

○ REVIEW OF ROLF A JACOBSON'S 'MANY ARE SAYING': THE FUNCTION OF DIRECT DISCOURSE IN THE HEBREW PSALTER

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Sean Burt reviews *Many are Saying: The Function of Direct Discourse in the Hebrew Psalter*, by Rolf A Jacobson. (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series; 397; New York: T & T Clark International; 2004. ISBN 0567081931.)

Jacobson's book, a revised version of his 2000 Princeton dissertation, starts with the reasonable premise that the psalms are largely rhetorical texts, that many of them were 'composed in order to persuade some audience... to act in some way or to adopt some belief or way of life' (p. 3). He focuses his study particularly on the device of direct discourse (hereafter DD), or words ostensibly quoted verbatim from some other speaker or context.

Chapter 1 lays out J.'s methodology for working with DD. J. recognises that, far from having merely a semantic function in the progression of an argument, DD has great significance for the pragmatics of a communicative situation. DD has a performative, theatrical dimension. It 'allows [those who quote] to shed their own perspective and clothe themselves with the perspective of some other original speaker' (p. 8). By using DD, a speaker can utter words without having to take responsibility for them. Additionally, while DD gives the appearance of language completely attributable to another speaker, the reporter of DD, 'chooses which aspects of the original speech to quote based on *the experience that the author wishes the reader to have*' (p. 11 – italics in text). This point, central to J.'s argument, arises from what he calls Meir Sternberg's 'Proteus Principle,' which asserts that the original context and perspective of the quoted words are always recontextualised by the new communicative situation (pp. 13-16).

Having taken a brief tour through his theoretical approach, J. begins the process of cataloguing and categorising each instance of DD in the Psalter. For each occurrence, J. offers a reading of its stylistic characteristics and its import for the argument of the psalm. Naturally, context guides meaning, and many of J.'s observations (by his own admission) defy easy systematisation. However, some general features can be observed. Chapter 2 presents quotations of speech uttered by the psalmists' enemies. Through the words of another speaker, the psalmist can give voice to ideas (such as God's perceived impotence) that the reporter may find somehow unacceptable to voice. When, for instance, the psalmist writes, 'the fool says in his heart, "There is no God,"' (Pss 14, 53) one can perhaps hear 'an echo of his own unspoken and indeed unspeakable doubt – the doubt that God cares, the doubt that God sees, the doubt that God is an effective presence in the world' (p. 53). In the Psalter, similar statements that directly deny the power of God are found only in the mouths of enemies. J. finds this fact suggestive, and thus asserts that the enemy quotations, as heard by the *actual* audience of the worshipping community (not the text's implied audience – more on this below), serve to draw lines between appropriate and inappropriate speech. The enemy's people may deny YHWH's power, but the psalmist's people may not (at least not directly).

Chapter 3 takes on self quotations, an example of which occurs in Ps 30:6, ‘as for me, I said in my prosperity, “I shall not be made to stagger forever”’. Obviously, with these forms of DD, the identity of the speaker quoted has little significance for the new context – instead, J. highlights changes in the circumstances, the time frame, and the content of the words quoted. Self quotations draw out a contrast between the original utterance and the recontextualised situation. In the case of Ps 30, the speaker who reports these words differentiates him or herself from them by noting they took place both in the past and in ‘prosperity’ (pp. 79-80). As a result, the speaker implicitly takes a step back from those words and disavows their content.

J. takes a brief detour in chapter 4 through some highlights of previous scholarship on the next variety of DD, God quotations. Unlike with other kinds of DD in the Psalter, a significant amount of research has been directed toward God quotations, particularly quotations of God *qua* divine oracles. J. disagrees with the common characterisation of God quotations as oracles primarily because they have been placed in a new context. Such quotations, as part of DD, are by definition not current messages. Whatever their earlier context, in their new setting, the ‘Proteus Principle’ takes over. In the Psalms quotes are not direct responses to oracular inquiries. J. argues that most of the God quotations are citations of earlier tradition (p. 124). God is quoted in the psalms ‘because [the quotes] carry the authority of the tradition. To be precise, the God quotations carry authority because they purport to be the speech of God... [the psalmists] wish to use the power of God’s authority in their psalms’ (p. 125). Here, J.’s comment is insightful, though he does not seem fully to acknowledge its implications. The use of DD, as J. noted in the chapter on enemy quotes, can allow the psalmist to say words that he or she does not have social license to say outright. The case of the God quotes differs from that of the enemy quotes in that here, the content is not at issue. Rather, this use of DD affects the social context of the utterance. The speaker claims divine authority and is able to assert that his or her words are actually God’s words. J. observes that the God quotes serve to construct society, to ‘restrain the wicked impulses of the community... and to encourage the virtues of covenant obedience’ (p. 125), as well as to characterise God as an entity that iteratively speaks to the community (p. 128). Lurking behind J.’s argument, however, is the implication that the active engines really driving the construction of community are the psalmists themselves, not God.

In the final chapter, J. takes on the situations where the psalmist quotes the community as a whole. As with the other varieties of DD, the community quotes blur the difference between reporter and reported. The psalmist incorporates the words of the community, merging the ‘I’ of the psalmist’s speech with the ‘we’ of the community, though, of course, under the umbrella of the ‘I’. The words of the speaker ‘align the psalmist with the community of which she is a part’ (p. 142). Further, J. maintains that the community, through the liturgical practice implied by the psalms, returns the favor by repeating the words in a refrain.

J. makes a compelling case for the integrative function of DD in the community quotes, but by evoking liturgical practice, his argument hints at a real shortcoming in his method. Throughout his study, J. works to keep his investigation within the realm of the speakers and audiences *implied* by the texts. That is, for lament and praise psalms, the implied audience is God, for liturgies, the community, for wisdom, students, and so on. He avoids addressing the question of real live composers and audiences up front. However, with his occasional invoking of actual worship situations, he lets the question of real communicative contexts enter by the back door. Without situating a communicative transaction in a real setting, the investigation into

poetic devices ultimately becomes an academic exercise. The allusion to liturgical acts entails the question of priestly and governmental leaders composing and selecting texts for periodic repetition, so that a community can be told who they are and how they speak (can an entire community really be quoted, anyway?). The notion that DD is a device for avoiding responsibility for words becomes far more suggestive if located in such a context.

This book has several strengths, some of which resist adequate summary in a brief review. It surveys every instance of DD in the Psalter and presents useful criteria for identifying it where not clearly marked. J. also acknowledges that his conclusions about the function of various types of DD are rules of thumb rather than laws, and quite context specific – appropriately, given his appeal to Sternberg’s ‘Proteus Principle.’ This book would be quite useful as a reference for rhetorical study of the Psalms, as well as of other texts that employ DD. Nonetheless, insofar as J. does not explicitly extend his analysis to actual communicative contexts, J.’s methodology must be supplemented. Surely, any study of persuasion in literary texts must attend to a text’s own devices and implied communicative logic, but the real impact of rhetoric has everything to do with flesh-and-blood audiences and concrete social relations.