PERFORMING PSALMS OF LAMENT: DOES GOD (OFF-STAGE) RESPOND TO THE COMPLAINANT'S CRY?

June F Dickie
University of KwaZulu-Natal

Abstract

The *underlying complaint in the psalms of lament is God's apparent silence or lack of intervention in a difficult situation. However, performing a psalm of lament suggests that this might not be the case. Performing any psalm requires one to identify the various speakers and addressees at different points. In the case of psalms of lament, the possibility arises of a representative of God's voice entering the dialogue. There are several clues within the text that suggest this interpretation, the main one being the dramatic change in mood evident in many lament psalms. Another one is comparison with lament psalms where the voice of God is cited. Also, the nature of poetry allows hearers to draw on their own experience to make sense of "gaps" in the text, and for different voices in literary text to speak without the use of speech introducers. Further clues emerge from a study of speech-act theory and the way that conversation-partners use language in relating to one another.*

If one discerns that the voice of God is represented in some form in lament psalms, this has important theological, hermeneutical, liturgical, and pastoral implications. A performance or liturgical reading of a lament psalm (sensitive to the different voices and indicating the possibility of a conversation taking place) can help hearers discern that a voice representing God does respond to the complainant's cry. This encourages contemporary sufferers as they identify with the lamenter and hear some response to help them in their situations.

Keywords: Lament; Liturgy; Psalms; Covenant; Divine speech

Introduction

The argument of this article is that the psalms of lament can be understood as dialogues between the lamenter and a voice representing God (often in the presence of the enemies). The voice representing God moves the lamenter from a place of pain to one of greater confidence in the covenant promises. The underlying theories are those of the nature of lament, the silence of God (or otherwise), the distinct voices in lament psalms, the nature of (Hebrew) poetry, speech act theory, and "involvement strategies". These six topics are briefly described in the first section, including attention to two lament psalms which cite "the words of God" (Ps 12 and Ps 60), and two other two lament psalms which do not explicitly indicate divine speech (Ps 3 and Ps 13). Comparison of the situational factors indicates why this might be the case.

In the second section, particular focus is given to Ps 3 and Ps 13 which do not include direct quotations of God's words. A study of mood-changes in the text, together with the theory outlined in the first section, suggest the possible identification of God-speech in these psalms.

Nature of lament

Lament is prayer that is born in the deepest secrets of abandonment and loss, a way of "bearing the unbearable" (Ackermann 2001:26). It expresses passionate yearning for the presence of God, urging God to intervene (to speak and to act) as it protests against unjust suffering, of either individuals or a community.[1] It is a cry emerging from the depths of the covenant relationship with God, holding God to the covenantal promises (Cilliers 2007:397; O'Connor 2002:7).

Lament generally includes questions of the type "why?" and "how long?" which are essentially complaints about the absence of God. Verbs of anger tend to dominate in lament psalms (Westermann 1981:177). Although the complaints may be bitter and reproachful, including a note of blame and rebuke against God, it is prayer, connecting with God, and a response to the invitation in the psalms "to pour out [one's] heart before God".[2] The very fact that people in the Bible lament indicates that they do not accept that such suffering is God's purpose (Cilliers 2007:395), and therefore demand from God a new reality (O'Connor 2002:128). God must see, God must judge, and God must act (O'Connor 2002:72). Indeed, lament is an expression of faith and hope, anticipating change (Hilkert 1999:43-44).

God's silence?

Many scholars point out that God's silence and absence seems to be the underlying complaint in most psalms of lament.[3] Dorothee Soelle (1975:85) notes that "All extreme suffering evokes the experience of being forsaken by God and by everyone." Even Jesus experienced the "speechlessness of God". When He cried out to God in the Garden of Gethsemane, He received no answer.[4] In the psalms of lament, God appears to have rejected the people, forgotten them, been angry with them, or been negligent (Westermann 1981:178). The psalmist generally uses rhetorical questions to raise such complaints, along with petitions for God to "arise" or "wake up" (Broyles 1989:71-72). The *waiting* for God to act is often more painful than that of an attack (Pavese 1961:146ff), for the absence of God means that one's "primal trust in the world's reliability is destroyed" (Soelle 1975:86).

The most extreme case in the Bible of the absence of the voice of God in response to the pain of people is that described in the book of Lamentations. However, God's "speechlessness" can be understood as giving uninterrupted time and space for the lamenter to give expression. Silence from God is necessary, to allow human voices to reveal fully and declare their pain. Indeed, Kathleen O'Connor (2002:85-86) asserts that the absence of God's voice in Lamentations is a calculated choice, a conscious theological decision to facilitate healing. It ensures that telling the truth is honoured, and "denial" is denied. As she observes, "The benefit of exposed wounds is that they become visible and unavoidable. Left exposed, they require us to see, acknowledge, and attend to them." Emmanuel Katongole (2017: xvii-xviii) agrees that the silence of God reflects

---

[1]   Cilliers (2007:404) describes lament as "shattering and evocative speech that subverts the status quo of silence, stigmatization and condemnation".

[2]   See Ps 62:8.

[3]   In a few biblical laments (e.g., Ps 60:6-8) God does speak audibly.

[4]   See Mat 26:38 and Soelle 1975:79.

a deeply caring God. Even though God may appear to be out of the picture, God is not only moved by those who suffer, but hurts and suffers with them.

Moreover, Søren Kierkegaard suggests that, even when God seems to be silent, God may be speaking.[5] Indeed, the dialogical nature of many psalms (as argued by Carleen Mandolfo 2002) provides room for discerning a representative of the voice of God in those moments when the lamenter remembers past experiences of God's saving acts or holds on to the covenantal promises. Before considering several lament psalms to distinguish possible "conversations" between the psalmist and a representative of God, a brief review is given of theories suggesting dialogical voices in lament psalms.

Different voices in lament psalms

The main evidence for the dialogical nature of a psalm is the presence of shifts in voice and changes in addressee (Bosma 2009:167).[6] The shifts in voice are suggested by indications in the text referencing the words of enemies, God, or self-speech, as well as by sudden shifts in mood that often occur in lament psalms. Some scholars believe that these multi-voices signal an ancient performative context, an example of ritual "dialogue".[7]

Concerning these sudden shifts from complaint to trust and confidence, Hermann Gunkel (1913: col 1935) claims that they attest to a divine answer to prayer. William Bellinger (1984:57-58, 78-79) agrees that the shift in mood in psalms of lament indicates "some sort of divine response". At such turning points of mood, Gunkel and Begrich (1933:347, 351) argue that prophetic elements were incorporated. They suggest that "an oracle may enter into the psalm poetry" (Gunkel and Begrich 1933:357-358). However, Gunkel thought of prophetic elements in the psalms more in terms of imitation of prophetic style than genuine prophetic speech. In contrast, Sigmund Mowinckel (1922:5) argues that prophets played a significant role in the cult of ancient Israel, and that their oracular speech is preserved in some of the psalms. He believes that the prophet had the power to mediate revelation (of the divine will or word). Hans Kraus (1961:94) also concludes that divine speech in the psalms may come through cult prophets. This is further discussed in section 1.3.2.

Mandolfo (2002:3) also pays attention to the different voices in many biblical laments, noting that often there is a shift from first-person voice to third-person,[8] with the former speaking lament and the latter being, what Mandolfo (2002:1) calls a "didactic voice". Although she views the didactic voice as a ploy by lamenters to strengthen their appeal in order to get a favourable response from YHWH, she does acknowledge that it is a counterpart to God's own speech (Mandolfo 2002:50, 55, 13).[9] However, she considers the didactic voice to be horizontal communication (human to human) and

---

5   As Kierkegaard (1949) prays: "Do not let us forget that You also then speak, when You are silent."

6   For example, Ps 9 has the voice of the suppliant in vv.1-7 and another voice in vv.8-10 (Mandolfo 2002:47-48). These voice alternations support the notion that the psalms were originally composed for the cult (Hilbert 2005:1).

7   Broyles (1989:19) views the different voices as evidence of the oral origins of the texts.

8   The shifts are noticeable either by a grammatical shift (in person and or number) or through a change in content or mood (Mandolfo 2002:1, 7-8).

9   Harris (1970:39, cited by Hilber 2012:17) refers to third-person speech in psalms as "indirect divine speech".

distinguishes it from an oracle which is divine to human (Mandolfo 2002:21). Thus she sees the didactic voice as a second voice within the lamenter, competing with the voice of complaint (Mandolfo 2002:2-3). Derek Suderman (2017:2, 8) challenges her view of different voices, and argues that shifts in mood represent shifts in address (between divine and human audiences) but the same speaker. However, Mandolfo (2002:15) notes that when the addressee is considered to be the congregation, the pronoun is singular. It seems acceptable to continue with the majority view (contra Suderman) that there are many voices to be distinguished in the psalms, and our purpose is to determine if the voice of God can be understood to be represented in one of these voices.

Carl Bosma (2009:131, 143) asserts that there are two ways in which the voice of the Lord is heard in the Psalter: first, through direct quotations of the words of YHWH (as in Ps 12:6 and Ps 60:6), and second, through the voice of prophecy (as in Ps 20 and Ps 28). These two ways will be addressed, and then consideration will be given to determine if the first clear way of hearing words from God can point to hearing words from God through the prophetic voice.

Direct quotations

Ps 12:5b includes a speech-introducer ("says the LORD", ESV) suggesting that it contains the words of God. There are a number of voices in this short psalm: first the psalmist complains in vv.1-2 and makes a request in vv.3-4. Another speaker is then introduced (v.5), presenting the view of God. Nicolaas Ridderbos (1962:152) suggests that these words may have been uttered by a cult official. Next, v.6 records the congregation's "amen of faith" (Weiser 2000:160), continuing the dialogue (Kraus 1986:12). A further change in speaker and addressee is apparent in v.7, with the psalmist addressing YHWH (Bosma 2009:141-142).

Another example which includes a quotation of divine speech is Ps 60. Direct speech is used in vv.6b-8, implying that these are the words of YHWH. Nancy DeClaisse-Walford and Beth Tanner (2014:508) note that "Scholars debate if someone in charge speaks these words for God or if God, God's self, is speaking here." Despite the use of speech-introducers and direct speech, it seems that some scholars question whether these examples are in fact the words of God.

Thijs Booij (1978:255) notes that quotations of divine speech in the Psalms have been interpreted in four ways: apart from as "citations", some scholars interpret such "direct speech" as a stylistic device, or as a poetical-prophetical expression, or as an oracle within a cultic situation. There seems to be an overlap in interpretation between "prophetic expressions" and "oracles", but they all fall within the ambit of prophecy. The interpretation at variance is that of God-speech in psalms being viewed as a literary device. For example, Raymond Tournay (1991:131, 161) claims that ancient theophanic traditions were used by post-exilic psalmists to preface divine speech in psalms, "a form of literary motif". For Tournay (1991:30), the idea of pre-exilic cultic prophets is very problematic. Literary development theories thus pushed psalms previously considered pre-exilic into the post-exilic period (Hilber 2003:366). However, John Hilber (2003:366) points out that the Neo-Assyrian oracles testify to the existence of cultic, royal prophecy in the seventh century in a society close to Israel and Judah. Further, Hilber (2005:1) observes that recent research into Assyrian prophetic sources provides

"fresh evidence concerning the preservation of cultic prophecy in psalms."[10] Thus, it seems justifiable to continue with the idea of a "prophetic voice" expressing the words of God in many (pre-exilic) lament psalms.

Prophetic voice

Some scholars (e.g. Bonnard 1960; Bellinger 1984) perceive one of the voices in lament psalms as representing the voice of God through oracles and theophanies.[11] Tournay (1991:131, 161) asserts that sometimes the oracles are explicit, and at other times only implicit. Many other scholars (e.g. Johnson 1944; Ridderbos 1962:45; Eaton 1981; Bosma 2009:143) understand that the oracle or theophany was spoken by cult prophets in the name of YHWH, and is represented in the text of psalms. Indeed, there are many psalms in which prophetic voices speak in the name of the Lord.[12] Indirectly, therefore, these voices represent the voice of God (Bosma 2009:144).

Mowinckel (1961) suggests that the cult-prophet who delivered "the promises of YHWH" may have been a singer or Levite. Other scholars (e.g. Booij 1978; Wilson 1982:292; Tournay 1991:30) also understand Levitical singers to represent the voice of God. As Tournay (1991:56) notes, the singers' liturgical (prophetic) performance was "an attempt to actualize the presence of YHWH in the presence of the faithful". Similarly, Wallace (2017:4) maintains that the duty of the Levitical singers (or temple musicians) was not only to offer hymns to God but also to help in the *mediation of the divine message* to the people.[13]

Mowinckel (1961:58-60) notes that in some lament psalms, YHWH's answer was preserved (as in Ps 12) whereas other psalms have "direct or indirect references" to such answers, but a divine answer was "certainly to be presupposed". Sometimes the answers were addressed directly to the worshipper (as in Ps 27:14). At other times the promises speak of the worshipper in the third person (as in Ps 12:6 and Ps 91:14-16). But in all cases, "the temple prophet is the intermediary between YHWH and the worshipper, announcing what YHWH has said."

A psalm which shows many voices in dialogue, but which does not include "direct speech of God", is Ps 20. First, the psalmist makes a request (vv.1-5) and then a response is given in v.6. However, the response is not spoken directly by God himself but by God's official representative (Ridderbos 1962:216-217; Bosma 2009:144). Another interesting example of an answer to prayer spoken by a cult official (priest or prophet) is found in Psalm 28:6 (Ridderbos 1962; Bosma 2008:204-206).

Bosma (2009:148) suggests that the "cult prophet hypothesis" in these lament psalms allows for a dynamic interplay between the words of the lamenter and those spoken in the name of the Lord, presented in a liturgical setting. By paying attention to shifts in speaker and addressees, responsive readings can enable contemporary listeners to

---

[10]   Based on the view that Assyrian oracles were immediately recorded without alteration, Millard (1985:142-143) concludes that biblical prophecies were recorded immediately as well.

[11]   Augustine applied a Christological hermeneutic to understand one of the voices in the psalms as being that of Christ (Fiedrowicz 2005:51).

[12]   E.g., Pss. 2:6-9; 20:7; 25:8-10, 12-14; 27:14; 28:5; 31:24; 32:8, 9; 36:2 (Ridderbos 1962:45).

[13]   Several texts speak of the inspiration of the Levitical singers (e.g., 2 Chron 20:19-22; 1 Chron 15:22ff, 25:1ff).

experience the dialogue between the prayers of the petitioners and the answer from the Lord.

Relation between the two forms of hearing God's voice

A question that arises is: why is direct speech used in some lament psalms (e.g. Ps12 and Ps 60) and not in others (e.g. Ps 13 and Ps 28)? Three factors may be determinative.

First, scholars note that direct speech in the mouth of God is limited to *communal* lament psalms. DeClaisse-Walford and Tanner (2014:505) assert that "God quotations are not found in individual prayers for help." Both Ps 12 and Ps 60 are communal prayers for help. DeClaisse-Walford and Tanner (2014:505) note that the Hebrew text of Ps 12 shows a "lack of the first person anywhere in the psalm other than in the speech of God in v. 5", and that in Ps 12, the psalmist "complains on behalf of an oppressed community". Similarly, they conclude that Ps 60 is "a communal or national prayer for help". In contrast Ps 13 and Ps 28 are "individual lament[s]" (Craigie 2004:141, 236) and consequently do not include the actual citation of God's speech.

Second, the use of direct speech for the words of God seems to follow the psalmist's quotation of derisive words of the enemy. For example, Ps 12:4 cites the words of the enemy, and v.5 gives a direct quotation from God, speaking, supposedly to the enemy (as 3PS is used, rather than 2PS for the psalmist). Similarly, in Ps 2 the enemies speak derisively about God and the Anointed One (v.3); God answers the enemies (v.6) and then speaks (using direct speech) to the Anointed One (vv.7-9).[14] This suggests that in some cases, derisive words cited as being spoken by the enemy are matched by a citation of words spoken by God. This gives a literary hint that in Ps 3 and Ps 13 (both of which include citations of words spoken by the enemy), it is possible that a response from God might be implicit in the text.

Third, those psalms within the canon which contain direct speech of God (quotations of a divine oracle) are placed in strategic positions in the final shape of the Psalter. For example, Ps. 81 stands at the centre of Pss. 79-83 and at the centre of book 3. Similarly, Ps. 95 is at the centre of Pss. 90-100 (Stek et al 1985:876, 890). This suggests that God-speech was included in the biblical text when it served a strategic purpose, but its absence does not imply it did not take place.

Nature of (Hebrew) poetry

First, all poetry uses terse language (Berlin 1985:7) and thus certain words (such as connectives and speech-introducers) may be omitted, to support the rhythm pattern. In particular, Wilfred Watson (2007:81) notes that Hebrew poetry uses parataxis, "the placing side by side of scenes *without connectives* that directly *coordinate the parts* with one another" (my emphasis). This means that a response from God may directly follow a complaint from the psalmist, without the need to introduce the new voice. In support of this notion, Tannen (1986:318-320) found that speech introducers are not used in dialogue about 25% of the time in American and Greek literary texts. Because such texts are performed, dialogue can be easily indicated by changing the voice (shifts in pitch, amplitude, voice quality, prosody, and pacing). This could happen in the performance of

---

[14]   However, not all lament psalms in which the words of the enemy are cited include direct speech from God (e.g. Ps 41, Ps 42).

psalms too, and indeed, is a major advantage from a voice-sensitive reading-aloud of psalms.

Second, poetry uses metaphorical language and thus gaps in understanding are inevitable. In line with Reception theory, listeners must bring their experience and cultural understanding to fill in the gaps.[15] This includes an understanding of how conversations work in the culture, and how they are represented in a poem. As Robert Alter (1985:136) notes, "the poetic form is the psalmist's means of realizing his spiritual vision, [using] modulated shifts in grammatical voice and object of address".

Next, ideas from speech act theory can be helpful to understand further what may be happening in the dialogues apparent in lament psalms.

Speech act theory

Kevin Vanhoozer (e.g.1998), among others, has consistently proposed the use of speech act theory for biblical interpretation. He claims (Vanhoozer 2017:6) that this theory helps us view texts as doing things (not just representing a state) and this opens up possibilities for transformative reading. Thus there is concern with not just the semantics of language but also the pragmatics (Vanhoozer 2017:6-7).

Speech act theory is appropriate when the speaker intends to elicit a response from the hearer (Briggs 2001:17-19). In the psalms of lament, the lamenter is seeking to get a response from YHWH (Gerstenberger 1988:53), and thus speech act theory could be helpful. For the purpose of using terms from speech act theory when considering the psalms in section 2, definitions of three kinds of acts are helpful. First, there are locutions (in which a person states something); second, illocutions (what a person *intends* to achieve by stating something); and third, perlocutions (the *impact* of the communication on the hearer).

An important aspect of speech act theory is that the force of an utterance is impacted by the context of the utterance: what has gone before (the content or silence) is important (Austin 1975:74-77). This brings us to the notion of a conversation, and ways in which connectedness between participants in a conversation is built.

Involvement strategies in conversation

Tannen (1993:152) refers to "involvement strategies" which facilitate understanding and connectedness between two people by providing "an emotional experience of interpersonal involvement".[16] This emotional experience is brought about by creating patterns of "sound" (through poetic devices such as rhythm, alliteration, assonance, and word repetition) and patterns of "sense" (through using ellipsis, dialogue, and imagery). The Hebrew text of the psalms under study will be examined to see if such features appear in the voices of the lamenter and the representative of God, thereby fostering a greater sense of connectedness between them.

---

[15]   In Reception Theory, the reader is given a creative role and is a full participant in the production of the meaning of the text (Darr 1998:29).

[16]   See also Tannen 1989:34, 13-17.

Lament psalms translated for performance

In the next section, attention is given to two short personal laments, Ps 3 and Ps 13.[17] For each psalm, an overview is given, with a focus on the change of mood of the psalmist and features in the Hebrew text which support the idea of a conversation taking place. Thereafter, the two psalms are "translated for performance". The NLT (New Living Translation) text is given first, and later the performance text (based closely on the NLT).

Psalm 3

    [1] O LORD, I have so many enemies;
        so many are[18] against me.
    [2] So many are saying,
        "God will never rescue him!"
            Interlude

    [3] But you, O LORD, are a shield around me;
        you are my glory, the one who holds my head high.
    [4] I cried out to the LORD,
        and he answered me from his holy mountain.
            Interlude

    [5] I lay down and slept, yet I woke up in safety,
        for the LORD was watching over me.
    [6] I am not afraid of ten thousand enemies
        who surround me on every side.
    [7] Arise, O LORD! Rescue me, my God!
  Slap all my enemies in the face!om[19]
        Shatter the teeth of the wicked!
    [8] Victory comes from you, O LORD.
        May you bless your people.

Overview of Ps 3

The psalm begins with the psalmist addressing God by the covenant name, YHWH. This immediately sets the conversation within the bounds of the covenant. Then the psalmist proceeds to raise her complaints, including complaint about the enemy. She recalls the actual words of the enemy used in derision against her. This is followed by a pause ("Selah").

Verse 3 indicates a significant change in mood in the psalmist, and the first words she says are significant: "But you, YHWH". The use of the adversative "but" signals a turn-about, and then "you" shows that her attention has moved from the enemies to God. Moreover, she uses the covenant name in addressing "YHWH". And then she continues,

---

[17]   Ps 3 and Ps 13 are usually considered individual psalms of lament, although Mowinckel (1982) classifies them as communal laments. However, he does acknowledge that they are "very personal communal laments" (Ferris 1992:16).

[18]   Hebrew: 'rise'.

[19]   ESV has "For you smite … you break …" (perfect tense). Motyer (2007) suggests that they are probably "perfects of certainty". The performance translation follows this view.

expressing confidence where there had been fear. Something has clearly happened during the pause indicated in the Hebrew text. Perhaps in that space another conversation has taken place, unrecorded but implied. Perhaps this is where the cult prophet has inserted an oracle. Or perhaps the psalmist has been reminded of a word from God. In line with speech act theory, the new "act" (attitude) is the result of "speech" (heard or remembered).

The covenant name YHWH is repeated again in the following sentence (v.4). Clearly the covenant is uppermost in the psalmist's mind. She remembers that she is not alone to face the multitude of enemies. She remembers former experiences of covenant blessings (protection, hope, and removal of shame). Perhaps one representing the voice of God has reminded her of these former events and past deliverance. Then again, at the end of v.4, the psalmist stops to reflect (as indicated by "Selah"). Verses 5 and 6 suggest the content of her reflections. First, she remembers a particular incident when she was kept in safety. And that leads her to have faith for the future, assured that the God of the covenant (mentioned in v.5) is with her.

Before the next two (final) verses, there is another dramatic change in mood. From an attitude of fear (in vv.1-2), the psalmist has moved to a place of feeling secure, assured of her covenant partner's presence (in vv.3-6). This enables her now to strongly exhort her covenant partner to act: to save her and administer justice to the enemy. Twice in these verses (7-8a), the psalmist uses the covenant name (YHWH) as well as the possessive ("my") to strengthen her appeal for action. Assured that YHWH will indeed act, the psalmist then, out of a place of assurance and confidence, requests the blessing to be extended to all within the covenant.

Tannen's work highlights that dialogue partners are drawn together emotionally by using similar words or sound patterns. Conversely, the use of similar words probably indicates that the two persons are becoming emotionally bonded. An analysis of the Hebrew in Ps 3 does indeed show repetition of key words between the voice of the lamenter and that understood to represent the voice of God. For example, in v.7, the lamenter cries out, says הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי ('save me') and God is depicted using a word with the same verb-root as that used by the lamenter, הַיְשׁוּעָה ('salvation'). This repetition indicates an emotional connection between the two dialogue partners, and is particularly pertinent as it is the same word-root used by the enemy in v.2 ('there is no salvation'). Thus the representation of God's words in the final verse not only builds connection with the psalmist, but also breaks the power of the enemy's words in the mind of the psalmist.

The psalmist's use of קום ('rise'/'arise') in both v.1 and v.7a shows her move from a place of fearing the "rising" of the enemy to a confident clarion call for YHWH to 'rise'. Between the two uses of the word 'rise' are reminders of the covenantal blessings of protection and "being on the winning side" ('my glory' in v.3b). The word repetition serves to emphasise the impact of hearing words from a representative of God.

Finally, the word-pair 'cried out' and 'answered' (in v.4), used by the lamenter and the one transmitting the word of God respectively, also serves to create an emotional closeness between the speaker and respondent. This supports the notion of "involvement" between the two parties, shown not just by locutions (words) but also by illocutions (intentions of closeness), resulting in positive perlocutionary effects (of the lamenter feeling understood and giving up her complaining stance).

The Hebrew text does support the idea of there being two voices in the psalm, one representing God. This suggests a performance translation of the psalm, one version of which follows. For the performance, the lamenter is on stage, as are the enemies. God is off-stage, not visible but audible. (The speech acts being used are indicated below on the right.)

Scene 1:

Lamenter	O LORD,	2PS address + covenant name
	I have so many enemies; so many are against me. So many are saying,	complaint re enemy
Enemies	"God will never rescue her!"	direct speech (intensification of complaint)
	(reflection)	silence

Scene 2:

God	I am a shield around you, your glory,	reminder of covenant blessings
	the one who holds your head high. (Lamenter listens carefully)	
Lamenter	I cried out to you, LORD,	memory of past experience + reminder of covenant partner
God	I answered you from my holy mountain.	reminder of covenant blessings
	(reflection: lamenter listening and pondering)	silence
Lamenter	I lay down and slept yet woke up in safety.	memory of past experience
God	I was watching over you.	reminder of covenant blessings
	(Lamenter listening)	

Scene 3:

Lamenter	There may be ten thousand enemies surrounding me on every side,	possible experience (intensify action of previous memory)
God	But you will not fear	response to covenant action

Scene 4:

Lamenter	Arise, O LORD!	address, covenant name + imperative
	Rescue me, my God!	Imperative, address + possessive
God	I will slap all your enemies in the face!	covenant action
	I will shatter the teeth of the wicked.	intensification of covenant action

Enemies	(reacting to pain to their mouths)	
God	I give victory.	covenant action

Scene 5:

God	I will bless my people.	covenant action

Psalm 13

Psalm 13 was selected as the next example, being brief but including other features of lament not included in the first example. It is a classic case of an individual lament psalm,[20] with the three subjects of lament all being present:[21] the psalmist has trouble with God, with himself, and with others. His experience is one of helplessness (a social concern provoked by an enemy), which leads to anxiety (personal distress) and consequently a protest to God (raising a theological issue). Although the initial problem is with an enemy, the psalmist chooses to involve God in the real or imagined threats he is suffering. This may be risky, but the alternative is to remain isolated and alienated (May 1994:78). The NLT translation follows:

> [1] O Lord, how long will you forget me? Forever?
>   How long will you look the other way?
> [2] How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul,
>   with sorrow in my heart every day?
>   How long will my enemy have the upper hand?
>
> [3] Turn and answer me, O Lord my God!
>   Restore the sparkle to my eyes, or I will die.
> [4] Don't let my enemies gloat, saying, "We have defeated him!"
>   Don't let them rejoice at my downfall.
>
> [5] But I trust in your unfailing love.[22]
>   I will rejoice because you have rescued me.
> [6] I will sing to the Lord because he is good to me.

Overview of Ps 13

Ps 13 begins with the lamenter complaining that YHWH has forgotten him and is hiding YHWH's face from him.[23] This is portrayed through four "How long" rhetorical

---

[20] Gunkel (1926:46) considers this lament to be "the model of a lament of the individual . . . in which the individual components of the genre step forth most clearly".

[21] Westermann (1981:64) contends that individual psalms of lament typically have three protagonists (God, self, and the enemy). In Ps 13, "God" appears in v.1, self in vv.1-2, and the enemy in vv.2, 4. However, Weiss (1984:441) criticises Westermann's notion of these three parties, arguing that these are not unique to the genre of lament, but typical of all communication.

[22] ESV has "I have trusted …" i.e. past tense.

[23] The nature of the problem is apparent in light of the last verse of the previous psalm: the psalmist is surrounded by wicked people who seem to be having success over him. In Ps 13, the terms "forget" and "hide the face" suggest that YHWH has turned away from the psalmist (Broyles 1989:80). Allen (2005:158) identifies the psalmist's complaint as "divine absence and neglect".

questions (vv.1-2),[24] which present the psalmist's distress.[25] But why is God accused, and held responsible for his suffering? The argument seems to be that YHWH should preserve from death (or deep distress) those who are covenant partners. The psalmist has looked to God in his need, but expectation has been disappointed. YHWH does not seem to have heard previous petitions, and the suffering has continued beyond a point of being able to endure. God the Deliverer has become God the Cause of distress (Broyles 1989:223). However, by attributing the cause to God, it is also a confession that God is the one who can reverse that distress" (Broyles 1989:224-225).[26]

In the first part of the psalm (vv.1-4), the lamenter seems to be conducting a monologue. His words overflow in a torrent, terminating with recall of the enemy's words. His speech consists of three complaints followed immediately by three imperatives (his ideas of how to counter the complaints). Unlike Ps 3, there is no "Selah" in the Hebrew text. His speech pours out until his emotional energy seems to have dissipated. He ends his tirade by quoting the exact words of the enemy, thereby indicating the strong emotional impact of these cutting words on him.

What do these initial verses reveal about the mind-set of the psalmist? In both v.1 and v.3, he uses the divine covenant name. Clearly, he is thinking of the covenant as the basis of his relationship with God. There is also a growing intimacy with God, from the address "YHWH" in v.1 to "YHWH my God" in v.3. This could be an increasing effort to persuade God to act, reminding God of the relationship between them. As such it represents an illocution (intending to persuade) to provoke a positive perlocution (God acting). And it would seem that God does act. Clearly something has happened between vv.4 and 5 as there is a dramatic change in the psalmist's mood (Goldingay 2006:208). Federico Villanueva (2008:3) claims that his situation has not changed, and Alter (1985:66) agrees, asserting that "the surprising emotional reversal [is] impelled by the motor force of faith." John Goldingay (2006:208) argues, "The links and contrasts with what precedes suggest that *we do not need to hypothesize* that the suppliant received a word from God to make the transition possible" (emphasis added).

Although God's words are not recorded, they can be deduced by the content of the psalmist's next statements. First, the use of "but" (v.5) indicates that his growing fear has been halted. The notion of the covenant has been uppermost in his mind (as revealed by use of the covenant name in vv.1 and 3). Then, in vv.5-6, three covenantal blessings counter his three complaints. His cry of "Answer me" is responded to with remembrance of YHWH's "unfailing love"; his fear of death is responded to with "you have rescued me"; and his request "Don't let my enemies gloat" is countered with remembrance that "YHWH is good to me".

In terms of Tanner's "involvement strategies", it was noted previously that dialogue is a means of creating an emotional bond between two people. The converse is also often true, with an emotional move being a response to dialogue. Concerning the Hebrew text,

---

[24] Westermann (1981:184) points out that the question "how long?" in v.1a (addressed to God, the first subject) is expanded in v.2a in connection with the second subject (self) and in v.2b in connection with the third subject (the enemy). The full interrogatory sentence (including all three subjects) is found only in Ps 35:17.

[25] Although the psalmist's attitude is negative, the very question "How long ..?" suggests hope that the unbearable situation will end at some time. See Weiss 1984:304.

[26] If this were not the case, Broyles asks, why would the community of worshippers in Israel have preserved psalms of such unresolved dissonance?

the lamenter shows an emotional move towards God through the alliterative use of אָשִׁירָה ('sing') following the one representing God making a declaration of 'salvation' (בִּישׁוּעָתֶךָ). The alliteration of the שׁ sound suggests that there is an emotional bond between the two dialogue partners. Similarly, the psalmist's use of יָגֵל ('let it rejoice') is followed by the one depicting God using גָמַל ('bountifully'), the two words showing assonance of the final vowel. These poetic features within the Hebrew text support the notion that the interjection of a voice representing God into the lamenter's outburst is accepted positively (as shown by the psalmist's emotional move towards God) and further affirmed (by the emotional "involvement" between the two dialogue partners). One also notes the repetition of לְבָבִי ('my heart') in v.2 and v.5, first linked with sorrow and later with joy. The move from one to the other seems to be the result of remembering God's חַסְדְּ ('covenant love'), emphasised by the repetition of 'my heart'. Further, the illocution (intent) of the lamenter's words in v.4b אֶמּוֹט ('when I am shaken') is dramatically responded to (by the one representing God) in the next word (v.5a), חַסְדְּ ('covenant love').

Poetic features in the Hebrew text

One can also deduce perlocutionary features in the structure of the Hebrew text. The three stanzas show decreasing length, from five lines in the first stanza to four lines in the second to three lines in the third (Weiss 1984:299-300). This could reflect the growing peace (with less need for words), a positive effect on the lamenter. Thus the Hebrew text; as well as an understanding of the conversational, dialogical form of lament psalms; suggests that the lamenter has heard (or been reminded of) words from God, which has led to a change of attitude, from complaint to faith.

The performance translation of Ps 13 below suggests the conversation between the lamenter and God.

Scene 1:

Lamenter	O LORD, how long will you forget me?	address, covenant name, complaint
	Forever?	Intensification (complaint)
	How long will you look the other way?	Intensification (complaint)
	How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul,	Intensification (complaint)
	with sorrow in my heart every day?	Intensification (complaint)
	How long will my enemy have the upper hand?	Intensification (complaint)

Scene 2:

Lamenter	Turn and answer me, O LORD my God!	imperative, address, covenant name
	Restore the sparkle to my eyes, or I will die.	imperative + threat
	Don't let my enemies gloat, saying,	negative imperative
Enemies	We have defeated him!	victory shout
	(exuberant hands in air)	
Lamenter	Don't let them rejoice at my downfall.	negative imperative

Enemies	(dancing and having a good time)	

Scene 3:

God	My love for you has not failed.	reminder of covenant
	I will rescue you.	covenant blessings
Lamenter	I will rejoice.	response to blessings
	I will sing to you, LORD.	response to blessings
God	I am good to you.	covenant blessings

Conclusion

Silence (or inactivity) of God may be a silence of punishment (e.g. Deut 31:17), or one to promote patience (2 Pet 3:9), or may reveal commitment to the covenant, allowing the human partners of the covenant to voice their perspectives (as in Lamentations). It is this latter "silence" that at first seems to be operative in the psalms of lament. In line with O'Connor (2002:28-29), it appears that "God's silence gives reverence to voices of anger." However, further study shows that the "silence" is more a space for the complainant to discern a nudging (or a word from a representative of God) in the direction of hope. The lamenter is reminded of past experience and convictions, to encourage her that God will, or already is, involved in the painful situation.

Some writers refer to this nudging as "memory". John Donne (1955:73-74) writes: "The art of salvation is but the art of memory . . . remembering the mercies of God . . . this opens the door, this restores [the psalmist] to liberty, if he can remember." Wendell Berry (1990:89) also notes that a good poem has as its centre "a complex reminding, to which it relates as both cause and effect." Memory of the problem is at the heart of the complaint, but memory of the character of God is also the crux of the solution. Other writers refer to this nudging in the direction of hope as "imagination". Gregory Orr (2002:16-17) maintains that awareness of the chaotic in ourselves and in the world generates "a spontaneous ordering response, an innate faculty possessed by everyone", and he asks: "Why not call it 'imagination'?" If one recognises that memory and imagination are gifts from God, this nudging can be identified as a voice from God responding to the lamenter.

As Ellen Davis (2019) notes, "the distinctive value of lament psalms [is] their sustained and possibly unique potential for eliciting a response". The reason for this lies in the fact that the complaints are addressed to God. Even when the psalm ends without resolution (or a clear expression of confidence that God has heard the prayer and will act), it can be life-giving. For example, Donne (1955:161) reads Ps 38 "toward salvation" because in his understanding "all the words, including the complaints, are directed to God". He concludes: "Our deliverance is in his time, and not in ours."

But beyond a hoped-for future deliverance, a liturgical reading (or performance) of a lament psalm can help people engage with the psalm in new and insightful ways that will help them in the present. In particular, the use of different voices for the different characters helps those hearing the performance to recognise that a dialogue is in process. Even as they hear (and perhaps identify with) the complaints of the lamenter, they also hear a response representing the voice of God. This can help contemporary audiences learn to listen and look for the voice of God in response to their own personal laments.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ackermann, D. 2001. *Tamar's cry: Re-reading an ancient text in the midst of an HIV/AIDS   pandemic*. Cape Town: EFSA Institute.

Allen, J.G. 2005. *Coping with trauma. Hope through understanding*. Washington: American Psychiatric Publishing.

Alter, R. 1985. *The art of Biblical Poetry*. New York: Basic Books.

Austin, J.L. 1962/1975. *How to do things with words*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.

Bellinger, W.H. Jr. 1984. *Psalmody and prophecy*, JSOT Supplement Series 27. Sheffield: JSOT Press.

Berlin, A. 1985. *The dynamics of Biblical parallelism*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press.

Berry, W. 1990. The responsibility of the poet. In Berry, W. (ed.) *What Are People For?* New York: North Point Press.

Booij, T. 1978. *Godswoorden in de Psalmen: Hun funktie en achtergronden.* Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Bosma, C.J. 2008. Discerning the voices in the Psalms: A discussion of two problems in Psalmic interpretation, Part 1, *Calvin Theological Journal*, 43(2):183-212.

Bosma, C.J. 2009. Discerning the voices in the Psalms: A discussion of two problems in Psalmic interpretation, Part 2, *Calvin Theological Journal*, 44:127–170.

Briggs, R. 2001. *Words in action: Speech Act Theory and Biblical interpretation*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.

Broyles, C.C. 1989. *The conflict of faith and experience in the Psalms. A form-critical and theological study*. Sheffield: JSOT Press.

Cilliers, J. 2007. Breaking the syndrome of silence: Finding speech for preaching in a context of HIV and AIDS, *Scriptura*, 96:391-406.

Craigie, P.C. (2004). *Psalms 1–50 (2nd ed., Vol. 19)*. Nashville, TN: Nelson Reference & Electronic.

Darr, J.A. 1998. *Herod the Fox. Audience criticism and Lukan characterization*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd.

Davis, E. 2019. Bending the silence. Paper presented at New Song, Hebrew Poetry Conference, Durham University, June 2019.

deClaissé-Walford, N. and Tanner, B. 2014. Book two of the Psalter: Psalms 42–72. In Young, E.J., Harrison, R.K., and Hubbard, R.L. Jr. (eds.), *The Book of Psalms*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.

Donne, J. 1955. *The sermons of John Donne, Vol II*. In Potter, G.R. and Simpson, E.M (eds.). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Eaton, J.H. 1981. *Vision in worship: The relation of prophecy and liturgy in the Old Testament*. London: SPCK.

Ferris, P.W. Jr. 1992. *The genre of communal lament in the Bible and the ANE*. Atlanta: Scholars' Press.

Fiedrowicz, M. 2005. General introduction in St Augustine, *On Christian belief*. New York: New City Press.

Gerstenberger, E.S. 1988. *Psalms: part 1: with an introduction to cultic poetry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans**.**

Goldingay, J. 1993/2006. *Praying the Psalms*. Bramcote, UK: Grove.

Gunkel, H. 1926. *Die Psalmen. Handkommentar zum Alten Testament*. Gottingen, Germany: Vandenhoek and Ruprecht.

Gunkel, H. and Begrich, J. 1933. *Einleitung in die Psalmen.* Gottingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht.

Hilber, J.W. 2005. *Cultic prophecy in the Psalms*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Hilkert, M.C. 1999. Preaching the folly of the cross. *Word and World,* 19(1):39-48.

Holy Bible: *New Living Translation*. 2013. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

Johnson, A.R. 1944. *The cultic prophet in ancient Israel*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

Katongole, E. 2017. *Born from lament: The theology and politics of hope in Africa.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Kierkegaard, S. 1949. *Die Tagebücher, 1834-1855*. München: Kösel Publications.

Kraus, H. 1986. *Theology of the Psalms*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House.

Mandolfo, C. 2002. *God in the cock. Dialogic tension in the Psalms of lament*. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press.

Mandolfo, C. 2008. Talking back: the perseverance of justice in Lamentations. In Lee, N.C. and Mandolfo, C. (eds.), *Lamentations in ancient and contemporary cultural contexts*. Atlanta: SBL, 47-56.

Mays, J.L. 1994. *Psalms* (interpretation commentaries). Louisville: John Knox Press.

Millard, A.R. 1985. La prophetie et l'ecriture: Israel, Aram, Assyrie, *RHR*, 202:125-144.

Motyer, A. 2007. *Treasures of the king. Psalms from the life of David*. Nottingham, UK: IVP.

Mowinckel, S. 1962/1982. *The Psalms in Israel's worship*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

O'Connor, K.M. 2002. *Lamentations and the tears of the world*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.

Orr, G. 2002. *Poetry as survival*. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press.

Pavese, C. 1961. *This business of living, Diary: 1935-1950*, ed. and trans. A. E. Munch. London: Peter Owen Ltd.

Ridderbos, N.H. 1962. *De Psalmen Vol 1 (Ps. 1-41).* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Soelle, D. 1975. *Suffering*, trans. E.R. Kalin. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Stek, J., Barker, K., Burdick D., Wessel, W., and Youngblood, R. (eds). 1985. *NIV Study Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Suderman, W.D. 2017. From dialogic tension to social address: Reconsidering Mandolfo's proposed didactic voice in lament Psalms, *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*, 17 (Article 10).

Tannen, D. 1986. Introducing constructed dialogue in Greek and American conversational and literary narrative. In Coulmas, F. (ed.), *Direct and Indirect Speech.* Berlin: De Gruyter, 311-332.

Tannen, D. 1989. *Talking voices: repetition, dialogue, and imagery in conversational discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tannen, D. 1993. *Framing in discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tournay, R.J. 1991. *Seeing and hearing God with the Psalms*. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark.

Vanhoozer, K.J. 1998. *Is there meaning in this text?* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Vanhoozer, K.J. 2017. From speechaActs to Scripture acts: The covenant of discourse and the discourse of the Covenant. Online: https://myrrh.library.moore.edu.au:443/handle/10248/10223 (Accessed: 8 July 2020).

Villanueva, F.G. 2008. *The 'uncertainty of a hearing'. A study of the sudden change of mood in the psalms of lament*. Leiden: Brill.

Watson, W. 1984 / 2007. *Classical Hebrew Poetry*. London: T&T Clark.

Weiser, A. 2000. *Psalms: A commentary*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

Weiss, M. 1984. *The Bible from within. The method of total interpretation*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University.

Westermann, C. 1981. *Praise and lament in the Psalms*. USA: John Knox Press.