

# **Re-Presenting Dislocation: The Poetics of Exile and Diaspora in Ancient Jewish Texts**

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## Abstract

This thesis considers examples of ancient Jewish literature that present open-ended poetics concerning exile and diaspora. Part I of the thesis focuses on the book of Lamentations, Second Isaiah, and 1QS to demonstrate that these examples present the resolve of exile as deferred, and do not focus solely on physical homecoming. Part II considers how the diaspora narratives of Esther and Joseph also reflect an open-ended poetics towards exile and diaspora by the way in which they characterise the diaspora heroes/heroines. Moreover, the interpretations of Esther in antiquity present an open-ended poetics by portraying the exile and diaspora as part of a larger history of displacement that is neither inherently negative nor absent of divine providence.

The language of “opened-endedness” is inspired from the work of Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, who discusses how some Jewish texts offer “closure” to the “narrative of exile,” whereas others are more “open-ended.”<sup>1</sup> In terms of biblical scholarship, and scholarship on Second Temple, Hellenistic literature and beyond, ancient Jewish literature is often regarded as containing closed poetic expressions concerning exile and diaspora. In the case of texts such as Second Isaiah, this literature is largely portrayed as a body of work that failed as prophecy because its idealized imagery of homecoming did not historically come to pass. Moreover, the diaspora narratives of Esther and Joseph, and the interpretations of Esther in antiquity, are often regarded as apologising for aspects of diaspora life, or as viewing the state of exile and diaspora as a burden. However, this thesis argues that these examples belong to a larger history of ancient Jewish texts that reflect upon displacement, suffering, and its impact on the divine’s relationship with the people in poetically nuanced ways.

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<sup>1</sup> Ezrahi explores Zionism’s impact on Jewish literature; see Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, *Booking Passage: Exile and Homecoming in the Modern Jewish Imagination* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2000), 235.

## Abstracts of Part I and Part II

Part I of thesis discusses how the book of Lamentations, Second Isaiah,<sup>2</sup> 1QS and Yehuda Amichai's poem "Jews in the land of Israel" present open-ended poetics concerning exile. These ancient texts are chronologically earlier than the texts in Part II, and therefore focus on the concept of exile. Chapters One and Two discuss how the book of Lamentations and the book of Isaiah grapple with exile as something that occurs as a result of divine punishment and address the uncertainty that exile creates in the relationship between the people and the divine. The wilderness becomes an important symbol throughout Second Isaiah, and is also present in Lamentations, to address the people's relationship with the divine and how it is impacted by displacement. This part of the thesis explores how both Lamentations and Second Isaiah create an open-ended poetics concerning exile, and what metaphors, motifs, and stylistic features contribute to this effect, with Lamentations presenting a thoroughly open-ended and dialogic poetics of exile.

In Chapter Three, I consider 1QS's interpretation of Isaiah 40:3 to show how it builds upon Second Isaiah's open-ended poetics of exile by interpreting the command to "clear a path in the wilderness" (בַּמִּדְבָּר פָּנּוּ דֶרֶךְ יְהוָה) with "the study of the law" (מִדְרַשׁ הַתּוֹרָה). Part I concludes by bringing these examples into conversation with a modern Hebrew poem by Yehuda Amichai, "Jews in the Land of Israel." This poem alludes to the "transformation of the wilderness" motif as found in the book of Isaiah to reflect on how physical homecoming did not resolve the trauma and difficulties created by exile. Drawing these examples together shows how these ancient Jewish texts have a comparably complex perspective on exile, suffering, and homecoming.

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<sup>2</sup> Isa. 40–55.

Part II of the thesis considers how the trauma of displacement<sup>3</sup> becomes narrativized and creates an open-ended poetics towards diaspora in the book of Esther, its versions in antiquity in Greek and Aramaic, as well as the Joseph narrative in Genesis. Chapter Four explores how Esther and Joseph, whose stories share many similarities, are characterised as diaspora heroes/heroines, and how their characterisation creates an open-ended poetics. Chapter Four focuses on the relationship between the feminization and subordination that Esther and Joseph experience as displaced persons, as well as how the themes of hiding and deception display the anxieties that diaspora communities may experience.

Chapter Five considers in more depth the versions of Esther, focusing on the Aramaic interpretation and translation known as the Targum Sheni.<sup>4</sup> The Tg. Sheni presents Esther's diaspora experience as congruent with past experiences of suffering and displacement now known to us in the Hebrew Bible, such as the longstanding conflict between the Israelites and the Amalekites during the time of Israel's wandering in the wilderness. An open-ended poetics towards diaspora is reflected in the Tg. Sheni in that Esther's experience of displacement is not portrayed as a complete rupture with past life before the exile, or as antithetical to Jewish identity.<sup>5</sup> Rather, the experience of diaspora is woven into the past.

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<sup>3</sup> I use "displacement" as a general term when exile and diaspora might be too specific. Later in the introduction I discuss the semantic overlap between exile and diaspora, which is another reason why I occasionally refer to "displacement." "Displacement" is a broader term that refers to being moved from one place to another. Therefore, it can encompass potential overlaps between exile and diaspora.

<sup>4</sup> This will be abbreviated to Tg. Sheni throughout the rest of this thesis.

<sup>5</sup> Hector Patmore, "The Beginnings of Jewish Late Antiquity: The Fate of the Book of Esther," in *A Companion to Religion in Late Antiquity*, Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World, ed. Josef Lössl and Nicholas Baker-Brian (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2018), 257–276 (272).

## Introduction

This dissertation explores how exile and diaspora are addressed with an open-ended poetics in the book of Lamentations, Second Isaiah, 1QS, the book of Esther and its versions in antiquity.<sup>6</sup> These texts demonstrate how exile and diaspora were addressed in poetically nuanced ways in ancient Jewish literature by leaving the exile or diaspora as unresolved, and as something which does not require closure through physical homecoming. Drawing together the insights of scholars in biblical studies and of antiquity, as well as studies in modern Hebrew literature, challenges the ways in which ancient Jewish literature has been portrayed as lacking poetic complexity in its engagement with these concepts. Part I focuses on the open-ended poetics of *exile* in the book of Lamentations, Second Isaiah and 1QS, and Part II considers the open-ended poetics of *diaspora* in the Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic versions of Esther with references to the Joseph narrative in Genesis.<sup>7</sup>

## Defining Key Terms and Approaches

The following paragraphs discuss some of the technical terms, methodologies, and key elements of scholarship that play a role in my literary analysis and interdisciplinary approaches to these texts.

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<sup>6</sup> Unless stated otherwise, all translations of the Hebrew will be from the NJPS, and translations of the versions of Esther in Greek are from NETS. I use Bernard Grossfeld's translation of the targumim to Esther as found in Bernard Grossfeld, *The Two Targums of Esther* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991). For all translations, adaptations to the line breaks and capitalization may occur.

<sup>7</sup> Gen. 37–50.



## Poetics

The term poetics refers to the study of the “building blocks” of literature.<sup>8</sup> The poetics of a text can include motifs,<sup>9</sup> linguistic patterns or structures, recurring literary devices, plots, and characters.<sup>10</sup> Narratology, for example, which focuses on the structure of narratives and their study, is a subdivision of poetics. Throughout this thesis, particularly in Part I, I consider several motifs that relate to and conceptualize aspects of displacement in ancient Jewish texts, and I also consider how these motifs are received in later texts. Part II of the thesis focuses more on elements of plot, narrative, and characterisation in the versions of Esther and the Joseph narrative. All these aspects fall under the aegis of poetics, and they respectively illuminate how these texts reveal the impact of displacement in their composition.

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<sup>8</sup> Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, BLS 9 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983), 15.

<sup>9</sup> An example of a literary motif according to Jean Charles Seigneuret is the many references to railroads throughout Leo Tolstoy’s novel *Anna Karenina*, and they suggest that “Literary criticism uses the term leitmotiv almost as a synonym for a recurring image.” Jean-Charles Seigneuret, *Dictionary of Literary Themes and Motifs* (New York, NY: Greenwood, 1988), xxi. Seigneuret’s example and Alter’s definition are the most relevant to what I consider a motif in practice. Alter defines a motif as a “concrete image, sensory quality, action, or object recurs through a particular narrative”. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, revised and updated edition (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2011), 120. More specific examples of motifs in his view include “dreams, prisons and pits,” as well as “silver” in the Joseph narrative in Genesis. Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 120. Talmon’s definition of a motif is relevant to this thesis in that he directly addresses the “wilderness” motif in the Hebrew Bible, and this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two. Talmon defines a motif as a “a representative complex theme that recurs within the framework of the Hebrew Bible in variable forms and connections. It is rooted in an actual situation of an anthropological or historical nature. In its secondary literary setting, a motif gives expression to ideas and experiences inherent in the original situation and is employed by the author to re-actualize in the audience the reactions of the participants in that original situation. The motif represents the essential meaning of the situation, not the situation itself. It is not a mere reiteration of the sensations involved, but rather a heightened and intensified representation of them.”

See Shemaryahu Talmon, “The ‘Desert Motif’ in the Bible and in Qumran Literature,” in *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 31–64 (39). I take issue with Talmon’s definition in that it is unclear how motifs could retain a link to an original, “essential meaning of a situation” and how that meaning is best determined. In Chapter Two, I take issue with this in the context of how the wilderness is discussed with regards to the book of Isaiah in comparison to the pentateuchal narratives.

<sup>10</sup> Berlin, *Poetics*, 19.

A poetics-led study of a text when considering these elements would likely ask what functions these traits or elements serve. In combination with Berlin's use of the term, I am also informed by Jonathan Culler's definition of poetics. Culler defines poetics as "the attempt to account for literary effects by describing the conventions and reading operations that make them possible."<sup>11</sup> For Culler, poetics is an "account of the resources and strategies of literature," and it can also be part of an "expanded rhetoric that studies the resources for linguistic acts of all kinds."<sup>12</sup> Therefore, when I refer to a poetics of exile and diaspora in ancient Jewish literature, I am building on a combination of Culler and Berlin's use of poetics in order to discuss how certain motifs, lexical choices, characterisations, recurring literary devices and plots, are directly impacted by, and conceptualize, exile and diaspora.

### **Reception History of Texts and Their Motifs**

Regarding how one might approach the reception history of texts and their motifs, I am informed by Brennan Breed's approach which he describes as "Nomadic," and by this he means that he organizes sources according to what aspects of a text or motifs are brought out by them, not by their chronological relationship.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, in his view readings from "Jews and Christians, ancients and moderns, westerners and easterners and southerners" could be included together in the same section as long as they are demonstrably highlighting "similar virtual capacities of a given biblical text."<sup>14</sup> This is also my reasoning behind including Yehuda Amichai's poem in Chapter Three that discusses 1QS's interpretation of Isaiah's

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<sup>11</sup> Jonathan D. Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, 2nd ed., Very Short Introductions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 71.

<sup>12</sup> Culler, *Literary Theory*, 71. Culler also notes the overlap between rhetoric and poetics, and he defines rhetoric as "the study of the persuasive and expressive resources of language: the techniques of language and thought that can be used to construct effective discourses." Ibid., 70.

<sup>13</sup> I agree with Breed when they suggest that the general benefit of reception studies is that commentators can find a surprising paucity of significances that these motifs and texts take on when they interact with readers in different contexts or with a particular perspective. Brennan W. Breed, *Nomadic Text*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014), 118–119.

<sup>14</sup> Breed, *Nomadic Text*, 141.

poetics of exile, because Amichai's poem brings out similar "capacities" in Isaiah's poetics that address the topics of exile and homecoming. In turn, the comparison is informative for understanding all three examples and their poetics of exile. In the chapters on the book of Esther there are occasions where a particular theme is highlighted in all versions of the narrative, or where the later versions take a different approach than the Hebrew narrative which is relevant to my argument. Therefore, throughout these chapters the versions will be in dialogue with one another where it is relevant to my discussion of the text. Overall, the aim of discussing the reception of motifs or themes between texts is not to suggest that they mean the same thing throughout their reception. Rather, the aim is to show how a particular discourse is shaped across different manifestations of a text's interpretation.

Additionally, when a text's context is obscured to us then the way in which it was interpreted by early readers becomes a central part of interpreting it.<sup>15</sup> The purpose of looking beyond biblical texts and further into antiquity (such as 1QS and the versions of Esther in Greek and Aramaic) is to show how particular readings have continued to participate in a discourse concerning exile and diaspora throughout history, and how they participate in ways that challenge certain assumptions scholars have about the ancient writers and their perspectives towards displacement. The following sections will explain in further detail the dynamic of "open-endedness" against "closure" in relation to the themes of exile and diaspora in ancient Jewish literature, as well as relevant scholarship on the concepts of exile and diaspora.

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<sup>15</sup> The following quotation from Breed encapsulates a helpful way of thinking about the role of context for interpretation: "Of course, readings cannot occur outside of contexts, and contexts do impact reading, but context cannot alone determine the reading, because context itself must be determined and can always be redetermined. One could characterize this reciprocal relationship as 'dynamic coemergence,' in which context, text and reading progressively specify each other without any necessary hierarchy between the three being posited." Breed, *Nomadic Text*, 131.

## **Open-endedness and Displacement**

I use the term “open-endedness” or “open-ended” to describe how certain literary features reflect an open-ended perspective towards homecoming as a physical act for diaspora communities that resolves being in the state of exile or diaspora. Texts with open-ended poetics concerning exile and diaspora, such as the book of Esther, focus instead on alternative ways of life in diaspora, and not on physical homecoming as providing a necessary completion to the state of displacement. Additionally, other texts such as 1QS highlight the way in which physical homecoming is not in focus, and in turn these texts metaphorize exile to address the loss of sovereignty within the homeland. A closed poetics of exile and diaspora would be a text whose literary features and perspective on homecoming portrays physical homecoming as completing, perhaps in a utopian sense, the narrative of exile or diaspora for a community.

Throughout this thesis, I argue that each of my examples contains different but nonetheless open-ended perspectives towards exile and diaspora. The purpose is not to be exhaustive, but rather to highlight the centrality of open-ended poetics in a variety of biblical and Second Temple texts. In order to describe more fully what is meant by open-ended, it is necessary to discuss the semantics and scholarship on the concepts of exile and diaspora in relation to the Hebrew Bible and other Jewish literature.

## **Exile and Diaspora**

There is a broader scholarly context that talks about the Hebrew Bible, and other ancient Jewish texts, as having open-ended perspectives towards exile and diaspora. Firstly, I will define the terms exile and diaspora, as well as their relevance to biblical studies and to studies in ancient Judaism.

Exile refers to the forced removal of a person (or people) from a place, usually a homeland, and their being barred from that place as a punitive measure.<sup>16</sup> Times of war and political upheaval are common reasons why exile may occur. Diaspora<sup>17</sup> refers to the scattering of a group of people from one location (likely an ancestral homeland) to other locations.<sup>18</sup> Diasporas occur for a wide range of reasons as well, such as natural disasters, slavery, and political upheaval; and diasporas are not necessarily forced. Distinguishing exile as forced but diaspora as voluntary is therefore insufficient as a criterion.<sup>19</sup> Subsequently, due to the lack of autonomy that diaspora and exilic communities may experience, depending on their circumstances, there can be considerable overlap between exile and diaspora.

In the context of its use in biblical literature, Unnik argues that the geographical sense of “diaspora” as noun and verb actually derive from the LXX, where Deuteronomy 28:25 refers to a “diaspora among all the kingdoms of the earth.”<sup>20</sup>

δῶφε σε κύριος ἐπικοπήν ἐναντίον τῶν ἐχθρῶν σου ἐν ὁδοῦ μιᾷ ἐξελεύσῃ πρὸς αὐτοὺς καὶ ἐν ἑπτὰ ὁδοῖς φεύξῃ ἀπὸ προσώπου αὐτῶν καὶ ἔσῃ ἐν διασπορᾷ ἐν πάσαις ταῖς βασιλείαις τῆς γῆς

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<sup>16</sup> Halvorson-Taylor suggests that “exile” refers to forced migration and “geographic displacement.” Martien A. Halvorson-Taylor, *Enduring Exile: The Metaphorization of Exile in the Hebrew Bible*, *VTSup* 141 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 1.

<sup>17</sup> Diaspora comes from the Greek verb διασπείρω, meaning “I scatter” or “I disperse.”

<sup>18</sup> Descriptively, it can refer to the people who reside in these other locations far from the place of origin, e.g., “Diaspora Jews.”

<sup>19</sup> See definition by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Spaces of Dispersal,” *Cultural Anthropology* 9/3 (1994): 339–344 (343; note 5). See also Meyer Reinhold, *Diaspora: The Jews among the Greeks and Romans* (Toronto, ON: Stevens, 1983), 11.

<sup>20</sup> James M. Scott, “Exile and the Self-Understanding of Diaspora Jews in the Greco-Roman Period,” in *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish and Christian Conceptions*, *JSJSup* 56, ed. James M. Scott (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 173–220 (180).

May the Lord give you slaughter before your enemies; you shall go out against them by one way and flee from them by seen ways. And you shall be in dispersion in all the kingdoms of the earth.

Below is the equivalent verse in the Masoretic Text.<sup>21</sup>

יִתְּנֶהָ יְהוָה נֶגֶף לְפָנֵי אֹיְבֵיךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ אֶחָד תֵּצֵא אֵלֵיוּ וּבִשְׂבָעָה דְרָכִים תִּגְנוּם לְפָנָיו וְהָיִיתָ לְזִעְזֹה לְכָל מַמְלָכוֹת  
הָאָרֶץ:

The LORD will put you to rout before your enemies; you shall march out against them by a single road, but flee from them by many roads; and you shall become a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth.

Unnik argues that diaspora was not originally a geographical term but denoted destructive decomposition into individual parts.<sup>22</sup> He suggests that diaspora would effectively dissolve the coherence of a nation, so it is essentially destroyed,<sup>23</sup> and that exile does not necessarily achieve this result. As a result of this distinction, Unnik even suggests that diaspora has a more inherently negative connotation.<sup>24</sup> James M. Scott, however, challenges Unnik’s view of diaspora as largely negative. Scott notes that many examples, including Josephus’s *Antiquities*, refer to bringing back those who have been scattered to restore Jerusalem without derogatory connotations.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, Scott argues instead that exile and diaspora are synonyms, mainly because they often occur together;<sup>26</sup> often “within the covenant context of

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<sup>21</sup> MT is an abbreviation for Masoretic Text that will be used throughout this thesis.

<sup>22</sup> See Willem Cornelis van Unnik, *Das Selbstverständnis der jüdischen Diaspora der hellenistisch-römischen Zeit*, [The self-understanding of the Jewish diaspora in the Hellenistic-Roman period], ed. Pieter Willem van der Horst (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 150. See also the discussion in Scott, “Exile,” 180.

<sup>23</sup> Scott, “Exile,” 180. See note 22 which alludes to how Deuteronomy 28:25 and Jeremiah 41[34]: 17 translates “diaspora” where the Hebrew Volrage reads “horror” (זערה).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>25</sup> See Josephus *Ant.* 12. 139; Antiochus III wrote a letter to this effect. Scott, “Exile,” 184.

<sup>26</sup> Scott, “Exile,” 184; note 31.

sin-punishment-return.”<sup>27</sup> That the definitions of exile and diaspora overlap adds to the complex poetics of exile and diaspora in ancient Jewish texts.

Scott’s insight about the overlap between exile and diaspora highlights the multivalency of both exile and diaspora in a way that is helpful for thinking about the poetics of ancient Jewish literature, as well as the social realities of ancient Jewish communities. Exile, while in contemporary terms is easier to define than diaspora, does not encompass the breadth of experiences of displacement for ancient Jewish communities. While this state of being applied to some Judeans for a time, the exile proper had a historical beginning, middle and end. Moreover, there were both forced and voluntary migration from ancient Israel before the exile, and after the exile, and those who remained in “diaspora” long after the exile ended. The paradigm of exile, with an implied desire for it to be completed or finished upon being *allowed* to return home, is not the only model that is present in ancient Jewish literature. The desire for physical return to the homeland in the case of texts such as Second Isaiah have been overstated to the detriment of understanding the text’s poetics. After the Jews taken to Babylon were allowed to return, poetics addressing the topics of exile and diaspora in ancient Jewish texts did not cease. The paradigm of exile and the implied completion of exile upon being allowed to return to the homeland was insufficient to address the realities of diaspora life, as well as life for Jewish communities without sovereignty in their homeland.

Concerning the Babylonian exile and its impact, Robin Cohen suggests that while even the invocation of Babylon connoted “captivity and oppression” in ancient Jewish literature that this was also the time when “new creative energy” developed in a “challenging, pluralistic context outside the natal homeland.”<sup>28</sup> Even after the destruction of the second Temple in 70

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>28</sup> Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2008), 24.

AD, Babylon remained a central “brain centre for Jewish life and thought.”<sup>29</sup> Cohen’s lists of common features of diaspora communities also highlights that the relationship towards return or homecoming is not straightforward, and that different perspectives toward homecoming can be present. Below is Cohen’s list of common traits shared by diaspora communities:

“1. Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions; 2. alternatively or additionally, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions; 3. a collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history, suffering and achievements; 4. an idealization of the real or imagined ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation; 5. the frequent development of a return movement to the homeland that gains collective approbation even if many in the group are satisfied with only a vicarious relationship or intermittent visits to the homeland; 6. a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history, the transmission of a common cultural and religious heritage and the belief in a common fate; 7. a troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group; 8. a sense of empathy and co-responsibility with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement even where home has become more vestigial; and 9. the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.”<sup>30</sup>

Cohen’s definition highlights the tension between experiences of hostility and also the potential of “enriching life” in host countries, as well as the diverse approaches towards the

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<sup>29</sup> See Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 24.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 17. Robin Cohen’s monograph helpfully traces developments in the field of diaspora studies and contains two chapters that address the Jewish diaspora.



homeland itself. Return or assimilation are not the only options, and the homeland can still be venerated and even maintained remotely. Overall, the diaspora gave rise to written reflections on identity, the nation's past, as well as reflections on the relationship between Jerusalem and those living in the diaspora.<sup>31</sup> Chapters Four and Five consider how ancient Jewish diaspora stories, such as the book of Esther, and the Joseph narrative, play a role in exploring the positives and negatives of diaspora life in literary form.

While exile and its metaphorization persists in ancient Jewish texts long after the Babylonian exile, the concept of diaspora is more appropriate to describe the emerging poetics of displacement in biblical and other ancient Jewish literature. As I will begin to discuss in Chapter One, exile becomes a more metaphorical category to convey the people's strained relationship with the divine who is both displaced with them, and who has caused their displacement.

Moving on from their semantic ranges, exile and diaspora have certainly shaped the content of the Hebrew Bible and other literature in the Second Temple, Hellenistic period and beyond. The Hebrew Bible is watermarked by experiences of marginalization and displacement that are helpfully contextualised in light of the impact of not only the Assyrian exile of the Northern Kingdom, but also the Babylonian exile.<sup>32</sup> Citing Adam and Eve's

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<sup>31</sup> Robert P. Carroll, "Deportation and Diasporic Discourses in the Prophetic Literature," in *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish and Christian Conceptions*, JSJSup 56, ed. James M. Scott (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 63–85, (85).

<sup>32</sup> Hans Barstad discusses and summarizes in his introductory chapter how 2 Kings 24–25 presents a biblical account for the events leading up to the Babylonian exile. King Jehoiakim (who has been made king of Judah by the Babylonians) revolted and was subsequently "attacked by a joint army of Babylonians, Arameans, Moabites, and Ammonites." His son Jehoiachin is made king in his stead. Jehoiachin is later besieged by Nebuchadnezzar, who raids the temple of its treasures, the palace and takes captives (2 Kings 24:14–16). Following this, Jehoiachin is replaced with Zedekiah who rebels against Nebuchadnezzar. This act of rebellion leads to another siege of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:4–7). Zedekiah attempts to escape the city with his army but is followed by the Babylonians. He is blinded and taken as a prisoner to Babylon (2 Kings 25:4–7). See Hans M. Barstad, *History and the Hebrew Bible: Studies in Ancient Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography*, FAT 61 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 98–99.

expulsion from the Garden of Eden up to the book of Chronicles, Robert P. Carroll writes that the Hebrew Bible is “the book of exile” as well as “the great metanarrative of deportation, exile and potential return.”<sup>33</sup> Additionally, Reinhard Kratz in his article, “The Relation Between History and Thought: Reflections on the Subtitle of Peter Ackroyd’s *Exile and Restoration*,” concludes that he agrees with the seminal work of Peter Ackroyd when he suggests that the Babylonian exile as a historical event “exerted a great influence upon the development of theological thinking.”<sup>34</sup> Thomas Römer also describes the Priestly source in the Pentateuch as affected by the exile in that “By situating all rituals and religious institutions in a mythical past P claims that there is no need for a king or a state to enforce the cult; everything is founded in the original revelation.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Carroll, “Deportation,” 64.

<sup>34</sup> Reinhard G. Kratz, “The Relation Between History and Thought: Reflections on the Subtitle of Peter Ackroyd’s *Exile and Restoration*” in *Exile and Restoration Revisited: Essays on the Babylonian and Persian Periods in Memory of Peter R. Ackroyd*, ed. Gary N. Knoppers and Lester L. Grabbe (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 152–165 (162). Cf. Peter Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration: A Study of Hebrew Thought of the Sixth Century BC* (London: SCM, 1968), 237–238. In his article Kratz also states the exile was more than a historical event that was responded to. He writes, “one gets the impression that exile and restoration are already part of “ideology” for almost all texts, starting with Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah, as well as for Haggai and Zechariah. They do not witness events, but mainly an “idea of exile and restoration.” The same is true for the Priestly work, the Deuteronomistic History and Chronicles.” Kratz, “The Relation Between History and Thought,” 162.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Römer, “The Hebrew Bible as Crisis Literature” in *Disaster and Relief Management = Katastrophen und Ihre Bewältigung*, ed. Angelika Berlejung, Forschungen Zum Alten Testament 81 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 159–177 (168). Additionally, Römer in his article on the exile and its effect on the composition of ancient Jewish literature describes the Babylonian exile and destruction of Jerusalem as a “ideological crisis” especially for the upper class who would have consisted of court and temple officials. Generally, he argues that the “the destruction of the Judean capital instituted a political, economical and also an ideological crisis. And this crisis necessitated a reflection about the reasons and the future after the collapse.” Römer, “Crisis Literature,” 160. Another example is the work of Martin Noth who suggests that the Deuteronomistic History was an aetiology of exile. Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*. 2nd ed. JSOTSup 15 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991); see also Römer’s comments about Noth’s work in, Römer “Crisis Literature,” 168. Whether or not one agrees with Römer on his dating of the Priestly source, or with Noth’s understanding of the Deuteronomistic Historian, these examples demonstrate that the exile, and diaspora have been central concepts for understanding the Hebrew Bible and the poetics of ancient Jewish literature. On the other hand, Barstad critiques scholars who overemphasize the event of the Babylonian exile as forming a complete cultural rupture at the expense of scholarly interest in the people who remained in the land. This point will be brought up again in relation to the book of Lamentations in Chapter One which is arguably written from the perspective of those who remained in the land. Barstad, *History and the Hebrew Bible*, 158.

In light of Cohen’s definition of diaspora, and how exile and diaspora are potentially synonymous in their use as noted by Scott, we can also reflect on how viewing the Bible as a metanarrative of exile and potential return potentially obstructs the way in which we approach its poetics of displacement. Taking such a perspective privileges ideas of return and completion as central for these texts. However, it is also part of ancient Jewish poetics concerning exile and diaspora that there is lack of closure, or completion, and often no return. My argument is not that biblical and ancient Jewish texts have exclusively open-ended perspectives, but that open-ended poetics concerning displacement were central to ancient Jewish poetics, and that open-ended poetics can be found in a variety of examples.

Resistance to providing closure for the “narrative” of exile via physical homecoming leaves open the possibility for what Ezrahi calls the “invention of counterlives,” and alternative models, that do not view physical homecoming as a utopian end to the narrative of exile or diaspora.<sup>36</sup> Subsequently, the examples in this thesis were chosen to highlight the existence of alternative narratives of displacement that do not focus on physical homecoming when addressing exile or diaspora.

### **Scholarship on Exile, Diaspora, and Ancient Jewish Literature**

The following paragraphs will discuss significant contributions in scholarship on exile and diaspora that also evokes the language of open-endedness. Thomas Römer, for example, describes the whole Pentateuch as theologically having an “open end,” and he also concludes in his article that the Babylonian exile became an integral part of Jewish identity.<sup>37</sup> Römer sees the rupture caused by the Babylonian exile as generating not only a tendency to interpret divine promises in an open-ended manner, but also as affecting the composition of the texts.

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<sup>36</sup> Ezrahi, *Booking Passage*, 53.

<sup>37</sup> Römer, “Crisis Literature,” 174–175. Römer does not use the term poetics, although his thoughts on the open-ended nature of the Pentateuch are relevant to discussing the poetics of the texts.

One example Römer uses is Moses' death which occurs on mount Nebo, just outside of the promised land in Deuteronomy 34. Not only does Moses' death outside the land betray a diaspora perspective,<sup>38</sup> but Römer also suggests that references to the unfulfilled divine promise to give the land to the Israelites within the Pentateuch gives it an open-ended perspective.<sup>39</sup> That these divine promises are not clearly fulfilled in the Pentateuch creates space for different understandings of how they might be fulfilled or otherwise understood.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, Michael Knibb's research on intertestamental literature focuses on the reuse of the seventy year prophecy from the book of Jeremiah<sup>41</sup> in the book of Daniel and Enoch. Knibb concludes that, "all [these texts] seem to share the view that Israel remained in a state of exile long after the sixth century, and that the exile would only be brought to an end when God intervened in this world order to establish his rule."<sup>42</sup> Ancient Jewish texts are also products of times of uncertainty, fear, and hope, and this appears to generate open-ended perspectives on exile, diaspora, homecoming and the fulfilment of divine promises.

However, some texts such as Second Isaiah<sup>43</sup> are not often presented as having an open-ended perspective with regards to exile, diaspora, and its effect on the people's relationship with the divine. Second Isaiah has been described as failing in its historical context because its vision of idealized homecoming did not come to pass in reality.<sup>44</sup> With this orientation, interpretations of Isaiah in antiquity either try to ignore this failure, or isolate parts of Isaiah from its context in order to make it relevant to a new context.<sup>45</sup> This entails that later

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<sup>38</sup> Deut. 34:1–8. See Römer, "Crisis Literature," 174.

<sup>39</sup> Deut. 34:4. Ibid., 174.

<sup>40</sup> "This literary strategy opens different possibilities to understand the fulfilment of the promise, which can be read as fulfilled (with the Achaemenids or still to be accomplished in a more eschatological sense)." Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Jer. 25:11–12; cf. Dan. 9:20–23.

<sup>42</sup> Michael A. Knibb, "The Exile in the Literature of the Intertestamental Period," *Heythrop Journal* 17 (1976): 253–272 (271–272).

<sup>43</sup> Isa. 40–55.

<sup>44</sup> See the introduction to Chapter Two.

<sup>45</sup> See Chapter Three.

interpretations, such as 1QS's interpretation of Isaiah 40:3, can also be treated as one-dimensional in their engagement with the book of Isaiah and the concept of exile. Other texts, such as the book of Esther, are often discussed in terms of their apologetic stance towards diaspora life, with some scholarship assuming that diaspora life was perceived as antithetical to Jewish identity.<sup>46</sup>

Hindy Najman's work, on the other hand, demonstrates how scholarship has also appreciated the complexity of ancient Jewish literature, the impact of exile and destruction upon its composition, as well as the hermeneutical practices of ancient communities. Najman suggests in her monograph *Losing the Temple: Recovering the Future* that "Ancient texts that express a loss of intimacy with the divine are not merely indicators that something died and, perhaps, that something else was born. The texts are doing the work of returning a culture to its life."<sup>47</sup> Texts such as Lamentations that respond to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and the Babylonian exile through the language of lament also exemplify this dynamic.<sup>48</sup> Although the text is chronologically earlier, in Chapter One I discuss how Lamentations has a dialogic and, therefore, open-ended poetics of exile, following the insights of biblical scholars, as well as scholars such as Gershom Scholem and Mikhail Bakhtin. However, the dialogic poetics of Lamentations is not completely replaced with the desire for physical homecoming *alone* in the hopeful prophetic oracles of Second Isaiah, which several scholars argue is responding

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<sup>46</sup> See the introductions to Chapters Four and Five.

<sup>47</sup> Hindy Najman, *Losing the Temple and Recovering the Future: An Analysis of 4 Ezra* (New York, NY; Cambridge University Press, 2014), 6. Najman uses the term "revelation inflected by destruction" to describe this phenomenon.

<sup>48</sup> For Jonathan Lear's concept of "radical hope" see Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 12. See also Najman's engagement with this concept where she suggests that the role of lament can specifically become "a new song or a new hope." Najman, *Losing the Temple*, 6.

directly to Lamentations.<sup>49</sup> To borrow Francis Landy's words, *even* the poetry of Second Isaiah is hedged by grief, silence, and absence, "despite the voices of consolation."<sup>50</sup>

As exile and diaspora continue to be relevant to Jewish history, later reflections on these topics also echo similar concerns and poetic features of ancient Jewish literature. The wilderness as a place of origins and divine revelation, but also as associated with exile and punishment, plays an important role in how homecoming is conceptualized in texts from antiquity up to contemporary times.<sup>51</sup> In Chapter Three, I discuss how Yehuda Amichai's poem, "Jews in the Land of Israel" compares with 1QS's interpretation of Isaiah's transformation of the wilderness motif, and the way the motif functions in the book of Isaiah. Ezrahi's discussion of exile and homecoming in the modern Jewish imagination is a helpful starting point for considering how ancient Jewish texts similarly contain complex narratives of closure like the modern examples she discusses.

In the context of the twentieth century, Ezrahi notes that there is a paradox that creates anxiety around Jewish identity. She suggests that Zion and exile form different ends on a spectrum as "organizing principles of the Jewish imagination."<sup>52</sup> Moreover, Ezrahi suggests that Zionist alternatives appear to offer closure to the diaspora "narrative of exile." She asks, "How do closure and containment compete with open-endedness to provide narrative possibilities in a culture newly obsessed with boundaries, magnetized by the soil and by the sheer pull of gravity?"<sup>53</sup> Ezrahi discusses poetry and prose of various forms and discusses their broader perspectives towards homecoming and diaspora life. For example, Ezrahi writes

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<sup>49</sup> See section entitled, "The Relationship Between the book of Lamentations and Isaiah."

<sup>50</sup> Francis Landy, "The Ghostly Prelude to Deutero-Isaiah," *BibInt* 14 (2006): 332–363 (333).

<sup>51</sup> Hindy Najman, "Towards a Study of the Uses of the Concept of Wilderness in Ancient Judaism," in *Past Renewals, JSJSup* 53 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 143–159 (144–145). See also my discussion of the wilderness motif and relevant scholarship in Chapter Two.

<sup>52</sup> Ezrahi, *Booking Passage*, 235.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

that with the resettlement of a Jewish homeland that more obvious tensions arose in the Jewish imagination, and that there emerged more “secularized reflection” on this reunification with sacred space.<sup>54</sup> They discuss the writings of S.Y. Abramovitch, Sholem Aleichem, and Philip Roth as pursuing “fictional alternative[s], mimetic counter-parts to the very idea of original, unduplicable space.”<sup>55</sup> For example, in *Motl the Cantor’s Son* by Sholem Aleichem, the United States becomes a “different kind of homeland, as a continent that houses the wayward imagination and the liberal invention of counterlives.”<sup>56</sup>

Although Ezrahi’s discussion of Zionism and its effect on the modern Jewish imagination relate to modern examples, the discourse surrounding exile, diaspora, and homecoming is an ancient one. In light of Carroll’s insight about the Hebrew Bible as the metanarrative of exile, Ezrahi’s insights on the “narrative of exile” as an important aspect of Jewish literature can also illuminate the way in which ancient Jewish texts addressed the long-lasting historical and ideological aftereffects of the Babylonian exile, and the growth of diaspora communities.<sup>57</sup> Ezrahi refers also to the impact of Adam and Eve’s banishment from the garden in Eden in Genesis to show that the “narrative” of exile in the Jewish imagination has wrestled with the trajectory of “creation, exile and redemption.”<sup>58</sup> When this teleological narrative is mapped onto the semantic meaning of exile as indicating a desire to return to the

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<sup>54</sup> They discuss how the example of American Jewish novels challenged other conceptions of homecoming and exile: “What can stand as a somewhat artificial but compelling closure for the American Jewish novel remains a challenge to the Israeli writer: how to avoid the lure of ‘hypnotic words...insulated from the changing winds of history,’ appropriating instead the airiness of the arabesque; how to keep images from becoming icons, archaeology from becoming eschatology, ‘arrival’ from becoming the places of death; how to *reopen* the narrative so that narrative itself can continue—and so that one can hear the suppressed, the silenced voices—the memory in the stones.” Ezrahi, *Booking Passage*, 491.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>57</sup> They suggest that the “journeys” in their modern examples that “reinvent some of the most ancient reflexes in the Jewish imagination bred on the experience and the theodicy of exile.” *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 9. For a discussion of Derrida’s use of the term *différance* which is relevant to Ezrahi’s discussion here, see chapter seven of Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge Classics, 2001). For the earliest publication in French see; Jacques Derrida, *L’écriture Et La Différence* (Paris: Éditions Du Seuil, 1967).

place one was barred, then presumably the resolve to exile would come about by reunification with the original space one was barred from (i.e., homecoming). However, Ezrahi's examples do not reflect this "rigid teleological structure."<sup>59</sup> Rather, these texts conceptualize exile and return as part of an "open-ended adventure."<sup>60</sup> Diaspora, therefore, complicates and challenges a more teleological narrative of exile where return or homecoming is an act of closure, or reunification, that would close the narrative.

The most radical form of this open-endedness, Ezrahi argues, is evidenced in some Jewish writing's commitment to "a lack of closure as the truest guarantee of continuity:"

"In its most radical form, this is an imaginative license that has no geographical coordinates: it is an affirmation and reconfiguration of the Jewish word as nomadic exercise and Jewish exile as a kind of literary privilege. Each of the writers and their vast and scattered community of readers are bound by a commitment to provisional, imagined (or remembered) worlds, to desire as the principle of fiction, and to a lack of closure as the truest guarantee of continuity."<sup>61</sup>

Texts that highlight lack of closure, as Ezrahi states, as the "truest guarantee of continuity" are significant for ancient Jewish texts as well. The narrative of exile and return generated counternarratives to exile and return, where lack of closure and open-endedness formed another response to displacement. The chapters of this thesis will discuss how open-ended poetics concerning exile and diaspora addressed the broader metaphorization of exile in

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<sup>59</sup> Ezrahi, *Booking Passage*, 10.

<sup>60</sup> Subsequently, the Jewish poetics of exile they describe is indicated in how the "imaginative enterprise in *galut* was subsumed under the struggle to construct the future as projected image of the lost past—but that within such as apparently rigid teleological structure it remained a remarkably **open-ended adventure.**" Ibid., 10; emphasis is my own.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 10.



ancient Jewish literature; the impact of having lack of sovereignty in the land itself, and also the possibilities and vulnerabilities of diaspora life.

### **The Broader Context of Displacement and Homecoming in the Second Temple Period and Beyond**

This section discusses ways in which diaspora communities described themselves, including their relationship to their land of origin and their host countries. As such, this section provides valuable context for the texts analysed in Part II of the thesis. It is worth noting that it was not always a matter of choice whether people stayed in diaspora and whether they had to move on numerous occasions. For example, many people including the Jews were subject to “forced population transfers” in the Graeco-Roman world.<sup>62</sup> Nonetheless, Paul McKechnie also observes that there was a pattern where a dominant group would enforce mass exiling, and that this was sometimes followed by the eventual return of the exiles to their homeland. In the case of the Athenians, he notes that successful return of whole groups, or at least the ability to do so, “is a completely typical feature of the fourth century in Greece till Alexander.”<sup>63</sup> Turning to Jewish communities, Scott suggests that the “lack of assimilation and/or preservation of a distinctively Jewish identity may also be indicative that a Diaspora community expected to return to the land, particularly if Ἰουδαῖος denotes ‘Judean.’”<sup>64</sup> In the case of the Romans, however, mass movements of people could easily be seen as a potential threat, so it is unlikely that whole communities were allowed full autonomy to return to their homelands as they pleased.<sup>65</sup> Although diaspora Jews were technically allowed to return to

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<sup>62</sup> Scott, “Diaspora Jews,” 207. Scott also gives several examples of other diasporas which happened in the Greco-Roman world such as the Boeotians, Olynthians, and Aeginetans. See *ibid.*, 204–205.

<sup>63</sup> Paul McKechnie, *Outsiders in the Greek Cities in the Fourth Century BC* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1989), 23; cf. Scott, “Diaspora Jews,” 205.

<sup>64</sup> Scott, “Diaspora Jews,” 209–210. This argument about identity will be considered in more depth in Chapter Four.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

their homeland, that does not mean that they could practically do this or even that they all wanted to return.

There are also differing views about how diaspora communities saw themselves or how those living in the land would have viewed communities outside the land. When it comes to analysing those in the diaspora, the options tend to be either that the community had a largely negative self-assessment or a largely positive assessment of diaspora life. For example, Gruen illustrates through the Letter of Aristeas that the reality conveyed by Egyptian Jews in the diaspora was not necessarily one of horror or slavery, but could also consist of more optimistic images, and this coincides with Cohen's description of diaspora communities quoted earlier in the introduction. For example, the harsh actions of Ptolemy II's father are mitigated by his liberating the Jewish captives in Egypt.<sup>66</sup> Josephus, extrapolating from the narrative of Pseudo-Hecataeus, pointedly contrasts the forcible expulsion of the Jews to Babylon by the Persians with their migration to Egypt and Phoenicia after the death of Alexander the Great.<sup>67</sup>

While Gruen's scholarship highlights acceptance of diaspora life, it must be noted that "Jewish separatism" in the diaspora has a long history of being viewed in an unforgiving and problematic way when the subordination and power dynamics of diaspora life are not taken into account.<sup>68</sup> The power dynamics between subordinate and dominant societies partially

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<sup>66</sup> "It is, in any case, irrelevant for our purposes. Even the harsh version in the *Letter of Aristeas* is immediately softened. Ptolemy I employed the newly arrived Jews in his army, paid them handsomely, and set them up in garrisons. His son went much further. Ptolemy II excused his father's severe actions as necessary to appease his troops and then proceeded not only to liberate all Jewish captives in Egypt, but to enroll many in the forces and even to promote the more trustworthy leaders to official positions in the realm. The reality or unreality of this rosy picture makes no difference. This was the image conveyed by Egyptian Jews. They did not portray themselves as laboring under the yoke." Erich S. Gruen, "Diaspora and Homeland," in *Diasporas and Exiles: Varieties of Jewish Identity*, ed. Howard K. Wettstein (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 22.

<sup>67</sup> Gruen, "Diaspora and Homeland," 22.

<sup>68</sup> Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, "Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 19 (1993): 693–725 (717). They observe that exclusivism such as "Jewish

accounts for how exilic and post-exilic communities appear to respond with an “us versus them attitude” that is misunderstood or over generalized. Smith-Christopher takes, for example, the mixed marriage crisis in Ezra-Nehemiah as indicative of a traumatized community.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, I agree with Smith-Christopher, who calls for a “hermeneutics of exile that is informed by the wider familiarity with patterns of dominance, resistance, and the dynamics of social subordination.”<sup>70</sup> The book of Esther and its early interpretation in Part II is another example of a text where approaches that take these matters into consideration illuminate how the narratives reflect some of the anxieties of diaspora communities.

Overall, there is diversity in the Second Temple period in terms of how diaspora communities connected with past traditions, their homeland, and other cultures within and outside of ancient Judea. In one example from Philo of Alexandria, Gruen notes that Philo interprets the Shavuot Festival as a celebration that the Jews once possessed their own land and did not have to exist as wanderers or foreigners in other lands, yet he notes that this is not an inconsistency or a contradiction for Philo. Gruen writes that “Diaspora Jews might find fulfillment and reward in their communities abroad, but they honored Judaea as refuge for the formerly displaced and unsettled, and the prime legacy of all.”<sup>71</sup> Gruen also discusses how the participation of diaspora communities in giving to the annual Jerusalem tithe in the Second Temple period does not necessarily indicate that they wanted to return.<sup>72</sup> In fact, their

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particularism” is generally viewed negatively when practised by dominant groups, but for minority groups (e.g., the Amish) it is not seen as so threatening. Additionally, the Boyarins state that the rabbinic response to “Paul’s challenge was to renounce any possibility of domination over Others by being perpetually out of power.” Boyarin and Boyarin, “Diaspora,” 722.

<sup>69</sup> Smith-Christopher considers how “levitical-like” concerns with purity might represent a self-conscious resistance towards the dominant culture. He refers to it as a theology of “quarantine” which might have come out of the traumatic experience of exile. D. L. Smith-Christopher, “Reassessing the Historical and Sociological Impact of the Babylonian Exile (597/587–539 BCE),” in *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions*, ed. James M. Scott (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 7–36 (34).

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 35–36.

<sup>71</sup> Gruen, “Diaspora and Homeland,” 36; See Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 2.168.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 30–31.

participation in his view implies that diaspora communities saw return as unnecessary, and that the diaspora could endure indefinitely.<sup>73</sup> Within this diversity of responses to displacement, and its aftermath, the open-ended poetics of earlier biblical texts can be appreciated as participating in a longstanding discourse on exile, diaspora, and homecoming in ancient Jewish literature.

Overall, the open-ended poetics in my selection of texts is informed by the complex realities of diaspora communities and those who remained in the land. Referring back to Cohen's list of traits for diaspora communities that was cited earlier, it is evident that the various responses to the "homeland" included both a desire for return as well as the continued growth of diaspora communities. Moreover, diaspora communities participated in the veneration and idealization of the homeland, even maintaining it financially. This information provides another avenue to appreciate poetic open-endedness not as a minority feature of some Jewish texts, but as a reflection of the immense impact of displacement upon Jewish communities. Returning to the homeland, while it was surely desired by some, did not represent the only or perhaps the most significant paradigm that was active in the imagination of ancient Jewish communities.

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<sup>73</sup> Gruen aptly notes that "the continuing pledge of allegiance proclaimed that the diaspora could endure indefinitely and quite satisfactorily," and, moreover, that continuing to give annual tithes did not indicate a desire return, but rather that return was unnecessary for those in the diaspora. *Ibid.*

## Part I: The Book of Lamentations and Second Isaiah's Poetics of Exile and Wilderness

### Chapter One: The Dialogic Poetics of the Book of Lamentations: נִקְּנוּ כְּשִׁעָנוּ וּמָרִינוּ אֶתְּהָ לֹא סָלַחְתָּ (“We Have Transgressed and Rebelled. You Have Not Forgiven”)

Lamentations engages with exile as a historical phenomenon, and also as an experience that reflects distance from the divine and God's displeasure. This chapter considers how the book of Lamentations contains a dialogic and therefore open-ended poetics concerning exile and suffering. The dialogic way in which the poems approach these issues is shown through the “coexistence and interaction”<sup>74</sup> of conflicting perspectives on the destruction and exile rather than integration of these perspectives. Features of the language of lament foster this dialogic discourse concerning exile and suffering. Additionally, the combination of the effects of the language of lament with the alphabetic acrostic form leaves its audience with a sense of “unhoming”<sup>75</sup> by the fifth and final poem which abandons this form. The effect of this combination of features is that the audience is left without an authoritative or singular message concerning the exile, suffering, and whether they are reconciled with God.<sup>76</sup> This open-ended and unresolved discourse in Lamentations is a crucial context for understanding the prophetic texts of Second Isaiah, as well as diaspora stories such as the book of Esther and the Joseph narrative, that offer their own responses to the impact of the Babylonian exile and its impact on the people's relationship with the divine.

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<sup>74</sup> M. Bakhtin, *Problems in Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. C. Emerson (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 28.

<sup>75</sup> Richard S. Briggs, “The Ostrich and the Sword: Reading the City-Lament of Lamentations Intertextually with the Wilderness Wanderings of the Book of Numbers,” in *Reading Lamentations Intertextually*, ed. Heath Thomas and Brittany N. Melton (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 43–54 (52).

<sup>76</sup> Goldingay suggests that the combination of Lamentations' form and content “allows for comprehensive expression of grief but suggests a containment that holds this expression within bounds.” John Goldingay, *The Book of Lamentations*, NICOT, ed. Robert L. Hubbard and Bill T. Arnold (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2022), 5; cf. Pamela Jean Owens, “Personification and Suffering in Lamentations 3,” *Austin Seminary Bulletin: Faculty Edition* 105 (1990): 75–90 (77).

The five poems<sup>77</sup> of Lamentations mourn the physical destruction of Judah and its temple in Jerusalem, the loss of human life due to the siege, exile, famine, and warfare.<sup>78</sup> Each poem focuses on aspects of the people's suffering as a result of the Babylonian destruction. In doing so, the poems create a context for the community to express their pain and anxieties using the language of lament,<sup>79</sup> and to ask challenging questions of the divine, as well as hope for reconciliation with the divine. The exile is addressed, as mentioned earlier, as a historical event and also as an experience that reflects displacement from the divine and God's displeasure in a wider cultural context.

Lexical choices related to exile or displacement,<sup>80</sup> as well as the "wilderness" motif and "the lord is my portion" motif, have a role in creating an open-ended poetics towards exile. These motifs re-orient the audience towards focusing on the people's relationship to the divine, and do not emphasize physical homecoming as a resolve to their current situation.

The connotations of wilderness with desolation, as well as death and exile, reflect the uncertain state of the community's relationship with God as it is presented in the text. The references to the wilderness in Lamentations, for example, contrast significantly with Second Isaiah, which is the focus of chapter two, and therefore helps to demonstrate the variety of responses towards displacement among ancient Jewish texts. The dialogic poetics of Lamentations becomes foundational for texts such as Second Isaiah,<sup>81</sup> but also for the book of Esther which is the subject of chapters four and five. Like Lamentations, the Hebrew version

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<sup>77</sup> The five poems correspond to the five chapters of the book of Lamentations, referred to throughout this chapter as Lam 1, 2 etc.

<sup>78</sup> E. Boase, "Chaos and Order: Lamentations and Deuteronomy as Responses to Destruction and Exile," in *Reading Lamentations Intertextually*, ed. H. A. Thomas and B. N. Melton (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 58.

<sup>79</sup> See Boase, "Chaos and Order," 58. See also Tod Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament, and Protest in the Afterlife of a Biblical Book* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000). In this monograph he argues that Lamentations is an ancient example of survival literature.

<sup>80</sup> Such as the root גלה meaning to "uncover" or "go into exile."

<sup>81</sup> Chapters Two and Three.

of the book of Esther portrays the divine as distant. For example, the book does not mention the divine by name, and focuses on the difficulties of diaspora life in the capital of Persia, Susa, and the role of Esther and Mordecai in averting the people's annihilation.<sup>82</sup>

The five poems in Lamentations arose after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587 BCE, with scholars generally agreeing that their composition began shortly after the event itself.<sup>83</sup> Westermann notes that many interpreters think that the text could not have arisen after 538 BCE because that is when the exiles were allowed to start returning to the land.<sup>84</sup> However, it is not clear why this would prevent the development of this text especially if these laments were gradually incorporated into liturgical use soon after 587 BCE.<sup>85</sup>

Overall, I am in favour of Gerstenberger's view that Lamentations arose in the context of communal worship and is the product of multiple writers.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Chapters Four and Five.

<sup>83</sup> Claus Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 54.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. Although it is possible that the poems present themselves as witnessing the destruction of Jerusalem and its immediate aftermath, this could also be the writers' projection of the past. Goldingay, *Lamentations*, 7; cf. D. R. Hillers, *Lamentations: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 2nd ed. AB 7A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 10. Moreover, Westermann surveys a diversity of opinions on the origins and dating of the different poems. In his commentary, Boecker takes the perspective of each chapter having independent origins and generally thinks they are early responses to the destruction. He also suggests that Lam 3 is the latest. See H. J. Boecker, *Die Klagelieder* [Lamentations] (Zürcher Bibelkommentar; Zurich Evangelische Verlag, 1985); cf. Westermann, *Lamentations*, 51–53.

<sup>85</sup> Goldingay, *Lamentations* 16–17; cf. H. A. Thomas, "The Liturgical Function of the Book of Lamentations," in *Thinking Towards New Horizons: Collected Communications to the Nineteenth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, Ljubljana 2007*, ed. M. Augustin and H. M. Niemann, BEATAJ 55 (Frankfurt: Lang, 2008), 137–147.

<sup>86</sup> Erhard. S Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations*, vol. XV, *The Forms of the Old Testament Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans), 475. If we assume that Lamentations rose in popularity and use in liturgical settings, such as Goldingay suggests, in places such as Mizpah and Bethel, then he imagines that Levites and other authority figures likely had a hand in shaping the content of what would become the collection of Lamentations, stating "It thus gained a semi-official place in the community's worship resources." Goldingay, *Lamentations*, 20.

Given these insights, I think it more plausible that there were multiple writers and points of origin for the individual poems.<sup>87</sup> For example, in my discussion of Lam 3, I refer to Adele Berlin's suggestion that this poem represents the "voice of exile" and posits an exilic origin for this poem.<sup>88</sup> Goldingay suggests that if Jerusalem was decimated the way the poems describe, then they could not originate from there as it would have been uninhabitable. Other sites where Jewish communities continued to live include Mizpah and Bethel, so some scholars suggest that this could be the place of origin for Lamentations.<sup>89</sup>

I agree with Goldingay that Lamentations had a cathartic function for its early audiences to express pain, trauma, and protest to God in a structured way.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, this function is also a helpful context for understanding the role that Lamentations plays as a "background" for texts such as Second Isaiah which is the topic of Chapter Two.<sup>91</sup> Goldingay states that although "the people's laments and protests in these poems meet with no response within the poems (they are, after all, laments and protests, like many psalms that do not incorporate a response from God)" texts such as Isaiah 40-55 appears to respond to the kinds of issues raised in the text.<sup>92</sup> The prayers to God in Lamentations presuppose "a freedom on Israel's part to grieve and protest before Yahweh about things that happen to it and to plead for a reversal and for Yahweh to act against its attackers—even if it has to grant that it had deserved what happened."<sup>93</sup> Overall, the purpose of the five poems is generally considered to

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<sup>87</sup> Westermann, *Lamentations*, 58. There is variation among the opinions of scholars on the text's authorship that Westermann discusses thoroughly in the monograph. Each poem might have originated from different individuals, or a group of scribes, or priests reflecting together, and they have become part of a single collection. Goldingay, *Lamentations*, 12. There are also copies among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Goldingay, *Lamentations*, 18; Cf. See F. M. Cross, "4QLam," in *Qumran Cave 4: XI: Psalms to Chronicles*, ed. E. C. Ulrich et al., DJD 16 (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 229–237.

<sup>88</sup> See the section on Lam 3 in this chapter.

<sup>89</sup> Goldingay, *Lamentations*, 16.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.



be cathartic, helping the community to process and grieve the loss of the city and its inhabitants.

### **Bakhtin and Dialogue**

My use of the term dialogic in this chapter is inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin's approach to language and literature.<sup>94</sup> Bakhtin's approach is not a strict methodology, but his insights form a perspective on the nature of discourse and all language. I employ the term dialogic in relation to the poetics of Lamentations with many modifications to Bakhtin's approach.

Bakhtin's approach to literature and to language as a whole encourages exploring the interpretative possibilities when the interpreter does not privilege a single voice, or perspective when reading a text, but rather attempts to retain the integrity of multiple independent and unmerged voices and perspectives.<sup>95</sup> Bakhtin suggests that polyphonic texts would normally include a clash of voices, even simultaneous voices, lacking a progression of thought.<sup>96</sup> A distinctive feature of polyphonic texts is the lack of evolution, and "coexistence

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<sup>94</sup> The concepts of "Dialogic" and "Monologic" truth are key to Bakhtin's approach to language and to his study of literature. A Dialogic truth would exist at the point of intersection between several unmerged voices, and the paradigm is one of conversation. Bakhtin, *Problems*, 8; see also Carol A. Newsom, "Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth," *The Journal of Religion* 76 (1996): 290–306 (293–294). A Dialogic truth requires "a plurality of consciousness...[which] in principle cannot be fitted within the bounds of a single consciousness." Cf. Bakhtin, *Problems*, 81; Newsom, "Bakhtin," 293. Dialogic truth, therefore, has a more personal quality to it as opposed to the abstraction of "Monologic" thought. In a conversation, for example, the participants are not propositions or assertions, but people who utter them. The "essence of who says them" is key to dialogic discourse, rather than the integral point of view, position, or personality. Bakhtin, *Problems*, 93; see also Newsom, "Bakhtin," 294. On the opposite end of the spectrum is "Monologic" truth. An example of this would be a statement which does not depend on the one saying it for it to be true. It is just as true when repeated by others. Another feature is that a Monologic truth tends to gravitate towards a system, seeks unity, and is organized in a systematic way. Newsom who has done extensive work on Bakhtin describes "Monologic" truth in the following way: "even if it [the monologic truth] is the product of many minds, it is represented as capable of being spoken by a single voice." Newsom, "Bakhtin," 292. For example, in relation to Biblical studies, Miller concludes in his study of Lamentations and Deuteronomy that are these not "monolithic in their perspectives of God and justice, both voicing uncertainty about the nature of divine justice." See Boase, "Chaos and Order," 67.

<sup>95</sup> Charles William Miller, "Reading Voices: Personification, Dialogism, and the Reader of Lamentations 1," *BibInt* 9 (2001): 393–408 (394).

<sup>96</sup> Miller, "Reading Voices," 407.

and interaction”<sup>97</sup> between different perspectives, concepts, and ideas. Bakhtin’s description of dialogic discourse and polyphonic texts would be considered as having open-ended poetics. The dialogic nature of the poetics of Lamentations coincides with its open-ended poetics towards exile.

### **Dialogic Poetics and Form**

Lamentations within biblical scholarship is often described as an open, ambiguous text that resists giving closure for the traumatic event that it describes. For example, Heath in his monograph describes Lamentations as a “open” rather than a “closed” text.<sup>98</sup> Likewise, scholars such as Galit Hasan-Rokem also refer to the “deeply dialogic mode of communication including humans and the divine” that is presented.<sup>99</sup> The form and poetic traits of the text create this dialogic quality between the five poems. Lamentations contains elements of funeral dirges with individual and communal laments to address the suffering and exile more specifically.<sup>100</sup> While Lamentations is certainly concerned with the land of Judah, arguably the text also contains a “voice of exile” in chapter three,<sup>101</sup> and Lam 4 and 5 address the afflictions of those who remained in the land.

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<sup>97</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems*, 28.

<sup>98</sup> Heath who is interested in looking at Lamentations through a more theological lens describes it as having an “ambiguous theology.” Heath A. Thomas. *Poetry and Theology in the Book of Lamentations: The Aesthetics of an Open Text* (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2013), 3.

<sup>99</sup> Galit Hasan-Rokem, “Bodies Performing in Ruins: The Lamenting Mother in Ancient Hebrew Texts” in *Lament in Jewish Thought*, ed. Ilit Ferber and Paula Schwebel, vol. 2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 33–64 (40).

<sup>100</sup> David Janzen, *Trauma and the Failure of History: Kings, Lamentations, and the Destruction of Jerusalem*, SemeiaSt 94 (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2019), 94. Regarding the meter of a Qinah, which is essentially a funeral dirge, Shea states that it “consists of bicola composed of cola of relatively standard lengths followed by distinctly shorter cola, or 3:2 in terms of stress accents.” They also note that this is not the only meter by means found in Lamentations. See, William H. Shea “The Qinah Structure of the Book of Lamentations,” *Biblica* 60 (1979): 103–107 (103).

<sup>101</sup> Adele Berlin, *Lamentations: A Commentary*, OTL (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 84.

Lamentations as a composition does not fit neatly into any one type of genre and seems to be inspired by several types. For example, Westermann sees Lamentations chapters 1, 2 and 4 as communal laments with elements of dirges interspersed throughout; while Lam 3 is a mixed poem, Lam 5 is a communal lament.<sup>102</sup> Jahnou suggests that the direction of address is also significant: if you address the deity in the second person this is more similar to a lament than a dirge, as dirges mourn bereavement and express pain.<sup>103</sup> Once again, there is a mixture of genres throughout Lamentations. Lee, for example, suggests that the crossovers between laments, city laments, and dirges as they occur in Lamentations indicate that the book is inspired by many types of expressions, especially by combining communal laments and communal dirges.<sup>104</sup>

There are multiple voices in Lamentations, and sometimes voices of uncertain demarcation, that also contribute to its dialogic nature. Lanahan, for example, identifies five potential voices in the book including 1) personified Jerusalem (1.9, 11-22; 2:20-22); 2) a more general narrator (1.1-11 except for part of verse 9, 15, 17; 2:1-19; 3) the *geber* or first-person male suffer (ch. 3); 4) the residents of Judah in chapter 4, and 5) the chorus of the people in Jerusalem in chapter 5.<sup>105</sup> This is not, however, the most important aspect for why Lamentations is described as an “open” text or why it can be described as dialogic.

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<sup>102</sup> Westermann, *Lamentations*, 1–11. Heath in his monograph takes a similar approach, Heath notes that Lam 1, 2, and 4 are seen as assemblance of communal dirges, and that Lam 3 as a mixed poem that has elements of individual laments and communication laments and wisdom material. Lam 5 is generally considered to be a communal lament (Heath, *Poetry*, 77).

<sup>103</sup> Hedwig Jahnou, *Das Hebräische Leichenlied im Rahmen der Völkerdichtung*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 36 (Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1923), 165–197; Heath, *Poetry*, 77; cf. also with Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020).

<sup>104</sup> Nancy Lee, *The Singers of Lamentations: Cities under Siege, from Ur to Jerusalem to Sarajevo*, *BibInt* 60 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 33–37.

<sup>105</sup> W. F. Lanahan, “The Speaking Voice in the Book of Lamentations,” *JBL* 93 (1974): 41–49. Cf. Hasan-Rokem, “Bodies Performing in Ruins,” 40 note 18.

Even within a single poem that contains one main narrator, there is oscillation between God as “aggressor” and God as “comforter” of the people, and these perspectives are not integrated into a coherent narrative or resolved. Bakhtin’s approach is helpful because it brings to the table an awareness to “preserve the polyphony of unmerged voices with full respect for their historical and cultural particularity.”<sup>106</sup> Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism and polyphony are relevant to describing this oscillation because dialogism refers to “double-voicedness” as a “general property of language,” as well as the “specific engagement of two voices in a single utterance.”<sup>107</sup> It is not just about many characters speaking, but the way in which ideas and concepts interact in challenging and sometimes conflicting ways with one another. This is what makes Lamentations a dialogic text, not because it has many personifications or narrators, but because the poems exhibit “coexistence and interaction”<sup>108</sup> rather than integration of conflicting perspectives on the destruction and exile.

## **Lamentations 1**

Beginning with the interaction between Lam 1 and Lam 2, it becomes apparent that Lamentations does not integrate or resolve the issue of the people’s blame for bringing on the destruction, or the issue of the divine’s apparent cruelty in causing this suffering despite the people’s blame. The inability to move past the suffering of the people and the lack of resolve between either completely blaming God or completely blaming personified Jerusalem all contribute to creating a dialogic discourse. The ensuing exile and disenfranchisement of the people remaining in Judah are at the heart of these chapters. While the punishment is seen as

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<sup>106</sup> Newsom, “Bakhtin,” 305; cf. Bakhtin, *Problems*, 88. Goldingay offers a different perspective which I do not think is incongruent with the use of Bakhtin’s theories when they say that the voices are not like a dialogue, but like “voices comparing notes or voices that separately address whoever may be listening.” Goldingay, *Lamentations*, 17.

<sup>107</sup> The double-voicedness of language can also be referred to as polyphonic. Barbara Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship: An Introduction*, *Semeia* 38 (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2000), 35.

<sup>108</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems*, 28.

deserved from the perspective of Lam 1, if God is the punisher, then how can the relationship ever be reconciled after what Daughter Zion deems as unnecessarily cruel torment?

Lam 1:12

לֹא אֲלִיכֶם כָּל־עֲבָרֵי דֶרֶךְ הַבַּיִטּוֹ וַיֵּרְאוּ אִם־יֵשׁ מִכְאוֹב כְּמִכְאֹבִי אֲשֶׁר עִוְלָל לִי אֲשֶׁר הוֹגָה יְהוָה בַּיּוֹם חֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ:

May it never befall you, all who pass along the road—look about and see: Is there any agony like mine, which was dealt out to me when the LORD afflicted me on His day of wrath?

Later in 1:14 Daughter Zion emphasizes her inability to withstand her aggressors,

נִתְּנֵנִי אֲדֹנָי בְּיַדֵּי לֹא־אוּכַל קוּם

The Lord has delivered me into the hands of those I cannot withstand.

Daughter Zion presents her situation as one where the divine has utterly decimated her and made her a spectacle. Moreover, she had no hope to overcome or defend against her attackers. As previously noted, Lamentations generally deals with the fall of Jerusalem and its temple, and the state of the people in the land of Judah after the Babylonian destruction. Nonetheless, references to the exile in Lamentations are not only related to the historical event and its aftermath, but exile or other language of displacement also has a wider function in Lamentations. References to exile coincide with the destruction and lament for the city in Lam 1. Not only is the destruction of the city brought into view, but the exile of some of its citizens is mentioned as early as Lam. 1:3:

<sup>1</sup>אֵיכָה יִשָּׁבָה בְּדָד הָעִיר רַבָּתִי עִם הַיְתָה כְּאַלְמָנָה רַבָּתִי בַגּוֹיִם שְׁרָתִי בַּמְּדִינוֹת הַיְתָה לְמַס:

<sup>2</sup>בָּכּוּ תִבְכֶּה בְּלִילָה וְדַמְעָתָה עַל לְחִיָּה אֵין־לָהּ מִנְחָם מִכָּל־אֲהָבֶיהָ כָּל־רַעְיָהּ בָּגְדוּ בָּהּ הִיוּ לָהּ לֹא־יָבִים:

<sup>3</sup>גָּלְתָה יְהוּדָה מֵעֲנִי וּמֵרֵב עֲבָדָהּ הִיא יִשָּׁבָה בַגּוֹיִם לֹא מִצָּאָה מְנוּחַת כָּל־רִדְפֶיהָ הַשְׂיִגוּהָ בֵּין הַמְּצָרִים:

<sup>1</sup>**Alas!** Lonely sits the city once great with people! She that was great among nations is become like a widow; the princess among states is become a thrall. <sup>2</sup>Bitterly she weeps in the night, her cheek wet with tears. There is none to comfort her of all her friends. All her allies have betrayed her; they have become her foes. <sup>3</sup>**Judah has gone into exile because of misery and harsh oppression; when she settled among the nations, she found no rest; all her pursuers overtook her in the narrow places.**

The first word of Lamentations, אֵיכָה, meaning “alas” or “how”, is associated with the funerary dirge, and is also a fitting beginning for the alphabetic acrostic as it begins with the letter *Aleph*. Within the first eleven verses, the poet creates a contrast between Zion’s past glory and her present circumstances, and the narrator imitates the imagined speech of gloating onlookers shaming the personified city.<sup>109</sup> These aforementioned features are associated with the funeral dirge, but as the chapter unfolds the subject of the dirge (Zion) is found to be alive and speaks in verse twelve.

Linafelt appropriately notes that lament is an accurate description for much of Lamentations, and that as Zion speaks the poem takes on characteristics familiar to psalms of lament extant in the book of Psalms.<sup>110</sup> Here the work of Gershom Scholem on lament is illuminating for understanding the dialogic nature of Lamentations poems and how lament may be a particularly suitable form to explore such difficult issues in a dialogic manner. Returning to the first word of the poem, the אֵיכָה that begins Lamentations is a rhetorical question and appropriately receives no answer.<sup>111</sup> This aspect arrives at the heart of the form of lament as a

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<sup>109</sup> Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 37.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> See Gershom Scholem, “On Lament and Lamentation,” in *Lament in Jewish Thought*, ed. Ilit Ferber and Paula Schwebel, vol. 2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 313–320. See also Eli Schonfeld, “Ein Menachem: On Lament and Consolation,” in *Lament in Jewish Thought*, ed. Ilit Ferber and Paula Schwebel, vol. 2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 10–30 (26).

language that “exists on the edge of nothingness...” being the “expression of innermost expressionlessness.”<sup>112</sup>

Gershom Scholem in “On Lament and Lamentation,” writes that the language of lament “reveals nothing”:

“... because the being that reveals itself in it has no content (and for that reason one can also say that it reveals everything) and conceals [verschweigt] nothing, because its entire existence is based on a revolution of silence [Schweigen]. It is not symbolic, but only points toward the symbol; it is not concrete [gegenständlich], but annihilates the object. This language is lament.”<sup>113</sup>

Moreover, Scholem writes that, “There is no answer to lament, which is to say, there is only one: falling mute [das Verstummen].” This is contrasted with other forms of lament in the Hebrew Bible where laments address God, and perhaps expect an answer.<sup>114</sup> אֵיכָה signals that the expression of pain is fronted, and that comfort may not be possible at the beginning.

It is not long before exile is specifically mentioned in Lam 1. Exile as described in Lam 1:3 is not a straightforward transfer away from A towards B, with no ability to return to A. The metaphorical impact of exile here is a generalized state of being scattered to many places like them term diaspora suggests. The reference to finding no resting place implies that the displacement is ongoing (הִיא יִשְׁכָּה בְּגוֹיִם לֹא מְצָאָה מְנוּחָה). Judah’s vulnerability is highlighted by the reference to the attacking pursuers. Already in the book of Deuteronomy 28:68 מְנוּחָה also occurs in the context of the threat of exile (Deut. 28:64–65) when it states that even among the nations (בְּגוֹיִם) that there will be no rest (מְנוּחָה) for the Israelites’ feet. That the exile is

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<sup>112</sup> Scholem, “On Lament,” 314.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 313.

<sup>114</sup> Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 38.

mentioned at the beginning of Lam 1 suggests that both the people in Judah after the destruction and those who were displaced are central topics. Given the state of the land of Judah as described in Lam 4 and 5, it is possible to imagine people going into a voluntary state of displacement in addition to any people who were forcibly removed from the land.

The semantic field of words related to exile or displacement in Lamentations varies depending on how one understands the word translated either as “wandering” in the ESV/NRSV or as “sorrow” in the NJPS in Lam 1:7 and 3:19.

Lam 1:7

זָכְרָה יְרוּשָׁלַם יָמֵי עֲנִיָּה וּמְרוֹדֶיהָ כָּל מַחְמַדֶּיהָ אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ מִיָּמֵי קֶדֶם בְּנֹפֶל עִמָּהּ בְּיַד־צָר וְאִין עֹזֵר לָהּ רְאוּהָ  
צָרִים שָׁחֲקוּ עַל מִשְׁפַּתָּהּ:

<sup>7</sup>All the precious things she had in the days of old **Jerusalem recalled in her days of woe and sorrow**,<sup>115</sup> when her people fell by enemy hands with none to help her; when enemies looked on and gloated over her downfall.

Lam. 3:19-24

זָכַרְתִּי עֲנִיָּי וּמְרוֹדַי לַעֲנָה וְרָאֵשׁ: <sup>20</sup>זָכוֹר תִּזְכּוֹר וְתִשְׁחַח עָלַי נַפְשִׁי: <sup>21</sup>זֹאת אֲשִׁיב אֶל־לִבִּי עַל־כֵּן אוֹחִיל: <sup>22</sup>חֲסֹדִי  
יְהוָה כִּי לֹא־תִמְנוּ כִּי לֹא־כָלוּ רַחֲמָיו: <sup>23</sup>חֲדָשִׁים לְבָקָרִים רַבָּה אֲמוֹנָתְךָ: <sup>24</sup>חֲלָקִי יְהוָה אֲמַרְהָ נַפְשִׁי עַל־כֵּן אוֹחִיל  
לוֹ:

<sup>19</sup>To recall my distress and **my misery** was wormwood and poison; <sup>20</sup>Whenever I thought of them, I was bowed low. <sup>21</sup>But this do I call to mind, Therefore I have hope: <sup>22</sup>The kindness of the LORD has not ended, His mercies are not spent. <sup>23</sup>They are renewed every

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<sup>115</sup> NRSV has “wandering.”



morning—Ample is Your grace! <sup>24</sup>“The LORD is my portion,” I say with full heart;  
therefore will I hope in Him.

From the context provided in Lam 1:3 where there is a reference to Judah going into exile, it is not surprising that arguments have been made for the root *וָדַד* meaning “to wander” and/or “to be without home.” In Lam 1:7 the understanding is that it is an abstract plural meaning “homelessness” or “wandering.”<sup>116</sup> An alternative view is that the word in question is from the root *מָרַד* meaning “misery” or “humiliation” which is evidenced in the NJPS’s translation.

Commentators have struggled, according to Salters, with the translation of “wandering” because in 1:7 the referent is the city Jerusalem,<sup>117</sup> so in what sense can Jerusalem be in a state of wandering? While this observation is understandable, it underestimates the validity of such a term to describe the city in a metaphorical sense. Taking *מָרַד* as “homelessness” is not incoherent for the three contexts in which the term appears in Lamentations. HALOT’s rendering of *מָרַד* as “homelessness”<sup>118</sup> captures the potential overlap between homelessness as being outcast from a place of security as well as being in an insecure and vulnerable position. This is congruent with how exile would become a more frequent metaphor that is used in contexts that are not mainly addressing the Babylonian exiles. For example, Halvorson-Taylor argues that exile itself became “a metaphor for political disenfranchisement, social inequality, and alienation from God. To suffer any of those

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<sup>116</sup> Cf. Isa. 58:7; cf. Gesenius 1269b; Robert B. Salters, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Lamentations*, ICC (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2010), 57.

<sup>117</sup> Salters suggests that the REB’s rendering of this word as “restlessness” in contrast with the NEB’s “wandering” reflects that translators are uncomfortable describing the city as wandering or homeless. Salters notes that Provan in his work on Lamentations suggests that wandering is an inappropriate description of Zion because elsewhere in the text the people are on the move, whereas Zion stays behind in mourning. See Iain W. Provan, *Lamentations: Based on the Revised Standard Version*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 43; cf. Salters, *Lamentations*, 5.

<sup>118</sup> *מָרַד* HALOT Online.

conditions is, in effect, to be in exile.”<sup>119</sup> This kind of vulnerable position of wandering or homelessness is appropriate for Zion and certainly her scattered children. Therefore, Lamentations arguably participates in this metaphorization of exile where personified Jerusalem is envisioned as homeless. Personified Zion's homeless, vulnerable, and desolate state provides the context for discussing the oscillation between conflicting perspectives that is central to the dialogic poetics of Lamentations.

Lam 1:18 offers an understanding of why the destruction and exile have occurred, and it is the first statement in Lamentations that openly claims God is in the right with regards to bringing these events upon Judah, and that Zion has done wrong. Regarding exile as a form of divine punishment, Halvorson-Taylor suggests that because exile is often presented as a form of divine wrath, a consequence of things going wrong and angering the gods, “biblical authors assumed that exile had meaning beyond its concrete sense, a meaning that was not neutral.”<sup>120</sup> This is indicated by Daughter Zion’s speech where she plainly states, “For I have disobeyed him” (כִּי פִיהוּ מְרִיתִי), and “The Lord is in the right” (צַדִּיק הוּא יְהוָה).

#### Lam. 1:18–22

18 צַדִּיק הוּא יְהוָה כִּי פִיהוּ מְרִיתִי שְׁמַעוּ-נָא כָּל-עַמִּים וְרֵאוּ מִכְּאֲבִי בְּתוֹלְתֵי וּבַחֲוָרֵי הֶלְכוּ בְּשֹׁבֵי: 19 קְרָאתִי לְמַאֲהָבֵי הַמָּה רַמּוֹנֵי כְּהַנִּי וְזִקְנֵי בְּעִיר גְּנוּעוּ כִּי-בִקְשׁוּ אֶכֶל לָמוּ וַיֵּשִׁיבוּ אֶת-נַפְשָׁם: 20 רָאָה יְהוָה כִּי-צָר-לִי מְעַי תִּמְרְמוּ נְהַפְדוּ לִבִּי בְּקִרְבִּי כִּי מָרוּ מְרִיתִי מִחוּץ שִׁפְלָה-חָרַב בַּבַּיִת כַּמֶּנֶת: 21 שְׁמַעוּ כִּי נֶאֱנַחָה אֲנִי אִין מְנַחֵם לִי כָּל-אֲבִי שְׁמַעוּ רְעֵתִי שָׁשׂוּ כִּי אַתָּה עָשִׂיתָ הַבָּאָה יוֹם-קְרָאתָ וַיְהִי כְמוֹנִי: 22 תָּבֹא כָּל-רְעֵתְךָ לְפָנָי וְעוֹלָל לָמוּ כְּאִשׁוּר עוֹלָלָתְ לִי עַל כָּל-פְּשָׁעַי כִּי-רַבּוֹת אֲנַחְתִּי וְלִבִּי דוֹי:

<sup>119</sup> Halvorson-Taylor goes on to say that in the on-going exile model that “the chronology of exile is not the primary concern.” Some authors thought that the exilic period extended until the rise of the Maccabees, with others maintaining “the exile continued to the present day and would only end with an eschatological intervention.” Halvorson-Taylor, *Enduring Exile*, 8. Moreover, the sense that exile cannot be easily rectified, becoming more of an “enduring exile” marks a profound transformation in the interpretation of exilic experience.

<sup>120</sup> Halvorson-Taylor, *Enduring Exile*, 201.

**18The LORD is in the right, for I have disobeyed Him.** Hear, all you peoples, and behold my agony: My maidens and my youths have gone into captivity! <sup>19</sup>I cried out to my friends, but they played me false. My priests and my elders Have perished in the city as they searched for food to keep themselves alive. <sup>20</sup>See, O LORD, the distress I am in! My heart is in anguish, I know how wrong I was to disobey. Outside the sword deals death; Indoors, the plague. <sup>21</sup>When they heard how I was sighing, there was none to comfort me; All my foes heard of my plight and exulted. For it is Your doing: You have brought on the day that You threatened. Oh, let them become like me! <sup>22</sup>Let all their wrongdoing come before You, and deal with them as You have dealt with me for all my transgressions. For my sighs are many, and my heart is sick.

In Lam 1:18, Daughter Zion states that her people have gone into captivity (בְּשָׁבִי). The term clarifies the traumatic nature of the displacement and highlights it as non-consensual, at least in this specific verse.<sup>121</sup> This is the only time the term בְּשָׁבִי occurs in Lamentations, but it is common in other prophetic texts to describe people taken into exile, especially in the book of Jeremiah.<sup>122</sup> Going back to Lam 1:5, she states that the Lord has afflicted her because of her many transgressions (כִּי־יָהֲנֶה הַזֶּגֶה עַל רַב־פְּשָׁעֶיהָ) reinforcing her role in why these events occurred. Lam 1:15 continues this sentiment as well:

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<sup>121</sup> The NETS translation of 1:3 captures the way in which the LXX portrayed Judah going into exile: “Judea was deported from her humiliation and from greatness of her slavery; she sat among the nations; she has found no rest; all those pursuing her have overtaken her among her oppressors.” While the LXX renders the phrase as “Judah is exiled,” but verb is not passive in the Masoretic tradition. Paul Joyce and Diana Lipton, for example, argue that Jerome’s vulgate translation renders the native Hebrew verb best as it indicates they might have migrated voluntarily. See Paul M. Joyce and Diana Lipton, *Lamentations Through the Centuries* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 42.

<sup>122</sup> See Jer. 20:6; 22:22; 30:16; 48:46.

Lam. 1:15–16

15 סִלָּה כָּל־אֲבִירֵי־אֲדָנָי בְּקִרְבִי קָרָא עָלַי מוֹעֵד לְשֹׁבֵר בַּחוּרָי גַּת דָּרָךְ אֲדָנָי לְבַת־וֹלַת בַּת־יְהוּדָה: 16 עַל־אֵלֶּה אֲנִי בּוֹכֶיָה עֵינַי עֵינַי יִרְדָּה מַיִם כִּי־רָתַק מִמְּנֵי מִנְחָם מְשִׁיב נַפְשֵׁי הָיוּ בְּנֵי שׁוֹמְמִים כִּי גִבֹר אֹיֵב:

15The Lord in my midst has rejected All my heroes; He has proclaimed a set time against me to crush my young men. As in a press the Lord has trodden **Fair Maiden Judah**. 16For these things do I weep, my eyes flow with tears: Far from me is any comforter Who might revive my spirit; My children are forlorn, for the foe has prevailed.

Designating herself “Fair Maiden Judah” suggests that the tone of this passage is more sympathetic towards her experience. Overall, God is characterised as the aggressor who decimates her.<sup>123</sup> In Lam 1:13-14 there are various phrases which indicate the ways in which God has caused her suffering; he sets a trap for her feet, and binds her transgressions into a yoke that he places upon her.

Lam 1:13–14

13 מִמָּרוֹם שָׁלַח־אֵשׁ בְּעֶצְמֹתַי וַיִּרְדָּנָה פָּרֵשׁ רֶשֶׁת לְרַגְלֵי הַשִּׁיבְנֵי אַחֲזֹר נִתְנַנְּנִי שִׁמְמָה כָּל־הַיּוֹם דָּוָה: 14 נִשְׁקַד עַל פְּשָׁעַי בְּיָדוֹ יִשְׁתַּרְגּוּ עָלַי עַל־צַוְּאָרָי הַכָּשִׁיל כַּחֲזִי נִתְנַנְּנִי אֲדָנָי בְּיָדֵי לֹא־אֹכֵל קוֹם:

From above He sent a fire down into my bones. **He spread a net for my feet**, He hurled me backward; He has left me forlorn, In constant misery. 14**The yoke of my offenses is bound fast, lashed tight by His hand**; Imposed upon my neck, it saps my strength; **the Lord has delivered me into the hands of those I cannot withstand.**

<sup>123</sup> Gerstenberger notes that the portrayal of a “scornful deity” who has caused the catastrophe pervades all “lament and complaint” literature in the ancient Near East. Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, 475.

The perspective of Daughter Zion and the narrator in Lam 1 is that God has caused this destruction and become like an enemy to her. It is also directly in response to Daughter Zion's rebellion. While this is the overall perspective of Lam 1, there are two voices; that of Daughter Zion and the narrator who appears to sympathise with Daughter Zion's situation and her exiled children. Lam 1 ends with Daughter Zion requesting that God also punish her enemies the same way he punished her, another feature that will resurface again in Lam 3:

Lam 1:22

תָּבֵא כָּל־רָעָתָם לְפָנַי וְעוֹלָל לְמוֹ פְּאֹשֶׁר עוֹלֵלָתְ לִי עַל כָּל־פְּשָׁעַי כִּי־רַבּוֹת אֲנִחָתִי וְלִבִּי דָוִי:

<sup>22</sup>Let all their wrongdoing come before You, **and deal with them as You have dealt with me for all my transgressions.** For my sighs are many, and my heart is sick.

The various voices may simulate a conversation, however Lam 1 as a whole communicates a single idea: Zion's transgressions have brought her misery and suffering upon her. Moreover, from the perspective of Lam 1 God is in the right for punishing her even if it is excessively harsh.<sup>124</sup>

In Miller's consideration of Lam 1, Miller suggests that neither the narrator nor Daughter Zion's imagined speech dominate the discourse, "There is no final conclusion; the conflict between the two speakers remains unresolved and unresolvable."<sup>125</sup> However, Lam 1's perspective on Daughter Zion's guilt is not substantially challenged in a way that suggests that two perspectives have intersected with one another. The dialogic nature of the conversation about Daughter Zion's wrongdoings and whether such a punishment was

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<sup>124</sup> Cf. Lam 1:18, 20.

<sup>125</sup> Miller, "Reading Voices," 407.

deserved begins to be fleshed out in Lam 2, where the narrator voices his anger at God more explicitly.

If Lamentations is read chronologically, by the end of Lam 1 there is one perspective which is fairly dominant, and it agrees with the accusatory nature of the start of the poem even if there is sympathy with personified Zion. For Lam 1, even though the language of lament and the rhetorical opening of הָיָה יְהוָה create a dialogic poetic form, the content of the ideas is not dialogic in nature. The lack of integration or resolve between different perspectives which is indicative of dialogic texts comes in the interaction between Lam 1 and 2. Lam 1's perspective on Daughter Zion's wrongdoing and blame is not uncommon and is found in other ancient Near Eastern city laments that highlights self-blame on the people/city's part.<sup>126</sup> What will become evident in Lam 2, 3, 4, and 5 is that these poems protest and explore the consequence of this perspective that is raised in Lam 1 to address exile, suffering, and the nature of the people's relationship to the divine in a way that is dialogic. The impact of this dialogic discourse is that it presents an open-ended perspective towards the exile and its resolve, and towards resolve concerning the people's relationship with the divine.

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<sup>126</sup> Westermann suggests that the formal similarities that *Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur* shares with the book of Lamentations can be insightful for its study; both texts personify the city, and there is a similar atmosphere in addressing the destruction of a city and its effect on the inhabitants. Moreover, he also notes that the language of lament and petition is found in both, echoing what is also found in some psalms of lament in the Hebrew Bible. See Westermann, *Lamentations*, 11–18; See also the work of Samuel Noah Kramer, *Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur*, The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, Assyriological Studies 12 (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1940). Furthermore, Westermann also notes that the Sumerian text is likely from the first half of the second millennium BCE, so it is a distant parallel to Lamentations. Furthermore, Thomas McDaniel suggests that direct literary dependence between Lamentations and *Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur* cannot be established. This is mainly the case because the similarities often amounted to no more than a single word. For this discussion see Thomas F. McDaniel, "The Alleged Sumerian Influence upon Lamentations," *Vetus Testamentum* 18 (1968): 198–209. Overall, the similarities are more indicative of similarities in the forms of lament itself as a wider cultural phenomenon, and not an indicator of direct literary dependence. McDaniel discusses that writers who experienced war and sieges in the ancient Near East would likely discuss similar aspects of them because these were not unique experiences; most would entail hunger, famine, the destruction of the city walls, as well as the captivity of the inhabitants. McDaniel "Sumerian Influence," 200.

## Lamentations 2

Lam 2 is similar to Lam 1 in that the dialogue is framed between an anonymous narrator and Daughter Zion. However, the narrator speaks to her and sympathises more clearly with her experience in this chapter. In Lam 1 Jerusalem remembers and longs for the days before the destruction, and in Lam 2 it is God who forgets the temple but remembers a threat from long ago instead. There is a parallel between Jerusalem's act of remembering in Lam 1, longing for better days, and God forgetting his temple and remembering a threat from long ago:

Lam 2:17

עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר נָמַם בְּצַע אֱמֻרָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר צָנָה מִימֵי־קֶדֶם הָרָס וְלֹא חָמַל וַיִּשְׁמַח עַל־יָד אֹיְבֵי הָרִים קָרַן צָרִיד:

<sup>17</sup>The LORD has done what He purposed, has carried out the decree that He ordained long ago; He has torn down without pity. He has let the foe rejoice over you, has exalted the might of your enemies.

Arguably, Daughter Zion is given less of a voice in Lam 2. This may be a stylistic feature because there are more third person descriptions of the female personified city,<sup>127</sup> but it also has implications for creating a dialogic discourse. Lam 2:20–22 could be considered Daughter Zion's direct speech, or the speech of the narrator. Earlier in Lam 1, the narrator allows personified Zion to speak, but the narrator in Lam 2 appears to be more emotionally involved in Zion's plight. The prayer spoken by Daughter Zion in 2:20–22 contains a harrowing depiction of the people's suffering.<sup>128</sup> In response to the narrator's request that

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<sup>127</sup> Hasan-Rokem, "Bodies Performing in Ruins," 43.

<sup>128</sup> Salters describes verses 20–22 as constituting Zion's prayer: "The final verses constitute the prayer of Zion, although we must surely interpret this as the prayer of the poet and, in the commemoration of the 9th of Ab, the prayer of the community. In addition to calling on Yahweh to take note (cf. 1.9c, 11c), there is a clear element of accusation here. The question 'Should women be driven to eating their own children?' appears to accuse Yahweh of going too far in his aggressive attacks." Salters, *Lamentations*, 109.

Zion cry aloud to the Lord, we have either the narrator's speech speaking as Daughter Zion, or Daughter Zion speaking herself:

Lam. 2:18–22

<sup>18</sup>צָעַק לָבָם אֶל־אֲדֹנָי חֹמַת בִּתְצִיּוֹן הוֹרִידֵי כִנְחָל דְּמָעָה יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה אֶל־תַּתְּנִי פּוּגַת לָךְ אֶל־תִּדְּם בַּת־עֵינֶיךָ:  
<sup>19</sup>קוּמִי רַנִּי בַלַּיִל לְרֹאשׁ אֲשֶׁמְרוֹת שִׁפְכִי כַמִּים לִבֶּךָ נֹכַח פְּנֵי אֲדֹנָי שְׂאֵי אֱלֹו כִפְיֶךָ עַל־נַפְשׁ עוֹלְלֶיךָ הַעֲטוּפִים בְּרָעַב  
בְּרֹאשׁ פְּלִיחֹצוֹת: <sup>20</sup>רְאֵה יְהוָה וְהַבִּיטָה לְמִי עוֹלְלָתָ פֹה אִם־תֹּאכְלֶנָּה נְשִׁים פְּרִים עַלְלֵי טַפְחִים אִם־יִהְרַג  
בְּמַקְדָּשׁ אֲדֹנָי פֶּהוּ וְנִבְיָא: <sup>21</sup>שִׁכְבוּ לְאֶרֶץ חֹצוֹת נַעַר וְזָקֵן בְּתוֹלְתֵי וּבַחֹזְרֵי נָפְלוּ בְּחֶרֶב הַרְגָתָ בְּיוֹם אֶפְרָי טִבְחָתָ לֹא  
חִמְלָתָ: <sup>22</sup>תִּקְרָא כְיוֹם מוֹעֵד מְגוּרֵי מִסָּבִיב וְלֹא הָיָה בְיוֹם אַרְיָהוּנָה פְּלִיט וְשָׂרִיד אֲשֶׁר־טַפְחָתִי וְרַבִּיתִי אִיבֵי כָלָם:

<sup>18</sup>Their heart cried out to the Lord. O wall of Fair Zion, Shed tears like a torrent day and night! Give yourself no respite, your eyes no rest. <sup>19</sup>Arise, cry out in the night at the beginning of the watches, pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord! Lift up your hands to Him for the life of your infants, who faint for hunger at every street corner. <sup>20</sup>See, **O LORD, and behold, to whom You have done this! Alas, women eat their own fruit, their new-born babes! Alas, priest and prophet are slain in the Sanctuary of the Lord!** <sup>21</sup>Prostrate in the streets lie both young and old. My maidens and youths are fallen by the sword; you slew them on Your day of wrath, you slaughtered without pity. <sup>22</sup>You summoned, as on a festival, my neighbors from roundabout. On the day of the wrath of the LORD, none survived or escaped; those whom I bore and reared my foe has consumed.



Daughter Zion highlights two aspects of suffering first; mothers starved to the point of devouring their own children, and priests killed in the sanctuary.<sup>129</sup> The reference to the slaughter of the priests in the temple is reminiscent of Lam 1:10:

Lam 1:10

יְדוּ פֶרֶשׁ צָרַעַל כָּל־מַחְמַדֶּיהָ כִּי־רָאָתָהּ גּוֹיִם בָּאוּ מִקְדָּשָׁהּ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָהּ לֹא־יָבֹאוּ בִקְהָל לָךְ:

The foe has laid hands on everything dear to her. She has seen her Sanctuary invaded by nations which you have denied admission into your community.

The narrator appears to experience an outburst in response to the images of Yahweh as an aggressor towards the people.<sup>130</sup> Moreover, Salters aptly notes that in these verses “there is a clear element of accusation here” that implies that God has taken his punishment too far.<sup>131</sup>

Daughter Zion’s, or the narrator’s, opening phrase in 2:20 “רָאֵה יְהוָה וְהַבִּיטָה לְמִי עוֹלַלְתָּ” (See, O LORD, and behold, to whom You have done this) sets up the parallelism between the suffering of the women, children, priests, and young people in the following clauses. This opening line is reminiscent of Lam 1:9 which also contains the imperative of רָאֵה:

Lam 1:9

רָאֵה יְהוָה אֶת־עֲוֹנֵי כִּי הִגְדִּיל אוֹיֵב:

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<sup>129</sup> Salters notes parallels between other texts: “At Lev 26.29, in the context of Yahweh predicting punishment for sin, the eating of children is envisaged; cf. also Deut 28.53, 56, 58.” Salters, *Lamentations*, 175. Linafelt argues that the translation “to whom you have done this” in the NRSV and NJPS water the accusatory nature down of Zion’s statement, noting that עלל carries the force of “afflict” or “to abuse,” and he argues that this verb implies capriciousness on Yahweh’s part. Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 56. Linafelt uses Judges 19:25 as an example where the texts describe the rape and murder of the Levite’s concubine, and that the same verb functions as a parallel with “rape.” Ibid., 56.

<sup>130</sup> Salters, *Lamentations*, 108.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 109.

See, O LORD, my misery. How the enemy jeers!

Moreover, in Lamentations 1:11, Zion's speech also begins with, רֵאָה יְהוָה וְהִבִּיטָהּ (Look O Lord and behold). Nonetheless, it is interesting that Salter states that 2:20–22 are *not* Daughter Zion's actual speech, but what the narrator wants her to say.<sup>132</sup> The implications for this are important for thinking about not only how discourses are created within the poem, but also how the poems of Lamentations then relate to one another. There is a difference between personified Jerusalem speaking, as she clearly does in Lam 1, or the narrator demonstrating what he wants her to say. The context of Daughter Zion's speech in Lam 2 is different because an emotive narrator is telling her to cry out. The poetic effects of her speech being the imagined speech of the narrator highlights the narrator's dismay at what they have seen; so much so that he wishes Daughter Zion would question God's punishment and highlight the suffering that has occurred. In Lam 1, Daughter Zion accepts the punishment, but still laments her misery and the excessive nature of the punishment; and Lam 2 ends with Zion's plea unanswered and without resolve. Either way, Daughter Zion or the narrator have protested against God's judgement and actions, creating conflict with Lam 1's perspective on the destruction and exile.

The personification of Daughter Zion is significant for how Lamentations develops a dialogic poetics. Mandolfo makes a helpful comparison between the musical *Wicked* in comparison with the film *The Wizard of Oz*; he does so to demonstrate how Lamentations is a polyphonic

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<sup>132</sup> Salters writes, "The words are the poet's and not Zion's; and he is urging his audience/readers/commemorators to adopt his stance regarding Yahweh. Our poet is distressed about the devastation all around him, the destruction and the slaughter, the cannibalism, the infanticide and the sacrilege. He is convinced that Yahweh is the perpetrator and feels that Yahweh should be confronted with what he has done; and he puts the words in the mouth of the stricken city. By referring to the desperate situation the women and children find themselves in, he hopes to appeal to Yahweh's compassion; and by the reference to the violation of the temple and the cultic personnel he appeals to Yahweh's self-respect!" Salters, *Lamentations*, 178.

text through the personification of Daughter Zion.<sup>133</sup> Mandolfo highlights that Daughter Zion is given a voice in Lamentations which allows her to speak back against the accusations levelled against her by the prophets, much like how the musical *Wicked* gives Elphaba a voice (and a much more sympathetic perspective) which is lacking in the *Wizard of Oz* film.<sup>134</sup> For example, Lamentations preserves the metaphor of Jerusalem as a woman: She is still adulterous as she is in other texts, but we *also* hear her side of the narrative. This is the equivalent to the way in which *Wicked* preserves the signifiers of Elphaba's character from the *Wizard of Oz* film (e.g., the green skin and distinctive cackle).<sup>135</sup> Lamentations is therefore reworking lament-like psalms as a way to achieve this goal of giving Daughter Zion a voice.<sup>136</sup>

But there are still limits to how this voice is constructed in each poem. For example, Lam 2 may not necessarily give Zion a voice as she had in Lam 1. If the speech of Zion in the last several verses of the Lam 2 is reported or imagined speech of the narrator, then the tone is more of frustration at what someone else wants Zion to say. In that case, rather than Lam 2 presenting two unmerged voices, it presents us with the narrator's struggle with the role of God in Judah's suffering and exile, and the poem ends without closure on this issue.

It is also worth noting that this cry to call God's attention to these specific horrors (cannibalism and deceased priests) does not entail that Daughter Zion is implying that she is in the right in contrast to God, rather that the punishment is too excessive. Lam 2 does not subvert the message of Lam 1. Rather, Lam 2's protesting narrator raises the issue of God's

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<sup>133</sup> Carleen Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets: A Dialogic Theology of the Book of Lamentations* (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2007), 57–58.

<sup>134</sup> Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion*, 57–58. See also Mandolfo's article, "Dialogic Form Criticism: An Intertextual Reading of Lamentations and Psalms of Lament," in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, ed. Roland Boer, SemeiaSt 63 (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2007), 69–90 (73).

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 90. Mandolfo explains that they are not comparing Daughter Zion to the original children's story *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), but rather the popular film (1939) and musical (2003).

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

role in causing suffering, and what its implications are for the people and how they perceive the divine after these events.

Faced with the horrors described in Lam 2:20–22, either Daughter Zion or the narrator question the suitability of God’s punishment, and this has implications for how the divine is perceived. Linafelt, for example, notes that the narrator in 2:13 tries to fulfil the role of comforter and cannot:<sup>137</sup>

מָה־אֶעֱיֵדָךְ מָה אֶדְמֶה־לָּךְ הַבַּת יְרוּשָׁלַם מִה אֲשׁוּה־לָּךְ וְאֶנְתַּמֶּךְ בְּתוֹלַת בַּת־צִיּוֹן כִּי־גְדוֹל כַּיָּם שְׁבַרְךָ מִי  
יִרְפָּא־לָּךְ:

<sup>13</sup>What can I take as witness or liken to you, O Fair Jerusalem? **What can I match with you to console you, O Fair Maiden Zion? For your ruin is vast as the sea: Who can heal you?**

The second question the narrator poses reflects the rhetorical nature of the first, and it is clear that there is no answer, and no one who can heal her. Like the הִיכָה that begins Lam 1 and 2, the language of lament fosters a dialogue without an authoritative narrative perspective that discounts the value of other perspectives in the poem or provides a sense of closure. Overall, the narrator’s frustration and outburst in 2:18 in light of these rhetorical questions to Zion reflect the frustration that can arise from not being able to find resolve. Therefore, the narrator’s outburst in 2:18 highlights the dialogic poetics between Lam 1 and 2.

Returning to Bakhtin’s approach, he suggests that polyphonic texts would normally include a clash of voices, even simultaneous voices, lacking a progression of thought.<sup>138</sup> A distinctive feature of polyphonic texts is the lack of evolution, and “coexistence and interaction”<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 54.

<sup>138</sup> Miller, “Reading Voices,” 407.

<sup>139</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems*, 28.

between different perspectives, concepts, and ideas. This last distinctive feature is evident between Lam 1 and 2. The narrator identifies with Zion's suffering so strongly that it is hard to tell who speaks in 2:20. If there was any closure to 1:21–22 by hoping for the day of God's anger, then Lam 2 undermines this hope by refocusing on the day of the Lord as the day he punished Zion (2:17).<sup>140</sup> For example, if Lamentations was only composed of the first chapter, then one could argue that some resolve is achieved. Zion accepts her guilt, she suffers divine punishment, in response Zion hopes that God will punish her enemies by the same standards with which she was punished.<sup>141</sup> However, Lam 2 displays a frustrated and despairing narrator. Therefore, I agree with Janzen that Lam 2 does not provide further closure for Zion in light of Lam 1, but also that the narrator is overwhelmed by the extent of Zion's suffering.<sup>142</sup> The outburst from Lam 2's narrator occurs after they reflect upon the extent of the people's suffering, and the shame and destruction brought to the temple and the city. The reality of the suffering does not appear to be integrated with the image of Yahweh as aggressor in a way that provides closure, generating further dialogue on these issues instead.

Reflecting on the heterogenous quality of Lam 1 and 2 thus far, the dominant features would be the way in which God's role as aggressor is not resolved. God is portrayed as in the right to punish, and Zion is in the right to complain about the nature of this excessive and horrific punishment. Both ideas stand in tension with one another without providing a sense of closure to personified Zion and the narrator.

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<sup>140</sup> Janzen, *Trauma and the Failure of History*, 104.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

### Lamentations 3

Lam 3 offers another perspective that interacts with the previous presentations of God as an aggressor in Lam 1 and 2, and with the themes of suffering and exile. Lam 3 alternates between hope and despair,<sup>143</sup> approaching the topics of exile and God's role as aggressor from the perspective of an anonymous male narrator (*geber*/גִּבֹּר). Lam 3 has also been presented as the pinnacle of the book of Lamentations message.<sup>144</sup> Although, it has been argued that Lam 3 represents the hopeful perspective that other voices in Lamentations lack,<sup>145</sup> it does not resolve the issues set out by previous poems and continues to generate a dialogic discourse on the exile and destruction.

A notable difference from the first two poems is the identification of the narrator. Adele Berlin describes the narrator here as the “personified voice of exile.”<sup>146</sup> This contrasts with Lam 1 and 2 which are generally approached as voices from within the land.

Lam 3:1–2

אֲנִי הַגִּבֹּר רָאָה עָנִי בַשֶּׁבֶט עֲבָרְתוֹ: <sup>2</sup>אוֹתֵי נָתַג וַיִּלְךְ חֹשֶׁךְ וְלֹא-אֹר: <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>I am the man who has known affliction under **the rod of His wrath**; <sup>2</sup>**Me He drove on and on** in unrelieved darkness.

The language of “affliction” (עָנִי) also occurs back in Lam 1:3, where Judah is described as going into exile. The language of עָנִי also occurs in Lam 1:7 which was also discussed earlier, where personified Zion mourns her previous state before the destruction during her time of

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<sup>143</sup> Berlin, *Lamentations*, 86.

<sup>144</sup> Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia, PN: Fortress, 1979), 594.

<sup>145</sup> Jill Middlemas, “Did Second Isaiah Write Lamentations Iii?” *VT* 56 (2006): 505–525.

<sup>146</sup> Berlin, *Lamentations*, 84.

affliction (עֲנִיָּה) and “homelessness” (וּמְרוֹדֵיהָ). In Lam 3:2, the *geber* has been driven on and on (אוֹתִי נָהַג וַיִּלְכֶּד) into darkness. Roots pertaining to movement, נהג and הלך,<sup>147</sup> indicate that the metaphor of journeying is employed to describe the treacherous way that God is treating the *geber* under the “rod of his wrath” (בְּשֵׁבֶט עֲבָרָתוֹ). The language of movement is also compounded with the mention of chains (חֻשְׁתֵּי) in Lam 3:7, which suggests that the narrator is portraying himself as a captive soldier being driven into exile.

Lam 3:7

גָּדַר בְּעָדֵי וְלֹא אֵצֵא הַכְּבִיד נְחֻשְׁתֵּי:<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup>He has walled me in and I cannot break out; **he has weighed me down with chains.**

The violence the *geber* witnesses evokes the semantic range of warfare with references to being thrown in a cistern, shot with arrows, having innards torn out, as well as deportation.<sup>148</sup>

Lam 3:12–13

דָּרַךְ קִשְׁתּוֹ וַיִּצִיבֵנִי כַמִּטְרָא לַחֵץ:<sup>13</sup> הֵבִיא בְּכִלְיוֹתַי בְּנֵי אֲשָׁפוֹתוֹ:<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup>He has bent His bow and made me the target of His arrows: <sup>13</sup>He has shot into my vitals the shafts of His quiver.

These images of being taken captive and warfare are appropriate for depicting violent conflict between soldiers. Therefore, they are suitable for the male narrator (גֵּבֵר) to speak of because these fates may have disproportionately affected soldiers in Judah.<sup>149</sup> After detailing the

<sup>147</sup> נהג in the Qal means to “lead” or “drive,” and הלך means to “go, walk.”

<sup>148</sup> Berlin, *Lamentations*, 84–85.

<sup>149</sup> For example, Assyrian reliefs show prisoners taken away in chains. Cf. with the image in Lam. 3:7 which also refers to chains. Berlin, *Lamentations*, 86.

harms the narrator has suffered, the tone shifts to imaging the divine as more merciful beginning in Lam 3:21. The language of God being the *geber*'s "portion" exemplifies the positive shift in tone and perspective on the divine, and it may also indicate that the state of exile does not prohibit them from being in the divine's favour.

### **"The Lord is my Portion" Motif**

Reflecting on "the Lord is my Portion" motif addresses the benefit of Berlin's insight into this chapter as the "voice of exile," and how Lamentations contains an open-ended poetics concerning exile. To contextualise how this motif is used in Lamentations it is helpful to see how it is employed in the book of Numbers. It occurs there when the Levites are told that the Lord will be their portion as opposed to a having a territory of their own as their portion:

Num 18:20

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַהֲרֹן בְּאַרְצָם לֹא תִנְחַל וְחֶלֶק לֹא־יִהְיֶה לָּךְ בְּתוֹכָם אֲנִי חֶלְקֶךָ וְנִחְלַתְךָ בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

<sup>20</sup>And the LORD said to Aaron: **You shall, however, have no territorial share among them or own any portion in their midst; I am your portion** and your share among the Israelites.

This motif is also picked up in Lam 3 when the speaker says that "the Lord is my portion." The landless state of the Levites emphasizes that their provision comes from God and serving him.<sup>150</sup> When discussing this example from Numbers 18:20, Montgomery discusses in their dissertation how this "landless" state mirrors the people's wandering in the wilderness in the pentateuchal narratives where God miraculously provides for the people.<sup>151</sup> Additionally,

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<sup>150</sup> Matthew Montgomery, *At Home with God: "Inheritance" in the Hebrew Bible in Light of the Ancient Near Eastern Cultic Worldview* (PhD diss., diss. Regent University, 2022), 37.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid. 37.



they suggest that the Levites “inheriting” God “instead of a plot of land is an invitation to a life of ‘landlessness.’”<sup>152</sup> Berlin suggests that the motif’s use in Lam 3 implies that the people’s “landholding” in lieu of the physical land is God.<sup>153</sup>

Lam. 3:21–24

זאת אֲשִׁיב אֶל־לְבִי עַל־כֵּן אוֹחִיל:<sup>22</sup> חֶסְדֵי יְהוָה כִּי לֹא־תִמְנוּ כִּי לֹא־כָלוּ רַחֲמָיו:<sup>23</sup> חֲדָשִׁים לְבֹקְרִים רַבָּה אֲמוֹנָתִי:<sup>24</sup> חֶלְקִי יְהוָה אֲמַרָה נִפְשִׁי עַל־כֵּן אוֹחִיל לוֹ:

<sup>21</sup>But this do I call to mind, therefore I have hope: <sup>22</sup>The kindness of the LORD has not ended, his mercies are not spent. <sup>23</sup>They are renewed every morning—ample is Your grace! <sup>24</sup>“The LORD is my portion,” I say with full heart; therefore will I hope in Him.

The metaphorical sense in which God, or something else, can be someone’s portion is also likely to be relevant to the passage, so it is more likely that both nuances of “fate” and that God is a “lot” in lieu of landholding itself are at work.

While in the book of Numbers land is at issue, in other texts such as Ecclesiastes 3:22 it appears to be used in the more general sense that portion refers to “lot” as in “fate.” In Psalm 16:5; 73:26, 119:57; 142:5 חֶלֶק is also used to refer to God as the narrator’s “portion.” The motif of the divine being someone’s “portion” (חֶלֶק) in Lam 3 comes when the speaker asserts that God has not stopped being kind towards the people. Therefore, “portion” as reference to the land, as well as to someone’s general fate, are applicable in the context of Lam 3.<sup>154</sup>

Therefore, in the context of Lamentations, it has been noted that the reference to God being

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid. Cf. the narratives of God providing food and water in the wilderness in Exodus 15; 16; and Numbers 20:1–13.

<sup>153</sup> Berlin, *Lamentations*, 93.

<sup>154</sup> Montgomery discusses in their dissertation Number 18:20 and suggests that נַחֲלָה (inheritance) in the context of covenants could be seen through two lenses: “God’s inheritance is both the people (relational) and the land (land-oriented). Similarly, the people’s inheritance is both the land (land oriented) and God (relational).” Montgomery, *At Home with God*, 10.

someone's portion can also signify their general fate, but given the prominence of the exile as an aspect of the people's suffering it adds weights to Berlin's view that this "voice of exile" reminds the audience that God is their "portion" regardless of their circumstances. This contributes to a more open-ended perspective on the exile and its implications for how the community could relate to the divine under these circumstances, and therefore this motif and its use in Lamentations contributes to an open-ended poetics concerning exile.

### Oscillation Between God as a Source of Hope and a Source of Rejection

It has already been noted that in Lam 3 there is oscillation between God as a source of hope but also as a source of pain and suffering. This oscillation contributes and builds upon the dialogic nature of Lam 1 and 2 in that these perspectives are not merged or integrated but coexist side and side. The dialogic quality of Lam 3 can be seen in how the narrator oscillates between the recognition that he cannot entirely blame God for the suffering he sees, but on the other hand God's control over the world, and its events, is not something that the narrator can ignore either. While the Lord is his "portion," which could be an especially powerful image for a member of the *golah*, even this does not resolve the narrator's troubles.

Therefore, both God and human beings receive critique.

Lam. 3:39–44

מה־יתאוּנוּ אָדָם חַי גָּבֵר עַל־חַטָּאוֹ: <sup>40</sup>נִחַפְּשָׁה דְרָכֵינוּ וְנִחַקְרָה וְנִשׁוּבָה עַד־יְהוָה: <sup>41</sup>נִשָּׂא לִבֵּנוּ אֶל־כַּפָּיִם אֶל־אֵל בְּשָׁמַיִם: <sup>42</sup>נִחַנּוּ פְשָׁעֵנוּ וּמַרִּינוּ אֶתְּךָ לֹא סָלַחְתָּ: <sup>43</sup>סָכַתָּה בָּאָרֶץ וַתִּרְדָּפֵנוּ הֲרַגְתָּ לֹא תִמְלֹת: <sup>44</sup>סָכַוְתָה בְּעֵנּוּ לְךָ מִעֲבוּר תִּפְלָה:

<sup>39</sup>Why should a living man complain, a man, about the punishment of his sins? <sup>40</sup>Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the LORD! <sup>41</sup>Let us lift up our hearts and hands to God in heaven: <sup>42</sup>We have transgressed and rebelled, and you have not forgiven. <sup>43</sup>You

have wrapped yourself with anger and pursued us, killing without pity; <sup>44</sup>you have wrapped yourself with a cloud so that no prayer can pass through.

Despite the prominence given to the narrator's reflections on piety and patience in light of suffering, the poem does not end on this note. The two perspectives are not merged, rather the *geber*, like Daughter Zion in Lam 1, asks God to visit judgement on those who have harmed the people; asking God that they at least experience a punishment as harsh as theirs:

תתן להם מגנת לב תאלתה להם: תרדף באף ותשמידם מתחת שמי יהודה:<sup>65</sup>

<sup>65</sup>You will give them dullness of heart; your curse will be on them. <sup>66</sup>You will pursue them in anger and destroy them from under your heavens, O LORD.”

Tod Linafelt, for example, critiques the tendency in scholarship to place Lam 3 as an ideological high point of Lamentations, glossing over the pain that the *geber* highlights concerning God's absence and rejection.<sup>155</sup> Nineteenth and twentieth century scholarship on Lamentations in Linafelt's evaluation focused on the suffering *geber* in Lam 3 for problematic reasons. Linafelt suggests that it is both male bias and Christian bias that has led to undue attention being focused on Lam 3 as the pinnacle of Lamentations. Linafelt, for example, critiques Hillers for thinking of the *geber* in Lam 3 as an “everyman,” and that this rules out the central role of personified Zion because she cannot be construed as an “everyman.”<sup>156</sup> Regarding the tendency to see the positive parts of Lam 3 as the highpoint of Lamentations, Linafelt discusses how the *geber* was seen as similar to Jesus in the New Testament; and in conjunction with parts of Lam 3 emphasizing reconciliation, rather than confrontation with the divine, there has been a tendency to focus on Lam 3 as representing

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<sup>155</sup> Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 3.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

the key message of Lamentations.<sup>157</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, to emphasize the positive parts of Lam 3 would obscure that the poem ends much like Lam 1 with a plea that God visit punishment of equal measure to those that participated in Judah's downfall.<sup>158</sup> The poem does not end suggesting that accepting suffering silently is the end of the matter, nor does it provide complete closure or resolve to the discourse surrounding suffering and exile in Lamentations.

Moreover, the reference to God hiding himself in a cloud in 3:43 is significant in terms of outlining the problem with divine communication in Lam 3 that distresses the *geber*.

Although God can in theory listen to the people, he has decided not to. Divine absence and divine punishment go hand in hand, and punishment or the destruction of temples would commonly be connected to the sin of the kings and people in the ancient Near East.<sup>159</sup>

Concerning this issue Berlejung writes:

“Experiences of divine withdrawal from the human partners, divine absence, could be described with terms of hiding, leaving, turning away or darkening the face, and other metaphors that designated the end of human-divine communication and the rejection by the god(s). This withdrawal was always believed to be for a limited time.”<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid. In Chapter Three of this thesis this kind of concern will come up again in the context that the transformation of the wilderness motif is interpreted in light of a “New Exodus motif” that has been influential in both Isaiah scholarship and New Testament scholarship.

<sup>158</sup> Lam. 1:22.

<sup>159</sup> Angelika Berlejung, “Divine Presence and Absence,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Ritual and Worship in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Samuel E. Balentine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 344–361 (347).

<sup>160</sup> Berlejung, “Divine Presence and Absence,” 360. Berlejung states that gods were not limited to a single abode, so, once again, the idea that divine presence could be more mobile is in line with the ancient Near Eastern context, “Markers of divine presence were numerous in the ANE and the OT: they were material and immaterial, mobile and immobile, earthly and cosmic. Gods were not believed to be reduced to a single abode, and several aspects could be combined. Divine presence, traditionally believed to be located in a temple (= dwelling) and a cultic image (= divine body), could be dissolved from space and time.” Ibid., 359–360.

The model of communication between gods and their people is often described in terms of a royal audience in the ancient Near East.<sup>161</sup> A god who turns his/her face away signals a breakdown in communication and often coincides with divine punishment, much like how a king's face might shine on the person standing before him if he is in favor with the king, while a king hiding his face from someone would signal displeasure with that individual.<sup>162</sup> For example, earlier in Lam 2:9 divine absence has led to a breakdown of communication between the divine and the prophets, and this is related to the exile of the society's elite.

Lam 2:9

מֶלֶכָּהּ וְשָׂרֶיהָ בְּגוֹיִם אֵין תּוֹרָה גַּם־נְבִיאֶיהָ לֹא־מֵצְאוּ חֶזוֹן מִיְהוָה:

Her king and princes are among the nations; the law is no more, and her prophets find no vision from the LORD.

The resolve to this issue of communication between the deity and the people is the inversion of whatever caused the divine to leave in the first place. Such as, for example, the people's iniquity (עֲוֹן).

Lam 2:14

<sup>14</sup>נְבִיאֶיךָ חֶזוּ לְךָ שְׁוֵא וְתַפְּל וְלֹא־גִלוּ עַל־עֲוֹנֶיךָ לְהַשִּׁיב לְךָ שְׁבִיתֶיךָ וַיִּחְזוּ לְךָ מְשֻׁאוֹת שְׁוֵא וּמְדַוִּיחִים:

<sup>14</sup>Your seers prophesied to you delusion and folly. **They did not expose your iniquity so as to restore your fortunes**, but prophesied to you oracles of delusion and deception.

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<sup>161</sup> Berlejung, "Divine Presence and Absence," 348.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

Lam 2:14 hints that the people might have been unaware of the extent of their follies, and so they were unable to alter their ways in time to restore their status with their god.

Therefore, the broader context in which divine presence and absence are conceptualised in the ancient Near East is helpful for contextualising Lamentation's complaints of abandonment towards God. Berlejung, for example, notes that divine absence was seen as time limited. As a result of sin or disobedience, a god might stop dwelling at a certain place, such as a temple, but in theory they could certainly return or change location should circumstances change. It would not therefore be inconceivable that the situation between the people and the divine entity could be rectified and that the divine presence would return. This contextualises the open-ended poetics towards exile seen thus far in Lam 1, 2, and 3 because while exile is a difficult and traumatic state, the text does not imply that returning to the land would resolve the problem of divine disfavour. Therefore, motifs such as "the lord is my portion" which suggest that *God* is the people's portion reveal the impact of displacement on how the community's relationship with the divine is conceived of in these challenging circumstances.

Overall, the way in which the *geber* addresses the suffering of the people and his own has a pronounced dialogic quality. The narrator seeks multiple perspectives in order to inform their own,<sup>163</sup> advocating for a resolute and patient response to suffering, but also acknowledges that the divine appears not to be responding, and the poem ends with the relationship still in disrepair.

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<sup>163</sup> I think Bier is correct in suggesting that the *geber*'s discourse "is better read as a polyphony that engages multiple perspectives as he seeks to make sense of his situation." See Miriam Bier, "'We Have Sinned and Rebelled; You Have Not Forgiven' the Dialogic Interaction between Authoritative and Internally Persuasive Discourse in Lamentations 3," *BibInt* 22 (2014): 146–167 (147).

When referring to the various topics over which Lamentations offers multiple interpretive possibilities i.e., how should the people respond to the divine? Heath states that, “[t]hese and other interpretive possibilities are not finally ‘solved’ or definitively ‘answered’ within the poems of Lamentations.”<sup>164</sup> This tension and lack of resolve is an indication of a dialogic poetics. As mentioned earlier, according to Bakhtin in a polyphonic text voices can coexist, “as an eternal harmony of unmerged voices.”<sup>165</sup> Moreover, these unmerged perspectives in Lam 3 create tension in the poem. That these perspectives do not coexist perfectly together is demonstrated in the oscillation between hope and despair throughout Lam 3.<sup>166</sup>

There are trends in how the dialogue between the first three poems is constructed in scholarship. Usually, Lam 1–2 are described as highlighting protest against God and the voice of daughter Zion, while Lam 3 is sometimes heralded as prioritising obedience and piety as the more correct response to suffering.<sup>167</sup> The effect of Lam 3 is, from these perspectives, to undermine the accusations that daughter Zion makes against God in the earlier chapters. I agree with Bier that this oversimplifies not only the individual contents of the chapters, but also the way in which they have been woven together in their current form to present a more complex discourse on exile and suffering. Neither God nor Daughter Zion is presented as a monolithic figure, and neither is exempt from critique in these chapters.

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<sup>164</sup> Heath, *Poetry*, 4.

<sup>165</sup> Miller argues this in relation to Lam 1 which I do not think is necessarily a polyphonic text, but the observation holds true for the other chapters. Miller, “Reading Voices,” 407; also cf. Bakhtin, *Problems*, 30.

<sup>166</sup> Heath argues that Lamentations is characterized by the vacillation between penitence and protest, confession and lament. Heath, *Poetry*, 3.

<sup>167</sup> Paul R. House, *Lamentations*, WBC 23B (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 429. On page 11 Linafelt cites a few examples where commentators devalue lament unless it leads to something else that is less mournful, such as the work of Otto Ploger whom he does not cite fully. Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 11. Linafelt critiques the work of Norman K. Gottwald for suggesting that the book “inculcates” a “submissive spirit” giving only examples from Lam 3, and largely ignoring the figure of Zion who he admits does not fit into this analysis. Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 12–13.

Lam 3 therefore exemplifies a conflicting internal dialogue. The narrator suggests that the divine would not happily cause these sufferings, and that divine mercy is the resolution. If the community repents, then in theory the issues can be resolved (3:40–41). The emphasis on piety and suffering diligently does not however provide closure for the suffering or the effects of the Babylon conquest and exiles. The narrator states that God does respond when there is repentance (3:21–41), but in 3:42–44 he states that God does *not* do this.<sup>168</sup> Therefore, I agree with Janzen who argues that Lamentations is caught in an endless debate in which the narrator cannot find closure:

“...perhaps Zion is not guilty, and God will intervene to correct an injustice; or perhaps Zion is guilty, but repentance will end the suffering; or perhaps Zion is guilty but God will not listen to repentance; or perhaps Zion is not guilty and God is the enemy...”<sup>169</sup>

Following from this observation, Janzen suggests that Lamentations cannot choose between these competing narratives, which accounts for the dialogic quality of the text and why there is no single authoritative narrative perspective in Lamentations.

### **Lam 3:42 as a Microcosm of the Dialogic Poetics of Lamentations**

Being unable to choose between these competing narratives contributes to the dialogic poetics of Lamentations. For example, Lam 3:42 acts as a microcosm of Lamentations dialogic poetics. When the narrator, after constructing a more hopeful view on God’s interaction with the community through prayer, says that the community has sinned but that “You have not forgiven” (בְּחַוְנוּ פָּשַׁעְנוּ וּמָרִינוּ אֶתָּה לֹא סָלַחְתָּ) this statement is often translated as if there is a conjunctive vav between clause A and clause B “*and* you have not forgiven,” but these ideas stand next to each other, encapsulating the paralyzing nature of attempting to

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<sup>168</sup> Janzen, *Trauma and the Failure of History*, 111.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*



process the trauma of the conquest and exile. Moreover, God has hidden himself like in a cloud, and no prayer can pass through (סְכוּתָהּ בְּעָנָן לִי מֵעֲבוּר תְּפִלָּה). From the narrator's perspective, both statements being accurate conveys the paralyzing nature of this discourse. It is a common motif that God turns his face away, especially in laments,<sup>170</sup> but here it comes back in a way that undermines previous statements that indicated some certainty that God would respond to the people's confessions of their wrongdoing. The idea of God as an unfair aggressor which was so prominent in Lam 1 and 2, and early on in Lam 3, seeps back into the narrator's discourse.

Lamentations begins a discourse with which Second Isaiah continues by using God's own voice as a response.<sup>171</sup> The hopeful and comforting oracles of Second Isaiah that appear to address an exilic audience respond to some of the concerns raised by the laments in Lamentations, such as by stating that God is now acting to help the people in difficult times and even return them from exile.<sup>172</sup> Because of this open-ended poetics towards suffering and exile, the voices of those who have suffered take a prominent place. The people's suffering is not silenced, and rather through the language of lament their voice is emphasized. The narrators in these poems appear to be overwhelmed by the subject matter of Zion's suffering. The narrator in Lam 3 wrestles with the negative and positive aspects of God as punisher, while validating Zion's right to question and advocate for herself that the punishment is excessive and to pray for change.<sup>173</sup> The ambivalence regarding what will happen to the land and people, and whether or not God's relationship with the people can be restored creates a

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<sup>170</sup> Berlejung, "Divine Presence and Absence," 348.

<sup>171</sup> I am not convinced that Second Isaiah's writers knew of Lamentations, but see the introductory sections of Chapter Two for thoughts on the relationship between the two texts.

<sup>172</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>173</sup> In Houck-Loomis's view, the narrator is attempting to reconcile the complexity of God and their own self. See Tiffany Houck-Loomis, "Good God?!? Lamentations as a Model for Mourning the Loss of the Good God," *Journal of Religion and Health* 51 (2012): 701–708 (705).

dialogic poetics. Different perspectives are presented as valid and do not resolve themselves into a single, coherent perspective on the destruction and its meaning.

## **Lamentations 4**

The preceding sections have considered how Lam 1-3 create a dialogic poetics of exile and suffering, largely evidenced by the oscillation between hope and despair, and the inability to integrate contradictory views on God and the people's role in suffering. Lam 4 and 5 also contribute to creating a dialogic poetics concerning exile and suffering which will be discussed in the following paragraphs. Lam 4 focuses on the state of the people in Judah, but also makes a few allusions to those who are exiled (Lam 4:15, 20; 22). Like Lam 1 and 3, the poem ends by requesting that God cause their enemies to suffer as they have suffered, and in Lam 4 this enemy (Edom) is named.

Lam 4 like Lam 1 addresses the issue of the people's guilt or wrongdoing. There is a reference to the guilt (עֲוֹן) of בַּת־עַמִּי (the Daughter of my People) in Lam 4:6 exceeding the iniquities of Sodom, which in contrast to Jerusalem was destroyed swiftly. In Lam 4:7 it is said that the Daughter of my People's elect (הַיְיָרִיבִי) were purer than snow, but in 4:8, we learn that these elect ones are no longer recognizable as a result of starvation and that their faces are covered with soot. The hyperbolic and confounding image of dimming gold (יָעַם זָהָב) in 4:1, along with the society's wealthy becoming destitute, convey the aftermath of the conquest and destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. I agree with O'Connor who describes the tone of the fourth poem as having a sense of "remoteness" and "exhaustion."<sup>174</sup> This "remoteness" and "exhaustion" can be seen in 4:10, where "compassionate" women are cooking their own children. This highlights the extreme horrors that the conquest brought

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<sup>174</sup> Kathleen O'Connor, "Lamentations," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 6 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 1011–1072 (1059); see F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2002).

upon the inhabitants as to whether or not this is understood as an act of compassion itself (rather than the child dying slowly from starvation), or that women who would in other circumstances be considered compassionate are now engaging in cannibalistic acts:

10 יְדֵי נָשִׁים רַחֲמָנִיּוֹת בָּשְׁלוּ יְלָדֵיהֶן הָיוּ לְכָרוֹת לְמוֹ בְּשֶׁבֶר בַּת־עַמִּי:

<sup>10</sup>With their own hands, tenderhearted women have cooked their children; such became their fare, in the disaster of my poor people.

In 4:13 we find other perspectives on the destruction and fall of the nation, there is a reference to the fault of the prophets and priests, and there is a reference to adversaries entering the gates of Jerusalem in 4:12. They, presumably the prophets and priests, wander throughout the street in verse fourteen, being shunned by the people as they are now defiled with blood. In the proceeding verse they are wandering as undesirables among nations:

13 מִחַטָּאת נְבִיאֶיהָ עֲוֹנוֹת פְּהִיגָהּ הַשֹּׁפְכִים בְּקַרְבָּהּ דַּם צְדִיקִים: 14 נָעוּ עֹרְרִים בַּחֲצוֹת נִגְאָלוּ בַדָּם בְּלֹא יוֹכְלוּ יִגְעוּ בַלְבָּשֵׁיהֶם: 15 סוּרוּ טָמֵא קְרָאוּ לְמוֹ סוּרוּ אֶל־תִּגְעוּ כִּי נָצוּ גַם־נָעוּ אָמְרוּ בְּגוֹיִם לֹא יוֹסִיפוּ לְגוֹר: 16 פְּנֵי יְהוָה חִלְקָם לֹא יוֹסִיף לְהַבִּיטָם פְּנֵי כַהֲנָיִם לֹא נִשְׂאוּ זָקֵנִים לֹא חֲנָנוּ:

<sup>13</sup>It was for the sins of her prophets, the iniquities of her priests, who had shed in her midst the blood of the just. <sup>14</sup>They wandered blindly through the streets, defiled with blood, so that no one was able to touch their garments. <sup>15</sup>“Away! Unclean!” people shouted at them, “Away! Away! Touch not!” So they wandered and wandered again; for the nations had resolved: “They shall stay here no longer.” <sup>16</sup>The LORD’S countenance has turned away from them, he will look on them no more. They showed no regard for priests, no favor to elders.

Their displacement among the nations in verse 4:15 is an extension of their rejection by the people. In 4:18, the group of people who the narrators speaks on behalf of (presumably not prophets or priests) speaks of feeling watched and under the guise of an occupying force:

צָדוּ צְעָדֵינוּ מִלְּכַת בְּרַחֲבֵינוּ

Our steps were checked, we could not walk in our squares.

The people's pursers (רֹדְפֵינוּ) who are as swift as eagles chase them into the mountains and lie in wait for them in the wilderness (4:19). In Lam 4:20 the people further express that the anointed one, possibly a king who has now been captured,<sup>175</sup> was a source of protection (a shadow)<sup>176</sup> under which they sought to live “among the nations:” בְּצֵלוֹ נִחֵיהָ בְּגוֹיִם.

Lam 4:19–22

<sup>19</sup>קָלִים הָיוּ רֹדְפֵינוּ מִנְּשָׂרַי שָׁמַיִם עַל־הַהָרִים דָּלְקָנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר אָרְבוּ לָנוּ: <sup>20</sup>רוּחַ אֲפִינוּ מִשָּׁמַיִם יְהִי נֶלְפֵד בְּשִׁחִיתוֹתָם אֲשֶׁר אֲמָרְנוּ בְּצֵלוֹ נִחֵיהָ בְּגוֹיִם: <sup>21</sup>שִׂישִׁי וְשִׂמְחֵי בַת־אֲדוֹם יוֹשְׁבֹתֶי בְּאֶרֶץ עוֹז גַּם־עָלֶיהָ תַעֲבֹר־כּוֹס תִּשְׁכְּרֵי וְתִתְעָרֵי: <sup>22</sup>תַּם־עֲוֹנָהּ בַת־צִיּוֹן לֹא יוֹסִיף לְהַגְלוֹתָהּ פֶּקֶד עֲוֹנָהּ בַת־אֲדוֹם גְּלָהּ עַל־חַטָּאתֶיהָ:

<sup>19</sup>Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles in the sky; they chased us in the mountains, lay

in wait for us in the wilderness. <sup>20</sup>The breath of our life, the LORD'S anointed, was

captured in their traps—he in whose shade we had thought to live among the nations.

<sup>21</sup>Rejoice and exult, Fair Edom, who dwell in the land of Uz! To you, too, the cup shall

pass, you shall get drunk and expose your nakedness. <sup>22</sup>Your iniquity, Fair Zion, is

expiated; he will exile you no longer. Your iniquity, Fair Edom, He will note; he will

uncover your sins.

<sup>175</sup> In Lamentations God's anointed refers to a king (most likely). Salter's thinks it refers to Zedekiah but there are a variety of opinions. Salter's, *Lamentations*, 333.

<sup>176</sup> In Isaiah 49:2 God's protection is referred to as a shadow, as well as in Ps. 17:8, 91:1; 121:5.

Regarding the message towards Edom, the only chapter that does not align with this tone are Lam 2 and 5, otherwise all poems end with a desire for vengeance against those who participated in the destruction and its aftermath.<sup>177</sup>

Thus far, Lam 4 focuses predominately on the unpleasant experience of those remaining in the land, and there are references to displacement which reinforce the idea that exile was seen as a punishment for sin. In verse 4:22 which was quoted earlier, there is wordplay with the Piel of גלה meaning “to expose” or “disclose” with the Hiphil of the same root meaning “to deport.”<sup>178</sup> This combines the association of exile with punishment for wrongdoing or wronging the gods. Salters suggests that the message is not that exile itself is ending, but rather that there will be no further deportations, such as the ones carried out by Nebuzaradan in 581 BCE.<sup>179</sup> Subsequently, Lam 4 could either be taken as presenting an open-ended perspective on exile in that it conveys a meagre hope that there will be no further deportations, or it could be taken as suggesting that the exile is thankfully ending. Dobbs-Allsopp agrees with Kraus that this is not a general statement about the end of exile, and that contextually these statements can be read as wishes or imprecations,<sup>180</sup> as well as in Lam 1:21–22, and 3:59–66.<sup>181</sup>

While the verse is likely wishing for no further deportations, and perhaps not the end of exile itself, Lam 4 may provide closure in how it talks about the exile in comparison to Lam 1. For example, Dobbs-Allsopp notes that in 1:3 Judah is going into “exile,” and there is much

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<sup>177</sup> Regarding the specific nature of Edom’s iniquity, Salters suggests that “We have taken the view (v. 21) that it was Edom’s expansion into southern Judah (rab) that occasioned this outburst by the poet in these two verses; and Renkema draws attention to archaeological research which confirms that Edom did invade southern Judah and took possession of land there.” Salters, *Lamentations*, 338. Cf. as well with Ps. 137:7 which implicates Edom in the destruction of Jerusalem.

<sup>178</sup> Salters, *Lamentations*, 338.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 337. Cf. Jer. 52:28–30.

<sup>180</sup> Precative perfect.

<sup>181</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 138.

misery and no place for her to find rest. While in Lam 4 personified Zion's "punishment" is complete, and there will be no more deportations.<sup>182</sup> This does provide an ending to the narrative of suffering and displacement that is begun in Lam 1. On the other hand, Lam 5 continues this discourse on exile and suffering in a way that fundamentally challenges such a perspective on the collection of poems as whole. The following paragraphs discuss how Lam 5 contributes to Lamentations dialogic poetics concerning suffering and exile.

### **Lamentations 5**

Firstly, Lam 5 is distinct in its presentation in comparison to the other poems because it is not an alphabetic acrostic, though it does contain 22 lines. The significance of abandoning this form will be discussed in more detail in the next subsection of this chapter. As discussed thus far, Lam 1–3 presents oscillation between hope and despair, and these poems do not integrate multiple perspectives on Judah's exile and suffering, but allow them to co-exist together.

Lam 4 focused on the people's negative transformation as a result of the conquest, and also the exile of its citizens. Although there is a reference to wishing for no more deportations at the end of Lam 4, or to God not continuing the exile, the text does not end suggesting that physical homecoming would remedy all the problems mentioned in the text thus far,<sup>183</sup> and even the resolve that Lam 4 might bring to the suffering described in the previous poems, this is largely undermined by the continuance of the fifth and final poem.

Lam 5 focuses on the state of the people in the aftermath of the destruction,<sup>184</sup> and is aptly described by Goldingay as raising "questions about whether the community's suffering is to

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Chapter Two will revisit the implications of this statement with regards to how Second Isaiah is interpreted as a text predominately about physical homecoming.

<sup>184</sup> Salters, for example, thinks that Lam 5 was written chronologically after all chapters except Lam 3. Salters, *Lamentations*, 339.

go on forever.”<sup>185</sup> The chapter is structured like a communal lament. There is an address to God (5:1), followed by complaint or description of the distress (5:2–18) and then an appeal for help in (5:19–22).<sup>186</sup> Like the poems that have come before it, Lam 5 contains references to displacement, and the language of displacement reflects on the community’s relationship to the divine. In Lam 5:18–22, the root שׁוּב operates as both a reference to those who are displaced due to exile, and to being displaced from God.

#### Lam 5:18–22

עַל הַר־צִיּוֹן שְׁשָׁמִים שׁוֹעֲלִים הַלְכוּ־בוֹ: <sup>19</sup>אֵתָהּ יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם תִּשָּׁב בְּסֶאֱף לְרַר נְדוּר: <sup>20</sup>לָמָּה לְנֹצֵחַ תִּשְׁפָּחֵנוּ תַעֲזֹבֵנוּ לְאַרְךָ יָמִים: <sup>21</sup>הֲשִׁיבֵנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְנִשׁוּבָה חַדֵּשׁ יָמֵינוּ כְּקֶדֶם: <sup>22</sup>כִּי אִם־מָאֵס מְאַסְתָּנוּ קִצְפָּתָ עָלֵינוּ עַד־מָאֵד:

<sup>18</sup>Because of Mount Zion, which lies desolate; jackals prowl over it. <sup>19</sup>But You, O LORD, are enthroned forever, your throne endures through the ages. <sup>20</sup>Why have You forgotten us utterly, forsaken us for all time? <sup>21</sup>**Take us back, O LORD, to Yourself, and let us come back;** Renew our days as of old! <sup>22</sup>For truly, you have rejected us, bitterly raged against us.

The combination of שׁוּב + אֵל can mean to return to somewhere or someone, and in other biblical texts this combination refers to returning to God.<sup>187</sup> For example, it is also used of God returning to Zion.<sup>188</sup> Therefore, Lam 5:21 is not necessarily referring to a return from exile, but rather to the restoration of the people’s relationship with Yahweh using the language of displacement.<sup>189</sup> The people specifically want to be brought back “to you,” referring to the divine (אֱלֹהֵינוּ).

<sup>185</sup> Goldingay, *Lamentations*, 7.

<sup>186</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 138.

<sup>187</sup> See Jeremiah 3:7 and Hosea 14:2.

<sup>188</sup> Salters, *Lamentations*, 371; cf. Zech. 1:3 and 8:8.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 372.

The final verse of Lamentations in combination with the people asking to be returned to the divine in 5:21 demonstrates an open-ended perspective towards exile. There is a lack of consensus on how best to translate the  $\text{כִּי־יָבֵן}$  of 5:22. For example, Linafelt argues that it should be translated as meaning “for if,” with all of 5:22 as the protasis of a conditional sentence for which the apodosis is missing.<sup>190</sup> Linafelt captures the effect that this final verse has on the text when he writes that “the final verse leaves open the future of the ones lamenting,” it defers the apodosis, a wilful “*nonending*.”<sup>191</sup> If Lam 5 ends the collection of poems without a focus on physical restoration, but the restoration of the relationship, hanging on a “*nonending*,” this reinforces that Lamentations has an open-ended poetics concerning exile and suffering, and the impact of exile on the people’s relationship with the divine. Moreover, the dialogic nature of Lam 1-3 is seen in Lam 5 by how the final verses do not give a sense of closure or a single authoritative perspective on the exile and destruction.

The lack of resolve, the lack of a narrative of closure, explicitly employs the language of displacement; not only to reflect on the plight of a portion of the population, but to reflect on the community’s relationship to the divine. Gershom Scholem whose work was quoted earlier, suggests that neither mourning nor lament can be overcome, “It is the essential law of mourning, which can only be recognized as such here, that it cannot escape this revolution, as long as its purity is not otherwise marred. [...] There is no answer to lament, which is to say, there is only one: falling mute [das Verstummen].”<sup>192</sup> The lack of closure that Lamentations provides by not moving past acts of lament fosters a dialogic poetics towards suffering and exile that leaves the future unresolved. This opens the way for different responses to exile and its aftermath, such as the one found in Second Isaiah which is the topic of chapter two.

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<sup>190</sup> Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 343.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.

<sup>192</sup> Scholem, “On Lament,” 316.



## The Acrostic Form of Lamentations

This section discusses how the alphabetic acrostic form of Lamentations 1-4 contributes to creating a dialogic poetics. An acrostic poem is one where the first letter of each stanza or line either mirrors the sequence of the alphabet of the language of the poem, or sequences of lines together spell out a word or phrase.<sup>193</sup> Van Der Spuy notes several reasons and ways of understanding the poetic effect of an alphabetic acrostic poem.<sup>194</sup> They identify six possible functions of acrostic poems in relation to examples from the Hebrew Bible; 1) the first is as a “mnemonic” feature, 2) a feature of “enumeration,” 3) a feature of “completeness, wholeness, totality,” 4) an “aesthetic feature,” 5) a feature for “visual and aural” purposes, and lastly 6) as a “cognitive” feature.<sup>195</sup>

Some of these features are discussed in more depth than others in Van Der Spuy’s article, but generally the function of acrostic poems appear to be largely stylistic and to demonstrate the skill of the poet(s) in using their language, especially within certain visually and aurally appealing constraints. For example, as an aesthetic feature a poet showed their skills by being able to compose a poem within the constraints of an alphabetic acrostic.<sup>196</sup> Subsequently, Maloney suggests that the impact of the alphabetic acrostic could be both visual and aural.<sup>197</sup> However, Van Der Spuy’s discussion of the acrostic poems as conveying “completeness, wholeness, [and] totality” is where the alphabetic acrostic may be a form that is intentionally

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<sup>193</sup> Examples within the Hebrew Bible include Prov. 31:10–31; Ps. 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119 and 145; and Nah. 1:1–9.

<sup>194</sup> Lam 1 has the now standardized order of letters, however, Lam 2, 3, and 4 swap Ayin and Pe. There is evidence that the order of the orders Pe and Ayin was not necessarily fixed during the time these texts may have been composed. Heath, *Poetry*, 81. See also Elie Assis, “The Alphabetic Acrostic in the Book of Lamentations,” *CBQ* 69 (2007): 710–724.

<sup>195</sup> Roelie Van Der Spuy, “Hebrew Alphabetic Acrostics - Significance and Translation,” *OTE* 21 (2008): 513–532 (516–519).

<sup>196</sup> Van Der Spuy, “Hebrew Alphabetic Acrostics,” 460.

<sup>197</sup> Leslie D. Maloney, *A Word Fitly Spoken: Poetic Artistry in the First Four Acrostics of the Hebrew Psalter* (Phd diss., Baylor University, 2005); cf. Van Der Spuy, “Hebrew Alphabetic Acrostics,” 518.

played with. Lamentations as the collection of poems does not convey that completeness or wholeness can be achieved. Rather the collection wrestles with the destruction, the exile, and the people's relationship to God and ends, as noted earlier, with a "nonending."<sup>198</sup>

Janzen's discussion of the role of the acrostic poem for Lamentations demonstrates the open-ended poetics of Lamentations and how it addresses the suffering of the destruction and exile. Janzen argues that although the alphabetic acrostic form suggests completeness or covering a topic in its totality, Lamentations gives its audience not completeness but rather repetition; "with the acrostic structure, the community's suffering repeats over and over, from beginning to end, from Aleph to Tav, as psychological trauma repeats into the lives of survivors, making the trauma continually present."<sup>199</sup> Janzen argues that while some explanations are offered in some of the poems that later ones simply ignore or even contradict some of these perspectives, therefore, "the acrostic does not signify completeness of explanation but points only to the attempt to establish it as an endless and irresolvable problem."<sup>200</sup> Lam 5, unlike the four previous poems, is not an alphabetic acrostic which might suggest that attempts at wholeness, completeness, or a coherent understanding of the events and why they occurred, are no longer being attempted in the same way.

The alphabetic acrostic form in combination with the language of lament has not produced a totalizing, coherent account of the suffering that gives closure or shuts down the discourse. This contrast between form and content reflects Scholem's insights on the language of lament "that lament encompasses all language and destroys all language."<sup>201</sup> Scholem writes that "While lament encompasses all other languages as a unity, it does so in a way that is precisely contrary to revelation: that is, not as a unity of the all, but as a unity of the

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<sup>198</sup> Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 343.

<sup>199</sup> Janzen, *Trauma and the Failure of History*, 93.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>201</sup> Scholem, "On Lament," 318.

particular.”<sup>202</sup> Although the alphabetic acrostic form has given boundaries and structure to its expression, it has not exhausted the exploration of the topics. Halbertal’s analysis of Lam 5:22 which is also informed by Scholem’s work substantiates the undermining effect of Lamentations poetics of suffering and exile in the **אָן יָ** clause of 5:22:

“The book concludes in a bewildered, protesting, bitter tone in which even the promise of a future reconciliation is shaken. God has rejected his people; there will be no return. [...] It shatters as well the traditional frameworks that are supposed to help overcome devastation and set it within a meaningful order.”<sup>203</sup>

Regarding the conclusion of Lamentations, Halbertal suggests that **אָן יָ** in other instances has the force of “but”, which in this case would create a devastating contrast between the request for God to restore the people to him while the narrator acknowledges “But, [**אָן יָ**] You have rejected us, bitterly raged against us.” Linafelt takes a similar approach to translating **אָן יָ** stating that the end of Lam 5 leaves “a protasis without an apodosis, or an “if” without a ‘then.’”<sup>204</sup> While the implied apodosis is negative, “it does nevertheless defer that apodosis.” This leaves room to imagine a different future, a different “then.”<sup>205</sup>

Regarding the translation of the last clause, I prefer Salter’s rendering of **אָן יָ** as “even though” which was referred to in the subsection of this chapter that discussed Lam 5.<sup>206</sup> Linafelt’s comment on the final phrase of 5:22 that “the poetry’s refusal to move beyond lament”<sup>207</sup> aligns with Scholem’s thoughts on lament as unable to escape the cycle of

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 314.

<sup>203</sup> Moshe Halbertal, “*Eikhah* and the Stance of Lamentations,” in *Lament in Jewish Thought*, ed. Ilit Ferber and Paula Schwebel, vol. 2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 3–11 (8).

<sup>204</sup> Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 60.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>206</sup> Salters, *Lamentations*, 341.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 60.

mourning.<sup>208</sup> Not only do the final verses of Lam 5 lack a response from God (and there is no answer to lament according to Scholem), but the poem refuses to move beyond it.

Overall, the alphabetic acrostic form provides a structure for exploring the topics of punishment, suffering and exile, but any sense of completeness or a totalizing effect of covering these topics is not produced. It rather contrasts with the language of lament as language that receives no answer and is inherently dialogic in nature, and it is this contrast which contributes to Lamentation's dialogic poetics of exile and suffering.

### **The “Wilderness” Motif and the Transformation of the People in Lamentations 4 and 5**

The following paragraphs discuss how references to the wilderness<sup>209</sup> in Lamentations contribute to its dialogic discourse on exile and suffering, and how it is used as a symbol to describe the community's relationship to the divine. Moreover, this discussion prepares the way for the discussion of Second Isaiah in Chapter Two which is a text that uses the wilderness to describe the people's relationship to the divine concerning exile and homecoming. As will be shown in Chapter Two, the wilderness serves to describe the positive transformation of the people in light of exile and God's now favourable relationship with them. However, in Lam 4 and 5 the negative connotations of the wilderness are fronted, including the negative ways in which the people have been affected by the destruction and exile. The contrast between these presentations is valuable for discussing the diversity of poetics of exile among ancient Jewish texts.

The lament of the narrator in Lam 4 describes the people as having become cruel, “like the ostriches in the wilderness.”

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<sup>208</sup> Scholem, “On Lament,” 316.

<sup>209</sup> A more detailed treatment of the wilderness motif will be in the introduction to Chapter Two on Second Isaiah because it a central theme for that text.

Lam 4:3

גַּם־תִּנְיִן חֶלְצוּ שֵׁד הַיִּנְיָקוֹ גּוּרֵיהֶן בַּת־עַמִּי לְאַכְזֹר כִּי עֵינַיִם בְּמִדְבָּר:

<sup>3</sup>Even jackals offer the breast and suckle their young; but my poor people has turned cruel, like ostriches of the desert. <sup>4</sup>The tongue of the suckling cleaves to its palate for thirst.

Little children beg for bread; none gives them a morsel.

Ostriches and jackals often appear as a pair of animals in prophetic texts.<sup>210</sup> Ostriches dwell in inhabited places, such as the wilderness, and are often used as a sign of “devastation and abandonment.”<sup>211</sup> The ostrich and jackal together pick up upon the “the rhetorical sense” of the wilderness which in this instance is a “cruel place marked by the absence of appropriate care, and the collapse of life.”<sup>212</sup> I agree that this is the sense in which Lam 4 employs the image of this pair of animals and this is corroborated by later sections of Lam 4 and also Lam 5.

The wilderness has connotations with desolation and abandonment, and of being used to represent distance from God, and in this case the wilderness appears to connote the negative transformation of the people in light of exile.<sup>213</sup> The language of cruelty in Lam 4:3 also reframes the horrors back in Lam 2:20 that caused the narrator to overflow with emotion, that is the murder of priests and mothers devouring their own children, because the hardship brought on by the conquest and exile have led to the these events. Moreover, the sense that the wilderness represents a dangerous place of desolation is reinforced by Lam 5:9.

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<sup>210</sup> Briggs, “The Ostrich and the Sword,” 49.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 50. Scholars have noted that the sound of an ostrich’s cry has been likened to the sound of lamenting which also contributes to the ostrich’s significance in Lam 4. Ibid., 49.

<sup>213</sup> See the introduction to Chapter Two.

Lam 5:9

⁹בָּנֵנוּשְׁנוּ נָבִיא לְחַמְנוּ מִפְּנֵי חֶרֶב הַמִּדְבָּר:

⁹We get our bread at the peril of our lives, because of the sword of the wilderness.

Lam 5 is largely concerned with the people's plight under the dominion of an occupying force, and the reference to the sword of the wilderness indicates a sense of insecurity and danger around gathering resources as a result of the conquest and exile. The poverty and vulnerability of the people is the narrator's focus as he paints a dire picture of those who remained in the land. Salters, who thinks that the MT need not be amended to be understood, generally thinks that "the poet is thinking of the danger of foraging for food. It is because of hostile elements in desert areas" and therefore suggests that sword (חֶרֶב) is understood as metaphorical.

The ostrich and its association with the wilderness demonstrates an already growing association between wilderness, exile, and punishment that is well established in the pentateuchal narratives of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness. What is notable here is that the pentateuchal narratives do not need to be referred to by the writers of Lam 4 and may not have existed in a recognizable form at this point historically, therefore we can already see a vibrant use of the wilderness and associated images to describe the effects of the destruction and exile upon the people. By the end of Lam 5, Briggs writes that the wilderness is certainly a place of death:

“In the face of the ostrich and the sword, rehabilitation involves recognizing judgment upon failure as life-giving intervention, and finding a new home, “located” in the practice of repentance. Only in this somewhat limited sense is the book a book of hope.”<sup>214</sup>

Overall, Briggs’s analysis highlights the way in which imagery associated with the wilderness describes a state of separation and punishment from the divine that cannot be easily overcome, and certainly not only through physical homecoming. The following paragraphs will consider how the image of the wilderness interacts with the idea that the sins of previous generations impact the suffering of the present generation in Lam 5, which further contributes to Lamentations dialogic approach to exile and suffering. Referring back to the introduction, the wilderness in texts such as Second Isaiah was often seen as referring to a simplistic way of talking about the restoration of the nation and the people’s relationship to the divine through physical homecoming, but we can already see in Lamentations that the wilderness and associated imagery was employed in more complex ways that reflected the ways in which writers struggled with the impact of exile and destruction on the community.

### **The Sins of Previous Generations in Lamentations 5 and the Book of Numbers**

The book of Numbers, which is set during the time when the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, shares with Lamentations a concern with generational survival and continuity between generations in light of the exile and destruction.<sup>215</sup> Building on the references to the

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<sup>214</sup> Briggs, “The Ostrich and the Sword,” 52.

<sup>215</sup> The oracles of Balaam, in his view, have an eschatological thrust which looks “far beyond the time of Moses to the time of future generations.” Dennis Thorald Olson, *The Death of the Old and the Birth of the New: The Literary and Theological Framework of the Book of Numbers* (PhD diss., Yale University, 1984), 298. Numbers not only spoke to the sixth century BCE exiles, but he argues that it is designed “to function as model and paradigm for generation after generation.” Olson, *Death of the Old*, 300. He suggests that the book ending with the narrative of Zelophehad’s daughters requesting that they inherit his wealth (which meant that a previous judgement needed to be adjusted) suggests that “The growth of the book reflects this struggle of previous generations as they sought to appropriate past traditions for their time and for generations to come.” Ibid, 300.

wilderness, and the ostrich and jackal in Lam 4, the following paragraphs compare the way in which generational sin in both texts demonstrates an open-ended poetics concerning exile.

The dialogic and open-ended perspective that Lamentations presents concerning the exile and its effect on the people's relationship with the divine can be highlighted by comparing it to the way in which generational change is presented in the book of Numbers.

In Lam 5:7, the narrators say that their fathers have sinned and have passed away, yet they bear their iniquities:

אָבֹתֵינוּ חָטְאוּ אֵינָם אַנְקָנוּ עֲוֹנֵיהֶם סָבְלָנוּ:<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Our fathers sinned and are no more; and we must bear their guilt.

Later on, in Lam 5:16, there is suddenly a confession that all the people have sinned, not only the previous generations:

נִפְלְהָ עֲטָרַת רֹאשֵׁנוּ אִוִּי-נָא לָנוּ כִּי חָטְאָנוּ:

The crown has fallen from our head; woe to us that we have sinned!

A brief comparison in the way in which the wilderness motif functions in the book of Numbers is helpful for understanding the way in which it could also be functioning in Lamentations, and how it contributes to an open-ended and dialogic approach to exile and suffering. In a wilderness setting, the book of Numbers recounts the demise of one generation doomed to die in the wilderness and not enter the promised land.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> The generation not allowed to enter also includes Moses. Despite its apparent disjointed structure, Numbers as it stands is organised into a coherent whole. See Adriane Leveen, *Memory and Tradition in the Book of Numbers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3. Number's wilderness traditions likely stem from the Priestly source edited between the seventh and fifth centuries. Leveen, *Memory and Tradition* 2–3.



In Numbers 14, it is clear that the people's punishment for disobedience will take time to resolve, but it is not endless.<sup>217</sup> When Moses announces the punishment for those who did not hesitate to enter the promised land, he clarifies that the next generation will have to suffer but will ultimately enter the land once the previous generation has passed away. In comparison to the tone of Lamentations Lam 4 and 5, Numbers 14 does present a positive outlook at least for the generation that is allowed to enter the land.

In light of scholarship that reads the final form of Numbers as addressing an audience affected by the Babylonian exile, the parallels between the historical reality and the text would imply that the next generation, the children of those in exile or those who remained, have hope.<sup>218</sup>

Num 14:31–33

וְטַפְּכֶם אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְתֶּם לְבוֹ יְהוָה וְהִבִּיאֲתִי אֹתָם וַיִּדְעוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר מְאַסְתֶּם בָּהּ: <sup>32</sup>וּפְגָרֵיכֶם אֲתָם יִפְּלוּ בַמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה: <sup>33</sup>וּבְנֵיכֶם יִהְיוּ רֹעִים בַּמִּדְבָּר אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה וְנָשְׂאוּ אֶת־נְוִיתֵיכֶם עַד־תָּם פְּגָרֵיכֶם בַּמִּדְבָּר:

<sup>31</sup>Your children who, you said, would be carried off—these will I allow to enter; they shall know the land that you have rejected. <sup>32</sup>But your carcasses shall drop in this wilderness, <sup>33</sup>while your children roam the wilderness for forty years, suffering for your faithlessness, until the last of your carcasses is down in the wilderness.

Leveen suggests argue that the book of Numbers uses the Exodus generation as a deterrent,<sup>219</sup> with each generation being encouraged to make the choice “to build a certain type of

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<sup>217</sup> Numbers 14:26–35.

<sup>218</sup> Halvorson Taylor, *Enduring Exile*, 200. She writes that, “The construction, in Num 13–14, of the forty years in the wilderness as a period during which Israel was punished for her sin and lack of faith could be read as a sort of exile: while elsewhere in Exodus–Numbers, transgressors are swiftly punished with death, the sinful generation of the wilderness period is forced to wander, which is analogous to exile.”

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

nation.”<sup>220</sup> The future remains open-ended at the end of Numbers,<sup>221</sup> and this coincides with how the book of Numbers shares a concern for the continuity and discontinuity between generations and the role that each generation has in defining itself.<sup>222</sup>

References to the sins of previous generations as well as the sins of the current generation raise the issue of how the exile of the people and occupation of the land might be resolved. Earlier I discussed the change from Lam 5:7 and 5:16, where in 5:7 the sins of the fathers are indicted as blame for the events of the destruction and conquest, but in 5:16 the narrators imply that “we” have sinned. Seeing this either as the result of the narrator’s reasoning, or evidence of a conflicting dialogue, or simply that the sins of both generations are being compounded, displays ambiguity as to the exact nature of what caused the destruction and the steps to build a different future. In conjunction with the oscillation between God as a source of hope and as aggressor, and in combination with the contrast that is created by the alphabetic acrostic form and the dialogic nature of the language of lament, it seems that the narrator of Lam 5 displays uncertainty as to how the current generation can resolve the issues caused by exile and occupation.

According to Briggs, Lamentations “can do no more than hope that God has not “‘utterly rejected’ Jerusalem (5:22),” and this is the note on which the book ends.<sup>223</sup> Both Numbers and Lamentations according to Briggs “defer the realization of hope beyond their own

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid. Significant sections include Numbers 11 when the Israelites remember Egyptian delicacies. This event has a ripple effect, as only three chapters later the people of this generation are condemned to death. Ibid., 3–4. Leveen writes that, “A generation temporarily bound for the desert on the way to the promised land ends its life bound by the desert.” Leveen even writes that the fate of this generation “haunts” the rest of the book of Numbers. Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Olson, *Death of the Old*, 298–299.

<sup>222</sup> He argues that because Deuteronomy is Moses’s last words to the second generation that this “retains the perspective of the new generation at the end of numbers as a hermeneutical paradigm for all succeeding generations.” Ibid, 298–305.

<sup>223</sup> Briggs, “The Ostrich and the Sword,” 52.

limits.”<sup>224</sup> The ambiguity as to where the narrator’s generation stands points to an uncertain future and is another facet of Lamentation’s dialogic poetics of exile and suffering.

### **The Wilderness and the People’s Relationship with God in Jeremiah 31<sup>225</sup>**

Another example that is also helpful for contextualising how Lamentations engages with the “wilderness” motif is found in Jeremiah 31:2. There the “wilderness” motif is employed to describe the nature of the people’s relationship with God.

מָצָא חַן בַּמִּדְבָּר עִם שְׂרִידֵי הָרֶבֶב...

The people escaped from the sword, found favor in the wilderness...

This phrase is reminiscent of the beginning of God’s relationship with the Israelites in the wilderness, and at mount Sinai/Horeb where the law was transmitted to Moses.<sup>226</sup> The wider context of Jeremiah 31 shows how the wilderness as a motif is used to convey how God treated the people with care in a desolate and dangerous place. This particular passage is also reminiscent of themes and content of several of Second Isaiah’s oracles that will be discussed in Chapter Two.

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>225</sup> The LXX ascribes the book of Lamentations to the prophet Jeremiah, who himself is described as lamenting in 2 Chron. 35:25 which suggests that the texts interpretation continued to grow in antiquity. This is not the reason why this example was chosen, but coincidentally Jeremiah’s use of the wilderness motif demonstrates how it is intertwined as a way to conceive of the people’s relationship to the divine apart from the pentateuchal narratives. Regarding the topic of Jeremiah’s association with Lamentations, see the following works: Goldingay, *Lamentations*, 14; Cf. A. Labahn “From Anonymity to Biography: Jeremiah as a Character Memorizing the Past in the LXX version of Lamentations,” in *Reading Lamentations Intertextually*, ed. B. N. Melton and H. A. Thomas (London: T&T Clark, forthcoming 2021). Women traditionally were the lamenters in Israel, on this see B. N. Melton, “Conspicuous Females and Inconspicuous God: The Distinctive Characterization of Women and God in the *Megilloth*,” in Melton and H. A. Thomas, *Reading Lamentations Intertextually*, ed. B. N. Melton and H. A. Thomas (London: T&T Clark, forthcoming 2021).

<sup>226</sup> Jeremiah 2:1–3, for example, describes Israel as a bride following God into the wilderness. Hosea 2:14 offers a similar sentiment to what we find in Jeremiah.

<sup>2</sup>כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה מְצָא חַן בַּמִּדְבָּר עִם שְׂרִידֵי חֶרֶב הַלֹּחֶף לְהַרְגִיעוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל: <sup>3</sup>מִרְחוֹק יְהוָה נִרְאָה לִי וְאַהֲבַת עוֹלָם  
 אֶהְבֵּתִיךָ עַל־פֶּן מִשְׁכַּתִּיךָ חֹסֵד: <sup>4</sup>עוֹד אֶבְנֶה וְנִבְנִית בְּתוֹלַת יִשְׂרָאֵל עוֹד תַּעֲדִי תַפְיִךָ וְיִצְאֵת בְּמַחֹל מִשְׁחָקִים: <sup>5</sup>עוֹד  
 תִּטְעִי כְרָמִים בְּהַרֵי שְׁמֶרוֹן נִטְעוּ נִטְעִים וְחִלְלוּ: <sup>6</sup>כִּי יִשְׁיֹם קְרָאוּ נִצְרִים בְּהַר אֶפְרַיִם קוֹמוּ וְנַעֲלֶה צִיּוֹן אֶל־יְהוָה  
 אֶל־הַיְנוֹ: <sup>7</sup>כִּי־כֹה אָמַר יְהוָה רְנוּ לִיעֶקֶב שְׁמִחָה וְצַהֲלוּ בְּרֵאשׁ הַגּוֹיִם הַשְׁמִיעוּ הַלְלוּ וְאָמְרוּ הוֹשִׁעַ יְהוָה אֶת־עַמֶּךָ אֵת  
 שְׂאֵרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: <sup>8</sup>הִנְנִי מְבִיא אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ צָפוֹן וּמִבְּצֻמִּים מִיַּרְבֵּת־אֶרֶץ בָּם עוֹר וּפֶסֶס הָרָה וְיִלְדֹת נִחְדָּו קֹהֵל גְּדוֹל  
 יָשׁוּבוּ הִנֵּה: <sup>9</sup>בְּבִכִי יָבֹאוּ וּבְתַנְנוּגִים אוֹבִילִם אוֹלִיכֶם אֶל־נַחְלֵי מַיִם בְּדַרְדַּר יִשָּׁר לֹא יִכְשְׁלוּ בָּהּ כִּי־הֵייתִי לְיִשְׂרָאֵל  
 לְאָב וְאֶפְרַיִם בְּכָרִי הוּא: <sup>10</sup>שְׁמְעוּ דְבַר־יְהוָה גּוֹיִם וְהִגִּידוּ בְּאֵיִם מִמְּרָחֵק וְאָמְרוּ מִזְרָה יִשְׂרָאֵל יִקְבְּצֻנוּ וְשָׁמְרוּ כְּרַעַה  
 עֲדָרוֹ:

<sup>2</sup>Thus said the LORD: The people escaped from the sword, found favor in the wilderness;  
 when Israel was marching homeward <sup>3</sup>the LORD revealed Himself to me of old. Eternal  
 love I conceived for you then; Therefore I continue My grace to you. <sup>4</sup>I will build you  
 firmly again, O Maiden Israel! Again you shall take up your timbrels And go forth to the  
 rhythm of the dancers. <sup>5</sup>Again you shall plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria; men shall  
 plant and live to enjoy them. <sup>6</sup>For the day is coming when watchmen shall proclaim on the  
 heights of Ephraim: Come, let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God! <sup>7</sup>For thus said the  
 LORD: Cry out in joy for Jacob, shout at the crossroads of the nations! Sing aloud in  
 praise, and say: Save, O LORD, Your people, the remnant of Israel. <sup>8</sup>I will bring them in  
 from the northland, gather them from the ends of the earth—the blind and the lame among  
 them, those with child and those in labor—in a vast throng they shall return here. <sup>9</sup>They  
 shall come with weeping, and with compassion will I guide them. I will lead them to  
 streams of water, by a level road where they will not stumble. For I am ever a Father to  
 Israel, Ephraim is My first-born. <sup>10</sup>Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and tell it in the

isles afar. Say: He who scattered Israel will gather them, and will guard them as a shepherd his flock.

The above passage refers to finding favor in the wilderness (בַּמִּדְבָּר) and escaping violence signified by the “sword” (חֶרֶב). The reference in this passage to a sword is why some commentators have noted a connection between Lamentations 5:9 and this passage because in Lamentations 4 there is the phrase “sword of the wilderness” (חֶרֶב הַמִּדְבָּר).<sup>227</sup> In the Jeremiah passage, it is on a homeward journey that Israel finds God in the wilderness. When discussing Jeremiah 31:2–6, for example, Brueggemann notes that the reference to the wilderness is also a “reference to contemporary exile.”<sup>228</sup> Part of the sentiment for this passage within the context of the latter half of the book of Jeremiah is to suggest that exile is not a “godless” place where the divine has certainly abandoned the people.<sup>229</sup> Transformed by the hardship and punishment of the harsh wilderness landscape, the relationship between God and the people, comes “full circle”; the wilderness was where God’s relationship with Israel began and now it will be the place of its repair.<sup>230</sup>

The use of the wilderness as a motif and associated imagery in Lamentations has a similar effect to how it is being used in Jeremiah 31 to conceptualize the people’s relationship with the divine. Although in Lamentations the focus is how the people have been negatively transformed. Lam 5 ends with the narrator voicing their desire that God should take the people back, despite the negative transformation that they have undergone. What this entails

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<sup>227</sup> Lam 5:9.

<sup>228</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *To Build, To Plant: A Commentary on Jeremiah 26–52*, ITC (Edinburgh: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 59.

<sup>229</sup> Brueggemann, *To Build*, 59.

<sup>230</sup> John M. Bracke, *Jeremiah 30–52 and Lamentations*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2000), 12.

may not only be complete sovereignty for the nation, or even the return of exiles, but it certainly means repairing the relationship between the people and God.

Lam 5:19–22

19 אַתָּה יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם תֵּשֵׁב כִּסְאֲךָ לְדוֹר וָדוֹר: 20 לָמָּה לְנֹצֵחַ תִּשְׁכַּחַנו תַּעֲזֹבוּנוּ לְאַרְךָ יָמִים: 21 הֲשִׁיבוּנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְנָשׁוּבָה חֲדָשׁ יָמֵינוּ כְּקֶדֶם: 22 כִּי אִם-מָאֵס מְאַסְתָּנוּ קִצְפָּתָ עָלֵינוּ עַד-מָאֵד

19But You, O LORD, are enthroned forever, your throne endures through the ages. 20Why have You forgotten us utterly, forsaken us for all time? 21Take us back, O LORD, to Yourself, and let us come back; renew our days as of old! 22For truly, You have rejected us, bitterly raged against us.

Lamentations 5:19–20 shows that in contrast to the desolate mount Zion, that Yahweh is enthroned forever, enduring throughout the ages. In the following chapter, the prologue to Second Isaiah also refers to the enduring nature of God in contrast to the ephemerality of humans.<sup>231</sup> As noted earlier in this chapter, the final verse of Lam 5 presents an open ending towards exile and suffering, almost, as Heffelfinger writes, begging the divine “for a response and for a resolution.”<sup>232</sup> Later traditions also continue this dialogue concerning suffering and exile. The dialogic poetics of Lamentations, the open ending it presents, receives responses that themselves will go on to generate more discourses on exile and homecoming in antiquity.<sup>233</sup> Even in Chapter Two, the “hopeful” messages of Second Isaiah

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<sup>231</sup> Isa. 40:1–11.

<sup>232</sup> Katie M. Heffelfinger, *I Am Large, I Contain Multitudes: Lyric Cohesion and Conflict in Second Isaiah*, *BibInt* 105 (Boston, MA: Brill, 2011), 97.

<sup>233</sup> See introduction for Chapter Two about arguments for dependence between Second Isaiah and Lamentations texts.

are not sealed off from doubt or from continuing reflection on the people's relationship with the divine that also employs the wilderness motif.

## Chapter One Conclusion

It was noted throughout this chapter that scholars such as Briggs describe Lamentations as ending in “unhoming.”<sup>234</sup> The reader is not left solely seeking the restoration of the nation's social institutions and infrastructure after the exile and conquest, but rather “they are required to relocate the focus of God's action consequent upon the judgment.”<sup>235</sup> Additionally, scholars such as Linafelt similarly write that “the book of lamentations remains incomplete.”<sup>236</sup> The sense of “unhoming” or incompleteness is indicative of the dialogic poetics Lamentations presents concerning exile and suffering. This sense of “unhoming” reflects on the exile itself and also how it represents displacement from the divine. The wilderness, which is a common motif in the Hebrew Bible, is also employed as a way of describing the negative transformation of the people in light of exile and the destruction of Jerusalem, but also their displacement from divine favour. The personified city itself may even be described as “homeless” or “wandering” as a result of divine disfavour alongside being destroyed by the divine.<sup>237</sup>

The dialogic poetics of Lamentations is fuelled by God encompassing the only source of hope, and also the source of punishment.<sup>238</sup> The oscillation between hope and despair that is so apparent in Lam 3 demonstrates why several scholars have made such remarks about the text being open-ended. The alphabetic acrostic form, that is abandoned in the fifth and final poem, gives a sense of structure and may even indicate that the people's suffering can be

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<sup>234</sup> Briggs, “The Ostrich and the Sword,” 52.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>236</sup> Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 61.

<sup>237</sup> Lam 1:7; מְרֻדֵי הָאָרֶץ.

<sup>238</sup> E. Boase, “The Characterization of God in Lamentations,” *ABR* 56 (2008): 32–44.

illuminated in its totality, but this effect is not achieved in these poems. Rather, the discourse remains open and unresolved by the end of the collection, with no single authoritative perspective. The dialogic poetics of exile and suffering is also fostered by the nature of the language of lament as a language which receives no answer, and as such the divine does not answer these challenges or protests in the text.

Whether or not God will take the people back, or continue to reject them, is left unanswered in Lam 5:21–22. The final verses of the fifth poem capture how Lamentations ends in “unhoming”:

Lam 5:21–22

הַשִּׁיבֵנו יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְנָשׁוּבָה חַדְשׁ יָמֵינוּ כְּקֶדֶם: <sup>22</sup>כִּי אִם-מָאֵס מְאֹדֶנּוּ קִצְפָתָ עָלֵינוּ עַד-מָאֵד

<sup>21</sup>Take us back, O LORD, to Yourself, and let us come back; Renew our days as of old!

<sup>22</sup>For truly, you have rejected us, bitterly raged against us.

Despite the rebuilding of the temple and the end of the Babylonian exile, things would never be as they were before because the people and the land suffered significant upheaval, and their sovereignty in the land would be affected. Even after the construction of the Second Temple, the concerns found in texts such as Lamentations did not disappear.<sup>239</sup> The open ending that Lamentations presents concerning suffering and exile does not suggest that the historical exile endures, but that displacement from God is of greater general concern and the root of the problem, and that this is not so easily resolved. This displacement from the divine is signified by the destruction of the city, its temple, and the exile of many of its inhabitants. Overall, Lam 5 leaves the future open-ended and uncertain which coincides with its dialogic

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<sup>239</sup> Berlejung, “Divine Presence and Absence,” 360.



poetics regarding exile and suffering, and in doing so the people remain figuratively in the wilderness of suffering and exile, displaced from divine favour.

Although Lamentations leaves the future as uncertain for the people, this is not to say that it does not provide consolation. In his argument on the link between lament and consolation, Schonfeld states that, “Consolation is not about saying the right words (“consoling speech”), it is not about explaining evil, but rather it is about the very opening—or re-opening—of the dimension of otherness. Consolation is about making the pure event of otherness present, thus opening the very dimension of future, of hope.”<sup>240</sup> The dialogic poetics concerning exile and suffering, the open-endedness with which Lamentations approaches these topics, is how it provides consolation to the people’s situation because no single authoritative answer would be able to provide consolation.

The dialogic and open-ended poetics of exile and suffering in Lamentations can be situated as part of a long tradition not only of Jewish texts, but texts that generally reflect upon exile as more than a historical event. In Carroll’s work on the importance of the exile for the Hebrew Bible’s reflections on identity, he refers to the voice of exile as a “muffled cry.”<sup>241</sup> Carroll’s allusion to a “muffled cry” is a reference to one of Julia Kristeva’s essays on exile which he quotes more fully at the start of his article:

“The language of exile muffles a cry, it doesn’t shout. [...] Our present age is one of exile. How can one avoid sinking into the mire of common sense, if not by becoming a stranger to one’s own country, language, sex and identity? Writing is impossible without some kind of exile.

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<sup>240</sup> Schonfeld, “Ein Menachem,” 27.

<sup>241</sup> Carroll, “Deportation,” 85.

Exile is already in itself a form of dissidence, since it involves uprooting oneself from a family, a country or a language. More importantly, it is an irreligious act that cuts all ties, for religion is nothing more than membership of a real or symbolic community which may or may not be transcendental, but which always constitutes a link, a homology, an understanding. The exile cuts all links, including those that bind him to the belief that the thing called life has A Meaning guaranteed by the dead father. For if meaning exists in the state of exile, it nevertheless finds no incarnation, and is ceaselessly produced and destroyed in geographical or discursive transformations. Exile is a way of surviving in the face of the dead father, gambling with death, which is the meaning of life, of stubbornly refusing to give into the law of death.”<sup>242</sup>

Kristeva’s assessment of exile and language, though tailored to the modern age, demonstrates an important connection between exile and surviving loss of community and meaning (“the dead father”). It speaks to the struggles in the poems of Lamentations that face not only death and destruction, the loss of the divine sanctuary, but also scattering and exile as another form of punishment and separation from community and God.

If Lament is indeed the “verbalization of suffering,”<sup>243</sup> then woven into these poems is how the narrators confront the act of displacement upon their community. Narratives of displacement and homecoming appear to offer a beginning, middle, and end. The importance of Jerusalem, of Judah, and of homecoming in many biblical texts and texts from antiquity written by Jewish communities may give the impression that Jewish identity and its relationship to displacement encompasses a complete narrative, or one that could become

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<sup>242</sup> Julia Kristeva, “A New Type of Dissident,” in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Basil: Blackwell, 1986), 292–300 (298).

<sup>243</sup> Schonfeld, “Ein Menachem,” 10–30; 24.

complete. Halvorson-Taylor notes that texts that focus on exile have a variety of perspectives, some see the end of exile as near or report that it has ended, while others “leave the future more unresolved.”<sup>244</sup> For example, in Halvorson-Taylor’s monograph about the notion of “enduring exile” in biblical literature, she suggests that certain texts develops a sense of an “enduring exile” in an attempt to “resolve” and “confront” “...the lacuna between expectation and reality and, in so doing, they find in exile something more potent and existential than the passage of seventy years, a return to the land, and even a rebuilt temple...”<sup>245</sup>

Ezrahi’s insights on exile and homecoming (that were discussed in the introduction) in the modern Jewish imagination is helpful for comprehending the significance of how the biblical texts complicate narratives of closure, and also for understanding the dialogic poetics of suffering and exile in the book of Lamentations. Ezrahi writes that Zionist alternatives appear to offer closure to the diaspora “narrative of exile,” and she asks how such narratives of closure “compete with open-endedness.”<sup>246</sup> In both cases, biblical texts remain important elements shaping the discourses on exile and homecoming. In this chapter, Lamentations represents an early response to the Babylonian exile and the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, and it is one that does not offer closure to the narrative of exile, but rather presents an open-ended and dialogical response to it.

In the context of biblical scholarship, discussions of the failure of prophecy<sup>247</sup> and the rise of the language of “apologetic” hermeneutics<sup>248</sup> reveals more about some contemporary scholars’ needs for closure to the narrative of exile than is often found in the texts themselves. In the following chapter, I examine how Second Isaiah, a text that frequently

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<sup>244</sup> Halvorson-Taylor, *Enduring Exile*, 200.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 201. The examples she uses of “enduring exile” in biblical texts are the book of Zechariah, Third Isaiah, and the book of Consolation in Jeremiah.

<sup>246</sup> Ezrahi, *Booking Passage*, 235.

<sup>247</sup> See the introduction to the next chapter on Second Isaiah.

<sup>248</sup> This point is relevant for Chapters Four and Five on the book of Esther.

refers to Zion and describes exiles journeying through desolate places, continues to wrestle with the narrative of exile and homecoming, and also how this is reflected in its reception in the Community Rule (1QS).

## Chapter Two: Isaiah's Poetics of Exile and Wilderness

In the conclusion to Chapter One, I referred to Halvorson-Taylor's work on the concept of exile, who argues that some texts depict exile as nearly completed or as having ended, but others may "leave the future more unresolved."<sup>249</sup> The book of Lamentations left its audience with an open-ended perspective regarding how the devastation to Judah and the exile might be resolved in the future. The five poems addressed the conquest and the exile, allowing the people to complain about their suffering, to protest about it, and also to request that God take them back.<sup>250</sup> The collection did not end with certainty that the end of the punishment had been achieved, but refused to move beyond lament, deferring resolution. The concept of closure for exile is a central issue for discussing Isaiah's poetics of exile because Second Isaiah is often seen as presenting a closed narrative concerning exile, and by that standard as having failed in its message given that Isaiah's visions of restoration did not come to pass historically. By considering the way in which references to divine speech and promise frame Second Isaiah, and how the poetry engages with material from First Isaiah, it can be shown how Second Isaiah's message of comfort focuses on rhetorically comforting the people that their relationship with the divine is restored, and that the primary function is not to depict an idealized physical return to the land.

In contrast with the book of Lamentations, Second Isaiah (chapters forty to fifty-five of the book of Isaiah) presents a comforting message to an exilic audience that their time of punishment and exile has come to an end. Moreover, in contrast with the inherently dialogic poetics of Lamentations, Second Isaiah's poems appear to offer authoritative perspectives on a number of topics, such as idolatry and the primacy of Yahweh above all other gods. The book of Isaiah is often treated as lacking openness in terms of its perspective on exile and

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<sup>249</sup> Halvorson-Taylor, *Enduring Exile*, 200.

<sup>250</sup> See Lam. 5:22.

homecoming, and as a text that is centred around predicting an idealized return to Jerusalem. However, this chapter will explore whether Second Isaiah's poetry has an open-ended poetics towards exile and homecoming.

In line with how the exile was perceived in the book of Lamentations, in Second Isaiah exile is also a sign of divine disfavour.<sup>251</sup> In Second Isaiah, the return of the exiles to Jerusalem is indeed a positive image, and this is often not separated from the restoration of the nation in other respects. There are also other dimensions to how exile and homecoming are addressed in Second Isaiah. The wilderness with its widely negative connotations took on a sense of divine judgement, and even the absence of God, which was also evident in Lamentations.<sup>252</sup> In Second Isaiah the wilderness, a place representing punishment and potentially exile from Judah and God, is transformed into a place of lushness and life; and the people can traverse it safely.

The transformation of the wilderness in Second Isaiah is a rhetorical device that is not primarily trying to depict the physical homecoming of the exiles. Rather the motif reflects the positive transformation of the people and their relationship with Yahweh. As opposed to viewing the poetry of Second Isaiah as suggesting that physical homecoming is its main goal for its intended audience, this chapter will consider the motif of the "transformation of the wilderness" and how it interacts with references to divine speech to convey to its audience how their relationship with the divine is entering a positive period. This distinction will also be relevant to my analysis of 1QS's interpretation of Isaiah's poetry in Chapter Three that builds upon the open-ended poetics of Second Isaiah. Additionally, the findings in this

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<sup>251</sup> Römer, "Crisis Literature," 164. See Isa 47:6,

קצפתי עלי עמי חללתי נחלתי ונאחנם בנגדך לא-שמתי להם רחמים על-זקן הכבדת עלי מֵאֵד:

I was angry at My people, I defiled My heritage; I put them into your hands, but you showed them no mercy. Even upon the aged you made Your yoke exceedingly heavy.

<sup>252</sup> Frederik Poulsen, *The Black Hole in Isaiah* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 374.

chapter and chapter three will inform Part II of the thesis which focuses on the diaspora narrative of Esther. Reading Second Isaiah as having an open-ended poetics of exile and homecoming helps to contextualize later texts, such the book of Esther, which take a thoroughly open-ended perspective to homecoming from the exile. Moreover, in its interpretation in antiquity, the book of Esther demonstrates how the divine was increasingly read into the diaspora narrative of Esther to demonstrate how divine providence was not bounded by territory, which is also the case in Second Isaiah.

Second Isaiah is generally dated to around 530 BCE, placing the composition about 150 years after Isaiah ben Amoz's career as a prophet which is described in the chapters of First Isaiah.<sup>253</sup> The descriptions of Babylon's fall have been taken as indications that many oracles reflect a time just before it occurred:<sup>254</sup>

“Second Isaiah is thus usually associated with the decade or so between 550 and 539, as the Babylonian Empire began to crumble and the Persian Empire rose up to succeed it. That at least some of this material predates the fall of Babylon is suggested by the fact that its depictions of the city's demise (e.g., Isa 47) anticipate a degree of destruction that never materialized.”<sup>255</sup>

The book of Isaiah in its current form contains editorial layers from before the pre-exilic, exilic and the post-exilic period, with the entirety of Second Isaiah being placed after the Babylonian exile. Second Isaiah was likely an originally independent, anonymous collection of salvation oracles that could be dated to the end of the Babylonian or early Persian era, and

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<sup>253</sup> C. L. Crouch and Christopher B. Hays, “Isaiah in the sixth century,” in *Isaiah: An Introduction and Study Guide: A Paradigmatic Prophet and His Interpreters* (London: T&T Clark, 2022), 51.

<sup>254</sup> Crouch and Hays, “Isaiah in the sixth century,” 51. Cyrus of Persia defeated the Babylonians in 539 BCE, and in Isa 45:1–3 it is implied that he is an instrument of Yahweh.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

this independent collection was later added to the scroll of Isaiah.<sup>256</sup> Second Isaiah is also directly influenced by materials found in First Isaiah.<sup>257</sup> Stromberg notes that past scholarship saw Second Isaiah as developing entirely separately from Isaiah 1-39, but this is no longer the case, with there being a variety of views that see Second Isaiah as either alluding to first Isaiah directly, or being part of an editorial layer that also shaped the First Isaiah that we have now.<sup>258</sup> For example, Isaiah 35 which shares similarities with the style of Second Isaiah<sup>259</sup> has been seen as a later insertion into First Isaiah, or as a source of inspiration for the writers of Second Isaiah. On the basis of style alone it is not possible to determine if one layer is older than another, but some references to Babylon in First Isaiah, for example, do appear to be later insertions.<sup>260</sup>

Second Isaiah opens with a comforting message to its audience that presents Yahweh returning to Jerusalem, as well as the transformation of the natural world, followed by other comforting images of Yahweh leading the people like sheep. While the Babylonian Exile is not referred to explicitly, it is very much in the background of Second Isaiah. In 597 BCE the

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<sup>256</sup> Römer's view is informed by Williamson's monograph which I allude to later on in this chapter. See H. G. M. Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah's Role in Composition and Redaction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), as well as the scholarship of Ulrich Berges, *Jesaja 40–48*, HThK.AT (Freiburg Im Breisgau: Herder, 2008), 30–45.

<sup>257</sup> See Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah*, 55, 243.

<sup>258</sup> See Stromberg's chapter on Second Isaiah in Jake Stromberg, *An Introduction to the Study of Isaiah*, T&T Clark Approaches to Biblical Studies (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 12, 36, and 40. Seitz argues that Isa 40:1-11 evokes the prophetic call in Isa 6 where God is speaking again from the divine council. See Christopher R. Seitz, "The Divine Council: Temporal Transition and New Prophecy in the Book of Isaiah," *JBL* 109 (1990): 229–247 (243). Additionally, Stromberg identifies three different periods when First Isaiah was edited and accounts for its current shape, "the pre-exilic period with the prophet Isaiah himself, and possibly the supporters of Josiah; the exilic period after the destruction of Jerusalem; and the post-exilic period after the return to the land." Stromberg, *Isaiah*, 24. For example, Isa 24-27, 34-35 and 36-39 are often considered to stem from the exilic and post-exilic period. *Ibid.*, 16. He also discusses the language of "holy seed" in Isa 6:13 as indicating that it comes from the exilic period. Furthermore, Isa 24–27, and Isa 34–35 are often considered to be exilic or post-exilic. *Ibid.*, 19

<sup>259</sup> This will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

<sup>260</sup> See Isa. 13:1–14:23 which contains an oracle against Babylon. It is often considered to be late, or edited by later writers, because Babylon was not a world power in the pre-exilic period. Stromberg, *Isaiah*, 16. In the eighth century Babylon was still a vassal to Assyria. *Ibid.*, 17



first wave of Judah's elite was deported to Babylonia. There was a second round of deportations in 586 BCE, and there was likely a third round in 582 BCE.<sup>261</sup> Crouch and Hays note that the offer to return to Judah under Persian imperial rule might not have been extended to the children and grandchildren of the original exiles.<sup>262</sup> Furthermore, there is the additional fact that not everyone wanted to return to Judah, which might explain why Second Isaiah appears to be expending energy trying to persuade people to return.<sup>263</sup> I suggest that this aspect also explains why references to divine speech and promise that endure remains important for Second Isaiah, because it leaves open a future that is not entirely contingent on the physical restoration of the nation to be as idealised as the poetry describes; rather the poetry emphasizes that Yahweh's power will endure forever and his favour towards the people.

Regarding the intended audience of the poems, Isaiah 40-48 shows some awareness of Babylonian culture, such as the references to the deities Nabu and Marduk, and Bel<sup>264</sup> as well as references to Babylonian divinity and astrological practices.<sup>265</sup> Also, in Isaiah 48:20 the audiences are told to depart *from* Babylon.<sup>266</sup> Isaiah 49-55 is more focused on Jerusalem and makes more references to its restoration. This is one reason that a growing number of scholars suggest that chapters 49-55 could have been written in or around Jerusalem.<sup>267</sup> The emphasis on Babylon in chapters 40-48 does not necessarily mean that the prophet was in Babylonia, but many poetic oracles address an exilic audience in Babylon, so it may be inferred that the composer of these messages may well reside there.<sup>268</sup> Second Isaiah

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<sup>261</sup> Crouch and Hays, "Isaiah in the sixth century," 56 (2 Kgs 24–25; Jer 52:30).

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>264</sup> Isa 46:1.

<sup>265</sup> Crouch and Hays, "Isaiah in the sixth century," 54. See Isa 47:9, 12–13.

<sup>266</sup> "Go forth from Babylon..." (... מִבָּבֶל) Crouch and Hays also note that Second Isaiah appears to address the Egyptian diaspora as well. Crouch and Hays, "Isaiah in the sixth century," 55.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, 54–55.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*

potentially addresses multiple communities, one of which is certainly in exile, but also potentially an audience that remained in the land as well.

Scholars who have taken more critical approaches to Second Isaiah's providence have tended to challenge certain assumptions brought to Isaiah's poetics in ways that are helpful for analysing Second Isaiah's poetics of exile.<sup>269</sup> For example, as mentioned earlier Barstad argues that Isaiah's prologue is metaphorical which fits his view of Second Isaiah as a Judean text.<sup>270</sup> This approach contrasts with many scholars who take, for example, Yahweh's journey in 40:1-11 as evidence of the "new Exodus" motif, or as referring to the specific journey of Babylonian exiles returning to Judah. While Barstad thinks that the audience of Second Isaiah is in Judah,<sup>271</sup> regardless of where you place the text, he aptly notes that exile and homecoming are not the only things that are important for Second Isaiah. What is central for not only the prologue, but also the other references to the "transformation of the wilderness" is that Yahweh has forgiven the people, and if they trust him that he will cause them to prosper.<sup>272</sup> The return from the exile is only a part of the restoration, including "political and religious restoration," victory over God's enemies, and those who participated in harming the Judeans after the conquest.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Cf. with Tiemeyer's approach in Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion: The Geographical and Theological Location of Isaiah 40-55*, *VTSup* 139 (Leiden: Boston, 2011); see also Barstad's approach in Hans M. A. Barstad, *Way in The Wilderness: "The Second Exodus" in the Message of Second Isaiah*, *JSS* 12 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989).

<sup>270</sup> Barstad, *Way*, 20.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 20. He writes, "Within the context of national restoration there belongs also the return to Zion of Judeans from abroad." *Ibid.*, 19.

## The Relationship Between the Book of Lamentations and Isaiah

Arguments have also been made for the direct influence of the book of Lamentations on Second Isaiah.<sup>274</sup> These texts have been placed at opposite ends of a spectrum where Isaiah is considered to be the positive response to Lamentations. Arguments of direct dependence between them are not conclusive given that the evidence could reflect how laments as a genre existed widely and would have been known to the writers of Second Isaiah, not necessarily the specific text of Lamentations that we have in MT.<sup>275</sup> It is helpful to consider Second Isaiah's poetics as in conversation with communal laments, and Lamentations is a surviving example that comes from the same time period and addresses the exile, suffering, and the people's relationship to the divine. However, that does not mean that the text is directly citing Lamentations in the same spirit that 1QS clearly cites Second Isaiah, which will be discussed in Chapter Three.

Patricia Willey's work on the book of Isaiah and its link to the book of Lamentations argues that Second Isaiah contains direct allusions to all five poems of Lamentations.<sup>276</sup> Moreover, she argues that Second Isaiah is trying to answer the laments by disputing some of the complains, reversing them, and reinventing them.<sup>277</sup> Tiemeyer also, for example, argues for direct dependence between Isaiah 40-55 and Lamentations, noting that roughly the texts come from the same period.<sup>278</sup> She suggests that because of the liturgical form of

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<sup>274</sup> See Patricia T. Willey, *Remember the Former Things: The Recollection of Previous Texts in Second Isaiah*, Dissertation (PhD diss., Emory University, 1996). See also Norman K. Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations*, SBT 14 (London: SCM Press, 1954), 106; see also Carol A. Newsom, "Response to Norman K. Gottwald, 'Social Class and Ideology in Isaiah 40-55,'" *Semeia* 59 (1992): 73-78 (76); Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 32.

<sup>275</sup> Benjamin Sommer himself notes this before going on to clarify his own approach which I discuss further on in this section. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 129-130.

<sup>276</sup> Willey, *Remember the Former Things*, 265. Cf. with Willey's discussion on Isa 49:1-54:17.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>278</sup> 586-522 BCE. Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion*, 348. However, she also notes that largely Second Isaiah is considered to be later than Lamentations.

Lamentations that it is reasonable to assume that the writers of Second Isaiah had access to Lamentations, but not its final form.<sup>279</sup>

One example that comes up in scholarship on this issue is the language of “comfort” (נחם). For example, in Isaiah 40:1 the audience is told “Comfort, comfort (נחמו) my people, says your God,”<sup>280</sup> and Tiemeyer suggests that the root נחם that is present in Isa 40:1 means that it is directly alluding to several passages in Lamentations “in which Zion laments the absence of a comforter...”<sup>281</sup> In Lam 1:2, the narrator indeed notes that Jerusalem has been abandoned by everyone and “there is none to comfort her” (אין מנחם לה).<sup>282</sup> Moreover, in Isa 51:12 the divine states that he is the one who comforts the people. However, the common occurrence of verbal roots is not reliable evidence that a text is being quoted directly, and this verbal root does appear in other biblical texts where God is described as comforting the people, indicating its use as an idiom.<sup>283</sup>

What scholars such as Willey and Tiemeyer have shown is that Lamentations and Second Isaiah indeed come from a similar time, and address similar issues, but their allusions are indications that the texts address similar subject matters, not necessarily that Second Isaiah is reading a form of Lamentations similar to what we have before us.<sup>284</sup> For example, Tiemeyer notes that Lam 1:2–4 and Isa 51:11–12 share four verbal roots that she cites as evidence that Second Isaiah directly borrows from Lamentations to reverse its message: There are the

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Isa 40:1 נחמו נחמו עמי יאמר אלהיכם:

<sup>281</sup> Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion*, 352.

<sup>282</sup> Cf. Lam. 1:9 “With none to comfort her” (אין מנחם לה).

<sup>283</sup> Cf. Isa. 12:1 and Isa 22:4, “אל תאיצו לנחמני על-שד בת-עמי:” (Press not to comfort me for the ruin of my poor people); See also with Jer. 31:13, 15; Nah. 3:7; Zech. 1:17. In the psalter God also comforts people, cf. Ps. 23:4; and in Ps. 69:21 the narrator says, like Daughter Zion in Lamentations, that they have no comforters; see also the uses of נחם in Ps. 71:21; 77:3; 86:17; 119:76, 82.

<sup>284</sup> The personification of Daughter Zion has also been cited as evidence of direct borrowing because in Lamentations Daughter Zion is portrayed as barren, desolate, and her children are led away into captivity, whereas Daughter Zion has a reverse of fortunes where her children will be led back to her in Second Isaiah. See Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion*, 354–355. Note that, however, this is not the only text to personify Zion as a woman; cf. Amos 5:1–2; Hos. 1–3; Ezek. 16, 23; Jer. 3:1–3, 31:2, 4.

participles מְנַחֵם (“comforter”),<sup>285</sup> נָגַשׁ in the Hiphil (“to overtake” or “to obtain”),<sup>286</sup> יָגַה (“to suffer” or “suffering”),<sup>287</sup> and the root אָנַח (“to groan” or “groaning”).<sup>288</sup> Benjamin Sommer also notes parallels between Isa 51:17–22 and Lam 2:13–19, but also notes that texts such as Nahum 3 also contains references to consolation.

Nah 3:7

וְהָיָה כְּלִי־רָצִיף יִדְוֹד מִמֶּנּוּ וְאָמְרֵשְׁדָּדָה נִינְוָה מִי יִנּוּד לָהּ מֵאֵינן אֲבִקֵּשׁ מִנְחָמִים לָהּ:

<sup>7</sup>All who see you will recoil from you and will say, “Nineveh has been ravaged!” Who will console her? Where shall I look for **anyone to comfort you?**

Zechariah 1:17 also states that the divine will again “comfort” Zion,

וְנִחַם יְהוָה עוֹד אֶת־צִיּוֹן וְבָתֵּר עוֹד בִּירוּשָׁלַם:<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup>**And the Lord will again comfort Zion;** He will choose Jerusalem again.

Moreover, Sommer suggests that the writers of Second Isaiah’s commitment to replicating its source material lead to a failure of harmonization between the grammar of the two texts. To clarify, in Isa 51:19, one would apparently expect the phrase “who will comfort you” and not “How shall I comfort you?”

Isa 51:19

שְׂתִימִים הִנֵּה קִרְאֲתֶיךָ מִי יִנּוּד לָךְ הַשֹּׁד וְהַשָּׂבָר וְהַרְעָב וְהַתְּרֵב מִי אֲנִיחֶמְךָ:<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Isa 51:12; Lam 1:2

<sup>286</sup> Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion*, 354–355.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>These two things have befallen you: Wrack and ruin—who can console you? Famine and sword—**how shall I comfort you?**

The explanation offered by Sommer is that the lack of grammatical harmonization reflects the desire to replicate the use of the first-person form of the verb from Lamentations.<sup>289</sup>

Lam 2:13

מָה־אֶעֱיִדָךְ מָה אֶדְמָה־לְךָ הַבַּת יְרוּשָׁלַם מִה אֲשׁוּה־לְךָ וְאֶנְחֶמְךָ בְּתוֹלַת בַּת־צִיּוֹן כִּי־גָדוֹל כַּיָּם שְׁבָרְךָ מִי יִרְפָּא־לְךָ<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup>What can I take as witness or liken to you, O Fair Jerusalem? What can I match with you **to console you**, O Fair Maiden Zion? For your ruin is vast as the sea: Who can heal you?

The other allusions to Lamentations do not come at the cost of grammatical coherence and appear to reflect a broader use of lexical choices than exact phrases. Therefore, I take issue with Sommer’s explanation because the text of Isaiah 51 is not incoherent but rather the first-person form “I will comfort” (אֶנְחֶמְךָ) is unexpected, but what is unexpected for a modern commentator is not necessarily incorrect, unexpected or can only be explained by the text copying from Lamentations. There are also other parallels to the language that is shared between Isaiah and Lamentations which is also noted by Sommer such as Nahum 3:10–17, indicating that the language of comfort, for example, had a life of its own outside of Lamentations and Isaiah. Although in Second Isaiah, God answers similar complaints to the ones that Daughter Zion makes throughout Lamentations, including the accusation that the

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<sup>289</sup> Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 130.

divine abandoned Zion and the people.<sup>290</sup> In Lam 1:17 the narrator says that Zion has none to comfort her, whereas Second Isaiah opens with a declaration of comfort and that the people have completed their punishment.<sup>291</sup> However, it is most likely that Second Isaiah responds to Lamentations in the sense that it is responding to communal laments and the trauma that communities of Judeans who were exiled and remained in the land experienced.

Arguments for direct dependence between the two texts do not solve issues with understanding Isaiah itself, rather it seems to primarily serve the purpose of placing Second Isaiah as a polemic against Lamentations, in the same way that scholarship that sees almost every reference to the wilderness in Second Isaiah as alluding to the pentateuchal wilderness wandering period in order to redeem the wilderness from its negative connotations.<sup>292</sup> This type of approach leads to a less attentive reading of the interaction between motifs in Isaiah such as the “transformation of the wilderness” motif, as well as how Second Isaiah responds to First Isaiah in a way that creates a more open-ended poetics of exile.

### **Isaiah as a Failed Prophet: Literal or Metaphorical Homecoming**

As stated earlier, Second Isaiah does not necessarily suggest that physical homecoming is the most important response to exile, nor should it be considered Second Isaiah’s main message to its audience. However, the way in which some of the metaphors and motifs have been interpreted in scholarship give this impression. In the context of discussions on the “failure of prophecy” after the Babylonian exile, it is helpful to bear in mind how problematic the

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<sup>290</sup> Willey, *Remember the Former Things*, 103. Scholars such as Willey have argued also that the *geber* of Lam 3 was the model for the suffering servant in Second Isaiah. Furthermore, the language of imprisonment used by the *geber* in Lamentations 3 corresponds with how exiles would describe themselves according to Smith-Christopher in, Daniel Lynwood Smith-Christopher, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington, IN: Meyer-Stone Books, 1989).

<sup>291</sup> The depiction of Daughter Zion in Isaiah 51-52 comprises the most prominent similarities to Lamentations where Daughter Zion is also an “abandoned, suffering woman being called to awaken and arise to her restoration.” Willey, *Remember the Former Things*, 103.

<sup>292</sup> See section entitled “The Wilderness Motif.”

assertion is that prophecy is seen to have failed after the exile, or that it fell short of established “biblical” standards of prophecy that put predicting the future as a primary means of authentication.<sup>293</sup>

For example, Carroll writes that prophets are best considered to have been successful in light of whether their message persuaded their audience or not.<sup>294</sup> Furthermore, he also suggests that taking the approach that Isaiah’s prophecies are predictions of the future would be to misconstrue its message and the nature of prophecy in biblical texts.<sup>295</sup> However, Carroll’s approach to Isaiah which touches on the issue of the homecoming of the exiles still maintains that Isaiah is a “failed” prophet, whose failure is lessened in Third Isaiah and later interpretations by metaphorizing its message. Because Isaiah does not live up to “biblical” standards of prophecy, in short, Isaiah is a “failed” prophet, whose agenda did not live up to what historically took place, including the complete ingathering of the *golah*, and the national restoration of Judah:

“But by biblical categories Second Isaiah was a false prophet because of his failed vision of a permanent salvation. An appeal to treat his work as rhetorical and full of double meanings may exonerate him from gross error by reducing his message to a conventional statement that the future belongs to God’ and the exiles should return home when the opportunity arises. If this is acceptable and combined with an understanding of the prophet as a creative figure in Israelite society who tried to create the future, then Second Isaiah becomes an important, seminal figure in the reconstruction of the postexilic period.

Whether the biblical categories can be squared with these more modern categories is open to debate. Given their different premisses and presuppositions it seems highly unlikely that

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<sup>293</sup> Cf. with Robert P. Carroll, “Second Isaiah and the Failure of Prophecy,” *ST* 32 (1978): 119–131. See also the work of Hindy Najman, *Losing the Temple*, that was cited earlier in this thesis.

<sup>294</sup> Carroll, “Failure of Prophecy,” 128.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.



they can be. It remains the case that this attempt at relocating the language of Second Isaiah is an acknowledgment of the serious failure of the prophet at a more conventional level.”<sup>296</sup>

A relevant critique of Carroll’s conclusion is how the rhetorized approach to Isaiah is seen as less valuable than if the text is taken as predicting a redeemed future. This perspective I believe undergirds many approaches to Isaiah’s poetry, where its motifs and metaphors are assumed to be about a “new Exodus” that is describing the literal return of many exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem modelled on the Exodus from the Pentateuch.<sup>297</sup> From the perspective outlined in Carroll’s work, the interpretations of Isaiah in the Second Temple period and beyond would then be reworkings of a failed message. This approach is problematic given some of Carroll’s own observations about the nature of prophecy as not being about

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<sup>296</sup> Carroll, “Failure of Prophecy,” 131. Carroll in his monograph suggests that a significant predicament for later interpreters was to demonstrate how prophecies are still open to fulfilment given that their predictions failed to materialize in their original historical context. Interpretive practices in the Second Temple period, for example, were able to defend prophecy against the accusation of “dissonance” and keep hope alive for the people. Regarding Second Isaiah, he suggests that “such a gap between expectation and experience is the essence of dissonance and the preaching of Second Isaiah only created greater dissonance for those who took his vision seriously.” Robert. P. Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed: Cognitive Dissonance in the Prophetic Traditions of the Old Testament* (New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1979), 151–152. Moreover, Carroll states that Second Isaiah envisages the immediate future, but also questions whether these images were only meant to rhetorically urge the people to return, or whether they represent truly predictive images of the future. Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed*, 151. What is missed in this line of argument is the assumption that empirical predictions about the future are the core function of prophecy and the measure by which they should be assessed. While Carroll himself does highlight this issue, he maintains the idea that texts such as Second Isaiah are failures. On the other hand, prophecy could also be approached as inherently open-ended, not solely about predicting the future in such linear terms. I want to thank Constanze Günthenke for highlighting that in the field of Classics prophecies are generally approached as open-ended, and not solely as predicting the future either successfully or unsuccessfully.

<sup>297</sup> The view that Isaiah is solely concerned with physical homecoming, being the emblematic prophet who urges this course of action, is even found in Cohen’s monograph on global diasporas in his chapter addressing the Jewish diasporas: “It was, however, the stirring prophecies of a figure known as the second Isaiah [...] that galvanized a return movement of the exiles. Isaiah (13: 20–22) hurled colourful imprecations at the Babylonians, beseeching ‘the remnant of Israel’ to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem before it was too late. If they did, redemption [...] would surely follow. Some followed Isaiah’s pleading, but the purposes of their journeys were neither quite so heroic, nor so spiritually pure, as Isaiah had urged.” Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 23. Moreover, Carroll himself employs the typology of the new Exodus to demonstrate what in his view is the dissonance between Second Isaiah’s prophecies and reality: “The legends of the old exodus would be surpassed in this new exodus from Babylon across the desert (now turned to springs).” Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed*, 151.

predicting the future, but also given that Second Isaiah's oracles are also poetic, and as such contain rhetorical features.

Like Carroll's discussion, Römer also perceives Isaiah as a failed prophet. Römer notes the example of Isaiah 43:17 where the text refers to the people forgetting the "former things" (רֵאשִׁוֹנוֹת),<sup>298</sup> which he interprets as "divine judgements" and the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>299</sup> This specific example will be addressed later in the chapter, but the initial issue I have with this formulation comes into view further on when he writes, "One may conclude that many prophetic books were revised after the crisis in an eschatological perspective; this may partially be understood as a reaction to the fact that the revolutionary announcement of a paradise-like situation in Second Isaiah did not come true."<sup>300</sup> This perspective on Second Isaiah as predicting an idealized vision of the future has consequences for approaching its poetics. More recent scholarship has given voice to the function of the metaphors and motifs as rhetorical devices, giving a message of comfort, not as an itinerary of what will necessarily happen or what the people would expect.

Halvorson-Taylor, in her introductory remarks on the metaphorization of exile in the Second Temple period, also refers to Isaiah as a counter example to the metaphorization of exile.

"Exile had come to mean more than forced migration and geographic displacement and functioned as an expression for marginalization of other sorts. Exile now signified not only forced migration and living in a foreign land under foreign domination, but also a variety of alienations: political disenfranchisement within Yehud, deep dissatisfaction with the status quo, and a feeling of separation from God. In this new interpretation of exile, which was not limited to its geographic dimension, exile persisted despite repatriation; it

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<sup>298</sup> Isa. 43:18.

<sup>299</sup> Römer, "Crisis Literature," 165.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 165.

was a condition that could not be resolved simply by returning to the land, as the jubilant promises of Second Isaiah suggested.”<sup>301</sup>

If Isaiah is primarily seen as the redemptive and land-oriented response to Lamentations or towards communal laments, then the text is misunderstood in terms of how its message functioned for its earliest audiences. What I want to suggest is that to take Second Isaiah as failing to predict the exact nature of homecoming misunderstands the poetry and how it functions to cultivate communal identity around Yahweh and the experience of marginalization.<sup>302</sup> This is directly relevant to the topics of exile and homecoming because these are important topics for Second Isaiah and several metaphors and motifs address them. Later on, in the Second Temple period as we will see in Chapter Three, Second Isaiah’s approach to exile is further metaphorized in interpretations that relate to communities who struggle within the land itself.

### The “Wilderness” Motif

The wilderness is an integral part of Second Isaiah’s poetics of exile and how it addresses the topic of homecoming. Wilderness (מִדְבָּר) is also associated with nomadism and liminality, as

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<sup>301</sup> Halvorson-Taylor, *Enduring Exile*, 1.

<sup>302</sup> My use of the term communal identity is informed by Assman’s scholarship on religion and cultural memory and the way in which we can analyse the Bible and other literature as revealing changes and developments in communal and cultural memories, including cultural traumas. He notes that cultural memory is not passed down biologically for obvious reasons, so it is transmitted through “cultural activities” such as writing. Jan Assman *Religion and Cultural Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 32; 38. His definition of cultural memory is that “it is a projection on the part of the collective that wishes to remember and of the individual who remembers in order to belong. Both the collective and the individual turn to the archive of cultural traditions, the arsenal of symbolic forms, the “imagery” of myths and images, of the “great stories”, sagas and legends, scenes and constellations that live or can be reactivated in the treasure stores of a people” (ibid., 7–8). Assman has suggested that the stories of which Genesis comprises of can be defined as formative texts for these communities because they “transmit identity-confirming knowledge by narrating stories that are shared” (ibid., 38). Formative texts often contain “tribal myths, heroic lays, genealogies” and in generally answer the question “Who are we?” (ibid., 38). Overall, interpretation of narratives concerning the group itself can be “*functionally equivalent procedures in the production of cultural coherence,*” and interpretation is one way in which communities can heal from a cultural trauma. Ibid., 39.

well as with divine encounters.<sup>303</sup> Wilderness plays an especially iconic role in the Hebrew Bible as the backdrop for Israel’s forty-year sojourn, as well as when God gave the law to the Israelites at mount Sinai/Horeb. It has also been noted that the wilderness traditions became intricately linked to concepts such as exile in biblical texts, as well as texts from the Second Temple period.<sup>304</sup> Poulsen aptly describes how the desert with its widely negative connotations could take on a sense of divine judgement and even the absence of God,<sup>305</sup> and this is the primary basis in which it appears to be used in Second Isaiah. Najman aptly notes in her work on the concept and poetics of wilderness that, “Wilderness may or may not be a reality but it is always a metaphor for a much bigger narrative about suffering and loss, primordial chaos and exile.”<sup>306</sup> It is in this context that Second Isaiah’s and also Lamentations’ use of the wilderness operates; not only as depicting physical loss, but as part of a larger narrative that includes exile and suffering, and in these cases the wilderness is part of an open-ended poetics concerning exile.

Back in Chapter One, the wilderness was a less significant motif, but was still present in Lam 4 and 5 to describe the dismal state of the people and their relationship to God in light of the

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<sup>303</sup> See Najman, “Towards a Study,” 144–45; Talmon, “The ‘Desert Motif,’” 54; Laura Feldt, “Wilderness and Hebrew Bible Religion – fertility, apostasy and religious transformation in the Pentateuch,” in *Wilderness in Mythology and Religion: Approaching Religious Spatialities, Cosmologies, and Ideas of Wild Nature*, ed. Laura Feldt, Gustavo Benavides, and Kocku von Stuckrad, Religion and Society 55 (London: Equinox, 2012), 55–94 (57–58; 65); see also Robert Barry Leal, *Wilderness in the Bible: Toward a Theology of Wilderness*, StBibLit 72 (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2004), 63.

<sup>304</sup> Halvorson-Taylor, *Enduring Exile*, 70. Sue Gillingham also notes that “The Moses/ Exodus tradition provide an ideal counterpart for the David/Zion tradition, for it provide a relational model for understanding the bond between God and his people, over and against the institutional model of God’s presence in an established state cult; this was especially pertinent during the exile, when the traditions of king and temple were under threat.” Susan Gillingham, “The Exodus Tradition and Israelite Psalmody,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52 (1999): 19–46 (24).

<sup>305</sup> Poulsen, *Black Hole*, 374.

<sup>306</sup> Hindy Najman, “Conceptualising Wilderness: Poetic Processes and Reading Practices in the Hodayot and the Apostrophe to Zion,” in *Orion* vol., ed. Esther G. Chazon, et al. (2023, forthcoming).

exile. Second Isaiah on the other hand contains many motifs and metaphors relating to the wilderness; people are often conceptualized as plants, there are references to the Exodus and the wilderness wanderings, and also references to being guided through harsh terrain that are not references to the pentateuchal narratives. In Lam 4 and 5 references to the wilderness and to animals associated with it (such as the jackal and the ostrich) indicates that the transformation of the people and their relationship to Yahweh was the only possible way forward after the destruction and exile. The wilderness remains a place of death, destruction, and punishment, and its transformation in this context provides a plethora of opportunities for the writers of Second Isaiah to imagine a different future for the people and their relationship with the divine.

The oracles in Second Isaiah do not only depict an idealised restoration of the nation and return of the exiles, but the poems more often address the perceived absence of God that is felt so strongly in books like Lamentations. The transformation of the wilderness, and the theme of God guiding people, interacts with references to divine word and speech in a way that creates a more open-ended poetics concerning exile and homecoming than is often ascribed to the text. In light of the growth of scholarship on Isaiah's poetics, this chapter will discuss how the transformation of the wilderness and the emphasis on divine word creates a more subtle perspective on exile and homecoming in Second Isaiah that focuses on the transformation of the people in light of exile, and the restoration of their relationship with Yahweh.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> The sense that the poetry and its metaphors reflect on the nature of the people's relationship to Yahweh more generally is developed even more so in Third Isaiah, but for the sake of the topic of this chapter and thesis I focus on Second Isaiah as it relates more specifically to the themes of exile and wilderness.

Apart from the exodus narrative, the desert or wilderness is often portrayed as a location where fugitives or other marginalised characters flee in an attempt to escape their pursuers.<sup>308</sup> Moreover, arid and depopulated landscapes such as מִדְבָּר (the most common word translated into English as “wilderness”) are sometimes portrayed as populated by lawless vagrants or even demons. The מִדְבָּר, then, can be a chaotic and dangerous place: It is inhospitable terrain, not simply a dry desert-like one.<sup>309</sup> Exile itself is also a figure for displacement and defamiliarization<sup>310</sup>, which enables the overlap between the wilderness in Isaiah to address the exile as it is also a dangerous place associated with punishment and death; in Chapter One this was also an important association the wilderness had for Lam 4 and 5.

However, in addition to these above features which are predominately negative, מִדְבָּר is also associated with nomadism and liminality,<sup>311</sup> as well as with divine encounters.<sup>312</sup> Most significantly, it is in this harsh environment where the majority of theophanies occur within the Pentateuch,<sup>313</sup> and this aspect of the wilderness leads to an intertwining of suffering,

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<sup>308</sup> See David’s flight from Saul into the wilderness (1 Sam. 26). Also, in the book of Maccabees, characters also find security in the wilderness (1 Macc. 2:29–31).

<sup>309</sup> Alison Schofield aptly notes that the “symbolic overtones” of the desert “had less to do with any essential physical quality, than it did with its effect produced in the Hebrew imagination. Just as in the wilderness wandering narratives, the desert was a feared and dangerous place, feared as a place of the uncontrolled. From this perspective, *midbar* could represent a number of physical landscapes.” Alison Schofield, “The Em-Bodied Desert and Other Sectarian Spaces in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Constructions of Space IV: Further Developments in Examining Ancient Israel’s Social Space*, ed. Mark K. George (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 155–174 (164). She also suggests that “such a view was held in 2 *Baruch*, which describes Jerusalem after the apocalyptic destruction of its population as a ‘forest of wilderness.’” Schofield, “The Em-Bodied Desert,” 164.

<sup>310</sup> See Francis Landy, “Exile in the Book of Isaiah,” in *The Concept of Exile in Ancient Israel and Its Historical Contexts*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Christoph Levin, BZAW 404 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 241–256.

<sup>311</sup> Feldt, “Wilderness and Hebrew Bible Religion,” 57–58, 65.

<sup>312</sup> Najman, “Towards a Study,” 144–45; Talmon, “The ‘Desert Motif,’” 54; Leal, *Wilderness in the Bible*, 63.

<sup>313</sup> All theophanies in Genesis to Exodus, except those related to Abraham, take place in the wilderness. Leal, *Wilderness*, 150. Additionally, Feldt’s critique of Talmon’s article, which was quoted earlier in this essay, is also informative. She highlights the prominence of the wilderness as a setting for the majority of the books of Exodus, Deuteronomy, Leviticus, and Numbers. Feldt, “Wilderness,” note 6, 56–57.

liminality, and divine encounter in Jewish texts from antiquity.<sup>314</sup> Second Isaiah's transformation of the wilderness motif is therefore significant in employing the negative, but also more positive associations of the wilderness in order to address how exile transforms the people and God.

Scholars including Najman, Brooke, and Leal have all noted in different ways how the desert's association with divine revelation exists in a kind of tension with its negative qualities.<sup>315</sup> In particular, Najman has explored how even the wilderness itself becomes "a place of life and rebirth" in texts found at Qumran such as the Hodayot.<sup>316</sup> For example, Omer-Sherman suggests that "the same Hebrew prophet who might curse the people with the fate of the "barrenness" of the wilderness might also recognize it as a site of an exalted spiritual state, glancing back enviously toward the forty years of wandering as a period in which the people shared a special intimacy with the deity who accompanied them."<sup>317</sup> Therefore, it has been noted that the wilderness, with its connotations with divine revelation and suffering, are not necessarily irreconcilable. This dichotomy is played out not only in texts from antiquity but continues to be present for modern poetry.<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> This observation is indebted to Najman's thesis in Najman, "Conceptualising Wilderness." This intertwinement has had far reaching effects for the development of Judaism and Christianity. It is arguably more apparent in Christianity because of the writings of the Desert Fathers, as well as in later periods due to the Puritans use of the desert as a symbol of separation from the Catholic church.

<sup>315</sup> For example, Leal traces how the wilderness is both "A place of critical encounter but also as the site of God's grace expressed through history. Here God disciplines, purifies, and transforms, and it is here that aspects of God's nature and will are revealed." Leal, *Wilderness in the Bible*, 63. Wilderness is portrayed as a landscape to be shunned and is generally negative in prophetic literature. *Ibid.*, 74. Cf. also with Najman's "Conceptualising Wilderness," and *ibid.*, "Towards a Study," 144–45. Moreover, George Brooke notes that "The combination of positive with predominately negative aspects of the pentateuchal desert tradition may account for the relative paucity of explicit desert terminology in the texts." George J. Brooke, "Isaiah 40:3 and the Wilderness Community," in *New Qumran texts and studies: proceedings of the first Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies, Paris, 1992 International Organization for Qumran Studies*, ed. George J. Brooke (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 117–132 (129).

<sup>316</sup> Najman, "Conceptualising Wilderness."

<sup>317</sup> Ranen Omer-Sherman, *Israel in Exile: Jewish Writing and the Desert* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 2006), 10.

<sup>318</sup> See Chapter Three.

In relation to modern poetry which may be heavily inspired by biblical literature, scholars such as Zerubavel note that the tension between the wilderness as a place of transformation and of revelation is held in tension with its connotations of punishment and destruction, where the wilderness often fluctuates between being the “*nonplace*” and the “*counter-place*” in different contexts.<sup>319</sup> As a *nonplace*, Zerubavel notes that it connected contemporary Jewish communities to their biblical roots where the wilderness connoted transition, revelation and was a “site of national birth,” and it also “contributed to the formation of a new Hebrew identity and lore.”<sup>320</sup> Nonetheless, she also notes that the desert also became a symbolic obstacle to homecoming, hence the idea of making the “desert bloom” took on special significance in the early years after the creation of the modern state of Israel where the phrase referred to the efforts made to cultivate areas such as the Negev into functioning farmland<sup>321</sup> and to the drainage of swamps (such as Huleh Valley). Nonetheless, the desert also became a “counter-place” and a terrain which symbolically resulted from “Jewish exile from the homeland”:<sup>322</sup>

“Projecting the Jewish decline narrative, associated with exile, onto the country’s landscape led to the environmental imagery of destruction and desolation. The desolate desert represented a symbolic category that was loosely applied to a variety of terrains that challenged the Jewish settlement. The negative perception of the ‘symbolic desert’ was thus defined from the perspective of the settlement and emphasized their conflictual relationship. The desert, the counter-place, served as the potential frontier for the

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<sup>319</sup> Zerubavel notes that the desert emerged as a “complex and fluid symbolic landscape, alternating between its functions as the *nonplace* and the *counter-place* within different contexts.” Yael Zerubavel, *Desert in the Promised Land* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019), 214.

<sup>320</sup> Zerubavel, *Desert*, 213–14.

<sup>321</sup> Eric Stephen Zakim, *To Build and Be Built: Landscape, Literature, and The Construction of Zionist Identity* (Philadelphia, PN: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 182–3.

<sup>322</sup> Zerubavel, *Desert*, 214.



settlement, and the ‘conquest of the desert’ represented the process by which it was to be reshaped into a Jewish place.”<sup>323</sup>

In relation to the Hebrew Bible, the history of scholarship on the wilderness has often prioritized the negative set of associations over others. The narratives in the Pentateuch and their largely negative perception of the wilderness have led some to suggest that the kind of tensions which Hindy Najman and Yael Zerubavel have noted may not factor into the majority of the ancient texts that allude to the wilderness. For example, scholars such as Talmon suggest that the desert as a place of “disobedience and punishment” has a much greater and more significant impact on how the wilderness is alluded to in later texts than “the concept of the desert as the locale of divine revelation and of Yahweh’s love for Israel.”<sup>324</sup> He thinks that the idealisation of the desert in some of the prophets is actually the result of “an unwarranted isolation of the ‘revelation in the desert’ theme from the preponderant ‘transgression and punishment’ theme, with which it is closely welded in the pentateuchal account of the desert trek.”<sup>325</sup>

For example, Talmon’s assessment of how Isaiah appropriates the “desert motif” is that it is only in Second Isaiah where we find the wilderness wandering traditions “could be freed from its purgatory qualities and concomitantly be invested with new images of promise and hope.”<sup>326</sup> Rather, this dichotomy which is hinted at in both Zerubavel’s and Najman’s formulation is very much a factor for Second Isaiah. Part of the reason why this may not be perceived is due to the prevalence of scholars who discuss the “new Exodus” motif, which entails using the wilderness wandering narratives from the Pentateuch as negative examples

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<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>324</sup> Talmon, “The ‘Desert Motif,’” 47–48. Talmon suggests that the “desert motif” first occurs in Deuteronomy, but in the Pentateuch, there is no desert motif because it only refers to the literal terrain.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 54.

that will be redone in a positive way. However, these tensions are more alive in Second Isaiah's poetics than they may first appear, especially when the Pentateuchal narratives are no longer assumed as the main intertexts to evaluate the significance of the wilderness. In Second Isaiah, the journeys are not always linear or with a clear destination in mind. This supports interpreting the significance of journeying through a transformed wilderness with God's aid as relating to the people's relationship with their god in light of conquest and exile. The majority of the sections in this chapter will explore this particular point by considering examples of the "transformation of the wilderness" motif in Second Isaiah.

### **The "New Exodus" Motif and Supersessionist Readings of Isaiah**

The "new Exodus" motif is often used to interpret the images of returning *golah*, the wilderness, and references to God guiding his people as specific references to the Exodus from the Pentateuch. The old Exodus becomes a typology for the new one, that is much more pleasant for the people to endure this time around, hence the transformation of the wilderness which often is depicted in Second Isaiah. The "new Exodus" motif's application to Second Isaiah in scholarship reveals the dangers of amalgamating individual motifs into a single concept that is not actually referred to in the text itself. A better term to describe these reoccurring motifs can be the "transformation of the wilderness" motif, and this descriptive designation enables us to better analyse Second Isaiah in comparison with the "new Exodus" approach.

Firstly, it is worth defining supersessionism before moving onto how it is has arguably influenced the study of Isaianic motifs and, therefore, Isaiah's poetics of exile and homecoming.<sup>327</sup> Supersessionism refers to the view that the Christian church is the new or

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<sup>327</sup> I am not arguing that all the following interpretations of Isaiah are supersessionist explicitly or that the only producers of such interpretations come from a Christian perspective.

true Israel who has permanently superseded the nation of Israel as the people of God. In this view, the church comes to inherit the covenantal blessings that were originally promised to the nation of Israel throughout the Hebrew Bible. Israel as a consequence loses any unique role, identity, or purpose that is distinct from the Christian church.<sup>328</sup>

When discussing the wilderness motif in Isaiah, it is important to note that while many experts in Isaiah have challenged the concept of a “new Exodus” as motif in Isaiah, the prominence of wilderness motifs being absorbed into this category has had a long-lasting impact on the interpretation of Isaiah’s engagement with topics such as exile and homecoming. The book of Isaiah has been employed in supersessionist readings of the Hebrew Bible and the “new Exodus” motif has played a role in some of these readings.<sup>329</sup>

Firstly, it must be noted that there are major issues with the term “new Exodus” and the way in which this construction of Isaianic motifs has contributed to supersessionist readings of the book. Talmon’s work on the wilderness motif and his assessment of how Second Isaiah’s use

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<sup>328</sup> Michael J. Vlach, “Forms of Replacement Theology,” *TMSJ* 20 (2009): 57–69, 60.

<sup>329</sup> Other motifs that have been identified including that of Israel being a “light to the gentiles” have also featured in some readings. One example of this kind of supersessionist-like reading of Second Isaiah can be found in the works of N.T. Wright. Kaminsky and Reasoner offer critique of how Wright interprets the motifs found in Second Isaiah in order to construct what they view as an improper understanding of the relationship between the Jews and gentiles in these chapters. Drawing on Isaiah 42:6 and Isaiah 49:6, Wright suggests that it becomes the Jews responsibility to pass their knowledge of truth, that is torah, to the nations – and their failure to do so is consequential for the events that unfold in the New Testament and Jesus’ role as a light to the gentiles. Kaminsky and Reasoner, for example, critique Wright’s work for arguing that the references to the Jews in Second Isaiah being a light to the nations means a call to “missionize the gentiles.” Kaminsky and Reasoner state that this is an assumption that is unfounded by a close reading of the text. Joel Kaminsky and Mark Reasoner, “The Meaning and Telos of Israel’s Election: An Interfaith Response to N.T. Wright’s Reading of Paul,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 112 (2019): 421–446 (423). In his other work, Kaminsky notes that contemporary scholars may inadvertently exaggerate the “inclusive” nature of texts such as Third Isaiah (45–66), and those others may read texts such as Ezra and Nehemiah in the “harshest possible terms” with little understanding of how these texts are written from the perspective of a marginalized society in a difficult historical period. Joel Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob: Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 129. For example, Motyer in his introduction and commentary to Isaiah states “Isaiah is the Paul of the Old Testament in his teaching that faith in God’s promises is the single most important reality for the Lord’s people.” See J. A. Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 20 (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press/IVP Academic, 2009), 12–13.

of the wilderness relates to other biblical texts does not highlight the complexity of its uses within biblical texts. Talmon's definition of a motif is that it "represents the essential meaning of the situation, not the situation itself. It is not a mere reiteration of the sensations involved, but rather a heightened and intensified representation of them."<sup>330</sup> While his definition is flawed in the assumption that motifs are always rooted in an actual situation, what his definition raises is how we often perceive motifs as reanimating "ideas" and "experiences" that were "inherent" in earlier (not necessarily "original") situations.<sup>331</sup> There can be meaningful links between the use of motifs across various texts that are not necessarily reduced to the direct influence of one text upon another. The issue with this approach in the context of Hebrew Bible studies is that it becomes harder to see the wilderness as unrelated to the Wilderness Wandering traditions. This becomes an issue with Second Isaiah because the wilderness wandering traditions make up such a small fraction of references to the wilderness. This association with the Exodus and/or wilderness wandering traditions has fed some of the "new Exodus" interpretations and more supersessionist readings of Second Isaiah.

Within Isaiah it has been noted that the wilderness imagery of 40:3–4 is interwoven into a matrix of other imagery including the transformation of the wilderness into fertile land or a garden (Isa 41:18–19; 42:15–16), and many have designated passages such as 51:9–11; 52:11–12 as part of the "new Exodus" motif.<sup>332</sup> Several scholars have critiqued the aptness of the "new Exodus" motif in its application to Isaiah's use of the wilderness motif, and have shown the problematic nature of such interpretations that see in almost every reference to the

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<sup>330</sup> Talmon, "Desert motif," 39.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> The examples that they have in mind for the transformation of the wilderness are 41:18–19; 42:15–16 and while I do not agree with the designation "new Exodus" motif, these are the examples Bo Lim lists: 51:9–11; 52:11–12. See Bo H. Lim, *The "Way of the Lord" in the Book of Isaiah* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 14.

wilderness a reference to a “new Exodus” or the Exodus known to us through the pentateuchal narratives.<sup>333</sup> However, it is less often noted how such readings have participated in supersessionist discourses.

But what is the nature of the relationship between the “new Exodus” motif and supersessionism? In the case of Second Isaiah, the issue with the “new Exodus” readings are a double-edged sword in that they represent inattentive readings of Isaiah’s own poetics but are *also* employed in supersessionist readings of the text because the “old Exodus” is superseded by a “new Exodus.”

While the term “new Exodus” is more common in New Testament scholarship, it is indebted to Isaiah scholarship.<sup>334</sup> A notable example of such an approach is an article by Fred L. Fisher in 1977 entitled, “New and Greater Exodus,”<sup>335</sup> where he traces a connection between the Exodus and Jesus’s salvation in the New Testament. Fisher suggests that the term “The New and Greater Exodus,” is suitable to describe the continuity between the Gospel and the prophetic text and the latter’s “infinite superiority.”<sup>336</sup> A more contemporary example which has the “new Exodus” at the heart of its exegesis includes the work of Rikki E. Watts, who suggests that the Gospel of Mark’s composite citation of Isaiah 40:3 suggests that the Isaianic

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<sup>333</sup> Most notable is Hans M. A. Barstad’s monograph, *Way in The Wilderness*. He systemically goes through common occurrences of the “new Exodus” motif, and he helpfully disentangles references to the wilderness from the few references to the Exodus that are in Second Isaiah. See also Øystein Lund, *Way Metaphors and Way Topics in Isaiah 40-55* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007); see also Bo H. Lim, *Way of the Lord*. Several studies use the terms “theme” and “motif” interchangeably.

<sup>334</sup> Daniel Lynwood Smith, “The Uses of ‘New Exodus’ in New Testament Scholarship: Preparing a Way through the Wilderness,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 14 (2016): 207–243 (208-209).

<sup>335</sup> Fred L. Fisher, “The New and Greater Exodus: The Exodus Pattern in the New Testament,” *SwJT* 20: (1977): 69–79.

<sup>336</sup> Fisher, “The New and Greater Exodus,” 79. See also Smith’s bibliography which contains other relevant works, “The Uses of ‘New Exodus,’” 224; a good example is Rikki E. Watts who suggests that specifically the Isaianic “new Exodus” is important for the Gospel of Mark’s perspective on Jesus’ ministry. Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark* WUNT 88 (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997).

“new Exodus” is Mark’s “overall conceptual framework.”<sup>337</sup> The idea of a “new Exodus” being central to Second Isaiah has influence beyond Isaiah scholarship. In relation to Isaiah itself, the “new Exodus” motif and its application to Second Isaiah is extremely limited in being able to describe Second Isaiah’s poetry largely because much of these chapters do not focus on or allude to the Exodus specifically.<sup>338</sup>

For example, Talmon’s approach in his article on the “desert motif” is that it is only in Second Isaiah where we find the wilderness wandering traditions “could be freed from its purgatory qualities and concomitantly be invested with new images of promise and hope.”<sup>339</sup> However, the wilderness is not purged of any qualities in Second Isaiah, rather the hopefulness of Second Isaiah’s poetic thrust of the transformation of the desert motif arises precisely because the negative qualities of the wilderness are latent in the text and provide an appropriate context to highlight the divine’s power and strength. Moreover, taking such an approach can prevent a more subtle evaluation of the wilderness’s significance for Second Isaiah.

Overall, the motifs in Second Isaiah refer to the re-establishing of the nation, and the destruction of the Babylonian and other foreign nations that witnessed Judah’s downfall,<sup>340</sup> but the idea that a second Exodus is critical for Second Isaiah or applies to the majority of passages with wilderness and guiding imagery is inaccurate.

The prologue to Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40:1–11) is a good example of why the “new Exodus” motif may obscure more than it illuminates when applied to the text. Viewing the prologue as participating in a “new Exodus” motif seems to lead to a more literal interpretation of the

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<sup>337</sup> Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus*, 90.

<sup>338</sup> Smith, “The Uses of ‘New Exodus,’” 226.

<sup>339</sup> Talmon, “Desert Motif,” 54.

<sup>340</sup> Barstad, *Way*, 88.

wilderness and plant imagery, and to overemphasizing on physical homecoming as central to Isaiah's message.

Some scholars read passages that discuss return or journeying imagery as being more explicit references to highways from one location (often unstated) to Jerusalem, as Childs does in relation to the prologue to Second Isaiah.<sup>341</sup> Moreover, within Second Isaiah Childs suggests that the “theme of the highway is part of a larger set of images describing the transformation of the wilderness into a garden ... in order to facilitate the return of the exiles.”<sup>342</sup> Other scholars have also seen the pastoral imagery in Isaiah 40:11 as indicative of the language commonly used in relation to both the Exodus traditions and the theme of exile. Additionally, Niccacci also thinks that the pastoral imagery in verse eleven is related to the Exodus.<sup>343</sup>

כְּרֹעַה עֲדָרוּ רֹעֶה בְּזִרְעוֹ יִקְבֹּץ טְלָאִים וּבְחִיקוֹ יִשָּׂא עֲלוֹת יְנֵהֶל:

Like a shepherd He pastures His flock: He gathers the lambs in His arms. And carries them in His bosom; Gently He drives the mother sheep.

However, Tiemeyer notes that the pastoral imagery in 40:11 does not identify the sheep, so they argue that it is not meant to identify “a specific group of people.”<sup>344</sup> Rather, she writes that, “More likely, they are part of the extended shepherd metaphor, serving, in a sense, as typical shepherd paraphernalia (shepherds have sheep, otherwise they are not shepherds).”<sup>345</sup>

I agree with Tiemeyer when she suggests that it is “unwarranted” to see the exiles as

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<sup>341</sup> Brevard Childs notes that in Isaiah 11 “the promise of the return of the “dispersed of Judah” (v. 12) is portrayed in terms of a highway from Assyria.” Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary, Old Testament Library* (Louisville, KY: London, 2001), 299. It need not be mutually exclusive that the passage partakes of either the “new Exodus” motif or the “transformation of the wilderness” motif.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*, 299. The examples he cites are Isa. 41:18 and 42:15.

<sup>343</sup> Alviero Niccacci, *The Exodus Tradition in the Psalms, Isaiah and Ezekiel Author*, *Liber Annuus* 61 (2011): 9-35 (28). He cites Ps. 77:21; 78:52; 80:2 as further examples of pastoral imagery.

<sup>344</sup> Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion*, 172.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

necessarily being represented by the lambs and ewes in this pastoral metaphor.<sup>346</sup> However, Tiemeyer does previously note that this passage, while not describing a “new Exodus,” is alluding to the ingathering of the diaspora.<sup>347</sup> In light of how pastoral imagery is often connected to both the image of the ingathering of the diaspora as well as the Exodus, it makes sense to see this as an allusion to the restoration achieved through the ingathering of the diaspora,<sup>348</sup> but this is not a “new Exodus” that redeems the old one. Nor is it necessarily to be interpreted as suggesting that physical homecoming is the only thing Yahweh wants from the people.

Interpreting the opening of Second Isaiah as exhibiting the “new Exodus” motif obscures the way in which the voice of 40:6-8 is a rebuttal against the assertion to prepare highways and paths in the wilderness for the Lord. As Tiemeyer notes, throughout Second Isaiah especially, the passages describing ways in the wilderness do not necessarily portray a linear narrative of travel in a way that suggests that the passages are modelled on the Exodus as a narrative of homecoming.<sup>349</sup> Perhaps, the importance of the rebuttal of the prologue in verses 40:6–8 may be overlooked partly because of the verses which follow it (40:9–11) where the tone becomes more positive. These verses also describe God’s triumphant return to Zion and describe him as a shepherd leading his sheep back to Zion.

כְּרֹעַה עֲדָרוּ יְרֻעָה בְּזָרְעוֹ יִמְבֵּץ טְלָאִים

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<sup>346</sup> Ibid.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid. Barstad suggests that the shepherd motif does not need to have anything to do with displacement (cf. Psalm 23). Rather it is a common motif to refer to the king or deity as taking care of the people he is responsible for in the Hebrew Bible. Barstad, *Way*, 48–49. It also occurs in other texts such as Ps. 78: 51–52. He notes that in the psalter there are several examples where the shepherd motif occurs outside of any relationship to the Exodus. Barstad, *Way*, 50.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid., 13; Tiemeyer notes that many scholars who view the Second Exodus motif as behind many “way” passages in Isaiah suggest that they describe a “progressing journey from Babylon to Zion,” (ibid., 13) but actually the Exodus imagery is spread throughout Isaiah 40-55 in a non-linear fashion which complicates this assertion (ibid., 36).



Like a shepherd He pastures His flock: He gathers the lambs in His arms.

Moreover, Lund and Tiemeyer also note that,

“the notion of ‘desert’, i.e. a place without water, is a standard symbol for curse, punishment and death within the culture where Isa 40–55 was composed, as evidenced by, for example, Ps 42:1–3; 63:1; 107:4–9, 40; 143:6. Isa 40:3–5 is thus a conventional theophany that proclaims God’s imminent transformation of his people’s situation.”<sup>350</sup>

Tiemeyer’s insight above also accords with how the wilderness functioned in Chapter One in Lam 4 and 5. Overall, Tiemeyer argues that in the majority of cases where wilderness imagery, motifs or metaphors occur, they are best understood figuratively as a way of conveying the peoples transition from “slavery to freedom,” and from “death to life,” rather than as descriptions of physical journeys from Babylon to Judah.<sup>351</sup> Therefore, these reoccurring way (דרך) images or the motif of the transformation of the desert as they appear in Second Isaiah do not necessarily derive their significance from other biblical texts. Critiquing a “new Exodus” approach is not only helpful reading Second Isaiah more attentively, and it is an important corrective for how Second Isaiah’s engagement with exile and homecoming has been read in supersessionist ways historically. Second Isaiah’s transformation of the wilderness is not about correcting previous wilderness treks that are often associated with punishment.

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<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 173; cf. with Lund, *Way Metaphors*, 81–85.

<sup>351</sup> Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion*, 155. Moreover, she suggests that the use of the Exodus motif in Isaiah 40–55, where it does occur, does not necessitate that the writers of these texts thought that a second Exodus would literally occur.

## The “Transformation of the Wilderness” in Isaiah 40–55

Throughout Second Isaiah the transformation of the wilderness is often a sign of God’s power to transform the natural world, and the “transformation of the wilderness” motif encompasses divine acts of creation and destruction, such as irrigation and scorching the land, and also the creation of ways, and guidance, through inhospitable terrain. In Isaiah 40:1–11, the prologue to Second Isaiah, the “transformation of the wilderness” motif interacts with references to divine word and promise to create an open-ended poetics towards exile and homecoming, focusing on the divine and the people’s transformation as a result of exile and destruction.

After discussing the prologue in Isa 40, I consider how the interactions between these two images creates a framework for Second Isaiah as a whole. The subsequent sections of this chapter consider other occurrences of the “transformation of the wilderness” motif throughout the other parts of Isaiah 40-55 in order to reflect on how they express the transformation of the people and their relationship to the divine in light of exile, and also foster an open-ended poetics of exile.

### Isaiah 40:1–11

<sup>1</sup>נחמו נחמו עמי יאמר אלהיכם: <sup>2</sup>דברו על־לב ירושלים וקראו אליה כי מלאה צבאה כי נרצה עונה כי לקחה מיד יהוה כפלים בכל־חטאתיה: <sup>3</sup>קול קורא במדבר פנו דרך יהוה ישרו בערבה מסלה לאלהינו: <sup>4</sup>כל־גיא ינשא וכל־הר וגבעה ישפלו והנה העקב למישור והרכסים לבקעה: <sup>5</sup>ונגלה כבוד יהוה וראו כל־בשר נהדו כי פי יהוה דבר: <sup>6</sup>קול אמר קרא ואמר מה אקרא כל־הבשר תציר וכל־חסדו כציון השדה: <sup>7</sup>יבש תציר נבל ציון כי רות יהוה נשבה בו אכן תציר העם: <sup>8</sup>יבש תציר נבל ציון ודבר־אלהינו יקום לעולם: <sup>9</sup>על הר־גבה עלי־לך מבשרת ציון הרימי בפת קולך מבשרת ירושלים הרימי אל־תיראי אמרי לערי יהודה הנה אלהיכם: <sup>10</sup>הנה אדני יהוה בְחֶזֶק יבוא וזרעו משלה לו הנה שקרו אתו ופעלתו לפניו: <sup>11</sup>כרעה עדרו ירעה בזרעו יקבץ טלאים ויבחיקו ישא עלות ינהל:

<sup>1</sup>“Comfort, comfort my people!” Says your God. <sup>2</sup>“Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and call out to her that she has finished her service, that her iniquity is pardoned, for she has received from the hand of the Lord double according to all her sins.” <sup>3</sup>**A voice cries out: “In the wilderness clear the way of the Lord, make straight in the steppe a highway for our God!”** <sup>4</sup>**Let every valley be raised, and every mountain and hill made low. And let the rough ground become level, and the ridges a plain.** <sup>5</sup>Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together, for **the mouth of the Lord has spoken.** <sup>6</sup>**A voice cries out, “Cry!” And another said, “What should I cry? All flesh is grass, and all its goodness like the flower of the field.** <sup>7</sup>The grass withers, the flower fades when the spirit of the Lord blows on it: Surely, people are grass. <sup>8</sup>**The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever.** <sup>9</sup>Ascend a high hill, O herald of Zion. Raise your voice with strength, O herald of Jerusalem. Rise up! Do not be afraid. Say to the cities of Judah, “Behold, your God!” <sup>10</sup>“Look, the Lord God comes in strength, and his arm rules for him. Look, his reward is with him and his wages are before him. <sup>11</sup>Like a shepherd shepherds his flock, he gathers lambs with his arm, and into his bosom he will carry them. He gently guides the nursing sheep.”

Isaiah 40:1–11, especially 40:1–8, are important for how understanding Second Isaiah’s poetics generally.<sup>352</sup> The first eleven verses are generally considered to be a unity which forms a prologue.<sup>353</sup> The idea that these first eleven verses form an introduction to Second Isaiah has arisen because of the lacuna between the events of chapter thirty-nine and forty

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<sup>352</sup> Scholars such as Barstad suggest that the whole message of the Second Isaiah can be subsumed under the opening two verses, with all the rest of Isaiah 40–55 being a reformulation of the basic message of verses 1–2. Barstad, *Way*, 10.

<sup>353</sup> Examples include Baltzer’s commentary, see Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40-55*, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, ed. Peter Machinist, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 47.

where the Babylonian captivity itself is left undescribed in Isaiah's poetry.<sup>354</sup> Second Isaiah's introduction which speaks of comfort and describes God's return to Jerusalem via a wilderness trek appears to be a triumphant response to the void created by the exile that fills the gap between First and Second Isaiah, accounting for the sudden shift in tone and content. It is not entirely clear who is speaking in these initial verses (Isa 40:1–11): Scholars such as Freedman suggest that the voice crying in the wilderness (Isa 40:3) is the prophet himself,<sup>355</sup> but others suggest it could be a divine attendant.<sup>356</sup> In verse three, the voice begins its task that it was commissioned within the first two verses by commanding that a way in the wilderness be cleared. Regarding how we should understand these verses, Cross's division helps to account for the change of tone by the use of the interrogative in verse six.<sup>357</sup> For example, unlike the voice that cries out in verse three, the voice crying out in verse six receives a response which tempers the sentiment of the command. This tempering lends weight to designating the voice which responds in verse six as a prophet, but regardless, it is

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<sup>354</sup> Melugin's summary of the unity of chapters 40–55 and their relation to the later chapters is helpful, as even though the prologue does not present itself as an introduction to an independent body of prophetic literature, he notes that there is a clearly a synchronic shift between the topic of Assyria to the topic of Israel's future post-exile. Roy F. Melugin, "Poetic Imagination, Intertextuality, and Life in a Symbolic World," in *Desert Will Bloom: Poetic Visions in Isaiah*, ed. A. Joseph. Everson and Hyun Chul Paul Kim (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2009), 7–16 (13).

<sup>355</sup> David Noel Freedman, "The Structure of Isaiah 40:1-11," in *Divine Commitment and Human Obligation: Selected Writings of David Noel Freedman Volume Two: Poetry and Orthography*, ed. John R. Huddleston (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 232–257 (228). Landy also notes that the prophet in this case would be speaking on behalf of people and their "incapacity to speak" in light of the devastation of the Babylonian captivity. Francis Landy, "Spectrality in the Prologue of Deutero-Isaiah," in *Desert Will Bloom: Poetic Visions in Isaiah*, ed. A. Joseph. Everson and Hyun Chul Paul Kim (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2009), 147.

<sup>356</sup> Goldingay's commentary throughout summarises the evidence for and against this. See John Goldingay and David Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40–55*, ICC 1 (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2006). See also Freedman's essay on the structure of the first eleven verses; "The Structure of Isaiah 40:1–11," 232–257; and Childs, *Isaiah*, 295.

<sup>357</sup> Baltzer identifies one of the voices as a prophet: He thinks that the first speaker in Isaiah 40 is God, followed by God's vizier (vss. 3–5), and then we have the third unidentified speaker at the start of verse six who is a heavenly being that charges the fourth speaker (maybe a prophet) who responds to the charge. Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 47.

a voice that offers a rebuttal to the previous command to create a path through the wilderness (40:6–7).

Isa 40:6–7

קֹל אָמַר<sup>358</sup> קָרָא וְאָמַר מָה אֶקְרָא כָּל־הַבְּשָׂר חֲצִיר וְכָל־חֲסִדּוֹ כְּצִיץ הַשָּׂדֶה:  
יִבֹשׂ חֲצִיר נִגְבַּל צִיץ כִּי רוּחַ יְהוָה נֹשֶׁבֶה בּוֹ אֶכֶן חֲצִיר הָעֵמֶם:<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup>A voice cries out, “Cry!” And another said, “What should I cry? All flesh is grass, and all its goodness like the flower of the field. <sup>7</sup>The grass withers, the flower fades when the spirit of the Lord blows on it: Surely, people are grass.

Whether we identify this fourth voice (40:6-8) as a prophet, someone else, or an angelic messenger, the use of the interrogative phrase on the part of this speaker, “what shall I cry?” (מָה אֶקְרָא) appears to have a significant effect on the oracle’s structure. This particular voice is rebutting the earlier proclamation to pave a way in the wilderness (40:3).

While the content of 40:3–5 and 6–8 are significantly different, Blenkinsopp aptly notes that verses five and eight are connected thematically by the lexical choices of דְּבַר and the phrase “the word of our Lord” (דְּבַר־אֱלֹהֵינוּ). The phrase “the glory of the Lord” (כְּבוֹד יְהוָה) which also occurs in 40:5, parallels the appearance of “the word of our Lord” in 40:8.<sup>359</sup> While the proclamation to clear a way in the wilderness has a rich reception history, the motif of the

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<sup>358</sup>The LXX and 1QIsaiah<sup>a</sup> reflect another reading of this verb as “and I said” (וְאָמַרְתִּי) not as “and another said.” While this is not the majority view, some scholars such as Francis Landy suggest that the reading in 1QIsaiah<sup>a</sup> and the LXX is preferable to the MT which is quoted.

<sup>359</sup> Moreover, Blenkinsopp suggests that verses 7-8 function as a kind of rebuttal to verse 6b, which would not be uncommon to prophetic discourse. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 19A, AB (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2002), 183.

“word of the Lord” lasting forever is not only significant to Isaiah 40, but as scholars such as Freedman suggest, it may be the climax of Isaiah 40:1–11.<sup>360</sup>

The way in which people are described as plants in this passage also emphasises how the “word of the Lord” lasting forever is central in the prologue. This is used in 40:6-7 where people are envisioned as “grass” (קֶצֶיר). Patricia Tull has noted that this conceptual metaphor is used throughout Isaiah to describe human life and “envision” human regeneration,<sup>361</sup> but in Isaiah 40:1–11 it is used to highlight how “the word of the Lord” lasts forever.<sup>362</sup> For example, in Isaiah 6:13 there is the image of a fallen tree stump representing Judah; while in Isaiah 11:1 there is also the image of the shoot coming from Jesse’s stump.<sup>363</sup> These images evoke the way that trees can regenerate from their roots even after the destruction and death of everything else.<sup>364</sup> When applied to Judah they serve as a message of hope and a response to the devastation of exile.

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<sup>360</sup> Freedman, “The Structure of Isaiah 40:1-11,” 248.

<sup>361</sup> Patricia K. Tull, “Persistent Vegetative States: People as Plants and Plants as People in Isaiah,” in *Desert Will Bloom: Poetic Visions in Isaiah*, ed. A. Joseph Everson and Hyun Chul Paul Kim (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2009), 26.

<sup>362</sup> See Isa. 5. There the ephemerality of human beings is related to the injustices that people carry out as a result of rejecting the word of the divine.

וְהָיָה כְּנֹר וְנָבֶל תָּרַח וְחֻלְיִל וְנִינֹן מִשְׁתִּיחֵם וְאֵת פְּעַל יְהוָה לֹא יִבִּיטוּ וּמַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵיו לֹא יֵאָדוּ:<sup>12</sup>  
לִכֹּן גְּלָה עַמִּי מִבְּלִי־דַעַת וּכְבוֹדוֹ מִתִּי רָעַב וְהִמּוֹנוֹ צָחָה צָמָא:<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Who, at their banquets, have lyre and lute, timbrel, flute, and wine; but who never give a thought to the plan of the LORD, and take no note of what He is designing. <sup>13</sup>Assuredly, my people will suffer exile for not giving heed, its multitude victims of hunger and its masses parched with thirst.

<sup>24</sup>לִכֹּן כְּאֹכֵל קֹשׁ לִשׁוֹן אֵשׁ וְחֹשֶׁשׁ לְהַבָּה יִרְפָּה שְׂרָשֻׁם כַּמֶּקֶּה יְהוָה וּפְרָחֵם כְּאֶבֶק יַעֲלֶה כִּי מָאָסוּ אֶת תּוֹרַת יְהוָה צָבָאוֹת וְאֵת אִמְרַת קְדוּשׁ־יִשְׂרָאֵל נֶאֱצִו:<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Assuredly, as straw is consumed by a tongue of fire and hay shrivels as it burns, their stock shall become like rot, and their buds shall blow away like dust. For they have rejected the instruction of the Lord of Hosts, spurned the word of the Holy One of Israel. The people ignore god’s plans, and will suffer in exile.

<sup>363</sup> Citing Isa. 11:1, “But a shoot shall grow out of the stump of Jesse, a twig shall sprout from his stock” She states that, “As trees can regrow from their roots even if the rest has been destroyed, tree metaphors served to encapsulate the message of punishment for the people, as well as oracles of salvation.” Kirsten Nielsen, *There Is Hope for a Tree: The Tree as Metaphor in Isaiah*, JSOTSup (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988), 71.

<sup>364</sup> Nielson, *Hope for a Tree*, 26.

The metaphor by which people are described as plants in Isaiah 40:1–11, however, does not convey the vitality of human life amid adversity, but rather the everlasting quality of divine promise and speech. In 40:7–8 the noun for “grass” (קָצִיר) connotes the barrenness associated with the desert plains which were mentioned earlier in 40:3–4, and through which the way would be cleared. Its significance in the passage can be further illuminated by comparing it to an earlier example where similar imagery is used to describe the transformation of the wilderness.

Isaiah 35 opens with a speaker wishing that the wilderness would bloom.

Isa 35:1–2

אִישׁוּם מִדְבָּר וצִיָּה וְתִגַּל עֲרֶבֶה וְתִפְרַח כְּחַבְצֵלֶת:<sup>1</sup>  
 פְּרוֹם תִּפְרַח...<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The arid desert shall be glad, the wilderness shall rejoice and shall blossom like a rose. <sup>2</sup>It shall blossom abundantly...

Bringing these chapters into dialogue with each other can be illuminating for analysing their language as both chapters 35 and 40, according to scholars such as Sweeney,<sup>365</sup> share the same concern for Zion’s redemption and hearing the word of God. The transformation of grass into reeds and bulrushes in Isaiah 35 intentionally contrasts with the nettles and thistles which characterise the destruction of Edom in the previous chapter.<sup>366</sup> In 35:7, the transformation and rejoicing of the desert entails that even the “grass” (קָצִיר) turns to reeds and bulrushes (לִקְנֵה וְגִמְאָ).

<sup>365</sup> Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39: With an Introduction to Prophetic Literature*, FOTL 16 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 435.

<sup>366</sup> Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 456.

7וְהָיָה הַשָּׂרֵב לְאֵגָם וְצִמְאוֹן לְמַבּוּעַי מִיָּמִים בְּנֹהַ תִּנְיִים רִבְצָה הַצִּיֹּר לְקִנְיָה וְגִמְאָ:

<sup>7</sup>Torrid earth shall become a pool; parched land, fountains of water; The home of jackals, a pasture; The abode [of ostriches], reeds and rushes.

It is likely that the dry land which is transformed is a metaphor for Zion in Isaiah 35,<sup>367</sup> and in Isaiah 40. In Isaiah 40, Yahweh is pictured as returning to Zion, suggesting that he will be in the best position to exert power and act on behalf of his people. In juxtaposition to how this transformation of a desolate wilderness inspires hope in Isaiah 35, in Isa 40: 1–11 the thrust of the oracle reflects upon the ephemerality of humankind.

On the other hand, in Isaiah 40:1–11 the metaphor that often conveys the vitality of human life is used to temper the proclamation to clear a path in the wilderness, by contrasting it with the ephemerality of human life and the everlasting nature of divine speech (Isa 40:8):

8יְבֹשׁ הַצִּיֹּר נָבֵל צִיץ וְדְבַר־אֱלֹהֵינוּ יָקוּם לְעוֹלָם:

<sup>8</sup>The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever.

This might suggest that the voice which utters in 40:6, “what shall I cry? All flesh is grass” (מָה אֶקְרָא כָּל־הַבָּשָׂר הַצִּיֹּר) is as much an integral part of Isaiah’s poetics of exile as the oracles of deliverance and hope. Therefore, 40:9–11 do not necessarily indicate that the “doubts” of 40:6–8 have disappeared along with the numerous voices.<sup>368</sup> Statements such as “surely, people are grass” (אֲכֵן הַצִּיֹּר הָעֵפֶם) and “what shall I cry” (מָה אֶקְרָא) are not necessarily at odds

<sup>367</sup> Poulsen, *Black Hole*, 373–374.

<sup>368</sup> Francis Landy, “Spectrality in the Prologue of Deutero-Isaiah,” in *Desert Will Bloom: Poetic Visions in Isaiah*, ed. A. Joseph. Everson and Hyun Chul Paul Kim (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2009), 152. Francis Landy states that the word of God and the spirit of God correspond to each other as well, and that these “immaterial entities that prove more durable than the solidity of flesh and all it represents. It thus encapsulates a fundamental motif of Deutero-Isaiah, and perhaps of prophetic writings generally, whereby the powerless are vindicated and power is illusory.” Landy, “Spectrality,” 151.



with the proclamations to clear a path in the desert, but this shift tempers the earlier verses in the oracle.

The interaction between these voices characterised by command and response, and also the rebutting voice in verse six, can be further contextualised by bringing Isaiah 40 into dialogue with Isaiah 6. The way in which Second Isaiah engages directly with Isaiah 6 also creates a framework for seeing the open-ended poetics of Second Isaiah's discourse of exile.

### Isa 6:1–13

<sup>1</sup>בְּשַׁנַּת־מוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ עֲזַיָּהוּ וַאֲרָאָה אֶת־אֲדֹנָי יוֹשֵׁב עַל־כִּסֵּא רָם וְנִשְׂא וְשׂוּלְיוֹ מְלֵאִים אֶת־הַהֵיכָל: <sup>2</sup>שֶׁרָפִים עֹמְדִים מִמַּעַל לוֹ שֵׁשׁ כְּנָפַיִם שֵׁשׁ כְּנָפַיִם לְאַחַד בְּשֵׁתַיִם יְכַסֶּה פָּנָיו וּבְשֵׁתַיִם יְכַסֶּה רַגְלָיו וּבְשֵׁתַיִם יַעֲזֹפֵף: <sup>3</sup>וַיִּקְרָא זֶה אֶל־זֶה וַאֲמַר קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת מְלֵא כָּל־הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ: <sup>4</sup>וַיִּגְעוּ אַמּוֹת הַסָּפִים מִקּוֹל הַקּוֹרֵא וְהַבֵּית יִמְלֵא עָשָׂן: <sup>5</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר אֲוִי־לִי כִי־נִדְמִיתִי כִּי אִישׁ טָמֵא־שָׁפְתִים אָנֹכִי וּבַתּוֹךְ עִם־טָמֵא שָׁפְתִים אָנֹכִי יוֹשֵׁב כִּי אֶת־הַמֶּלֶךְ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת רָאוּ עֵינָי: <sup>6</sup>וַיִּנְעַף אֵלַי אֶחָד מִן־הַשֶּׁרָפִים וּבִידּוֹ רִצְפָה בְּמִלְקָחַיִם לִקַּח מֵעַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: <sup>7</sup>וַיִּגַע עַל־פִּי וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה נִגַע זֶה עַל־שִׁפְתַיִךְ וְסָר עֲוֹנֶךָ וְסִטְאָתְךָ תִּכְפָּר: <sup>8</sup>וַאֲשַׁמַּע אֶת־קוֹל אֲדֹנָי אֲמַר אֶת־מִי אֲשַׁלַּח וּמִי יִלְדֶ־לָנוּ וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה שְׁלַחְנִי: <sup>9</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר לֹךְ וְאָמַרְתָּ לְעַם הַזֶּה שְׁמְעוּ וְאַל־תִּבְיִנוּ וּרְאוּ רָאוּ וְאַל־תִּדְעוּ: <sup>10</sup>הֲשָׁמַן לִב־הָעַם הַזֶּה וְאַזְנֵי הַכֹּהֵן וְעֵינָיו הֲשַׁע פְּו־יִרְאֶה בְּעֵינָיו וּבְאַזְנוֹ יִשְׁמַע וּלְבָבוֹ יִבִּין וְנֹשֵׁב וְרִפָּא לוֹ: <sup>11</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר עַד־מָתַי אֲדֹנָי וַיֹּאמֶר עַד אֲשֶׁר אִם־נִשְׂאוּ עָרִים מְאִין יוֹשֵׁב וּבְתִיִם מְאִין אָדָם וְהִאֲדָמָה תִּשָּׂאָה שְׁמָמָה: <sup>12</sup>וְרִחַק יְהוָה אֶת־הָאָדָם וּרְבֵה הָעֲזוּבָה בְּקִרְבֵּי הָאָרֶץ: <sup>13</sup>וַעֲזוּד בָּהּ עֲשָׂרֶיהָ וְשָׂבָה וְהִיתָה לְבָעַר כְּאֵלֶּה וְכֵאלוֹן אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁלְכֹת מִצְרַיִם בָּם זָרַע קִדְשׁ מִצְרַיִם:

<sup>1</sup>In the year that King Uzziah died, I beheld my Lord seated on a high and lofty throne; and the skirts of His robe filled the Temple. <sup>2</sup>Seraphs stood in attendance on Him. Each of them had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his legs, and with two he would fly. <sup>3</sup>And one would call to the other, “Holy, holy, holy! The LORD of Hosts! His presence fills all the earth!” <sup>4</sup>The doorposts would shake at the sound of the one who called, and the House kept filling with smoke. <sup>5</sup>I cried, “Woe is me; I am lost!

For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my own eyes have beheld the King LORD of Hosts.”<sup>6</sup> Then one of the seraphs flew over to me with a live coal, which he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs.<sup>7</sup> He touched it to my lips and declared, “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt shall depart and your sin be purged away.”<sup>8</sup> Then I heard the voice of my Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me.”<sup>9</sup> **And He said, “Go, say to that people: ‘Hear, indeed, but do not understand; See, indeed, but do not grasp.’**<sup>10</sup> **Dull that people’s mind, stop its ears, and seal its eyes—Lest, seeing with its eyes and hearing with its ears, it also grasp with its mind, and repent and save itself.”**<sup>11</sup> I asked, “How long, my Lord?” And He replied: “Till towns lie waste without inhabitants and houses without people, and the ground lies waste and desolate—<sup>12</sup>For the LORD will banish the population—and deserted sites are many in the midst of the land.<sup>13</sup>” **“But while a tenth part yet remains in it, it shall repent. It shall be ravaged like the terebinth and the oak, of which stumps are left even when they are felled: its stump shall be a holy seed.”**

Scholars such as Williamson have noted that Second Isaiah appears to reverse some of the themes in Isa 6:11–13 and Isa 5:8–10, and that both Isaiah 6 and 40 take place in the heavenly court,<sup>369</sup> and both texts clearly address the topics of exile, homecoming, and the people’s relationship to the divine. Given Williamson’s arguments and the thematic overlaps between parts of Second Isaiah and First Isaiah, it is reasonable to assume that these similarities resulted from direct influence of parts of First Isaiah on the writers of Second Isaiah, or at the very least that the thematic overlaps were so significant that it contributed to

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<sup>369</sup> Williamson, *Isaiah*, 55. He also discusses how Second Isaiah appears to open a book that has long been sealed. *Ibid.*, 243.

why Second Isaiah became associated with First Isaiah.<sup>370</sup> Further similarities between Isaiah 6 and Isaiah 40 include references to the removal of sin and iniquity (6:7; 40:1–2), as well as references to God’s glory (6:3; 40:5). Another similarity between Second Isaiah more generally and Isaiah 6 would be the metaphor of deafness and blindness and how it refers to the inability of people to do as Yahweh pleases or to understand him.<sup>371</sup> Another similarity is the emphasis on divine speech and words. In Isaiah 6 divine speech is paradoxically supposed to be communicated to the people so that they do not understand their wrongdoings towards their god, but in Second Isaiah divine word is a reminder that the divine lasts forever in comparison to human beings.

The prophet’s question in 6:12 and its response from Yahweh indicates that the length of the time of exile, punishment and destruction will nonetheless leave in the land a “holy seed” (זֶרַע קֹדֶשׁ) that will remain as its substance (מַצְבֵּתָהּ) in the land. Conceptualizing people as plants is also employed by the writers of Second Isaiah in Isaiah 40 which was discussed earlier. From the perspective of these verses, the focus appears to be on the part that remains in the land that will be purged or burned (לְבַעַר) even a second time after the destruction.<sup>372</sup>

This passage emphasises how this Holy Seed that survived multiple destructions will be different with respect to being able to understand and do what Yahweh wants, unlike the previous generations.<sup>373</sup>

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<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah*, 46. See Isa. 44:9–20 as another example of this motif.

<sup>372</sup> Alternatively, in 6:13 וְשָׁבָה could be taken as referring to the עֲשָׂרִיָּה (tenth) that “will return” to the land instead of “remain” in the land which the NJPS and NRSV translate it as. The context implies that even the small remnant that remains in the land will be destroyed again, and what remains after that is the “holy seed.”

<sup>373</sup> The phrase “holy seed” is known in biblical texts mainly through Ezra Nehemiah. While in these texts it does refer to the exilic community, it does not need to in this context and the vagueness of the verse’s language presents difficulties with assessing whether it is about who remained in the land the entire time or whether this is a tenth that returns from exile.

In Isaiah 6:9, the prophet is commanded to communicate a confusing message so that the people purposefully do not understand God (לֵךְ וְאָמַרְתָּ לְעַם הַזֶּה שְׁמָעוּ שְׁמוֹעַ וְאַל-תִּבְיִנוּ וּרְאוּ רְאוּ וְאַל- (תִּדְעוּ).<sup>374</sup>

Most notably, in both Isaiah 40 and 6 there are references to voices calling out and speaking.<sup>375</sup>

Isa 6:3, 5

וְקָרָא זֶה אֶל-זֶה וְאָמַר קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת מְלֵא כְּלֵהָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ ... וְאָמַר אוֹיֵלִי ...

<sup>3</sup>And one would call to the other, “Holy, holy, holy! The LORD of Hosts! His presence fills all the earth!” ... <sup>5</sup>I cried...

Isa 6:8

וַיִּשְׁמַע אֶת-קוֹל אֲדֹנָי אֹמֵר אֶת-מִי אֶשְׁלַח וּמִי יֵלֶךְ-לִנְנוּ וְאָמַר הֲנִי שְׁלֹחֲנִי:

<sup>8</sup>Then I heard the voice of my Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?”  
And I said, “Here am I; send me.”

In Isa 6:8 the prophet initially responds negatively to the calling in 6:5 (אוֹיֵלִי; “Woe is me!”) and this is reminiscent of the negative tone of the rebuttal in Isaiah 40:6-7 that tempered the command to create a way in the wilderness. Returning to Landy’s work, he suggests that the words of consolation throughout Second Isaiah could even be seen as a “trap,” intended to make sure the people do not understand, even “hedged by a lethal double meaning” if Isaiah

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<sup>374</sup> “Go, say to that people: ‘Hear, indeed, but do not understand; See, indeed, but do not grasp.’”

<sup>375</sup> Williamson notes parallels between these two texts, see Williamson, *Isaiah*, 38. Williamson notes that other parts of Second Isaiah also reflect aspects of the themes in Isaiah 6, including Isaiah 42:16, 42:18–19 and 43:8. *Ibid.*, 38.

6:9–13 still apply to the message of 40:1–11.<sup>376</sup> Is this the sealed message that when unsealed causes the people not to understand the divine word? Blenkinsopp suggests, for example, that the cryptic verses of Isa 29:1–12 which refer to a sealed book (הַסֵּפֶר הַחֵתוּם) is an intended reference to the sealed document of Isa 8:16 (תּוֹרָה בְּלִמְדֵי צוּר תִּעֲיָדָה חֵתוּם).<sup>377</sup> Moreover, he suggests that these sealed messages could refer to the entire book of Isaiah in its final form including Second Isaiah.<sup>378</sup>

The open-ended nature of Second Isaiah's poetry can therefore be illuminated through how it builds upon themes and content from First Isaiah. In Francis Landy's words, Isaiah 40's dialogue becomes an invitation which enables recipients to become "surrogate authors of the book, or at least responsible for its effectiveness,"<sup>379</sup> and this continues on from parts of First Isaiah that are characterised by discourse between a prophet and a divine council concerning exile, punishment, and the people's relationship to divine word. Landy's analysis is not only illuminating for analysing the poetic effects of the prologue of Second Isaiah, but also for the way in which it relates to First Isaiah, and is later interpreted in 1QS.<sup>380</sup> Returning to Isa 40:1–11, I agree with Landy that the prologue to Second Isaiah shows that the comfort provided by the message of return and Zion's restoration are also "doubled by an absence, a

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<sup>376</sup> Landy, "The Ghostly Prelude," 334. It is possible that verses 6:12–13a were added to 1–11 after the fall of Jerusalem and exile of its citizens. Williamson, *Isaiah*, 37. He also suggests that Isaiah 6:10 is in place before the writing of Second Isaiah. *Ibid.*, 48. Williamson also notes that in 6:12 God is referred to in the third person in a context where he is the speaker which is unusual. This might signal that these verses were added at a later point which would explain the disjointedness. Williamson, *Isaiah*, 35–36. Although it is not possible to be conclusive, if this line of argument is followed then this is an example of how exile is already impacting the composition of Isaiah as a whole, but also how Second Isaiah is likely drawing from this tradition.

<sup>377</sup> "Bind up the message, seal the instruction with My disciples."

<sup>378</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Opening the Sealed Book: Interpretations of the Book of Isaiah in Late Antiquity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 26.

<sup>379</sup> Landy, "The Ghostly Prelude," 337.

<sup>380</sup> See Chapter Three.

silence, and a grieving, despite the voices of consolation,”<sup>381</sup> the absence or grieving that Landy describes is encapsulated by the voices that cries out in 40:6–8.

קול אִמַּר קְרֵא וְאִמַּר מָה אֶקְרֵא כָּל־הַבֶּשֶׂר הַצֵּיר וְכָל־חַסְדּוֹ כְּצִיץ הַשָּׂדֶה: <sup>7</sup>יָבֵשׁ הַצֵּיר נִבֵּל צִיץ כִּי רוּחַ יְהוָה נִשְׁבָּה  
בוֹ אֲכַנּוּ הַצֵּיר הָעֵם: <sup>8</sup>יָבֵשׁ הַצֵּיר נִבֵּל צִיץ וְדִבְרֵי־אֱלֹהֵינוּ יָקוּם לְעוֹלָם:

<sup>6</sup>A voice cries out, “Cry!” And another said, “What should I cry? All flesh is grass, and all its goodness like the flower of the field. <sup>7</sup>The grass withers, the flower fades when the spirit of the Lord blows on it: Surely, people are grass. <sup>8</sup>The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever.”

The transformation of the wilderness and the motif of Yahweh’s word in Isa 40:1–11 encapsulate Isaiah’s hopefulness, but also frames the core of this hopefulness on the power of Yahweh’s word that is not tied to the endurance of the nation alone or the ingathering of the *golah*. Divine word and promise are what will last, and the focus is not solely on physical homecoming. As mentioned earlier, the interaction between the “transformation of the wilderness” motif and references to divine speech also occurs at the end of Second Isaiah which suggests that the interaction of these motifs forms a framework for the poetry. The following paragraphs look at examples of the “transformation of the wilderness” motif throughout the rest of Second Isaiah.

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<sup>381</sup> Landy, “The Ghostly Prelude,” 333. See also when Landy suggests that in Isaiah 40 these voices are “dislocated, associated with exile and the desert.” *Ibid.*, 334.

## Isaiah 41:17–20

Moving on from the prologue, in Isa 41:18–19 the transformation of the environment also refers to the transformation of the people in light of suffering.<sup>382</sup>

17 הָעֲנִיִּים וְהָאֲבִיּוֹנִים מִבְּקוּשִׁים מִים וְאֵין לָשׁוֹנִם בְּצִמָּא נִשְׁתָּה אָנִי יְהוָה אֲעֲנֶנּוּ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא אֶעְזֹבֶם: 18 אֶפְתַּח  
עַל־נְשָׁפִיִּים נְהָרוֹת וּבְתוֹךְ בְּקָעוֹת מַעְיָנוֹת אֲשִׁים מְדַבֵּר לְאֲגַם־מִים וְאֶרְץ צִיָּה לְמוֹצָאֵי מַיִם: 19 אֶתֶּן בַּמְדְּבָר אֲרָז  
שִׁטָּה וְהִדַּס וְעֵץ שָׁמֶן אֲשִׁים בְּעֶרְבָה בְּרוֹשׁ תְּדַהֵר וּתְאֹשִׁיב יְהוָה: 20 לְמַעַן יֵרְאוּ וַיִּדְעוּ וַיִּשְׂמְחוּ וַיִּשְׂכִּילוּ יְהוָה כִּי גַד־  
יְהוָה עָשְׂתָה זֹאת וּקְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּרָאָה:

<sup>17</sup>The poor and the needy seek water, and there is none; their tongue is parched with thirst. I the LORD will respond to them. I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. <sup>18</sup>I will open up streams on the bare hills and fountains amid the valleys; I will turn the desert into ponds, the arid land into springs of water. <sup>19</sup>I will plant cedars in the wilderness, acacias and myrtles and oleasters; I will set cypresses in the desert, box trees and elms as well—  
<sup>20</sup>That men may see and know, consider and comprehend that the LORD’S hand has done this, that the Holy One of Israel has wrought it.

In Isaiah 41:17 God provides water for those who are vulnerable, and whose tongue “is parched with thirst” (לְשׁוֹנִם בְּצִמָּא נִשְׁתָּה), and here this act of giving water demonstrates that God has not forsaken the exiles.<sup>383</sup> In 41:18, the divine transforms the wilderness through

<sup>382</sup> Poulsen, *Black Hole*, 374. Comparable examples outside of Second Isaiah could include 29:17–24 where transformation of Lebanon parallels the healing of the deaf and blind. Ibid., 373. Isaiah 32:15–18 is another text where God pours out his spirit and transforms the wilderness.

<sup>383</sup> Isa 41:17: “I, God of Israel, will not forsake them” (אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא אֶעְזֹבֶם). The presence of water, wilderness and guiding imagery has led many scholars to interpret this passage as part of the “new Exodus” motif. For example, Brevard Childs thinks that in 41:17–20 there is a depiction of the exiles returning from Babylon through the desert, and that this “is the background for introducing the language of the return of paradise” through the blossoming of the desert. Childs, *Isaiah*, 320. However, the context of Isa 41:17–20 reinforces that Judah is Yahweh’s chosen people, and I agree with Barstad who notes that the verses that precede 17–20 are generally comforting to the people;

irrigation, by opening up streams (נְהָרוֹת) on bare hills and springs (מְעִינֹת) in plains. Through parallelism, the following lines emphasise how God will irrigate the wilderness. For example, after the phrase “pool of water” (לְאֵגַם־מַיִם) there is a conjunctive vav (ו) followed by the construct noun phrase “dry land” (וְאֶרֶץ צִיָּה) that introduces a different but equivalent source of water, a spring of water (לְמוֹצְאֵי מַיִם).<sup>384</sup> The divine then populates this wilderness by sprouting planting cedars (אַרְזֵי), acacias (שִׁטָּה), myrtles (הָדָס), oleasters (עֵץ שָׁמֹן), cypresses, elm trees, and box trees (בְּרוֹשׁ תְּדָהָר וְתֵאשׁוּרֵי יִתְדָו).<sup>385</sup> The transformation of the wilderness

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there is no specific reference to exiles here or even to the Exodus narrative. Barstad, *Way*, 26–28. Similarities have been noted between Isa 41 and Psalm 107:

<sup>33</sup>יִשְׁם נְהָרוֹת לְמִדְבָּר וּמוֹצְאֵי מַיִם לְצִמְאוֹן: אֶרֶץ פְּרִי לְמִלְחָה מִרְעֵת יִשְׁבִי בָהּ: <sup>35</sup>יִשְׁם מִדְבָּר לְאֵגַם־מַיִם וְאֶרֶץ צִיָּה לְמוֹצְאֵי מַיִם: <sup>36</sup>וַיִּזְשָׁב שָׁם רְעִבִים וַיְכַוְּנוּ עִיר מוֹשָׁב:

“He turns the rivers into a wilderness, springs of water into thirsty land, fruitful land into a salt marsh, because of the wickedness of its inhabitants. He turns the wilderness into pools, parched land into springs of water. There He settles the hungry; they build a place to settle in.”

The similarity between Isaiah 41 and Psalm 107 demonstrates how Second Isaiah’s use of the transformation of the wilderness is potentially part of a wider discourse that conceptualises the people’s change of circumstances after the exile and their relationship with the divine.

Psalm 107 begins with a description of the ingathering of exiles who are in captivity. There is similarity in the lexical choices of both texts, such as מִדְבָּר, נְהָרוֹת, מוֹצְאֵי מַיִם, מִדְבָּר (Isa 41:18; Ps. 107:33) as well as the use of the verbal root שִׁם (in the third or first person respectively) to describe how God makes “the wilderness into pools, parched land into springs of water” (מִדְבָּר לְאֵגַם־מַיִם וְאֶרֶץ צִיָּה לְמוֹצְאֵי מַיִם) in Isa 41:18 and Ps. 107:35. In fact, the phrase “springs of water” also occurs in 107: 33 and 35, and the root שִׁם is used in both these verses to describe the acts of transformation. There need not be a direct relationship between these texts and dating both is not a simple matter. For example, Barstad critiques the idea that Isaiah was influenced by the Psalter and instead that the reverse is true. He especially critiques scholars such as H. J. Kraus who view the Psalms as reflecting the “preaching of Second Isaiah” on the post-exilic community because it is a hangover from older scholarship that preferred such hypotheses. For a fuller discussion see Barstad, *Way*, 27 note 69. Rather, both texts are participating in a metaphorical discourse to describe the ingathering of the diaspora. In Psalm 107, Yahweh is portrayed as responsible for the wellbeing of man in general, not only for giving water on a literal homeward bound journey. Barstad, *Way*, 28. Both Isaiah’s use of the wilderness and its presence in Psalm 107 does not, for example, reflect the influence of the pentateuchal wilderness wandering narratives, but rather a wider discourse concerning exile that is addressed via the “transformation of the wilderness” motif.

<sup>384</sup> The Qal first person imperfect of the root שִׁם is omitted in the second clause but is implied, and this is the same case for the first clause with the Qal first person imperfect of פָּתַח.

<sup>385</sup> These last three kinds of trees adorn God’s sanctuary and where he would rest his feet in Isa. 60:13.



conveys the divine's control over nature, and moreover this is the act of transforming land associated with suffering, exile, and punishment into a lush oasis-type terrain.<sup>386</sup>

### Isaiah 42:15–16

There are several instances in Second Isaiah where God's guidance in harsh terrain can also be considered an aspect of its transformation. In the passage below, where the divine makes rough terrain traversable. The transformation and description of the terrain implies that the wilderness is the imagined setting.<sup>387</sup> Yahweh's power to transform the natural world and also to lead those who are vulnerable to safety through dangerous terrain is once again in close proximity with references to divine word or speech, as we saw back in Isaiah 40 and 55.

Isa 42:15–16

אֶחָרִיב הָרִים וּגְבְעוֹת וְכָל-עֵשְׂבָבָם אֹבִישׁ וְשִׁמְתִי נְהָרוֹת לְאֵיִם וְאֲנַמִּים אֹבִישׁ:

וְהוֹלַכְתִּי עֲרִים בְּדֶרֶךְ לֹא יָדְעוּ בְּנִתְיבוֹת לֹא-יָדְעוּ אֲדָרִיכֶם אֲשִׁים מִחֹשֶׁה לְפָנֵיהֶם לְאוֹר וּמַעַקְשִׁים לְמִישׁוֹר אֶלֶּה

הַדְּבָרִים עֲשִׂיתֶם וְלֹא עֲזַבְתֶּם:

<sup>15</sup>Hills and heights will I scorch, cause all their green to wither; I will turn rivers into isles, and dry the marshes up. <sup>16</sup>I will lead the blind by a road they did not know, and I will

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<sup>386</sup> Blenkinsopp notes that the passages we are looking at in Isaiah 41 says nothing of making a journey easier for returning exiles. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 203. See also Chapter One where it was considered how the wilderness in Lam 4 and 5 was a symbol for punishment and exile from the divine. Regarding this passage in Isaiah, the work of Tiemeyer has suggested that this passage depicts the reforestation of Judah due to the species of flora and fauna that are mentioned in this passage, and therefore the blooming of the desert conveys the hope of restoration after the kind of destruction that might accompany the presence of an occupying army. Tiemeyer writes that the “reforestation of Judah after the inevitable devastation of native flora and fauna by an army of occupation, especially since the species mentioned are native to Syria-Palestine but not Mesopotamia.” Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion*, 177. The provision of water in the wilderness is elsewhere used in Isaiah to talk about the diaspora returning in Isa 43, 48, and 49. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 203.

<sup>387</sup> While the reference to journeying in this example is not explicitly in the wilderness, unlike other examples, this passage occurs in close proximity with references to the wilderness.

make them walk by paths they never knew. I will turn darkness before them to light, rough places into level ground. These are the promises—I will keep them without fail.

Barstad, for example, argues that references to the water, of turning rough places into level ground, leading the blind, darkness and life,<sup>388</sup> all serve to illustrate “for the prophet’s audience relating to their present unfortunate situation, as contrasted to their future national restoration.”<sup>389</sup> Furthermore, the desert and sea which can be highly dangerous terrains are negative obstacles because they blocked access to God’s land. Therefore, the image of God vanquishing these obstacles by building a path through them so that he, and the people, can enter and dwell in the land need not be understood as suggesting that physical homecoming is the only message or way to understand these passages.<sup>390</sup> Moreover, in 42:15–16, God transforms lush land into desolate and harsh terrain, and he also removes water causing the landscape to wither.

Additionally, the language of journeying suggests that the paths that the people walk on symbolise how God can lead those who are most vulnerable through harsh and dangerous terrain. For example, in 42:16 he will lead those who are blind by an unknown road (וְהוֹלֵכְתִּי (עֲוִרִים בְּדֶרֶךְ לֹא יָדְעוּ); turning darkness into light (אֲשִׁים מִחֹשֶׁךְ לְפָנֵיהֶם לְאוֹר); and will make rough places into level ground (וּמַעֲקֹשִׁים לְמִישׁוֹר). In 42:16, like in Isa 40, there is again the motif of the “divine word” which will be kept without fail (אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים עָשִׂיתָם וְלֹא עֲוֹבְתִים).

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<sup>388</sup> Barstad, *Way*, 38. The above passage is another example of a passage that has been understood as an example of the “new Exodus” motif because it refers to leading the people through rough terrain. *Ibid.*, 46–47. He thinks this passage concerns primarily Judah, *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>390</sup> Clifford, “The Unity of the Book of Isaiah,” *CBQ* 55 (1993): 8; cf. Bo, *Way of the Lord*, 150.

As noted earlier, both Isaiah 35 and Isa 40 share a concern for Zion's restoration, the return of people to Zion, and contain the motif of the "transformation of the wilderness" alongside imagery of Yahweh's holy way on which people will follow:

וְהָיָה-שָׁם מִסְלֹוֹל וְדֶרֶךְ וְדֶרֶךְ הַקְּדוֹשׁ יִקְרָא לָהּ לֹא-יַעֲבֹרְנָהּ טָמֵא וְהָיָה-לָמוּ הַלֵּךְ דֶּרֶךְ וְנֹאֲוִילִים לֹא יִתְעוּ:

<sup>8</sup>And a highway shall appear there, which shall be called the Sacred Way. No one unclean shall pass along it, but it shall be for them. No traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.

The language of leading the blind echoes a passage from Isaiah 35:5.

אֲזַי תִּפְתָּחַנָה עֵינֵי עִוְרִים וְאָזְנֵי חֲרָשִׁים תִּפְתָּחַנָה:

<sup>5</sup>Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.

Similarities between Isaiah 40 and 35 have already been discussed, and moreover in Isaiah 42 and 35 the emphasis is on the people returning to God and towards loyalty to him. The passage is not solely concerned with their physical location. This is indicated by the references to blindness as a symbol for the people's vulnerable state which co-occurs with references to the divine leading the people. Subsequently, the transformation of the wilderness in this passage, and its relationship to the motif of divine speech, presents an open-ended perspective towards exile.

### **Isaiah 43**

Isaiah 43:2 also addresses the topic of exile and homecoming through the transformation of the wilderness, including its irrigation and by making paths through it.

<sup>1</sup>וַעֲתָה כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה בְּרָאָהּ יַעֲקֹב וַיִּצְרָהּ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֱלֹהֵיךָ קִרְאתִי בְשֵׁמֶךָ לֵי־אֲתָהּ: <sup>2</sup>כִּי־תַעֲבֹר בַּמַּיִם אֶתְּךָ־אֲנִי וּבַנְּהָרוֹת לֹא יִשְׁטָפוּךָ כִּי־תִלְךָ בְּמוֹ־אֵשׁ לֹא תִכְוֶה וְלֹהֲבָה לֹא תִבְעַר־בָּךְ: <sup>3</sup>כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ קְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל מוֹשִׁיעֶה נְתַתִּי כְּפָרָה מִצָּרִים כּוֹשׁ וּסְבָא תַחֲתֶיךָ: <sup>4</sup>מֵאֲשֶׁר יִקְרַת בְּעֵינַי נִכְבְּדֶתָ וְאֲנִי אֶהְבַּתִּיךָ וְאַתָּן אֲדָם תַּחֲתֶיךָ וּלְאֻמִּים תַּחַת נַפְשֶׁךָ: <sup>5</sup>אֱלֹהֵי־תִירָא כִּי אֶתְּךָ־אֲנִי מִמִּזְרַח אֲבִיָּא וְרָעָה וּמִמְעַרְבִי אֶקְבְּצֶךָ: <sup>6</sup>אֲמַר לְצַפּוֹן תִּנְּי וּלְתִמְנָן אֱלֹהֵי־תִכְלְאֵי הִבִּיאֵי בְנֵי מִרְחֹק וּבְנוֹתַי מִקְצֵה הָאָרֶץ: <sup>7</sup>כֹּל הַנִּקְרָא בְשֵׁמִי וְלִכְבוֹדִי בְּרִאתִיו יִצְרָתִיו אֶרְפָּעֵשִׂיתִיו:

<sup>1</sup>But now thus said the LORD— Who created you, O Jacob, who formed you, O Israel: Fear not, for I will redeem you; I have singled you out by name, You are Mine. <sup>2</sup>When you pass through water, I will be with you; Through streams, they shall not overwhelm you. When you walk through fire, You shall not be scorched; Through flame, It shall not burn you. <sup>3</sup>For I the LORD am your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as a ransom for you, Ethiopia and Saba in exchange for you. <sup>4</sup>Because you are precious to Me, and honored, and I love you, I give men in exchange for you And peoples in your stead. <sup>5</sup>Fear not, for I am with you: I will bring your folk from the East, Will gather you out of the West; <sup>6</sup>I will say to the North, “Give back!” And to the South, “Do not withhold! Bring My sons from afar, And My daughters from the end of the earth—<sup>7</sup>All who are linked to My name, whom I have created, Formed, and made for My glory.

In 43:2 the references to being overwhelmed by water and fire are references to powers of destruction that could harm the people. For example, water is commonly portrayed as a threatening force such as in Psalm 69:2-3, 15–16. In 43:2 the references to being overwhelmed by water and fire are not references to the wilderness wandering traditions as they are now known.<sup>391</sup> These are references to powers of destruction that could harm the

<sup>391</sup> Barstad identifies the references to water in the wilderness, the “old” in contrast with “new” things, the “way” in the desert, and Yahweh’s special relationship with the people as being about national and

people, and the impetus is on their miraculous safety because of the divine's care for them. In regard to many passages in Second Isaiah including the one cited above, I agree with Barstad who writes that has been a to “great disadvantage” to Isaiah scholarship that it has been so eager to “press these beautiful and rich poetic verses into the irrelevant common mound of the exodus event.” In the context of discussing the above example from Isa 43, Barstad notes that even if one wants to refer to the ingathering of the exiles as a “new Exodus” in Second Isaiah that one would have to acknowledge that a “new Exodus” it is not central to Second Isaiah's poetics.<sup>392</sup>

### Isa 43:14–21

14 כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה גְּאֻלְכֶם קְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמַעַנְכֶם שְׁלַחְתִּי בְּקִלָּה וְהוֹרְדְתִי בְּרִיחִים כֹּלֵם וְכַשְׂדִּים בְּאֲנִיּוֹת רִנְתֶּם:  
 15 אֲנִי יְהוָה קְדוֹשְׁכֶם בּוֹרֵא יִשְׂרָאֵל מִלְּכַכֶּם: 16 כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה הַנּוֹתֵן בַּיָּם דְּרָף וּבַמַּיִם עֲזִים נְתִיבָה: 17 הַמּוֹצִיא רֶכֶב־  
 נְסוּס חֵיל וְעֲזוּז יַחַדוֹ יִחַדְדוּ יִשְׁכְּבוּ בַל־יִקּוּמוּ דְעַכּוֹ כַּפְשֻׁתָהּ כְּבוֹ: 18 אֶל־תִּזְכְּרוּ רֵאשִׁנוֹת וְקַדְמִיּוֹת אֶל־תִּתְבַּנְּנוּ: 19 הִנְנִי

cultic restoration, including the ingathering of the *golah*. He discusses his analysis in contrast with a variety of older approaches to the text that assumed these passages were seen as references to the Exodus narrative. See Barstad, *Way*, 97–98.

<sup>392</sup> Barstad, *Way*, 92–93. Isaiah 48:3, 20–22 contains a clear allusion to the wilderness wandering narratives, namely Exodus 7:1–7 and Numbers 20:1–13, where Moses strikes a rock in order to bring forth water for the wandering Israelites. Overall, this passage is a word of doom against Babylon Barstad, *Way*, 101. See also the oracles against Babylon in Jer. 50:8; 51:6 and 51:45. Isa 48:20–21:

20 צֵאוּ מִבְּבֶל בְּרַחוּ מִכַּשְׂדִּים בְּקוֹל רִנָּה הִגִּידוּ הַשְּׂמִיעוּ זֹאת הוֹצִיאֶיהָ עַד־קֶצֶה הָאָרֶץ אָמְרוּ גְּאֻל יְהוָה עֲבָדוּ יִעֲקֹב:  
 21 וְלֹא צָמְאוּ בְּחַרְבוֹת הוֹלִיכֶם מַיִם מִצּוֹר הִזִּיל לָמוֹ וַיִּבְקַע־צוּר וַיִּזְבּוּ מַיִם: 22 אֵין שְׁלוֹם אָמַר יְהוָה לְרֹשְׁעִים:

“<sup>20</sup>Go forth from Babylon, flee from Chaldea! Declare this with loud shouting, announce this, bring out the word to the ends of the earth! Say: “The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob!” <sup>21</sup>They have known no thirst, though He led them through parched places; he made water flow for them from the rock; He cleaved the rock and water gushed forth. <sup>22</sup>There is no safety—said the LORD—for the wicked.”

This passage which addresses the exiles in Babylon does relate the accounts of water being provided in the wilderness by the divine with the present situation of the exiles and their future homecoming journey. Back in Isa 48:3, there are also references to divine speech that often co-occurs with the “transformation of the wilderness” motif. Here the miraculous surviving of the wandering Israelites is a reminder of how the divine is acting on behalf of the people. As noted earlier in this chapter, passages concerning homecoming and that portray the transformation of the wilderness are not isolated from the concerns of the restoration of the nation more generally, such as re-establishing of the nation, the destruction of the Babylonian, and other foreign nations that witnessed Judah's downfall. Barstad, *Way*, 88.

עֲשֵׂה תְדַשָּׁה עִתָּהּ תִצְמַח הַלֹּוא תִדְעוּהָ אַף אֲשִׁים בַּמִּדְבָּר דָּרָךְ בִּישׁמוֹן נְהָרוֹת:<sup>20</sup> תִּכְבְּדֵנִי מִיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה תִּגְיִם וּבְנֹת  
יַעֲנֶה כִּי־נִתְמַי בַּמִּדְבָּר מִיָּם נְהָרוֹת בִּישִׁימֹן לְהִשְׁקוֹת עַמִּי בְּחֵירִי:<sup>21</sup> עִם־זוֹ יִצְרַתִּי לִי תִהְלֵתִי יִסְפְּרוּ:

<sup>14</sup>Thus said the LORD, Your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: For your sake I send to Babylon; I will bring down all [her] bars, And the Chaldeans shall raise their voice in lamentation. <sup>15</sup>I am your Holy One, the LORD, Your King, the Creator of Israel. <sup>16</sup>Thus said the LORD, who made a road through the sea and a path through mighty waters, <sup>17</sup>Who destroyed chariots and horses, And all the mighty host—They lay down to rise no more, They were extinguished, quenched like a wick: <sup>18</sup>Do not recall what happened of old, Or ponder what happened of yore! <sup>19</sup>I am about to do something new; Even now it shall come to pass, suddenly you shall perceive it: I will make a road through the wilderness and rivers in the desert. <sup>20</sup>The wild beasts shall honor Me, Jackals and ostriches, for I provide water in the wilderness, Rivers in the desert, to give drink to My chosen people, <sup>21</sup>The people I formed for Myself That they might declare My praise.

In the above verses there is arguably a reference to the parting of the Sea of Reeds in verse sixteen which describes the divine as making roads and paths through water ( הַנּוֹתֵן בַּיָּם דָּרָךְ ) (יְבַמִּים עֲזִים נְתִיבָה).<sup>393</sup> This in fact highlights the way in which the divine transforms the wilderness in ways that imply that he is caring for the people, and shows that this has also occurred in the past. Subsequently, scholars such as Dille suggest that exile is portrayed in this passage as a “purifying” and transformative experience.<sup>394</sup> Moreover, Lim Bo when discussing this passage suggests that the “way” the divine is making does not necessarily

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<sup>393</sup> “Who made a road through the sea and a path through mighty waters.” Above in 43:14–21 there is arguably an allusion to the parting of the Red Sea from Exodus 14–15, but this does not equate to a “new Exodus” motif. See the sectioned entitled, “The Wilderness Motif.”

<sup>394</sup> Sarah J. Dille, *Mixing Metaphors: God as Mother and Father in Deutero Isaiah*, JSOTSup 398 (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 191–196; cf. Bo, *Way of the Lord*, 142–143.

refer a “new Exodus,” but rather he considers the motifs of guiding, of the transformation of the desert by irrigation and the creation of paths, seem to represent how transformation, healing, and hope can occur after exile.<sup>395</sup> Building on Bo and Dille’s observations, forgetting the “former things” (אַל־תִּזְכְּרוּ רֵאשֹׁנוֹת) need not refer to the Exodus or Wilderness Wandering traditions specifically. In fact, the open-ended aspect of Second Isaiah’s poetics of exile can be seen in how Isaiah purposely employs sudden shifts in speaker, tone, and themes and motifs so that they create tension and are juxtaposed with one another, and one such example includes the references to remember or not to remember former things.<sup>396</sup> The poems do not express a singular or coherent perspective on what to remember or forget, adding to a sense of tension throughout the collection. Katie Heffelfinger in her work on Second Isaiah suggests, for example, that Isaiah 46:9 is juxtaposed with Isaiah 43:18 where we read; “do not remember the former things.”<sup>397</sup> As was discussed in the section entitled, “Isaiah as a Failed Prophet: Literal or Metaphorical Homecoming,” Second Isaiah has not always been approached as a text that contains these kinds of tensions, but rather as being homogeneously positive, and as focused on the physical return of the exiles to Judah.

In light of the examples of the transformation of the wilderness motif considered thus far, it is likely that destruction, exile and being in divine disfavour is what is to be forgotten. The transformation of the wilderness and the people’s ability to traverse such inhospitable and dangerous terrain with the divine’s assistance suggests that now the people are no longer in disfavour, and this coincides with the call to forget past events when this was not the case. A

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<sup>395</sup> Bo, *Way of The Lord*, 150–151.

<sup>396</sup> Katie Heffelfinger, “Isaiah 40–55,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Isaiah*, ed. Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 123.

<sup>397</sup> אַל־תִּזְכְּרוּ רֵאשֹׁנוֹת. As scholars such as Heffelfinger have also observed, many messages of comfort in Isaiah stand in tension with numerous expressions of divine wrath as well (e.g., 42:14–25; 43:22–28; 45:9–25; 48:1–11; 50:1–3). See Heffelfinger, “Isaiah 40–55,” 123.

time when the people were unsure of, or in the divine's disfavour, is shown through the alphabetic acrostic poems of Lamentations (see Chapter One).

Reflecting back on Chapter One, Lam 4 invoked the connotations of the ostriches and jackals (תַּנִּינִים וַיִּבְנוֹת יַעֲנָה) as cruel animals, associated with desolate terrain in order to emphasize how hardship, exile, and destruction have made the people cruel.<sup>398</sup> In contrast to the negative transformation of the people in Lam 4, Second Isaiah is presenting a positive transformation of the people and the wilderness that represents the exile and suffering that they are experiencing. In the context of addressing exile and homecoming, the motif of transforming the wilderness implies that now the people are in the divine's favour. Therefore, this example further demonstrates how Second Isaiah presents its audience with an open-ended poetics of exile that is not solely concerned with physical homecoming, nor a “new Exodus.”

#### Isaiah 44

In Isaiah 44, the transformation of dry terrain indicated by the lexical choices of יִבְשָׁה and צָמָא is another example where the transformation of the wilderness reflects the transformation of the people.<sup>399</sup> As in Isaiah 40:6–7, the metaphor of people being described as plants conveys this transformation. Here, the people will sprout among the grass and are described as being like willows beside watercourses.

Isa 44:3–4

כִּי אֶצְקֶמְמִים עַל־צָמָא וְנִזְלִים עַל־יִבְשָׁה אֶצְקֶ רֹחֵי עַל־זֶרְעָה וּבִרְכָתִי עַל־צִיָּצְאִיךָ: <sup>4</sup>וְצִמְחוּ בְּבֵין חֲצִיר כַּעֲרָבִים  
עַל־יַבְלֵי־מַיִם:

<sup>398</sup> Lam. 4:3.

<sup>399</sup> Poulsen, *Black Hole*, 374. Regarding the meaning of these words in the passage, צָמָא here is an adjective meaning means “thirsty,” so it could imply that people are being watered. However, the parallel it forms with יִבְשָׁה which does mean “dry ground” strengthens reading it as an elliptical reference to ground that is parched.



<sup>3</sup>Even as I pour water on thirsty soil, and rain upon dry ground, so will I pour My spirit on your offspring, my blessing upon your posterity. <sup>4</sup>And they shall sprout like grass, like willows by watercourses.

The people will also be marked by God's name in verse five indicating another aspect of change.

Isa 44:5

זֶה יֹאמֵר לַיהוָה אֲנִי וְזֶה יִקְרָא בְּשֵׁם־יְעֻקֵּב וְזֶה יִכְתֹּב יָדוֹ לַיהוָה וּבְשֵׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל יִכְנֶה:

<sup>5</sup>One shall say, “I am the LORD’S,” another shall use the name of “Jacob,” another shall mark his arm “of the LORD” and adopt the name of “Israel.”

The comparison between water and God's spirit (44:3), and plants and human beings (44:4), functions well as a metaphor in conjunction with the importance of the “transformation of the wilderness” motif. Following on from these verses in 44:6, the text begins to implore the people not to worship idols and contrasts their lack of power with Yahweh who is portrayed as the people's maker and the maker of everything.<sup>400</sup> The wider context of how the transformation of the wilderness functions in relation to homecoming is that the final verses refer to Cyrus as the divine's “shepherd” (רֹעִי) and as someone who will act on the divine's behalf to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>400</sup> Isaiah 44:8–21. See Isa. 44:21 where the divine says that he has “fashioned” (יִצְרָתִיךָ) Israel his servant, and in 44:24 which states that he made everything, “it is I, the Lord, who made everything” (אֲנִי יְהוָה עֹשֶׂה כָּל).

<sup>401</sup> According to the book of Ezra, Cyrus would allow the Jews to return to Judah and decreed that the temple in Jerusalem be rebuilt. See Ez. 4:6–24.

הָאֵמַר לְכוֹרֵשׁ רֹעִי וְכָל־תְּפִצֵּי יְשׁוּלָם וְלֹא־מֶר לִירוּשָׁלַם תִּבְנֶה וְהִכָּל תִּנְסֶד:

<sup>28</sup>[I] am the same who says of Cyrus, “He is **My shepherd**; He shall fulfill all My purposes! He shall say of Jerusalem, ‘She shall be rebuilt.’ And to the Temple: ‘You shall be founded again.’”

The positive image of homecoming and restoring the temple cult is not addressed without reflection on the people’s relationship to the divine which is indicated by conceptualizing the people as plants that are watered in inhospitable terrain (44:3–4). Like Lamentations, the harsh and desolate terrain and its transformation appear to correlate to the transformation of God’s relationship with the people, which also includes the nation’s restoration and the divine’s sanctuary.

### Isaiah 49:9–12, 26

In the examples below from Isaiah 49, the transformation of the wilderness is also used to describe people in light of the experience of displacement.

<sup>9</sup>לֵאמֹר לְאֲסוּרִים צֵאוּ לְאֶשֶׁר בְּחֹשֶׁךְ הִגְלוּ עַל־דַּרְכֵיכֶם יְרַעוּ וּבְכָל־שִׁפְיִים מְרַעִיתֶם: <sup>10</sup>לֹא יִרְעָבוּ וְלֹא יִצְמָאוּ וְלֹא־יִכָּסוּ וְלֹא יִשְׁמְשׁוּ כִּי־מִרְחֻמָּם יִנְהַגּוּ וְעַל־מַבּוּעֵי מַיִם יִנְהַלְמוּ: <sup>11</sup>וְשִׁמְתִי כָל־הָרִי לְדֶרֶךְ וּמִסְלֹתַי יִרְמֹוּ: <sup>12</sup>הִנֵּה־אֵלֶּה מִרְחוֹק יָבֹאוּ וְהִנֵּה־אֵלֶּה מִצָּפוֹן וּמֵיָם וְאֵלֶּה מֵאֲרָץ סִינַיִם: ...<sup>26</sup>וְהִאֲכִלְתִּי אֶת־מוֹנִיךָ אֶת־בְּשָׂרָם וְכַעֲסִים דָּמָם וְשִׁכְרוּן וְיִדְעוּ כָל־בָּשָׂר כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה מוֹשִׁיעֶךָ וְגֹאֲלֶךָ אֲבִיר יַעֲקֹב:

<sup>9</sup>Saying to the prisoners, “Go free,” to those who are in darkness, “Show yourselves.” They shall pasture along the roads, on every bare height shall be their pasture. <sup>10</sup>They shall not hunger or thirst, hot wind and sun shall not strike them; for He who loves them will lead them, he will guide them to springs of water. <sup>11</sup>I will make all My mountains a road,

and My highways shall be built up. <sup>12</sup>Look! These are coming from afar, these from the north and the west, and these from the land of Sinim... <sup>26</sup>I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh, they shall be drunk with their own blood as with wine. And all mankind shall know that I the LORD am your Savior, the Mighty One of Jacob, your Redeemer.

Some of the language in this passage is also reminiscent of the prologue to Second Isaiah. In Isa 49:10 the divine leads (יְנַהֲגֵם) returning exiles<sup>402</sup> to springs of water (וְעַל-מְבוּעֵי מַיִם). The lexical choices of דָּרָךְ and מְסַלֶּה in such close proximity (לְדַרְךְךָ וּמְסַלֶּהְתִּי) is reminiscent of the language back in Isaiah 40:1-11. Whereas Yahweh himself is journeying in 40:1-11, here returning exiles are taking these paths through difficult terrain to return to Judah. Another similarity between this passage and the prologue is that the audience is informed several verses later that “all flesh will know that I am the Lord” (וְיָדְעוּ כָּל-בָּשָׂר כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה) which is reminiscent of the voice that cries in 40:6 that “all flesh is grass” (כָּל-הַבָּשָׂר הָעֵצִיר) and that all flesh will see God’s glory (כְּבוֹד). These miraculous acts of guiding serve as a sign of the divine’s power and care for the people,<sup>403</sup> and are signs of the incoming positive transformation of the land and the people’s situation.<sup>404</sup>

## Isaiah 51

Isa 51:11 depicts the exiles coming from all over the diaspora as part of the restoration of the nation. Referring to mighty deeds of the past in this passage comforts people that the divine is

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<sup>402</sup> In 49:12-13 it is strongly implied that the prisoners that are told to go free earlier refer to those in exile. In 49:12 they are described as “coming from afar” (מִרְחוֹק יָבֵאוּ) and from the north and west.

<sup>403</sup> That these miraculous acts are testament to the divine’s power occurs also in Isa 41:20, 43:21, 49:26, and 55:13.

<sup>404</sup> Tiemeyer argues that we should contextualise the wilderness in light of these conceptual metaphors, as wilderness imagery often occurs in conjunction with them. Tiemeyer summarises that “the best way to understand this motif is as a metaphorical description of Zion’s own state” with examples including Isa 49:19; 51:3; 52:9. Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion*, 165.

able to accomplish the restoration.<sup>405</sup> As we saw back in Chapter One, the wilderness not only represented exile, but was also used to describe the state of the place and the people that were left behind as in Lam 4 and 5. Isaiah 51 in comparison responds to complaints of the kind found throughout Lamentations not only by saying that the future is hopeful, but by saying that the wellbeing of the Judahites is not the only measure of Yahweh's efficacy in the world.

Isaiah 51:3–8

<sup>3</sup>כִּי־נַחַם יְהוָה צִיּוֹן נַחַם כָּל־תְּרוֹבֶתֶיהָ וַיִּשְׂם מִדְּבָרָהּ כְּעֵדֶן וְעַרְבָתָהּ כְּגִן־יְהוָה שְׂשׂוֹן וְשִׁמְחָה יִמְצָא בָּהּ תוֹדָה וְקוֹל זִמְרָה: <sup>4</sup>הִקְשִׁיבוּ אֵלַי עַמִּי וְלֹאֹמְרֵי אֵלַי הִאֲזִינוּ כִּי תוֹרָה מֵאֵתִי תֵצֵא וּמִשְׁפָּטֵי לְאוּר עַמִּים אֲרַגִּיעַ: <sup>5</sup>קְרוּ צְדִיקֵי יִצְאָ וְשִׁעֵי וְזִרְעֵי עַמִּים יִשְׁפֹּטוּ אֵלַי אֵימֹת יְקוּוּ וְאֶל־זִרְעֵי יִחְלֹוּ: <sup>6</sup>שָׂאוּ לְשָׁמַיִם עֵינֵיכֶם וְהִבִּיטוּ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת כִּי־שָׁמַיִם כְּעָשָׂן נִמְלְחוּ וְהָאָרֶץ כְּכַבֵּד תִּבְלֶה וְיִשְׁבִּיחַ כְּמוֹ־כֶן יִמּוּתוּן וַיִּשׁוּעַתִּי לְעוֹלָם תִּהְיֶה וְצַדִּיקְתִּי לֹא תִסָּחֵת: <sup>7</sup>שִׁמְעוּ אֵלַי יְדַעֵי צְדִיק עִם תּוֹרָתִי בְּלִבְכֶם אֶל־תִּירְאוּ חֲרַפַּת אֲנֹשׁ וּמִגְדַּפְתֶּם אֶל־תִּתְחַתּוּ: <sup>8</sup>כִּי כְּכַבֵּד יִאֲכַלְמֶן עֵשׂ וְכַצְּמֶר יִאֲכַלְמֶן קֶס וְצַדִּיקְתִּי לְעוֹלָם תִּהְיֶה וַיִּשׁוּעַתִּי לְדוֹר דוֹרִים:

<sup>3</sup>Truly the LORD has comforted Zion, comforted all her ruins; he has made her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the Garden of the LORD. Gladness and joy shall abide there, Thanksgiving and the sound of music. <sup>4</sup>Hearken to Me, My people, and give ear to Me, O My nation, for teaching shall go forth from Me, My way for the light of peoples. In a moment I will bring it: <sup>5</sup>The triumph I grant is near, the success I give has gone forth. My arms shall provide for the peoples; The coastlands shall trust in Me, they

<sup>405</sup> Barstad, *Way*, 73. There are similarities in this passage to the image of Zion in Isa 1:30 where it is said that Zion has become like a withered tree and like a garden without water;

כִּי תִהְיֶה כְּאֵלֶּה נִבְלַת עֵלֶה וְכַגְנָה אֲשֶׁר־מִים אֵין לָהּ:

For you shall be like a terebinth wilted of leaf, and like a garden that has no water. Isa. 1:30 addresses those who pursue justice (רַדְפֵי צְדִיק), and like the passage in 51, it is not solely concerned with the physical location of such people, but also their disposition towards Yahweh hence the reference to those who pursue justice. In the context of Second Isaiah, the restoration of the nation is also brought about by the destruction of Judah's enemies, Yahweh's return to his sanctuary, as well as the return of the exiles. *Ibid.*, 73–74.

shall look to My arm. <sup>6</sup>Raise your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: Though the heavens should melt away like smoke, And the earth wear out like a garment, and its inhabitants die out as well, My victory shall stand forever, My triumph shall remain unbroken. <sup>7</sup>Listen to Me, you who care for the right, O people who lay My instruction to heart! Fear not the insults of men, and be not dismayed at their jeers; <sup>8</sup>For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, The worm shall eat them up like wool. But My triumph shall endure forever, My salvation through all the ages.

The references to God comforting Zion (נחם) are reminiscent of Daughter Zion and the narrator's complaints throughout Lamentations.<sup>406</sup> God is not punishing Zion at this time, he has comforted Zion and also her ruins, כִּי־נָחַם יְהוָה צִיּוֹן נָחַם כָּל־הַרְבֵּתֶיהָ.<sup>407</sup> This comfort also comes in the form of the “transformation of the wilderness,” where Zion changes from a desolate, abandoned ruin to a paradisiacal garden.

Isa 51:3

וַיִּשְׂם מִדְּבָרָהּ כְּעֵדֶן וְעַרְבָתָהּ כְּגֵן־יְהוָה

He has made her wilderness like Eden, Her desert like the Garden of the LORD.

The extent of the comfort goes beyond the city itself, as in 51:5 the divine “provides” as far as the coastlands, וַיִּזְרַעֵי עַמִּים יִשְׁפֹּטוּ אֵלַי אַיִּים יְקוּוּ וְאֶל־זֶרְעֵי יִיחַלּוּן.<sup>408</sup> Earlier in 51:4 the divine also implies that his teaching (תּוֹרָה) and judgement (מִשְׁפָּט) will be a light for people (לְאִוֵר עַמִּים), that will go out from him (מֵאַחַי תֵּצֵא). The transformed ruins of Zion, where the temple once stood, will now emanate Yahweh's cult to an even greater extent than before.

<sup>406</sup> See section entitled, “The Relationship Between the book of Lamentations and Isaiah.”

<sup>407</sup> “Truly the LORD has comforted Zion, comforted all her ruins.”

<sup>408</sup> “My arms shall provide for the peoples; the coastlands shall trust in Me, they shall look to My arm.”

Isaiah 51's portrayal of the returning of the exiles and the restoration of the abandoned city and temple is not intended to set out boundaries by which to measure Yahweh's efficacy, i.e., the returning of the exiles to Judah, but to inspire in its audience's loyalty to the divine. As Isaiah 51 suggests, if the heavens themselves melt away, and the earth wears away, as well as those who are in it, this would not represent Yahweh's failure.<sup>409</sup>

Isa 51:6

...כִּי־שָׁמַיִם כְּעָשָׁן נִמְלָחוּ וְהָאָרֶץ כַּכֶּגֶד תִּבְלֶה וְיֹשְׁבֵיהָ כְּמוֹ־כֶן ?מוֹתוֹן וַיִּשְׁעֵתִי לְעוֹלָם תִּהְיֶה וְצַדִּיקְתִּי לֹא תִחַח

... Though the heavens should melt away like smoke, And the earth wear out like a garment, and its inhabitants die out as well, My victory shall stand forever, My triumph shall remain unbroken.

Should everything look as if it has gone wrong, the people should trust that Yahweh's promises will come to fruition in some form; moreover, they should still remain loyal and trust Yahweh. These poems do not suggest that if an idealised homecoming does not happen that Yahweh has failed, they instead provide hope that no matter how unfortunate the community's circumstances appear, the community should hope for this idealised restoration of Yahweh's power and Zion as the centre of his power and cult:

Isa 54:9–10

<sup>9</sup>כִּי־מִי נִחַ זֹאת לִי אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי מֵעַבֵּר מִיָּנֹחַ עוֹד עַל־הָאָרֶץ כֵּן נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי מִקִּצְף עָלֶיךָ וּמִגְעַר־כָּד:

<sup>10</sup>כִּי הֵהָרִים יִמוּשׁוּ וְהַגְּבָעוֹת תִּמוּטְנָה וְחִסְדֵי מֵאֲתָךְ לֹא־יִמוּשׁוּ וּבְרִית שְׁלוֹמִי לֹא תִמוּט אָמַר מְרַחֵמְךָ יְהוָה:

<sup>9</sup>For this to Me is like the waters of Noah: As I swore that the waters of Noah nevermore would flood the earth, So I swear that I will not Be angry with you or rebuke you. <sup>10</sup>For

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<sup>409</sup> Isa. 51:6.

the mountains may move, and the hills be shaken, but my loyalty shall never move from you, nor My covenant of friendship be shaken—said the LORD, who takes you back in love.

As the end of Second Isaiah approaches, the “transformation of the wilderness” motif once again occurs in conjunction with references to the eternal quality of God’s *hesed* and divine word. In Isaiah 55, the last collection of images reflects on the ways through the wilderness, its blooming, and the everlasting nature of divine promise.

### Isaiah 55:8–13

<sup>8</sup>כי לא מחשבותי מחשבותיכם ולא דרכיכם דרכי נאם יהוה: <sup>9</sup>כי־גבהו שמים מארץ כן גבהו דרכי מדרכיכם ומחשבותי ממחשבותיכם: <sup>10</sup>כי כַּאֲשֶׁר ירד הגשם והשלג מן השמים ושמה לא ישוב כי אם־הרונה את־הארץ והולידה והצמיחה ונתן זרע לזרע ולחם לחם: <sup>11</sup>כן יהיה דברי אשר יצא מפי לא־ישוב אלי ריקם כי אם־עשה את־אשר חפצתי והצליח אשר שלחתי: <sup>12</sup>כי־בשמחה תצאו ובשלום תובלגון ההרים והגבעות יפצחו לפניכם רנה וכל־עצי השדה ימחאו־קף: <sup>13</sup>תחת הנעצוץ יעלה ברז וְתחת הסרפד יעלה הדס והיה ליהנה לשם לאות עולם לא יכרת:

<sup>8</sup>For My plans are not your plans, nor are My ways your ways—declares the LORD. <sup>9</sup>But as the heavens are high above the earth, so are My ways high above your ways and My plans above your plans. <sup>10</sup>For as the rain or snow drops from heaven and returns not there, but soaks the earth and makes it bring forth vegetation, yielding seed for sowing and bread for eating, <sup>11</sup>so is the word that issues from My mouth: It does not come back to Me unfulfilled, but performs what I purpose, achieves what I sent it to do. <sup>12</sup>Yea, you shall leave in joy and be led home secure. Before you, mount and hill shall shout aloud, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. <sup>13</sup>Instead of the brier, a cypress shall rise; instead of the nettle, a myrtle shall rise. These shall stand as a testimony to the LORD, as an everlasting sign that shall not perish.

The relation between the transformation of the wilderness and God’s word in the above passage frames the final poems of Second Isaiah. Isaiah 55:12 describes people being led home securely (פִּי־בְשִׁמְחָה תֵצֵאוּ וּבְשָׁלוֹם תּוֹבְלוּן)<sup>410</sup> on a path through dangerous terrain. Isaiah 55:12 describes people being led home securely on a path through the wilderness.<sup>411</sup>

Moreover, it is not only the people who are depicted as going forth in Isaiah 55, but also divine speech. On this matter, Isaiah 2 is significant for evaluating the significance of the reference to the divine word as part of Second Isaiah’s poetics of exile. In Isaiah 2:3 the parallelism between instruction (תּוֹרָה) coming from Zion (מִצִּיּוֹן) and the word of the Lord (וּדְבַר־יְהוָה) going out (תֵצֵא) from Jerusalem (מִירוּשָׁלַם) shows the overlap between the importance of the location for worshipping and understanding the divine, as well as the way in which one should “walk” (וַיִּרְנוּ מְדַרְכָּיו וְנִלְכָה בְּאַרְחֵתָיו).<sup>412</sup> Conceptualizing life as a journey or “way” in which one “walks,” also occurs in conjunction with references to teaching coming from the temple in Zion in Isa 2:3.

וְהָלַכְוּ עִמָּם רַבִּים וְאָמְרוּ לָכֵן וְנִעְלָה אֱלֹהֵי־הַר־יְהוָה אֶל־בַּיִת אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וַיִּרְנוּ מְדַרְכָּיו וְנִלְכָה בְּאַרְחֵתָיו כִּי מִצִּיּוֹן

תֵצֵא תּוֹרָה וּדְבַר־יְהוָה מִירוּשָׁלַם

<sup>410</sup> “Yea, you shall leave in joy and be led home secure.”

<sup>411</sup> I agree with Tiemeyer, who suggests that the presence of the root יצא in verse twelve does not entail that the Exodus tradition has influenced this passage or that it is describing a “new Exodus.” Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion*, 199. The root יצא often occurs to describe how God “brought” the Israelites out of Egypt in the Hiphil stem, examples include Deut. 5:6; Exod. 16:3, 6 and Exod. 20:2. Barstad notes that often this passage is seen as referring to the return from exile, and he notes that in this passage (Isa. 55:12–13) the root יצא has led scholars to believe that this is a reference to a “new Exodus” and to exiles leaving from Babylon. Barstad, *Way*, 76. Another perspective to take on the verb and how it shapes the interpretation of this passage is how it is used in relation to warfare. Barstad notes that this root occurs as a call to go forth to war. Ibid., 77–78. In 55:12 he suggests that the root is not only associated with God bringing the Israelites forth from Egypt, but in 55:12 the going out is connected to joy and peace also stems from the tradition of holy war. Ibid., 86. Another example where the root יצא might have these connotations is Isa. 52:8–12.

<sup>412</sup> “That He may instruct us in His ways, and that we may walk in His paths.”



<sup>3</sup>And the many peoples shall go and say: “Come, let us go up to the Mount of the LORD, to the House of the God of Jacob; that He may instruct us in His ways, and that we may walk in His paths.” For instruction shall come forth from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Returning to Isaiah 55, the sowing of plants connoted with prosperity and happiness, over those associated with desolation is made possible because God’s word (דְּבַר יְאֵשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִפִּי)<sup>413</sup> does not fail to do what it accomplishes. The implications of the divine word’s trustworthiness and imperishable quality harken back to Isaiah 40:1-11 where we are also informed that it endures forever.

The last image that Second Isaiah leaves its readers with is the image of God planting a seed that becomes an “everlasting sign” (אוֹת עוֹלָם). Like Isaiah 40:1-11 emphasises the everlasting nature of divine speech to temper the command to pave a way through the wilderness, so too Isaiah 55 ends with a reflection on something more enduring. In this passage, the sowing of plants connoted with prosperity and happiness, over those associated with desolation, is made possible because God’s word does not fail to do what it accomplishes. Therefore, thus far the beginning and end of Second Isaiah presents its audiences with an open-ended poetics of exile. It does not suggest that physical homecoming is the only goal or message of the poetry, nor do these passages appear to refer to a “new Exodus”. The work of scholars such as Barstad and Tiemeyer, among others cited in this chapter, show that to emphasize either a “new Exodus” or physical homecoming in Second Isaiah obscures the nuanced way in which the poetry addresses the concerns of a people and implores them to trust again in Yahweh. Rather, the metaphors and motifs reflect on the importance of divine word, and the transformation of the wilderness conveys the imagined positive transformation of the people

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<sup>413</sup> “The word that issues from My mouth.”

and the divine's now favourable disposition towards them. Therefore, Second Isaiah's poetics of exile can be understood as open-ended, and not as suggesting that if physical homecoming does not occur then the function of these prophetic oracles has failed.

The co-occurrence throughout Second Isaiah between the "transformation of the wilderness" motif and references to divine word and speech, even to the divine as lasting eternally, suggest that the poetry is not giving an itinerary for the future as much as it is rhetorically inspiring a community who has experienced displacement to trust in Yahweh. The fact that eventually Jewish communities were allowed to return is known, and the reality as stated in the introduction is that not everyone could or wanted to return. This did not cause an insurmountable problem nor entail that traditions such as Isaiah were deemed irrelevant for those who did not return. The next chapter considers how the open-endedness of Second Isaiah's approach to exile through the transformation of the wilderness was inspiring for communities who were resident within the land to conceptualise their own struggles and identity.

## **Chapter Two Conclusion**

In conclusion, the ingathering of the exiles to Jerusalem is part of the nation's restoration, and Second Isaiah addresses exile and homecoming explicitly. However, the passages from Second Isaiah discussed in this chapter that depict the transformation of the wilderness do not suggest that physical homecoming is the sole message the writers of Second Isaiah are trying to impart to their audience. The "transformation of the wilderness" motif and its interaction with references to divine promise rather creates an open-ended poetics concerning exile. The examples show that the transformation of the wilderness often refers to the people themselves and addresses the divine's disposition towards them, which has changed from one of

punishment to one of kindness. The way in which the people are conceptualized as plants in a few of these examples emphasizes this aspect of Second Isaiah's approach to exile.

Isa 44:3–4

כִּי אֶצְקֶמְתִּים עַל־צָמָא וְנִזְלִים עַל־יַבְשָׁה אֶצְקֶ רֹחִי עַל־יַרְעֵד וּבְרִכְתִּי עַל־צִאֲצָאִיד: <sup>4</sup>וְנִצְמְחוּ בְּבֵין תְּצִיר כְּעֵרְבִים  
עַל־יְבִלֵי־מָיִם:

<sup>3</sup>Even as I pour water on thirsty soil, and rain upon dry ground, so will I pour My spirit on your offspring, my blessing upon your posterity. <sup>4</sup>And they shall sprout like grass, like willows by watercourses.

That the transformation of the wilderness is related to the state of the people and the divine's disposition towards them is also reminiscent of how the wilderness functioned in the book of Lamentations. In Chapter One, the wilderness was used to describe the negative transformation of the people in light of exile and destruction, and conveyed a sense of that they felt they were exiled from divine favour. This chapter has considered “the transformation of the wilderness” motif and how it interacts with references to divine word or speech to explore how Second Isaiah addresses the themes of homecoming and exile. The wilderness remains a dangerous place of death and isolation, but with divine guidance, irrigation and transformation, this place of death and God's absence can become a place of positive transformation and life. In the wilderness that is exile, the people can still experience transformation and closeness with the divine.

Moreover, passages such as Isaiah 54:10 highlight that the physical return of the exiles is not the sole measure of this change from a time of punishment and exile to a time when the divine sees the people in his favour.

Isa 54:10

<sup>10</sup>כי הָהָרִים יִמוּשׁוּ וְהַגְּבָעוֹת תִּמוּטְנָה וְחֻסְדֵי מִאֲתָדָי לֹא-יִמוּשׁוּ וּבְרִית שְׁלוֹמִי לֹא תִמוּט אָמַר מְרַחֵמְךָ יְהוָה:

<sup>10</sup>For the mountains may move, and the hills be shaken, but my loyalty shall never move from you, nor My covenant of friendship be shaken—said the LORD, who takes you back in love.

In light of Isaiah 40:1–11, Isaiah 55 also exemplifies how the return of the exiles is a part of an important change that is taking place, which is the completion of a time of punishment and being outside of the divine’s favour. This goes alongside a reminder that the divine’s ways are not like the ways of human beings (וְלֹא דַרְכֵיכֶם דְּרַכִּי) and may, therefore, elude human understanding.

Isa 55:8–9, 12–13

<sup>8</sup>כי לֹא מַחְשְׁבוֹתַי מַחְשְׁבוֹתֵיכֶם וְלֹא דַרְכֵיכֶם דְּרַכִּי נֹאם יְהוָה: <sup>9</sup>כִּי-גִבְהוֹ שָׁמַיִם מֵאָרֶץ כֵּן גִּבְהוֹ דַּרְכֵי מִדְּרַכֵיכֶם וּמַחְשְׁבוֹתַי מִמַּחְשְׁבוֹתֵיכֶם... <sup>12</sup>כִּי-בְשִׂמְחָה תִצְאוּ וּבְשָׁלוֹם תּוּבְלוּן הָהָרִים וְהַגְּבָעוֹת וּפָצְחוּ לְפָנֵיכֶם רִנָּה וְכָל-עֵצֵי הַשָּׂדֶה יִמְחָאוּ-כָף: <sup>13</sup>תַּחַת הַנֶּעְצָוִץ יַעֲלֶה בְרוֹשׁ וּתַחַת הַסְּרָפֵד יַעֲלֶה הַדָּס וְהָיָה לִיהוָה לְשֵׁם לְאוֹת עוֹלָם לֹא יִכָּרֵת:

<sup>8</sup>For My plans are not your plans, nor are My ways your ways—declares the LORD. <sup>9</sup>But as the heavens are high above the earth, so are My ways high above your ways and My plans above your plans... <sup>12</sup>Yea, you shall leave in joy and be led home secure. Before you, mount and hill shall shout aloud, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. <sup>13</sup>Instead of the brier, a cypress shall rise; instead of the nettle, a myrtle shall rise. These shall stand as a testimony to the LORD, as an everlasting sign that shall not perish.

Second Isaiah’s open-ended poetics towards exile is demonstrated by the way in which the transformation of the wilderness signals that the future will be hopeful and be characterised

by the divine's good will towards the people. Although Lamentations did not move beyond lament, it had a cathartic role for its audience in expressing suffering and addressing displacement from home and the divine. On the other hand, Second Isaiah's idealized restoration of the nation and the people's relationship with the divine is also cathartic. It provides hope and optimism concerning the exile and the restoration of the nation. It attempts to move beyond lament and provide comfort, which is evident in Second Isaiah's opening lines. However, the idealized image of the restoration of the people, the wilderness, and Zion is another way in which the future is left "unresolved"<sup>414</sup> or deferred in Second Isaiah, creating an open-ended poetics concerning exile. Reflecting back on Chapter One, Lam 5:19-20 shows that in contrast to the desolate mount Zion, Yahweh is enthroned forever, enduring throughout the ages. Both Lamentations and Second Isaiah emphasize the endurance of the divine, and divine word, above physical homecoming.

When the poetic oracles of Isaiah are interpreted and applied to a different context in 1QS, the idealized portrayals of homecoming and the people's relationship to the divine are imagined as processes that the interpretation of the text actualises. The way in which Second Isaiah engages in dialogue with First Isaiah further underscores the way in which Second Isaiah may have impacted its earliest audiences of exiles in such a way. For example, Francis Landy suggests that the rhetorical calling out to make a way in the wilderness is a gesture which invites a response from the reader.<sup>415</sup> This invitation enables recipients to become "surrogate authors of the book, or at least responsible for its effectiveness."<sup>416</sup>

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<sup>414</sup> Halvorson-Taylor. *Enduring Exile*, 200.

<sup>415</sup> Landy, "The Ghostly Prelude," 337. Landy highlights the subtleties that are potentially present in Isaiah 40:1–11, especially in relation to First Isaiah. For example, he asks whether the commission to speak so that the people do not understand still stands in Isaiah 40. If so, then the words of consolation are a "trap" "hedged by a lethal double meaning." *Ibid.*, 334.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

Moreover, with regard to how Second Isaiah engages with First Isaiah, it can be demonstrated that Second Isaiah's poetic oracles by their nature engender dialogue and interpretation because they themselves are the product of such reflections on First Isaiah. In light of the prologue's similarities to Isaiah 6, one might ask if the time of punishment is indeed over, can the people now understand and move on from the former painful memories as the audience is told in Isaiah 40? Or perhaps the message of Second Isaiah is obscured or will not function in this way, but rather function more like the message to the people in Isaiah 6 that would ensure that they do *not* understand and receive divine punishment. Second Isaiah's message of comfort would remain in tension with itself, proclaiming a time of comfort and idealization of the relationship between the people and the divine that may not be attainable. Therefore, the open-ended nature of Second Isaiah's poetics of exile may also be demonstrated through its dialogue with First Isaiah.

In the next chapter, I examine the way in which 1QS interprets Second Isaiah's poetics to speak to a community that potentially views itself as exiled within the land, and that interprets the metaphors and motifs as relating to the study of divine teachings. 1QS builds upon the open-ended poetics of exile in Second Isaiah to address a community that perceives itself as marginalized living within the land and employs Second Isaiah in order to describe how the study of divine law is a central aspect to this community's identity. As noted in the conclusion to Chapter One on Lamentations, in the context of the twentieth century, Ezrahi suggests that Zion and Exile form different ends of a spectrum as "organizing principles of the Jewish imagination" and of conceptualizing Jewish identity.<sup>417</sup> Although different discourses offer closure to the diaspora "narrative of exile," she in particular asks how

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<sup>417</sup> Ezrahi, *Booking Passage*, 235.

discourses such as Zionism compete with the “open-endedness” of alternative narratives that are not as focused on the land itself and the people’s location.<sup>418</sup>

1QS takes an open-ended perspective towards exile that is inspired by Isaiah’s open-ended poetics towards exile. Given the metaphorical nature of Second Isaiah’s language and its focus on the people’s relationship and loyalty to Yahweh, Second Isaiah sows the seeds for its message to be generative for communities within the land and in the diaspora. In the next chapter, I suggest that Isaiah’s reception in 1QS also presents an open-ended poetics of exile. Additionally, the discussion of 1QS and the nuanced connotations that exile garners in antiquity overlaps with the way in which exile and diaspora are addressed in the versions of the book of Esther, which is the topic of Chapters Four and Five in Part II of the thesis.

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<sup>418</sup> Ibid., 235.

### **Chapter Three: 1QS and Yehuda Amichai's "Jews in the Land of Israel" read Isaiah's Poetics of Exile and Wilderness**

This chapter will explore how the interpretation of Isaiah 40:3 in 1QS reflects a subtle engagement with Second Isaiah's open-ended poetics of exile. 1QS's interpretation of Isaiah 40:3 reflects the same entanglement between the "transformation of the wilderness" motif and references to divine speech and promise that occurred in Second Isaiah. Instead of approaching 1QS's citation of Isaiah 40:3 as isolating the verse from its context within Second Isaiah, I approach the citation and interpretation as showing how 1QS functions as an early reader of the book of Isaiah. By interpreting the command to clear a way in the wilderness as "the study of the law" (מדרש התורה), 1QS interprets Isaiah 40:3 against the backdrop of the transformation of the wilderness as it occurs throughout Second Isaiah; including how references to divine speech interact with the transformation of the wilderness motif. This reading is substantiated not only by how the interpretation reflects the way in which several motifs intertwine in Second Isaiah, but also because the interpretation appears to continue the dialogue on homecoming, exile, and hearing God's word that begins in Isaiah 40.

Other approaches have considered the citation's significance in 1QS column VIII as deriving primarily from the reference to the wilderness (מִדְבָּר), and how this could relate to the location of the editors/writers and audience of 1QS. However, much can be gained from approaching 1QS as an early reader of Isaiah more generally. The process by which 1QS interprets Isaiah can be explored by examining the way in which the interpretation of Isaiah 40:3 engages with Isaiah's poetics more broadly, but also how it appears to continue a dialogue surrounding homecoming, exile, and hearing the word of God that begins in Second Isaiah itself.



In the final section of the chapter, I reflect on how Second Isaiah and Isaiah 35's poetics are read in a more contemporary example by Yehuda Amichai in his poem "Jews in the Land of Israel." Although I am not arguing that Amichai was influenced by 1QS directly, two different readers in different contexts have continued this discourse on homecoming and exile from the book of Isaiah in similar ways. Namely, how Amichai's poem, and 1QS's interpretation of Isaiah 40:3, respond to the dialogue begun in Isaiah 40.

Analysing 1QS's interpretation of Second Isaiah as a reader contributes to our understanding of Isaiah because it highlights the ambiguities, or the "absence" as Landy has put it, in Second Isaiah's own poetics.<sup>419</sup> While Isaiah 40:3 has had a robust reception in the Gospels,<sup>420</sup> the way in which scholarship has approached these interpretations, often as part

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<sup>419</sup> Landy, "The Ghostly Prelude," 333.

<sup>420</sup> The allusions to Isaiah 40:3 in the gospels consist of Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3 which is combined with an allusion to Malachi 3:1; Luke 3:4–6; John 3:4–6. Moyise and Menken helpfully note that "Matthew's usage, similar in many respects to that of the Dead Sea Scrolls, represents a revelatory form of exegesis that presented the scriptures as the answer to the problem of understanding the days in which the evangelist and his group lived." Moyise and Menken, *Isaiah in the New Testament*, 78. On the other hand, this is a surface level similarity. In the case of Luke, they also discuss how the allusions to Isaiah generally address, "a richness of themes that encapsulate elements that are central to the gospel. Christology, eschatology, the problem of the Jewish rejection, gentile inclusion, critique of the Jewish religious establishment and final eschatological renewal." Ibid. Fuller, for example, argues that the gospel of Luke uses Isaiah 40:3–5 "to characterize the ideological exile of sin and demonic control that envelops all Israel" and not simply as an introduction for John the Baptist. See Michael E. Fuller, "Isaiah 40.3–5 and Luke's Understanding of the Wilderness of John the Baptist," in *Biblical Interpretation in Early Christian Gospels, Volume 3: The Gospel of Luke*, ed. Thomas R. Hatina (London: T&T Clark, 2010) 43–58 (45). Unpacking potential issues with how scholarship more generally discusses the "problem of Jewish rejection" and "critique of the Jewish religious establishment" and "eschatological renewal" in the context of the NT would need more space than can be afforded in this thesis to accurately compare how Isaiah is cited in the Gospels in comparison to 1QS. See the section entitled, "The 'New Exodus' Motif and Supersessionist Readings of Isaiah," where I addressed issues with how Isaiah is discussed in the context of NT scholarship and the "new Exodus" motif. Overall, 1QS's interpretation of Isaiah is not entirely similar to the gospels which is apparent looking at Luke's allusion and its use in the context of speaking about John the Baptist:

<sup>3</sup>καὶ ἦλθεν εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν περίχωρον τοῦ Ἰορδάνου κηρύσσων βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, <sup>4</sup>ὡς γέγραπται ἐν βίβλῳ λόγων Ἡσαΐου τοῦ προφήτου Φωνὴ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ Ἐτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν Κυρίου, εὐθείας ποιεῖτε τὰς τρίβους αὐτοῦ· <sup>5</sup>πᾶσα φάραγξ πληρωθήσεται καὶ πᾶν ὄρος καὶ βουνὸς ταπεινωθήσεται, καὶ ἔσται τὰ σκολιὰ εἰς εὐθείας καὶ αἱ τραχεῖαι εἰς ὁδοὺς λείας· <sup>6</sup>καὶ ὄψεται πᾶσα σὰρξ τὸ σωτήριον τοῦ Θεοῦ. <sup>7</sup>Ἔλεγεν οὖν τοῖς ἐκπορευομένοις ὄχλοις βαπτισθῆναι ὑπ' αὐτοῦ Γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν, τίς ὑπέδειξεν ὑμῖν φυγεῖν ἀπὸ τῆς μελλούσης ὀργῆς. <sup>3</sup>He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, <sup>4</sup>as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The voice of

of a “new Exodus” motif can give the impression that the book of Isaiah generally offers a homogeneously optimistic message. In other words, the citations of Isaiah are sometimes portrayed by scholars as highlighting the positive aspects of Isaiah’s message.<sup>421</sup> It is worth acknowledging the ways in which such readings of Isaiah have shaped scholarly approaches to the text’s poetics. As argued in the previous chapter, the book of Isaiah still struggles with the concepts of homecoming and exile and addresses an audience that has experienced displacement. Isaiah’s poetry remained important for communities who applied these metaphors suitably to their own situation even when living within the land, and to their relationship with the divine.<sup>422</sup>

### **The Community Rule**

The Community Rule is part of a tradition of manuscripts that have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were discovered among caves near the site of Qumran. The manuscript that is best preserved has been designated 1QS, and this will be the focus of the chapter. The Community Rule versions describe a group and its requirements for entry and maintaining group membership, and it presents some of the group’s values and organization.<sup>423</sup> Moreover, in Hempel’s view the rival group that is often referred to

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one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight. <sup>5</sup>Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, <sup>6</sup>and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

<sup>7</sup>John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?”

<sup>421</sup> Joel Kaminsky, for example, notes that contemporary scholars may inadvertently exaggerate the “inclusive” nature of texts such as Isaiah as a heritage of supersessionist or supersessionist leaning readings of the text. Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, 129.

<sup>422</sup> I concur that this does necessarily reflect how the Gospels truly function as readers of Isaiah, but rather how some scholarship on the Gospels and their use of Isaiah has influenced Isaiah scholarship.

<sup>423</sup> Charlotte Hempel, *The Community Rules from Qumran: A Commentary*, Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 183 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 1.

throughout as men of injustice forms an important contrast with the community's own identity.

“The rival group referred to as the people of injustice is clearly very closely associated with the emergence of a community, its self-definition in terms of halakhah, food, and economy (wealth, work). All three passages that were looked at mention separation from this group at a defining moment in the community.”<sup>424</sup>

In general, the text provides a framework for the how the community should be structured and organized in relation to things such as the entry of new members, eating, cleanliness, and relationships with members outside of the group.<sup>425</sup>

The group itself in the Community Rule is often referred to as the Yahad. The Yahad is also associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls more generally, but the exact nature of this relationship remains unclear.<sup>426</sup> For example, Hempel notes that the date of a settlement emerging at Khirbet Qumran is estimated at around 90-70 BCE.<sup>427</sup> However, some versions of the Community Rules, such as 1QS (100–75BCE) and 4Q259 (150–100BCE) are potentially older than the settlement, and because the content within the tradition refers to the community as being established for some time, it suggests that several of the manuscripts of the Community Rules were not written at Qumran.<sup>428</sup> Additionally, Hempel notes that the

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<sup>424</sup> Charlotte Hempel, “The Community and its Rivals According to the ‘Community Rule’ From Caves 1 and 4,” *Revue de Qumrân* 21 (2003): 47–81 (61). Hempel discusses how the Community Rule “creates a framework that addresses a struggle with the forces of evil.” She cites as examples, “...the Covenant Ceremony (in 1QS and 4Q256) as well as the Teaching on the Two Spirits (in 1QS) the Hymn (in 1QS, 4Q256, 4Q258, 4Q260 and 4Q264) creates a framework that addresses a struggle with the forces of evil.” Hempel, *The Community Rules from Qumran*, 7.

<sup>425</sup> Melissa Sayyad Bach “How Hard is it to Get into the Community Rule? Exploring Transmission in 1QS from the Perspective of the Modes of Religiosity,” *SJOT* 35, (2021): 159–186 (160).

<sup>426</sup> Hempel, *The Community Rules from Qumran*, 1.

<sup>427</sup> According to Hempel, all twelve manuscripts of the Community Rules range in approximate dating between 150 BCE-50 CE. *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid.* See also James Nati, “The Community Rule or Rules for the Community,” in *Sibyls, Scriptures, and Scrolls: John Collins at Seventy*, ed. Joel Baden, Hindy Najman, and Eibert

description of the Yahad in the Community Rules need not match the reality, because these are literary creations.<sup>429</sup> This is a helpful corrective that not only applies to this text, but is also reminiscent of how texts such as Second Isaiah were approached as “failures” by comparing the text with what we know about the exile and return from a historical perspective. Moreover, Melissa Sayyad Bach helpfully describes the Community Rule as “a central document describing the lifestyle and ideology of a unique and exclusive Jewish community.”<sup>430</sup> Overall, the versions of the Community Rules contain community guidelines, liturgy, rituals, the group’s myth of origin, and hymns.<sup>431</sup>

### 1QS’s Interpretation of Isaiah 40:3

1QS Col. VIII, 13–16<sup>432</sup>

בְּתִכּוּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים יִבְדְּלוּ מִתּוֹךְ מוֹשֵׁב הַנְּשִׂי (אֲנָשִׁי) הָעוֹל לִלְכֵת לְמַדְבָּר לִפְנוֹת שֵׁם אֵת דֶּרֶךְ הוֹאֵהָא<sup>13</sup>

כִּאֲשֶׁר כָּתוּב בְּמַדְבָּר פָּנוּ דֶּרֶךְ \*\*\*\* יִשְׂרוּ בְעֵרְבָה מִסְלָה לְאֱלוֹהֵינוּ<sup>14</sup>

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Tigchelaar, *JSJSup* 175 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 2:916–939. Moreover, Hempel writes that, “While it is impossible at the moment to pinpoint the range of locations where the scribes behind the composition of this complex tradition and their communities were based, the manuscripts (including 1QS) offer accounts of diverse forms of communal life at a range of locations.” Hempel, *The Community Rules from Qumran*, 8–9.

<sup>429</sup> Hempel, *The Community Rules from Qumran*, 9. See also, Charlotte Hempel, “Curated Communities: Refracted Realities on Social Media and at Qumran,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Ancient Media Culture*, ed. by Travis Williams, Chris Keith, and Loren Stuckenbruck, STDJ (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming). She discusses how, “The terminology “curated communities” is meant to signal the literary nature of our sources which were selectively shaped. While it is important to guard against reading these works as “reality literature,” some kind of relationship to various realities may be presumed even though it is difficult to established this with certainty.”

<sup>430</sup> Bach, “How Hard is it to Get into the Community Rule?” 160.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

<sup>432</sup> Translations and editions of 1QS are taken from the 1QS study edition in F. Garcia Martinez, Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, ed. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition* (Leiden: BRILL, 1999). I altered the translation of Isa 40:3 found in the study edition to match the translation used for Isa 40:3 in Chapter Two. Regarding the manuscript traditions, there is a parallel fragment in 4QS<sup>d</sup> which suggests that earlier versions of the community rule did not contain the citation from Isaiah 40:3. See Brooke, “Isaiah 40:3,” 127. On the other hand, Metso in her monograph, *The Textual Development of the Qumran Community Rule*, thinks the missing part of 4QSD corresponds to the citation of Isa 40:3. Sarianna Metso, *The Textual Development of the Qumran Community Rule*, STDJ 21 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 85.

היאה מדרש התורה א[ש]ר צוה ביד מושה לעשות ככול הנגלה עת בעת<sup>15</sup>

וכאשר גלו הנביאים ברוח קודשו<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup>And when these have become /a community/ in Israel “.../in compliance with these arrangements/ they are to be segregated from within the dwelling of the men of sin to walk to the desert in order to open there His path. <sup>14</sup>As it is written (Isa 40:3): «*In the wilderness clear the way of the Lord, make straight in the steppe a highway for our God!*» <sup>15</sup>This is the study of the law wh[i]ch he commanded through the hand of Moses, in order to act in compliance with all that has been revealed from age to age,<sup>16</sup> and according to what the prophets have revealed through his holy spirit.

The citation of Isaiah 40:3 in 1QS has received much attention in scholarship in relation to the possible location of the writers and readers of 1QS itself. While there are many manuscripts that have been discovered, the focus will remain on 1QS and how this tradition engages with Isaiah’s poetics.<sup>433</sup> It has also been suggested that the interpretation does not concern the entire passage of Isaiah’s prologue, but rather specific words in the passage that could, in theory, relate to the writers/editors’ present. Firstly, the feminine demonstrative (היאה) in line fifteen could signal the interpretation of Isaiah 40:3,<sup>434</sup> and there are a couple of possibilities regarding its referent. For example, James Vanderkam suggests that the

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<sup>433</sup> There are differences between the various manuscripts of the Community Rule. It could be the case that certain traditions of 1QS included more direct references to Isaiah than other iterations and that a diachronic development is not necessarily represented among the manuscript traditions. See Metso, *Textual Development*, 1997 about the composition of the Community Rule for a thorough discussion on the opinions of dating the different traditions. Metso argues that 4QSE, B, and D derive from an earlier version of the tradition, one which does not have columns 1-4, or sections parallel to 1QS 8:15–9:11. However, scholars such as Philip Alexander suggest that 1QS represents an early tradition. Philip Alexander, “The Redaction-History of Serekh Ha-Yahad: A Proposal,” *RevQ* 17 (1996): 437–456, (438). Alexander dates 1QS to approximately 100–75 BCE using palaeographic evidence, but 4QSB and D to half a century later. Overall, there is no consensus, and there is still merit in analysing the composition of 1QS on its own terms.

<sup>434</sup> Brooke, “Isaiah 40:3,” 121.

demonstrative refers to the feminine noun “highway” (מסלה), and George Brooke, for example, thinks it is likely that it should be read as a masculine form (הואה),<sup>435</sup> and suggests that those who think the antecedent is the masculine noun “way” (דרך) are correct.<sup>436</sup> Perhaps *Midrash Hatorah*, “the study of the Law” (מדרש התורה) may refer to the interpretation of the phrase “prepare the way” (פנו דרך), or the phrase *Midrash Hatorah* could be interpreting “way” (דרך) solely, like scholars such as Brooke have suggested.<sup>437</sup>

Alternatively, it is also possible to interpret the entire quotation as referring to *Midrash Hatorah*. The desert from this perspective symbolises the group’s isolation from others, in particular the evil men from whom they must be separate.<sup>438</sup> This is substantiated by Hempel’s suggestions that the interpretation of Isaiah 40:3 highlights the centrality of the study of the law for the community and its sense of identity.<sup>439</sup> If the entire quotation is read as *Midrash Hatorah*, then it relates to the wilderness (מִדְבָּר) and its transformation through creating ways with the references to divine word and speech that were already present in the prologue to Second Isaiah (40:1–11).

Other parts of Isaiah are also referenced in column XI, where it describes how the members of the community should be instructed.

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<sup>435</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid.

<sup>438</sup> This may even manifest itself in their approaches to the interpretation of Torah in comparison with other groups. Cf. with the work of Devorah Dimant who takes a more metaphorical approach to the text. Devorah Dimant, “Not Exile in the Desert but Exile in Spirit: The Peshet of Isa 40:3 in the Rule of the Community and the History of the Scrolls Community,” in *History, Ideology and Bible Interpretation in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, FAT 90 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 455–464.

<sup>439</sup> Hempel, “Interpretive Authority,” 70–71.

להנחותם בדעה וכן להשכילם ברזי פלא ואמת בתוך<sup>19</sup> אנשי היחד ל[הל]ך תמים איש את רעהו בכול הנגלה  
להם [ה]היא עת פנות הדרך<sup>20</sup> למדבר ולהשכילם כול הנמצא לעשות בעת הזואת [ו]הבדל מכול איש ולוא  
הסר דרכו<sup>21</sup> מכול עול

He should lead them with knowledge and in this way teach them the mysteries of wonder and of truth in the midst of<sup>19</sup> the men of the Community, so that they walk perfectly, one with another, in all that has been revealed to them. This is the time for making ready the path<sup>20</sup> to the desert and he will teach them about all that has been discovered so that they can carry it out in this moment [and] so they will be detached from anyone who has not withdrawn his path<sup>21</sup> from all injustice.

The lexical choices of *panot* (פנות), *derek* (דרך), and *midbar* (מדבר) invoke the earlier citation of Isaiah 40. 1QS not only interprets Isaiah, but more directly appears to respond to the discourse begun in Isaiah 40 through its interpretation of what it means to “clear” the way for the Lord in relation to how the community should conduct themselves.

While the text appears to depict a community who is not technically exiled but living within the land of Judah, they appear to see themselves as experiencing an exile that derived from the marginalisation that Jewish communities experienced due to the loss of sovereignty experienced after the Babylonian captivity and beyond. Here, we can see how the wilderness more firmly interacts with the theme of exile in a way that is more easily recognized as metaphorical. George Brooke suggests that the interpretation of the blameless ones of Psalm 37:18–19 is a notable example of this metaphorical aspect of the wilderness, because the

interpreters insert the phrase “returnees of the wilderness” or “those who return to the wilderness” (4QpPs a 1–10 iii 1–2) in order to describe the “unlocated group.”<sup>440</sup>

Moreover, this group will go on to receive “all the inheritance of Adam.”<sup>441</sup> Brooke further writes concerning this interpretation that the only other occurrence of מְדַבֵּר in the pesharim is an interpretation of Isa 10:24–27 in 4QpIsa a 4-6 ii 18 which reads: “when they return from the wilderness of the peoples.” Brooke goes on to write that what the wilderness implies in this context is a place of exile and oppression, “whether in Assyria or Egypt, from which the Prince of the Congregation will have a role in delivering the people.”<sup>442</sup> This understanding of what the wilderness connotes accords with the majority of its occurrences in Second Isaiah which was discussed in Chapter Two.

The citation of Isaiah 40:3 and its interpretation as *Midrash Hatorah* in 1QS builds upon the connection that is already present in Second Isaiah between the transformation of the desert motif and references to divine speech and promise.<sup>443</sup> In the context of 1QS, Second Isaiah’s discourse of restoration and homecoming is incorporated in a context where its recipients were residing in the land. Throughout the Community Rules, Hempel notes that members of

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<sup>440</sup> George J. Brooke, “Room for Interpretation: An Analysis of Spatial Imagery in the Qumran Pesharim,” in *Reading the Dead Sea Scrolls: Essays in Method*, EJS 39 (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2013), 137–150 (143).

<sup>441</sup> George Brooke, for example, notes that the term מְדַבֵּר “occurs twice in the continuous pesharim and therefore might be taken as confirming the interpretation given it in the Rule of the Community.” Brooke, “Room for Interpretation,” 143.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>443</sup> See Archibald L. H. M. van Wieringen and Frank G. Bosman’s communication model to describe the relationship between source texts and the texts that receives it. Van Wieringen and Bosman’s communication model provides another way of phrasing the relationship between Isaiah and 1QS. The text immanent writers of 1QS in this instance are interpreting the role of the text immanent reader of Isaiah, and this is demonstrated by how the interpretation in 1QS is engaged with Isaiah’s poetics more broadly, but also by the way in which 1QS’s engagement with Isaiah appears to respond to the dialogue that begun between the anonymous voices in Isaiah 40. Their approach distinguishes not only between real and historical reader and writers, whose intentions are not accessible to biblical scholars, but between text-immanent authors and readers. See Archibald L. H. M. van Wieringen and Frank G. Bosman, “Beyond Death: A Communication-Oriented Analysis of the Intertextual Relation between 1 Corinthians 15:54d and Isaiah 25:8a” in *Festschrift of Riemer Roukema* (forthcoming).



the community are often described as “the people of holiness”<sup>444</sup> and “people of perfect holiness.”<sup>445</sup> In 1QS, the transformation of the wilderness highlights the importance of studying Torah, the word of God, as a way of life. 1QS is not focused on the physicality of homecoming, and not only due to its providence or its possible date of composition; even in Second Isaiah the transformation of the wilderness was already a metaphor for the people’s transformation as a result of the exile.

The metaphorization of the people’s experience of exile and how Second Isaiah’s poetry imagined the restoration of the people’s loyalty to Yahweh could be easily contextualised to speak to other situations, such as how hardship, displacement, and disenfranchisement can transform the people’s relationship with the divine. 1QS has its own unique contribution to interpreting Second Isaiah, and 1QS interprets the response to the command to “clear a path” as devoting one’s life to the study of divine word and teaching. Therefore, 1QS functions as a reader in that it also continues and participates in Second Isaiah’s discourse on exile and homecoming in its own context.

1QS’s focus on divine word and teaching is not completely in contrast to the way in which Second Isaiah balances its hopefulness of the restoration of the nation and temple cult, and the return of the exiles, while emphasizing the enduring nature of Yahweh’s power.

Moreover, Yahweh’s power is portrayed as not being contingent on the people’s physical state or even the nation, even though the poet/poets of Second Isaiah rhetorically argue that the people should be devoted to Yahweh, that the time of punishment is over, and he will now begin to act on behalf of the people again. This message is conveyed, as we saw in

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<sup>444</sup> See also 1QS 5:13; 4Q256 9:8–9, 11; 4Q258 1:7–8; 1QS 8:17, 23. Hempel, *The Community Rules from Qumran*, 10.

<sup>445</sup> See also 1QS 8:20–9:2 // 4Q258 6:12; 7:1–3. Ibid.

Chapter Two, through the “transformation of the wilderness” motif, as well as through references to Yahweh guiding the people.

### **The “Transformation of the Wilderness” Motif and Yehuda Amichai’s “Jews in the Land of Israel”**

This section will consider the way in which Yehuda Amichai’s poem functions as a reader and interlocutor with Isaiah’s poetics in a way that is not dissimilar from 1QS. This modern Hebrew poem demonstrates ambivalence and struggle with the implications of homecoming, and, like 1QS, the poem is directly influenced by and cites the book of Isaiah. Additionally, the content of the poem problematizes the actualization of some interpretations of Isaiah’s poetry about homecoming and exile. In particular, the poem highlights how Isaiah has been employed in discourses surrounding homecoming and exile in modernity.

The idea of making the “desert bloom” took on special significance in the early years after the creation of the modern state of Israel, with the phrase referring to the efforts made to cultivate areas such as the Negev into functioning farmland,<sup>446</sup> as well as to the drainage of swamps (such as Huleh Valley). The wilderness became, in Zerubavel’s account, a “counter-place,” a terrain which symbolically resulted from “Jewish exile from the homeland.”<sup>447</sup> This sentiment about the wilderness as a “counter-place” to home and to God’s presence is similar to how the wilderness functions in parts of the book of Isaiah, as well as in 1QS’s interpretation of Isaiah 40:3.

Isaiah 35’s desert blooming imagery became a source of inspiration. An example which demonstrates the prevalence of the book of Isaiah for helping to construct this discourse surrounding homecoming and reclaiming land is how the opening line from Isaiah 35 was

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<sup>446</sup> Zakim, *To Build and Be Built*, 182–183.

<sup>447</sup> Zerubavel, *Desert*, 214.

incorporated into a folk song entitled *Y'esusum Midbar* from the twentieth century.<sup>448</sup>

*Y'esusum Midbar* strings together verse one from Isaiah 35 with half of verse six:

אִישׁוּם מִדְבָּר וְצִיָּה וְתִגַּל עֲרָבָה וְתִפְרַח פְּחֻבְצֻלָּת... כִּי־נִבְקְעוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר מַיִם וַיִּנְחָלִים בְּעֲרָבָה:

<sup>1</sup>The arid desert shall be glad, the wilderness shall rejoice and shall blossom like a rose...  
for waters shall burst forth in the desert, streams in the wilderness.

Isaiah's use of wilderness imagery has left its mark on a long-lasting discourse on homecoming and exile as evidenced by the prominence of the idea of making the desert bloom for the modern state of Israel. In the context of the early state of Israel, the transformation of the wilderness appears to apply to the concept of irrigating and making desert landscapes liveable within Israel which was an important element of Zionist discourse in the twentieth century.<sup>449</sup>

As mentioned earlier in Chapter Two, in Isaiah 35 the speaker wishes that the desert would bloom, and the chapter ends with a reference to the ransomed ones of the Lord returning to Zion.

Isa 35:1–2, 6, 10:

אִישׁוּם מִדְבָּר וְצִיָּה וְתִגַּל עֲרָבָה וְתִפְרַח פְּחֻבְצֻלָּת: פְּרֹחַם תִּפְרַח... אִזְּזוּ יְדֵלְגוּ כַּאֲיִל פֶּסֶם וְתִרְוֶן לְשׁוֹן אֶלֶם כִּי־נִבְקְעוּ  
בַּמִּדְבָּר מַיִם וַיִּנְחָלִים בְּעֲרָבָה... וַיִּפְדּוּנִי יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁבּוּן וַיָּבֵאוּ צִיּוֹן בְּרִנָּה וְשִׂמְחַת עוֹלָם עַל־רֵאשִׁים שְׂשׂוֹן וְשִׂמְחָה יִשְׂיִגוּ  
וַיָּבֵאוּ יָגוֹן וְאַנְחָה:

<sup>1</sup>The arid desert shall be glad, the wilderness shall rejoice and shall blossom like a rose. <sup>2</sup>It shall blossom abundantly... <sup>6</sup>Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the

<sup>448</sup> *Y'esusum Midbar* was composed by David Zahavi. See the arrangement by Alice Parker from 1995, "Y'susum Midbar - D. Zahavi arr. A Parker - HaZamir Chamber Choir," [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PztBJnk1Tk0&ab\\_channel=ZamirChoralFoundation](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PztBJnk1Tk0&ab_channel=ZamirChoralFoundation).

<sup>449</sup> See Zakim, *To Build and Be Built*, 2006.

dumb shall shout aloud; for waters shall burst forth in the desert, streams in the wilderness... <sup>10</sup>And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come with shouting to Zion, crowned with joy everlasting. They shall attain joy and gladness, while sorrow and sighing flee.

Scholars such as Scott have noted the similarities between Isaiah 35 and Second Isaiah, namely the way in which the wilderness functions between them.<sup>450</sup> I agree with Scott who suggests that the image of the desert blossoming connects Isaiah 35:1, 2 to Isaiah 41:19,<sup>451</sup> and that the theme of streams bursting forth in the desert connects Isaiah 35:6, 7 with 41:18; 43:19, 20 and 44:3.<sup>452</sup> Additionally, the theme of a “holy way” for the Lord is reminiscent of Isaiah 35:8 with Isaiah 40:3; 43:19 and 49:11.<sup>453</sup> Regardless of whether one attributes chapter 35 as belonging to the corpus that became Second Isaiah, or as the basis for much of Second Isaiah’s inspiration, Scott’s observations about the similarities between Second Isaiah and Isaiah 35 are insightful.

The image of the desert blooming has enjoyed a particularly rich afterlife, and one example which demonstrates this is found in Yehuda Amichai’s poem. He revisits this image of the desert blooming, and it is described using the same verbal root (פרח “to blossom/bloom”) in his poem “Jews in the Land of Israel.” This poem explicitly relates the motif of transforming the wilderness with the experiences of Jewish communities immigrating to Israel in the second stanza (lines eleven to sixteen).

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<sup>450</sup> B. Y. Scott, *The Relation of Isaiah, Chapter 35, to Deutero-Isaiah*, *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 52 (1936): 178–191 (191).

<sup>451</sup> Scott, *The Relation of Isaiah*, 186.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>453</sup> *Ibid.*

מה אנו עושים כאן בשובנו עם הכאב הזה,

הגעגועים יבשו עם הבצות,

המדבר פורח לנו וילדינו יפים.

אפילו שברי אניות, אשר טבעו בדרך,

הגיעו לחוף הזה,

אפילו רוחות הגיעו. לא כל המפרשים.

What are we doing, coming back here with this pain? Our longings were drained together with the swamps, the desert blooms for us, and our children are beautiful. Even the wrecks of ships that sunk on the way reached this shore, even winds did. Not all the sails.<sup>454</sup>

The desert does bloom for Amichai's implied reader, and the mention of children provides a glimmer of hope in comparison to the mention of "all the sails" that failed to reach the shore. However, there is an implicit contrast between the blossoming of the desert, the drainage of the swamp and the way in which Jewish communities in this poem are described as irrigated by the spilled blood of circumcision.

The pain which the speaker refers to in this poem is caused by circumcision. They do not allude to the covenant of circumcision made between Abraham and God in Genesis 17, but rather to the narrative of Dinah and the Shechemites (in Genesis 34) in stanza one (lines eight to ten).

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<sup>454</sup> My translation is based on Bloch's but with several changes, as such some passages are identical to hers. In other parts I have tried to render the Hebrew more literally. The original Hebrew is taken from this edition: Yehuda Amichai, *Ve-Lo 'al menath li-zkor* (Yerushalayim: Shoken, 1971), 13–14. For Hanna Bloch's translation see, Yehuda Amichai, *The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, ed. and trans. Chana Bloch, 2nd ed. Literature of the Middle East (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2013).

ברית המילה עושה לנו,

כמו בחמש, בפרשת שכם ובני יעקב,

בהיותינו כואבים כל חיינו.

The covenant of circumcision does it to us, as in the Chumash, in the weekly Torah portion about Shechem and the sons of Jacob, so that we go on hurting all our lives.

In Genesis 34, the pain caused by circumcision is part of a ploy to incapacitate the Shechemites so that Simeon and Levi could slay the men and plunder the city to avenge their sister Dinah. The biblical narrative of Genesis 34 emphasises how circumcision, which increasingly became a kind of marker of identity for Jewish communities in antiquity,<sup>455</sup> can be initially paralysing and opens the practitioners up to vulnerability, and how it can also be weaponized as it is in Genesis 34. Hence, the pain which the writer refers to and which is *brought back* to the Israel upon immigration in the first three lines of the poem.

אנחנו שוכחים מנין באנו. שמותינו

היהודיים מן הגולה מגלים אותנו

ומעלים זכר...

We forget where we came from. Our Jewish names from the exile reveal us, and bring back the memory of...

The spilled blood of circumcision is explicitly related to the experience of displacement in this poem, and the difficulties that Jewish communities encountered through their

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<sup>455</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Abraham: The Narrative of a Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2015), 102.

marginalisation throughout history. This pain also becomes an identifying factor for the speaker of the poem. There is a tension between the prosperity of the desert blossoming and the past for Jewish communities as is presented in the first lines of the poem.<sup>456</sup> Despite the beautiful children in number and the desert blooming, the final stanza of the poem (consisting of three lines) reflects the anxieties of first/second generation immigrants,<sup>457</sup> as well as the difficulty or inability in letting go of that pain which was such a fundamental aspect of the speaker's conception of their past.

דמ שפוך איננו שרשי אילנות,

אך הוא הקרוב להם ביותר,

שיש לבני האדם.

Spilled blood is not the roots of trees, but it is the closest thing that human beings have.<sup>458</sup>

Overall, Amichai's poem is an example where the "transformation of the wilderness" motif continues to relate to the theme of exile and homecoming, as it also does in the book of Isaiah. The same conceptual metaphor that was employed in Isaiah, that is "people are plants," here describes how the writer perceives Jewish communities surviving the trauma and devastation that results from displacement. Unlike Isaiah's branches or stumps which

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<sup>456</sup> In the opening lines, we have a description of locations associated with the diaspora in Europe, such as "Medieval cities" with "lots of red." The colour palette of the poem shifts later, when the desert/and or Israel is described as a "dark land" with "yellow shadows" that pierce the eyes of those who look upon it.

<sup>457</sup> Yehuda Amichai immigrated to Israel from Germany with his family in 1936 at the age of 12. Chana Bloch, 1996 foreword to *The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, xv-xvi. Odeh notes that scholars have generally placed "Amichai's aesthetic legacy within a sort of apolitical and ahistorical paradigm," but they argue that this does not take into account aspects of his biography nor the portrayal of Jerusalem and Palestinians within his poetry. See Tayseer Abu Odeh, "The Politics of Yehuda Amichai's Aesthetic Camouflage: Jerusalem and the Settler-Colonial Gaze," *The Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 21 (2022): 204–225 (208).

<sup>458</sup> Bloch's translation renders the phrase "that human beings have" as "we have." The emendation is not to suggest a more universal reading, but to render the Hebrew more literally.

continue to sprout despite devastation due to God's divine providence, in Amichai's poem it is spilled blood that irrigates Jewish communities. Homecoming stands in tension with the persistence of spilled blood as the "roots" of the trees, and the pain is still carried despite the change in location. Much like how Isaiah's poetics concerning homecoming and exile does not present homecoming as a closed narrative, but also highlights the importance of the transformation of the people, Amichai's poem too continues this discourse by invoking Isaiah's "transformation of the wilderness" motif in a way that destabilizes a positive closure to the narrative of "exile."

Although it is more likely that Amichai's use of Isaiah is intended to be ironic, both Second Isaiah and 1QS have open-ended poetics towards homecoming. Second Isaiah's poetic oracles with their highly rhetorical language remained relevant for communities who did not return to the land, as well as those who did return. The metaphorical nature of these poetic oracles generated interpretations that applied to communities in a variety of situations, and this was demonstrated in 1QS's interpretation of Isaiah 40:3. All three texts discussed in this chapter; the book of Isaiah, 1QS, and Yehuda Amichai's poem, have complex perspectives on homecoming and exile that offer open narratives of exile as opposed to closed ones.

### **Chapter Three Conclusion**

As noted earlier in the section entitled "The Wilderness Motif," it has been noted by scholars that the wilderness can be a place of displacement as well as origins, a place of transformation, revelation, and also of punishment and destruction. The wilderness is at once the "*nonplace*" and the "*counter-place*" in different contexts.<sup>459</sup> Even in the book of Lamentations in Chapter One, it was observed that the wilderness carried negative

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<sup>459</sup> Zerubavel notes that the desert emerged as a "complex and fluid symbolic landscape, alternating between its functions as the *nonplace* and the *counter-place* within different contexts." Zerubavel, *Desert*, 13.



connotations that represented the people's marginalization, their separation from God, divine disfavour towards the people, and a destitute state of punishment and suffering. Chapters Two and Three have discussed how the transformation of the wilderness and God's guidance through it in Second Isaiah metaphorically applied to the people themselves. This does not mean that Second Isaiah was not interested in the nation and cult's restoration, and of the ingathering of the *golah*, but that Second Isaiah does not suggest that physical homecoming is the only way to please the divine in light of the exile. Consequently, the more emphatically metaphorical interpretation of Isaiah's poetry in 1QS and Amichai's poem is not an imposition onto the "failed" prophecies of Isaiah, but these later texts are building upon Isaiah's own open-ended poetics of exile.

Second Isaiah and its reception in 1QS demonstrates the dialectical tension present in references to the wilderness in ancient Jewish texts. The wilderness in texts such as Lamentations and especially Second Isaiah, plays an important role in how texts approach this dialectic of exile and return in a closed or open manner. The way in which 1QS interprets Isa 40:3 as the study of the law even has it echoes in texts that are unrelated to it further in history that highlight the link between exile, wilderness, suffering, and closeness with the divine and divine revelation. For example, the poetry of Edmond Jabès illustrates this relationship between exile, wilderness, and connection to the divine.

“If God spoke in the desert it was to deprive His word of roots, so that the creature should be His privileged bond. We shall make our souls into a hidden oasis,’ said Reb Abravanel.”<sup>460</sup>

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<sup>460</sup> For more of his writing and poetry see Edmond Jabès, *From the Book to the Book: An Edmond Jabès Reader*, trans. Rosemarie Waldrop (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press), 167. The poetry of Jabès addressed topics such as exile, diaspora, writing, as well as Jewish identity more generally. See Ezrahi's monograph for several discussions concerning his writing e.g., *Booking Passage*, 9–11.

Overall, ancient Jewish texts have a place in the discourse that Ezrahi speaks of regarding “open” and “closed” narratives of exile. As noted in the conclusion to Chapter One, Ezrahi suggests that there is a paradox concerning Jewish identity where Zion and exile form different ends of a spectrum as “organizing principles of the Jewish imagination.”<sup>461</sup> Ezrahi writes that Zionist alternatives appear to offer closure to the diaspora “narrative of exile”: and she asks “How do closure and containment compete with open-endedness to provide narrative possibilities in a culture newly obsessed with boundaries, magnetized by the soil and by the sheer pull of gravity?”<sup>462</sup> Yehuda Amichai’s poem displayed ambivalence towards the narrative of “closure” and “containment” that homecoming could offer, with the experience of displacement being an intimate part of how he conceives of Jewish identity within the poem.

דמ שפוך איננו שרשי אילנות,

אך הוא הקרוב להם ביותר,

שיש לבני האדם.

Spilled blood is not the roots of trees, but it is the closest thing that human beings have.

Moreover, in the first line of stanza two, it is clear that pain is brought *back* into the land, and it is not resolved by return alone.

מה אנו עושים כאן בשובנו עם הכאב הזה,

What are we doing, coming back here with this pain?

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<sup>461</sup> Ezrahi, *Booking Passage*, 235.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid.

In chapters Two and Three, I suggested that two ancient examples, Second Isaiah and its reception in 1QS, present an open-ended poetics towards exile and homecoming. What is central to all three examples (Second Isaiah, 1QS, and “Jews in the Land of Israel”) is that they reflect upon how one can respond to exile and displacement, whether it is physical or metaphorical in nature. 1QS makes it clear that a literal “way” is perhaps not what the speakers in Isaiah 40 are primarily interested in, and I argued that this is the case for Second Isaiah itself. For 1QS, it is a way of life shaped by the study of divine teaching (*Midrash Hatorah*). Yehuda Amichai’s poem discusses the physical journey of homecoming and nation building, but the physical homecoming does not change the past or resolve the problems of the present or future. While the use of the book of Isaiah in Amichai’s poem is likely ironic, this irony becomes double edged if one considers the way in which Chapter Two explored how Second Isaiah has a more nuanced engagement with exile.

1QS and Yehuda Amichai’s poem not only interpret Isaiah but function as readers of the text by demonstrating how one might respond to the dialogue that Isaiah 40 begins on the issue of exile and homecoming. I suggest that Landy’s assertion that in Isaiah 40:1–11, “the goal is also the journey, both fixed and mobile”<sup>463</sup> is helpful for understanding 1QS’s engagement with Isaiah, as well as Amichai’s poem’s approach to homecoming. All three texts function as readers of each other because the later interpretations highlight, and build upon, the absences and struggles with homecoming and exile present in the book of Isaiah.

The following chapters will focus on the book of Esther to explore the way in which exile and diaspora, which as noted in the introduction can overlap with one another, impacted the composition of Esther, the versions of Esther in antiquity, and the Joseph narrative. Part II considers whether these texts present an open or closed poetics of exile and diaspora by

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<sup>463</sup> Landy, “The Ghostly Prelude,” 334.

employing the insights of refugee, gender, and postcolonial studies. Chapters Four and Five will consider another aspect of how ancient Jewish narratives and their interpretation in antiquity demonstrated an open-ended poetics towards exile and diaspora in antiquity.

## Part II: The Poetics of Exile and Diaspora in the Book(s) of Esther

The following chapters will focus on how the book of Esther, its interpretation in antiquity, and the Joseph narrative in Genesis present an open-ended poetics concerning exile and diaspora. Being firmly situated in the diaspora, the book of Esther, and the many versions and interpretations of the book of Esther in antiquity, reflect a valuable contribution to how exile and diaspora as concepts shaped the poetics of ancient Jewish literature. In the introduction to this thesis, it was noted that exile and diaspora were used synonymously in many ancient Jewish texts.<sup>464</sup> This derives from the fact that both exile and diaspora can be involuntary and can also be forms of punishment, and also that a long-standing aftereffect of the Babylonian exile was that many diaspora communities continued to live outside the land of Judah, so the two terms are not always easily separated. As Levenson notes regarding the book of Esther, for many ancient Jews exile *became* diaspora,<sup>465</sup> and both marginalization and a lack of agency were part of these experiences. The narratives of Esther and Joseph address some of the anxieties and marginalization experienced by displaced people and communities and this is demonstrated through the characterisation of protagonists such as Esther, Mordecai, and Joseph. These narratives also present an open-ended poetics of exile and diaspora that imagines life outside the land in ways that do not require physical homecoming as a resolve.

In contrast with the emphasis on the divine word and the divine's power to rescue the people in Second Isaiah, or the emphasis on studying divine teaching in 1QS, the book of Esther presents divine providence as hidden or behind the scenes, but the community nonetheless survive and live more safely in the diaspora as a result of the efforts of diaspora heroines/heroes such as Esther and Joseph. Overall, the way in which these characters are

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<sup>464</sup> Scott, "Exile," 184.

<sup>465</sup> Jon D. Levenson, *Esther: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 15.

portrayed shows how the versions of the book of Esther reflect the diversity of literary responses to exile, and the ensuing diaspora, in a way that has a particularly open-ended poetics of exile and diaspora. The characterisation of the protagonists in the Hebrew versions of the Esther and Joseph narratives suggests that these narratives are closer in time to the initial displacement, and to how the community addressed these concerns through storytelling. Later on in antiquity, the LXX and the AT reimagine the character of Esther in ways that align with the influence of Hellenistic literature. In the case of the Tg. Sheni which is an Aramaic translation and interpretation, displacement itself becomes woven into the context and interpretation of stories such as the book of Esther. This contextualisation of Esther's narrative does not imply that the diaspora or exile are antithetical to Jewish identity or need to be resolved through homecoming, but rather imply that displacement is part of Jewish history and identity. Therefore, both the Hebrew version of Esther and its interpretations in antiquity provide different examples of how ancient Jewish literature contains open-ended poetics concerning exile and diaspora.

Chapter Four discusses the deceptive and subversive tactics which characterize Esther and Joseph's approach to life in the diaspora in order to gain security for their communities, and how both characters are considerably "feminized." The insights of gender and refugee studies, as well as postcolonial criticism highlight how the marginalization of the diaspora experience is expressed in the book of Esther and the Joseph narrative. In these examples there is an overlap between deceptive and subversive behaviour of characters with their feminization and subordination. The interaction between feminization and subordination is not only contained to the characters themselves. Rather, these stories also reflect a more distant view of the divine's involvement in the people's plight which has been noted by previous scholarship. The more distant perspective on divine providence offers another response to the kinds of laments offered back in the book of Lamentations that were

discussed in Chapter One, and the response is quite different to how Second Isaiah in chapters Two and Three emphasizes divine guidance and the divine's ability to transform the wilderness that is exile into hospitable terrain. Therefore, this chapter will consider how the exile and ensuing diaspora have significantly shaped not only Esther and Joseph's presentations, but also the perspective on divine providence in these narratives.

Chapter Five considers in more detail the versions of Esther in antiquity, in particular the Aramaic translation and interpretation known as Tg. Sheni, to explore how displacement for Jewish communities appears to be woven into past narratives to contextualise the narrative of Esther. Rather than diaspora life being presented as a form of rupture and as antithetical to Jewish identity, this chapter explores how displacement is presented as an important aspect of Jewish communities' past.

## Chapter 4: Deception, Subversion, and Femininity in the Book of Esther

The narrative of Esther and her uncle Mordecai's rescue of the Jewish communities in Ahasuerus's kingdom has been described by Jon Levenson as "the narrative of the transformation of the *exile* into the *Diaspora*."<sup>466</sup> Key to this transformation appears to be the presentation of the characters identity, which is also something that Levenson comments upon in the same paragraph quoted above:

"Though we cannot be certain of either its date or its place of composition, it would seem reasonable to assume that the book of Esther is a legacy of Persian Jewry and reflects a stratum of society with a very different understanding of Jewishness from that of comparable literature. This is a stratum that has come to terms with diaspora, and, indeed, the book of Esther can be read as the narrative of the transformation of the *exile* into the *Diaspora*."<sup>467</sup>

From this perspective, the book of Esther demonstrates a considerably different understanding of Jewish identity in contrast to comparable texts or at least marks a change in terms of how Jewish identity can be represented. I want to suggest that what is notable about Esther's presentation in the Hebrew version, as well as in the narrative of Joseph, is the open-ended nature to the diasporic experience. Furthermore, the comparison between the stories of Joseph and Esther in the MT highlights the intersectionality between questions of gender and power in settings such as a diaspora. The intersectionality between gender and power in these examples presents an open narrative of exile as opposed to a closed one. The way in which these narratives address, or do not address, divine providence in the exile will also be

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<sup>466</sup> Levenson, *Esther*, 15

<sup>467</sup> *Ibid.*



considered, and how this contributes to the texts' open-ended poetics concerning exile and diaspora.

The relationship between changes in identity, exile, and diaspora can be illuminated by the insights of postcolonial criticism, as well as gender studies, that help shed light on the complex inner workings of marginalization and agency in texts composed by marginalized groups. The previous chapters of this thesis have considered texts that lament destruction and an absent God, but also texts that suggest that homecoming is possible and desirable, but moreover that God is present with the people at this time, and that things can be transformed positively from this point onwards. The interpretation of Second Isaiah in 1QS built firmly upon the metaphors and motifs in Isaiah that often described the positive transformation of the people's situation after the exile and renewed relationship with their god. The book of Esther when brought into dialogue with these texts and traditions offers a different response than that of Second Isaiah to the exile and lamentation found in the book of Lamentation. In the book of Esther in the Hebrew version, God remains hidden, but the community is still able to move forward in the diaspora.

The insights of some postcolonial critics help to demonstrate how Esther represents subversive tactics and behaviour as a mode of survival, and additionally, how this mode of survival also highlights the tension between the two sides of Esther's identity. The Hebrew version of the book of Esther demonstrates and complicates the construction of a "complicity-versus-resistance" approach to such unequal settings between groups in a society. Comparing the MT narrative of Esther with the narrative of Joseph from Genesis, the link between subversive tactics and femininity arises from the power dynamics in the narrative: Both characters rise in foreign courts but are also subject to objectification and harassment. These more fluid and complex identities are central to how Esther and Joseph

save their respective communities/family. Identity is not presented as dichotomous, in particular the Hebrew version of Esther appears to sympathise with their hybrid identities as a tool to preserve the community in the diaspora.

The presentation of Esther's more fluid or complex identity is related to the text's more open-ended perspective on the diaspora experience. While Second Isaiah contains images of the wilderness being transformed by God, in the book of Esther there is an example of a transformed person. Esther employs deceptive and subversive practices, straddling her group of origin and the dominant group in the narrative which dominates most of her life. Esther's liminal place between these two communities as demonstrated by her more fluid identity creates a way forward for the community in terms of survival.

Exilic, post-exilic, Second Temple, and Hellenistic texts are often seen as having an apologetic perspective towards the presentation of characters' allegiances and identity. One example of this is demonstrated in Maren Niehoff's discussion of the patriarch Joseph and how he is imagined in Second Temple and Hellenistic texts. Niehoff concludes in her monograph that the "aesthetic or literary dimension always remains overshadowed by some ideological agenda or other topical concerns. In this respect, Jewish literature differs from other cultures in Antiquity."<sup>468</sup> However, closer treatment of Jewish literature demonstrates that such a generalization does not encompass the poetics of ancient Jewish literature and obscures the complex inner workings of societies where there are dominant and subordinate groups, and how such dynamics impact the poetics of a text. The following two chapters on

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<sup>468</sup> Maren Niehoff, *The Figure of Joseph in Post-Biblical Jewish Literature*, *Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums* 16 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 145. Another example would be Chesnutt's treatment of the Hellenistic text *Joseph and Aseneth* where he suggests that the issue of intermarriage is the composer's main concern; cf. R. D. Chesnutt, *From Death to life: Conversion in Joseph and Aseneth* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), and *ibid.*, "When Aseneth met Joseph: A Late Antique Tale of The Biblical Patriarch and His Egyptian Wife," *Reconsidered*, *JBL* 119 (2000): 760–762.

the versions of Esther will therefore discuss how biblical texts, Second Temple, and Hellenistic Jewish literature, can tell a more nuanced narrative of how marginalization and displacement impact a texts' poetics.

In terms of how the Hebrew version relates to the LXX, AT, as well as the targumim to Esther, it is also not uncommon to find the language of agenda or apologetics to explain the differences that occur between them, such as the insertion of God as a character in the versions, as well as the increasing piety of Esther and Mordecai. However, input from postcolonial critics, as well as gender studies, reframes and challenges this assumption as will be demonstrated throughout this chapter. Moreover, these insights show how the versions of the book of Esther engage with questions of marginalization, identity, and God's presence outside of ancient Judea in nuanced ways.

### **The Narrativization of Trauma and the Book of Esther**

It is worth noting that the book of Esther has been critiqued for adding little to conversations about diaspora, marginalization, and identity. In Sugirtharajah's monograph on *The Bible and the Third World* they state that:

“The Book of Esther encourages largely a strategy of assimilation, endorses conformity and has little relevance for liberative purposes, or for that matter for the present-day diasporic communities who live in alien contexts seeking to negotiate an identity which will both celebrate their own ethnicities and embrace the cultural heritage of the foreign countries in which they are settled.”<sup>469</sup>

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<sup>469</sup> R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial, and Postcolonial Encounters* (Cambridge Core: Cambridge, 2001), 251–252.

Sugirtharajah's observation about the inability for a text such as Esther to facilitate the celebration of the identities of those of the marginalized group as well as of the foreign country (perhaps dominant group) is incongruent with the plot of the book of Esther in its ancient context. In its ancient context the narrative indeed functioned in this way to enable the celebration and survival of a marginalized culture.

Part I of this thesis considered whether the book of Lamentations, Second Isaiah, and 1QS demonstrated an open or closed poetics of exile, and Part II focuses on texts that latently have an open-ended perspective towards exile and diaspora, especially the Hebrew version of Esther and the Joseph narrative from Genesis. 1QS's engagement with the transformation of the wilderness motif and Isaiah's poetics of exile addressed in Chapter Three addressed a sense of marginalization within the land, where exile can also be a metaphorical state and the study of divine teaching is the way to move forward in light of this. The book of Esther and its interpretation in antiquity demonstrate another aspect of how ancient Jewish texts presented their audiences with open-ended poetics concerning exile and diaspora. The Hebrew versions of Esther and Joseph are unconcerned with homecoming, and more with surviving and thriving in the diaspora. Esther and Joseph's stories address the hopes and anxieties of displaced peoples, creating an open-ended poetics towards displacement in that their hybrid identities and the security they gain for their communities makes continued life in the diaspora possible.

In Part I, Lamentations, Second Isaiah, and 1QS contained tensions surrounding exile, and this was often manifested in terms of how the wilderness was both a place of punishment and exile from the divine, but also a place where the divine would come to the people, help them and transform them like the terrain and the plants associated with it. Lamentations in particular lacked resolve regarding homecoming and exile which is perhaps due to the fact

that it was composed shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem. What is found in the diaspora stories of Joseph and Esther is a similar lack of resolve that is found in Lamentations concerning exile and diaspora. Also, in Esther's narrative there is a complete lack of interest in homecoming, and there is no mention of the divine. While the wilderness that often represents exile in Second Isaiah and 1QS is positively transformed, texts such as Esther present a thoroughly open perspective on diaspora life, and it is not entirely clear how strong a role the divine plays in it. The versions in antiquity which will be discussed in this chapter and Chapter Five insert many references to the divine and the divine's power in history, but for this chapter it will be considered how the vulnerability of the diaspora heroines/heroes interacts with this more behind the scenes or ambivalent approach to divine providence as part of its poetics of exile and diaspora.

As noted in the introduction, scholars have researched the benefits that narrativizing traumas can produce for communities:

“By narrativizing trauma, communities of storytellers are offered a means by which to create a narrative that puts back together the pieces of the community that have fallen, including the ones that have torn apart the community's states of consciousness.”<sup>470</sup>

Visser, for example, highlights that there are “complex workings of trauma during colonization as well as in processes of self-construction under decolonization processes, in which complicity, guilt and agency are crucial issues.”<sup>471</sup> These complex constructions are also at work in the book of Esther and arguably the narrative of Joseph which shares many similarities and thematic overlaps with it. There is considerable overlap between their

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<sup>470</sup> Sarah Emanuel, “Trauma and Counter-Trauma in the Book of Esther: Reading the Megillah in the Face of the Post-Shoah Sabra,” *The Bible & Critical Theory* 13 (2017): 26–27.

<sup>471</sup> Irene Visser, “Trauma Theory and Postcolonial Literary Studies,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47 (2011): 270–282 (276).

experiences of marginalization, subordination, and apparent “femininity” which is a facet of the complex interworking that Visser discusses.

There is a precedent for approaching biblical texts as coming out of various colonial contexts including “Egyptian, Persian, Assyrian, Hellenistic and Roman...”<sup>472</sup> The protagonists Esther and Joseph, for example, are embedded in the foreign royal courts and employ subversive tactics in order to sway those in charge to act in their favour. The way in which Esther’s agency is portrayed among the versions of the narrative, for example, reflect how the aftereffects of displacement as a cultural trauma have impacted its composition.

Visser’s description of the process of self-construction under colonial settings provides helpful insights into some prominent themes within the narrative, such as deception and hiding. Subsequently, the following sections will explore how the insights from the disciplines discussed in this subsection illuminate aspects of the book of Esther, as well as its versions in antiquity.

### **Introducing the Versions of Esther**

This chapter focuses on the Hebrew version of Esther known to us through the MT. The Greek versions, that is the LXX and AT, will also be considered where relevant throughout this chapter. The book of Esther locates itself in the Persian empire under the rule of a highly exaggerated portrait of a Persian ruler, Ahasuerus (Xerxes I, 485-465 BCE).<sup>473</sup> The narrative is often described as a diaspora narrative in connection with the Joseph narrative and the narrative of Daniel, or more broadly as an example of diaspora literature. This is partly due to

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<sup>472</sup> Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 251.

<sup>473</sup> It is relevant to note that Ahasuerus has been identified with Xerxes I (485–465 B.C.), but the validity or strength of this argument does not have implications for my thesis. It is clear that there are different traditions at work in the versions of Esther in Hebrew and Greek. The LXX, for example, refers to him as Artaxerxes (Ἀρταξέρξης) which underpins this association with Xerxes I, whereas the AT reads Assyeros (Ἀσσυήρος).

its dating to the late Persian or perhaps early Hellenistic era, as well as due to its plot revolving around Jewish communities living outside the land after the exile. There remains debate as to whether the book of Esther derives from a Persian or a later Hellenistic context.<sup>474</sup> Some argue that the book was probably composed in the eastern diaspora around the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, while other scholars, such as Fox, are of the opinion that it is a Hellenistic work.<sup>475</sup> Due to the layered and complex transmission of texts, it is perhaps the case like many other examples of ancient Jewish literature that the versions of Esther that exist today bear the marks of the Persian and Hellenistic eras in ways that are not directly traceable in the current form. The book of Esther as a narrative likely came from the Persian era, but as one can see, there was considerable growth in the narrative's popularity in the Hellenistic era.

### **The Greek Versions (LXX and AT)**

The Greek versions of Esther, the LXX and the AT, contain six long passages that are not present in the MT tradition. These passages closely mirror one another in the Greek versions.<sup>476</sup> While there are a number of differences between these versions, the longer passages known as the Additions stand out significantly with regards to how the narrative itself is shaped.

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<sup>474</sup> It is worth noting that the way in which the Persians are described in the book of Esther coincides with the motifs mentioned by Greek historiographers, including Herodotus. Adele Berlin, for example, lists several motifs which overlap including “luxury, hierarchy, bureaucracy, wine drinking, the postal system, imperial law, bowing down, eunuchs, impalement, a royal garden, and a sexually virtuous queen.” Adele Berlin, “The Book of Esther and Ancient Storytelling,” *JBL* 120 (2001): 3–14 (10).

<sup>475</sup> Michael Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 139.

<sup>476</sup> While it is not possible to reconstruct its growth, there has been speculation that the book of Esther may have originally ended around 8:17 like the AT. Mapfeka, for example, suggests that the final chapters detailing the revenge of the Jewish communities against their attackers, and the tone of the later chapters more generally, seem out of place and put more focus on Purim. Tsaurayi Kudakwashe Mapfeka, *Esther in Diaspora: Toward an Alternative Interpretive Framework*, *BibInt* 178 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 17.

The LXX version of Esther can potentially be dated to the first century BCE.<sup>477</sup> Scholars such as Karen Jobes have dated the other Greek version of Esther, the AT, as potentially dating to the fourth century BCE.<sup>478</sup> But the dating of these traditions is not straightforward, and the relationship between the Greek versions and one another as well as the MT is also contentious. Below is a summary of the additions in the LXX version to demonstrate how they reshape the book of Esther in contrast with the MT tradition:

Addition A begins our narrative in the Greek versions; it contains Mordecai's foreboding dream of two dragons wrestling with one another, followed by the image of a spring that transforms into a river. It also implies that there will be impending war or conflict (cf. Add. A:16; and Add. A:6 in the AT). The people in the dream cry out<sup>479</sup> to God for assistance, and upon this Mordecai wakes up and does not understand his dream. He then proceeds to accidentally uncover a plot by two of the king's eunuchs who seek to assassinate the king, and Mordecai brings them to justice and is rewarded. In the AT and LXX, this addition is quite significant because it provides a rationale for why Haman sought to harm Mordecai and the Jews.

Add. A:17 (LXX)

καὶ ἦν Ἀμαν Ἀμαδάθου Βουγαῖος ἔνδοξος ἐνώπιον τοῦ βασιλέως, καὶ ἐζήτησεν  
κακοποιῆσαι τὸν Μαρδοχαῖον καὶ τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ὑπὲρ τῶν δύο εὐνούχων τοῦ βασιλέως.

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<sup>477</sup> Michael Fox, "Three Esthers," in *The Book of Esther in Modern Research*, ed. Sidnie White Crawford and Leonard J. Greenspoon (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 57.

<sup>478</sup> Karen H. Jobes, *The AT of Esther: Its Character and Relationship to the Masoretic Text*, SBL Dissertation Series 158 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1996).

<sup>479</sup> In the AT the narrator aligns themselves with the people and says that "we" cry out ("καὶ ἀνεβοήσαμεν πρὸς κύριον" Add. A:6).



But Haman son of Hamadathos, a Bougean, was highly esteemed by the king, and he sought to harm Mardochaios and his people because of the two eunuchs of the king.

And in the AT, there is a similar idea in Esth A:18/17.

Αμαν Αμαδάθου Μακεδόνα κατὰ πρόσωπον τοῦ βασιλέως, καὶ ἐζήτει ὁ Αμαν  
κακοποιῆσαι τὸν Μαρδοχαῖον καὶ πάντα τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ὑπὲρ τοῦ λελαληκέναι αὐτὸν τῷ  
βασιλεῖ περὶ τῶν εὐνούχων, διότι ἀνηρέθησαν.

And Haman was seeking to harm Mardochaios and all his people because of what he had said to the king concerning the eunuchs, because they had been executed.

It is after this point that the narrative of Esther begins as it does in the MT with Ahasuerus's many feasts which details Vashti's dismissal as his queen when she refuses to appear before him and the others at his feast.

Addition B is a decree from the king to the peoples explaining why he has agreed to do what Haman wants (which is to eliminate all the Jews in his kingdom).

Addition E is of a similar nature in that it is another decree from the king explaining why he has now granted the Jews the power to defend themselves. It also explains how he has come to a different view and no longer wants them to be eliminated (after Esther has pleaded for her people and implicated Haman).

Add. E: 17–21 (LXX)

καλῶς οὖν ποιήσετε μὴ προσχρησάμενοι τοῖς ὑπὸ Αμαν Αμαδάθου ἀποσταλεῖσιν  
γράμμασιν διὰ τὸ αὐτὸν τὸν ταῦτα ἐξεργασάμενον πρὸς ταῖς Σούσων πύλαις ἐσταυρῶσθαι  
σὺν τῇ πανοικίᾳ, τὴν καταξίαν τοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐπικρατοῦντος θεοῦ διὰ τάχους ἀποδόντος  
αὐτῷ κρίσιν, τὸ δὲ ἀντίγραφον τῆς ἐπιστολῆς ταύτης ἐκθέντες ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ μετὰ

παρρησίας ἔαν τοὺς Ἰουδαίους χρῆσθαι τοῖς ἑαυτῶν νομίμοις καὶ συνεπισχύειν αὐτοῖς, ὅπως τοὺς ἐν καιρῷ θλίψεως ἐπιθεμένους αὐτοῖς ἀμύνωνται τῇ τρισκαιδεκάτῃ τοῦ δωδεκάτου μηνὸς Ἀδαρ τῇ αὐτῇ ἡμέρᾳ· ταύτην γὰρ ὁ πάντα δυναστεύων θεὸς ἀντ' ὀλεθρίας τοῦ ἐκλεκτοῦ γένους ἐποίησεν αὐτοῖς εὐφροσύνην.

You will therefore do well not to carry out the letters sent by Haman son of Hamadathos, because he who did these things has been crucified at the gates of Susa with his whole household, since the God who prevails over all things has recompensed him quickly with the deserved judgment. And you will do well to post a copy of this letter publicly in every place and to allow the Judeans to live in accordance with their own precepts and to join in helping them in order that they might defend themselves against those who attack in the time of oppression, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, Adar, on that same day. For God, who rules over all things, has made this day to be a joy for his chosen race instead of a day of destruction for them.

In the AT there is a similar sentiment in its version of Addition E: 17–21.

καλῶς οὖν ποιήσατε μὴ προσέχοντες τοῖς προαπεσταλεμένοις ὑμῖν ὑπὸ Ἀμαν γράμμασιν διὰ τὸ καὶ αὐτὸν τὸν τὰ τοιαῦτα ἐργασάμενον πρὸς ταῖς Σούσων πύλαις ἐσταυρῶσθαι αὐτῷ τὴν καταξίαν δίκην τοῦ τὰ πάντα κατοπεύοντες ἀεὶ κριτοῦ. ἐκτεθήτω δὲ τὸ ἀντίγραφον τῆς ἐπιστολῆς ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ χρῆσθαί τε τοὺς Ἰουδαίους τοῖς ἑαυτῶν νόμοις καὶ ἐπισχύειν αὐτοῖς, ὅπως τοὺς ἐν καιρῷ θλίψεως ἐπιθεμένους αὐτοῖς ἀμύνωνται. ἐκρίθη δὲ ὑπὸ τῶν κατὰ τὴν βασιλείαν Ἰουδαίων ἄγειν τὴν τεσσαρεσκαιδεκάτην τοῦ μηνός, ὅς ἐστιν Ἀδαρ, καὶ τῇ πεντεκαιδεκάτῃ ἑορτάσαι, ὅτι ἐν αὐταῖς ὁ παντοκράτωρ ἐποίησεν αὐτοῖς σωτηρίαν καὶ εὐφροσύνην.

Therefore, do well not to pay attention to the letters previously sent to you by Haman, because he himself who did such things has been crucified at the gates of Susa, since the

Judge who always sees all things has recompensed him with the deserved penalty. So let a copy of this letter be posted in every place, so the Judeans might both live by their own laws and strengthen them in order that they might defend themselves against those who attack in a time of oppression. And it has been decided by the Judeans throughout the kingdom to observe the fourteenth day of the month, which is Adar, and to hold a feast on the fifteenth, because on those days the Almighty has made for them deliverance and rejoicing.

While some of the Additions developed in the Hellenistic era may have originally been written in Hebrew, Additions E and B<sup>480</sup> were almost certainly composed in Greek because their style and vocabulary are indicative of other Greek writing styles.<sup>481</sup>

Addition C contains the prayers of Esther and Mordecai asking God to save the people from Haman's plans. It takes place after Mordecai requests Esther to go before the king which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Addition D embellishes Esther's approach to the king where God directly intervenes to ensure that she is not killed by him when she approaches because she was uninvited. God intervenes by changing the king's attitude from anger to kindness so that she is successful.

Lastly, Addition F contains the interpretation of Mordecai's dream where it becomes clear that the images in the dream foreshadow the events of the narrative itself.

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<sup>480</sup> These additions include the two royal letters which elaborate on Haman's first decree which follows 3:13, and on the letter written by the king clarifying that Jewish communities could defend themselves and follows 8:12).

<sup>481</sup> Carey A. Moore, *Daniel, Esther, and Jeremiah: The Additions: A New Translation*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 154. Clines also thinks that Additions B and E are "patently" Greek. See David J. A. Clines, *The Esther Scroll: The Story of the Story*, JSJSup 30 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1984), 69.

Scholars have had varying views on how these versions relate to one another: Emmanuel Tov suggests that the AT is either an “inner-Greek rewriting” of the narrative, or that it is a Greek translation of either a Hebrew or Aramaic rewriting of Esther’s narrative.<sup>482</sup> While he suggests that the AT had access to a Hebrew or Aramaic text that was different from the MT, it essentially revised what is the LXX traditions towards whatever Hebrew or Aramaic text it also had.<sup>483</sup> On the other hand, scholars such as Jobes, Clines, Fox, and Moore argue that the AT<sup>484</sup> derives from an independent tradition which is earlier than the MT.<sup>485</sup> According to Mapfeka and echoing Tov, scholars thought that the AT was initially a revision of the LXX (B-Text) because some of the earliest manuscripts contained the same Additions that are also found in the LXX;<sup>486</sup> the text is also more concise than the LXX in general which might suggest that a process of editing or consolidation occurred. It has also been suggested that the style and vocabulary of the Additions aligns more with the LXX than the AT. Therefore, it is likely that the Additions were added to the AT at a much later stage.<sup>487</sup> Therefore, the AT tradition in its current form is also multi-layered like the LXX and MT traditions.

The versions of Esther differ significantly enough to say that each has its own Esther.<sup>488</sup>

Clines, for example, suggests that the AT focuses more on the conflict between the two

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<sup>482</sup> Emanuel Tov, “The ‘Lucianic’ Text of the Canonical and Apocryphal Sections of Esther: A Rewritten Biblical Book,” in *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint*, ed. Emanuel Tov, *VTSup* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 535–548 (536). Tov thinks that the AT is clearly a revision of the LXX. See Tov, “The ‘Lucianic’ Text,” 538.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*, 539.

<sup>484</sup> The AT is preserved in five different manuscripts. For more details about the manuscripts see *ibid.*, 535.

<sup>485</sup> See Jobes, *The AT of Esther*, 223; Michael Fox, *The Redaction of the Books of Esther* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1991), 14–17; and Carey A. Moore, *Esther*, AB 7/2 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), lxii.

<sup>486</sup> Scholars such as Kristin De Troyer and Emanuel Tov argue that the AT is a recension of the LXX; cf. Kristin De Troyer, *The End of the Alpha Text of Esther: Translation and Narrative Technique in MT 8:1-17, LXX 8:1-17, and AT 7:14-41.*, rev. and updated ed., SCS 48 (Atlanta, GA: SBL 2000), 279-349 and Emanuel Tov, “The ‘Lucianic’ Text,” 535–548.

<sup>487</sup> Mapfeka, *Esther in Diaspora*, 18.

<sup>488</sup> See the essay by Fox where he explores how Esther is characterised differently in the three versions, “Three Esthers,” 50–76.

courtiers (Haman and Mordecai) which initiates the threat to the Jewish communities in the first place. Additionally, Lacoque notes that the AT places more focus on Mordecai than Esther; for example, Haman's house is given to Mordecai, not to Esther (Esth 8:15). Furthermore, in the AT, the edicts are written to the whole empire from the king and Mordecai, not from Esther.<sup>489</sup> Fox thinks that the AT's Esther is in line with critical feminists readings of the MT where Esther is a "pliant tool" of Mordecai who is asked explicitly to charm the king.<sup>490</sup> Moreover, the narrator describes her as fearful during the second feast when she makes her request to the king (AT 8:2), and she does not participate in writing any decrees or appear to make any plans.<sup>491</sup> Esther in the MT exerts more agency in comparison with this version, and arguably in comparison with the LXX as well.

The six additional passages that are found in the LXX and the AT reshape the narrative significantly. The influence of Hellenistic romance novels from which many additions borrow features, shapes Esther's characterisation considerably in the LXX. Fox notes that Addition D, which embellishes on Esther's approach to the king, makes her into a "stereotypical Victorian damsel or the heroine of a Gothic novel" as she faints twice during this encounter.<sup>492</sup> He suggests that the LXX, by making Esther appear frail, entails that Esther's behaviour is not perceived as an overt threat to the king. This "deliberate use of feminine frailty" in Fox's view becomes different from the "the obligatory courtly submissiveness and the tactical self-effacement that the MT Esther, like everyone else in the Persian court, must employ."<sup>493</sup> The Additions align the narrative with Hellenistic romances by showing the character to have "overwhelming emotions," including episodes of fainting,

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<sup>489</sup> André Lacoque, "The Different Versions of Esther," *BibInt* 7 (1999): 301–322 (320).

<sup>490</sup> Fox, "Three Esthers," 57.

<sup>491</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>492</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

which highlights the frailty of female characters, and also the Additions emphasize the piety of the heroes/heroines.<sup>494</sup>

The narrator in the MT does not condemn or protest the constraints under which Esther operates. On the other hand, it seems that the LXX wants Esther to observe these constraints “as a matter of propriety,” and is recontextualising Esther for an audience so that the character’s behaviour is not misinterpreted for brazenness.<sup>495</sup> Fox rightly concludes that Additions C and D, which will be alluded to further in the chapter, make Esther’s character “more pious and less independent than the Esther of the MT.”<sup>496</sup> In the AT, Esther is similarly portrayed as more pious and less independent in general.

Chronologically, many scholars such as Halvorson-Taylor, Jobes, Clines, Fox, and Moore think that the AT represents an earlier form of the narrative than the MT.<sup>497</sup> Halvorson-Taylor, for example, argues that this development can be traced by how the motif of secrecy and deception is developed throughout the versions, arguing that it occurs to overcome some interpretive issues or holes in the plot already noted in the AT.<sup>498</sup> The technique and assumptions between the evolution of manuscript traditions means that there is division about this topic, and I am inclined to disagree that the AT represents an earlier form of the narrative than the Hebrew MT. One issue with this is that the AT is hypothetically reconstructed at

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<sup>494</sup> There are some similarities to the Hellenistic novel Chariton which are discussed by Fox in the essay, “Three Esthers,” 59.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>497</sup> Kirsten de Troyer’s more recent research has shed some light of this issue. She suggests that the AT is indeed a revision of the Old Greek (LXX). There are instances where the revisions attempt to get closer to the original Hebrew text when it is in common with the *Vetus Latina*, or the Georgian second versions. The AT was a source of the Hexapla which entails that it must be a revision of the Old Greek. Kirsten de Troyer presented her research on, “Bestowing Honour and Wearing the Appropriate Clothes: The Book of Esther in Greek,” paper presented at the *Seminar on Jewish History and Literature in the Graeco-Roman Period*’s LXX Forum (Oxford University, 04/05/2021).

<sup>498</sup> Halvorson-Taylor, “Secrets and Lies: Secrecy Notices (Esther 2:10, 20) and Diasporic Identity in the Book of Esther”, *JBL* 131 (2012): 467–485 (469).

various stages to arrive at a version that could pass as earlier than the MT than is actually presented in the existing manuscript traditions. For example, currently within its “core” (aside from the additions which mirror the LXX’s additions) the AT contains references to God which the writers/editors of a version like the MT would have had to omit, such as the following example:

AT 4:11

καὶ ἀπέστειλεν ἡ βασίλισσα λέγουσα Παραγγείλατε θεραπείαν καὶ δεήθητε τοῦ θεοῦ ἐκτενωῶς· καὶ γὰρ καὶ τὰ κοράσια μου ποιήσομεν οὕτως, καὶ εἰσελεύσομαι πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα ἄκλητος, εἰ δέοι καὶ ἀποθανεῖν με.

Then the queen sent saying, “Proclaim a religious service, and petition **God** earnestly, and I and my girls will do likewise. And I will go to the king uninvited, even if it be necessary that I die.”

There appears to be no precedence for this kind of omission. In general, as texts are received chronologically references to the divine seem to be inserted and not removed, and characters become more pious in a way that reflects changes in religious practices (such as the importance of prayer in Second Temple and subsequent ages). This coincides with the way in which Esther and Mordecai are portrayed in the Greek versions and the targumim.

In addition to these references to the divine, the AT follows suit with the LXX in terms of prioritising Mordecai as a character, as well by including God as an active character in the narrative. Both these tendencies are indicative of later interpretations of Esther where Mordecai’s importance is increased, and God takes on a more significant role in the narrative. Therefore, if elements of the AT could represent an older strand of the narrative, then those strands are deeply edited and embedded into a version of the narrative that is at first sight

considerably later than the version of the narrative preserved in the MT. Nonetheless, each version is best treated as its own literary work, with the potential contention that something similar to the MT in Hebrew was likely the inspiration for the LXX version.

### **The Book of Esther as a Diaspora Narrative**

The book of Esther follows Esther and Mordecai's rise to success in a foreign court as members of the *golah* community in Babylon, and how they rescue their community from annihilation. As noted earlier, Bernard Levenson describes the book of Esther as "the narrative of the transformation of the *exile* into the *Diaspora*."<sup>499</sup> But how exactly does Esther accomplish this and how does this affect the text's poetics? What underlies Levenson's assessment of this transformation is the lack of interest in homecoming found in the MT version of Esther, as there is no mention of Jerusalem/Zion or to returning from the exile. In comparison to Second Isaiah that is frequented by images of restored Zion and of God guiding people back to her (or some undetermined location), the book of Esther in the MT shows no interest in homecoming and does not once mention God.

In the previous chapters it was discussed that Second Isaiah had an open-ended poetics concerning exile and homecoming, and that the metaphors and motifs were often employed to describe the transformation of the people's relationship with Yahweh. Although homecoming was an important topic, it was not the only measure to demonstrate the restoration of the relationship with the deity or the deity's power. The narrative of Esther on the other hand appears to be uninterested in Zion's restoration and focuses instead on the tension in the narrative between the survival or destruction of diaspora communities. In this narrative an

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<sup>499</sup> Levenson, *Esther*, 15.



individual who is seemingly able to exist successfully in both societies provides a way forward and saves the diaspora community from annihilation.

A common feature of diaspora narratives is that the hero/heroine saves their people with no or little involvement from God.<sup>500</sup> Overall, the stories of Joseph, Esther, and Daniel all feature a Jewish protagonist who lives outside of their homeland, then rises to a privileged position in a foreign court.<sup>501</sup> The stories of Joseph, Daniel, and Esther are often described as diaspora narratives because they revolve around the experience of being in the diaspora, particularly, being Jewish and having a role in a foreign court.<sup>502</sup> Even if the stories themselves are not set during the diaspora (such as the Joseph narrative) they still show the influence of that historical experience of displacement in their composition. For example, Susan Niditch notes that “underdog” tales,<sup>503</sup> in which both stories partake, unsurprisingly address feelings of insecurity.<sup>504</sup> The book of Esther indeed deals with life after exile, where

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<sup>500</sup> Martien Halvorson-Taylor, “Displacement and Diaspora in Biblical Narrative,” in *The Oxford Handbook to Biblical Narrative*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 498–506 (499).

<sup>501</sup> Talmon notes that “Mordecai and Haman indeed resemble Joseph, Nehemiah and Daniel, expatriated Jews who held office at foreign courts.” Shemaryahu Talmon, “‘Wisdom’ in the Book of Esther,” *VT* 13 (1963): 419–455 (435). Moreover, I agree with Niditch who argues that the “wisdom” genre elements those other scholars detect in Esther might be better deemed folkloric. For example, many of the features Talmon identifies such as the “ad hoc” mentality of the text, the lack of historical details, and undeveloped characterizations are also characteristic of folklore writ large. Susan Niditch, *A Prelude to Biblical Folklore: Underdogs and Tricksters* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 44–45.

<sup>502</sup> The book of Judith and Tobit could also be included in this list, however (when discussing the MT) the stories of Daniel, Joseph, and Esther are frequently grouped together. A significant difference in terms of the content between Tobit and Judith with the three MT diaspora narratives is that the three MT narratives are also “court tales” where the locus of the drama unfolds in a foreign court, whereas this is not the case with Judith or Tobit.

<sup>503</sup> Additionally, she argues that “underdog” tales with “trickster” characters or protagonists comfort their audiences in a more specific way: They suggest that people should accept their fortune, and that even if they fail, they will survive if they use their wits. Niditch, *Underdogs*, 48.

<sup>504</sup> Moreover, Niditch observes that “trickster” tales are highly critical of authority and she identifies features of Esther that are reminiscent of such tales. Niditch does acknowledge that, however, the book of Esther has a much more accepting attitude towards the authority of the Persian court despite its affinities with trickster tales. *Ibid.*

the Jews are members of a minority group.<sup>505</sup> Subsequently, postcolonial criticism has much to offer an analysis of the narrative in order to account for the power dynamics at play in the text, and how the behaviour of the characters may reflect the historical influence of displacement upon a community.

The insights of Homi Bhabha are helpful in this regard because the hierarchical power structure and the subordinated situation of diaspora Jews creates corresponding circumstances in which there is a mix of “hybridity and liminality” with respect to the characters’ sense of loyalties and identities.<sup>506</sup> This mix of hybridity and liminality that is at work in Esther’s narrative contributes to its open-ended poetics concerning exile and diaspora because it presents characters who exist between the world of the dominant group, as well as the marginalized group. The tension between this liminality is not resolved by either complete assimilation or complete resistance to the other group. The construction of identity from this perspective is based on the intertwining of the “colonizer,” or dominant group, and the “colonized,” or subordinated group.<sup>507</sup> The benefit of this approach to texts inspired from settings where one group, often ethnic, has significant power over another is that it prevents the analyst from dichotomizing, or essentializing, how the characters’ identities are represented.<sup>508</sup> In short, such an approach allows us to describe the nuances of the literary composition as it is influenced by states of marginalization and displacement of which the diaspora stories of Joseph and Esther are examples.

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<sup>505</sup> Survival and life are navigated in an uncomfortable and marginal in-between state. Niditch describes this approach to survival as rooted “somewhere between co-option and self-respect and by holding to the conviction that to be wise and to be worthy are the same.” *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>506</sup> These are the relevant sections of Bhabha’s work, see Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 36–9, 21. See also Sugirtharajah’s use of Bhabha in *The Bible and the Third World*, 249.

<sup>507</sup> Bhabha, *Culture*, 36–9, 21; see also Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 249.

<sup>508</sup> Bhabha, *Culture*, 36–9, 21.

## Deception and Hiding in the Book of Esther

Esth 2:9

<sup>5</sup>איש יהודי הָיָה בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה וְשֵׁמוֹ מֶרְדֵּכַי בֶּן יָמִיר בֶּן־שְׁמִי בֶן־קִישׁ אִישׁ יְמִינִי: <sup>6</sup>אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָה מִירוּשָׁלַיִם עִם־הַגְּלָה אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָתָה עִם יְכָנְיָה מֶלֶךְ־יְהוּדָה אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָה נְבוּכַדְנֶאֶצַּר מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל: <sup>7</sup>וַיְהִי אִמּוֹן אֶת־הַדּוֹסָה הִיא אֶסְתֵּר בַּת־דָּדוֹ כִּי אִין לָהּ אָב וְאִם וְהַנְּעָרָה יִפְתֹּחַ־תְּאֵר וְטוֹבַת מְרָאָה וּבְמוֹת אֲבִיהָ וְאִמָּהּ לְקַחְהָ מֶרְדֵּכַי לֹו לְבַת: <sup>8</sup>וַיְהִי בְּהַשְׁמַע דְּבַר־הַמֶּלֶךְ וְנָתַן וְבַהֲקַבֵּץ נְעָרוֹת רַבּוֹת אֶל־שׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה אֶל־יַד הֶגֶי וְתִלְקַח אֶסְתֵּר אֶל־בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־יַד הֶגֶי שְׁמֵר הַנָּשִׁים: <sup>9</sup>וַתִּיטֵב הַנְּעָרָה בְּעֵינָיו וּתְשֹׂא תְּסֻד לְפָנָיו וַיִּבְהַל אֶת־תְּמָרוּקֶיהָ וְאֶת־מְנוֹתֶיהָ לְתַת לָהּ וְאֵת שְׁבַע הַנְּעָרוֹת הַרְאִיּוֹת לְתַת־לָהּ מִבֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּשְׁנָה וְאֶת־נְעָרוֹתֶיהָ לְטוֹב בֵּית הַנָּשִׁים: <sup>10</sup>לֹא־הִגִּידָה אֶסְתֵּר אֶת־עַמָּהּ וְאֶת־מִוְלַדְתָּהּ כִּי מֶרְדֵּכַי צָוָה עָלֶיהָ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִגִּיד:

<sup>5</sup>There was a Jewish man in the citadel, Shushan, and his name was Mordecai, son of Yamir, son of Shmi, son of Kish, a man of Benjamin. <sup>6</sup>Who had been exiled from Jerusalem with the exiles who were exiled with Jeconiah, king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babel drove into exile. <sup>7</sup>And he was fostering Hadassah, that is, Esther, the daughter of his uncle, because she had neither father nor mother. And the young woman was beautiful of form and beautiful of appearance. And when her father and her mother died Mordecai took her to himself as a daughter. <sup>8</sup>When the word of the king and his law were heard, and when many young women were gathered at the capital, Shushan, in the care of Hegei, then Esther was taken to the king's palace in the care of Hegei, the keeper of the women. <sup>9</sup>And the young woman pleased him and she elicited favour from him, so he hastened to give her cosmetics and her portions, and to give to her seven chosen young women from the king's palace. And he transferred her and her young women to the best position in the house of the women. <sup>10</sup>Esther did not reveal her people or her kindred because Mordecai commanded her not to reveal it.

The above passage contains the introduction to Esther's character in Esther 2, and it highlights already the relevant themes of deception, subversive behaviour, and its link to femininity. The following paragraphs will discuss how these themes suggest that Esther destabilizes the power structures in her narrative, and how this therefore contributes to her narrative having an open-ended poetics concerning exile and diaspora.

Firstly, Esther/Hadassah's two names<sup>509</sup> from a literary perspective highlight her hybrid or destabilized identity with one being of Hebrew origin and the other likely to be Persian in origin.<sup>510</sup> Later interpretations comment upon both of Esther's names and how they characterise her in ways that reflect a deep engagement with the Hebrew text. In the targumim, for example, her Hebrew name Hadassah (הַדַּסָּה) is interpreted as meaning "myrtle." In the Tg. Sheni her name relates to her character in that, "as the myrtle spreads fragrance to the world, so she spreads good works. And for this cause she was called in the Hebrew language Hadassah because the righteous are likened to myrtle."<sup>511</sup> In Esther Rabbah, her Hebrew name is also associated with the righteousness of her deeds: "For the rabbis, Hadassah is the myrtle, 'Because she was a righteous woman and the righteous ones are compared to the myrtle.'"<sup>512</sup>

The myrtle's significance may go further in terms of Esther's role as a protector of her people in the narrative. I agree with Hancock's analysis of the book when she argues that Esther's characterisation continues traditions of Persian women serving as advisors to royalty to

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<sup>509</sup> Both Joseph and Esther have Hebrew names as well as names that are indicative of the wider culture in which they live, but Joseph is nonetheless referred to by his Hebrew name throughout.

<sup>510</sup> There is a possible relation to the Goddess Ishtar or the Persian word for star.

<sup>511</sup> See Tg. Sheni 2:7:

והוה מרבי ית הדסה היא אסתר <בת אחבוי> והות הדסה שמה כמה דאסא מטול האיך דבסיס ריחיה דאסא בגו עלמא אוף  
היא אסתר כדון הות עבדא עובדין טבי' בגו עלמא

<sup>512</sup> Tg. Rishon, 2:7. In Esther Rabbah, it is explained that as the myrtle has a sweet fragrance but a bitter taste, so likewise Esther was "sweet to Mordecai but bitter to Haman." See Esth. Rabbah, VI.

prevent violence or other kinds of disasters against their family and communities.<sup>513</sup>

Moreover, the interpretations of the name Hadassah strengthen this image of Esther as not only righteous, but as a protector of her people. For example, the myrtle is one of the four kinds of foliage that cover the Sukkoth booths in the desert.<sup>514</sup> From this perspective, Esther symbolically shelters the Jewish communities under Ahasuerus's rule like the booths would have done in the wilderness.<sup>515</sup>

Moving to the theme of deception, the possible etymological link between the name Esther (אֶסְתֵּר) and the verb to hide הִסְתִּיר<sup>516</sup> is significant for analysing how the narrative reflects the effects of marginalization and displacement upon its composition. This same connection is also alluded to in later interpretations and is thematically latent in the MT narrative. In the Tg. Sheni, it is Mordecai who constructs one room within another in which to hide Esther from being taken into the king's palace. Similarly, in the Tg. Rishon,<sup>517</sup> Mordecai conceals Esther for years so that she will not be taken away. Moreover, in Megillah 13a there is an explicit link made between her name, deception, and hiding:

Hadassah was her name. Why then was she called Esther? Because she concealed (מסתרה) the facts about herself, as it says, Esther did not make known her people or her kindred.<sup>518</sup>

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<sup>513</sup> Rebecca S. Hancock, "Esther and the Politics of Negotiation: An Investigation of Public and Private Spaces in Relationship to Possibilities for Female Royal Counselors," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2012), 137. Hancock notes that the Additions to Esther highlight how she advocates for her people against a threatening power like Moses does (e.g., 14:8); and in her prayers she references the Hebrews enslavement in Egypt as well. Hancock, *Esther*, 152–153.

<sup>514</sup> Lev. 23:40 and Neh. 8:15. See Alexander Green, "Power, Deception, And Comedy: The Politics of Exile in The Book of Esther," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 23 (2011): 61–78 (71). See also Jules Gleicher, "Mordecai the Exilarch: Some Thoughts on the Book of Esther," *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy*, 28 (2001): 187–200 (198).

<sup>515</sup> Green, "Power, Deception," 71.

<sup>516</sup> Jo Carruthers, *Esther Through the Centuries*, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 106.

<sup>517</sup> This will be abbreviated to Tg. Rishon throughout the rest of the thesis.

<sup>518</sup> See Carruthers, *Esther Through the Centuries*, 106:

רבי יהודה אומר הדסה שמה ולמה נקראת שמה אסתר על שם שהיתה מסתרת דבריה שנאמר אין אסתר מגדת את עמה  
'וגו'

An additional element of deception and hiding in the MT narrative is that Mordecai tells Esther not to reveal that she is Jewish, and Esther obeys him.

Esth 2:20

אֵין אֶסְתֵּר מְגַדֶּת מִזֶּדֶת מוֹלְדוֹתָהּ וְאֶת־עַמָּהּ כִּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה עָלֶיהָ מֶרְדֵּכַי וְאֶת־מֵאֲמָר מֶרְדֵּכַי אֶסְתֵּר עָשָׂה כִּאֲשֶׁר הִצִּיֵּהָ  
בְּאִמְנָה אֶתּוֹ:

<sup>20</sup>But Esther still did not reveal her kindred or her people, as Mordecai had instructed her; for Esther obeyed Mordecai's bidding, as she had done when she was under his tutelage.

The LXX differs significantly from the MT tradition here.

<sup>20</sup>ἡ δὲ Εσθηρ οὐχ ὑπέδειξεν τὴν πατρίδα αὐτῆς· οὕτως γὰρ ἐνετείλατο αὐτῇ Μαρδοχαῖος, φοβεῖσθαι τὸν θεὸν καὶ ποιεῖν τὰ προστάγματα αὐτοῦ, καθὼς ἦν μετ' αὐτοῦ· καὶ Εσθηρ οὐ μετήλλαξεν τὴν ἀγωγὴν αὐτῆς.

<sup>20</sup>But Esther did not reveal her ancestry. For so Mardochaios had commanded her: to fear God and to do his ordinances, just as when she was with him. So Esther did not change her way of life.

Why are these deceptive tactics significant for Esther as a diaspora narrative and how do these features reflect the influence of displacement and marginalization upon the text? Firstly, the use of deception has been noted as one of the many psychological effects of forced migration and living as a marginalised community. Scott's investigations into refugee culture found that "*intentional misrepresentation*" is often a tactic employed by those who are part of a subordinated group.<sup>519</sup> Additionally, Eftihia Voutira and Barbara Harrel-Bond suggest that

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<sup>519</sup> Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, "Reading War and Trauma: Suggestions Toward a Social-Psychological Exegesis of Exile and War in Biblical Texts" in *Interpreting Exile: Displacement and*

lying can become a source of survival for refugees to get help for oneself and ones' family,<sup>520</sup> stating that, "to be a refugee means to learn to lie."<sup>521</sup>

It is in light of these kinds of observations of refugee culture that Smith-Christopher discusses the diaspora stories of Joseph, Daniel, and Esther, and he asks whether all these tales display a sense of being "watched, supervised, and often found out."<sup>522</sup> I agree with Smith-Christopher that these tales convey anxiety around being "watched" or "found out" because this anxiety is related to the marginalized and displaced state of the protagonists. It arises in the context of helping to ensure survival for their communities. Therefore, such insights from refugee studies provide a different perspective on the significance of "passing off as" Persian for Esther. The MT version of Esther, for example, does not qualify or clarify the nature of her deceptive or subversive practices. It may reflect how the MT is closer in time to the initial displacement that led to the diaspora because the narrator does not comment on or judge her character harshly for behaving in this manner.

In the LXX version of verse twenty, it seems that there is an attempt to resolve the tension between resisting and separating from a dominant society and cooperating and assimilating into the dominant society. The LXX has Esther covertly retain a stronger tie to Jewish customs which would almost seem at odds with the command to keep her identity hidden or would certainly make her task more difficult. From one perspective, her covert continuation

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*Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, ed. Brad E. Kelle, Frank Ritzel Ames and Jacob L. Wright, AIL 10 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 257. See also the work of James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), and *ibid.*, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance, Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990);

<sup>520</sup> Smith-Christopher, "Reading War and Trauma," 257.

<sup>521</sup> Eftihia Voutira and Barbara Harrell-Bond, "In Search of the Locus of Trust: The Social Worlds of the Refugee Camp," in *Mistrusting Refugees*, ed. E. Valentine Daniel and John Knudsen (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1995), 207–224 (216); see also Smith-Christopher, "Reading War and Trauma," 258.

<sup>522</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

of these customs which she learned from her uncle can be interpreted as a kind of resistance. Therefore, one could argue that the LXX resolves some of the tension between resisting and cooperating in favour of resistance in comparison with the MT.

For example, in Addition C of the LXX, Esther reminds God of her great struggle to keep *kashrut* with regards to food and marriage during her prayer, “καὶ οὐκ ἔφαγεν ἡ δούλη σου τράπεζαν Αμαν, καὶ οὐκ ἐδόξασα συμπόσιον βασιλέως οὐδὲ ἔπιον οἶνον σπονδῶν” (Add. C: 28).<sup>523</sup> On the other hand, in the AT, Esther is not told to keep her identity secret which lessens the sense of threat or persecution from a narrative perspective.<sup>524</sup>

Esther’s attitude towards her royal position and her marriage is made explicit in the LXX in a way that is left ambiguous in the MT. For example, when she says that she loathes her crown like a menstrual rag, “βδελύσσομαι αὐτὸ ὡς ῥάκος καταμηγίων.”<sup>525</sup> Addition C also makes it clear that Esther was forcibly taken into the king’s harem, “βδελύσσομαι κοίτην ἀπεριτμήτων καὶ παντὸς ἀλλοτρίου.”<sup>526</sup> In Tg. Sheni 2:8, for example, the other women would “dance and show off their beauty through the windows”<sup>527</sup> while in house of the women, but Esther had no such aspirations to be queen or even to be noticed in the harem.

While this ambiguity as to Esther’s thoughts and feelings may be indicative of the elliptical style of many Hebrew narratives, it is true that the MT does not make it explicit that Esther

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<sup>523</sup> “And your servant did not eat at Haman’s table, and I did not venerate the king’s banquet nor did I drink the wine of the drink-offerings.”

<sup>524</sup> An interesting question raised by the AT’s omission of Esther’s deception and hiding is the dynamic of power. Were all the Jews in equal danger or would an individual such as Esther with significant social status be exempt? Regardless of how we chronologically assemble the AT with the MT, it seems that the secrecy motif reorientates the perceived severity of Haman as a threat. This can be both perceived as a plot hole or a commentary on how Esther’s power in the palace protects her from the fate of Jews with less power than she.

<sup>525</sup> “I loathe it like a menstrual rag” (Add. C: 27).

<sup>526</sup> “I loathe the bed of the uncircumcised – and of any foreigner” (Add. C: 26).

<sup>527</sup> ובנת עממיהא כד הוון שליחוי עברין הויין מרקדן ומחזיין שופריהון מן כוותא



despised her royal position.<sup>528</sup> Moore goes as far as suggesting that the Niphal (נִקְלָה) in Esther 2:15 does not necessarily indicate that she was passively taken by force, and this is also the verb used to describe Mordecai's adoption of her.<sup>529</sup> The above example of translating the Niphal of נִקְלָה demonstrates the ambiguities within the text's language.

The Hebrew version does not contain much material that clarifies Esther's thoughts and feelings about her life and what is happening to her. However, Moane's discussion of the various modes of resistance that colonized people have employed is illuminating for considering Esther's character. She cites the work of Scott, which was alluded to earlier, who refers to these modes of resistance as the "weapons of the weak;"<sup>530</sup> such as "non-cooperation, false compliance, secrecy, feigned ignorance, sabotage," poetry, music, drama, and others.<sup>531</sup> Groups or individuals would often cooperate with the dominant group,<sup>532</sup> including taking on positions in its administration.<sup>533</sup> She notes, however, that collusion or cooperation needs to be contextualised as part of a system of domination.<sup>534</sup> It may often be enforced, out of self-interest, but could also arise out of the "greater economic and political power of dominators."<sup>535</sup> These observations apply well to the stories of Esther, Mordecai, Daniel, and Joseph, who take up important roles in the dominant society's court, but also have limitations on their agency.

It is not only Esther who hides or works behind the scenes in the narrative, divine providence is also hidden and perhaps works behind the scenes. God is not mentioned in the MT, which

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<sup>528</sup> Moore, *Esther*, 213.

<sup>529</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>530</sup> Geraldine Moane, *Gender and Colonialism: A Psychological Analysis of Oppression and Liberation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 38.

<sup>531</sup> Moane, *Gender and Colonialism*, 38.

<sup>532</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>533</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>534</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>535</sup> *Ibid.*

is an anomaly that has not gone unnoticed by many commentators and interpreters. While Mordecai's interpretation of the events in Esther 4 suggests that one must trust in divine providence even in the bleakest moments. After Esther sends word to Mordecai that she would be risking her life if she goes unsummoned before king Ahasuerus to plead on behalf of the Jewish communities, Mordecai sends this reply to her:

Esth 4:14

14 כִּי אִם־הִתְקַרְשׁ תִּתְקַרְשִׁי בְּעַת הַזֹּאת רְנוּחַ וְהַצִּלָּה יֵצְמוּד לַיהוּדִים מִמְּקוֹם אַחֵר וְאַתָּה וּבֵית־אָבִיךָ תִּאבְדוּ וְגַם יוֹדֵעַ  
אִם־לֵעֵת כְּזֹאת הִגַּעְתָּ לְמַלְכוּת:

14For if you continue to remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, then you and the house of your father will perish. And who knows whether it was for a time like this that you have arrived at the kingdom?

Regarding God's hiddenness in the narrative, Van Den Eynde suggests that the divine is "hiddenly present" in the narrative.

"The same God who threatens to hide his face, also resolves not to let the people be destroyed completely (Deuteronomy 32:20, 26–27). The God who hides his face from the people will restore their fortunes. Then God will never again hide his face from them (Ezekiel 39:24-29). Esther is an ambiguous name, hinting at a goddess and at the absence of God, but ultimately laden with the hope-filled meaning: 'I am hiddenly present.'"<sup>536</sup>

The fortuitous position that Esther has as Ahasuerus's queen enables her to intercede on behalf of her people and save the Jewish communities in his kingdom, and this may suggest that divine providence is "hiddenly present" in the Hebrew narrative, perhaps playing on the

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<sup>536</sup> M. L. Sabine Van Den Eynde, "If Esther Had Not Been That Beautiful: Dealing with a Hidden God in the (Hebrew) Book of Esther," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 31 (2001): 145–150 (148).

similarities between the verb “to hide” and Esther’s name that was discussed earlier. As Esther works behind the scenes, perhaps in the diaspora the divine also does. In the LXX and AT, God becomes an active agent in the narrative which has significant implications for altering the spectrum between resistance and cooperation, and this also demonstrates that divine intervention was seen as taking place between the lines of the narrative. It is a feature of the AT, the LXX as well as both targumim. However, the LXX and AT highlight Esther’s anxiety and vulnerability when she approaches the king, giving credit of the victory to *God*. Overall, Esther appears less active in the LXX’s version of events.

For example, Addition D in the LXX has God intervene when Esther approaches the king. In a sense, God becomes the hero of the narrative. Rather than Esther gaining the king’s favour upon her approach to his throne in a bid to spare her people from genocide, the king is angry at her arrival: “καὶ ἄρα τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ πεπυρωμένον δόξει ἐν ἀκμῇ θυμοῦ ἔβλεψεν” (Esth. D: 7).<sup>537</sup> Seeing him angry and fearing for her life, Esther faints, so God comes to her aid, “καὶ μετέβαλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ βασιλέως εἰς πραΰτητα.”<sup>538</sup>

However, the Tg. Sheni takes a different approach than the Greek versions and retains an emphasis on Esther gaining the king’s favour upon her approach as she “gained grace and favour before him.”

Tg. Sheni 5:2

ואתגמלת חינא וחסדא קדמוי

Comparing these versions highlights the ambiguity of the Hebrew version in terms of how the character’s presentations and behaviours fall between resisting and assimilating into the

<sup>537</sup> “Raising his face, flushed with colour, he looked at her in fiercest anger.”

<sup>538</sup> Esth. D: 8.

dominant society, whereas the LXX, AT, and targumim seem to attempt to resolve this tension in favour of resistance.

### **Complicity and Resistance in the Book of Esther**

As noted in the introduction, contemporary histories of colonialism are challenging the tendency to see colonialism as a dichotomy of “complicity-versus-resistance.”<sup>539</sup> I agree with Mosala who wrote that the book of Esther builds “around the memory of very difficult times under colonial exile” and is about “the struggle for survival.”<sup>540</sup> Her observation is substantiated within the introduction to Mordecai and Esther’s characters in Esther 2 which was examined earlier in the chapter.

Emphasizing a perpetrator-victim dichotomy runs the risk of erasing some of the agency subordinated groups did possess and how both the dominant and subordinate groups influence one another:

“An alternative approach to a colonial society would be one that acknowledges its diversity, resists rigid categorizations, and conceives of power in a more Foucaultian manner as a force which is dispersed throughout society and may be exercised, although unequally, by people of all statuses. When employed for an analysis of gender, such a model requires an understanding of the ways in which masculinity, as well as femininity, have been constructed in colonial settings.”<sup>541</sup>

For example, while we have seen so far that Esther’s employment of deceptive tactics and the theme of hiding implies the subordinate position she is in, she does however, come to exert a

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<sup>539</sup> Malia B. Formes, “Beyond Complicity versus Resistance: Recent Work on Gender and European Imperialism,” *Journal of Social History* 28 (1995): 629–641 (635).

<sup>540</sup> Itumeleng Mosala, “The Implications of the Text of Esther for African Women’s Struggle for Liberation in South Africa,” *Semeia* 59 (1992): 129–137 (135).

<sup>541</sup> Formes, “Beyond Complicity,” 635.

strong influence on the dominant culture through the Persian court that primarily serves the interests of the Jewish community at Susa. Like Haman, she too manipulates the king for her own purposes. For example, king Ahasuerus says to both Esther and Mordecai in Esther 8 that he has given the “house of Haman” to Esther,<sup>542</sup> indicating that not only has Esther and her community survived the situation, but Esther herself has grown in power and wealth, and can continue to be an advocate for them:

Esth 8:7

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶחָשׁוּרֶשׁ לְאֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה וְלְמֹרְדֵכַי הַיְהוּדִי הַגֵּה בֵּית־הַמָּן נְתַתִּי לְאֶסְתֵּר וְאֶתֹו תְלוּ עַל־הַעֵץ עַל  
אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַח יָדוֹ בַּיהוּדִים:

<sup>7</sup>Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and Mordecai the Jew, “I have given Haman’s property to Esther, and he has been impaled on the stake for scheming against the Jews.”

The hybridity of Esther/Hadassah’s character does not represent a dichotomy between Jews and Persians and is a representation of a more fluid identity that enables survival in the diaspora. The tension between Esther’s community of origin and her life in the Persian court remains unresolved which suggests that change is necessary for survival, and in doing so Esther’s narrative presents an open-ended poetics concerning exile and diaspora. While it may appear that Esther’s behaviour leans towards accommodation and cooperation, the situation remains more complicated. The levels of deception that Esther endures, as well as how she breaks her deception in order to preserve her community when she pleads before Ahasuerus in Esther 7, demonstrate this tension as ever present in the narrative.

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<sup>542</sup> Esth. 8:7.

## Subversion and Femininity in the Book of Esther

This section considers the role of subversion and the intersection between gender and power dynamics in Esther's portrayal in the MT. The tension between resistance and cooperation is shown in how Esther, a woman and member of a diaspora community, comes to subvert gender and power dynamics despite the limitations. As seen above, Esther comes to exercise power over others for the sake of herself and her people.

In her approach to the king in Chapter Four, Esther uses elaborate feasts in order to put the odds in her favour before making her request of the king. In doing so she not only demonstrates her patience and careful planning, but her actions as a character are also in line with the way in which those in subordinate positions would likely employ subversive tactics to try to guarantee success.

The way in which the narrative highlights Esther's skill at this is shown by briefly considering the context provided by Chapter One, where Ahasuerus deposes queen Vashti for outrightly disobeying him. The king is subsequently easily swayed by his advisors to issue a decree further limiting the agency of *all* women in his kingdom. Esther as a Jewish woman provides a link to two groups that are targeted by Ahasuerus's oppressive decrees in the narrative. Vashti's refusal to appear before the king in chapter one leads to the creation of a decree forcing women to "honour" their husbands.

Esth 1:16–22

<sup>16</sup>ויאמר מומכן לפני המלך והשרים לא על-המלך לבדו עומה ושתה המלכה פי על-כל-השרים ועל-כל-העמים אשר בכל-מדינות המלך אחשורוש:<sup>17</sup> כי-יצא דבר-המלכה על-כל-הנשים להכזות בעליהן בעיניהן באמרם המלך אחשורוש אמר להביא את-ושתה המלכה לפניו ולא-באה:<sup>18</sup> והיום הזה תאמרנה שרות פרס-ומדי אשר שמעו את-דבר המלכה לכל שרי המלך וכדי בזיון וקצף:<sup>19</sup> אם-על-המלך טוב יצא דבר-מלכות מלפניו ויכתב בדתה

פרס-ומדי ולא יעבור אשר לא-תבוא ושתני לפני המלך אהשוורוש ומלכותה יתן המלך לרעותה הטובה ממנה: <sup>20</sup>ונשמע פתגם המלך אשר-יעשה בכל-מלכותו כי רבה היא וכל-הנשים יתנו יקר לבעליהן למגדול ועד-קטן: <sup>21</sup>וייטב הדבר בעיני המלך והשרים ויעש המלך כדבר ממוכן: <sup>22</sup>וישלח ספרים אל-כל-מדינות המלך אל-מדינה ומדינה ככתבה ואל-עם ועם כלשונו להיות כל-איש שרר בביתו ומדבר כלשון עמו:

<sup>16</sup>Thereupon Memucan declared in the presence of the king and the ministers: “Queen Vashti has committed an offense not only against Your Majesty but also against all the officials and against all the peoples in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. <sup>17</sup>For the queen’s behavior will make all wives despise their husbands, as they reflect that King Ahasuerus himself ordered Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she would not come. <sup>18</sup>This very day the ladies of Persia and Media, who have heard of the queen’s behavior, will cite it to all Your Majesty’s officials, and there will be no end of scorn and provocation! <sup>19</sup>“If it please Your Majesty, let a royal edict be issued by you, and let it be written into the laws of Persia and Media, so that it cannot be abrogated, that Vashti shall never enter the presence of King Ahasuerus. And let Your Majesty bestow her royal state upon another who is more worthy than she. <sup>20</sup>Then will the judgment executed by Your Majesty resound throughout your realm, vast though it is; and all wives will treat their husbands with respect, high and low alike.” <sup>21</sup>The proposal was approved by the king and the ministers, and the king did as Memucan proposed. <sup>22</sup>Dispatches were sent to all the provinces of the king, to every province in its own script and to every nation in its own language, that every man should wield authority in his home and speak the language of his own people.

Esther manages to secure a place for herself in the palace and the safety of her community in spite of this, causing further irony and tension in the narrative that not only a woman, but a Jewish woman, ends up exerting such strong influence upon the king despite the two decrees

that come forth from the palace. Power is what is really at stake in these letters addressed to each nation in their own language because the hierarchical relationship between husbands and wives models the power relations in Ahasuerus's kingdom.<sup>543</sup> Just as Ahasuerus should in theory have power over Vashti, so too should men of lesser standing exercise power over the women in their lives.

The overlap between trickster and wisdom protagonists also demonstrates the potential for feminine, subversive, or behind the scenes characters to subvert the power structures which they are up against. These overlaps include working behind the scenes, being stealthy, having a "home-based" power that is often associated with women, with an emphasis on manipulating those of higher status to secure benefits for oneself.<sup>544</sup> Niditch further notes that while trickster tales tend to be "anti-establishment" and playful in terms of critiquing the establishment, "wisdom" heroes and heroines tend to become part of the dominant system and greatly benefit from it.<sup>545</sup> The unbelievable gullibility of king Ahasuerus is perhaps the most obvious jest at the Persians, yet despite the critiques of the characters, Esther and her people end up benefiting from Esther's tactful approach and her royal position.

On the other hand, many scholars suggest that Esther is a model for submission and a lack of female agency, ultimately benefiting the oppressors in the narrative. Esther's opposition is surely one of subtlety. Susan Niditch goes as far as describing Esther's opposition to the foreign court as a "behind the scenes" approach, which ultimately benefits the oppressors within the narrative.<sup>546</sup> Moreover, Niditch suggests that Esther "is a woman who offers a

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<sup>543</sup> Van Den Eynde, "If Esther Had Not Been That Beautiful," 146.

<sup>544</sup> Niditch, *Underdogs*, 141.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid. She suggests that the trickster embodies "chaos, marginality and indefinability" whereas the wisdom heroine/hero signifies "order, neatness, a world in which everything fits."

<sup>546</sup> Susan Niditch, "Esther: Folklore, Wisdom, Feminism, and Authority" in *A Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna. Feminist Companion to the Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner-Idan (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 26–46 (33).



particular model for success, one with which oppressors would be especially comfortable” because what Esther does is ultimately strengthening for the power structure of the Persian empire.<sup>547</sup> Commentators such as Sugirtharajah also take a highly critical view of Esther’s characterisation and her apparent conformity because the narrative does not appear to question the primacy of the Persian courts or power. In their view, the narrative merely “aspires to survival or, at best, some degree of survival within the system.”<sup>548</sup>

On the other hand, commentators such as Beal<sup>549</sup> and Moore<sup>550</sup> have taken more sympathetic approaches to the text and to Esther’s character. For example, the phrase to “lift [נָשָׂא] loyalty in his eyes,”<sup>551</sup> of which variants are used in Esther 2:9; 15, and 17 can be understood as causative.<sup>552</sup> I agree with Beal that the fact that Esther can “lift loyalty in his [Hegei’s] eyes” suggests that Esther possesses an “unexpected agency” even in her limited circumstances, “a power to lead him [the male subject] away from where he intends to be.”<sup>553</sup>

Esth 2:9

וַתֵּיטֵב הַנְּעֻרָה בְּעֵינָיו וַתִּשָּׂא חֶסֶד לְפָנָיו וַיִּבְהַל אֶת־תְּמָרוֹקֶיהָ וְאֶת־מְנוֹתֶיהָ לְתַתּ לָהּ וְאֵת שְׂבַע הַנְּעֻרוֹת הַרְּאִיּוֹת  
לְתַת־לָהּ מִבֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּשְׁנֶה וְאֶת־נְעֻרוֹתֶיהָ לְטוֹב בֵּית הַנְּשִׂימִים:

<sup>9</sup>And the young woman pleased him and she elicited favour from him, so he hastened to give her cosmetics and her portions, and to give to her seven chosen young women from

<sup>547</sup> Niditch, “Folklore,” 33.

<sup>548</sup> Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 251.

<sup>549</sup> Timothy Beal, *The Book of Hiding: Gender, Ethnicity, Annihilation, and Esther*, Biblical Limits (London: Routledge, 1997), 35.

<sup>550</sup> Moore, *The Additions*, 21.

<sup>551</sup> וַתִּשָּׂא חֶסֶד לְפָנָיו (Esth. 2:10).

<sup>552</sup> Beal, *The Book of Hiding*, 35.

<sup>553</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

the king's palace. And he transferred her and her young women to the best position in the house of the women.

In short, Esther is affecting the people around her and not only relying on her beauty.<sup>554</sup>

Esther saves her community by utilising a “model for success” which is not outrightly threatening to the “oppressors” in the narrative by approaching Ahasuerus humbly, but this guarantees her success.<sup>555</sup> A preliminary look at the exchange in Esther 7 between Esther and Ahasuerus makes this apparent.

Esth 7:2–4

2 וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאַסְתֵּר גַּם בַּיּוֹם הַשֵּׁנִי בְּמִשְׁתֵּה הַיַּיִן מִה־שְׂאֵלְתֶךָ אֶסְתֵּר הַמֶּלֶכָה וְתַנְתֵּן לִּי וּמִה־בְקִשְׁתֶּךָ עַד־חֲצִי הַמַּלְכוּת וְתַעֲשֵׂ: 3 וַיַּעַן אֶסְתֵּר הַמֶּלֶכָה וַתֹּאמֶר אִם־מְצָאֵתִי חַן בְּעֵינֶיךָ הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאִם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב תִּנְתֵּן־לִי נַפְשִׁי בְּשֵׂאלְתִי וְעַמִּי בְּבִקְשָׁתִי: 4 כִּי נִמְכַרְנוּ אֲנִי וְעַמִּי לְהַשְׁמִיד לְהַרְוֹג וּלְאַבֵּד וְאֵלּוּ לְעַבְדִּים וּלְשִׁפְחוֹת נִמְכַרְנוּ הַחֲרָשְׁתִּי כִּי אֵין הַצָּר שְׁנֵה בְּנֹזֶק הַמֶּלֶךְ:

<sup>2</sup>On the second day, the king again asked Esther at the wine feast, “What is your wish, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to half the kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.”<sup>3</sup>Queen Esther replied: “If Your Majesty will do me the favor, and if it pleases Your Majesty, let my life be granted me as my wish, and my people as my request. <sup>4</sup>For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, massacred, and exterminated. Had we only been sold as bondmen and bondwomen, I would have kept silent; for the adversary is not worthy of the king's trouble.”

Esther reflects the king's lexical choices back at him (בְּשֵׂאלְתִי and בְּבִקְשָׁתִי)<sup>556</sup> and orientates her response as prioritizing what may or may not “please” him: אִם־מְצָאֵתִי חַן בְּעֵינֶיךָ הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאִם־

<sup>554</sup> Ibid.

<sup>555</sup> Niditch, “Folkore,” 33.

<sup>556</sup> “My wish” and “my request.”

עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב.<sup>557</sup> Esther is not only aware of her vulnerable position but is also catering to the king's ego strategically. Esther puts herself in a position to look hyperbolically non-threatening which helps to guarantee her success and mitigate the king's volatility. Ahasuerus from his perspective becomes the brave protector who is in control of the situation like he is in his kingdom, when in fact the brave protector is Esther who has successfully manipulated the king into saving her people. Due to the time taken to prepare her approach to the king, the request that the people fast, and the two banquets that Esther prepares and invites Haman and Ahasuerus to, it is likely that these events imply that Esther has planned how she requests help from the king and is therefore employing rhetorical strategies to do so. The outright rebellion of a character like Vashti, as seen in Esther 1, does not end well when dealing with someone like king Ahasuerus.

Taking an unsympathetic approach to characters who negotiate between resistance and cooperation in such settings could reinstate a “complicity-resistance” dichotomy towards the text which has been discussed as an issue earlier in this chapter. Esther's behaviour is not only influenced by the patriarchal society in which the tale was composed. Her passivity reflects her own personal and vulnerable position, and it also reflects the vulnerable position of Jews in Ahasuerus's kingdom.

Feminist studies on the narrative have tended to approach Esther as either a positive or negative role model,<sup>558</sup> and these approaches can be deficient in examining the intersectionality between gender and power in, for example, certain diaspora communities. Beal notes that the way in which an individual could exceed their limitations indicates the

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<sup>557</sup> “If Your Majesty will do me the favor, and if it pleases Your Majesty.”

<sup>558</sup> Beal, *The Book of Hiding*, 61.

instability of that order that they exceeded, and therefore enables social transformation.<sup>559</sup>

The social transformation that Beal thinks is possible reflects how Esther's presentation in the MT lies on the spectrum of complicity and resistance. It is between these poles that we can situate Esther's subversive behaviour that does not topple the power structure but, nonetheless, she uses it for her own gain and that of her community. Another potential drawback of a "good" or "bad" role model approach to the book of Esther is that it obscures the way in which Esther's hyper-femininity, such as her silence and obedience, correlates to the subjugated status of her and her people.

Additionally, the mechanisms of domination for patriarchal societies overlap with those used in colonial contexts.<sup>560</sup> Colonialism and patriarchy, for example, can reinforce one another as systems of domination.<sup>561</sup> Not only did this happen in terms of women being especially affected by limitations in economic opportunities, but a common discourse under colonialism is to conceptualise the colonized country and people as feminine, with the colonizer being masculine.<sup>562</sup> These discourses of femininity under such oppressive systems can reinforce the inferiority of the subordinated peoples.<sup>563</sup> Esther's own lack of power in a patriarchal society parallels the Jewish community's position as a "subjugated minority,"<sup>564</sup> making her success and authority at the end of the narrative more ironic and remarkable.

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<sup>559</sup> Beal thinks that this prohibits certain kinds of questions from being asked about the text, and some of which are also relevant to this chapter, namely, "the unstable constructions of gender and ethnicity... (1) how individual identities are shaped and fixed within particular symbolic and social orders; and (2) how individual agents exceed their fixed positions within a particular order, indicating instabilities in that order and making social transformation possible" *ibid.*

<sup>560</sup> Moane, *Gender and Colonialism*, 33. According to Moane, dominant groups use their power to create the status quo and enforce it, and the mechanisms to do this are incredibly similar to those of patriarchy. *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>561</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>562</sup> *Ibid.* Subsequently, subordinate groups are often characterized as passive, submissive, and as lacking the ability to act and think critically. *Ibid.* 27.

<sup>563</sup> *Ibid.* 33.

<sup>564</sup> Susan Zaeske, "Unveiling Esther as a Pragmatic Radical Rhetoric Source," *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 33 (2000): 193–220 (198). Zaeske's thesis is that the book of Esther is a work of rhetoric which details "survival strategies for an oppressed group." Zaeske, "Unveiling Esther," 197.

An additional point which brings the overlap between feminization and subordination into view are the parallels between Vashti and Mordecai that are noted in Beal's monograph. The pattern of refusal, then outrage at the refusal, then a return to peace after new legislation is brought forth is paralleled both in the decree against the Jews and in Vashti's expulsion. In a way, Mordecai and Vashti parallel one another.<sup>565</sup> Esther and Mordecai's actions are influenced by these discourses of subordination and femininity that operate in colonial-like settings. Rather than falling completely on the "complicit" side of the spectrum of between resisting, and assimilating into the dominant society, Esther's presentation and the presentation of her identity allows her to strike a middle ground which enables her to rescue her community.

The inversion of control and power that takes place in the book of Esther does challenge the dominant society and the king's authority, even if it is not an outright rebellion, it is a step in the direction of survival, and it also does not lead to the erasure of Jewish identity, or to complete assimilation. In fact, Esther is able to establish Purim with Mordecai as a festival to be celebrated in the wake of these events.<sup>566</sup>

### **Subversion and Femininity in the Joseph Narrative and Later Traditions**

Joseph's portrayal in Genesis chapters 37-50 provides an example of a male protagonist in a diaspora narrative whose characterisation is similarly impacted by marginalization and anxieties of diaspora life.<sup>567</sup> More specifically, the character of Joseph in Genesis and also in

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<sup>565</sup> Beal, *The Book of Hiding*, 47.

<sup>566</sup> See Esth. 9:29–32.

<sup>567</sup> There are a variety of opinions concerning the dating and providence of the Joseph narrative in the MT and of imagined earlier forms of the narrative, from Solomon's golden age up to the post-exilic age as a diaspora novella. Scholars who have adopted views like Soggin's have suggested that the composition of the Joseph narrative may have even been prompted by the circumstances of the Egyptian diaspora, giving that community an identity by providing a "founding father" and a "founding myth." See Bernhard Lang, *Joseph in Egypt: A Cultural Icon from Grotius to Goethe* (New

some later interpretive traditions demonstrates an overlap between the use of his deceptive or subversive tactics with his apparent “feminine” traits. The patriarch Joseph has been described as an effeminate figure in Rabbinic sources. The relationships that these rabbinic interpretations have with the biblical narrative in Genesis are insightful in elaborating on the nature of Joseph’s character in Genesis.

Beginning with the below extract from Genesis Rabbah 84:7, the ornamented tunic that Jacob bestows upon Joseph, and his favouritism towards him, arguably lay the foundation for seeing Joseph as a larger-than-life figure.

יוסף בן שבע עשרה שנה וגו' (בראשית לז, ב), ואת אמר והוא נער, אלא שהיה עושה מעשה נערוֹת, ממשמש  
בעיניו, מתלה בעקבו, מתקן בשערו.

Being still a lad even with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah: That he would engage in childish/girlish behavior, penciling his eyes, lifting his heel and curling his hair.<sup>568</sup>

Wendy Zierler notes that translators have tended to see the phrase מעשה נערוֹת as referring to childish behaviour. However, it could also be read as “girlish behaviour.”<sup>569</sup> Alicia Ostriker

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Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 28; and cf. Soggin who gives a late date to the Joseph narrative, see J. A. Soggin, “Notes on the Joseph Narrative,” in *Understanding Poets and Prophets: Essays in Honour of George Wishart Andersen*, ed. G.A. Auld (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 336–349. For example, Lang notes in his monograph on the narrative and its reception that recent biblical criticism suggests interpreting it as a diaspora novella; as a narrative that reflects, “Jewish life as no longer confined to a Palestinian geographical setting.” Lang, *Joseph in Egypt*, 24. In short, that the narrative in the MT was at least edited in light of the Babylonian exile is supported by recent scholarship.

<sup>568</sup> The text and translation come from Wendy Zierler’s article, “Joseph(ine), the Singer: The Queer Joseph and Modern Jewish Writers,” *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* 24 (2013): 97–119 (100).

<sup>569</sup> Zierler, “Joseph(ine), the Singer,” 100.

and Lori Lefkowitz also highlight that Joseph was perceived as effeminate and vain in later traditions.<sup>570</sup>

Related to this discussion of Joseph's "girlish" nature is the way in which his beauty is described in Genesis 39. Near the beginning of the narrative, we are told that וַיְהִי יוֹסֵף יָפֵה־תֹאֵר (יִפְתָּה־תֹאֵר וְטוֹבֵת מְרָאָה).<sup>571</sup> His mother, Rachel, is also described as beautiful and shapely in appearance in (יִפְתָּה־תֹאֵר וְטוֹבֵת מְרָאָה).<sup>572</sup> Additionally, Esther is also described as יִפְתָּה־תֹאֵר וְטוֹבֵת מְרָאָה in Esther 2:7. This coincidence alone may suggest that there may be some aspect of Joseph's handsome appearance that is most accurately compared with the beauty of his mother.

Joseph's appearance in Genesis 39 also relates how Joseph is harassed by Potiphar's wife and is put in prison when she accuses him of attempting to assault her. Here is where comparisons to the narrative of Esther suggest that Esther's own portrayal is affected by her marginalised position as well as her gender identity. The language that Potiphar's wife uses indicates the way in which Joseph and his body are the property of Potiphar. This power dynamic is indicated by Potiphar's wife's use of the imperative "Lie with me!" (שְׁכַבְהָ עִמִּי) in Gen 39:7 and 12. For example, when she tells the servants that Joseph tried to assault her, she refers to him as an אִישׁ עִבְרִי who has come to mock (לְצַחֵק בְּנִי) Egyptian woman.<sup>573</sup> Then, when she rehearses the narrative for her husband, she also calls him a הָעֶבֶד הָעִבְרִי (Hebrew slave)<sup>574</sup> which emphasizes his subservient status according to her and Potiphar.

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<sup>570</sup> Lori Lefkowitz, *In Scripture: The First Stories of Jewish Sexual Identities* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 85–98; cf. Zierler, "Joseph(ine), the Singer," 100. See also, Alicia Ostriker, *The Nakedness of the Fathers: Biblical Visions and Revisions* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 111–112; cf. Zierler, "Joseph(ine), the Singer," 100.

<sup>571</sup> Gen. 39:6.

<sup>572</sup> Gen. 29:17.

<sup>573</sup> Gen. 39:14.

<sup>574</sup> Gen. 39:17.

Overall, Potiphar's wife uses Joseph status not only as a slave but as a Hebrew slave in order to try and maintain her hold over him. His sexual objectification is in line with his perceived subordinate status as a Hebrew slave. Esther is also clearly objectified, and her beauty is central to the plot as to why she is recruited into the harem and successful in gaining Ahasuerus's favour. As noted earlier in this chapter, she goes through an extensive grooming process to become an object of desire for Ahasuerus. These similarities in the ways in which the physical beauty of the protagonist makes them vulnerable to the abuse of power of others is indicative of how both narratives reflect the difficulties of being displaced. The protagonists' vulnerability is realised and becomes part of their journey which will lead to them having a privileged position in the dominant culture and guaranteeing benefits for their community. Additionally, the tunic that his father gifts to him is another way in which the Joseph narrative hints at the destabilizing and potentially gender-bending nature of his character.

### **Joseph's tunic: כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים**

Gen 37:2–4

<sup>2</sup>אֵלֶּה הַלְדוֹת יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף בֶּן־שִׁבְעֵעָשָׂר שָׁנָה הָיָה רֹעֵה אֶת־אֶחָיו בְּצֹאן וְהוּא נֶעַר אֶת־בְּנֵי בִלְהָה וְאֶת־בְּנֵי זִלְפָּה וְנָשִׂי אָבִיו וַיִּבֶא יוֹסֵף אֶת־דְּבָרָם רָעָה אֶל־אָבִיהֶם: <sup>3</sup>וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֶהָב אֶת־יוֹסֵף מִכָּל־בְּנָיו כִּי־בָרַךְ־נָגִים הוּא לוֹ וַעֲשָׂה לוֹ כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים: <sup>4</sup>וַיִּרְאוּ אֶחָיו כִּי־אִתּוֹ אֶהָב אָבִיהֶם מִכָּל־אֶחָיו וַיִּשְׂנְאוּ אֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ דַבְּרוּ לְשָׁלֹם:

<sup>2</sup>This, then, is the line of Jacob: At seventeen years of age, Joseph tended the flocks with his brothers, as a helper to the sons of his father's wives Bilhah and Zilpah. And Joseph brought bad reports of them to their father. <sup>3</sup>Now Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons, for he was the child of his old age; and he had made him an ornamented tunic. <sup>4</sup>And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of his brothers, they hated him so that they could not speak a friendly word to him.



Jacob's favouritism towards the son of his favourite wife is epitomised by his giving him a *כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים* (an ornamented tunic). Perhaps the grandiosity of such a garment is highlighted by how this phrase is understood or translated in the LXX as a *χιτώνα ποικίλον* (a many coloured tunic). Within the Hebrew Bible, it is King David's daughter Tamar who is the only other individual who dons a *כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים*. Shortly after this is mentioned in the narrative, David's son Absalom sexually assaults her. The association of this tunic with a princess has not gone unnoticed. This too creates an image of Joseph that is possibly "effeminate" or blurring what appear to be more conventional gender associations by describing him in ways that female characters are described.

Zierler notes the role of clothing in the Joseph narrative highlights the "performative aspects" of the narrative, such as when Potiphar's wife sends Joseph to prison due to the garment he left beside her (*וַיַּעֲזֹב בְּגָדוֹ אֶצְלוֹ*),<sup>575</sup> and also how Pharaoh adorns Joseph in royal garb as part of his elevation to being second in command over Egypt.<sup>576</sup> Additionally, Joseph's royal garments allow him to deceive his brothers at length<sup>577</sup> while he tests them in various ways and holds a banquet for them. Like Esther, he is given a signet ring from the pharaoh and dressed in royal garb within his narrative to indicate the elevation of his status:

Gen 41:41–42

<sup>41</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־יוֹסֵף רְאֵה נָתַתִּי אֶתְךָ עַל כָּל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: <sup>42</sup>וַיֹּסֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶת־טַבַּעְתּוֹ מֵעַל יָדוֹ וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָהּ עַל־יַד יוֹסֵף וַיִּלְבַּשׁ אֹתוֹ בְּגָדֵי־שֵׁשׁ וַיַּשֶּׂם רֶבֶד הַזָּהָב עַל־צַוְנָרוֹ:

<sup>575</sup> Gen. 39:15.

<sup>576</sup> Gen. 41:41. Zierler, "Joseph(ine), the Singer," 102.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Pharaoh further said to Joseph, “See, I put you in charge of all the land of Egypt.” <sup>42</sup>And removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph’s hand; and he had him dressed in robes of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck.

The poem *היא יוסף* by Zarchi (1983) arguably draws out the ambiguities and liminality of Joseph’s identity which builds upon the biblical text as well as rabbinic sources. Zierler suggests that “Zarchi’s portrayal of the girl/boy Joseph sitting in her tent decked or “drawn” (*metzuyarah*) in the *kutonet passim* highlights the ambiguously gendered meaning of the cloak.”<sup>578</sup>

Gen 37:3

וְיִשְׂרָאֵל אָהַב אֶת־יוֹסֵף מִכָּל־בְּנָיו כִּי־בָן־זָקֵנִים הוּא לוֹ וַעֲשָׂה לוֹ כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים:

<sup>3</sup>Now Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons, for he was the child of his old age; and he had made him an ornamented tunic.

Zarchi’s poem opens with Rachel sat in a tent disguising her daughter “Joseph” as a boy.

וּבְנִיגְלָה הִיא נֶעֶר

וּבְנִסְתָּר נֶעֶרָה

Out in the open—a boy,

But in secret, a girl.<sup>579</sup>

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<sup>578</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>579</sup> For the full text see the poem *היא יוסף* [Hi Joseph] in Nurit Zarchi, *Isha Yalda Isha* [A Woman Brought Woman] (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1983). The translation is adapted from Galit Hasan-Rokem, Shirley Kaufman, and Tamar S. Hess, *The Defiant Muse: Hebrew Feminist Poems* (New York, NY: Feminist Press, 1999), 167.

The juxtaposition between the roots גלה and סתר highlights the way in which the child is being disguised. It is worth noting that גלה in the Hophal and Hiphil stems can refer to driving someone into exile or being driven into exile, and it occurs in these two stems in Esther 2:6 which introduces Mordechai and Esther as the descendants of exiles. Zarchi's modern poem incidentally is highlighting how the marginalized, diaspora heroines/heroes take on liminal roles, whose liminality in their identities is also expressed in the way in which they subvert expectations of gender roles. Not only are Joseph(ine)'s curls hidden by a silk cap (כפת משי), but now the כְּהַנֵּת פְּסִים due to its link to Tamar potentially signals the special status of this child, as well as the child's vulnerability to being harmed and exploited by others. Although Zierler does not think that the poem goes as far as suggesting that the moment where Joseph reveals himself to his brothers is imagined as the moment that Joseph(ine) reveals their gender identity, I agree that the poem develops the importance of deception or "masquerade" in the Joseph narrative and the vulnerability of Joseph's character.<sup>580</sup>

Overall, Joseph, like Esther, participates in a masquerade that involves deceptive and subversive tactics in their narrative, and this connection has not been lost on modern and ancient interpretations of his character in relation to the topics of gender and identity. As this chapter has shown, his vulnerability in the Hebrew narrative is related to his experiences of displacement and marginalization. Unlike Esther, Joseph's deception is directed towards his brothers when they arrive in Egypt and do not recognize him, which will be discussed in the next section of this chapter. This plot development where Joseph deceives his brothers highlights how well assimilated Joseph has become to life in Egypt, and the way in which his character blurs the boundaries between Hebrew and Egyptian culture.

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<sup>580</sup> Zierler, "Joseph(ine), the Singer," 111.

The following paragraphs explore how Joseph's experiences of displacement and marginalization are conveyed through his high level of assimilation into Egyptian culture, and also through his own interpretation of his experience of displacement. Joseph's perspective on divine providence and his sufferings encapsulates how diaspora heroines/heroes with their hybrid identities and experiences are suited to the role of advocates and rescuers for their communities, because they can harness the benefits of the dominant culture to help them.

### **Suffering and Divine Providence in the Joseph Narrative**

Both Joseph's interpretation of his experiences, and Mordecai's insights about Esther's role on behalf of Jewish communities, convey that these destabilizing characters display the anxieties of communities who have more recently experienced displacement. Chapter Five considers how the presentation of Esther is considerably altered in later interpretations where there is a greater sense of independence between different groups and cultures that are demonstrated within the text itself, and so the continuity of Esther's behaviour and custom with Jewish custom is emphasized. On the other hand, for the Esther and Joseph of the Hebrew narratives, *survival* is emphasized: The masquerade-like existence that Joseph and Esther experience is not judged harshly or qualified by discussing how they kept certain customs or identifying behaviour while in their respective foreign courts.

Joseph's assimilation into Egyptian culture and the passing years since his brothers sold him into slavery creates the opportunity for him to become unrecognizable to them. When Joseph's brothers arrive in Egypt looking for grain, he begins to take advantage of this lack of recognition and the reader is not informed as to what his end goal is. Joseph even uses an interpreter to help create the illusion that he cannot communicate with the brothers, and

appears to put the brothers through a series of tests and manipulates them.<sup>581</sup> In Genesis 44, Joseph is moved by his brother Judah's speech (Gen. 44:18–25) where Judah offers to take the place of his brother Benjamin who has been framed by Joseph for theft. Joseph can no longer keep the charade up and breaks down in tears in front of his brothers once Judah has finished speaking. This is where he reveals his identity to them and offers an interpretation of the events of his life and God's providence within it.

Gen 45:1–8

<sup>1</sup>וְלֹא־יָכַל יוֹסֵף לְהִתְאַפֵּק לְכָל הַנֹּצְצִים עָלָיו וַיִּקְרָא הוֹצִיאוּ כָל־אִישׁ מֵעָלַי וְלֹא־עָמַד אִישׁ אִתּוֹ בְּהִתְנוּדַע יוֹסֵף אֶל־  
אָחָיו: <sup>2</sup>וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־קֹלוֹ בְּכִי וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּשְׁמַע בֵּית פַּרְעֹה: <sup>3</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־אָחָיו אֲנִי יוֹסֵף הָעוֹד אָבִי הֲיִי וְלֹא־  
יָכֹלוּ אָחָיו לַעֲנוֹת אֹתוֹ כִּי נִבְהָלוּ מִפְּנָיו: <sup>4</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־אָחָיו גִּשׁוּ־נָא אֵלַי וַיִּגָּשׁוּ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי יוֹסֵף אֲחֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר־  
מִכְרַתֶּם אֹתִי מִצְרַיִמָּה: <sup>5</sup>וַיַּעֲתָה אֶל־תַּעֲצָבוֹ וְאֶל־יַחַר בְּעֵינֵיכֶם כִּי־מִכְרַתֶּם אֹתִי הֲנֵה כִּי לְמַחְיָה שָׁלַחֵנִי אֱלֹהִים  
לְפָנֵיכֶם: <sup>6</sup>כִּי־זֶה שָׁנַת־מִים הָרָעַב בְּקָרֵב הָאָרֶץ וְעוֹד חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים אֲשֶׁר אֵין־חֶרֶשׁ וְקֶצִיר: <sup>7</sup>וַיִּשְׁלַחֵנִי אֱלֹהִים לְפָנֵיכֶם  
לְשׁוּם לָכֶם שְׂאֵרֵי־בָאָרֶץ וְלִהְיֹת לָכֶם לְפָלִיטָה גְדֹלָה: <sup>8</sup>וַיַּעֲתָה לֹא־אַתֶּם שָׁלַחְתֶּם אֹתִי הֲנֵה כִּי הֵאֱלָהִים  
וַיִּשְׁימֵנִי לְאֵב לְפָרְעֹה וּלְאֲדוֹן לְכָל־בֵּיתוֹ וּמִשַּׁל בְּכָל־אָרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:

<sup>1</sup>Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, “Have everyone withdraw from me!” So there was no one else about when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. <sup>2</sup>His sobs were so loud that the Egyptians could hear, and so the news reached Pharaoh's palace. <sup>3</sup>Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph. Is my father still well?” But his brothers could not answer him, so dumfounded were they on account of him. <sup>4</sup>Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come forward to me.” And when they came forward, he said, “I am your brother Joseph, he whom you sold into Egypt. <sup>5</sup>Now, do not

<sup>581</sup> Gen. 37:18–30. Because Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery in Gen 37, it may be the case that these series of tests, and why he targets Benjamin, is to see whether his brothers are still capable of the hostile behaviour that they demonstrated in the past towards him. That Judah protects Benjamin perhaps demonstrates that things have changed, and might account for Joseph's emotional reaction because Judah's response contrasts with the hatred that his brothers had towards Joseph in the past.

be distressed or reproach yourselves because you sold me hither; it was to save life that God sent me ahead of you. <sup>6</sup>It is now two years that there has been famine in the land, and there are still five years to come in which there shall be no yield from tilling. <sup>7</sup>**God has sent me ahead of you to ensure your survival on earth, and to save your lives in an extraordinary deliverance.** <sup>8</sup>**So, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, lord of all his household, and ruler over the whole land of Egypt.**

Later on, in Genesis Joseph offers another interpretation of events in Genesis 50:19-20 that contains the same sentiment of the first.

Gen 50:19–20

19 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יוֹסֵף אֶל־תִּירְאוּ כִּי הִתְחַסַּת אֱלֹהִים אָנֹכִי: <sup>20</sup>וְאַתֶּם חָשַׁבְתֶּם עָלַי רָעָה אֱלֹהִים חֲשָׁבָה לְטוֹבָה לְמַעַן עֲשֶׂה כִּי־וָיָם הַזֶּה לְהַחְיִית עַם־רַב:

<sup>19</sup>But Joseph said to them, “Have no fear! Am I a substitute for God? <sup>20</sup>Besides, although you intended me harm, God intended it for good, so as to bring about the present result—the survival of many people.

In both the Joseph and Esther stories the characters navigate the difficulties of being in a foreign court as a minority and as a displaced person, and this corresponds with the more distant and interpretive perspective on divine providence in the narrative. The way in which Joseph’s interpretation of his own narrative envisions God’s providence is similar to the view that we find in the book of Esther of how God intercedes in the present lives of the community. Moreover, in both cases it is part of how the characters in the narrative respond to the cultural trauma of exile and ensuing diaspora.

To provide some context as to where Joseph's interpretation of God's behaviour fits in with other biblical literature, Schmid has helpfully described the view of how God intervenes in history within the Joseph narrative as unique in comparison with other parts of Genesis.<sup>582</sup> In his view, the narrative has a more "remote" and "sophisticated" view of how God acts in history because God's presence is identified by Joseph himself in Genesis 50:20 as a personal act of interpretation.<sup>583</sup> Moreover, Schmid observes that the narrative's view of God's providence does not necessarily align with more traditional concepts, such as divinely ordained history, or the emphasis on covenant which other biblical texts have.<sup>584</sup> That both the book of Esther and the Joseph narrative portray God's role in history as being left up to personal interpretation, not presenting it as a fact to the audience, is one way in which the Book of Esther and the Joseph narrative are alike.<sup>585</sup>

Firstly, both Esther and Joseph's lives seem to be governed by God's providence without direct influence from the deity. God is not directly involved in the events of the Hebrew version of Esther nor is the divine name used in the text. In the Joseph narrative, we are told that "God was with Joseph" throughout Genesis 39, although God does not speak directly to Joseph as he does to Jacob in Genesis 46.<sup>586</sup> Additionally, both save their families or their people from death.<sup>587</sup> It is in light of the seriousness of the threat to the community/family

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<sup>582</sup> Schmid, "Joseph's Second Dream: Towards a Biblical Theology of How God Acts in History," (online video and audio file, unpublished paper), *The Frederick Neumann Memorial Lecture*, 2014. Available at: <http://av.ptsem.edu/detailedplayer.aspx?PK=c4ee9702-3070-e411-8d6d-0050568c0018>. (50:34 onwards). Some scholars view the attitude towards God's providence in the Joseph narrative as indicating that the narrative is later than some of the other material in Genesis. R. Pirson, *The Lord of Dreams: A Semantic and Literary Analysis of Genesis 37–50* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 136.

<sup>583</sup> Schmid, "Joseph's Second Dream," 48: 50–49: 20.

<sup>584</sup> *Ibid.*, 48: 52.

<sup>585</sup> *Ibid.*, 36: 15–37.

<sup>586</sup> Gen. 39: 2; 3; 21; 23.

<sup>587</sup> These are a few examples which explain why Bernstein suggests that the book of Esther "appropriated" and "absorbed" elements from the Joseph narrative. M. S. Bernstein, *Stories of Joseph: Narrative Migrations between Judaism and Islam* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2009), 249.

that both texts reveal this more remote view of how God intervenes in history in comparison with other biblical material. After Esther sends word to Mordecai that she would be risking her life if she goes unsummoned before king Ahasuerus to plead on behalf of the Jewish communities, Mordecai sends this reply to her:

Esth 4:14

14כי אם־הִסְתַּרְשׁ פְּתָרִישִׁי בְּעַת הַזֹּאת רְחוּם וְהַצֵּלָה יֵצְמוּד לַיהוּדִים מִמָּקוֹם אֲחֵר וְאַתָּה וּבֵית־אָבִיךָ תֵּאבְדוּ וְמי יוֹדֵעַ  
אִם־לָעַת כְּזֹאת הַגְּעֵת לַמְּלָכוֹת:

14“For if you continue to remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, then you and the house of your father will perish. And who knows whether it was for a time like this that you have arrived at the kingdom?”

The idea that God used Esther’s suffering, assimilation into Persian court life and her marriage to Ahasuerus in order to save the Jewish communities in his provinces is similar to how Joseph interprets God’s providence in his own narrative. He suffered in that he experienced servitude and false imprisonment,<sup>588</sup> and in that he was both assimilated into Egypt, yet also was simultaneously an outsider due to his Hebrew heritage.<sup>589</sup> Esther is told by Mordecai to conceal her identity<sup>590</sup> and as part of coming into his role as an Egyptian viceroy, Joseph also becomes unrecognizable to his own brothers.<sup>591</sup> Joseph has an Egyptian name;<sup>592</sup> he speaks Egyptian<sup>593</sup> and wears Egyptian clothing. Furthermore, his marriage to Aseneth insinuates a certain level of acceptance into Egyptian society.

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<sup>588</sup> Gen. 39:20.

<sup>589</sup> Gen. 43:32.

<sup>590</sup> Esth. 2:20.

<sup>591</sup> Gen. 42:8.

<sup>592</sup> Gen. 41:45.

<sup>593</sup> In Gen. 42:23 Joseph has a translator present which helps to solidify his disguise.



Gen 41:45

45 וַיִּקְרָא פַרְעֹה שֵׁם־יוֹסֵף צִפְנַת פַּעֲנָח וַיִּתֶּן־לוֹ אֶת־אֲסֵנֶת בַּת־פּוֹטִי פְרַע כִּהֵן אֵן לְאִשָּׁה וַיֵּצֵא יוֹסֵף עַל־אֲרֶץ  
מִצְרַיִם:

<sup>45</sup>And Pharaoh named Joseph Zaphenath-paneah and he gave him Aseneth, daughter of Poti-phera, Priest of On, for a wife.

Esther's and Joseph's experiences of marginalization as displaced people is tied to their employment of subversive tactics and masquerade-like behaviour, that enables the characters to navigate different social groups and situations. Joseph's interpretation of his own narrative, Mordecai's speech to Esther, as well as the link between Esther's name and hiding might suggest that the deception and trickery that the characters employ does not negate the possibility that divine providence can coexist with them, but that the divine's interactions in human affairs are hidden behind the scenes. Additionally, Joseph and Esther's marginalisation is demonstrated in terms of how others in the narrative objectify them. This in particular highlights the links between femininity and subordination. This is, of course, not as noticeable in the Joseph narrative because his gender identity shapes his narrative in ways that Esther's conceivably cannot be for its time. Joseph plays the role of a dream-interpreting courtier, a role more similar to Mordecai in the book of Esther, whereas Esther uses her beauty and wits to become queen.

The similarities between Joseph and Esther are more striking in terms of their characterisation than those he shares with Mordecai, especially in the MT version of Esther. Joseph and Esther's hybrid or fluid characterisations reflect the experience of displacement and marginalisation upon the text's poetics, and the overlap between femininity and subversive behaviour is also indicative of this.

Within the Hebrew Bible the thread of *היא יוסף* is not entirely absent. Joseph's similarities to Esther are significant and show that ancient interpreters were playing with the link between femininity and subordination that is latent within the Joseph narrative itself. In the LXX and AT these similarities are not highlighted and there seems to be more of a focus on shaping the characters more in line with the traits of Greek novels and elaborating on the narrative itself to fill in interpretive gaps. Affinities between Joseph and Esther in the MT occur not only because of possible direct influence from one text onto the other. Rather, it is also how the destabilizing aspects of Joseph's character, which defy boundaries and/or destabilize categories, also apply to Esther's characterisation and the way in which her narrative critiques the men of the Persian court and Mordechai, whose refusal to bow before Haman inflames his hatred for Mordecai and the Jews. Overall, the way in which these characters inhabit dual identities, or even masquerades, in order to assist their communities is reflective of their marginalised status.

Overall, the characterisation of Joseph and Esther create an open-ended poetics concerning exile and diaspora because the Hebrew narratives do not problematise or try to resolve their hybrid identities. On the other hand, Joseph and Esther are valorised for their destabilizing and liminality qualities, and this enables them to preserve and rescue their respective communities.

#### **Chapter Four Conclusion**

The MT narrative of Esther is illuminated by insights from studies into refugee culture that demonstrate the links between the themes of deception, femininity, and subversion. The multifaceted identities of Esther and Joseph are brought out by the ways in which the characters can pass off as having multiple or different backgrounds. In addition to this, the feminization of Joseph and Esther corresponds to the subordination they experienced as

marginalised characters, as well as their objectification. In both the Hebrew versions, the divine does not take a prominent role in preserving the people in comparison to the protagonists.

It has been noted that exilic communities generally would embrace ideologies which support lifestyles that would ensure their survival.<sup>594</sup> In particular, these survival strategies would lead to the development of different senses of identities.<sup>595</sup> Survival does not appear to be facilitated by falling entirely onto either side of the resistance and cooperation spectrum. Rather there is tension within Esther's character and behaviour precisely because she falls in between these poles, and this is also central to her successful rescue of the Jewish communities in Susa, as well as Joseph's ability to save his family in Genesis. Although Joseph displays longing for his bones to rest in the land of Canaan, within his lifetime he does not return.<sup>596</sup> The lack of any emphasis on homecoming from the diaspora/exile already places it within an open-ended perspective towards exile and diaspora. Moreover, the open-endedness of the text is demonstrated by the boundary bending and potentially gender-bending characters who enable their communities to survive and thrive in the diaspora.

Returning to Leveson's statement in the introduction, Esther indeed turns exile into diaspora<sup>597</sup> in that the narrative provides a way forward for the communities; one that does not lead to the erasure of previous loyalties or identities, but a transformation that is caught in an inherent tension between the dominant and the subordinated group. The versions, which are composed even more firmly in a diaspora context and also further in history, take

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<sup>594</sup> Ames, "The Cascading Effects of Exile," 185.

<sup>595</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>596</sup> Gen. 50:25.

<sup>597</sup> Levenson, *Esther*, 15.

different approaches to Esther's presentation where there is a preference towards the resistance side of the spectrum.

In the MT narrative of Esther, power structures are not toppled but they are undermined, and Esther has secured safety for her people in a way that suggests long-term survival is possible. Complete erasure and assimilation have not occurred, but neither has complete resistance as shown by Mordecai's and Esther's integration into the power structures of the Persian courts. The creation of Purim (Esth. 9:26) reflects the continuation and transformation of communal life in diaspora as a result of Esther and Mordecai's actions, creating an open-ended poetics concerning exile and diaspora.

Timothy Beal's work on Esther brings out the way in which the narrative in Hebrew complicates identity performance and assimilation as a response to marginalisation and displacement.

“It is the aggregation of the many identity convergences, shifting alignments, ambivalences, and marginal locations in the narrative that leads, ultimately, to the profound disaggregations of other subjects and the order of relations of ‘us’ and ‘them’ upon which they rely. The narrative of Esther is, in this sense, farcical. It is stuffed with identity convergences, disaggregations, and complex, shifting patterns of character alignment.”<sup>598</sup>

As noted earlier, Beal describes the book of Esther as a “literary farce that highlights the impossibilities of locating and fixing the not-self, or other (specifically the woman as other and the Jew as other) over against ‘us.’”<sup>599</sup> The narrative as a response to displacement does

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<sup>598</sup> Beal, *The Book of Hiding*, IX.

<sup>599</sup> Ibid.

not reinforce a dichotomy between “us” and “them,” but offers a way to move forward that does not look to physical homecoming as the resolve.

The book of Esther along with the Joseph narrative presents a nuanced account of how a character and community can respond to displacement and the role of the divine in suffering, exile, and diaspora. Joseph and Esther hover between the dominant group and the marginalized group, and the vulnerability of their positions is expressed in the hyper-feminization of Esther and the feminization of Joseph.

The MT version of the book of Esther highlights the marginality and anxieties that can be associated with diaspora, which might not be appealing for later audiences who have lived in the diaspora longer. The insights of refugee studies, postcolonial studies and gender studies illuminate how the categories of subordinate and feminine can overlap with one another. The overlapping creates an open-ended poetics concerning exile and diaspora in the Hebrew version of Esther and the Joseph narrative, because the displaced character is not judged harshly for their levels of assimilation nor their subversive and deceptive tactics. That they survive and thrive in the diaspora is seen as positive even if it is difficult, and that they facilitate the rest of the diaspora community to thrive in the diaspora is also seen as positive. Both narratives suggest that life in the diaspora does not need to be resolved through homecoming, and in the case of the Joseph narrative, the divine is still active in human affairs under these circumstances.

Reflecting back on Chapter One, verses from the book of Lamentations oscillated between God as both an aggressor but also as a source of comfort and safety. The idea that God has hidden himself and shuts out the prayer of the people<sup>600</sup> provides helpful contextualisation for the way in which the Hebrew version of Esther presents an open-ended poetics concerning

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<sup>600</sup> Lam. 3:44.

exile and diaspora. Much like how Second Isaiah responded to communal laments like the ones found in Lamentations, the book of Esther is also responding to the same exile and its aftermath. Esther being a direct descendant of those taken into exile explores another response to displacement in a prose narrative that narrativizes the trauma of displacement in a way that suggests that the community can survive even if the divine hides from the people, or, as in the case of the Joseph narrative, is more remote. By narrativizing those anxieties, which is evident in the feminization and gender-bending aspects of Joseph's and Esther's characterisations, both texts present an open-ended poetics concerning exile and diaspora.

## Chapter Five: Weaving Displacement into the Past in the Book(s) of Esther

This chapter explores how the Tg. Sheni weaves the experience of displacement into the distant past of the book of Esther in order to create a sense of continuity with earlier Israelite history and legends. The Tg. Sheni is an example of an ancient interpretation of the book of Esther that presents an open-ended poetics concerning exile and diaspora.

The many versions of the book of Esther reveal different aspects of how displacement impacts communities, including the way in which the narrative addresses the marginalization and insecurity of Jewish communities in Ahasuerus's kingdom. One response to the anxieties of diaspora communities in the Second Temple period that is addressed in the versions of the book of Esther is the role of divine providence to provide reassurance that ultimately disaster will be avoided. As was discussed in the previous chapter, in the Greek versions of Esther as well as the targumim, God became a prominent character in the narrative in comparison with the Hebrew version. In distinguishing between the Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic versions, Patmore suggests that the Hebrew and Greek versions envision "security" and "self-determination within an alien culture" in different ways, whereas the targumim to Esther focus instead on situating her narrative "within a wider narrative of exile and return."<sup>601</sup> Patmore also suggests that the Greek texts envision optimism about life in the diaspora, whereas the targumim present "the diaspora situation as antithetical to Jewish identity and look for its ending."<sup>602</sup> While I agree that the targumim situate Esther as part of a wider narrative of exile, this is not done to suggest that being in diaspora is antithetical to Jewish identity. However, by contextualizing the book of Esther into a wider framework of exile and

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<sup>601</sup> Patmore, "The Beginnings of Jewish Late Antiquity," 272.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid. Furthermore he notes that "The sense of *galut* (exile) articulated by the rabbis remained a defining category of Jewish thought down to the present day, as the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel so clearly articulates."

diaspora suggests that displacement is an integral aspect of Jewish identity in the tradition and is not antithetical to it.<sup>603</sup>

### **The Targum Rishon and the Targum Sheni**

The Tg. Rishon and Tg. Sheni are Aramaic translations and interpretations of the book of Esther that contain an extensive amount of Aggadic material. While containing the entire book of Esther translated into Aramaic, the targumim envelope the narrative with more context, including traditions about king Solomon and Jeremiah, and the targumim provide us with more insights into the characters' motivations and thinking.

Regarding when to date these traditions, the Tg. Rishon could be dated to the seventh century; and on the basis of internal evidence the Tg. Sheni cannot be later than the end of Byzantine rule of Palestine at the beginning of the seventh century: it could however be earlier or contain elements that are earlier, even as early as the fourth century.<sup>604</sup> Regarding the content of the Tg. Sheni, it could be composed of a variety of other targumim, namely three sources: the Targum Yerushalmi, Targum Tosefta, and Targum Rabbati.<sup>605</sup> This might explain the patchwork-like quality of much of the Aggadic material that has been preserved in it, and the diversity of the material.<sup>606</sup>

The breadth with which scholars date the Tg. Sheni is indicative of the variety of its Aggadic material, but I am inclined to allow for the material to have a wide chronological scope. For

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<sup>603</sup> Cf. Patmore, "The Beginnings of Jewish Late Antiquity," 272. He describes the Tg. Sheni's engagement with the concept of diaspora as a state of being that is antithetical to Jewish identity.

<sup>604</sup> Grossfeld, *The Two Targums*, 20. Grossfeld in his introduction to the Tg. Sheni notes that a targum to Esther possibly existed in Amoraic times, and that Rosefta Meg. IV:20 and y. Meg. IV:1 suggest that this is the case.

<sup>605</sup> See Grossfeld's introduction to the Tg. Sheni; *The Two Targums*, 20.

<sup>606</sup> Grossfeld also notes that some of the material in the Tg. Sheni could date to the eleventh century because some of the Aggadic material is present in the lore of other cultures, especially Tg. Sheni 1:1 and 2 which contains the legends about Evil-Moerodakh's ascension to the throne, Solomon's throne, Solomon's control over animals and spirits, the queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon, and the Jeremiah legends. See *ibid.*, 15.



example, the Tg. Sheni appears to reflect the persecution of Jews from Christians (see Haman's tirade against the Jews in Tg. Sheni 3:8).<sup>607</sup> Houtman, Kirn, and Van, for example, suggest that Haman's tirade against Judaism in 3:8 best situates the text in the seventh century as the criticism of Judaism likely reflects a Christian perspective.<sup>608</sup> Therefore, what makes up the targumim is likely to derive from multiple time periods and sources, and this adds to the complexity with which the text addresses the themes of exile and diaspora.

The Tg. Sheni will feature most in these chapters, but the Tg. Rishon is still significant for seeing which motifs developed in the history of interpretation. In light of the work of Posner,<sup>609</sup> it is feasible to build a literary analysis of the text on the assumption that the Tg. Sheni did not necessarily borrow from Tg. Rishon, nor are they of the opinion that the writers of Tg. Rishon knew of the Tg. Sheni.<sup>610</sup> The two targumim potentially could have been composed around the same time and perhaps drew on similar traditions, but they can be approached as independent works. I agree with Grossfeld who goes as far as suggesting that their differences are best accounted for because the writers had a different purpose for each.<sup>611</sup> The targumim to Esther, even more so than the Greek versions, endow the narrative of Esther with interpretive traditions that imbed it in the history of ancient Israel, and traditions now known to us in the Hebrew Bible.

Overall, the versions in Greek and Aramaic generally give a sense of order and purpose to the narrative. In the case of the Tg. Sheni diaspora is woven into the past as much as Israelite history is woven into the book of Esther's narrative present. Adele Berlin suggests that the

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<sup>607</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>608</sup> A. Houtman, H. Kirn, and S. E. Van, *A Jewish Targum in a Christian World: Jewish Targum in a Christian World* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 290.

<sup>609</sup> Solomon Posner, *Das Targum Rischon zu dem Biblischen Buche Esther* (PhD diss., University of Breslau, 1896), 18–26.

<sup>610</sup> Grossfeld, *The Two Targums*, 23.

<sup>611</sup> Ibid., 23.

writers of Hebrew Esther wanted it to sound “biblical” itself, and that the book of Esther is indicative of other diaspora stories in that it draws on other biblical literature and themes “to create strong ties with preexilic Israel and with the traditional literature that had been or was in the process of being canonized.”<sup>612</sup> Berlin also talks about the “burden” of diaspora stories as needing to provide continuity for Jewish communities “in the face of the overwhelming dislocation of the Jewish community.”<sup>613</sup> However, it suggests an inherently negative perspective on diaspora life to describe their function for communities as addressing the burden of diaspora. In the introduction the idea that the diaspora was largely seen in negative ways was discussed in more detail, and it was demonstrated that several ancient Jewish texts did not portray diaspora as an inherently negative state.<sup>614</sup>

In her discussion of “trickster” type characters in folklore and the Hebrew Bible, Susan Niditch identifies both Joseph and Esther as tricksters or trickster type characters. As part of her discussion, she states that while tricksters embody, “chaos, marginality and indefinability,” the wisdom heroine/hero signifies “order, neatness, a world in which everything fits.”<sup>615</sup> While I disagree with the juxtaposition and her conception of a wisdom hero as lacking these aforementioned traits, her descriptions *are* helpful for thinking about the character of the versions of Esther and the targumim, and how they relate to one another. The MT embodies more of the “chaos, marginality and indefinability,” whereas the versions and Aramaic interpretations imbue the tale with “order, neatness, a world in which everything fits.”<sup>616</sup> A key part of creating this sense of order is through making the divine’s intervention in the narrative explicit. The Tg. Sheni also prioritizes making ties to earlier traditions,

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<sup>612</sup> Berlin, “Ancient Storytelling,” 7.

<sup>613</sup> Ibid.

<sup>614</sup> See section in the introduction of this thesis entitled, “The Broader Context of Displacement and Homecoming in Antiquity.”

<sup>615</sup> Niditch, “Esther: Folklore,” 41.

<sup>616</sup> Ibid.

whereas the Greek versions appear more interested in updating the narrative for a contemporary audience.<sup>617</sup> The following subsections consider how the Tg. Sheni continues to transform exile into diaspora, and therefore creates an open-ended poetics of exile and diaspora. Overall, by making Esther's displacement part of a longer history of earlier displacements and struggles in Israel's history, the Tg. Sheni fosters an open-ended perspective towards exile and diaspora.

All versions of the narrative aside from the MT generally do the following as a way of bringing order and purpose to the narrative. For example, all the versions aside from the MT include the divine as a character, and they include material that seeks to explain or further contextualise the narrative itself. Additionally, the versions include allusions to previous traditions which subsequently present the diaspora as an extension of a longer history of displacement.

### **A New Frame for the Narrative: Mordecai's Dream (Addition A in the Greek Versions)**

The dreams and their interpretations in the versions reveal different influences on the text's composition, they also give sense of purpose to the narrative and alter its narrative structure. For the Greek versions of Esther, Mordecai's dream in what is called Addition A in the LXX and AT considerably changes the narrative's framework because it does not begin with the king's banquets and Vashti's expulsion from the palace, and his dream foreshadows the conflict between Haman and Mordecai. It places not only more of a focus on Mordecai, but it characterizes the Jewish communities as loyal to king Ahasuerus whereas the gentiles in the narrative are attempting to undermine it. It provides an explanation for the conflict between Haman and Mordecai that centres on their loyalty to the king, and *not* on the past conflict

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<sup>617</sup> This point will be discussed in more detail using the example of how Haman's ancestry is translated and interpreted in the LXX and AT text. See the section entitled, "The Agag and Saul Traditions."

between Israelites and Amalekites. Addition A is generally understood as “an allegory of the ensuing narrative.”<sup>618</sup> The following paragraphs show how the LXX reshapes the narrative of Esther predominately through Addition A, and this contextualises the way in which the Tg. Sheni will take a different approach in terms of how it contextualises the narrative of Esther.

The beginnings of LXX and the AT are significantly different from the MT. Mordecai’s dream foreshadows the coming conflict with Haman where the “whole righteous nation” (δικαίον πᾶν ἔθνος) is under threat, but God hears their cry.

Add. A:1–11 (LXX)

<sup>1</sup>Ἐτους δευτέρου βασιλεύοντος Ἀρταξέρξου τοῦ μεγάλου τῆ μιᾶ τοῦ Νισα ἐνύπνιον εἶδεν Μαρδοχαῖος ὁ τοῦ Ιαΐρου τοῦ Σεμείου τοῦ Κισαίου ἐκ φυλῆς Βενιαμίν, <sup>2</sup>ἄνθρωπος Ἰουδαῖος οἰκῶν ἐν Σούσοις τῆ πόλει, ἄνθρωπος μέγας θεραπεύων ἐν τῆ αὐλῇ τοῦ βασιλέως. <sup>3</sup>ἦν δὲ ἐκ τῆς αἰχμαλωσίας ἧς ἠχμαλώτευσεν Ναβουχοδοноσορ βασιλεὺς Βαβυλῶνος ἐξ Ἱερουσαλημ μετὰ Ἰεχονίου τοῦ βασιλέως τῆς Ἰουδαίας. <sup>4</sup>καὶ τοῦτο αὐτοῦ τὸ ἐνύπνιον· καὶ ἰδοὺ φωναὶ καὶ θόρυβος, βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμός, τάραχος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. <sup>5</sup>καὶ ἰδοὺ δύο δράκοντες μεγάλοι ἔτοιμοι προῆλθον ἀμφοτέρω παλαίειν, καὶ ἐγένετο αὐτῶν φωνὴ μεγάλη, <sup>6</sup>καὶ τῆ φωνῇ αὐτῶν ἠτοιμάσθη πᾶν ἔθνος εἰς πόλεμον ὥστε πολεμῆσαι δικαίων ἔθνος. <sup>7</sup>καὶ ἰδοὺ ἡμέρα σκότους καὶ γνόφου, θλίψις καὶ στενοχωρία, κάκωσις καὶ τάραχος μέγας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, <sup>8</sup>καὶ ἐταράχθη δίκαιον πᾶν ἔθνος, φοβούμενοι τὰ ἑαυτῶν κακά, καὶ ἠτοιμάσθησαν ἀπολέσθαι, <sup>9</sup>καὶ ἐβόησαν πρὸς τὸν θεόν. ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς βοῆς αὐτῶν ἐγένετο ὡσανεὶ ἀπὸ μικρᾶς πηγῆς ποταμὸς μέγας, ὕδωρ πολὺ· <sup>10</sup>φῶς καὶ ὁ ἥλιος ἀνέτειλεν, καὶ οἱ ταπεινοὶ ὑψώθησαν καὶ κατέφαγον τοὺς ἐνδόξους. <sup>11</sup>καὶ διεγερθεὶς

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<sup>618</sup> Cameron Boyd-Taylor, “Esther and Additions to Esther,” in *T&T Clark Companion to the Septuagint*, ed. J. K. Aitken (Cambridge: T&T Clark, 2015), 203–221 (204).

Μαρδοχαῖος ὁ ἑωρακὼς τὸ ἐνύπνιον τοῦτο καὶ τί ὁ θεὸς βεβούλευται ποιῆσαι, εἶχεν αὐτὸ ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ καὶ ἐν παντὶ λόγῳ ἤθελεν ἐπιγῶναι αὐτὸ ἕως τῆς νυκτός.

<sup>1</sup>In the second year when Artaxerxes the Great was king, on the first day of Nisa, Mardochoaios the son of Iairos son of Semeias son of Kisaaios, from the tribe of Benjamin, saw a dream. <sup>2</sup>He was a Judean man dwelling in the city of Susa, a great man, serving in the court of the king. <sup>3</sup>Now he was of the group of exiles which Nabouchodonosor, king of Babylon, took captive from Ierousalem with Iechonias, the king of Judea. <sup>4</sup>And this was his dream: Look! Shouts and confusion! Thunder and earthquake! Chaos upon the earth! <sup>5</sup>Look! Two great dragons came forward, both ready to fight, and a great noise arose from them! <sup>6</sup>And at their sound every nation prepared for war, to fight against a nation of righteous people. <sup>7</sup>Look! A day of darkness and gloom! Affliction and anguish! Oppression and great chaos upon the earth! <sup>8</sup>And the whole righteous nation was in chaos, fearing the evils that threatened themselves, and they were ready to perish. <sup>9</sup>Then they cried out to God, and from their cry, as though from a small spring, there came a great river, abundant water; <sup>10</sup>light, and the sun rose, and the lowly were exalted and devoured those held in esteem. <sup>11</sup>Then when Mardochoaios, who had seen this dream and what God had determined to do, awoke, he had it on his heart and sought until nightfall to understand it in every detail.

After waking from this dream, Mordecai overhears of the plot to overthrow the king by two eunuchs, and upon making the king aware of this Mordecai is rewarded with a promotion in the court. The introductions to the LXX and AT differ in comparison with the MT that has an

entire first chapter focusing on the king and the disposition of Vashti, and a decree which demands that women obey their husbands and speak their husband's language in the home.<sup>619</sup>

Noah Hachman in his work on the Additions suggests that gentiles in Addition A dislike Mordecai and the Jews because they are in fact truly loyal to the monarch; on the other hand, individuals such as Bigthan, Teresh, Gabatha, Thara, and Haman are insidiously trying to take control over the regime.<sup>620</sup> He suggests that this perspective found in the Greek additions, in particular Addition A which brings Gabatha and Thara's plot against the king to the forefront of the narrative, would fit in the context of the first twenty years of the first century BCE and shed light on the situation of diaspora Jewish communities in Ptolemaic Egypt.<sup>621</sup>

Regarding the interpretation offered of why the conflict begins, Seeman suggests that the dragon's wrestling in his dream is indicative of Greek athletics which an audience in the first BCE or second century BCE would have been familiar with. The description of the dragons sparring with one another suggests, in Hachman's view, that the hubris of both men played a part in initiating the conflict.<sup>622</sup> Overall, it is not an entirely forgiving picture of Mordecai.

The imagery of light, feasting, and joy occurs primarily in the LXX, but also in the AT to a lesser extent, and it is echoed in the dreams interpretation in Addition F. Firstly, Mordecai's dream in both versions alludes to the day in which the dragons spar with one another as a day

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<sup>619</sup> Esth. 1:16–22. The decree against the women in Ahasuerus's kingdom was also discussed in the previous chapter.

<sup>620</sup> Noah Hacham, "Bigthan and Teresh and the Reason Gentiles Hate Jews," *VT* 62 (2012): 318–356 (319).

<sup>621</sup> Hacham, "Bigthan and Teresh," 319. He argues that LXX Esther incorporates two accounts of regicide into the narrative, the first in Addition A where Mordecai reports it to the king and is rewarded, and the second one in Esth. 2:21–23. *Ibid.*, 324–25.

<sup>622</sup> Chris Seeman, "Enter the Dragon: Mordecai as Agonistic Combatant in Greek Esther," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 41 (2011): 3–15 (13).

of “ἡμέρα σκότους καὶ γνόφου καὶ ταραχὴ πολέμου,”<sup>623</sup> and in the LXX it is a “ἡμέρα σκότους καὶ γνόφου, θλίψις καὶ στενοχωρία.”<sup>624</sup>

Esth 8:16 (AT)

καὶ τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ἐγένετο φῶς, πότος, κώθων.

For the Judeans there was light, drinking, feasting.

Esth 8:16 (LXX)

τοῖς δὲ Ἰουδαίοις ἐγένετο φῶς καὶ εὐφροσύνη·

For the Judeans there was light and gladness.

In the following verse the same lexical choices reoccur.

Esth 8:17 (LXX)

χαρὰ καὶ εὐφροσύνη τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις, κώθων καὶ εὐφροσύνη.

Wherever the proclamation was made “there was gladness and joy among the Judeans, a feast and mirth.”

In the LXX, these lexical choices are related to the description of how Purim is established and to be celebrated.

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<sup>623</sup> “A day of darkness and gloom and chaos of war! And every nation prepared to fight.” AT 11:8; A:7-8.

<sup>624</sup> “A day of darkness and gloom! Affliction and anguish!” LXX 11:8; A:7.

Esth 9:17

καὶ ἀνεπαύσαντο τῇ τεσσαρεσκαίδεκάτῃ τοῦ αὐτοῦ μηνός καὶ ἤγον αὐτὴν ἡμέραν ἀναπαύσεως μετὰ χαρᾶς καὶ εὐφροσύνης.

And they rested on the fourteenth of the same month and celebrated it as a day of rest with joy and gladness.

When Mordecai comes to understand in Addition F how the dream foretold the events of what has occurred in the narrative, the motif of darkness and gloom is inverted when the celebration of God's saving the people is a day of joy and rejoicing "χαρᾶς καὶ εὐφροσύνης" before God.<sup>625</sup> The opposite of the day of war and terror that was alluded to in the dream.

Mordecai's dream and its interpretation give the narrative a sense of control and purpose which is not as present in the MT where the events of the narrative are not hinted at early to the same extent. Additionally, the dream also makes Mordecai more similar to two other infamous Jewish courtiers, Joseph and Daniel, who both interpret dreams.<sup>626</sup> Overall, I agree with Seeman who notes that, "Greek Esther's message of God's pervasive presence within and controlling power over Israel's existence is clear and consistent."<sup>627</sup>

### **The Jeremiah Traditions in Targum Sheni**

Moving to the Tg. Sheni, the book of Jeremiah became part of the context for Esther and Mordecai's narrative in Tg. Sheni, and the allusions to the book demonstrate one way in which the Babylonian exile becomes more significant for the Tg. Sheni's interpretation of Esther. In the Tg. Sheni, Esther was interpreted not only against the backdrop of the book of

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<sup>625</sup> LXX 10:13, F:10. There is a similar description of Purim in the AT as a gathering of "χαρᾶς καὶ εὐφροσύνης" before God (10:40; F:10).

<sup>626</sup> See Gen. 41:9-36 and Dan. 2:24-49.

<sup>627</sup> Seeman, "Enter the Dragon," 14.



Jeremiah, but also Psalm 137 whose authorship in antiquity was attributed to Jeremiah.<sup>628</sup> In Tg Sheni 1:2, Nebuchadnezzar himself is the one who requests those held captive to sing in the psalm:

כד אתון ומטון לנהרות' דבבל עני נבוכד־נצר וכן אמר להון לישר' אילין זימריא דהויתון מזמרי' קדם מריכון  
רבא דירוש' ייתיון ויזמרון קדמיי וכד שמעו ליואי נטלי' ית כינריהון בערבתיא דקיימין על נהרותא דבבל דהכין  
כתי' על נהרות בבל על ערבים עניין ליואי ואמרי' לנבוכ־נצ' אין הוינן עבדין רעות אבונן דבשמיא והוינן  
משבחין קדמוי בירוש' בידא דידיך לא אתמסר יתן השתא היך נשבה קדמך שבהא דמרינן וכן כתבא מפרש ואמר  
איך נשיר את שיר

When they finally arrived at the rivers of Babylonia, Nebukhadnezzar declared, thus saying to Israel, “Let those singers who used to sing before your great Lord in Jerusalem comes and sing before me.” When the Levites heard (this), they suspended their lutes by the willows which stood by the rivers of Babylonia; for thus it is written: “By the rivers of Babylonia, by the willows.” (Then) the Levites replied to Nebukhadnezzar, saying: “Had we done the will of our father in Heaven, and had we offered praises before him in Jerusalem, we would not have been delivered into your hand(s). So how can we now offer before you praises due to our Lord? For thus it is explicitly written: ‘How can we sing the Lord’s song?’”

Just before this allusion to Psalm 137, the prophet Jeremiah visits the ancestral tombs of the patriarchs, matriarchs, and prophets to plead with them to awaken from their graves and witness their descendants going into exile. It is also significant that later traditions assign authorship of Psalm 137 to Jeremiah because this further reinforces how the Tg. Sheni brings the experience of exile to bear on Esther’s narrative. Each plea is answered through reference

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<sup>628</sup> See Chapter One, section entitled, “The Wilderness and the People’s Relationship with God in Jeremiah 31,” note 229.

to a verse in the book of Jeremiah. His plea to all the matriarchs is answered by reference to Rachel weeping for her children, and wishing them to return from exile from Jeremiah 31:

Tg. Sheni 1:2

וקם מקברי אבהתא ואזל ונפל על קברי אמהתא עני וכן אמ' אמהתנא מרחמניתנא שרה רבקה רחל ולאה  
קומו מגו קבריכון וחזון ית בניכו' ובנתכון דאזלין בשבי' ומהלכין בגלותא לא צביית מסאבא מתיבא רוח  
דקודש' וכן אמרת כבר אמרית קול ברמה נשמ'

So he arose from the graves of the Patriarchs and proceeded to fall upon the graves of the Matriarchs and prostrated himself. He declared saying: “O our merciful mothers, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah! Arise from within your raves and observe your sons and daughters going into captivity and embarking into exile, unwillingly defiled.” Whereupon the Holy Spirit replied, thus saying: “I already said: ‘A voice was heard in Rama.’”

The reference to Jeremiah 31:15-17 works especially well as more context for the book of Esther because Esther and Mordecai belong to the tribe of Benjamin, which is one of the three tribes that are descendant from Rachel and Jacob as opposed to Leah and Jacob.

Jer 31:15–17

<sup>15</sup>פֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה קוֹל בְּרָמָה נִשְׁמָע נְהִי בְּכִי תַמְרוּרִים רָחֵל מִבְּכָה עַל־בָּנֶיהָ מֵאַנְהָ לְהַנְחֵם עַל־בָּנֶיהָ כִּי אֵינָנּוּ: <sup>16</sup>פֹּה  
אָמַר יְהוָה מְנַעֵי קוֹלֶךָ מִבְּכִי וְעֵינַיֶךָ מִדְּמָעָה כִּי יֵשׁ שְׂכָר לְפַעֲלֶיךָ נְאֻם־יְהוָה וְשָׁבוּ מֵאֶרֶץ אוֹיֵב: <sup>17</sup>וְיִשְׁתַּקְּוּהָ  
לְאַחֲרֵימָךְ נְאֻם־יְהוָה וְשָׁבוּ בָנִים לְגִבּוֹלָם:

<sup>15</sup>“Thus, says the Lord; ‘A voice was heard in Ramah. Wailing, bitterest weeping. Rachel weeps for her sons. She refuses to be comforted about her sons, for they are no more!’

<sup>16</sup>Thus, says the Lord; ‘Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your labour,’ says the Lord. ‘And they will return from the land of the

enemy, <sup>17</sup>and there is hope for your future,’ declares the Lord, ‘And sons will return to their borders.’”

Even though this oracle might have been originally directed only against Northern Israel, at a later time the oracle came to apply to all of Israel and Judah when Judahites were eventually taken into exile.<sup>629</sup> The location of Ramah may have even taken on greater significance at this time, as Ramah appears to have become a holding cell where exile-bound Judahites awaited transportation: Jeremiah is even among them in Jeremiah 40:1.<sup>630</sup> Through references to Jeremiah Psalm 137, often known as the “Psalm of Exile,” becomes part of the context for how the narrative of Esther is interpreted, and builds upon Mordecai and Esther’s family history as detailed in Esther 2:6–7.

Additionally, in Tg. Sheni 4:13 the verb למעקר is the same verb used to translate לְנִחוּשׁ in the Targum to Jeremiah (1:10) for the phrase, “to uproot and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant,” a common motif throughout the book of Jeremiah.

Tg. Sheni 4:13

וביה בליליא איתעברת איתתיה מיניה וקם המן מן זרעיתיה ובעא למזבן כולהון יהודאי ולמעקר יתהון

That very night a woman became pregnant from him, and Haman arose from his descendants, who has been seeking to buy all of the Jews and **to uproot** them completely.

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<sup>629</sup> J. R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, NY: Doubleday), 437.

<sup>630</sup> “The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, after Nebuzaradan, the chief of the guards, set him free at Ramah, to which he had taken him, chained in fetters, among those from Jerusalem and Judah who were being exiled to Babylon.” Although, the word ברמה is not interpreted as a noun in the Targum, it is interpreted as a place name in the Peshitta, the LXX as well as Matthew 2:18. Lundbom, *Jeremiah*, 346.

Tg. Jeremiah 1:10

חֲזִי דְמַנִּיתְךָ יוֹמָא הַדִּין עַל עַמְמֵי אֲרָם וְעַל מַלְכוּתָא לְמַעַקֵּר וּלְתַרְעָא וּלְאַבְדָּא וּלְפַגְגָּא וְעַל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמַבְנֵי  
וּלְקִמָּא:

See that I have appointed you today over the nations and over the kingdoms **to uproot**, and to tear down, and to destroy, and to break down, but over the house of Israel—to build up and to establish.

Generally, allusions to the Jeremiah traditions in the Tg. Sheni strengthen the relevance of the exile for contextualising the narrative. This is already latent in the Hebrew version of the narrative where Mordecai and Esther are introduced in Esther 2, which has been previously discussed. Additionally, the Jeremiah traditions make it apparent that the divine has intervened on behalf of the people in the past and suggests that divine involvement in human affairs persists in exile and diaspora. Moreover, that Esther's experience of displacement is part of a wider framework of suffering and displacement where the divine remains concerned for the people's welfare. Overall, this fosters an open-ended poetics concerning exile and diaspora because the diaspora does not represent a complete rupture from divine favour.

### **Prayers and Earlier Traditions in the Greek Versions and the Targumim**

The integration of Esther's narrative with past traditions constructs an open-ended poetics towards diaspora as a viable and not inherently negative state of existence, and this effect is also achieved by the inclusion of prayers. In both the Greek versions and the targumim we see the inclusion of prayers in the narrative of Esther. Given some of the similarities between the prayers in the targumim, both will be considered in this section. The prayers collapse time through biblical allusions and give the narrative a general sense of order and purpose in the LXX, AT, Tg. Sheni, and Tg. Rishon. In Mordecai's prayer after speaking with Esther in

chapter four and asking her to go before the king, he evokes the Exodus as another example of God saving his people from harm.

Add. C: 8–9 (LXX)

<sup>8</sup>καὶ νῦν, κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ βασιλεύς, ὁ θεὸς Ἀβρααμ, φεῖσαι τοῦ λαοῦ σου, ὅτι ἐπιβλέπουσιν ἡμῖν εἰς καταφθορὰν καὶ ἐπεθύμησαν ἀπολέσαι τὴν ἐξ ἀρχῆς κληρονομίαν σου· <sup>9</sup>μὴ ὑπερίδης τὴν μερίδα σου, ἣν σεαυτῷ ἐλυτρώσω ἐκ γῆς Αἰγύπτου· <sup>10</sup>ἐπάκουσον τῆς δεήσεώς μου καὶ ἰλάσθητι τῷ κλήρῳ σου καὶ στρέψον τὸ πένθος ἡμῶν εἰς εὐωχίαν, ἵνα ζῶντες ὑμνῶμέν σου τὸ ὄνομα, κύριε, καὶ μὴ ἀφανίσης στόμα αἰνούντων σοι. <sup>11</sup>καὶ πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ ἐκέκραξαν ἐξ ἰσχύος αὐτῶν, ὅτι θάνατος αὐτῶν ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτῶν.

<sup>8</sup>And now, O Lord God, King, God of Abraam, spare your people, for they are looking to ruin us, and they desired to destroy the inheritance that has been yours from the beginning.  
<sup>9</sup>Do not neglect your portion, which you redeemed for yourself out of the land of Egypt.  
Do not neglect your portion, which you redeemed for yourself out of the land of Egypt.  
Hear my petition, and have mercy upon your allotment; turn our mourning into feasting, that we may live and sing hymns to your name, O Lord; do not silence the mouth of those who praise you.

In AT Addition C, Mordecai also makes references to the Exodus, as well as in the LXX version of Addition C. However, the prayer as presented in the AT is considerably shorter.

Add. C. 8–9 (AT)

<sup>8</sup>καὶ νῦν, κύριε, ὁ διαθέμενος πρὸς Ἀβρααμ, φεῖσαι τοῦ λαοῦ σου, ὅτι ἐπιτέθινται ἡμῖν εἰς καταφθορὰν καὶ ἐπιθυμοῦσιν ἀφανίσει καὶ ἐξᾶραι τὴν ἐξ ἀρχῆς κληρονομίαν σου· <sup>9</sup>μὴ ὑπερίδης τὴν μερίδα σου, ἣν ἐλυτρώσω ἐκ γῆς Αἰγύπτου·

<sup>8</sup>And now, O Lord, you who covenanted with Abraam, spare your people, because they have advanced to ruin us, and they desire to remove and take away the inheritance that has been yours from the beginning. <sup>9</sup>Do not neglect your portion, which you redeemed out of the land of Egypt.

The reference to the Exodus is one example of how the paradigm of the past provides comfort in a parallel situation of marginalisation in the diaspora. Esther's prayer in Tg. Sheni 5:1 also provides many references to earlier traditions:

בבעו אסתר אמרת מלהא ובתחנונים סדרת צלותא בבעו מינך שמע צליין שמע צלותי בעידנא הדין גלינא  
וטרידנא מן ארענא ובדיל חובנא מסרתא יתנא דיתקיים בנא פתגם דכתיב ותתזבנון תמן לבעלי־דבביכון לעבדין  
ולאמה' ולית דקני והא אבהתנ' מזדבנין ולית דקני

Esther said her words in supplication and arranged her prayer in an imploring manner.

“I beg of You, hear our prayer, hear my prayer at this time. We are exiled and banished from our land. You surrendered us on account of our sins, so that the matter which is written concerning us: ‘There you will be sold to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no one will buy you,’ will be fulfilled, and here we are being sold and no one wants to buy us.”

The prayers also increase the sense of the character's piety and give us insights into their thoughts and motivations. Regarding the way in which Esther abases herself, in the Tg. Sheni Nolte and Jordaan suggests that the “symbolic acts” of throwing ashes and dung on her head are both acts of “penitence and mourning” as well symbolising the exchange of her royal crown for something negative.<sup>631</sup> They conclude that the effect of the way in which she

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<sup>631</sup> S. Philip Nolte and Pierre J. Jordaan, “Esther's Prayer in Additions to Esther: Addition C to LXX Esther—An Embodied Cognition Approach,” *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 20 (2009): 293–309 (305).

demeans her own body is intended to portray her as pious, and to offer a response to how she can be seen as pious despite having married a gentile.<sup>632</sup>

Additionally, the prayers uttered by Esther suggest that this pattern of rescue is predicated on the “merit of the patriarchs” who are referenced throughout her prayer. In the Tg. Sheni before entering to see the king, Esther invokes the binding of Isaac as precedent for her rescue in this situation as well as the people’s:

Tg. Sheni 5:1

תלתא יומין צמית קדמך לקבל תלתא יומין דאזל אברהם למיעקד בריה על-גבי מדבחא קדמך וקיימתא ליה  
קיימא ואמרת ליה דכל אימת דנעלון בנך לאנגקי אידכר להון עקדת יצחק אבוהון ופרוק יתהון

I fasted before You three days, corresponding to the three days it took Abraham to go (to the place) to tie up his son on the altar before You. You preserved the covenant toward him and said to him that whenever your descendants will come into distress, I will remember for them the binding of their father Isaac and redeem them.

The merit and deeds of ancestors have a particularly important role in this prayer and are a means of imploring the divine to assist the community. In the Tg. Sheni, the legends of ancestors such as Abraham and Isaac are part of how exile is transformed into diaspora, and also how experiences of past displacement are woven into the context for Esther’s diaspora narrative. The diaspora is not represented as a complete rupture with what has come before. Rather, in Esther’s prayer it is an episode similar to previous ordeals involving the divine and the ancient Israelites.

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<sup>632</sup> “Her acts of belittling her body in this way, as well as demeaning her marriage to the gentile king, portray Esther as a moral woman. Through these actions Esther returns to the ways of her people, because this is how God wants it.” See Nolte and Jordaan, “Esther’s Prayer in Additions to Esther,” 305.

## The Divine as a Character in the Versions of Esther

God's characterisation and agency in the versions to Esther gives a sense of reassurance, order, and purpose to the narrative in the LXX, AT, Tg. Sheni, and Tg. Rishon. Some aspects of this were touched in Chapter Four with regards to how the divine is not mentioned in the Hebrew version of Esther, but in contrast he is present in all the versions. All the versions and early interpretations suggest that God had more direct involvement in the narrative. For example, Esther's approach to the king in the Greek versions requires divine intervention for her to gain the king's favour in Addition D.

Add. D: 6–8<sup>633</sup> (LXX)

<sup>6</sup>καὶ εἰσελθοῦσα πάσας τὰς θύρας κατέστη ἐνώπιον τοῦ βασιλέως, καὶ αὐτὸς ἐκάθητο ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ καὶ πᾶσαν στολὴν τῆς ἐπιφανείας αὐτοῦ ἐνεδεδύκει, ὅλος διὰ χρυσοῦ καὶ λίθων πολυτελῶν, καὶ ἦν φοβερὸς σφόδρα. <sup>7</sup>καὶ ἄρας τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ πεπυρωμένον δόξῃ ἐν ἀκμῇ θυμοῦ ἔβλεπεν, καὶ ἔπεσεν ἡ βασίλισσα καὶ μετέβαλεν τὸ χρῶμα αὐτῆς ἐν ἐκλύσει καὶ κατεπέκυσεν ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν τῆς ἄβρας τῆς προπορευομένης. <sup>8</sup>καὶ μετέβαλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ βασιλέως εἰς πραύτητα, καὶ

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<sup>633</sup> Here is the very similar version from the AT, Add. D: 6–9:

<sup>6</sup>καὶ εἰσελθοῦσα τὰς θύρας ἔστη ἐνώπιον τοῦ βασιλέως, καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐκάθητο ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ καὶ πᾶσαν στολὴν τῆς ἐπιφανείας αὐτοῦ ἐνεδεδύκει, ὅλος διάχρυσος, καὶ λίθοι πολυτελεῖς ἐπ' αὐτῷ, καὶ φοβερὸς σφόδρα. <sup>7</sup>καὶ ἄρας τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ πεπυρωμένον ἐν δόξῃ ἐνέβλεπεν αὐτῇ ὡς ταῦρος ἐν ἀκμῇ θυμοῦ αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐφοβήθη ἡ βασίλισσα καὶ μετέβαλε τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτῆς ἐν ἐκλύσει καὶ ἐπέκυσεν ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν τῆς ἄβρας τῆς προπορευομένης. <sup>8</sup>καὶ μετέβαλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ βασιλέως καὶ μετέθηκε τὸν θυμὸν αὐτοῦ εἰς πραύτητα, καὶ ἀγωνιάσας ὁ βασιλεὺς κατεπήδησεν ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀνέλαβεν αὐτὴν ἐπὶ τὰς ἀγκάλας αὐτοῦ καὶ παρεκάλεσεν αὐτήν <sup>9</sup>καὶ εἶπεν Τί ἐστίν, Εσθηρ; ἐγὼ εἰμι ἀδελφός σου, θάρσει. <sup>6</sup>When she had gone through the doors, she stood before the king. And the king was seated on the throne of his kingdom, clothed in the full array of splendor, all covered with gold and precious stones upon him. And he was most terrifying. The queen was terrified, and her face turned pale from faintness, and she stooped on the head of the attendant who went before her. <sup>7</sup>Then God changed the spirit of the king and turned his anger to gentleness, <sup>8</sup>and alarmed, the king jumped down from his throne and took her in his arms. He comforted her, <sup>9</sup>and said, "What is it, Esther? I am your brother. Take heart!



ἀγωνιάσας ἀνεπήδησεν ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀνέλαβεν αὐτὴν ἐπὶ τὰς ἀγκάλας αὐτοῦ, μέχρις οὗ κατέστη, καὶ παρεκάλει αὐτὴν λόγοις εἰρητικοῖς.

<sup>6</sup>When she had gone through all the doors, she stood before the king. He was seated on the throne of his kingdom, clothed in the full array of his splendor, all covered with gold and precious stones. And he was most terrifying. <sup>7</sup>And when he raised his face inflamed with glory, he gazed at her in the full flush of anger. The queen staggered, her color turned pale from faintness, and she collapsed on the head of the attendant who went before her. <sup>8</sup>Then God changed the spirit of the king to gentleness, and alarmed, he jumped from his throne and took her in his arms until she was quieted. He kept comforting her with soothing words.

Whereas in the Tg. Sheni and Tg. Rishon, God does not intervene as explicitly.

Tg. Sheni: 5:2

והוה כד חזא מלכ' ית אסתר מלכתא קיימ' בדרתא ואתגמלת חינא וחסדא קדמוי והמן אספקלטורי דמלכא בעא למיתי למקטל ית אסתר ואושיט מלכא לאסת' ית שרביטא דדהב' וקרבת אסתר ומטת ברישא דשרביטא

<sup>2</sup>So when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the courtyard, she gained grace and *favor* before him, and Haman, the executioner of the king, (sought) to proceed to kill Queen Esther, whereupon the king extended to Esther the golden sceptre.

Tg. Rishon 5:2

והוה כד חזא מלכא ית אסתר מלכתא כד נציבא קיימא בדרתא ותריין עינאה זלגן דמען ומסתכלא כלפי שמיא מן-יד איטענת רחמין ואושיט מלכא לאסתר ית תיגדא דדהבא דהוה נקיט בידיה וקריבת אסתר ומטת בידהא ואחדת ברישא דתיגדא

<sup>2</sup>Now it happened when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court and both of her eyes flowing, filled with tears, and looking toward heaven, she immediately found mercy, and the king extended toward Esther the golden staff, which he held in his hand. So Esther approached and extended her hand and touched the top of the staff.

Thus far the targumim and Greek versions have shared many similarities, but the Greek versions emphasize direct involvement of the divine in the narrative and the influence of Hellenistic literature, and tropes, on the narrative. The way in which the divine acts directly in the case of the Tg. Sheni fosters an open-ended poetics towards diaspora and exile that acknowledges displacement as a wider phenomenon in Jewish history. Additionally, this builds upon the way in which the Jeremiah traditions and the inclusion of prayers present Esther's experience as part of a wider framework of Jewish and Israelite history in the narrative. Displacement is not an irreparable rupture, and the divine still acts and rescues the people when they need rescue, and this is demonstrated by the inclusion of divine intervention in the versions of Esther. The following paragraphs consider how the Agag and Saul traditions contribute to the Tg. Sheni's open-ended poetics towards exile and diaspora, and also how they differ from the Greek versions.

### **The Agag and Saul Traditions**

Esther and Mordecai's relationship to the tribe of Benjamin and Israel's first king, Saul, is present in all versions of the book of Esther, although Esther and Mordecai's genealogy is addressed in the Greek versions and the targumim in divergent ways. The presence of the Saul and the Agag traditions are one way in which continuity with past traditions is created. Through these allusions to the tribe of Benjamin, king Saul, and the conflict with Amalek/Agag, the experience of displacement is further also woven into the past. I suggest that the Saul and Agag traditions are the most significant factor for why the Tg. Sheni can be

described as having an open-ended poetics towards exile and diaspora, because these traditions firmly place Esther's experiences of displacement and marginalization in dialogue with the wilderness wandering traditions, but also with the Israelite monarchy. Therefore, these traditions do not present diaspora or exile as having caused an irreparable rupture that can only be resolved through physical homecoming.

The references to Agag and the Israelites' conflict with the Amalekites also gives a rationale for the conflict between Haman and Mordecai. Therefore, in the MT and targumim it is crucial to the plot and the narrative's wider significance for other traditions. The MT, Tg. Sheni, and Tg. Rishon expand on the Agag and Saul traditions, however, the LXX and Alpha do not associate Haman with Agag or the Amalekites.

The family history provided for Mordecai, which was discussed in Chapter Four, recalls several names that are associated with the tribe of Benjamin and narratives concerning Saul, including Shimei and Kish. Kish is significant in that it is the name of Saul's father, and Shimei was a Benjamite who cursed David in 2 Samuel 16:5-13 for the bloodshed he brought to the house of Saul.

2 Sam 16:5–13

<sup>5</sup>איש יהודי היה בשושן הבירה ושמו מרדכי בן יאיר בן-שמעי בן-קיש איש ימיני: <sup>6</sup>אשר הגלה מירושלים עם-  
הגלה אשר הגלתה עם יכניה מלך-יהודה אשר הגלה נבוכדנאצר מלך בבל:

<sup>5</sup>There was a Jewish man in the citadel, Shushan, and his name was Mordecai, son of Yamir, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a man of Benjamin. <sup>6</sup>Who had been exiled from Jerusalem with the exiles who were exiled with Jeconiah, king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babel drove into exile.

The chronology presented here creates some issues for interpretation if Mordecai himself is among the first exiled with Jeconiah. Moore in his commentary suggests that the אֲשֶׁר at the start of verse six indeed modifies the subject of verse five which is Mordecai.<sup>634</sup> However, this creates an improbable timeline making him one-hundred and twenty years old at the time the book of Esther is set, and Esther would be in her sixties when she came to the palace.

While his ancestor Kish is probably the subject of the אֲשֶׁר, what is important is how this connects Mordecai and Esther's lineage to Benjamin, to the Saulide dynasty, and to the exile.

The connection to Saul in Mordecai's ancestry relates to another conflict known from other biblical literature between the Israelites and the Amalekites, and Agag their king, such as Saul's dealings with them in 1 Samuel 15.<sup>635</sup> No explicit reason is provided in the Hebrew version for why Mordecai refuses to bow before Haman in Esther 3, but it is likely that the ancestral grudge between Israel and Agag plays a role.<sup>636</sup> In the MT, the antagonist Haman is introduced and provided with a brief descriptor of his ancestry:

<sup>1</sup> אחר הדברים האלה גדל המלך אחשורוש את־המן בן־המדתא האגגי וינשאהו וישם את־כסאו מעל כלי־השירים  
אשר אתו: <sup>2</sup> וכל־עבדי המלך אשר־בשער המלך פרעים ומשמתחיים להמן כי־כן צוה־לו המלך ומרדכי לא יכרע  
ולא ישתחנה: <sup>3</sup> ויאמרו עבדי המלך אשר־בשער המלך למרדכי מדוע אתה עובר את מצות המלך: <sup>4</sup> ויהי באמרם  
אליו יום יום ולא שמע אליהם ויגידו להמן לראות היעמדו דברי מרדכי כי־הגיד להם אשר־הוא יהודי:

<sup>634</sup> Cf. Moore, *Esther*, 51. Moore also notes that various commentators throughout the years have also suggested that the אֲשֶׁר could refer to all of Mordecai's family line.

<sup>635</sup> The AT does not have a parallel to verse six, so it lacks making an explicit link between Mordecai's ancestors and being exiled.

<sup>636</sup> In the LXX, Mordecai's excuse for not bowing before Haman was so that he did not pay obeisance to anyone other than God (Add. C:4–5). This explanation has been regarded as a weak at best in comparison with what might be implied in the MT, especially given that Mordecai as a courtier would have certainly had to pay obeisance in his role. This was a key feature of Persian protocol. See Seeman, "Enter the Dragon," 5. An explanation offered in the targumim as well as b. Meg 19a is that Haman, perhaps through his clothing, was presenting himself as a deity, hence why Mordecai could not bow before him. See Tg. Rishon 3:2,4; Tg. Sheni 6:1. See also b. Meg. 19a.

<sup>1</sup>Some time afterward, King Ahasuerus promoted Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite; he advanced him and seated him higher than any of his fellow officials. <sup>2</sup>All the king's courtiers in the palace gate knelt and bowed low to Haman, for such was the king's order concerning him; but Mordecai would not kneel or bow low. <sup>3</sup>Then the king's courtiers who were in the palace gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's order?" <sup>4</sup>When they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai's resolve would prevail; for he had explained to them that he was a Jew.

As Haman is a descendent of Agag, the conflict with Agag that began during the period of wandering in the wilderness is also brought to bear on the present situation. The Benjamite ancestry of Esther and Mordecai along with the Agagite/Amalekite heritage of Haman provides a rationale for the conflict between them.

During the wilderness wanderings the Amalekites' wage war against Israel. This conflict is also referred to in Balaam's oracle. It is not insignificant that the struggle with the Amalekites and their king Agag infringes upon the Israelites safe journey to Canaan in Exodus 17:14-16.

Exod 17:14–16

<sup>14</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כָּתֹב זֹאת זִכָּרוֹן בְּסֵפֶר וְשִׂים בְּאָזְנוֹי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ כִּי־מָחָה אֶמְחָה אֶת־זִכָּר עַמְּלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם:

<sup>15</sup>וַיִּבֶן מֹשֶׁה מִזְבֵּחַ וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יְהוָה נָסִי: <sup>16</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי־יָד עַל־כַּס יְהִי מִלְחָמָה לַיהוָה בְּעַמְּלֵק מִדֹּר דָּר:

<sup>14</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, "Inscribe this in a document as a reminder, and read it aloud to Joshua: I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven!" <sup>15</sup>And Moses built an altar and named it Adonai-nissi. <sup>16</sup>He said, "It means, 'Hand upon the throne of the LORD!' The LORD will be at war with Amalek throughout the ages."

The significance of designating Haman as an Agagite is not only relevant for this reason, but also because Esther and Mordecai are Benjamites, and Israel's first Benjamite King failed to completely irradicate the Amalekites. In 1 Samuel 15, Saul's failure to completely eradicate the Amalekites, and not to take the spoils afterwards, is one of the main reasons for him falling into God's disfavour.

1 Sam 15:22–24

22 וַיֹּאמֶר נְשׂוּאֵל הַחֶפֶץ לַיהוָה בְּעֹלוֹת וּנְזָחִים כְּשֹׁמֵעַ בְּקוֹל יְהוָה הֲנֵה שֹׁמֵעַ מִזְבַּח טוֹב לְהִקְשִׁיב מִחֶלֶב אֵילִים: 23 כִּי חֲטָאֵת־קָסָם קָרִי וְאָנֹן וּתְרָפִים הִפְצֵר יַעֲן מֵאֲסַת אֶת־דְּבַר יְהוָה וַיִּמְאַסֶּה מִמֶּלְכָּהּ: 24 וַיֹּאמֶר שְׂאוּל אֶל־נְשׂוּאֵל חֲטָאֵתִי כִי־עֲבַרְתִּי אֶת־פִּי־יְהוָה וְאֶת־דְּבָרֶיךָ כִּי יִרְאֵתִי אֶת־הָעַם וְאֲשָׁמַע בְּקוֹלָם:

22But Samuel said: “Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obedience to the LORD’S command? Surely, obedience is better than sacrifice, compliance than the fat of rams. 23For rebellion is like the sin of divination, defiance, like the iniquity of teraphim. Because you rejected the LORD’S command, he has rejected you as king.” 24Saul said to Samuel, “I did wrong to transgress the LORD’S command and your instructions; but I was afraid of the troops and I yielded to them.

The targumim intensify the significance of the conflict and develop how the narrative draws on earlier narratives before the exile. In Tg. Rishon 3:1, Haman is described as “Haman, son of Hammedatha, of the clan of Agag, a son of the wicked Amalek.”

המן בר המדתא דמזרעית אגג בר עמלק רשיעא

In Tg. Sheni 3:1, Haman is also referred to as a בר עמלק.

בתר פתגמיא האלין רבי מלכא אחש' ית המן בר המדתא אגגיא בר כדא בר כוזא בר אליפילוט בר דיוס בר  
דיוסיס בר פרוס בר מעדן בר בלעקן בר אנתמירוס בר הזרוס בר שגר בר נגר בר פרמשתא בר ויזתא בר  
עמלק בר דלחינתיה דאליפז בוכריה דעשו ורבי יתיה ונטיל יתיה ושוי ית כרסייה לעיל מכל רברבנוי ועבדוי

After these events, King Xerxes promoted Haman, son of Hamdatha, the Agagite, son of Kido', son of Koza', son of 'Elipilot, son of Deyos, son of Deyosis son of Paros, son of Ma'adan, son of Bil'aqan, son of 'Antimiros, son of Hadros, son of Segar, son of Nagar, son of Parmasta, son of Wayezata, son of 'Amaleq, son of the concubine of 'Elipaz, the first-born of Esau; he promoted him, advanced him, and placed his throne above that of all his nobles and his attendants.

Overall, their struggle with Haman is framed within a conflict that began when the Israelites were wandering through the wilderness, and thus places the experience of surviving the diaspora in dialogue with a narrative of homecoming and origins for the Israelites.

In Haman's introduction in the MT it is implied that Haman is a descendant of Agag, the king of Amalekites, whom Saul, a Benjamite, fails to eradicate in 1 Samuel 15. The link between the tribe of Benjamin and the Saulide dynasty causes us to reflect on Esther and Mordecai's introduction in chapter two: Being Benjamites, Esther and Mordecai eventually succeed where Saul failed as Esther has Haman and all his sons hanged (Esth 9:25).

Early interpretations reinforce this notion, for example in the Tg. Sheni Mordecai tells Esther that Saul's failure to kill Agag directly leads to Haman's existence. Between the time that Saul spares Agag and Samuel finally executes him, his wife becomes pregnant by him.

Tg. Sheni 4:13

וביה בליליא איתעברת איתתיה מיניה וקם המן מן זרעיתיה ובעא למזבן כולהון יהודאי ולמעקר יתהון

That very night a woman became pregnant from him, and Haman arose from his descendants, who has been seeking to buy all of the Jews and to uproot them completely.

Therefore, the links to Israel's past provide a way of communicating something about the present. It also characterises the Jewish communities in the diaspora narrative of Esther as, metaphorically, back in the wilderness under the siege of the Amalekites. Haman's Agagite ancestry is also significant for how Rome was conceptualised which is relevant to the historical contexts of the targumim. The identification of Haman as an Agagite also allows him to be identified with Esau, who is an ancestor of Amalek.<sup>637</sup> Esau would become a symbol for Rome in late Jewish antiquity,<sup>638</sup> making the allusion even more appropriate to critique a symbol of power. Perhaps, in this way, Esther's narrative gave a sense of future hope that even Rome's power could be overturned.<sup>639</sup>

### **Haman as a Βουγαῖον in the LXX and AT**

While Haman's ancestry develops a link to Agag and the Amalekites in the Hebrew MT tradition, in the LXX and AT, the term Agagite is rendered as Βουγαῖον. Unfortunately, there is no consensus as to what Βουγαῖον means. It is likely that the translators wanted to choose a term that the current audience would recognize as a kind of archetypal enemy which the term Agagite provides in the MT of Esther.<sup>640</sup> For example, Wechsler argues that the term

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<sup>637</sup> Gen 36:16.

<sup>638</sup> See Tg. Jonathan and 1 Sam 2:5.

<sup>639</sup> Patmore, *Jewish Late Antiquity*, 272. He suggests that the attitude espoused in the targumim was "the book of Esther bore witness to the final phase of a long running historical scheme: the current confrontation with Rome was the final iteration of the struggle between Esau and Jacob." Moreover, in Targum Neofiti the translation and interpretation of Exodus 17:16 links Benjamin, Esther, and Amalek as a significant conflict that began before entry into the land and would be resolved by Esther and Mordecai. See Tg. Neofiti and Exodus 17:16. While the manuscript of the Targum Neofiti dates to the sixteenth century, there is a nearly identical text found among the Cairo Genizah and the fragment targumim. Therefore, this could be an early Palestinian tradition, no earlier than the late second century CE. See Patmore, *Jewish Late Antiquity*, 272.

<sup>640</sup> Moore, *The Additions*, 148.



Βουγαῖον is a gentilic term identifying Harman with the Beja,<sup>641</sup> a people characterised in other ancient sources as warlike and having a reputation for “attacking defenceless individuals.”<sup>642</sup> The portrayal of the Beja (sometimes rendered Βουγαῖον) might have lent itself to replacing Agagite especially when we consider the way in which the Amalekites attacked Israel while they were going through the wilderness. Nonetheless, the lexical choice in the LXX and AT does not intensify the links between Israel’s past and the diaspora communities.

By continuing this conflict that effectively begins on Israel’s journey to the promised land, the troubles of diaspora life appear less like a rupture with the past, but dislocation is presented as continuous with a broader narrative of displacement. In this way, the genealogy provided for Haman, and the way in which it is interpreted in the Targumim, heighten this relationship between the past and the present. On the other hand, the LXX and the AT, which refer to Haman as a Βουγαῖον, appear to prioritize making the negative characterisation of Haman more understandable to a contemporary Greek speaking audience of Jews.

### **Parallels Between Esther and Saul**

Mordecai and the role of his ancestry in the narrative have been examined, and now parallels between Esther and Saul will be considered. The references to both Saul and Agag in the narrative also provide instances of comparison between Esther and Saul. For example, Stern argues that the MT of Esther is written from a perspective that is critical of the diaspora and that its portrayal of kingship is inherently backwards in comparison with the biblical narratives of Judean kingship demonstrated by Mordechai’s ascent to a prominent position in

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<sup>641</sup> Michael Wechsler, “The Appellation βουγαῖος and Ethnic Contextualization in the Greek Text of Esther,” *VT* 51 (2001): 109–114 (110).

<sup>642</sup> Wechsler, “The Appellation βουγαῖος,” 111.

the royal court, “Only in diaspora could a descendant of Saul achieve the status of king.”<sup>643</sup>

Stern argues that by linking Mordecai and Esther to Saul this implies that the narrative is inherently critical of life in the diaspora.<sup>644</sup> However, the link to the Saulide dynasty is by no means inherently negative, and the following paragraphs show how it fosters an open-ended perspective towards exile and diaspora.

Saul’s character has engendered a variety of interpretations in later traditions that suggest that he was often interpreted in a sympathetic manner. It would be difficult to argue for a sympathetic or a tragic reading of Saul’s character in the MT as a whole (based on 1-2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles). Nonetheless, it is apparent that early interpretive traditions developed nuanced readings of his character that appeared to read against the grain some of the narratives that were more sympathetic to David and his legacy. These readings imbue Saul with more modesty, respect, and perhaps a sense that God was even unjust towards him.<sup>645</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising that the writers of Esther assigned her and Mordecai with Benjamite ancestry in a positive way.

Regarding Esther’s relationship to her ancestor Saul, Berger argues that the presentation of Saul in 1 Samuel and Esther in the book of Esther link the two as the Bible’s only “docile and

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<sup>643</sup> Elsie R. Stern, “Esther and the Politics of Diaspora,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 100 (2010): 25–53 (40).

<sup>644</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>645</sup> In Yoma, 22b of the Babylonian Talmud, it is suggested that Saul was treated harshly by God in comparison to David.

אמר רב הונא: כמה לא חלי ולא מרגיש גברא דמריה סייעיה; שאול באחד - ועלה לו דוד בשמים ולא עלתה  
“Rabbi Huna said: How spared from sickness and worry is the person whose help is his Master in Heaven! Saul erred in one sin, and it was reckoned against him, whereas David erred in two sins and it was not reckoned against him.”

See *Babylonian Talmud, The Schottenstein Edition, The Horn Edition of Seder Moed, Tractate Yoma*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Mesorah Publications, 2003). For more examples of how Saul was portrayed sympathetically in later sources see H. Liss, “The Innocent King Saul: Saul in Rabbinical Exegesis,” in *Saul in Story and Tradition*, ed. C. S. Ehrlich and M. C. White (Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 245–260.

submissive ascendants to royalty.”<sup>646</sup> While Esther represents an improvement in many ways, some positive aspects of Saul’s kingship may also be inferred from the way the narrative addresses violence and silence. Namely, both Esther and Saul are characteristically silent. For example, Saul did not tell his uncle about his election to be the king of Israel in 1 Sam 10:16 (לֹא־הִגִּיד לוֹ) using the same verbal root found in the book of Esther when she is told not to reveal her identity in Esther 2:10 (לֹא־הִגִּידָה אֶסְתֵּר).<sup>647</sup> Saul was arguably silent in the face of opponents to his kingship and lacked an authoritative response to Agag and the Amalekites, whereas Esther breaks her silence at the appropriate time when Mordecai asks her to plead with the king on behalf of the Jewish communities.

Esther and Mordechai’s bloodshed, in Berger’s view, is different from the kind of revenge taken by David and Solomon in that it results in the bloodshed of other Israelites, whereas the revenge of Esther and Mordechai targets Haman and his offspring and those who took up arms against the Jewish communities. “The Benjaminite leadership in Esther, on the other hand, takes appropriate measures against the Jews’ Agagite enemy and his adherents, while fostering peace and unity among *all* of its own kin.”<sup>648</sup> Berger’s perspective presents a viable option for considering the significance of Esther and Mordecai’s Benjamite ancestry. I suggest that this creates an open-ended poetics concerning exile and diaspora because Esther is able to accomplish what Saul was unable to achieve, and additionally, a sense of continuity between traditions before the diaspora and after is created in a positive way.

The radically different contexts in which the stories present themselves may also play a role in why Esther succeeds where Saul fails. Saul is the first king of Israel, of which Israel was warned to not even have a king (1 Samuel 8:6-9). Arguably his timidity and lack of authority

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<sup>646</sup> Yitzhak Berger, “Esther and Benjamite Royalty: A Study in Inner-Biblical Allusion,” *JBL* 129 (2010): 625–644 (630).

<sup>647</sup> Berger, “Esther and Benjamite Royalty,” 629.

<sup>648</sup> *Ibid.*, 644.

made him an unsuitable king for a nation, and these two things could relate to his failure to do what was right in God's eyes. However, in the narrative of Esther we see that the role of deception and silence is much more positive or necessary for survival, but nonetheless, Esther breaks her silence at the appropriate time to save her people, and to doom Haman and his family. In the context of the diaspora, Esther's arguably "docile" attitude towards ascending the throne and her silence becomes understandable as well as strategic. This is particularly the case in later traditions such as the targumim and the Greek versions. Deceptive or subversive tactics to ensure success or survival are more applicable when one is in a subordinate position like Esther, being both Jewish and a woman in Ahasuerus's kingdom which appears to be ostensibly hostile to both.

### **Chapter Five Conclusion**

The narrator of Zadie's Smith novel, *White Teeth*, describes the experience of diaspora as one prone to repetition: "Even when you arrive, you're still going back and forth; your children are going round and round."<sup>649</sup> The repetition of diaspora is like the repetition of the initial trauma itself,<sup>650</sup> but weaving diaspora into the past presents one way in which communal identity can be shaped by displacement in constructive ways and not only destructive ways. Chapter Five has discussed certain features of the versions of Esther that provide the narrative with a sense of purpose and order. Alluding to biblical traditions is another way in which a sense of order and purpose is achieved. Esther does transform exile into diaspora as Levenson

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<sup>649</sup> Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (London: Penguin, 2011), 161.

<sup>650</sup> See also Zapata's discussion of Smith's novel in Beatriz Perez Zapata, "Decolonizing Trauma: A Study of Multidirectional Memory in Zadie Smith's 'The Embassy in Cambodia'" in *Decolonizing Trauma Studies: Trauma and Postcolonialism*, ed. Sonya Andermahr (Basel: MDPI AG, 2016), 49–60 (50). Zapata discusses the use of the term "original trauma" by the narrator of Smith's novel to describe the migrants experience of diaspora. See Zapata, *Decolonizing*, 50.

notes,<sup>651</sup> and in doing so the experience of diaspora is woven into the past which creates an open-ended poetics concerning exile and diaspora.

Most significantly, the Saul and Agag traditions develop this sense of the past affecting the present. It is a conflict that begins while the Israelites are displaced and travelling to the promised land, and by this conflict reappearing in the diaspora it creates a parallel between the experience of wandering in the wilderness with being in exile and diaspora. The specific connection to Saul and his failure to eradicate Agag and all the Amalekites not only provides a rationale for the diaspora conflict but also presents a way of envisioning a more positive future for diaspora life.

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<sup>651</sup> Levenson, *Esther*, 15.

## Conclusion

Many ancient Jewish texts have an open-ended poetics concerning exile, homecoming, and diaspora. This open-ended perspective helps to explain the growth of the metaphorization of exile in antiquity and later periods in Jewish literature. The different ways in which groups imagined themselves within this narrative of exile and return often kept deferring the resolution to the “narrative” of exile, and therefore left the future open. The book of Lamentations, Second Isaiah, 1QS, the Hebrew versions of Joseph and Esther, and the Tg. Sheni are all examples of ancient Jewish literature that have open-ended poetics towards exile and diaspora. This openness reflects the historical reality of diaspora communities who continued to grow outside the land, and there are also texts that struggle with residing in the land in a marginalized state without sovereignty. The language of displacement, of wandering and wilderness, has a role to play in these texts as well, and for communities to see their disenfranchisement through the language of wilderness and journeying.

The association between exile as a form of punishment and being rejected from the divine, which the wilderness often represents, explains the nuanced engagement with diaspora and exile as concepts in ancient Jewish texts because it is also a place of divine revelation, closeness with the divine, and a place that the divine can transform. It is from the harshness of these associations that the complex connotations of exile and diaspora arise, where both states are acknowledged for their difficulties and negative connotations; however, they are not presented as godless states, or as antithetical to Jewish identity. Second Isaiah exemplifies this transformation where a place associated with death, displacement, punishment, and distance from the divine becomes a place where the divine can still act on behalf of the people, and it is one that the divine positively transforms. The wilderness contains these tensions even when considered apart from the pentateuchal traditions.

The primary texts of this thesis build upon the negative associations of exile, displacement, punishment, and God's relationship to the people after the exile; but they do so in order to present the potential for its positive transformation, and do not suggest that physical homecoming is the only response to displacement. Although the examples span different periods and literary styles, these texts all portray the divine as not contained by borders. Rather, the divine operates in the shadows, not unlike the diaspora heroes/heroines of the Hebrew versions of the Joseph and Esther narratives. Additionally, there is an increasing awareness of the importance of divine word and studying sacred texts as a response to exile, and these things by their nature are portable and are applicable to communities in the diaspora and within the land.

The oscillation between God as saviour and aggressor, as the one who causes displacement that is physical and displacement that represents being far from his favour, was an important aspect of the poetics of Lamentations. Chapter One considered the dialogic nature of lament in the book of Lamentations, as well as the function of the alphabetic acrostic form as part of how Lamentations addressed exile, homecoming, and suffering. In the face of harsh realities and conditions, Lam 1–3 did not present a black and white perspective on these issues. The divine and the people both receive critique, and the people's complaints were not silenced. Homecoming is not presented as the resolve, but rather the resolve would be the restoration of the people's relationship with the divine.

Lamentations ended in a state of "unhoming"<sup>652</sup> where the reader was not left solely seeking the physical restoration of the social infrastructure before the conquest and exile, but they are encouraged to focus on repairing the relationship with the divine.<sup>653</sup> Due to its dialogic poetics and the breaking with the acrostic structure for the final poem, the book of

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<sup>652</sup> Briggs, "Ostrich and the Sword," 52.

<sup>653</sup> Ibid.

Lamentations provides a sense of incompleteness in its closing lines. The dialogic poetics and the oscillation between hope and despair between the narrators and Daughter Zion, contributes to why many scholars have made such remarks about Lamentations. The final verses of the fifth poem capture how Lamentations ends in a state of incompleteness, “unhoming,” and deferral.

Lam 5:21–22

הַשִּׁיבֵנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְנָשׁוּבָה חַדְשׁ יָמֵינוּ כְּקֶדְמָם: כִּי אִם-מָאֵס מְאֹסָתָנוּ קִצְפָתָ עָלֵינוּ עַד-מָאֵד:

<sup>21</sup>Take us back, O LORD, to Yourself, and let us come back; Renew our days as of old!

<sup>22</sup>For truly, you have rejected us, bitterly raged against us.

As discussed in Chapter One, the end of Lam 5 potentially leaves a protasis without an apodosis, an “if” without a “then.” This deferral of return or resolve from the exile and God’s displeasure is a prominent example of open-ended poetics concerning exile in ancient Jewish literature. It resists giving an answer or a clear explanation of the intricacies of human suffering and the divine’s role in these things. The dialogic nature of the reflections on the divine’s role in suffering and displacement in Lamentations received different responses in antiquity, responses that continued to explore how exile and diaspora impacts the relationship between the people and the divine.

The approach to suffering, exile, and divine absence in Lamentations is a foundation on which texts such as Second Isaiah and the book of Esther respond. They have different but not necessarily contrasting views on how divine providence may operate after such a rupture. For the book of Isaiah, especially Second Isaiah, the wilderness as a motif became a way of describing how the relationship between God and the people can be positively transformed.



As Zerubavel noted, the tension between the wilderness as a place of displacement as well as origins, and a place of transformation and of revelation, is held in tension with its connotations with punishment and destruction. As such, the wilderness often fluctuates between being the “*nonplace*” and the “*counter-place*” in different contexts.<sup>654</sup> In the case of the book of Isaiah it was shown that the negative connotations of the wilderness and its positive transformation became central for how the text addressed its exilic audience with a message of comfort, and also by highlighting the idealized restoration of the capital city Jerusalem and its temple.

Although the restoration of Jerusalem was important for Second Isaiah’s poetics, the text did not suggest that physical homecoming could resolve all of the people’s problems with the divine, nor did it suggest that if this literal prediction of homecoming should not come to pass that the text has failed. By reflecting on the importance of divine speech and promise throughout Second Isaiah and how it frames Second Isaiah’s oracles, it was shown that homecoming is not the core aspect of Second Isaiah’s poetics of exile and wilderness. Rather, Landy’s approach to Second Isaiah’s poetics is substantiated by the way in which references to divine speech interact with the “transformation of the wilderness” motif throughout Second Isaiah.

Without the voices of rebuttal or sorrow, and juxtaposing themes and motifs, the subtlety of how Second Isaiah addresses exile is lost. Therefore, I agree with Landy that the excitement of return as described in Isaiah 40 is doubled by “an absence, a silence, and a grieving, despite the voices of consolation.”<sup>655</sup> Second Isaiah does not create a linear narrative of exile and return with its motifs and metaphors, and that the messages of comfort can be applied to

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<sup>654</sup> Zerubavel notes that the desert emerged as a “complex and fluid symbolic landscape, alternating between its functions as the *nonplace* and the *counter-place* within different contexts.” Zerubavel, *Desert*, 214.

<sup>655</sup> Landy, “The Ghostly Prelude,” 333.

communities within and outside the land speak to the openness of Isaiah's poetics. The openness of Isaiah's poetics towards exile and homecoming, and its highly rhetorical language, laid the foundation for more metaphorical interpretations of Second Isaiah's poetics in the Second Temple period.

1QS and Yehuda Amichai's poem, "Jews in the Land of Israel," not only interpret the "transformation of the wilderness" motif in the book of Isaiah, but these examples respond to the dialogue begun in Isaiah 40 on the issue of exile and homecoming. In Chapter Three, when the poetry of Isaiah was interpreted and applied to a different context in 1QS, the idealized portrayals of homecoming and the people's relationship to the divine were seen as processes that the interpretation of the text actualises. Landy's assertion that in Isaiah 40:1-11 "the goal is also the journey, both fixed and mobile"<sup>656</sup> applies to both 1QS's engagement with Isaiah, as well as Amichai's engagement with the "transformation of the wilderness" motif. Second Isaiah, 1QS, and Yehuda Amichai's poem wrestle with closed narratives of exile and offer instead open-ended perspectives towards them. Both examples build upon the absences and struggles with homecoming and exile already present in the book of Isaiah. 1QS heightens Second Isaiah's open-ended poetics of exile and wilderness by equating making a way through the wilderness with the study of divine law (*Midrash Hatorah*). And moreover, Yehuda Amichai's poem displays doubt as to whether the literal manifestation of Isaiah's wilderness imagery could bring the resolve to exile so ideally described within the text itself.

The book of Esther also enters into this discourse on exile, homecoming, and diaspora in the style of a prose narrative, capturing different aspects of diaspora life. The Hebrew version of the narrative, like the book of Lamentations, portrays the divine as in a hidden state, much like how Esther hides parts of her identity in the narrative and works behind the scenes.

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<sup>656</sup> Ibid., 334.

Likewise, Joseph's narrative of displacement and how he rescues his family highlights the way in which diaspora heroines/heroes could be presented as liminal characters; characters that destabilize or defy boundaries between the dominant and subordinate culture, and between gender. In the Hebrew versions, the divine is either entirely hidden (the book of Esther) or plays a lesser role (the Joseph narrative). However, the community survives nonetheless, and new traditions are created which suggests that diaspora life can continue without requiring homecoming as a resolve.<sup>657</sup> These texts have a latent open-ended perspective to exile and diaspora and do not prioritize homecoming or suggest that diaspora life is antithetical to Jewish identity.

Both Joseph and Esther through their objectification and marginalization manage to secure a safer future for their communities. The way in which these tales reflect the anxieties of displaced and marginalized communities is shown in the dire situation of the community's demise that the plot revolves around, and this is also reflected in how the protagonists are presented as liminal characters. The anxieties of displaced communities are reflected in the role of deception and the use of subversive tactics on behalf of the protagonists. These aspects reinforce how these diaspora protagonists destabilize the boundaries between the displaced group and others.

Returning to Levenson's statement in the introduction of Chapter Four, Esther indeed turns exile into diaspora in that the narrative provides a way forward for the communities.<sup>658</sup> This way forward does not lead to the erasure of previous loyalties or identities, but rather a transformation in tension with the dominant and the subordinated group. This unresolved

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<sup>657</sup> Esth. 9:26.

<sup>658</sup> Levenson, *Esther*, 15.

tension contributes to the open-ended poetics concerning exile and diaspora in Joseph's and Esther's narratives.

The interpretations of Esther in antiquity do not reinforce a dichotomy between Jewish communities and other groups, or that diaspora life is somehow antithetical to Jewishness. For example, the Tg. Sheni and aspects of the Greek versions of Esther weaved displacement into the distant past. This reflected how communal identity can be shaped by displacement in constructive ways, and not only destructive ways. The Greek versions and Targumim emphasized divine providence throughout Israel's history, and they also demonstrated the intertwinement of those communities in the diaspora and other groups. For the Tg. Sheni, Esther and Mordecai are portrayed as integrated into both societies, and the narrative seems concerned with the sudden "disruption of such integration...which the addressee may be led from the outset to imagine is the normal state of affairs."<sup>659</sup> Although, the Tg. Sheni like the Hebrew narrative does transform exile into diaspora, in doing so the experience of diaspora is also woven into the past.

Alluding to biblical traditions is another common feature of the Greek versions and the targumim. These allusions are how experiences of threat and anxiety in the past are projected onto the contemporary audience's diaspora experience, and this does not entail that diaspora life is antithetical to being Jewish. The Saul and Agag traditions in particular develop this sense of past struggles being manifested in the present. The conflict between Saul and Agag/Amalekites is a conflict that begins while the Israelites are displaced and travelling to the promised land, and by this conflict reappearing in the diaspora it creates a parallel between the experience of wandering in the wilderness and diaspora life. Esther's diaspora

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<sup>659</sup> Robert Hayward, "Profile Targum Esther Sheni," *Aramaic Studies* 9 (2011): 65–82 (74).

narrative is not presented as a rupture in these later traditions, but as part of a larger narrative that is open-ended, without physical homecoming as the resolve to the situation.

Ancient Jewish literature has much to offer scholarly discourses on exile and displacement. Overall, the experiences of suffering and displacement in several ancient Jewish texts do not resolve in homecoming or even with a firm, authoritative perspective on the future. The more open-ended poetics of these examples echoes the openness of many later literary expressions in Jewish literature as discussed in Ezrahi's work. Biblical texts as well ancient Jewish literature from the Second Temple, Hellenistic period, and beyond can also present open-ended narratives of exile and diaspora.

What the examples of Lamentations, Isaiah, 1QS, Yehuda Amichai's poem, as well the Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic versions of Esther have shown is that some ancient Jewish literature when writing the exile engendered an open-ended poetics concerning exile and diaspora. Returning to Ezrahi's work, they suggest that the act of "writing" the exile is a "struggle to capture a past that has been lost, in the name of a future which is its projected image."<sup>660</sup> Ezrahi goes onto to say that this is not simply "a postromantic response to displacement," but that this act of writing the exile itself becomes "a form of repatriation, of alternative sovereignty."<sup>661</sup> Indeed, the composition of texts and interpretive traditions in the biblical and Second Temple period testify to how communities captured a past to build a future,<sup>662</sup> and also how the impact of displacement and marginalization coloured the motifs and narratives that these communities created. Transforming exile into diaspora, refusing to move beyond lament, writing diaspora into the past, prioritizing the study of sacred texts, and emphasizing that divine word will last forever regardless of circumstances all foster an open-

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<sup>660</sup> Ezrahi, *Booking Passage*, 239.

<sup>661</sup> Ibid.

<sup>662</sup> See Najman, *Losing the Temple*, 6.

ended poetics concerning exile and diaspora. Stemming from biblical literature up to modern Jewish literature, the examples of ancient Jewish literature in this thesis belong to a long history of open-ended literary reflections on displacement and suffering.

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<sup>663</sup> Originally published in New York, NY: Basic Books, 1981.

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