overall. Is the Bible a single monologic utterance, albeit holding within it a variety of voices? To frame the question theologically, does the Bible as a single utterance of “God” demonstrate a single, monologic truth to which all of its internal utterances, even those that at times appear to protest, attest? Is there an overarching point of view to which all Scripture’s voices ultimately subscribe? Biblical and narrative theologies, seeking to provide a controlling and coherent storyline to the Bible, have long sought to integrate offending inconsistencies, or find a way to redeem them. If the Bible is read as a polyphony, however, inconsistencies are simply part of the intrinsic warp and woof of the text.

The second constitutive property of an utterance is the “specific finalization of the utterance.” This is the inverse of boundedness, “the inner side of the change of speech subjects.” Bakhtin outlines three components of this finalization: first, the “semantic exhaustiveness of the theme,” that is, that the speaker has “said (or written) everything he wishes to say.” Second, the “speaker’s plan or speech will,” that is, the speaker has said everything s/he intended to say. Third, the “typical compositional and generic form of

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28 E.g. Sternberg contends that the Bible is “ideological singular” (Sternberg, Poetics, 37).
29 Bakhtin, “Speech Genres,” 76, emphasis original.
30 Bakhtin, “Speech Genres,” 76.
32 Bakhtin, “Speech Genres,” 77, emphasis original.
33 Bakhtin, “Speech Genres,” 77, emphasis original.
finalization.”

A third feature of the utterance is “the relation of the utterance to the speaker himself (the author of the utterance) and to the other participants in speech communication.” Bakhtin breaks this into two parts. First, “each utterance is characterized primarily by a particular referential semantic content,” determined by the author, which determines the compositional and stylistic features of the utterance. Second, there is an expressive element that evaluates that referential semantic content. Consequently, utterances always entail evaluation, with “no such thing as an absolutely neutral utterance.” This evaluative aspect of the utterance is crucial to my project. In spoken communication, the evaluative component can be gleaned from intonation, and perhaps by body language and other cues. It gets trickier in written communication, where cues such as ironic tone can be less clear. Observing the choice of language and the context of utterances, however, can provide some clues to the evaluative stance within a text.

Bakhtin mentions two further constituting factors of the utterance, so tightly interrelated that it is difficult to distinguish between them. Fourth, utterances are thoroughly dialogic. And fifth, utterances are inherently responsive and

35 Bakhtin, “Speech Genres,” 76.
37 Bakhtin, “Speech Genres,” 84. Note that Bakhtin speaks of the “author” throughout his work, and for the time being I retain his terminology. In §2.2.4.3 below, however, I will nuance the reference to “author” in light of my distinction between real and implied authors (cf. also §1.3).
40 See further §2.3.
41 Bakhtin, “Speech Genres,” 85; cf. Clark and Holquist, Mikhail Bakhtin, 207; Todorov, Dialogical Principle, 53; Morson and Emerson, Prosaics, 134.
responding. That is, addressivity is an “essential (constitutive) marker of the utterance.”43 Utterances interact with preceding utterances and anticipate forthcoming utterances. They hold addressivity in their DNA, assuming an audience and anticipating that audience’s response.44 The utterance is thus “both already a response to something and also framed so as to elicit a response.”45

Utterances, then, are bounded by changes in speaking subject. They are internally finalized and consist of both a particular referential semantic content and an evaluation of that content. Utterances are inherently dialogic, constituted by addressivity. Utterances are not mere words or sentences, though a word or a sentence might comprise an utterance, if it satisfies the criteria. They are invested with much more in a socially embedded life-existence, being at once “the simultaneity of what is actually said and what remains unspoken.”46

2.2.2 Dialogue In Bakhtin

Having defined the utterance as Bakhtin’s basic unit of communication, I now examine how these utterances interact dialogically. Bakhtin speaks of dialogism in at least three different ways: the internal dialogism of the word, the double-voicedness of language, and the dialogism of the idea in the polyphonic text.47 Given Bakhtin’s lack of systematization, however, these three senses bleed and blur into one another.48 Attempting to tease out the meaning of “dialogue” is

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43 Bakhtin, “Speech Genres,” 95; cf. Eco’s open work, in which “‘openness’” is “based on the theoretical, mental collaboration of the consumer, who must freely interpret and artistic datum, a product which has already been organized in its structural entirety (even is this structure allows for an indefinite plurality of interpretations)” (Eco, The Open Work, 12, emphasis original).

44 Cf. Holquist, Dialogism, 60; Todorov, Dialogical Principle, 53; Green, How are the Mighty Fallen? 77.

45 Green, Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship, 53.

46 Clark and Holquist, Mikhail Bakhtin, 207; cf. Green, How are the Mighty Fallen? 75.

47 Cf. Vice, Introducing Bakhtin, 46; and Morson and Emerson, who similarly categorise dialogue into three “senses” (Morson and Emerson, Prosates, 486n4), although my explanation differs in some respects. For Morson and Emerson, the third sense of dialogue is characterised first and foremost by dialogic truth, a worldview that finds expression in polyphonic texts. I move in the reverse direction, looking at the dialogism of the idea in the polyphonic work, and then observing how this reflects a dialogic, as opposed to monologic, sense of truth.

further complicated by the overlapping use of terms by commentators. First, though, it is important to clarify that for Bakhtin dialogue is something other than the everyday understanding of dialogue as “the alternation of speakers.” It is not the external structure of dialogue or the form of exchanges in quotation marks (or other external markers) that makes a text dialogic, but a property of the way utterance interacts with utterance. Bakhtin also distinguishes “dialogue” from Hegelian dialectics:

Dialogue and dialectics. Take a dialogue and remove the voices . . . remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness . . . and that’s how you get dialectics.

Hegel’s dialectics is, in the end, a totality, subsuming thesis and antithesis, and consequently is far removed from Bakhtin’s conception of unmerged voices in dialogue. Further, while “dialogue” interanimates the related concepts of polyphony and heteroglossia, the three terms are not synonymous. Heteroglossia describes different social languages, speech styles, or genres that can interact dialogically. Polyphony is a property of a literary work that reflects, or embodies, a dialogic sense of truth. While dialogism and polyphony are not the same thing, then, each needs the other in a literary text and they are mutually interpenetrating. This mutual interanimation might be partially responsible for some confusion of terms, for example, when Clark and Holquist

49 Holquist distinguishes between dialogism as the “characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia” and dialogue as a “verbal process” (Holquist, glossary to Dialogic Imagination, by Bakhtin, 426, 427). Green employs dialogical as “the large tent under which to position Bakhtin’s thought,” and dialogism as the “rather ugly English word that catches all the implied intersections among partners” (Green, How are the Mighty Fallen? 21).

50 Morson and Emerson, “Heteroglossary,” 264; cf. Morson and Emerson, Prospectives, 49.


53 Vice, Introducing Bakhtin, 50.

54 See further §2.2.3.
suppose that “‘polyphony’ is simply another name for dialogism.”55 Stordalen, too, barely distinguishes between the two. He states that Bakhtin started out “using a term translated ‘polyphony’ ” to designate “a non-hierarchical presence of voices in a text, each defining itself in relation to other voices,” but that “‘Dialogism’ is now used as shorthand for this literary strategy and for the philosophy it is thought to reflect.”56 Vice observes this collapsing of terms, and clarifies that polyphony refers more precisely to “the construction of the voices of characters and narrator in the novel.”57 That is, polyphony is “not reducible to dialogism” and instead “refers to the autonomy of the characters’ voices. The voices which make up the polyphonic novel are dialogic: they interact dialogically, and the language of which they are composed is dialogic.”58 So while polyphony and dialogism (of the third sense, see §2.2.2.3 below) are intimately related, there is a nuance of difference to be observed. Green helpfully suggests thinking of polyphony as a subset of dialogism,59 as I do. For greater clarity I refer, where possible, to the polyphonic work, rather than simply “polyphony,” to emphasise that polyphony is a property of texts.

### 2.2.2.1 Dialogue One: The Internal Dialogism of the Word

A first sense of dialogue in Bakhtin is the internal dialogism of the word.60 This relates to the responsive and responding nature of language, acknowledging that all speech is inherently relational.61 Words are spoken into existing linguistic worlds and spatio-temporal, socio-cultural contexts, such that “every utterance, every word that is spoken, enters into a world that is already spoken about.”62 In this first sense, every word or utterance is dialogic, engaging its every previous use in the linguistic world, and anticipating every potential use to come.63 In this

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57 Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin*, 112. Vice clarifies that dialogism is “a relational property,” heteroglossia is “a linguistic description” and polyphony, along with chronotope, are “terms for literary forms” (Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin*, 50).
61 Cf. the constitutive addressivity of the utterance in 2.2.1.
63 This is the basis for intertextuality in Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 59-60 and
first sense it would be impossible for a word or utterance ever to be monologic, unless it were that primeval word of “the first speaker, the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe.” But dialogue must, for Bakhtin, mean something more. In the inherent internal dialogism of the word, all language is natively dialogic. Yet Bakhtin stipulates that some literary genres are dialogic, in contradistinction to those which are monologic. There must, therefore, be some further way of construing dialogue in Bakhtin that gives rise to this dichotomy.

2.2.2.2 Dialogue Two: The Double-Voicedness of Language

A second sense of dialogue, then, is double-voiced discourse. This is speech that is not only directed “toward the referential object of speech, as in ordinary discourse,” but also directed “toward another’s discourse, toward someone else’s speech.” That is, double-voiced utterances reference other people’s utterances, with which they are intentionally in dialogue. The speaker of a double-voiced utterance utilises “someone else’s discourse for his own purposes by inserting a new semantic intention into a discourse which already has, and which retains, an intention of its own,” much as I have just done with Bakhtin’s words to make a point of my own, in double-voiced agreement. Others’ utterances are taken up and given new significance in new contexts, while still retaining “their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate.” The most obvious example of double-voicedness is straightforward reported speech, in which one speaker explicitly indicates that they are reporting another’s words, overtly using them in quotation.

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passim. For Kristeva, “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Kristeva, “Word, Dialogue and Novel,” 37).

65 Bakhtin, PDP, 185, emphases his.
68 Bakhtin, “Speech Genres,” 89.
69 As Green explains, “reported speech is the language claimed to be that of another, so speech about speech, utterance crossing utterance. . . . Someone takes over the speech or utterance of another; one borrows, and another lends—though perhaps unwillingly. . . . In narrative, it will also be reported by someone, best called a narrator” (Green, Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship, 48). Green includes a helpful sliding scale of narratorial intrusiveness in reported speech (Green, Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship, 49–51). See also Eco, on the various levels on which readers may or may not recognise intentional double voicing and intertextual irony (Eco, On Literature, 218).
Newsom provides a useful and succinct summary of three types of discourse in this second sense of dialogue, distinguishing between single-voiced, double-voiced, and double-voiced with a sidelong glance. Single voiced dialogue occurs when “a person unselfconsciously directs remarks toward a referential object.” It is in this way that an utterance might be monologic—a single voiced utterance is directed, without any intention of dialogue, solely toward its object. Second, Newsom identifies double-voiced agreement when “the speaker is aware of or intends listeners to hear the stylized or objectified speech of a class or a group or a tradition ringing through his own words.” Double-voiced disagreement, by contrast, occurs when “the speaker’s intention is directly opposed to the discourse he takes into his speech (e.g., parody).” Third, there is “the double-voicing characteristic of hidden polemic,” that is, “the word with a sideward glance at someone else’s hostile word.”

In this second sense of dialogue, utterances can be either monologic or dialogic. Single-voiced utterances are owned solely by their speaker and are thus monologic. Double-voiced utterances—whether of agreement, disagreement, or polemic—are dialogic.

As well as dialogue between individual speakers, double-voiced utterances may also interact dialogically with wider social, cultural, and ideological discourses. For Bakhtin, part of Fyodor Dostoevsky’s skill lay in sensing “in the struggle of

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70 Newsom, “Bakhtin,” 23–24. Bakhtin’s own taxonomy (Bakhtin, PDP, 199) has been adapted and streamlined by, e.g., Morson and Emerson, *Prosaics*, 147; and Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom?*, 26.
71 Newsom, “Bakhtin,” 23; that is, “[d]irect, unmediated discourse direct exclusively toward its referential object, as an expression of the speaker’s ultimate semantic authority” (Bakhtin, *PDP*, 199).
77 Although they are dialogic in the first sense in that they are already invested with the internal dialogism of the word that characterises all language.
78 Morson and Emerson, “*Heteroglossary*,” 265. E.g., Miller’s study of double-voicing in Lam 1 observes when speakers within the chapter take up each other’s utterances, reframing them with semantic intentions of their own (Miller, “*Reading Voices*,” 393–408).
opinions and ideologies (of various epochs) an incomplete dialogue on ultimate questions.”

That is, both individual perspectives and wider ideologies could be interacting dialogically in double-voiced discourse. An utterance could thus conceivably be overlaid with multiple speakers’ semantic intentions, as well as ideologies of both the current age and ages past. Double-voiced utterances in literary texts allow these overtones of wider social, cultural, and traditional discourses, in which speakers are inevitably steeped, to be referenced. This opens up avenues for exploring how such ideologies might appear in utterances in Lamentations, and in turn how these utterances interact with each other.

2.2.2.2.1 Excursus: Authoritative and Internally Persuasive Discourse

This becomes particularly salient for this study when it is observed that, among these ideologies “of various epochs,” some discourses are what Bakhtin calls “authoritative.”

For Bakhtin, the authoritative word is discourse into which “no correspondence shall be entered into.” That is:

The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it. The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers. Its authority was already acknowledged in the past. It is a prior discourse. It is therefore not a question of choosing it from among other possible discourses that are its equal. It is given (it sounds) in lofty spheres, not those of familiar contact. Its language is a special (as it were, hieratic) language. It can be profaned. It is akin to taboo, i.e., a name that must not be taken in vain.


Bakhtin, “Speech Genres,” 88. Authoritative discourses are “those discourses that validate the presence of larger social ideals and from which the subjects themselves can never completely escape” (Blevins, “Introduction,” 16).

Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 342, emphases original. See further §5.1.2.
Further, in terms of the response the authoritative word demands, Bakhtin argues that

It is not a free appropriation and assimilation of the word itself that authoritative discourse seeks to elicit from us; rather, it demands our unconditional allegiance. . . . one must either totally affirm it, or totally reject it. It is indissolubly fused with its authority—with political power, an institution, a person—and it stands and falls together with that authority. One cannot divide it up—agree with one part, accept but not completely another part, reject utterly a third part.\footnote{Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 342.}

Authoritative discourse, for Bakhtin, is not open to dialogic interaction. Bakhtin gives the examples of “the authority of religious dogma, or of acknowledged scientific truth or of a currently fashionable book.”\footnote{Bakhtin, “Three Fragments,” 280. But see further §2.2.4.5.} The traditional theological influences that participate in Lamentations might be considered in this category, as established, authoritative discourses. Further, Lamentations and the wider biblical canon can, in some spheres at least, be considered authoritative discourses. Indeed, Bakhtin himself places the Bible in this category of literature, immune to the possibility of dialogic interaction.\footnote{Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 342.}

Bakhtin sets the authoritative word against “internally persuasive discourse.”\footnote{Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 343.} Internally persuasive discourse, unlike the authoritative word, “is denied all privilege, backed up by no authority at all, and is frequently not even acknowledged in society (not by public opinion, nor by scholarly norms, nor by criticism), not even in the legal code.”\footnote{Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 342. Note that authoritative discourse and inner persuasive discourse “may coincide, but usually do not. Even when authoritative voices are inner persuasive, the two aspects are distinct. There are degrees of authoritativeness and inner persuasiveness” (Morson and Emerson, “Heteroglossary,” 268).} And yet it is this discourse which is felt to be more convincing than an authoritative discourse that, for whatever reason,
does not quite ring true. Authoritative discourse “is not usually experienced as truly persuasive but rather demands unconditional allegiance simply because it derives from an authoritative source.”⁸⁷ Internally persuasive discourse, by contrast, “is denied such authority or privilege. Its importance comes only from its persuasiveness.”⁸⁸ Internally persuasive discourse is “affirmed through assimilation, tightly interwoven with ‘one’s own word.’”⁸⁹ It is felt to be true.⁹⁰

Exploring double-voicedness is a fruitful area for investigation in biblical studies, particularly in relation to authoritative religious discourses. Levine, for example, examines quotations of God’s word, and enemy words, in interaction with social, religious, and tradition ideologies in the Psalms.⁹¹ He explores how the psalmists deal with authoritative discourses and demonstrates situations in which God’s word is quoted in the psalms “in order to quarrel with it.”⁹² This is one clear example of dialogic interaction with authoritative discourse.

Newsom works with double-voicing in Lamentations and Isaiah. She demonstrates how the Judahite speech of Lamentations is incorporated for new ideological purposes in Deutero-Isaiah.⁹³ For Newsom, reading attuned to double-voicing allows readers “to discern the way in which Judahite speech is not only taken up but reaccented in Second Isaiah, infused with the perspectives and intentions of the exilic community.”⁹⁴ This is a good example of how a traditionally authoritative discourse—Judahite political propaganda—is taken and “skewed” dialogically, in order to populate older ideas with new ideological intentions.⁹⁵

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⁸⁷ Morson and Emerson, “Heteroglossary,” 268, emphasis theirs.
⁸⁸ Morson and Emerson, “Heteroglossary,” 268, emphasis theirs.
⁹⁰ See further §5.2.2.
⁹² E.g., Ps 82:2-7; 90:3, 13, 17; Levine, “Dialogic Discourse of Psalms,” 272.
⁹⁴ Newsom, “Response to Gottwald,” 74.
⁹⁵ Newsom gives two key examples. First, Zion in Lamentations is both the wandering, exiled Zion (Lam 1:3,7) and the physical city, Zion. In Deutero-Isaiah she is more definitively the geographical located Zion/Jerusalem (Isa 51:9-52:12). The left-behind Judahites of Lamentations are left out in Deutero-Isaiah, such that the children of Zion, and the true
In Lamentations, the authoritative discourses with which speakers’ utterances interact dialogically could include Deuteronomic traditions, prophetic ideology, priestly paradigms, and wisdom words. That is, the traditional theological influences that are quoted, referenced, or alluded to within its lines.\textsuperscript{96} These discourses are double-voiced in that they occur in the speeches of speakers in Lamentations, where those speakers may agree, disagree, or parody. But they are also “dialogic” in the sense that they interact with the speech around them, and the speech of others, in a third sense of dialogue—the dialogism of the idea.

\textbf{2.2.2.3 Dialogue Three: The Dialogism of the Idea in Polyphonic Texts}

The third sense of dialogue, and the one with which I primarily work in relation to Lamentations, is the dialogism of the idea: the interaction of voice-ideas or integral points of view, as represented in polyphonic texts. A voice-idea is “a unity of idea and personality: the idea represents a person’s integral point of view on the world, which cannot be abstracted from the person voicing it.”\textsuperscript{97} Voice-ideas are thus localised “in specific, human lives” and tested out “by rubbing them against other ‘ideas’ embodied by characters.”\textsuperscript{98} For Bakhtin, Dostoevsky “was capable of representing someone else’s idea, preserving its full capacity to signify as an idea, while at the same time also preserving a distance, neither confirming the idea nor merging it with his own expressed ideology.”\textsuperscript{99} These voice ideas interact dialogically in the polyphonic text.\textsuperscript{100} Polyphonic texts, in turn embody dialogic truth. This is truth that “exists at the point of intersection of several unmerged voices.”\textsuperscript{101} Dialogic truth, along with a change

\footnotesize{community of YHWH, are the exiles returning home (Newsom, “Response to Gottwald,” 76). Second, the failed leaders in Lam 1:6; 2:9; 4:13-16 are elided in Deutero-Isaiah, with only the imagery of the children, sons, and daughters of Zion carried through so as to avert the eyes from any further critique of the ruling classes (Newsom, “Response to Gottwald,” 77-78).

\textsuperscript{96} Cf. §1.8.1. See further §5.5.

\textsuperscript{97} Morson and Emerson, \textit{Prosaics}, 237.

\textsuperscript{98} Stordalen, “Dialogue and Dialogism,” 24.

\textsuperscript{99} Bakhtin, \textit{PDF}, 85, emphasis original. As, for example, between Ivan and Alyosha in \textit{The Brothers Karamazov}.

\textsuperscript{100} Green, \textit{How are the Mighty Fallen?} 25; cf. Morson and Emerson, “Heteroglossary,” 266.

in the position of the “author,” and a concomitant change in the position of the characters in a polyphonic work, is essential to the dialogism of the idea.\textsuperscript{102}

At this point, observe, again, that explaining Bakhtin’s terms in a linear fashion is problematic, as each needs an appreciation of the others in order to complement its explanation. I began with utterance (the basic unit of speech as communication), progressed to dialogue (the interaction of utterances) and followed to polyphony (the representation of utterances interacting dialogically in a text). Vice, however, frames her discussion in reverse, such that “[p]olyphony . . . creates the conditions for dialogism.”\textsuperscript{103} For Vice, “polyphony makes dialogism possible; the autonomy of the character's voice provides the conditions for dialogue on equal terms between that character and the narrator.”\textsuperscript{104} Morson and Emerson approach dialogue and polyphony from both directions, stating in one article that “[p]olyphony is an approach to narrative that embodies a dialogic sense of truth”\textsuperscript{105} while in their \textit{Prosaics} framing it the other way round, such that a “ ‘dialogic sense of truth’ is absolutely constitutive of polyphony.”\textsuperscript{106} The polyphonic text and the dialogic sense of truth, then, are mutually implicating.\textsuperscript{107} And indeed, for Bakhtin, the dialogism of the idea is best represented literarily in the polyphonic text.

\subsection*{2.2.3 The Polyphonic Text
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For Bakhtin, the polyphonic text was exemplified by Dostoevsky's novels. Indeed, initially Bakhtin claimed that Dostoevsky invented polyphony, as a new way of imagining consciousnesses, but he later re-evaluated this stance to the effect that Dostoevsky’s work was “less an unprecedented event in the history of

\textsuperscript{102} Morson and Emerson identify two “constitutive features of polyphony: a specific form-shaping ideology that incorporates a dialogic sense of truth (dialogue in the third sense) and a changed position of the author needed to embody that kind of dialogue” (Morson and Emerson, \textit{Prosaics}, 260). I include a third feature, a change in position of the characters. This is a correlate of the change in position of the “author.”

\textsuperscript{103} Vice, \textit{Introducing Bakhtin}, 114.

\textsuperscript{104} Vice, \textit{Introducing Bakhtin}, 132, emphasis original.

\textsuperscript{105} Morson and Emerson, \textit{Heteroglossary},” 258.

\textsuperscript{106} Morson and Emerson, \textit{Prosaics}, 232

\textsuperscript{107} Cf. §2.2.2.
the novel than as the purest expression of what had always been implicit in the
genre.”\textsuperscript{108} According to Bakhtin, Dostoevsky “placed the idea on the borderline
of dialogically intersecting consciousnesses” and in so doing “brought together
ideas and worldviews, which in real life were absolutely estranged and deaf to
one another, and forced them to quarrel.”\textsuperscript{109} The book of Lamentations can be
conceived similarly, as the interaction of voice-ideas, localised in specific,
embodied characters, jarring against each other, intersecting and quarrelling
dialogically. First, though, I turn to an explanation of the key features
constituting the polyphonic novel, the literary format that, for Bakhtin, best
represents the dialogism of the idea.

\textbf{2.2.3.1 A Dialogic Sense of Truth}

Essential to the polyphonic novel is a \textit{dialogic sense of truth}, which differs
markedly from its antithesis, a monologic sense of truth. There are four key
distinctions to be made here. First, dialogic truth requires a \textit{plurality of
consciousnesses}.\textsuperscript{110} Monologic truth can be spoken by a single voice and grasped
by a single consciousness.\textsuperscript{111} Newsom clarifies that “[e]ven if such propositions
or systems of thought are actually the product of many minds, they can be
represented as capable of being spoken by a single voice or spoken by a single
consciousness.”\textsuperscript{112} Dialogic truth, however, cannot be coerced into summary
statements.\textsuperscript{113} Instead, it “requires the plurality of consciousnesses that can
enter into relationship with it from a variety of noninterchangeable
perspectives.”\textsuperscript{114} The polyphonic novel thus exhibits a plurality of
consciousnesses, existing “at the point of intersection of several unmerged
voices.”\textsuperscript{115}

\footnote{Clark and Holquist, \textit{Mikhail Bakhtin}, 242; cf. Green, \textit{Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship}, 18.
Contra Morson and Emerson, who accept Bakhtin’s judgement that Dostoevsky’s polyphonic
novel comprised an entirely new form (Morson and Emerson, \textit{Prosaics}, 232, 239 and
passim).}

\footnote{Bakhtin, \textit{PDP}, 91.}

\footnote{Bakhtin, \textit{PDP}, 81 and passim.}

\footnote{Newsom, “Job as Polyphonic Text,” 92.}

\footnote{Newsom, “Bakhtin,” 24.}

\footnote{Cf. Newsom, “Bakhtin,” 24.}


\footnote{Newsom, “Job as Polyphonic Text,” 91; cf. Morson and Emerson, \textit{Prosaics}, 236; Newsom,}
Second, dialogic truth is embodied. It matters who is speaking. While monologic truth may consist of abstract, stand-alone statements, dialogic truth “insists on the situated quality of truth, the importance of the distinctive point of view which finds itself in relationship with other distinct viewpoints—as over against the realm of impersonal and universal propositions.” In Bakhtin’s terms, there are no “‘no-man’s thoughts.’” Bakhtinian dialogue thus “does not conflate meanings or personae but retains their concrete differences, allowing other voices to be heard, sometimes simultaneously, on several registers of significance at once and anticipating different responses at different times.”

Polyphonic works exhibit the embodiedness of points of view in dialogue. For Bakhtin, there is in Dostoevsky’s novels no “impersonal truth, and in his works there are no detached, impersonal verities. There are only integral and indivisible voice-ideas, voice-viewpoints” which “cannot be detached from the dialogic fabric of the work without distorting their nature.” He explains that “[i]n the compositionally expressed dialogues of Dostoevsky’s characters there are also no separate thoughts or positions. They never argue over separate points, but always over whole points of view, inserting themselves and their entire idea into even the briefest exchange.” Characters are fully fledged personalities embodying integral points of view, and “there are absolutely no separate thoughts, propositions or formulations such as maxims, sayings, aphorisms which, when removed from their context and detached from their voice, would retain their semantic meaning in an impersonal form.” According to Bakhtin, in Dostoevsky “the ultimate indivisible unit is not the separate referentially bound thought, not the proposition, not the assertion, but rather the integral point of view, the integral position of a personality.”

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120 Cf. the open work as a “‘pure expression of personality’” (*Eco, The Open Work*, 8).
121 Bakhtin, *PDP*, 96, emphasis original.
122 Bakhtin, *PDP*, 96.
123 Bakhtin, *PDP*, 95, emphasis original.
124 Bakhtin, *PDP*, 93, emphasis original.
Third, dialogic truth resists systematisation. Monologic truth, made up of discrete propositional statements, “tends to gravitate toward a system. It seeks unity.”\footnote{Newsom, “Bakhtin and Dialogic Truth,” 292; cf. Morson and Emerson, “Heteroglossary,” 262; Newsom, “Job as Polyphonic Text,” 90; Newsom, “Bakhtin,” 24.} In a monologic work, “an idea, in itself, belongs to no one. . . . it gravitates toward some impersonal, systematically monologic context; in other words, it gravitates toward the systemically monologic worldview of the author himself.”\footnote{Bakhtin, PDP, 79, emphasis original.} Dialogic truth resists this systematising tendency, so that “[w]hat emerges is not system but ‘a concrete event made up of organized human orientations and voices.’ ”\footnote{Newsom, “Bakhtin and Dialogic Truth,” 294, quoting Bakhtin, PDP, 93.} Resistance to system is integral to the polyphonic novel, with the unity of such a work found not in such a system, but in the live event of conversation.\footnote{Newsom, “Bakhtin,” 24.}

Fourth, dialogic truth is \textit{unfinalisable,} it is “always open.”\footnote{Newsom, “Bakhtin and Dialogic Truth,” 294, quoting Bakhtin, PDP, 93.} Monologic truth closes down argument or debate, making generalising propositional statements that are the same regardless of who says or perceives them. For Bakhtin, a “finalised” work cannot be truly dialogic, but is only a “stenographer’s report of a \textit{finished} dialogue, from which the author has already withdrawn and \textit{over} which he is now located as if in some higher decision-making position.”\footnote{Newsom, “Job as Polyphonic Text,” 91; cf. Morson and Emerson, Prosaics, 237, 258; Bakhtin, PDP 15, 51.} Bakhtin conceded, however, that closure with unfinalizability was something Dostoevsky did not always master.\footnote{Newsom, “Bakhtin and Dialogic Truth,” 294; see also Clark and Holquist, Mikhail Bakhtin, 243. Cf. Eco’s open work, which is “effectively open to a virtually unlimited range of possible readings” (Eco, The Open Work, 21).} And indeed, it is difficult to imagine how unfinalisability could actually be achieved compositionally. Literary works “close” in one sense as soon as they are pinned down in print. The author is out of reach, characters’ destinies are determined, and dialogue is snap-frozen.

Eco’s distinction between “finished” texts that remain either “open” or “closed” is helpful here. That is, a text may be “finished” in that it is in its “final form.”

\footnote{Eco, The Open Work, 21.}

\footnote{Bakhtin, PDP, 63, emphases original.}

\footnote{Cf. Morson and Emerson, Prosaics, 253.}
But this “fixity of form, however, does not then correspond to fixity in meaning.” 132 A work may be “organically completed” but still “‘open’ to a continuous generation of internal relations.” 133 Eco gives the example of Finnigan’s Wake, which is “finite in one sense, but . . . unlimited” in another. 134 Analogously, then, a polyphonic work could be finished compositionally, but unfinalizable in that it does not close down polyphonic possibility by fixing meaning monologically.

The polyphonic novel, then, represents dialogic truth. It comprises a plurality of consciousnesses, participating in an unmerged dialogism of the idea. Truth is embodied and personal. Polyphonic novels are unified by the event of conversation rather than the unity of a system, and they are unfinalisable.

### 2.2.3.2 A Change in Position of the “Author”

A second constituting feature of the polyphonic text is a change in the position of the “author.” For the purposes of explaining Bakhtin’s distinction of the role of the “author” in polyphonic, as opposed to monologic texts, I continue to employ his term, “author.” Recall, though, that historical authors are behind the text, and in speaking about Lamentations I will go on to work instead with the concept of the implied author, the Poet. 135 I retain the term “author” in my discussion for the moment, however, in order to better mesh with Bakhtin. I do, however, put this in quotation marks as an indication that these are not actual authors, and take up the question of “author” in Bakhtin in §2.2.4.3.

In a monologic work, the “author’s” perspective prevails and all other views are subject to the “author’s” monologic truth. 136 Regardless of what protests or alternative points of view might be voiced within a work, the “author” ultimately

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132 Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 86.
133 Eco, *The Open Work*, 21.
134 Eco, *The Open Work*, 10, emphases original.
135 See §1.3: When Bakhtin speaks of the “author,” Vice suggests reading what, in contemporary literary poetics, would be called the “narrator” (Vice, Introducing Bakhtin, 126). But this is problematic in relation to Lamentations, as there is no “narrator” for the poems as such. See further §3.1.2.1.
controls meaning or ideology.\textsuperscript{137} In Bakhtin’s purview, “[m]ost literary works are monologic in that the voices appearing therein are controlled by the author’s perspective.”\textsuperscript{138} In a monologic work, “the author controls all of the voices, subordinating all but the one that expresses the author’s own position.”\textsuperscript{139} In polyphonic works, however, “the author must give up this monologic control and allow other points of view to come into genuine dialogue.”\textsuperscript{140} The “author” of a polyphonic work thus becomes a “participant in the dialogue without retaining for himself the final word.”\textsuperscript{141} This does not necessarily mean the “author” is passive, or has no viewpoint, a criticism initially levelled at Bakhtin’s dialogism. Indeed, a text “without an authorial position . . . is in general impossible. . . . The issue here is not an absence of, but a radical change in, the author’s position.”\textsuperscript{142} The key is not that an “authorial” perspective is not present, but that it “is not privileged.”\textsuperscript{143} Instead, “authorial” “views compete in an equal and open-ended dialogue with the views of other characters; and the victory of the author’s views is anything but assured.”\textsuperscript{144} When “authorial” ideology appears, it is simply as one among other ideologies competing for attention in the text.\textsuperscript{145} Note, though, that this is only because the “author” has chosen not to privilege themselves, revealing, in turn, an ideological commitment to the very form-shaping ideology of the polyphonic text.\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{137} Morson and Emerson, Prosaics, 238. A monologic work might air a number of characters’ dissenting views, but still adhere to an overall controlling “authorial” ideology (Newsom, “Job as Polyphonic Text,” 90-91).

\textsuperscript{138} Newsom, “Bakhtin and Dialogic Truth,” 295.

\textsuperscript{139} Newsom, “Bakhtin,” 24; cf. the closed work in Eco, which “aims[s] as pulling the reader along a predetermined path” (Eco, The Role of the Reader, 8).

\textsuperscript{140} Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 25; cf. Morson and Emerson, Prosaics, 238-39; Green, How are the Mighty? 27. Again, this is analogous to Eco’s open work, in which there are “no privileged points of view, and all available perspectives are equally valid and rich in potential” (Eco, The Open Work, 18).

\textsuperscript{141} Bakhtin, PDP, 72.

\textsuperscript{142} Bakhtin, PDP, 67, emphasis original. Morson and Emerson suggest “authorial” ideology might still be evident in at least two ways. First, the construction of the work as polyphonic reveals an ideological commitment to dialogic rather than monologic truth; and second, through the voice or viewpoint of a particular character or the narrator (Morson and Emerson, “Heteroglossary,” 259; cf. Morson and Emerson, Prosaics, 252; Green, Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship, 59).


\textsuperscript{144} Morson and Emerson, “Heteroglossary,” 259.

\textsuperscript{145} Newsom, “Bakhtin and Dialogic Truth,” 295-96; cf. Clark and Holquist, Mikhail Bakhtin, 245; Morson and Emerson, Prosaics, 233, 239; Newsom, “Job as Polyphonic Text,” 92-93.

\textsuperscript{146} Cf. Morson and Emerson, “Heteroglossary,” 259.
2.2.3.3 A Corresponding Change in the Position of the Characters

With the change in position of the “author” there is a concomitant change in the position of characters. There is a levelling out, a democratisation of utterances, so that in theory, all have “equal right to speak.” In a polyphonic work, “equality of utterance is central.”\(^{147}\) Characters, or “heroes,” are no longer, as in a monologic work, objects whose actions and viewpoints are dictated by an “author.”\(^{148}\) Instead, they become “subjects, on an equal footing with the narrator (their voices are constructed in exactly the same way as this figure’s voice).”\(^{149}\) In Dostoevsky’s work, claims Bakhtin,

[a] character’s word about himself and his world is just as fully weighted as the author’s word usually is; it is not subordinated to the character’s objectified image as merely one of his characteristics, nor does it serve as a mouthpiece for the author’s voice. It possesses extraordinary independence in the structure of the work; it sounds, as it were, alongside the author’s word and in a special way combines both with it and with the full and equally valid voices of other characters.\(^{150}\)

In a polyphonic work, then, the voice-ideas or integral-points of view of both “author” and characters compete on a level playing field, interacting with each other in the unmerged dialogism of the idea. Can Lamentations can be typified as such a polyphonic text? Do its speakers express their perspectives in democratic, dialogic interaction? Perhaps the more pertinent question is whether any text can be thought of in such polyphonic terms as Bakhtin imagined. In the following section I address two major issues with Bakhtin’s

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\(^{148}\) Cf. Green, *How are the Mighty Fallen?* 274.

\(^{149}\) Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin*, 114. Recall that Vice uses “narrator” where Bakhtin uses “author,” see n. 135 above.

\(^{150}\) Bakhtin, *PDP*, 7, emphasis original.
polyphony, and three further questions regarding the application of Bakhtin's
dialogism of the idea in Lamentations.

\section*{2.2.4 Problems with Polyphony}

\subsection*{2.2.4.1 The Impossibility of Escaping Authorial Control}

Can speakers ever “escape” authorial control? Morson and Emerson
acknowledge that in reality, “after all, the author is still the sole creator and
designer of the work.”\textsuperscript{151} But they continue to maintain that, even though
“characters in a polyphonic work have been created by the author . . . once they
come into being, they partially escape his control and prevent him from
knowing in advance how they will answer him.”\textsuperscript{152} As a theoretical ideal, the
notion of autonomous characters interacting as integral personalities on a par
with their creator is delightful; in truth it is farcical.\textsuperscript{153} As Vice points out, “even
if there is such a thing as a novelist’s respect for her or his characters, it is only
further testimony to the author’s complete control over the text and its
occupants.”\textsuperscript{154} By constructing a work polyophonically, an “author” demonstrates
a commitment to dialogic truth and interaction. But each character’s voice is
still constructed, so that ironically, “the freer such a character appears, the more
likely to be testimony to a definite ‘artistic vision’ on the part of the author, even
if that vision is open-ended rather than finalizing.”\textsuperscript{155} That is, the more obviously
polyphonic a text appears, the more intent there has been to construct the text
thus. In reality, then, the polyphonic text yields only an “illusion of the character
having an autonomous word.”\textsuperscript{156}

And yet, as Bakhtin demonstrated with his survey of readings of Dostoevsky,\textsuperscript{157}
readers approaching texts discern different “authorial” perspectives from each
other, each identifying a perspective they understand to be the “message” of the

\textsuperscript{151} Morson and Emerson, \textit{Prosaics}, 239.
\textsuperscript{152} Morson and Emerson, \textit{Prosaics}, 240.
\textsuperscript{154} Vice, \textit{Introducing Bakhtin}, 115.
\textsuperscript{155} Vice, \textit{Introducing Bakhtin}, 115.
\textsuperscript{156} Vice, \textit{Introducing Bakhtin}, 115; cf. Emerson, \textit{The First Hundred Years}, 128).
\textsuperscript{157} Bakhtin, \textit{PDP}, 5-46.
text, indicative of what the “author” really thinks. This may be entirely different from how another reader reads. The variety of intentions readers can come up with for a single text suggests readers are not in fact identifying an actual “authorial” perspective, but are instead identifying something quite different. The advantage of reading polyphonically, then, is not a sort of naïve imagining that all the voices are in fact autonomous, out of control of an “author,” but a recognition that the voices might present as such in a polyphonic work, making the possibility of determining the “authorial” perspective the issue. A polyphonic reading thus reserves judgement as to where any “authorial” perspective might lie.

2.2.4.2 The Impossibility of Equality

The question of “authorial” control aside, it must also be asked if voice-ideas or utterances of different characters can ever be equal. As Barbara Green observes, Bakhtin’s explication of voice-ideas as equal participants in dialogue “seems to have neglected to make explicit the fact that the power relations in life and literature have been and remain grossly uneven.” Ken Hirschkop also questions the possibility of equal utterances, highlighting

\[ \text{the uneven structuring of language}, \] that is, the fact that the discursive world consists, not of speaking individuals, but of a series of interacting structures or forms of discourse, which vary according to the durability of the utterance, the size and nature of speaker and audience, the degree of literacy required for participation, as well as the social factors highlighted in Bakhtin’s own work.\(^{159}\)

In a real dialogue, speakers are almost never evenly matched, and hearers and conversants recognise intuitively who has the upper hand, whether by merit of


\(^{159}\) Hirschkop, “Is Dialogism for Real?” 111, emphasis original.
sheer rhetorical force or by virtue of some social, cultural, or political power dynamic. This critique has been especially salient in feminist appraisals of Bakhtin, where the power relation between women and men is recognised as a key factor inhibiting truly dialogic interaction. \[160\] The question becomes: “How can one (individual or) group really relate to another without exploitation, dominance, or annihilation—not so much in the abstract as given the obvious history of the procedure and the uneven positions from which men and women now start?” \[161\]

This question of uneven dialogue between genders is particularly pertinent in relation to Lamentations, which includes an opening male voice (the Lamenter), a female voice (Zion), and a further male voice (the יִרְבְּרֵי). Is the male voice somehow more authoritative? Ought it be? Indeed, some commentators observe different emphases in the male and female voices in Lamentations, accusing Zion of being emotional and irrational, and praising the יִרְבְּרֵי for his rational theologising. \[162\] This has the effect of downgrading the status of female Zion’s speech, and elevating the male perspective as indicative of the “true” point of view. This dynamic will be teased out over the course of the thesis.

Also significant in Lamentations is the absence of the usual authoritative “prestige” voices, the voices of YHWH and his prophets. \[163\] Other “authoritative” discourses, however, do appear, \[164\] and the speakers of Lamentations interact with these dialogically. The question is whether these “prestige” voices maintain their position of unimpeachable power as authoritative discourse, or whether they are somehow undermined, contexually.

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\[161\] Green, Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship, 59; cf. O’Connor, “Horror, Authors, and Heroes,” 247.

\[162\] Mintz, Hurban, 32; cf. Allen Liturgy of Grief, 50. See further §8.2.1.6.

\[163\] See further §§8.2.1.1 and §8.2.1.2.

\[164\] See §1.8.1.
Thus far I have explained utterance, dialogue, and polyphony primarily in Bakhtin’s terms. Bakhtin speaks of the “author” of a text, and the position of the “author’s” ideology as on a par with characters’ points of view within a text is intrinsic to Bakhtin’s explanation of polyphony. As outlined in §1.3, however, any concept of the “author” of a biblical text like Lamentations is necessarily a construct, the image of an implied author. Bakhtin himself foreshadows the implied author concept with his comments on primary and secondary authors, with a vague allusion to the “problem of the image of the author. The primary (not created) and secondary author (the image of the author created by the primary author).” Bakhtin also hints at the irreconcilable distance between actual, primary, authors and readers when he asserts that “[t]he primary author cannot be an image. He eludes any figurative representation. When we try to imagine the primary author figuratively, we ourselves are creating his image, that is, we ourselves become the primary author of the image.”

That is, historical or “primary” authors are out of reach, and any author readers attempt to reconstruct would necessarily be of their own construction, an “implied” author. The category “author” is thus not helpful in discussion of Lamentations, because there is no direct access to the historical author or authors, nor their processes of authoring and/or redacting and collating. For this reason, I go on to speak of the “Poet” of Lamentations, as my shorthand for the image of the implied author. When evaluating what Bakhtin might term “authorial ideology,” I speak instead of the prevailing perspective of the text, or of the “Poet’s” point of view.

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165 See §2.3.2.
167 Bakhtin, “Notes Made in 1970-71,” 148, (emphasis original). Morson and Emerson tease this out a little more, explaining that “when we respond to an utterance, when we treat it as an utterance, we are necessarily positing an author, even if there really is no author. We may know that a given work was produced by a collective, by the effort of successive generations, but to respond to it we endow it with a ‘voice,’ imagine someone possessing the experience of those generations, speaking to us out of its wisdom (or folly)” (Morson and Emerson, Prospects, 133, emphasis original).
168 Cf. §1.3. My “Poet” encompasses all the vagaries of historical authoring, redacting, and collating, in the image of the implied author. Cf. Polzin’s “Deuteronomist,” who is “that
2.2.4.4 The Problem of Poetry in Relation to Lamentations

Drawing attention to the “Poet” leads to another issue in applying Bakhtin to Lamentations, a book of poetry. For Bakhtin, language works in completely different ways in prose texts and in poetry. Bakhtin developed the theory of the polyphonic novel based on Dostoevsky’s novels. In contrast to the dialogic possibility of polyphonic novel Bakhtin asserts that:

The language of the poet is *his* language, he is utterly immersed in it, inseparable from it, he makes use of each form, each word, each expression according to its unmediated power to assign meaning (as it were, “without quotation marks”), that is, as a pure and direct expression of his own intention. No matter what “agonies of the word” the poet endured in the process of creation, in the finished work language is an obedient organ, fully adequate to the author’s intention.\(^\text{169}\)

While a novel may be polyphonic, a poem, according to Bakhtin, can always only ever be monologic, a “pure and direction expression of his own intention.”\(^\text{170}\) In so dismissing poetry, Bakhtin seems to make the classic biographical error. That is, he assumes that the speaking voice of a poem, the lyric “I,” is a direct expression of an author’s language and ideology.\(^\text{171}\) In poetry, he says, “artistic consciousness” expresses itself “directly and without mediation, without conditions and without distance.”\(^\text{172}\) This, however, is not always the case. Speaking voices in poetry, just as in the novel, may be constructs of the implied

\(^{169}\) Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 285-86, emphasis original. Bakhtin admits only the dialogism of the word in poetry (the first sense of dialogue), allowing that poetry can only be dialogueed by “what can be found in the treasure-house of language itself” (Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 278). But he then goes on to assert that even the dialogism of the word is lacking in poetic genres: “In genres that are poetic in the narrow sense, the natural dialogization of the word is not put to artistic use” (Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 285).


\(^{171}\) Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin*, 75; cf. §1.3 n. 35.

author. Yet even when recognising that multiple, constructed voices may appear, Bakhtin insists that a poem, “no matter how many contradictions and insoluble conflicts the poet develops within it, is always illumined by one unitary and indisputable discourse.”

Bakhtin’s insistence that poetic genres are monologic puzzles commentators, who see great polyphonic possibility in poetry. In his later work, Bakhtin amended the binary distinction between poetic genres as monologic and the novel as polyphonic, allowing that literary works may be more or less dialogic. That is, it is not necessarily the novel itself that intrinsically admits of dialogism, but the degree of “novelness” a work displays. This affords a way ahead that allows poetry in general, as well as poetry in Lamentations, to be read dialogically.

2.2.4.5 The Problem of the Bible as “Authoritative Discourse”

For Bakhtin, the Bible is “the authoritative (as distinct from innerly persuasive) text.” Recall that for Bakhtin, authoritative discourse is unassailable, and cannot be dialogised. It demands assent by virtue of its status as a prior word of the fathers, meaning it “can not be represented—it is only transmitted.” Is it appropriate, then, to co-opt Bakhtin’s polyphony, developed in relationship to Dostoevsky’s novels, for the study of biblical Hebrew poetry?

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173 Cf. §1.3.
176 Eco makes a similar transition in his understanding of the open, versus the closed, text (Eco, Role of the Reader, 4-5).
177 Green, Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship, 60-61; cf. Vice, Introducing Bakhtin, 76; Morson and Emerson, Mikhail Bakhtin, 319.
179 See §2.2.2.2.1.
181 Also questioned by, e.g., Green, Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship, 27; Polzin, Moses and the Deuteronomist, 16; and Stordalen, “Dialogue and Dialogism,” 35. Green, Polzin, and Stordalen all go on to defend using Bakhtin for Biblical studies, however, with variations on the theme that if the shoe fits, the text may wear it (Green, “Bakhtin and Biblical
Green is disarmingly candid on this matter, stating that she “puzzles over the amount of thought that, it would now appear, Bakhtin got wrong. He seems not to have imagined in any substantial way that his theories might be useful for Holy Writ, whose nature was for him so qualitatively different from other texts.”¹⁸² There is growing recognition that Bakhtin’s work is useful in the realm of biblical studies,¹⁸³ as the burgeoning number of Bakhtinian readings of biblical texts attests.¹⁸⁴ Authoritative discourses are challenged, dialogically, in the poetry of Lamentations—not as inert, static, and incontrovertible authoritative discourses, but precisely as those discourses that spark “dialogue about ultimate questions.”¹⁸⁵

Is Lamentations a polyphonic text? Do her speakers, embodying their own integral points of view, clash and converse in a great dialogism of the idea? Do they interact as “equally privileged participants in the great dialogue”?¹⁸⁶ Or are all these speakers, in the end, subservient to a prevailing Poet’s perspective, despite any protests expressed along the way? Reading Lamentations as a polyphony according to Bakhtin allows perspectives in dialogue to be explored as though they were on equal terms, before attempting to discern an overall perspective—if such a thing exists.

In order to test this out, it is necessary to assess the points of view expressed by each speaker in Lamentations. I trace their interactions as though they existed in polyphonic dialogue. Only then do I ask if there is one point of view that prevails, whether of one of the characters, one of the cited authoritative discourses, or some other, overarching Poet’s point of view that might be read

¹⁸² Green, Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship, 186. Stordalen suggests Bakhtin “may have simply overstated the monologic character of the Bible (as he did that of Tolstoy) in order to profile the dialogue that he cherished so highly” (Stordalen, “Dialogue and Dialogism,” 37).
¹⁸³ Cf. Jones, Dostoevsky After Bakhtin, xi; Green, Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship, 186; Pardes, Countertraditions, 122; Green, How are the Mighty Fallen? 23; Stordalen, “Dialogue and Dialogism,” 37; Mandolfo, “Sanctioned Subversion,” 32.
¹⁸⁴ See §2.2 n. 2.
¹⁸⁵ As Bakhtin describes the polyphonic text (Bakhtin, “Notes Made in 1970–71,” 151).
¹⁸⁶ Bakhtin, PDP, 92.
“between the lines.”\textsuperscript{187} To assess point of view in Lamentations I turn to Boris Uspensky, who built on Bakhtin’s work to develop the theory of point of view in the polyphonic text.

\textit{2.3 Point of View}

Boris Uspensky’s work on point of view took its cue directly from Bakhtin’s polyphony,\textsuperscript{188} and has since influenced the literary study of Hebrew narrative.\textsuperscript{189} Volumes on the poetics of Hebrew narrative include the study of point of view, observing the way in which biblical Hebrew narrative texts inculcate unsuspecting readers with the narrator’s point of view.\textsuperscript{190} In more recent ideological readings of Hebrew narrative, canny readers, wise to the narrator’s machinations, identify textual biases in order to \textit{resist} being inculcated with the text’s point of view.\textsuperscript{191}

But there does not seem to be a corresponding comprehensive toolbox for the study of compositional elements in Hebrew poetry.\textsuperscript{192} Uspensky himself, while

\textsuperscript{187} Cf. Polzin, who reads the Deuteronomistic history as a polyphony, following the various points of view in interaction. He concludes, however, that while opposing theologies appear, there is ultimately an overall adherence to the ideology of the Deuteronomist (Polzin, \textit{Moses and the Deuteronomist}, 72).

\textsuperscript{188} Uspensky cites the influence of Bakhtin, Voloshinov, Vinogradov, and Gukovsky, and advances a theory of point of view in order “to complement their work” (Uspensky, \textit{Poetics of Composition}, 5-6n11).

\textsuperscript{189} See, e.g., Berlin, \textit{Biblical Narrative}, 55-57; Craig, \textit{Poetics of Jonah}; Polzin, \textit{Moses and the Deuteronomist}.

\textsuperscript{190} See, e.g., Sternberg, \textit{Poetics}, 84-185.

\textsuperscript{191} E.g., Bach, “Women, Seduction, and Betrayal,” 13-33. For resistance as a reading strategy see Fetterley, \textit{The Resisting Reader}, xi-xxvi.

\textsuperscript{192} In their studies of biblical narrative, Berlin notes in passing that “it is possible to speak of point of view in poetry as well as prose, and in ancient texts as well as modern” (Berlin, \textit{Biblical Narrative}, 43); and Sternberg recognises that multiple points of view do appear in, e.g., the Psalms (Sternberg, \textit{Poetics}, 72). These narrative critical studies, however, focus on the way the various literary elements like plot, character, perspective, dialogue, ambiguity, narrative gap and so on contribute to the meaning, effect, and rhetoric of \textit{narrative} texts. Studies of poetry, by contrast, tend to comprise either encyclopaedic catalogues of various formal techniques, or studies of one or other formal technique in a great amount of detail (e.g. Watson, \textit{Classical Hebrew Poetry}, for almost encyclopaedic reference of techniques; Kugel, \textit{The Idea of Biblical Poetry}, on parallelism; Berlin, \textit{Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism}; and Lunn, \textit{Word Order Variation in Biblical Hebrew Poetry}). As is already evident, I am not primarily interested in these formal techniques. Rather, I am interested in \textit{compositional} poetics, the poetics of point of view, dialogue, rhetoric and so on. Indeed, Polzin, defines “composition” as concerned with “the relationships of various points of view, on a number of levels, that make up a literary work” (Polzin, \textit{Moses and the Deuteronomist}, 18). Schökel’s
including discussion of point of view in relation to art, film, and theatre, is primarily concerned with narrative texts. When he mentions poetry it is only tangentially, with no explication of its literary potential as a form that could also express multiple points of view. If, as Bakhtin contends, a poem is the direct and monologic expression of the historical poet, then this makes perfect sense. Of course there would only be one point of view—the historical poet’s—being expressed. But as explained above, some poetry can in fact be read as a polyphony engaging various points of view. Beginning with Uspensky’s discussion of point of view in the narrative text, then, I develop a method for identifying and assessing points of view in the poetry of Lamentations.

2.3.1 Point of View and the Polyphonic Narrative Text

Uspensky identifies four different types, or planes, of point of view: “the plane of ideology, the plane of phraseology, the spatial and temporal plane, and the psychological plane.” The plane with which I am primarily concerned is the plane of ideology, the “point of view as an ideological and evaluative position.” The ideological point of view is that “according to which the events of the

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volume on Hebrew poetry is perhaps the closest to the poetics of poetry I desire. He begins with the usual formal features, but also includes discussion of images, figures of speech, and dialogue and monologue (Schökel, Hebrew Poetics)—all aspects I classify as “compositional.” He does not, however, engage with author/ IMPLIED author, addressee, or perspective/point of view. Watson comments on some compositional features, e.g., irony, hyperbole, rhetorical questions and so on, but does not discuss point of view, implied author, or variation of speaking voice (Watson, Classical Hebrew Poetry). Alter, who brought attention to “the manifold varieties of minutely discriminating attention to the artful use of language, to the shifting play of ideas, conventions, tone, sound, imagery, syntax, narrative viewpoint, compositional units, and much else” (Alter, Biblical Narrative, 12) in the study of biblical narrative, still devotes the lion’s share of theoretical discussion in his companion book on poetry to parallelism, rather than compositional poetics (Alter, Biblical Poetry, 3-84). Even Alter, then, having bemoaned the lack of studies of compositional poetics in biblical narrative, defaults to more structural concerns in his study of biblical poetry. Robust discussions of point of view, perspective, authority, ideology, and evaluation in biblical poetry are lacking (but note the paper presented by Tod Linafelt and F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp at SBL 2011, which made some forays into addressing this).

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193 Uspensky acknowledges poetry in two brief footnotes (Uspensky, Poetics of Composition, 81n1, 12n12).
194 Uspensky, Poetics of Composition, 6; cf. Berlin, Biblical Narrative, 55-56.
195 Uspensky, Poetics of Composition, 6; also sometimes called the “conceptual” point of view (Fokkelman, Reading Biblical Narrative, 143). Lamentations can also be analysed in terms of the other planes of point of view. See, e.g., Berlin for spatio-temporal point of view in Lamentations (Berlin, Lamentations, 7), and Landy for the linguistic or phraseological point of view in Lamentations (Landy, “Lamentations,” 329).
narrative are evaluated or judged.” Uspensky distinguishes between two types of text, those having a single ideological point of view that dominates all other perspectives in the text, and those in which a variety of ideological points of view appear. These two types of text correspond, of course, to Bakhtin’s monologic and polyphonic texts respectively. Uspensky’s explanation of polyphony thus complements Bakhtin’s, but with a particular focus on point of view, such that “[p]olyphony, as has been exemplified by Bakhtin in the work of Dostoevsky, is an instance of multiple points of view on the ideological plane.”

That is, “[p]olyphony occurs when several independent points of view are present within the work,” and these “points of view in a polyphonic work must belong directly to characters who participate in the narrated events (in the action). In other words, there must be no abstract ideological position outside of the personalities of the characters.” In a polyphonic narrative, then, “the various viewpoints are not subordinated, but are presented as essentially equal ideological voices.”

The question of interest to Uspensky is “whose point of view does the author assume when he evaluates and perceives ideologically the worlds which he describes.” He suggests author, narrator, and character could be the “possible vehicles of ideological viewpoint” in narrative texts. In an extension from Bakhtin, who speaks primarily of “author,” Uspensky speaks of “author or narrator.” He goes on to clarify that “when we speak about the authorial point of

197 I.e., “the simplest case (and for us, the least interesting) occurs when ideological evaluation is carried out from a single, dominating point of view” (Uspensky, *Poetics of Composition*, 8). This “single viewpoint will subordinate all others in the work” (Uspensky, *Poetics of Composition*, 9).
204 Uspensky, *Poetics of Composition*, 11. Cf. Polzin on point of view in Joshua: “the ultimate ideological stance(s) of the book ought to be looked for in both the reporting narrative of the text as well as in its reported words, especially those of its principal heroes, God and Joshua” (Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 73-74). See also Berlin, *Biblical Narrative*, 55.
view . . . we refer not to the author’s world view in general, independent of his work, but only to the viewpoint which he adopts for the organization of the narrative in a particular work. This seems to be akin, then, to determining the point of view of the implied author, or the text.

Uspensky distinguishes between the “author” and the “narrator,” with the narrator presenting characters and assessing their actions, thus potentially expressing particular evaluative points of view concerning those characters and actions. Studies of biblical narrative have adopted this notion, examining the techniques narrators use to expressing their opinions about characters and actions. Bar-Efrat explains that

Narrators usually speak of the characters and their deeds in a factual tone, but they are not indifferent to them. Their attitudes are expressed in a variety of ways, mostly implicit and inconspicuous. On the whole they keep their distance from the characters, but sometimes their point of view coincides with that of one of them. They frequently hint at things—in delicate and indirect ways—rather than stating them explicitly. The method of the biblical narrator requires a constant mental effort on the part of the reader, involving careful thought and attention to every detail of the narrative.

Narrative critics, then, look to the biblical narrator as the one who governs the ideology of biblical narrative texts. According to Berlin, “[i]n the Bible the ideological point of view is that of the narrator. It is he, according to his conceptual framework, who evaluates. Occasionally the ideological views of characters are present, but in general these are subordinated to that of the narrator.”

205 Uspensky, Poetics of Composition, 11.
206 Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art, 45.
207 Berlin, Biblical Narrative, 56.
Reading biblical narrative as monologic text, the omniscient narrator expresses and communicates the governing ideological, or evaluative point of view.\textsuperscript{208} This is the perspective that is transmitted to readers and guides their interpretation of events.\textsuperscript{209} In narrative-critical studies interested in determining the “message” of the biblical text, the goal thus becomes to determine the point of view of the narrator, as this narrator is assumed (by some literary critics, at least), to speak for God.\textsuperscript{210} If the narrator’s perspective can be identified and extracted from its embodied context, then it can be turned into a monologic take-home Sunday School lesson. Even when multiple points of view are expressed, recognising these “multiple points of view is the first step in discovering the point of view of the implied author; and this is the first step in discovering the meaning and purpose of the story.”\textsuperscript{211} Again, the presupposition is that there is a meaning or purpose, a prevailing perspective that determines the ideological, indeed, the theological significance of the text.

But characters can also evaluate. In a monologic text, characters’ perspectives are subordinate to the narrator, who expresses the controlling ideological point of view of the text. In a polyphonic text, however, the narrator’s view must contend with the viewpoints of the characters—at least in theory.\textsuperscript{212} Various ideological points of view “become manifest primarily in the manner in which characters (vehicles for the ideological positions) evaluate the world around them.”\textsuperscript{213} But as Bar-Efrat points out,

In actual fact, however, the narrator is never absent from the narrative, for when the characters speak in their own voices, their speech does not have the same independence as that of characters in a play, because in narrative literature . . . the narrator prefaces

\textsuperscript{209} Longman, \textit{Literary Approaches}, 88.
\textsuperscript{211} Berlin, \textit{Biblical Narrative}, 82.
\textsuperscript{212} See §2.2.4.1 on the naivety of supposing characters can ever be fully autonomous.
\textsuperscript{213} Uspensky, \textit{Poetics of Composition}, 10.
the characters’ speech with a phrase, such as: “And he asked”, “And she replied”, “And X said to Y” etc., making it clear that we hear the characters’ conversations only by virtue of the narrator’s assistance.214

Even when characters speak in their own voices, then, their very portrayal and manipulation by a narrator governs and controls something of that self-expression.215 While in theory, the perspectives of narrator and characters compete on a level playing field in a polyphonic narrative text, characters can never quite, in reality, escape the machinations of their creator/s.

2.3.2 Point of View and Lamentations

But what happens when there is no narrator? When the text at hand is not a narrative? When, without some prior knowledge of a “story,” it would be difficult to determine a plot line at all? Stordalen comments that in both Job and Dostoevsky, “there is a non-hierarchical presentation of characters’ conflicting views of life and world, of conflicting ‘ideas.’ The book is devoid of an objective narrator to referee the conflict.”216 In its presentation of speaking voices without narratorial introduction or organisation, Lamentations is similarly, perhaps supremely, devoid of an objective narrator. Rather, each character speaks and presents their own assessment of the situation, the relationship between sin and suffering, of Zion, and of YHWH. Lamentations primarily constitutes not reported speech, but represented speech.217 There is no speaker whom readers or listeners ought automatically to assume presents the Poet’s perspective.218 Can any single speaker be assigned the controlling point of

214 Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art, 41-42. Cf. Bal’s distinction between internal and external focalisation (Bal, Narratology, 152-53).
215 Cf. §2.2.4.1.
217 There are short snatches of reported speech attributed to the children (Lam 2:12a), enemy bystanders (2:15, 16), the nations (4:15a, c) and possibly YHWH (3:57). The main characters’ perspectives, however, primarily present directly, independent of any intrusive intorts (although see the possible self-quotations in 3:18, 24, 54, 56; 4:20b).
218 These options for voices governing “authorial” point of view will be assessed in ch. 8.
view? Or must all speakers be heeded in their interaction with one another, reading for the dialogue?

Studies of Lamentations often mention point of view in passing. Berlin, for example, engages the spatio-temporal perspective, and also identifies dominant tones and “evaluations” in each chapter. But the individual chapters of Lamentations are not as homogenous as her summary statements would suggest. Hillers observes a progression in psychological point of view. O’Connor engages multiple points of view throughout, but lacks a comprehensive framework for assessing and tracing point of view overall. Boase interacts regularly with “viewpoint” and argues, like O’Connor, that multiple viewpoints are held in tension. She includes an excellent chapter engaging dialogic interaction across the book of Lamentations. While regularly mentioning point of view, however, her primary focus is on the representation of prophetic motifs in Lamentations. Miller reads polyphonically, looking at interaction of perspective, but focuses especially on double voicing (dialogue two) rather than the polyphonic dialogism of the idea (dialogue three). What is lacking is a sustained study of evaluative point of view throughout Lamentations.

2.4 Conclusion: Toward a Method

Readers of Lamentations who affirm the ongoing usefulness and validity of the biblical record are interested in identifying the theology, or message, of the text. But how is one to determine the prevailing perspective, when neither God, nor his usually appointed agents speak? When there is no narrator to adjudicate how various speakers’ voices should be assessed, but instead a company of characters presenting points of view in competition? Bakhtin’s dialogism of the idea provides a framework for understanding these competing

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219 Berlin, Lamentations, 7.
220 Hillers, Lamentations (1972), 17
221 O’Connor, Tears of the World, 23, 28 and passim.
223 Miller, “Reading Voices,” 394.
224 See §1.8.
perspectives, as equally important integral points of view, interacting dialogically in a polyphonic text. In their plurality they grasp at dialogic truth, truth that need not be subservient to a single monologic message.\(^\text{225}\)

Could one of these integral personalities (or the authoritative traditions to which they appeal) in Lamentations represent “the” perspective of the text, and thus its message or theology? Is there some overarching ideology to which all the speakers submit in their evaluations? And where might one look to find it? According to Polzin, who works with the Deuteronomistic history “it is only by a close compositional analysis that we can come to some conclusion about the relative strength of each voice.”\(^\text{226}\) I carry out a compositional analysis of Lamentations, employing Uspensky’s work on evaluative point of view to ask, whom or what each speaker deems to be ultimately to blame for the destruction that has come upon Jerusalem. This must necessarily include a discussion of each speakers’ assessment of the relationship between sin and suffering. In the literature review, I showed how this relationship could be construed, theologically, as either theodic or antitheodic. Walter Brueggemann suggests that in the Hebrew Bible, theodic appeal and theodic protest (antitheodicy) concern who is considered to be ultimately at fault for Israel’s troubles.\(^\text{227}\)

Consequently, to assess theological evaluative point of view in relation to theodic and antitheodic potential in Lamentations, I look at who each speaker blames for Zion’s suffering, with a particular emphasis on how the relationship between sin and suffering is construed. Is suffering accepted as just punishment for sin, such that Zion is to blame? Or is such severe suffering, despite any...

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\(^{225}\) Having set out something of Bakhtin’s work, I undertake my analyses with reference to polyphony and dialogism, but without further frequent reference. Bakhtin is, after all, the frame and not the picture.

\(^{226}\) Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 64.

\(^{227}\) That is, “[t]he ground of theodic appeal to Yahweh and theodic protest against Yahweh is Israel’s conviction that in a covenantal ordering of the world, Israel has just claims against Yahweh and is not only free but obligated to insists on those claims against Yahweh. . . . It is Israel’s sense of its own just claim that leads to the astonishing awareness that fault may lie with an enemy whom Yahweh must resist, or fault may lie with Yahweh, either through passive negligence or through active abuse. Either way, the fault of the enemy or the fault of Yahweh, Israel’s speech is resistant to the acceptance of full fault for itself” (Brueggemann, “Aspects of Theodicy,” 264, emphases original).
extremity of sin, an abuse of power such that YHWH is to blame? Who speaks, to whom, and who or what do they say is responsible for Zion’s pain?228

Only then can I ask if there is a controlling point of view. Can a prevailing monologic perspective be identified? If so, is this one of theodicy or antitheodicy? I demonstrate the ways in which both theodic and antitheodic readers have supported their case for reading Lamentations monologically, and argue that Lamentations is better read as a polyphony, dialogically.

2.5 Postscript: A Note on the Attempt to Find an Organising Principle in Bakhtin, in Dostoevsky, and in Lamentations

I noted above that secondary scholars of Bakhtin often attempt to organise or systematise Bakhtin for the sake of coherent explication of his concepts.229 Somewhat sardonically, Hirschkop observes that whatever organising principle is found to make “sense” of Bakhtin (e.g. dialogue, answerability etc), it usually reflects what interpreters want to find. He criticises attempts to capture “the spirit of Bakhtin’s work” for providing Bakhtin scholars

not with a knowledge of his work, but with a series of Bakhtin-figures or totems, each equally ambitious, equally insightful, equally dogmatic, and absolutely different from every other figure. The spirit of Bakhtin’s enterprise usually turns out to be something global, impressive, fairly vague, and uncannily familiar.230

Ironically, then, the totalising tendencies of biblical interpreters, in conversation with whom I employ Bakhtin’s theory, are mirrored in interpreters of Bakhtin.

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228 Cf. Mintz, “Who speaks to whom about whom as seen from whose point of view? It is in the play of these questions, which defines the rhetorical situation of the text, that the deepest theological business of Lamentations gets transacted” (Mintz, Hurban, 26).
229 See §2.2.
This is precisely what I take issue with in my reading of readings of Lamentations. Indeed, this is the very issue with which Bakhtin himself took issue in the interpretation of Dostoevsky. Bakhtin’s PDP is, at least in part, a reaction to monologising tendencies in Dostoevsky criticism. Bakhtin’s survey of readers of Dostoevsky concludes by lamenting that “[e]veryone interprets in his own way Dostoevsky’s ultimate word, but all equally interpret it as a single word, a single voice, a single accent, and therein lies their fundamental mistake.”\textsuperscript{231} That is, while recognising the “difficulty of opting for and sticking to one or the other of the swarming ideologies that collide with each other in Dostoevsky’s world,” ultimately, “sooner or later they end up choosing one of the conflicting voices as ‘truly representing’ Dostoevsky’s point of view, which is really their own point of view.”\textsuperscript{232} In Hirschkop’s terms, when readers set out to determine Dostoevsky’s point of view, they find Dostoevsky-totems, that reflect back what they wish to find in the text. Just as Bakhtin protested in regards to Dostoevsky’s work, argues Hirschkop, so, ironically, Bakhtin’s work itself is subjected to monologising efforts. Readers of Bakhtin seeking an organising principle find their own approach reflected in their Bakhtin-totems.

Similar tendencies are evident in theological readings of Lamentations. Even when interpreters recognise multiple voices and acknowledge both theodic and anti-theodic potentials, the usual approach is to identify a particular stance that they insist is the real perspective of the text.\textsuperscript{233} That is, they find Lamentations-totems, indicative of the theological commitments they bring to the text. In all three cases–reading Dostoevsky, reading Bakhtin, and reading Lamentations—the same enterprise appears each time. The drive is to organise, classify, and systematise, to determine the answer, the prevailing point of view. In short, the aim is to monologise.

\textsuperscript{231} Bakhtin, \textit{PDP}, 43, emphasis original.
\textsuperscript{232} Clark and Holquist, \textit{Mikhail Bakhtin}, 240. See Bakhtin, \textit{PDP}, 3-46.
\textsuperscript{233} See §1.8.2.
CHAPTER THREE:
LAMENTATIONS 1

3.1 Introduction to Lamentations 1

This chapter reads Lamentations 1 attentive to the evaluative perspectives of its two speakers, the Lamenter and Zion. The key question is, who each speaker, in any given utterance, blames for Zion’s suffering. I engage with interpreters who read Lam 1 either theodically, such that Zion is at fault through her sinfulness, or antitheodically, such that YHWH is at fault for his extreme punishing actions. The chapter demonstrates that the evaluative perspectives of speakers in Lam 1 alter in dialogic interaction. Each perspective is mitigated, if not entirely undermined, by the Other’s. Looking to either voice for the theological message of the text is thus complicated by the changes in perspective that occur. Rather than reading monologically, then, Lam 1 is more helpfully conceived of as a polyphony.

This chapter also introduces some key issues, beginning with an explanation of the difficulty in even determining utterance boundaries to start with. I then identify the speakers in Lam 1, and draw attention to the problem of the metaphor of female Zion for 21st century readings of the text. Then I undertake a compositional analysis for the text. For each utterance, I present brief overviews of relevant interpretative issues, and ask: who speaks, to whom, and what is their evaluative point of view, viz., their evaluation of the relationship between sin and suffering. These evaluations are then engaged with the literature to demonstrate how interpreters invest utterances with theological significance to

1 Cf. Miller, “Reading Voices,” 393-408; Mandolfo, Daughter Zion, 76.

2 Cf. §2.2.1.
read either theodically or antithedically. I conclude by examining the interaction of points of view across the entire chapter, asking if there is a dominant theological point of view.

### 3.1.1 Units for Analysis

I divide the text into utterances based primarily on changes in grammatical person and/or addressee that could indicate a change in speaking voice. As a further criterion for determining change in speaker, Knut Heim includes “modifications of perspective and tone.” Similarly, in his analysis of Jeremiah, Mark Biddle identifies “tensions of theme, viewpoint, presupposition,” along with grammatical, syntactical, and structural indicators, as clues that suggest the speaking voice has changed. As Biddle himself acknowledges, however, it is entirely possible that a single speaker’s utterance may itself contain tensions of theme and viewpoint. Indeed, it is precisely these tensions of viewpoint in which this thesis is particularly interested. I rely more heavily on grammatical indicators to distinguish between utterances, and only once the boundaries are established do I look to point of view for any changes in perspective that may have occurred. But, again, a grammatical change in person or addressee does not necessarily imply a change in speaker. It may simply be, for example, that the speaker has turned to a different addressee. Determining changes in speaker is further complicated by the lack of explicit indicators of discourse, such as “then she said” that appear more commonly in narrative texts. The poetry of Lamentations, for the most part, lacks any such indicators as its speakers cry out their pain directly. Identifying units of speech, then, is contestable. As

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3 Cf. §1.8.2.4 p. 62.
4 Cf. Heim, “Personification of Jerusalem,” 147; Biddle, Polyphony and Symphony, 10.
5 Heim, “Personification of Jerusalem,” 147.
6 Biddle, Polyphony and Symphony, 10.
7 Biddle, Polyphony and Symphony, 10.
8 Cf. Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 134. See Meier, Speaking of Speaking, 1-55, for direct discourse in Hebrew narrative texts.
9 Apart from when secondary speakers are quoted by one of the primary speakers, e.g., onlookers (2:15c; 4:15a?), children (2:12b), enemies (2:16b,c), the nations (4:15c?), and once, potentially, YHWH (3:57).
Adele Berlin observes, any “subdivisions are artificial constructs of the exegete.” Indeed, the very fact that “different exegetes find different speakers is a sign of the variety of interpretations that are possible, or a sign that such identification is as much a product of the interpreter as a feature of the text.” My divisions, then, are necessarily provisional and open to interpretation.

3.1.2 Speakers in Lamentations

There are two speakers in Lam 1, the Lamenter and Zion. Each gains approximately an equal hearing, with the Lamenter speaking in verses 1-11b (interrupted by Zion at 1:9c); and Zion in verses 11c-22 (interrupted by the Lamenter at 1:17a-c). Crucially, I do not equate either of these voices’ points of view a priori with the Poet’s perspective or the perspective of the text. Rather, I treat both as constructed voices within the poem-world and observe the way they interact dialogically. This understanding of speakers as constructed characters is usually implicitly understood in the case of Zion, whom commentators are happy to treat as a constructed character. It is not so clear in the case of the Lamenter, however, whose voice is often conflated with that of the “poet” or “author.” The Lamenter, however, is just as much a construction of the Poet as Zion herself.

10 Berlin, Lamentations, 5.
11 Berlin, Lamentations, 6.
13 E.g., Hillers conflates the opening speaker with “the poet himself” (Hillers, Lamentations, 79). Berlin rightly urges that speaking voices not be confused for “authors, witnesses, or historical persons” (Berlin, Lamentations, 6)
3.1.2.1 The Lamenter

Commentators identify the opening speaker of Lamentations variously as Jeremiah, the narrator, didactic voice, observer, or reporter. All these appellations are problematic in one way or another. Even if this voice could be equated with an author, Jeremianic authorship has long been refuted. Naming the voice after the prophet is thus confusing, if not plain incorrect. The favoured term by far is “narrator,” and the Lamenter does exhibit some narrator-like characteristics. He portrays what he sees from a bird’s eye view, reports actions, and describes actors. The advantage of a general term like “narrator” is that it is not necessary to distinguish between different narrators in Lam 1, 2, and 4: all may be cast simply as “the narrator.”

But Lamentations is, after all, poetry, not narrative. There is no fabula unfolding in time and space, no story with beginning, middle, and end. I question, then, the aptness of applying the term “narrator” to any voice in Lamentations. Further, biblical narrators stand outside of the story, describing and evaluating authoritatively but invisibly, as from a distance. They are not usually participants in the drama like the other characters. While some commentators do understand the first speaker of Lamentations as an objective observer, he does not stand far off, describing dispassionately—or at least, not

15 Lee, The Singers of Lamentations, 55. If not Jeremiah himself, Lee suggests this speaker “at least re-sings his utterances” (Lee, The Singers of Lamentations, 49).
16 E.g., Bergant, Lamentations, 15; Trudinger, “Lamentations as City and Land,” 45; Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 84; House, Lamentations, 342; O’Connor, Tears of the World, 17. Heim initially calls the opening speaker the “default voice,” but goes on to refer to this voice as the “narrator” (Heim, “Personification of Jerusalem,” 147).
17 Mandolfo, Daughter Zion.
18 Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 141; Berlin, Lamentations, 48.
20 See §8.1.3.
21 Cf. Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 141; §2.3.2.
22 See Bal, Narratology, 5. Hebrew poetry “refuses on principle to be controlled or determined by the articialations, constrictions and corresponding rules of plot and chronological sequence” (Fokkelman, Reading Biblical Narrative, 171-72; cf. Estes, “Biblical Lyric Poetry,” 429).
23 Cf. Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art, 26; Fokkelman, Reading Biblical Narrative, 123; Sternberg, Poetics, 129-85. See further §8.2.1.3.
for long. Rather, he is intimately involved with the scene and enters lament with the very bowels of his being (cf. 2:11). Further, any “authoritative,” or “narratorial,” perspective he may express is challenged in dialogic interaction with Zion. He does not equate, then, to an omniscient, authoritative narrator. He is simply one speaker within the poem-world, like Zion, the צו, and the Community Voice.  

Mandolfo’s “didactic voice” (DV) also works with the notion of one speaker expressing an authoritative perspective, specifically on behalf of the deity or the deity’s agents. That is, the DV is “a third-person voice that speaks of and for rather than to God.” Mandolfo develops this concept from her reading of traditional authoritative reorienting voices in the Psalms. She then employs the term in her discussion of Lamentations to demonstrate the difference between the DV in Psalms of Lament and the DV in Lamentations. The term is helpful in conveying the character of the third person voice when he speaks for or on behalf of the deity, or on behalf of established, normative traditions. As Mandolfo herself explains, however, this voice, which in Psalms and Latter Prophets consistently speaks on behalf of YHWH, is in Lamentations “wrest[ed]” around to Zion’s point of view. The DV is thus not always an

26 It is possible to speak of narrators in relation to poetry, especially for epic poetry, which is much more akin to narrative (see, e.g., Regier, “Dubious Narrators,” 69-70; Klawitter, The Enigmatic Narrator, ix; Cunningham, “The Epic Narrator,” 215). Narrative poetry is scarce in the Hebrew Bible, however, with only a few exceptions (Pss 78, 105, 106; cf. Alter, Biblical Poetry, 27; Fokkelman, Major Poems, 74).
27 Cf. Lanahan, “The Speaking Voice,” 41. Conway also distinguishes between narrators of Hebrew narrative texts, and the opening speaker in Lamentations, in her recent Masters’ thesis (Conway, “From Suffering Toward Redemption,” 12). In the absence of an omniscient narrator to govern evaluative perspective, Conway asks similar questions to me: “If the male voice is not an omniscient external narrator, where is the normative voice in Lamentations?” (Conway, “From Suffering Toward Redemption,” 12). While not undertaking the same analysis with Bakhtin, she too finds that theological “truth in Lamentations arises out of the interaction of these two voices [the Lamenter and Zion], and also the third voice of the community” (Conway, “From Suffering Toward Redemption,” 13). This synergy between independent studies is suggestive of the burgeoning possibilities in dialogic readings.
28 Mandolfo, Daughter Zion, 60.
29 Mandolfo, Daughter Zion, 60, emphasis original.
30 Mandolfo, “Dialogic Form Criticism,” 69-90; Mandolfo, Daughter Zion, 55-77.
31 Mandolfo, Daughter Zion, 76. Lam 1-2 “is the only dialogic text in the Bible . . . in which this alignment takes place” (Mandolfo, Daughter Zion, 60).
appropriate description of the Lamenter’s voice in Lamentations, as he does not always speak on behalf of the divine. “Observer” and “reporter” capture something of the Lamenter’s role in describing Zion’s distress. But neither indicates the full extent to which he is, or at least becomes, involved in Daughter Zion’s plight. They too suggest a speaker standing afar off, describing the disaster dispassionately from a distance.

I refer to the opening third person speaker of Lamentations as the “Lamenter.” As narrative texts have narrators, so it is appropriate for laments to have a Lamenter. Like “narrator,” the term “Lamenter” is general enough to allow that the Lamenter of Lam 1 may or may not be the same as the Lamenter of Lam 2 and/or 4, without having to distinguish definitively between them. Unlike the narrators of biblical narrative texts, the Lamenter is not an omniscient manipulator of the characters, but a participating speaker in the poetry.

A preponderance of commentators do, though, characterise the Lamenter precisely as an objective onlooker, describing the scene dispassionately. O’Connor is particularly keen to portray him as “at first a distant and chiding commentator” in order to support her argument that he becomes a sympathetic witness to Zion’s cry. Given his vocabulary, and the lament and dirge conventions he employs, however, it is difficult to reconcile the Lamenter’s stance with that of an impartial observer. Even when his reproach of Zion is most evident (1-9b), his speech is cut with sympathy. The tone and tenor of his language is far from objective, it is bitter and filled with weeping. The opening ḫ Proper itself connotes worlds of pain, at once removing the Lamenter’s speech

32 Recall that “lament” is my shorthand for the poems of Lamentations, recognising that they in fact participate in multiple genres (see §1.7.3).
33 Cf. Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 134.
34 Cf. Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 141.
35 E.g., “a distant observer, an ‘objective’ reporter” who is “unemotional, (O’Connor, Tears of the World, 17); “dispassionate” (Bergant, Lamentations, 15); “a more objective reporter” (Lanahan, “The Speaking Voice,” 41); “direct, enigmatic” (Landy, “Lamentations,” 329); a “detached voice” (Hillers, Lamentations, 79).
from any hint of a cold, factual domain. O’Connor’s observation that the Lamenter becomes more sympathetic to Zion’s plight as Lamentations proceeds is compelling, but he is already more than a disengaged “reporter” right from the outset of the book.

At this juncture, observe that I have thus far referred to the Lamenter as male. This should be questioned, given that mourning in the ANE was the prerogative and domain of women. Why then, do I assume—as does almost every other commentator—that this Lamenter is male? I suspect the reason is historical. The long standing association with Jeremiah, even once Jeremianic authorship is discounted, leads to an assumption that male speakership is normative; apart, of course, from when the obviously female Zion speaks. Given the female Zion, the wealth of female imagery within the chapter, and the association of women with mourning, however, this may not be a good assumption. While sticking with the status quo in this project, further work could fruitfully explore the possibility of an opening female speaker in Lamentations.

3.1.2.2 Zion the City, the Woman, and the People

The second speaker is Zion, the city personified. Determining a title that captures her identity as representative of the city and its inhabitants, as well as her metaphorical identity as a particular woman, is something of a challenge. Seidman’s “city-woman” encompasses the geographical and metaphorical aspects, but is somewhat impersonal and does not entirely portray the collective nature of the trope, that she represents the people. To include both the personal and collective, however, calling her Zion the city-woman-people, would soon become unwieldy. I refer to “Zion” as shorthand for the enigmatic entity who is simultaneously city, woman, and representative of a people.

Other terms for Zion in Lamentations include Jerusalem (1:7, 8, 17; 2:10 4:12), Daughter Jerusalem (2:13, 15), Zion (1:4, 17; 2:6; 4:2, 11; 5:11, 5:18), Daughter Zion (1:6; 2:1, 4, 8, 10, 18; 4:22), Virgin Daughter Zion (2:13), Judah (1:3, 5:11), Daughter Judah (2:2, 5), Virgin Daughter Judah (1:15), and Daughter my People (2:11; 3:48; 4:3, 6, 10). The city, the nation, and the people are also referred to a number of times in male terms, as Israel (2:1, 3, 5) and Jacob (1:17; 2:2, 2:3).

Terms are concentrated differently in each chapter, with a discernible shift in usage as the book progresses. The proper nouns Zion, Judah, Jacob, and Israel are prevalent in Lam 1 and 2, where poetic personification of the city as woman is to the fore. In Lam 1 the metaphorical woman is prominent, while in Lam 2 the physical space becomes more evident, with reference to geographical features, such as the dwellings, stronghold, or tent of daughter Zion. Things happen “in” daughter Judah/Zion in Lam 2 (e.g. 2:5, 6), to the people living within her broken down walls. The male terms Israel and Jacob appear only in Lam 1 (1:17) and 2 (2:1, 2, 3, 5). In Lam 3, the city never takes a proper name, appearing only as “Daughter my People” (3:48). This term is favoured in Lam 4 (4:3, 6, 10), and when “Jerusalem” appears in Lam 4:12 it is perhaps more literally, referring to the gates of the city. By the end of Lam 4 the representative figure of Zion is addressed, once, briefly (4:22a), before disappearing entirely. When “Zion” and “Judah” do appear in Lam 5, they take primarily geographical referents, rather than functioning as obvious personification. When the communal voice (CV) takes up the lament in Lam 5, then, the explicitly female figure all but disappears, contributing to the silencing of the female in the book of Lamentations overall.

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42 Dobbs-Allsopp suggests that “Lady/Mistress over the Nations” (דְּשֵׁרָה בֶּנְיָמִין, 1:1) and “Princess over the Provinces” (דְּשַׁרְתָּ בֶּנְיָמִין, 1:1) are further titles, indicative of her prior royal status (Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 51, 55). Edom is also addressed in female terms (Lam 4:21-22), see §6.2.5.
44 In 5:11 women are raped “in” Zion and Judah; 5:18 refers to the physical temple Mount Zion.
45 See further §6.5.
In terms of meaning, “Jerusalem” refers first to the historical city, the political and military centre of Judah.\textsuperscript{46} More specifically, “Zion” originally referred to the holy hill within Jerusalem,\textsuperscript{47} the site of the temple understood as the particular locus of the dwelling place of YHWH.\textsuperscript{48} The term “Zion” thus has religious overtones, though it comes to be understood as representative of, if not synonymous with, the city itself,\textsuperscript{49} this being especially favoured in poetic language.\textsuperscript{50} “Judah” geographically encompasses the entire nation.\textsuperscript{51} Both Zion and Judah, however, come to be understood as representative of the city Jerusalem, the land, and the people.\textsuperscript{52}

Second, particularly in prophetic rhetoric, “Jerusalem,” “Zion,” and “Judah” are understood metaphorically, as a personification of a woman associated with the city.\textsuperscript{53} Femaleness is further emphasised by the prefixes “daughter” and “virgin daughter.”\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{46} Cf. 2 Sam 5:7; 1 Kgs 8:1; 1 Chr 11:5; 2 Chr 5:2.
\textsuperscript{47} Cf. 2 Kgs 19:31; Ps 2:6; 48:2, 11; 74:2; 78:68; 125:1; 133:3; Isa 2:3; 4:5; 8:18; 10:12, 32; 16:1; 18:7; 24:23; 29:8; 37:32; Jer 31:12; Joel 2:1, 32; Obad 17, 21.
\textsuperscript{48} Cf. Ps 9:11; 50:2; 76:2; 132:13; Isa 12:6; 31:9; 33:5; 60:14; Jer 8:19; Joel 3:16, 17, 21; Amos 1:2; Mic 4:7; Zech 8:3.
\textsuperscript{49} Maier distinguishes between Zion, as the temple mount, and Jerusalem as the “political entity” (Maier, Daughter Zion, Mother Zion, 1).
\textsuperscript{50} Jerusalem occurs 660 times in the Hebrew Bible, while “Zion” occurs 154 times, and only in poetry (Maier, Daughter Zion, Mother Zion, 1).
\textsuperscript{51} In Lam 1:3 Judah goes into exile, perhaps representing those who were taken to Babylon.
\textsuperscript{52} Cf. the poetic parallelism between Judah and Jerusalem in, e.g., Isa 3:8; 5:3; Jer 14:2; Joel 3:20; Amos 2:5; Mic 1:9; Zeph 1:4; and between Judah and Zion in Jer 14:19; Lam 5:11. Labahn gives Daughter Zion and Daughter Judah slightly different nuances, associating Zion with salvation, and Judah with the history of the people (Labahn, “Fire from Above,” 252). Frymer-Kensky suggests Zion is used in love whereas Jerusalem is used for anger (Frymer-Kensky, “Zion, the Beloved Woman,” 169).
\textsuperscript{53} See, e.g., the female prophetic personifications of Jerusalem (Isa 4:4; 37:22; 40:2; 51:17; 52:1; 2: 66:10, 11; Jer 2:2; 4:14-18; 14:2; 51:35; Ezek 16:2-3; 23:4; Mic 1:9; 4:8; Zeph 3:14; 9:9), Zion (Isa 1:8; 3:16-17; 4:4; 10:32; 16:1; 37:22; 49:14; 51:3; 52:2-2; 62:11; 66:8; Jer 4:31; 6:2, 23; 30:17, Joel 2:23; Mic 1:13; 4:8-13; Zeph 3:13; Zech 2:10; 8:2; 9:9, 13), and Judah (Jer 3:7; 8, 10, 11, 18; Hos 4:15; Mic 1:9). Galambush contends that when Jerusalem and Samaria are personified the context is “always ‘adultery’ on the part of the city” (Galambush, Yahweh’s Wife, 44). For Galambush, the metaphor is always negative, such that “in the Hebrew Bible personified cities, almost without exception, are condemned, destroyed, or have their destruction lamented” (Galambush, Yahweh’s Wife, 26). According to Galambush the only exception is 2 Sam 20:19, with even the Zion language in 2 Isa being questionable: “Zion in Deutero-Isaiah is loved and comforted, but this apparently positive personification is ambiguous. The promises of comfort to Zion assume the brutal punishment ‘Daughter Zion’ has already, and justly, received for her sins” (Galambush, Yahweh’s Wife, 26n3; cf. Harding, “Resisting Reader,” 150).
\textsuperscript{54} Commentators question whether Zion is a daughter (דָּוָּרָתֶּן, “daughter Zion” and similar as
Third, the metaphorical Zion becomes a representative for all her inhabitants. She is a particular woman, but she bears the pain of a people in her (female) body. When I refer to “Zion,” then, this encompasses her collective identity as representative of the city and the land and, by implication, its inhabitants; as well as her metaphorical identity as a particular woman. The complex of images connoted by “Zion” incorporates elements of the physical city, the corporate identity of the people of Jerusalem and Judah, and the female body. The femaleness of Zion is vital to the trope, and the personification carries both political and religious import. “Zion” is at once city, woman, and people. The names by which Zion is known in Lamentations alternate and occur in parallel, suggesting a bleeding of the various senses across any boundaries between them. The effect is a richness of imagery that encompasses swathes of geographical, religious, and political potentials, all woven together in one body.

3.1.2.3 Problems with the Metaphor

The genius of the metaphor is the pathos it engenders for a particular person, a degraded woman. Zion the woman speaks to entreat some sense of relief for her people (Lam 1:15-16, 18-19; 2:20-22). Their representation by a female figure, apophasis, suggests a need to entreat in relation to a woman, especially since there is no proper feminine name for Zion. The traditional reading of נָּשָׁה as “daughter of Zion” (Stinespring, “No Daughter of Zion,” 133; cf. Fitzgerald, “BTWLT and BT,” 171; Frymer-Kensky, In the Wake of the Goddesses, 169; NIDOTTE, 780; O’Brien, Challenging Prophetic Metaphor, 130) is not necessarily wrong, but it is important to recall that נָּשָׁה is a poetic appositional genitive, or whether Zion the city has a daughter (the “daughter of Zion”). Stinespring challenged the traditional rendering of נָּשָׁה as “daughter of Zion,” arguing that “daughter-of” terms should be read as appositional genitives: “daughter/maiden Zion” (Stinespring, “No Daughter of Zion,” 133; cf. Fitzgerald, “BTWLT and BT,” 171; Frymer-Kensky, In the Wake of the Goddesses, 169; NIDOTTE, 780; O’Brien, Challenging Prophetic Metaphor, 130). Dobbs-Allsopp, however, argues that נָּשָׁה (geographical name) is a genitive of location, derived from the city-goddess tradition so that נָּשָׁה should read “daughter of Zion.” He objects to the grammatical argument, arguing that the “of” should be retained, while still reading the phrase as referring to the city itself (Dobbs-Allsopp, “Syntagma of Bat,” 451-70).

55 Cf. the close connection between Zion and her inhabitants in, e.g., Isa 1:27; 4:3; 10:24; 30:19; 37:32; 51:16; 61:3; Jer 51:35; Joel 2:23; between Jerusalem and inhabitants in, e.g., Isa 5:3; 8:14; 22:21; 30:19; Jer 4:3-4; 8:1; 11:2, 9, 12; 13:13; 17:20, 25; 18:11; 19:3; 25:2; 32:32; 33:10; 35:13, 17; 36:31; 42:18; Ezek 11:15; 12:19; 15:6; Zeph 1:4; Zech 12:5, 7-8, 10; 13:1; and Judah and the people in, e.g., Jer 4:3-4; 7:2, 30; 11:2, 9; 17:25; 18:11; 25:2; 30:3; 35:13; 36:31; Hos 6:11; Zech 1:21. See Turner for how the image allows readers to move seamlessly from the woman to the city and its inhabitants and back again (Turner, “Daughter Zion, 193-204). There is an important connection between Zion and the image of the woman, especially in Lam 2, see, e.g., daughter Zion//the splendour of Israel (2:1); the dwellings of Jacob//strongholds of Judah (2:2); daughter Jerusalem//virgin daughter Zion (2:13) (cf. Maier, Daughter Zion, Mother Zion, 2). Hillers suggests variations simply serve poetic purposes, making the personification evident and fitting the line length required for metrical purposes (Hillers, Lamentations, 31).
however, is not without its issues. William F. Lanahan observes that by virtue of the metaphor, Jerusalem becomes “an object bereft of all dignity, reduced to the level of a thing to be gawked at. The personification functions at this point merely as a rhetorical device by which the city’s degradation is intensified. Converting the city into a woman makes her fall all the more shameful.”

For Lanahan, then, Zion the defiled woman victim is simply a useful literary image, able to draw disdain from an audience. Similarly, for Alan Mintz, “the serviceableness of the image of Jerusalem as an abandoned fallen woman lies in the precise register of pain it articulates.” For Mintz, the “usefulness” of Zion derives from the image’s ability to draw sympathy from an audience. He lauds the literary possibility of the metaphor without so much as a “too bad,” declaring that it “is in the illicit aspect of womanhood that the possibilities of the figure are best exploited.” So Mintz pronounces female sexual activity to be “illicit,” and there to be “exploited,” and for Lanahan, the female aspect of the trope usefully connotes especial shame. In like manner, Heim blithely extols the brilliance of the female metaphor, its versatility (she can be wife, daughter, lover), and its expedience in enabling dialogue, without any challenge of the use of a particularly female metaphor to represent a nation’s sins, simply asserting that “[t]he personification of Jerusalem is used ingeniously.”

How is it that these (male) commentators can comment on the degradation and shame of a woman, only insofar as it is a “serviceable” and “ingenious” image, playing on the rhetoric of shame and “illicit” sexuality? Discussions of female

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58 Mintz, Hurban, 24.
59 Mintz, Hurban, 25.
60 Heim, “Personification of Jerusalem,” 140.
61 Cf. Brenner’s description of pornoprophetic passages (Hos 1-3, Jer 2-5; Ezek 16; 23; Isa 47), which “invariably reflect female sexuality as negative and male sexuality as neutral or positive” (Brenner, “Pornoprophetics Revisited,” 63). Brenner contends that the “dual image of husband/wife and, implicitly, male/ female sexuality is . . . unbalanced. The ‘husband’ is divine, correct, faithful, positive, voiced. The ‘wife’ is human, morally corrupt, faithless, negative, silent or silenced: her voice, if heard at all, is embedded within the male discourse of the text” (Brenner, “Pornoprophetics Revisited,” 63). Lamentations participates in this same rhetoric to a certain extent, although the YHWH/husband image is not explicit. Further, in Lamentations the female figure finds her voice in a way that does not happen in
Zion can be cut with judgement, perhaps not always intentionally, but simply as a result of reading the female figure as merely a piece of useful rhetorical imagery. Mintz, for example, describes Zion as having “amused herself promiscuously without giving heed to the consequences of her defilement.” For Mintz, “[e]ven in the anguish of her victimage Zion is not held to be innocent of complicity in her fate” presupposing that “in her glory Fair Zion conducted herself with easy virtue and ‘gave no thought to her end’ (1:8).” Even as he celebrates the literary potency of the female image, he denigrates the female character.

Further, Mintz sets female Zion in Lam 1 and 2 against the male לון in Lam 3. His discussion of personification in Lamentations explains that the “nation is represented as an abandoned woman, or, in a more complex instance, as a persecuted man.” The male in Lamentations is thus already deemed “more complex” than the female. Mintz continues to promulgate this assessment, determining that “a woman’s voice, according to the cultural code of Lamentations, can achieve expressivity but not reflection.” In order to undertake “acts of reasoning and cognition,” then, a “new, male figure is required.” The female is emotional, illicit, and promiscuous. The male is reasoned, appropriately convicted, and justifies God.

Linafelt rightly takes Mintz to task for too facilely characterising the female as the emotional victim and the male as the theological penitent in Lamentations. In the text, asserts Linafelt, “the man is also presented as victimized and . . . Zion may be construed as doing theology.” Further, in the latter verses of Lam

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62 Mintz, Hurban, 24.
63 Mintz, Hurban, 25.
64 Mintz, Hurban, 23.
65 Mintz, Hurban, 32.
66 Mintz, Hurban, 32.
67 Mintz, Hurban, 33.
68 Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 6-7.
69 Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 6.
3, the male figure too “abandons a theologizing based on reason and cognition for a theological stance not unlike that of Zion in chapters 1 and 2.” Kalmanofsky also challenges the disjunction between emotional female and theologising male, analysing the prayer strategies of male and female figures in Lamentations and finding that both employ prayer to “confront more than to appease God.” These efforts go some way toward correcting the twin tendencies to look down on Zion and elevate the . But the ease with which commentators can unquestioningly accept a damning assessment of the female without exploring the potentially damaging effects of the metaphor for real women raises a red flag. Indeed, rather than challenging the imagery, Deryn Guest observes that “[t]he commentaries have reinscribed the violence within the text without acknowledging the sheer terror involved with the image.”

Naturally, there are cultural and social explanations for the female imagery, which commentators sometimes employ to defend the legitimacy of allowing ongoing gendered violence to be forever immemorialised in the text. First, they argue, when placed in its historical and cultural setting the metaphor “Zion as woman” makes perfect sense. There are good reasons for the use of the female metaphor, not least its origin amongst other ANE city-personifications. Further, once the picture of an adulterous woman running amok among the prophets is established, it becomes a stock image that a Poet versed in his

71 Kalmanofsky, “Gender and Prayer,” 56.
72 Cf. Guest, “A Recriminative Response,” 413, 420; Weems, *Battered Love*, 87. Baumann identifies three potential dangers for readers. First, for women, “the danger of reading the texts in such a way that women identify with the biblical view of Israel/Jerusalem, assume the guilt for the violence that was suffered, and accept the role of victims of violence” (Baumann, *Love and Violence*, 229). Second, for men, the “threat to male humanity when men identify too strongly with the dominant God-images, formulated in male terms” (Baumann, *Love and Violence*, 230). Third, “Seeing God as a righteous perpetrator of violence and a ‘legitimator’ of male violence does damage to the image of God” (Baumann, *Love and Violence*, 231). Maier identifies four key feminist critiques of the marriage metaphor, first, it “equates God with Male,” second, it “gives divine sanction to male hierarchy,” third, it “reinforces the domestic violence,” and fourth, it is “‘pornographic’” (Maier, *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor*, 32-35).
metaphoric traditions would be foolish not to use. Everyone knows that “adulterous woman” is a cipher for idolatry, pursuing foreign gods, and making alliances with pagan nations. Yet while the adulterous, defiled woman is rhetorically useful, and understandable contextually, is it excusable as an image? Understanding the origin and background of the image of city-woman does not stop me from objecting to the use of a woman’s naked body to support one’s rhetoric.

Second, commentators contend that the female portrayal of Zion is “only” a metaphor and has nothing to do with the rape and shame of real women. But metaphors are powerful, and have a long history of being read “both ways,” such that tenor and vehicle become mutually implicating. That is, once the metaphorical image of Zion as harlot is established and it becomes justifiable to rape and abuse her in punishment for some perceived wrong, it is a small step to justifying real abuses. I cannot, therefore, let the potential damage to womenkind inculcated by these images go completely unremarked. Guest goes as far as to claim that “the literary abuse directed at Zion/Woman is no less damaging than the abuse acted upon women in actuality.”

Third, commentators sometimes defend the appropriateness of the metaphor on the grounds that such graphic imagery is supposed to elicit shock and revulsion in the prophets, and pity and compassion in Lamentations. But this is a woman’s body, naked and on display, in a way that is (almost) never done with

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75 Cf. Weems, Battered Love, 13. Pardes comments that in Hosea and Ezekiel “female eroticism is synonymous with abomination, promiscuity, and infidelity” (Pardes, Countertraditions, 134), surely connotations which are also exploited in Lamentations.
82 While not defending the use of metaphorical violence as such, Kalmanofsky notes the personification as a “rhetorical device intended to heighten the emotional intensity” (Kalmanofsky, “Gender and Prayer,” 55; cf. O’Connor, Tears of the World, 14; Berlin, Lamentations, 9; Weems, Battered Love, 13).
biblical male bodies. In the context of a 21st century woman’s reading, then, I carry a concern for the ongoing potency and power of the imagery, particularly for women who, like me, wish to read the text as Scripture, somehow faithfully.

In feminist comment there is some attempt to address these concerns. While much of the work revolves around the marriage metaphor in the prophets, Guest takes up the same imagery when it appears in Lamentations, objecting to the portrayal of Zion as a woman behind whom the (male) elite responsible for the city’s downfall might “hide.” For Guest, the unacceptable scapegoating of the female draws the assessment that Lamentations should be excised, thus ironically negating, in part, her own argument, given she engages with Lamentations in the first place! Further, as Thomas points out, Guest fails to observe adequately that the female is not the only one who is “blamed” in Lamentations. Guest’s work does, however, raise crucial questions of gender in Lamentations and is an excellent point from which further feminist readings of Lamentations might proceed.

Baumann briefly surveys feminist critique of the marriage metaphor imagery in Lamentations, warning of the “danger that gender stereotypes that legitimize violence against women may be strengthened and cemented.” She notes that the most extreme suffering in Lamentations is portrayed with situations that are likely to have occurred in the lives of real women in the fallout of war and famine. Drawing on the notion that metaphors become mutually implicating, she also observes that when the “ethical impurity of Israel/Jerusalem is

83 There is scant reference to shaving the hair of the head, the “feet” (potentially pubic hair), and the beard in Is 7:20; 15:2. Male genitalia appear briefly in Jer 5:8 and Ezek 23:20.
84 Brenner identifies Hos 1-3, Jer 2-5; Ezek 16; 23; Isa 47 as “pornoprophetic” passages engaging the marriage metaphor (Brenner, “Pornoprophetics Revisited,” 63). Baumann’s excellent study of the marriage metaphor includes Nah 3:4-7; Hos 1-3; Jer 2-3; Ezek 16; 23; Isa 40-66; Lam 1; Mic 1; Mal 2 (Baumann, Love and Violence, 1).
87 Thomas, “Feminist Interpretation(s),” 169.
88 Baumann, Love and Violence, 173.
89 Baumann, Love and Violence, 173; e.g., losing children (2:12), being widowed (1:2; 5:3), being raped (5:11; cf. Keefe, “Rapes of Women/Wars of Men,” 79-97).
confused with the physical uncleanness of women” there is potential that “women become the paradigmatically unclean persons.” Following the lead of O’Connor, she notes the problematic of identifying YHWH with the abuser, and moreover, the abuser to whom Zion is to return, blaming herself for his actions. Finally, she critiques the element of Lamentations that advises passive suffering in submission to what is portrayed as “legitimate force exercised by the divine ‘Lord.’” Baumann’s survey, while identifying key issues does not set about resolving the issues she raises—difficulties that are, admittedly, not easily allayed.

In a recent essay, Thomas briefly surveys feminist approaches to Lamentations, characterising Guest and Seidman as “resistant” feminist readings. For alternatives that are attentive to feminist concerns while remaining engaged with the text, he mentions only O’Connor, Mandolfo, and Snow-Flesher. O’Connor’s work, however, is not explicitly feminist. Mandolfo’s is more so, but her critique is primarily of how Zion is constructed in the prophets, reading Zion’s reconstructive self-authoring in Lamentations much more positively. And Snow-Flesher’s three page overview of Lamentations hardly has space to dedicate to a solid exploration of questions of gender. While there is much discussion of the marriage metaphor among the prophets, then, it seems the time is ripe for further analysis of gender construction in Lamentations.

In his closing remarks on the feminist interpretations he surveys, Thomas concludes that “a set of pre-theoretical philosophical and theological constructs

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93 Thomas, “Feminist Interpretation(s),” 168-70. See Guest, “A Recriminative Response,” 444; Seidman, “Burning the Book,” 288. Seidman’s piece is a short essay with the character of a memoir, so does not engage the issues critically, although it does evoke them beautifully.
95 Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion*, 79-102.
affect outcomes.” He suggests that any future work with Lamentations “may press ‘feminist analysis’ to expose presuppositional elements in play and the hermeneutical similarities and differences that eventuate as a result of them.” And indeed, reading with integrity requires that we feminist interpreters expose our presuppositions—at least those of which we are aware—as we approach the text. But this exposition must not stop with feminist interpretations only. Any analysis of Lamentations ought to be subject to having its presuppositional elements exposed, in order to observe “presuppositional elements in play and the hermeneutical similarities and differences that eventuate as a result of them.”

With this in mind, I proceed to the text. I identify presuppositional elements regarding the justice or injustice of YHWH, and the concomitant rhetorical moves that are made to either defend or denounce YHWH and the biblical text. I demonstrate the hermeneutical outcomes implicated by interpreters’ competing presuppositional commitments to either upholding, or to protesting, the text and the God of the text.

### 3.2 Lamentations 1: Analysis

#### 3.2.1 Lamentations 1:1-9b

##### 3.2.1.1 Lamentations 1:1-9b: Overview

The Lamenter opens by painting a word-picture of the city as a desolate woman. The initial יִשְׁפָּה immediately speaks of agony and introduces associations of death and mourning from the dirge genre in which the exclamation is a staple.

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96 Thomas, “Feminist Interpretation(s),” 173.
97 Thomas, “Feminist Interpretation(s),” 173.
98 See further §8.1, where I outline my personal presuppositions as an evangelical feminist approaching the text to read both faithfully and critically.
99 References to the commentaries in the discussion of the text are of necessity selective and representative, rather than exhaustive.
100 Westermann, Lamentations, 7. Further dirge elements in the opening of Lam 1 include the contrast motif, Jerusalem depicted as a widow, and the qinah metre (Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 54). See further Jahn, Das Hebräische Leichenlied, 2-90.
Mourning imagery prevails. The ruined city-woman, her structures, and her inhabitants “sit” (שׁע, 1:1a) on the ground, “weeping” (עָבַד, 1:2a, 16a), “mourning” (רָעָב, 1:4a), “groaning” (יוֹנָה, 1:4b, 8c, 11a, 21a), grieving (נֶפֶשׁ, 1:4c), and searching for an elusive comforter (שָׁבַע, 1:2b, 9b, 16b, 17a, 21a) who cannot be found.101 As the poem progresses it becomes apparent that there is no death being mourned here—neither of Zion nor of YHWH—but that this is an expression of the pain of Zion’s abandonment by YHWH, her “husband.”102 Rather than mourning the death of the husband-deity, the depiction of Zion as אֱלֹהִים (1:1b)103 indicates her despondence as she sits alone, bereft.104 In a stinging reminder of the totality of her reversal, her former glory as “princess among the provinces” (שָׁלוֹחֵי בְּרוֹדֵיהֶן, 1:1c) is called to mind.

The translation of אֱלֹהִים as “her lovers” (1:2) may overstate the case, prematurely connoting sexual sin before perhaps warranted.105 The verb אֱלֹהִים can be used of love between God and people (Ex 20:6; Deut 5:10; 7:9, 13; 2 Sam 12:24), between men (1 Sam 16:21; 18:1, 22; 20:17), between women and men (Gen 24:67; 29:32; Judg 14:16; 1 Sam 18:28), and between a parent and a child (Gen 44:20). The active participle can simply mean “those who love” (Ps 122:6; 123:4).

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103 Cohen defines אֱלֹהִים as a special instance of “widow,” specifically “a once married woman who has no means of financial support and who is thus in need of special legal protection” (Cohen, “The ‘Widowed’ City,” 76, 78; cf. Mintz, Ḥurban, 24; Berlin, Lamentations, 49). In its metaphorical context it could also carry political connotations of a displaced city state, with Cohen rendering אֱלֹהִים explicitly as “vassal,” in parallel to לְטֵבָא (“tributary”; Cohen, “The ‘Widowed’ City,” 78; cf. Merneptah Stele line 27; Is 47:8–9a, 54:4; Jer 51:5; Berlin, Lamentations, 49).
104 Dobbs-Allsopp notes a play on sitting “alone” (сад), indicating either a city secure in its autonomy (cf. Num 23:9; Deut 33:28; Jer 49:31), or, in this context, “alone and abandoned” (cf. Is 27:10). The images are “allowed to play off one another” to contrast Zion’s past with “her desolate present” (Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 54–55).
105 O’Connor, Tears of the World, 22. CEV, KJV, NASB, NIV, NRSV all read “lovers.” The Amplified Bible extrapolates to “lovers (allies),” indicating the political potential of the metaphor. GNB reads “former friends,” reserving judgement for the moment. The piel participle form (1:19) occurs in the prophetic marriage metaphor, where it is more clearly indicative of illicit lovers (Jer 22:20, 22; Ezek 16:33, 36, 37; 23:5, 9, 22; Hos 2:7, 9, 10, 12, 15; Zech 13:6).
145:20; Prov 8:17, 21; 13:24; Dan 9:4; Neh 1:5) or act as a noun, “friends.” At this stage, then, it may simply imply “friends,” although it may take on nuances of “lovers” in hindsight as the poem progresses. Friends and kinspeople had a duty to comfort the afflicted, but there is no one left to act as a “comforter” (הָנָה, 1:2b, 9b, 16b, 17a, 21a; cf. Eccl 4:1) for Zion. In failing to provide comfort, Zion’s fair-weather friends have become her “enemies” (בַּיָּמִים, 1:2c).

Zion the widow is also the bereaved mother whose children have gone into exile (יֵלְא, 1:3a), with “suffering” (עֲנָה, 1:3a; cf. 1:7a, 9c; 3:1, 19; Ex 3:7, 17; 4:31) and “hard servitude” (הַעֲבָדָה, 1:3a; cf. Ex 1:14; 2:23; 5:11; 6:6). In a play with the opening scene of a woman “sitting” (נִסָּת, 1:1a) on the ground, Zion is now depicted as one who “dwells” (הָבַנָּה, 1:3b) among the nations. In a further wordplay, her pursuers overtake her in “dire straits” (הֲבַנָּת וָסָה, 1:3c), calling to mind Egypt (בַּנָּת וָסָה) and connecting with that enslavement of old.

106 Gibson, Hebrew Grammar, 133.
107 Gordis argues the inverse, that should read “lovers,” on the basis of parallelism with גְּזָרָי (Gordis, Lamentations, 153). Dobbs-Allsopp suggests the “loved ones” and “friends” are Judah’s “erstwhile political allies” (Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 56; cf. Obad 7). “Lovers” could also indicate religious allegiances to “other deities who were making a bid for her allegiance” (Thompson, “Israel’s Lovers,” 476).
108 Cf. Berlin, Lamentations, 50; Trudinger, “Lamentations as City and Land,” 46-47. Miller suggests an intentional “poetic wordplay in which the word’s polysemic potential is being exploited,” such that what appears “at first as a moving portrait of Jerusalem’s mistreatment by her friends and loved ones, may also be read as a statement about her disloyalty toward and betrayal of YHWH” (Miller, “Poetry and Personae,” 58). Reading progressively, there is not necessarily a hint of illicit love here yet, but reading in simultaneity allows later imagery to be read back into earlier poetry, perhaps confirming initial reader suspicions.
109 Anderson, A Time to Mourn, 84.
111 Cf. Anderson, A Time to Mourn, 94.
112 Cf. Trudinger, “Lamentations as City and Land,” 46, Berlin, Lamentations, 50. Lam 1:3a specifies that Judah has gone into exile, suggesting to O’Connor that the verse refers to the portion of the population exiled in Babylon (O’Connor, Tears of the World, 20-21).
113 Indeed, Jouion suggests reading Egypt for (cf. Gen 12:12), indicating the Judeans were forced to Egypt for refuge (cf. Jer 44:11, 12, 27; Jouion, “Études de Philologie Sémitique,” 209-10).
absolute plural יָדַעְתָּנֵי appears only here in the Hebrew Bible,\textsuperscript{115} deriving from the verb יָדָעַה, “to wrap up, to be cramped, to be restricted, to be depressed/worried.”\textsuperscript{116} NRSV’s translation, “distress”\textsuperscript{117} plays on this last meaning, although there could well be some notion of being cramped or restricted also in view, indicative of being pursued into a tight spot with no chance of escape.\textsuperscript{118} Guest extends the possibility of narrowness to read a hint of sexual abuse. That is, female Zion’s enemies have overtaken, or penetrated, her “narrow place.”\textsuperscript{119} Inferring a sexual nuance may, again, be reading too much, too soon. I keep connotations of both narrowness and distress open by translating with “dire straits.”\textsuperscript{120}

Lamentations 1:4 highlights Zion the physical city, as the very roads and gates take on attributes of mourning (שֶׁהֲבָא, 1:4a; cf. 2:8c; 5:15) and desolation (שָׁנָא, 1:4b; cf. 1:13c, 16c; 3:11; 5:18).\textsuperscript{121} The Lamenter portrays the grief of portions of the populace—priests and young girls (1:4b, c)—in a merismus encompassing everyone in between.\textsuperscript{122}

In the first appearance of explicit sin language in the book, the Lamenter connects the victory of “her foes” (טוריה, 1:5a) and “her enemies” ( الإرهاب, 1:5a)

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{115} The singular “distress” (יָדַעְתָּן) appears in Ps 118:5.
\item \textsuperscript{116} HALOT, 1058.
\item \textsuperscript{117} NASB reads “distress.” NIV and NRSV infer a feminine pronoun “her distress,” not present in MT.
\item \textsuperscript{118} Salters, Lamentations, 44; cf. GNB.
\item \textsuperscript{119} Guest, “A Recriminative Response,” 417.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Cf. KJV, “between the straits”; NKJV “in dire straits.” LXX (άνω μέσων τῶν φλεβώντων) also keeps both possibilities live, as do V (inter augustia) and P (חֶבֶץ חוֹלָスタイル). Tg. Lam includes both associations successively, with the “border regions” interpreting narrowness, and “they oppressed her” reflecting distress (יָדַעְתִּי אֲשֶׂר אֲשֶׂר לְנָא, cf. Brady, Targum Lamentations, 156).
\item \textsuperscript{121} Both land (Gen 47:19; Isa 49:8, 19; 61:4; Ezek 6:6; 12:19; 19:7; 33:28; 35: 12, 15; 36:4) and people (2 Sam 13:20; Isa 54:1) can be יָדַעְתָּן. The word is a leitmotif in Lamentations, contributing to the fluidity between Zion the woman and Zion the city. It is significant that Tamar is described as יָדַעְתָּן after being raped, (2 Sam 13:20) suggesting a particular kind of desolation associated with despoothing and humiliation.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Miller, “Poetry and Personae,” 61.
\end{itemize}
directly to YHWH’s intent to make her “suffer” (יִנֶּה, 1:5b; cf. 1:12c; 3:32, 33),
which he attributes, in turn, to “the multitude of her transgressions” (תֹּלֶדֶת, 1:5b, cf. 1:14a, 22b). Conse-
quently, he says, “her little ones” (יתֹּלֶדֶת, 1:5c; cf. 2:19c)—that is, her inhabi-
tants—have been taken into captivity (cf. Deut 28:13, 41). The reversal of daughter Zion’s status is relent-
lessly pounded home with the loss of her “splendour” (יִנֶּה, 1:6a) and her leaders scattered like stags spooked
by the hunt. In the midst of “her affliction” (יתֹּלֶדֶת, 1:7a; cf. 1:9c, 3:19) Jerusalem
calls to mind all “her precious things” (מתpleasantים, 1:7b; cf. 1:10a, 11b; 2:4b). Continuing
the reversal motif, these are gone and instead the enemy looks on,
mocking.

123 The noun יִנֶּה is most simply translated “crime,” though HALOT adds the nuance of crime
“within a community” (HALOT, 981). This community association emphasises the
representative role of Zion, even as crimes are ascribed to her as an individual woman (“her”
crimes, יִנֶּה, 1:5; “my” crimes, יִנֶּה, 1:14, 22). Salters further characterises יִנֶּה as
deliberate rebellion against Yahweh, not just sin or iniquity” (Salters, Lamentations, 50). P
(םַפַּמֵּש) employs the same term for יִנֶּה here and in 1:14; 22, as well as יִנֶּה in 1:8 and
יִנֶּה in 4:13, 22, obscuring any distinction between Hebrew terms (cf. Albrektson,
Lamentations, 59). LXX employs a wider range of terms for sin language in Lamentations,
with ἁμαρτήματα translating יִנֶּה here and in 1:14 but not in 1:22. V (iniquitatum) translates יִנֶּה
in 1:5, 14, 22 consistently.

124 As with “lovers” (1:2) and “dire straits” (1:4), there is a possible sexual connotation in “her
precious things,” namely, that these are her genital organs (cf. 1:10). יִנֶּה can be used of
precious objects (Hos 9:6; Joel 3:5; 2 Chr 36:19), or of children (Hos 9:16), and is used of the
beloved in Song 5:16. In Isa 64:11 the plural “our pleasant places” is connected to the
sanctuary, a connection also made with יִנֶּה in Lam 1:10. Of the three uses of יִנֶּה in Lam 1,
the context of reversed glory and splendour (1:6) might suggest the primary association in
1:7b is precious things, or treasures, although it could just as easily be the people themselves
(cf. House, Lamentations, 355). In 1:10a, however, the strong connection to other images
connoting rape, and the invasion of the sanctuary, suggest an association with the forceful
invasion of the temple, which, in the context of the female metaphor, could indicate rape. In
1:11b, connections with giving up children for food (cf. 4:10) could suggest that the primary
association at there is children. Myriad associations thus adhere to the term, and once each
is established, it might be read, retrospectively, back into the earlier use of the term. Note that
the spelling in 1:7 (יִנָּה) differs from that in 1:10 (יִנֶּה) and 2:4 (יִנֶּה).
Lamentations 1:11 reads יִנָּה but gives the qere יָנָה. It is not clear what
difference, if any, is signified by the alternate spelling (see HALOT, 570; BL 493e; Salters,
Lamentations, 58).
Verse 8 pronounces Zion’s sinfulness emphatically (Jer 1:8a): she has certainly sinned, or sinned tremendously.\textsuperscript{125} The hapax legomenon נֶאֶה (1:8, vocalised נֶאֶה; contra נֶאֶה in 1:17) is difficult. Scholars observe three possible meanings, all of which are “grammatically possible but equally difficult, and all supported by the immediate context.”\textsuperscript{126} First, derived from one meaning of the root רָגַע, it could indicate a shaking of the head in mockery\textsuperscript{127} such that Jerusalem is considered an object of mocking scorn (cf. Ps 44:15; Jer 18:16; 48:27).\textsuperscript{128} This fits the immediate context of enemy derision (1:7d). Second, the root רָגַע can also mean “to be aimless, homeless,”\textsuperscript{129} which, in keeping with the context of Zion’s homelessness (1:7a), could indicate that she wanders among the nations (cf. Gen 4:12, 14; 1 Kgs 14:15; 21:8; Jer 49:30).\textsuperscript{130} Third, רָגַע could indicate menstrual impurity, inferring a connection to רָגַע, “bleeding, menstruation” (Lev 12:2, 5; 15:19-26, 33; 18:19; Ezek 22:10; 36:17) or “separation, abomination, defilement” (Lev 20:21; Ezra 9:11; 2 Chr 29:5),\textsuperscript{131} in 1:17, and indicating that Zion is “in a state of ritual impurity” (cf. Lev 15:19-26, 33; Ezek 22:10).\textsuperscript{132} This fits the context of her nakedness (1:8c) and (menstrual) uncleanness (1:9a) that follows.\textsuperscript{133} It is possible that “all three associations adhere to the word, and the dominant one shifts as we proceed from line to line.”

\textsuperscript{125} Cf. House, \textit{Lamentations}, 354. The emphatic construction נָאָה נָאָה of the verb נָאָה (cf. 5:7, 16), “to miss a mark, wrong, offend, be culpable, sin” (HALOT, 305), is rendered grammatically identically, rather than idiomatically, in LXX (ἀμαρτίαν ᾧμαρτεν).


\textsuperscript{127} HALOT, 696.


\textsuperscript{129} HALOT, 678.

\textsuperscript{130} Cf. Berlin, \textit{Lamentations}, 53-54. LXX (ἐὰν οὐλον ἐγένετο), V (\textit{instablis facta est}), and Tg. Lam (זָאָה לְגָאה יְהוָה) presuppose something of this nature.

\textsuperscript{131} HALOT, 673.


\textsuperscript{133} Albrektson, \textit{Lamentations}, 64.
line—from the consequence of sin, to the scorn of others, to the idea of nakedness and impurity in her skirts.”

For “her nakedness” (מְשֶרֶשֶׁת, 1:8b) is now on display for all to see. “Uncovering nakedness” in the Hebrew Bible almost always has associations of forbidden sexual activity (Lev 18:7-19; 20:17-18; Ezek 16:36-37; 23:10, 18; but contrast Ex 20:26; Ezek 16:8; Hos 2:9), and in some prophetic passages is closely located with shame (Is 47:3; Nah 3:5). Indeed, Salters translates נָקַע explicitly as “pudenda, genitals,” such that the “image is of a woman whose genitals have been seen and so is utterly disgraced.” There are questions, however, over the genesis of this disgrace. Has Zion has participated in illicit sexual activity willingly, or is her naked state the result of violent sexual crime against her?

Either way “her uncleanness” (מְנַצָּה, 1:9a) is evident in “her skirts” (מֵעָלֶיהָ, 1:9a). If this is the uncleanness of menstrual blood, as some commentators suggest, then 1:9a supports reading מְנַצָּה in 1:8 as menstruation. Berlin rejects this, however, by asserting that menstruation makes one “ritually, but not morally, impure; menstruation is not a sin.” Instead, Berlin reads מְנַצָּה as “the impurity of sexual immorality,” indicative of adulterous behaviour on the

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134 Berlin, Lamentations, 54. This may be an example of talkin, intentionally employing a term because of its polysemic associations (cf. Gordis, Lamentations, 155; Levine, Aramaic Lamentations, 92).


136 Salters, Lamentations, 61; cf. “nakedness, genital area of a man or of a woman” (HALOT, 882); “pudenda” (Albrekton, Lamentations, 64). LXX (ἀνθρωπίνην αὐτῆς) and V (ignominiam eius) speak in general terms of shame. Tg. Lam נְזָרָה, from the root bdq “to split,” contains “an explicit physical reference to the female genitalia, but it also works well metaphorically with reference to the breached walls of a city” (Alexander, Targum of Lamentations, 166). Alexander translates “breach,” however, obfuscating the sexual explicitness that Brady renders “nakedness” (Brady, Targum Lamentations, 156).

137 Dobbs-Allsopp and Linafelt draw on rape images in 1:10b-c; 12b; 13c; 22b to “thicken” the imagery, implying rape here too (Dobbs-Allsopp and Linafelt, “Rape of Zion,” 79).


139 Berlin, Lamentations, 54; cf. Pham, Mourning in the ANE, 75.
part of Zion.\textsuperscript{140} While I sympathise with Berlin’s desire to “stress that this verse is not evidence that menstruation was considered morally offensive or disgusting,”\textsuperscript{141} I would not entirely rule out the possibility that her uncleanness implies menstrual blood. In poetic language, associations may be used to evoke a visceral response without a strict requirement for consistency of image with referent. And Berlin does concede that the phrase could be read metaphorically such that “Jerusalem’s moral impurity was obvious for all to see, as visible as a bloodstain on the skirt of a menstruating woman.”\textsuperscript{142} Even so, she continues to insist that “[t]he idea of a menstruant is not present at all in our verse. The phrase ‘her impurity is in her skirts’ means that her impurity results from her sexual immorality. She is not a menstruant; she is a whore.”\textsuperscript{143} In light, however, of the appearance of צְרִיכָה in 1:17, the possibility of talhin at work in צְרִיכָה in 1:8, and the general sense of degradation depicted by imagery, rather than any strict legal referent, it may be reasonable to read menstruation here. The metaphorical nature of the imagery, and the possible origin of the people’s sin in idolatry and defiling the land with blood (cf. Ezra 9:11), suggest the ritual uncleanness of menstruation could be a further metaphor for the moral impurity of blood that defiles the land.

\textit{3.2.1.2 Lamentations 1:1-9b: Who, to Whom, and Point of View}

The Lamenter speaks, though it is initially uncertain to whom he directs his outpouring of grief. He mentions YHWH (1:5b), the onlooking nations (1:3b, 8b), Zion’s former friends (1:2b, c), and her enemies (1:2c, 3c, 5a,c, 6c, 7c,d), and throughout the unit, Zion herself is the subject of lament. But none of these characters is explicitly addressed. Once they are named, however, the reader may become aware of their possible presence on the periphery of the poem. It will become apparent that at least some of these have been “listening in” as the poem proceeds. Further, according to genre convention, and in keeping with


\textsuperscript{141} Berlin, \textit{Lamentations}, 54.


\textsuperscript{143} Berlin, \textit{Lamentations}, 55.
Bakhtin’s concept of the superaddressee, all lament is implicitly directed at YHWH. In addition, along with the onlooking nations, Zion’s no-longer friends, and the scornful enemies, each reader who takes up these pages is now implicated as a further witness to the pain it contains.

Significantly, the Lamenter does not begin with accusation and sin. He focuses instead on Zion’s tragic reversal in status, her terrible situation, and the role of her friends and enemies in her downfall (1:1-5a). Zion’s friends or political allies have betrayed her and might as well be her enemies (1:2b,c). These betraying friends-turned-enemies are added to the nightmarish unnamed pursuers (1:3c) and other elusive enemies (1:5a). While enemies figure prominently in the opening phrases, in the poem’s rhetoric these must be understood as “a mere instrumentality of divine purpose” such that YHWH, and not any foreign god, remains ultimately in control.

It is not until 1:5b that sin first enters the scene. The Lamenter identifies YHWH as the instigator of Zion’s suffering (1:5ba), and only then does he link this suffering to what, at this point, he understands to be its underlying cause: the “multitude of her transgressions”(1:5b). Here, then, is a first potential “theological interpretation of the disaster facing the people.” From the Lamenter’s point of view, who is to blame? Reading theodically, 1:5b proves that “Zion has sinned and is experiencing her deserved punishment.” Drawing attention to her sin “functions to exonerate Yahweh who is named as the one responsible for Jerusalem’s plight.”

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144 Cf. §1.4.1.
145 Mintz, Hurban, 27.
146 But note O’Connor, who reads “lovers” in v. 2 such that even there, the Lamenter’s “opinion of her is clear. She deserves no comfort, for she has brought her suffering upon herself” (O’Connor, Tears of the World, 20).
148 Miller, “Poetry and Personae,” 64. For Miller, “the narrator openly proclaims Zion’s guilt and justifies the harshness of her existence” (Miller, “Poetry and Personae,” 64; cf. O’Connor, Tears of the World, 21).
Once stated, the perspective that Zion only has herself to blame gains momentum with some of the most densely packed sin statements in the book, implying to some, at least, her wanton participation in her own degradation. While the Lamenter does identify Zion’s friends-turned-enemies and foes as agents in her downfall, and YHWH is implicated in instigating her suffering (1:5b), reading theodically, the Lamenter accepts that Zion’s sin is the root cause of her distress. In keeping with prophetic and Deuteronomistic conceptions, Zion had fair warning, continued in her sin, and consequently God had to punish her. Or so the theory goes. So effectively have prophetic and Deuteronomistic ideologies achieved their ends that even today interpreters will assume that “the bitch had it coming to her” without questioning the moral and ethical implications of such statements. In straightforward theodical readings, then, 1:5 comprises an “explicit statement of guilt” that “clearly confirms her culpability.” This is augmented by the further assertions of sinfulness and uncleanness in 1:8–9 as evidence that Zion “got what was coming to her.”

Boase and Renkema, however, observe some internal tensions in 1:1–9b that challenge this interpretation. First, while the assertion that suffering is imposed as YHWH’s response to sin is clear (1:5b), Boase suggests the extremity of Zion’s suffering that dominates the verses surrounding the statement, especially the suffering of her children (1:5c), might call into question the appropriateness of this response. Second, after a statement like 1:5, Renkema suggests some explanation of these sins might be expected, but none is provided.

Lee deconstructs how “the author of Lamentations tries to make her appear ugly and degenerate” so that she is “viewed as being justly condemned and rightfully exploited” (Lee, “Mothers Bewailing,” 202).


Cf. §1.8.2.1 n. 180.


even proposes that the lack of specificity indicates that sin has been “committed unawares.”\textsuperscript{158} In this understanding, the only hint the people have of the seriousness of their supposed sin is “the reality and extent of the corresponding misfortune.”\textsuperscript{159} This, for Renkema, does not seem quite fair. He concludes that due to the “lack [of] any degree of clarity with respect to the nature of the transgressions in question,” the “theodicy content of this statement can thus be disregarded.”\textsuperscript{160} While Boase does not dispense with the theodic content entirely, she suggests that the “various description of misery motifs” surrounding 1:5, along with the “lack of specificity” at least creates “tension in understanding the extreme nature of Yahweh’s treatment of the city.”\textsuperscript{161}

The interpretive question in 1:1-9b depends to some extent on whether Zion’s disheveled state is a result of menstruation, adultery, or rape. If πηγή (1:8) is “menstruous,” then her uncleanness, and the nakedness revealing this state, could depict a woman who is pitiable rather than sinful.\textsuperscript{162} After all, as O’Connor asks, how can Zion “be held responsible for the natural discharges of her body”?\textsuperscript{163} Even if this reading is “correct,” however, menstrual impurity may also be employed metaphorically, such that the representation of ritual impurity indicates, metaphorically, a moral impurity.\textsuperscript{164} Even if Zion’s uncleanness is from menstruation, then, it could still indicate that she is to be “compared to a debased, slatternly harlot, shamelessly exposing her nakedness and indifferent

\textsuperscript{158} Renkema, “Theodicy in Lamentations?” 416.
\textsuperscript{159} Renkema, “Theodicy in Lamentations?” 416. Renkema suggests the Lamenter and the people are uncertain of the origins of their suffering. Searching for explanation they latch on the Deuteronomic explanation of suffering as imposed for sin, although they do not know what sin this might have been. While I am sympathetic to what Renkema is trying to do, I am not convinced, reading synchronically, that Scripture allows him to assume the people had no concept of their sin. The greater question, theologically, is whether it is ever appropriate for suffering so extreme to be imposed by a supposedly just deity. A related and urgent issue is the application of this kind of rhetoric to contemporary situations. That is, when the “sin + punishment = suffering” equation is read in reverse to assume that any suffering presupposes sin, especially in relation to the ruin of cities. This is insidious and damaging, not to mention just plain wrong (cf. Bergant, “The Challenge of Hermeneutics,” 14).
\textsuperscript{160} Renkema, “Theodicy in Lamentations?” 416.
\textsuperscript{161} Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 175.
\textsuperscript{162} Cf. Kaiser, “Female Impersonator,” 176.
\textsuperscript{163} O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1030.
\textsuperscript{164} Berlin, Lamentations, 54
to the marks of menstrual blood—‘filthiness’—on her garments.”165 At this point, observe the choice of language in the commentary. Ellison selects some especially salacious terms—debased, slatternly, harlot—in a display demonstrating how the “illicit” possibilities of female sexuality have taken root in the male imagination. Such language contributes to the ongoing degradation of Daughter Zion in interpretation.166

The image of Zion the adulterer is more obvious if יִשָּׁר (1:8) is taken directly as the uncleanness resulting from adultery. If “friends” (1:2) are indeed illicit “lovers” then, reading theodically, the evidence mounts to suggest that “this apparently pitiful woman had taken lovers, she had acted immorally, and she deserved her punishment.”167

Boase does not see the accusation of adultery quite so straightforwardly, however, questioning whether 1:8-9 portrays Zion as an adulterer, or alternatively, as a victim of rape.168 There is certainly confluence with the prophetic portrait of Zion as adulterer (e.g. Isa 1:21-26; Jer 13:20-27), but Boase calls this into question given “the images also portray Zion as victim, and can be read as reference to sexual assault.”169 There is no unambiguous statement of sexual impropriety on Zion’s part and for Boase, this undermines “the correspondence between sin and its consequences.”170 If Zion is a victim, then someone else is to blame for her pain. Yet just as the potential adultery imagery is ambiguous, so too is the insinuation of rape. Possible rape images appear in

165 Ellison, Lamentations, 705.
166 Cf. §3.1.2.3.
167 Berlin, Lamentations, 49. As early as 1:2 there is “a hint of ambiguity regarding Jerusalem’s complicity in her own problems” (Miller, “Poetry and Personae,” 58). In v. 2 this is contingent on the translation of זִבְצָק as “lovers,” implying illicit sexual activity; or “friends,” implying those who ought to fulfil the comforting role, see nn. 102, 103.
168 Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 211.
1:1-9b, but none is explicit.\textsuperscript{171} It is not until 1:10 that further statements confirming the nations’ unlawful violation of Zion will be made.

For the moment, then, the “image of the city-woman in her abject state elicits both revulsion and pity. . . . we are torn by ambivalent urges: we cannot bear to look but we cannot turn our eyes away.”\textsuperscript{172} This ambivalence is mirrored in the stance of the Lamenter and in the polarisation of commentators. The Lamenter makes statements asserting Zion’s sin, which can be interpreted theodically such that Zion deserves her suffering. He surrounds them, however, with such overwhelming depictions of suffering that antithoedic readers are able to challenge any simplistic notion of the assumed relationship between (unspecified) sin and (extreme) suffering. The opening scene is thus profoundly unsettling, as readers gaze in sick, vertiginous titillation upon this vision of “revulsion and pity.” Covertly, I, too, turn my eyes away, preferring not to see. And in so doing, I too align myself with her enemies.

\subsection*{3.2.2 Lamentations 1:9c}

\subsubsection*{3.2.2.1 Lamentations 1:9c: Overview}

Zion’s entreaty for someone, in this instance YHWH, to “look” (יִרְאֵ, 1:9c, cf. 1:11c, 12a, 18b, 20a; 2:20a; 3:59, 60; 5:1) upon her is the first in a series of recurring refrains. The cry could in fact comprise an implicit cry for help—for active, saving “looking.”\textsuperscript{173} Mention of “misery” or “affliction” (אֲבֵרֵים; 1:9c; cf. 1:3a, 7a; 3:1, 3:19) is another ambiguity resonant of rape (cf. Gen 34:2).\textsuperscript{174}

\textsuperscript{171} Cf. Trudinger, “Lamentations as City and Land,” 46. Implications of rape are present in הָעַגְרָה (1:3c); הָעַגְרָה (1:4b cf. 2 Sam 13:20); and “her nakedness” (1:8b). As the chapter progresses, the language weaves a “network of mutually reinforcing images of rape” (Dobbs-Allsopp and Linafelt, “Rape of Zion,” 81).

\textsuperscript{172} Berlin, Lamentations, 48.

\textsuperscript{173} Parry, Lamentations, 53; cf. Boyce, The Cry to God, 64-68.

\textsuperscript{174} The noun אֲבֵרֵים “misery, oppressed situation” (HALOT, 856; LXX ἀπείναω; V adflictionis) stems from יִבְרָה, the piel of which (“to oppress, humiliate, do violence to,” HALOT, 853) is sometimes understood as “the technical Hebrew verb for rape” (so Guest, “A Reckonative Response,” 418). It appears in rape contexts in Gen 34:2; 2 Sam 13:12, 14, 22, 32; Judg 19:24; 20:5 and Lam 5:11. Van Wolde, however, challenges the rape association, examining texts
3.2.2.2 Lamentations 1:9c: Who, to Whom, and Point of View

Zion interrupts the Lamenter with a direct plea to YHWH. It reads as though she has been party to the opening lament and is suddenly no longer able to contain her pain, even as her speech is measured in the same carefully structured cadences as the Lamenter’s. Unlike the Lamenter’s first utterance, Zion makes no mention of sin or guilt, drawing attention only to the immediacy of her affliction and attributing this to the work of the “enemy” (יָשָׁר, 1:9c). She cries in desperation for YHWH to see. Her interjection, then, breaks into the Lamenter’s speech, disrupting the unfolding imagery that would implicate her in her own subjugation. This disruption can be taken in an antithed direction, as a hopeful glimpse of protest: Zion herself explicitly objects to her oppression, and becomes the subject of speech rather than the object of derisive looking. But not all are convinced. Rather than a sign of agency and protest, Guest reads 1:9c and other “first person interjections” as “left in the text without satisfaction, as endless, forlorn, futile appeals.” It seems, however, that when the Lamenter returns to speech in 1:10 that Zion’s interjection may indeed have had some effect.

Does Zion deserve her shame? She deflects attention from any sense of sinfulness, focusing solely on her affliction. She points to her enemies’ culpability without making any overt theological claim. Her cry is first and foremost a cry of pain. In calling to YHWH, he is in a sense now implicated, and guilty if he does not act to save.

where the piel of יָשָׁר appears with a woman as the object (Gen 16: 6, 9; 21:50, 34:2; Deut 21:14; 22:24, 29; Judg. 19:24; 20:5 and 2 Sam 13:12, 14, 22, 32; but not, curiously, Lam 5:11). Van Wolde argues that the semantic field of יָשָׁר is social-juridical, such that the term indicates social humiliation rather than the sexual, physical violence connoted by the English “rape.” She recommends that יָשָׁר be translated “debased” (van Wolde, “Does ’ינָה Denote Rape?” 543-44). In the context of the rape passages mentioned above, however, this debasement, social-juridical though it may be, is clearly connected to a violent and unwanted overpowering of the woman, i.e., rape.

176 Guest, “A Recriminative Response,” 419.
At this point, note that the very act of writing and reading about Zion in her devastation can become a harrowing exercise. The ease with which wounding words are bandied about—menstrual impurity, rape, illicit, adulterous, shame, violation—gives me pause for thought, and leads me to question my own impulse to intellectualise and analyse, attempting, for the sake of survival, to hold Zion’s pain at bay. While the immediate context is Zion’s humiliation, not the suffering children, I am reminded of Greenberg’s injunction that “[n]o statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of the burning children.”\footnote{Greenberg, “Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire,” 23.} Are my words credible in the presence of the humiliated Zion? Indeed, what can possibly be said? (cf. 2:13). Perhaps a more appropriate response is simply to sit in the dust of the ruined city, remembering, and join the ruined woman in her weeping.

3.2.3 Lamentations 1:10-11b

3.2.3.1 Lamentations 1:10-11b: Overview

After the insinuations of the first part of the chapter, Lam 1:10 now takes a more sinister turn. Enemies have “stretched out” (יָדִ֑ים, 1:10a; cf. 1:13b, 17a; 4:4b) their hands over “her precious things” (מַעֲנֵיהֶ֑ים, 1:10a; cf. 1:7b, 11b; 2:4b).\footnote{Cf. §3.2.1.1 n. 124.} appeared in 1:7b where its primary referent was the temple treasures, and perhaps, secondarily, the people themselves.\footnote{Mintz, 
\textit{Hurban}, 25; Dobbs-Allsopp and Linfelt, “The Rape of Zion,” 77. Guest goes so far as to read “hand” (1:10a) as euphemism for “penis” (Guest, “A} Not only are temple treasures seized, but in the metaphorical context, there is a groping violation of Zion’s person.\footnote{Guest, “A} The image is reinforced by the statement that the
nations have “entered” (אָבִּים, 1:10b) “her sanctuary” (קְ.getDeclared:10b).\(^{181}\) YHWH himself forbade these nations to enter (אָבִּים, 1:10c; cf. 1:10b) the congregation—his congregation (יְהוָ֣ה, 1:10c; cf. Deut 23:3).\(^{182}\) In verse 10, then, images that might have remained ambiguous alone now conspire together to indicate the male body forcing entry to the female.\(^{183}\)

In the first mention of “all her people” (כָּלָ֣ה הַנְּבָנָ֥ה, 1:11a), verse 11 explicitly connects the all-encompassing aspect of the metaphor with Zion the city—woman—people. The people search for food as they endure the ravages of famine (cf. 2 Kgs 25:3).\(^{184}\) So desperate are they that they trade “their treasures” (תְּנֵ֣תָם, 1:11b; cf. 1:7b, 10a; 2:4b) for bread to restore their נֶפֶשׁ (1:11b, cf. 1:16, 19c). again does double (or triple?)\(^{185}\) duty, potentially referring to both temple treasures (cf. 1 Kgs 20:6, Joel 4:5) and children (cf. Lam 4:1-2, 10; Hos 9:16).\(^{186}\)

### 3.2.3.2 Lamentations 1:10-11b: Who, to Whom, and Point of View

After Zion’s interjection in 1:9c the Lamenter resumes, now turning to speak to YHWH. This turning arguably includes a change in attitude toward Zion, having heard her cry of desolation.\(^{187}\) His perspective in 1:10-11b is less judgmental, not mentioning sin, and increasingly sympathetic to Zion’s people, acknowledging the atrocities against them. Whom does he now find to blame?

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182 Cf. Salters, Lamentations, 67.
184 Salters, Lamentations, 68-69; Westermann, Lamentations, 131; Parry, Lamentations, 55.
185 If the imagery of penetrating the sanctuary is carried through from 1:10a-b.
186 Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 40; Hillers, Lamentations, 87; Provan, Lamentations, 47; Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 67. Contra Salters, these are “things treasured by individual inhabitants” (Salters, Lamentations, 69).
187 Cf. O’Conor, Tears of the World, 22; Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 212; Miller, “Reading Voices,” 399; Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 39.
In my discussion of 1:1-9b I suggested that understanding Zion’s state as a result of menstruation, adultery, or forced entry will in part determine whether a response of judgement or pity is elicited. Reading rape in 1:10-11b thus changes the game, making a more pronounced case for pity. Reading antithetically, rape imagery implies Zion is a victim, and not to blame for the extent of her pain. Once rape is recognised, “what interpreters have construed as the punishment of the harlot would appear to be an institutionally sanctioned form of rape. That is, it represents an intentional perpetration of violence against women.”\textsuperscript{188} Further, rape imagery in 1:10-11b allows rape to be read retrospectively in the earlier language of 1:8-9.\textsuperscript{189} There is a shift away from judgement of Zion, toward sympathy, and an indictment of YHWH, tied to the stronger rape language and imagery.\textsuperscript{190} It is impossible to know precisely what impact the imagery would have had on an audience contemporaneous to the text. For ethical contemporary readers, however, troubled by the literary rape, a response of pity for Zion, and protest against YHWH seems appropriate.

This is not universally the case, however. Salters refutes Mintz’ identification of rape imagery in Lam 1, asserting that the image would lack rhetorical force. He contends that “[t]o be raped is rarely reprehensible, hence the image of the raped woman would be weak.”\textsuperscript{191} This statement in and of itself is an example of the dangerous power of language and text. Salters does not couch his assertion in terms of the historical or textual context, but simply makes it as a statement, as though it were always the case that “[t]o be raped is rarely reprehensible.” As much as I am cautious of inferring authorial intention, I suspect it is not in fact Salters’ goal to dismiss the abhorrence of rape for all times. I suspect he is speaking specifically in the context of the Hebrew Bible. Even so, I challenge the notion that rape would hold no rhetorical power. The retributive results of the

\textsuperscript{188} Dobbs-Allsopp and Linfelt, “The Rape of Zion,” 79
\textsuperscript{190} O’Connor, Tears of the World, 23; Dobbs-Allsopp, 67.
\textsuperscript{191} Salters, Lamentations, 66.
rapes of Dinah (Gen 34), Tamar (2 Sam 13), and the Levite’s concubine (Judg 19), for example, suggest that rape was taken very seriously indeed.\textsuperscript{192}

Even when identifying rape imagery, Mintz himself insists this need not indicate that Zion is a victim. Rather, for Mintz it is an indication that “what began as unwitting, voluntary promiscuity, suddenly turned into unwished for, forcible defilement.”\textsuperscript{193} The male myth that “she was asking for it” is perpetuated. Somewhat dammingly he continues to explain that “[a]s affectingly as Zion’s fallen situation is presented, the sympathy is cut with judgment, for we are aware that in her wantonness Zion has brought the inevitable upon herself.”\textsuperscript{194} Even when the line is crossed from voluntary activity to abuse, then, there is all too much willingness to agree that the “bitch had it coming to her.” In light of the damaging effects that mutually implicating metaphors can have on contemporary women, this is a dangerous position to take.\textsuperscript{195} Perhaps I am simply too schooled in the sentiments of my time, too convinced that then, as now, there is never a justifiable reason for rape. But whatever the case, I am more inclined to agree with Dobbs-Allsopp and Linafelt that even if Zion is “metaphorically guilty of sin,” the extremity of her current situation suggests that “this in no way justifies the violence of the punishment itself.”\textsuperscript{196}

Is Zion to blame for her shame? Reading Lam 1:1-11b as a whole controlled by verses 5, 8 and 9, commentators can and do argue that “from the narrator’s [Lamenter’s] perspective, she has caused her own pain by sexual liaisons that express betrayal and violence.”\textsuperscript{197} But recognising rape imagery in 1:10-11b, and rereading 1:1-9b in light of this imagery, challenges this interpretation,

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{192} Although see Deut 22:28-29 for a different approach to rape. 
\textsuperscript{193} Mintz, \textit{Hurban}, 25; cf. Miller, “Reading Voices,” 399. 
\textsuperscript{194} Mintz, \textit{Hurban}, 26; cf. Miller, “Reading Voices,” 399. 
\textsuperscript{195} See \S3.1.2.3. 
\textsuperscript{197} O’Connor, \textit{Tears of the World}, 23.}
questioning whether Zion has been abused above and beyond any consequences of her own making.

Further, in 1:10-11c itself the Lamenter makes no mention of sin. Instead, following Zion’s lead in 9c, he highlights the role of her enemies (cf. 2c, 3c, 5a; 10a-c). He also indicts YHWH, obliquely, in 1:10b-c. If YHWH is the one who forbade the nations to enter her sanctuary, then ultimately it was his obligation to prevent this invasion from happening.\footnote{Cf. Parry, Lamentations, 54, Salters, Lamentations, 67.} If the Lamenter is accusing anyone in this unit, it is the nations who have violated Zion, and, tacitly, YHWH who colluded in this violation by his absence. Any notion of Zion’s sin is silenced, for now.

\subsection*{3.2.4 Lamentations 1:11c}

\subsubsection*{3.2.4.1 Lamentations 1:11c: Overview}

Building on the plea of 1:9c, Zion now entreats YHWH not only to “look” (יָדַע, 1:11c, cf. 1:9c), but also to “see” or “pay attention” (חזו, 1:11c). She attempts to draw his attention to how “worthless” (יִשָּׁר, 1:11c, cf. 1:8; Jer 15:19) she has become. Again, her cry could implicitly comprise a plea for “pitiful looking,” that is, for looking that results in help (cf. 1:9c).\footnote{Lanahan, “The Speaking Voice,” 44. Cf. Heim, “Personification of Zion,” 149; Boyce, The Cry to God, 65-67.}

\subsubsection*{3.2.4.2 Lamentations 1:11c: Who, to Whom, and Point of View}

As in 1:9c Zion addresses YHWH directly. Apparently accepting the judgements of 1:5, 8, 9 she now pronounces herself “worthless” (יִשָּׁר).\footnote{O’Connor, Tears of the World, 24.} Zion acknowledges her degraded state. But is this indicative of her acceptance of the perspective that correlates this worthlessness precisely with her sins? Or could there also be, in her cry for attention, a hint of protest?
3.2.5 Lamentations 1:12-16

3.2.5.1 Lamentations 1:12-16 Overview

The phrase “is it nothing to you,” (לא אִתָּךְ, 1:12a) is difficult and likely corrupt. It appears, though, as part of an entreaty to gain attention from all “who pass by” (הלֵם יְהוָה, 1:12a). Zion repeats the verbs used to address YHWH, “look/attend” (להת, 1:12a; cf. 1:11c) and “see” (ראה, 1:12a; cf. 1:11c), but in reverse order. In 9c and 11c Zion called for YHWH to see, but now she entreats anyone to “look” upon her, which is somewhat ironic, given the voyeuristic, shameful “looking” she has endured from her enemies (1:7, 8; cf. 2:16). Zion now calls anyone who will listen to see if there is any sorrow or “pain” (מארה, 1:12b; cf. 1:18b) like the sorrow with which she has been afflicted (עָלָיו, 1:12b). In light of the situation just elucidated, the quasi-rhetorical question can only engender a “no, of course not.” This suffering has been inflicted (יָדָי, 1:12c; cf. 1:4c, 5b; 3:32, 33) by none other than YHWH “on the day of his fierce anger” (יְהוָה רָע, 1:12c; cf. Amos 5:18; Is 13:13; Zeph 2:2).

Zion elaborates, mixing the metaphorical and the literal to further describe her affliction. Employing day of YHWH imagery, she describes “fire” (שָׁנָה, 1:13a; cf. 2:3c, 4c; 4:11b; Jer 48:45, Ps 104:4) from heaven going down into her “bones” (הנשָׁה, 1:13a; Jer 20:9). YHWH “spread” (משח, 1:13b; cf. 1:10a, 17a) a net to trap her and “turned” (משח, 1:13b) her aside (cf. 3:9,11). Little wonder she is left “desolate” (רש, 1:13c; cf. 1:4b, 16c; 3:11; 4:5; 5:18) and “faint” (רָע, 1:13b; cf. 5:17). The leitmotif תְּשׁוֹבָה recurs, bringing its associations of desolation for both city (c.f. 1:4b; 5:18) and people (c.f. 1:16c; 3:11; 4:5). Once again, this

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201 See Salters, Lamentations, 72-73.
202 This is the only occurrence of the poal, with the poel occurring in 1:22b, 2:20a; 3:51. LXX (ऐννηονιη) and T (אָרֹא אַלָּךְ) retain the passive, but P turns it into an active form, presupposing the pointing אָלָךְ and making explicit that it is YHWH who has afflicted (אֶלֶךְ לֹא אָלֶיךָ).
desolation may take overtones of sexual violation (cf. 2 Sam 13:20).204 Zion declares herself “faint,” (יהוה, 1:13c; cf. 5:17) a term sometimes understood to be specifically related to menstruation (cf. Lev 15:33; 20:18; Isa 30:22).205 Once again, then, there are possibilities of female-specific ignominies, now spoken in Zion’s own voice.

The text of 1:14, with its “yoke” (נוצה, 14a; cf. 3:7) “bound” (שパイ, 1:14) together by YHWH’s hand, is complicated.206 This is no ordinary yoke, but the entanglement of her “sins” (희רש; 1:14a; cf. 1:5b, 22b), Zion’s first mention of any wrongdoing. YHWH then handed her over to the hands of those she could not withstand (1:14c). She could not fight back, for YHWH has vanquished all her warriors and fighting fit young men. In festival language, YHWH appointed a “time” (-duration, 1:15b; cf. Zeph 1:7-8), not for celebration, but to “break” them (שパイ, 1:15b; cf. 2:9a, 11b, 13c; 3:4, 47, 48; 4:10b). In harvest imagery YHWH tramples Virgin Daughter Judah, crushing out her life blood as from grapes in a wine press (cf. Isa 5).207 Zion weeps copiously, (JNIEnv, 1:16a; cf. 1:2a), eyes flowing with tears. She has no “comforter” ( מאשר, 1:16b; cf. 1:2b, 9b, 17a, 21a) to restore her. Her children share her state of desolation (희רש, 1:16c; cf. 1:4b, 13c; 3:11; 5:18), and her enemy has prevailed.

205 Kaiser, “Female Impersonator,” 176; contra Salters, Lamentations, 77. זרזא can indicate both “faint, sick,” and “menstruating” (HALOT, 216). Both possibilities are represented successively in Tg. Lam (רזרזא וזרזא).
207 Cf. Meek, “Lamentations,” 14; Salters, Lamentations, 82. Some commentators take Virgin Daughter Judah as a further, separate figure, personifying the entire nation (and its population) rather than just the city (House, Lamentations, 360; Renkema, Lamentations, 170; Parry, Lamentations, 59), but see §3.1.2.2.
3.2.5.2 Lamentations 1:12-16: Who, to Whom, and Point of View

With no response from YHWH, Zion turns to address the bypassers, suggesting they too have been “listening in” to what has gone before (1:12).208 These bypassers may comprise the very same nations who previously responded to Zion with mockery and scorn (1:7d).209 Zion thus turns to face her human tormenters, mockers, and scoffers, head on. She demands their attention (1:12a) and unleashes a torrent of torments, that she perceives to be imposed by YHWH (1:12c-15). YHWH has afflicted (1:12b), inflicted pain (1:12c), sent fire (1:13a), spread a net (1:13b), turned her back (1:13b), left her desolate (1:13c), bound the yoke (1:14a, cf. Jer 27:8; 28:2-3, 5-17), handed her over (1:14c), rejected (1:15a), determined to crush (1:15b), and trod down (1:15c). For all these things—the lack of a comforter, the desolation of her children, and the prevail-ence of the enemy—she weeps.

From Zion’s perspective, YHWH commands her suffering, and she names him explicitly (יְהֹוָה, 1:12c, יְהוָה, 1:14c, 15a,c).210 This is another nod to the discourse that insists YHWH is in control of history, such that Zion’s suffering is not to be understood as due to the greater power of some other god. But if YHWH has so commanded, to what extent is he, rather than Zion, to blame for her suffering? For Dobbs-Allsopp, affirming divine omnipotence in 1:12-17 implicates YHWH. That is,

208 But note the third person in 1:15c. Miller reads this as an interjection from the Lamenter (Miller, “Reading Voices,” 50), although the fragment is usually assumed to be part of Zion’s speech. Parry explains the third person as reference to a different metaphorical woman, “Virgin Daughter Judah” (Parry, Lamentations, 59).
209 “Bypassers” is a common motif (cf. Job 21.29; Zeph 2.15), a “conventional term in Hebrew poetry for witnesses of suffering and devastation who often mock the sufferer and do not intervene” (O’Connor, Tears of the World, 25).
210 Mintz distinguishes the two halves of the chapter: “In the first half of chapter 1 it was the foreign conquerors who crushed and degraded Israel; in the second half the enemy is virtually absent. The sole source and agent of retribution is God Himself” (Mintz, Ḥurban, 27; but note YHWH’s role in making her suffer in 1:5b, and mention of enemies in 1:14c, 16c, 17b, 21b,c, 22a). Provan connects the two, such that in v. 13 the “imagery here therefore neatly combines the thoughts that Jerusalem is suffering, and that this suffering is the outworking of Yahweh’s judgement” (Provan, Lamentations, 49). For Parry, while “Zion does not explicitly charge God with wrongdoing, she may imply that he has not acted appropriately (Parry, Lamentations, 57, emphasis original).
if God’s divine omnipotence is effectively salvaged through this kind of portrayal, it just as clearly shows that God must bear a share of the responsibility for the suffering Judah had to endure. It is unmistakable that God was its immediate and mediated cause. . . . If God remains for the poet the fundamental power controlling human history, then it is God who must ultimately be held responsible for the pain and suffering experienced in that history.211

Read in this light, YHWH is to blame. Yet, as theodtic readers are quick to point out, within her ascription of tortuous deeds to YHWH (1:12-15) Zion alludes to, even confesses, her own sin for the first time. She says that her “transgressions” (גָּמִלַת, 1:14a; cf. 1:5b, 22b) have been bound into a yoke “by his hand” (יָדֹע, 1:14a).212 The two words are directly juxtaposed, signalling an intimate relationship between “her” transgressions and the works of “his” hand. House describes this as a “God-fashioned, sin-forged, Babylon-produced yoke,”213 demonstrating the confluence of YHWH’s actions, Zion’s sin, and enemy agency in her suffering. The interpretive question is whether, as House asserts, this “confession” implies she consecrates that her sin has wrought its justified ends, or whether, within the text, there are hints of an alternative perspective, a stance that resists and insists that even if she has sinned, the fault for her current state

211 Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 70-71; cf. Provan, Lamentations, 49; Berlin, Lamentations, 57.

212 Linafelt excludes the reference to transgression in 1:14, contending that Zion “mentions ‘sin’ or ‘guilt’ only twice (1:18, 22)” in Lam 1 (Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 10). The first phrase of 1:14 is admittedly difficult, and Linafelt follows Hillers in emending the MT (גָּמִלַת) to מָצָאוּ, “watch is kept over my steps” (Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 157-58n28; cf. Hillers, Lamentations, 73). Both Hillers and Linafelt concede, however, that the evidence Hillers musters to support this reading is uncertain (Hillers, Lamentations, 73; Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 157-58n28). While the change from מָצָאוּ to מָצָאָה is attested in a number of manuscripts and presupposed by V (vigilavit iugum iniquitatum mearum), and LXX (ἐγκατείχεν ἐπὶ τὰ ἁγίαματα μου), Albrektson rightly argues for the retention of the MT as the lectio difficilior (Albrektson, Lamentations, 75-76). The change from מָצָאָה to מָצָאָה is more conjectural again, with V (iniquitatum), LXX (ἀοέβευς), and P (אָמַר) all reflecting מָצָאָה, “rebellions.”

213 House, Lamentations, 359; cf. Parry, Lamentations, 58.
is not entirely her own. There are, it seems, “broader complexities surrounding the question of responsibility.”

The relationship between Zion’s transgressions and YHWH’s hand in 1:14 is thus a tipping point for interpretation. While commentators generally acknowledge both the wrongdoing of Zion and the agency of YHWH, the relative emphasis given to each becomes telling. Reading for theodicy, the interpretive priority is to emphasise her sins. For example, while Salters acknowledges that YHWH “is depicted as the one who has caused” her suffering, he reads 1:14 as a demonstration that “Jerusalem acknowledges that her present suffering is directly linked with her past sins (cf. v. 5).” Similarly, Westermann notes both aspects of the metaphorical yoke—confession of sin and accusation—but concludes that confession of sin prevails, in a “dampening down of the element of accusation against God.”

Reading for antitheodicy and protest, however, the interpretive priority is to highlight that sins are bound into a yoke by his hand, indicting YHWH. For example, for Dobbs-Allsopp, “the emphasis [of verse 14] is on the intentionality of God’s actions.” So too, while Berlin observes that the Lamenter both “credits God with the destruction, and holds Jerusalem guilty for it” she immediately follows with the more sympathetic “[n]evertheless, Jerusalem is portrayed as a victim.” Whatever her transgressions may have been, it was YHWH, asserts Zion, who has bound them into a crippling yoke. Reading theodically, then, primacy is given to Zion’s sin. Reading antitheodically, focus turns instead to YHWH’s actions.

215 Salters, Lamentations, 71.
216 Salters, Lamentations, 77.
217 Westermann, Lamentations, 134.
219 Berlin, Lamentations, 58, emphases mine.
Similar interpretive preferences are evident in the very structures commentators perceive in the unit in its wider context. Westermann, for example, in keeping with a reading that prioritises Zion’s responsibility, observes an inclusio formed by the focus on Zion’s sins in verses 14 and 18:

Heavy is the yoke of my transgressions,
fixed in place by his hand (14a);

... 
righteous is he, is Yahweh.

For I have rebelled against his word (18a).  

Dobbs-Allsopp, however, observes an inclusio that inverts the ascription of responsibility entirely, an “inclusio relating to God’s violent activity: in 1:12b the personified city calls attention to how God ‘dealt’ ... with her violently and in 1:22 she implores God, using the same language, to ‘deal with’ her enemies as ‘you have dealt with me.’” In his inclusio, then, the focus is on the action of YHWH against Zion. Once again, the emphasis given to Zion’s and YHWH’s respective responsibility varies, with interpretive inclinations manifesting themselves in the very structures commentators perceive in the text.

Finally, just as antitheodic interpreters mitigate the Lamenter’s ascription of sin to Zion in the first unit (1:5b) by highlighting the surrounding portrayals of suffering, so too Zion’s confession in 1:14a can be mitigated contextually. There is still no specificity given to the nature of her sin, such that “tension between the extent of the suffering and a lack of specificity in naming the sin” ensures that “the focus remains on the suffering of the city.” And confession comes

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220 Westermann, Lamentations, 134.
221 Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 68.
222 Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 178.
couched in a litany of despair, such that “the detailed description of her suffering, consistently emphasizing its originator, seems to suggest that the Lord’s punishment is too cruel.”

Does Zion deserve her shame? Who is to blame? The veiled admission in 1:14a suggests she accepts her fault, but it also implicates YHWH, who is the one who bound her sin into a crippling yoke. Further, Zion’s suffering for nameless sins has reached a new nadir of severity, challenging the appropriateness of YHWH’s actions. The jarring immediacy of Zion’s pain thus displaces any straightforward “sin + punishment = suffering” equation.

3.2.6 Lamentations 1:17

3.2.6.1 Lamentations 1:17: Overview

Zion “reaches” (דַּעַת, 1:17, cf. 1:10a) out her hands for help but still finds no “comforter” (גָּפְר, 1:17a; cf. 1:2b, 9c, 16b, 21a). The personification then becomes, briefly, a male one. YHWH has “commanded” (לָקַח, 1:17b), that Jacob be surrounded (בָּרָכְת, 1:17b) by his “adversaries” (לָקַח, 1:17b). Female Jerusalem reappears in 1:17c, where she is now described explicitly as a “menstruant” (לָקַח). The clear reference to menstrual impurity now reads retrospectively into the possible connotation observed at 1:8-9 (cf. Lev 12:2, 5: 15:19-26, 33; 18:19; 20:21; Ezek 18:6, 22:10; 36:17). The poetic picture is of the nations keeping their distance, so as not to defile themselves by approaching a menstruating woman (cf. Lev 18:19).

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223 Heim, “Personification of Zion,” 149.
224 Jerusalem, Zion, and Jacob are used synonymously, with “Jacob” extending the reach of the metaphor back over all of Israel and their history (House, Lamentations, 361; cf. Parry, Lamentations, 60).
225 Kaiser, “Female Impersonator,” 176; Berlin, Lamentations, 58-59; Parry, Lamentations, 61; Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 70; Albrektson, Lamentations, 78.
227 Berlin, Lamentations, 58-59; cf. Parry, Lamentations, 61; Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 70. NRSV’s “filthy thing” euphemises. This “filthy thing” is a “menstrual rag” (O’Connor, Tears of the World, 27). Salters describes the readings of LXX (ἐἰς ἀλογαθημένην),
3.2.6.2 **Lamentations 1:17: Who, to Whom, and Point of View**

As Zion interrupted the Lamenter’s speech (1:9c), with neat symmetry the Lamenter now cuts in to Zion’s (1:17). As in 1:10-11c, the Lamenter omits any mentions of sin—even though Zion herself has acknowledged her transgressions (1:14)—and instead reinforces her claims of horrific treatment at the hands of YHWH. There is indeed no one to comfort her (1:17a, cf. 1:16b), it was indeed YHWH who has done this (1:17b, cf. 1:12c, 14c, 15a, 15c); and this was indeed done in collusion with her foes (1:17b,c; cf. 1:14c). The Lamenter thus sees and attends to Zion in a manner that neither YHWH, nor the bystanders she entreated to attend to her plight, have yet done.

Could it be, then, that Zion’s presentation of pain in 1:12-16 has garnered some sympathy from the Lamenter? Instead of finding fault (1:5b, 8-9), he now affirms her cry of suffering. Here then, is a suggestion that the Lamenter “moves also from one who elegizes Zion to one who laments in solidarity with her and even attempts, albeit futilely, to provide the response to the lament that Zion is seeking.”

Does Zion deserve her shame? Who is to blame? Confirming Zion’s speech in 1:12-16, the Lamenter observes her lack of comfort and highlights the role of YHWH, in collusion with her foes, in causing her degradation. He makes no mention of her sin. YHWH’s absence as a comforter is a serious indictment. Another figure—the Lamenter—is now required to fill the void left in the wake of YHWH when he absconded from the city.

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3.2.7 Lamentations 1:18-19

3.2.7.1 Lamentations 1:18-19: Overview

Zion declares YHWH “just” (יִשְׁמָעֵל, 1:18a) and states that she has “rebelled” (יִרְבָּה, 1:18a, cf. 1:20b; 3:42) against his word (יְרָמָה, lit. “his mouth,” 1:18a). She entreats all the peoples to “hear” (הָאַשֵׁנ, 1:18b, cf. 1:21) and “see” (יָרָא, 1:18b, cf.1:12c) her “suffering” (יְסִיר, 1:18b, cf. 1:12b). A specific sorrow follows: her young women and young men have gone into “captivity” (נֵגֵד, 1:18c; cf. 1:5c). Zion attempted to call her “lovers” (יִרְבָּאוּ, 1:19a, cf. 1:2) for help. These lovers, however, “deceived” (יָרָה, 1:19a) her. Her priests and elders “perished” (יֵדְעֵה, 1:19b) in the city, as the motif of seeking food to restore their צָהֵב repeats (1:19c, cf. 1:11b).

3.2.7.2 Lamentations 1:18-19: Who, to Whom, and Point of View

After the Lamenter’s interjection Zion responds with what, at first blush, is a clear confession of sin: “The Lord himself is just; I rebelled against his word” (1:18a). Reading dialogically, it seems that just as the Lamenter’s speech in 1:17 was transformed by listening to Zion’s complaint in 12-16, so too, now Zion takes up and agrees with contentions from her counterpart’s earlier speech–namely, that she has rebelled, or sinned, against YHWH (cf. 1:5b, 8-9).233 Attending to one another results in a trade of perspectives. The Lamenter

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230 Perhaps indicative of ignoring the warnings of the prophets, YHWH’s mouthpiece (cf. Ex 7; Job 23; Hos 6; House, Lamentations, 362).
231 So that they might “learn from her mistake” (Provan, Lamentations, 53; Pham, Mourning in the ANE, 89; Longman, Lamentations, 350); or, more likely, to gain sympathy (Salters, Lamentations, 92).
232 After the introduction of the piel form in 1:19 (כָּכַה), “all those who love her” (כָּכַה אֱלֹהִים, 1:2) takes on new ambiguity. Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible the piel כָּכַה, “lover” (HALOT, 17) occurs almost without exception in passages referencing the marriage metaphor (Jer 22:20, 22; 30:14; Ezek 16:33, 36–37; 23:5, 9, 22; Hos 2:7, 9, 12, 14–15; but see Zech 13:6). This allows the allusion to illicit lovers from the marriage metaphor to be cast back upon the qal כָּכַה in 1:2 As with other imagery, then, clarification or extension as the chapter proceeds sheds light, retrospectively, on earlier images that were initially taken straightforwardly (cf. Salters, Lamentations, 93).
233 Parry, Lamentations, 62; cf. Salters, Lamentations, 90.
indicts Zion in his first utterance, but after hearing her complaint turns to accuse to YHWH and the enemies he enlisted against her. Zion initially cries out in protest to YHWH, but after listening to the Lamenter, now blames herself.\textsuperscript{334}

Zion’s first mention of sin was veiled, and tied inextricably to YHWH’s agency (1:14). But at 1:18, reading theodically, at least “this is it with no holds barred, fortissimo.”\textsuperscript{335} Sin has been bubbling away in the background, now it is upfront where it ought to be. Not only does Zion confess, she also exonerates YHWH. A triumphant note sounds for theodicy, with implications for blame spelt out (terrifyingly) by Pham:

“Yahweh is just”, is a confession of faith. Yahweh is יְהוָה because he acts in accordance with who he is and what he says and wills. . . . Jerusalem acknowledges her sins. She deserves to be punished, to be deserted, forlorn and humiliated. She submits to Yahweh’s judgment.\textsuperscript{336}

For Pham, then, 1:18 justifies YHWH, as Zion concurs with her accusers that her punishment is deserved. But this insistence that Zion “deserves to be punished,\textsuperscript{334} Whether correctly or incorrectly, this is her perception, much as women in abusive relationships find themselves to blame for their partners’ violations (cf. O’Connor, Tears of the World, 27).
\textsuperscript{335} Salters, Lamentations, 91.
\textsuperscript{336} Pham, Mourning in the ANE, 88. Cf. Westermann, “Here, at the high point of the whole song, this motif is brought into conjunction with an acknowledgement of God’s ways such that the whole preceding lament is set off: God must act in this way, because we have transgressed against his word” (Westermann, Lamentations, 135-36, emphasis original). Heim, “Lady Jerusalem’s perspective has changed. She explicitly vindicates the Lord’s dealings with her and acknowledges her guilt” (Heim, “Personification of Jerusalem,” 150); Renkema, “She insists at this point in the text that YHWH is justified and that her misery is a result of her own recalcitrance” (Renkema, “Theodicy in Lamentations?” 417); House, v. 18 is “an emphatic declaration of God’s righteousness in the matter of her punishment” (House, Lamentations, 361); Longman, vv. 18-19 comprise “at least an implicit recognition that her suffering is deserved” (Longman, Lamentations, 350). Note that while these interpreters acknowledge, for the most part, that this is Zion’s perspective, they agree with her perspective at this point. That is, for these interpreters, when Zion admits she is guilty, this is the truth of the matter, even from outside the text.
to be deserted, forlorn and humiliated” takes on sinister proportions in light of the ongoing power of the metaphor. Are the female victims of sexual violence, physical assault, and emotional manipulation somehow to blame for the atrocities carried out against them?237

Thankfully, it is not as simple as Pham makes it out to be, neither in the text nor in the commentary. Dobbs-Allsopp questions the translation and implications of יָנֹֻי in the current context. On the one hand, he says, the exclamation “The LORD is in the right!” (NRSV), can comprise a “legal declaration of innocence” (cf. Exod 9:27, 2Kgs 10:9, Job 32:1).238 On the other, “The LORD is just” could imply the specific nuance of “the common ancient Near Eastern standard of divine and royal behavior (Deut. 32:4; Ps 119:137; Jer 12:1; Zeph 3:5).”239 In this formula, the expected kicker is “and I am in the wrong,” which Dobbs-Allsopp contends is not present here.240 Thus for Dobbs-Allsopp, while the “declaration of God’s innocence is plainly evoked . . . its force is nonetheless significantly softened: it is not accompanied by the other half of the verdict formula (‘and I am in the wrong’)” (cf. Ex 9:27, Neh 9:33).”241 Further, he maintains that by being cast in the third rather than the second person, the statement is robbed “stylistically of much of its pathos, vigor, and directness.”242

The cry directly following Zion’s “confession” also causes pause for thought. Antitheodic readers point out that Zion very quickly tempers her admission of sin by drawing attention to tremendous suffering (1:18b-19).243 Further, by explaining that she has been deceived by her “lovers” (1:19a; erstwhile political allies, cf. Jer 22:20, 22; 30:14; Ezek 16:33, 36, 37; 23:5, 9, 22), Zion shifts the

237 See §3.1.2.3.
238 Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 71.
239 Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 71.
240 But see Lam 18aβ, “for I have rebelled against his word” (Hillers, Lamentations, 90).
242 Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 71.
focus of blame to those who did the deceiving. Highlighting her suffering and pointing out that it is not entirely her fault, Zion thus concedes that she has done wrong—but that regardless of the seriousness of her wrongdoing, nothing is deserving of the severity of her present situation. This turns responsibility back over to YHWH.

Indeed, for Mandolfo, the portrayal of YHWH’s actions in the greater context of Lamentations mean that 1:18a cannot possibly be taken at face value. She suspects Zion’s confession is “coerced,” a double-voiced statement of the dominant discourse—“YHWH is just”—that Zion has recontextualised ironically. For Mandolfo, “whether she has sinned or not seems nearly beside the point from where she is standing. YHWH’s indiscriminate brutality takes center stage and thus mitigates the gravity of the charges against her.” Similarly, Stiebert finds in the remainder of Lamentations “no evidence to substantiate the claim of 1:18: ‘YHWH is righteous.’ We see him only as brute.”

Even if not double voiced, given the hellish treatment she has received at the hands of YHWH, 1:18a must be recognised for the sinister statement that it is. It is entirely possible (pace Mandolfo) that Zion speaks 1:18a sincerely. But this itself is troubling, given what is known from sociology and psychology of battered women’s incorrect perceptions that they are to blame for their partners’ violent behaviours. Even if Zion is sincere in her confession and desire to vindicate YHWH, then, there are grounds for challenging her own perception of the situation.

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244 House sees this as a cop out on Zion’s part: “she does not take full responsibility for her actions, for she claims she was deceived” (House, Lamentations, 362).
249 Cf. O’Connor, Tears of the World, 27, 29.
3.2.8 Lamentations 1:20-22

3.2.8.1 Lamentations 1:20-22: Overview

Lamentations 1:20-22 form an imprecation, as Zion entreats YHWH to “see” (רָאָה, 1:20a; 1:9c, 11c; 2:20a; 5:1) her turmoil and make reparation against her enemies (cf. Pss 79:12, 83:14-18, 137:7-9). She is in evident “distress” (דָוָד, 1:20a), with stomach “churning” (דֹרֶם, 1:20a, cf. 2:11a) and heart “flipflopping” (דָּבָר, 1:20b) within her.\(^{250}\) She attributes this state to having indeed rebelled (לְרַע, 1:20b), before picturing the full scale destruction of her people. The sword bereaves without, death prevails within (1:20c, cf. Deut 32:25; Ezek 7:15; Jer 14:18).\(^{251}\)

Zion reports that others have “heard” (לִשֵּׁם, 1:21a; cf. 1:18) how she “sighs” (הָעַה, 1:21a, cf. 1:4c, 8c, 11a). There is no sympathy, however, and she continues to lack a comforter (1:21a). Her enemies even “rejoice” (לִשָּׁה, 1:21b, cf. 4:21b) at her trouble. Zion calls for these enemies to be subject to the same day of YHWH that has so devastated her (1:21c). Imprecation continues into the final verse, with Zion calling for all their “evil” (לְרַע, 1:22a) to “go up” (לִבְרֵם, 1:22a) before YHWH. She entreats him to “afflict” them just as he has “afflicted” her (לִבְרֵם, 1:22a,b; cf. 1:12c, 2:20a) for all her “rebellion” (לִשֵּׁם, 1:22b; cf. 1:5b, 14a). Her sighs are many, her heart is “faint” (לִשֵּׁם, 1:22c).\(^{252}\)

\(^{250}\) The Hebrew is idiomatic, indicating something akin to “torment within” (Salters, Lamentations, 97). The verb, לִשֵּׁם, is in the rare form pealal, with the repeated consonants signifying rapid, repeated action (Jotion, 59d; GKC, 55e).

\(^{251}\) Gordis reads the asseverative kaph in 1:20, on the grounds that “within there was death” is a “far more vivid” portrait than simply “like” death (Gordis, “Asseverative Kaph,” 177).

\(^{252}\) Kaiser continues to read Zion as a menstruant, with לָלָל in 1:22 as in 1:13 (Kaiser, “Female Impersonator,” 176). The adjective is vocalised לָלָל here, however, simply “faint, sick” (cf. Isa 1:5; Jer 8:18; HALOT, 216) rather than as at 1:13, לָלָל, “faint, sick” in connection to menstruation (HALOT, 216).
Zion turns from the nations and enemies—no comfort there—to readdress YHWH. She employs her customary “see!” (יָרַא, 1:20a) to draw attention to her state. As in 1:18a, she links her suffering with “rebellion” (רָעַב, 1:20b, cf. 1:18a) and then with “transgression” (עָשָׁה, 1:22b, cf. 1:5b, 14a), in further possible confessions. The unit progresses to imprecation. The call is not (explicitly) for the end of her suffering, but rather that YHWH would visit the same day of judgement she has borne upon her enemies. While imprecation is a staple in the lament genre, it is still, like a battered woman’s reckoning that she deserves her beating, troubling.

Reading theodically, 1:20b and 1:22b indicate that Zion “realizes that she has only herself to blame.” For House, for example, 1:20 is evidence that Zion “is beginning to come to her senses,” while in 1:22 she “confesses that her sins have caused her pain,” with no hint of protestation of innocence.

Boase, however, questions this assessment. She observes Zion’s adoption of a prophetic tradition that assumes suffering is a consequence for sin. At the

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254 See further the excurses in §5.2.8 and §6.2.5.
258 Note that Linafelt does not recognise מָרַע נִמְלָל (1:20b) as an admission of Zion’s rebellion, claiming (without further discussion) that it is “textually very uncertain” (Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 10). This may be on account of misreadings of the verb מָרַע (to be recalcitrant, rebellious; HALOT, 632) as מָרַע (to be bitter; HALOT, 638). LXX (παραπανικάνω) and P (אַמַּרִיתּוּד) presuppose מָרַע here and in 1:18; V (amaritudo plena sum) presupposes מָרַע here, but not in 1:18. Linafelt would thus not be out on a limb to suggest reading מָרַע here instead of MT. On the other hand, T (נַפְּלָנָה) clearly reflects the Hebrew מָרַע in both 1:18 and 1:20. It is pertinent to note Salters’ observation that reading מָרַע is natural, “especially so if one does not recognise here than Zion has had a change of heart/mind” (Salters, *Lamentations*, 98). Thus translation is guided by interpretive preference, informing the textual decision whether to read Zion’s cry as one of bitterness (cf. 1:2) or of confession.
same time, however, she contends that this equation is subverted by the “implicit questioning of Yahweh’s even-handedness and the emphasis on the suffering.” For Boase, the call for YHWH to punish her enemies, along with continuing lack of specificity of sin, suggest “an element of reproach and question as to Yahweh’s even-handedness.” Similarly, Dobbs-Allsopp maintains that imprecation serves “to implicate God implicitly as well. . . the divine agent of destruction and the enemy are two sides of the same coin.”

In addition to noting this oblique indictment in the imprecation, Dobbs-Allsopp discusses 1:20-22 in more general terms. He writes lyrically about poetic techniques, the curse element of the funeral dirge, the poignancy of Zion’s suffering, the place that language might play in coming to her aid, and the silence with which the lament leaves its reader. But he gives no sustained comment on Zion’s “admissions” in verse 20b and 22b, an omission for which Longman takes him to task:

Interestingly, Dobbs-Allsopp does not comment on this verse [20] in his commentary on the book. He is so intent on building a picture of woman Jerusalem as offended by a violent God that he passes quickly or in silence over those passages where woman Jerusalem owns her own responsibility for her plight.

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259 Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom?* 216.
260 Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom?* 215. For Boase, the unit moves “between the support of and the subversion of the prophetic traditions which it evokes” (Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom?* 215).
263 Longman, *Lamentations*, 350. This may not be entirely fair. Dobbs-Allsopp does acknowledge that Lamentations expresses both theodic and antitheodic sentiments (Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 27-33) although he does, in the end, tend to read antitheodically. Similarly, Boase states that Lamentations is a polyphony (Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom?* 31-32), but also tends, in the commendable endeavour to highlight previously neglected aspects of the text, toward antitheodicy.
And so Longman strikes the nub of the issue. Commentators—both antitheodic and theodic—prioritise parts of the text that will best support their case, bypassing those that do not. Longman, for his part, continues to insist that 1:22 “reaffirms Jerusalem’s awareness that her sad state is her own fault.”264 As such, he does exactly that of which he accuses Dobbs-Allsopp, but in reverse. That is, he is so intent on building a picture of woman Jerusalem rightly reproved by a just God, that he passes quickly or in silence over any indications to the contrary.

3.3 Lamentations 1: Overall Point of View

In the contested waters charting Zion’s sin, YHWH’s heavyhandedness, and the enemy’s gratuitous enjoyment of carrying out the task of destroying, who is finally to blame? And in reading these perspectives, how do interpreters justify their respective theodic or antitheodic claims?

The Lamenter’s first glimpse of fault has Zion’s friends-turned-enemies (1:2c), nameless pursuers (1:3c) and faceless foes (1:5a) in sight.265 He then nails his colours to the mast in 1:5: Zion bereft because of the “multitude of her transgressions” (1:5b). The Lamenter, at least initially, defaults to a concept of retributive justice in keeping with prophetic and Deuteronomic conceptions.266 The Lamenter’s picture of Jerusalem, fallen according to devices of her own making, continues to build (1:8-9b) until she interrupts in 1:9c. When the Lamenter resumes speech, he no longer mentions her sin, instead taking up Zion’s own themes.267 He turns to YHWH and highlights the triumph of her

264 Longman, Lamentations, 351.
265 Remember, though, that in executing judgement on Zion, the enemies and YHWH are two sides of the same coin.
266 Note that this assumes prophetic discourses are already in currency, as traditional master narratives (Mandolfo, Daughter Zion, 15). In Mandolfo’s project, Zion resists her portrayal in the prophets, presupposing the preexistence of the prophetic marriage metaphor texts (Mandolfo, Daughter Zion, 29-54). Similarly, Boase assumes the primacy of the prophetic passages she employs, building her argument around the appearance of established prophetic motifs in Lamentations (Boase, Fulfillment of Doom? 23). See §1.2 for dating.
267 Zion’s “interruptive outcry” breaks the Lamenter’s “monopoly of viewpoint” (Miller, “Reading Voices,” 399).
enemies, implicitly indicting YHWH (1:10-11b; cf. 9c). Yielding the floor to Zion (1:12c) he only intrudes once more (1:17). Here again he makes no mention of sin, reiterating claims Zion made in 1:12-16: YHWH has done this, and it is horrific. Thus the Lamenter begins with the default perspective that suffering must stem from some prior sin, but after hearing her cry and seeing her suffering he softens his response. He draws attention instead to her enemies and, at the very least, hints at YHWH’s complicity.

Zion’s first cry from the heart entreats YHWH to regard her suffering at the hands of her enemy (1:9c). In contrast to the Lamenter’s interpretation of her situation in 1:5b, 8-9b, her outspoken statement disregards any mention of sin, instead highlighting her affliction and the might of her enemies. When she resumes speech, however, she becomes increasingly accusing of YHWH. In 1:9c, 11c Zion entreats YHWH to look and see what her enemies have done to her. In 1:12b-c, her plea is reversed: she entreats all who pass by (including her enemies) to look and see what YHWH has done. According to Zion, it is YHWH who brings sorrow, afflicts, sends fire, spreads a net, leaves desolate, turns back, crushes, and, ultimately, turned her over to her enemies (1:12-15). There is a single mention of something related to sin—her “rebellion” (1:14b)—but this, too, was bound into the yoke by YHWH. Zion, it seems, while protesting against her enemies and giving a nod to her part in the process, points the finger squarely at YHWH.

After the Lamenter’s interjection, however (1:17), Zion concedes: YHWH is just, I have rebelled (1:18). It is as though she has heard the Lamenter’s earlier rhetoric, and upon reflection takes up his theme, blaming herself, even though

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270 Even when human enemies are in view, these enemies are doing YHWH’s bidding, which makes it “difficult in Lam 1-2 to distinguish between God and the (foreign) ‘enemies’ in Daughter Zion’s vitriol” (Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion*, 4-5). The confluence between Zion and enemies becomes much more pronounced in Lam 2.
he no longer does so. But there is some ambivalence here, it seems. Her pain is meteoric, her betrayal devastating. While she twice more concedes the point (1:20b, 22b) there is an overwhelming sense of her pain.

The Lamenter initially assigns fault to Zion for her sin. Once mitigated by her presentation of pain, however, he becomes more sympathetic and turns toward indicting YHWH and the nations. Zion begins by crying out the extent of her despair. She accuses YHWH but then proceeds to acknowledge the role her sin has played, even while protesting the harshness of her punishment. While the Lamenter and Zion initially present different perspectives—as embodied, integral points of view—these interact dialogically as each responds to the other. Is there one overall, dominant monologic perspective? If so, where should a reader look for this, to the rhetoric of the Lamenter, the rhetoric of Zion, or somewhere else?

3.3.3.1 The Lamenter and the Prevailing Point of View

Boase observes the way in which, in much scholarly commentary, the Lamenter’s point of view is “given privileged position in interpreting Lam 1,” with commentators believing “that this persona provides an objective, and consequently ‘correct,’ theological interpretation of events.” By virtue of having spoken first, the Lamenter “convinces us to accept his perspective on Zion’s suffering. He thinks she brought it on herself.” While the Lamenter speaks first in Lam 1, however, Zion has the final word. So which, then, is the prevailing perspective? Others assign the normative perspective to the Lamenter by equating his voice with that of the “author,” “poet,” or “narrator.”

Miller explores the dialogic interaction between the Lamenter and Zion in terms of Bakhtin’s active and passive double-voiced discourse (the second sense of dialogue). He demonstrates that the Lamenter and Zion both influence and undermine each other. On one hand, they take up each other’s language and vocabulary to disagree, “continually colliding with each other—challenging and undermining the purpose and intention of the other speaker” (Miller, “Reading Voices,” 406-407). On the other hand, the Lamenter’s speech is transformed by attending to Zion (Miller, “Reading Voices,” 397, 399).

Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 212.

O’Connor, Tears of the World, 17.

Cf. Miller, “Poetry and Personae,” 51. E.g., Hillers, the first speaker is “the poet himself”
But the Lamenter does not have that status. He is an equal speaker in the poem-world. Rather than “an objective observer who gives the ‘true’ interpretation of Zion’s fate, the narrator [Lamenter] must be understood as a literary construct, a persona or voice who interacts with other personae within the book.” Recognising that both voices in Lam 1 are literary constructs thus raises questions regarding the commonly held notion that the narrator [“Lamenter”] stands outside of the poem and thereby offers the reader an “objective” perspective. When critics read Lamentations 1 in this way, they, in effect, privilege the narrator’s viewpoint and silence Jerusalem’s voice by subordinating it to that of the narrator.

Boase highlights further issues in assigning the Lamenter the normative point of view. There are aspects of alternative perspectives within his own utterances. While his attitude at verses 5 and 8-9b might suggest “she brought it on herself,” there are intimations of a more sympathetic stance as he proceeds. So the Lamenter’s “voice gives but one viewpoint of the destruction and . . . that viewpoint is not without its tensions.” His perspective regarding the relationship between Zion’s sin and her suffering alters in dialogic interaction with Zion’s. The Lamenter is thus not a reliable guide to an overall theological perspective.

### 3.3.3.2 Zion and the Prevailing Point of View

What about Zion? Ought her voice be privileged simply because of the extent of her pain, the survivor’s prerogative? O’Connor suggests Zion has the moral

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(Hillers, Lamentations, 79).

276 See §3.1.2.1.


278 Miller, “Reading Voices,” 394.

279 Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 212.
authority of the victim, such that her speech “undermines” that of the Lamenter. But Zion’s perspective, too, is changed by dialogic interaction. While she first accuses and vehemently objects to her affliction, she proceeds to admit complicity in her suffering. These confessions, though, are potentially coerced, or perhaps reflect a false self-perception. As a victim still embroiled in her victimisation, Zion’s shifting evaluation of her causative role in her situation cannot be taken as the prevailing perspective. So it is that “[w]hen one comes to the end of Lamentations 1, neither voice has gained a dominant position. There is no final conclusion; the conflict between the two speakers remains unresolved and unresolvable. The voices exist, in other words, ‘as an eternal harmony of unmerged voices.’”

Each speaker maintains their integrity as an embodied point of view interacting dialogically in a polyphony, even as their speech is influenced by attending to the Other. The impossibility of determining a dominant voice, however, is uncomfortable for readers looking for certainty, or who have an interpretive stance which presupposes a monologic theological message. Consequently, while commentators generally do acknowledge elements of both Zion’s penitence and her protest, they also tend toward highlighting either the extent of Zion’s sin or the extent (and injustice) of her suffering.

### 3.3.4 Theodicy Prevails: Suffering is the Measure of Sin

Explicit connections between suffering and sin appear more frequently in Lam 1 than in any other chapter. The Lamenter attributes sin to Zion twice in the first half of the poem (מַעַן, 1:5b; מַעַן, 1:8a), and she herself then admits transgression and rebellion (מַעַן, 1:14a, 22b; מַעַן, 1:18a, 20b). In 1:5b, 18a,
28b, and 22b sin is causally connected to her suffering. Prioritising and privileging this perspective allows Lam 1 to be read theodically. For example, Longman argues emphatically that the prevailing perspective of the chapter, indeed the book, is that the people have the primary role in bringing about their predicament:

The poet states clearly that “The LORD has brought her grief because of her many sins” (1:5b) and “Jerusalem has sinned greatly and so has become unclean” (1:8a). Personified Jerusalem herself proclaims, “My sins have been bound into a yoke; by his hands they were woven together” (1:14a). As opposed to Linafelt, she exonerates God in 1:18a, “The LORD is righteous, yet I rebelled against his command.”

Similarly, House insists that “[t]heir wounds are their own fault. God has not forsaken them for no reason. The whole chapter seeks to describe how God afflicts and forsakes the people who have rejected his word and have forsaken their covenant commitments.”

Even when the severity of Zion’s suffering is recognised, theodic-leaning commentators are reluctant to waver from understanding that suffering is the just result of sin. Westermann, for example, does observe the “two motifs” of

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283 So Gordis, Lam 1 confirms that “Zion has deserved her fate because she has sinned and defied her God” (Gordis, Lamentations, 129); Lanahan claims that “Jerusalem willingly admits the folly of her past behavior towards God in her making of futile alliances with the gentiles” (Lanahan, “The Speaking Voice,” 44); Trudinger finds the “reason for this tragedy” in 1:5a, 8b: “Jerusalem has sinned. In other words, Jerusalem bears responsibility for the catastrophe” (Trudinger, “Lamentations as City and Land,” 46); Heater rejects any “effort to claim unjust punishment” insisting that “Jerusalem freely admitted her culpability” and “attributed the calamity to Yahweh as just punishment” (Heater, “Structure and Meaning,” 152).


285 House, Lamentations, 365; cf. Salters, Jonah and Lamentations, 73.
“agony” and “guilt.” In his discussion of 1:18, he draws out both of these motifs:

Those voicing the lament here clearly know that the terrible fate which has befallen them has been inflicted upon them because of their own guilt. Yet they do not stop with confirming that their punishment was deserved. Instead, they lay their bitter agony before God. They do so in order that, despite their guilt, God might graciously turn toward them once again.

While Westermann’s reading does acknowledge the extent of Zion’s suffering, and pay due regard to valuing her presentation of pain, he still asserts that “their punishment was deserved.” According to this kind of interpretation, even “in the anguish of her victimage Zion is not held to be entirely innocent of complicity in her fate.” Rather, “the sin is the equal of the suffering.”

3.3.5 Antitheodicy Prevails: Suffering is not the Measure of Sin

Antitheodic readings operate in reverse. Linafelt champions an antitheodic reading stance, even finding fewer references to sin in the chapter than commentators usually observe. He maintains that 1:12-16 contains no reference to sin, that Zion “mentions ‘sin’ or ‘guilt’ only twice (1:18, 22) and that her

286 Westermann, Lamentations, 140.
287 Westermann, Lamentations, 140. While Westermann identifies both pain and penitence, then, he does not dwell so much on protest.
290 Dobbs-Allsopp, “Tragedy, Tradition, and Theology,” 36, a perspective that Dobbs-Allsopp ascribes to Gottwald, Lamentations. Note though, that while Gottwald states that YHWH’s anger and Zion’s suffering are “[c]ommensurable” to her sin (p. 72), he later acknowledges that Lamentations “senses an excess of punishment amounting to injustice” (Gottwald, Lamentations, 117). The inherent polyphony of the text thus draws competing assessments of the commensurability, or otherwise, of Zion’s suffering and her sin, even within a single commentator’s work.
291 Such that “there is no attempt here to interpret or explain suffering” (Linafelt, “Zion’s Cause,” 275).
only statement of ‘repentance’ (1:20) is textually very uncertain.”

Consequently he declares that “[u]nlike the poet in 1.1-11, Zion makes little correlation between her sins and her suffering.”

Rather, “[i]nstead of explanations for suffering, one finds in the [sic] Zion’s speech an accusation against God combined with a terrifying description of misery.”

Reading antitheodically, any hint of sin is overwhelmed by Zion’s agony and accusation.

This is, perhaps, the extreme end of the spectrum. Most antitheodical readings do acknowledge the presence of strong theodic statements. Boase, for example, acknowledges the greater concentration of sin language in Lam 1 than elsewhere in Lamentations. She goes on, however, to question the strength of this language and the prophetic trajectory it presupposes, given that

the sin references in ch. 1 are, on the whole, non-specific, although an allusion to sexual immorality is one possible reading of vv. 8-9. The lack of specificity, which occurs in conjunction with graphic expressions of suffering and divine causality, has the effect of destabilizing the centrality of the sin motif, and creates tension for the reader.

Reading antitheodically, a lack of specificity in describing sin lends some ambiguity to the accusations and admissions. While conceding that “Zion does indeed admit her sins or disobedience,” she does so “flatly and not altogether wholeheartedly.”

This lack of wholeheartedness “at the very
least . . . appears to call into question the appropriateness of YHWH’s response.\textsuperscript{298} Instead of majoring on sin, then, antitheodic interpreters note how Zion’s admissions are “subordinate to the focus of her speech, namely, a description of her suffering.”\textsuperscript{299} The extent of this suffering suggests to antitheodic readers that YHWH’s punishing response is far too extreme.\textsuperscript{300} Dobbs-Allsopp and Linafelt encapsulate the antitheodic inclination in their article exploring rape imagery in Lam 1. From their analysis of 1:8b-c, 10b-c, 12b, 13c, and 22b, they find in Lam 1 a “a network of mutually reinforcing images of rape.”\textsuperscript{301} They summarise the chapter thus:

The poet’s figuration of Zion as rape victim personalizes the city’s destruction in a way that is not easily ignored. We are compelled to compassion by these images of victimization, and in so far as Yhwh is envisioned as the perpetrator of this crime (Thr 1,12b. 13c. 22b) we are led by the poet to question the ethics of Yhwh’s actions. Is there anything that can justify such an abhorrent

\textsuperscript{298} Miller, “Reading Voices,” 401. Dobbs-Allsopp explains that “[t]he concern is not about the appropriateness of Yahweh’s punishment, which is assumed from the start, but about what Exum most fittingly calls the ‘uneasy awareness’ that Yahweh’s punishment far exceeds the community’s guilt” (Dobbs-Allsopp, “Tragedy, Tradition, and Theology,” 45).

\textsuperscript{299} Miller, “Reading Voices,” 400-401. Cf. Boase, Lam 1 “does express the view that Jerusalem’s suffering is a consequence of her sin, but the relative weight of this insight must be held in balance with the overriding dominance of the suffering portrayed” (Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 174).

\textsuperscript{300} Miller notes that “she assents to the notion that she has done wrong. Jerusalem does not contradict what the narrator has previously said, she merely recontextualizes the comments, thus making them conditional and open to new purposes. Rather than pointing to Jerusalem’s sinful culpability, which was their original purpose, now they direct her attention to her woeful suffering, her victimization at the hands of her enemy, and the inappropriateness of YHWH’s response to her wrongdoing” (Miller, “Reading Voices,” 402). Similarly, Dobbs-Allsopp explains that the “strong emphasis on sin shows clearly that the poet is interested in acknowledging the reality of communal sin and guilt. Yet despite such seemingly straightforward representations of Judah’s sin, the poem also actively resists the temptation to collapse too facilely the reality of sin and guilt with the reality of radical suffering” (Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 61). Mandolfo holds that “God is held responsible for Zion’s misery, but both of the poem’s speakers acknowledge that Zion’s sins (never specifically identified) triggered God’s actions (vv. 8, 14, 18, 20).” Even so, she says, “clearly the poet sees Zion’s torment as surpassing her deserts” (Mandolfo, “Lamentations,” 238).

\textsuperscript{301} Dobbs-Allsopp and Linafelt, “The Rape of Zion,” 81.
crime? Our answer, and we believe the poet’s answer as well, must be an emphatic no!\textsuperscript{302}

Antitheodic readings, then, mitigate confessions of sin contextually. Even when acknowledging theodic statements, these are undermined by the enormity of the surrounding suffering and the lack of specificity of sin. Further, regardless of sin, they argue that nothing is deserving of suffering in this extremity.

Now observe that above, Linafelt and Dobbs-Allsopp assert that this, their antitheodic stance, is in fact the perspective of the Poet, that is, the point of view of the text as a whole. Theodic readings argue the opposite, asserting that from the perspective of the text, Zion and the Lamenter agree that Zion “clearly” deserves her punishment “because of her own guilt,” and that this must be the prevailing perspective of the chapter.

Miller protests against reading Lam 1 as though the Lamenter presents the controlling point of view. To do so makes it “a monologic text: it permits only one point of view and creates a world that gives forth a single ideology, belief system, and purpose.”\textsuperscript{303} But in like manner, when commentators privilege Zion’s voice, elevating her authority as a protesting victim, they too read monologically, subordinating her admissions of guilt to her expressions of pain. Both theodic and antitheodic readings thus organise and prioritise particular aspects of the text in order to read monologically. These organisations are based, in part, on whether they prioritise the male voice or the female voice, although neither voice is actually consistent in its assessment of the situation throughout the chapter.

\textsuperscript{302} Dobbs-Allsopp and Linafelt, “The Rape of Zion,” 81.
\textsuperscript{303} Miller, “Reading Voices,” 394.
How then, to read? The two speakers in Lam 1 express perspectives that shift and change, taking up themes from each other, even as they never directly acknowledge the other’s presence by way of second person address. They begin with opposing perspectives but these interact dialogically, even to the point of exchange. Rather than reading for a prevailing point of view, then, “the” theological perspective of Lam 1 cannot be found in one or other viewpoint. Reading polyphonically allows the Lamenter and Zion to have their say, and for both theodic and antitheodic interpretations of their stances to be held in tension. As Dobbs-Allsopp remarks,

the brutality of God’s actions—God “made her suffer”—combined with their harsh consequences—children going into exile as “captives before the foe”—serve to soften, blunt, and even undercut the force of the acknowledged “transgressions.” In this way, then, the poem is able to give credence to both realities, the reality of sin and the reality of suffering, while at the same time insisting that these realities must be considered and weighed together.

3.4 Lamentations 1: Conclusion

Two voices—two embodied integral points of view—speak in Lam 1. They initially express different perspectives, but these are altered and exchanged in interaction with one other. Neither provides a definite, prevailing perspective. The interpretive impulse in the discipline of biblical studies, however, is to fix meaning: to monologise, as though there were a dominant message. This tendency is evident in both theodic and antitheodic readings of Lam 1. Theodic readers affirm the Lamenter’s (opening) accusations, and Zion’s (later)

304 Cf. Bakhtin, regardless of address, “[t]wo embodied meanings cannot lie side by side like two objects—they must come into inner contact; that is they must enter into a semantic bond” (Bakhtin, PDP, 189; cf. Miller, “Reading Voices,” 395).
305 Cf. Mandolfo, the didactic voice “in Lam 1-2 has structurally reversed its former perspective and now stands with the supplicant, more or less against the deity and the prophets through whom the deity speaks” (Mandolfo, Daughter Zion, 60).
admissions, of sin. Antitheodic readers counter by arguing that the nature of sin is never specified, and that in any case, Zion’s admissions are contextualised by the vast scope of her suffering. Rather, they say, the burden of the poetry is to present her pain, even to protest the unethical behaviour of YHWH. Both these stances are monologic, attempts to find in the text a dominant theology. Recognising elements of both penitence and protest in Lam 1, interacting polyphonically within and across both the Lamenter’s and Zion’s speech, is a more fruitful way to read in keeping with the text.

3.5 Postscript: Who is to Blame? The Disappearing Poet

According to Bakhtin, in polyphonic texts, independent voice-ideas interact as unmerged consciousnesses, free from authorial control.397 As seen in Lam 1, the Lamenter and Zion present their perspectives as unmerged speakers, and these interact with one another dialogically. As stated in the methodology, however, while the idea of characters interacting with each other independent of any authorial meddling is a nice idea in theory, in practice there is always an author/s, even if said author is beyond the reader’s reach.398 While I distinguish between historical authors and the implied author or Poet as the perceived orchestrator of the finished text, Guest speaks of “writer,” “author,” and “poet” interchangeably. And for Guest it is the “writer” of Lamentations who has managed to avoid all blame. She urges, then, that “it is vital to recall that behind all the ‘speakers’ in Lamentations lies the hand of the director in overall control of his cast.”399 This “writer,” says Guest, employs poetic metaphor and imagery to point the finger first at Zion and then at YHWH and in so doing turns any attention away from himself.400 That is, on the one hand, “[i]t would be disastrously easy to be pulled into the rhetoric of the writer and see her own self-indictments as sufficient evidence for the ‘truth’ of the claim that her own

397 Bakhtin, PDP, 72 and passim; see §2.2.3.2 and §2.2.3.3.
398 See §1.3 and §2.2.4.3. Guest speaks of “author,” “poet,” and “writer” interchangeably.
399 Guest, “A Recriminative Response,” 423; cf. the disappearing narrator in Hebrew narrative texts (Sternberg, Poetics, 125; Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art, 32-45; Fokkelman, Reading Biblical Narrative, 55-72).
wanton rebellious behaviour has brought about the dire consequences she now laments.”\textsuperscript{311} This is resonant of the theodic readings described above, and reading this way, Zion is the focal point of the gaze and is found to be to blame.

But on the other hand, as Guest explains, “[i]t would also be disarmingly simple to follow her gaze, which is focused on the instigator of the pain and suffering, and challenge the excessively harsh role of the deity in this situation.”\textsuperscript{312} This position sits alongside antitheodic interpretations. Reading this way, YHWH becomes the object of the gaze and the accusation. But both of these positions, maintains Guest, “lose track of the one who is controlling these responses. The writer himself—who has opted to describe a fallen city in terms of a fallen and justly broken woman—is the one responsible for this imagery, and yet is often the only “character” left unexposed.”\textsuperscript{313} Perhaps, then, it is the Poet who violates Zion in perpetuity.\textsuperscript{314}

\textsuperscript{311} Guest, “A Recriminative Response,” 423.
\textsuperscript{312} Guest, “A Recriminative Response,” 424.
\textsuperscript{313} Guest, “A Recriminative Response,” 424.
CHAPTER FOUR

LAMENTATIONS 2

4.1 Introduction to Lamentations 2

This chapter reads Lamentations 2 dialogically, observing increasing accusation against YHWH as the book of Lamentations proceeds. The Lamenter and Zion continue to interact dialogically, progressing toward a more aligned evaluative point of view in their accusations. I analyse their utterances in 2:1-10, 11-12, 13-17, 18-19, and 20-22, providing an initial overview, and a discussion of evaluative point of view in conversation with theodic and antitheodic readings. The key question for evaluative perspective is, again, who each speaker primarily blames for Zion’s pain. Do the Lamenter and Zion accept that Zion’s suffering is just punishment, or resist this, contending instead that YHWH has been too heavy handed? Theodic readings of Lamentations are more inclined to identify the former perspective within the text, while antitheodic readings read the latter. In Lam 2, however, the Lamenter and Zion become more united in their accusation of YHWH, and their assessment of his actions as reprehensible. Defending the justice of YHWH thus becomes increasingly untenable. I set this stance in dialogue with Lam 1, continuing to read Lamentations as a polyphony.
4.1.1 Who Speaks in Lamentations 2?

There are two speakers, the Lamenter (2:1-19), and Zion (2:20-22).1 The third person Lamenter opens the chapter, describing the reduced situation of Zion. This Lamenter may be the same Lamenter as in Lam 1, although this is not necessarily the case.2 In contrast to Lam 1, the bulk of Lam 2 is spoken by the Lamenter (2:1-19), with Zion’s voice only heard as the poem comes to a close (2:20-22).

4.2 Lamentations 2: Analysis

4.2.1 Lamentations 2:1-10

4.2.1.2 Lamentations 2:1-10: Overview

Lamentations 2, like Lam 1, is an acrostic poem and opens with the הָלְכָה exclamation.3 The tone of the chapter is immediately different, however, as the Lamenter describes Adonai’s destroying actions in a relentless series of verbs.4 The downcast despair of Lam 1 becomes, in Lam 2, imbued with anger. In a

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1 Establishing speakers’ identities is much more contested for Lam 2 than Lam 1, with disagreement over the number and identity of the speakers, and where each starts and ends. Others who identify two voices, a continuation of the male voice of Lam 1 in 2:1-19, and Zion in 2:20-22, include Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 78; Provan, Lamentations, 57; and Bergant, Lamentations, 56. Lee has the same divisions but with the prophet Jeremiah in vv. 1-19, and “Jerusalem’s” poet in vv. 20-22 (Lee, The Singers of Lamentations, 132). Berlin identifies “the poet” in 2:1-10, 11-19, with Jerusalem speaking in 2:20-22 (Berlin, Lamentations, 67). House identifies three speakers, a “narrator” (2:1-10), a first person “voice like the prophet Jeremiah’s” (2:11-19) and Jerusalem (2:20-22; House, Lamentations, 275). Gerstenberger, unusually, identifies 2:11-12 with the voice of the divine (Gerstenberger, Psalms and Lamentations, 487-89). Renkema has “poets” speaking in 2:1-10, 13-19, with Zion in 2:11-12, 20-22 (Renkema, Lamentations, 267; cf. Miller, “Poetry and Personae,” 111-15). Wiesmann also reads 2:11-12, 20-22 as Zion’s speech, but with a female speaker in 2:1-10; 13-17, and the people in 2:18-19 (Wiesmann, Klagelieder, 142, 146, 151, 154, 159). Labahn, on the other hand, identifies a “female author who mourns her losses” in 2:11-22 (Labahn, “Fire from Above,” 243n10).

2 Although note that ָּ and ָּ in Lam 2:16, 17 (cf. Lam 4:16, 17) are reversed from the order of Lam 1.

3 In contrast to Lam 1 where YHWH is by far the dominant designation of the divine (1:5b, 9c, 11c, 12c, 11b, 18a, 20a; with אֱלֹהִים in 1:14, 15), Lam 2 employs both YHWH (יהוה, 2:6b, 7c, 8a, 9c, 17a, 20a, 22b) and Adonai (יהוה, 2:1a, 2a, 5a, 7a, 18a, 19b, 20c) fairly evenly. YHWH is more prevalent in Lam 3 (יהוה, 3:18, 22, 24, 25, 26, 40, 50, 55, 59, 61, 64, 66; יהוה, 3:31, 36, 37, 58), and then יהוה never occurs in Lam 4 or 5 (יהוה appears in 4:11a, 16a, 20a; 5:1, 19, 21).

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barrage of brutalities, the Lamenter describes how Adonai has “beclouded” (כֵּקְדָּם, hiphil, 2:1a), “thrown down” (פָּשַׁם, hiphil, 2:1b) and “not remembered” (לֹא נָאָבָר, 2:1c). He has “engulfed” (בֹּלֶט, piel, 2:2a; cf. 2:5a,b, 8b, 16b), “not pitied,” (חָמֵל, hiphil, 2:2a; cf. 2:17b, 21c; 3:43), “broken down” (חֲרָשָׁה, 2:2b, cf. 2:17b), and “thrown down” (נָשָׁם, hiphil, 2:2c). He has “cut down” (נָשָׁם, 2:3a), “withheld” (שַׁבְּר, hiphil, 2:3b, cf. 2:8b) his right hand, “burned” (סַרְפָּה, 2:3c), and “consumed” (אַפָּל, 2:3c, cf. 4:11b) with fire. He has “bent his bow” (רַרְדָּה, 2:4a, cf. 3:12), “set his hand” (נָשָׁם תַּחְנוֹנָו, niphal, 2:5a; cf. 3:12), “slain” (רַרְדָּה, 2:4b, cf. 2:20c, 21c; 3:43), and “poured out” (שַׁבְּרָה, 2:4c, cf. 2:11b, 12c, 19b; 4:1b, 11a, 13b) fury like fire. He has, again, “engulfed” (בֹּלֶט, piel, 2:5a; cf. 2:2a,b, 8b, 16b), “laid in ruins” or “corrupted” (שַׁבְּרָה, 2:5b, piel, cf. 2:6a, 8a), and “multiplied” (לָלַב, 2:5c, hiphil) mourning and lamentation. He has “done violence” (לָלַב, piel, 2:6a), “laid in ruins” (שַׁבְּרָה, 2:6a, cf. 2:5b, 8a) his tabernacle, “abolished” (שַׁבְּרָה, piel, 2:6c) festival and sabbath, and “spurned” (לָשָׁם, 2:6c) king and priest. He has “scorned” (לָשָׁם, 2:7a) his altar, “disowned” (לָשָׁם, 2:7a) his sanctuary, and “delivered” (רַרְדָּה, 2:7b, hiphil) Zion into the hands of the enemy.

This was no random event, asserts the Lamenter. YHWH “determined” (לָשָׁם, 2:8a) to ruin, he “marked out the line” (לָשָׁם, 2:8a) for demolition, and did not stay his hand from destroying (2:8b), causing the very defences and walls of the city to “lament” (קְשָׁם, hiphil, 2:8c). Image piles upon image as all is brought low. Gates and bars have “sunk” (נָשָׁם, 2:9a) into the ground. He has “destroyed” (לָשָׁם, piel, 2:9a) and “shattered” (שַׁבְּרָה, piel, 2:9a, cf. 3:4) her bars. King and princes are scattered among the nations and prophetic vision is no more (2:9b,c; cf. 2:14). There is a sense of totality, even extravagance, in the extent to which YHWH destroys. As the barrage concludes, elders and maidens alike sit, like Zion herself, in the dust, their heads bowed down to the ground (2:10, cf. 1:1). Zion is cast down, and down, and utterly down.
The opening announcement that Adonai has “beclouded” (םג, 2:1a) Daughter Zion casts a dark shadow over Lam 2:1-10.5 His “anger” (יִרְע, 2:1a, 3a, 6c; cf. 1:12c, 3:43, 66; 4:11a) is unmistakable, and it is directed at Zion.6 That he has not remembered, in this context, is not simply an oversight, but an “active ignoring” on YHWH’s part.7 He ignores his “footstool” (בָּזֶה, 2:1c), in an allusion to the ark of the covenant, which came to represent the place where YHWH dwells and is worshipped (1 Chron 28:2; cf. Ps 99:5; 132:7).8 The implicit reference to the temple here becomes apparent, retrospectively, when the unit goes on to concern itself with temple, sanctuary and altar (2:6-7).9

Mention of the “day of his anger” (יִרְע בָּזֶה, 2:1c, 21c, 22b; cf. 1:12) establishes intertextual connections with the prophetic “day of YHWH” (e.g., Isa 2:1-4:1; 19; Amos 3-5; Jer 4:5-31; Zeph 1:3-3:8; Joel 2:2; Ezek 30:3), placing the chapter firmly in the context of this threatened day of judgement.10 On this day YHWH destroys, or more literally, “consumes” (בֹּרֵר, 2:2a, 5a,b, 8b, 16b; cf. Jer 51:34; Hos 8:8; Jonah 2:1) all the habitations of Jacob, linking the consuming fire of anger with the consuming of food.11 This is a ravenous, fast-acting hunger, an appetite devouring all in its path.12 Like an enemy, YHWH consumes both

5 The verb בָּזֶה is a hapax legomenon, possibly a hiphil verb related to the noun בָּזֶה, “cloud,” hence “beclouded” (cf. LXX (ἔγνωφοσέν), P (חֻפָּה), and V (obtexit caligine); Renkema, Lamentations, 216; Salters, Lamentations, 112; Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 80; Westermann, Lamentations, 140; Albrektson, Lamentations, 86). Tg. Lam, however, reads כְּנֶבֶן “to loathe,” perhaps from the Arabic yb “blame, revile” (cf. Hillers, Lamentations, 96; Rudolph, Der Text der Klagelieder, 105). Alternatively, Berlin suggests a connection to the noun בּוֹרֵר, presupposing a verb בּוֹרֵר, “treat with contempt” (Berlin, Lamentations, 66; cf. Ps 106:40). NRSV translates “humiliated” perhaps on the basis of of the Syriac noun כּוֹכֵב, “shame” (Salters, Lamentations, 112). While connotations of blame, humiliation, and contempt do fit the context, the “beclouding” of Zion, in an inversion of the image of the God whose presence is usually indicated by clouds, is more compelling (cf. Albrektson, Lamentations, 86; Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 80; Salters, Lamentations, 112-13).

6 Lam 2 uses a variety of names for the city, the land, and the people. In 2:1-10 alone, Daughter Zion (2:1a, 4b, 8a, 10a), Daughter Judah (2:2b; 5c), Zion (2:6b), Jerusalem (2:10c), Israel (2:1b; 3a; 5a) and Jacob (2:2a; 3c) appear.


8 Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 81.

9 Cf. Salters, Lamentations, 114; Albrektson, Lamentations, 86; contra Hillers, Lamentations, 97.

10 Cf. House, Lamentations, 374.

11 To “swallow, engulf” (HALOT, 134).

12 Cf. Salters, Lamentations, 116; Renkema, Lamentations, 222.
physical structures (2:2a, 5b, 8b) and people (2:5a, 16b). It seems almost superfluous, then, to state that YHWH acts without “pitying” (דַּלְתַּל, 2:2a, cf. 2:17, 21; 3:43; Jer 13:14; Ezek 5:11; 7:4, 9; 8:18; 9:10; Zech 11:6; but see Joel 2:18; Hab 1:17; Mal 3:17 for the reverse). There is no mercy spared here. Rather, YHWH’s “wrath” (זָרַע בָּרֵא, 2:2b; cf. 3:1; Isa 9:19; 10:6; 13:9, 13; Jer 7:29; Ezek 21:31; 22:21, 31; 38:19; Hos 5:10; 13:11; Zeph 1:15, 18; Job 40:11) reaches epic proportions.

YHWH’s “fierce anger” (יָרַע אָרְךָ, 2:3a) has cut down the horn, or strength, of Israel. In a reversal of the usual state of affairs, “his right hand” (זָאֵז, 2:3b) of protection is withdrawn. In 2:4a this same right hand is actively set against Zion in a manner usually pertaining to her enemies, not her God. The mighty right hand of protection from, and action against, Zion’s enemies (e.g., Ex 15:6, 12; Deut 26:8; Ps 89:13; Isa 41:10) has now been turned against her.

Consuming by fire continues (שָׂרְדַּת בָּשָׂר, 2:3c; cf. 4:11; Ex 24:17; Deut 4:24; 9:3; Isa 1:7; 5:24; 9:18-20; 29:6; 30:27, 30; 33:11, 14; Ezek 15:5, 7; 19:12; Joel 1:19-20; 2:5; Amos 1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14; 2:2, 5; Zech 9:4; Job 15:34).

Lamentations 2:3 may, self consciously or otherwise, reference Deut 28 and 29:22-28, participating in Deuteronomic retributive theology. It is this theological backdrop that leads House to read YHWH’s actions in Lam 2:1-10 as covenant punishment for sin, even though sin has yet been nowhere mentioned. For House, covenant reversal is evident throughout (cf. Lev 26, Deut 28), indicating that “Israel has experienced nothing less than the covenant

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13 Consuming is usually predicated of enemies, not YHWH (House, Lamentations, 377; cf. Jer 51:34, where מְלֹא and מָלְאָה are used of Nebuchadrezzar).

14 Renkema describes מְלֹא as “an emotionally laden and forceful outburst of anger” (cf. Gen 49:7), but cautions readers not to suppose YHWH is out of control (Renkema, Lamentations, 224). Salters, on the other hand, suggests this anger is “overflowing and excessive” (Salters, Lamentations, 117).

15 Gottlieb, Lamentations, 26; Renkema, Lamentations, 227; Salters, Lamentations, 120; Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 82.


17 House, Lamentations, 378-79.
curses themselves, which is another way of saying they have experienced the day of the Lord” (cf. Amos 5).  

The Lamenter then likens YHWH to an enemy in two ways. YHWH has bent his bow “like an enemy” (הָאָרֶץ, 2:4a, 5a; cf. Isa 63:10) and set his hand against Israel “like a foe” (הָאָרֶץ, 4a; cf. Job 16:9, Job 19:11). In so doing he has slaughtered “every delight for the eye” (בִּלָּל הַתָּמִיּוֹת, 2:4b; cf. 1:7, 10, 11; 1 Kgs 20:6; Ezek 24:16, 21, 25). The verb “slaughter” (הֵרָע) usually takes human objects, such that commentators understand the “delights” in 2:4b in reference to people, perhaps even the children. But נְתוֹנֵי נְתֹנִי may also extend metaphorically, to all her “precious things,” whether people or possessions. All are subject to YHWH’s anger (והָאָרֶץ, 2:4c; cf. 4:11), once more poured out like fire (2:4c; cf. 2:3c; 4:11a).

18 House, Lamentations, 380.
19 Salters, Lamentations, 125; Alexander, Targum of Lamentations, 129n14.
20 The construct נְתוֹנֵי נְתֹנִי, as with the noun נְתוֹנִי in 1:7, 10, 11, could refer to either people or objects (cf. Kgs 20:6; Ezek 24:16, 21, 25). The MT does not make the referent of “what is pleasing to the eye[s]” (HALOT, 570) explicit, a vagary corroborated by LXX (τὰ ἐπιθυμηματα ὑποθέτουμον μου, note the pl. of the sg. ὑποθέτουμα), and the 1s suffix, over which MT is to be preferred as this is not Zion speaking; cf. Albrekton, Lamentations, 92). V (omni quod pulchrum erat visu), and T (הֶהָרָע). Tg. Lam, however, inserts “every young man,” specifying the human referent, but both nuances in view by retaining “precious items” (הָאָרֶץ; Salters, Lamentations, 125; but see Alexander, Targum of Lamentations, 129n14). That the people to which נְתוֹנֵי נְתֹנִי refers could be the children (cf. Hos 9:16) is often supposed in translation (cf. NRSV, “all in whom we took pride”; CEV, “loved ones”; ESV, “all who were delightful in our eyes”; GNB “those who were our joy and delight”; TM, “young men”). Levine, however, observing a link with נְתוֹנֵי in 2:4c, contends these are the “devout who attend the sanctuary” (Levine, Aramaic Lamentations, 111). Lam Rab 2:4 §8:2 encompasses both these possibilities, with “children who were as dear to their parents as the apple of their eye” and “the members of the Sanhedrin who are dear to Israel as the apple of their eye” (Alexander, Targum of Lamentations, 129n14). Like Levine, Renkema takes נְתוֹנֵי as symbolic of the sanctuary, but suggests, then, that the precious thing being destroyed is the temple (Renkema, Lamentations, 233). Further, if the “tent” of Daughter Zion is taken as the temple sanctuary, then there may also be, as in Lam 1, an allusion to sexual violation on the grounds of the metaphor of Zion the city woman, and “the correspondence body Temple and genitals Inner Sanctuary” that Mintz identifies in relation to Lam 1 (Mintz, Hurban, 25). It is reasonable to read in נְתוֹנֵי both “loved ones and precious items” (cf. House, Lamentations, 380), indeed Labahn extends its reach to include “Judah with all its architecture, people and land” (Labahn, “Fire from Above,” 255). See also §3.2.1.1 n. 124.
The enemy-like actions of 2:4a give way to a direct attribution of enemy status to YHWH: “The Lord has become (like) an enemy” (היה אלהים אנון, 2:5a). Whether the ל is read as the ל veritatis, “the Lord is an enemy”21 or the simile “the Lord is like an enemy,”22 the distinction between YHWH and enemy becomes ever more murky. He has “destroyed,” or consumed, (ברק, 2:5a, cf. 2:2a, 5b, 8b, 16b) Israel.23 The physical structures of the city are in view with the destruction of palaces and strongholds (2:5b, cf. 2a,b), and, continuing into verse 6, “his booth” (לעבה, 2:6a) and “his festival” (לעבותיו, 2:6a). The only verb with any positive connotation in the entire utterance, “increase” (增至, 2:5c) applies to the increase of mourning and lamentation.24

Verse 6 is of particular interest for assessing theological evaluative point of view because of the verb “he practices violence against” (שחית, 2:6a; cf. Jer 22:3; Ezek 22:26; Zeph 3:4; Prov 8:36), which for Gottlieb indicates an “unlawful application of force.”25 There is some contention, then, that applying this verb to YHWH is theologically untenable as “the verb in question and its derived noun have to do with the perpetration of unjustified violence which cannot apply to YHWH.”26 This, of course, is precisely the point. If YHWH’s violence is, in fact,

21 Gordis, Lamentations, 279; Meek, “Lamentations,” 17. Albrektson notes that the particle ל (ל) is not represented in P (בֵּיהוּדָה), but suggests this is due to a different vorlage, rather than a judgement that YHWH is in fact the enemy (Albrektson, Lamentations, 93). Tg. Lam (היה אש יְהֹוָה אלהים אנון) on the other hand, labours the point that YHWH is only like an enemy (Alexander, Targum of Lamentations, 130; cf. Levine, Aramaic Lamentations, 111).

22 Gottlieb, Lamentations, 27; cf. Salters, Lamentations, 122; Renkema, Lamentations, 229; Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 83).

23 “Consuming” is a leitmotif in Lam 2, with two different verbs connoting the concept. The piel בָּלָה (2:2a, 5a,b, 8b, 16b), “to engulf,” can also take the meaning “to destroy” (HALOT, 134; see, e.g., NRSV, which renders בָּלָה “destroy” in 2:2a, 5a,b, 8b, but “swallow” in 2:16b). The qal בָּלָה (2:3c, 20b) “to eat” (HALOT, 47) indicates both the consuming fire of YHWH (2:3c; cf. 4:11b) and the wretchedness of mothers consuming their own children (2:20b).

24 Note the assonance in בָּלָה אָנוּס, 2:5c.

25 Gottlieb, Lamentations, 27. The qal of בָּלָה, “to treat violently” (HALOT, 329), in the hiphil indicates “to endure violence, to be bared” (HALOT, 329). This occurs in Jer 13:22, in the context of threatening that Judah’s skirts will be raised and her nakedness put on display in order to facilitate violation. Again, then, there could be a shadow meaning in the choice of word, indicative of sexual violation.

26 Renkema, Lamentations, 239. This theological position leads to a text-critical suspicion, as
unjustified and unlawful (cf. Job 19:7), the passage becomes a serious indictment. YHWH himself carries out an unlawful violation and desecration of his own temple and its religious observances. Renkema downgrades the potential indictment, however, by suggesting the ascription of unlawful violence to YHWH is not “an objective appropriation of the content of YHWH’s deeds but rather . . . the subjective experience of those deeds by human persons.” It is difficult to determine, however, how a distinction between YHWH’s hostile presence as experienced by the people, and YHWH as he “really is” might be made. Lamentations 2:6 thus maps the totality of violence. It affects both religious and civic observances (festival and sabbath, 2:6b), and military and spiritual leadership (king and priest, 2:6c). Such is the scope of YHWH’s fierce anger (2:6c).

Verse 7 continues to depict YHWH “scorning” (יָרָה, 2:7a) and “disowning” (ָּרָא, 2:7a) his own altar and sanctuary, further disrupting the expectations of a people who presumed upon YHWH’s protection for this sacred place. YHWH tears down the place of worship he himself instituted, leaving theological institutions and assumptions of inviolability in rack and ruin. Once again, “[i]t was Yahweh himself who handed Zion over to the enemy” (cf. 1:10).

While there has been hot, burning anger, 2:8 makes clear that this attack was planned in cold blood. YHWH determined (שָׁרֵם, 2:8) to ruin, “acting with . . . premeditated precision.” Rather than setting a line to build, YHWH made

interpreters “retranslate the Greek or Syriac texts to Hebrew expressions which do not have the same character of an accusation against Yahweh” (Gottlieb, Lamentations, 28). LXX διάσπασε, V dissipavit, P מָפַח, and Tg. Lam (בַּלָּשׁ) all distinctly assuage the force of the Hebrew לְשׁוֹן “to treat violently,” a tendency emulated in e.g., NRSV “broken down”; but contrast GNB, “smashed to pieces”; ASV, KJV, “violently taken away”; CEV, “shattered”; NASB, “violently treated”; NIV, “laid waste”; and NKJV, “done violence to.”

Cf. Salters, Lamentations, 132; Renkema, Lamentations, 240. Reading the difficult “booth in a garden” as a reference to the temple (cf. Alexander, Targum of Lamentations, 130n19).

Salters, Lamentations, 240.

Salters explains: “The repudiation of his own altar and his own sanctuary—which to some will have been the very essence of Yahweh worship—may have seemed inconceivable to a Yahweh devotee” (Salters, Lamentations, 134).

Salters, Lamentations, 133.

Salters, Lamentations, 137; cf. House, Lamentations, 383; Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations,
plans to destroy.\textsuperscript{32} YHWH’s hand, again, is set against his own people (2:8b, cf. 2:7b; 3:3). YHWH is active in destroying, and equally active in withholding assistance.\textsuperscript{33} The Lamenters anthropomorphises the city’s anguish such that the very ramparts and walls of Jerusalem “lament” (יֵבְשָׁה, 2:8c, cf. 1:4, 5:15). There can be no recourse to the notion that YHWH was “only a little angry.”\textsuperscript{34}

Verse 9 continues with further images of the physical city’s destruction. YHWH has broken down all her defences, allowing the enemy to penetrate, in another possible picture of rape (2:9).\textsuperscript{35} Military strategists and guardians of civic polity are scattered. With king and princes among the nations, military might is gone.\textsuperscript{36} Lack of “guidance” (עֵצָה, 2:9c) indicates loss of priestly, institutional leadership.\textsuperscript{37} Prophets have no “vision” (הֵיכָה, 2:9d), indicating loss of prophetic and religious leadership (cf. Mic 3:6-7). There is an appeal, here, to Zion theology, with its “two pillars: YHWH’s election and protection of Zion and his election and legitimation of the Davidic king.”\textsuperscript{38} With gates violated, city entered, and king gone, this theology is found wanting.\textsuperscript{39}

After all these images of a broken down society and city (2:1-9a), there is a transition through the mourning of the people (2:9b-10) to the Lamenters’ own mourning (2:11ff).\textsuperscript{40} There is no place left but to sit upon the ground, amidst the rubble of the ruins (2:10, cf. 1:1, 3:6, 28). Mourning behaviours dominate:

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\textsuperscript{32} Cf. Amos 7:7-9; Berlin, Lamentations, 71; Berrigan, Lamentations, 45.
\textsuperscript{33} Cf. Renkema, Lamentations, 227-28.
\textsuperscript{34} Zech 1:15. Contra Fretheim, “I was Only a Little Angry,” 365. Blaming the excesses of the enemies for the extremities of Zion’s suffering does not convince in Lam 2, in light of the violence attributed to YHWH.
\textsuperscript{35} Cf. Guest, “A Recriminative Response,” 417; see n. 22 and n. 27 above.
\textsuperscript{36} Cf. House, Lamentations, 383.
\textsuperscript{37} In this instance עֵצָה denotes “ cultic activity and life” rather than the Law (Salters, Lamentations, 140; cf. Renkema, Lamentations, 260).
\textsuperscript{38} Renkema, Lamentations, 258.
\textsuperscript{39} Renkema, Lamentations, 258; cf. Isa 3:26.
\textsuperscript{40} Berlin, Lamentations, 72. Dobbs-Allsopp marks 2:1-8 as a distinct unit, with 2:8c-9a a “hinge” between the destruction described in 2:1-8 and the outcomes for people in 2:9-12 (Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 91).
putting on dust and sackcloth, mourning attire, and sitting in silence (2:10a).\textsuperscript{41} The mourning of the entire populace is “conveyed through a merismus—the extremes of the spectrum encapsulate everything in between them: the ‘elders’ and the ‘maidens’ symbolize the old and the young, the men and the women, the mature and the inexperienced.”\textsuperscript{42}

The destruction is thus total and devastating, affecting every aspect of community life. Consuming fire targets architectural structures, painting a picture of destruction of the physical environment (dwellings, strongholds, kingdom, tent, palaces, booth, tabernacle, sanctuary, walls, rampart, gates, bars).\textsuperscript{43} These structures can also be considered representative of the activities that take place within them, so that when linked with their leaders (rulers, king, priests, princes, prophets, elders) Lam 2:1-10 forcefully conveys the breakdown of all the structures of society. Lamentations 2:9 encapsulates this totality, with gates and bars representing the physical city, shattered; kings and princes her leadership and military might, scattered; guidance, the law, gone; and prophets, the presence of God, unaccountably absent. The fire destroys everything in its path: the city, everything within her, everything she stands for, and every part of life—physical, military, spiritual, all.\textsuperscript{44} Just as the city itself has been cast down, so too are the people’s heads bowed to the ground.\textsuperscript{45} Everything the city walls represent, every aspect of life that went on within them, and every person who assumed their protection is cast down with the walls themselves.\textsuperscript{46}

\subsection*{4.2.1.3 Lamentations 2:1-10: Who, to Whom, and Point of View}

The Lamentter speaks in the third person, describing YHWH’s actions against Zion in distressing detail. Initially, as with Lam 1, there is no specified audience.


\textsuperscript{42} Berlin, \textit{Lamentations}, 71; cf. Salters, \textit{Lamentations}, 143, 145. Berrigan links 2:10 with the infants in 2:11, further extending the reach of this totality: “These are the indices of all that has gone awry, has come to naught—suffering innocents: maidens, the aged, children, and mothers. Their protectors, the kings and nobles, are in captivity. So with tradespeople and farmers, the producers of food and services” (Berrigan, \textit{Lamentations}, 48).

\textsuperscript{43} Cf. Labahn, “Fire from Above,” 249.

\textsuperscript{44} Cf. Labahn, “Fire from Above,” 247.


The same audience of onlookers and bystanders may be gathered, however, with YHWH, Zion herself, the enemy, the surrounding nations, and indeed any who are passing by being party to the lament.\textsuperscript{47}

The Lamenter, imbibing something of Zion’s vitriol from the previous chapter, turns his accusation to YHWH.\textsuperscript{48} For Dobbs-Allsopp, then, the “central thrust” of 2:1-8, at least, is to show “in no uncertain terms that God is the chief cause of Jerusalem’s destruction.”\textsuperscript{49} Even an extremely theodicy reader can recognize that here it seems “the calamitous events of 586 B.C. were not random. No matter how painful, the truth is that Yahweh did these terrible things to His own people.”\textsuperscript{50} YHWH has withheld his hand of protection and actively participated in breaking down her defences, setting his hand to destroy.\textsuperscript{51} YHWH actually allowed and encouraged the enemies’ access to Zion’s most precious places, so that he might as well be one of them.\textsuperscript{52}

The reading of ב in לָאָהֲרָה (2:4a, 5a) and לְשׁוֹן (2:4a) is an interpretive crux. If taken as the asseverative,\textsuperscript{53} then YHWH is the enemy. There is theological resistance, however, to actually equating YHWH with the enemy.\textsuperscript{54} Commentators instead contend that YHWH is only \textit{like} an enemy, reading the ב as a simile.\textsuperscript{55} Salters, for example, avows that while “Yahweh may be acting with extreme violence against his people, and he may have aided the Babylonian invaders” it still “cannot be said that he is the enemy of Israel.”\textsuperscript{56} But regardless

\textsuperscript{47} Although none is addressed directly in 2:1-10, each of these parties is mentioned in the chapter.
\textsuperscript{48} Cf. Trudinger, “Lamentations as City and Land,” 47. Form critically, Lam 2:1-8 comprises an “accusation against God” (Westermann, \textit{Lamentations}, 159), but it is in a very real sense that the Lamenter “hurls accusations at God” (O’Connor, \textit{Tears of the World}, 33).
\textsuperscript{50} Heater, “Structure and Meaning,” 152.
\textsuperscript{53} Cf. Gordis, “Asseverative Kaph,” 176-78.
\textsuperscript{54} Renkema, while demonstrating some reluctance to state explicitly that YHWH is the enemy, does concede that “he himself actively defiles Israel” (Renkema, \textit{Lamentations}, 226).
\textsuperscript{55} Gottlieb, \textit{Lamentations}, 27; Salters, \textit{Lamentations}, 122; Renkema, \textit{Lamentations}, 229.
\textsuperscript{56} Salters, \textit{Lamentations}, 127.
of whether there is an identity or a comparison being made, the force of the metaphor is still powerful. While observing commentarial reticence to name YHWH explicitly as enemy, Dobbs-Allsopp observes the pronounced adversarial coloring to the unit. . . . Here we do not meet the kindly and compassionate God so often preached in church and synagogue. Nor do we even have to do with the fearsome but righteous God of justice whose punishments, though severe, are always just and appropriate. Rather, here the only presence of the deity available to the poet (and reader) is that which is manifested in the raw and malevolent power of an enemy. Here there is no consideration of just cause (recall the thematic prominence of God’s anger and the corresponding absence of any mention of human sin in this part of the poem).\(^57\)

Whether YHWH is an enemy, or is only \textit{like} an enemy, in the end, makes no difference to those who experience his enemy-like actions against them. Salters may unwittingly get to the nub of the matter when he says that the “poet perceives Yahweh’s actions as those of an enemy.”\(^58\) In the perception of the people who are experiencing these enemy-like actions, it matters not one whit whether YHWH is in fact an enemy, or is merely behaving like an enemy. The outcome they experience—starvation, fire, destruction, death—is the same. In the presence of the burning children, then, the distinction between “YHWH is an enemy” and “YHWH is like an enemy” is merely academic.\(^59\)

The question of perception is itself contested in readings of this utterance. Reading theodically, House argues that rather than rehearsing a rollcall of accusations from a particular point of view, the Lamerter is simply telling it

\(^57\) Dobb-Allsopp, \textit{Lamentations}, 84. Dobbs-Allsopp cautions, however, that picturing God as an enemy is not “always and forever appropriate” (Dobb-Allsopp, \textit{Lamentations}, 84).

\(^58\) Salters, \textit{Lamentations}, 122.

how it is, describing YHWH’s actions objectively rather than reproachfully.\textsuperscript{60} That is, the “drumbeat of what God has done is not so much a series of accusations as it is a thorough statement of fact.”\textsuperscript{61} This supposed stance of objectivity, however, is difficult to reconcile with the Lamenter’s engagement and sympathy toward Zion, especially when he goes on to empathise physically with her pain (2:11). Further, whether there is a distinction between objective description and reproachfulness in the text is not so much a function of the text as it is of the reader. House’s reading upholds the justice of God, and thus the Lamenter cannot be seen to be going too far down the road of reproach. Hence, House’s assessment that the Lamenter’s version of events is an objective “statement of fact” rather than an emotionally involved accusation.

My question for perspective, however, is not whether or not the Lamenter is objective, but how he assesses the relationship between YHWH’s anger and Zion’s pain. I ask after the Lamenter’s view on the knotty relationship between suffering and sin. What reason, if any, is given for YHWH’s anger? According to the Lamenter’s perspective, is this anger and its outcomes justified? On one hand, there is no mention of sin in Lam 2:1-10, with the single suggestion of sin in the entire chapter occurring at 2:14.\textsuperscript{62} To some commentators this suggests the anger of YHWH is irrational and undeserved in the extreme. For example, Dobbs-Allsopp suggests the extreme anger in Lam 2 “imputes to God felt pain and a belief that God has been wronged in a very serious way.”\textsuperscript{63} He continues, though, to observe that nowhere in the chapter is there any sign of God’s felt pain or of God having been wronged. Thus, God’s anger, as shaped by the poem’s rhetoric, becomes noticeably one-dimensional, almost solely a source for hurtful action, leaving

\textsuperscript{60} House, \textit{Lamentations}, 373.
\textsuperscript{61} House, \textit{Lamentations}, 372. Similarly, while describing the first half of Lam 2 as “unremitting” and “frightening,” Landy characterises it as an “almost objective account of God’s onslaught” (Landy, “Lamentations,” 330).
\textsuperscript{62} And even then, it is “veiled” (Salters, \textit{Lamentations}, 118).
\textsuperscript{63} Dobbs-Allsopp, \textit{Lamentations}, 81.
the poem’s readership, then, with the impression, as O’Connor observes, of an “out of control” and “mad deity.”

For both Dobbs-Allsopp and O’Connor, then, there is some suggestion that as “the narrator [Lamenter] depicts the assault on land and people, he is simultaneously charging God with infidelity, lack of integrity, and loss of self-control.”

On the other hand, allusions to the day of YHWH in Lam 2 participate in prophetic pronouncements of judgement, enabling some commentators to read theodically (cf. Isa 13:9, 13; Jer 23:20; 30:24; 32:31; 44:6; Ezek 38:18; Zeph 2; 3). Deuteronomic intertexts couch YHWH’s anger in covenant terms, providing more than sufficient justification of YHWH from outside this particular pericope (cf. Deut 28; 29; 31). This is how House reads, arguing that in light of day of the LORD imagery, Lam 2:2, for example, merely confirms that “God has acted according to what the prophets and psalms threaten/promise.” Similarly, he maintains that Lam 2:9b-c is “not an abstract description of what has happened to disinterested parties. These groups have a past that relates to what has happened to them in the present.” House thus continues to insist that the abhorrent actions of YHWH are justified. Further, he looks forward to 2:14 to contextualise YHWH’s violence in relation to the leaders’ sin (2:14a,b), even though in 2:1-10 their absence is simply noted, with no suggestion of blame. House also looks back to assertions of Zion’s sin in 1:5, 8-9, 18-22 as

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64 Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 81; quoting O’Connor, “God is mad, out of control, swirling about in unbridled destruction” (O’Connor, Tears of the World, 33). Contra Renkema, who insists that YHWH has by no means lost control (Renkema, Lamentations, 224).
65 O’Connor, Tears of the World, 33.
66 E.g., צא גָדוֹל (2:1)
67 He does concede that “Such reports are horrible even when placed in canonical context” but still asserts that “this context indicates they do have a theological and historical basis behind them” (House, Lamentations, 378).
68 House, Lamentations, 383-84. Dobbs-Allsopp, who acknowledges that “though human sin is nowhere in view locally, its reality is definitely acknowledged elsewhere in the sequence, and such knowledge undoubtedly will color how readers finally assimilate and interpret the poem’s evocation of God as enemy” (Dobb-Allsopp, Lamentations, 85).
69 That is, “as a class of people the prophets have not been faithful, and because of this they receive no vision from Yahweh, which is an earmark of what happens on the day of the Lord (see Amos 8:11-12)” (House, Lamentations, 384).
precursors setting the scene for Lam 2, so that he can continue to justify YHWH.\textsuperscript{70}

But while House points to the historical “past” of the king, priests, and prophets to justify YHWH’s violence, one wonders what he will make of it when \textit{children} are slaughtered and left dying in the streets.\textsuperscript{71} He correctly observes that merismus in Lam 2:10 indicates that “Every element of society suffers under God’s wrath.”\textsuperscript{72} He does not comment here, however, on the justice, or otherwise, of a deity who inflicts excruciating suffering on all, including the innocent, for only the sins of some.

Lam 2:1-10 thus opens with accusation. Although it is not directly addressed to YHWH, at the very least, it implicates him, providing increasing ammunition for antitheodic readings. The Lamenter insinuates that YHWH is to blame. Theodic readings counter by reading his outrage as statement of fact, not indictment, putting the chapter in the context of the day of YHWH, covenant theology, and calling on prior assertions of sin to assert that Zion is still to blame.

\section*{4.2.2 Lamentations 2:11-12}

\subsection*{4.2.2.1 Lamentations 2:11-12: Overview}

The Lamenter moves from YHWH’s actions and their outcomes for the city and the people, to the intensely personal internal effect these actions have had on him himself. In language reminiscent of Zion, he declares that his eyes are “full” (חלה) of “tears” (יהלמה, 2:11a, cf. 1:2a, 2:18b).\textsuperscript{73} Correspondence continues with stomach churning anguish (המיה, pealal, 2:11a, cf. 1:20), a motif

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{70} House, \textit{Lamentations}, 378.
\item \textsuperscript{71} Cf. Greenberg, “Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire,” 23.
\item \textsuperscript{72} House, \textit{Lamentations}, 385.
\item \textsuperscript{73} The qal of חלה, here “to fail” (\textit{HALOT}, 477) or be “full” of tears, conveys a sense of being “full up” or “complete,” contributing to the notion in Lam 2 that the people are “finished” or “spent” (cf. the piel in 2:22c, yielding something akin to “my enemy has finished them off”).
\end{itemize}
with which Zion too described her distress.²⁴ His “bile” (כבד, lit. “liver”) is “poured out” (שלח, 2:11b, cf. 2:4c, 12c, 19b; 4:1b, 11a, 13b)²⁵ “on the ground” (לאר, 11b, cf. 2:2c, 10a,c, 21a).²⁶

Reason for the Lamenter’s distress unfolds in two parts. First he laments the breaking, or “destruction” (Љשכ, 2:11c; cf. 2:13c, 3:47, 47; 4:10b) of “Daughter-My-People” (cf. 3:48; Jer 8:11, 21). This is the first place in Lamentations where this particular epithet, suggestive of a strong connection between the Lamenter and the people, appears.²⁷ While “breaking” can apply to the destruction of a city gate or wall (e.g., Isa 30:13-14; 45:2; Lam 2:9a; Amos 1:5), it can and does also apply to the breaking of a body (e.g., Lev 1:19; Ps 37:17; Jer 14:17; Lam 1:15b),²⁸ thus connecting city and woman in the very choice of word.

Second, the reason for his distress is the children, whose plight extends over a full four lines (2:11c-12c). The Lamenter reports their cry, “Where is bread and wine?” (2:12a).²⁹ The children are “faint” (شدد, niphal 2:11c, cf. hithpael, 2:12b) from hunger. This tragedy takes place in full view, outside “in the streets” (הנהלת, 2:11c, 12b; 4:18a). They are pictured pierced with hunger as with a sword, lying on the ground like the “wounded” (לאר, 2:12b; cf. 4:9).³⁰ Their life blood “pours out” (שלח, 2:12c; cf. 2:4c, 11b, 19b; 4:1b, 11a, 13b). The mothers of these infants are also in view, as those to whom the little ones cry (2:12a), and in

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²⁴ For the peal see §3.2.8.2 n. 249.
²⁵ Being “poured out” (שלח) is a leitmotif in Lam 2 and 4. Along with the pouring out of the Lamenter’s innards here, YHWH pours out fury like fire (2:4c, 4:11), life-blood is poured out (2:12c; cf. 4:13c), and Zion is urged to pour out her heart (2:19b). Dobbs-Allsopp suggests the repeated word joins “all of these separate images, inextricably linking them” (Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 95).
²⁶ Cf. Zion sitting on the ground (1:1), and the downward moving verbs and images in Lam 2 (e.g., 2:1b, 9a).
²⁷ Cf. Salters, Lamentations, 147. See further §6.1.1.1.
²⁸ Dobbs-Allsopp suggests the latter sense is to the fore (Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 94-95).
²⁹ A “frequentative,” i.e., they are crying out over and over (Salters, Lamentations, 149).
³⁰ Salters, Lamentations, 150; House, Lamentations, 386. Cf. Tg. Lam (אַלָּא אִישׁ), “as they scream like sword-wounded from thirst, in the cities’ squares, as their lives expire from hunger into their mother’s bosoms” (Levine, Aramaic Lamentations, 67).
whose embrace they die (2:12c). Just as the little children die in their mothers’ arms, so the people expire on Mother Zion’s blood-soaked earth-bosom.

Let the reader note, at this point, the taxing toll that communicating these atrocities in academic-speak takes upon this writer. Greenberg’s injunction, allowing only what is credible in the presence of the burning children to be said, once again plays upon my heart and mind. I feel that I fail them, as I am left lingering over these wounding, and wounded, words.\textsuperscript{81}

\textbf{4.2.2.2 Lamentations 2:11-12: Who, to Whom, and Point of View}

After describing YHWH’s incessant violence (Lam 2:1-10), third person portrayals of anger give way to the Lamenter’s first person “outpouring of emotion, expressed in physiological terms that signify anxiety and agitation.”\textsuperscript{82} Rather than describing events and their outcomes as an observer or even a witness, the Lamenter enters the experience of suffering, giving a subjective account of the effect witnessing this suffering has had on him.\textsuperscript{83} He feels Zion’s pain and mourns along with her.\textsuperscript{84} The Lamenter aligns with Zion, to the point where “his sympathy for her has so far transcended mere observation that he experiences the same churning of the bowels (2:11) that Jerusalem has also experienced (1:20).”\textsuperscript{85} He thus confirms Zion’s anguish and takes her side, having been recruited to her cause.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{81} Cf. Greenberg, “Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire,” 23; Galli, “Uttering the Holocaust’s Unutterability,” 396-412.
\textsuperscript{82} Berlin, \textit{Lamentations}, 72.
\textsuperscript{84} Cf. Berlin, \textit{Lamentations}, 72; Bergant, \textit{Lamentations}, 15. An alternative explanation for the change in tone, perspective, and allegiance at 2:11-12 is that a new speaker appears here, see §4.1 n. 1.
The primary reason for the Lamenter’s allegiance with Zion is the children.\textsuperscript{87} Here, then, is where theodric readers have the most work to do, when they witness “the harsh and outrageous consequences of God’s divine rampage, the starvation of the city’s most innocent victims, the babies.”\textsuperscript{88} I noted this above, when House still affirmed the city’s fallen status as just punishment for sin. Interestingly, he has little to say in defence or otherwise of YHWH in his comments on verses 11-12, a significant gap considering his usual assertions of the unassailable justice of YHWH. He speaks as though it is regrettable, but all the same, perfectly understandable:

Deut 28:41, 50, and 53-57 indicate that the nation that conquers the unrepentant Israel will have no mercy on the young, will take the children in captivity, and will besiege the people until they eat their own children rather than face starvation. The speaker understands that the children’s plight is one more horrifying proof that the covenant curses have not only come upon the people; they continue with horrifying results. It is therefore an indication of how the people’s sins affect their children. . . . This suffering could have been averted by parental faithfulness.\textsuperscript{89}

House simply takes an act-consequence interpretation of the Deuteronomic curses as read. He does not protest this punishment or suggest it is too extreme. The closest he comes to admitting that something is grossly wrong is a quote from Westermann, that in and of itself rightly moves toward critique of YHWH:

The precipitating event was the “day of wrath” on which Israel experienced the punishment of God. Although the event was recognized as punishment, it remained incomprehensible in its


\textsuperscript{88} Dobbs-Allsopp, \textit{Lamentations}, 94.

\textsuperscript{89} House, \textit{Lamentations}, 386.
severity. . . . With the perishing of young children by starvation, something unspeakable has taken place. The explanation that this was a divine punishment does not suffice, for what is the place of small children in that?90

While including Westermann’s words, however, House neither affirms nor negates the statement, simply quoting it in a string of other quotes that demonstrate, for him, that the imagery is “meant to be moving.”91 While agreeing with other commentators that the Lamenter is recruited to Zion’s cause, then, he continues to assume that from the Lamenter’s point of view this is appropriate, if horrible, suffering.92

House thus continues to champion a monologic reading of Lamentations for theodicy, but he is something of a lone voice at this point. Other theodic readers can agree that, even if there is punishment, here at Lam 2:11 the poem “reads like a silent reproach to the Almighty: ‘No matter how justified your dealings with Jerusalem may be, what have these little ones done to suffer so much?’ ”93 By presenting the suffering of the innocents, the reproach resounds. Despite any sin on Zion’s part, then, it is difficult not to conclude, at this moment, that the actions YHWH has taken are too extreme, far more excessive than required to address any kind of parental sin. Lamentations 2:11-12 acknowledges and confirms Zion’s experience of suffering and her prerogative to protest. It draws attention to those who cannot be to blame—the children—and thus implicitly indicts YHWH. The Lamenter weeps for the children, and theodic readers have little to say.94

90 Westermann, Lamentations, 153-54.
91 House, Lamentations, 386.
92 House, Lamentations, 386-87.
93 Re’emi, “Lamentations,” 96-97. Cf. Renkema: “We are left with the impression that a veiled question is at work here as to the justification and purpose of the suffering of the children and infants. Although the poets proclaim that YHWH is rightly punishing daughter Jerusalem because of her sins, (1.5, 18, 22) based on their insight that the unjust behaviour of parents also has an effect on their children, such knowledge does not reconcile with the terrible lot these children have to face, given that they are not (yet) able to accept personal responsibility” (Renkema, Lamentations, 271).
94 Note that the Hebrew Bible contains conflicting understandings of intergenerational sin.
4.2.3 Lamentations 2:13-17

4.2.3.1 Lamentations 2:13-17: Overview

After mirroring Zion’s pain for her children, the Lamenter turns to her with a series of rhetorical questions. How can he “bear witness” (יְבִיא, hiphil, 2:13a) to her? To what “compare” (רְבָּעָה, piel, 2:13) or “liken” (רְבָּעָה, hiphil, 2:13b) her, in order to “comfort” (רְבָּעָה, piel, 2:13b) her? His address reflects something of tenderness, with the use of two of Zion’s more poignant epithets, “daughter Jerusalem” (יְהוֹעֵד יְרוֹמֶשׁת, 2:13a, cf. 2:15b) and “virgin daughter Zion” (יְהוֹעֵד נְתוֹנָה, 2:13b). This comforting endeavour, however, proves practically impossible. Her “shattering” (רְבָּעָה, 2:13c, cf. 11b; 3:47, 48; 4:10) is as vast “as the sea” (רְבָּעָה, 2:13c), that is to say, incomparable and boundless in its reach (cf. Ps 104:25). The Lamenter’s questions culminate in asking “who can heal you?” (יְהוֹעֵד רֵיהָשָׂא לְךָ, 2:13c; cf. Jer 19:10-11).

Who indeed. With ruin this great, can anyone heal? Salters suggests this “final question: ‘Who can heal you?’ means ‘You are beyond healing/repair.’” He goes on, however, to puzzle it out, surmising that “the personal interrogative ‘who?’ must reflect the possibility in the poet’s mind that Yahweh is probably the only hope in this regard: the very one who has caused the catastrophe.” This is how Renkema reads, so that the question presupposes a theological

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Both the view that punishment is inflicted upon successive generations (e.g., Ex 20:5; Ex 34:7; Deut 5:9; Lev 26:40; Num 14:18; Is 14:21; Jer 32:18), and the view that each generation is responsible only for their own sin (e.g., Jer 31:29-30 and Ezek 18:1-4, 2 Kgs 14:6), are attested. Jer 3:25 encompasses both notions, that “we and our ancestors” have sinned. See further the discussion of Lam 5:7, 16 in §§7.2.1.1 and §7.2.1.2.

The verb is difficult. On the grounds of the subsequent two verbs, Renkema suggests reading some nuance of “compare” (רְבָּעָה, 2:13a) or “liken” (רְבָּעָה, 2:13b) here too, yielding “What example shall I hold up to you?” (Renkema, Lamentations, 276-77). The nuance of “testify” or “witness,” however, is more appropriate in light of the Lamenter’s increasing empathy (Cf. HALOT, 795; Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 96; O’Connor, Tears of the World, 3).

Mintz, Hurban, 29; Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 96. The association between the sea and chaos is live in the imagery (cf. Ps 46:3; Jonah 2:16; Renkema, Lamentations, 279).

Salters, Lamentations, 154.

Salters, Lamentations, 154; cf. O’Connor, Tears of the World, 38.
conviction that YHWH, and YHWH alone can fulfil this healing role.99 This conviction becomes further apparent in 2:18-19, when the Lamenter explicitly exhorts Zion to address YHWH. This injunction, however, is problematic in light of the knowledge that it is YHWH who has afflicted. Herein lies the paradox: “[T]he only possible healer is God, but God is the very one who assaulted her and smashed her in the first place.”100

Zion’s prophets come into view. The Lamenter describes what the prophets have done to contribute to her downfall (2:14a,c), as well as what they have failed to do (2:14b). They have “seen” (בָּלָּק, 2:14a,c) “emptiness” (אִנְחָה, 2:14a,c) and “whitewash” (נַהֲרָה, 2:14a; cf. Ezek 13:10-16; Jer 27-29).101 They have neglected to reveal or “uncover” (יָזַר, piel, 2:14b)102 Zion’s “iniquity” (רַשָּׁת, 2:14b; cf. 4:6, 13, 22; 5:7). Here in the midst of the portrayal of prophetic failings is the only mention of sin in all Lam 2. It was the prophets’ role to warn her, to “return” (נָבְזֹת, 2:14b), or keep, her from captivity.103 But instead of doing so, they have proffered prophecies that are empty and misleading (2:14c).

Zion has fallen in full view of “all who pass by” (כִּלְלָה תְּשֵׁבָתָה, 2:15a; cf. 1:12a). Unlike the Lamenter, and despite her earlier beseeching (1:12), these “tourists of tragedy”104 do not engage compassionately with Zion’s plight. They remain at a distance, as either shocked, or more overtly hostile, witnesses to her fall.105 They “clap their hands” (נָבְזֹת, 2:15a), “hiss” (נֵדַר, 2:15b) and “wag their heads” (נָבְזֹת, 2:15b).

99 Renkema, Lamentations, 279.
100 O’Connor, Tears of the World, 38. See further §7.2.4.2.
101 Compare Jeremiah’s opposition to “false” prophets (cf. Jer 6:14; 8:11), where false visions are also tied to the destruction of (Daughter)-my-People (יְשֵׁבָתָה נְתֵנָה, Jer 6:14; יְשֵׁבָת נְתֵנָה תְּשֵׁבָת, Jer 8:11; cf. 2:11b).
102 Note the wordplay with “exile,” cf. 1:3, qal; 4:22a hiphil, 4:22b.
103 Cf. Parry, Lamentations, 80; Provan, Lamentations, 73.
104 Berrigan’s evocative phrase. As to their identity, Berrigan suggests Babylonians, Edomites, Moabites, Philistines, or Egyptians (Berrigan, Lamentations, 53; cf. Salters, Lamentations, 161).
105 Cf. Berlin, Lamentations, 74. Berlin tends toward shock and astonishment (Berlin, Lamentations, 74; cf. Salters, Lamentations, 158); while Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 97; House, Lamentations, 389; Provan, Lamentations, 74; Hillers, Lamentations, 107; Parry, Lamentations, 82, tend toward derision.
hiphil, 2:15b). The Lamenters quotes their mocking incredulity: could this really be the “perfection of beauty” (כָּלְתָּא צִיּוֹן, 2:15c; cf. Ps 50:2) and “the joy of the whole earth” (יִצְבֹּא שֵׁือָךְ, 2:15c; cf. Ps 48:3)? These statements reflect a Zion theology, but it is not clear whether they are voiced in earnest, indicating that the bystanders believed in Zion’s inviolability along with her, or whether they are spoken in mocking irony: “perfection of beauty? whatever!”

The enemy stance is more obviously indicative of derision, as they “open their mouths” (מָפְתַי חַלְגֶה, 2:16a) against her, “hiss” (שָׁרוּ, 2:16b; cf. 2:15b), and “gnash their teeth” (יָיַר הָדָר, 2:16b). The Lamenters quotes their gloat that they have “devoured” her (כִּלָּה, piel, 2:16b; attributed to YHWH in 2:2a, 5a,b, 8b). They have longed to see Jerusalem receive her comeupance, and at last they have “seen” or “witnessed” (זָאָה, 2:16c) that for which they had been waiting.

Verse 17 directly contradicts the enemies’ claim to have devoured, insisting that YHWH has done this (cf. 2:2a, 5a,b, 8b). He has “done” (שׁוּכָה, 2:17a) what he “purposed” (נַחַת, 2:17a; cf. Jer 4:28). He has brought to fulfilment his promise to “destroy” (בָּעַת, piel, 2:17a). He “commanded” (נִפְשַׁט, piel, 2:17b) this long ago, determining to “demolish” (תְּדֹא, 2:17b; cf. 2:2b), not “pitying” (שָׁלֶא, 2:17b; cf: 2:2a, 21c; 3:43). He is the one who has enabled her adversaries to “rejoice” (שָׁלֶה, piel, 2:17c; cf. 4:21a), having himself “exalted” (שָׁלֶה, hiphil, 2:17c) them against her. YHWH has done this, all of it.

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106 Recording the reaction of bystanders is a common disaster motif, providing “an external observer, another perspective, that confirms the poet’s perspective” (Berlin, Lamentations, 73).

107 Berlin detects a note of incredulity, as if the nations reflect Zion’s own belief in her inviolability (Berlin, Lamentations, 7); contra Salters, who sees the statements “reflecting not so much the thinking of others as Jerusalemites themselves” (Salters, Lamentations, 160).

108 Cf. Parry, Lamentations, 82; Salters, Lamentations, 162; House, Lamentations, 390.

109 Salters, Lamentations, 163.

110 Cf. Gottlieb, Lamentations, 34.
4.2.3.2 Lamentations 2:13-17: Who, to Whom, and Point of View

For the first time in Lamentations the Lamenter addresses daughter Zion directly. His increasing empathy and direct address are evidence of an attempt to become the comforting witness she lacks.\(^{111}\) But it is not apparent that he adequately fulfils this role, for how can anyone bear witness when “no language has the capacity to encompass or contain fully and adequately (and thus assuage) such great hurt and pain”?\(^{112}\) It is clear, though, that the clincher for the Lamenter is the fate of the children (2:11-12). It is their plight that has so convincingly recruited him to Zion’s cause, as evidenced by his tender address to Zion as he highlights the little ones’ plight.

The only mention of Zion’s sin in Lam 2 appears in 2:14b. But it comes a step removed. The prophets failed to warn her. Could these religious leaders be ultimately to blame? (cf. Lam 4:13-16; Mic 3; Jer 23; Hos 4).\(^{113}\) This provides a possibility for reading antithedically, a potential prophetic scapegoat for Zion’s pain.\(^{114}\)

But mention of sin could also implicate Zion for failing to turn away from her wicked ways. She was responsible for listening and responding to the prophets. In this view, there is no excuse, as Re’emi indicates when he explains that the “poet tries to excuse the sin of Jerusalem, and thereby give some comfort to the


\(^{113}\) Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom*? 182; cf. Meek, “Lamentations,” 19. Renkema suggests Jerusalem’s prophets are “the primary cause of the present famine confronting the children of the city” but then states that the prophets’ “presumption that they alone have brought Jerusalem to her knees is misplaced. All of this is the work of YHWH. In spite of the failure of Jerusalem’s prophets, YHWH has brought the true prophetic word to fulfilment (2.17 contra 2.14)” (Renkema, *Lamentations*, 267).

\(^{114}\) Boase asserts that this is “one explanation for the fall of Jerusalem, a viewpoint expressed in Lam 2:14” (Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom*? 183). At the same time, however, she asserts that “this reference is non-confessional, occurring as part of a wider complex which considers the absence of suitable comforters for Zion (vv. 13-16). While guilt is attributed to prophets and people, no syntactic link occurs to emphasize the sin as cause of the suffering” (Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom*? 182).
Daughter of Zion; it is her prophets that have led her astray.” In saying “tries to excuse” he implies “there is no excuse,” in the poem’s view. Theodic readings thus suppose guilt is implicit throughout. The day of YHWH and the covenant context trump any sense of empathy, to the point where Re’emi can proclaim that “what had happened to them was just what true prophets like Amos had declared God must necessarily do to his chosen people, his chosen city, his chosen king, his chosen land, if he was to be true to himself and to his loving purpose for the world.” The notion is that Zion got what she deserved. Why should she complain? Her prophets may have failed by not pointing out her sin to her, but, reading theodically, that is no excuse.

Another direction for blame appears in 2:16. The Lamenter reports the crowing triumph of Zion’s enemies, who take credit for “devouring” her, delighting in ascribing themselves the role of the subjugator. This is immediately refuted in 2:17, however, as the Lamenter asserts in no uncertain terms that YHWH is the instigator of Zion’s destruction. YHWH’s sovereignty, and the source of calamity in his word, come through strongly. The enemy nations are reduced to mere weapons, albeit effective ones, in his hand. In the Lamenter’s view, then, these “enemies may have ‘swallowed her up’ (v. 16), but it was God who was acting in their actions (v. 17).” Not only did YHWH cause her downfall, he gave her enemies their cause to rejoice.

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115 Re’emi, “Lamentations,” 97, emphasis mine.
116 House, Lamentations, 388; cf. Westermann, Lamentations, 155; Parry, Lamentations, 82-83.
117 Re’emi, “Lamentations,” 95. Re’emi presupposes a true and objective perspective congruent with his theological assessment that Zion’s punishment is just desserts for her sin. Cf. Heater, the Lamenter’s admonishment is a “gentle but chiding” description of “why the calamity had happened” (Heater, “Structure and Meaning,” 153); and House, “God sent the foes, just as the prophets said he would if the covenant people did not change” (House, Lamentations, 391).
118 Cf. Calvin, “the Jews had indeed been deceived by the false prophets; but this had happened through their own fault, because they had not submitted to obey God, because they had rejected sound doctrine, because they had been rebellious against all his counsels” (Calvin, Jeremiah and the Lamentations, 368; cf. House, Lamentations, 388; Salters, Lamentations, 156).
119 Provan, Lamentations, 57.
120 Salters, Lamentations, 166; cf. Trudinger, “Lamentations as City and Land,” 48; Provan, Lamentations, 75.
According to the Lamenter, YHWH acted in anger in 2:1-7. In 2:17 however, YHWH’s destroying work is preconceived, planned from ancient times (cf. 2:8).\textsuperscript{121} For House, this is a straightforward indication that the destruction “was a specific act by God intended to punish the long-term sins of a specific nation, Israel.”\textsuperscript{122} But this contention also gives antitheodical readings momentum, for how can one forgive a deity who cold-bloodedly predetermines the death of babies? Berlin contends that in the poem’s point of view, even the “fact that the destruction is the result of false prophecies that prevented repentance (v. 14) and that God carried out what he said he would (v. 17)—that is, the conventional explanation of the events—does not assuage the poet.”\textsuperscript{123}

Lamentations 2:13-17 holds a sense of helplessness in light of what YHWH, in collusion with crooked prophets and callous enemies, has done. The Lamenter asks impossible questions, pointing at prophetic shortcomings and only secondarily at sin. Zion’s enemies have certainly had their part to play, but the Lamenter does not allow their self-aggrandising hubris to win the day, finishing the litany of blame in Lam 2:14-17 with the decisive assessment that all of this is the work of YHWH.

Reading theodically, the covenant context and the “day of YHWH” suggest that Zion’s sin, although mentioned only once, is in the background throughout, justifying YHWH’s sovereign judgement in imposing suffering. Reading antitheodically, the Lamenter’s empathy for Zion’s children, and the indictment of the religious leaders rather than the people themselves, challenges what morality YHWH can retain after treating Zion’s innocents so abhorrently.

\textsuperscript{121} Cf. Salters, Lamentations, 165; Berlin, Lamentations, 74; Provan, Lamentations, 75.

\textsuperscript{122} House continues by making a very important caveat, clarifying that the “verse has a very specific frame of reference and should not be applied to every city’s fall” (House, Lamentations, 390). This is a key caution in the application of Lamentations in contemporary faith communities. Automatically assuming that where there is suffering there must have been sin, must be avoided.

\textsuperscript{123} Berlin, Lamentations, 72.
4.2.4 Lamentations 2:18-19

4.2.4.1 Lamentations 2:18-19: Overview

The first line of 2:18 is especially difficult, textually, and has drawn a number of conjectural emendations, best summarised recently by Salters.\footnote{See Salters, Lamentations, 167-69.} Salters himself objects to MT on the grounds that the 3ms verb “cry out” (נשא, נָשָא), does not fit in the context of the address to Zion, that began in 2:13 and continues through 2:18-19, finding the 3ms “intrusive” in the context.\footnote{Salters, Lamentations, 168; cf. Ewald, Klagelieder, 335-36n18; Meek, “Lamentations,” 21; Albrektson, Lamentations, 117. NRSV, “Cry aloud to the Lord”; CEV, “deep in your heart you cried out to the Lord”; GNB “cry out to the Lord.”} Salters suggests, then, that the MT reflects a very early corruption of the Hebrew text, and follows Ewald in reading the 2fs imperative, נשא.\footnote{Salters, Lamentations, 169; cf. Hillers, Lamentations, 111; McDaniel, “Philological Studies II,” 203-4; GKC 100g.} Further, with McDaniel he reads לְבוֹם אֲלֵיה (לְבוֹם אֲלֵיה), indicating whose heart is crying out, that is, the people of Israel.

*BHS* also considers לְבוֹם אֲלֵיה corrupt and reads the 2fs imperative נשא, but with a further emendation to לְבוֹם אֲלֵיה, constituting an injunction to Zion to “cry out with a loud voice.”\footnote{Similarly, Driver reads לְבוֹם אֲלֵיה, “Cry with a full heart to the Lord” (Driver, “Abbreviations,” 92).} BHQ, however, drops the suggested emendation, noting that the reading of MT is consistently attested in the Mss and thus there is no clear evidence upon which to base any proposed changes to the text.\footnote{*BHQ,* 123. LXX (Ἐβόησεν καρδία αὐτῶν), V (clamavit cor eorum), and P (לה الخام scen Lam) all corroborate MT. Tg. Lam supplies the antecedent “of Israel” (לְבוֹם רָעְשֵׁאל קָרֶם) (לְבוֹם), indicating whose heart is crying out, that is, the people of Israel.}

Reading for the *lectio difficilior*, MT is preferred. Salters’ objection that it jars in the context of address to Zion can be answered by observing that in Lamentations, jarring lines are frequently juxtaposed. It is not irregular for...
Lamentations to turn from one addressee to another (cf. Lam 1:17), or from one speaker to another. “Their heart cried to the Lord”\(^{130}\) could be an aside, an address to the crowd of witnesses\(^{131}\) in the midst of address to Zion, which resumes at Lam 2:18aβ with address to the “wall of Daughter Zion.” This is consistent with Salter’s own observation that the Masoretes placed an *athnah* at בַּיָּהָה, indicative that the first stich is complete in and of itself.\(^{132}\) That is, “Their heart cried out to the Lord” is a stand alone aside before the Lamenters turns again to address to Zion in Lam 2:18aβ.\(^{133}\)

This term of address, “wall of Daughter Zion” ([בַּיָּהָה בָּתִּי צוֹיָה, 2:18a]) is also problematic, with some uncertainty as to its referent. First, it might refer to the city wall itself.\(^{134}\) Second, it could refer to YHWH, the protector and wall about the city (cf. Zech 2:9).\(^{135}\) And third, it could be metaphorical, standing for personified Zion (cf. 2:8c).\(^{136}\) Given the earlier anthropomorphism of parts of the city, I take this as address to the very walls (*pars pro toto*) of Zion (cf. 2:8). By virtue of the personification, the address is to Zion the city, the woman, and the people.

Zion is urged to let tears run down like a torrent (2:18b) day and night, not letting her eyes let up from crying (2:18c). She is to “rise” (רָאָה, 2:19a) in the night, cry out continually, and “pour out” (שָׁתַת, 2:19a; cf. 2:4a, 11b, 12c; 4:1b, 11a, 13b) her heart. She is to raise her hands to Adonai in supplication, pleading

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\(^{130}\) Cf. ASV, “Their heart cried unto the Lord”; ESV; “Their heart cried to the Lord”; KJV “Their heart cried unto the Lord”; NASB, “Their heart cried out to the Lord”; NIV, “The hearts of the people cry out to the Lord”; NKJV “Their heart cried out to the Lord”; GNB note “Their hearts cried out to the Lord”; House, *Lamentations*, 369; Berlin, *Lamentations*, 65.

\(^{131}\) Cf. Provan, who reads Lam 2:18α as an aside to the reader, a pause in the “address to Zion (vv. 13-19) to draw our attention to, and involve us in, her expression of her distress before God, before proceeding in the remainder of vv. 18-19 to encourage her in this activity” (Provan, *Lamentations*, 75).

\(^{132}\) Cf. Provan, *Lamentations*, 167n119; cf. “the first line of the verse hangs by itself, unattached to the address to the wall that follows” (Berlin, *Lamentations*, 74).

\(^{133}\) Contra Salter, *Lamentations*, 170.

\(^{134}\) Cf. V (super muros), an adverbial of place (GKC 118d).


for the “life” (חי, sg., 2:19c) of her “little ones” (שליות, pl. 2:19c; cf. 1:5; 2:11c; 20b; 4:4b), who faint with hunger at the “head of every street” (בראש כל ורשימים, cf. 4:1; Isa 51:20; Nah 3:10).

### 4.2.4.2 Lamentations 2:18-19: Who, to Whom, and Point of View

After the brief, general address in 2:18aa, the Lamenter continues to address Zion, now urging her to speech.137 The intent of this address is contested. Is the Lamenter directing Zion to confess or to protest? If the aim is to urge Zion to cry out in penitence, then there is an implicit assessment that she has sinned and needs to turn to YHWH to remedy the situation,138 for relief from her distress.139 There is no mention of confession, however, and the Lamenter’s directive might instead be an encouragement to Zion to cry out in protest. Linafelt insists the Lamenter is not advocating a cry for comfort, relief, or forgiveness. Rather, the appeal is to be a protest, as he urges “Zion to confront YHWH with the intolerable suffering of children, precisely on behalf of the children.”140 For Linafelt the true concern is “neither a reconciled relationship with YHWH [as it would be if penitence were the aim] nor the possibility of praise, but the very survival of the children who are dying in the street.”141

Continuing concern for children (2:19) raises further questions regarding YHWH’s ruthlessness. If the Lamenter’s aim is for Zion to bring the children to YHWH’s attention, there is indictment of YHWH: how could YHWH possibly treat children this way? How can YHWH regard the suffering little ones and not come to their aid? This will become more forceful in Lam 2:20, when Zion asks pointedly, “Should women eat their own offspring, the children they have borne?” (2:20b), clearly a case of Zion challenging YHWH.

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137 Compare her unsolicited interruptions in Lam 1:9c, 11c.
140 Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 56, emphasis original.
141 Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 56.
House, however, does not see it that way. He recognises that 2:18-19 are problematic, with the excruciating image of suffering children underscoring “the difficulty of discussing the elements of sin and punishment in Lamentations.”\textsuperscript{142} He can see that, while parents might deserve their suffering, the children “suffered gravely” through no fault of their own.\textsuperscript{143} Rather than finding protest or accusation of YHWH in this recognition, however, he solves the dilemma by explaining:

One could blame God for the whole situation, since he sent the Babylonians, but if God never punishes Israel, then wickedness must go unpunished, an option hardly favourable to anyone. The children suffer for the sins of others, in this case their parents and the Babylonians. . . . This does not change the children’s suffering, but it may change readers’ question from “How could God do such a thing?” to “How could those parents do that to their children?”\textsuperscript{144}

For House, even in light of innocents’ suffering, the appropriateness of YHWH’s actions is maintained and Zion’s people take all the blame.\textsuperscript{145} YHWH is not at fault for the suffering of the little ones, rather, their parents are.

Whether Zion is urged to confession or to penitence, the object of her cry is YHWH, the sovereign source of her pain. The appeal is conventional, and to be expected in a lament.\textsuperscript{146} Even so, like the raped city-woman and the ease with which a victim moves to imprecation—other aspects of Lamentations that also make perfect sense in their ANE contexts—it remains an horrific image. The woman who has been wasted and consumed by YHWH is, horrifically, exhorted to return to her torturer.\textsuperscript{147} Linafelt rightly critiques Westermann’s notion that

\textsuperscript{142} House, \textit{Lamentations}, 393.
\textsuperscript{143} House, \textit{Lamentations}, 393.
\textsuperscript{144} House, \textit{Lamentations}, 393, emphases original.
\textsuperscript{145} Note again, though, that the Hebrew Bible includes rhetoric that finds children to be guilty and subject to punishment for the sins of their parents (cf. §4.2.2.1 n. 94).
\textsuperscript{146} Linafelt, \textit{Surviving Lamentations}, 55.
\textsuperscript{147} Cf. Linafelt, \textit{Surviving Lamentations}, 55; Dobbs-Allsopp, \textit{Lamentations}, 96. See further §7.2.4.2.
turning Zion to YHWH is a “plea for God’s gracious intervention.” Rather, he insists that this “is surely too benign a characterization. The notion of an abused and violated woman turning for help to her abuser, and the one who abused her children, should inspire in the modern reader something less than the notion of gracious intervention.” Indeed, I am not sure if Meek realises the awful poignancy of his question, “To whom else can she go?” (cf. John 6:68). Bergant is surely right to note a theological tension between “the God who caused the city’s misfortune” and “the God to whom the stricken city turns in her agony.” This tension gains ever more momentum as the book moves on.

4.2.5 Lamentations 2:20-22

4.2.5.1 Lamentations 2:20-22: Overview

Zion employs the familiar refrain, “look” (תָּבֹא, 2:20a; cf. 1:9c, 11c, 20a) and “see” (וַיְכַכְּפֶל, 2:20a; cf. 1:11c, 20a), following with three questions of her own. Look and see, whom have “you afflicted” (יְכַכְּפֶל, poel, 2:20a, cf. 1:12c, 22a,b)? Look and see, should women “consume” (שֶׁכַּכְּפֶל, 2:20b) their “little ones” (יְכַכְּפֶל, 2:20b; cf. 1:5a; 2:11c; 19c; 4:4b)? Look and see, should priest and prophet—regardless of their complicity—be “slain” (יְכַכְּפֶל, niphal, 2:20c; cf. 2:4b, 21c; 3:43) “in the sanctuary” (נָכַכְּפֶל, 2:20c; cf. 1:10b, 2:7a)?

148 Westermann uses this phrase in regards to Lam 1:9c, 11c (Westermann, Lamentations, 127, 130), describing 2:20-22 as a “plea for God’s gracious response,” but the point is the same (Westermann, Lamentations, 158).
149 Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 55.
152 Berlin explains that the “picture of women devouring their children is a particularly gruesome form of cannibalism signifying extreme famine; it is a reversal of the natural order in which women feed their children” (Berlin, Lamentations, 75; cf. Lev 26:29, Deut 28:53-57; 2 Kings 6:26-30; Jer 19:9; Ezek 5:10). But the idea is extended in Lam 2:20-22, with 2:21 playing ‘on the idea of cannibalism in a manner that goes beyond the conventional. The root תָּבֹא, ‘slaughter,’ is used of butchering meat in preparation for a meal (e.g., 1 Sam 25:11), but here it is not meat that is slaughtered, but people, who are ‘sacrificed’ on the festival day (v. 22). The connection with the trope of cannibalism is made more secure by the wordplay between תָּבֹא and יָפַקְפֶּה, ‘those cared for (v. 20).’ God who slaughters his people is no less a cannibal than the mothers who eat their children” (Berlin, Lamentations, 76).
While Mother Zion draws attention to the children and little ones, metaphorically these include all of city Zion’s inhabitants, as becomes apparent when she illustrates the extent of her population’s decimation. The “young” (נַעְרֵי, 2:21a, cf. 5:13) and “old” (חָרְשׁוֹנִים, 2:21a, cf. 1:19b; 2:10a; 4:16b; 5:12, 14) lay dying on the ground “outside” (הַשְּדֵים, 2:21a, cf. 1:20c, 2:19d, 4:1b, 5a, 8a, 14a). “Young women” (בָּתוֹלָות, 2:21b, cf. 1:4c, 18c) and “young men” (בָּּעָרִים, 2:21b, cf. 1:18c) have fallen by the sword. Women, little ones, priest, prophet, young, old, women, men: 2:20-21 encompasses all.153 YHWH has been indiscriminate in the day of his anger, drawing the threefold accusation “you slew, you slaughtered, you pitied not” (זְרִיתֶם דְּוַעֲשָׂה תָּפִיט לָא חָלָה, 2:21c).

In a horrifying reversal of festival-like celebrations (הֵובָא תַּחַת, 2:22a) enemies arrive from all around “like antipilgrims coming to celebrate an antifestival in Zion.”154 Zion reiterates that this occurs on the “day of the anger of YHWH” (יָרָה אֵל, 2:22b, cf. 2:1c) forming a frame for the chapter with 2:1c.155 But this is not the final frame, for she then repeats once more the pitiful theme. The children, those she “bore” (תִּשְׁכַּח, piel, 2:20c; cf. 2:20b) and “reared” (רָמוּת, piel, 2:20c) have been “destroyed,” completely, (דָּמָת, piel, 2:22c) by the enemy.

4.2.5.2 Lamentations 2:20-22: Who, to Whom, and Point of View

In Lam 2:20-22, Zion responds to the Lamenter’s encouragement to speech (2:18-19).156 She cries out to YHWH, beginning with her familiar “Look, O Lord, and see!” (cf. 1:9c, 11c, 12a, 20a). She takes up the Lamenter’s theme from 2:18-19 and pleads for YHWH to take notice of the lives of her children. Perhaps she hopes to sway YHWH by drawing his attention to them—after all, it is their suffering that has so persuasively drawn the Lamenter to her cause.157 The continuing question for interpretation, as in 2:18-19, is to what extent 2:20-22 is

153 Cf. Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 58.
154 Parry, Lamentations, 85.
155 Cf. Parry, Lamentations, 85.
157 Berlin, Lamentations, 75; Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 56.
construed as protest, rather than penitence, in the face of YHWH. Indeed, it is difficult to see how it could be read as anything but protest, or (in form critical terms) “accusation against God.”158 Her two questions, should priests and prophets be slain, should children lie dead in the streets (2:20b,c) must draw from any moral reader or hearer a clear “NO!”159

Even so, theodic--leaning readers mitigate the accusatory element of 2:20-22 to greater or lesser degrees. For example, Parry, while insisting that 2:20-22 is a strong prayer of protest and “not a prayer of confession,” feels the need to add in brackets “(though she would not deny that she has sinned).”160 While keeping this aspect of Zion’s sin clearly in the picture, Parry does go on to observe Zion’s “implicit accusation that to treat his people in this brutal way was not right and that the punishment has crossed a line that should not have been crossed.”161 The intimation that YHWH has “crossed a line” is itself a line that the Lamerter, Zion, the and the Community Voice all court, to greater or lesser extents, throughout Lamentations. But it is a line that more theodic readers are reluctant to broach. Indeed, for Hillers, Lam 2:20-22 only “comes close to being a reproach to Yahweh.”162 Even as he recognises the “ghastly extremes of suffering,” he concedes only that these “seemed to those involved to be out of proportion to any guilt of the sufferers,”163 intimating that they were not in fact so. And House permits only that the rhetorical questions of Lam 2:20 “would amount to mere accusations if they were not offered in a prayer in which ‘see’ means ‘do something.’ ”164 Even the assumption that these are “mere” accusations signifies a reluctance to take the note of accusation and protest more seriously.

158 Westermann, Lamentations, 158.
160 Parry, Lamentations, 84.
161 Parry, Lamentations, 84.
162 Hillers, Lamentations, 108.
163 Hillers, Lamentations, 108.
There is no question for antitheodic readers, however, that 2:20-22 do constitute accusation.\textsuperscript{165} For Linafelt, this is confirmed by the use of the verb מָרַע, which contains the “force of ‘to afflict’ or ‘to abuse’ and may even imply capriciousness.”\textsuperscript{166} Linafelt thus finds in 2:20-22 a prayer that, like the rest of Lam 2, continues to accuse, highlighting the “ruthlessness” of YHWH in afflicting the children.\textsuperscript{167} Lee does not put too fine a point on it when he reads YHWH’s actions as “murder” from Zion’s point of view, such that in 2:20-22 “Mother Zion openly accuses YHWH of being her enemy in killing her well-cared-for-children.”\textsuperscript{168} And Dobbs-Allsopp finds in Zion’s cry a contention that “the punishment is out of proportion to the crime.”\textsuperscript{169}

In this understanding, there is no sense of confession or of submission to a perceived just punishment on Zion’s part. Rather, Zion resists, with what Dobbs-Allsopp calls “heroic defiance.”\textsuperscript{170} Instead of parroting the judgement made of her in Lam 1, Zion responds with a protest cry. Her concern is her children untimely slain, whose suffering poses a serious challenge to readings that would continue to uphold the justice of the enemy YHWH.

### 4.3 Lamentations 2: Overall Point of View

As in Lam 1, the Lamenter speaks first, to an unspecified audience. In Lam 2, however, he takes a much more fiery stance from the start, a stance that in antitheodic readings is construed as accusation against YHWH. There is more and more fluidity between “enemy” and “YHWH” (2:3b, 4a, 5a) so that when the city is delivered to the hand of her “enemy” (2:7b) it is difficult not to see the two as one and the same. The Lamenter multiplies images of YHWH’s

\textsuperscript{165} E.g., Bergant, \textit{Lamentations}, 79; Lee, “Mothers Bewailing,” 204. The verses “dare[s] God to look at what he has done and to whom he has done it, as if to reprimand him: ‘Take a good look and consider the consequences of your action’” (Berlin, \textit{Lamentations}, 77).


\textsuperscript{167} Indeed, for Linafelt 2:20-22 is “the most accusatory passage in the book” (Linafelt, \textit{Surviving Lamentations}, 57).

\textsuperscript{168} Lee, “Mothers Bewailing,” 207. Lamentations 2:20-22 comprise Zion’s “ironic invective at YHWH, the murderer of her children” (Lee, “Mothers Bewailing,” 207, emphasis original).


\textsuperscript{170} Dobbs-Allsopp, \textit{Lamentations}, 79.
destroying fire (2:1-10), reminiscent of Zion’s ascriptions of menacing actions to YHWH in 1:12-15. So involved does he become in her plight that he begins to suffer along with her, taking up her language of lament to describe his own pain (2:12). He then turns to address Zion directly, attempting to comfort by witnessing to her pain. He cites a series of potential comforters and foes in 2:14-17: prophets, bypassers, enemies, culminating with YHWH, the ultimate foe and failing comforter. The only mention of sin in the chapter, in verse 14, occurs in this sequence, condemning the prophets for failing to warn Zion of the error of her ways. The Lamenter then urges Zion to speech, in a sense answering his own rhetorical question “who can heal you?” with “no one; but if anyone, then only YHWH,” an assessment that creates interpretive challenges for readers who are appalled that she should be encouraged to plead to the abuser.\(^{171}\) The Lamenter insists, enemy arrogance notwithstanding (2:17), that YHWH is both the source and the solution of Zion’s suffering. Zion responds to the Lamenter’s exhortation by pleading for YHWH to look and see the plight of her children, by extension all of her people. In so doing she too brings her accusation against him.

Is either voice to be prioritised, and do they differ polyphonically at this point in any case? Trudinger suggests that by speaking first, and by virtue of the male-female power imbalance, the Lamenter’s perspective carries the most weight (cf. Lam 1).\(^{172}\) Further, third person speech is generally perceived by readers as more authoritative than first person speech,\(^ {173}\) giving the Lamenter’s opening speech the illusion of “objectivity.” As the Lamenter becomes a more and more supportive witness to Zion’s pain, this illusion of objectivity conveyed by his third person speech might actually serve to confirm and affirm Zion’s prior

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\(^ {171}\) See §7.2.4.2.

\(^ {172}\) Trudinger observes “an imbalance of power between the narrator [Lamenter] and the city. The narrator speaks first, and so sets the scene. The narrator defines the metaphor of the city as female, and in doing so assigns the city to a lower status in society” (Trudinger, “Lamentations as City and Land,” 49). Further, “by assuming the authority to name the city as female, the narrator subordinates the city to himself. Later, the narrator commands the city (2:18-19)” (Trudinger, “Lamentations as City and Land,” 49).

\(^ {173}\) Cf. Morson and Emerson, Prosaisics, 164; Mandolfo “Sanctioned Subversion,” 47.
claims to felt pain, in a voice perceived to be more objective and authoritative. Then, however, the Lamenter himself speaks in the first person (Lam 2:11-13), potentially losing some sense of authoritative objectivity in the change. Can a first person Lamenter be believed, or is his speech now marred with the same subjectivity that leads interpreters to downplay the significance of Zion’s speech? The Lamenter’s first person speech, moreover, demonstrates increasing solidarity with Zion. This could be construed monologically, with both the Lamenter and Zion reflecting a more and more protesting stance of accusation across the chapter.

4.3.4 Reading Theodically: Suffering is the Measure of the Sin

There are a handful of commentators, however, who insist that Lam 2, along with the whole book, is theodical. House is the most certain of these, declaring that from the point of view of the poetry, despite “important matters of divine severity, human responsibility, and innocent suffering because of the actions of the wicked,” Lamentations’ violence is “associated with justice, not with abuse.” While sin is only mentioned once in Lam 2, its pervasive presence is presupposed by the framing context of the day of YHWH which sets the scene, in verses 1 and 22, for everything in between. In this understanding, despite the recognition of terrible suffering, YHWH’s justice is maintained and Zion suffers on that day because she has sinned, and deserves it.

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174 The “perceived objectivity inscribed in the section’s predominant third-person styled narration, serves to corroborate and substantiate those more personal and biased accounts” (of Zion in 1:13-15 and the נֵבַע in 3:1-18; Dobb-Allsopp, Lamentations, 87).
175 House, Lamentations, 398.
176 E.g. House, Lamentations, 396-97; cf. Salters, Lamentations, 154; Westermann, Lamentations, 155, 59. Provan sweeps the whole question of evaluation aside, such that “the justice of God is again not an issue. . . . It is simply assumed that the calamity is sufficiently explained by Zion’s ‘iniquity’, and that the only proper response comprises prayer and (implicitly) confession of sin, in the hope that her fortunes will be restored” (Provan, Lamentations, 58).
4.3.5 Reading Antitheodically: Suffering is not the Measure of the Sin

Boase rebuts this contention that the day of YHWH is determinative for Lam 2, with the sin of Zion assumed. She undertakes an extensive analysis of the day of YHWH motif in both the prophetic material and in Lamentations. On the basis of her investigations, she demonstrates that “complete absence of reference to sin in vv. 1-8 subverts the prophetic motif, which always names specific sins when the day is directed against Judah.”\(^{178}\) For Boase, the absence of the full motif subverts its appearance in Lamentations such that “Zion is portrayed as the suffering and inconsolable victim of divine wrath. The causality of sin is not central to this chapter, and to place heavy emphasis on this [the day of YHWH] aspect of the chapter does disservice to its central theme–the outrage at Yahweh’s treatment of Zion.”\(^{179}\)

For Boase, then, the “central” theme of Lam 2 is protest against YHWH. Similarly, other commentators contend that sin takes a back seat in Lam 2, pointing out that its single appearance (2:14b) is barely significant in light of her sufferings.\(^{180}\) Further, mention of sin comes in the context of prophetic failings, and thus references Zion the city-woman-people’s alleged sins only secondarily.\(^{181}\) This leads to a focus on the indictment of YHWH, as antitheodic readers find in the Lamenter’s increasing sympathy evidence that the Lamenter comes to side with Zion against YHWH. For example, O’Connor maintains that the Lamenter becomes “wholly engaged in Zion’s tragedy. He forgets her guilt and his accusations in chapter 1 and turns furiously against the divine attacker. He stands with her and speaks on her behalf, accusing the God whose beloved she once was of betrayal and abuse, of excessive and calculated rage.”\(^{182}\)

\(^{178}\) Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom?* 190.

\(^{179}\) Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom?* 184.

\(^{180}\) Cf. Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom?* 184, 190.


Reading antitheodically, then, reference to sin gives way to “repeated emphasis on the destructive wrath of Yahweh within the chapter, which presents Zion as the inconsolable victim of Yahweh’s excessive actions.” In this reading, “God’s behavior, not Zion’s, is reprehensible.” Theologically, “Judah’s fate is presented entirely as the result of YHWH’s destructive actions.” Rather than blaming Zion, the focus is on YHWH’s culpability for the suffering of the children, suffering that suggests his punishment has “transgressed the bounds of fairness.”

Antitheodic commentators thus observe that pervasive shame and despair (Lam 1) give way to anger and accusation (Lam 2). In Lam 1, Zion was the focal point, with the Lamenter assigning, at least initially, blame to the sin and guilt of the people (1:5, 8-9). This initial judgement by the Lamenter begins to be recast by the end of Lam 1. Here in Lam 2 the camera turns to YHWH, linking Zion’s “circumstances of distress with their overall reason in God’s passion and behaviour.” The Lamenter’s wavering between Zion’s sin and YHWH’s anger now settles upon YHWH as the guilty party. In keeping with Zion’s original complaint, he blames YHWH instead of her, drops reference to her sin, takes up the theme of her suffering children, and even speaks her language of

183 Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 190.
184 Zion “openly names her oppressor and lays the murder of her people, the loss of her children, her own violation and pain, firmly at God’s door” (Guest, “A Recriminative Response,” 442). The Lamenter’s “interpretation of Zion’s predicament changes in this chapter. He no longer blames her; instead, he charges God with violent abuse of city woman Zion” (O’Connor, Tears of the World, 33). Lam 2 “focuses even more forcefully on divine culpability” (Mandolfo, Lamentations, 238).
185 O’Connor, Tears of the World, 34.
186 Renkema, Lamentations, 213.
190 Cf. Provan, “The first poem ended . . . with a suggestion of Zion’s dissatisfaction with the narrator’s seemingly simple equation between suffering and sin. Whereas there was no trace of doubt in his words as to the justice of the divine action in history, she felt that she was no worse than her enemies, and that it was unjust that she should suffer while they did not” (Provan, Lamentations, 59).
192 Provan, Lamentations, 78; Salters, Jonah and Lamentations, 73.
193 Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 49.
anguish as he describes his pain in her terms, churning stomach and all.\textsuperscript{195} He becomes more and more sympathetic to her such that her scream of pain becomes his own.\textsuperscript{196} In the absence of YHWH the Lamenter perhaps even becomes the missing comforter.\textsuperscript{197} In response, Zion goes on to pour out her heart to YHWH. Her response to the Lamenter’s urging is a further indication of the dialogic relationship between the speakers in Lamentations. It certainly seems the Lamenter and Zion are united in their accusation and complaint against YHWH, and the prevailing perspective of the poem is protest.\textsuperscript{198}

The same material in the text—the day of YHWH frame, increasing empathy between the Lamenter and Zion, prophetic failings, and a single reference to sin—is thus read in divergent directions. As with Lam 1, however, each cluster of interpreters can recognise aspects of the other’s position latent in the chapter. For example, while demonstrating that the day of YHWH motif is subverted to draw attention to YHWH’s responsibility rather than Zion’s sin, Boase also observes that “indictment of Zion” is “present,” even if “indirect.”\textsuperscript{199} House, while primarily blaming Zion, concedes that, in light of the prophetic failure, “[t]he destruction was not all the people’s fault. They had help.”\textsuperscript{200} That interpreters can identify both aspects in the text, even as they promote the reading they prefer, goes some way to demonstrating the inherent polyphony of Lamentations.

\textsuperscript{195} Linfelt, \textit{Surviving Lamentations}, 52.

\textsuperscript{196} Linfelt, \textit{Surviving Lamentations}, 52.


\textsuperscript{198} Cf. Hillers, “The main point of this chapter is that is was Yahweh himself who destroyed city and people” (Hillers, \textit{Lamentations}, 103.

\textsuperscript{199} Boase, \textit{Fulfilment of Doom?} 183. Mandolfo also concedes that “she does admit to having sinned (Lam 1:18), but it is an admission that comes across in its new context as more ironic than heartfelt, perhaps uttered to emphasise the disproportionality between sin and punishment” (Mandolfo, “Dialogic Form Criticism,” 87).

\textsuperscript{200} House, \textit{Lamentations}, 387. Similarly, Gottwald can accept that while “the poet finds God’s judgement of Zion deserved; nonetheless, the means chosen to punish are bitter and hard to accept, especially the abrasive taunts of the enemy and the death of the children by famine” (Gottwald, “Lamentations Reconsidered,” 169).
Further, Lam 2 follows directly on from Lam 1. While reading Lam 2, then, the sounds of Lam 1 continue to resound in readers’ ears. The strength of the sin motif in Lam 1, when set against the strength of YHWH’s depravity in Lam 2, provides a dissonance that is not easily resolved, whether attempting to read theodically or antitheodically. The continued absence of the answering, authoritative voice of YHWH means that Lam 2 “dissolves into an inability to articulate a clear moral and, by implication, theological judgment in Lam 1-2.”

4.5 Lamentations 2: Conclusions

Lamentations 2 demonstrates a more critical stance toward YHWH as the Lamenter becomes more sympathetic toward Zion. With increased vehemence from both Zion and the Lamenter, the weight of the evidence tends toward an antitheodical reading: YHWH has acted reprehensibly. Both theodic and antitheodic readers, however, continue to employ a variety reading strategies allowing them to read in accordance with their own assessments of Zion’s, or YHWH’s, culpability, respectively. Reading theodically, interpreters highlight the context of the day of YHWH, assuming it implicitly supplies the contention that sin underlies Lam 2 in its entirety. These readers also bring sin statements from Lam 1 to bear on Lam 2 to counteract any claim of unjust suffering. Reading antitheodically, interpreters note that the single reference to sin (2:14) is swallowed up by depictions of suffering. They instead highlight YHWH’s abhorrent actions, Zion and the Lamenter’s protest against them, and the innocence of the suffering children. Read in series with Lam 1, Lam 2 presents a markedly different stance, one that tends more toward vindicating Zion and accusing YHWH. Read in simultaneity with Lam 1, however, Lam 1 and Lam 2 provide a range of perspectives, appearing together in a polyphony.

4.6 Postscript

In the afterword to chapter 3 I took up Guest’s suggestion that it is the “writer,” or Poet, who is responsible for causing Zion pain in perpetuity. In Guest’s

Mandolfo, “Dialogic Form Criticism,” 89.
analysis, by accusing Zion and YHWH in turn in Lam 1, the “writer” deflects any attention from his own complicity.\textsuperscript{202} Trudinger makes similar observations for Lam 2, suggesting that the Lamenter’s condemnation of prophets in Lam 2 serves to deflect suspicion that ought to be cast at him.\textsuperscript{203} In observing who is to blame for Zion’s pain, Trudinger asserts that

[b]y the end of Lam 2, responsibility for the tragedy has been spread around widely—Jerusalem, a past generation of prophets, and God have all been blamed. The only character untouched by guilt is . . . the narrator [Lamenter]. In fact, the narrator, as we noted above, appears to be quite a noble character as he becomes the only friend and comforter of Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{204}

Rather than seeing this comforting facet of the Lamenter’s role positively, however, Trudinger thinks it insidious. Treating the Lamenter under the rubric of the “narrator” of biblical narrative, he observes that “the reader, who is accustomed to an omniscient and trustworthy narrator elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, is inclined to accept the essential veracity of the narrator’s description.”\textsuperscript{205} That is, “[w]hile the narrator [Lamenter] may use imaginative language, the situation described is congruent with reality. Or so the trusting reader thinks.”\textsuperscript{206} For Trudinger, even when observing the sympathy between the Lamenter and Zion, and using this to argue that Lam 1-2 is “about extreme pain and suffering that goes beyond anything that might reasonably be expected in the circumstances,” he contends that interpreters are all, in the end, sucked in: “They are following the trajectory set by the narrator’s speeches. The interpreter has become caught up in the rhetorical strategy of the narrator—moving from condemnation of the city to sympathy, and to apprehension towards God.”\textsuperscript{207}

\textsuperscript{202} Cf. §3.5.
\textsuperscript{203} Trudinger, “Lamentations as City and Land,” 49.
\textsuperscript{204} Trudinger, “Lamentations as City and Land,” 51.
\textsuperscript{205} Trudinger, “Lamentations as City and Land,” 50.
\textsuperscript{206} Trudinger, “Lamentations as City and Land,” 50. But note that readers could also resist.
\textsuperscript{207} Trudinger, “Lamentations as City and Land,” 51.
Trudinger questions, then, the veracity and trustworthiness of the narrator (Lamenter), finding that in blaming all these others he manages to keep the spotlight off any part he himself may have had to play.

In questioning the ethics of the Lamenter I also have concerns about the way the female voice is sublimated to that of the male. As I (and others) have read, the Lamenter's perspective changes from blame, through description, to sympathy and even empathy with Zion. But in taking Zion’s pain and voicing it for her, has the Lamenter subsumed the female voice of pain? In Lam 1, the two voices partook equally. In Lam 2, while the male voice is much more sympathetic, the female voice is pushed to the margins of the text (2:20-22). On the one hand, by witnessing to her pain, the Lamenter gains attention for Zion and lends strength to her claims of ill treatment. On the other, after 2:20-22 Zion no longer speaks for herself. The take-over of the male, begun here in Lam 2, is even more strongly evinced in Lam 3. Once the אָדָם speaks (Lam 3), female Zion disappears almost entirely, aside from a smattering of brief, and silent, cameo pieces (4:3, 6, 10, 22a). Zion the female city-woman is ultimately written out of the text.
CHAPTER FIVE:
LAMENTATIONS 3

5.1 Introduction to Lamentations 3

Lamentations 3 receives the lion’s share of attention in studies of Lamentations. Commentators repeatedly take its intensified acrostic, central position, and putative theodic message as determinative for understanding Lamentations, and any theology it might pose, as a whole. They commend the first person speaker, the יִרְדוֹן, for modelling the correct stance of sinful humanity before YHWH. The theodic claim is that the central discourse of Lam 3, characterised by hope, lights the way back to restored relationship. Antitheodic readers strike back, reading Lam 3 as far more ambiguous than any central catchcry might imply.

I examine the chapter in the utterances, 3:1-20, 21-24, 25-39, 40-41, 42-54, and 55-66, undertaking the usual exegetical overview, observing point of view, and analysing theodic and antitheodic moves in the commentaries. I then draw my observations together to highlight the various perspectives through which the יִרְדוֹן moves in an internal Bakhtinian dialogue. To conclude, I comment on the influence Lam 3 has had on interpretations of Lamentations as a whole. Taking small parts of Lam 3 as determinative for the meaning of Lamentations contributes to readings of the book as a theodicy. These readings subjugate the protest element of Lam 1 and 2, and indeed, parts of Lam 3, to a controlling,

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“central,” discourse of hope and penitence. I demonstrate that this “central” discourse can be mitigated by other, antitheodic perspectives in Lam 3, and illustrate an alternative way of conceptualising centrality. Rather than subjugating Lam 3 and the book of Lamentations to one or two governing statements in the “centre,” then, Lam 3 is better read as a polyphony.

5.1.1 Who Speaks in Lamentations 3?

Identifying the opening speaker of Lam 3 is more contested than for either Lam 1 or 2. This is somewhat ironic, given that he announces himself at the outset: “I am the יהוה! (3:1). This יהוה speaks throughout the chapter, although he will move between first person singular (3:1-24; 48-66) and first person plural (3:40-47) forms. He begins by declaring himself to be the “man” יהוה, 3:1; cf. 3:27, 35, 39) who has seen affliction (יהוה, 3:1; cf. 1:3a, 7a, 9c; 3:19). Some commentators identify him with an historical figure, suggesting Jeremiah, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah, or a defeated soldier, a “strongman.” Historical identities are speculative, however, behind the text and impossible to determine with any certainty. Hillers goes to the opposite extreme, designating the יהוה as an “everyman,” a universal representative sufferer. Still others identify the יהוה as a communal representation of the people, indeed a continuation of Daughter Zion herself, now taking on an individual male perspective.

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5 E.g., Gurewicz, “The Problem of Lamentations 3,” 22.
8 Cf. §1.3. The יהוה is a constructed speaker.
While precise identities cannot be determined, there are, literally, a range of associations that inhere in the term. A רָעָה is male, as distinct from women and children. He is a “strong” man, perhaps even a warrior or a soldier. It is ironic, then, that in Lam 3 he is utterly defeated. In Psalms and Job the connotation of physical strength in the term is taken over to imply to spiritual strength. A רָעָה is a man in right standing with YHWH. This provides further irony, if the רָעָה in Lamentations has, in fact, been guilty of sin (3:39, 42). Whoever he is, the רָעָה is a literary construction like Zion and the Lamenter, not an historical person, and further, not directly identifiable with the “Poet.” In light of the strong female and communal character of the first two chapters, recognising a corresponding male, individual voice is appropriate. This need not exclude the possibility, however, of a communal or representative aspect to his role, just as the female Zion, an individual woman who speaks in the first person, represents her inhabitants in her body.

11 Cf. Ex 10:11; 12:37; Num 24:3, 15; Deut 22:5; 2 Sam 23:1; Is 22:17; Jer 22:30, 30:6, 31:22, 43:6, 44:20; Ps 127:5; Job 3:3; 38:3; 40:7; Prov 6:34, 30:1, 19; Dan 8:15; 1 Chron 23:3; 24:4; 26:12; which almost always refer to an adult male, with the only exception in Job 3:3, where Job refers to himself in his infancy as a רָעָה (NRSV, “man-child”). NRSV may have been over zealous in translating רָעָה in Lam 3:1 as the “one” in the (commendable) interests of gender inclusiveness (cf. O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1046).
12 Cf. Josh 7:14, 17, 18; Judges 5:30; Jer 41:16; Prov 24:5; 28:3; Bergant, Lamentations, 82; O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1046; Parry, Lamentations, 96.
13 Cf. TDOT, 377.
15 Berlin rightly laments that “discussions of the first-person singular voice in chapter 3 all too often merge the question of authorship with implied poet. The speaker of chapter 3 is no more real than Jerusalem” (Berlin, Lamentations, 32; cf. §1.3 n. 35; §2.2.4.4). Such readings make the mistake of assuming that a first person poetic speaker is the Poet (e.g., Heather, “Structure and Meaning,” 153; and Landy, “Lamentations,” 332), or even the author (e.g., Gurewicz, “The Problem of Lamentations 3,” 23), rather than a literary figure constructed by the Poet. Cf. §1.3.
17 As Thomas explains, putting limits on the figure “diminishes the way it functions poetically” (Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 225; cf. Mintz, Hurban, 32). I keep the interpretive horizons open, allowing both individual and representative aspects to the רָעָה’s identity.
On the grounds of changing perspectives, and changes from singular to plural, some commentators suggest there are multiple speakers in Lam 3.18 While it is perfectly reasonable to read these changes as indicative of new speakers, it is not necessary to do so.19 The changes in perspective through which the chapter moves can instead be understood as expressive of internal tension as the רָמוֹג moves through various understandings of his situation. The juxtaposition of hope and expectancy, and disappointment and despair, constitute the רָמוֹג’s internal dialogue with a past self, with alien discourses, and crucially, with the authoritative discourses of his tradition. The chapter thus comprises the רָמוֹג’s internal dialogue between internally persuasive and authoritative discourses.20

### 5.1.2 Internally Persuasive and Authoritative Discourse

A dialogue of ideas can be external, between two or more interlocutors (as in Lam 1-2) or internal, within a single speaker’s utterance.21 As Bakhtin explains, “[q]uite frequently within the boundaries of his own utterance the speaker (or writer) raises questions, answers them himself, raises objections to his own ideas, responds to his own objections, and so on.”22 A single speaker can move through a variety of perspectives, interacting with and assessing ideas in an internal dialogue.23 In this internal “quarrel with oneself,” explains Levine, “the speaker may seem to be quarreling with another’s word, but is really quarreling internally over the nature and power of God.”24

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19 Cf. the interchange of “I” and “we” in the Psalms (e.g., Pss 44, 74, 83, 89, 123; cf. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 107).
20 My reading of Lam 3 owes much to O’Connor’s “Lamentations,” 1013-72, though she does not frame her reading in terms of Bakhtin’s “internally persuasive” versus “authoritative” discourse (Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 342-47).
21 Cf. Levine’s distinction between “the quarrel with others and the quarrel with oneself” (Levine, “Dialogic Discourse of Psalms,” 269).
23 Cf. Mandolfo on discourse in the Psalms, where a “shift in tone from complaint to praise, for example . . . can be read as the dialogic interplay between theological viewpoints” (Mandolfo, “Sanctioned Subversion,” 33). Thus, “even monologues can be dialogic insofar as the speaker incorporates more than one point of view or linguistic form into her own discourse” (Mandolfo, “Sanctioned Subversion,” 33).
While this dialogue happens internally, other discourses may be brought to bear on the quarrel. An internal dialogue might interact with the perspective of an earlier self.\textsuperscript{25} It might interact with “alien” discourses from outside the self.\textsuperscript{26} It takes place within the context of “the broader social dialogue being carried on by the many different voices or discourses of which it is constructed,” participating within these broader discourses.\textsuperscript{27} But most significant for my reading is the רָעִי’s internal dialogue with authoritative voices.\textsuperscript{28} These are the dominant ideological voices that participate in the theological backdrop to Lamentations. I read Lam 3 as the רָעִי’s struggle to assimilate or reconcile his pre-existing theological understandings with the overwhelming horror of his experience. He attempts to make authoritative discourse “ring true” as internally persuasive. For authoritative and internally persuasive discourses are not polar opposites or mutually exclusive categories. Rather, an authoritative discourse may or may not prove to be internally persuasive. That is,

Both the authority of discourse and its internal persuasiveness may be united in a single word—one that is \textit{simultaneously} authoritative and internally persuasive—despite the profound differences between these two categories of alien discourse. But such unity is rarely a given.\textsuperscript{29}

For Bakhtin, authoritative discourse is “the word of a father, of adults, of teachers.”\textsuperscript{30} It

\textsuperscript{25} Cf. Holquist, glossary to \textit{Dialogic Imagination}, by Bakhtin, 427; Levine, “Dialogic Discourse of Psalms,” 279.
\textsuperscript{26} “Alien” discourse is not necessarily hostile, but is “simply that which someone has made his own, seen (or heard) from the point of view of an outsider” (Holquist, glossary to \textit{Dialogic Imagination}, by Bakhtin, 423). Quoting “alien” discourses serves, in Lamentations, to confirm what has happened to Daughter Zion, from an outside perspective, e.g., when the Lamenter cites bypassers questioning the impossibility of Jerusalem falling to the enemy (2:15).
\textsuperscript{27} Mandolfo, “Sanctioned Subversion,” 30.
\textsuperscript{28} Cf. §2.2.2.2.1
\textsuperscript{29} Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 342, emphasis original.
is privileged language that approaches us from without; it is distanced, taboo, and permits no play with its framing context (Sacred Writ, for example). We recite it. It has great power over us, but only while in power; if ever dethroned it immediately becomes a dead thing, a relic.\(^{31}\)

Authoritative discourse “is not usually experienced as truly persuasive but rather demands unconditional allegiance simply because it derives from an authoritative source.”\(^{32}\) Thus, authoritative discourse, while it has a high claim (particularly religious language on the religious) may or may not prove to be internally-persuasive.\(^{33}\)

Internally persuasive discourse, on the other hand “is more akin to retelling a text in one’s own words, with one’s own accents, gestures, modifications.”\(^{34}\) Internally persuasive discourse, unlike the authoritative word, “is denied all privilege, backed up by no authority at all, and is frequently not even acknowledged in society (not by public opinion, nor by scholarly norms, nor by criticism), not even in the legal code.”\(^{35}\) Instead, its “importance comes only from its persuasiveness,”\(^{36}\) its ability to convince. For Bakhtin, human “coming to consciousness” is “a constant struggle between these two types of discourse: an attempt to assimilate more into one’s own system, and the simultaneous freeing of one’s own discourse from the authoritative word, or from previous earlier persuasive words that have ceased to mean.”\(^{37}\)

In the יהוה’s internal dialogic struggle, the authoritative word “of the father” collides with the internally persuasive experience of suffering. Lamentations 3

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\(^{31}\) Holquist, glossary to Dialogic Imagination, by Bakhtin, 424.

\(^{32}\) Morson and Emerson, “Heteroglossary,” 268, emphasis original.

\(^{33}\) Holquist, glossary to Dialogic Imagination, by Bakhtin, 424.

\(^{34}\) Morson and Emerson, “Heteroglossary,” 268.


\(^{36}\) Holquist, glossary to Dialogic Imagination, by Bakhtin, 424.
comprises the הֶֽלְבֵי’s internal quarrel “over the nature and power of God.” He interacts with authoritative discourses from earlier traditions, and attitudes of an earlier self, in the attempt to assimilate and reevaluate theological presuppositions in light of his experience. Discourses from Israel’s wisdom, Deuteronomistic, and prophetic traditions layer upon each other in Lamentations. These are the reigning ideological discourses in the context of which Lamentations’ voices speak. The question for this chapter, then, is whether these voices are found to be finally persuasive, or found wanting.

5.2 Analysis Lamentations 3

5.2.1 Lamentations 3:1-20

5.2.1.1 Lamentations 3:1-20: Overview

Lamentations 3 abandons the familiar הֶֽלְבֵי opening, beginning instead with the pronoun הֶֽלְבֵי (3:1) and following at the start of the second line with הֶֽלְבֵי (3:2). The opening lines thus immediately impress upon the reader that this chapter presents an intensely personal perspective. This is suffering as experienced by one man, the הֶֽלְבֵי (3:1; cf. 3:27, 35, 39). He declares that he has “seen” (מִיָּרֹן, 3:1; cf. 1:7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 18, 20; 2:16, 20) “affliction” (יִֽעֲנָה, 3:1; cf. 1:3, 7, 9; 3:19, 33; 5:11), calling to mind Zion’s own pleas for YHWH to “see” (1:9). While Zion cried out for someone to see her, however, he claims to have himself “seen”

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39 The prevalence of “conventional language” in Lam 3 suggests to Dobbs-Allsopp that “traumatic times in particular require the use of traditional expressions and rhythms” (Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 115). In “response to horrific situations, people draw on the traditional motifs they know well and that are ready to hand” (Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 116). The question is whether these traditional motifs are comforting, confirming the confessions of old, or undone, in light of inexplicable suffering.
40 Assumes these discourses were known in Israel at the time of writing Lamentations.
41 Cf. Meek, “Lamentations,” 23; Gurewicz, “The Problem of Lamentations 3,” 22; Mintz, Hurban, 39; Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 110. Even if the הֶֽלְבֵי takes a representative aspect, as a literary figure he presents an individual experience of defeat.
affliction.\textsuperscript{42} This has the sense of having experienced suffering himself,\textsuperscript{43} but also interacts in double-voiced dialogism with Zion’s pleas for being seen by YHWH.

The יִהוָה attributes his affliction to the “rod” (יִהוָהֶן, 3:1)\textsuperscript{44} of his “anger” (יִהוָהֶן, 3:1).\textsuperscript{45} In a cruel reversal of the image of YHWH the good shepherd, the shepherd’s rod of comfort\textsuperscript{46} becomes a rod of anger and affliction.\textsuperscript{47} This “rod” also recalls day of YHWH imagery, linking back to 2:22b and bringing the context of divine punishment to bear on the poetry.\textsuperscript{48} YHWH’s “hand” (יִהוָה, 3:3) of affliction strikes the יִהוָה “all day long” (יִהוָה, יִהוָהֶן, 3:3; cf. 1:13, 3:14, 62).

Reverse shepherd imagery extends through to verse 11.\textsuperscript{49} Rather than being “led” (יִהוָהֶן, piel, Ps 23:2) by still waters, the יִהוָה has been “driven” (יִהוָהֶן, 3:2) and made to “walk” (יִהוָהֶן, hiphil, 3:2) in “darkness” (יִהוָהֶן, 3:2) not “light” (יִהוָה, 3:2). Rather than lying down in green pastures, he is made to sit in “darkness” (יִהוָה, 3:6). Rather than being led (יִהוָה, Ps 23:3) in right paths (יִהוָהֶן, Ps 23:3), his way is bricked up (יִהוָה, 3:7,9) and made crooked (יִהוָה, piel, 3:9).\textsuperscript{50} He has been led utterly astray, “turned aside” (יִהוָה, polel, 3:11) from his way.

YHWH then becomes a “predator in relation to his people.”\textsuperscript{51} He “lies in wait” (יִהוָה, 3:10) and “tears in pieces” (יִהוָה, piel, 3:11).\textsuperscript{52} The יִהוָה is left “desolate” (יִהוָה, 3:1; f. 1:4, 13, 16). YHWH the anti-shepherd and wild animal becomes

\textsuperscript{42} And thus does “what God fails to do” (Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 111).
\textsuperscript{43} Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 111; O’Connor, Tears of the World, 47; Renkema, Lamentations, 352.
\textsuperscript{44} Cf. Ps 23:4.
\textsuperscript{45} Cf. Lam 2:2b.
\textsuperscript{46} Cf. יִהוָהֶן, Ps 23:4. The lack of a comforter is a leitmotif in Lam 1.
\textsuperscript{47} Cf. Hos 4:16; 13:5-8; Amos 3:12; Isa. 10:5, where Assyria is the “rod.” Van Hecke reads Lam 3 as an intentional antithesis to Psalm 23 (Van Hecke, “Pastoral Metaphors,” 208).
\textsuperscript{49} Contra 2 Sam 7:14, Ps 89:33; Job 9:34, 21:9; cf. Hillers, Lamentations, 125.
\textsuperscript{50} See Hillers, Lamentations, 124, on v. 9 as the reverse of Ps 23; cf. Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 230.
\textsuperscript{52} Cf. Hos 13:5-8; Job 10:16; Is 38:13; Jer 2:30; Hos 5:14.
YHWH the warrior in 3:12-13, “setting his bow” (רֹדֵה, קַשְׁתָּו, 3:12; cf. 2:4) and shooting “his arrows” (בָּשַׁחְתָּו, 3:13)\(^{53}\) into the heart of the נֶבֶר. As if physical affliction weren’t enough, the נֶבֶר also faces social derision, becoming the “laughingstock” (שׁחָם, 3:14; cf. 1:7) of his people, the object of “their mocking songs” (עֵינָא, 3:14; cf. 3:63). The image of the נֶבֶר being devoured by YHWH is then inverted, such that he is now made to devour (שׁחתו, hiphil, 3:15). But the diet on which the נֶבֶר is forced to gorge is one of “bitterness” (בָּשַׁח, 3:15), “wormword” (לֵיתֶהוּ, 3:15; cf. 3:19), and “gravel” (חֲפַל, 3:16).

Lamentations 3:17-18 transitions from description of “his,” that is, YHWH’s, actions, to the effect these actions have had on the נֶבֶר internally. Peace has abandoned or “rejected” him (בָּשַׁח; 3:17).\(^{56}\) Happiness is a memory so distant as to be forgotten (3:17). The נֶבֶר even quotes to himself something of his inner thoughts: my “hope” (רְאוֹם, 3:18) from the LORD is forever “destroyed” (שָׁכְב, 3:18). YHWH’s name appears for the first time in verse 18, ensuring “that the naming of the ‘LORD,’ when finally delivered, receives added emphasis.”\(^{57}\) Who is responsible for all this? YHWH.

The נֶבֶר’s “affliction” (שָׁכְב, 3:19; cf. 1:7a, 9c; 3:1) and “homelessness” (חֲפַל, 3:19; cf. 1:7a) continue to call Zion to mind.\(^{58}\) The 2ms imperative “remember” (בָּשַׁח, 3:19) is often amended to the first person, “I remember.”\(^{59}\) I read, however, as the Hebrew would have it: “Remember my affliction and my homelessness.”\(^{60}\)

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\(^{53}\) Lit. the “sons of his quiver,” 3:13; cf. Job 16:12-13, 6:4, Ps 38:3; Lam 2:4.


\(^{55}\) Cf. גַּשַּׁת in 3:5.

\(^{56}\) In Lam 2:7, 3:31, נְבֶר is predicated of YHWH. Here, then, “the statement counterpoints God’s rejection” (Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 113).

\(^{57}\) Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 110.

\(^{58}\) The terms also appear together in 1:7a, but in reverse order.

\(^{59}\) E.g., NRSV “The thought of my affliction.”

\(^{60}\) Cf. Gunkel, “gedenke meiner!” (Gunkel, Klagelieder,” 1051); Gordis, Lamentations, 178; Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 234. The imperative is represented in V (recordare),
The unit finishes in abject helplessness. The הָעַד’s very הֵנָּה mirrors the outward physical position of Zion, her elders and maidens, and her gates and bars. It is “sunk down” (יֶבֶשָׁה, 3:20) within him.

5.2.1.2 Lamentations 3:1-20: Who, to Whom, and Point of View

The הָעַד speaks, with no specified addressee. There is, at first, no direct plea for YHWH or anyone in particular to “see” (יָרֵא). Instead the הָעַד tells, in poetic hyperbole, of the affliction that he has “seen” (יָרֵא, 3:1). Lam 3:1-16 is relentless in describing what “he” has done to “me.” “He” has driven, led into darkness, turned his hand, wasted flesh, broken bones, walled in, made to drink poison, made to dwell in darkness, bricked up, weightened the chains, blocked out prayers, bricked up, twisted the path, confused the way, torn apart, made desolate, used for target practice, shot with arrows, filled with bitterness, sated with wormwood, broken teeth, and made to cower in the ashes. In 3:17-18 the הָעַד turns inward. As though speaking to his own הֵנָּה he quotes himself saying “‘my hope from the LORD is forever destroyed’” (3:18). Only in 3:19 does the הָעַד turn to YHWH, briefly entreating him to “remember!” (יָרֵא). YHWH can again, however, be understood as the superaddressee of the poem throughout.

NRSV names YHWH as the afflicter from the outset. In MT, however, the name of YHWH is not mentioned in the first 17 verses, appearing for the first time in 3:18. There is some contention, then, that the name of YHWH is left out

\[P(\text{תָּרָכָה})\] and Tg. Lam (יָרֵא). Contra Salters, who reads the infinitive (Salters, Lamentations, 220; cf. BHQ, 125). Hillers reads with LXX (ἐμνημονεύοντα), “I remember,” assuming a vorlage הָעַד אֲנִי יָרֵא or הָעַד אֲנִי יָרֵא (Hillers, Lamentations, 114). See further Gottlieb, Lamentations, 42; Salters, Lamentations, 219-20. Weber suggests an inherent ambiguity, with the infinitive form activated first, contributing to a negative reading of v. 18; and the second, imperative form activated secondarily, indicating slightly more hope in YHWH (Weber, “Transitorische Ambiguität,” 114).

61 In contrast to Zion’s pleas that YHWH see and attend to her pain (1:9c, 11c, 20a).
62 See §1.4.1.
63 “I am one who has seen affliction under the rod of God’s wrath,” Lam 3:1. NRSV makes the identity of the foe explicit too soon (cf. O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1048). YHWH is indeed the attacker, but he is not named until v. 18.
of the section in order to avoid blasphemy.\textsuperscript{64} After all, attributing such actions to YHWH could constitute a serious accusation against the deity.\textsuperscript{65} But the speaker of Lam 2 didn’t seem to have any such qualms.\textsuperscript{66} It is also difficult to imagine that the יִהוָה could sink much lower than his present position. What, then, would he have to lose by naming his afflicter, given the state to which he has already been reduced? In any case, the identity of the afflicter is already obvious, if not explicit.\textsuperscript{67} After Lam 2 there can be no doubt that the afflicter is YHWH.\textsuperscript{68} But the initial absence does build a certain tension, as readers and hearers wait to have it confirmed again: it is awful, and it was YHWH.\textsuperscript{69}

The יִהוָה reflects not only upon his physical decimation but also on his inner state of chaos. Devastation is complete and all encompassing, including physical (3:1-16), and mental and spiritual (3:17-20), not to mention social derision (3:14).\textsuperscript{70} Not only has YHWH afflicted, but every possible good thing and hope for the future from YHWH has been removed (3:17, 18). A nadir of despair appears at 3:8, where the יִהוָה complains that YHWH has shut out his prayers. Even so, a brief aside to YHWH appears in 3:19, attempting (in vain) to gain his attention, for without the possibility of divine response, what hope is there?\textsuperscript{71}

Who is to blame? There is no confession of sin in 3:1-20.\textsuperscript{72} Even so, House finds the day of the Lord imagery (3:1-6) evidence that the יִהוָה “understands, then, that he and his hearers have experienced what the Lord threatened. Warnings

\textsuperscript{65} Cf. the reticence to declare that YHWH “is” the enemy rather than “like” an enemy in Lam 2:4, 5; see §4.2.1.3.
\textsuperscript{66} YHWH is named repeatedly in Lam 2:1-10 (יִהוָה, 2:1a, 2a, 5a, 7a; יִהוָה, 2:6b, 7c, 8a, 9c).
\textsuperscript{67} Cf. Berlin, Lamentations, 88; Bergant, Lamentations, 83.
\textsuperscript{68} Brandscheidt relates the 3ms suffix in 3:1 (יִהוָהְנָב) back to 2:22, to confirm that “his” wrath is YHWH’s (Brandscheidt, Gotteszorn und Menschenleid, 52).
\textsuperscript{69} Cf. Bergant, Lamentations, 87; Gordis, Lamentations, 174; Mintz, Hurban, 34; Salters, Jonah and Lamentations, 74; Renkema, Lamentations, 353.
\textsuperscript{70} Cf. O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1049. In Lam 2, merismus captures the complete devastation of the city and inhabitants. Lam 3 presents complete devastation as it pertains to one person.
\textsuperscript{71} Cf. Zion’s pleas that YHWH see and attend to her pain (1:9c, 11c, 20a).
\textsuperscript{72} Cf. Lee, The Singers of Lamentations, 175; Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 227.
were ignored and consequences have come."\(^{73}\) For House, the logical assumption is that present suffering implies prior sin, and hence, the affliction the יְהוָה is currently experiencing is to be explained as just punishment.\(^{74}\)

But there are a number of issues that upset this assumption. YHWH is portrayed as a torturing jailer, a ravenous wild animal, and a cruel and violent warrior on the rampage. This imagery cannot serve but to accuse. Regardless of whether there is sin—and at this point in Lam 3 it is not yet obvious that there is—this is suffering in the extreme, suffering that highlights YHWH’s “divine brutality."\(^{75}\) While a covenant context ruling the chapter might provide grounds for reading the passage theodically, the apparent absence of sin and the extreme violence of YHWH provide grounds for reading for protest, even complaint.

### 5.2.2 Lamentations 3:21-24

#### 5.2.2.1 Lamentations 3:21-24: Overview

Immediately following his declaration that all hope is gone (3:18), the יְהוָה announces that there is in fact reason to “hope” (יִתְנָה, hiphil, 3:21; cf. 3:24).\(^{76}\)

The idiomatic “I return to my heart” (תְּחַנְּנִי, 3:21)\(^{77}\) has the sense of taking heart, reminding, or coming to one’s senses, and the reason for “this” (זָרַע, 3:21) soon follows.\(^{78}\) YHWH’s “steadfast love” (זָרַע, 3:22) and “renewing

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\(^{73}\) House, *Lamentations*, 409; cf. Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 229


\(^{75}\) Bergant, *Lamentations*, 88.

\(^{76}\) Note the inclusio formed by the almost identical phrases, יִתְנָה in 3:21 and יִתְנָה in 3:24. The cognate noun תְּחַנְּנִי appears in 3:18 and the adjective יִתְנָה in 3:26, but this vocabulary of hope is lacking in every other chapter of Lamentations.

\(^{77}\) Cf. Deut 4:39; 30:1; 1 Kgs 8:47; Isa 44:19; 46:8; 2 Chron 6:37.

\(^{78}\) Salters, *Lamentations*, 224. While contextually, it seems the reason for hope must be found in the positive attributes to come, rather than the miserable description that has been, יִתְנָה usually refers to what precedes (as in 1:8; 3:21). Albrektson suggests, then, reading יִתְנָה in v. 20 as a 2ms rather than the 3fs, such that v. 20 becomes a declaration to YHWH: “thou wilt certainly remember, and thy soul will give heed to me.” This declaration thus becomes the reason for hope (Albrektson, *Lamentations*, 143-45). Gottwald also reads the 2ms in v. 20, contending that this original was changed to avoid offending YHWH (i.e., an instance of the *tiqqun ha-sopherim*; Gottwald, *Lamentations*, 13).
mercy” (ח爱好者, 3:22) remain. Indeed, YHWH’s mercies cannot be “complete” (ח爱好者, 3:22), for they are made new every day (3:23). In a further brief aside to YHWH himself (cf. 3:19), the אמון הון affirms YHWH’s “faithfulness” (אמות הון, 3:23). Reporting more words he has previously rehearsed internally (cf. 3:18), the אמון הון reminds himself that YHWH is his “portion” (ח爱好者, 3:24) and the one in whom to “hope” (חון, 3:24; cf. 3:21).

Lamentations 3:22-24 includes more positive attributes of YHWH than anywhere else in the book. “Steadfast love” (חסדים, 3:22) calls to mind YHWH’s covenant loyalty,80 often appearing in the Hebrew Bible, as here, in collocation with cognates of “mercy” (ח爱好者) or “faithfulness” (אמות הון).81 Attributing חסדים, אמונה חסדים, and אמון הון to YHWH thus makes a strong statement of the goodness, covenant loyalty, and compassion of YHWH. And this is where it gets knotty, because these affirmations would seem to fly in the face of the affliction the אמון הון has “seen.”82 In this regard, it is interesting to note that verses 22-24 are missing from LXX entirely. The usual explanation is that a scribe has made the error of homoioteleuton, reading 3:21b (חסדים: אמון הון) as 3:24b (חסדים: אמון הון) and thus missing out the intervening material. It may be worth asking, however, if LXX

79 The same verb is used at 4:22 to indicate the “completeness” of Zion’s sin/punishment.
80 House, Lamentations, 414. חסדים is predicated of YHWH in Gen 24:12, 14, 27; 32:11; 39:21; Ex 15:13; 20:6; 34:6–7; Num 14:18–19; Deut 5:10; 7:9, 12; 1 Sam 20:14; 2 Sam 2:6; 7:15; 15:20; 22:26, 51; 1 Kgs 3:6; 8:23; Isa 54:8, 10; 55:3; 63:7; Jer 3:12; 9:23; 16:5; 31:3; 32:18; 33:11; Hos 2:21; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Mic 7:18, 20. Reading synchronically, the covenant context of חסדים resounds. Salters, however, suggests that linking חסדים to covenant was a relatively late development, such that “it is perhaps reading too much into this passage to assume that the poet was thinking of the covenant” (Salters, Lamentations, 225; cf. Renkema, Lamentations, 385).
81 Cf. Ex. 34:6; Is 54:8, 10; 63:7; Jer 16:5; Hos 2:21; Zech 7:9; Ps 25:6; 40:12; 51:3; 69:17; 103:4; Dan 1:9. The piel form of the verb חסד appears in Lam 3:32. The noun חסד, “womb,” hearkening back to an earlier meaning, the “inner parts of the body,” thought to be the seat and source of compassion (HALOT, 1218). On חסד as “en-womb” love see Renkema, Lamentations, 387; Tribe, Rhetoric, 35-40. See further the discussion of חסד in §6.2.1.1.
82 Cf. Ps 36:5; 40:11; 88:12; 89:2, 3, 25, 34, 50, 92:3, 98:3, 100:5. In Lamentations חסד occurs only here and at 3:32, in both verses collocated with forms of חסד.
83 Salters, Lamentations, 224; Albrektson, Lamentations, 145; BHQ, 65.
represents an earlier Vorlage, with the wholly other, wholly positive vv. 22-24 comprising a later insertion.\textsuperscript{84}

5.2.2.2 Lamentations 3:21-24: Who, to Whom, and Point of View

The יְהוָה continues to speak without specified addressee in 3:21-22, moving through to a single short address to YHWH in 3:23. This aside to YHWH comprises only two words in the Hebrew, יְהוָה אֵשֶׁת אֲדֻמָּה, “Great is your faithfulness.”\textsuperscript{85} The assertions of 3:24 briefly relay the יְהוָה’s address to his own יִשְׂרָאֵל.\textsuperscript{86} The יִשְׂרָאֵל that was continually bowed down in its affliction, unable to imagine hope (3:18), turns to affirm hope in YHWH (3:21, 24). There is an almost palpable lightening of the oppressive gloom with which the chapter began. Lamentations 3:21 is thus a transition point, as the יְהוָה turns away from the introversion of individual suffering, toward YHWH’s steadfast love and compassion.\textsuperscript{87} The unannounced immediacy of this 180 degree turn is intriguing.\textsuperscript{88}

After the harrowing repetition of violent actions attributed to YHWH (3:1-16) and the יְהוָה’s internal reflection on his diminished state (3:17-20), there is no blame, implied or otherwise, cast in any direction. There is no self-flagellation, no mention of enemies, and, unprecedentedly in any address to YHWH thus far, no hint of accusation against YHWH. The speaker turns, instead, toward hope.\textsuperscript{89} The change of tone at verse 21 is so extreme that NRSV adds a “but” to smooth the transition, signalling the markedly different perspective in this and the next few verses. In the rhetoric of the chapter, however, the abrupt about turn can be read as indicative of the internal dialogue. There is no need to see a disjointed

\textsuperscript{84} Verses 22-24 are attested, however, in P, V, and Tg. Lam.

\textsuperscript{85} Cf. Pss 36:5, 40:11, 88:12, 89:2, 3, 6, 9, 50; 92:3, 119:20, 143:1. Renkema sees this as indicative that “he still experiences the vestiges of an ‘I-Thou’ relationship” with YHWH (Renkema, Lamentations, 390); cf. O’Connor, Tears of the World, 50.

\textsuperscript{86} Cf. Ps 42:6, 12; 43:5.

\textsuperscript{87} Cf. Mintz, Hurban, 35; Renkema, Lamentations, 383; Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 116; House, Lamentations, 413.

\textsuperscript{88} Cf. O’Connor, Tears of the World, 49; O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1051.

\textsuperscript{89} Cf. Mintz, Hurban, 35.
insertion of some other discourse, or to attempt to smooth the transition. Rather “the poem expresses the theological dilemma that faces the speaker and his community and that forms the central struggle of the chapter and of the book” by juxtaposing these disparate stances here.\footnote{O'Connor, “Lamentations,” 1051; cf. Weber, “Transitorische Ambiguität,” 115. This same “discordant shift in speech” occurs “throughout the psalms of lament” (Mandolfo, Daughter Zion, 72).} The appeal to authoritative covenant conceptions of YHWH’s love, mercy, and faithfulness (3:21-24) abuts the internally persuasive experience of suffering (3:1-20).

In reading and interpretation, whether this authoritative discourse is found to be persuasive or not is connected to whether interpreters read theologically or antitheodically. For House, the grounds of hope for the נביא are found in covenant mercies.\footnote{Cf. Exod 2:23-25; 3:19-20; House, Lamentations, 414.} Use of נביא language suggests to him that “[n]ot even the coming of the day of the Lord against Jerusalem signals the end of God’s covenant mercy.”\footnote{House, Lamentations, 414; cf. Parry, Lamentations, 101.} The נביא also appeals to Psalmic assurances, reminiscent of the covenant with David.\footnote{Cf. 2 Sam 7:15; 1 Kgs 8:23; Ps 89:2, 14, 24-37. Note the difference between the Mosaic covenant, contingent on behaviour, and the Davidic covenant, in which, though there might be punishment, YHWH’s steadfast love and faithfulness would never be removed (Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 118).} Both cohorts of images appeal to authoritative discourse, to language and concepts familiar from tradition. Indeed, Salters explains that the נביא “has been at rock bottom, and the beliefs he grew up with now come to his aid.”\footnote{Salters, Lamentations, 228.} Calling these to mind may be a strategy to remind the נביא of YHWH’s faithfulness. Yet in light of the experience of 3:1-20 it is difficult to know whether these old formulations will hold. Authoritative affirmations of faith may or may not win through to internal persuasiveness.\footnote{Cf. Salters, “he is recalling the old beliefs and certainties. Surely they are still true!” (Salters, Lamentations, 226).}

Even so, at this point in Lamentations, theodic readers breathe a sigh of relief, finding in 3:21-24 and the subsequent pericope the “true” perspective on YHWH.
in the midst of suffering. The contention is that despite the magnitude of suffering, YHWH is in fact all lovingkindness, compassion, and faithfulness.\textsuperscript{96} The destroying anger of YHWH, articulated with such pain in the previous chapters, and indeed in the first part of this chapter, is merely a “passing phase,” while love is YHWH’s enduring nature.\textsuperscript{97} Mintz distinguishes here between what is experienced to be true—the devastation of the previous part of the chapter—and a cognitive reasoning process determining what is actually true—the “propositions he [the יְהֹוָה] adduces about God’s nature.”\textsuperscript{98} Reading theodically, the earlier experience of the chapter is merely perception, and misguided perception at that. This, then, is a major theodic reading strategy: allowing the results of a so-called reasoning process to trump the wisdom of experience. The יְהֹוָה, having expressed his despair, now “wins through to confidence.”\textsuperscript{99} Lamentations 3:1-20 was a faulty perspective, while 3:21-24 are “true,” providing the objective and unbiased assessment of YHWH’s unchanging character.

But while the “arresting statement of faith” in verse 23 “seems, for the moment, to wipe away the hopelessness and suffering of the first twenty lines of the poem,”\textsuperscript{100} readers tending antitheodically are not convinced. As O’Connor asks:

The sudden appearance of hope in the middle of the book both startles and reassures, even as it creates one of the book’s interpretive challenges. How is the hope of chapter 3 to be measured against the bleak poetic terrain around it? What is the nature of this hope, uttered as it is by someone who seems to be moving in and out of despair?\textsuperscript{101}

\textsuperscript{96} House, \textit{Lamentations}, 415.
\textsuperscript{98} Mintz, \textit{Urban}, 35.
\textsuperscript{99} Hillers, \textit{Lamentations}, 6.
\textsuperscript{100} O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1051.
\textsuperscript{101} O’Connor, \textit{Tears of the World}, 44.
O’Connor contends, then, that while hope does appear in 3:20-24, it “appears as an important interlude, a moment of calm in the storm, but [is] merely one perspective among several in the aftermath of the invasion.”

Further, a key theodic reading strategy (as outlined above) is to affirm the covenant context, signalled by reference to YHWH’s unfailing יָהָּוה. For House, this יָהָּוה indicates that

God’s covenantal fidelity and integrity remain intact no matter how things may seem. Human beings may not wish it were so, but judgment of sin as promised proves this faithfulness. Gratefully, so does God’s promise to start anew with a terribly compromised covenant partner, and it is this fact of Yahweh’s faithfulness that the speaker affirms here.

Calling to mind a covenant context is hardly comforting, however, if the covenant is, as it seems, irrevocably broken. Further still, is Zion the only “terribly compromised covenant partner” in this relationship? Or is not YHWH, as covenant partner, also terribly compromised by his acts of brutality and abuse? This YHWH is far too familiar, far too compromised, and far too human to offer any real comfort.

Theodic readers, then, find much to affirm the justice of YHWH in Lam 3:22-24, reading the perspective of the יָהָּוה here as a mirror of their own beliefs. Reading toward the antitheodic, however, there is not yet sufficient evidence that the brief faith articulated in 3:21-24 has taken root, taking hold of the יָהָּוה persuasively.

102 O’Connor, Tears of the World, 45.
103 House, Lamentations, 415.
5.2.3 Lamentations 3:25-39

5.2.3.1 Lamentations 3:25-39: Overview

The difficult syntax of 3:25-39 in and of itself contributes to unsettling the faithful statements theodic readers suppose the utterance contains. The unit begins with a threefold affirmation of what is “good” (יִהְיֶה, 3:25, 26, 27). YHWH is good to those who “wait” (רָאוֹן, 3:25). It is good to wait in “silence” (רָאָשׁ, 3:26; cf. 2:10, 3:28) for YHWH’s “salvation” (יִנָּחֵשׁ, 3:26). This is the complete inverse of the counsel given to Zion in 2:18, where she was urged to cry out loud. And it is good to bear the “yoke” (כֹּחַ, 3:27; cf. 1:14) while still young.

Clarifying what he perceives to be “good” for the afflicted, the מַעַשֵּׂה advocates specific actions. He should “sit alone” (יִישָׁב, 3:28; cf. 1:1) and “be silent” (רָאָשׁ, 3:28). He should “give his mouth to the dust” (יִנָּחֵשׁ, 3:29) and “give his cheek to his afflicter” (לַמַּכֵּר, 3:30). He should be “sated” (שֶׁם, 3:30; cf. 3:31-32) with insult. The proviso, though, is that this is appropriate when “he” has “imposed” it (יִנָּחֵשׁ, 3:28). “He” remains, for the moment, unspecified, but in light of 3:25-26 can be none other than YHWH.

Within this admonition itself is a further, vague hint of hope (רָאוֹן, 3:29). This hope, however, is only a slight and slim “perhaps” (אֲפַל, 3:29).

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105 A threefold repetition of the first word also occurs in the פ stanza (יָלֶל, 31-33). The particle יִ is repeated at the beginning of each of the פ lines (3:34-36).
107 Though what youth has to do with it I am not sure, given this affliction affects all (2:20-22).
108 These may comprise voluntary acts of “obeisance and of humiliation before God (cf. Ps. 72:9; Mic 7:17), stressing the idea that such suffering should be passively accepted” (Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 120; cf. House, Lamentations, 417). Contra Parry, “This is no self-humbling before God—God himself grinds the man’s teeth into the gravel and presses him down into the dust” (Parry, Lamentations, 99).
109 Cf. 2 Sam 24:12; 1 Chron 21:10.
110 Cf. Salters, Lamentations, 234. Again, the NRSV makes the interpretive move for its readers, translating “when the Lord has imposed it” (cf. 3:1).
111 Cf. Renkema, Lamentations, 403. Luther apparently removed the “perhaps” deeming it to be
The 8 lines are pivotal in explaining why hope in YHWH might not, in fact, be unfounded. First, the כב asserts, Adonai will not “reject” (יה, 3:31; cf. 2:7, 3:17) “forever” (יִהְיֶה, 3:31; cf. 5:19). Second, where he “inflicts suffering” (יה, hiphil, 3:32; cf. 1:4, 5, 12; 3:33), he will have compassion (יה, piel, 3:32). And third, YHWH does not “afflict” (יה, piel, 3:33; cf. 1:3, 7, 9: 3:1, 19; 5:11) or “impose suffering” (יה, piel, 3:33; cf. 1:4, 5, 12; 3:32) “from his heart” (יה, 3:33).

This too is the antithesis of what has come before. In 2:7 YHWH rejected (יה) altar and sanctuary, with no recovery in view. In 2:17 YHWH afflicted without pity (יה לֵא), an assertion that will be restated almost verbatim in 3:43. In Lam 2, then, the Lamenter was unequivocal in stating that YHWH acted intentionally, wilfully, and determinedly to destroy (2:8, 17). The contention that YHWH has not afflicted “from his heart” is thus open for debate, and proves to be decisive in determining a direction for interpretation.

The 8 lines each begin with the preposition “to” (יה, 3:34, 35, 36) in combination with infinitive constructs. They outline a series of actions which, depending on translation of יד רה וּרְעֹב יְהֹוָה (3:36), the כב claims YHWH either does, or does not, see. “To crush” (רָעֹב, piel, 3:34) the prisoners of the land “underfoot”

112 Cf. the noun יָדְמֵהֶם in 3:22.
114 The syntax of the unit is difficult. The verb יָדְמֵה does not appearing until the end, and does not usually govern infinitives with יָד in any case (Hillers, Lamentations, 116). Hillers thus relates the יָד-infinitive phrases back to the verbs in v. 33, such that Adonai does not deliberately torment or afflict “by crushing” and so on (Hillers, Lamentations, 111). But as Hillers himself acknowledges, the acrostic requires each stanza to begin with יָד, and it may be for this reason that the unusual word order is employed.
115 The phrase can be read as the indicative “Adonai does not see” (cf. P (רָעֹב); V (ירבע; O’Connor, Tears of the World, 50; O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1053; Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 121); or the rhetorical question, “Does Adonai not see?” (cf. Tg. Lam (רָעֹב רֹאש: הֹוָה); Albrektson, Lamentations, 151; Westermann, Lamentations, 166; Berlin, Lamentations, 83; Parry, Lamentations, 113). Gottwald reads the indicative, but translates יָד “to approve,” yielding “the Lord does not approve” (Gottwald, Lamentations, 14; cf. Meek, “Lamentations,” 27; Gordis, Lamentations, 181; House, Lamentations, 418).
In each of these situations the interpretive question relates to whether 3:36 is the rhetorical question “does the Lord not see?” or the indicative “the Lord does not see.” Reading the rhetorical question, “Does the Lord not see?” draws the response, “Of course he sees!” That is, in keeping with the hopeful mood of 3:21-39, contextually the verses read that yes, YHWH does see. This reveals a particular theological stance that would uphold YHWH’s integrity and mercy. Asserting that YHWH “sees” fits with the notion of a kind, compassionate God, if that is indeed what has been established in 3:21-33. But Lamentations is built on contradiction, not consistency. Making statements that oppose preceding statements is not unheard of in this book. It would not be irregular, in Lamentations, to follow a statement of faith with an indictment of YHWH: “the Lord does not see.” Given the plea to YHWH to see that recurs throughout Lamentations, making such an assertion could serve “to point up all the places in Lamentations where God is requested to see and look upon the destruction” (1:9c, 11c, 20a; 2:20a; 3:59-60, 63; 5:1). The need for lament is kept alive: YHWH has not yet seen, we need to continue to bring our plight to his attention.

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This reads the sentence in the indicative, as the more straightforward reading of MT, but agrees, theoretically, with readings that favour the rhetorical question. That is, YHWH is aware of, and not happy about, the situation.

116 Whether from YHWH or the enemy, Salters, Lamentations, 242.
117 Salters, Lamentations, 243; cf. Parry, Lamentations, 114.
118 Salters, Lamentations, 243.
119 Parry, Lamentations, 113.
120 E.g. House, Lamentations, 418; Parry, Lamentations, 113.
121 Salters somewhat wryly comments that “[t]he effect of the question at the end of v. 36 is to link the entire stanza with the preceding context in which the poet is trying to restore faith in a merciful God. This effect has been sufficient reward for those who see a question here” (Salters, Lamentations, 240-41 n. 148).
122 Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 121; cf. Renkema, Lamentations, 415-16; Gottlieb, Lamentations, 50; see discussion in Salters, Lamentations, 240-42.
Verses 37 and 39 are clearly questions, beginning with the the interrogatives ויהי and יהי respectively. Many commentators read 3:38 as a rhetorical question as well, although the verse, like verse 36, is grammatically indicative.\textsuperscript{123} Lamentations 3:37, “can anything happen unless Adonai commands?” in essence asserts that nothing takes place unless decreed (יָרֵא, piel, 3:37) by Adonai.\textsuperscript{124} Reading 3:38 as a question, “is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both good and evil go forth?” would continue this train of thought, eliciting the affirmation that yes, it is by the Most High’s command that both “evil” (יָרֵא, 3:38) and “good” (בָּרֵא, 3:38) “go forth” (כִּי, 3:38).\textsuperscript{125}

Asserting that both good and evil derive from YHWH reaffirms his sovereignty (cf. 2:17). Hillers finds this a comfort, “because the creator and what he has made cannot in the final analysis be evil.”\textsuperscript{126} In this reading, evil experienced at the hands of YHWH is, once again, only a matter of perception, and cannot possibly be the truth of the matter. Renkema does not state explicitly that YHWH cannot be evil, but does find that verses 37-39 are “very close to the notion of theodicy.”\textsuperscript{127} For Renkema they indicate that “[a]ll good things and every evil ultimately have their origins in the Most High. If this is the case than [sic] God has no need to justify his actions, good or bad . . . And the one who does not need to justify himself is ultimately justified.”\textsuperscript{128} For Hillers, if good and evil come from YHWH, then what is experienced by the people as evil cannot, in the final analysis, actually be evil. For Renkema, it implies that YHWH can do whatever he likes. Both positions uphold the justice of YHWH, continuing to read theodically.

\textsuperscript{123} None of the versions read v. 38 in the interrogative. See Salters, Lamentations, 244-45.
\textsuperscript{124} Cf. Salters, Lamentations, 243.
\textsuperscript{125} Cf. Amos 3:6; Isa 45:7; Ezek 20:25; Job 2:10; Berlin, Lamentations, 95; Parry, Lamentations, 114.
\textsuperscript{126} Hillers, Lamentations, 130.
\textsuperscript{127} Renkema, “Theodicy in Lamentations?” 420.
\textsuperscript{128} Renkema, “Theodicy in Lamentations?” 420.
But affirming that YHWH is the source of both good and evil causes theological problems for those who insist that evil cannot a priori stem from YHWH.\textsuperscript{129} Read in the indicative, the \textit{κατὰ} negates the sentiments of 3:37, such that “[i]t is not from the Most High that evil and good go forth.”\textsuperscript{130} This affirms the opposite of the rhetorical question, becoming instead a “statement, clearing the Most High of causing evil.”\textsuperscript{131} The verse is thus translated in reverse.\textsuperscript{132} In this reading, “man’s suffering is not due to the will of God but to man’s own wrong-doing.”\textsuperscript{133} In this case the verse would seem to assert that evil does not stem from YHWH,\textsuperscript{134} even though parts of Lam 1 and 2, and 3:1-20 habitually attribute violent, even evil, actions to YHWH.\textsuperscript{135}

Lamentations routinely places opposing stances side by side, even in the same chapter. Apparent consistency is, once again, no guarantee of a “correct” interpretation. Indeed, O’Connor suggests the “syntactical confusions of these verses are probably best left standing, for they evoke the theological predicament of the speaker.”\textsuperscript{136} This is a theological mess in which the \textit{κατὰ} himself is embroiled. Observe, though, that \textit{both} readings that assert YHWH is in control (e.g., Renkema, Hillers), \textit{and} readings that insist YHWH has nothing to do with evil (e.g., Gordis), demonstrate a desire to uphold YHWH’s justice and integrity. Thus even opposing readings of the verse itself agree, at least, on the need to read for theodicy.

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\textsuperscript{129} E.g. Gordis, for whom attributing good and evil to YHWH has “grave theological problems of its own” (Gordis, Lamentations, 140).
\textsuperscript{130} See discussion in Salters, Lamentations, 244. There are theological stances at stake in translation.
\textsuperscript{131} Salters, Lamentations, 244. For Gordis, the rhetorical question interpretation is the result of “faulty exegesis” such that the passage “has been made to yield a sense diametrically opposite to the poet’s meaning” (Gordis, Lamentations, 172).
\textsuperscript{132} “Not from the mouth of the Most High has it issued to bring suffering to a good man” (Gordis, Lamentations, 181).
\textsuperscript{133} Gordis, Lamentations, 182.
\textsuperscript{134} Gordis, Lamentations, 183.
\textsuperscript{135} Gordis himself notes the insistence that YHWH is the cause of all causes in 3:1-20! (Gordis, Lamentations, 174).
\textsuperscript{136} O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1052.
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Lamentations 3:39 contains the first mention of “sin” (אש, 3:39) in Lam 3.\textsuperscript{137} It also employs the term רָאָב for the last time in this chapter, paralleled now with אָש. The רָאָב is a “living man” (רֹאֵב, 3:39), that is, one who has thus far survived.\textsuperscript{138} How can a survivor “complain” (ירא, hitpolel, 3:39) about (the punishment for) his sin.\textsuperscript{139}

### 5.2.3.2 Lamentations 3:25-39: Who, to Whom, and Point of View

Lamentations 3:21-24 continued the personal focus and first person speech of 3:1-20, albeit with a more hopeful turn. Lamentations 3:25-39, however, is now entirely impersonal.\textsuperscript{140} There are no self-reflections, no first person pronouns, and no second person addressees. This is a different kind of discourse entirely.\textsuperscript{141} Indeed, this language is familiar from elsewhere, drawing on the authoritative discourse of Israel’s wisdom and psalmic traditions.\textsuperscript{142} Reading as an internal dialogue, here the וֹדֵד recollects earlier aphorisms, relying on traditional explanations for the way things “work” in the world.\textsuperscript{143}

\textsuperscript{137} The kethib reads נָאש (sg., cf. LXX τῆς ἁμαρτίας αὐτοῦ); while qere gives נָאש (pl., cf. V (peccatis suis), Tg. Lam (אָשָּׁר נָאשָּׁר)).

\textsuperscript{138} Renkema, Lamentations, 423.

\textsuperscript{139} The noun נָאָש can refer to “sin against God” (HALOT, 306, e.g., Num 27:3; Deut 19:15; 24:16; 2 Kgs 10:29; 14:6; Isa 1:18; 31:7; 38:17; Pss 51:7,11; 103:10; Lam 3:39; Dan 9:16; 2 Chr 25:4), or the punishment or “guilt” brought about by that sin (HALOT, 306, e.g., Lev 19:17; 20:20; 22:9; 24:15; Num 9:13; 18:22, 32; Deut 15:9; 23:22; 24:15; Isa 53:12; Ezek 23:49). See discussion in Salters, Lamentations, 246-47. Given the depiction of the וֹדֵד’s current situation (3:1-20) it is more likely that in this instance, נָאָש refers to the consequences of sin, that is, to the punishment and its outworkings in which he finds himself (cf. Hillers, Lamentations, 130; Salters, Lamentations, 247; Gordis, Lamentations, 184; House, Lamentations, 420).

\textsuperscript{140} Pronominal suffixes are lacking in the Hebrew, with the impersonal tone conveyed by the use of verb forms like participles (3:25), and jussives (3:28, 29, 30). The unit speaks abstractly of the מַעַּה בָּא (3:33); מַעַּה בָּא (3:36, 39); and מַעַּה בָּא (3:27, 35, 39).

\textsuperscript{141} Suggesting to some commentators a new speaker (sometimes conflated with a new author or editorial hand), responding to the וֹדֵד with theological reasoning concerning his sin. Middlemas, for example, considers vv. 21-39 to be a corrective to the rest of the chapter, coming from a much later date to correct and refute the urging to lament in Lam 1, 2, and 4 (Middlemas, “Did 2 Isaiah write Lam III?” 517).

\textsuperscript{142} Once again, this assumes, historically, that these discourses were established authoritative languages at the time of writing of Lamentations. This tends to be taken for granted by commentators (e.g., Renkema, Lamentations, 392; Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 119; House, Lamentations, 416; Salters, Lamentations, 230).

\textsuperscript{143} I.e., he is “virtually quoting the language of the faith of Israel. He is not himself confident but he recalls and parades old dictums from his knowledge of the doctrines of his day”. . .
perspective that he cites, he appears to absolve YHWH, accepting that affliction is humanity’s fault, and there are therefore no grounds for complaint. This is somewhat ironic, given the complaint of the first part of the chapter, and much of the book of Lamentations. Instead, he says, there is hope. YHWH is good, full of compassion and steadfast love. It is appropriate for a יַעֲקֹב to acquaint oneself with the dust while accepting YHWH’s discipline (cf. Prov. 3:11-12). 144 After all, this current misery is caused by sin. Sovereign YHWH had no choice but to punish. 145 YHWH is justified, the blame is humanity’s. 146 Or at least this is what commentators citing this “central” discourse as the controlling theological insight would have readers of Lamentations believe, asserting that here is the truth of the matter. 147 The moral of the story becomes: “When suffering comes, a man should be passive and utterly abase himself before God.” 148 Shortly, the call to confession will be made. Hope is obtained by turning in penitence to YHWH.

There are two key moments in verses 25-39 that are particularly salient for theodical readings. The first is in 3:33, where the יַעֲקֹב asserts that “he” does not cause suffering nor afflict “from his heart.” 149 Theodical readers take this statement as a “proof” that YHWH is not, in fact, the pitiless destroyer other parts of the book (and antitheodical readings) make him out to be. 150 There is no

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144 "perhaps recalling old adages from the past in order to boost his faith,” he “reflects on the best way to handle adversity” (Salters, Lamentations, 230; cf. Gerstenberger Lamentations, 494; Renkema, Lamentations, 392).
146 Ryken insists that “suffer they must, for God is just” (Ryken, Jeremiah and Lamentations, 757).
147 Gordis, Lamentations, 175; Ryken, Jeremiah and Lamentations, 757. “The strongman’s questions set this traditional view before his audience, as if he is seeking agreement and support for it. By blaming human sinfulness for the catastrophe, he justifies God’s deeds and this leads him to confession” (O’Connor, Tears of the World, 52).
150 Cf. O’Connor, he “tries to absolve God” with the claim that he does not afflict willingly (v. 33) (O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1052).
151 E.g., House, Lamentations, 420. Cf. Parry, “The basis for the expectation [that salvation will come] is an understanding of who YHWH is. Because he is good, one can expect future deeds of goodness, even if one does not see evidence of them now” (Parry, Lamentations, 102-103, emphasis original.).
denial that YHWH has afflicted—2:1-10 and 3:1-18 have made that quite clear—but (so the argument goes) from the יתכניס: perspective, YHWH must have been compelled against his “true” nature to have done these things (and yet compare 2.8). Renkema elaborates, and I quote him at length because he illustrates so well the point I wish to make:

Where the preceding statements concerning God’s merciful favours could only find a basis in the limited duration of God’s anger, here . . . the concept is given much firmer roots in very fundamental theology: the poets speak of the very essence of God. As a matter of fact, here in the middle of the third song and simultaneously—at the literary structural level—in the centre of the five songs as a whole, we find the very basis for all the sighs and laments, prayers and pleadings, hopes and expectations we have encountered so far from the poets and their sympathisers: they know that all of this does not conform to the essence of God. What they have been forced to endure is clearly against God’s nature.

Renkema thus demonstrates in one fell swoop the take of theodicy. The “key” theological insight is this: God must have been constrained against his own nature, for God is de facto merciful. The afflicting ( יתכניס, 3:33) ascribed to YHWH “constitutes, in fact, a contradictio in terminis. For God, oppression is an opus alienum.” YHWH’s “causing to suffer” ( ית伝え, 3:33) is, for Renkema, “alien to

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151 I.e., “To the strong man it appears that God must be powerless in this matter, that the true identity of God is not abusive or wrathful but characterized by great mercy” (O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1052; cf. Renkema, Lamentations, 383; Salters, Lamentations, 239; Hillers, Lamentations, 129).

152 Renkema, Lamentations, 408. Mintz similarly asserts that “God never acts capriciously. God’s punishments are just and meted out only to the deserving” (Mintz, Hurban, 35). Parry describes the sentiments as “theology proper—an appreciation of who God is in his very being. God gets no pleasure from inflicting pain on people—his judgments are not the way he wants to relate to humanity but are his response to human sin. Punishment is an ‘alien’ work of God given reluctantly and after numerous warnings” (Parry, Lamentations, 106, emphasis original).

153 Renkema, Lamentations, 409.
the essence of God, not according to his heart.” Consequently, “[n]o matter how necessary YHWH’s judgement against Israel is, he does not carry it out willingly because it does not belong to his nature to do so.”

But why, then, if this is not in YHWH’s character, has he acted this way? Ought readers now turn their compassion from the 721, to YHWH, who has been forced to act against his nature? How does this rhetorical move defend the justice of YHWH at the expense of the sufferer, and turn readers’ sympathies to the abuser rather than the abused?

According to theodic readings, “[s]ince God does not afflict willfully (Lam. 3:33-36), the ultimate cause can only be the sufferer’s own sin (3:39).” God had to carry out judgement for this sin, but his hand was “forced.” I am reminded of Re’emi’s rhetoric, insisting that all that has happened was what “God must necessarily do to his chosen people, his chosen city, his chosen king, his chosen land, if he was to be true to himself and to his loving purpose for the world.” It is difficult, however, to reconcile “loving purpose” with dead babies and the other atrocities that have been seen so far in Lamentations. No matter the ethics of infanticide, though, theodic readers insist that sin requires that reparation be made. They agree with the assessment that will be voiced in Lam 3:39, that sin is the source of suffering. That is, affliction does not arise from deep within the

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155 Renkema, *Lamentations*, 410. Renkema does acknowledge that “present experience and theological insights were at odds with one another,” but still deems the “theological insights” to be correct (Renkema, *Lamentations*, 409) For Gottwald, “[t]he expression ‘he does not afflict from the heart’ is the high watermark in Lamentations’ understanding of God. . . . The angry side of his nature, turned so unflinchingly against Jerusalem, is not the determinative factor in the divine purposes. Begrudgingly, regretfully, if there is no other way toward his higher purposes, he may unleash the forces of evil, but ‘his heart’ is not in it!” (Gottwald, *Lamentations*, 98; cf. House, *Lamentations*, 418).
158 Re’emi, “Lamentations,” 95, quoted in regards to Lam 2:13-17 in §4.2.3.2.
true heart of YHWH, but rather Israel is to blame.\textsuperscript{159} YHWH is just, “the people are guilty.”\textsuperscript{160}

The denouement of this notion occurs at 3:39, the second key moment for a theodic reading. This indictment of the human sinner is the first such statement in Lam 3 (cf. Lam 1:5b, 8a, 9a, 14a, 18a, 20b, 22b; 2:14a). The implication of the rhetorical question, “How can a living man complain?” is that there are no grounds for complaint. The ignominies experienced by the בוני— and by extension, Zion the city, the women and the people— are deserving suffering, appropriate punishment. YHWH had no choice, there is no right to complain.\textsuperscript{161}

The people should turn to the “proper response” of penitence, rather than complaint.\textsuperscript{162} This is “proven” for theodic readers by the immediacy of that very move in 3:40-41.\textsuperscript{163} But as Hillers points out, verse 39 is the first indication in Lam 3 that “the man’s troubles have been due to his own sins— and that he should call into question not the goodness of God but his own goodness.”\textsuperscript{164} Can this be considered the governing idea when it only appears for the first time in the chapter here?

Who is to blame in verses 25-39? The בוני, and the people of whom he is a part. Reading theodically, there is no right to complain. It “boils down to this: given that humans sin, why should someone complain if they don’t like the


\textsuperscript{161} I.e., 3:39 “heightens the emphasis on the justice of YHWH’s judgment,” with the “main concern” to “admonish the people to avoid complaining, as YHWH’s punishment was justified and predicted, as on display in Deut 30:15: the good and evil, blessing and curse, that was set out before Israel, gave them the opportunity to rebel or obey, and they chose rebellion, justifying the divine punishment” (Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 248, emphases original). Again, this assumes that the rhetoric of Deuteronomy was well established by the time of writing of Lam 3, a position that may be historically naïve. See, for example, Anne-Mareike Wetter, who argues that diachronically, Deuteronomy was a later, “more nuanced” version of faith in YHWH than forms expressed here in Lamentations (Wetter, “Balancing the Scales,” 39).

\textsuperscript{162} I.e., “When suffering is deserved, it ought to produce confession rather than complaint. The sin that caused the suffering in the first place must be repented of and renounced” (Ryken, Jeremiah and Lamentations, 757; cf. Mintz, Hurban, 35).

\textsuperscript{163} Cf. Hillers, Lamentations, 130.

\textsuperscript{164} Hillers, Lamentations, 130.
consequences of their actions?” The apparent “truths” of verses 33 and 39–YHWH does not afflict willingly, therefore affliction must be brought on by one’s own sin—are thus construed to support reading theodically.

Antitheodic readers, however, are not so easily appeased. First, unlike the intensely personal expressions of 3:1-24, there is no personal investment in 3:25-39. In keeping with proverbial wisdom, the statements are generalised. There is no direct correlation to the immediacy of the ὇χλω’s situation. There is thus no buy in, no ownership, and no felt conviction that the positive attributes of Yahweh and approach to suffering, directly applies to him.

Second, affirmations of YHWH’s mercy within the unit do not quite ring true. They are tentative, “wavering.” “Perhaps” there is hope (3:29) is not exactly a solid avowal of confidence. The affirmation that YHWH will have compassion in verse 32 comes with the twin assertion that YHWH is the one who has afflicted, hardly a comforting thought. Reading the indicative, “Adonai does not see” in 3:36 “appears to juxtapose that high view of Yahweh [expressed in vv. 31-33] with an observation that the same Yahweh pays no attention to severe cruelty in the world.” Surely, then, “The LORD does not see” is “not reassuring in the least.”

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166 In a Bakhtinian framework, “a given proverb is easily seen as monologic: it is ‘no-man’s-speech’ ” (Stordalen, “Dialogue and Dialogism,” 36). The very “procedure of collecting proverbs into continuous writing forces ‘monologic’ utterances to meet and wrestle,” such that “there is a discernible intent to engage outside discourse by citing it” (Stordalen, “Dialogue and Dialogism,” 36, emphasis original). By citing proverbial wisdom here, then, the ὇χλω engages this outside discourse dialogically, in an attempt to integrate sapiential mores with his experience of suffering.
167 Renkema, Lamentations, 403. Similarly, O’Connor suggests his “suffering is too deep to be overturned for long by simple theological affirmation” (O’Connor, Tears of the World, 50).
170 Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 121. Interestingly, rather than finding fault with YHWH’s refusal to see, O’Connor suggests it might provide “another defense for the deity’s failure to act. God does not see; perhaps God is not to blame” (O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1052).
Third, sentiments expressed in verses 3:25-39 conflict with much of the rest of the book. Affirming YHWH’s compassion (3:32) directly contravenes statements avowing that YHWH afflicts without pity (3:42; 2:2a; 17b, 21c). The course of action suggested—sitting quietly and accepting your lot—is at odds with that advised to Zion (2:18-19) and indeed at odds with the existence of Lamentations entirely. If sitting quietly in the dust were desired, what lament literature would have survived? The thus contradicts his own advice by complaining.

Further, the pericope of “hope” is preceded and followed by statements that undermine on the one hand, and quash this hope on the other, creating no small cognitive dissonance when compared with experience. As Stiebert explains, after the “overwhelming catalogue of cruelty” in Lam 2, “appeals to YHWH’s ‘kindness’ and ‘compassion’ (3:22, 32), ‘faithfulness’ (3:23) and ‘salvation’ (3:26) are hard to take seriously. Given the wider context, 3:19-41 reads like macabre sarcasm.” Stiebert goes on to ask, of verse 33, “how can we possibly believe this, in the light of YHWH’s multiple atrocities?” Greenberg’s assertion that in a post-Holocaust world, “[n]o statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of the burning children” is apt. It is hard to conceive that “YHWH does not afflict willingly” would hold water in the presence of Jerusalem’s dying children, actually.

As the text progresses, it becomes clear that affirmations of faithfulness are not the’s final word (3:42-54, potentially 55-66). The “hopeful possibilities turn out to be illusory: after that bit of soul-searching, the situation is no less desperate than before.”

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171 Parry, _Lamentations_, 103.
175 Greenberg, _Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire_,” 23.
For the antitheodic reader, then, there is something of a disconnect between statements of YHWH’s steadfast love, and the agony of the דוד’s situation. Rather than being ironic, however, it reads as if the דוד is trying to convince himself of the “truth” of the wisdom-like statements he cites; attempting to make their authoritative status ring true internally.\textsuperscript{177} There is an attempt, hearkening back to familiar traditions, to try and explain his suffering and excuse YHWH.\textsuperscript{178} It is not clear that he succeeds. At this point, “he cannot resolve the contradiction between his confidence in Yahweh (vv. 20-33) and the circumstances of his torture and abuse (vv.1-20).”\textsuperscript{179} Simply put, “[h]is experience of suffering and his theological beliefs contradict each other.”\textsuperscript{180}

Within a Bakhtinian framework, the דוד’s attempt to justify the ways of YHWH by appealing to proverbial discourse constitutes an attempt to reconcile the internally persuasive experience of pain with the authoritative discourse of religious tradition.\textsuperscript{181} This creates a dialogic tension within the דוד’s discourse. He draws on wisdom tradition to assert YHWH’s ongoing fidelity and integrity, in an attempted antidote to his extreme experience to the contrary.\textsuperscript{182}

Whether these statements take root and become persuasive or not, it must be acknowledged that vestiges of a faith-filled, hope-full perspective do remain in Lamentations 3.\textsuperscript{183} Just as Zion’s plight and accusations of YHWH must not be ignored, so too the דוד’s turn to YHWH must not be downplayed as the interpretive pendulum swings toward bringing Zion’s expression of pain to light.\textsuperscript{184} In Lamentations, opposing perspectives sit juxtaposed un/comfortably

\textsuperscript{177} Cf. O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1051; Tigay: “In his desperate quest for relief, he will try anything—even turn the other cheek (3:30), or profess an absurd faith in divine goodness that is at odds with his own experience (3:33-36)” (Tigay, “Lamentations,” 447).

\textsuperscript{178} Cf. Salters, Lamentations, 242.

\textsuperscript{179} O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1052.

\textsuperscript{180} O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1052.

\textsuperscript{181} O’Connor’s assessment is that “his efforts fail” (O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1052).

\textsuperscript{182} Cf. Mandolfo, Daughter Zion, 64-65.

\textsuperscript{183} Cf. Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 120; Parry, Lamentations, 103.

\textsuperscript{184} O’Connor’s work goes some way to recognising and expounding the contradictory perspectives in the text, as evidenced by my use of citations from her work to support both theodic and antitheodic sentiments. She speaks of the “erratic course” of the “speaker’s
within tight acrostic and enjambed unity, as though it were not odd to find despair and hope in the same breath. The question, then, is whether one perspective is finally more persuasive than another. In Bakhtinian terms, can the chapter (and the book), be read monologically, for an overall message or theology? Is one perspective established as more authoritative than another? What signals suggest which claims should be given priority? I tackle these questions in more detail in chapter 8. My inclination at this point, however, is to say that after the onslaught of violence and attack by YHWH (3:1-20), the momentary lightening of the spirit in 3:21-39 is a bandaid on a bleeding artery, a “pissing into the wind” that has no more effect against the darkness than a garden hose against a raging Victoria bushfire. There is a momentary turn to penitence, yes, perhaps even to something vaguely akin to praise, but 3:42 will see the return of rage.

5.2.4 Lamentations 3:40-41

5.2.4.1 Lamentations 3:40-41: Overview

Admonitions to “test” (בָּאָפַת, 3:40) and “search out” (בָּאָפַת, 3:40) “our ways” resonate with Psalms and wisdom discourses. They indicate a self-examination, plumbing the depths of the human heart in order to turn and “return” (בָּאָפַת, 3:40) to YHWH. The injunction to raise “heart” (בָּשַׂר, 3:41) and “hands” (בָּשַׂר, 3:31) calls for a genuine turning, where the inner attitude of the heart mirrors the outer posture of penitence predicated of lifting one’s hands to heaven.

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185 Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 106.
186 Dobbs-Allsopp suggests not, finding “no explicit attempt within the poetry itself to resolve the contradictory nature of this use of language; claims and counterclaims are given equal linguistic weight” (Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 122). Thomas argues that allowing the central discourse of Lam 3 to determine the meaning of Lamentations “closes the meaning of the book” (Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 223).
187 As Yael Klangvisan so evocatively put it, during discussion of our respective translations of Lam 3.
188 Cf. Pss 64:7; 77:6; Prov 2:4; 20:27.
190 Salters, Lamentations, 250; Hillers, Lamentations, 131.
5.2.4.2 Lamentations 3:40-41: Who, to Whom, and Point of View

The exhortation is a first person “hortatory plural,” as the נזא “speaks as one among a larger group.” That is, he now “expands his laments beyond his own suffering to embrace the suffering of the community.” While many commentators group verses 40-41 together with 42-47 due to the first person plural, I distinguish between the implied addressee of 40-41 as the community, and the addressee of 42-47 as YHWH. The pivotal point is verse 42, which begins with the first person plural, in a seeming continuation of verses 40-41, but switches abruptly to second person singular address to YHWH. The edges admittedly are blurred, as the poem moves from the cohortative, through verse 42, to become accusatory.

The נזא urges an examination of the people’s behaviour, the self-same people to whom he belongs. In keeping with the assumption that the people are culpable because of their sin (3:39), he advocates turning to God in repentance. Verses 40-41 anticipate verse 42, which admits explicitly that we have “sinned” (גזר; cf 1:5,14, 22) and “rebelled” (服役; cf. 1:18, 20). The assumed corollary is that by turning in penitence to YHWH, suffering will somehow be alleviated. The sin + judgement = suffering equation is to be countered by the suffering + repentance = forgiveness formula. Theodicy readings interpret accordingly, determining that because this affliction and its cause in “sin is human in origin, we have only to scrutinize our actions and return to God in order to be saved from suffering.”

194 Corresponding to a change in genre from wisdom to communal lament (cf. Berlin, Lamentations, 95; Childs, Old Testament as Scripture, 595).
195 House, Lamentations, 420; Provan, Lamentations, 100; Childs, Old Testament as Scripture, 595.
196 Gordis, Lamentations, 185. Cf. Krašovec, “The Source of Hope,” 233; Parry, Lamentations, 116; Longman, Jeremiah and Lamentations, 339; Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 249; House, Lamentations, 421. Berlin agrees that vv. 40-41 suggest the straightforward equation: “If God is indeed so good and so merciful, and if the people have sinned, the natural next step
Even while recognising that “YHWH is the ultimate cause of their suffering,” Parry asserts that “he has caused it only in response to the persistent unrighteous behavior of his people.” House similarly insists that 3:40 indicates “clearly that the speaker agrees with the narrator (1:5) and Jerusalem (1:12-16) that sin has led to God’s acting like an enemy (2:1-10) and to God’s causing him and Jerusalem horrible pain (2:11-22; 3:1-18).” The people only have themselves to blame.

Antitheodic readers are quiet in the face of the call for penitence, noting simply that this “call for self-reflection in Lam 3:40-42 finds no echo in the chapters that precede it.” Perhaps, then, the brief call for penitence is swallowed up in the clamour for attention of competing perspectives. But it, too, still sounds in this text and must not be shouted down.

5.2.5 Lamentations 3:42-47

5.2.5.1 Lamentations 3:42-47: Overview

The admission that “we” have “sinned” (cf. 3:42; cf. 1:5, 14, 22) and “rebelled” (cf. 3:42; cf. 1:18, 20) uses language familiar from Zion and the Lamenter’s prior speeches, and found in prophetic pronouncements of judgement. The confession could thus potentially confirm the context of just punishment for judged sin. But in a moment everything changes: “we have sinned and rebelled; you have not forgiven” (3:42). The spotlight turns from focus on the people to zoom in on YHWH’s devastating destruction (cf. 1:12c-15; 2:1-9; 3:1-18). The נְאָר accuses YHWH of failing, even refusing to “forgive” (3:42). He has covered

is that the people must repent and then they will surely be forgiven” (Berlin, Lamentations, 95-96). She rightly foreshadows, however, the “sudden jolt” that upsets the assumption in v. 42 (Berlin, Lamentations, 96).

Parry, Lamentations, 116.

House, Lamentations, 421.

Mandolfo, Daughter Zion, 73.

himself with “anger” (חָרָם, 3:43; cf. 1:12; 2:1, 3, 6, 21, 22; 3:66; 4:11.). He has “pursued” (גָּזַה, 3:43; cf. 1:3; 4:19), he has “slain” (מָכַה, 3:43; cf. 2:4, 20, 21) and he has not “pitied” (יוֹסֵד, 3:43; cf. 2:2, 17, 21). He has hid himself with “cloud” (נִצְנָה, 3:44) so no prayer can “pass through” (נַחֲמָ֑ה, 3:44). YHWH has made his own people “rubbish” (טַכָּה, 3:45) and “refuse” (נָאָ֑צָה, 3:45) among the nations. Almost identically to 2:16, the יִהְיוֹ נֶבֶר declares that enemies have “opened their mouths” (פָּרִים פָּרִים, 3:46) in animosity. The utterance finishes with an alliterative flourish summing up the situation: “panic and pitfall” (פַּאַרֵד פַּאַרֵד, 3:47), “destruction and devastation” (שָׂרֵת שָׂרֵת, 3:47). Lamentations 3:43-44 alludes to the pillar of smoke and theophany of Ex 33.22 but in contrast to the comforting presence of YHWH they signify there, here “the clouds represent not God’s awesome presence with his people but his total inaccessibility.” YHWH does not see.

5.2.5.2 Lamentations 3:42-47: Who, to Whom, and Point of View

Lamentations 3:42 begins with the same first person plural as 3:40-41. In keeping with the exhortation to penitence, the יִהְיוֹ נֶבֶר confesses that he and his people have sinned and rebelled (3:42). If the perspective of the previous couple of verses were to continue, a further urging to repentance and confirmation of human culpability could be expected. But the יִהְיוֹ נֶבֶר turns instead to YHWH to accuse him, saying, “You have not forgiven.”

From a theodic perspective, there need not be any conflict between the two parts of 3:42. The יִהְיוֹ נֶבֶר, on behalf of the people, admits sin and rebellion. It is

202 Cf. Berlin, Lamentations, 96; Parry, Lamentations, 117.
203 Parry, Lamentations, 117.
204 Boase sees the change of perspective as indicative of a change in speaking voice, from the יִהְיוֹ נֶבֶר to the community (Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 223). However, as she herself observes, the יִהְיוֹ נֶבֶר’s opening perspective (vv. 1-19) is quite different from his perspective in 3:20-39; and yet this is (in her reading, and mine), the same speaker (Boase, Fulfilment of Doom?, 226-27). A change in perspective does not necessarily indicate a different speaker.
appropriate then, that if repentance has not yet been forthcoming, that YHWH has not yet forgiven. Further, the very act of addressing YHWH provides, for Parry at least, an expectation that “at the fundamental level of his being God is merciful and he will not block himself off from prayer forever.” In keeping with verse 33 (but against 2:8) Parry insists that “the reader knows that things are not the way that God wanted them to be.”

The weight of 3:42-47, however, must surely tend toward reading antithedically. An immediate accusation appears on the flip side of the confession coin. While not denying that the speaker “invites a collective examination of conscience” and “declares their sinfulness,” O’Connor rightly observes that “he attaches to this confession a stinging accusation against Yahweh: ‘We have sinned and rebelled/and you have not forgiven.’ For Berlin, the bitter reversal indicates that “old theology has proved to be false,” that is, the theology that if the people repented, YHWH would forgive. Instead, there is now “no direct relationship between repentance and forgiveness.” Repentance might well be required, and may even “be effective if only it could reach God,” but God has blocked himself with a cloud. That being so, “[t]hat it does not reach him is God’s fault.” YHWH will not forgive, regardless of whether the people have repented, because YHWH has placed a barrier of anger and cloud between them and cannot hear their confessions. Moreover, given the traditional association of cloud with YHWH’s protective presence and guidance, this blocking “is a devastating negation of a fundamental religious concept inscribed in traditional sources. It is a fierce indictment of God. Nowhere in Lamentations, and perhaps in the entire Bible, is

205 So House, Lamentations, 421; Parry, Lamentations, 116.
206 Parry, Lamentations, 117; contra 3:43-44.
207 Parry, Lamentations, 117, emphasis original.
209 Berlin, Lamentations, 96.
210 Berlin, Lamentations, 96.
211 Berlin, Lamentations, 96.
God’s refusal to be present more strongly expressed.”212 Panic and pitfall, destruction and devastation.

In 3:42, then, as the יז כ “shifts his address from the people to Yahweh, his real anger and energy are aimed not at his community but at the deity.”213 This complaint, for O’Connor, is “more bitter” than ever, so that it “seems virtually to cancel any power of the communal act of repentance to resolve the speaker’s theological dilemma. The second complaint makes the communal confession of sin and repentance appear halfhearted and ritualistic in the face of new accusations against Yahweh.”214

The faithful assertions of earlier verses are eclipsed as the pericope goes on to outline, once again, YHWH’s part in the downfall of his people.215 In marked contrast to the attempt to explain suffering by recourse to human sin, antitheodic readers suggest the יז כ now believes that “Yahweh’s anger is out of control, and that, not human sin, is the source of the community’s pain.”216 Any sense of quietness and trust is thus, not negated, exactly (it still stands in the text), but certainly mitigated to a certain extent by the accusatory “you have not forgiven.” The brief acknowledgement of sin and rebellion is very quickly swallowed by repetition of YHWH’s destroying action and defensive inaction. While the יז כ has entertained the possibility that their suffering comes down to human culpability, he now turns to find YHWH to blame. Well, says the יז כ, we have sinned, yes, but you have not forgiven. And, what’s more, you’re the bigger person.

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212 Berlin, Lamentations, 96.
5.2.6 Lamentations 3:48-54

5.2.6.1 Lamentations 3:48-54: Overview

Eyes and water comprise leitmotifs in Lam 3:48-54. Streams of water “flowing down” (וב, 3:48; cf. 1:16) from the נַרְבִּים’s eyes and “flowing up” (תַּפְלֶה, 3:54) over his head envelop the unit. The motif recollects Zion’s own tears “pouring” down her face (תַּפְלֶה, 3:49), as well as her pleas for YHWH to “see” (רָאָה, 3:50; cf. 1:9c, 11c, 20a; 2:20a). The נַרְבִּים’s eyes “afflict” him (תַּפְלֶה, poel, 3:51), also reminiscent of Zion’s affliction (cf. 1:12, 22; 2:20). It is no surprise then, when the נַרְבִּים reveals the reason for his weeping, it is the fate of the “daughters of my city” (בָּנוֹת, יִשְׂרָאֵל, 3:51), the women. The images are strongly resonant of “daughter” Zion. Then in a return to hunting imagery (cf. 3:10-13), the נַרְבִּים speaks of being “hunted down” (תַּפְלֶה, 3:52; cf. 4:18) and trapped in a “pit” (בָּם, 3:53, 55). In this pit, indicative of Sheol, stones rain down upon him and waters begin to close over his head.

5.2.6.2 Lamentations 3:48-54: Who, to Whom, and Point of View

The נַרְבִּים resumes first person speech in Lam 3:48. While the opening individual lament-like section of Lam 3 was an intensely personal reflection (3:1-20), the נַרְבִּים now offers a more communal view. In 3:48-51 the נַרְבִּים is aware of the people and the city about him. This more encompassing grief might suggest something of the internal dialogic struggle through which he has progressed. Having emerged from his own experience and expression of grief, he is able to take on an empathetic, advocative role, witnessing to the pain of his people.

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217 Cf. Pss 11:1; 124:7; 140:6; Jer 16:16.
218 Dobbs-Allsopp describes here “a more expansive and inclusive ‘I’ that that of 3:1-18” (Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 106; cf. Mintz, Hurban, 38). This is not a new speaker, however. Positing a new speaker at this point rather than one moving through different perspectives, would serve “singularly to gut the force of the poem” (Mintz, Hurban, 38).
219 Cf. Mintz, Hurban, 38.
But there is more introspection to come, with 3:52-54 more akin to the self-focused position of 3:1-20. I am hunted (3:52), I am thrown in a pit (3:53), and then, in a quotation of himself, “I am lost” (3:54).\(^{221}\) Lamentations 3:48-54 tends more easily toward an antitheodic than theodic interpretation. There is grief, there is unbearable waiting for YHWH to see, and there are enemies. The cry “I am lost” leaves little room for any expectation of relief.

**5.2.7 Lamentations 3:55-66**

**5.2.7.1 Lamentations 3:55-66: Overview**

The יְהֹוָה cries to YHWH from the depths of the “pit” (רָד, 3:55).\(^ {222}\) He entreats YHWH to “hear” (חָשֵׁם, 3:56), and not to “hide” (לֹא חָשֵׁם, hiphil, 3:56) himself away (cf. 2:1). “Do not fear” (אֵלָ֣וי עַדָּךְ, 3:57) is a traditional phrase signifying “comfort and confidence.”\(^ {223}\) In juridical language, the יְהֹוָה asks YHWH to “struggle” or “plead” (דַּעְתָכּ, 3:58) on his behalf (cf. 3:34-36).\(^ {224}\) He claims to have been wronged, and calls for YHWH to “see” (רָאָ֣ה, 3:59) and “judge” (פִּקְדָנִ֣י, 3:59) his cause, suggesting, in direct contravention to 3:42, a claim of innocence.\(^ {225}\)

The יְהֹוָה calls for vindication from YHWH against his enemies—enemies that reproach, mock, and tease (3:60-63).\(^ {226}\) He entreats YHWH to pay them back accordingly (3:64; cf. 1:21-22).\(^ {227}\) The final lines of the chapter show no mercy, demanding that YHWH “pursue” (עָבַ֣ד, 3:65; cf. 1:3, 6; 3:43; 4:19; 5:5) them with “anger” (אֵרִ֣י, 3:65). The יְהֹוָה wishes YHWH to destroy, indeed “exterminate” (שָׂרַ֣ב, hiphil, 3:66) his enemies completely.

\(^{221}\) Where “lost” potentially indicates death (cf. Ps 88:6; Isa 53:8; Parry, *Lamentations*, 120).

\(^{222}\) Cf. 3:53, creating a linguistic link between successive utterances.


\(^{226}\) Cf. 3:14; Ps 69:10; 79:4.

5.2.7.2 Lamentations 3:55-66: Who, to Whom, and Point of View

In Lam 3:55-66 the יהוה addresses YHWH. The major interpretive question is contingent on how the perfect verbs are read. If read straightforwardly, Lam 3:55-66 can be understood as an assurance of help already given, providing hope for the present situation. But if read as precative perfects, however, Lam 3:55-66 can be construed as a prayer for help. Interpreters employ grammatical and contextual arguments to support readings either way, which turn out to be consistent with their preference for reading theodically or antitheodically.

Reading the perfects as past perfects, the passage affirms that YHWH has seen, heard, and acted. This affirmation could pertain to two (or more) situations. First, the יהוה refers to a previous time of suffering, where he witnessed YHWH’s effective salvation. The reminder of YHWH’s past actions as regards some past crisis is called to mind to convince him that YHWH will again act on his behalf. Alternatively, the יהוה could be referring to the current suffering, asserting that YHWH has already seen and acted to alleviate the present situation, although the outworking of this has not yet taken effect. Either way, the affirmation that he has seen and acted defends YHWH, supporting a theodic reading of the section.

But the book of Lamentations is predicated precisely on the notion that YHWH has not heard, or acted, or seen. Complaints continue to be made. Reading the precative perfect allows 3:56-66 to be understood as an entreaty for help from

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228 So House, Lamentations, 426; Salters, Lamentations, 266.
231 E.g., Meek, “Lamentations,” 28; Ryken, Jeremiah and Lamentations, 758; Parry, Lamentations, 124; House, Lamentations, 426; Salters, Lamentations, 266.
232 E.g., House, Lamentations, 426; Salters, Lamentations, 270.
233 Cf. Ps 136; House, Lamentations, 427; Salters, Lamentations, 272.
234 Westermann, Lamentations, 186; cf. Ex 2:25; 3:7,9; Parry, Lamentations, 122.
235 C.f. Gen 40:14. Gesenius notes the example in Genesis and observes that the perfect can
within the midst of suffering. This suggests “Lamentations 3 in no way presents a past experience from which deliverance has been brought about.” Instead, reading antitheodically, the closing verses of the chapter are a further desperate plea, inciting YHWH to see, hear, and act in response to present pain.

In terms of blame, the malice and mocking of the enemy come into view. This is an interesting turn of rhetoric, considering the imagery equating YHWH with the enemy earlier in the chapter and the book. Now the “enemy’s” acts are being brought to YHWH’s attention for him to enact vengeance and retaliation.

5.2.8 Excursus: Vengeance as Vindication

The closing verses of Lam 3 comprise a vitriolic plea that YHWH should exact judgement upon the enemies (cf. 1:21-22; 4:21-22). “We may be guilty, Israel cries, but so are they; let our chastisement be vindicated by their destruction.”

express a wish or imprecation in Arabic, but rejects the notion of a precative perfect tense in Hebrew (GKC §8n n. 2). Contra WO, who allow the existence of a precative, but without explanation (WO §8.4). Gibson observes the precative in situations where “a translation as though it were a juss. or an imper. is either demanded or makes better sense” (Gibson, §60c). Aside from the Gen 40:14 example, he notes that the precative is restricted to poetry, identifying further possible examples in Ps 3:8; 4:2; 7:7; 10:16; 25:11; 31:6; 56:9; 60:6; 61:6; 67:6, 7, 8; 85:2-4; 107:42; 109:28; 119:21; 129:4; 140:8; Lam 1:21; Isa 43:9; Job 21:16; 22:18.

Reading v. 55, מָלַךְ, as performative leads naturally into reading v. 56, מָלַךְ, as precative: “I call out your name . . . hear my voice!” The entreaty to YHWH not to close his ears ( économ) then follows logically, as does a reading of the subsequent verbs (vv. 57-61) as precative (Gibson §57b, 60c). The imperatives in v. 59 (רָאֵשׁ) and v. 63 (רָאֵשׁ) lend weight to taking the entire section as a plea to YHWH, as do the volitional imperfects in vv. 64-66 (רָאוֹתָהוּ). Some interpreters, reluctant to concede the existence of the precative perfect, identify the perfect verbs as “prophetic perfects,” that is, statements in the perfect that in fact express a wish for what they hoped had happened already (cf. Gibson, §59b). The outcome for interpretation is the same—the unit is read as a plea for future help.


Cf. 1:20-22; 2:20-22. O’Connor takes a somewhat different tack, arguing that “temporal distinctions that separate past from present are not required to make sense of the verses. The strong man may be calling upon memories of past suffering and rescue as a means to fan hope in his present reality. Or he may simply be speaking of his immediate past (vv. 52-56), which has immediate presence for him” (O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1056). The unit still expresses a desire for what the רָאֵשׁ hopes for from YHWH (O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1056).

Parry suggests this equation is no longer in play (Parry, Lamentations, 119), whereas O’Connor maintains that when “the speaker addresses his enemy directly . . . that enemy is unmistakably Yahweh (v. 55)” (O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1054).

Mintz, IIfurbian, 40; cf. Hillers, Lamentations, 133.
While many commentators note the imprecation, they tend to explain it simply as part of the lament genre, with no further comment on the implications of such violent rhetoric. For example, Hillers says:

That God should deal out retribution to Israel’s enemies, or torment to a man’s tormenters, is a typical Old Testament theme. Even when Israel was conscious of her own rebellion against God, as in this poem (vv 39-41), and acknowledged the justice of such punishment as was meted out to her, this guilt never meant to her that her enemies were justified in the atrocities they committed. On the contrary, belief in divine justice meant that Yahweh should deal just as strictly with the nations as he did with Israel.\footnote{Hillers, \textit{Lamentations}, 133.}

Similarly, Ryken observes that the “cry for vengeance is another echo from the book of Jeremiah, where the prophet frequently asked God to destroy his enemies,” but does not question the ramifications of praying for another nation’s extermination.\footnote{Ryken, \textit{Jeremiah and Lamentations}, 759.} And Salters observes how “the poet exults in the certainty” of the coming vengeance, without any comment on the grotesqueness of this exultation.\footnote{Salters, \textit{Lamentations}, 280.} How quickly the deliverance of Exodus becomes the genocide of conquest—as it does, still, today.

Bergant is one of a minority of scholars who identifies the imagery for the insidious injunction it is, declaring that the sentiments with which the poem ends (3:58-66) are distressing indeed. Not only is there a lack of forgiveness on the part of the man, but he actually seeks to enlist God as an accomplice who will administer the vengeance with which his heart is filled. This is not
only an unsavory picture of human revenge, but it portrays God as vicious and vindictive.²⁴⁴

Bergant does, however, then mitigate the “distressing” sentiments by pointing out that calling upon YHWH to correct an unjust situation, and leaving the execution of that justice to the agency of YHWH rather than taking it up oneself, is an appropriate course of action to take.²⁴⁵ This does not, however, deal with the sentiments, which remain distressing indeed.²⁴⁶

5.3 Overall Point of View

Lamentations 3 begins with the תַּבוֹן’s description of his treatment at YHWH’s hands (3:1-16), and his internal turmoil as a result of that treatment (3:17-20). It moves through quiet hope and penitence (3:21-24) to general didactic instruction (3:25-39). An exhortation to corporate penitence (3:40-41) precedes an immediate turn toward further accusation, drawing the cruelty of the enemy to YHWH’s attention (3:42-47). The lament then takes a more inclusive scope to include the people of the city (3:48-54). The last verses (3:55-66) are difficult, representing either further hope and trust in YHWH’s saving action (if read as straightforward qal perfects, cf. 3:21-24) or further demands that YHWH see and attend to the תַּבוֹן’s plight (if read as preceptive perfects). The chapter finishes with a violent plea for YHWH to exact vengeance upon the תַּבוֹן’s enemies (cf. 1:20-22).

In terms of the key question—who is to blame—indictment of YHWH in 3:1-20 gives way to the most explicit affirmations of YHWH’s goodness, and the most extended exploration of the connection between human sin and suffering in Lamentations (3:21-39, 40-42). This engagement with penitence and admission

²⁴⁴ Bergant, Lamentations, 106. To be fair, the “vicious and vindictive” portrayal of YHWH is one that has already been established in the book of Lamentations. In the rhetoric of the poem, he is simply being asked to turn his tantrum away from the תַּבוֹן and his people, and to take it out on his enemies instead.
²⁴⁶ See further §6.2.5.
of sin is fleeting, however, and reverses its object of accusation in 3:42, where the אֵל asserts that while the people have sinned, YHWH has not forgiven. Further incriminating description of what YHWH has done to his people follows. The unnamed enemies’ role in their downfall also features, and YHWH is urged to vanquish these enemies, which takes on new levels of meaning in light of earlier insinuations that YHWH is the enemy.

5.3.1 Who is to Blame? Reading Lamentations 3 for Theodicy: The Centrality of Faith and Penitence

Theodic readers of Lamentations appeal to the centrality of Lam 3, and especially 3:21-24 and 3:25-39, to provide the hermeneutical key to the book in its entirety.247 The statements on the goodness of God are considered the climax or supreme theology because of their “central” place in the book.248 These “central” statements affirming YHWH’s goodness are prioritised over any potentially undermining accusation on the periphery. Most commentators recognise that these are not the only sentiments expressed in Lamentations, but the notion is that they “correct” prior assessments of the situation. “Love” is “permanent,” “anger” is “temporary.”249 And the way to return to YHWH’s love, rather than anger? Penitence, naturally. The central theological “message” is, thus, that one should wait quietly and endure suffering sent from the Lord.250

The twin urgings to acquiescent acceptance (3:25-39) and heartfelt penitence (3:40-42) become the central lessons for the people of YHWH. That is, when all

247 Lam 3 is “the monumental center” and “theological nub” (Mintz, Hurban, 33); the “high point of the book, central to it in more than an external or formal way” (Hillers, Lamentations, 122); “its central and most important” chapter (Saebo, “Who is The Man?” 295); providing the “central argument that God is gracious” (Heater, “Structure and Meaning,” 154); cf. Brandscheidt, Gotteszorn und Menschenleid, 48. Lam 3 is the “acrostic showcase of the book, the center of the text, and the ideological focus of the work” (Grossberg, Centripetal and Centrifugal Structures, 85). See survey in Westermann, Lamentations, 67.

248 A theological “linchpin,” “shedding its qualified light over the whole” (Gottwald, Lamentations Reconsidered, 168); “a central theological insight of the book” (Parry, Lamentations, 33).

249 Parry, Lamentations, 33; cf. Hillers, Lamentations, 129. Mandolfo sees the central sections as “a conscious” editorial “attempt to ideologically centralize the DV’s theological position. . . . It is essentially the intrusion of divine discourse into what is otherwise theologically troubling speech” (Mandolfo, Daughter Zion, 72).

250 So Re’emi, Lamentations, 116-17; Bracke, Lamentations, 188; Mintz, Hurban, 33.
goes wrong, accept your lot, return to YHWH, confess your sin, and YHWH will return. Tigay summarises the theodic interpretation nicely: “in chapter 3, the sufferer finally grasps ‘a necessary relationship between the ordeal thrust upon him and his own actions.’”\textsuperscript{251} If it is the case that “God does not afflict willfully (Lam. 3:33-36), the ultimate cause can only be the sufferer’s own sin (3:39).”\textsuperscript{252} According to this reading, “the poet proffers the view that Israel’s destruction was caused by its own guilt. The punishment was earned, not arbitrary (3:33-39), and only submission could bring it to an end (3:40-41).”\textsuperscript{253}

An understanding of the \textit{theodicy’s central role as the theologiser in Lamentations is thus a hallmark of theodic readings of Lamentations. Affirmations of YHWH’s goodness are prioritised over descriptions of his destroying actions, and the theological “heart” or “key” of the book is reckoned to be the posture of quiet submission and penitence demonstrated by the \textit{theodicy.}\textsuperscript{254} Who is to blame? In theodic readings, human “guilt functions for interpreters as a way of retaining the notion of God as the author of the destruction . . . while nevertheless relieving God of any ultimate responsibility for the disturbing results of the destruction.”\textsuperscript{255} By making it about sin, God gets let off the hook.\textsuperscript{256}

\textbf{5.3.2 Who is to Blame? Reading Lamentations 3 for Antitheodicy}

Antitheodic readers dispute the claim that centrality implies theological superiority. First, rather than prioritising the “central” discourse of faith, they contend that this is undermined by the turn back to despair.\textsuperscript{257} The book and the

\textsuperscript{251} Tigay, “Lamentations,” 446; quoting Mintz, “Representation of Catastrophe,” 12.

\textsuperscript{252} Tigay, “Lamentations,” 447.


\textsuperscript{254} See Especially House, Lamentations, 429.

\textsuperscript{255} Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 10.

\textsuperscript{256} With this “focus on guilt the destruction itself falls away nearly altogether” (Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 10; cf. his engagement with Brandscheidt, Linafelt, “Zion’s Cause,” 270-71).

\textsuperscript{257} The “central” assertions are “little more than the ghost of salvation oracles past” (Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 3); “the poem’s expression of hope remains muted at best” (O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1057) and “the realities of suffering and death and of a God
chapter start with terrible suffering, and finish, not with certain hope, but with questioning and lack of resolution. These brackets of terror subvert the hope in between. Further, there are doubts and uncertainties even within the “central” statements themselves: perhaps there is hope; God may, or may not, see. Thus, as is the case throughout Lamentations, “chapter 3 is in reality a mixture of hope and despair, and it ends in a plea to God which leaves us balanced on a knife edge between the two.”

Second, antitheodic readers argue that, even if there is sin, the ‘s immediate switch to accusation in 3:42 suggests he believes the suffering imposed for this sin is too great. In this view,

The sufferer in chapter 3 recognises God as the source of his suffering, and acknowledges his sinfulness in a general way, as part of being human, but he does not see his suffering as just punishment for his sin. Rather, he finds the extent of God’s anger incomprehensible; his only hope is that crying out in his wretchedness will evoke God’s compassion.

From the ‘s point of view, argue antitheodic readings, the punishment YHWH has inflicted has gone too far, becoming “disproportionate to the engulfing pain in which he lives.”

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259 Cf. O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1046; Provan, Lamentations, 23
Third, Linafelt leads the charge in displacing the centrality of the כובד and his posture of penitence by pitting him against Zion, a protesting figure. Linafelt argues that by elevating Lam 3, “biblical scholars have focused on the interpretation of pain, and they have done so primarily by explaining pain and suffering as resulting from the guilt of the sufferer.”\textsuperscript{264} He protests that for too long, there has been a bias in Christian interpretation in seeing this confession and penitent turning toward God of the (male) כובד in Lam 3 as the take-home lesson of Lamentations. The presentation of (female) Zion’s pain in Lam 1 and 2, by contrast, is all but ignored, an imbalance Linafelt sets out to correct. In an important contribution toward redressing the balance, he draws out Zion’s presentation of pain as a foil to the כובד’s piety.\textsuperscript{265} He argues that “the figure of Zion, by valorizing the presentation of pain over its interpretation, offers a powerful alternative model of biblical theology to the ‘patient sufferer’ of Lamentations 3.”\textsuperscript{266} Zion is a model for the presentation of pain and of protest, not penitence. While Linafelt’s rubric works to correct the balance, he makes an almost binary opposition between Zion as the protester and the כובד as the penitent. Yet the male figure, like Zion, is in a state of internal conflict too. He expresses penitence, yes, but he also vents some fairly harsh sentiments towards YHWH. Zion protests and laments, yes, but she too confesses sin.\textsuperscript{267}

Reading theodically, a clear “central” message holds and controls all that comes before and after. Reading antitheodically, this so-called central message is undermined by the salience of presented pain, and by anger and accusation against YHWH, in the chapter and the book as a whole, especially as presented by the contesting voice of Zion. Antitheodic readings highlight the undermining accusation in the first and third portions of Lam 3, the ambiguity in 3:21-39, and the extremity of suffering. They counterbalance the כובד’s penitence with Zion’s protest. Clearly, “there are complex tensions at work here,” but in

\textsuperscript{264} Linafelt, “Zion’s Cause,” 268, emphasis original.
\textsuperscript{265} Linafelt, “Zion’s Cause,” 268.
\textsuperscript{266} Linafelt, “Zion’s Cause,” 268.
\textsuperscript{267} Cf. Mandolfo, Daughter Zion, 72; O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1046.
antitheodic readings, “God emerges as responsible, accountable, and lacking in compassion, as utterly blameworthy.”

It is certainly the case that one view on the theological significance of Lam 3 has been overplayed, making Lamentations seem more hopeful than it perhaps ought to be. On the flip side, however, it does a disservice to Lamentations to decide that it is hope-less and protesting in its entirety, or even predominantly. Both reading stances monologise, making a single perspective in the text determinative for the whole. One stance is interested in defending the integrity of the text and of the God of the text, while the other desires to “make sense of Lamentations as a book of despair with no hope on the horizon.” If neither of these interpretations is entirely appropriate, is one at least more persuasive than the other? Or can both stances, reading polyphonically, be kept in play? Perhaps a decision between theodicy and antitheodicy need not be made. I now outline two reading strategies that unsettle monologic readings of Lam 3, reading instead for the possibilities raised when Lamentations is understood as a polyphony.

269 As O’Connor recognises, “hope is one experience of survival, one interlude in coming to grips with tragedy, and one fragile interpretation among others. Hope appears, flags, disappears as if forever, reemerges, and fades again as the light changes” (O’Connor, Tears of the World, 57). That is, his “hopeful testimony is fragile and uncertain. He vacillates so often between hope and despair that his hope remains ambiguous at best. This is not to deny the presence of hope in the poem but rather to question a long history of interpretation where hope washes away and silences the suffering and despair around it” (O’Connor, Tears of the World, 45; cf. Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 17-18).
270 Parry comments on the swing toward highlighting Lam 1 and 2 rather than Lam 3, finding (correctly) that “while this reaction has played a helpful role in redressing the balance . . . it has often led to an unhelpful underplaying of chapter 3” (Cf. Parry, Lamentations, 92). While agreeing with traditional readers that Lam 3 should be considered “central to the interpretation of the book as a whole,” Parry goes on to take the insights of counterreaders more seriously than most theodic interpreters do, insisting that “our interpretation of Lamentations 3, while it will relativize the lament and despair, must not delegitimize or undermine them” (Parry, Lamentations, 92).
271 Cf. O’Connor: “His hopeful discourse creates one of the book’s most vexing interpretive problems. Is the placement of the man’s testimony at the book’s center, in the most dense and intricate of acrostic poems, reason to find it ‘the monumental center of the book’ and the ultimate triumph of faith? Or is the voice of hope eclipsed by the trailing off of the book in the disheartened voices of the poet-narrator and the community in the final chapters?” (O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1046).
5.4 Reading Polyphonically: Multiple Centres in Lamentations

As demonstrated, theodic readings of Lam 3 centralise and monologise interpretation according to what they perceive is the “central” priority. The contention is that “Right at the literal center of the book of Lamentations is an appreciation of the being of YHWH as the ground of hope” (3:31-33).275 The verses, however, comprise one possible literary centre, depending on how centrality is conceived. Line for line, the literal centre, structurally, occurs at 2:22b,c.276 These alternative central verses are spoken by Zion, and highlight the anger of YHWH and the destruction of her children:

לְאָלָה תֵּבֹא אֵלֶּיהָ שָׂלֹחַ פַּלַּמְתֵּן הָאָדָּר
אֱלֹהֵי אָבֹתֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

on the day of the anger of the LORD there was no fugitive, no survivor those I bore and raised my enemy has completely destroyed.

These sentiments would provide quite a different prevailing point of view should they be prioritised as the “central” message of Lamentations.277 Reading Lamentations as a polyphony, however, one need not determine a single

275 Parry, Lamentations, 105, emphasis original.
276 Lam 1 = 67 lines, Lam 2 = 67 lines, Lam 3 = 66 lines, Lam 4 = 44 lines and Lam 5 = 22 lines. From a total of 266 lines, the literal centre occurs at lines 133 and 134, equating to 2:22b,c. BHS questions the four line stanzas 1:7 and 2:19, removing 1:7b and 2:19d. When these are removed, then Lam 1 = 66 lines, Lam 2 = 66 lines, Lam 3 = 66 lines, Lam 4 = 44 lines and Lam 5 = 22 lines. This gives a total of 264 lines, with the centre occurring at lines 132 and 133, equating to 2:22c; 3:1, which both point to YHWH as afflicter. Interestingly, the two questionable lines themselves read “all the precious things that were hers in days of old” (1:7b) and “who faint for hunger at the head of every street” (2:19d). Both potentially refer to the children, connecting with the line that appears as central whether or not the questionable lines are included: “those whom I bore and reared my enemy has destroyed” (2:22c). BHQ finds no textual evidence to support removing either line (BHQ, 114, 124), suggesting the total of 266 lines should be retained.

277 Thomas is the only other commentator I have come across who appears to notice that (pace Parry) 3:33 is not the literal centre of Lam but rather one possible literary centre. While he identifies 2:21, rather than 2:22b, c, as the structural centre, he too suggests that such a reconception “gives a rather different theological vision than 3:33” (Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 223).
centrality. Polyphonic works have “several distinct and irreducible centers.”

Rather than all perspectives being tied up and brought in line with “a single design governed by a single ultimate semantic authority,” each independent character or hero has its own independent centrality. Multiple centres play in the text simultaneously.

If the concept of centrality in Lamentations is broadened to encompass multiple centres, then the centre of the יִרְבֵּךְ’s discourse might well be hope, however wavering (3:29). But there may also be a centre tied to Zion, a centre which is characterised by her concern for her children, and her distress at the day of YHWH. Conceptualising the text polyphonically could thus address Linafelt’s concern that prioritising the יִרְבֵּךְ, Lam 3, and (parts of) 3:20-39 as the “high point” or “ideological core” evades “the question of how the figure of Zion might challenge and/or enrich modern interpretive and theological discourse.”

In a text with multiple centres, each associated with one of the speakers, there is a polyphony of centrality. There is, in Bakhtin’s polyphonic world, a shift “from a universe where there is thought to be a single center to the realization that there are multiple hubs (so from a Ptolomaic to a Copernican, or mutatis mutandis, from a Newtonian to an Einseinian set of assumptions about reality).” Both Zion’s discourse of protest at the destruction of her children, and the יִרְבֵּךְ’s discourse of penitence regarding his sin, can be held, simultaneously, as “central.”

5.5 Reading Dialogically: The Interaction between Internally Persuasive and Authoritative Discourses

The second polyphonic conception operates with a more linear reading strategy, and has been demonstrated to a certain extent in my reading of the chapter

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278 Morson and Emerson, Prosaics, 254.
279 Morson and Emerson, Prosaics, 254.
280 Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 3.
281 Green, How are the Mighty? 275; cf. Morson and Emerson, Prosaics, 240.
282 Cf. §8.2.4.1.
already. It follows the יָדִיד through Lam 3 as he moves through different stages of anger, theology, theodicy, penitence, and resistance, in an attempt to come to terms with the suffering he continues to experience. In this conception, the יָדִיד moves through an internal dialogue, calling to mind traditional authoritative discourses in an attempt to make them innerly persuasive and so find some comfort. He rehearses familiar formulations of the relationship between suffering and sin, and faithful affirmations of YHWH’s love, mercy, and justice, as he tries to reclaim them as internally persuasive in the midst of experiential evidence that would suggest YHWH is anything but loving, merciful, and just. The chapter demonstrates the change in mood and perspective and attitude through which a single sufferer may move. There is a willingness on the יָדִיד’s part to entertain alternate aspects of his suffering, both admitting sinfulness and resisting suffering. His self-convincing effort is not entirely successful, however, as seen by the about-turn in 3:42 “we have sinned but you have not forgiven.” The pain of experience is found to be internally persuasive in a way that the authoritative central discourse is not.

While not using a Bakhtinian framework, O’Connor identifies this same dichotomy:

> Does the speaker really believe that the community’s sin is the reason for their tragedy and that God was justified in the abuse that flayed their bodies and souls? Or has the speaker arrived at some bottom point, spiritually and psychologically? Has he

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284 The “tradition is . . . being used as a resource and a foil. Its evocation affirms that . . . language which was efficacious in the past may also be of service now. It is thus a search through old formulas for a context through which to comprehend this new catastrophe, a search that does not work because it never worked” (Landy, “Lamentations,” 332).
286 “Inner persuasiveness is not permanent. A discourse may begin to lose its persuasiveness” (Morson and Emerson, “Heteroglossary,” 269).
287 If one reads the verbs in the final verses as past perfects, however, the chapter could be construed theodically—that is, by reminding oneself of YHWH’s past actions, the authoritative discourses have once again become persuasive.
entered his sufferings so honestly and thoughtfully that now new life emerges within, as inexplicable as grace? Any answer to these questions must remain an interpretive decision. What is clear is that the speaker has not reached theological resolution.288

Whatever interpretive decisions one makes, it should by now be apparent that deciding one way or another is not done easily or lightly. The "swings back and forth between faith and doubt. Hope and despair co-inhabit his inner world. In his poem, cobbled out of confidence and despair, accusation and submission, hope is merely episodic, not enduring, not triumphant."289 By the same token, however, despair is episodic and not all-pervasive. While "[t]he poem's contradictions leave it theologically conflicted,"290 it seems "the power and success of this poem . . . derives in no small part from its ability to hold and affirm conflicting and contradictory truths without eventually surrendering either."291

5.7 Lamentations 3: Conclusion

The cries out, grasps at hope, and recites the resources of his theological tradition in an attempt to rationalise his suffering. He urges his people to submission and penitence before lapsing into hopelessness, as he realises that even if the people do repent, nothing will change unless YHWH, too, repents and forgives. The pleas on behalf of his people that YHWH would take notice of their suffering and act on their behalf against their enemies, a darkly ironic twist given that YHWH himself is portrayed as the enemy in parts of Lamentations. There is more theodic potential in this chapter than anywhere else in Lamentations, but antitheodic readers resist prioritising this at the expense of the note of protest. Reading Lam 3 as a polyphony raises the possibility of more expansive ways of readings, recognising multiple centres and

290 O’Connor, Tears of the World, 57.
291 Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 120.
conceiving the chapter as a struggle between internally persuasive and authoritative voices. The Ἰσραήλ employs faithful statements to comfort himself and “correct” prior claims of ill treatment at the hands of YHWH. These faithful statements, however, in light of his experience, may not be finally internally persuasive. Lam 3 leaves readers, once attuned to the multifariousness of its theologies, with decided ambiguity.
CHAPTER SIX:
LAMENTATIONS 4

6.1 Introduction to Lamentations 4

Lamentations 4 returns to the נַגְּנֶד opening (cf. Lam 1, 2) and departs from the threefold acrostic (Lam 3), with a shortened form of only two lines per stanza. In contrast to the previous three chapters, Lam 4 tends to fall somewhat off the scholarly radar. Commentators’ convictions that Lam 3 provides the theological key to the book lead them to give that so-called central chapter sustained attention. Some commentators redress the bias towards Lam 3 by drawing out the portrayal of Zion in Lam 1 and 2. But Lam 4 has not been the subject of much interest. Perhaps this neglect is the result of the judgement that the poem itself is more distant and less personal than Lam 1 to 3. Further, Lam 4 is replete with ambiguous words and tangly grammar, complicating translation. And according to at least one commentator, Lam 4 abandons the use of metaphor and personification for Jerusalem. Patently, it does not. Personification occurs in the title Daughter-my-People, and Daughter Zion reappears at 4:22, not to mention Daughter Edom. Other metaphors appear

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1 An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the colloquium, Spiritual Complaint: Theology and Practice of Lament, held in Auckland, New Zealand in February 2011. The paper from that presentation is currently under revision for publication.
2 And at times is ignored completely. Childs mentions Lam 4 only insofar as noting in passing that Gunkel assigned it, with Lam 1 and 2, to the political dirge form (Childs, OT as Scripture, 591). Gottwald’s “reconsideration” of Lamentations moves directly from the “special case” of Lam 3 to Lam 5, overlooking Lam 4 entirely (Gottwald, “Lamentations Reconsidered,” 167).
throughout, as Lam 4 blurs boundaries between the literal and the metaphorical. But perhaps an even simpler reason for its neglect is that Lam 4 is just too difficult to subject to a narrow theological interpretation.

But these biases aside, Lam 4 is a stunning, if stark, piece of poetry that deserves sustained attention. It is full of metaphors and imagery of the ruined city and her people, evident from at least the second verse onwards. The brief return of daughter Zion after her absence from Lam 3 requires comment (4:22), as does the image of Daughter Edom about to experience the same ignominies Zion herself has had to bear (4:21-22).⁶

Lamentations 4, in keeping with the dirge genre in which it participates, presents a barrage of unthinkable reversals.⁷ The impossible has happened and everything is the opposite of what it ought to be. Gold loses its lustre, precious jewels are worthless, precious gold is broken like clay pots, הבשנים is cruel, suckling infants thirst, those accustomed to rich meals starve, the formerly finely clothed scurry around in the muck, radiant leaders lose their allure, women are nourished by those they are supposed to nurture, enemies have entered the gates, prophets are blind, and priests are defiled with blood. All of these are impossibilities, conjuring an image of a world that simply cannot be.

In this portrayal of reversal, Lam 4 blurs the boundaries between individual and communal, literal and metaphorical, such that they are practically indistinguishable. While Lam 1, 2, and 3 all do this to a certain extent, Lam 4 is masterful in its presentation of various social groupings, highlighting particular characteristics of those cohorts, and then using these to indict the entire people, representatively. After the intensely individual focus of Lam 3, Lam 4 thus shifts its gaze more decisively toward the communal. Further, the explicit first person

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⁶ Curiously, the portrayal of Edom as female does not seem to have merited the same ethical attention as the portrayal of Zion as female. See further §6.2.5.

⁷ Cf. Jahnow, Das Hebräische Leichenlied, 99, 179; Kraus, Klagelieder, 75.

⁸ “Daughter My People” (בָּתִּי בֵּן) is a key term for Zion in Lam 4. See §1.4 and §6.1.1.1.
plural in 4:17-20 anticipates Lam 5, which will be entirely spoken in the communal voice. There is thus a progression in the mixing and merging of individual and collective, and metaphorical and literal. The poetry becomes more and more porous, to the point where Lam 5 will scoop up everyone and everything in its plural pronouns. This gives momentum and cohesion to the book as a whole. The individual-yet-communal portraits and pleas of both Zion and the נֵבֶר (Lam 1-3) progress through Lam 4 to explicit communal representation, culminating in the communal prayer of Lam 5.

I examine Lam 4 in three utterances. First, the third person description in verses 1-16, further divided into 2 sub-sections by theme: a descriptive sequence, which contains hints of a first person speaker (4:1-10), and an explanatory sequence, entirely in the third person (4:11-16). Second, I examine the first person plural verses, 4:17-20. Third, I treat 4:21-22 as a unit, although noting that it includes second person address to both Edom and Zion in turn. As usual, I provide a preliminary overview of each utterance before asking who is speaking, to whom, and who they accuse, in dialogue with theodic and antitheodic interpretations in the scholarly commentary.

6.1.1 Speakers in Lamentations 4

The opening speaker of Lam 4 is, once again, a Lamenter.9 This may or may not be the same Lamenter as in Lam 1 and 2, but I use the generic term to at least avoid closing down this possibility.10 In contrast to Lam 2, where the Lamenter proceeds to speak in the first person, identifying empathetically with Zion (Lam 2:11-13), there is only an oblique indication of the Lamenter’s first person

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10 Some commentators attempt to identify a specific speaker, e.g., Lee argues on the basis of the title נֵבֶר (cf. Jer 4:11; 6:26; 8:11, 19, 21–9:1; 9:7; 14:17) and other hints of genre, content, imagery, technique and terminology that Jeremiah is speaking in 4:1-16 (Lee, The Singers of Lamentations, 182–83). Lanahan calls the speaker of Lam 4 the “bourgeois” (Lanahan, “The Speaking Voice,” 47). Gerstenberger has an unusual take, reckoning that the speaker of 4:1-10 “must be a divine or divinely appointed lamenter speaking up for the people,” suggesting that “Yahweh himself, of course, or an authorized officiant in his place, would be the most plausible choice” (Gerstenberger, Psalms and Lamentations, 498).
perspective in Lam 4. This is found in the pronominal suffix of בְּהֵן–טֶנֶּהי (concatenating) “daughter my people,” in 4:3, 6, and 10. The majority of Lam 4, however, is spoken descriptively, in the third person.

6.1.1.1 Excursus: Who is בְּהֵן–טֶנֶּהי؟

The construct “Daughter My People” (becin (תֶּנֶּהי)) appears in Lam 2:11 and 3:48, but is especially characteristic of Lam 4:1-10, occurring three times in the ten verses. In Lam 4:3, LXX (τοὺς κατέξεις θαυμὸν μου) and Tg. Lam (becin (תֶּנֶּהי)) presuppose the Hebrew הבנה–טנני, daughters of my people (cf. Ezek 13:17), leading Gottlieb and others to suggest only the female portion of the population is implied by the term. This would indict only the women for cruelty, making the failings of women a scapegoat behind which male leaders may hide. But given the frequent personification of the people as a woman throughout Lamentations, this epithet, like Daughter Zion, Daughter Jerusalem, and Daughter Judah, more likely refers to the entire community. Further, the blurring of individual and communal, highlighting a peculiarly female role–suckling the young–does not necessarily imply only the female portion of the population, but instead comprises a metaphorical portrait that might encompass all Daughter Zion’s inhabitants. The communal is becoming ever more visible in the transition between individual and community. This does not mean the female element of the trope is unimportant, however. The NRSV conveys the communal aspect of הבנה–טנני in its translation “my people,” but fails

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11 For Parry, the Lamenters “indicates his unity with the sufferers by his references to ‘my people’ ” (Parry, Lamentations, 132).
12 See §3.1.2.2 n. 54 for bat-[name] as the appositional genitive, “Daughter (that is) My People” (cf. Frymer-Kensky, “Zion,” 169).
14 Gottlieb, Lamentations, 61; cf. Provan, Lamentations, 112; Westermann, Lamentations, 200; Kraus, Klagelieder, 72; House, Lamentations, 439.
to translate the female aspect. But ובנות היא is not just “my people,” she is also female, and this should not be obscured in translation. Instead, ובנות היא is another term for Zion the city, the woman and the people, “Daughter My People.”

The lack of explicit involvement, and a perceived distancing of the Lamenter from the situation at hand, leads some scholars to accuse the Lamenter of Lam 4 of being unemotional and detached. While noting a certain sense of detachment, however, Berlin rightly asserts that Lam 4 is no less emotional than what has come before. That is, “[t]he more objective or distant stance of this chapter yields a poem no less moving, and indeed, one that is more graphic, than the earlier chapters. It is simply employing a different literary vehicle.”

Some of the starkest, most abhorrent images in all Lamentations appear in Lam 4. Further, the switch to the first person plural in 4:17-20 suggests that the Lamenter is closely aligned with the city, sympathetic to her, and himself a part of her people. Rather than being emotionally removed, then, the Lamenter portrays the horror he perceives while barely keeping it together. Faced with a chaotic world, the only way to broach his pain is with a familiar form, the tight acrostic structure, and sparse—but by no means unfeeling—words skimming the surface of barely contained emotion, which will burst forth like a flood in Lam 5.

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19 Cf. Meek, “Lamentations,” 30; Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 96-98, 232n82. See also §3.1.2.2.


21 Berlin, Lamentations, 103n1.
Significantly, Lam 4 is the only chapter in Lamentations that never addresses YHWH directly, suggesting to Mandolfo that Lam 4 has “no prayer element.”

With the notion of superaddressee attendant in my reading, and the understanding that all laments are implicitly directed to YHWH, however, Lam 4 continues to assume that YHWH is in audience. At the very least, he is the Lamenter’s hoped-for hearer. Further, while the chapter is spoken by one speaker, the Lamenter, this does not necessarily demand the designation “monologue.” As seen in chapter 5, it is entirely possible for a single speaker to move through a range of perspectives, in an internal dialogism of the idea.

6.2 Lamentations 4: Utterance-Wise Analysis

6.2.1 Lamentations 4:1-10

6.2.1.1 Lamentations 4:1-10: Overview

Lamentations 4:1-10 announces its pain with the now familiar אָשֶׁר, as it launches into a litany of inconceivable alterations to life in Jerusalem. Gold (דרו, 4:1α; הֹדֵל, 4:1β; לֶא, 4:2α) has tarnished or “become dim” (לֶאָה, hophal, 4:1α) and “changed” (לֶאָה, 4:1β). Hillers, objecting that gold does not actually “tarnish” supposes that Lam 4:1 cannot stand as written, and so emends the text.

Other scholars who accept the text but still seek a literal explanation of how gold can be so besmirched surmise that it is darkened by dirt, perhaps from

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23 Cf. §1.4.
24 The hophal of the verb לֶאָה, “to be darkened,” (HALOT, 846) is a hapax legomenon. Hillers emends the text from לֶאָה וְלָכֶנֶה, “is despised,” and reads לֶאָה as לֶאָה, “is hated,” to yield “How gold is despised! Good gold is hated!” (Hillers, Lamentations, 137-38). There is no textual witness for his suggestion, however. Strong also objects to the notion of gold losing its lustre, and proposes that לֶאָה should be understood as indicating an agnate relationship, from the noun לֶאָה and the preposition לֶא (cf. Ezek 28:3; 31:8; 32:19). He suggests, then, that its use here indicates that gold has become like any other metal, viz., that Zion’s elite now lie indistinguishable from the hoi polloi (Strong, “Verb Forms of ‘MM,” 547-49). LXX (ὡμοσφοροθήσεται), V (obscuratam est), and Tg. Lam (Nation), however, all corroborate MT, suggesting the text need not be emended (cf. Salters, Lamentations, 284; Westermann, Lamentations, 196). Albrektson explains the unusual rendering of P (לָאָה, “rejected, thrown away”) as perhaps indicative that the translator was unfamiliar with לֶאָה and sought a verb that would fit in context (Albrektson, Lamentations, 172-73; cf. Salters, Lamentations, 285).
lying around in the dust of the streets (cf. Zech 9:3). But this ignores the basic conventions of poetry, which uses figurative language and is not confined to the literal. In a series of images in which brightness, colour, and life drain away to blackness, dryness, and death, it is entirely consistent that gold, too, be dimmed. As Dobbs-Allsopp points out, the impossibility of gold tarnishing may well be “precisely to the point . . . the occurrence of the impossible pointedly underscores the severity of the situation.” Blackened gold is simply the first in a chapter full of impossibilities. In the language-world of the poem, the world is so altered it hardly bears any resemblance to reality. There is no need to seek a rational explanation for tarnished gold, for in this starved and faded world nothing is rational at all.

An interpretive impetus toward the literal is also evident in scholarly discussion of “sacred stones.” Commentators disagree as to whether the Lamenter is referring to gemstones, perhaps stored in the temple so as to have gained the description “sacred,” or to the foundation stones of the temple, hence “sacred.” The “sacred stones” could also indicate the rubble of the entire holy city, not just the temple. Allowing the poetry to remain rich with resonance, precious stones” could include all these possibilities. The sacred stones, moreover, are poured out “on every street corner” (בֵּית הָעֵדֶה, 4:1b), recalling the children fainting for hunger at the head of every street (2:19), and young and old lying in the streets (2:21).

27 See Salters, *Lamentations*, 286-87, for an overview.
28 The “temple treasures” (Meek, “Lamentations,” 30); jewels or temple vestments (Kraus, *Klagelieder*, 75). Emerton looks to related words in Aramaic (אֶתְרָאָה, “ear-ring, nose-ring”), Syriac (אֶתְרָא, “ear ring, nose ring”), and Arabic (*qudisun*, “silver trinkets”; *qadisun*, “precious stone”), to argue that “sacred stones” (תַּכְלָתֵלֵבּ) refers to jewels or gemstones (Emerton, “תַּכְלָתֵלֵבּ,” 233; cf. Hillers, *Lamentations*, 138). Tg. Lam reads “sacred jewels” (רְדִסְתֵּלֵבּ), and specifies that the gold of 4:1a is gold of the “House of the Sanctuary” (אֶתְרָאָה); see Alexander, *Targum of Lamentations*, 164n1).
Reading through to 4:2, however, reveals the metaphorical significance of the sacred stones. Here the “precious children of Zion” (בָּנָיָּה לִי חָמוֹר, 4:2a)\(^{31}\) are likened to gold.\(^{32}\) It becomes apparent that the sacred stones poured out at the head of every street includes a figurative reference to the children of Zion.\(^{33}\) This is further confirmed by observing that the phrase “at the head of every street” (בְּרֵאשִׁי הַשִּׁכְנוֹת, 4:1) occurs only on three other occasions in the Hebrew Bible, all of which refer to children fainting or dying.\(^{34}\) The Lamenters may well be mourning the loss of valuable gold and precious stones, and ruins and rubble are inevitably left littering the streets in the aftermath of disaster. But it is the children of Zion who are the real concern (cf. 1:5c, 16c; 2:11-12, 19-22). The children, in turn, metaphorically encompass all the city’s inhabitants.\(^{35}\) Metaphor piles on metaphor. Gold and sacred stones signify the precious sons of Zion, and these sons of Zion are all the inhabitants of mother Zion. The image of gold and precious stones are thus both tenor and vehicle of the metaphor. Just as stones and gold are worthless and scattered and fallen, so too are Zion’s beloved children.

In a reversal of the care a mother is supposed to give her young, the Lamenters describes בָּנָיָּה לִי חָמוֹר as “cruel” (כָּרָע, 4:3b), worse even than jackals and ostriches. Lam 4:4 elaborates on this apparent cruelty: the children have nothing to eat (cf. 2:11-22). Breasts have run dry so the “infant” (יְהוֹ, 4:4a; cf. 2:11) receives no sustenance. “Little ones” (יִבְלָס מֵא, 4:4b) clamour for “bread” (לָחֵם, 4:4b) but there is no one to “give to them” (לָשָׁה, 4:4b).\(^{36}\) In the literal aspect, mothers in the ruins struggle to feed their children. In the metaphorical aspect, קְנֺה הָאָדָם the city-woman is unable to sustain her people.\(^{37}\) No one is exempt, even the high

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\(^{31}\) Literally “sons of Israel.” Note the wordplay, בָּנָיָּה לִי חָמוֹר.

\(^{32}\) Cf. Gottlieb, Lamentations, 61; Salters, Lamentations, 288.


\(^{34}\) Cf. Is 51:20; Nah 3:10; Lam 2:19.


\(^{36}\) Note the wordplay, לָחֵם לָשָׁה.

classes are reduced to rubbish, with those who feasted on delicacies now “desolate” (בָּשָׂל, 4:5a; cf. 1:4, 13, 16; 3:11; 5:18), “in the streets” (בָּשָׂל, 4:5a; cf. 4:8a, 14a). Those formerly clad in the scarlet array of wealth and prestige now embrace the “ash heaps” (פשע, 4:5b).

Lam 4:6 elucidates the cause of the situation, interpretation of which depends in part on how צָלְעַ (4:6a; cf. 2:14, 4:13, 22; 5:7) and נָצָּמֶר (4:6a; cf. 1:8; 3:39; 4:13, 22; 5:7, 16) are understood. Both terms can refer to both sin, and to the results of sin: punishment and guilt (צָלְעַ), or the offering made to atone for sin (נָצָּמֶר).

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38 That is, in the public eye (Salters, Lamentations, 295).
39 צָלְעַ and נָצָּמֶר appear in parallel in Lam 4:6, 13, 22b, with the related verb קָשַׁר also in collocation with צָלְעַ in 5:7, suggesting some overlap in meaning.
41 For צָלְעַ as “guilt caused by sin (and the consequences thereof)” (HALOT, 800), see, e.g., Gen 15:16; Ex 20:5; 34:7; Num 14:18; 15:31; 18:1; 23; 30:16; Deut 5:9; Lev 26:40; Isa 14:21; Jer 14:20; 30:14-15; 32:18; 50:20; 51:16; Ezek 4:4-5, 17; 14:10; 18:17-19; Hos 7:1; 13:12; Zech 3:3, 4; 1 Sam 25:24; 2 Sam 3:8; 14:9; Pss 32:5; 109:14. For צָלְעַ as “punishment” (HALOT, 800), see, e.g., Gen 4:13, 19:4; Ezek 21:30, 34; 32:27; 35:5; 44:10, 12.
The NRSV translates 4:6 with “chastisement” (עון) and “punishment” (ח录用), indicating that Jerusalem’s punishment was greater than that of Sodom, but creating some ambiguity as to whether this was necessarily due to greater sin. If Jerusalem’s punishment was greater than Sodom’s, then the verse highlights the extremity of YHWH’s punishing anger. This could indicate that the punishment was out of all proportion to the crime, given that not even Sodom—the proverbial sinful city—suffered this much for her sins. If, however, it is indeed her sin that is greater, then YHWH is (according to some commentators) just in his treatment of Zion. That is, her sin is so great that she has gotten what she deserved. The former reading would give cause to indict YHWH (for excessive punishing measures), the latter, ה rall ה (for excessive sin).

43 Gordis employs the observation that in Hebrew, the same word can be used to indicate both an action and the result of that action, to argue that both רע and ח录用 mean punishment (Gordis, Lamentations, 184). While רע certainly moves easily between the primary sense of sin and the secondary sense of guilt or punishment (see nn. 41, 42 above), ח录用 does not display such easy fluidity. Indeed, NRSV renders ח录用 as “punishment” only in Lam 4:6 and Zeph 14:19. In all other cases it refers, contextually, to either sin, or to the resultant sin offering given to make expiation for sin (not part of the context in Lam 4). This suggests the primary sense “sin” should probably also be read for ח录用 here. Cf. P, which gives עון (“iniquity”) for רע, and סינ (“sin”) for ח录用. Similarly, LXX, gives ἀνοίγεια for both רע and ח录用 in 4:6, clearly indicating “sin, lawlessness,” without the nuance of punishment. Note, though, that as Albrektson points out, LXX uses a variety of sin language and does not render Hebrew terms consistently (Albrektson, Lamentations, 59). The use of ἀνοίγεια for both terms in 4:6 is thus not conclusive evidence that there is no nuance of punishment present in MT. Tg. Lam also uses one word to translate both terms (ילדה), again indicating sin rather than punishment. V, on the other hand, consistently gives peccatum for ח录用 (4:6, 13, 22; as for the related noun פשע, 1:8; 3:39); and iniquitas for רע (2:14; 4:6, 13, 22; 5:7). The former can take the secondary nuance of “punishment,” but the latter does not (cf. Salters, Lamentations, 296). The parallelism between רע and ח录用, however, might be mutually implicating such that the secondary sense of punishment becomes present in both terms. It seems, however, that in Lam 4:6 the primary significance of both רע and ח录用 is “sin” (cf. Salters, Lamentations, 296).


45 Johnson, “Form and Message,” 69; Re’emi, Lamentations, 119. Mackay claims the Lamenter “has to admit that her behaviour had been culpably outrageous and so God’s reaction was amply warranted” (Mackay, Lamentations, 186).


47 Cf. Salters, Lamentations, 296.
While there is certainly a view to punishment in the immediate context—Lam 4:1-10 graphically portrays the outcomes of YHWH’s punishing actions—it seems, semantically, that תַּשֵׁל and תַּשְׁאָם cannot be separated from the primary nuance of sin. Jerusalem’s punishment clearly is much worse than Sodom’s (cf. 4:6b), but the choice of terms suggests that this is due to greater sin.48 There is no reason, however, as some commentators have done, to automatically equate sin and punishment throughout Lamentations, assuming that if there is great suffering there must necessarily have been greater sin.49 Theodic readings are all too keen to lay blame on Zion and Zion alone. While תַּשֵׁל and תַּשְׁאָם in 4:6 probably should take the primary meaning of “sin,” the secondary nuance of punishment is still one possible translation,50 requiring some openness to either interpretation (and their respective implications).51

Reference to Sodom (4:6)52 and later, to mothers eating their children (4:10)53 echoes covenant curses. Calling Sodom to mind references the epitome of sin and judgement in the Hebrew Bible, only to make clear that Jerusalem’s fate is far worse.54 Sodom was destroyed instantly with no one “laying a hand upon it”

49 E.g. House, who notes that both senses might be present, but infers that the “slow, horrible punishment in comparison to Sodom’s swift judgment indicates the magnitude of Jerusalem’s sins” (House, Lamentations, 440; cf. Gottwald, Lamentations, 65; Bergant, Lamentations, 114; Renkema, “Literary Structure,” 346; Gous, “Mind over Matter,” 82; Re’emi, “Lamentations,” 121; Johnson, “Form and Message,” 69).
50 See Mitchell, “Lamentations 4 as Historiography,” 80; Provan, Lamentations, 113; O’Connor, Tears of the World, 60n3; Mackay, Lamentations, 185.
51 While, on textual evidence, favouring the primary sense of “sin,” Salters suggests the poet “is of the opinion that there is a correlation between sin and punishment, but his concern is not primarily with comparing the sins of Jerusalem and Sodom but with the present outcome of sin” (Salters, Lamentations, 297). For Berlin, “‘punishment’ and ‘penalty’ are more apt than ‘sin,’ but the echo of sin is not entirely absent” (Berlin, Lamentations, 107). Similarly, Parry notes that in the context, “a focus on punishment seems likely” but that “Israel’s sinfulness” is probably “also in view.” He offers “transgression-punishment” for תַּשֵּׁל and “sin-punishment” for תַּשְׁאָם, explicitly keeping both aspects in view (cf. 1 Sam 28:10; Zech 14:19; Lam 3:39; 5:7; Parry, Lamentations, 136). Boase favours “punishment,” while noting that 4:6 has “elements of both attribution of guilt and description of misery” (Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 185).
52 Cf. Deut 29:23.
There is some measure of mercy in clean, instant death. Jerusalem, however, has been subject to a long, drawn out siege, with devastating effect on the starving population.56

Verses 7 and 8 are riddled with difficulties, but the prevailing impression is of the “bright young things” of Jerusalem now fading away from hunger.57 Their faces and forms were beautiful and brightly coloured, ruddy and radiant; now they are shrivelled and black (4:7-8).58 The privileged princes, like the children, are reduced to scavenging on the rubbish heap, with nothing to eat.59 The Lamenter then likens those “slain” from “hunger” (בָּיוּן, 4:9) to those who are “slain” (בָּיוּן, 4:9αα. β; cf. 2:12b) by the “sword” (בָּיוּן, 4:9). This is not a straightforward comparison, however. He deems it better to have one’s life “drain away” (בָּיוּן, 4:9b) by the sword, than by the “piercing” (בָּיוֹן, pual, 4:9b) hunger of famine.60 Finally, the nadir is reached in 4:10. Compassionate women have boiled their children for food.61 This demands of any moral reader at least a moment’s pause. For in the presence of the children boiled for food, there is nothing credible, nothing at all meaningful, to say.62

55 The verb בָּיוֹן, “to dance, go round, whirl” (HALOT, 297) has been puzzling in the history of exegesis. LXX (ἰδόνωνα) and P ( redux) seem to derive from בָּיוֹן “to grow weak, tired” (HALOT, 297). V (ceperunt), “have begun” may presuppose בָּיוֹן (BHQ, 131), and T extemporises, not helping to elucidate any possible meaning of בָּיוֹן. Current consensus, however, is to read the verse as indicative that no hands were “turned against” Sodom (cf. Jer 23:19; 2 Sam 3:29; Hos 11:6; so Albrektson, Lamentations, 179-80; Westermann, Lamentations, 196; Gottlieb, Lamentations, 62; Gordis, Lamentations, 189; Berlin, Lamentations, 107; HALOT, 297; BHQ, 131), although routes to this reading may differ. See further the discussion in Salters, Lamentations, 297-99.

56 Berlin, Lamentations, 107; Bracke, Lamentations, 229; Gordis, Lamentations, 189; Hillers, Lamentations, 140; O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1062; Parry, Lamentations, 135.

57 “Nazirites” (Parry, Lamentations, 136; House, Lamentations, 440-41), or nobles or young leaders (Salters, Lamentations, 300; Berlin, Lamentations, 99).


60 In direct contradiction of the sentiments of 3:39; cf. Parry, Lamentations, 137n1

61 Provan describes 4:10 as a “fitting climax” for the unit (Provan, Lamentations, 116). Perhaps it is just a bad choice of terminology on Provan’s part, but I must ask how he can call such horror a “fitting climax” for anything. I object to this disturbing imagery being described as “fitting” or “climactic.” This is no climax. This is a nadir of despair.

The adjective “compassionate,” (רַחֲמִי, 4:10) is a *hapax legomenon.*\(^63\) The related adjective, רַחוּם, is only ever used of YHWH in the Hebrew Bible.\(^64\) All but two times\(^65\) it appears with חַנְנָן, such that the pairing can be considered a hendiadys extolling the character of YHWH.\(^66\) Strange then, perhaps, to find reminiscence of this character of YHWH in reference to women. There is also terrible irony in the wording. While the verb רָחַם means “to be compassionate/to have mercy/pity,” and the plural noun רָחֲמִים means “compassion,” the *singular* noun רָחִים means “womb,” certainly a significant linguistic connection in this context.\(^67\) The children, the fruit of the “womb” (רָחִים), sustained and nurtured by their “compassionate” (רַחֲמִי) mothers, have now become “food” (לֶחָרִים, 4:10), to nurture and sustain the very women who brought them forth from the womb.\(^68\) The image, of course, invokes the same imagery that appears in covenant curses, where the people are gruesomely warned that disobedience means “you shall eat the flesh of your sons, and you shall eat the flesh of your daughters.”\(^69\)

All these reversals dramatically illustrate the inconceivable situation that will be spelt out in 4:12: how could the holy city be so compromised? The Lamenter

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\(^63\) But note the noun used of YHWH’s compassion, רְחֵמָה, in 3:22, 32.

\(^64\) Ex 34:6; Deut 4:31; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Ps 78:38; 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; 145:8; Neh 9:17; 9:31; 2 Chr. 30:9.

\(^65\) Deut 4:31; Ps 78:38.

\(^66\) Ex 34:6; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Ps 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; 145:8; Neh 9:17; Neh. 9:31; 2 Chr. 30:9.


\(^68\) Amusingly, Gordis suggests a “far better view is to see in *lebhārōt* the name of a demon or vampire known from Akkadian folk-lore,” translating “[t]hey (i.e., the compassionate women) became vampires to them (their own children)” (Gordis, *Lamentations,* 191). He draws on Felix Perles, who renders לֶחָרִים the plural of *Labartu,* on comparison with the Akkadian *labarti* (Perles, *Textkritik,* 85-86). Gordis also cites the Akkadian text, “I will praise the Lord of Wisdom,” which reads “The demon Labartu knocked her down, he drove her straight to the mountain (of the underworld)” (ANET, 436b). While it is currently in vogue to write about vampires (witness the Twilight phenomenon), I must say with Provan that we are “on safer (if not such interesting) ground if we retain the more mundane translation,” i.e., “food” (Provan, *Lamentations,* 116).

\(^69\) Lev 26:29 (NRSV); cf. Deut 28:52-57.
portrays various cohorts, giving an impression of the particular fate that comes to victims of violence. But each cohort, at the same time, symbolically represents the demise of the city and her people as whole. Image piles upon image, with precious things now worthless and important people now degraded in a concatenation of pictures of unprecedented change. The dovetailing of literal and metaphorical blurs the picture and hazes the edges, but always, the impression of desolate children remains. Everywhere the Lamenter turns his gaze he perceives the inconceivable. Bright, radiant, full things—colours, figures, bodies, skin, breasts—are faded, blackened, dried out, and wizened up. Everything is broken, even compassion.

6.2.1.2 Lamentations 4:1-10: Who, to Whom, and Point of View

The chapter opens, once again, with the יְהֹוָה exclamation and third person description by the Lamenter.70 As with much of the Lamenter’s speech in Lam 1 and 2, there is no audience named, but the hope that YHWH is the implicit superaddressee for every lament is assumed.71 In terms of who is to blame, there is a potential echo of accusation against YHWH in 4:2, with the image of clay pots in a potter’s hands. YHWH is the potter who moulds the clay.72 In 4:2b, however, pots (children/inhabitants) are broken and discarded, worthless and shattered. Is this, too, the work of the Potter’s hands, and thus an indictment of YHWH for his part in the “shattering” (יַגְדַּה, 4:10; cf. 1:15; 2:9, 11, 13; 3:4, 47, 48) of his people?73

The Lamenter then calls יַגְדַּה “cruel” for failing to nurture her children, as even wild animals do (4:3). House continues to maintain that here in 4:3-6, it is due to the parents’ sins that the children have nothing to eat (4:3-6).74 It is difficult, however, to equate women whose breasts have dried up from

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70 As in Lam 1 and 2, the opening יְהֹוָה gives an indication of the tone of despair, the grief of the Lamenter, and crucially, the “way in which [the following descriptions] should be interpreted” (Parry, Lamentations, 134, emphasis original).
71 Cf. §1.4.
72 E.g. Is 29:16; 45:9; 64:8; Jer 18.
73 YHWH is explicitly identified as the one who shatters in 1:15; 2:9; 3:4.
74 House, Lamentations, 437; but see §4.2.2.3 n. 93; §7.2.1.2.
starvation with the perpetrators, rather than the victims, of this situation. While "בְּהֵן תִּכְנַס" is a representative figure like Zion, there is perhaps a view toward the particular plight of women and mothers in the image of women unable to feed their children. Just as literal mothers cannot provide sustenance for their children, so לְבֵיהֶן תִּכְנַס can no longer sustain her inhabitants.

The primary accusation in 4:1-10 depends on the interpretation of verse 6. As discussed above, this could carry the nuance of either "her punishment is greater than Sodom’s" or "her sins are greater than Sodom’s."75 In the former case, visiting Jerusalem with punishment crueler than Sodom’s indicates that YHWH has gone too far, exceeding even the archetypal judgement upon a city. In this reading, YHWH is accused for afflicting Jerusalem far more severely than her punishment should afford.76 Not even Sodom, that paradigmatic city of sin, was punished so severely!77

If Jerusalem’s sins are greater than Sodom’s, then the Lamenter indicts Jerusalem, painting a picture of the enormity of her sinful nature, and asserting that it is for this reason that she suffers.78 Naturally, in keeping with their readings of other sin-blame texts, theodic readers prefer this take, in which Zion’s suffering is entirely fair, and YHWH is vindicated.79

If nuances of both sin and of punishment are present in וַהֲשָׁאָה תִּכְנַס and לְבֵיהֶן תִּכְנַס, then the Lamenter indicts both לְבֵיהֶן תִּכְנַס, for her sins, and YHWH, for the extreme lengths to which he resorts in punishing.80 Even so, I press the point and continue to

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75 Mackay, Lamentations, 185; Bergant, Lamentations, 113.
77 Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 233; Stiebert, “Human Suffering and Divine Abuse of Power,” 204; Mitchell, “Lamentations 4 as Historiography,” 90. The question of whether YHWH’s judgement on Sodom was itself just, is beyond the scope of this thesis.
79 Johnson, “Form and Message,” 69, 70; Re’emi, Lamentations, 119.
insist, as did Zion in Lam 1 and 2, that even if her sin was far greater than Sodom’s, nothing is deserving of this kind of treatment at the hands of a deity.\(^{81}\)

Lamentations 4:10 barely stands contemplation, with the depiction of mothers eating their own children the ultimate evidence of the awfulness of the entire situation.\(^{82}\) The image, however, demands study and explication. It requires taking the risk of staring into the face of the abyss, and finding that YHWH, in fact, is not present, not just, not at all who the people thought he was. This affronting image suggests a further reason, then, why Lam 4, indeed all Lamentations, tends to be so overlooked.

Some commentators are content to let accusation in Lam 4:10 rest on mothers. Bergant, for example, calls them “callous.”\(^{83}\) The image is from covenant curse language, but O’Connor points out that while the Lamenter “reports the fulfillment of this curse” he “omits references to the fathers’ cruelty and desperation,” levelling “charges only at mothers.”\(^{84}\) And so the female scapegoat once more stumbles off into the desert to die, alone. As with Daughter Zion’s nakedness and “harlotry” in Lam 1 and 2, women are in the spotlight for negative behaviour.\(^{85}\) This is the case even when it is assumed that the female figure represents an entire population, but it becomes even more pronounced if it is assumed, with those who read with the LXX at verse 3, that אֹתוֹן refers only to the female portion of the population.

These mothers, despite the lengths to which they are driven, are described as “compassionate.” “Compassionate” does not “callous” bespeak. In order to make sense of this apparent oxymoron, commentators conclude that these women

\(^{81}\) Cf. Stiebert, “Human Suffering and Divine Abuse of Power,” 204.
\(^{82}\) Cf. Deut 28:53-57; Lam 2:22.
\(^{83}\) Bergant, Lamentations, 112.
\(^{84}\) O’Connor, Tears of the World, 69.
\(^{85}\) Although this may be mitigated by the emphasis on prophets and priests in 4:13-16, presumably a predominantly male elite (cf. Guest, “A Recriminative Response,” 429; but note the female prophet Huldah in 2 Kgs 22:14; 2 Chr 34:22).
were “formerly” compassionate, but clearly are no longer. They are thus doubly to blame. But once again, the senselessness of compassionate women acting so out of character contributes to the effect of Lam 4. These women are indeed compassionate women, and as such, their actions are incomprehensible. While “[t]he adjective and the image are in conflict,” then, as with untarnishable gold becoming tarnished (4:1), and the fall of the impregnable city (4:12), the pitiful picture of the impossible is precisely the point. Throughout Lamentations conflicting images— the merciful YHWH, the angry YHWH; the protesting sufferer, the penitent sufferer— alternate. Here in Lam 4, competing images— precious children, abandoned as worthless in the streets; compassionate women, consuming the fruit of their womb—are given in the very same breath, increasing the intensity of disorientation. Rather than an indictment of the women then, the appalling imagery bespeaks the desperation of the situation, when even a mother’s compassion for a child is a sheer impossibility.

6.2.2 Lamentations 4:11-16

6.2.2.1 Lamentations 4:11-16: Overview

Images of fire and burning, so pervasive in Lam 2, return with fierce intensity in 4:11. In venting his “fiery wrath” (תָּפֹא, 4:11a; cf. 2:4c), YHWH has “poured out” (תָּפֹא, 4:11; cf. 2:4c; 2:11b, 12c, 19b; 4:1, 13; Ezek 7:8; Zeph 3:8) his “burning anger” (תָּפֹא הָשָּׂא, 4:11a; cf. 1:12). YHWH has “kindled a fire” (נַפְס הָשָּׂא, hiphil, 4:11b; cf. 1:13; 2:3, 4), and “consumed” (סיָּמָה, 4:11b; cf. Lam 2:3c; Ex 22:5; Ezek 23:25; Zeph 1:18, 3:8; Zech 9:4; Ex 3:2; Neh 2:3,13; Nah 1:10) her foundations

86 Mackay, Lamentations, 188; Trible, Rhetoric of Sexuality, 54.
88 Mitchell, “Lamentations 4 as Historiography,” 82; but then so are the images of YHWH with the adjectives in the middle of ch 3.
89 Note that I observe this aspect of the rhetorical effect of the poem, but make no judgement as to whether, historically, mothers in Jerusalem did in fact cook their children for food. The Lamenter may simply be using stock imagery, evoking the covenant curse of Deut 28:53-57 (cf. Bergant, Lamentations, 115; O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1062). For discussion of the possible historical background to the imagery see Hillers, “History and Poetry in Lamentations,” 157-160.
with burning fire. While fire is certainly metaphorical for YHWH’s judgement (cf. 2:1-10), this may also refer to fires in the city upon its destruction.\footnote{90} Fire imagery also connects with the destruction of Sodom in 4:6 (cf. Gen 19:24). The fire that “consumes” (אֲשֶׁר אָכָל, 4:11) connects verbally with 4:10, where mothers “consumed” (אָכָל, 4:10; cf. 2:20b.) their children. As for the children, so for the city: both are swallowed up.\footnote{91} Lamentations 4:11a evokes “day of the Lord” language while 4:11b calls to mind “Zion theology.”\footnote{92}

The Lamenter reports that the “kings of the earth” (ְיַהֲוָה-אָנוּ, 4:12a) and indeed, all the “inhabitants of the world” (יְהוָה-הָעָלָם, 4:12a), did not “believe” (אָמַר, 4:12a) that Jerusalem could be so violated that “enemy and foe” (יְהוָה-אָבוֹ, 4:12b; cf. 1:5a, 2:4a, 17c) would enter her gates.\footnote{93} The hyperbole reflects, again, the Judahite theology of the inviolability of Zion.\footnote{94} In this understanding, YHWH the king dwells in Zion and consequently,

Jerusalem and its temple and the hill on which they both stood were all endowed with cosmic potencies befitting the permanent residence of the High God (Ps. 132:8, 13-14), and thus, Zion, the entire city-temple complex, was thought to be impregnable, inviolable (cf. Ps 48:3-6). Hence, the surprise and unbelief of the “kings of the earth” and “inhabitants of the world” as they learn of Jerusalem’s fall.\footnote{95}

Rhetorically, then, the incredulity of the kings of the nations underscores and confirms, from an outside perspective, that the ultimate inconceivable event has transpired—the city has been taken.96

Verses 13-16 form an elusive passage dealing with the leadership of Jerusalem and their role in the downfall.97 The best sense is gained by linking the first clause of 4:13 (חַיִּים נְפָרָיָה תַּעֲנֵהוּ הַמַּגִּיד) forward to verse 14.98 Thus:

Because of the sins of her prophets, the iniquities of her priests
- who shed righteous blood within her -
they wandered blindly through the streets.

The referent of “they,” however, remains unspecified throughout 4:14-16, and may not refer even to the same subject each time. Those who wander the street blindly could refer to the priests and prophets whose sin is announced in 4:13.99 If so, then ironically, the seers are “blind” (בֹּדֶא, 4:14a)100 and the purifiers are “defiled” (וֹדֵּא, 4:14a),101 consistent with impossible reversals. Alternatively, verses 13 and 14 may be read as though the prophets’ and priests’ actions have caused the resultant wandering of all. The “sins” (חַיִּים, 4:13) and “iniquities”102

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96 The Lamenter states that this inviolability is assumed by the rest of the world (Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 132-33). It is questionable, however, whether this report is accurate, or whether the Lamenter is projecting a Judahite belief onto the nations (so Berlin, Lamentations, 110; cf. Hillers, Lamentations, 149; Mitchell, “Lamentations 4 as Historiography,” 84; Re’emi, “Lamentations,” 122; Provan, Lamentations, 117; Newsom, “Bakhtin and Dialogic Truth,” 303; Parry, Lamentations, 138; House, Lamentations, 443). “The fall of the city will have dismayed the people of Judah, and other states may have been surprised, but the poet treats this surprise as though it were universal and comprehensive” (Salters, Lamentations, 312).

97 See Salters’ detailed discussion (Salters, Lamentations, 313-23).


99 Berlin, Lamentations, 111; O’Connor, Tears of the World, 65; Meek, “Lamentations,” 33; Parry, Lamentations, 139; House, Lamentations, 444; Westermann, Lamentations, 202; Renkema, Lamentations, 530; Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 187.

100 Rudolph conjectures that Lam 4:14 refers to menstrual impurity, reading בֶּןָר for בֵּן־רְאָב; i.e., the prophets are menstruous, the priests are bloodied (Rudolph, Die Klagelieder, 248; cf. HALOT, 216).

101 Cf. Gordis, Lamentations, 192.
(ןוּן, 4:13) that were ascribed to the entire people in 4:6102 are now explicitly tagged to “her prophets” (עֹבְרֵי, 4:13) and “her priests” (כֹּהֵנִים, 4:13). As a result of their sinful activity, however, all are suffering, wandering blindly “through the streets” (עָבְדֵיהֶם, 4:14a).103

In the closest the Lamenter ever comes to explicitly naming any particular iniquity, this sinful activity is defined as “pouring out” (לָשֵׁן, 4:13; cf 2:4; 2:11; 2:12; 2:19; 4:1; 4:11) the blood of the “righteous” (עֹשֵׂה, 4:13b) “within her” (וכֹּי, 4:13b).104 It is unlikely the charge of innocent blood indicates that prophets and priests have killed people directly.105 But by failing to warn the people of their sins, the religious leaders have nonetheless caused the people’s downfall.106 Another possibility is that, in the rhetoric of the poetry, pouring out the blood of the righteous is not a literal description, but “merely an indirect reference to idolatry, which was associated with bloodshed.”107

The question of who “they” are arises again in 4:15, where it is difficult to decide who is shouting, and at whom, not to mention what it means that “they were so defiled with blood that they could not touch their clothes.”108 Are the ones who are defiled shouting to others to keep away, in a leper-like warning not to come

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102 I.e., to “לָשֵׁן, 4:6, although in the reverse order and with יִפֹּל now in the plural.
103 Cf. 4:5, 8; Hillers, Lamentations, 142, 149; Provan, Lamentations, 117.
104 Note the possible wordplay, לָשֵׁן “with the sword,” cf. 2:21.
105 Salters contends that “nowhere in the Hebrew Bible do prophets and priests engage in actual murder” (Salters, Lamentations, 315), but see, e.g., 1 Kgs 19:17.
107 Parry, Lamentations, 139.; cf. Berlin, Lamentations, 104, 110. Berlin cites Ezek 22:1-5, which reads to me like both bloodshed and idolatry are in view, rather than one being a cipher of the other; and Ps 106:37-40, which clearly links the shedding of blood of sons and daughters with sacrifice to idols. Thus “The priests and prophets have become morally impure by shedding blood (a symbol of idolatry), a sin that defiles the land and leads to exile” (Berlin, Lamentations, 104). If the picture of prophets and priests is extended to include all the people, then this could be an indictment, too, of a nation that practiced idolatry. Rudolph’s emendation to yield menstrual impurity in v. 14 could also connect blood and uncleanness to ritual impurity, potentially forging a link between the prophets and priests in Lam 4 and the sullied daughter Zion in Lam 1 and 2.
108 See discussion in Salters, Lamentations, 317-18. The best sense is that a blood defilement has made “them” ritually unclean, so that even their clothes are polluted. No one should touch them or be touched by them lest they too become defiled.
near? Or are the people shouting at the defiled (the prophets and priests?) to stay away? Is it only the prophets and priests who are considered unclean, wandering among the nations, or are all the people now regarded by the nations as blind and defiled, with those nations doing the yelling? The same questions pertain to those who are “scattered” (売れ, piel 4:16a). Are the scattered ones the elders and wayward priests (4:16b), or the whole people? Either way, YHWH no longer “regards” (зван, hiphil, 4:16a; cf. 1:11; 2:20; 3:63; 5:1) them, turning a blind eye to their plight.

Just as each of the portraits in 4:1-10 might be read with both literal and metaphorical referent, so there might be a representation of the people as a whole in the depiction of “blind prophets” and “defiled priests,” particularly if the sin for which the people are indicted is supposed to be idolatry. While it is not clear who the fugitives and wanderers are, recognising that the lament is poetry rather than narrative explanation allows a variety of possibilities to remain open. While prophets and priests (4:13), and priests and elders (4:16), form an inclusio for 4:13-16; it seems 4:15b and 16a at least, refer to those who have been scattered by exile. Thus again, those who have been scattered and will no longer be regarded by the Lord may be both the prophets and priests whose sins have been their downfall, and the people as a whole—or at the very least, the exiled portion.

### 6.2.2.2 Lamentations 4:11-16: Who, to Whom, and Point of View

The Lamenter continues to speak in 4:11-16, in what is perhaps a more explicitly theological attempt to tease out the origins of הָיָה הָבְעַרְיָא’s suffering. These verses consist of third person description, without even the Lamenter’s oblique identification with the people by way of the first person suffix on הָיָה הָבְעַרְיָא. In

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110 So Berlin, Lamentations, 111, Bergant, Lamentations, 117, Mackay Lamentations, 194.
112 So House, Lamentations, 446. Berlin suggests that by 4:15b “the metaphor fades into its literal referent: the people of Judah” (Berlin, Lamentations, 111; cf. Hillers, Lamentations, 150; Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 187).
113 Though House is right to note that while “[d]escription takes the place of overt empathy . . .
addition to direct description by the Lamenter, it includes reported speech in varying degrees. The Lamenter reports, if not the actual words, at least a perceived attitude of the nations when he projects belief in the inviolability of Zion onto the kings and inhabitants of the earth (4:12). He also quotes the shouted words of 4:15, “away! Unclean!” and “away, away, do not touch!” The addressees of these snatches of quoted speech are indeterminate. And the entire unit, once again, has no specified addressee, although YHWH may still be the superaddressee.

In terms of who is to blame, the Lamenter turns, for culprits, to YHWH (4:11), to the city’s leaders (4:13-16), and, potentially, to the nations (4:12b, 15b). These players are, of course, interconnected. While the destruction clearly has its source in YHWH, it has its roots in the sins of the prophets and priests (and so the people?), and has been exacted by the enemies. The emphasis given to each of these players’ causative roles, however, varies depending on the interpretation a given interpreter wishes to make, whether reading in defence of Zion or in defence of YHWH.114

The indictment of YHWH in Lam 4:11 is similar in content and accusatory tone to 2:1-10. This is the first mention of YHWH in Lam 4. For readings that tend antithedically, it indicates that in the Lamenter’s search for meaning, YHWH is found to be “the primary cause of Jerusalem’s destruction and the people’s suffering.”115 This is demonstrated by both the attribution of wrath to YHWH in

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114 House asserts that “every speaker . . . agrees that the pain has been and still is horrible, that Israel’s sin caused the pain, that the pain is sufficient punishment for the sin, and that relief is needed. Every speaker agrees that the Lord has sent this woe and that only the Lord can end it” (House, Lamentations, 437). It is debatable whether all Lamentations’ speakers agree that the “pain is sufficient punishment for the sin.” In places, the suggestion is that the pain is over and above just punishment for sin. House is right to point out that sin and suffering, in the rhetoric of Lamentations, are connected. The question is whether YHWH has gone too far in making his point.

4:11, and the reiteration that “YHWH himself” scattered the people (4:16) leaving no doubt as to who has actioned this state of affairs.

Reading theodically, however, other commentators point out that YHWH’s anger was not unprovoked. The fullness of YHWH’s anger, conveyed by the opening verb (יָדוֹ, piel, 4:11) indicates to them that “anger, on Yahweh’s part, is considered appropriate. He therefore responds in full measure.” While sin is not present in 4:11, some theodic interpreters claim that “vv. 6 and 13 reveal the links.” They insist that YHWH’s anger (4:11) is “delivered or promised, in punishment for wrong-doing. By using the phrase here, the poet accepts that what has been experienced in the fall of Jerusalem and its aftermath is punishment for sin.”

This anger had its origin in the sins of prophet and priest, the religious leadership (4:13-16; cf. 2:14). House is unequivocal in asserting that Lam “remains steadfast in its opinion about why the day of the Lord has come. As in 1:5, 8, 14, 18; 2:14; and 3:39, the speaker lays the responsibility for what has occurred at the feet of a sinning people.” Recalling 1:18, he reiterates that here, as there, “Yahweh is in the right,” and, still resisting the likes of Linafelt and Mandolfo, maintains that “[N]owhere in the book is this belief contradicted.”

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118 Salters, Lamentations, 310.
117 Salters, Lamentations, 310.
118 Salters, Lamentations, 311.
119 Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 133; Ryken, Jeremiah and Lamentations, 761; Hillers, Lamentations, 149; Salters, Lamentations, 313. The “reasons for the tragic fall of Jerusalem” are the “fault of the prophets and priests who were guilty of the murder of innocent folk” (Salters, Lamentations, 313). Parry, however, asserts that “[t]he audience will understand that the poet is not suggesting that only the prophets and priests are to blame,” connecting with Lady Zion as representative in ch. 1 and the communal confession in 3:39-42 (Parry, Lamentations, 138-39). To these might be added the picture of the entire community represented by מַעֲבַד in 4:6. At the same time, of course, there is the contention that “a failure of leadership seems to be perceived as central to the degeneration of the people” as in 2:14 (Parry, Lamentations, 139).
120 House, Lamentations, 444.
121 House, Lamentations, 444.
That being so, YHWH maintains his integrity, and the people are once more to blame—this time, prophets and priests especially. If this apportion of blame is confined to prophets and priests, there might be a slight relief from the accusation of the people. If it were the sin of her leaders that caused her downfall, perhaps she is not herself culpable, though she still suffers the results in her violated body. But again, the social grouping of “prophets and priests” might be metonymic for the whole people. Women were the scapegoat in 4:3, 6, 10. Now the Lamenter brings the failed priests and prophets to attention (4:13-16), as they take their turn as representative of the community.

The charge is that the prophets and priests have “poured out the blood of the righteous within her.” It is unclear whether the accusation means the prophets and priests themselves have actively shed the blood of innocents, or whether they are culpable for the sins of the people, because of a failure to warn them of the errors of their ways. This accusation, then, remains rather vague. Tigay explains that “[i]t is not clear under what circumstances the priests and prophets are supposed to have shed innocent blood, since elsewhere in the Bible it is kings and ministers who are accused of this crime. The accusation does not carry conviction: it strikes one as a grasping at straws.”

122 Cf. Salters, Lamentations, 282, 313.
123 Those who accept that the prophets and priests are responsible include Bergant, Lamentations, 116; O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1063; O’Connor, Tears of the World, 64; Westermann, Lamentations, 198.
124 So Stiebert, “Jerusalem is not fully responsible: she was led by the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests” (Stiebert, “Human Suffering and Divine Abuse of Power,” 204). Contrast Krašovec, who allows only that “[a]ccusing the prophets and priests could sound like an excuse for the people as a whole, but the poet does not permit this” (Krašovec, “The Source of Hope,” 227). Krašovec thus does not let Zion off the hook (cf. Re’emi, “Lamentations,” 122).
125 Berlin, Lamentations, 104; Provan, Lamentations, 118.
126 Cf. Provan, it is likely that “given the reference to priests and prophets in the previous verse, that it is crimes specifically connected with religious observance which the author has in mind here” (Provan, Lamentations, 118).
127 As noted above, the closest Lamentations comes to identifying specific sins; cf. Tigay, “Lamentations,” 448.
128 Cf. Gordis, Lamentations, 146; Hillers, Lamentations, 149; Bracke, Lamentations, 232; Mackay, Lamentations, 192; Westermann, Lamentations, 203; Re’emi, “Lamentations,” 123; Salters, Lamentations, 314.
For Tigay, then, verse 13 “gives the impression of an attempt to account for a calamity that the author could not really explain.” Similarly, Mitchell finds, in light of the extremity of the suffering portrayed in Lam 4, that “the statements of vv. 12-16 that YHWH was angry at the blood guilt of the priests and the blindness of the prophets are too vague to be satisfying.” Stiebert also contends that “any attempt to focus on Jerusalem’s wrongdoing is blurred by the harshness of YHWH’s viciousness, and by the magnitude of both her punishment and her suffering—which are not and, in my view, cannot be adequately justified.” Thus “the vividly described suffering of members of the community, particularly the children, seems to call for a better explanation.” And so the antitheodic resistance continues: yes, there may have been sin, but in light of this deep darkness, that standard explanation is nowhere near sufficient.

The unit closes with further reference to leaders and to the agency of YHWH, mirroring 4:11 and reemphasising, for antitheodic readers at least, that “YHWH’s pivotal part in inflicting suffering is only too clear. He is full of wrath and has poured out his anger; it was he who kindled the destructive fire (4:11), who scattered and who ceased protecting the people (4:16).” YHWH himself has scattered them.

6.2.3 Lamentations 4:17-20

6.2.3.1 Lamentations 4:17-20 Overview

Lamentations 4:17-20 employs the recurring motif of seeing, with the people’s eyes filled up, finished or “worn out” (נַעַר, 4:17; cf. 2:11, 22; 3:22; 4:11) from looking for “help” (חֲבָל, 4:17; cf. 1:7). They “watched” (התב, piel, 4:17b) for a “nation” (הָאָרֶץ, 4:17b) that did not “save” (חָשַׁל, hiphil, 4:17b). Alas, they watched

132 Stiebert, “Human Suffering and Divine Abuse of Power,” 204, emphasis original.
135 Dobbs-Allsopp suggests that, at least in the first stanza (4:17a) the “helper” anticipated could
in “vain” ( Heb, 4:17a). Filled to excess and bloated with blood, a threefold statement announces the increasing deterioration of the city in rapid succession. The “end” ( גֵּרְנָה, 4:18b) “drew near” ( גַּרְנָה, 4:18b), the days “filled up” ( גַּרְנָה, 4:18), the “end” ( גֵּרְנָה, 4:18b) had “come” ( גַּרְנָה, 4:18b).

Hunting imagery carries across from 4:18 ( יָטִיא, “they hunted us,” 4:18; cf. 3:52), into verse 19, with pursuers hunting the king and his consorts as though they were “birds of prey” ( יָטִיא, 4:19). This chase is out in the open—in the mountains and the wilderness—rather than confined to the city streets of 4:18. This expresses a different spatial perspective as the Lamenters places himself (and the community) alongside the king fleeing the city rather than trapped inside by the siege. The Lamenters describes the king with a number of ascriptions demonstrating the hope the people had had in him. But now the “breath of our life” ( יָטִיא, 4:20), the “Lord’s anointed” ( יָטִיא, 4:20), is “captured” ( יָטִיא, niphal, 4:20), in the hunters’ “pits” ( יָטִיא, 4:20). Quoting the people’s former belief that they could live safely “under his shadow” ( יָטִיא, 4:20), the Lamenters provides further evidence that Zion theology fails.

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137 An epithet indicating the sense of “the person on whom our life depends” (Berlin, Lamentations, 113). Cf. descriptions of the king in the Amarna letters (ANET, 484); and of Rameses II (de Sagniac, “Theologie Pharaonique,” 82). See Hillers, Lamentations, 151-52.
139 Cf. יָטִיא in 3:53, 55.
140 A “court title[s] ascribing nearly divine status to the king” (Hillers, Lamentations, 151). Note the contrast with Jeremiah’s denunciation of trusting in kings and temple (cf. Jer 7:4). Also note that elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible a protective “shadow” is predicated of YHWH, not the king (Isa 49:2, Pss 17:8; 91:1; 121:5; cf. Salters, Lamentations, 333; but see Isa 32:1-2).
Another reversal is thus added to the litany of impossibilities in Lam 4. Just as prophet and priest turned out to be false, so too a king in captivity is useless. Just as the protective presence of YHWH has vanished from Mount Zion, so too the human arm of protection is vanquished. Hopes in the religious elite (4:13-16), the political powers of the world (4:17), and the leader of the nation (4:20) have all proven “empty” (יֵ֫צָּא, 4:17a). Have hopes in YHWH gone the same way? Has the end indeed come?

6.2.3.2 Lamentations 4:17-20: Who, to Whom, and Point of View

The Lamenter speaks in the first person plural, collecting the entire community as he relays their doomed hopes for a helper from among the nations, and their misplaced hopes in the now captured king. Commentators who deem the opening verses of the chapter to be distant now observe a shift in perspective from a dispassionate reporting style, to a more involved first person identification. The Lamenter, however, is already affiliated with this city, land, and people, although there is, perhaps, now a closer identification with the community in the change to plural.

Indeed, the identification is so close that it is impossible to determine whether in fact this plural should be considered a new community voice, or the Lamenter now speaking on behalf of the community. I proceed with the understanding that the Lamenter speaks collectively, encompassing the least

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143 Cf. Parry, who explains that the opening יֵ֫צָּא governs the tone of shock and pain in the chapter right from the beginning (Parry, Lamentations, 134).
144 So Gottwald, 4:17-20 “gives way here, as in chapter 5, to overt communal discourse by the collective body of sufferers” (Gottwald, “Lamentations Reconsidered,” 170).
145 Hillers, Lamentations, 145. O’Connor rightly observes that “the mixing of singular and plural voices blurs the line between individual and community, between the lamentor and the lamented” (O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1064).
146 Cf. Bergant, Lamentations, 120. Those who do see a change in voice from the Lamenter to the community include Provan, Lamentations, 109; O’Connor, Tears of the World, 59; Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 133-34; and Mitchell, “Lamentations 4 as Historiography,” 86. The community presence is certainly implied by the use of the first person plural, whether indicative of the community speaking in unison, or of the Lamenter acting as spokesman (cf. Gerstenberger, Psalms and Lamentations, 499; Berlin, Lamentations, 112; O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1064).
(the infants) to the greatest (the king) and, moreover, including himself in the communal expression.\textsuperscript{147} There was community representation in the voice of Zion, and perhaps in the voice of the "nant. Further, there have been hints of community involvement throughout Lam 4, as the Lamenter drew attention to various cohorts that could have both literal and metaphorical referents in turn. But now the personification and metaphorical representation gives way to explicit communality (cf. 3:40-47).\textsuperscript{148} There is no specified addressee in 4:17-20, but given the communal form, it is not unreasonable to imagine the community together as part of the general witness to these words, and YHWH as implied superaddressee.

Again, the question remains: Who is to blame? After scapegoating the woman’s body (4:3, 6, 10), the failure of the religious leadership (4:13-16) came in for accusation. Now the Lamenter’s focus turns to political and military allies and leadership. Lack of help from the unnamed nation is all the more disappointing for the people having eagerly awaited it. The strength of the reproach, however, depends on whether the verse signifies a nation that would not save, or could not save. Provan argues that this nation’s lack of aid is “unwillingness rather than merely inability on the part of the guilty nation.”\textsuperscript{149} If this is the case, there is indictment indeed. Perhaps the nations’ crime was not merely that they stood by, watching and mocking while Zion suffered, but that they did nothing to help when it was within their power to do so. Berlin, however, insists there is no such value judgement in the expression, translating simply as “‘a nonsaving nation.’”\textsuperscript{150} Ambiguity remains. Was this a nation that would not or could not save? Does either of these comprise true innocence, in any case?

\textsuperscript{147} Cf. Hillers, Lamentations, 150; Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 134.

\textsuperscript{148} Personification has not entirely disappeared, however, with daughter Edom and daughter Zion to be addressed in 4:20-22. The community perspective will continue more emphatically in Lam 5.

\textsuperscript{149} Provan, Lamentations, 121, emphasis original.

\textsuperscript{150} Berlin, Lamentations, 113.
Re’emi, in typical theodic style, turns the possible indictment of a nation into an indictment of Zion. That is, Zion should have looked only to YHWH for salvation, not to any neighbouring nation, and consequently she has been punished. Willingness to accept foreign aid is, for Re’emi, “not only a failure but also a sin.”

A further focus for failure is the king himself. According to Zion mythology, the Davidic king was instituted by YHWH and should have been unimpeachable. The Lamenter quotes the community’s failed belief in 4:20b: “under his shadow we will live among the nations.” From a Zion theology point of view, the capture of the king is another unthinkable in the ongoing catalogue of the impossible. The king was supposed to keep them safe among the nations. How is it possible that he has been taken? The formerly authoritative discourse of Zion theology is taken, assessed, and found wanting.

6.2.4 Lamentations 4:21-22

6.2.4.1 Lamentations 4:21-22: Overview

Lamentations 4:21-22 is unusual in the book of Lamentations, in that a new city-woman, “Daughter Edom” ( throwError, 4:21a, 22b) appears. This is a surprising inclusion, and if the context is the fall of Jerusalem, seems at first bizarre given that historically Babylon, not Edom, was the enemy. Further, the Lamenter has been insinuating all along that YHWH is actually the enemy, and the nations merely tools. As Stiebert observes, it seems somehow ironic, then,

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152 Historically, “[P]ractically speaking [king] Zedekiah had been the people’s last hope” (Salters, Lamentations, 332).
153 Note that the assumption of the inviolability of Zion was reported by the Lamenter as a point of view held by the nations. The hope in the protection of the king is reported in a quote, thus creating a step (or two) of remove, and casting a shadow over just how much this report might be trusted.
154 Completing the picture of “failure of all three branches of Israel’s leadership” (prophet, priest and king (Ryken, Jeremiah and Lamentations, 762; cf. Gottwald, “Political and religious leaders failed equally” Gottwald, “Lamentations Reconsidered,” 170).
155 Cf. Mitchell, “Lamentations 4 as Historiography,” 90; although see Obad 10-16 for Edom’s hostile role in taking advantage of Jerusalem’s fallen situation.
156 Cf. 2:1-10; 3:10; House, Lamentations, 447.
for solace to be “sought in imagining the punishment of the enemy—YHWH’s agents, rather than YHWH himself!—in this case Edom.”¹⁵⁷

Why should Edom be selected for this invective? Landy suggests that “Edom” has “symbolic import” so that the verses comprise “the possible beginning of Edom’s career in Hebrew literature as the archetype of Rome and all the enemies of Israel.”¹⁵⁸ Alternatively, it is possible that Edom is the nation that would not save (4:17), as elsewhere she is depicted standing by scornfully while Jerusalem suffers, or even participating in Zion’s subjugation.¹⁵⁹ Salters, however, rejects both these possibilities, asserting instead that the Lamenter must want to say something specific about Edom, even if it eludes current readers as to what that actually is.¹⁶⁰ What is clear is a certain level of animosity toward Edom.¹⁶¹ From the Lamenter’s perspective, Edom is somehow at fault, and deserves the punishment promised her. Edom is told to “rejoice” (שָׁפֵר, 4:21a) and be “glad” (שׁוּדָה, 4:21a). The implication is “while you still can,”¹⁶² for in the next breath she learns that the “cup” (כִּילָה, 4:21a)¹⁶³ will pass to her too. She will be “drunk” (שָׁפָר, 4:21b) and be made “naked” (כֵּלֶם, hithpael, 4:21b).¹⁶⁴ Exposure of her nakedness implies exposure of her sins.¹⁶⁵

Daughter Zion then makes her final fleeting appearance (4:22a). The Lamenter declares her “punishment” (חִדָּה, 4:22a; cf. 2:14a; 4:6a, 13a; 5:7) to be “complete” (חִסֵּר, 4:22b).¹⁶⁶ The verb הָסַל in the final stanza, contributes to the sense of

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¹⁵⁷ Stiebert, “Human Suffering and Divine Abuse of Power,” 204.
¹⁵⁸ Landy, “Lamentations,” 333. Meek declares that “[o]f all their neighbors none was so hated by the Jews as Edom” (Meek, “Lamentations,” 34).
¹⁵⁹ Cf. Obad; Ezek 25:12, 35:3, 15; Ps 137:7; Jer 4:11; Mal 1:2-5; Joel 3:19. Note that in Obadiah, however, Edom and Jacob are brothers, rather than naked (or soon to be naked) women.
¹⁶⁰ Salters, Lamentations, 334.
¹⁶¹ Cf. Ps 137:7; Ezek 25:12-14; Obad; see Gerstenberger, Psalms and Lamentations, 499; Salters, Lamentations, 334. 
¹⁶² Cf. Parry, Lamentations, 143.
¹⁶³ That this is the cup “of God’s wrath” is assumed; cf. Isa 51:17, 22; Jer 25:15; 25:17; 28; 49:12; 51:7; Ezek 23:31-33; Hab 2:16; Ps 75:9.
¹⁶⁴ Cf. Gen 9.21-22; Hab 2:15-16.
¹⁶⁵ Cf. Parry, Lamentations, 143.
¹⁶⁶ The same verb used of YHWH’s כֵּלֶם in 3:22.
completion or fullness already indicated by דָּבֶר (4:11; 17) and אֲלוֹם (4:18). And it is now her וְתָאַבַּת that is complete. As discussed above, this could signify sin, or punishment for sin, or have overtones of both. Is it Zion’s sinfulness that is complete,\footnote{Salters, Lamentations, 337. I.e., “her iniquity has come to fruition in the disaster promised by the pre-exilic prophets” (Salters, Lamentations, 337).} or her punishment?\footnote{Both the iniquity and the punishment, cf. 4:6 (Mackay, Lamentations, 203).} If punishment, does this mean that the punishment is finished as of now and the dire circumstances will end, indeed have ended, or simply that there will be no new punishment, though the consequences of prior punishment have yet to play out? Similar uncertainty pertains to the parallel statement, that no more will be “added” כֵּפֶר, hiphil, 4:22a) to her “going into exile” (וָלֹא, hiphil inf constr, 4:22a). Does this indicate that there will be no more fresh taking into exile (but the exiles will stay there indefinitely?).\footnote{As suggested by NRSV’s “he will keep you in exile no longer” (cf. Is 40:2). “Zion appears as one who has sufficiently atoned” (Eissfeldt, The Old Testament, 503).} Or that the current exile is over and her people will now come home?\footnote{Cf. Renkema, Lamentations, 564-69; Hillers, Lamentations, 153; House, Lamentations, 434.} Provan suggests, then, that the verbs וָלֹא and וְתָאַבַּת express wishes for the future, rather than assurances of what has already happened.\footnote{I.e., the precative perfect, Provan, Lamentations, 123; Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 189; or “prophetic perfect” (Parry, Lamentations, 143; Salters, Lamentations, 338). Dobbs-Allsopp acknowledges that contextually “one can make a strong case for understanding these clauses as wishes instead of declarative sentences,” but “even so, the declarative force of the statements would resonate regardless” (Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 138; cf. Hillers, Lamentations, 152-53).}

Lamentations 4:22b inversely mirrors the announcement to Zion in 4:22a, with poetic wordplay causing maximum effect. Rather than iniquity or punishment being “complete,” Daughter Edom’s “iniquity” (שֶׁבֶם, 4:22b) is “appointed” (שֶׁבֶם, 4:22b). Rather than an end to “exile” (וָלֹא, 4:22a), Edom’s “sins” (וָלֹא, 4:22b) will be “exposed” (וָלֹא, 4:22b).\footnote{Cf. Zion in 1:8-10.} The pairing of וָלֹא and וְתָאַבַּת occurs once again
(cf. 4:6, 13; 5:7), but this time it is Edom, rather than Zion, whose sinfulness is announced.

6.2.4.2 Lamentations 4:21-22: Who, to Whom, and Point of View

A change in addressee occurs in 4:21-22 as the Lamenter turns to address Daughter Edom (4:21, 22b) and Daughter Zion (4:22a) directly.⁷⁴ This is the first instance of second person address in Lam 4. Somewhat unusually in Lamentations, it is not an address to YHWH, as readers might have come to expect from 1:9c, 11c, 20-22; 2:20-22; and 3:42-47; 55-66. Moreover, the final cadences of lament are usually given to pleas for vengeance.⁷⁵ But instead of entreating YHWH in an attempt to seek reparation, the Lamenter addresses Edom and Zion; with judgement, and with an assurance that vengeance is at hand, respectively.⁷⁶

If read as declarative statements, 4:21-22 can be read as an answer to the pleas of 1:20-22 and 3:61-66. There is thus assurance that YHWH has seen and taken action.⁷⁷ Theodic readings laud this potential glimpse of assurance as one of the “most hopeful and confident” statements in Lamentations.⁷⁸ The assurance that someone else, at least, is going to pay for their sins in the same way as Zion has paid for hers is supposedly a hopeful, comforting factor,⁷⁹ although not,

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⁷⁴ A number of commentators propose a new voice, speaking on behalf of YHWH in 4:21-22, e.g., Parry, Lamentations, 132; House, Lamentations, 436; Salters, Lamentations, 283.
⁷⁵ Cf. Lam 1:20-22, 3:59-66; Westermann, Lamentations, 207. Coming in the position where an imprecation might be expected, this “prediction that Edom will be punished echoes the call of the communal lament for punishment to fall upon the enemy” (Salters, Lamentations, 334).
⁷⁶ This “shift from no-hope to confident-hope is so dramatic and so unexpected that one is left disoriented” (Parry, Lamentations, 142). Note that when not referring to Israel or Judah, daughter language is in the context of judgement (cf. Isa 23:10; 47:1; Jer 46:19; cf. O’Brien, Challenging Prophetic Metaphor, 128).
⁷⁷ Cf. Parry, Lamentations, 144.
⁷⁸ Parry, Lamentations, 132; the “most comforting” (House, Lamentations, 436); “the most hopeful note in the entire book of Lamentations” (Berlin, Lamentations, 114; cf. Bergant, Lamentations, 122-23; Bracke, Lamentations, 227; Hillers, Lamentations, 153; Re’emi, “Lamentations,” 126; Johnson, “Form and Message,” 70; Provan, Lamentations, 12; Ryken, Jeremiah and Lamentations, 764-65). Boase is more measured, describing 4:22a as “a fleeting element of hope” (Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 232); cf. Salters, a “faint light at the end of the tunnel” (Salters, Lamentations, 338).
⁷⁹ Cf. “There was a certain satisfaction, accordingly, in the thought that her turn was coming and she would have to drink of the same cup of shameful humiliation” (Meek,
presumably, for Daughter Edom. Reading theodically, the pronouncement that Zion’s punishment is complete, and Edom’s is coming, provides a corrective to the depression of 4:1-20.180

Reading antitheodically, however, this hint of relief—if that is what it is—is short lived. Lamentations 5, with its unmitigated desperation and decided lack of response from YHWH, remains to come. Perhaps, then, the assurance of completion for Zion, and promise that Edom will get what she deserves are also ironic impossibilities. How can it be that Zion’s punishment is complete, and Edom’s declared open season, when it is patently obvious that Zion remains embroiled in devastation?

6.2.5 Excursus: Vengeance as Comfort: Schadenfreude at its Worst

The assurance of vengeance in 4:21-22 should disturb readers more than most commentators acknowledge.181 Few question the ethics of the imprecations in 1:21c-22 and 3:64-66, and the answering assurances of vengeance here in 4:21-22.182 Krašovec, for instance, praises the close of Lam 4 as “most powerful, and the antithesis in v. 22 is marvellous.”183 What is it, exactly, that he finds marvellous? The assurance of more butchering, more suffering, more children dying in the streets?184 Taking comfort in another’s demise is disturbing and

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180 Parry asserts that the “deep darkness of 4:1-20 should not be allowed to obscure the bright light of 4:21-22,” and that “the word of hope at the climax of the poem must not be allowed to render the terrible plight of the inhabitants of the city less dreadful or shocking . . . Lamentations 4 takes the darkness very seriously, even if it does not allow it the last word” (Parry, Lamentations, 132, emphasis original).

181 See also §5.2.8.

182 Westermann at least acknowledges the petition against enemies in an excursus (1:22, 3:64-66, 4:21-22), but makes no comment problematising the entreaty for revenge, taking it simply as par for the course in lament literature (Westermann, Lamentations, 207). Boase calls imprecation “unpalatable” (Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 188n209); Dobbs-Allsopp describes 1:20-22 as “ugly and repugnant” but, at the same time “convenient and necessary” (Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 73).


184 As Berrigan asks, “If this is the fate of children of war, what judgment lies on those who so dispose of children?” and “Would the powerful who judge the children of enemies dispensable, so dispose of their own children? What judgment lies on such, and those they speak for?” (Berrigan, Lamentations, 94).
must be questioned at a fundamental level. There are two aspects to this supposed “comforting” that are especially distressing. First, the very premise that an announcement of another’s judgement is expected to serve as comfort. And second, that this judgement, like Zion’s, is couched in highly gendered, sexually violent terms.

First, how, and for whom, is it possible that announcing judgement upon Edom (4:20-22)\(^{185}\) can be construed as “comforting”? Lanahan is rightly critical of this notion. That the Lamenter can so blithely pronounce judgement on Edom suggests to Lanahan that he “falls short” of “empathy and compassion. After he has observed the chaos and experienced the confusion, his reaction is the wish that the evil be spread out even further.”\(^{186}\) Rather than a comforting statement, then, for Lanahan, 4:21-22 is “merely an ineffectual tantrum of vindictiveness.”\(^{187}\)

There is a sense in which lament voices a cry from the heart, and that cry may be bloodthirsty. Not acknowledging the very human desire for revenge would be to deny this aspect of the experience of felt pain. In one sense, then, imprecation serves the purpose of expressing these feelings “honest to God.”\(^{188}\) And yet, while the lust for blood may be understandable in terms of human nature and the desire for justice, the astute reader is fully justified in questioning the ethics of voicing such hate-filled statements, in light of the actions they may presage. Dobbs-Allsopp is right to state that while imprecation gives “voice to and channels the community’s raw rage at suffering’s deep hurt,”\(^{189}\) “[t]he brutality of the invective in these last two stanzas should not be sentimentalized or sidestepped.”\(^{190}\)

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\(^{185}\) Or indeed, calling upon YHWH to exact justice on enemies; cf. 1:20-22, 3:59-66.


\(^{188}\) “Hatred and wishes for vengeance against cruel and oppressive enemies are typical and normal human responses to trauma” (O’Connor, Tears of the World, 69; cf. Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 137). Zion is a survivor and as such her “call for revenge also has its place in the literature of survival” (Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 41).

\(^{189}\) Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 137.

\(^{190}\) Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 137.
O’Connor teases out the ethical tangle by suggesting that while lament expresses vengeful feelings, the actions are left in the hands of YHWH. For O’Connor, felt pain is appropriately expressed in lament, and that includes the expression of vengeful feelings toward the enemy. An ethical issue only appears “when people begin to act upon those desires.”  

Indeed, Lee suggests that the very act of lament and imprecation “might serve to curb the lamentor’s need to exact violent vengeance.” As Bergant has so aptly stated, however, retribution and perceived justice are tricky to negotiate, and in reality cannot be left up to the deity indefinitely:

The loss of innocent life is obscene and the extent of devastation incalculable. It is appropriate that women and men of integrity stand up in righteous indignation. However, when they cry out angrily is it for justice or for blood? And in the heat of such anger, is it possible to make such a distinction? If it is genuine justice that they desire, how is it to be executed? It is impossible to relegate the exercise of justice to God alone, for societies cannot survive without the stability and social harmony that justice promises.

There is no easy answer to this complex ethical predicament.

Second, while there is some scholarly critique challenging the rhetoric degrading female Zion in Lam 1 and 2, little attention is given to the portrayal of Edom as female in Lamentations. The rhetoric that equates the vilifying of another nation with “woman,” naked and exposed, should be as disturbing as the degrading portrayal of Zion herself. Have contemporary readers been so

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94 See especially Guest, “A Recriminative Response,” 413-48; Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion*. See discussion in §3.1.2.3.
induced to the Judahite way of thinking, that when an enemy–Edom–is portrayed in the same shameful female images, this is suddenly acceptable? I have similar concerns when Berlin comments on the vengeance wreaked on Babylon:

It remains for Second Isaiah, the prophet of comfort, to bring the rhetoric of Lam 1 full circle, to envision Babylon the way our poet envisioned Jerusalem. Isaiah 47 makes Dear Virgin Babylon the mourner, sitting on the ground shamed by her uncovered nakedness, no longer the Mistress of Kingdoms, now a widow, bereft of her children, and about to suffer the “evil” . . . that she deserves.196

This vindictive invective that the female enemy deserves the same shameful punishment as Zion has received is worrying, to put it mildly. Letting the cycle of violence and retaliation continue cannot remain unquestioned.197 While the call for vengeance is one perspective expressed in the text, acknowledging this strand among the multiplicity of perspectives does not require uncritical acceptance. This voice must be heard and acknowledged, but it must also be critiqued, evaluated, and, in this case, found wanting, as publicly and loudly as possible.198

6.3 Overall Point of View: Lamentations 4

Lamentations 4 presents a selection of portraits of social cohorts in the Jerusalem community. In particular focus are women (4:3, 6, 10), religious leaders (4:7–8, 13–16), and the king (4:20). When it comes to ascribing blame, each portrait highlights a particular kind of failing that might, at the same time, also implicate the entire community. Alongside the accusation of Jerusalem's

196 Berlin, Lamentations, 61.
197 Cf. Berrigan, Lamentations, 94. Witness the current political situation in Palestine.
198 Cf. Lee, who advocates the use of the lament in the church and the world, while rejecting the bloodthirsty desire for vengeance. For Lee, the lament form can be utilised while being reimagined from within, “innovating and transforming songs and genres to meet the sociopolitical and religious challenges of the times” (Lee, Lyrics of Lament, 194).
people and leaders, however, is the emphatic insistence that YHWH is this suffering’s source (4:11, 16).199 The nations, too, play a role, both the nation that did not come to Jerusalem’s aid (4:17), and the pursuing enemies (4:18-20). While these perspectives interrelate—Zion sinned, YHWH punished, agency of the enemies—theodic readings lean toward highlighting the sin statements (4:6, 13, 21),200 maintaining that the siege and destruction are “appropriate retribution” for sin.201 They find comfort and hope in the promise of vengeance for Edom and relief for Zion (4:21-22). Antitheodic readers push back, arguing that in light of the people’s suffering, the statements of sin—even the specificity of “shedding innocent blood” (4:13)—are “too vague to be satisfying.”202 Further, reading progressively forward to Lam 5, there is a “movement back into description of misery” such that hope “continues to be fleeting and temporary.”203 Once again, “Lamentations does not develop a single approach to attempt to explain the exile but is an untidy combination of many perspectives.”204 Reading Lam 4 as polyphonic text allows the dispersal of blame in all these different directions to be held in tension.

6.4 Lamentations 4: Conclusion

Lamentations 4 speaks great sorrow. The Lamenter composes a barrage of impossibilities that demonstrate just how unthinkable it is that the city should be compromised. The chapter moves to the communal voice in verses 17-20, bringing the tragedy together as a matter of concern for all her people. From babes in arms to the king, none have escaped. This move to communal voice prefigures the communal lament of Lam 5, which takes up the collective voice in earnest and in desperation. Lamentations 4 ends not with the anticipated plea for vengeance (cf. 1:21c, 22; 3:59-66) but a (troubling) assurance of vengeance for Edom and concomitant relief for Zion. The blurring of literal and

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201 Mackay, Lamentations, 203
204 Bracke, Lamentations, 234; cf. O’Connor, the “fall is ultimately multifaceted in its causes” (O’Connor, Tears of the World, 65).
metaphorical, and individual and communal in Lam 4, along with the progression to communal voice, show how the fates of individuals and communities are inextricably intertwined. The downfall of one, or one sector of society (especially when it is the leadership), is the downfall of all.205

6.5 Postscript: The Progression from Individual to Communal Perspective: A Move Toward the Monologic?

I noted in the introduction to this chapter that Lam 4 does not gain much attention from scholars. The contention is that as Lamentations proceeds, “the poems in Lamentations grow shorter, less energetic, more diminished,”206 even “less theological.”207 But the shorter stanzas actually invoke greater intensity, aurally, with the urgency of their more staccato sounds. Rather than a let down or emotionally distant piece after the intensity of Lam 3, Lam 4 is in a significant position rhetorically. It serves as a vital transition from the individual voices of Lam 1 and 2 (Zion and the Lamenters) and 3 (the רוּחַ), to the communal speaking voice of Lam 5. This transition began in 3:40-47, but was not yet a fait accompli.208 Lam 4, however, blurs the boundaries of individual and communal ever more progressively. There are vestiges of the first person speaker in 4:1-10 in the pronominal suffix on רוּחַ. At the same time, this very name itself explicitly names the people. The portraits of 4:1-10 pick out no individuals, focusing instead on small groups of society in turn. The same is true of the prophets, priests, and elders highlighted for disapproval in 4:13-16. These vignettes concerning children, women, nobles, priests, prophets, and elders demonstrate the extent to which the disaster has encompassed all. Each of these

205 Cf. Levinas, “Transcendence and Height,” 17.
208 Pace Dobbs-Allsopp, who contends that the “merger between individual and community is complete” by 3:40-47 (Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 107). Curiously, while having said the merger was already a fait accompli, he then goes on to comment (rightly and eloquently) on the very increasing aspect of communality in Lam 4, noting, as I myself have observed, that Lam 4 “gradually becomes more and more explicitly communal as the sequence progresses” (Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 135).
strata of the community mentioned might also be metonymic for the whole.209 One individual figure, the king, is in view, but he enters the scene only once the Lamenter has drawn the community together in the first person plural form, couching the description of his demise, too, in the rhetoric of community. Beginning with children (4:1-2) and culminating with the king (4:20), merismus encompasses everyone in between. So Lam 4 blurs the boundaries between literal and metaphorical and between individual and communal. This blurring also shows how the fates of the individual and the community interconnect.210 This is full-scale devastation, but it is brought about, arguably, by the sin of only some—the prophets, priests, and elders (4:13-16). Certainly, the children have not contributed to this sin, and they suffer for it all the same. Even if the whole people are indicted by the metaphorical imagery, the impression is still that there is a pouring out of the innocents. The tragedy is that all suffer for sins committed “in her midst” (4:13).

At the last, Daughter Zion returns (4:22a), giving one last glimpse of the individual woman before she disappears from the scene entirely. With her is Daughter Edom, another city-woman (4:21, 22b). But neither of these figures has recourse to speech. They are spoken to, but they themselves do not speak. As an act of violence, this is absolute. Here, then, the subsuming of the individual in the communal, and the silencing of the Woman, is complete.

CHAPTER SEVEN:
LAMENTATIONS 5

7.1 Introduction to Lamentations 5

Lamentations 5 departs markedly, but not recognisably, from the previous four chapters. The stanzas are shorter, each comprising only one line. While not an actual acrostic, Lam 5 retains, like Lam 1-4, 22 stanzas in total, hence the moniker “alphabetic.” The qinah rhythm, to the extent that it does exist in the first four chapters, is essentially abandoned. Instead, much of Lam 5 exhibits a more even 2/2 stress, with increased poetic parallelism.¹ Unlike the mixed genres of the first four chapters, Lam 5 is closer to a standard communal lament form (cf. Pss 44, 60, 74, 79, 80), albeit with an especially long complaint section (5:2-18), and with the turn to praise and confidence that usually concludes a communal lament missing almost entirely.² These differences, particularly the puzzling abandonment of the acrostic that has served Lamentations so well thus far, lead some commentators to suggest that Lam 5 originated at a later time.³ Others invent alternative acrostics or mnemonics to impose upon Lam 5.⁴ Instead of contriving to constrain the poetry with such conformity, however, differences in Lam 5 can be allowed to stand, as they contribute to the poetic effect of Lamentations as a whole. The change in form in Lam 5 represents a

¹ Although note the qinah in Lam 5:2, 3, 14 (cf. Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 144).
² Gerstenberger, Psalms and Lamentations, 502-504; cf. Westermann, Lamentations, 211. The possible turn at 5:19 is “rather hesitant praise, to be sure” (Westermann, Lamentations, 219-220).
³ E.g., Lee, The Singers of Lamentations, 192; Lachs, “Date of Lamentations V,” 47. See House for an overview of dating proposals (House, Lamentations, 457-58). Sommer also cites lack of allusion to Lam 5 in Deutero-Isaiah as evidence of a different date and origin (Sommer, A Prophet Reads Scriptures, 130).
dismantlement of the symbolic world, in which not even poetry behaves as expected anymore. The intensity and pace of the poetry is increased by the shorter stanzas and more even, mostly parallel, stichs. The abandonment of the acrostic mirrors a world absent of any sense of order or predictability. Lamentations 5 is a last, desperate plea for help, which escapes, in part, the stricter structural discipline of the previous poems as it builds to its uncertain end.

Within the communal lament framework, Lam 5 falls into three parts: 5:1, a petition or appeal to YHWH; 5:2-18, a lengthy complaint or description; and 5:19-22, a further petitionary prayer. Lamentations 5 is prayer, couched beginning and end in address to YHWH. For analysis I have divided the poem into manageable units where there is an obvious change in grammatical person or addressee. Accordingly, I examine verses 1-10, 11-14, 15-18, and 19-22 in turn. Following the method already established, I give an overview of the content of each utterance and engage with evaluative perspectives in the text, before turning to theological interpretation of these perspectives from the scholarly commentators.

### 7.1.1 Who Speaks in Lamentations 5?

There is a single speaking voice in Lam 5, but this voice presents a communal perspective, speaking primarily in the first person plural. This community voice (CV) expresses continued ambiguity on the questions of blame for Jerusalem’s destruction. The chapter is thus similar to Lam 3, in that it comprises a single voice expressing more than one evaluative perspective. Unlike the wild swings

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7 Thus “the element of petition is being given determinative significance for the whole composition” (Westermann, *Lamentations*, 213; cf. O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1067).

8 Cf. Miller, “Poetry and Personae,” 221.
between despair and hope in Lam 3, however, the movements through which Lam 5 progresses are not nearly so pronounced, perhaps indicative that polyphonic perspectives are becoming more aligned with one another.

I noted earlier that Lam 4 blurs the boundaries between individual and communal.9 In the continuing progression, the first person plural voice of Lam 5 suggests the communal perspective is now very much to the fore. This is the case whether the CV is envisaged as a representative speaker, speaking on behalf of the community of which he is a part,10 or whether the entire community itself is imagined to speak in unison.11 Given the strong correspondence with Zion’s pleas in Lam 1,12 the community implied by the CV is the same as that of which Zion was the representative figure, the people of Jerusalem/Judah. Rather than Zion speaking as an individual metaphorical representation of the community, however, the group presence is now explicit, with words from a collective rather than a single poetic speaker. Even if these words are spoken by a single spokesperson on behalf of that people, the plurality implied by the first person plural is clear.

On the one hand, this joining of all voices together in prayer to YHWH is a positive move, representing a coalescence of all those affected by the devastation and presenting a united front on behalf of the entire community. On the other, it does mean that the distinctive tones of individual voices have been silenced. At the end of this chapter I question whether the individual voices, identified and heard in the previous chapters, maintain their distinctiveness when joined together in this combined, united plea. It may be that the monolithic “we” has in fact subsumed their respective characteristic timbres, taking over monologically. I explore the ethics of presuming to speak on behalf

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9 See §6.5.
12 Cf. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 145. Note the confluence between, e.g., 5:1 and 1:9c, 11c, 12a, 18b, 20a; 2:20a; between 5:3 and 1:1; between 5:5 and 1:3b; between 5:11 and 1:8-10; and between 5:17 and 1:13c, 22c).
of a larger group, questioning who is supposed to be implied by the plural, and asking whether any part of the community presupposed by the CV has been left out.

7.2 Lamentations 5: Analysis

7.2.1 Lamentations 5:1-10

7.2.1.1 Lamentations 5:1-10: Overview

Lamentations 5 opens with a threefold plea to YHWH. The CV entreats him to “remember” (יִנְאָה, 5:1; cf. 3:19; Ps 132:1; 137:7), to “look” (יִנָּר, 5:1; cf. 1:11c, 12b; 2:20a; 3:63), and to “see” (יִתְנֶה, 5:1; cf. 1:9c, 11c, 12b, 18b, 20a). Repeating these familiar pleas calls to mind Zion and the YHWH’s entreaties for looking and remembering ever more forcefully. What follows, then, is to be read in light of what has already been.\(^{13}\) Calling for YHWH to remember is perhaps an implicit entreaty for active response to pain.\(^{14}\) The community calls for YHWH to see what has happened to them and to attend to their “shame” (גֹּפֶן, 5:1; cf. 3:30, 61). They elaborate on the cause of this shame in 5:2-18.\(^{15}\)

The CV laments the loss of their “inheritance” (גְּדֹלַת, 5:2), which, in an allusion to YHWH’s hand being “turned against” the בְּנֵי (3:3),\(^{16}\) has now been “turned over” (גְּדֹלַת, 5:2) to strangers.\(^{17}\) In a technical sense, גְּדֹלַת can refer to the land itself, either individual properties handed down the family line,\(^{18}\) or the land as a

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\(^{13}\) Cf. Miller, “Poetry and Personae,” 213; Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 142-43.

\(^{14}\) Salters, Lamentations, 342; Mackay, Lamentations, 209-210; Bergant, Lamentations, 127; Parry, Lamentations, 147. Contra Hillers, it is “not yet an explicit call for help, but only a preliminary” (Hillers, Lamentations, 162).

\(^{15}\) Cf. Salters, Lamentations, 342. For Williamson, “the entire complaint is constructed to draw attention to the degree of the community’s public humiliation” (Williamson, “Public and Hidden Transcripts,” 72; cf. Parry, Lamentations, 147). For House “shame” refers both back, as a “summary of all that they have endured” and forward, as the poem goes on to explain what this shame entails (House, Lamentations, 459).

\(^{16}\) Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 144.

\(^{17}\) Moreover, not just to strangers from outside the family group, but, in escalating parallelism, to foreigners (Berlin, Lamentations, 117-18).

\(^{18}\) Their “inalienable, hereditary property” (HALOT, 687; cf. Lev 25:25-28; Num 27:8-11; 36:3-12; 1 Kgs 21:14).
whole given (*sic*) to the people of Israel.\(^9\) Understanding יָהָּד as physical property is reinforced by the parallelism inheritance//homes (5:3). But at the same time, the potency of the plaint lies in the conviction that the people themselves are YHWH’s inheritance.\(^{20}\) YHWH’s own people are given by YHWH’s own hand into the hands of the enemy.

Continuing the charge of dispossession and displacement, the people count themselves as “orphans” (יהודים, 5:3), and their mothers “like widows” (הֶבְלוֹת, 5:3).\(^{21}\) As the people were YHWH’s inheritance, so he was their father.\(^{22}\) Now both aspects of the distinctive relationship are absent. Furthermore, orphans and widows were among the most vulnerable in society, those to whom society owed a special duty of care.\(^{23}\) This choice of metaphor thus emphasises the people’s abject helplessness.\(^{24}\) The image of mothers “like widows” also alludes to personified Zion, sitting on the ground in her bereavement (cf. 1:1b). Shades of Mother Zion, then, appear in the backdrop to the poetry, even though she herself has disappeared, absorbed into the communal body.\(^{25}\)


\(^{21}\) Gordis favours the *kaph veritatis*, our mothers “are indeed widows” (Gordis, *Lamentations*, 195; cf. Mackay, *Lamentations*, 211n43; Meek, “Lamentations,” 35; Levine, *Aramaic Lamentations*, 180). Contra Provan, who favours the simple comparative “like” (Provan, *Lamentations*, 126). GKC, 118x, declares *kaph veritatis* “out of the question.” LXX (ophys χήρας), P (אֲשָׁמְתָא וּמַשְׁמֶשְתָא) and V (quasi viduae) read the kaph as comparative. Tg. Lam extrapolates, explaining that the women are “like” widows in that the men have been captured, but they cannot be directly equated to widows because they still don’t know if their men are dead or alive (Alexander, *Targum of Lamentations*, 179-80; Levine, *Aramaic Lamentations*, 180). In the poetic medium, however, whether our mothers “are” widows or “are like” widows is immaterial: they, along with orphans, are left in their poverty, vulnerable and without defence (cf. discussion of Lam 2:4a,5a in §4.2.1.3).


\(^{25}\) See further §7.4.
In their desperation, cut off from what they insist is the rightful use of their land even as they remain in it, the people are forced to buy wood for the fire and water to drink (5:4).26 They are “pursued” (רָפָא, 5:5; cf. 1:3c, 6c; 3:43; 4:19a) relentlessly. Reminiscent of Deuteronomistic and Davidic promises, they lament the lack of YHWH’s promised “rest” (נָקָם, 5:5; cf. 1:3) in the land, and from their enemies.27 There is here a possible reproach of YHWH, for his failure to provide the rest that was promised (cf. Deut 12:10).28

The situation is so dire that the people are forced to go begging for bread.29 The mention of Egypt and Assyria is anachronistic, but as traditional enemies they may be employed here as a symbolic word pair (5:6; cf. Jer 2:18, 36; Hos 7:11; 12:2, Zech 10:10,11).30 Alternatively, they could comprise a geographical merism, with Egypt in the southwest and Assyria in the northeast signifying that the people will turn anywhere, even to traditional enemies, for food.31

For Salters, however, 5:6 does not continue from 5:2-5 in describing the current situation of desperation, but rather connects intimately with the forthcoming mention of ancestral sin in 5:7.32 In his reading, “giving the hand” to Egypt and Assyria is a clear admission of sin, a confession of past illicit political alliances (cf. Hos 7).33 But while the CV does move easily between past and present in 5:7, the majority of 5:1-10 describes a current situation, the present urgent deprivations of hunger and oppression, and so refers to the basic need for life-sustaining bread, rather than to any political allegiances of the past.

26 Salters, Lamentations, 346; cf. O’Connor, Tears of the World, 74.
28 Cf Williamson, “Public and Hidden Transcripts,” 75-76.
29 Provan, Lamentations, 128; Berlin, Lamentations, 119. See House, Lamentations, 462-63; Salters, Lamentations, 348-50. Lamentations, it would seem, is utterly contemporaneous.
31 Hillers, Lamentations, 164; Mackay, Lamentations, 213; Meek, “Lamentations,” 36.
Lamentations 5:7, then, is the first unambiguous mention of sin, with אשם (cf. 1:8a; 5:16) and עון (cf. 2:14; 4:6, 13, 22) collocated. The complaint is that the present generation bears the burden of “guilt” (עון) for a previous generation that “sinned” (אשם). As seen in chapter 6, the word עון can refer to both the “misdeed/sin” itself\(^{34}\) and the “guilt caused by sin (and the consequences thereof).”\(^{35}\) In 5:7, the primary association is the second, the guilt and consequences of sin, punishment.\(^{36}\) That is, the current generation bear the punishing results of guilt caused by the sin of the “fathers.” The notion of children bearing the sins of the fathers is attested throughout the Hebrew Bible.\(^{37}\) It is refuted, however, in, e.g., Jer 31:29-30 and Ezek 18:1-4, 2 Kgs 14:6, where the proverbial “sour grapes” that set the children’s teeth on edge are rejected, and each person is made accountable for their own sins.\(^{38}\) While here in 5:7 the notion of ancestral sin impeding upon following generations is attested, in 5:16 the alternative notion of direct personal responsibility appears. There are thus multiple conceptions of sin present in Lam 5, standing in dialogic tension with one another.

The CV depicts further outcomes of punishments for past sins, bemoaning that “slaves” (עבדים, 5:8) rule over them.\(^{39}\) They risk their “life” (/met, 5:9) for food because of the “sword in the wilderness” (חרם, 5:9).\(^{40}\) While the precise

\(^{34}\) E.g., 2 Sam 22:24; Ps 18:24; Is 11:10; 13:22; 30:14; Hos 5:5; 9:7; Mal 2:6.

\(^{35}\) HALOT, 800; e.g., in Num 14:19; Gen 15:16; Jer 33:8; 50:20; Ezek 4:4-5, 17; 14:10; Hos 7:1; 13:12; Zech 3:4.

\(^{36}\) Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 197; Provan, Lamentations, 128; Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 146; Berlin, Lamentations, 114; Salters, Lamentations, 351.

\(^{37}\) E.g., Ex 20:5; Ex 34:7; Deut 5:9; Lev 26:40; Num 14:18; Is 14:21; Jer 32:18.

\(^{38}\) Cf. Lam Rab 5:7 §1: “Our fathers sinned and they are no more, and we have borne their iniquities. The Holy One, blessed be he, said to them, ‘On your own you stand!’” See also §4.2.2 n. 94.

\(^{39}\) Potentially Babylonian officials (Hillers, Lamentations, 164; Berlin, Lamentations, 121; see 2 Kgs 25:24). Alternatively, the curse language employed here might be traditional rhetoric, simply indicating that the dire threat of punishment has come (cf. Salters, Lamentations, 352).

\(^{40}\) The “sword in the wilderness” is difficult, potentially referring to the threat of attack by violent desert dwellers when the people forage in the desert for food (Rudolph, “Klagelieder,” 121; Provan, Lamentations, 129; Gottlieb, Lamentations, 70; Meek, “Lamentations,” 36; Salters, Lamentations, 353-54). Alternatively, Gordis emends בְּנָרָם, “sword,” to בְּנָרָים, “heat,” creating a chiasm between bread/famine and heat/scorching heat in 5:9-10:
meaning of bodies being “black” from famine is uncertain, it seems the heat of famine has devastating physical effects on the people’s forms (cf. 4:7-8).

7.2.1.2 Lamentations 5:1-10: Who, to Whom, and Point of View

Lamentations 5 begins and ends with address to YHWH, placing all the intervening portraits in the context of prayer. The prayer in Lam 5:1-10 is expressed in the first person plural, describing the dire straits in which the people find themselves. There is, at first, no explicit ascription of cause or blame, although there may be a veiled accusation of YHWH in 5:2, where the use of the niphal of יְהֹוָה leaves the name of the one who handed the people over unstated.

Mention of sin and punishment in 5:7 provides the first stated target for accusation. The focus is a previous generation, whose sins continue to take effect in the punishing situation the people now endure. Reading for protest, there is a strong sense of complaint at the present situation: we are not the people who have sinned and yet here we are bearing the deprivations of their punishment. In this view, Lam 5:7 “attributes sin to previous generations and complains about the unjust suffering of the present generation.” Reading רָע as “punishment,” Boase contends (contra Salters) that Lam 5:7 “is not

We get our bread at the peril of our lives,  
because of the heat of the desert,  
our skin is as hot as an oven,  
because of the burning heat of famine (Gordis, Lamentations, 195).

The juxtaposition of heat and famine echoes further curse imagery (cf. Deut 28:22; Berlin, Lamentations, 121; Williamson, “Public and Hidden Transcripts,” 72), supporting a connection between heat and famine such that Gordis' emendation is reasonable here.

See discussion in Salters, Lamentations, 354-55.


Salters reads 5:6 as already an admission of sin, with Egypt and Assyria indicative of past sinful political alliances (Salters, Lamentations, 340). As noted above, however, in the context of present pain the focus is on the contemporary situation.

Cf. sour grapes, Jer 31:29-30.

Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 195. O’Connor is more cautious, suggesting that the “speakers may be distancing themselves from the parental guilt by claiming that the ancestors’ failures, not theirs, set the nation on its course to the catastrophe” (O’Connor, Tears of the World, 75).
confessional, but is a continuation of the description of misery. Implicit in this reading is that there is an excess of suffering.”46 In this perspective, the community has “suffered unjustly.”47

Other interpreters, however, read 5:7 as an acceptance of the people’s situation, such that the current generation identify with past sins and admit complicity therein (cf. Jer 3:25).48 Verse 7 is made to “collapse” into agreement with verse 16 such that both verses comprise confession.49 For example, Parry insists that in 5:7 the people “clearly associate themselves with the fathers (‘our fathers’) and make no attempt to deny their own sin.”50 For Parry, mentioning the fathers emphasises that, in a community, all are mutually implicated.51 This, of course, is in keeping with reading to indict Jerusalem and her people, and thus to exonerate YHWH. In such readings there is no recognition of the potential inequity of visiting the iniquity of the “fathers” upon those who are not, themselves, at fault.52

In contrast to these interpretations, reading Lam 5 as a polyphonic text allows ambiguity to remain. Lamentations 5:7 need not be conflated into agreement with 5:16. Both perspectives—our fathers sinned, we bear their guilt unjustly;

47 Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 197.
48 E.g., Salters, Lamentations, 348; Re’emi, “Lamentations,” 129; Hillers, Lamentations, 164; Gerstenberger, Psalms and Lamentations, 503; Parry, Lamentations, 150. Cf. Pss 78.9-11, 17-20, 106:6; Ezra 9:6-15; Neh 9:16-17, 26-28; Jer 3:25. Taking a different approach, Berlin protests that both interpretations—attributing sin to the previous generation, or conflating past sin with the previous generation—pay too much regard to theology and not enough to poetry. For her, 5:7 is “a literary trope, not an actual intergenerational portrait” (Berlin, Lamentations, 120). In the rhetoric of sin and blame, however, it makes a differences whose faults are being highlighted here.
49 Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 195. E.g., Salters reads 5:6-7 as a recognition that their “tragic circumstances” have “not simply appeared out of the blue: they have a theological explanation,” namely, ill advised attempts at alliance. Salters does not immediately collapse the two verses, however, suggesting that even on its own 5:7 acknowledges that sins are intergenerational, (cf. Jer 3:25); they, and we too, have sinned (Salters, Lamentations, 350). But then he goes on to undermine any possible complaint of “sour grapes” in 5:7 (cf. Jer 31:29; Ezek 18:2; Exod 20:5) with the assertion that the “author—and here we must take the confession ‘we have sinned’ (v. 16) into consideration—distances himself from those sentiments” (Salters, Lamentations, 351).
50 Parry, Lamentations, 150, emphasis original.
51 Parry, Lamentations, 150.
and we ourselves sinned, this is the cause of our woe–may be expressed.  

Diverging views appear within the same poem, even the same utterance.  

Both the notion that children pay for the sins of their ancestors, and the notion that children are not to be held accountable for the sins of previous generations are attested in the Hebrew Bible.  

Reading as a polyphony allows both perspectives to be voiced and heard in the ongoing, internal dialogue, broadening the scope of theological interpretation to allow a range of possibilities, held together simultaneously.

7.2.2 Lamentations 5:11-14

7.2.2.1 Lamentations 5:11-14: Overview

Lamentations 5:11-14 encapsulates the degradation of a nation, presenting four pairs of persons in poetic parallel: women and young women (5:11); princes and elders (5:12); young men and youths (5:13); and elders and young men (5:14). First, as is so often the case in men’s wars, the women, both married (ָֽזֶּ֔הֶן, 5:11) and unmarried (ַֽיְּהֻֽנֵ֥ב, 5:11), are “humiliated” (יִֽנְּ֖בָּה, 5:11; cf. 3:33), which in this context clearly indicates rape (cf. Gen 34:2; 2 Sam 13:12, 14, 22, 32; Judg 19:24, 20:5). These atrocities take place in Zion and Judah, that is, throughout the land. No Israelite woman, young or old, north or south, married or unmarried, is safe.

“Princes” (ָֽזָּ֖רִים, 5:12) are hung up “by their hands” (יִֽנְּ֖וזֶּ֖ב, 5:12), a difficult phrase that at the very least connotes shame (cf. 5:1), as former leaders are

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55 Cf. §4.2.2.2 n. 94.
58 Zion and Judah are clearly used in a geographical sense here, although mentioning them in relation to the fate of women recalls the female personification of Zion in Lam 1, 2, and 4 (cf. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 146). Vestiges of the female speaker linger.
strung up on public display. In parallel, the “older men” (יָגוֹרְכֵנ, 5:12) are shown no honour. Continuing the degradation of the male portion of the population, “young men” (יַעֲנִירְכֵנ, 5:13) are made to carry the “millstone” (יִתְנַסֵי, 5:13), a shameful task beneath their dignity. In the poetic parallel “boys” (יִשְׁמְרֵנ; 5:13) are compelled to “stagger” (יַגְלֵה, 5:13) under heavy loads of wood.

In the final line of the unit, the picture turns from scenes of shame to the reversal of corporate social and political life. The “elders” (יָגוֹרְכֵנ, 5:14) have departed, no longer sitting at the “gate” (יֶשֶׁב, 5:14) to execute judgement. The “young men” (יַעֲנִירְכֵנ, 5:14) no longer celebrate life with song. While elements of the community are visible—men, women, young people—normal daily life has been so far destroyed as to be unrecognisable.

59 It is unclear whether these princes are hung up, dangling from their own hands; or whether “their hands” refers to the hands of the enemies who have hung them (Hillers, Lamentations, 155, 158; cf. Meek, “Lamentations,” 37). It is also unclear whether the image is of corpses publicly displayed as a warning to the populace, or of the princes being hung up as a form of torture while still alive (Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 146; cf. House, Lamentations, 465; Parry, Lamentations, 151). In any case, the image is one of “cruel and degrading treatment” (Salters, Lamentations, 358).

60 The hapax legomenon יָגוֹרְכֵנ, from the same root as the verb יִתְנַסֵי, “to grind” (HALOT, 374) is likely a qatal form, indicating tools or instruments, hence “millstone” (Albrektson, Lamentations, 202; Salters, Lamentations, 359). The precise point of being made to “carry” (נָשָׁב) the millstone is unclear, with NRSV opting for the notion of being “compelled to grind” (cf. GNT). Grinding grain was a menial task reserved for the lowest class of slaves or women (cf. Ex 11:5; Isa 47:2; Eccl 12:3). While this itself would be shameful enough for a virile young man, there are also possible sexual connotations in being made to “grind” (cf. יָגוֹרְכֵנ, Job 31:10). Gordis points out that slave girls who ground grain were “exposed to sexual violation” (Gordis, Lamentations, 196; cf. Berlin, Lamentations, 123; Hillers, Lamentations, 158), suggesting that being forced to perform such menial labour might go hand in hand with sexual exploitation. Indeed, V (adultescitibus impudice abusi sunt) has interpreted thus (drawing an exclamation mark from HALOT, 373). Provan and Hillers note the possibility but reject it, saying “grinding” refers simply to grain. They object that the suggestion of sexual abuse does not fit with the parallelism in the second half of the verse (Hillers, Lamentations, 158-59; Provan, Lamentations, 131; cf. Salters, Lamentations, 360). But recall that in 5:11, women were sexually abused. Contextually, then, sexual violence might also underlie 5:13.

61 I.e., that they are forced to carry (Rudolph, “Klagelieder,” 122; Berlin, Lamentations, 123). Hillers emends the text to yield “from hard work” (Hillers, Lamentations, 159), but the idea is the same. They are forced to do heavy manual labour, leaving them struggling for strength.

62 Cf. House, Lamentations, 466; Parry, Lamentations, 152. Thus the poetry, with its 22 elements but departure from acrostic form, mirrors the community situation.
7.2.2.2 Lamentations 5:11-14: Who, to Whom, and Point of View

The first person plural is momentarily set aside as 5:11-14 employs sparse third person descriptions of the fates of various social groups. Rather than describing the common plight of all (as in 5:1-10), the unit highlights specific forms of degradation peculiar to particular cohorts. At the same time, however, the poetry maintains connections between the group and the individual. For example, in 5:11, while Zion and Judah are clearly used geographically, the mention of their names cannot help but conjure an association with the metaphorical Zion: the city, the people, and the Woman. The fate of the metaphorical woman is now inextricably bound with the fate of the women who are humiliated. In this last poem, they are one and the same, furthering the fluidity between the community represented by Zion and the community represented by the CV. Thus “language is used so as to conflate identity, to break down distinctions between Zion’s dominant persona and voice and the ‘we’ who voices this final poem.”

Lamentations 5:11-14 is not explicitly addressed to YHWH. It occurs, however, within the context of the encompassing addresses (5:1, 19-22). While the CV has already broached the topic of sin and blame (5:7), and will soon address it again (5:16), there are no accusations in 5:11-14. Nor is there explicit complaint against YHWH. Indeed, YHWH is not mentioned at all.

This is pure piteousness. Once again Lamentations extends its reach to encompass all people, married women (אִשָּׁה, 5:11), young men (יֶדַעְתֵּן, 5:14), and everyone in between, in the dissolution of civil society. Again, this is a reversal of the expected way of life. Here is simply shame and humiliation (cf. 5:1).

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63 Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 145.
64 There is, however, an obvious gap left by the niphal verb (נַשֵּׁב, 5:12), that leaves the identity of the afflicter unstated.
66 Cf. House, Lamentations, 466; Salters, Lamentations, 361.
While there is no direct address or complaint in 5:10-14, for House, the portraits indicate that “things have not gotten better for these children of Zion,” signalling that it is “appropriate to continue to bring their plight before the Lord and hope for renewal.” One might just as easily say, however, that in light of their utter hopelessness, and the lack of any evidence of intervention by YHWH, these portraits demonstrate that attempting to gain YHWH’s attention is futile, and hope is very distant indeed.

7.2.3 Lamentations 5:15-18

7.2.3.1 Lamentations 5:15-18: Overview

Reversals continue. Rejoicing has ceased or “departed” (םובשׁ, 5:15; cf. 5:14) from their “heart” (םובשׁ, 5:15; cf. 5:17). Dancing has been “turned” (םובשׁ, 5:15) to “mourning” (םובשׁ, 5:15; cf. 1:4, 2:8). The niphal יפשׁ once again leaves the identity of the one doing the turning unstated, suggesting to Salters, at least, that “the identity of the real protagonist” is YHWH. The CV announces that the “crown” (םוסר, 5:16) has “fallen” (םובשׁ, 5:16) from their head. Then comes a pronouncement of woe, directly linked to the notion of sin: “woe now to us, for we have sinned!” (םוסר ילוא יבשׁו, 5:16). This, then, is the second verse in which sin is explicit in Lam 5 (cf. 5:7).

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69 The “joy of our heart” might allude to “the (personified) city, ‘the joy of all the earth’ (2:15c),” i.e., Jerusalem (Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 147).
72 Possibly referring to the city’s crenellations, in an image of the city walls and defenses falling to the ground (Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 147); cf. 2:8-9, where broken walls and fallen king are presented in close proximity. Alternatively, it could refer to the tumbling down of the Davideic dynasty (cf. 4:20; so Berlin, *Lamentations*, 124). Salters rejects both possibilities, highlighting instead the symbolic aspect of honour turning to shame (cf. Prov 12:4, Job 19:9; Salters, *Lamentations*, 363).
In a threefold repetition of statements beginning with ובש ("because of," 5:17a, b; 18a) the unit builds to the (anti)climax in 5:18. Because of “this” (וה, 5:17a), says the CV, our heart is “faint” (והיה, 5:17a; cf. 1:13).73 Because of “these things” (והא, 5:17b) our eyes have “dimmed” (והישה, 5:17b).74 And finally, unthinkably, ultimately, because of Mount Zion, which is “desolate” (תנשא, 5:18; cf. 1:4b, 13c, 16c; 3:11; 4:5a).75 This reversal of Zion from habitation to uninhabited, human domain to wilderness is capped with the poignant observation that “foxes” (עראות, 5:18) roam upon it.76

The interpretive question is whether the “because of” statements (5:17a, b, 18a) are retrospective, referring back to all the desolation set out in verses 5:2-16;77 or prospective, referring forward to Mount Zion.78 Of course they may be both.79 I read 5:17-18a both retrospectively, as a culmination and summary of everything that has come before; and prospectively, moving forward to Zion, deserted.80 The three statements thus summarise, with increasing intensity, the situation

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73 והיה, “faint, sick” or “menstruating” (HALOT, 216). The connotation of sickness due to menstruation (cf. 1:13, see §3.2.5.2, n. 201) is not as often made here as in 1:13, although there, as here, the claim of being “faint” is in close proximity to the announcement that Zion is “desolate” (5:18). Tg. Lam (והיה) includes the possibility of menstruation at 1:13, but not in 5:17; cf. LXX (ἀθανάτωμαι), V (maestum factum est), P (אמא).74 Perhaps from crying (House, Lamentations, 468, Salters, Lamentations, 366). Tg. Lam attempts to tease out the inconsistency between singular and plural in the grammar, making specific the referents of “this” (הא בֵּית-רֹאשֵׁי, the “house of the sanctuary”) and “these things” (יתאמ עַל בֵּית אָדָם מָנוֹלַד מִמֶּנָּה (the “people of the house of Israel who have gone into exile from there”; cf. Alexander, Targum of Lamentations, 185).

75 For לְגוּנֵי pertaining to both woman and land, see §3.1.2.2., n. 116.


77 So House, Lamentations, 468; Provan, Lamentations, 132; Hillers, Lamentations, 159. Salters distinguishes between “this,” the acknowledgement of sin in 5:16b; and “these,” the circumstances described in 5:2-16 (Salters, Lamentations, 366).

78 Berlin suggests the threefold ובש statements are “likely” to be proleptic, while retaining the possibility that they “refer to everything described” (Berlin, Lamentations, 124).

79 Parry, Lamentations, 152; Berlin, Lamentations, 124-25; Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 147.

portrayed in 5:2-16, while also moving through to the ultimate reversal: the desolation of Zion.\textsuperscript{81}

There are whispers of Zion the woman in the portrait of Mount Zion made desolate and the people’s heart made faint (cf. 1:13, 2 Sam 13:20). But instead of daughter Zion or virgin daughter Zion, she is now Mount Zion, with the masculine noun 𐤏𐤇 transformi ng “her” into an “it.” Again, the female figure is pushed to the margins, subsumed, consumed, desolate.

\textbf{7.2.3.2 Lamentations 5:15-18: Who, to Whom, and Point of View}

After the parallelisms of 5:10-14, the CV resumes the litany of complaints to YHWH. There are three primary interpretive issues regarding the question of blame, all to do with how the statement of sin in 5:16b relates to what precedes and what follows. First, there is the question of the relationship between the confession of sin in 5:16b and the accusation against ancestors in 5:7. Second, there is the question of how 5:16b relates to other places in Lamentations where sin and blame are collocated. Third, there is the question of how, if at all, the threefold 𐤏𐤇 statements (5:17-18a) relate to the pronouncement of sin in 5:16b. In each of these cases, it would seem, initially, that theodic readers have the lion’s share of the evidential weight. But there are hints that all is not straightforward. In terms of relating to what has come before, and what is still to come, antitheodic readers also construe the textual evidence to support their case.

First, then, interpreters differ on the degree to which they conflate 5:16b with 5:7. Theodic readers subjugate 5:7 to 5:16b. In this reading, the overall perspective of the chapter is one in which “the people make frank confession of their own responsibility for what has happened: ‘We have sinned.’”\textsuperscript{82} But as

\textsuperscript{81} Cf. O’Connor, \textit{Tears of the World}, 76; Salters, \textit{Lamentations}, 366.

\textsuperscript{82} Mackay, \textit{Lamentations}, 220. Mackay subjugates v. 7 entirely to v. 16, reading the chapter as a frank and appropriate acknowledgement of sin (Mackay, \textit{Lamentations}, 219-21). Berrigan is more nuanced but also concludes that “[w]e who endure cannot summon ancestors to the bar. No, we acknowledge cause and consequence. It is we who have sinned, have brought the
explained above, it is possible to read in 5:7 a protest at being punished unfairly for a previous generation’s sins.

Second, reading theodically, 5:16b is taken as a stellar contribution to the constellation of confession texts in Lamentations (cf. 1:18), confirming and reaffirming every prior statement that might possibly be construed as confession. House draws these together at 5:16, maintaining that:

The people confess the sins that have caused all this pain. As in 1:18-22, admission of guilt appears. . . . This phrase includes the dual understanding that sin has occurred and that punishment has followed the sin, an understanding that marks 1:5, 8, 14, 18, 22; 2:14; 3:42; and 4:6, 13, 22. . . . It upholds God’s righteousness in the matter of Jerusalem’s demise.83

Once again, YHWH is righteous and the people deserving of punishment. Yet while House connects 5:16 to corresponding statements of sin for contextualisation, other material in Lamentations can be brought to bear on the situation, material that stresses instead the extremity of YHWH’s vindictive behaviour. Miller, for example, accepts that confession of sin is present in 5:16. But he buffers this confession with the extremities of Lam 2, such that 5:16b cannot be taken at face value. A reader, he says, “will surely recall the reasons why Zion is desolate, is a ruin. It is because of YHWH, the Divine Warrior, who has attacked and destroyed Zion.”84 That is, rather than supporting and being

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84 House, Lamentations, 467; cf. Parry, Lamentations, 152.
supported by other statements confessing sin, 5:16 is mitigated by the context of suffering the people find themselves in, downplaying the element of confession and elevating the element of accusation.

Third, some commentators see in the singular “because of this” (יִלַּשְׁנָה, 5:17a) a direct reference to 5:16b. In this case, the reason “our heart is faint” is precisely “because of the community’s sin.” In such a reading “these” (5:17b) refers to the multiple situations portrayed in 5:2-16, but “this” (5:17a) refers to the singular situation: the crown has fallen, we have sinned (5:16).

It is not entirely clear, however, that the referents of כְּפָרַת and יִלַּשְׁנָה may be separated out so easily. It is not unusual to flit between singular and plural in biblical Hebrew poetry. Additionally, both elements of 5:17 might in fact refer forward to the desolation of Mount Zion. If so, then the reason for faintheartedness changes from “our [past] sin” to the present devastation, the desolation of Mount Zion (5:18), as caused by YHWH.

In light of the multiple interpretive possibilities, it is more fitting to read polyphonically, keeping aspects of both protest and penitence in mind. Dobbs-Allsopp and Boase both set out to read as such. Dobbs-Allsopp observes the discrepancies between verses 7 and 16, understanding them to be “two slightly different notions of sins.” Lamentations 5:16 becomes a “full-throated awareness of sin’s origins within the self” while 5:7 “locates the origin of sin beyond the self.” For Dobbs-Allsopp, rather than a clear confession:

The poem’s outlook on sin, then, is fundamentally tensive. Sin is experienced both within and beyond us, both mutually implicated but not reducible one to the other. Individual and communal

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86 Cf. the proleptic “this” in 3:21.
87 Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 145.
88 Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 145.
responsibility before God is owned, but the felt reality of sin’s “already thereness” is strongly realized and even objected to.\textsuperscript{89}

Dobbs-Allsopp does not allow the two sin statements to be collapsed into each other. He argues that the poetry itself resists being coerced into one monologic conception of confession. Similarly, Boase finds that the “confession of sin” in 5:16 “stands in contrast to the protest of v. 7.”\textsuperscript{90} Reading polyphonically, Boase contends that “there is evident conflict between a sense of unjust punishment and the acceptance that sin played a causal role in the fate of the community. That this tension is unresolved clearly articulates different viewpoints, dramatically pointing to a dialogic tension within Lamentations.”\textsuperscript{91}

Williamson also observes that 5:7 and 5:16 are “apparently contradictory.”\textsuperscript{92} He explains the contradiction in terms of public and hidden transcripts, with the tensiveness between the statements indicative that the communal voice can, in 5:7 “protest their own innocence” while at the same time “appearing to adhere to the ‘officially sanctioned’ interpretation that its suffering is a legitimate punishment for wrongdoing.”\textsuperscript{93}

In terms of dialogic interaction of evaluative point of view, then, there are at least two possible perspectives on the appropriateness of this punishment for sin upon the people who now suffer for it. Both occur within the voice of the community, suggestive of discord and dissent amongst those who call themselves “we.”

\textsuperscript{89} Dobbs-Allsopp, \textit{Lamentations}, 146, emphasis original.

\textsuperscript{90} Boase, \textit{Fulfilment of Doom?} 198. Westermann also observes a disparity between the CV’s efforts at distancing themselves from, or rebelling against, the ancestors’ sin in 5:7, and the admission of sin in 5:16b. He states that in verse 16 “the present generation merges itself with its forebears” while recognising that verse 7 is “attempting distancing” (Westermann, \textit{Lamentations}, 215). He recognises that the two verses “stand in tension” but asserts that “both attitudes are entirely appropriate for the lamenters” (Westermann, \textit{Lamentations}, 215.).

\textsuperscript{91} Boase, \textit{Fulfilment of Doom?} 198.

\textsuperscript{92} Williamson, “Public and Hidden Transcripts,” 76, emphasis original.

\textsuperscript{93} Williamson, “Public and Hidden Transcripts,” 76.
7.2.4 Lamentations 5:19-22

7.2.4.1 Lamentations 5:19-22: Overview

Lamentations 5:19, in a passing glimpse of praise, affirms that YHWH “reigns” (תָּמִינָה, 5:19) “forever” (לִבְרֵיה, 5:19). His “throne” (כָּנָאָר, 5:19) remains from “generation to generation” (לָךְ, 5:19). The verse asserts that YHWH, while no longer present and dwelling in Zion, does still maintain absolute sovereignty, enthroned on high. There is no room for the notion that Babylonian or other deities have caused the situation, proving more powerful that YHWH. The poem then progresses, however, to questioning. “Why” (לֵאֹר, 5:20) have you “forgotten” (לְאִשָּׂא, 5:20) “forever” (לִבְרֵיה, 5:20)? And “forsaken” (לְעָנָי, 5:20) for “so many days” (לָאָלָאָר יִתָּנָה, 5:20)? YHWH may well reign eternally, but he also ignores continually. The CV does not accept this ignoring as appropriate behaviour, entreating YHWH to “return” (לֵאָזָא, 5:21), and owning that if (and only if) he does, they will indeed be “returned” to him (לֵאָזָא, 5:21). This “turning” might be in repentance, or a restoration of the covenant relationship, the situation of the “days of old” (יִמְיַנְיָת הָכָן, 5:20) when he was YHWH and they were his people. Lam 5 could well have finished here, with the plea for restoration concluding with what would be considered an “appropriate” note in orthodox readings. But instead, it progresses to the final verse 22, which, structurally, according to the 22-fold form is an integral part of the poem. Thematically, however, it creates all kinds of difficulties. For

94 While קְסֵם more often has a sense of dwelling, sitting, or remaining (HALOT, 444), it can also have the sense of “reigning” (e.g., 1 Sam 4:4; Ps 9:5; 29:10; 1 Kgs 1:46; 2:12; Jer 22:4; Esth 1:2); indicated here contextually in parallel with “throne” (so House, Lamentations, 454). Contra Salters, who favours “remains” (cf. Ps 125:1; Joel 4:20; Salters, Lamentations, 369).
95 Cf. House, Lamentations, 468; Berlin, Lamentations, 125.
96 Cf. Parry, Lamentations, 153.
97 Cf. Berlin, Lamentations, 125; Salters, Lamentations, 370.
99 Gordis, Lamentations, 196; Hillers, Lamentations, 165.
100 House, Lamentations, 468; Salters, Lamentations, 371-72.
101 Salters, Lamentations, 373.
102 As evidenced by the tradition that sees Lam 5:21 repeated at the conclusion of reading Lamentations liturgically; cf. Isa 66:24; Mal 4:6; Eccl 12:14.
Lamentations 5:22 has proven impossible to translate with any certainty. The primary difficulty relates to the grammatically anomalous use of בָּשָׁם. Gordis’ 1974 survey of possible meanings remains a helpful point from which to begin discussion.\textsuperscript{103}

First, observes Gordis, the old JPSV imported a negative, translating 5:22: “Thou canst not have utterly rejected us, and be exceedingly wroth against us!”\textsuperscript{104} This, however, reverses the straightforward appearance of the verse,\textsuperscript{105} which, grammatical difficulty notwithstanding, seems to assert that YHWH has indeed rejected them. Further, there is no clear evidence for the reading, and as such it is not retained in the new JPSV.\textsuperscript{106} Second, the RSV read 5:22 as an interrogative: “Or have you totally rejected us, are you indeed so angry with us?”\textsuperscript{107} Gordis and Linafelt exclude this possibility, however, on the grounds that בָּשָׁם nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible introduces a question, or means “or.”\textsuperscript{108}

Third, LXX (ὅτι ἀπωθοῦμενός ἀπώσω ἡμᾶς), P (אִםִּי וַנַּעֲשֵׁנוּ), and 6 Hebrew Mss omit בָּשָׁם to achieve the much more straightforward “You have indeed rejected us.”\textsuperscript{109} This suggests the inherent difficulty in interpreting and translating the verse from the very first, as the versions are likely to have been attempting to make sense of the difficult text. As such, however, the MT is preferred as the lectio difficilior.\textsuperscript{110} Gordis objects further that to translate with such a clear statement asserting YHWH’s unequivocal rejection would be “inappropriate at the end of a penitential prayer for forgiveness and

\textsuperscript{103} Gordis, “Conclusion,” 289-93; see overviews in House, Lamentations, 470-72; Parry, Lamentations, 154-57; Hillers, Lamentations, 159-61; Westermann, Lamentations, 217-18; Salters, Lamentations, 373-75.


\textsuperscript{105} Gordis, “Conclusion,” 289; cf. Linafelt, “Refusal of a Conclusion,” 240.

\textsuperscript{106} Linafelt, “Refusal of a Conclusion,” 340.

\textsuperscript{107} Cf. “Or have you totally rejected us, are you indeed so angry with us?” (Westermann, Lamentations, 210-11); “Oder hast Du uns ganz verworfen—zänrest über uns gar zu sehr?” (Löhr, Klageleider, 26); “Oder hast du uns gänzlich verworfen und zänrest uns maklos?” (Kraus, Klageleider, 85).


\textsuperscript{109} Gordis, “Conclusion,” 289; Linafelt, “Refusal of a Conclusion,” 342.

\textsuperscript{110} Hillers, Lamentations, 160; Gordis, “Conclusion,” 289; Linafelt, “Refusal of a Conclusion,” 342.
restoration.” The question of what is or is not appropriate, however, is not a valid reason for rejecting any rendering. Lamentations frequently skirts the edges of appropriateness in its robust challenge of YHWH.

Fourth, אֲמַרְתָּם can be used to introduce conditional sentences (e.g. Gen 40:14; Josh 23:12; 1 Sam 20:9; Jer 7:5, 22:4, 26:15, 37:10; Hos 9:12; Prov 2:3; 19:19; Lam 3:32), a route that Ehrlich and Meek follow in their translations: “‘For if thou didst reject us completely, thou wouldst be angry unto much against us.’” Gordis discounts this, however, on the grounds that there is no extension to the thought, but rather the two stichs are direct parallels. And there is no further grammatical indication that the lines should be taken as conditional. Linafelt, however, suggests אֲמַרְתָּם can be understood as the introduction to a conditional sentence in 5:22, noting that some conditional sentences state only the protasis, with the apodosis assumed. Instead of reading the protasis in the first stich and the apodosis in the second, however, Linafelt reads both stichs as protasis, with apodosis left unstated. He translates: “For if truly you have rejected us, raging bitterly against us—” leaving the “then” of the if-then statement dangling, in what he calls “a willful nonending.”

111 Gordis, “Conclusion,” 289. Contra Provan, who objects to the assumption that the lament must end positively, declaring that it “does not have a confident ending, and it is difficult to see how it is that so many commentators . . . have come to the conclusion that it does” (Provan, Lamentations, 134).
113 Gordis, “Conclusion,” 289.
114 Apodoses with a protasis of אֲמַרְתָּם are marked in the Hebrew Bible by גָּאִיל (Ex 8:17, 9:2, 10:4); כְּ (cf. Joüon 118m, 176b; e.g., Gen 40:14; Deut 11:22; 1 Sam 20:9; Jer 7:5, 22:4, 37:10; Hos 9:12; Prov 19:19; Lam 3:32); עָבְרָה (Prov 2:3); כְּ (Jer 26:15); or the emphatic infinitive absolute (Josh 23:12). 5:22b lacks any such marker.
115 Linafelt, “Refusal of a Conclusion,” 342.
116 Cf. Joüon, 167r; e.g., Gen 38:17, Num 5:20, Exod 32:32.
117 Linafelt, “Refusal of a Conclusion,” 343.
118 Linafelt, “Refusal of a Conclusion,” 343, emphasis his.
While Linafelt’s reading has not gained unqualified support, the usefulness of his conception lies not in his precise reading of the grammar, but in the suggestion that 5:22 need not necessarily be pinned down to a determinable ending. Linafelt suggests an intentional unfinishedness. While I am reluctant to make assumptions regarding intentions, the appearance of a confusing and indeterminable verse at 5:22 does have the effect of opening up the text in multiple directions, and resisting attempts to close or monologise the chapter, and the book, at its end.

Fifth, Rudolph translates הִנֵּה as “unless,” i.e., “Turn us to yourself O Lord . . . unless you have rejected us.” However, this translation neglects to take into account that “unless” only translates הִנֵּה in the Hebrew Bible when it follows a negative, which is not the situation in Lam 5. Sixth, Hillers reads the verse adversatively, translating הִנֵּה with “but.” As with “unless,” however, this understanding of הִנֵּה usually follows a negative, whether explicit or implied. Finally, Gordis himself suggests reading הִנֵּה as “even if,

Salters critiques Linafelt for using “unorthodox” grammar to obtain an “awkward and unsatisfactory” translation that has no parallel in the Hebrew Bible (Salters, “Yahweh and his People,” 364). Others protest that an intentionally unfinished text is too contemporary an idea to fit with an ancient text (Mackay, Lamentations, 225; Berlin, Lamentations, 126). This is where distinguishing between intent and effect is helpful. While I cannot make assumptions as to the intentions behind the verse, I can observe the effect, which, if Linafelt is correct, is one of unfinishedness and openness, whether intended or not. This is, in a sense, how I have approached Lamentations as a whole. I do not argue that the work is intentionally structured to comprise a polyphony (pace Boase). This cannot be known. The polyphonic effect, however, may be observed by virtue of the way the text now presents in its current form.

Contrast, however, Grossberg’s understanding of the strong sense of completion indicated by the phrases “bring us back,” “we will return,” and “as of old” (5:21) (Grossberg, Centripetal and Centrifugal Structures, 104; cf. Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 148). There are thus competing centripetal and centrifugal forces at work in the final lines of Lamentations. These help to ensure formal completion but thematic openness (cf. the unfinalisability of the polyphonic work, §2.2.3.1.).


See GKC 163a. So V (see); Hillers, Lamentations, 161; Berlin, Lamentations, 115, 125; Williamson, “Public and Hidden Transcripts,” 74.

Mackay, Lamentations, 226; Linafelt, “Refusal of a Conclusion,” 341. E.g., Gen 15:4; 32:29; 35:10; 39:6; Ex 12:9; 23:22; Lev 21:14; Num 10:30; 26:33; Deut 7:5; 12:5, 14, 18; 16:6; Josh 14:4; 17:3 23:8; 1 Sam 2:15; 8:19; 14:39; 21:5; 2 Sam 12:3; 19:29; 21:2; 1 Kgs 8:19; 18:18:
although” on the basis of parallels with Psalm 89. He reads 5:21 as the main clause, to which 5:22 is subordinate. That is, “Why do You neglect us eternally, forsake us for so long? Turn us to Yourself, O Lord, and we shall be restored; renew our days as of old, even though You had despised us greatly and had been very angry with us.” A number of commentators, like me, are beginning to agree, cautiously, with Gordis’ translation of ֶה אִתָּם as “even though,” without necessarily agreeing that the verbs should be read as pluperfects.

Whichever option interpreters choose, it is probably right to understand the ending of Lamentations as less than positive. In Jewish liturgical use, the penultimate verse is repeated after 5:22, a strategy employed when the final verse of a book of the Hebrew Bible is deemed too depressing to form an appropriate finish. That is, in the history of reading and interpretation in Jewish community, Lam 5:22 is understood as negative in the extreme, and as such, is not a satisfactory note with which to finish reading in the liturgical setting. This practice presupposes a negative reading of the final verse.

7.2.4.2 Lamentations 5:19-22: Who, to Whom, and Point of View

While all of Lam 5 comprises a lament prayer spoken to YHWH in the CV, 5:19-22 reemphasises that YHWH is the prayer’s addressee. As YHWH becomes the focus of the prayer, the particulars of the people’s plight recede to the periphery. Lam 5:19 is almost a freestanding statement asserting YHWH’s sovereignty. The

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22:8, 18, 31; 2 Kgs 4:2, 24; 5:20; 9:35; 10:23; 14:6; 17:36, 39, 40; 19:18; 23:9, 23; Isa 33:21; 37:19; 55:11; 65:6,18; Jer 3:10; 7:23, 32; 9:23; 16:15; 19:6; 20:3; 22:17; 23:8; 31:30; 38:4,6; 39:12; Ezek 12:23; 36:22; 44:10, 22, 25; Amos 8:11; Zech 4:6; Ps 1:2, 4; Prov 18:2; 23:17; Ruth 3:18; Esth 5:12; 1 Chr 2:34; 23:22; 2 Chr 18:17, 30. Conversely, Hillers contends that YHWH can sometimes be used without directly following an explicit negative (Hillers, Lamentations, 161; see GKC, 163b; e.g., Mic 6:8; Isa 42:19. In both these cases, however, YHWH comes couched in an interrogative that presupposes a negative answer).

126 Gordis, “Conclusion,” 291.
127 Gordis, Lamentations, 198.
128 E.g. House, Lamentations, 472; Parry, Lamentations, 157.
129 Salters, “Yahweh and his People,” 364n9; Salters, Lamentations, 375. Gordis himself gives only a reference to Driver as justification for reading the verbs as pluperfects, without further explanation (Gordis, “Conclusion,” 292).
130 Cf. Provan, Lamentations, 134.
people's presence returns, however, in the pronominal suffixes of the second person verbs in the last three verses (יְהֹוָהְנָם, 5:21; יְהֹוָהְנָם, הַשָּׁמֶן, 5:20; יְהֹוָהְנָם, 5:22). After the intense focus on “our” plight of 5:2-18, these closing verses thus bring the people and YHWH together literally, mirroring the plea that “you” regard “us” with which the lament opened (5:1). It is as though the bringing together of “us” and “you” in the very lines of the poetry might prefigure the return of YHWH to his people that they seek (5:21).

As noted above, 5:19 could comprise the obligatory turn to praise and confidence of the communal lament form.\(^{132}\) The dictum attests to YHWH’s sovereignty: YHWH is in control, seated on his throne.\(^{133}\) But interpreters disagree on the significance of the statement. Reading theodically, it is indeed a hopeful proclamation, an acknowledgement that YHWH is not only in control, but that he has the situation under control, providing evidence of ongoing faith and cause for hope.\(^{134}\) Re’emi is perhaps the most enthusiastic advocate of reading this way, declaring that at 5:19 “Israel’s faith bursts forth with a victorious cry.”\(^{135}\) Re’emi’s effusiveness, however, is a little hard to take. Which of the preceding portraits—raped women, shamed men, forced labour, mourning and so on—can he equate with “victorious”? The degradation and desolation of Jerusalem and her inhabitants reads much more like defeat than victory.

In a theodic mindset, there are further implications of the avowal of YHWH’s sovereignty.\(^{136}\) These are nowhere better encapsulated than in Heater’s evaluation of 5:19, which deems that the “verse reiterates the theology of God’s sovereignty expressed throughout the book. He has the right to do as He chooses; humans have no right to carp at what He does” (cf. Job).\(^{137}\) But this

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\(^{132}\) Cf. §7.1 n.2.

\(^{133}\) Berlin, Lamentations, 125.

\(^{134}\) Cf. House, Lamentations, 468.

\(^{135}\) Re’emi, “Lamentations,” 131; cf. Mackay’s “petition of adoration” (Mackay, Lamentations, 208). Parry is more cautious, suggesting 5:19 is “not a full-fledged avowal of confidence, it is a step towards one” (Parry, Lamentations, 153).


assessment of the theology of the book does not ring true, given that much of Lamentations reads precisely as a “carping” at YHWH. While a brief statement of YHWH’s sovereignty does appear in 5:19, throughout the chapter and the book there is also due regard given to protest, and this protestation undermines any monologic acquiescence to YHWH’s “right to do as He chooses.”

Lam 5:19, then, can also be construed antitheodically. There is a turn toward YHWH, yes; this is part of the communal lament transcript and as such it appears here in Lam 5. But 5:19 also disguises more bitter sentiments embedded within it. First, the assertion that YHWH remains seated on the throne, taken by theodic readers as a declaration of YHWH’s sovereignty, might instead be understood as a veiled indictment. Why do you remain seated so far away? Why do you remain seated rather than rising to come to our aid?

Williamson suggests, then, that while Lam 5:19 “gives the appearance of a turn toward YHWH, closer analysis may reveal a double entendre disavowing YHWH’s willingness to arise on Zion’s behalf.” The verse, while stating YHWH’s sovereignty on one level, can thus also be read as ironic and accusatory. In a slightly different vein, also recognising that on one level the “mention of divine rule” is a form of “praise, a public recognition of honor due to the deity,” O’Connor deems it to be “a form of beseeching by praise, a manipulation, a flattery, as if to get on God’s good side, so perhaps God might listen.” There are thus shades of ambiguity raised by antitheodic readings, calling into question any straightforward lauding of YHWH’s sovereignty.

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138 Note the choice of language, “carping,” which is suggestive of disapproval of the people’s protest and a tendency to side with YHWH.
139 The communal lament usually comprises an address to YHWH; a description of the situation of need, cast as a complaint; a request for help; an affirmation of trust; and a vow of praise (Gillingham, Poems and Psalms, 214-15; see also n. 2 above).
140 Cf. Westermann, Lamentations, 216. Cf. the accusation that YHWH has covered himself with a cloud (Lam 3:44).
141 Williamson notes the entreaty to YHWH to rise and come to the people’s aid in e.g., Pss 44:27; 74:22, suggesting that 5:19 thus “admits of the interpretation that YHWH is a god who sits, perpetually doing nothing” (Williamson, “Public and Hidden Transcripts,” 77).
142 Williamson, “Public and Hidden Transcripts,” 78.
143 Cf. Westermann, Lamentations, 216.
144 O’Connor, Tears of the World, 77; Cf. Williamson, “Public and Hidden Transcripts,” 68.
A positive interpretation of 5:19 is also not convincing even when simply read in light of what comes after, in verse 20. The people return to doubt and accusation, as the chapter “collapses into a question directed to God.” The CV speaks out bitterly: why? And why so long? This questioning “[e]ffectively undercuts and isolates the hymn of praise.” In light of what precedes and follows, then, Lam 5:19 is a little too shallow, a little too short, and a little too little too late.

Interpretation of 5:19 thus depends once again on what the interpreter determines is the controlling factor holding sway over the chapter. If the people’s sin and YHWH’s greatness take priority over the presentation of pain, then the apparent turn to YHWH (5:19) is elevated in the hierarchy of utterances. If a reader is more attuned to the people’s cry of anguish (5:1-18, 20-22), then this brief line just does not stand up in the face of all consuming misery. Is there a guide to which interpretation should be taken, or, reading polyphonically, is there ultimately ambivalence toward YHWH?

Lam 5:21, too, can be read as expressive of faithfulness and hope, if the notion that turning in penitent prayer to YHWH is a positive move, and allowed to trump the pervasiveness of despair elsewhere. The emphatic “if you return to us” we “will indeed return” (5:21) recognises that any restoration is utterly

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146 Bracke, Lamentations, 235; cf. Linafelt, “the flicker of praise is extinguished in the final three verses of the chapter” (Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 59).
147 Cf. Bergant, Lamentations, 132; Provan, Lamentations, 133; Westermann, Lamentations, 212, 216; Berrigan, Lamentations, 130.
148 Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 148; cf. Linafelt, Surviving Lamentations, 59. “The undisputed rule of God, ordinarily a source of confidence and praise, only engenders a final accusation: Why have you forgotten us completely forsaken us these many days” (Bergant, Lamentations, 132). “The people’s double-edged praise slides over immediately into challenge” (O’Connor, Tears of the World, 77). Westermann asserts that v. 19 “not spoken with straightforward jubilation” noting that it must be heard “in conjunction with the accusation against God that follows” (Westermann, Lamentations, 216; cf. Salters, Lamentations, 369).
149 E.g., House “Expressions of pain do not mean that belief in divine uprightness has dissipated. Indeed, that the people still pray may well indicate that if anything their faith remains evident in the face of overwhelming pressure to discard it” (House, Lamentations, 468).
dependent on YHWH’s action.\textsuperscript{151} For House, it follows logically that this is because “Yahweh has been the wronged party.”\textsuperscript{152} Now, while this may have been so initially, it is not clear that Jerusalem has not also now been wronged.\textsuperscript{153} If YHWH is indeed in control (cf. 5:19), and only YHWH is able to return and restore the fortunes of the people (5:21), then YHWH is the one who reversed them to start with. Readers know this already from previous chapters (cf. 2:1-10; 3:1-20). Hence the paradox: while the people’s cry “reproaches God for having forgotten the speakers, at the same time the speakers are clinging to that God whom they have reproached.”\textsuperscript{154}

Turning to YHWH, the instigator of their pain, is considered entirely appropriate in theocidal interpretation. YHWH is the one who brought this about—the all-important caveat being the people’s sins and their deserving it—and he is the one who can stop it.\textsuperscript{155} Mackay, for instance, maintains that “in prayer they are at least looking in the right direction for relief.”\textsuperscript{156} But is approaching the one who has inflicted agony with the expectation of relief really the “right” thing to do?\textsuperscript{157} The social sciences have documented the many complex reasons why female victims continue to remain in abusive situations, often blaming themselves and excusing their partner’s violent behaviour.\textsuperscript{158} There are shades of this same insidious ability to convince the woman victim that she is at fault in this insistence that YHWH—the one who has afflicted (cf.

\textsuperscript{151} O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1071.
\textsuperscript{152} House, Lamentations, 469.
\textsuperscript{153} Cf. Gottwald, “Judah has both sinned and been sinned against” (Gottwald, “Lamentations Reconsidered,” 170).
\textsuperscript{154} Westermann, Lamentations, 216; cf. Salters, “Yahweh and his People,” 363.
\textsuperscript{155} House, Lamentations, 457 and passim.
\textsuperscript{156} Mackay, Lamentations, 208.
\textsuperscript{157} See also §4.2.4.3.
\textsuperscript{158} For studies that explore the narratives by which women accept blame abuse and excuse their partners, social and cultural attitudes that keep women in abusive relationships, and barriers to leaving, see, e.g., Boonzaier, “If the Man Says you Must Sit, Then you Must Sit,” 183-206; Boonzaier & De La Rey, “He’s a Man, and I’m a Woman,” 1003-29; Jackson, “Happily Never After,” 305-21; Towns & Adams, “Staying Quiet or Getting Out,” 735-54; Anderson & Saunders, “Leaving an Abusive Partner,” 163-91. Due to a range of beliefs and attitudes, partner abuse can be perceived by women as “normal, commonplace, and a private matter” (Daly, “Leaving Abusive Relationships, 2299; cf. Barnett, “Why Battered Women do not Leave,” 3-35, 343-72). Cf. Stockholm Syndrome.
1:5b, 12c, 14c, 15a,c, 17b, 21b; 2:1-8, 17, 20-22; 3:1-18, 32, 38, 42b-45; 4:11, 16a)—is the one to whom the people must now turn (cf. 2:18-19).

Further, a related question is whether, in spite of the appearance of protesting sentiments throughout Lamentations, there is any real recourse to resistance beyond the officially sanctioned lament form.\textsuperscript{159} Can they resist, and turn away from abuse, even abuse at the hands of YHWH, or is there nowhere else they can go? (cf. John 6:68). YHWH, after all, creates both weal and woe (Isa 45:7). For Seidman, reading antithetically, the people are powerless, coerced into “collective-bargaining with a God whose terrible powers make such actions mostly symbolic.”\textsuperscript{160} The presence of protest remains only an official outlet for venting, not an opportunity for true challenge and change.

Similarly, Williamson analyses Lam 5 in terms of public and hidden transcripts, explaining that with the communal lament apparatus, Israel has a sanctioned vehicle for legitimately expressing complaint to YHWH in the subordinate (Israel) to dominant (YHWH) relationship.\textsuperscript{161} Unlike Seidman, however, Williamson does not see the communal lament “plea bargain” as purely symbolic. For Williamson, digressions from the usual lament form suggest an extremity in the people’s suffering and anger that finally bursts through the official grievance of the public transcript (5:1-21) into the unsanctioned complaint of 5:22, the hidden transcript that can no longer hide.\textsuperscript{162} The sanctioned form includes an “address and introductory petition, complaint, turn toward God, petition, and vow of praise.”\textsuperscript{163} But Lam 5 departs from this by

\textsuperscript{159} In the context of Deuteronomic covenant (cf. Deut 28) there were provisions for both parties to express legitimate grievances, with the people taking recourse to the standard lament form, with its address, complaint, turn to YHWH, petition, and praise (Williamson, “Public and Hidden Transcripts,” 70; cf. Brueggemann, “Costly Loss of Lament,” 62-63; Laytner, \textit{Arguing with God}, xv). In Lam 5, this standard form for airing grievances is substantially changed, indicating to Williamson a deviation revealing the underlying hidden transcript (Williamson, “Public and Hidden Transcripts,” 71).

\textsuperscript{160} Seidman, “Burning the Book,” 288.

\textsuperscript{161} Williamson, “Public and Hidden Transcripts,” 69-71; cf. Bakhtin’s distinction between hidden and obvious open polemics (Bakhtin, \textit{PDP}, 196)

\textsuperscript{162} Williamson, “Public and Hidden Transcripts,” 79.

\textsuperscript{163} Williamson, “Public and Hidden Transcripts,” 70.
including a longer complaint than usual (5:2-18, 20), a very brief turn to YHWH in 5:19 that quickly reverts to more complaint,\textsuperscript{164} and replacing the vow of praise with the negative 5:22.\textsuperscript{165} This indicates to Williamson that Lam 5:22 “breaks the bounds of the communal lament and reveals Israel’s ‘hidden transcript.’”\textsuperscript{166} Lam 5:1-21 is in keeping with the public, sanctioned form of complaint to YHWH, but 5:22 parts company with legitimised complaint speech within the covenantal relationship. It expresses the true, hidden anger and resistance that goes much deeper than can be expressed by the conventional lament form. Thus for Williamson, 5:22 directly contradicts 5:21 (translating “but rather” for הֵמָּה).\textsuperscript{167} Lam 5:22 is “speech ‘out of bounds,’ ” demonstrating the art of resistance.\textsuperscript{168}

The departure from the public transcript at 5:22 thus raises questions as to the genuineness of seemingly conventional, communal lament statements that have preceded.\textsuperscript{169} Indeed, Williamson’s observations of subtleties in 5:1-21 that contribute to undermining the public transcript include elements I have already noted as contributing to ongoing tensive ambiguity in the chapter.\textsuperscript{170} Further, the “extreme brevity” of 5:21, followed hot on the heels by the desperate 5:22, also works “to counterpoint and erode much of the hopefulness that we might want to read into this verse.”\textsuperscript{171}

And so, at 5:22, Lamentations comes to a structural completion, if not a conclusion.\textsuperscript{172} There is no certainty regarding its translation or interpretation. The current tendency, regardless of the exact translation given, is to read the close of Lam 5 as expressing some uncertainty as to the future and the

\textsuperscript{165} Williamson, “Public and Hidden Transcripts,” 73.
\textsuperscript{166} Williamson, “Public and Hidden Transcripts,” 68.
\textsuperscript{167} Cf. Berlin, \textit{Lamentations}, 116; IBHS 39.3.5.d, 671.
\textsuperscript{168} Williamson, “Public and Hidden Transcripts,” 73, 80.
\textsuperscript{169} Williamson, “Public and Hidden Transcripts,” 75.
\textsuperscript{170} Williamson, “Public and Hidden Transcripts,” 75-78. Including, first, the implicit reproach based on intertextual allusion to, e.g., promised rest (5:5; cf. Deut 12:10; see §5.2.1.1 above). Second, the disparity between 5:7 and 5:16 (see §5.2.1.2 and §5.2.2.2 above). Third, the undermining juxtaposition of the brief 5:19 with 5:20. And fourth, the accusation that YHWH sits impassively doing nothing (see discussion of v. 19 above).
\textsuperscript{172} Cf. the unfinalisability of the polyphonic work, §2.2.3.1.
possibility of response from YHWH.\textsuperscript{173} Of course, reading negatively does not meet with agreement from all. Parry, for example, defends a hopeful conclusion, correctly observing that “the desire to avoid a ‘happy’ ending seems to be an important motive for many of those who embrace a negative interpretation.”\textsuperscript{174} But Parry is also correct when he observes that this desire to make an interpretation “fit” one’s own stance “cuts both ways.”\textsuperscript{175} As such, just as Parry complains that some commentators translate and interpret in order to fit their own desire to maintain a negative conclusion, so too there are there those who, to the very last, insist on clinging to orthodox theodicy.\textsuperscript{176}

Reading dialogically, the uncertain finish of Lamentations is very much in keeping with Bakhtin’s description of the “unfinishedness” of the polyphonic text. Lamentations “is left opening out into the emptiness of God’s nonresponse.”\textsuperscript{177} It leaves off in the midst of uncertainty, crying out for answers and answerability by way of both its form and its content.

For O’Connor, the lack of an answering voice from YHWH or any sense of closure is a gift in disguise. O’Connor sees the close of Lamentations as lacking in hope, yes, but interprets this lack positively. That is, while the content of the lament finishes with hopelessness, this makes the text a vitally important resource to have at hand for expressing ongoing pain and uncertainty before YHWH. The open ending allows Lamentations to express its hurt and uncertainty without trite answers that could in no way satisfactorily address the extent of its suffering. That is,

\begin{quote}
For God to speak in this book in a “happy ending” of comfort or promise would cheapen the suffering, foreshorten exploration of
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{173} E.g., Boase, \textit{Fulfilment of Doom?} 237; cf. Provan, \textit{Lamentations,} 124, 134; O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1071; Berlin, \textit{Lamentations,} 125; Bracke, \textit{Lamentations,} 236; Dobbs-
Allsopp, \textit{Lamentations,} 149; Miller, “Poetry and Personae,” 219-20; O’Connor, \textit{Tears of the World,} 70; Lee, \textit{The Singers of Lamentations,} 194.

\textsuperscript{174} Parry, \textit{Lamentations,} 157, emphasis original.

\textsuperscript{175} Parry, \textit{Lamentations,} 157.

\textsuperscript{176} E.g., House, \textit{Lamentations,} 456.

\textsuperscript{177} Linafelt, \textit{Surviving Lamentations,} 60.
tragedy, and deny the depth of human experience of pain. This book offers no answers. It plunges into pain beyond words and finds words to explore realities humans prefer to deny.  

Accusation and uncertainty leave the book hanging without comfort or closure. But for O’Connor, imposing an answering voice from YHWH would be “trite” and undermine the dedicated space for the expression of pain and suffering that is the book of Lamentations. Thus she is able to observe antitheodic sentiments within the text and uncertainty in its expression, while still championing the text as a useful prayer and example for expressing one’s own uncertainty to YHWH. This moves from finding within the text an apologetic for YHWH or an apologetic for Zion, to finding, in the fact of its existence, an apologetic for the text.  

Is there hope? There are those who say yes, if cautiously. Hope may be implicit in the very presence of address to YHWH, indicating a belief that YHWH can and will effect change. And there are those who say no. There is  

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178 O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1071. Childs’ position is not too dissimilar, although he is perhaps more hopeful about the possibility of response and resolution once the lament is found in its “proper confessional context.” That is, for Childs, “[t]he canonical shaping of the material has not supplied a ‘happy ending’, but it has moved the problem into its proper confessional context from which the community of faith must continue to struggle with its own history before God, as it always has in the past” (Childs, OT as Scripture, 595-96).  

179 They are “discouraged but not able to see any hope” (House, Lamentations, 468). Lanahan reads in the final verse “the implicit litotes: our God is not unrelenting” (Lanahan, “The Speaking Voice,” 49). Berrigan describes the ending as “majestic,” claiming that “[t]he faith in God is the final word, intact” (Berrigan, Lamentations, 128). Salters insists Lamentations “does not end as negatively or sadly as is reflected in many translations” but that “faith in Yahweh is strong” (Salters, “Yahweh and his People,” 365; cf. Re’emi, “Lamentations,” 132).  

180 Parry suggests the prayer for restoration indicates an underlying “belief in YHWH’s ongoing covenant relationship with his people” such that there is still hope in the strength of the relationship (Parry, Lamentations, 154, emphasis original). Similarly, Thomas finds that while the ending is open, any interpretative activity “is chastened by the drive in the poetry toward prayer to YHWH,” such that there remains the expectation of a response (Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 277).  

181 For Berlin, “[t]he last chapter, and with it the book as a whole, fail to provide the comfort that has been sought throughout it. The book thereby remains a perpetual lament commemorating unconsolable mourning” (Berlin, Lamentations, 125). O’Connor also lacks a happy ending, as “the people close their prayer with a dispirited modification of their request” (O’Connor, Tears of the World, 78). But she construes this positively, in that it “tells the ‘truth about the human experience of suffering’” (O’Connor, Tears of the World, 79). Still, any chance of hope is “exceedingly thin” (O’Connor, Tears of the World, 77). For Hillers, “the
accusation, as the people berate YHWH for not coming to their aid.\textsuperscript{183} The choice of interpretation is in no small part dependent on the perspective—hopefull or hope-less—a particular interpreter wishes to see perpetuated.

### 7.3 Lamentations 5: Overall Point of View

There are two ongoing trends in the interpretation of Lam 5. Reading theodically, sin becomes a primary organising category. The two references to sin (5:7, 16) are highlighted, with both interpreted as appropriate confessions by a people who recognise that their suffering arises as just punishment for their behaviour.\textsuperscript{184} Both the fact of address and the content of this address concede that YHWH is the only one who can help, and the CV beseeches him to do so. The very notion that YHWH continues to be addressed is a sign of hope that YHWH is sovereign and will not reject for ever.\textsuperscript{185}

Reading antithedically, however, the emphasis is on suffering rather than sin, recognising that the weight of the chapter is given to reproach rather than repentance.\textsuperscript{186} Statements that might otherwise be regarded as hopeful are undermined by the doubt that surrounds them.\textsuperscript{187} Rather than seeing cause for hope in the fact of address, YHWH’s lack of response and indeed the people’s

\textsuperscript{183} They move from blaming themselves and their ancestors (15:7, 16b) to blaming God in these final verses” (O’Connor, *Tears of the World*, pp. 77-78).


\textsuperscript{185} The CV “employs words from those pre-exilic days, from the old familiar liturgy, and relies on Yahweh’s power and justice as basis for the future” (Salters, “Yahweh and his People,” 363).

\textsuperscript{186} E.g., Boase, while advocating a polyphonic reading, does tend antithedically, stating that Lam 5 is “dominated by the description of misery in which the familiar motifs of destruction, conquest and famine occur. While praise of Yahweh is present (v. 19), any sense of hope which may be anticipated through this elements is questioned by the final words (v. 22) which close the book with the community in doubt as to whether the silence of Yahweh will ever be broken” (Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom*? 236).

\textsuperscript{187} To Provan, the preponderance of doubt rather than faith “does not suggest a hopeful people, and does not even imply a repentant one. The ‘orthodox’ view in the end does not prevail” (Provan, *Lamentations*, 23; cf. Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom*? 237).
doubt that YHWH will ever respond, pervade. In this case, the chapter and the book end on “a sour, despairing note.”

Reading polyphonically allows both perspectives to be held in tension. In this case, the ascription of sins to the fathers (5:7), read as a protest against the severity of the punishment experienced by the current generation, occurs in tension with the penitent confession of sins (5:16). In appealing to YHWH and acknowledging his sovereignty there is both a recognition that only he can act to restore them, and an indictment that he is taking his own sweet time to do so.

7.4 **Excursus: The Communal Voice and the Ethics of Speaking for All**

At the end of chapter 6 I noted how the perspective through Lam 4 becomes ever more communal. In Lam 5, there are no singular points of view, only the communal “we,” the CV, which encompasses the entire community in presenting its prayer to YHWH. On one hand, the community coming together with a common cause in their complaint before YHWH can be construed as a positive move. The blurring of the bounds between individual and communal, however, raises questions for me, regarding the collapsing of

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188 Cf. O’Connor, “In this final poem, God does not speak, the people do not acquire hope, and comfort eludes them” (O’Connor, * Tears of the World, 70*). “Like so much of the book, the people’s prayer is bleak, bitter, and hopeless (5:2-18), and it ends haltingly with an ambiguous plea for God to act (5:19-22)” (O’Connor, *Tears of the World, 70*).

189 O’Connor, *Tears of the World, 70*.

190 Cf. Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom*? 237. For Boase, Lam 5:7 “explicitly questions the link between sin and punishment” and this “claim of unjust suffering stands in tension with v. 16” so that the “polyphony of the text is highlighted” (Boase, *Fulfilment of Doom*? 236-37).

191 See §6.5.

192 Lanahan, “The Speaking Voice,” 48; O’Connor, “Lamentations,” 1068; Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 149. Conway’s excellent masters’ thesis argues that the book of Lamentations transitions from a communal perspective (Lam 1, 2), through an individual perspective (Lam 3), back to the communal (Lam 4, 5; see Conway, “From Suffering Toward Redemption,” 76 and passim). While the communal aspect is certainly present in the metaphor of Zion, however, I read Lam 1 and 2 as the individual woman, Zion’s perspective, which in turn may be extended to encompass the community, alongside the individual Lamenter’s perspective. Admittedly, this is a very fine distinction to make, but reading this way, Lamentations moves from the individual perspectives of an increasingly sympathetic Lamenter, the female Zion, and the male ָו; through the transition of Lam 4, to the communal perspective of Lam 5.

193 Cf. House: “At this point the people pray together. There are no complementary or competing voices. Everyone wants the same thing” (House, *Lamentations*, 456).
distinctive, individual protesting voices into a single communal entity. I have been advocating a dialogic reading of Lamentations: a reading that attends to individual voices in turn, noting the characteristic nuances of each speaker’s perspective; a reading that might be threatened if Lam 5 turns, in the end, into a monologue.\textsuperscript{194} Are individual voices and varying perspectives in fact displaced and discounted by the closing communal prayer? I have three concerns regarding the potential monologue-isation of Lam 5.\textsuperscript{195} Who is subsumed, who is assumed, and who is left out?

First, in the collective “we,” who is subsumed? Are there minority voices that are sidelined under a monolithic “we,” individual perspectives lost in the name of communal plaint? I have read Lam 5 as a single utterance that includes multiple perspectives. But if Lam 5 comprises one unified utterance, presenting a point of view supposed to apply to all those who are imagined to be included in the CV, then, as Green observes, the “danger is that differences will be subsumed into the general.”\textsuperscript{196} Specifically, the individual perspectives of Zion, the הַֽיָּמִ֥י, and the Lamenter are steamrolled into the one CV’s perspective. This is of particular concern, if it is assumed (as it often is) that the male Lamenter has picked up the role of speaking for or on behalf of the community, completely blanking out the distinctive female voice of Zion. The Other is subsumed, her face obliterated.\textsuperscript{197}

\textsuperscript{194} So Provan, Lamentations, 7.
\textsuperscript{195} Provan contends that while Lam 1-4 “have something of the character of dialogues, and there are hints of differing perspectives between the voices who participate,” Lam 5 “in contrast, is a monologue” (Provan, Lamentations, 7). It seems Provan has assumed that simply by virtue of being spoken in a single voice an utterance is necessarily a “monologue.” As demonstrated in ch. 5, however, dialogic interactions of the Bakhtinian kind can occur within single utterances. Miller captures this nuance of Lam 5 better, stating: “The final poem, although it gives no evidence of changing speakers, does continue the dialogue that began with the first speech of the book. It reflects many of the themes and motifs that the previous poems had earlier voiced. The perspective, however, is that of Jerusalem and her people, not that of the narrator” (Miller, “Poetry and Personae,” 221).
\textsuperscript{196} Green, Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship, 60. Cf. Lanahan: “The chorus is not simply the reporter, the city, the veteran, and the bourgeois speaking together; the chorus has its own character, subsuming each individual persona in an act of prayer which transcends the viewpoints and the inadequacies which the poet perceived and expressed through the first four chapters” (Lanahan, “The Speaking Voice,” 48).
\textsuperscript{197} See Levinas, Time and the Other, 105-114, for responsibility to the alterity of the Other.
Second, in the collective “we,” who is assumed? Do all those whom readers assume are included in the CV necessarily agree with the perspective/s it speaks? Are there any who would abstain from this communal prayer, or certain aspects thereof? Or is the presence of some assumed against their will? Indeed, Boase suggests that the tension between 5:7 and 5:16 is indicative of disagreement within the rhetorical environment of the text, such that vestiges of disagreement are left lying dormant in the received text. 198

Third, in the collective “we,” who is left out, potentially against their will, if a dominant voice presumes to speak on behalf of all? 199 This question reaches beyond just Lam 5. Lamentations as a whole is exhaustive in its scope of suffering and sufferers, including an entire people in its reach by the frequent use of merismus, and the constant fluidity between figures who are both individual and representative. But not everyone has been given recourse to speech. Some figures are only quoted, their words heard second hand in the report of the Lamenter, the יִשְׂרָאֵל, or Zion. Others speak not at all. What, for example, might the absent fathers, prophets, and priests have to say? What would the children say if they spoke for themselves rather than having their words put in the mouths of others? Further, what of non-human entities, might they also be given an opportunity to “speak”? 200 The walls and roads lament, yes, but what is their perspective? What of the foxes, the ostrich, pictured only for the purpose of negative comparison? 201

Speaking as “we” thus does not allow any clarification of who is subsumed, who is assumed, and who is left out. Indeed, it actively negates any sense of the individual and the distinct. Considering both simultaneity and progressivity in the book of Lamentations goes some way to addressing at least the first of these concerns. That is, while there is progression from individual to communal as the

198 Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 197.
199 Cf. Dobbs-Allsopp on the portraits of ch. 4, in which the “more personal embodiments of suffering” “stand in for the multitude of other individuals whose stories are not told, whose voices are not heard” Dobbs-Allsopp, Lamentations, 139.
200 Cf. Trudinger, “Lamentations as City and Land,” 42.
201 I.e., they are internally focalised by an external focaliser (cf. Bal, Narratology, 152-53).
book is read beginning to end, the individual voices still stand, and are heard, and exist simultaneously as Lam 1, 2, 3 and 4 stand alongside the CV of Lam 5.\(^{202}\) The Lamenter, Zion, and the 以下 may not have the final word, linearly, but they continue to speak alongside the CV in simultaneity. The same logic applies, \textit{mutatis mutandis}, to the question of whether answering voices in Deutero-Isaiah shut down or undermine voices in Lamentations, or vice versa. Again, progressivity indicates development through to a new point of view, even the move to penitential prayer.\(^{203}\) But the prior voices of Lamentations continue to coexist in the canonical text, as an eternally unmerged simultaneity of dissenting perspectives. Allowing that the text presents differing expressions as a simultaneity of voices allows multiple perspectives to stand, instead of letting voices that come later in the linear sequence shout over top of those that have preceded. As Bakhtin says of Dostoevsky’s novels, voice-ideas are “spread out in one place, as standing alongside or opposite one another, as consonant but not merging or as hopelessly contradictory, as an eternal harmony of unmerged voices or as their unceasing and irreconcilable quarrel.”\(^{204}\)

7.5 \textit{Lamentations 5: Conclusion}

Lamentations 5 comprises a prayer, a communal lament, to YHWH (albeit not a typical one). It highlights aspects of the people’s suffering and grief (5:2-18). Its desperate description is directed squarely at YHWH, as evidenced by explicit addresses at its opening and closing (5:1, 19-22). YHWH is questioned and called personally to account for his actions against, and inaction on behalf of, his people. But the people, too, have played their part, with the interpretation that this “misery and suffering is emphasized and interpreted as being punishment for sins: those of the forefathers (v. 7) and those committed by the people themselves (v. 16).”\(^{205}\) In Lam 5, the interpretive questions for theodicy

\(^{202}\) Cf. Dobbs-Allsopp, on poetry’s “quintessential occasionalness and its nonlinear strategies of signification (i.e., the need of lyric poetry to be read prospectively and retrospectively, vertically and horizontally)” (Dobbs-Allsopp, \textit{Lamentations}, 85).


\(^{204}\) Bakhtin, \textit{PDP}, 30.

\(^{205}\) Salters, “Yahweh and his People,” 362.
are first, whether sin dominates over suffering, or whether the portrayal of suffering prioritises accusation; and second, whether there is, or is not, hope, and on what grounds. Reading dialogically, there are hints of disagreement within the single utterance of the community. There is no monologic perspective expressed. Echoes of individual voices, whispers of Zion the woman, remain. Conflicting accusations and differing perspectives are held together within one chapter, one voice, one utterance. Finally, Lamentations 5 finishes, without resolution, with an unanswered appeal to the one who never speaks, providing an open ended invitation to read the poem, and the book, dialogically.\footnote{\textsuperscript{206} Cf. Eco’s open work, see §2.2.1 n. 42, 43.}
CHAPTER EIGHT: READING

LAMENTATIONS AS A POLYPHONY

It matters who is reading.

A responsible reader will need to sign her interpretation

with her life in some way.

—Barbara Green, Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship

8.1 Signing Interpretation with Life

In the introduction to this thesis I briefly identified myself as an evangelical feminist, attempting to read both faithfully and critically when I approach the biblical text. Now, having presented my analysis, I preface this final chapter with a fuller account of the process that led to my reading of Lamentations as a polyphony, and which then resulted in the thesis becoming a reading of readings of Lamentations. This constitutes a “signing of my life” to my work as I draw to a close.

As primarily an explanatory autobiographical interlude, this discussion can only tangentially touch on the contested worlds of evangelicalism and feminism. I make no attempt to provide full defenses or descriptions, and give no theological explanations of such sticky subjects as biblical authority or inspiration. Indeed, attempting a definition of either evangelicalism or feminism is nigh on impossible, and both are better considered to be plural, evangelicalisms and feminisms. For the present purposes, Andrew Sloane’s overview must suffice:
Feminists range from those who see Scripture and the faiths informed by it as irredeemably patriarchal, inimical to women and their interests, to those who see Scripture and (elements of) the faiths informed by it as liberating and life-enhancing for all people, including women (at least when properly understood and appropriated). Evangelicals vary widely on their views of Scripture (ranging from, say, strongly inerrantist views that tightly identify the words of Scripture with the Word of God, to infallibilist views and beyond, which see a more dynamic and complex relationship between them), [and] their understanding of the theological task (ranging from, say, strongly propositionalist views that see theology as a matter of systematizing the truth claims of Scripture, to post-conservative evangelicalism, which sees theology as seeking to articulate the narrative identity which is ours in the gospel in particular cultural contexts).¹

My original question, then, was how to read the Bible both faithfully and critically as an evangelical feminist. This, of course, was tied to my self-identification as a participant in both these discourses. From my evangelical Protestant upbringing in the Presbyterian church of Aotearoa-New Zealand, I received a fundamental conviction regarding the authority of Scripture, very much akin to the “God said it, I believe it, that settles it” bumper sticker brigade. As I read and studied more of the Bible, however, I became increasingly disturbed by portrayals of women in the text—the virgin-or-harlot dichotomy—and by the violence perpetrated against women (and others) by YHWH or YHWH’s agents (or others). I was particularly horrified by the “marriage metaphor” in the prophets, where YHWH is (abusive) husband and Zion is (unfaithful) wife. Why this metaphor to represent Israel’s idolatry, and what effect might the metaphor have on contemporary readers?²

¹ Sloane, introduction to Tamar’s Tears, xii-xiii.
² Cf. §3.1.2.3.
Given the wide expanse of the prophetic corpus, the limited time frame of a PhD project, and the melancholy bent of my personality, I turned my attention from the swathe of prophetic material to the particular variation of the marriage metaphor that appears in Lamentations. Here, Zion is a women bereft. Desolate and ruined she sits alone, widowed by her husband, abandoned by her lovers, and cut off from her captured children. There are indications of sexual abuse and violence in her past. Her nakedness is on display to all, and her bloodstains are sticky in her skirts. The enemy has fingered her delights and forcibly entered her sanctuary, in subtle but insistent ciphers for rape. This imagery—with the persistent beats that “she deserved it,” and “it was YHWH”—devastated me.

And while I understood that there were rhetorical reasons and literary precedents for the imagery, I found it more and more disturbing that Zion’s hurt is so frequently cast at the hands of YHWH. Lamentations seemed to depict “a God who not only allows disaster and tragedy but who enables and enacts it upon God’s own people.” Renita Weems’ questions thus struck a chord:

> What in the image of a naked, mangled female body grips the religious imagination? What can humiliating women and mutilating their bodies have to do with talk about God’s love for a people? Why do demagogues appeal to sexual images to frame what they have to say about political anarchy and religious idolatry?

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4  See §3.1.2.3.
Feminist readings alert biblical scholars to these kinds of questions, and address them variously. Athalya Brenner has been vocal in her critique of the marriage metaphor texts, stating:

One way of dealing with pornoprophetic texts is to expose and then reject them. This has certainly been the way I have chosen for myself. Other readers, although willing to employ a hermeneutic of suspicion to the point of exposition, might not be so willing to reject the texts. Troubled as they might become, they might wish to find an exegetical solution that might be theologically acceptable while neutralizing the texts’ harmful effects for gender relations.  

Brenner, then, highlights the way in which these questions take on extra significance for those who are concerned with how such texts work as Scripture. If Lamentations were simply an ancient text of no more than antiquarian interest, the pain and abuse of Zion could be somewhat alleviated. It is precisely its inclusion in Sacred Scripture that makes engagement with the awful metaphor so salient, and so problematic for a faithful evangelical interpretation. Again, Sloane provides a helpful overview of the questions at issue when attempting to undertake biblical interpretation from within both evangelical and feminist worlds, asking,

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8 See Osiek’s taxonomy, identifying “rejectionist, loyalist, revisionist, sublimationist, and liberationist” stances (Osiek, “Hermeneutical Alternatives,” 101; cf. Parry, “Feminist Hermeneutics and Evangelical Concerns,” 2-6).

9 Brenner, “Pornoprophetic Revisited,” 85.
is the text as a whole, or are particular texts, inherently oppressive? If so, how do we understand Scripture as God’s word? If not, how do we understand the criticisms that have been levelled against it and the features of the text that generate those criticisms? How do we wrestle with the historical and cultural particularity of the text/s while maintaining it is the word of a God of freedom and fidelity; a God of love and justice? What do we do with texts that seem to deny women the dignity we believe is rightly theirs—[ours] and which have been used in such ways? How do we hear the voice of feminist criticism, learning from it, without denying our evangelical heritage? In particular, how do we affirm the Bible as the authoritative word of the God of life in the face of such critique?10

My question thus became one of how this text, with this abhorrent imagery, might “work” as Scripture. For, as Braiterman observes, such “constitutional texts become objects of special care, devotion, attention, and love. Conversely, these very same texts (along with their faithful interpreters) invite conflict,

10 Sloane, introduction to Tamar’s Tears, xii. See further, Hoggard-Creegan and Pohl, Living on the Boundaries, 12-14 and passim; Parry, “Feminist Hermeneutics and Evangelical Concerns,” 1-28; Osiek, “The Feminist and the Bible: Hermeneutical Alternatives,” 96-109; Bird, “Feminist Interpretation and Biblical Theology,” 215-25; Bird, Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities, 248-64; Scholer, “Feminist Hermeneutics and Evangelical Biblical Interpretation,” 407-420; Sakenfeld, “Feminist Perspectives on Bible and Theology,” 5-18; Sakenfeld, “Feminist Uses of Biblical Materials,” 55-64; Tolbert, “Protestant Feminists and the Bible,” 5-23; Tolbert, “Defining the Problem: The Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics,” 113-26; Milne, “Toward Feminist Companionship: The Future of Feminist Biblical Studies and Feminism,” 39-59; McKay, “On the Future of Feminist Biblical Criticism,” 61-83; Russell, “Authority and the Challenge of Feminist Interpretation,” 137-46; Farley, “Feminist Consciousness and the Interpretation of Scripture,” 41-51; Ringe, “Biblical Authority and Interpretation,” 23-38; Trible, “If the Bible’s So Patriarchal, How Come I Love It?” 44-47, 55; Trible, “De-Patriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation,” 30-48. Note that many of these sources stem from an earlier period of scholarship, in which the intersection between approaches that upheld Scriptural authority and feminist critique was still of concern. In recent years the conversation has all but ceased. This is perhaps indicative of a more decisive parting of the ways, as feminist biblical scholars find less and less in common with evangelical entrenchments into authority. The 2012 volume edited by Andrew Sloane seeks to address this lack, albeit (ironically) primarily from male points of view (Sloane ed.), Tamar’s Tears). But it could also be indicative of a dwindling interest in, and perceived need for, feminist biblical studies in general. Exum, for instance, asks if “feminism [is] passé or just a bad word?” (Exum, “Where have all the Feminists Gone?” 4).
scorn, ridicule, hurt, hate, contempt, disgust, or apathy in the face of suffering and injustice.”11

Does accepting Lamentations, with its abhorrent imagery, as part of my constitutional text lay these charges of “conflict, scorn, ridicule, hurt, hate, contempt, or apathy” against me as an aspiring “faithful interpreter”? Must the disturbing double metaphor of Zion as scandalised woman and YHWH as brutalising master be accepted as somehow authoritative? What kind of a God does that posit? What do I do with that abusing and angry portrait, as a person of faith? These were the kinds of questions with which I was wrestling.12

Scholars are increasingly highlighting the shadow side of God, both in Lamentations and elsewhere in the Old Testament.13 God is murderer,14 abuser,15 unforgiving, and unforgiveable.16 These portrayals might be, for an outside observer, simply interesting relics and remnants of a gruesome but largely irrelevant religious past. But for “a person whose religious quest is to know the mind and heart of God,” this is indeed “a ‘land of terror.’ The very revelatory instrument that is supposed to draw the believer forward in her quest, the Scriptures, instead repel and diverts.”17 Braiterman does not put too fine a point upon it when he observes that gender violence, and myriad other “gender inequalities that characterize text and tradition alienate feminist readers, creating a deep religious crisis.”18

11 Braiterman, (God) After Auschwitz, 28.
13 Not that the violent God is absent from the New Testament, either, however! See, e.g., my study of the parables in Matthew in which God is depicted as an exacting authority figure, torturing, punishing, and casting people into outer darkness and eternal punishment (Matt 13:24-20, 47-50; 18:21-35; 21:33; 22:1-14; 24:45-51; 25:14-30, 31-46; Bier, “Violent Endings”).
14 E.g., Lee, “Mothers Bewailing,” 207.
16 E.g., Stiebert, “Human Suffering and Divine Abuse,” 212.
18 Braiterman, (God) After Auschwitz, 28; cf. Hoggard Creegan and Pohl, Living on the
And so I had (and still have!) two interests when I come to the text, both equally integral to my identity. First, I have an evangelical interest “in the integrity and usefulness of the biblical text,” and second, I have a feminist “interest in justice and a place to stand for [my] gender.”

I wished to retain the Bible’s status as Sacred Scripture, while at the same time objecting to imagery (and interpretation of that imagery) that equates female with harlotry, punishment, and sin; male with repentance, faithfulness, and trust; and YHWH with anger, vengeance, and abuse.

I turned first to Wolterstorff’s philosophical defense of the God who speaks, and his theoretical “double voiced discourse.” In this framework, a kernel of truth can be extracted from the text, while anything “morally dubious” is bracketed out as pure “form.” This, I hoped, would allow me to get to the heart of the text and its message while allowing the ugly metaphor to be discarded as its human “outer” layer. This project, however, proved in practice to be a fruitless wild goose chase. Wolterstorff’s analysis is primarily philosophical, and did not translate into actually reading the biblical text. As is evident from my study of Lamentations, form and structure together are integral to communicative effect. So I set aside Wolterstorff’s false dichotomy between form and content in favour of wrestling with the particularity of this metaphor, this form, this poetry, and this dialogue as Sacred text.

So I turned to the text and its voices, and set about discerning whether there were soundings that might have been submerged, silenced, or at the very least, have something more to say. I found Linafelt’s critique of the male-centred bias in Christian interpretations of Lamentations particularly compelling in this

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Meadowcroft, “In Whose Interests?” 166.

Bräiterman describes such an endeavour as an exercise in “textual apologetics” (Bräiterman, (God) After Auschwitz, 28-31). See §8.4 below.

Wolterstorff, Divine Discourse.

See Wolterstorff, Divine Discourse, 202-18, for his “second hermeneutic,” which is supposed to distinguish between divine and human discourse in a given utterance.


With Linafelt and Mandolfo I wondered whether attending to Zion’s protest in Lamentations could counteract the bias toward the רְנֵּבָּה, and the negative imagery of Zion portrayed by the prophets, respectively. Like Linafelt, Mandolfo purposefully turns up the volume of Zion’s discourse, and turns down the volume of the רְנֵּבָּה’s. But while helpful, the antitheodic move to attend to Zion resulted in a diminution of attention to theodic possibilities within Lamentations. While the רְנֵּבָּה’s apparent penitence is certainly offset and unsettled by Zion’s voice of protest, it, too, must be acknowledged as one strong and strident voice in (parts of) the text.

And so rather than focusing on One voice at the expense of the Other, I took to the text and attended to each voice in turn. I observed their perspectives, and, with O’Connor, wondered if I could argue that none of these voices and their views ultimately prevailed. Bakhtin’s theory of the dialogic offered an enticing tool toward this end. The possibility that a text could consist of distinct voices, participating equally in an unchoreographed dialogism of the idea, appealed immensely. Although there were problems with this conception, I determined to read Lamentations as if it were a polyphony, to observe, at least initially, the interaction of its evaluative points of view. To discern the various perspectives, I asked who each speaker found to be ultimately culpable for Zion’s devastation. I then stepped back to view the larger landscape, asking if these these evaluations were consistent in each chapter and over the book as a whole. Was there, finally, one perspective that prevailed, a monologic message of one sort or another?

It was in carrying out this endeavour—reading for the various perspectives—that I observed the phenomenon that became the driving force of this thesis. In determining a theology of Lamentations, the majority of interpreters read all the voices and perspectives in support of the claims they wish to make about the

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27 Cf. Braiterman, *God* *After Auschwitz*, 34.
29 See §2.2.4.
text, whether reading for theodicy or antitheodicy. And so I engaged my own readings of each chapter in conversation with these interpretations. Now, having carried out the individual chapter analyses, I look to the whole. Does one perspective prevail? Is there “a” theology of Lamentations? If so, is it one that reads in defence of Zion, or in defence of YHWH? And how might a dominant theological perspective even be determined anyway? In Bakhtin’s terms, is Lamentations, in the end, a monologic text, whose voices ultimately cede to a single, “authorial” perspective?

8.2 Reading Lamentations for a Monologic Message

Until now I have undertaken exegesis of Lamentations as if it were a polyphonic text, critiquing readings that tend too easily toward the monologic, whether theodic or antitheodric. Now, however, I change tack, and ask if Lamentations may, in fact, be read as monologic text. Amidst Lamentations’ varying voices, is there an overall discourse to which the multiple perspectives ultimately submit? How might such a view be determined? Where might a reader turn to discern the prevailing point of view? In exploring various options I draw on narrative-critical studies for guidance, given the relative dearth of material engaging point of view in poetry.30

8.2.1 Looking to Individual Voices for a Monologic Message

8.2.1.1. The Voice of YHWH provides the Prevailing Perspective of the Text

Polzin, in his enquiry into the dominant perspective of the Deuteronomistic history, maintains that “the ultimate semantic authority in the work, that is, the implied author’s main ideological stance, probably should be looked for both in the words of God and in the words of the narrator.”31 Alter, in his discussion of the final chapter of Job, suggests that when the poetic speech of God appears it

30 Cf. §2.3.
31 Polzin, Moses and the Deuteronomist, 27.
“looms above all other biblical poetry in virtuosity and sheer expressive power, the culminating poem that God speaks out of the storm soars beyond everything that has preceded it in the book.”

Human speech, then, is considered subordinate to divine speech in the Hebrew Bible, and the words of God are the first port of call for identifying an authoritative perspective in a narrative text. Indeed, for O’Connor, the direct speech of God is “the only fully authoritative voice in the Bible.”

Words from God’s own mouth are reckoned to hold the highest authority in a hierarchy of biblical speech. That the words of Jesus are written in red in some editions of the New Testament attests to this same expectation. In the Old Testament, too, there are words that are directly represented as God’s words, particularly in the prophets.

Indeed, direct speech from YHWH sometimes segues so seamlessly to and from a prophet’s own speech that it is difficult to distinguish between them. This phenomenon must in part contribute to the prophets’ own words being taken as on a par with YHWH’s, as will be explained in the next section.

In Lamentations, however, there is neither explicit nor, arguably, implicit speech from YHWH. Psalms and parts of Job do not fit the “speech from God” paradigm either. They are presented, in part at least, as speech back to God, or speech about God. As noted above, in Job the answering voice of YHWH appears to respond conclusively to Job within the book itself (Job 38:1-40:2), setting the record straight with the very words of God. Not that this answering voice itself is not problematic. Newsom asks, can “the dialogic process, as envisioned in the book of Job” actually “sustain the divine voice? Or does its presence repress all possibility of dialogue? Is the divine voice finally the author’s voice, privileging its perspective over all others, and so making the

34 E.g., Isa 46, 47, 55, where there are no narrative introductions to YHWH’s speech.
35 But note that Gerstenberger identifies the voice of YHWH “or an authorized officiant in his place” in 4:1-10 (Gerstenberger, *Psalms and Lamentations*, 498).
36 That is, “God does not remain beyond the frame but becomes a participant, contesting what has been said and offering another construction of reality” (Newsom, “Job as Polyphonic Text,” 105).
book a monologic utterance?”37 Indeed, the phenomenon of the divine voice quashing the dialogic, observable in Job, is precisely why O’Connor values the lack of speech from YHWH in Lamentations so highly, seeing it as an intentional move to preclude silencing debate. That is, “[h]ad the poets of Lamentations given a speech to God, God’s words would silence debate; the struggle with pain would come to closure prematurely. Any words from God would trump all speech.”38 YHWH responds in Job, and in doing so, potentially undermines the value of human speech.39 Nevertheless, divine speech does appear in Job to address authoritatively the fallible human perspectives.

No such response, however, is forthcoming in Lamentations. The only possible exception is 3:57, “you came near when I called on you; you said, ‘Do not Fear!’” (NRSV). As discussed in chapter 5, however, this quasi-quote is problematic.40 First, taken as a report of past activity by YHWH, it is not directly represented speech. It is quoted by the הוהי, indicated by the introductory “you said.” It is therefore a step removed from direct speech. By being embedded in another’s reported speech, it might bear double, or even triple-voiced nuances, whether of agreement, disagreement, or parody. Second, there is a case to be made for reading the verbs in 3:55-60 as precative perfects, that is, as wishful speaking for what might happen in the future.41 In this case, 3:57 is read as a plea to YHWH, “Come near when I call on you, say to me ‘Do not Fear!’ ” This is even further removed from direct divine speech, comprising a wish for some future word from God that may or may not yet be spoken. Lamentations thus contains

37 Newsom, “Job as Polyphonic Text,” 105.
39 Canonically, of course, there are similar concern regarding the words of 2 Isaiah, which appear to respond directly to Zion’s plea for a comforter (see especially Isa 40). Again, the question is whether, by providing answering speech from YHWH, the value of human speech in Lamentations is negated. This is certainly what has happened in the history of interpretation. See Linfelt, Surviving Lamentations, 62-63 and passim for discussion of how 2 Isaiah and other Jewish literature of “survival” has attempted to answer Lamentations in the history of its reception. Harding expresses concern that such attempts to mitigate distressing sentiments by subjugating them to 2 Isaiah’s triumphal voice does a disservice to the text, continuing to perpetuate the rhetoric of violence in its celebration of the return to the abuser (Harding, “In the Name of Love,” 1).
40 See §5.2.7.
41 See §5.2.7.
no unambiguously explicit God-words. Where else might one look for a
dominant point of view in Lamentations’ poetry?

8.2.1.2 The Voice of Prophet or Priest provides the Prevailing
Perspective of the Text

God’s speech, as noted above, is frequently mediated by a prophet in the biblical
text. Alter points out similarities between the words of God in Job, and
prophetic speech, suggesting then that when prophets speak, their speech puts
hearers in mind of the words of God. That is, if “we could actually hear God
talking, making His will manifest in words of the Hebrew language,” this–
prophetic speech–is what he would “sound like.”\footnote{Alter, \textit{Biblical Poetry}, \textit{141}.}
Divine speech is represented
as prophetic poetry, making clear that when the prophets speak, they speak on
behalf of God. The prophets, then, can be turned to for the divine, authoritative
point of view.\footnote{Alter, \textit{Biblical Narrative}, \textit{157}. See Polzin, on the way in which Moses’ speech as YHWH’s
prophet becomes imbued with divine authority (Polzin, \textit{Moses and the Deuteronomist}, \textit{27}
and passim.}

Despite attempts to equate the Lamenter with Jeremiah,\footnote{See §1.3.} however,
Lamentations contains no easily identifiable prophetic voice. Instead,
Lamentations attests to the \textit{absence} of prophetic vision (2:9). Further,
Jerusalem’s prophets are indicted, portrayed along with her priests as
bloodguilty and untrustworthy (2:14; 4:13). Having deceived the people in the
past, the prophets in Lamentations are silent. Even if they did speak, then, given
their role in Jerusalem’s downfall they could in no way be considered reliable.
In the absence of God’s appointed mouthpieces, the prophets, God cannot
speak.
8.2.1.3 An Omniscent Narrator Provides the Prevailing Perspective of the Text

Equating prophetic speech with divine speech has led, by extension, to the notion that the entire Bible is somehow “God’s word” in a prophetic-type paradigm.\(^45\) For example, Murray Rae asserts that “[t]he intention to tell where God is at work in the world is implicit in the subject matter of the biblical texts and is made explicit in such instances as the frequent prophetic refrain, ‘Thus says the Lord . . . ,’ and in statements of intent like those of Luke 1:1-4 and John 20:31.”\(^46\) In this conception, even when the prophetic refrain is not explicit, biblical words themselves become imbued with prophetic authority.\(^47\) In the absence of the explicit prophetic voice, then, readers look to biblical narrators, who, by the assumption that the entire Bible is an inspired word, take over the prophetic (and hence divine) authority. Polzin demonstrates this phenomenon at work in the Deuteronomic corpus. YHWH’s speech is reported by Moses, who holds the divinely appointed prophetic office. But Moses’ speech, in turn is reported by the narrator, and consequently, by the time Moses dies, the narrator has taken on the prophet’s own authority as YHWH’s mouthpiece.\(^48\) Bakhtin observed this same phenomenon at work in the written transmission of any authoritative speech. That is,

> The speaking subjects of high, proclamatory genres—of priests, prophets, preachers, judges, leaders, patriarchal fathers, and so forth—have departed this life. They have all been replaced by the writer, simply the writer, who has fallen heir to their styles. He either stylizes them (i.e., assumes the guise of a prophet, a

\(^{45}\) The model of inspired speech has been allowed to expand to encompass the entire text, even where it may not be entirely appropriate (see Goldingay, *Models for Scripture*, 1-18).

\(^{46}\) Rae, “Texts in Context,” 17.

\(^{47}\) Holmes regards the “prophetic and apostolic writings” as paradigmatic for theological interpretation, in light of “the prophetic office of Jesus Christ” (Holmes, “Revelation in the Present Tense,” n.p.)

\(^{48}\) YHWH’s authority as speaker is given first to Moses, and then to the narrator, such that by the end of the Deuteronomic History readers and hearers are accustomed to equating the words of the narrator with the authoritative word of the prophet, which in turn is reckoned equal to the authoritative word of YHWH (Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronist*, 32-34).
Biblical narrators thus take on the authority of the prophet, and hence, of divine speech. Consequently, literary critics understand the omniscient narrator to express the governing, authoritative perspective of the text.\textsuperscript{50} Biblical narrators control the presentation of characters and events at will, and command the dominant point of view.\textsuperscript{51} Even when other perspectives are expressed, these are subordinate to the narrator’s, which is assumed to be the same as YHWH’s.\textsuperscript{52} This narrative perspective is often covert, inveigled upon unsuspecting readers by “the self-effacing figures” of the narrators, who disappear into the background so as to present their ideology as the “unfailing perspective of God.”\textsuperscript{53}

But while many commentators do default to calling the Lamenter of Lam 1, 2, and 4 the “narrator,” Lamentations is \textit{poetry}, not narrative.\textsuperscript{54} The Lamenter does not “narrate” events as such, telling a story from a divinely appointed perspective. His is not the objective role of distant, omniscient “narrator,” but the invested, subjective role of Lamenter, intimately involved with the city he laments.\textsuperscript{55} There is thus no narrative view in Lamentations to which to appeal for a governing point of view.

\textsuperscript{49} Bakhtin, “Notes Made,” 132. Note that Bakhtin’s “writer” can be understood as the “narrator” (Vice, \textit{Introducing Bakhtin}, 126). \textsuperscript{50} Cf. Alter, \textit{Biblical Narrative}, 65; Berlin, \textit{Biblical Narrative}, 56. While narrators may well govern the perspective of the text, their perspectives need not necessarily be adhered to by readers. See Fetterly, \textit{The Resisting Reader}. Alter supposes that biblical narrators are always reliable (Alter, \textit{Biblical Narrative}, 184); and Sternberg, that “the Bible always tells the truth in that its narrator is absolutely and straightforwardly reliable” (Sternberg, \textit{Poetics}, 51). But this does not take into account readers suspicions nor the possibility that the narrator sets out to deceive (see, e.g., Gunn, “Reading Right,” 53-64). As Green observes, “[t]o assume narrator reliability, as though that voice were an unpositioned and nonediting voice, seems wholly inadequate” (Green, \textit{Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship}, 49). \textsuperscript{51} Alter, \textit{Biblical Narrative}, 35. \textsuperscript{52} Berlin, \textit{Biblical Narrative}, 56, 148n28; cf. Alter, \textit{Biblical Narrative}, 157; Bar-Efrat, \textit{Narrative Art}, 15. \textsuperscript{53} Alter, \textit{Biblical Narrative}, 157; cf. Bar-Efrat, \textit{Narrative Art}, 16. \textsuperscript{54} Cf. §3.1.2.1. \textsuperscript{55} As evidenced, for example, by his mournful \textit{יִֽהְנַֽהְנּ} (1:1, 2:1, 4:1), his embodied empathy (2:11), and his tender address in Daughter-\textit{my}-People (4:3, 6, 10)
Instead, there are simply characters in dialogue. Characters, too, may be the bearers of the ideological point of view of the text. In narrative, characters are mediated to readers by “the (implied) author, the narrator, or another character.” In Lamentations, in the absence of a mediating narrator, speakers express themselves directly. In narrative, a character’s words are weighed against their actions by the narrator. In Lamentations, speakers’ claims are neither corroborated nor rendered untrustworthy by an authoritative narrator. Instead, they are heard on their own terms. Might one of the speakers, then, present the prevailing perspective of the text?

8.2.1.4 The Lamenter Provides the Prevailing Perspective of the Text

Many commentators do call the opening speaker (my “Lamenter”) the “narrator,” and appeal to this figure for the objective, authoritative perspective. Even when understood as a character among other characters in the poem-world, however, commentators still deem his third person speech more authoritative than Zion’s first person perspective. This is in part because third person description has a “tendency to ‘depersonalize’ and ‘disembody’ the authoritative figure’s speech, so that it is not perceived as merely one person’s opinion.” Assuming the third person Lamenter speaks authoritatively leads some commentators to side with his initial assessment of Zion as sinful (1:5),

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56 Cf. Uspensky, Poetics of Composition, 8; Berlin, Biblical Narrative, 55.
57 Berlin, Biblical Narrative, 43, cf. Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art, 42. Aside from the small snatches when one of the major speaking voices mediates the speech of the onlookers (2:15c; 4:15a?), the children (2:12b), the enemies (2:16b,c), the nations (4:15c?), and once, potentially, YHWH (3:57).
58 Making poetry more akin to drama than to narrative, cf. Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art, 13. That is, they are internally focalised (Bal, Narratology, 152).
59 Cf. Fokkelman, Reading Biblical Narrative, 144.
60 Lanahan questions whether any of Lamentations’ voices might be considered the “sincere mode of expression used by the poet” (Lanahan, “The Speaking Voice,” 41).
61 E.g., Heim, “Personification of Jerusalem,” 169. See also §3.1.2.1.
62 Morson and Emerson, Prosacis, 164; cf. Mandolfo “Sanctioned Subversion,” 47. See also the discussion with Trudinger in §4.3.
and to read the dominant perspective of Lamentations as a message of necessary penitence.\textsuperscript{63}

As was shown in the analysis of Lam 1, however, the Lamenter, in interaction with Zion, “changes his mind.”\textsuperscript{64} While he, at first, accuses (1:5, 8-9), he then pities (1:10-11b), and finally acts as a witness to her pain (1:17).\textsuperscript{65} By Lam 2, the Lamenter has turned his accusations towards YHWH (2:1-10). If the Lamenter’s voice is understood as the “poet’s authentic voice,” which version of the Lamenter presents the “authentic” evaluation of the situation: the one who accuses Zion; or the one who pities and becomes a sympathetic “witness” to her, and an ally in her protest against YHWH? Lanahan is right to assert that equating this speaker’s speech with authorial speech is “manifestly inadequate and even simplistic after reading the entire book.”\textsuperscript{66} The Lamenter becomes ever more invested in Zion’s plight, shifting from a more theodic to a more anti-theodoc perspective as he witnesses her pain. He is simply one speaker among others, and, moreover, his perspective changes in dialogic interaction with Zion.\textsuperscript{67} He does not present a single, monologic perspective that can be identified as the theology of the text.

\textbf{8.2.1.5 The \textit{בָּנָּי} Provides the Prevailing Perspective of the Text}

The \textit{בָּנָּי} of Lam 3 is another popular candidate for providing the voice of reason and truth, presenting the message of Lamentations as one of required penitence. Heater goes so far as to claim that “most” commentators “agree that the writer wrote of himself in chapter 3,”\textsuperscript{68} making this the authorial, and thus authoritative point of view. Equating the \textit{בָּנָּי}’s discourse to the authorial view is linked to the citation of traditional discourses at the centre of Lam 3 (3:21-39),

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{63} See §3.3.4.
\item \textsuperscript{64} See §3.3.1.
\item \textsuperscript{65} See §3.3.3.1; 3.3.3.2.
\item \textsuperscript{66} Lanahan, “The Speaking Voice,” 41.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Cf. Boase, \textit{Fulfilment of Doom}? 212.
\item \textsuperscript{68} Heater, “Structure and Meaning,” 151. Heater provides no examples of the commentators to which he refers. As explained in §1.3, attempting to equate any one of the speaking voices with an actual historical direct speaker is indeterminable, simplistic, and naïve.
\end{itemize}
in which the רバリ allegedly turns from complaint to quietness and trust in an authentic moment of faith.

But it must be observed that in spite of his central hopeful statements, the רバリ, too, wavers. He expresses some beautiful sentiments of faith, yes, but he also wears out the vocabulary of grief with words of loss and pain along the way (3:1-20, 42b-54). He, too, does not present one overall, monologic perspective, in the struggle to reconcile his internally persuasive experience of suffering with the authoritative discourses of his faith.69

8.2.1.6 Zion Provides the Prevailing Perspective of the Text

Zion tends to be overlooked as a candidate for expressing the authoritative theological perspective in the book of Lamentations. Commentators dismiss her first person speech as subjective, rather than objective, and more expressive of emotion than “proper” theological reflection.70 Mandolfo observes this same phenomenon at work in the Psalms, where “protests are generally presented grammatically in the first and second person” which “makes the supplicant’s speech more personal, subjective, less authoritative.”71 Further, the assumption of Zion’s subjectivity is often tied to gender. That is, the female, “[e]motional Daughter Zion is often seen in contrast to the more typical, more theological, and less emotional male characters of the narrator and the רバリ.”72 For example, while Mintz allows that Zion is able to express pain, he contends that her female, first person voice is insufficient for wrestling with theological meaning. He declares that:

To deal with this threatened loss of meaning—what amounts to a threat of caprice, gratuitousness, absurdity—Zion as a figure is simply not sufficient; a woman’s voice, according to the cultural

69 See §5.3 and §5.5.
70 Mintz, Hirban, 32; contra Kalmanofsky, “Gender and Prayer,” 56.
71 Mandolfo, “Sanctioned Subversion,” 47.
72 Kalmanofsky, “Gender and Prayer,” 55.
code of Lamentations, can achieve expressivity but not reflection. And now acts of reasoning and cognition are the necessary equipment for undertaking the desperate project of understanding the meaning of what has happened.\textsuperscript{73}

For Mintz, then, the “solution is the invention of a new, male figure, the speaker of chapter 3.”\textsuperscript{74} But why, if Zion’s first person voice is considered suspicious, subjective, and less authoritative than a third person objective voice, should the רֶכֶל’s voice, also first person, be taken as more authoritative?

Linafelt rejects both the impulse for finding theological meaning, and the prioritising of the male רֶכֶל over female Zion, leading the charge in attending to Zion first and foremost. The idea is to dial up the register of Zion’s cries in order to “highlight a suppressed discourse. A discourse of anger and indignation—a resistance to her fate.”\textsuperscript{75} Attending to Zion’s pain is intimately connected to a more antithedical inclination in interpretation, in which the protest discourse is highlighted over against the רֶכֶל’s so-called “central,” penitential bent.\textsuperscript{76} In such readings Lamentations becomes more about the presentation of pure pain than any imperative for penitence, as Zion and her people air their grievances before the watching witnesses. Zion has the moral authority of the victim, the survivor.\textsuperscript{77} But attending to Zion’s discourse in order to redress the balance, while important, does not do away with the need to deal with the theodic strains of Lamentations that would not exonerate Zion.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{73} Mintz, 	extit{Hurban}, 32.
\textsuperscript{74} Mintz, 	extit{Hurban}, 32. Berlin contends that Lam 3, “more than all the others in the book, combines descriptions of suffering with theological inquiry into that suffering” (Berlin, 	extit{Lamentations}, 86).
\textsuperscript{75} Guest, “A Recriminative Response,” 434. Cf. Mandolfo, 	extit{Daughter Zion}; Linafelt, 	extit{Surviving Lamentations}.
\textsuperscript{76} But as Guest observes, attending to Zion still shelters and protects male interests, as she becomes a scapegoat behind which male figures may “hide” (Guest, “A Recriminative Response,” 413-48).
\textsuperscript{77} O’Connor, 	extit{Tears of the World}, 18; cf. Dobbs-Allsopp, 	extit{Lamentations}, 65.
\textsuperscript{78} Cf. Parry, 	extit{Lamentations}, 92.
8.2.2 Looking to Authoritative Discourse for a Monologic Message

Part of the reason why commentators take the  יִשְׂרָאֵל’s discourse as more authoritative than Zion’s is that he is seen to cite traditional, faithful discourses. Morson and Emerson explain that “if an utterance is felt to be highly authoritative (Scripture, for instance), it will probably be cited in a form of reported speech allowing for little opportunity to express agreement, disagreement, or other personal opinions.” ⁷⁷ The proverbial, wisdom-like speech of the  יִשְׂרָאֵל’s “central” discourse takes something of this character, with no pronominal suffixes connecting it specifically to the  יִשְׂרָאֵל’s speech (3:25-39). And some commentators do take this central discourse (which does follow on from a more personal confession of faith, 3:21-24) as the prevailing, proper perspective of Lamentations. ⁸⁰

Mandolfo examines this same phenomenon as regards to “prestige” languages, discourses of authority that appear within the Psalms. She identifies, in the Psalms of lament, the “settled theological voice” of Deuteronomy as one such prestige language. This appears in Psalms of lament in interaction with the more subjective “cries of individuals.” ⁸¹ Mandolfo observes that while the traditional authoritative discourse is often “‘felt to be right,’ ” when it is couched “within a supplicatory utterance, it is no longer taken for granted.” ⁸²

While prestige voices from the past might appear dominant and controlling over the whole text, then, the very fact of their inclusion in the genre of lament

⁷⁷ Morson and Emerson, Prosaics, 164.
⁸⁰ See §5.4.
⁸² Mandolfo, “Sanctioned Subversion,” 51. Thus “the authoritative hegemony of the didactic voice is not unshakable. In the mediated mouth of the Deuteronomist, the theological viewpoint of the didactic voice might seem fixed, but related dialogically with the discourse of the supplicant its position is decentered, and we are left with an epistemologically open-ended discourse” (Mandolfo, “Sanctioned Subversion,” 49).
“blows the otherwise monolithic message of the psalm wide open, with the result that a dialogic, rather then monologic truth about Israel’s God emerges.”

A similar dynamic is at work in Lam 3, as the ???? struggles to make the authoritative discourses of Wisdom, the Deuteronomist, and the prophets “internally persuasive.” His contention that “[w]e have sinned and rebelled, but you have not forgiven” (3:42) is one indication that the so-called “faithful one” is not himself convinced of the “prestige languages” of his own tradition. He undermines these discourses even as he appeals to them. Further, Lam 4 and 5 return to the despairing tone of Lam 1 and 2, also undermining the “central” faithful discourse. Thus by being embedded in the genre and rhetoric of lament, and by immediate and wider contextual undermining, the ????’s words of faithfulness and appeals to authoritative discourses cannot be straightforwardly understood as the “authentic” perspective of the text.

Boase works with the prestige languages of the prophets, demonstrating the many and various ways in which familiar theological motifs from these interwoven authoritative discourses are subverted by its deployment in Lamentations. As shown by Boase and Mandolfo, then, prestige languages or authoritative discourses are not cited innocently in Lamentations. They are subverted and rebelled against. Even when traditions are drawn upon in “emerging attempts to come to terms with the destruction . . . those attempts are not yet presented into a unified or resolved explanation.” The penitent ???? of Lam 3 does not, in the end, find the authoritative discourses he cites in the central section of the chapter (3:21-39), to be internally persuasive.

So much for Lamentations’ individual voices, and the authoritative discourses with which they engage. There is no single speaking voice, and no

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84 See §5.5.
85 Boase, Fulfilment of Doom? 239 and passim.
uncompromised prestige language to represent clearly the prevailing perspective of the text.\textsuperscript{87}

\section*{8.2.3 Looking to the Community for a Monologic Message}

Rather than looking to individual voices, I now step back to take in the landscape of Lamentations as a whole, asking whether in the overall trajectory there is an identifiable monologic message. Throughout the thesis I have observed a progression from the individual speaking voices of the Lamenter, Zion and the \textit{יְהוֹנָדָב}, through the increasingly expansive voice of Lam 4, to the communal voice, the “we” of Lam 5.\textsuperscript{88} Could the CV be the perspective that pulls everything together, merging the multiple voices, and systematising the individuals’ competing claims? I questioned the ethics of such an approach to lament in chapter 7, suggesting that in such a monolithic “we” the timbres of individual voices are lost or subsumed.\textsuperscript{89} Further, I found that even within the one, representative voice in Lam 5 there was still some ambivalence when it came to blame. That is, within the single utterance of the CV, there was no clear agreement as to culpability. Lamentations 5:7 somewhat ambiguously refers to “our fathers’” sin, suggesting protest that the current generation should experience punishment for previous generations’ sins. In Lam 5:16, however, there is a clear confession of “woe” to “us” because of “our sins.” The CV does not let the matter rest, however, continuing to confront YHWH for staying away for so long. The CV is thus found wanting when it comes to determining a prevailing perspective, continuing, within a single utterance, to equivocate.

\textsuperscript{87} Cf. Provan, who, while working with the rubric “authorial intent” rather than “perspective of the text” comes to a similar conclusion: “statements are . . . uttered by more than one voice, and the voices utter words from more than one perspective. . . . It is never made clear whether the author is actually to be identified with \textit{any} of the speakers, much less \textit{which} of the voices might be his” (Provan, \textit{Lamentations}, 18, emphasis original).

\textsuperscript{88} See especially §6.5.

\textsuperscript{89} See §7.4.
8.2.4 Looking to Form for a Monologic Message

Form and content work together, and should not be separated. For the purposes of determining a prevailing perspective, could the form of Lamentations provide some guidance as to its most important content, and hence, its “message”?

8.2.4.1 The Centre

As explained, the רָעַד’s discourse has long been a strong contender for providing the theological key to the book of Lamentations. As well as the assumptions regarding the רָעַד’s authority and the authority of the discourses he cites, commentators identify structural reasons for giving his discourse priority. They appeal to the centrality of his speech to uphold his perspective as the dominant view of the text. The portion of the chapter in which the רָעַד expresses faith and trust is reckoned to be the “centre” of the “central” chapter (3:21-39).

But just how “central” is this centre?

Thanks to the acrostic, the chapters of Lamentations have clearly defined boundaries, and Lam 3 is the central chapter of five. The increased acrostic intensity, from every third line to three lines a letter, signifies that something, at least, is special about Lam 3. There are certainly grounds for identifying Lam 3, and the “centre” of Lam 3 as a “central” idea. But there are different ways to conceptualise centre. As discussed in chapter 5, commentators often determine that “Right at the literal center of the book of Lamentations is an appreciation of the being of YHWH as the ground of hope.”

In a strict sense, however, I showed that the literal, mathematical centre of Lamentations occurs at 2:22b,c:

On the day of the anger of the LORD there was no fugitive, no survivor

90 Cf. §§5.3.1 nn. 247, 248.
91 Parry, Lamentations, 105, emphasis original.
Those I bore and raised my enemy has completely destroyed.\(^{92}\)

Determining the “centre” of Lamentations is thus not quite so straightforward. What difference would it make to read Lamentations with 2:22:b,c as the controlling, central idea? To read the whole through the lens of the enemy, YHWH, destroying children? Might there be other “central” ideas that may be brought into play?

Observing 2:22b,c as a second centre could contribute to a decentring of the usual gender assumptions made of Lamentations, shifting the gravitational pull of the book back from the central male figure, to the peripheral female. After all, Lam 1 and 2, where Zion is centrestage, comprise, mathematically, a little over half the book in total. Making this shift corresponds closely to shifting focus from the centrality of sin, to the centrality of suffering. The swing in recent interpretation is from a focus on the 722, to a focus on Zion. There is a concomitant prioritisation of protest, along with sheer presentation of pain, over the impetus toward penitence. The move to recognise an “other” centre is in keeping with these efforts. Observing that the weight of fully half of the text is concentrated in Lam 1 and 2 supports the move to a greater acknowledgement of Zion’s protest. Sin and the need for penitence can justifiably be identified as central to Lamentations. But suffering is also central.\(^{93}\)

Rather than simply exchanging one centre for another, however, could both central ideas be kept in play, simultaneously? Could 2:22 as centre and 3:21-39 as centre be held in tension, such that their antithetical “central” ideas comprise dipoles around which the book orbits elliptically, rather than 3:22-55 being the sun around which it circles? The kind of shift envisaged here is, once again, away from a monologic conception toward a Bakhtinian polyphony, “from a universe where there is thought to be a single center to the realization that there

\(^{92}\) See §5.4.

are multiple hubs (so from a Ptolemaic to a Copernican, or *mutatis mutandis*, from a Newtonian to an Einsteinian set of assumptions about reality."

Moreover, there may be *other* ways of conceptualising “centredness,” that might similarly decentre the usual construction. Renkema, for example, carries out an exhaustive structural analysis to find that “famine” is “the (literally) central position in the conception of the five songs.” Centrality, then, seems to be in the eye of the beholder. There are multiple possible centres, and as such, appealing to a single central discourse will not provide a prevailing perspective for Lamentations.

### 8.2.4.2 The End

Dobbs-Allsopp objects to appeals to the centrality of Lam 3 to provide the theological key to the book. He argues that the thematic climax of Lamentations is Lam 5, not Lam 3. Rather, “[t]he latter is only a peak, however impressive and remarkable, which is to be enjoyed and contemplated but ultimately surpassed en route to ch. 5.” In his reading, then, the supposed “high point of hope” in Lam 3 is swept away by the increasing desperation of Lam 4 and 5. Perhaps, then, when looking for a monologic message, it is in the close of the book that the work is summed up, and the prevailing perspective conveyed, a perspective that sinks back into despair in the absence of YHWH. But as demonstrated in chapter 7, Lam 5 finishes with decided uncertainty. Looking to the end of Lamentations will not allow an unambiguous theological perspective of any finality to be found.

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94 Green, *How are the Mighty?* 275; cf. Morson and Emerson, *Prosaics*, 240. Cf. elliptical geometries. Interestingly, Eco uses the same metaphors, the Copernican and Einsteinian universes, to illustrate his open work (e.g., Eco, *The Open Work*, 14, 18). Once again the synergy between Eco’s open work and Bakhtin’s polyphonic text is evident.
99 See §7.2.4.
8.2.5 Looking to the Canon for a Monologic Message

Internally, then, it is not obvious that a single theological perspective prevails. Could looking beyond Lamentations, to the greater canonical context, put Lamentations in its place and guide its interpretations? Lamentations does receive something of the response for which it cries in later writings, in what Mintz calls “survivals” of Lamentations.100 Within the biblical tradition, Lamentations’ voices do seem to be directly addressed by Deutero-Isaiah.101 Mintz explains:

The text of Second Isaiah displays a consciousness of its role as an antidote to the discourse of lamentation. Through echoes and quotations from the poetry of communal complaint, the prophet emphasized that it is precisely this discourse that has been superseded by the discourse of consolation.102

Reading this way, Lamentations’ voices are not just answered, but in fact “superseded” by later voices. The “antidote” to all this despair is found elsewhere as Lamentations cedes control to a dominant discourse that defends the goodness, love, and mercy of YHWH.103 The supreme example is the announcement, in Isa 40, that the comfort for which Zion was so desperate has come (Isa 40:1). Cold comfort, though, one might suggest, for the dead children.

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100 Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 18. Linafelt examines “survivals” of Lamentations in Deutero-Isaiah, Rabbinic writings, and contemporary Jewish literature responding to Lamentations. Christian Brady reads the Targum as an interpretation of Lamentations that “transformed the Book of Lamentations into a rabbinic manifesto for the synagogue, absolving God of all guilt, declaring Israel’s culpability, and presenting the path towards reconciliation through repentance and rabbinic worship” (Brady, *Targum Lamentations*, 4).


102 Mintz, *Hurban*, 44. Cf. Sommer on Lam 2:17-19 and Isa 62:6-7, in which he observes that 2 Isa “reverses the lament” (Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 128). Similarly, he suggests Isa 51 “as a whole reverses the negative message found in its source,” that is, in Lam 2:13-19 (Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 130); and that Isa 40:1-11 “may” allude to the “there is no comforter” (Lam 1:2, 9, 16, 21) refrain (Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 165-66).

Do the comforting tones of Deutero-Isaiah adequately address the pain of Lamentations? Or do they essentially shut down the petitioner’s voice by imposing an answering divine voice, thus silencing any (legitimate) protest on the part of daughter Zion? Can a promised—yet still far from certain—restoration adequately make up the years of exile, and the pain of rape and abandonment? After such extreme suffering, is there ever a satisfactory answering word? Has too much been lost? At what point is suffering sufficiently severe so as to sever the relationship between YHWH and Zion? How much must YHWH’s people bear at the hands of YHWH before there is no way back to reconciliation?

In chapter 4 I questioned the ethics of the Lamenter’s urging Zion to plead to YHWH (2:18-19). While Deutero-Isaiah can be read as the denouement of this return, I still question whether it is prudent to advocate, indeed, to celebrate restoration to the abuser. YHWH, after all, has done all of this to Zion. Should readers rejoice that “[t]he woman of sorrows—deserted by her husband, stripped of her children, violated by heathens—will have restored to her all she has lost. She will forget the ‘shame of widowhood’ and her new children, the children of ‘the wife forlorn/Shall outnumber those of the espoused.’ ” Is it a comfort to learn that YHWH “will be not just her comforter but her husband as well”? This seems somewhat insidious, to me.

Further, while Deutero-Isaiah is often prioritised, Lamentations is still, after all, part of the canonical scriptures in both Jewish and Christian tradition. Zion’s voice has not been excised, suggesting a there is a place, canonically, for the

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105 See §4.2.4.


107 Mintz, Hurban, 45. The same question pertains, for example, to whether Job’s “new” children make up for the ones he has lost, Job 1:2; 42:13-17.

108 Mintz, Hurban, 45; cf. Jer 31:31-34.
voicing of protest. Could Lamentations’ voices somehow unsettle and destabilise Deutero-Isaiah’s assurances of comfort? There is, in Deutero-Isaiah’s opening address to Daughter Zion, a suggestion of concession that her suffering has been excessive. She has received “double” (בְּפִים, Is 40:2) for her sins. Comfort or no, this suffering has been excessive. However obliquely, then, Zion continues to resist.

8.3 Reading Lamentations as a Polyphony

The interpretive tendency, even when recognising multiple strands in the text, is to monologise. Indeed the very impulse toward finding coherence in a text is itself perhaps a false assumption on the part of biblical scholars, betraying an expectation that biblical texts should conform to some unity, even when that text is unable to agree with itself. Contrary to readers’ desires for coherence, the poems in Lamentations “steadfastly resist all attempts to superpose on them a single unifying theological perspective.” In rebutting the overwhelmingly theodic readings of modern interpretation, Linafelt insists that Lamentations, “contrary to the consensus of biblical scholars, is more about the expression of suffering than the meaning behind it, more about the vicissitudes of survival than the abstractions of sin and guilt, more about protest as a religious posture than capitulation or confession.” In a similar vein, Mandolfo asserts that Lamentations “is less concerned with guilt and blame and more concerned with the experience and expression of suffering.”

But Lamentations is concerned with guilt and blame. It is also concerned with protest and accusation. And in all its concerns, it attests to excessive pain. For

111 Linafelt, “Presentation of Pain,” 279, emphases original.
113 Cf. Allen’s pastoral commentary, which came to my attention only in the finally stages of completing this PhD. He identifies what he calls three “trajectories” in Lamentations, strands of the text that are tightly interwoven but that express variously grief, guilt, and grievance (Allen A Liturgy of Grief, 15-22). This typology is very close to my reading of Lamentations as a polyphony of pain, penitence, and protest, respectively.
protest and penitence; suffering and sin; and accusation and acceptance are present among and within speakers’ voices in Lamentations. There is no clear divine voice in Lamentations, and no prophets left to speak of. There is no narrator to mediate, no reliable narrator-like voice to whom to assign the authorial ideology, or to evaluate which of the speaking personae presents the “right” theological perspective. Each speaker cites a range of ideologies and expresses a range of evaluations, in interaction with other discourses, both those of the other speakers and those of authoritative tradition. Appealing to any single speaker for a prevailing point of view quickly becomes a self-defeating endeavour. Multiple voices double-voice aspects of the tradition and juxtapose opposing explanations within tight compositional unity so that speakers undermine each other’s reliability. Answering speech in Deutero-Isaiah is unsettled by Lamentations’ ongoing presence, canonically.\footnote{114} Given that a prevailing, monologic message cannot easily be determined, I return to my opening premise and affirm that Lamentations is better understood as a polyphonic text.\footnote{115}

I identified constitutive elements of polyphonic texts according to Bakhtin in chapter 2,\footnote{116} and now give a brief reprise in light of Lamentations. First, polyphonic works exhibit a \textit{plurality of consciousnesses}. Lamentations’ voices can be read as plural consciousnesses each brought to bear on the happenings around 587 BCE. Second, polyphonic works exhibit the \textit{embodiedness} of points of view in dialogue. Lamentations’ voices are not disembodied propositions, but strongly visceral (e.g. 1:20-22; 2:11; 3:11-17). Even traditional discourses are mediated by being couched within lament language, so that these too are given person-ality (e.g. 3:25-39). Third, polyphonic works exhibiting dialogic truth display a \textit{resistance to system}. While there is strong structural, poetic, and thematic unity, Lamentations does not display any systematic enunciation of theology. Fourth, polyphonic works are \textit{unfinalizable}. The ambiguous ending of

\footnote{114}{Cf. Harding, “In the Name of Love,” 1-15.}
\footnote{115}{Cf. Boase, \textit{Fulfilment of Doom}? 203-204.}
\footnote{116}{See \S2.2.3.}
La 5 and the many survivals of Lamentations in ongoing literature demonstrate that the conversation is by no means closed. Polyphonic texts do not privilege the position of the author. Any authorial ideology appears on the same footing as characters’ perspectives in what constitutes a democratization of the text. While I question the possibility of ever actually achieving equality of utterance, dialogic tension in Lamentations makes it sufficiently difficult to determine which of the speakers or perspectives, if any, might be “more equal” than the others.

Lamentations, then, can be read as a polyphony. Reading Lamentations as polyphonic text “suggests a model in which the ‘truth’ about a difficult issue can only be established by a community of unmerged perspectives, not by a single voice, not even that of God,” or further, of the text claimed to be “word of God.” Thus “the rich interrelationships among utterances will need to take over from the tendency (so richly indulged by many) to extract and abstract quotes and think one has thereby made a free-standing statement or buttressed a point.”

Instead, the questions become: Which voice do I choose to privilege? Whose evaluation do I prefer? Do I side with the third person Lamenter, assuming his objectivity? What happens when he changes his mind and sides with Zion? Do I side with Zion, who, though she admits fault, protests her treatment bitterly? Do I sit with the in quiet penitence, figuring my troubles must somehow stem from sin? What about when he, too, lashes out in vehement accusation? For any given individual, just how much is invested in protecting the (God of the) text?

118 See §2.2.4.2.
120 Green, How are the Mighty? 78.
8.4 What is Invested? Theodicy and Antitheodicy as Apologetic for the Text

House’s commentary has been my first point of reference for a theodic understanding of Lamentations. His work demonstrates a commitment to upholding a “sense of commitment to Scripture as divine revelation,” and the a priori conviction that God is just. As such, House affirms that YHWH in Lamentations is “righteous, just, powerful, kind, severe, compassionate, faithful, and willing to hear and answer prayer.” The text thus becomes the “basis for hope,” as it continues to call successive communities to confession and faith, in the wake of sin and its consequences.

Guest also sees in Lamentations a defense of the justice of YHWH, but she takes a very different attitude toward the text. For Guest, the theodic justification of YHWH and the male, at the expense of Zion and the female, is thoroughly objectionable. She critiques the way in which the female metaphor allows male perpetrators to remain blameless, and argues, therefore, that both Lamentations, and the Zion metaphor should be excised from the biblical text entirely. Ironically, however, she partially negates her own argument by engaging with the very text she despises. By the act of writing, she keeps discussion of Lamentations and Daughter Zion very much alive. Her contribution to the dialogue continues to be heard, and the text receives ongoing attention.

And in fact Stiebert insists that the text must receive ongoing attention, even as she perceives within it an entirely different portrait of YHWH. For Stiebert,

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121 Preface to House, Lamentations, viii.
122 House, Lamentations, 278 and passim.
123 House, Lamentations, 329.
124 House, Lamentations, 329.
125 Guest, “A Recriminative Response,” 413 and passim.
127 Cf. the way in which the advocates sitting in silence, without complaint, within his own complaint (3:26, 28).
YHWH in Lamentations is “sinister and brutal,” and must by no means be justified.\textsuperscript{128} But while accepting no excuse for YHWH’s “berserker” behaviour, Stiebert still maintains that “keeping this record of atrocity, like the records of other atrocities—the Shoah and apartheid South Africa—is essential.”\textsuperscript{129} In this dynamic, even though it presents difficulties and abominations, it is important to keep Lamentations in focus, in light of the ongoing synergy between world and text. Stiebert values the text for the way it keeps important issues central, even as she finds its portrait of YHWH morally abhorrent. Even when reading antitheodically, then, interpreters can still find some value in the text.

Indeed, Zion’s antitheodic resistance gives Mandolfo cause to justify and celebrate the text as protest literature.\textsuperscript{130} This raw expression of honesty before YHWH in Lamentations is especially salient for faithful readers, who find the antitheodic sentiments and protest element of Lamentations liberating. The expression of complaint in Lamentations becomes a helpful paradigm for future generations to express the cries of their heart, “honest to God,” while remaining within the faith.\textsuperscript{131} As such, the text is valuable in reminding the congregation that all spheres of life matter to YHWH, and that all concerns are to be brought to YHWH.\textsuperscript{132}

Of course, this presupposes that Lamentations does not overstep the bounds of appropriate speech before YHWH. The poems are merely sanctioned complaints, agreed forms for venting to God.\textsuperscript{133} Further, it suggests that the

\textsuperscript{128} Stiebert, “Human Suffering and Divine Abuse,” 195.
\textsuperscript{129} Stiebert, “Human Suffering and Divine Abuse of Power,” 215.
\textsuperscript{130} Mandolfo, Daughter Zion, 128.
\textsuperscript{131} Allen, A Liturgy of Grief, 161.
\textsuperscript{132} Cf. Brueggeman, “The Costly Loss of Lament,” 64; cf. Westermann, Lamentations, 81-85
\textsuperscript{133} Mandolfo observes that the lament genre “has a specific ideological agenda, and all voices contained within it are compelled, more or less effectively, to be at its service” (Mandolfo, “Dialogic Form Criticism,” 76). For Mandolfo, “[t]he genre is, after all, a religious or cultic creation and is primarily in the service of upholding God’s authority” (Mandolfo, “Dialogic Form Criticism,” 76). Williamson, on the other hand, suggests Lam 5:22 disrupts the sanctioned lament form by breaking into a “private” transcript (Williamson, “Public and Hidden Transcripts,” 80).
disagreeable elements of the portrait of YHWH in Lamentations are mere rhetoric, and do not reflect the reality of the situation. YHWH, although coloured darkly in parts of Lamentations, is ultimately trustworthy and remains faithful. Thomas’ reading of Lamentations as open text, for example, finds that the rhetoric of the poetry allows both theodic and antitheodic sentiments to be expressed. Readers can select which way they read, legitimately following one line of interpretation or another.\textsuperscript{134} The ground and grammar for this strategy, however, is the presupposition that God is in \textit{fact} good, remaining present to be addressed in prayer.\textsuperscript{135}

This presupposition is crucial for O’Connor on a personal level. Throughout her theological commentary she advocates reading for multiple points of view.\textsuperscript{136} In the end, however, she concludes that “[a]lthough they offer contradictory testimonies, the predominant opinion among them is that God is cruel and violently abusive.”\textsuperscript{137} O’Connor avers, then, that “if God really is violent and abusive as well as gracious and merciful, I want nothing to do with religion. If God’s character is both abusive and merciful, as the biblical texts maintain, then there is nowhere for the abused to turn.”\textsuperscript{138} Where O’Connor turns, is to the possibility that “[t]he God who does not afflict or grieve willingly may be a God who cannot alter the forces at work in the world.”\textsuperscript{139} She sacrifices omnipotence on the altar of theodicy, positing a God who is actually good, and only portrayed so negatively in Lamentations because he is unable to do anything. It is to “this possibility that [she] cling[s] as to a life raft on a turbulent sea.”\textsuperscript{140} Lamentations as \textit{text}, however, remains a vitally important space for expressing pain, a “school for prayer” to YHWH.\textsuperscript{141}

\textsuperscript{134} Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 220.
\textsuperscript{135} Thomas, “Poetry and Theology,” 220.
\textsuperscript{136} O’Connor, \textit{Tears of the World}, 14, and passim.
\textsuperscript{137} O’Connor, \textit{Tears of the World}, 110.
\textsuperscript{138} O’Connor, \textit{Tears of the World}, 119.
\textsuperscript{139} O’Connor, \textit{Tears of the World}, 122.
\textsuperscript{140} O’Connor, \textit{Tears of the World}, 122.
\textsuperscript{141} O’Connor, \textit{Tears of the World}, 126.
All these readings of Lamentations, then, comprise efforts in what Braiterman calls textual apologetics. “In the face of evil and suffering,” he explains, this is “the means by which readers justify texts, traditions, and traditional-readings-of-tradition.” Textual apologetics consists in “upholding the relevance and value of textual canons.” Somewhat damningly, Braiterman goes on:

From a defensive point of view, apologists . . . attempt to render constitutional texts unobjectionable, significantly absolved of responsibility for evil or suffering. They overlook, pacify, exorcise, or otherwise master the demons who haunt the text and the multiple layers of tradition in which it is embedded. Apologists argue that text and tradition, when viewed positively, generate narrative and practical meanings that remain worthy of transmission under proper conditions. In the end, however, apologists justify themselves. At all costs they must not resemble obscurants clutching a dying literature or irrelevant practice. Rather, they remain virtuous defenders of a venerable tradition or bold interpreters of a still-vital canon. In either case they defend their own devotion. Their work and thoughts retain abiding depth and significance since one can still profit from reading the texts and traditions that they champion. Apologists thereby reach this conclusion. They have wasted neither their own time nor the time of the community by poring over outdated or even dangerous books. The tradition (whether in its entirety or in part) is rendered good and wholesome despite all evidence to the contrary.

All of the readings with which I have engaged, with the possible exception of Guest and Seidman, are concerned to find some value in the text. Regardless of whether Lamentations is read as theodicy, as an apologetic for YHWH, or as

142 Braiterman, (God) After Auschwitz, 29.
143 Braiterman, (God) After Auschwitz, 19.
144 Braiterman, (God) After Auschwitz, 50, emphasis original.
antitheodicy, as an apologetic for Zion, there is an underlying apologetic for the text.

8.5 Conclusion

Lamentations does not present a ready-made theology. Instead, it consists of multiple voices, presenting multiple theological evaluations of the relationship between Zion’s sin and her suffering. Each speaker expresses immense pain, as well as something of penitence and something of protest. Lamentations is a polyphony, a representation of dialogic, rather than monologic, truth. Even so, interpreters tend toward monologisation in their interpretation, employing a variety of reading strategies to support their inclinations to read either theodically or antitheodically. Whatever their final assessment of the text, almost all conclude that studying Lamentations is of some value, either because of the hopeful perspective it expresses, or in spite of its lack of hope. To this end, readings of Lamentations comprise exercises in textual apologetics. By keeping the text in focus, their readings ultimately result in championing not only the text and its interpreters, but also the God of the text.

8.6 Postscript: Signing Interpretation with Life, Reprise

At the beginning of this chapter, I related something of my journey as an evangelical feminist setting out to read the Bible both faithfully and critically. Although this endeavour was the impetus for beginning the PhD process, it was not the question the thesis ultimately came to address. Inevitably, new angles present themselves and become compelling as research progresses. As such, the thesis became a reading of Lamentations as a polyphony, and a reading of the ways in which interpreters construe its many perspectives for theodicy or antitheodicy. Having carried out my analysis and made my case for reading Lamentations as a polyphony, however, it now behooves me to come full circle and suggest implications for how I might now read, in light of Lamentations. In keeping with the spirit of Bakhtin’s polyphony, the following reflections are unfinished and cry out for further response.
I identified, then, two major interests in my approach to Lamentations, an interest “in the integrity and usefulness of the biblical text,” and an “interest in justice and a place to stand for [my] gender.” How does reading Lamentations as a polyphony allow me to address both these interests hermeneutically? Putting it simply, it means I do not have to choose between them.

My evangelical impulse toward upholding the integrity and usefulness of the biblical text has some affinity with the growing interest in the theological interpretation of the Bible. This is not quite the same as reading with a preconceived theology that one wishes to find within the text, such as theodicy or antitheodicy. Rather, the aim of theological interpretation is to read according to the Bible’s own integrity, “as Christian Scripture so as to hear God’s address.” Now, from the outset this assumes that there is some address, a message to be discerned and heard, which, as seen in my reading of Lamentations, is not always straightforward to determine. Acknowledging this difficulty in deciphering what exactly might constitute God’s address, Murray Rae advocates reading and interpreting Scripture “in the light of Scripture.” That is, theological interpretation should proceed according to the “logic that is internal to Scripture,” to read the Bible “on its own terms.” Theological interpreters seek “a hermeneutical framework within which the reading of biblical texts must take place if it is to be faithful to the distinctive theological character of the texts themselves.”

145 Meadowcroft, “In Whose Interests?” 166.
146 Green, “Introducing the Journal of Theological Interpretation,” i.
147 Rae, “Texts in Context,” 19.
149 Rae, “Texts in Context,” 20. Green asks, “can Bakhtin’s assertions about genre and its capacity to help us think elucidate interpretation? Might we ask, what is biblical narrative strategically, rather than what is it formally? How does it think?” Green, Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship, 28, emphasis original. Provan’s commentary “approaches the poems not only in their own terms, but also in terms of their relation to each other” (Provan, Lamentations, 29).
Reading Lamentations as a polyphony has some major ramifications when teamed with this insistence that reading be faithful to the “distinctive theological character of the texts themselves.” Polyphonic texts call for response, inducing future generations of readers and hearers to participate in the dialogue. Reading according to the text of Lamentations itself, then, is to read dialogically, taking part in the ongoing dispute over the nature of YHWH, and the appropriateness, or otherwise, of imposing devastating suffering as punishment for sin.\textsuperscript{151} Reading Lamentations as a polyphony means recognising, ideologically, that according to the responding and responsive nature of the text itself, further voices are compelled to participate.

Further, as Bakhtin would have it, in a polyphony no one voice is finally persuasive. There is no obvious authoritative message. Lamentations is not a prophetic pronouncement from on high. Reading according to the text itself, then, suggests a model for Scripture that is very different from the usual evangelical construals of biblical texts and their authority. For where, in the eternal harmony of unmerged voices, is authority to be located? Reading Lamentations as a polyphonic text thus yields a model for Scripture in which there is no dominant voice. Disputing orthodox statements of faith is allowed, \textit{according to the theological character of the text itself}. Within the logic of dialogic truth, contemporary voices may express their own perspectives alongside those of the text, and discern for themselves whether Scripture’s traditional authoritative religious statements are internally persuasive. And indeed, the plethora of interpretive conversations and divergent conclusions of readers of Lamentations suggests such dialogic activity is already taking place.\textsuperscript{152}

To be sure, the model “polyphony” cannot be facilely applied to all parts of the Bible. Parts of Paul’s letters, for example, do not hold the same sense of openness to dialogic engagement as Lamentations. Indeed, John Goldingay

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{151} Cf. O’Connor, \textit{Tears of the World}, 121-22; Mandolfo, \textit{Daughter Zion}, 19-23.
\item \textsuperscript{152} Cf. Sawyer, \textit{God, Gender and the Bible}, 9.
\end{itemize}
cautions against taking observations about parts of Scripture as paradigmatic for the whole, in attempts to find an all-encompassing metamodel.\textsuperscript{153} He observes the way in which models describing some part of Scripture have been “stretched” to apply to the entire biblical text, whether appropriate or not.\textsuperscript{154} I gave the example earlier of the way in which the prophetic paradigm, made explicit in the prophets by the “thus sayeth the Lord” refrain, is extended to construe the Bible in its entirely as “Word of God” even when that makes little sense.\textsuperscript{155} I am not suggesting, then, that “polyphony” and “dialogue” displace other long held models for Scripture and its interpretation. Indeed, to suggest such a move would be, itself, an exercise in monologisation. Nor am I suggesting that a dialogic reading of the Bible contribute to a “dethroning of biblical authority as it is now construed.”\textsuperscript{156} Rather, I am advocating for the inclusion of polyphonic text as one among other models for Scripture, and proposing that to read accordingly—that is, dialogically—can broaden and enrich a concept of Scripture’s speaking and its authority, in keeping with the text itself.\textsuperscript{157} Extending the model of polyphony to Scripture and its authority complements other models, and implies that talking back, discussing, resisting, and disputing perspectives in Scripture are all legitimate forms of faithful reading.

As such, it is entirely appropriate, indeed it is faithful to the theological character of the text itself, to critique and deconstruct its ideologies of violence and its rhetoric of rape. Yvonne Sherwood defines deconstruction as the

\textsuperscript{153} Goldingay, Models for Scripture, 16.

\textsuperscript{154} Goldingay, Models for Scripture, 6-17. The four models Goldingay identifies include Scripture as witnessing tradition (narrative/gospel); Scripture as authoritative canon (law etc); Scripture as inspired word (prophets); and Scripture as experienced revelation (poetry, revelation) (Goldingay, Models for Scripture, 18).

\textsuperscript{155} Goldingay, Models for Interpretation, 1. See §8.2.1.3.

\textsuperscript{156} As advocated by Mandolfo, Daughter Zion, 5.

\textsuperscript{157} Cf. Newsom, “As a descriptive category, polyphony is a useful model for understanding the nature of the biblical text, one that can avoid some of the distortions of the various attempts to grasp its unity in terms of center, system, and abstract summary” (Newsom, “Bakhtin and Dialogic Truth,” 296). Green suggests that “to work creatively with this set of seminal insights from Bakhtin can change the way in which we read the Bible and consequently the way the Bible is read, which has the potential to alter the way Scripture is understood” (Green, Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship, 191). This is precisely what has happened as I have undertaken my reading of Lamentations with Bakhtin.
“attempt to draw out the text in its own logic and idioms, but also to think about the limits of the text by holding it up to the scrutiny of its own logic.” While theological interpreters and those interested in deconstructing the text would not usually be considered natural allies, it seems that in the case of Lamentations, reading “according to how the text works” (theological interpretation) amounts to precisely “holding the text up to the scrutiny of its own logic” (deconstruction). Thus the objections I have made on ethical grounds—to the marriage metaphor, the portrayal of Daughter Zion, the abusive YHWH, the call for retaliation—are not at all out of keeping with upholding the integrity and authority of the polyphonic text.

Does reading dialogically allay my concerns? Reading dialogically addresses my evangelical impulse to uphold the integrity of the Bible by interpreting according to “Scripture itself.” In turn, if Lamentations is a polyphony that explicitly and implicitly invites participation, then reading according to its “internal theological logic” is to read dialogically, voicing and evaluating multiple perspectives, and subjecting its objectionable ideologies to critique. This addresses my feminist concern that the atrocities in Scripture not go unquestioned or worse, unnoticed.

And somewhere along the line, my anger at the abusing God, and my hopes for a God in whom I could have faith, came to be, if not resolved, at least held together more lightly. Reading as a polyphony, uttering the unutterable is allowed, and statements of protest take their rightful place alongside more orthodox statements of faith. I can affirm, on the one hand, that this is my sacred text through which God speaks, and on the other, protest the way in which women are treated, critiquing the text’s many and varied violent atrocities. The conversation is not yet closed, and this is a comfort to me.

(IN)CONCLUSIONS

The question addressed by this thesis is whether there is a prevailing theological perspective in Lamentations. Attempting to summarise “the” theology of Lamentations, however, monologises a multivoiced, polyphonic text. An overall perspective cannot be incontestably determined. Lamentations is thus better read as a polyphony, comprising unmerged perspectives interacting dialogically.

Reviewing the literature on Lamentations established the tight structural and poetic unity of Lamentations, as well as the theological diversity in the backdrop to Lamentations. In their assessments of the message or theology of Lamentations, however, interpreters tend to read Lamentations as either primarily theodic, or primarily antitheodic. While admitting my own antitheodic proclivity, I sought an approach to reading that could take account of both the structural-poetic unity, and the multiple theological potentialities of competing voices in Lamentations.

The methodology chapter developed this approach, drawing on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. Although not a perfect analogy, I established that Lamentations could helpfully be read as a Bakhtinian polyphony. That is, in Lamentations, different perspectives, embodied by different voices, interact in a dialogism of the idea. To explore this interaction I turned to Uspensky’s work on point of view, highlighting the evaluative, or ideological, point of view in order to trace the interaction of theological perspectives in Lamentations.

To identify these theological points of view, I asked who each speaker found to be primarily to blame for Zion’s pain. I was interested in whether speakers accepted, or resisted, the notion that Zion’s suffering was deserved punishment
for her sins, and how the perspectives of the speakers interacted dialogically. Interwoven with these readings I demonstrated how commentators read Lamentations in support of either theodic or antitheodic interpretations, and examined whether, in a given chapter, one of these perspectives were more persuasive.

In Lam 1, Zion initially deflects blame, but then progresses to entertaining seriously the notion of her own sinfulness. The Lamenter, however, moves in the other direction, from assuming that Zion’s nakedness and shame are deservedly on display, to highlighting how YHWH and her enemies have colluded against her. The two speakers, initially expressing differing evaluations, progress to an exchange of perspectives. Consequently, neither voice is reliably representative of an overall view. Within scholarly commentary, however, I identified reading approaches that read the chapter monologically as either theodicy or antitheodicy.

The stances of the Lamenter and Zion then become more aligned in Lam 2. Themes of shame, sin, and despair give way to the dominance of anger and accusation of YHWH, with the Lamenter becoming explicitly sympathetic toward Zion. The contention that “God has gone too far” is the prevailing perspective from both Zion and the Lamenter. The voices of the Lamenter and Zion have thus influenced each other in dialogic interaction. Even so, some commentators are able to make a case for theodicy in this chapter too, in spite of the weight of accusation against YHWH. The accusation, however, is offset by the confessions in Lam 1 such that reading dialogically, both theodicy and antitheodicy remain in play.

In Lam 3, the נַבִּיא undertakes an internal dialogue. He calls on the authoritative discourses at his disposal, but finds them ultimately unpersuasive in light of his experience of suffering. The נַבִּיא runs the gamut of emotion, wallowing in despair and grasping at hope. He urges the people of Zion to return and to
repentance, before lapsing again into hopelessness. He pleads— as Zion did—the YHWH would take notice and act on their behalf against their enemies. He indicts YHWH, but also speaks the most extended affirmation of YHWH’s justice in the entire book of Lamentations (3:21-42). This is a boon for theodicy, with many scholars reading it as the central core and theology. YHWH is good, sinners should wait quietly and repent. But the inner conversation continues.

The נבּ turns to YHWH with both admission and accusation: “yes, we have sinned, but you have not forgiven.” The נבּ thus demonstrates the changes in mood, perspective and attitude through which one speaker might progress, in an attempt to reconcile official, “authoritative” discourse with the innerly persuasive discourse of his experience. This is an attempt, moreover, that has not yet been successful.

In Lam 4 the Lamenter evaluates various participants’ roles in the downfall of the city, casting aspersions at different strata within society in turn. From mothers to priests, none are innocent. From babes in arms to royalty, none have escaped. In each portrayal, the specified group potentially represents the whole. While accusation against Jerusalem is certainly present, it is juxtaposed with the fierce, over the top anger of YHWH, keeping the two in tension. Lamentations 4 makes an important move to the communal voice in verses 17-20, bringing the tragedy together as a matter of concern for all. This prefigures Lam 5, which takes up the collective voice in earnest and in desperation.

Lamentations 5 is spoken in a communal voice, implying the community as a whole coming together in prayer. But nuances of disputing perspectives remain. YHWH is directly questioned and called personally to account for his abhorrent actions, in some of the most unambiguous accusations in Lamentations. But the people, too, have played their part, both the ancestors and the current generation. Once again there are conflicting understandings of the appropriateness, or otherwise, of the devastation, held together within one collective voice.
The speakers of Lamentations thus hold varying evaluations of the relationship between suffering as just or unjust punishment for sin. There is conflict and disagreement both within chapters and utterances, and across chapter and utterance boundaries. Speaking voices in Lamentations do not always agree with each other, and even “change their mind” over the course of the book. Speakers are not bound indefinitely to a single perspective. There is willingness to entertain the speech and the idea of another and adopt it as one’s own. None of these voices presents an unambiguous, dominant perspective. In Bakhtin’s terms, there is no clear monologic message.

Even so, readers delight in monologising, seeking coherence with their own theological understandings. Reading for theodicy, readers privilege Lam 3 as the central message controlling the meaning of the other chapters. They appeal to the male צְאוּ as the figure of appropriate faith who is to be emulated. When attention is paid to Zion, it is to highlight her acknowledgement of sin, which is privileged over her protest. Affirmations of YHWH’s righteousness and justice are preferred over any suggestion of accusation. YHWH is just, and Zion’s suffering is equal to her sin.

Antitheodic readers, by contrast, shift the focus from the “centrality” of faith in Lam 3 to the presence of protest in Lam 1 and 2. In so doing, they appeal to female Zion as a protesting victim seeking an empathetic audience for her pain, rather than the male צְאוּ as a submissive penitent. Zion’s admissions of sin are acknowledged, but these are contextualised by the extreme suffering that surrounds them; suffering that, verse for verse, predominates over mention of sin. Antitheodic readings point out that the nature of Zion’s sin is unspecified in Lamentations, casting a question over its basis. And rather than highlighting statements of YHWH’s justice, antitheodic readings prioritise any protest against him. They draw attention to the inherent evil involved when children and innocents suffers for the sins of others. YHWH is unjustifiably harsh, and Zion’s suffering is not equal to her sin.
While most readings of Lamentations do acknowledge, on the one hand, the culpability of Zion and her people, and on the other, the extreme punishing action of God, each tends to side with one of these stances as the “real” meaning and message. Either sin has attracted justified punishment for which penitence and patience is required; or, regardless of the seriousness of her sin, such severity of suffering inflicted by a divine being is unjustified, even evil, and requires protest.

The very variety of interpretations in the scholarly commentary, along with the long history of “survivals” of Lamentations, suggests a dialogue already taking place within and among readings and readers of Lamentations. And indeed, part of the inherently responsive and responding nature of the polyphonic text is the invitation to participate. In the ongoing dialogic interaction with Lamentations, further research could fruitfully explore the implications for reading that follow from recognising that Lamentations, indeed the Bible as a whole, can be read as a polyphony. I touched on this in the Postscript to chapter 8, but there are further avenues yet to explore. According to the nature of the dialogic, polyphonic text, how then should we read? Who may participate? Is any one interpretation to be preferred? On what grounds? What are the limits of interpretation? Which voices are allowed, and which, if any, are to be evaluated and found wanting? For while there may not be reasons to prefer one point of view over another in terms of a prevailing perspective, there may be moral or ethical, yes even theological reasons to favour a particular stance. Indeed, this is why readers champion the theodic and antitheodic stances that they do. But on what grounds can a reading be evaluated? What are the limits of valid interpretation? According to whose standard? I stated in the postscript to chapter 8 that reading dialogically means I need not decide between perspectives or interpretations. But could there be ethical reasons for preferring one over another? And if readings are to be compared and contrasted and favoured for one reason or another, does there come a point at which the conversation is closed? Another angle for enquiry, alluded to tangentially
throughout the thesis, would be to put Lamentations in intentional conversation with Job, exploring the dialogic interactions within each book comparatively. How does the rhetoric of sin and innocence differ between the books, and what difference does it make that in Job, YHWH speaks? Does the divine voice close down the dialogue, addressing humankind definitively?

In the dialogism of the idea in Lamentations, no perspective is finally persuasive. Each speaker voices something of penitence, and something of protest, and in the polyphony of its poetry, neither perspective is allowed to prevail. At the same time, Lamentations expresses unfathomable depths of pain, as the people beseech the absent YHWH to come their aid. There is no resolution, no concluding divine voice to bring clarity or closure. Reading Lamentations as a polyphony holds the multiple theological perspectives together in a dialogism of the idea, “an eternal harmony of unmerged voices.” A dialogic reading of Lamentations, then, need not conclude whether theology in Lamentations is finally theodic, or antitheodic, or both, or neither.

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1 Bakhtin, *PDP*, 30.
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APPENDIX: TRANSLATION OF
LAMENTATIONS

Lamentations 1
1 O how she sits bereft, the city that was great with people!
She has become like a desolate widow, (she that was) great among the nations!
Princess of the provinces, she has become an indentured slave!

2 Weeping, she mourns in the night, her tears upon her cheeks
There is no comforter for her, from all those who love her
All her friends have been treacherous, they have become her enemies.

3 Judah is exiled in her misery and abundance of servitude,
She dwells among the nations, she can find no rest
All her pursuers have overtaken her in dire straits.

4 Zion’s roadways mourn, for no one comes to her festivals
All her gates are desolate, her priests sigh
Her maidens grieve and it is such bitterness to her!

5 Her opponents have become the master, her enemies prosper
For the LORD has afflicted her for her great transgressions
Her little ones walk the way of exile in the presence of her enemies.

6 Gone from daughter Zion is all her splendour
Her rulers are like stags who have found no pasture
They flee helplessly before the pursuer.
7. Jerusalem remembers, in, the days of her affliction and homelessness,
   All the delights that were hers in the old days—
   When the people fell by the hand of the foe and there was no helper for her
   They saw her, the foe; they laughed at her destruction.

8. Jerusalem has certainly sinned, she has become unclean.
   All those who used to honour her now scorn her, for they see her naked shame.
   She herself sighs aloud and turns her face away.

9. Her uncleanness was in her skirts, she took no thought of her future.
   She has fallen from great heights and there is no comforter for her.
   Look, O LORD, at my misery, for my enemy is so great!

10. The enemy has fingered all her delights.
    She has even seen the nations enter her sacred place—
    Those whom you commanded should not go into your congregation.

11. All her people sigh from searching for bread,
    They trade her delights for food to restore their life.
    “Look, O LORD, and see, for I have become worthless!

12. Is it nothing to you, all you who pass on the way? See, and look,
    If there is any sorrow like my sorrow, with which I have been afflicted,
    Which the LORD has inflicted upon me in the day of his burning anger.

13. From on high he sent fire deep into my bones, and trampled me down.
    He cast a net for my feet and turned me away.
    He has made me desolate, all my days faint.

14. He bound my transgressions into a yoke, by his hand they were entangled.
    They came down heavily upon me, my strength falters.
    The LORD has given me into the hand of those against whom I cannot stand.
The LORD tossed aside all my mighty men within me,
He announced the appointed time to break my young men.
As in a wine press he has trampled the virgin daughter Judah.

For all this I weep, my eyes, O my eyes flood with tears!
For a comforter is far removed from me—someone to restore my life—
My children have become desolate, for mighty is my enemy.

Zion reaches out her hands, there is no comforter for her
The LORD commanded against Jacob, his enemies surround him.
Jerusalem has become menstruous in their midst.

The LORD himself is just, for I rebelled against his word.
But hear, all you peoples, and see my suffering!
My young women and my young men have gone into captivity.

I cried out to my lovers, they betrayed me
My priests and my elders perished in the city
While searching for food to restore their life.

Look, O LORD, how distressing this is to me, my stomach churns;
My heart thuds painfully within me, for I have indeed rebelled.
Outside the sword bereaves; inside, it is death.

They heard all my sighing; there is no comforter for me!
All my enemies heard of my trouble, they rejoice that you have done this to me.
Bring on the day you declared, when they too will be like me!

Let all their evil come before you and afflict them
As you have afflicted me for all my sins!
For great are my groanings, and oh! my heart is faint!
Lamentations 2

1 How Adonai in his anger has set daughter Zion under a cloud
He has cast down from the heavens to earth the splendour of Israel
and not remembered his footstool in the day of his anger.

2 Adonai has consumed, no mercy!, all the habitations of Jacob
He has broken down, in his fury, the strongholds of daughter Judah;
He has thrown to the ground, in dishonor, the kingdom and her princes.

3 He has cut down, in his burning anger, all the might of Israel;
He has withheld his right hand from them in the presence of the enemy;
He has burned in Jacob, like a flaming fire, consuming all around.

4 He has bent his bow like an enemy, he has set his right hand like a foe;
And he has slain every delight for the eye
In the tent of daughter Zion he has poured out his fury like fire.

5 Adonai has become (like) an enemy; he has engulfed Israel;
He has consumed all her palaces, laid in ruins his strongholds,
And multiplied in daughter Judah mourning and lamentation.

6 He has done violence to his booth like a garden, ruined his feasts
The LORD has abolished in Zion festival and sabbath,
And rejected, in his fierce anger, king and priest.

7 Adonai has scorned his altar, disowned his sanctuary;
He has delivered into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces;
A voice was raised in the house of the LORD like in the day of festival.

8 The LORD determined to lay in ruins the wall of daughter Zion;
He marked out the line, not withholding his hand from consuming;
He caused rampart and wall to lament; they languish together.
Her gates have sunk into the ground; he has ruined and shattered her bars; Her king and princes are among the nations; there is no law
Indeed her prophets find no vision from the LORD.

The elders of daughter Zion sit on the ground, they are silent;
They have thrown dust on their head, they have put on sackcloth;
The young girls of Jerusalem have bowed down their heads to the ground.

My eyes are spent with tears; my stomach contorts;
My bile is poured out on the ground because of the destruction of Daughter-My-People,
Because infants and little ones faint in the streets of the city.

They cry to their mothers, where is grain and wine?
As they faint like the sword-slain wounded in the streets of the city.
At the pouring out of their lives upon their mothers’ bosom.

What can I say to you, to what compare you, O daughter Jerusalem?
To what can I liken you, and comfort you, O virgin daughter Zion?
For great as the sea is your destruction; who can restore you?

Your prophets have seen for you emptiness and whitewash;
They have not laid bare your iniquity to reverse your captivity,
And they have seen, for you, oracles: empty and misleading.

They clap their hands at you, all who pass along the way
they hiss and wag their heads at daughter Jerusalem;
Is this the city they called perfection of beauty, joy of all the earth?

They rail against you, gaping open their mouths, all your enemies
They hiss, and gnash their teeth, they cry: we have devoured her!
How we longed for this day, we’ve found it; we’ve seen it!
The Lord has done what he purposed, carried out his threat;
That which he announced from days of old; he demolished and he has not pitied;
He has caused your enemy to rejoice over you, he has raised up the horn of your foes

Their heart cried out to Adonai. O Wall of Daughter Zion,
Let out a torrent of tears, running down day and night!
Give no relief to yourself, no respite to your eyes!

Rise up, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches
Pour your heart out like water before the presence of Adonai
Lift your hands up to him for the lives of your little ones,
fainting from hunger at the head of every street.

Look, O LORD, and see, whom you have afflicted this way
Should women consume their offspring, the little ones of their tender care?
Should priest and prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord?

Young boys and elders lie the ground in the streets
My young women and my young men have fallen to the sword
You slew them, in the day of your anger; you slaughtered, you pitied not.

You called together my adversaries as though for a festival day
And on the day of the anger of the LORD there was no fugitive, no survivor
Those I bore and raised my enemy has completely destroyed
Lamentations 3

1 I am the man who has seen affliction at the rod of his anger  
2 (it is) me he has driven and made to walk in darkness and not light  
3 Now he turns, and turns his hand against me again, all day long.

4 He has wasted my flesh and skin, he has broken my bones  
5 He has walled me in and enveloped me with poison and trouble  
6 He has made me dwell in darkness like the ancients long dead

7 He has hemmed me in and I can’t escape; he has made my chains weigh heavily upon me.  
8 Even when I call out and cry for help he blocks out my prayers.  
9 He has bricked up my ways and twisted my path

10 He is a bear ambushing me, a lion in hiding  
11 He has confused my way and torn me apart, he has made me desolate.  
12 He has taken aim with his bow and stood me in place as the target for his arrow

13 He has shot his arrows into my innards  
14 I have become the laughingstock of all my people, their mocking song all day long  
15 He has filled me up with bitterness, sated me with wormword

16 And he makes my teeth break on gravel, he makes me cower in the ashes  
17 My וָנָו is bereft of peace, I have forgotten happiness  
18 So I say, my hope from the LORD is forever destroyed

19 Remember my affliction and homelessness, wormwood and poison!  
20 I constantly bring it to mind and my spirits drop  
21 (of) this I remind my heart and for this I hope
22 That the lovingkindness of the LORD is not finished, that his compassions are not complete
23 They are renewed with the morning, great is your faithfulness
24 The LORD is my portion, said my soul, therefore I hope in him.

25 The LORD is good to the ones waiting for him, to the soul seeking him
26 (It is) good to wait, and be silent, for the LORD's salvation
27 (It is) good for a man to bear a yoke in his youth

28 To sit alone and be silent for he has imposed it upon him
29 To give his mouth to the dust, perhaps there is hope
30 To give his cheek to the smiter and be satisfied with reproach

31 For the Lord will not reject forever
32 For if suffering, then compassion; for great is his lovingkindness.
33 For he does not afflict them, and make the sons of men suffer, from his heart.

34 To crush under his feet all the prisoners of the land
35 To extend judgment to a man in the presence of the Most High
36 To a perverted man in his strife. The Lord does not see.

37 Who can speak and it be done if the Lord has not decreed?
38 Do not both evil and good proceed from the mouth of the Most High?
39 What person alive can complain, a man because of his sin?

40 Let us test our ways, and search out and return to the LORD,
41 Raise our heart and our hands to God in heaven
42 We have sinned and rebelled; you have not forgiven

43 You have covered with anger and pursued us, you have slain without pity
44 You have covered yourself with a cloud, preventing prayers passing through
45 You have made us waste and rubbish amongst the peoples
46 All our enemies have opened their mouths against us
47 A pit of panic upon us, devastation and destruction
48 Streams of water flow from my eyes because of the destruction of Daughter-my-People.

49 My eyes pour out without ceasing, there is no respite
50 Until the LORD looks down from heaven and sees
51 My eyes severely afflict my soul because of all the women of my city

52 Those who are my enemies for no good reason have hunted me out like a bird
53 My life has been destroyed in a pit and they threw down stones upon me
54 Waters rose over my head, and I said to myself, I am lost

55 I cried out your name, LORD from the depths of the pit
56 Hear my voice, do not hide your ear from relieving me and from my cry for help
57 Come near on the day I cry out to you, say, do not fear.

58 Struggle on my behalf Lord, my soul, redeem my life
59 See, LORD, my wrong, judge my cause
60 See all the vengeance and their determinations against me

61 Hear their reproaches LORD, all their determinations against me
62 Their lips rise against me, talking about me all day long
63 At work or at play they look at me with teasing songs

64 Repay them, LORD according to the works of their hands.
65 Give them anguish of heart, your curse upon them!
66 Pursue them with anger, let them be utterly destroyed from under the LORD’s heavens.
Lamentations 4

1 O how the gold is tarnished, the pleasing gold so altered;
   they are poured out—the sacred stones—at the head of every street

2 The precious sons of Zion, weighed up by refining—
   O how they are considered as earthenware vessels, the work of a potter’s hand!

3 Even jackals give the breast to feed their cubs
   Daughter-my-people is cruel, like ostriches in the wilderness

4 The tongue of the infant sticks to the roof of his mouth from thirst
   Little ones plead for bread, no one gives it to them

5 Those who feasted on delicacies are desolate in the streets
   Those who were raised in purple embrace the ash heaps

6 For greater is the iniquity of Daughter-My-People than the sin of Sodom
   Which was destroyed in a moment, no hands laid upon her

7 Her upper class were purer than snow, more dazzling than milk
   Their self more radiant than jewels, their appearance like sapphire

8 They are darker than soot; their forms unrecognisable in the streets
   Their skin has shrivelled upon their bones, it has withered, it has become like woodbark.

9 Happier were those slain by the sword than those slain by hunger
   —those pierced and drained from lack of food from the fields

10 The hands of compassionate women have boiled their children
   They have become food for them in the destruction of Daughter-my-People.
The LORD's fiery anger was complete, he poured out his burning wrath. He kindled a fire in Zion, it consumed her foundations.

The kings of the earth and all who dwell in the world did not believe. That foe and enemy went in the gates of Jerusalem.

Because of the sins of her prophets, the iniquities of her priests—who poured out the blood of the righteous within her—

they wandered blindly through the streets defiled with blood not able to touch their clothing.

Away, unclean, they cried to them, away, away do not touch. They fled and wandered, they said among the nations, no more to dwell.

The Lord made them scatter, he will continue to disregard them. The priests were not raised up, the elders were not honoured.

Again, longer still, our eyes looked for a helper; futile. In our watchtowers we watched for a nation that did not save.

The end came near, our days filled up, our end is come. They hunted our steps when we went about in the streets.

Our pursuers were swifter than eagles of the skies. Upon the mountains they pursued us; in the wilderness they ambushed us.

The breath of our nostrils, anointed of YHWH, was captured in their pits. Of whom we said, under his shadow we will live among the nations.

Rejoice and be happy daughter Edom, dwelling in the Land of Uz. But to you also will pass the cup, you will be drunk and you will be naked.
22 Your iniquity is complete, daughter Zion; no more will be added to your exile
Your iniquity is appointed, daughter Edom; your sins will be exposed.
Lamentations 5

1 Remember, LORD, what has happened to us; look, and see our shame
2 Our inheritance has been given to strangers, our homes to foreigners
3 We have become orphans, father gone; our mothers like widows.
4 We buy the water we drink; our wood comes at a price
5 We are pursued upon our necks; we are weary, there is no rest for us.
6 We have given the hand to Egypt, to Assyria to be filled with bread.
7 Our fathers sinned, they are no more, we ourselves bear their iniquities.
8 Slaves rule over us; there is no one to snatch us from their hand.
9 Our bread comes by our lives, from the heat in the wilderness.
10 Our skin is hot as an oven from the scorching heat of hunger.
11 Women are raped in Zion, young women in the towns of Judah.
12 Princes are hung up by their hands; the elders are not honoured.
13 Young men carry the grinding mill, and boys stagger under wood.
14 The elders have quit the city gate, the young men their songs
15 Rejoicing has quit our heart, our dancing has turned to mourning.
16 The crown is fallen from our head; woe now to us, for we have sinned!
17 Because of this our heart has become faint; because of these things our eyes have dimmed
18 Because of Mount Zion, desolate. Foxes roam upon it.
19 You, O LORD, reign eternally, your throne from generation to generation.
20 Why have you forgotten us forever, forsaken us these long days?
21 Return us to yourself, O LORD, and we will be returned, renew our days as of old.
22 Even though you have thoroughly rejected us, are angry with us in the extreme.