THE SONG OF THE SEA – A RHETORICAL-CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND CONTEXTUAL INTERPRETATION OF EX 15:1–21

by Georg Tilman Nicola Reger

Supervisor: Professor Dr. Gerald O. West

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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work.

All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged.

It is being submitted for the degree of Masters in Theology in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other university.

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Tilman Reger

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Date

Dedication

To my parents.

Preface

Studying abroad is usually an adventure and a challenge. I expected my year in South Africa at the University of KwaZulu-Natal to be an inspiring and stimulating experience. Indeed the time in South Africa has changed me and opened my eyes and my mind to many new things. It has become a lasting positive experience and an enduring influence to my way of thinking and perceiving the world. All this, of course, was possible thanks to many supportive, welcoming, and inspiring people, some of which I mention in my words of gratitude. Other will know their contribution without my calling their names.

The present work at its core is a result of my experience of having lived in South Africa; without this, it could not have been produced in its actual form. I started out from two different questions, one asking for biblical authority in the post-modern plurality of voices, the other grappling with biblical images of divine violence, back then with Ps 68 in mind. With the help of Prof Gerald O. West and the colleagues from Biblical Studies the topic of the present thesis arose and took shape. It was chiefly through the discussion of contextual biblical hermeneutics that my two previous questions were brought together.

After a long and at times arduous process of reading, reflecting, discarding, learning and writing I am very happy and relieved to present this dissertation as the result of my labour. I also wish to offer it as a grateful recognition to all those who took a share in it with their support, encouragement, and confidence. What is more, I sincerely hope this work may be a small stone that builds the bridge between Africa and Europe.

Words of Gratitude

First and foremost, I wish to acknowledge the support of my supervisor Prof Gerald O. West who encouraged me to develop my own question and approach, but also challenged me to engage thoroughly with contextual bible hermeneutics. Together with Prof West I want to name Ms Pat Bruce, Dr Sarojini Nadar and Prof Jonathan Draper for their inspiration in class and personal conversation. In place of all staff members of the School of Religion and Theology who assisted me upon my arrival at UKZN and welcomed me warmly, I wish to mention Prof Steve De Gruchy who departed this life much too early.

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Table Of Contents

I. INTRODUCTION 1

II. HERMENEUTICAL FRAMEWORK 2

1. Introduction – Objective, Process, Influences, and Goal 2
1.1. Objective and Aim of this Thesis: Interpretation of Ex 15:1–21 2
Old Testament as Hebrew Bible – Linguistic, Literary and Exegetic Implications;
Language, Background, Natural Understanding 2
1.2. Situation and Process: Contemporary Reading 5
1.3. Personal Influences 8
1.4. Goal: Contextual Interpretation and Application 11

2. The Hermeneutical Situation – a Historical and Hermeneutical Problem 11
2.1. Ancient Text, Modern Reader – Introduction 11
2.2. Ancient Text 11
2.3. Modern Reader and the Purpose of Exegesis 12
2.4. Conclusion 13

3. Problem Analysis – General and Specific 13
3.1. Introduction 13
3.2. Hermeneutical Pathways: Theory and Strategies 14
3.2.a. Level of Reader 14
3.2.b. Level of Text 18
3.2.c. Level of Context – Purpose, Intention, and Outcome 20
3.2.d. Bringing Together the Levels 21
3.3. Result, Goal, Conclusion 21

4. My Hermeneutical Model 22
4.1. Bi-focal Approach within the Tri-polar Model 22
4.2. My Personal Commitment 25

III. METHODOLOGY OF RHETORICAL CRITICISM 28

1. Introduction 28

2. Preliminary Definition 28

3. History and Development of the Method 29

4. Steps in Rhetorical Criticism 34

5. Goals 36

6. Principles 37

7. Relationship to Other Methods of Biblical Interpretation 38

8. Definition 40

9. Actuality of Rhetorical Criticism? 41

IV. EXODUS 15:1–21 – HEBREW TEXT AND ENGLISH TRANSLATION 43

V. STRUCTURAL AND STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF EX 15:1–21 47

1. Introduction 47
W.G.E. Watson's approach to Hebrew poetry 48

2. Delimitation 51

3. Basic Structural Division – Formal Linguistic Division into the Narrative Frame and the Poetic Parts 52

4. Segmentation – stanzas and strophic division of the poetic part (Ex 15:1b–18) 53
4.1. Review of Previous Research 53
4.1.a. Two Main Sections 53
4.1.b. Three or More Sections 55
4.1.c. Conclusion of the Review 57
4.2. My Own Delineation/Segmentation: Refrains, Stanzas, Strophes 57
4.2.a. Introduction, Guidelines 57
4.2.b. The Refrains 58
4.2.c. The Stanzas 59
4.2.d. Strophic Division 60
4.2.d.α. Introit 61
4.2.d.β. 1st Stanza 62
4.2.d.γ. 2nd Stanza 63
4.2.d.δ. 3rd Stanza 64
4.2.d.ϵ. Coda 66
4.3. Conclusion 66

5. Isolation of Poetic Devices 67
5.1. General Remarks / Introduction 67
5.2. Description of Poetic Devices in the Song of the Sea 68
5.2.a. Structural Poetic Devices 68
5.2.b. Non-structural (Stylistic-Aesthetic) Poetic Devices 71
5.3. Major Motifs in the Song of the Sea 74

6. Prose and Poetry – Interplay of Frame, Song, and Couplet 75

7. Functional Synthesis 76

VI. INTERPRETATION 79

1. Introduction 79

2. Aspects and Issues 80
2.1. The Nature of Yahweh as the God of the Exodus 80
2.2. Israel Among the Peoples 81
2.3. The Land – Dispersion, Migration, Occupation, Inheritance 83
2.4. Violence in the Song of the Sea and the Call for Peace 85
2.5. Worship – Forms, Places, and Actors 87
2.6. Gender – Men and Women in Event, Story, and Worship 89
2.7. Historicity of the Exodus – Story and History 91

3. A Theology of Hope and Justice and the Exodus 92

VII. CONCLUSION 94

VIII. ABBREVIATIONS 96

IX. BIBLIOGRAPHY 97

I. Introduction

The story of the Exodus of the Israelites from the bondage in Egypt has been an important text of the Hebrew Bible throughout the centuries. After flight from Egypt and before entrance into the Promised Land, the Exodus culminates in the salvation of the Israelites at the Sea of Reeds. The narrative account is followed by a hymnic response, the Song of the Sea (Ex 15:1–21), the only extended piece of poetry in the Book of Exodus. This song or poem also marks a literary turning point in Exodus. It refers to the preceding event at the Sea, but at the same time anticipates the narrative of the migration into Canaan and the settlement at the mountain of God, which will not take place until much later.

As regards content, the Song of the Sea is replete with violence. Disturbingly, it is God who acts most violently and brings death and destruction to the adversaries of the Israelites. How can we read a text of violence in times of peace? And how can this biblical text still contribute to, or fit into, the vision of a peaceful and just society, both locally and globally?

This thesis explores the Song of the Sea by close reading and subjects the exegetical results to a contextual interpretation. This is done from a hermeneutical position that foregrounds the interpreter's location and the context of reading as conditions of understanding. In this work, the attempt is made to bring German and South African reality into dialogue.

The issues addressed in the contextual interpretation are a result of a close reading following the principles of rhetorical criticism, a methodology that focuses on the relation of form and content, composition and on means of persuasion. This approach is particularly appropriate for the analysis of poetic texts.

The focus of this study is on the text in its final, canonical form. It follows a decidedly literary approach, reading the Song of the Sea as a unified piece of art and as discourse in synchronic perspective. Diachronic questions of the text history which arise will inevitably be addressed where necessary, but without being treated in detail here.

II. HERMENEUTICAL FRAMEWORK

1. Introduction – Objective, Process, Influences, and Goal

1.1. Objective and Aim of this Thesis: Interpretation of Ex 15:1–21

The objective of this thesis is the analysis and interpretation of a certain chosen text from the Old Testament: Ex 15:1–21, the Song of the Sea. This first chapter pursues the aim to provide a theory of the process of understanding that underlies this analysis and interpretation – that is, the hermeneutical framework. Adopting a phenomenological approach,[1] I will first take a general look at the interpretive situation and then continue with more specific considerations. An analysis of the hermeneutical problem under consideration follows, and the chapter will be concluded with the development and presentation of a hermeneutical model that will be applied in this thesis.

Old Testament as Hebrew Bible – Linguistic, Literary and Exegetic Implications; Language, Background, Natural Understanding

As mentioned at the beginning, the objective of this thesis is the analysis and interpretation of a certain chosen text from the Old Testament. The Old Testament's other common name "Hebrew Bible" points to two specific characteristics of this text and its literary context: It is a text originally written in classical Hebrew, and it is a text from the fundamental corpus of treasured and authoritative writings of the religious communities of Jews and Christians. Their writings are ancient documents that originated as far back in historic time as far as 1300 BCE.[2]

[1] By this I mean and intend to follow the course of experience of an average Bible reader and exegete, who starts out from his/her life situation considering it the "normal" that is not questioned in first place. The biblical text usually is considered foreign first, and leads to a certain hermeneutically and heuristically contributing feeling of alienation in sight of the ancient text. Appropriation is possible again in the course of the hermeneutical process and the merger of horizons, as will be explained in detail below.

[2] Overview of chronology of biblical literature: Becker 2005, *Exegese*, 204.

To be more specific, the text under examination, Ex 15:1–21, is a document of religious expression and enactment[3] that originated some time between 1300 and 400 BCE.[4] As a literary document, this passage is a poetic text, inserted into a narrative as part of a larger story. These specific qualities of time, language, and style, among others, that I will come back to in more detail later, point to the complex issue of problems and ways of understanding that will be dealt with in this chapter.

First hand reading, or 'natural' or 'ordinary' reading as it can be called,[5] however, allows us immediate understanding in everyday life. This is applicable for newspaper reports and baking recipes, as well as for ancient biblical texts. We have an essential understanding of the words, sentences, subject matter and meaning of what we read or hear. This understanding usually works without reflecting on each word or phrase and without a separate thought about the possibility and way of the actual act of communication and understanding. We have an idea of the result of our use of language as we start hearing or uttering words. This observation was prominently made by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). He described the situation of human existence as thrown into a world that exists prior to it. Things and their function are already determined before the individual reflects upon them: "Prior to all language and logical-rational understanding, human existence lives in a primal, original, pre-reflective, and pre-verbal network of functional connections."[6] What we use intuitively in everyday life is that which is at hand for us (*'das Zuhandene'*). This accounts for our thinking, our feeling, and our use of language, too[7]: We are always involved in the process of language and understanding, prior to all reflection and logical-rational thought.

[3] As opposed to genealogical lists, chronicles of kings or rulers, architectural instructions etc.
[4] Overview of datings in Propp 1998, *Exodus*, 507f.
[5] The term 'ordinary' in its technical sense as coined by West 1999, *Academy*, 10.
[6] Oeming 2006, *Hermeneutics*, 19.
[7] Heidegger [1926] 1962, *Being and Time*, §§ 29–34, p. 172–211.

These two considerations – the historically remote character of ancient biblical writings on the one hand and the involvedness in primal understanding – pose a problem for the theoretical reflection of the possibility and means of understanding and interpreting biblical texts. This twofold situation requires a double reflection. By our primal understanding we notice how different biblical texts are in terms of their language, the culture they represent, the world-view they are entrenched in, the belief system they are rooted in. Noting this discrepancy between the two worlds of the text and the reader obstructs direct understanding or at least draws attention to the ambiguity of this process. Primal understanding thus leads to the apprehension of lack of understanding.

Accordingly, as we read and achieve preliminary understanding, we become aware of our presuppositions that allow our preliminary understanding. We take a trustful stance towards the text and presume that we actually can understand what is written. Yet we can not be sure that we are guided by the same basic assumptions and concepts as the authors of ancient texts. Hence, it becomes uncertain what connects us today and the historically distant writers, or, on the level of subject matter, how close the two worlds of the reader and the writer are in actual fact – the question of context. What guides and informs a reader's interpretation is influenced and formed by the world he or she lives in, and their experiences.[8]

This double reflection process has been described by the influential German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) in his classic modern textbook of hermeneutics "Truth and Method".[9] Gadamer speaks of the meeting of the two horizons of text and reader and their fusion in a successful process of interpretation.[10] "Understanding a text involves letting the text speak and present its subject matter. Only an intensive dialogue

[8] On this idea compare H.-G. Gadamer's thoughts in "Truth and Method", who crystallizes basic elements of understanding which cannot be grasped by method. All understanding is necessarily based on experiences which are prior to it.
[9] H.-G. Gadamer [1960] [2]2004, Truth and Method, transl. J. Weinsheimer/D.G. Marshall, London/New York: Continuum.
[10] Jeanrond 2002, *Theological Hermeneutics*, 65.

between the text and interpreter can lead to the paradigm shift where the text suddenly starts asking the questions and the interpreter sees himself as the one being questioned."[11]

The task is to understand our ways of understanding. As a result, we need a thorough reflection on the process of understanding and an analysis of the situation of interpretation. This does not only involve a methodology for the analysis of the textual source, but prior to this a theory of the interpretative process that includes the interpreter involved as subject, who is located in a certain context. This is the aim and goal of this first chapter.

1.2. Situation and Process: Contemporary Reading

To continue with the phenomenological approach, I will set out to analyze and describe the situation a contemporary reader finds himself/herself in. This will be accomplished in broader, more general perspective first, and then more specifically focussed on the author of this thesis.

The contemporary reader is a person of the twenty-first century, the age of modernity and post-modernity. His/her situation can be described in various dimensions, with respect to geographic location, nationality, language, social position, level of education, religious orientation, race, class, gender, ethnicity to name but a few. The parameters that define a person can be external and given as detached from the individual's decision, like ethnic and family background, home language, nationality, or primary education. They can be modified or acquired by choice like place of residence, second languages, religious views and denominational ties, or higher education. They can also be the result of free choice and deliberate decision like personal relations, philosophical and social attitudes, or taste and style. This by no means is an exhaustive description of the elements that form a person, and all these elements are subject to social restraints, their degree of choice and freedom depending on the level of permeability and mobility in given society. However, these dimensions are possibilities of human personality formations which are communicated and

[11] Oeming 2006, *Hermeneutics*, 22.

aspired to in varying degrees in the global society of communications and media. There is no doubt that it is very hard to "climb the ladder" from a position of little wealth or in a restrictive society. But this does not excuse the wealthy and uninhibited from realizing these dimensions of possible development and personal formation they have gained from. Their lives are not the average or normal (rather on the contrary!); therefore, from the position of the wealthy and uninhibited, that is, from the centre of globalized North-Western First World perspective, it is necessary to be overt and aware of one's conditions and presuppositions. Twenty-first century readers need to be aware of the standpoint they are reading from and keep in mind the plurality of human existence and experience.

The contemporary background of all ventures of interpretation is the background of the globalized world. This situation is one of the main characteristics of post-modernism.[12] The corollary of globalization is the maze of a plurality of world views, also in the field of philosophical debate. The strong rivalling ideologies of the era of the Cold War have lost influence, but after the collapse of communist ideology no single ideological doctrine stepped into the former contestant's place. What is at play now is a plurality of paradigms that combat in the global dispute with a multitude of voices in all areas of life.

Regarding the interpretation of the Bible, the same applies. As Christianity is but one religion on the global playing field, the Bible is but one book in the global library of literature, be it religious literature or other. In the plurality of voices, the Bible has to claim and defend its position. Even within Christianity there is a plethora of interpretations and methods of reading the Bible, and also in academic theology there are contesting approaches. Where the Bible is put next to secular literature or compared to other religious writings by means of non-theological, literary methods, the Bible is exposed to even more theories and methods of interpretation. This use of, and perspective on, the Bible, however, is legitimate in the secular academic arena and in the context of the globalized world, given that the Bible is

[12] On the characteristics of the post-modern see Adam 1999, *Post-modern Biblical Interpretation*, 305-309, esp. 306f.

not only the Holy Scripture of certain religious communities, but also a piece of world literature. Theology in the context of the academy and the globalized world again cannot blatantly brush away the results of literary analysis as invalid and insignificant for their research, lest it loses its ties and connection to the rest of the academy and its voice in public discourse.[13]

Yet, the reader and interpreter of the Bible who is primarily in mind in the context of this thesis is a trained exegete. Here this means a person with academic theological education and somebody who is familiar with established scientific standards. As an educated reader in this sense, he/she is aware of the different methods of biblical interpretation and their neighbouring philosophical disciplines, the varying ways of use of the Bible, and the effect of personal involvement in the endeavour of scientific exegesis. Although these elements need not be present to the interpreter's conscious reflection at all times, it is part of the exegetical venture to bring them to conscious awareness. This is a vital part of contemporary exegesis that strives for relevance.[14]

To sum up this section considering the general contemporary situation of biblical interpretation, we can state with Oeming that the contemporary situation is marked by three important characteristics[15]: the plurality of methods, the plurality of meanings, and the loss of the objective /objectivity[16]. Oeming comes to this conclusion after a sketch of philosophical hermeneutics from Aristotle to Jean-François Lyotard, as he sees biblical hermeneutics "closely tied to this general intellectual development"[17]. Oeming notes regarding the growing plurality of methods that "many different hermeneutical concepts exist side by side … with strong antagonism; the representatives of each method … find it difficult to communicate

[13] Oeming 2006, *Hermeneutics*, 144f.; comp. Körtner 2006, *Einführung*, 15.
[14] It is true that this part of conscientization has not been received enough by Western academic theology, yet.
[15] Oeming 2006, *Hermeneutics*, 26–27.
[16] The German original has "Entobjektivierung der Exegese", rendered English "loss of the objective" by J.F. Vette. A more accurate translation would have been "loss of objectivity".
[17] Oeming 2006, *Hermeneutics*, 27.

with each other."[18] The growing plurality of meanings "confronts us today not with a fullness of meaning but with a flood of meanings."[19] Concerning the loss of the objectivity, the third observed tendency, Oeming says:

> "[H]ermeneutics began by claiming to make correct statements about objects (Aristotle). In contrast, the contemporary discussion seems to question more and more the mere existence of such correct statements. Objective interpretation and the precise meaning of a certain statement are becoming more and more ghosts of the past. Subjective interpretation is credited with ever more truth-content; the concept of the one truth as a regulating guideline for studies in the humanities is losing ground quickly. In its place, pluralistic models of truth and understanding appear along with their 'language games' and a plurality of discursive possibilities."[20]

1.3. Personal Influences

The personal factors and contributing influences at play – in this case in the author of this thesis – are important when developing a hermeneutical model as agenda of understanding. The reason is that the loss of objectivity first and foremost happens on the personal level: every judgement is a personal, particular judgement; there is no neutral or objective absolute verdict.[21] In the face of the loss of objectivity, however, all unavoidable subjectivity must be exposed. Only the overt declaration of the personal presuppositions, influences and intentions of the interpreter enable the readers of his/her interpretation to follow on all levels and probe the argument's validity.

An open declaration of the author's place and position helps to avoid working with hidden agendas – often even unnoticed by the interpreter him-/herself. Presuppositions and presumptions must be disclosed; then they can contribute to the set of interpretive tools and strategies. Therefore, as the author of this thesis I feel urged to declare from which place I am writing and what my personal background is.

Starting from a broad perspective and zooming in on the more specific characteristics I would describe my place of reading the Bible as follows: I am a German, that is Western,

[18] Oeming 2006, *Hermeneutics*, 27.
[19] Oeming 2006, *Hermeneutics*, 27; the term *'Sinnflut'* in the German original is an allusion to the biblical Flood. Oeming states in fn. 56: "This flood of meaning has truly biblical proportions." One wonders whether a certain degree of discontentment lies behind this assessment.
[20] Oeming 2006, *Hermeneutics*, 26–27.
[21] Oeming 2006, *Hermeneutics*, 27; 75.

European, male student of theology. My upbringing was in a middle-class family setting which I consider rather intellectual and culturally interested, with an open-minded, liberal, and critical atmosphere. My religious and church background is the average West German liberal protestant church membership that is (or used to be) somehow a cultural mainline standard, though church activities and pre-school care formed a vital part in my early education. I enjoyed formal school education up to matric level of which I spent one year in Central America through an intercultural exchange programme. Subsequent tertiary education in theology followed at two German universities and at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. Through my studies I became a Biblical scholar and theologian who is moving between traditions of the German protestant church and middle-class culture on the one side and the tensions of post-modernity and fragmented globalized society on the other. My experiences of studying and living in different contexts, both in Germany and abroad made me realize how deeply rooted I am in my origins in the global north, in an industrialized, rich, socially stable, multi-media, liberal and democratic society. Having travelled far and having gained substantially from my intercultural learning experiences in different multicultural societies, I comprehend my existence in local and global contexts as profoundly post-modern experience. What Oeming writes about the contemporary situation of understanding resonates with my personal condition: It is marked by pluralism and variability, a loss of objectivity and decentralization.

Therefore, I am anxious to mediate and navigate between languages, cultures, times and discourses – in other words, I am looking for hermeneutic theories and strategies that allow me to understand better the world I live in and to find adequate ways of interpreting and translating. I am interested in hermeneutics as a possible resolve to the present situation. I acknowledge a situation of pluralism and variability, loss of objectivity and decentralization, but I remain confident that understanding is possible between speakers through language and

communication, not only in the field of logics and statements but also in the realm of philosophical reasoning and religious conversation.

For this reason, I am concerned with the challenge of reading and presenting Biblical text as helpful and relevant resource in contemporary religious, philosophical and social debate. From my personal experience and interpersonal exchange, I have come to see that Biblical texts still have the ability to resonate with contemporary life and it is clear from the actual use of the Bible in many communities that this volume of revered texts is still held in highest regard. People address the Bible in many different contexts in search of answers to their life questions and decisions at stake. If these answers and decisions are not to be purely speculative and limited in validity on the individual, there needs to be some background theory how a particular reading and interpretation evolved and as to how far it can claim validity for others, too. This, again, is what textual hermeneutics and for this matter, Biblical hermeneutics, is all about.

A last remark on the influences that contribute to my hermeneutical endeavour with regard to questions of Biblical studies and theology: Although my statistical details – white, western, male, middle class, academic – would prima vista suggest otherwise, I have been inspired by theologies and theories that challenge traditional German academic theology. Liberation theologies, questions of gender and distribution of power in the social discourse, ecological and social questions, the peace movement and the call for global justice have been important to me from an early stage of my studies. The year of studies in South Africa had a substantial impact and strengthened the importance of these issues on my personal agenda. I recognize that I am still reading from the centre of hegemonic knowledge and power due to my origin, but with increasing awareness of the boundaries and with compassion for those at the margins. In this perspective, my challenge is the task of deconstructing traditionalist understandings and reconstructing fresh, life-giving, and reconciling readings.

1.4. Goal: Contextual Interpretation and Application

To sum up the thoughts of this introductory section I propose the following:

The aim of this thesis is the analysis and interpretation of a text from the Old Testament. The task is thus to interpret an ancient text meaningfully for today's context by standards of modern understanding. This requires understanding the biblical text as Scripture and as ancient literature. The process of interpretation is bound to a particular contemporary situation and it aims at the appropriation of the results and their application to the present time and situation. An element of critical importance in this process is the interpreter. Behind these efforts lies the wish to make a change to people's lives, in their communal sphere as well as in their personal life and minds, in order to help them grow in matters of faith and their understanding of religious issues. This thesis pursues this goal by means of analytical, scientific methods of Biblical interpretation; therefore, a hermeneutical framework and a methodology whose premises and steps are open to scrutiny are required.

2. The Hermeneutical Situation – a Historical and Hermeneutical Problem

2.1. Ancient Text, Modern Reader – Introduction

When a modern interpreter meets the biblical text, a tension or a conflict arises, that has been introduced with the above given observations on the contemporary situation: it is a situation where a text comes into play that is alien or not self-explanatory. Two different worlds are brought into contact: that of the text and the reader – or, to put it more specifically, the ancient text and that of the modern reader.

2.2. Ancient Text

The biblical text is a document from historic times; it stems from its own *ancient context*. The biblical text also is a document with its own history; it has developed, changed and matured in a *diachronic process of growth and tradition*. Within the Bible as a body of literature, the

biblical text has its history of *intertextual relations*, mostly within the canon of the Bible[22], but outside in the literature of the ancient Near East as well[23]. "There are traces in the Old Testament of how the oldest creedal statements … were continually rewritten and expanded intertextually, thus providing interpretation through contextualization."[24] This however results in synchronic connections and relations between biblical texts that transcend different writing and editing. The books of the Bible were written and handed down in a language that is out of use as spoken language in its literary form, Classical Hebrew; hence, biblical texts in their original form are written in a language that is foreign to all Bible readers. There is a *language difference* that is hidden behind translations in modern languages. For a thorough examination of biblical texts as ancient literature, the Hebrew text is still primary and the language difference remains.

2.3. Modern Reader and the Purpose of Exegesis

The 'modern reader' is a person of the twenty-first century living in her/his contemporary context. Their reading experiences are either individual or communal reading situations. They may be conducted in private, in church life or in the academic field, but in all diversity of cases, readers normally refer to the end form of the biblical text; thus, they adopt a synchronic approach and take the Bible as it has been handed down through history in its final form. They see before their eyes and practically hold in their hands the whole Bible of Old and New Testament. However, all readers stand in a diachronic chain of interpretation history with almost two millennia of use of the Bible in its canonical form. Modern reading is shaped reading that is affected by other reading experiences, both innerbiblical and of other literature, in history and present, as well as influenced by the media in a wider sense. For that reason,

[22] E.g. the reflection on Gen and Ex in Hos 11–12.
[23] Comp. the parallels between the Flood narration in Gen 7 and the Akkadian Flood myth of the Atrahasis Epic incorporated in the Gilgamesh epos, or the biblical creation accounts and the old Sumerian parallel of the primeval sea goddess Nammu, source of gods and the cosmos, see De Villiers 2005, *Gilgamesh*, 187; id. 2006, *Epic*, 26–34.
[24] Oeming 2006, *Hermeneutics*, 1.

readings by modern readers are always intertextual. Moreover, other factors are at play: Spiritual needs and questions bring in theological implications, a scientific interest introduces secular scientific approaches, comparison with modern literature forms, new literary reference systems and so forth.

2.4. Conclusion

The two short reflections on the meeting of ancient texts and modern readers show that both sides belong to a wider context and are each in their specific situation of intertextuality. Factors of diachrony and synchrony are at play in both cases. There is a language difference from the ancient text to the modern reader, but conversely modern readers confront the biblical text with discourses different from its original setting. A particular text would upon occasion be regarded in isolation from its context and background, and correspondingly readers would at times confront a text with text-external questions and bring in foreign needs.

We observe similar dimensions at play and there are clear overlaps of categories, but this allows us to comprehend the differences more clearly. Despite all seeming similarities, the hermeneutical problem is still present: the historic and hermeneutical divide between the modern reader and the ancient text. "Bridging the historical abyss between ancient texts and modern readers is a prime task of biblical hermeneutics."[25] How to bridge this gap is the key question which we will attend to in the next section.

3. Problem Analysis – General and Specific

3.1. Introduction

Hermeneutics as scientific discipline

> "denotes the theoretical and methodological process of understanding meanings in signs and symbols, whether written or spoken. Hermeneutics has vital importance for the task of interpreting the Bible because it is the discipline through which people reflect on the concepts, principles, and rules that are universally necessary for understanding and interpreting any

[25] Oeming 2006, *Hermeneutics*, 145.

> meanings whatsoever. Biblical interpretation must be intelligible as a particular form of interpretation in general."[26]

Philosophical hermeneutics develops the general theories for understanding in communication and for understanding written texts. Sub-disciplines of general hermeneutics make available specific theoretical models, in the case of this thesis a hermeneutical framework for the analysis and interpretation of an ancient biblical text.

The basic Aristotelian model of understanding is based on a concept of existence of reality independent from the realm of language; language refers to actual things in the world.[27] Language is primarily oral expression: sound patterns that refer to objects, mental or physical. A written text therefore is second order language: written signs that refer to oral signs that refer to objects. Written text as mediated communication thus has the ability to connect readers and remote worlds, beyond time and space.

How this process of mediated communication works and what its specific implication are for the understanding of biblical texts will be explicated in this section. Special attention will be given to the function of the Bible as Scripture in religious contexts.

3.2. Hermeneutical Pathways: Theory and Strategies

3.2.a. Level of Reader

The process of understanding language has been most influentially described in the modern age by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913). In contrast to nineteenth century linguists' historical diachronic approach to language development or actual grammar, Saussure opted for an a-historical, far more abstract approach.[28] He was interested in how language as such works prior to its realisation in a particular language, its grammar and development. The study of language in general as a system of signs governed by difference and relation was later called *structuralism*, though Saussure himself did not use the term

[26] Klemm 1999, *Hermeneutics*, 497–502.
[27] This concept has its specific heuristic function in contrast to the basic Platonic notion that language primarily refers to conceptual entities in the realm of ideas.
[28] Comp. Bertens 2008, *Literary Theory*, 42–47.

structure.[29] According to Saussurean structuralist theory, language exists in two forms: *parole*, which is the actual, individual utterance of language in use and its underlying grammatical matrix, and *langue*, the system of language as such and the fundamental relationship between words and what they refer to. In short, the words of a language form a *system of signs*. These signs are arbitrary signifiers that have not taken their specific *form* because of what they mean, but to be different from other signs. In actual practice, the relationship between sign and object has become a matter of *convention*. The *meaning* of words or of word forms in grammatical structures is determined by their *difference*. As Saussure says of all the elements that make up a linguistic system: "Their most precise characteristic is being what the others are not."[30] The differential principle does not only work to distinguish words from each other, it simultaneously distinguishes meanings from each other. The role that difference plays in turn implies that meaning is impossible without the whole system of differences, that is, the structure within which difference operates. Hence, meaning is at the same time enabled and produced by the relations between the sign elements that make up a language structure.[31] A word as linguistic sign is both form and meaning; the spoken or written form is the *signifier*, the meaning is the *signified*. The meaning of a sign, the *signified*, however, is not an object in the world, but it refers to a concept, which is a product of generalization and abstraction; by applying the concept through actual use of language to the (physical) world, they then have concrete referents.

This linguistic theory was taken further and beyond the linguistic discipline by the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009). Applying the principles of linguist structuralism to the study of cultures, he noted that the countless discreet elements – things, acts, customs, rules, relations, taboos – that together make up a culture constitute a system of

[29] Bertens 2008, *Literary Theory*, 44.
[30] Saussure 1959, *Course*, 117.
[31] Bertens 2008, *Literary Theory*, 47.

signs. All elements are not meaningful in them, but draw their meaning from the system of signs in which they function, and from their difference from other signs.[32]

Structuralism is a purely descriptive theory. Yet we constantly apply it in analytic and synthetic, creative acts. The notion that all elements of the world we live in may be interrelated leads to constant production of meaning: We can see the most unlikely things as signs and study them as parts of larger sign systems in which the meaning of those signs is not inherent in the signs themselves. The product of difference and relation allows the in-depth analyses of virtually everything imaginable. This concept is called *semiotics* or, in its more dynamic aspect, *semiology*, the term coined by Saussure[33] and prominently displayed in the work of the French literary critic Roland Barthes (1915–1980)[34].

Barthes applied *structuralist analysis* in "a very loose and freewheeling"[35] way to a whole range of cultural phenomena, e.g. the difference between boxing and wrestling, between soap powders and detergent, the drinking of wine versus the drinking of milk, or the design of a new Citroën. Barthes takes apart his objects and makes their constituent elements visible as signs in an underlying structure. That way he scrutinizes seemingly at random phenomena of popular culture and connects their structures to other systems of signs. Barthes' *infinite semiology*, that allows analyses of any entity in the world and relating everything as a sign to a sign system, raises the notion of far-reaching constructivism.

Constructivism as philosophical concept stands for the mode of mentally constituting the world we live in, instead of receiving the world as a given set with fixed meaning. Jean Piaget is credited to have first used the term in philosophical epistemology. The contrarian position would be forwarded by positivist idealism. Linguistic constructivism understands reality as the world we perceive, form and identify by means of language.

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[32] Bertens 2008, *Literary Theory*, 48f.
[33] Bertens 2008, *Literary Theory*, 51.
[34] Barthes 1972, *Mythologies*; id. 1967, *Elements of Semiology*.
[35] Bertens 2008, *Literary Theory*, 51.

The elements of reality, which in the terminology of structuralism are signs, achieve meaning in a system by their difference and relations – similarly, texts achieve their meaning in their difference and relations to a system of texts and meanings. "In the search for the meaning of a particular text it becomes quickly apparent that meaning is not objective, but rather is constructed by the individual reader and interpreter."[36] Our focus now is on the construction of meaning *in* the use of language and *by* the use of language. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in "Truth and Method" regards the experience of understanding as hermeneutic experience. For Gadamer, language is the medium of all hermeneutic experience; this hermeneutical experience not only consists in the understanding *of* language, but in the understanding *through* language, because human existence is constituted by the dialectic of language altogether.[37] According to Gadamer's hermeneutic, this is universally true: "Being that can be understood is language."[38] Language is the medium of appropriation of the world, since language is "a centre where the I and the world connect, or rather: where the I and the world are conceived/shown in their fundamental connectedness."[39] Hence, language at the same time is the means that allows us to connect to the world and is the form in which we make sense of the world, because it is language that fundamentally constitutes our existence as human existence. This philosophical hermeneutical position shows clear correlation to constructivist theory: We can understand the world we live in by making sense of what we experience through language. However, according to Gadamer's philosophy, it is not a radical constructivism, but rather an epistemological process of re-constructing the structures of being according to their linguistic dialectic as 'being that can be understood', which is language.

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[36] Oeming 2006, *Hermeneutics*, 75.
[37] Körtner 2006, *Einführung*, 16: "'Sprachlichkeit' ist für Gadamer die Bestimmung sowohl des hermeneutischen Gegenstandes als auch des hermeneutischen Vollzugs. Die hermeneutische Erfahrung besteht also nicht etwa nur im Verstehen *von* Sprache, sondern im Verstehen *durch* Sprache, weil die Menschliche Existenz insgesamt sprachlich verfasst ist."
[38] Gadamer [1960] [2]2004, *Truth and Method*, 470.
[39] Gadamer [1960] [2]2004, *Truth and Method*, 469.

In conclusion, according to Gadamer hermeneutics is concerned with the understanding of language and understanding through language. Reality is structured in the same manner as language according to semiotic theory. This accounts for being in general, including human experience. By virtue of our being structured in accordance with the dialectic of language, we are able to understand other being and texts as linguistic utterances that refer to other being.

3.2.b. Level of Text

A written text is a second order reference, according to the structuralist and semiotic theories introduced above: By means of written signs it refers to language signs that refer to object in reality. Reading historical texts poses an additional problem: Historical texts refer to past realities. How, then, are they accessible for present understanding?

Multiple dimensions are combined in an historical text: The text as language product establishes a system of internal referral on its own; it stems from an historical context and refers to its historical reality. It was construed by an historic author[40] and preserves the traces of his/her way of thinking; in the process of present reading, however, the historic context, its reality, and the author are not present as objective independent realities.

The problems described are traditionally subsumed under the heading of the question of intentionality in its three dimensions of *intentio auctoris*, *intentio lectoris*, and *intentio operi*; these concepts refer to the "world of the author", the "world of the text" and the "world of the audience" respectively.

Structuralism offers an explanation why understanding texts, even beyond centuries, nonetheless is possible: Texts are made up of signs that not only refer to other text-internal signs, but to objects in reality. Assuming that we get the meaning of the signs and their

[40] This is an overly simplifying view for biblical texts, which have a complicated textual history, but for the sake of heuristic clarity simplification serves the point I want to make.

system right and that the reality of the world behind the text and our present reality are structured analogically, we can still achieve understanding of ancient texts.

A critical focus on the world behind the text can contribute to understanding references in the texts or their situations of production. However, this does not necessarily have an impact on their understanding in a contemporary context. Historical questions are primarily interesting for historical understanding. It can only be a preliminary step if actualisation is intended.

Some scholars are confident that questions about the authors can be satisfactorily answered by close analysis of the setup of their texts. This is the general stance of the historical-critical method. Others contend that we cannot say too much about authorial intent. A text gains autonomy over against its author when the process of writing is finished. Umberto Eco for example wants to release the text from its author's influence: "The author should have the grace to pass away after writing the book, so that he [sic] would not disturb the momentum contained in the text."[41] Along the same line, Barthes proposed the "death of the author" and ascribes an independent life to the text itself.[42] Ricoeur contends: "What the text means does not coincide with what the author intended to say. Literally speaking, having become a *text* or only having conceptual or psychological meaning from now on have distinct fates."[43]

Reader oriented theories highlight the readers' contribution. The corresponding theory emerged from the 1980 together with post-structuralism, most prominently reader-response criticism associated with the name of Stanley Fish. This theory advocates the notion that the text only provides the material along which readers produce meaning[44], whereas there is no meaning inherent in the text. "A hermeneutics influenced by recipient-oriented approach must

[41] Eco 1984, *Postscript*, 14, quoted from Oeming 2006, *Hermeneutics*, 25.
[42] "La voix perd son origine, l'auteur entre dans sa propre mort, l'écriture commence." Barthes 1994, *La mort*, 491.
[43] Ricoeur 1974, *Hermeneutik*, 24–54, tranl. T.R.
[44] Close relation to semiosis and semiology, see above, on page 16.

live with the absence of universal criteria of right and wrong in a post-modern setting. In the extreme, we end up in a situation where the world of interpretation dissolves into many different worlds that are no longer able to communicate with each other."[45] One wonders whether the scholar of hermeneutics seriously believes in such a scenario and really has that little trust in his discipline. The task of hermeneutics, we would like to argue instead, follows the purpose of mediating between the different worlds of meaning and meanings of world of finding a language that keeps the communication between them going. In that sense, Oeming also states that

> "the current diversity of methods and the resulting flood of biblical meanings is *not* a new phenomenon; nor should it be a cause for concern. The diversity is a *necessary* aspect of the process of understanding… The manifold approaches to the Bible enable us to uncover and see the richness contained in the Word of God. The complexity of the process of understanding contains and legitimizes the multiplicity of approaches from the very beginning as a *fundamentum in re*."[46]

3.2.c. Level of Context – Purpose, Intention, and Outcome

In the context of this thesis, the hermeneutical framework wants to provide a model of understanding a biblical poetic text. Several needs of readers are at stake. The Bible is not merely regarded a piece of literature, neither in its religious application nor in the academic study. Instead, the Bible is regarded as a volume of texts that speaks into the context and culture of every time and location. Biblical hermeneutics therefore should facilitate communication across cultural borders. Since the Bible is a book concerned with issues of life in all its facets, it is ascribed a hermeneutical potential for understanding the actual present reality.[47] In this respect, biblical hermeneutics should be life affirming and liberating, promoting justice and peace. Poetic texts of the Bible are not mere aesthetic artefacts. Their artful language fosters imagination as an active, creative process. Poetic texts have the ability to invite their audience to join their emotional and argumentative momentum. For the

[45] Oeming 2006, *Hermeneutics*, 26.
[46] Oeming 2006, *Hermeneutics*, 143.
[47] Körtner 2006, *Einführung*, 75.

hermeneutical task, hence, there is an ethical demand, too: If a text calls for action, there needs to be proper standards by which to judge the implications of a text according to their effect.

3.2.d. Bringing Together the Levels

Biblical interpretation in the context of this thesis takes a bifocal starting point. It begins with the meeting of text and reader. Both bring their worlds with them that influence the interpretative process. Hence, the hermeneutical framework has to address the task of bringing together the levels of meaning and understanding.

The background of the act of interpretation is the reality of the globalized world. It is marked by a plurality of worldviews. Yet it is not free floating and independent from pre-existing influences. Reading is guided by questions and shaped by axioms and premises on the part of the interpreter, but also by the elements and signals a text contains. Thus interpretation is always both global and local.

The way the Bible is addressed in this thesis is marked by a hermeneutical position of trust: It reckons with the potential of biblical texts as speaking to the present situation and revealing helpful truths and insights. Yet it is the reader who makes sense of a text and actualizes instances of its meanings in the act of reading. Meaning emerges according to the signals received from the text and the presuppositions brought to the text. This naturally results in diversity of meanings, generated with a legitimate variety of approaches.

Hermeneutical and methodological considerations make the process, its guidelines, and results, transparent for inspection.

3.3. Result, Goal, Conclusion

A hermeneutical model provides the framework of the process of understanding. It is an expression of commitment of the reader to certain ideals and a certain perspective.[48] The

[48] West 1997, *Place*, 323.

theory resulting from the considerations made so far has to integrate the active players as well as the requirements and needs that arise on the different levels. The key hermeneutical questions in this thesis are: "How do we make sense of the historical text we read?" and "What does the text do with its readers?" and "Which are the influences that shape our particular ways of reading?" The framework has to include the issues of historicity and actualization, contextualization and relevance, and the ethical implications.

4. My Hermeneutical Model

4.1. Bi-focal Approach within the Tri-polar Model

The hermeneutical model is based on three main elements: the text, the context, and the reader. The text is a given entity, which has to be elucidated in a specific present context. The interpreter is part of this context and is influenced by the context he/she lives in. The context, however, is not a simple entity but a complex reality with many different elements and dimensions. A reader finds himself/herself in a specific location that is determined by place, time, social setting, ethnicity, gender, age, culture, belief etc. All these dimensions come to play in the reader's orientation with which he/she approaches a text. Cultural, ideological, and theological commitment are formed by these dimensions that fall under the collective term 'socio-political location'. The questions that arise and the voices from the text that are allowed to enter the interpretative process are channelled and limited by the ideo-theological commitment of the interpreter. This is the reason why interpretation never ceases, and why the ongoing process of interpretation generates new and differing meanings for the same texts.

For the present thesis the focus is narrowed for methodological reasons. The focus is placed on two of the three main elements, the text and the reader. They are the set entities in this venture of interpreting the Song of the Sea and its effect on the reader. Text and reader both are tied to their contexts. The background of the reader becomes the dominant context for the text, too, in a reading where its effect on the reader is examined.

In the encounter of text and reader, a process of interpretation begins and leads to understanding. In this act of communication, both entities send and receive in a process of mutual influence and engagement. There is no simple correspondence between the two worlds. The product of this process is the understanding of the meaning of the text. This however is not a fixed entity that subsequently commences its own, independent existence.[49] It is a rather unstable result of the dynamics between reader and text.

Talking about the text and the reader as entities needs some further explanation. Understanding the text as an entity is to understand it as a world of its own that is contained in its language system, but with reference to an outside reality (in case of ancient texts the historical context). The original author has disappeared, only the implicit author is accessible. Authorial intention cannot be determined independently, at best it equates with the text's intention.[50]

The reader as the other entity is embedded in his/her context. A reader cannot claim uninvolved objectivity; he/she always brings with him/her his/her own context, worldview, and presuppositions. Interpretation and understanding thus means making sense of the text against the background of the reader's context. The act of reading texts from historic contexts is an act of translation. It presupposes a coherent system of signs that shows lines of consistency with the reader's present reality. Thus, the result of the interpretative effort has to fit into the reader's conceptual system and understanding of the world. The reader's context shapes and limits the questions brought to the text and its understanding. With his/her ways of interpreting texts, the reader is committed to certain ideals and a certain perspective. Hermeneutical discussion analyses these commitments and discloses their influence on the interpretative process.[51] Yet there is always a distinct, particular reader, never an abstract, objective mind, regardless of how clearly its location is marked; therefore, it seems to be

[49] West 2009, *Exile*, 251, quoting Draper 1991, *Kingdom*, 244.
[50] Cf. U. Eco 1984, *Postscript*, compare on page 19.
[51] West 1997, *Place*, 2.

appropriate to speak of the reader as an entity, bearing in mind the person's openness and changeability.

With the focus on two of the basic entities in the process of interpretation, text and reader, this hermeneutical model could be classified a bifocal constructivist approach within the tri-polar-model. It is concerned with the text and its world on the one side, and the reader and his/her world on the other. The world of the text *is* the text in the way that the text is constituted by expressions of language which is the constituent of the text's world. Likewise, the reader *is* his/her context in the way that he/she incorporates the world around him/her and his/her world-view and way of thinking are formed by the world he/she lives in. The elements may be distinguished for heuristic reasons, but epistemologically they are inseparable. Linking the two separate worlds of text and reader is the assumption that is fundamental to this model: that the constructivist constitution of world by means of language as system of signs pervades humanity. Therefore, interpersonal understanding as well as intercultural and inter-temporal understanding is possible, although limited by the confines of the reader's particular perspective and conceptual system. A sensitive procedure and conscious mindset is necessary to balance similarity and foreignness, actuality and historicity, contextuality and universality, distanciation and subjectivity.

The application of such a hermeneutical model to the interpretation of biblical texts requires a methodology that focuses on text and reader as well. Socio-linguist and reader-oriented interpretative strategies supply the appropriate methods. Text observations will also bring to the fore traces of the text's history and lead to historically oriented methods, when required. The methodologies of new literary criticism and reader-response criticism are the approaches closest to the bifocal hermeneutic proposed here, that either depend on the emphasis on the characteristics of the text or on the effect it has on the reader. These methodologies have their roots in linguistic structuralism, which is highly cognate to constructivism in philosophy. Since the Song of the Sea is a poetic text, the emphasis will be

on the structural and poetic features of the text, how they are arranged and how they communicate a message to the reader – in short: its rhetoric. For that reason, the methodology adopted for the analysis of the Song of the Sea in this thesis follows the theory of *rhetorical criticism*.

4.2. My Personal Commitment

In the light of the afore-said, I consider it appropriate – if not necessary – for me as author of this thesis to give account once more of my personal location. Much has been mentioned in the section on personal influences.[52] Where I come from and how I was trained most of my academic life is quite close to the "white western male academic" position: formal German higher education and a quite bourgeois background.[53] The experience, however, of studying in South Africa for one year was substantial. There I imbibed what it means to reflect on location and become aware of the relevance of one's context and ideo-theological commitment. There I have learned that all theology is contextual.[54] There I became substantially more aware of my social responsibility as a biblical scholar and theologian, locally as well as globally. This awareness not only encourages me to see the socio-political context, out of which my deliberations emerge, but also makes me question which context and agenda they serve.[55] This is a learning process, and a difficult one, since it was a challenge to re-think and re-evaluate my theology under the new paradigm of contextual theology which I became acquainted with when arriving in South Africa. In addition, it remained a challenge returning to the environment of German scholarship, academy, church and society where accountability and commitment are rather abstract concepts within the discipline.

Where I see myself now is in a position in between: I am rooted in the German academic tradition, but I have tasted South African contextual theology. I live in a part of the

[52] See 1.3. Personal Influences, on page 8.
[53] Though in second generation only, my parents being social climbers coming from working class families.
[54] Cf. Maluleke 2001, *Theology*, 366f.
[55] I deliberately allude to the words of Mosala 1985, *African Independent Churches*,104, quoted in Maluleke 2001, *Theology*, 367.

world where political stability and social security and wellbeing have become a seemingly granted reality, but I have seen with my own eyes that this is not the case for most people on this planet. I would like to bring into conversation these two realities and bring into dialogue what each part can contribute from its perspective. With the limited means in my hand, what I can do primarily is to facilitate this conversation by raising the notion of indubitable contextuality of all theological endeavour in the Western context. I am not sure what I can contribute to the South African understanding from my location, since I am not a South African nor do I have sufficiently deep connection to land and people. I can only offer my contribution to the dialogue about biblical texts and ways of interpreting them from my location. With openness on both sides this offer will hopefully lead to a process of mutual exchange of ideas and the broadening of mutual understanding.

A helpful distinction in becoming aware of my ideo-theological commitment is West's formulation of "reading with" and "reading for".[56] Who do I read "with", who do I read "for"? I read "with" those, inevitably, who I am part of: the academic discipline, the wealthy society, the comfortable church congregations, the eco-friendly back-packer, that is from the centre with the dominant, powerful voices. However, that is only one side of my situation which I experience as ambiguous in various respects. I also read with the religious seekers, the doubting, those who do not simply want to conform, those who are willing to leave their comfort zone, those who care for community and unity beyond narrow limits, those who are easily excluded and stand outside these limits.

That's why I seek to read "for" those who are not represented and included by the dominant voice and the powerful centre. I wish to make heard the voices of the muted, voiceless, marginalized, speechless, and not eloquent. Giving them their voice and speaking on their behalf requires listening in first place, also listening to the gaps of silence, and to be careful my voice is not imposed on them. I wish to speak for spiritual upliftment of the poor,

[56] West 2006, *Vocation*, 318–323.

marginalized and burdened, but also for their material wellbeing. I speak for reconciliation, global responsibility and justice. I have learned to speak for life and for individual and social transformation.[57]

This orientation is clearly elicited by social and cultural experience of difference between German and South African reality. It has also been nurtured by my theological education and the faith I am based in. Both perspectives influence the perception of the other. Ideological and theological orientation are intertwined and form the ideo-theological commitment. It allows me to own and challenge my position and to be more overt of the processes of appropriation.

[57] West 2006, *Vocation*, 322.

III. Methodology of Rhetorical Criticism

1. Introduction

This chapter will outline a methodology that serves the goal of a contemporary reading of Ex 15 in its canonical form. It follows the hermeneutical considerations undertaken above. The aim is a synchronic interpretation focusing on the relationship of text and the present reader. Surface structure and rhetoric qualities are emphasised over questions of historical development. Also the effect on the actual contemporary reader/audience is given attention rather than the authorial intention and original context. The methodological considerations, however, include the historical and literary distance in terms of form, language, and content matter. Above all, the interpretative strategy foregrounds present questions. It does not purely distance interpreter and text, but seeks to bring together the text with its world and the reader with his/her world and questions. As the text, Ex 15, is a poetic text, the methodology needs to be suitable in particular to its poetic language and expressions. The "Song of the Sea" is not only a poetic text, but also a text fashioned as oral expression and probably intended for oral performance. Therefore, its suasive qualities, that is, the effect a text has on its audience, will be assigned special consideration. In addition, matters of composition and structural coherency will be considered as these contribute to the assessment of integrity and emphasis of the text as a unified whole.

2. Preliminary Definition

An accurate definition of the term rhetorical criticism and its corresponding method in biblical studies will be given at the end of the chapter. First, I will describe the development of rhetorical criticism from its beginnings as a self-conscious discipline in Old Testament studies in the 1960s and its far reaching roots in the study of rhetoric on the one hand and in form criticism on the other hand. I will introduce the essential steps of the method and the

primary goals, as well as the principles on which this method is based. Relationships with neighbouring disciplines in biblical studies as source criticism, form criticism, the historical-critical method as a whole, and post-structuralism and reader-response criticism in opposition to the historical methods will also be briefly discussed. This study, however, is concerned with rhetorical criticism in the context of the Hebrew Bible. Therefore, the related yet widely independent development of the New Testament will not be included. Eventually, I will address the question of actuality of rhetorical criticism as a possible method of biblical interpretation.

A preliminary definition, however, shall be given at this point to give an idea of the method, its strategy and goals. Rhetorical criticism can thus be defined tentatively as "the analysis of a text's compositional artistry with an eye to audience impact."[58]

3. History and Development of the Method

When in December 1968 James Muilenburg delivered his now-famous SBL presidential address "Form Criticism and Beyond", the discipline of rhetorical criticism in Biblical studies had "its origin in a self-conscious way."[59] Muilenburg voiced his interest "in understanding the nature of Hebrew literary composition, in exhibiting the structural patterns that are employed in the fashioning of a literary unit, whether in poetry or in prose, and in discerning the many and various devices by which the predications are formulated and ordered into a unified whole. Such an enterprise I should describe as rhetoric and the methodology as rhetorical criticism."[60]

Muilenburg had been engaged in this venture for most of his career and had developed this way of doing exegesis over a number of years. His works give ample proof of this, among them a "Study in Hebrew Rhetoric: Repetition and Style"[61] in 1953, a commentary on second

[58] Watson/Hauser 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 14.
[59] Howard 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 88.
[60] Muilenburg 1969, *Form Criticism and Beyond*, 8.
[61] Published in VT.S 1 (1953), 97–111.

and third Isaiah[62] in 1956, and an article on the Song of the Sea[63] in 1966, to name but a few. What Muilenburg called 'rhetorical criticism' at a late stage in his career collects intuitions, insights, and procedures that evolved over decades. Muilenburg, however, pointed out that "my allegiance is completely on the side of the form critics, among whom, in any case, I should wish to be counted."[64] Form criticism was where Muilenburg was clearly rooted, a discipline shaped by the German scholar Hermann Gunkel at the beginning of the twentieth century. Form criticism investigates the types of literature in the Bible. Its principal topics are oral traditions, genre, setting in life, and extra-biblical parallels.[65] This type of literary-sociological inquiry focuses on similarities of texts that are used in similar situations or contexts.[66] In his presidential address, Muilenburg first affirmed the necessity of the form critical discipline. He then proposed, nonetheless, that "the circumspect scholar will not fail to supplement … form critical analysis with a careful inspection of the literary unit in its precise and unique formulation"[67] because "there are other features in the literary compositions which lie beyond the province of the *Gattungsforscher* [form critic]."[68] Muilenburg's aim, thus, was not a move "beyond form criticism"[69], leaving the old ways behind, but rather supplementing form criticism with rhetorical criticism. He proposed to take into view the distinct, unique features of particular texts, displaying their meaning more properly by close analysis of their form-content relationship. Behind this lies his interest in encountering the authors at work in their texts: A "responsible and proper articulation of the words in their linguistic patterns and in their precise formulations will reveal to us the texture and fabric of the writer's thought, not only what it is that he thinks, but as he thinks it."[70]

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[62] Muilenburg 1956, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, IB 5.
[63] Muilenburg 1966, *Liturgy*, published first in the *Festschrift* for T.C. Vriezen.
[64] Muilenburg 1969, *Form Criticism and Beyond*, 4.
[65] Trible 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 21.
[66] For an exposition or traditional form criticism see: Tucker, Gene M. 1971. *Form Criticism*.
[67] Muilenburg 1969, *Form Criticism and Beyond*, 7.
[68] Muilenburg 1969, *Form Criticism and Beyond*, 6.
[69] For a refutation of this semantic and syntactic confusion see Trible 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 26, fn. 5.
[70] Muilenburg 1969, Form Criticism and Beyond, 7.

After his general methodological and hermeneutical proposal, Muilenburg outlined the canon of his new exegetical approach with two major tasks[71]: The first is to define the limits of a literary unit by using the criteria of form and content; the second is to discern structure in the overall design, in the individual parts, and how they work together. Attention to both features discloses the art of Hebrew composition and, what is more, the meaning of the text: "A proper articulation of form yields a proper articulation of meaning."[72]

Muilenburg's proposal was followed by a growing group of publications from Biblical scholars in both Old Testament and New Testament studies applying literary critical theories.[73] The floor in Biblical studies was now open for this new methodological approach after the then SBL president had his proposal published in the society's journal. What had been practised in departments of English and other literature and language studies for a while became fashionable and accepted in biblical studies, too.[74] Interdisciplinary trends and currents in literary criticism entered biblical studies, "at least in part because of impasses in older ways of explaining Scripture."[75] There was a growing fatigue with the dissection and atomizing of texts in historical perspective and a yearning for a new appreciation of all biblical texts and their smaller and larger units with regard to plot, theme, character and style. The study of classical rhetoric and even more so the theories of the Prague School, Russian formalism, and Anglo-American formalism, all very much akin with their emphasis on forms and surface structures, were now received by biblical rhetorical criticism.[76] The detailed linguistic treatments of biblical texts by rhetorical critics paved the way for other literary approaches, such as structuralism, narrative criticism, and later reader-response criticism. With new journals devoted to the new ways of biblical interpretation (Semeia in 1974 and

[71] Muilenburg 1969, *Form Criticism and Beyond*, 8–18.
[72] A rendition of Muilenburg's canon reported by P. Trible from classroom and lecture settings, Trible, 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 27 fn. 8.
[73] Cf. Howard 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 89.
[74] Wuellner 1987, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 451.
[75] House 1992, *Rise*, 3.
[76] Howard 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 99f., draws the connecting lines and offers related bibliography.

JSOT in 1976) and the acceptance of the interdisciplinary work of rhetorical and literary critics, the new discipline had arrived in academia.[77]

The late 1970s and early 1980s showed a partial dispartment in biblical rhetorical criticism, with scholars becoming more aware of persuasion as the primary focus of rhetoric. The means of persuasion in biblical speeches and other texts were given more attention, particularly in Old Testament prophecy with its discrete oracles and naturally also in New Testament epistolary literature with its concern for persuasion or conviction.[78]

Some second-generation rhetorical critics also moved beyond form criticism, rejected authorial intent and strove for compositional analysis with description as the goal.[79]

The growing interest in rhetorical features in the Hebrew Bible put forth introductions and handbooks on stylistic and structural analysis of classical Hebrew poetry as Wilfred G.E. Watson's "Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques"[80] in 1984, Paul E. Dion's "Hebrew Poetics: A Student's Guide"[81], or Luis Alonso Schökel's "A Manual in Hebrew Poetics"[82] both in 1988. The synthesis of this development is collected and condensed in the handy "Interpreting Hebrew Poetry"[83] by David L. Petersen and Kent H. Richards in the "Guides to Biblical Scholarship" series, published in 1992.

Phyllis Trible, a Muilenburg student, professor in Old Testament studies and past president of the Society of Biblical Literature, published a guidebook for rhetorical criticism in 1994 in the series of "Guides to Biblical Scholarship". In this work "Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah"[84], she gives a broad introduction into rhetorical criticism and its techniques and sketches its context in past and present. The larger part of the book is devoted to a rhetorical analysis of the book of Jonah with practical guidelines. In the

[77] House 1992, *Rise*, 4–5.
[78] Trible 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 41–48; Howard 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 100.
[79] E.g. Toni Craven's dissertation "*Artistry and Faith in the Book of Judith*", 1983, or Yehoshua Gitay, "*Prophecy and Persuasion*", 1981; cf. Trible 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 36.42f.
[80] Watson 1984, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques.* (JSOT.SS 26), Sheffield: JSOT Press.
[81] Dion 1988, *Hebrew Poetics: A Student's Guide*. Mississauga: Benben Publications.
[82] Schökel 1988, *A Manual in Hebrew Poetics* (Subsidia Biblica 11), Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute.
[83] Petersen/ Richards 1992, *Interpreting Hebrew Poetry*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.
[84] Trible 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

second part as well as throughout the book, Trible displays rhetorical criticism at work with various examples. What she writes about the evolution of the method in Muilenburg's opus is true likewise for her own work: Rhetorical criticism "does not identify a comprehensive system. Instead, the method lives where it came to birth, in the exegesis of texts. Practice precedes proposal."[85] Looking back on two-and-a-half decades of rhetorical criticism in biblical studies, she attempts to bring together the different strands of rhetorical criticism. In her analysis of present challenges, she includes the diversification of perspectives in literary studies and the alteration of literary critical theories.[86] She critically revises recent developments in the literary study of the Bible and in form criticism.[87] As a result, she admits that "revised form criticism would subsume rhetorical criticism", only to limit it immediately: again by saying "Yet the latter lives its own life."[88] This most likely is the case because modern rhetorical criticism embraced the second generation's criticism of the Muilenburg mode and took seriously the indicated lack of awareness for suasive effects of rhetoric. Trible at last consolidates the split of rhetorical criticism into structural analysis and the study of means of persuasion as she integrates both in her manual. Albeit the goal of rhetorical criticism is for her "proper articulation of meaning" and the means to this end is "proper articulation of form-content"[89], she limits these seemingly precise formulations by stating that "[m]eaning functions as a collective noun denoting variety rather than singularity."[90] Thus, Trible allows a wide spectrum of forms of rhetorical criticism as a living discipline. It works "at the boundary of text and reader, with emphasis of the former."[91] Accordingly, it is in the encounter of text and reader that meaning emerges, a process that is controlled by the limits

[85] Trible 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 28.
[86] Trible 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 55–73.
[87] Trible 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 73–84.
[88] Trible 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 83.
[89] Trible 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 27.
[90] Trible 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 95.
[91] Trible 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 99.

set by the text and that varies with the readers as they encounter the text. Text and reader are at work on each other simultaneously.[92]

4. Steps in Rhetorical Criticism

The steps in rhetorical criticism were outlined by J. Muilenburg in his proposal of the method in 1968. The basic methodological structure of this approach was anticipated in his analysis of Ex 15 in 1966, and in part as early as in his panel paper on Old Testament hermeneutics at an SBL symposium in 1957[93]. Two major tasks are to be undertaken by the scholar: First, to determine the limits of the literary unit he/she seeks to interpret[94]; second, to recognize the structure of a composition and the configuration of its component parts[95].

The delimitation does not only serve to define the beginning and end of a literary unit, it also points at the scope of the literary unit and provides the frame for the analytic work. Major motifs are usually introduced at the beginning and resolved at the end.[96] Climactic points within the unit must be carefully discerned from the overall climax and culmination of the entire unit, lest the literary unit be mistaken and fragmented.[97] This step requires high literary sensitivity since there is a certain amount of subjectivity at play as to where the accents of a composition lie. Yet parallels from the Bible and the literature of the ancient Near East offer material for comparison. Structural marks of composition indicate the junctures and constructive order of a text.

The second major task is "to recognize the structure of a composition and to discern the configuration of its component parts, to delineate warp and woof out of which the literary fabric is woven, and to note the various rhetorical devices that are employed for marking, on

[92] Trible 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 101.106.
[93] Muilenburg 1958, *Preface to Hermeneutics*, 18–38.
[94] Muilenburg 1969, *Form Criticism and Beyond*, 9f.
[95] Muilenburg 1969, *Form Criticism and Beyond*, 10–18.
[96] Muilenburg 1969, *Form Criticism and Beyond*, 9.
[97] Ibid.

the other hand, the shifts or brakes in the development of the writer's thought."[98] Attention needs to be given to forms of parallelism, their organisation into strophes, stanzas, and refrains.[99] Furthermore, stylistic elements have to be examined, such as key words, succession of interrogatives, use of particles, vocatives addressed to God, rhetorical questions or repetitions.[100]

Muilenburg's interest is still almost entirely concentrated on the subject matter and the original author. With his method, he intends to point out the literary skill and artistry of biblical authors and the literary qualities of biblical texts. Moreover, with his attention on the characteristics of particular texts that go beyond the conventions of literary genre, he trusts to get through to the original authorial intent.[101]

Subsequent scholars refined the analytical steps and adapted the method for varying text groups and different emphases and interpretative goals. The general programme, however, remained. Apparently, this was the case by virtue of the subject: texts consist of certain elements and show certain characteristics. Every coherent literary unit needs a beginning and an end, and there has to be some content in between leading the reader in a structured way from one point to the other. There remains a persistent limitation of pure method, as already mentioned above: "Practice precedes proposal."[102]

A detailed technical manual on "Classical Hebrew Poetry"[103] was published by W.G.E. Watson in 1984 that follows Muilenburg in its general order of delimitation and structural analysis. In his section on poetic devices, Watson differentiates between structural

[98] Muilenburg 1969, *Form Criticism and Beyond*, 10.
[99] Muilenburg uses the term „strophe" for „a series of bicola or tricola with a beginning and ending, possessing unity of thought and structure" (12) due to the "prevailingly consistent meters" he attest to Hebrew poetry. Watson 1984, whose terminology I adopt for structural and stylistic analysis below, uses the term strophe for a single unit of parallelism and the term stanza for a set of related parallelisms.
[100] Muilenburg 1969, *Form Criticism and Beyond*, 13–17. This set of stylistic devices is predominantly useful for the analysis of poetic texts which Muilenburg had in mind chiefly for the rhetorical critical method. Subsequent scholars adapted the programme for narrative and prophetic literature, too; cf. Trible 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 32–48.
[101] Muilenburg 1969, *Form Criticism and Beyond*, 7.
[102] Trible 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 28.
[103] Watson 1984, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*.

and non-structural devices with the respective emphases on compositional and stylistic-aesthetic components.

Trible's guidebook "Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah"[104], published in 1994, offers comprehensive background information on the history of the method and its genetic and hermeneutical relationships with other methods of biblical interpretation. Her detailed instructions on the rhetorical critical method follow the Muilenburg programme and supplement it with a full analysis of the book of Jonah. Trible includes both perspectives of compositional matter and persuasive quality. Moreover, she introduces the student in biblical studies to the diverse modes in the burgeoning field of rhetorical criticism and shows that the method keeps on developing where it is at work: in actual exegesis.[105]

5. Goals

Rhetorical criticism is a "synthetically oriented examination of literary composition"[106] It works on three levels: On the level of the *author* at work, on the level of the *text* and its dynamics, and on the level of the *audience* and the impact produced on it. Hence, rhetorical criticism "promises to combine the three foci on the author ('the world behind the text'), the discourse ('the world of the text') and the reader ('the world in front of the text')."[107]

The *mind and world of the author* comes to the fore through a close analysis of the articulation of thought, as Muilenburg states: A "responsible and proper articulation of the words in their linguistic patterns and in their precise formulation will reveal to us the texture and fabric of the writer's thought, not only what it is that he thinks, but as he thinks it."[108]

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[104]Trible 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
[105] Trible 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 28.
[106] Roth 1999, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 397 (following Muilenburg's definition of the method).
[107] Möller 2005, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 689.
[108] Muilenburg 1969, *From Criticism and Beyond*, 7.

Rhetorical criticism allows reviving a *text's meaning* with its particular dynamism: It can "recover the very dynamics of its message by exploring how its arrangement of thought and deployment of literary devices produced distinct effects within the audience."[109]

The main concern is with the text's actuality, its present theological meaning, and its effect upon contemporary readers. This sums up to the category of '*audience*'. Rhetorical criticism "seeks 'to move beyond the mere identification of forms and genres toward reconstituting the text as a piece of living discourse.'"[110] It "cannot help but surface the social nature of all discourse."[111]

Eventually, "rhetorical criticism takes readers 'away from a traditional message – or content-oriented reading of Scripture – to a reading which generates and strengthens ever-deepening personal, social, and cultural values' and leads its practitioners to 'personal or social *identification* and *transformation*.'"[112]

The ultimate hermeneutical goal is a blending in the understanding of author, meaning and audience in the process of reading. What Wilhelm Wuellner calls 'identification and transformation' thus is very close to Gadamer's concept of the "merger of horizons" in the process of understanding.

6. Principles

Rhetorical criticism is guided by a double interest: its concern for matters of composition and its concern for means of persuasion. These two aspects are two sides of a coin; they are interrelated and influence each other in both ways. Whereas Muilenburg was still mainly concerned with questions of composition, the double momentum has quickly attained general assent among rhetorical critics.

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[109] Overland 2008, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 655.
[110] Overland 2008, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 657, quoting D. Patrick/A. Scult 1990, *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation*, 13.
[111] Roth 1999, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 398.
[112] Roth 1999, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 398, quoting W. Wuellner 1987, *Rhetorical Criticism* (CBQ 49), 460–61, with reference to K. Burke's approach.

There is a clear focus on the canonical form of biblical texts. This is motivated by a hermeneutical decision that wants "to do justice to the integrity of the text itself apart from diachronistic reconstruction."[113] Full rhetorical criticism, however, includes "conversation" with the historical disciplines, as Trible grants, yet "it evaluates the findings of these disciplines in light of its own research and its own synchronic goals."[114] The synchronous perspective is adopted not to the neglect of the historical dimensions of the text, but to emphasise its meaning and effect as a unified whole.

The synchronous perspective and the emphasis on text meaning and effect particularly promote a contemporary reading that addresses present reading experiences and highlights the actuality of the text. Therefore, rhetorical criticism is conducive to a theological interpretation that goes beyond mere historical questions.

Two liabilities brought to the fore by Paul Overland deserve to be mentioned here: Rhetorical criticism is in danger of overdetection and underdetection of rhetorical devices, since there is no ancient manual of Hebrew rhetoric. As a remedy, he proposes that "careful, sustained exposure to texts of the OT and cognate cultures will accumulate observations yielding confident assertions."[115] On the same line, Kennedy argues that "rhetorical consciousness is entirely foreign to biblical Judaism"; nevertheless, it is "fairly obvious that both as a whole and in its various books there are signs of oral, persuasive intent."[116]

7. Relationship to Other Methods of Biblical Interpretation

Several other methods of biblical interpretation have been alluded to in this chapter. They form the background and context of rhetorical criticism. Some have shaped the development of rhetorical criticism by their contribution to the methodological debate, and some mark an alternative route. I will only roughly sketch the relationships of rhetorical criticism with other

[113] Childs 1979, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 74; quoted from Trible 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 50.
[114] Trible 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 94.
[115] Overland 2008,*Rhetorical Criticism*, 657, with reference to Watson/Hauser 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 7.
[116] Roth 1999, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 397, quoting Kennedy 1980, *Classical Rhetoric*, 120–121.

methods of biblical interpretation; the aim is to locate rhetorical criticism more accurately in the field.

The point of departure for rhetorical criticism as self-conscious method was form criticism, the home discipline of James Muilenburg. Form criticism itself is part of the canon of historical-critical methods that explore the processes behind the text of the transmitted biblical canon. The processes under investigation are the development of the narrative, prophetic or legal material on the one hand and the transmission and revision of the written records on the other hand. Source criticism, form criticism, and tradition criticism probe into the former aspects, the latter being enquired by text criticism, redaction criticism and the like. Overall, the disciplines under the umbrella term "historical-critical methods" seek to locate biblical texts in their historical context, to detect their historical development and growth, to identify the circumstances of text production, and thus to explain their original meaning. The historical-critical method hence is concerned with what is commonly labelled "the world behind the text".

The historical methods, however, led to a dissection of the biblical text. A growing interest in the literary qualities rose against the atomizing of the Bible, influenced by the developments in departments of literature and language from the 1960s. French structuralism aimed at determining the deep structures of texts, the different schools of formalism were more interested in the surface structures of texts, that is, their narrative or argumentative architecture, their plots and configuration of characters. All these methods have in common their concern for the text as such. They seek to investigate the "world of the text".

As the debate in linguistics and literary studies moved on, a new branch emerged from structuralism, which again originated in French philosophy of language. The notion of the arbitrariness of signs and meaning in language led to the insight that language and meaning is not a closed system of referral, but rather an open network of deferral. Structures of meaning

are never complete; understanding therefore is always a process of negotiation.[117] This theory was called post-structuralism; among its representatives are the names of Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva. Its meaning in discourse is always a matter of negotiation, there is no meaning in texts themselves. Thus, meaning is generated in the process of reading as a result of a conversation between reader and text. The methods that explore the process of reading as production of meaning, among them post-structuralism and reader-response criticism, focus on "the world of the reader".

Rhetorical criticism stands between the three groups of methodologies with its promise "to combine the three foci on the author ('the world behind the text'), the discourse ('the world of the text') and the reader ('the world in front of the text')."[118] The development of rhetorical criticism into many variants is a result of its openness to all sides and its ability to associate with other approaches. Hence it can be applied to all kinds of discourse and incorporate many different interpretative goals and perspectives. The distinct nature and asset of rhetorical criticism, however, is the method's ability to revive the text "as a living piece of discourse."[119]

8. Definition

After the detailed discussion of rhetorical criticism as a method of interpretation in the field of biblical studies, a conclusive definition has to be offered. As it has been demonstrated, there is a range of methodological approaches operating under the heading of 'rhetorical criticism'. The method is characterized by the diversity of proposals it sets free and includes. Yet, this is my attempt to define rhetorical criticism, which I propose for this study:

Rhetorical criticism is the synthetically oriented examination of literary composition that analyses the characteristic linguistic and structural features of a particular text in its

[117] Beal/Keefer et al. 1999, *Literary Theory*, 81.
[118] Möller 2005, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 689.
[119] Overland 2008, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 657, quoting Patrick/ Scult 1990, *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation*, 13.

present form with attention to the persuasive aspects and discourse strategies. It combines the three foci of author, text, and reader and facilitates personal identification and social transformation.

9. Actuality of Rhetorical Criticism?

After portraying and discussing rhetorical criticism as a method of biblical interpretation, a closing thought has to be dedicated to the question of actuality of this method and whether it merits further application in biblical studies. As we have seen, rhetorical criticism is a text-centred approach. Its perspective is inclusive and embraces author, text and audience likewise. Nevertheless, rhetorical criticism takes its onset at the text itself.[120]

In the academic field, this is still a valued starting point. It gives a voice to the text which invites the interpreter to listen closely without overly dominant presuppositions determining the interpretative process. It is also worth listening to the biblical texts repeatedly, since "[i]n large measure, the study of biblical poetry [and for that matter, of all biblical literature,] is conditioned by the time and place of those who study it."[121]

As a method that is primarily concerned with the text's inherent qualities and its effect on the audience, rhetorical criticism is particularly close to the reading experiences of ordinary readers who do not have access to specialized scholarly knowledge and analytic instruments. The method also facilitates the experiences of readers to resonate with the issues of the text as the attention to persuasive elements seeks to minimize the distance between text and audience. With its mindful ear for the message in the text and the way it is woven into the structure it also serves a homiletic purpose as it takes the audience by the hand along the narrative or argumentative lines of the text. Moreover, by highlighting the persuasive elements this method allows readers to engage more self-consciously in the process of reading and extend the beneficial process of mutual influence.

[120] Trible 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 101.
[121] Berlin 1999, *Poetry, Hebrew Bible*, 295.

To express the assets of rhetorical criticism and to indicate the "beyond" of the classical Muilenburg mode I end with a quote from Wuelner:

> "Rhetorical criticism makes us more fully aware of the whole range of appeals embraced and provoked by rhetoric: not only the rational and cognitive dimensions, but also the emotive and imaginative ones. Here is where rhetorical criticism can, and indeed will, make common cause with feminist criticism and non-Western modes of criticism.
> Rhetorical criticism changes the long-established perceptions of authors as active and readers as passive or receptive by showing the rationale for readers as active, creative, productive. Moreover, rhetorical criticism changes the status of readers to that of judges and critics to that of validators.
> Taking us beyond the diachronic reading to a synchronic reading of texts, rhetorical criticism makes us appreciate the practical, the political, the powerful, the playful, and the delightful aspects of religious texts. For … rhetorical study is the study of use, of purpose pursued, targets hit or missed, practices illuminated for the sake not of pure knowledge, but of further (and improved) practice."122

[122] Wuellner 1987, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 461.

IV. Exodus 15:1–21 – Hebrew Text and English Translation

The Hebrew text of Ex 15:1–21 is reproduced here according to the BHS.

1 אָז יָשִׁיר־מֹשֶׁה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לַיהוָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֵאמֹר

אָשִׁירָה לַיהוָה כִּי־גָאֹה גָּאָה
סוּס וְרֹכְבוֹ רָמָה בַיָּם׃

2 עָזִּי וְזִמְרָת יָהּ
וַיְהִי־לִי לִישׁוּעָה
זֶה אֵלִי וְאַנְוֵהוּ
אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי וַאֲרֹמְמֶנְהוּ׃
3 יְהוָה אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה
יְהוָה שְׁמוֹ׃

4 מַרְכְּבֹת פַּרְעֹה וְחֵילוֹ יָרָה בַיָּם
וּמִבְחַר שָׁלִשָׁיו טֻבְּעוּ בְיַם־סוּף׃
5 תְּהֹמֹת יְכַסְיֻמוּ
יָרְדוּ בְמִצֹּלֹת כְּמוֹ־אָבֶן׃

6 יְמִינְךָ יְהוָה נֶאְדָּרִי בַכֹּחַ
יְמִינְךָ יְהוָה תִּרְעַץ אוֹיֵב׃

7 וּבְרֹב גְּאוֹנְךָ תַּהֲרֹס קָמֶיךָ
תְּשַׁלַּח חֲרֹנְךָ יֹאכְלֵמוֹ כַּקַּשׁ׃

8 וּבְרוּחַ אַפֶּיךָ נֶעֶרְמוּ מַיִם
נִצְּבוּ כְמוֹ־נֵד נֹזְלִים
קָפְאוּ תְהֹמֹת בְּלֶב־יָם׃

9 אָמַר אוֹיֵב
אֶרְדֹּף
אַשִּׂיג
אֲחַלֵּק שָׁלָל
תִּמְלָאֵמוֹ נַפְשִׁי
אָרִיק חַרְבִּי
תּוֹרִישֵׁמוֹ יָדִי׃

10 נָשַׁפְתָּ בְרוּחֲךָ
כִּסָּמוֹ יָם
צָלְלוּ כַּעוֹפֶרֶת
בְּמַיִם אַדִּירִים׃

11 מִי־כָמֹכָה בָּאֵלִם יְהוָה
מִי כָּמֹכָה נֶאְדָּר בַּקֹּדֶשׁ
נוֹרָא תְהִלֹּת
עֹשֵׂה פֶלֶא׃

12 נָטִיתָ יְמִינְךָ
תִּבְלָעֵמוֹ אָרֶץ׃

13 נָחִיתָ בְחַסְדְּךָ עַם־זוּ גָּאָלְתָּ
נֵהַלְתָּ בְעֻזְּךָ אֶל־נְוֵה קָדְשֶׁךָ׃

14 שָׁמְעוּ עַמִּים יִרְגָּזוּן
חִיל אָחַז יֹשְׁבֵי פְלֶשֶׁת׃
15 אָז נִבְהֲלוּ אַלּוּפֵי אֱדוֹם
אֵילֵי מוֹאָב יֹאחֲזֵמוֹ רָעַד
נָמֹגוּ כֹּל יֹשְׁבֵי כְנָעַן׃
16 תִּפֹּל עֲלֵיהֶם אֵימָתָה וָפַחַד

בִּגְדֹל זְרוֹעֲךָ יִדְּמוּ כָאָבֶן

עַד־יַעֲבֹר עַמְּךָ יְהוָה
עַד־יַעֲבֹר עַם־זוּ קָנִיתָ׃

17 תְּבִאֵמוֹ וְתִטָּעֵמוֹ בְּהַר נַחֲלָתְךָ
מָכוֹן לְשִׁבְתְּךָ פָּעַלְתָּ יְהוָה
מִקְדָּשׁ אֲדֹנָי כּוֹנְנוּ יָדֶיךָ׃

18 יְהוָה יִמְלֹךְ לְעֹלָם וָעֶד׃

19 כִּי בָא סוּס פַּרְעֹה בְּרִכְבּוֹ וּבְפָרָשָׁיו בַּיָּם וַיָּשֶׁב יְהוָה עֲלֵהֶם אֶת־מֵי הַיָּם
וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הָלְכוּ בַיַּבָּשָׁה בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם׃

20 וַתִּקַּח מִרְיָם הַנְּבִיאָה אֲחוֹת אַהֲרֹן אֶת־הַתֹּף בְּיָדָהּ
וַתֵּצֶאן כָּל־הַנָּשִׁים אַחֲרֶיהָ בְּתֻפִּים וּבִמְחֹלֹת׃ 21 וַתַּעַן לָהֶם מִרְיָם

שִׁירוּ לַיהוָה כִּי־גָאֹה גָּאָה
סוּס וְרֹכְבוֹ רָמָה בַיָּם׃ ס

Exodus 15:1–21[123]

1 Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD:

I will sing to Yahweh, for he has triumphed gloriously;
horse and charioteer he has thrown into the sea.

2 Yah is my strength and my might,
and he has become my salvation;
this is my God, and I will praise him,
my father's God, and I will exalt him.
3 Yahweh is a man of war;
Yahweh is his name.

4 Chariots of Pharaoh and his army he cast into the sea;
The best of his officers were sunk in the Sea of Reeds.
5 The floods covered them;
they have come down into the depths like a stone.

6 Your right hand, Yahweh, glorious in power –
your right hand, Yahweh, shattered the enemy.

7 In the greatness of your majesty you overthrew your adversaries;
you sent out your fury, it consumed them like stubble.

8 At the blast (breath) of your nostrils (anger) were piled up the waters,
stood like a heap the floods;
congealed the depths in the heart of the sea.

9 The enemy said:
'I will pursue,
I will overtake,
I will divide the spoil,
my desire (soul) shall have its fill of them.
I will draw my sword,
my hand will destroy them.'

[123] The English translation is mine, following NRSV in the lexical rendition in most cases. I have tried to reproduce the Hebrew word order where possible, without leaving good literary English style.

10 You blew with your breath,
the sea covered them;
they sank like lead
in the mighty waters.

11 Who is like you, among the gods, Yahweh?
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,
causing awe and praise,
doing wonders?

12 You stretched out your right hand,
It swallowed them the earth.

13 You led in your steadfast love the people whom you redeemed;
you guided them with your strength to the abode of your holiness.

14 The peoples heard, they trembled;
torment seized those living in Philistia.
15 There, dismayed were the chiefs of Edom;
the leaders of Moab, a trembling seized them;
melted away all the dwellers of Canaan.
16 fell upon them terror and dread;

by the greatness of your arm they went silent like a stone

so that your people, Yahweh, passed through,
so that the people whom you acquired passed through[124].

17 You brought them in and planted them on the mountain of your possession,
a place for your dwelling you made, Yahweh,
a sanctuary, Adonai, that have established (made firm) your hands.

18 Yahweh will reign forever and ever.

19 When the horses of Pharaoh with his chariot and his chariot drivers went into the sea, Yahweh brought back upon them the waters of the sea. But the Israelites walked on dry ground in the midst of the sea.

20 Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing.

20 And Miriam sang to them:

20 Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously;
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.

[124] Gesenius §164, f.

V. Structural and Stylistic Analysis of Ex 15:1–21

1. Introduction

This analysis of Ex 15:1–21 follows a decidedly literary approach. Therefore, it is concerned with a text as an independent literary unit. Its interconnectedness with other surrounding literary units would deserve attention in its own rights, but a literary unit can as well be regarded self-contained as to its own meaning and message. It would then be held an autonomous entity intelligible in its own terms and needing no other texts for its correct interpretation.[125]

If a literary unit is subjected to close analysis on its own right, this requires exposing the complete unit in its integrity with all its parts and without added textual material that does not genuinely belong to this unit. Obtaining this self-sufficient literary unit in its completeness and coherent form requires its delimitation and separation from adjacent literary units in first place.

Once the delimitation of a literary unit is established, its inner structure can be put under scrutiny. Structural analysis serves to distinguish a text's pragmatics, that is, its means of communication. This refers to both its macro structure and its micro structure. On the level of macro structure, structural analysis illustrates the different forms of literary language (e.g. prose, poetry, laws, lists), the levels of speech (e.g. narrative, direct speech), means of composition (e.g. narrative frame, repetition, chiastic or climactic structure), and the text unit's partition (e.g. chapters, paragraphs, strophes).

On the level of micro structure, the smaller elements of a text have to be discerned and examined. This step is concerned with single sentences and their elements. In poetic texts, this includes the examination of verse lines and their combination to parallel lines with regard to the way they are structured and which rhetorical elements they feature. The analysis of these

[125] On this notion of "closure" see Watson 1984, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 62f.

elements demonstrates the inner coherency of a small textual unit (e.g. how two verse lines form a parallelism) and the cohesion between the textual units (e.g. how sentences are connected to a narrative, how an argument is developed, how narrative dynamics are built, how verse lines form a unified poem).

Ultimately, structural analysis seeks to show the structure and consistency of a literary unit, and the ways this consistency is created by means of its literary elements. These results offer an accurate basis for discerning the focus and goal of a text on an analytic ground and are valuable for determining its meaning in the following interpretive synthetic step.

This overview was only a brief sketch and of course not exhaustive. Nevertheless, it indicated the purpose and usefulness of structural analysis. From here I set out to the analysis of Ex 15:1–21, moving from more general considerations to the specific task of analysing a portion of Biblical poetry.

W.G.E. Watson's approach to Hebrew poetry

In what follows, I will adopt the method of analysing Hebrew poetry as developed by W.G.E. Watson in his manual "Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques".[126] It offers a comprehensive introduction to the analysis of Hebrew poetry as well as clear terminology that has been widely accepted by succeeding scholars.[127]

A brief outline of the method and terminology promoted by Watson will be given now. Since every poem is an individual entity and literary critics follow different approaches, there is no uniform procedure. Watson suggests the following:[128]

a) *Delimitation* entails determining the beginning and the end of a poem.

[126] Published 1984 in the JSOT Supplement Series, Vol. 26.
[127] For example Burden 1987, *Stylistic Analysis*; Howell 1989, *Exodus;* Watts 1995, *Song;* Fokkelman 1998, Poems.
[128] Watson 1984, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 18–20; for this outline I make use of the lucid synopsis presented in Burden 1987, *Stylistic Analysis*, 42–45.

b) By *segmentation*, the poem is divided into its components. This includes strophic analysis (the marking off of strophes), stichometry (entails determining the limits of each colon or stichos), and stanza demarcation.

c) By *inner-strophic analysis*, each strophe is analysed into its components such as type of parallelism, sound-patterns, and chiastic structures. Instead of analysis of each individual strophe, a whole stanza can be analysed.

d) *Isolation of poetic devices*. The whole poem as well as all the separate units must be searched for structural and non-structural devices.

e) *Tabulation* of repeated words, structural patterns, word-pairs, words with the same semantic field, peculiar vocabulary, and so on is very helpful in achieving accuracy and objectivity. Tables of these items provide an easy overview of their occurrence.

f) *Synthesis: functional analysis*. All the data are now interpreted by determining the functions of the various poetic devices in terms of their relation to each other and to the poem as a whole. Dominant poetic devices are easily identified and their functions determined.

g) *Comparison* with other Semitic languages is not always necessary, but might yield an interesting outcome.

Not all of these steps will be employed in our analysis. Tabulation does not prove to contribute meaningfully to this study, but others have carried out this task.[129] The compilation of rare and peculiar vocabulary is sometimes used to determine the age of Ex 15:1–21 or its text-critical layers; however, their appearance throughout the poem could equally well support consistency and purposeful anachronistic use of languages as well as archaism. Comparison with texts from other Semitic languages will not be conducted here, because it is out of the

[129] See Burden 1987, *Stylistic Analysis* and Howell 1989, *Exodus* for easily accessible examples; tabulation however leads them to results I cannot agree with and that go against other results of stylistic analysis, like Burden's concentrical structure.

focus of this thesis; it would be crucial for form-critical research. Other steps will require an additional expansion, especially the second step of segmentation, as the text under concern consists of both poetic and prose elements.

I will combine the steps of segmentation and inner-strophic analysis and present the outcome together. The structural assessment of the whole poem is based on the structural evaluation of the smaller units, but they inform each other vice-versa.

The isolation of poetic devices will follow afterwards, taking the whole song into view again. It also leads towards a brief review of the most important motifs of the song. After an assessment of the structural and stylistic relation of the Song of the Sea with the prose frame and the final couplet v. 21b, a functional analysis including all attained data will result in the synthesis. It will deliver a concluding of the functions and relationship of all parts and assess the unity and how it is achieved by interplay and cohesion of the elements of the text.

The literary analysis of Hebrew poetry uses a particular technical language. Of the terminology introduced by Watson to describe the components of a poem these are the most important:[130]

- A *colon*, stichos or verse-line is a single line of poetry, which is used on its own (monocolon) or as part of a larger unit or strophe (as bicolon/couplet, tricolon/triplet, quatrain etc.).
- A *strophe* is a verse-unit of one independent or more cola grouped together by a scheme of metre, by particular content, or by external means (not to be confused with stanza).
- A *stanza* is a unit made up of one or more strophes to form a sub-section of a poem; it is sometimes marked off by refrains.
- A *poem* is an independent, self-contained unit of poetry such as a psalm, a prophetic oracle, a speech, a wisdom poem or an acrostic poem.

[130] The "colon" class has several subdivisions which are not given in full detail here for the sake of clarity. They will be referred to later in due course.

Poetic devices will be introduced as they appear along the lines in the actual analysis below. They are grouped into structural devices and non-structural devices, the former being elements that organize the text structurally and guide the reader/audience, the latter being stylistic elements that enhance the reading/listening-experience aesthetically. They always appear within the context of a poem, never isolated, and relate to each other. The distinction is largely used for clarity of presentation. A comprehensive introduction and explanation with examples is given by Watson in an elaborate chapter on poetic devices.[131]

2. Delimitation

The delimitation of the text under consideration, Ex 15:1–21, is clear and without contestation in the scholarly discussion.[132] The antecedent verses Ex 14:31–32 function as concluding notes to chapter 14 and summarize the complex narrative description of the crossing of the Sea of Reeds and the drowning of the Egyptian army. The first verse of the text concerned, Exodus 15:1a, initiates with Hebrew אָז (*'āz*), meaning "at that time" or "then", an adverb "[s]eldom used except where some special emphasis is desired."[133] Here, it clearly indicates the beginning of a new section in the narrative, standing as a syntactical marker of a new temporal unit. The temporal motion is complemented with a shift of focus with regard to the acting persons. Ex 15:1a introduces the Song of the Sea "with a prose specification of speakers, addressee, and the nature of the address: Moses and the Israelites direct a song to Yahweh."[134] Whereas the preceding concluding note Ex 14:31–32 was given from a bird's-eye view, and commented on the whole scene of the crossing of the Sea of Reeds, the visual field of the narrator is now closing in on "Moses and the Sons of Israel", as they start singing

[131] Watson 1985, Classical Hebrew Poetry, chapter 11 "Poetic Devices", 273–348. Again, see Burden 1987, *Stylistic Analysis*, 44f. for a brief list with explanations.
[132] Only Coats 1999, *Exodus*, 121–123, regards Ex 15:20–21 as independent unit, due to his form-critical interest, but stresses its close relations to vv. 1–19.
[133] אָז , Brown-Driver-Briggs *Hebrew Lexicon*, 23; compare Num 24:17, Dtn 4:41, Ps 126:2, Isa 58:8,9,14 et al.
[134] Coats 1969, *Song*, 3.

a song to Yahweh. Therefore, the half-verse "represents a secondary narrative framework"[135] and "serves the dual purpose of linking the poem with the preceding material and introducing the song."[136] Thereafter follows the announced song, the poetic section Ex 15:1b–18.

The end of the unit is marked by the couplet sung by Miriam, Ex. 15:21b, a literal repetition of v. 1b, except the change of the cohortative אָשִׁירָה (*ʾāšīrâ*) in v. 1b to the imperative plural שִׁירוּ (*šīrû*).[137] The ensuing verses, beginning with Ex 15:22, open a new movement in the narrative and record a change of place, with Moses being the grammatical subject of the sentence again, as well as the leader of the Israelites as they leave the shores of the Sea of Reeds and set out into the desert of Shur. "A whole new section begins here", states G. Knight plainly.[138] Now the theme is the wandering of Israel through the desert and the absence of (drinking-)water. Through to chapter 18, the Israelites are "dealing with 'crises in the wilderness'."[139] The change of subject matter and scene is pointed out by accumulation of the respective lexical items denoting desert/wilderness, lack of drinking water, and bitterness, in vv. 22–24.

Hence, the end of the literary unit under consideration and the beginning of the following unit is indicated clearly by means of narrative signals and content after Ex 15:21.

3. Basic Structural Division – Formal Linguistic Division into the Narrative Frame and the Poetic Parts

At reading the passage of the Song of the Sea, the principal partition is evident as to its composition of prose and poetry. All scholars agree on the narrative frame Ex 15:1a, 19–21a. These verses consist of plain prose language that lacks the characteristic structures of parallelism in poetry and contains typical prose particles (object marker/definite accusative

[135] Coats 1969, *Song*, 3.
[136] Howell 1989, *Exodus*, 7.
[137] It is noteworthy that this is an imperative plural *masculine or common*, which shows that Miriam's invitation to sing is directed towards women *and* men.
[138] Knight 1976, *Theology*, 112.
[139] Anderson 1987, *Song*, 285.

preposition *'et*, definite article *ha*, relative pronoun *'ăšer*, consecutive *waw* and *waw* as conjuction).[140] At the end, the poetic couplet v. 21b, generally called the Song of Miriam, stands separated from the extensive poetic section v. 1b–18. However, it is closely attached to the song, not only on account of its content – as it were, it is an almost identical repetition of Ex 15:1b. But the couplet is also narratively linked to the longer song by the recapitulating verses of the prose frame, Ex 15:19–21a.

Over the inner division of the major poetic part, Ex 15:1b–18, there is considerable disagreement among the commentators and a variety of delineation proposals exists. These will be examined in the following section with the aim to establish a strophic division of the song for this study. Thereafter, another section will deal with the inner-strophic division.

4. Segmentation – stanzas and strophic division of the poetic part (Ex 15:1b–18)

4.1. Review of Previous Research

No scholarly consensus has been established regarding the division of the poem in smaller units or stanzas and strophes. "It is precisely because the text comprises so many different features that such varied structures have been proposed for it."[141] Most contemporary exegetes, however, tend to divide the song in two or three stanzas. There is even less agreement with regard to the strophic arrangement, i.e. the partition of stanzas into sub-units.[142]

4.1.a. Two Main Sections

A considerable number of exegetes see a divide after v. 12 separating two main sections, among them Childs 1974, *Exodus*, Coggins 2000, *Exodus*, Durham 1987, *Exodus*, Brenner

[140] Compare Watson 1984, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 54; Propp 1998, *Exodus*, 506.
[141] Howell 1989, *Exodus*, 9.
[142] On the terminology see Watson 1984, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 13, 160–162; compare the lucid overview in chart form in Burden 1987, *Stylistic Analysis*, 42–44.

1991, Song, and Human 2005, *Africa*.[143] They turn their attention to the content on the narrative level of the poem and see a first section that praises Yahweh's victory in the event at the Sea of Reeds, followed by a second section dealing with the consequences of that event.

Childs is straightforward assigning two parts without further dissection. It seems that Childs is not too heavily concerned with structural division beyond the easily visible; he is more concerned with form-critical questions. His explicit aim, conversely, is interpretation and appreciation of the text in its final form as a piece of literature with its own integrity.[144]

Along the same lines, *Coggins* sees two parts in the poem, splitting it after v. 12. He appears to be interested in the narrative developments, rather then in structural detail.

Durham leaves it to the reader to discern whether there are two or three parts. The first part, in his opinion, extends to v. 12. The second part could be the whole of vv. 13–18, or it could be a composition of two older pieces, consisting of vv. 13a, 14–16 and 13b, 17–18 respectively. "The subject matter and the form of the poem give some support to such a division," Durham states, but fails to give us the reasons for his verdict.[145]

Brenner adopts the main division after v. 12 and grants two main parts, but in addition he sees a "formulaic enclosure"[146] comprising of verses 1b–3, 18, and 21b. However, even though he adopts a source critical approach he holds, that "the whole of the liturgical enclosure and part one demonstrates a thematic and linguistic unity."[147]

Human also considers two main sections, but with the speciality that the main division is after v. 5. The sections are stylistically distinguished through the debating 'you-style' and the descriptive 'he-style' in vv. 1–5 and 6–17 respectively. V. 18 is an isolated 'he-style' verse and constitutes "an *inclusio*-type of ring composition".[148] This is a minority position in

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[143] Also: Watts 1957, *Song of the Sea* and 1995, *Song and the Ancient Reader*, Howell 1989, *Exodus*, Fischer 1996, *Schilfmeerlied*, Smith 2001, *Poetics*, Shreckhise 2007, *Rhetoric*.
[144] Childs 1974, *Exodus*, xiv.
[145] Durham 1987, *Exodus*, 205.
[146] Brenner 1991, *Song*, 26.
[147] Brenner 1991, *Song*, 27.
[148] Human 2005, *Africa*, 83 (italics his). originally published in OTE in German, Human 2001, *Exodus*.

the spectrum of analysis proposals; it remains unclear why there should not be a group of 'they-style' verses, too, but this would inevitably lead to fragmentation.

4.1.b. Three or More Sections

Among those who propose a structure with smaller units (three or more) are Cassuto 1974, *Exodus*, Muilenburg 1966, *Liturgy*, Patterson 1995, *Song*, Coats 1969, *Song* and 1999, Exodus, Burden 1987, *Stylistic Analysis*, and Fokkelman 1998, *Poems*.[149]

For *Cassuto*, the song is divisible into three strophes and an epilogue[150], based on stylistic observation: The repetitions in vv. 6, 11, and 16b mark the end of each one of the three strophes. The final verses 17–18 form an epilogue that is temporally detached from the events at the Reed Sea.

This view is shared by *Muilenburg*, who attests structural regularity to the three strophes, each of which being closed by a hymnic response with their characteristic repetitions. Only v. 17 is "placed outside the structural pattern of the three divisions"[151], Muilenburg declares. The closing verse 18 stands independent and forms together with v. 1b the particular beginning and ending of the song.[152]

Patterson confirms Muilenburg's strophic division with closing 'refrains'[153], adding the observation, "that each refrain proceeds not only on the basis of the prior stanza but points to the one that follows."[154]

Freedman adopts Muilenburg's and Cassuto's view of verses with repetitions as division markers, calling them 'refrains', too.[155] In contrast to both of them, Freedman finds

[149] Also Rozelaar 1952, *Song* (four stanzas).
[150] Cassuto 1974, *Exodus*, 173.
[151] Muilenburg 1966, *Liturgy*, 248f.
[152] Muilenburg 1966, *Liturgy*, 237.
[153] Patterson 1995, *Song*, 455, with reference to Watson 1984 "a classic example" for variant refrains.
[154] Patterson 1995, *Song*, 455.
[155] Freedman 1980, *Song*, 179.

two stanzas between the three refrains (vv. 7–10, 12–16a). The remaining verses form an opening and closing frame and "thus stand somewhat apart"[156].

In *Fokkelman's* view, there are four stanzas, separated by the refrains of repetitive parallelism. According to his analysis, there is no introit or introduction, the first stanza starts right off with v. 1 and the verses 17–18 form the last stanza, although there is a slight inconsistency in that Fokkelman holds the last two verses to be a stanza while at the same time splitting them and calling v. 18 a "coda"[157].

Most detailed with regard to the structure of Ex 15:1b–18 is the form-critical commentary by *Coats*. In his chart of the text structure, he defines up to three sub-divisions per verse.[158] Hence, this meticulous structural analysis proposes six sections in the poem. It is worth noticing that Coats, in contrast to the aforementioned exegetes, separates verse 12 from its preceding verse and assigns it to a group of verses from v. 12 through 17. His assessment of v. 11 as a "hymnic transition" gives reason for a dissection before v. 12. With regard to the whole poem, Coats classifies the parts of the song as follows: The opening verse is an introit to the song, which then comprises three hymnic units (vv. 2–3, v. 11, v. 18) interrupted by epic narrations (vv. 4–10, vv. 12–17).[159] According to Coats, these epic narrations are the principal units of the poem.

Burden takes another route but presents a similarly detailed analysis.[160] For Ex 15:1b–18 he proposes a title in v. 1b, a confession of faith in v. 2 before the hymn proper begins. The hymn proper, according to Burden, extends over the rest of vv. 3 through 18 as a textual unit. It is concentrically structured with six associated pairs of verses centring around v. 11. This totals nine sub-units, termed stanzas by Burden according to Watson's terminology. The nine stanzas equal five strophes in the hymn proper, while four of them are split strophes due to the

[156] Freedman 1980, *Song*, 182.
[157] Fokkelman 1998, *Poems*, 48.
[158] Coats 1999, *Exodus*, 117–118.
[159] Coats 1999, *Exodus*, 117f., Coats 1969, *Song*, 5–7.
[160] Burden 1986, *Stylistic Analysis*, 40–55; esp. the charts pp. 47 and 52.

concentric arrangement. This structural analysis is well argued and supported by Burden's detailed linguistic examination, but the use of the term "stanza" must be objected here, as it does not denote textual units discernible to the reader and therefore is misleading. However, it shows a tight cohesion in the poem and serves as a strong argument for its unity. The division of the whole text therefore is only between the two introductory verses and the hymn proper.

4.1.c. Conclusion of the Review

The existence of so numerous delineation proposals does not necessarily confirm the disunity of the song[161], but rather calls for well argued methods and conditions of division. In the view of the various interpretation possibilities, the specific focus of one piece of exegetical work and its particular aim and interest must yield the corresponding methodological approach and exegetical assumptions.

Hence, with the aim of delivering a rhetorical reading of the Song of the Sea and its frame in Ex 15:1–21 as a whole, this analysis pays special attention to the rhetorical and stylistic elements of the text. To state it using Phyllis Trible's short formula of the method of rhetorical criticism, adapted from J. Muilenburg: "Proper articulation of form content yields proper articulation of meaning."[162] Moreover, as I am interested in proposing a synchronic interpretation I particularly take into consideration the textual features that convey a sense of unity to the reader.

4.2. My Own Delineation/Segmentation: Refrains, Stanzas, Strophes

4.2.a. Introduction, Guidelines

After this display of differing divisions of the Song of the Sea, I want to propose my own segmentation of the unit. Rhetorical features will be given priority as the intention of the analysis is to show the means of its communicative effect on the reader. The presentation moves from major partition to minor subdivision: Following Watson's design and

[161] *Contra* Human 2005, *Africa*, 81.
[162] Trible 1994, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 91.

terminology, the demarcation of stanzas comes first, followed by the division into strophes, and finally the analysis of poetic devices.

In my strophic division I mainly follow the delineation proposed by J. Muilenburg in his article "A Liturgy on the Triumphs of Yahweh" from 1966[163]. As he understands Ex 15:1–18 "a composition that was designed for the cult"[164] he is particularly interested in "its form and structure, in its different styles and rhetorical features, in the various ways in which its content is articulated into varying types of speech"[165]. Therefore it is not surprising but comes rather naturally that his observations converge with the intention of this study. The conclusions of Muilenburg's structural analysis will be supplemented by findings of other scholars as well.

4.2.b. The Refrains

Word and content study reveals as primary motifs the sea (vv. 1b, 4–5, 8, 10), Yahweh's victory (vv 1b–3, 6, 11), the occupation of the land (vv. 13, 17), and the defeat of the enemy (vv. 7, 9, 12, 14–16a).[166] These primary motifs point to main parts, although not in a fashion of orderly sequence. A division between the verses referring to the scene at the shore of the Sea of Reeds and to the occupation of the land has often been proposed. However, it is necessary to pay attention to the elements of literary style, too. Muilenburg, together with Cassuto and Patterson (see above) have indicated the structural importance of the repeated staircase parallelisms that interrupt the narrative flow and voice praise to Yahweh. These colons of hymnic praise are vv. 6, 11, and 16b. In the Song of the Sea, in all refrains "the divine name is spoken in the vocative."[167] Like refrains they separate the main parts and the primary motifs. Watson points out that this pattern of parallelism is often used as a variant

[163] Muilenburg, to my knowledge, is the first proponent of this segmentation.
[164] Muilenburg 1966, *Liturgy*, 237.
[165] Muilenburg 1966, *Liturgy*, 237.
[166] Compare Hauser 1987, *Songs*, 280.
[167] Muilenburg 1966, *Liturgy*, 244; conf. also p. 248.

refrain and stanza marker, giving Exodus 15 as an example.[168] The stanzas are therefore separated by hymnic responses that conclude one section and point to the following ones. Patterson points out that "each refrain proceeds not only on the basis of the prior stanza but points to the one that follows. Thus, Yahweh's great strength (v. 6) displayed in the sending of Pharaoh's forces to the watery depths is sung in both surrounding stanzas. Likewise, Yahweh's incomparable power and holiness (v. 11) find reflection in the surrounding material, as does Yahweh's intervention on behalf of his people (v. 16b) so as to lead them to the place of his holy habitation (vv. 13, 17). Accordingly, the refrains do double duty as hinging devices."[169]

We accept the colons of hymnic praise as organising elements of the text[170]; we now have to gather more observations in support of this segmentation and accordingly group the textual material. Then we will see how the stanzas form and which additional parts there may be. The textual material between the refrains can quite easily be joined to stanzas; however, beginning and end of the poem need further attention and will be dealt with in more detail. A strophic division will follow afterward.

4.2.c. The Stanzas

With the three refrains in vv. 6, 11, and 16b, the second and third stanza are set in between the refrains. The second stanza of the song thus extends from v. 7 through v. 10 and is followed by the second refrain; the third stanza extends from v. 12 through v. 16a and is likewise followed by the third refrain.

According to Patterson's notion quoted above, the first refrain recapitulates the theme of the first strophe, Yahweh's great strength. Therefore, it would make sense at first glance to let the poem start with its first stanza from v. 1b with the first bicolon. However, there is a good point in Muilenburg's analysis: He observes repetition of the motives of the opening bicolon of the poem in the strophes of the first two stanzas, both times in their respective

[168] Watson 1984, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 154.
[169] Patterson 1995, *Song*, 455.
[170] *Contra* Howell 1989, *Exodus*, 22 who emphasises content against a separation of v. 6 and 7.

order.[171] We follow his argument and regard v. 1b as independent bicolon, acting as an Introit to the Song of the Sea. The first full stanza begins with the ensuing v. 2 and runs through to the first refrain in v. 6.

This separation in stanzas and refrains is underscored by noting that each refrain is preceded by the appearance of a stanza-closing simile: "like a stone" (vv. 5, 16a), "like lead" (v. 10).

Finally, the last two verses have to be considered and how they form an end of the poem. Since the poem does not close with a refrain, the last two verses remain without strophe. The last refrain, however, announces the theme of the following verse, too: How God leads his people to his place of habitation. This penultimate verse (v. 17) thus functions as Coda and is concluded by a shout of praise (v. 18).

As we could show the poem consists of three stanzas, each of them concluded with a refrain, and is framed by two acclamations of praise and a coda in penultimate position. This structure is suggested by the typeset of the translation given above (on page 45). Spacing indicates the division of the Song in stanzas and refrains, indention points to the strophic structure, which will be discussed in the following section.

4.2.d. Strophic Division

Now that the segmentation of the poem in its frame and the stanzas has been identified, the division of the stanzas in strophes as their sub-units will be carried out. This part will be kept rather short; its intention is to understand the structure of the single stanzas, their structural relation to the other stanzas, and their relation to the poem as a whole. Poetic devices, which partly structure the strophes and constitute the relations of the stanzas and strophes, will be dealt with in detail afterwards.

For better clarification, a note on terminology needs to be added at this step:

[171] Muilenburg 1966, *Liturgy*, 239f., 241.

The chief element of Hebrew poetry is the parallelism, generally spoken a symmetric combination of two (or more) clauses or verse lines.[172] The related clauses are typically printed as a pair in two (or more) lines in typeset. As a whole, the parallelism form a bicolon or couplet (two clauses/lines), a tricolon (three clauses/lines), or in seldom cases a quatrain (four clauses/lines). Each single clause is called a colon and can stand as independent sentence; this is a colon, stichos, or stich. It may be divided into halves for analytical and descriptive reasons; the isolated half is called a hemistich (or half-colon).

This distinction of the elements of parallelisms and clauses is necessary and instructive for identifying the different kinds of parallelisms and the structural relations between verse lines.

The verse numbering has been added to the text of the Hebrew Bible fairly late[173] and does not represent the way the Hebrew poets conceived their poems and songs. Some verses therefore need to be regarded as aggregation of more than one unit on the level of self-contained cola or bicola. This will be reflected in the numbering of verse lines with additional minuscules (a, b, c etc.).

4.2.d.α. Introit

The opening verse of the Song of the Sea (v. 1b) has been identified as an introit to the whole poem. It is constructed as a bicolon and announces the intent to praise. The second verse-line gives the reason that motivates the decision to sing God's praise. This couplet introduces the main theme of the song: the triumph and incomparability of Yahweh. The image of horse and rider being thrown into the sea and the subsequent defeat of the enemy also provides the major theme of the first half of the poem: The defeat and drowning of the Egyptian army recur in the 2. strophe of 1. stanza, in the 1. strophe of the 2. stanza, and once more at the end

[172] For more Detail see Watson 1984, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 114–122 ("Introduction") and the following ch. 6, "Parallelism" 114–159.
[173] Disposition of chapters by Stephan Langton (archbishop of Canterbury, 1150–1228) in the Paris Bible 1226, division of verses not until the 16th century (Lyon 1528, Paris 1555). Especially the book of Psalms is notorious for its inconsistencies between different traditions and editions; cf. B. Lang 1994, *Bibel*, 38f.

of the 2. stanza (v. 10). The triumphant power of Yahweh reappears in the other halves of the 1. and 2. stanzas.

4.2.d.β. 1st Stanza

The 1st strophe of the 1st stanza (v. 2–3) is a tricolon that centres on the praise of God.[174] The divine name is displayed in four variants at six positions.[175] It is a hymnic elaboration of the first colon of the introit. Although it utilizes the introit's material and stays with one theme, the strophe is different in perspective and style from the introit and the following strophe: It is a hymnic confession that ends in a declarative shout, probably a cultic shout or battle cry.[176] The dynamic of the strophe ascends along with the divine names, the intensity of the declarations and the verbs used, until the climactic progression[177] reaches its final shout: "Yahweh is his name!" (v. 3b)[178]

The 2nd strophe (v. 4–5) is a bicolon governed by the motif of the sea[179] and the drowning of the Egyptian army; it is elaborating on the second colon of the introit in the manner of the epic or declarative narrative.[180] Here the movement is turned around; the Egyptian army goes down into the waters until they are at the bottom of the depths, the dynamics reaches its climax with the simile "like a stone" (v. 5b).[181] At this point, "[t]he impotence of the enemy is complete."[182]

The bicolon of the 1st refrain realizes a connection of the two motifs of the first stanza: The power-of-God's-hand motif and the defeat-of-the enemy motif are joined together. The

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[174] *Contra* Freedman 1980, *Song*, 182. Freedman regards the introit independent unit and v. 2 as the exordium or introduction to the poem, who's proper beginning with v. 3.
[175] V. 2: Yah, El, Elohiym; v. 3: Yahweh, Yahweh.
[176] Muilenburg 1966, *Liturgy*, 239.
[177] Muilenburg 1966, *Liturgy*, 240.
[178] Why this verse is not to be regarded as staircase parallelism is well argued by Howell 1989, *Exodus*, 19.
[179] Four synonyms: V. 4: sea, Sea of Reeds; v. 5: floods, depths.
[180] Muilenburg 1966, *Liturgy*, 240.
[181] Shreckhise 2007, *Rhetoric* elaborates extensively on the expressions in Ex 15,1b–18 that connect the categories up/power/awe/praise and down/defeat/sea/destruction.
[182] Shreckhise 2007, *Rhetoric*, 210.

repeated first hemistich with an acclamation of God in identical diction (staircase parallelism) concentrates the final praise and powerfully finishes the first stanza.

4.2.d.γ. 2nd Stanza

The second stanza acquires its dynamics and its unity from bipolar action between God's sovereign deeds and the devastating consequence on the adversaries. This is illustrated amply in the two strophes of this stanza.

The 1st strophe of the 2nd stanza consists of two bicola (v. 7–8). It opens with a reminiscence of the major motif of the introit in the first bicolon (v. 7)[183], whereas the second bicolon (v. 8) recalls the sea-motif of the second verse-line of the introit and illustrates the change of the water. The first hemistichs of each bicolon (7a^{a}, 8a^{a}) are designed to stand in parallelism with each other: "in the greatness of your majesty" / "at the blast of your nostrils."[184]

The second strophe (v. 9–10) comprises of two bicola. It takes the enemy into view and even cites the words of the foe.[185] The first bicolon is constructed as chiastic parallelism with tripartite colons: Each verse-line of v. 9 consists of three verbal clauses[186] the order of which is inverted in the second verse-line (a b c / c b a).

The second bicolon (v. 10) parades the result of the enemy's boasts: They are drowned into the sea. This bicolon not only recollects the second part of the introit, but also parallels the second bicolon of the previous strophe (v. 8): The waters that were heaped up and congealed earlier now cover the rivals who sink into the water "helpless like lead weights."[187] Once more, "[t]he impotence of the enemy is complete."[188]

[183] Muilenburg 1966, *Liturgy*, 243.
[184] Muilenburg 1966, *Liturgy*, 243.
[185] „In the manner of Israel's poets", Muilenburg 1966, *Liturgy*, 243.
[186] Compare Howell 1989, *Exodus*, 27.
[187] Shreckhise 2007, *Rhetoric*, 210.
[188] Shreckhise 2007, *Rhetoric*, 210.

The various structural correspondences between the two strophes and their links to the introit firmly assert the coherence of this stanza.

The refrain to the second stanza is composed of a staircase parallelism which either has an extension in the third colon (a b / a c / c' c") or the expected repetition is missing as a case of *ellipsis* (a b / a c / [~~a~~] d d')[189]; in either case it can be regarded as a triplet that even stretches the dynamics of the staircase parallelism. After the description of the mighty deeds of God and the defeat of the enemy, the refrain bursts out with praise in this hymnic response. The incomparability of Yahweh – even among the gods – is stated in the mode of a question, but a rhetorical one that already implies its answer.

4.2.d.δ. 3rd Stanza

In the 3rd stanza, the 1st strophe includes a short and a long bicolon. Throughout the strophe, "you"-style of hymnic confession[190] is used with the verb in first position of each colon. The first, short bicolon (v. 12) picks up the theme of the preceding refrain and strophe, but then the second, more elaborate bicolon (v. 13) initiates a change of theme: the occupation of the land. This topic governs the second half of the song; therefore, this strophe and more precisely the change from v. 12 to v. 13 marks the turning point and hinge in the narrative content of the poem. An important key-word is "earth": It is not the sea anymore where the enemies drown, but the earth that swallows the opponents. In v. 13, reference is made to both the redemption of God's people in the past as an allusion to their life as slaves in Egypt, and to their future in the Promised Land where God resides. This strophe is the turning point that leads away from the sea and towards the land.

The 2nd Strophe extends from v. 14 through v. 16a and has impersonal style of epic narrative all through. It is composed as an artful envelope figure. There are six references to

[189] Watson 1984, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 151f. describes this pattern as "three-line staircase parallelism" with "ellipsis" as a variant of this type. Even though the characteristics of Ex. 15:11 correspond to Watson's descriptions, he lists it together with examples of two-line parallelism, which we reject.
[190] Muilenburg 1966, *Liturgy*, 246.

other populations: twice in general form ("the peoples", v. 14a; "they" v. 16 a[a]), twice subsumed under the name of a geographical entity ("Philistia", v. 14b; "Canaan", v. 15c), and twice with the specific name of an actual people ("Edom" and "Moab", v. 15a and 15b). The general terms take the outer positions, in second and penultimate positions are the geographical terms, and in the central position are the concrete names of actual people (a b / c c' b' / a'). Moreover, the central colons are organized in chiastic fashion juxtaposing the "chiefs of Edom" and the "leaders of Moab" in immediate succession. This order effects a climactic progression that reaches its culminating point in v. 15, which receives an additional stress from the strong introductory particle *'āz*.

The colon v. 16a[b] stands detached but provides a link between the previous verses and the major themes of the introit: the "might of your arm" refers to God's incomparability and triumph, the opponents are defeated and "become still like a stone". This colon is also very similar in structure, style, and content to v. 12, the beginning of the stanza, which can safely be regarded as another *inclusio* or envelope structure that holds together the whole stanza. The simile "like a stone" repeats the fashion of the end of a stanza as in v. 5 and v. 10[191]; the change of direction in the address to God in "you"-style prepares for the following refrain.

The refrain (v. 16b), like the other two refrains, is fashioned as staircase parallelism, in this case as bicolon again. It is distinguished from the preceding strophe by its use of "you"-style, addressing God again with the divine name Yahweh. In the sense of v. 13 the refrain takes up "the important motif of the people, which is hymnically celebrated in the refrain."[192] The Israelites – who remain unnamed throughout the poem – are contrasted to the other peoples as God's people. The second refrain had claimed the superiority of Yahweh among the gods (v. 11); as a result, the other peoples are regarded inferior to the Israelites, too. The repetition of the first hemistich emphasizes that it is due to God's intervention and leadership that the Israelites successfully escaped the threat at the Sea of Reeds and could enter the land

[191] Muilenburg 1966, *Liturgy*, 248.
[192] Muilenburg 1966, *Liturgy*, 246.

of their destination. The second colon asserts that God chose the Israelites as his people; not only does this confirm the declaration of v. 13 ("the people whom you redeemed") and the personal testimony of v. 2 ("he has become my salvation"), but also proclaims their special relation for the future and underlines Israel's claim for the land of their aforementioned foes.

4.2.d.ϵ. Coda

The last two verses (v. 17–18) form a coda to the whole song. The first verse is structured as triplet. Its first verse-line states the result of the struggle at the sea and the subsequent occupation of the land: God brought the Israelites into the country that he appointed to them; what is more, they were "planted in" and are thus intended to stay. Their place is the mountain of God's inheritance and possession. This place is further specified in the two following verse-lines as a place for God's dwelling, too, that he has established and made firm with his hands. Another reading of this verse would suggest a more dialectic interpretation: Since the people is planted on God's mountain, which requires the work of God's hand, the sanctuary established by God's hand is the very same people. As a result, God chose his people Israel as his place of abode and therefore wanted them to live in his inheritance.

The final colon v. 18 affirms the perspective of the foregoing verse and extends that vision into eternity. It ascribes honour of kingship to Yahweh and pronounces him as the ultimate king, which links this verse with the opening of the song proper in verse 2. As a concluding affirmation, this colon acknowledges the power and majesty of God as depicted in the song for the past and proclaims it for future times, too.

4.3. Conclusion

To conclude this detailed description of the poetic structure and the inner-strophic arrangement, we can say that the poem is a unified whole with sufficient cohesion in its general structure. The introit and the coda, as well as the refrains, tie together the parts of the

song. Even though there are two different topical sets (the event at the sea and the migration in to the land), they are closely knit together by the employed structural elements and motifs. The song is very dynamic, both in its dramatic content matter and in its structural organization. The mood of the song is serving the remembrance of the narrated event at the sea and inspires to join in the praise God for his saving power and providence. This dynamic is skilfully wrought in flawless balance and of high artistic quality.

5. Isolation of Poetic Devices

5.1. General Remarks / Introduction

Poetic and stylistic devices[193] in this context refer "to the elements that the poet employs… to create a particular poem."[194] Watson suggests the distinction between structural devices and non-structural devices. This distinction, however, "cannot be clinical"[195] and is used largely for clarity of presentation. The demarcation of poetic devices is often artificial, as they frequently occur in mixed forms and do not occur in isolation.[196]

Structural poetic devices contribute to the structuring of the text. Not only do they have literary artistic values as such, but also their function in the text as a whole has to be noted. They contribute to the reading/listening experience and enhance understanding by guiding the audience. Among them are different forms of *repetition, refrain, envelope figure (also known as inclusio), use of keywords, chiasmus, parallelism and word-pairs*.[197]

The non-structural poetic devices work well in isolation from the rest of the text, too. They do not add to the structure of the text. Among the non-structural devices these need to be mentioned: *Allusion, ellipsis, irony, oxymoron, hyperbole, merismus, hendiadys, litotes,*

[193] Both terms, poetic and stylistic, are employed conversely here. Since the analysis deals with poetic material, all matters of style deal with a particular piece of poetry and all poetic devices contribute to the particular style of this text.
[194] Petersen/Richards 1992, *Hebrew Poetry*, 49.
[195] Watson 1984, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 273.
[196] Watson 1984, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 273.
[197] Watson 1984, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 273–299.

enjambment, imagery, metaphor, abstract for concrete, rhetorical question.[198] However, as it has been noted above poetic devices do not actually occur in isolation but often appear in mixed forms. They can be part of larger structural patterns and hence become elements of structural devices as part of repetitions or chiasms, to give an example.

5.2. Description of Poetic Devices in the Song of the Sea

Now I will expose the most important poetic devices present in the Song of the Sea, grouped according to Watson's classification in structural and non-structural devices.

5.2.a. Structural Poetic Devices

On the level of macrostructure two characteristics have to be mentioned. As most part of Hebrew poetry the Song of the Sea is set out in parallelism. "Parallelism is universally recognized as *the* characteristic feature of biblical Hebrew poetry."[199] This basic feature of biblical poetry is "the recurrent use of a relatively short sentence-form that consists of two brief clauses."[200] The most classic example of this style in the Song of the Sea is v. 2b: "This is my God and I will praise him / this is my father's God and I will exalt him." The slash "/" indicates the pause between the two parallel clauses A and B. "What those pauses actually embody is the subjoined, hence emphatic, character of B."[201] There are also parallelisms that extend over more than two lines. V. 17 would be an example of a tricolon extending over three lines, but there is also the monocolon without parallel verse-line like v. 18. The various types of parallelism have been described by Petersen/Richards[202] and minutely by Watson[203].

Another noteworthy structural device on the macro-level is the arrangement in stanzas with separating refrains. The refrains in the Song of the Sea are set apart by their design as staircase parallelism, a specially structured type of parallelism in general. This form of

[198] Watson 1984, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 299–348.
[199] Watson 1984, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 114,(italics orig.).
[200] Kugel 1981, *Idea*, 1.
[201] Kugel 1981, *Idea*, 51.
[202] Petersen/Richards 1992, *Hebrew Poetry*, ch. 2, 21–35.
[203] Watson 1984, *Classical Hebrew Poetry* , ch. 6, 114–159.

couplet proceeds in steps: "A sentence is started, only to be interrupted by an epithet or vocative. The sentence is then resumed from the beginning again, without the intervening epithet, to be completed in the second or third line."[204] What is more, the refrain couplets are preceded by similes.[205] The similes in the Song of the Sea add to the climactic dynamics of each stanza. The increase of tension is then released in the exalted refrains that contain the acclamation of Yahweh in all three cases. Refrains serve to structure a poem or song. They also "enable people listening (whether as audience or congregation) to join in."[206]

On the inner-strophic and stanza level, in the microstructure so to speak, structural devices produce cohesion between verse-lines and between strophes. An example that has been made visible by the stichographic layout of the text of the Song of the Sea above is the envelope figure or *inclusion* style in vv. 9 and 14–16a. In both cases, the strophe consists of six verse-lines that are set out in concentric order. This is a chiastic structure where first and last element, second and penultimate, and the third and fourth clause correspond. Especially the strophe vv. 14–16a displays an artful arrangement where not only the entire strophe is fashioned in an envelope structure, but on top of it the two centre phrases are chiastic in style. This compositional technique increases tension in the audience and has its apt function in the two strophes that focus on the enemy most. The recurrence of the enemy-theme in the middle of all three stanzas (vv. 4–5; 9; 14–16a) creates strong cohesion between the stanzas; it increases tension and heightens the dynamic contrast to the saving deeds of Yahweh and the salvation of the Israelites.

Key words and lexical indicators of the main theme range on the ridge of structural and non-structural devices. The sea-theme is introduced in the introit and governs the entire first two stanzas by multiple allusions with lexical variability (sea, Sea of Reeds, floods,

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[204] Watson 1984, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 150.
[205] Petersen/Richards 1992, *Hebrew Poetry*, 50: "A simile is a figure of speech in which two entities are compared." Watson classifies simile as part of the imagery set: "Simile and metaphor overlap, to a certain extent. (…) Broadly speaking, the simile is more obvious than metaphor. This is because it is more *explicit*, or because the *ground of comparison* is actually stated." (Watson 1984, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 254; italics orig.)
[206] Watson 1984, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 297.

depth, waters). In seven out of ten cases, the sea-lexemes are placed at the end of a colon which gives them a signalling function of definiteness. The third stanza and coda, however, are void of any mentioning of the sea. The theme of the drowning of the Egyptians and the related sea motif is abandoned for the focus on the land. Now it is the earth that swallows the enemy (v. 12) and the Israelite pass through the land and its peoples (v. 16c) instead of the sea. This new theme, however, connects the third stanza and the coda closely and provides the link from the previous event at the Sea of Reeds to the forthcoming migration into Canaan. In terms of inter-textuality, this is an allusion to the later history as unfolded in the course of the book of Exodus and as such a structural device on the level of hyperstructure.[207]

Structural poetic devices on the *phonetic level* like sound repetition, alliteration, assonance or rhyme cannot be observed in the Song of the Sea. Such elements of style would serve to connect verses or parts of a poem. Here, however, they are not to be found to a greater degree. The only exceptions on the structural level are the three cases of staircase parallelism (vv. 6, 11, 16c) where the initial repetition lies in the matter of the nature of this type of parallelism. The other assonance and alliteration in the case of the infinitive-absolute composition in v. 1 will be dealt with in the section on non-structural devices. As for meter and rhythm, no scholarly consensus has been reached.[208] Therefore, I contend that these features are either irretrievably lost or they have never been part of the stylistic composition of the Song of the Sea. In either case, we need to restrict our analysis to what is at hand.

Finally, among the structural devices the *change of voice or speaker and of addressee* deserves attention. In the beginning of the song, an "I"-voice reports Yahweh's action in a descriptive mode and answers with praise. It is only in the refrain though, that Yahweh is addressed personally. From here, there is an interesting change of voice: The first-person speaker disappears; the addressee from here on throughout the rest of the song is Yahweh. His

[207] On the contention regarding the dating of the Song due to this allusion compare Propp 1998, *Exodus,* 507f.
[208] Propp 1998, *Exodus,* 503.508. With regard to Hebrew Poetry in general, Muilenburg states that "the Hebrew poet frequently avoids metrical consistency." (Muilenburg 1969, *Form Criticism and Beyond*, 12.)

name in form of the tetragrammon is called in the refrains and the coda only, but as subject of the reported events and source of all action he is omnipresent. Considering the effect on the audience, the change of voice at the turn from the first stanza to the first refrain gradually draws the listener/reader into the dynamics of the song. What at first was the song of "Moses and the Israelites" (v. 1a) then becomes an invitation to join in and participate in the praise. Where there was distance with the first-person voice of another there evolves inclusion. This shift and dynamic movement culminates in the confessional shout "Yahweh will reign forever and ever!" in the last verse. Eventually, the distance between observer and partaker is dissolved in the universal declaration of the power and influence of the Lord Yahweh.

5.2.b. Non-structural (Stylistic-Aesthetic) Poetic Devices

Whilst structural poetic devices function to organize a text in its formation and help the audience to listen and understand, the non-structural poetic devices do not add to the structure of a text but enhance its stylistic and aesthetic qualities.

The most noticeable stylistic feature of the Song of the Sea is its strong use of *imagery*. It is mainly two areas that this imagery material is taken from: the sea motif and the anthropomorphic description of Yahweh. Both combine to the superordinate image of Yahweh as ruler over the forces of nature.

The sea motif is illustrated with a whole cluster of terms for this element. This illustrates the force of the floods and inability for the enemy to escape the water. The vivid portrayal of the scene is augmented by the aspect of depth in vv. 5 and 8.

The anthropomorphic description of Yahweh extends throughout the song. Yahweh's arm and hand are mentioned several times, but it is also his nose and breath that cause the waters to pile up (v. 8) and to liquefy again (v. 10). Yahweh's arm and hand, however, do not only bring destruction and annihilation to the enemy, they are also the sign of guidance and

salvation for the Israelites. The Coda (v. 17) goes as far as describing Yahweh as a gardener who plants his people into his property.

Very important throughout the song is the *contrast of upward and downward movement*.[209] It is not obvious at first sight but the distinction and clear separation is evident: All the way through the Song of the Sea, the enemies are thrown into the sea (v. 1), sink in the Sea of Reeds (v. 4), come down into the depth (v. 5), sink in the waters (v. 10), or are swallowed by the earth (v. 12). The similes in vv. 5 and 10 illustrate the downward movement with the picture of stone or lead sinking in the deep water. Yahweh as triumphant and victorious sovereign is associated with the upper position and upward movement, raising the arm (v. 16) or hand (v. 6, 12) of blowing from above (v. 8, 10). Eventually, the destination for Yahweh and his wandering people is a mountain (v. 17) as place for their dwelling and the exertion of Yahweh's reign (v. 18).

The *similes* deserve a second comment in this context. Not only do the two mentioned occurrences illustrate the downward movement; what is more, all four similes, including "it consumed them like stubble" (v. 7) and "they went silent like a stone" (v. 16) convey a strong sense of passivity. There is nothing a stone, a piece of lead or dry straw can do. The enemy is put in a totally passive position. This passivity is amply described by the reaction shown by the Canaanite peoples in vv. 14–16a who all "melted away" (v. 15c). The aggregation of these reactions and the comparison of the simile "they went silent like a stone" (v. 16b) leads to the "ejaculatory praise"[210] of God in the concluding refrain.

What is also interesting to note with regard to the similes is the fact that the three cases leading to the refrains (vv. 5, 10, 16) all use nouns of feminine grammatical gender. This

[209] Shreckhise 2007, *Rhetoric*, 202.
[210] Hauser 1987, *Songs*, 265.

could be interpreted as a sublime rhetoric mocking of the enemy[211] and a multiplication of the sense of passivity and impotence of the enemy.

Closely linked to the use of imagery and simile is the *metaphoric language* used for the invocation of God in the first stanza. There, God is called "my strength, my might, my salvation" (v. 2), and "a man of war" (v. 3). These exalting epithets are a direct reaction to the events at the sea as condensed in the Introit (v. 1). As the song proceeds these appellations are spelled out in more detail.

The *use of the names of Israel's God* is remarkable in its intensity and frequency.[212] The most frequently occurring single word in the Song is the divine name *yhwh*.[213] In addition, different names for God are employed for the sake of variation, but for greater exaltation as well. In the 1st strophe of the 1st stanza alone, four different names of God are used (*Yah, Elij, Elohej, Yhwh*), and a fifth one is added in the Coda (*Adonai*, v. 17). The main use of the tetragrammon "yhwh" in all part of the song chiefly in the refrains, however, shows that this is the most important, most honourable name of God. Moreover, it is the name that exclusively pertains to the God of Israel.

Minor stylistic features of the Song are the *rhetorical question* in v. 11 and the *irony* in v. 9. There is a good portion of mockery in the latter verse: The enemy is boasting and attempts to threaten the Israelites, only to be blown away by Yahweh. After this, there is no doubt about the answer to the question in v. 11: No one is like Yahweh among the gods.

On the *phonetic level*, there are some elements worth mentioning here, though they are rather few and do not play an important role in the song. Patterns of sound repetition and metre or rhythm are scarce. The staircase parallelisms have been mentioned in the section on structural devices above. The repetition of the initial words of the two corresponding lines is not about sound effect, but of compositional nature. In v. 1, however, the infinitive-absolute

[211] Cf. Shreckhise 2007, *Rhetoric*, 210: "The implication overall is the irony and mockery of Pharaoh's power and evil intent."
[212] Hauser 1987, *Songs*, 266.
[213] Howell 1989, *Exodus*, 14.

composition deserves more attention. This is a distinctively Hebrew syntactic feature: A finite verb form is supplemented with an infinitive absolute. "The infinitive absolute occurs most frequently in immediate connexion with the finite verb of the same stem, in order in various ways *to define more accurately or to strengthen the idea of the verb*."[214] Thus, this construction does not alter structure or meaning and has mainly emphatic quality, combined with a special sound effect. Also, there is significant alliteration in v. 2 with *aleph* at the beginning of five words, especially with the divine epithets *elij* and *elohej*. After all, the phonetic devices are few and show little effect. The non-structural stylistic devices of the song work almost entirely on the semantic level. For any synchronous interpretation and actualization, as well as for a lively translation of a Biblical text, this is an advantage: Semantic elements can be reproduced in other languages, whereas sound elements are generally confined to one language.

5.3. Major Motifs in the Song of the Sea

The poetic devices which are utilized in the Song of the Sea point to the major motifs. These will be recapitulated briefly now.

The dominant theme, chiefly in the first two stanzas, is Yahweh's triumph over the Egyptian army at the Sea. The water-motif and the up-down-motif are combined to great effect. The god Yahweh is portrayed in anthropomorphic metaphors and exercises power as ruler over the forces of nature. The powerless and inferior enemy is contrasted with the most powerful and victorious God. This applies for the Egyptian army as well as for the Canaanite peoples. The entire episode illustrates Yahweh's glorious power so that the major motif dominating the whole song would be the exaltation of the incomparable God.

[214] Gesenius 1910, *Grammar*, §113, l (sic, italics original).

6. Prose and Poetry – Interplay of Frame, Song, and Couplet

Linguistically, prose and poetry in Ex 15:1–21 are clearly set apart by their specific characteristics.[215] The two poetic pieces are preceded by introductions in narrative prose style. Both announce the following poetic parts as sung pieces.

Thematically, the introductions set the scene and introduce the acting persons: Moses and the Israelites, resp. Miriam and the women.

Narratively, the opening frame verse links the song to the preceding story. The initial "then" points back to the foregoing event and the verse announces the following reaction of "Moses and the Israelites". The same applies for v. 20–21a, introducing the couplet sung by Miriam and the women. The bridging verse 19, however, sticks out alien in its thematic repetition.[216] After the resuming comment at the end of Ex 14 and the song of Moses, v. 19 acts like a cut-back. It is an almost literal repetition of parts of Ex 14:22, 28, and 29. The end of ch. 14 is fairly confused, too, with many repetitions and incoherencies in the temporal sequence of events. In the narrative stream it would make more sense to have v. 20 alone in between the song and the short couplet.

However the textual history, there are tight links between the narrative of Ex 14 and the frame of the songs of Moses and the Israelites and of Miriam and the women. The links operate both thematically (in motifs) and semantically (with lexical items, phrases, key words).

Regarding the relationship between the longer song and the short couplet it can be easily seen that there is an almost identical repetition of v. 1 in v. 21. The couplet v. 21 possibly was the nucleus for the composition of the longer song, as its stands more clearly in the tradition of women singing a victory song (comp. Jdg 5). The explanation "the prophetess Miriam, Aaron's sister" probably conceals the trace of old origin but later addition to the narrative Miriam is not introduced as prophetess or Aaron's sister earlier, nor is name

[215] See 3 above, on page 52.
[216] Coats 1969, *Song*, 3 identifies v. 19 as a gloss on vv. 1b–18.

mentioned before; here, her appearance as singled-out women and prophetess apparently needs special legitimization as Aaron's sister.

Considering the narrative flow, the doubled song would have fitted better in the whole narrative of the sea event with the short, appellative victory song of the women coming first and then being answered by all men singing the longer song. Historically this might have been the order of how the texts came into being,[217] but perhaps it was not appropriate to have a female side character singing before Moses and the men.

Rhetorically considered and with respect to the effect on the reader/audience the song of Moses and the men is a full-fledged hymn on the glorious power and victory of God. With its refrains it invites to join in. The shorter couplet sounds like a summary or a refrain or catchphrase one might go on humming after having heard the whole episode. It encapsulates the message of the whole song. Yet the order of the short summary of the sea event following the song and finally the couplet seems somewhat odd in the context of Ex 15:1–21, as well as in the larger context of Ex 14–15.

7. Functional Synthesis

Under the heading "functional synthesis" a general assessment of the extracted data on structural and stylistic features is intended. Here I consider how the poetic devices and literary characteristics of this particular text interact within the whole of the poem and its adjoining verses. This concluding evaluation will also take into perspective issues that point beyond this specific text. However, this is a provisional conclusion only, still restricted to textual observation. A wider interpretation incorporating contextual and application oriented concerns will follow at a later stage in due course.

The poem Ex 15:1b–18 as a whole shows strong cohesion between its parts and exhibits clear signals that tie together all its sub-units. The important question of unity can

[217] M. Noth argues the song was secondarily inserted, see Coats 1969, *Song*, 4f.

therefore be answered positively. It forms a unified whole and by its structure composed of introit, stanzas with refrains and coda is shaped as one coherent literary unit. Thematically, its parts are kept together by reappearing motifs and repeated key words.

Form critical considerations of the genre of the Song, however, have not led to one judgement agreed to generally by scholars. Broadly speaking, the song can be labelled a "hymn of praise".[218] By content it is a song of victory, comparable to Deborah's song in Jdg 5. Yet comparative study of form and content also show considerable differences so that it "therefore would not seem appropriate that there is an established 'form' victory song that was followed by both Exod 15 and Judg 5."[219] What is more, "there is not enough patterned regularity held in common by Exod 15 and Judg 5 to make it reasonable to propose something set as a victory song form lying behind these poems."[220] Whatever its precise form, its setting in life will best be assigned in the liturgy.[221]

The analysis of the song with the prose frame and the concluding couplet has already raised a notion of redactional disunity. The order of these elements seems to be confounded. On their content level, nonetheless, they belong together closely. Also in their larger context relations they prove to have strong links to the preceding narrative of the sea event. In retrospect reading, recurring lexical items and motifs demonstrate propinquity. As well, there is the vision of future events of the migration into Canaan and occupation of the land that provide forward connection beyond the immediate narrative context. It is embedded in the narrative line with the escape from Egypt and persecution by the pharaoh as background, the event at the Sea of Reeds as immediate narrative context, and the movement, both temporal

[218] Coats 1969, *Song*, 7, with reference to Gunkel's terminology; in Westermann's terminology a "declarative psalm".
[219] Hauser 1987, S*ongs*, 279.
[220] Hauser 1987, S*ongs*, 279. For a brief discussion of some forms proposed for Ex 15, see Coats 1969, *Song*, 7–9.
[221] Cf. Muilenburg 1984, *Liturgy*, 236. Already the title of this essay „ A Liturgy on the Triumphs of Yahweh" signals Muilenburg's form critical view. He proposes a dramatic enactment in the autumnal festival.

and geographical, from unsteadiness to settlement. Israel's god Yahweh proves to be the driving force as redeemer of Israel and a warrior against Egypt and the Canaanite peoples.

The song and all its parts display strong dynamics and vibrancy. The up-and-down motif as well as the strong contrasts between the powerless and passive enemy and the triumphant and potent god Yahweh intensify this dynamic character. Each stanza ends in praise and exaltation, just as the whole song finally culminates in universal glorification of Yahweh. In the context of the salvation from the Egyptian army the mood is cheerful and full of joy, rejoicing in God's victorious act and redemptive power.

A very interesting point that has not seen much scholarly attention is the dialectic relationship of Yahweh and his chosen people as he plants them "on the mountain of [his] possession": In this act, God binds himself in a covenant relationship to his chosen people. God's people becomes a place of Yahweh's dwelling and itself a sanctuary.

The main focus of the Song is on God, who alone is worthy of praise and who alone is mighty. He is the ruler over the cosmic forces. The Song exalts God's name and celebrates his praise, especially in contrast with the defeated enemies. "The poem is so composed that its very structure reveals the role of Yahweh, on the one hand; and of the enemy on the other."[222] Theologically speaking, God is the one who is active in redeeming the persecuted and oppressed. He is the redeemer and he alone acts to battle against the oppressor. There is no violence required, even less demanded, from the human side. As a result, this yields two implicit consequences: First, under oppression and persecution, the apt response is not aggression and violent resistance, but the appeal to God and prayer for change. Second, those who have suffered from oppression and persecution are called to care for the ones suffering now under such circumstances and show solidarity.

[222] Muilenburg 1984, *Liturgy*, 235 (sic!).

VI. Interpretation

1. Introduction

The structural and stylistic analysis of Ex 15:1–21 in chapter V exposed the textual observations and the issues on the level of the isolated biblical text. This chapter aims at the interpretation of the Song of the Sea and the adjoining couplet beyond distanciated exegetical explanation. It offers an interpretation in the light of the interpreter's specific context of reading. This interpretative situation is marked by the double focus on German and South African reality and a Christian (protestant) perspective. The Christian perspective entails a biblical perspective of Old and New Testament. The Hebrew Bible and, more precisely, the Book of Exodus will be given special attention in the assessment of issues pertaining to the text. Interpretation from a Christian perspective, however, means to interpret the text in the light of the Gospel proclaimed by Jesus Christ.

In order to substantiate the claim of contextuality beyond mere personal intuition, reference will be made to two recent church documents of ecumenical origin as well as to the Constitutions of South Africa and Germany. The constitutional documents represent non-religious texts that are normative for the make-up of the respective societies but also describe the core values and they are accepted and honoured generally.

The conclusion will be a result of a continuous dialogue of the author including scholarly literature and experienced German and South African realities. Conversely, the results and suggestions are offered as a contribution to the scholarly discussion and the ongoing intercultural dialogue. Being bound to a socio-political location and speaking on the grounds of a particular ideo-theological commitment, my results cannot claim objectivity and absolute truth. By dealing overtly with the conditions of interpretation (see ch. II, Hermeneutical Framework) I do hope, however, to reach valid conclusions which bear up against methodological revision and stand the test of inter-subjective plausibility.

From the results of the textual analysis, seven issues will be discussed subsequently. They emerged from my discussion with the biblical text against the backdrop of the context described earlier. These seven aspects are not related systematically, but rather show topical links. Metaphorically speaking, they are single chords that resonate between the biblical text and the present context. First, I will present them in the light of the biblical text itself, and then evaluate them from a contemporary Christian perspective. Finally, a theological evaluation of the Song of the Sea and the Song of Miriam will offer a synthesis with regard to the theological contribution, the risks and the liabilities of Ex 15:1–21.

2. Aspects and Issues

2.1. The Nature of Yahweh as the God of the Exodus

In the Song of the Sea, Yahweh is the object of praise. He is the God of the Exodus who revealed himself to Moses (Ex 3) and lead Israel out of the bondage in Egypt. In Ex 15:1–21, Yahweh is described as

- most powerful (v. 6), warrior (v. 3) and king (v. 17f.);
- glorious and triumphant (v. 1.21), most holy (v. 11);
- holding power over creation (v. 8.10), the enemies (v. 7), and other gods (v. 11;)
- having chosen Israel, saving and redeeming her, leading and defending her (v. 2.13.16.17);
- active in history (v. 1.21);
- abiding with Israel in steadfast and zealous love (v. 13);
- having a place of habitation, the mountain (v. 17), but being mobile, too (v. 13);
- owner of the mountain of his dwelling (v. 17);
- ruling with universal reign in time and space (v. 18).

Yahweh is the God of creation who reigns universally and with cosmic power, he is incomparable and most holy. In the Song of the Sea, this is demonstrated by God's violent

acts against the enemies of the Israelites and by causing terror among the neighbouring peoples. Yahweh is presented primarily as a warrior king and cosmic ruler. An interest in peaceful life is only alluded to by the gardening metaphor of planting in the Israelites on the mountain (v. 17).

From a contemporary Christian perspective:

The violent aspects of God in the Song of the Sea easily cause disquiet.[223] The exclusivity of Yahweh's love for Israel alone to the detriment of the surrounding population contrast the assertion of universal reign. The God proclaimed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a God whose reign establishes a kingdom of peace for all. Its universal call is inclusive of all creation, the redeeming love is offered to all people. A contemporary understanding of God transcends the limitation to one people, one place of dwelling, and one sanctuary of worship. The spiritual relationship with God is open to all people; God is a god who is *with* all who believe in him instead of having a sole temple.

Despite all this, God is still the God of the Exodus, being *with* and going *with* his people, being active in history where deliverance and redemption happens, the God of Creations and a lover of peace.

2.2. Israel Among the Peoples

The description of Israel in the Song of the Sea corresponds to its characteristics through out the book of Exodus. In Ex 15, Israel is characterized as

- God's chosen people (v. 16);
- Loved and protected by Yahweh, the God of the Exodus (v. 2.13.16.17);
- Worshipping Yahweh from old[224] (v. 2);
- Threatened by the Egyptian persecutors (v. 4.9);

[223] Coggins 2000, *Exodus*, xii contends that „sensitive worshippers are liable to ask whether the picture of God described in some parts of the Exodus story is one which they can find acceptable."
[224] The older/old names of God may indicate how the Israelites have known their God Yahweh before the revelation of his proper name.

- Settled in the land/on the mountain of Gods possession after the Exodus (v. 17);
- Living among other gentile peoples, (v. 14–16).

Two groups of enemies appear in the Song: First and foremost Pharaoh and the Egyptian army from the context of the time of bondage in Egypt, second the peoples of Canaan among whom the Israelites lived in their Palestinian homeland:

The Egyptians are introduced primarily as a military force (v. 1.4.6). Nonetheless, they are presented

- powerless despite their force and fury (v. 4f.);
- impotent against the power of Yahweh (v. 10);
- defeated by the forces of nature at God's command (v. 1.5.10.12).

The peoples of Canaan are presented as

- passive, they only hear (v. 14);
- tormented, dismayed, trebling (v. 14–16);
- liquefied as they melt away (v. 15);
- silent like a stone (v. 16) and hence as passive and impotent as the defeated Egyptians.

Structurally and by means of metaphorical language, a strong dichotomy is created between Israel and the other peoples. Yahweh alone is powerful in favour of the Israelites; his land and his covenant are reserved for Israel and as God's chosen people, exclusively. Even though the other peoples may be big in number or military force, they cannot hinder Israel from moving on.

From a contemporary Christian perspective:

The distinction of the exclusively chosen people and the exclusion of all other people is an obsolete idea in Christian thought: The new covenant in Jesus Christ is open to all believers. God's love transcends the limits of ethnicity, geography, and culture. The universality of

God's power allows for multi-cultural and multi-faith societies beyond all separating lines. Notwithstanding the special relationship of Yahweh with Israel, the church is adopting the history of Israel as recorded in the Bible; they are sister religions inspired by the same loving and redeeming God.

God is the master of all creation. Aggression against other children of God, therefore, is not condoned by Christian pacifist ethics in principle. Christian life in many cases is a life as minority, among other cultural or faith communities. Neither in a position of majority, and even less in a minority situation is violence a viable way. Ideas of supremacy fed by a pseudo-Christian ideology have caused great harm in Germany and South Africa, to name but two examples from the 20th century. The Christian voice will have to argue for peace and socially just societies. God, however, is a place of refuge and peace, not a weapon of terror and violence.

2.3. The Land – Dispersion, Migration, Occupation, Inheritance

The Song of the Sea is rich in references and allusions to different geographic and political entities of land and to different forms of land ownership and rule.

- *Egypt* is the land of Pharaoh, where the Israelites lived as slaves, as landless and displaced people. Formerly, it was a place of hope when famine struck their original homeland before it became the place of bondage for later generations.
- *The Sea of Reeds* is a transit place for the fleeing Israelites where they have no steady homes. At first it appears as a place of danger and defeat, but in the course of events becomes the place of salvation and a place where God proves his power.
- On the way through *the Canaanite land*, the Israelites are still homeless, they are sojourning through foreign territory. The land is inhabited by various other peoples who are a potential threat to the wandering Israelites.

- *The mountain of God's possession* finally is a place for stable settling and dwelling. Here, the Israelites can establish formal worship. Not only is it a place of safety, but also a place of prosperity and peace as the gardening metaphor of "planting in" (v. 18) indicates.

From the perspective of the account of the Book of Joshua, it remains an open question whether the Song adopts a story of settling peacefully on the mountain of God or a story of occupying Canaanite territory by force which was formerly inhabited by other people. The terror and dread that falls on the mentioned groups of people rather alludes to the violent occupation like in Joshua.

From a contemporary Christian perspective:

Israel's experience of landlessness and displacement as remembered in the Exodus story is a reality for many people all over the World: dispossessed and expelled in revolts, refugees from famine or drought, fleeing from devastating economical situations, displaced by terror, war or genocide, and the like.

A stable place of dwelling is a primary life resource. Having a stable and safe place to live means to have a place for growing food, raising children, work, worship, burying the dead, etc. Even if worship is not bound to one place there is still a special affection for places of religious meetings or even divine appearances.

The high importance of having a stable place to live at is acknowledged by the South African Constitution[225] which grants in its Basic Rights the freedom of movement and residence (section 21), the right to an environment that is not harmful (s. 24), state support to access land on an equitable basis (s. 25,5) and the right to have access to adequate housing (s. 26). This is a very advanced stance in constitutional law. In comparison, the German

[225] Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996, online: http://www.info.gov.za/documents/constitution/index.htm, accessed on 31 Mai 2010.

constitutional Basic Law[226] is much less explicit. Yet it grants the right to move freely which includes the free choice of the place of residence (article 11,1) and guarantees property and the right of inheritance (art. 14,1).

2.4. Violence in the Song of the Sea and the Call for Peace

The Song of the Sea is a literary product of a double reaction: It is a direct reaction to the defeat of the Egyptians at the shore of the Sea of Reeds in the context of the Exodus story; indirectly or on a second level, the Song is a reaction to slavery experienced in Egypt and the salvation from oppression. The Exodus of the Israelites was motivated by violence and oppression experienced in Egypt.

Hence, the Song is a response to God's saving act from a violent situation by means of violent intervention against the Egyptian Pharaoh and army. It is thus drenched in structural violence.

In the Song of the Sea

- God is violent primarily, he causes the annihilation of the entire Egyptian army and terrifies the Canaanite peoples (v. 1.3.4.6.7.10.12.14–16);
- the enemy's intent to pursue and destroy (v. 9) came first, chronologically speaking; the persecution of the Israelites was the cause of the event at the Sea;
- the Egyptians pursue the Israelites with the full force of military power, but they arrive too late and are drowned in the Sea (v. 10);
- the Canaanite people are restricted to passivity, they are tormented but remain silent (v. 14–16);
- the Israelites are inactive, too, but because Yahweh acts on their behalf; their task is to admire and praise but since they are the benefiting party, they are entangled in this incident;

[226] The Basic Law, Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany, English translation online: http://www.bundestag.de/htdocs_e/documents/legal/index.html, accessed on 31 Mai 2010.

- the gardening metaphor in the coda implies that peace is the desirable final situation; life in peace is the final goal of the whole exodus story. This fact creates an unsettling tension at long sight.

From a contemporary Christian perspective:

The violence in the Song of the Sea stands in sharp contrast to a Christian pacifist stance. Especially the fact that God is ruthlessly exerting violence could easily be used to legitimate violence against opposing and dissenting groups. From the Gospel of Jesus Christ a new concept of peace is proclaimed. It aims at a kingdom of peace and charity and is brought about by a loving God. Questions arise from the Song of the Sea whether the event at the Sea of Reeds was just violence or a just war? Must we not rather restrict the use of violence? This is not an abstract question rising from a biblical text but one that has its real cause in the actual violence in the world.

A "Decade to Overcome Violence" was established by the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 2001, following a decision of the eighths assembly of the WCC in Harare 1998. The activities of the Decade to Overcome Violence took into focus different manifestations of violence and gave special attention to peace in families, in the marketplace and workplace, in the social and political sphere, in the virtual world and within creation itself.[227] The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the war in Iraq started in 2003 raised attention and awareness for the need of peace locally and globally. For the conclusion of the Decade to Overcome Violence in 2011, an "Initial Statement towards an Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace"[228] was issued for discussion that includes the current challenges for peace and the churches' tasks. In a similar context, a South African "Joint Declaration by Church Leaders

[227] World Council of Churches, Decade to Overcome Violence, Initial Statement Towards an Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace, without date, abbreviated "WCC" in the following footnotes.
[228] Ibid.

on Violence and Crime"[229], issued by the Second Ecumenical Consultation on Violence and Crime on 7 March 2007, addressed the particularly peculiar situation in South Africa where an alarming increase of violence was disrupting and deforming society.

The Declaration by South African church leaders and the "Initial Statement Towards an Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace" by the WCC both point out the responsibility of Christians and the Churches for peacemaking.[230] Both argue in the light of the Gospel and on the basis of "the dignity of all human beings and … the value of life God has given us."[231] Their understanding of peace in the fullness of its meaning is a peace that embraces humanity as a whole within creation.[232] Violence is understood as a violation of limits and "the violation of integrity of relationships in the fabric of creation."[233] The use of violence therefore needs to be restricted to the "power of the sword" of chosen political leaders according to the law[234] to ensure good order and peace in a society. The vision of the WCC Initial Statement is "Just Peace".[235] An exceptional and highly occasional use of lethal means as a last resort may be justified, but the Christian norm for the use of force is nonviolence.[236]

Peace in the full meaning of the Hebrew "shalom" includes security, prosperity, stability, fertility, freedom, and justice. This vision of "Peace on Earth" is what calls Christians together with others to be peace-builders as they "make peace within creation in the same moment they make peace with creation."[237]

2.5. Worship – Forms, Places, and Actors

The Song of the Sea is an act of worship in both form and content. Its first utterance is explicit worship: "I will sing to the Lord." The reason for this hymnic praise is given in v. 2–3:

[229] Second Ecumenical Consultation on Violence and Crime in South Africa, Declaration by Church Leaders on Violence and Crime in South Africa, 7 March 2007, abbreviated "Church Leaders" in the following footnotes.
[230] WCC § 50.56; Church Leaders §1.
[231] Church Leaders §1.4, WCC §19.
[232] Church Leaders §4, WCC §26.
[233] WCC §29.
[234] Church Leaders §2.
[235] WCC chapter 3.
[236] WCC §90.
[237] WCC §116.

Having witnessed God's saving intervention sets free individual response. In the literary context of Ex 14–15 the Song in its extended form as well as the short couplet are presented as communal praise that involves all Israelites at the shore of the Sea of Reeds actively and vocally. In the narrative context of the Sea event the Song is a spontaneous response of men and women with song, dance, and instruments. In the internal context of the Song, a single speaker is looking back at the Sea event in retrospect from the mountain sanctuary (v. 17f.). It could well be a liturgical piece for ceremonial use in a stable cult. According to the narrative frame, the actors in the spontaneous praise are divided into two groups: the "sons of Israel" under Moses' lead and "all the women" under Miriam's lead (v. 1.20 resp.). To Moses the extended version is ascribed that sets in with an adhortative ("I will sing"), the much shorter version of only two lines is assigned to Miriam, opening with a cohortative or imperative ("Sing to the Lord!") which is more inclusive. The introduction of the couplet illustrates an example of embodied faith praxis: the women express their faith and praise with singing, dancing, music, rhythm instruments and words. Apparently, different forms of response belong to the broad variety of worship, the individual as well as the communal, the elaborate poetry as well as the short shout of praise, the verbal and the bodily expression.

From a contemporary Christian perspective:

The Song of the Sea appears as a vibrant act of worship in the celebration of God's wonderful act of saving the Israelites. It encourages other generations to imitate and develop colourful expressions of faith, including words, dance and music. As responsive reaction to the Sea event it sets free new response and re-enactment. The story of the event at the Sea can be read as an invitation to join in celebrating this historic experience and to appropriate it as collective memory. The form of the Song and the narrative composition draw readers into the story.[238] By choosing the Israelites as his people God declared that he wants (or maybe even needs) a

[238] See above on page 71 top.

worshipping community; the praying and praising people are his dwelling place. Prayer and songs of worship remind the community of God's presence and call God in their midst. To go a step beyond mere memory and re-enactment of past events, a worshipping community today has to ask: What are the praiseworthy deeds and characteristics of God at present? Where and when did similar things happen to us or people of our time? Such re-enactment and actualization keeps alive the beacon of hope in present faith.

2.6. Gender – Men and Women in Event, Story, and Worship

Women are largely absent in the Exodus.[239] In the actual events, only men play an important role, first and foremost Aaron and Moses. Even the number of the Israelites is given for the males only (Ex 12:37), subsuming women and children in one unnumbered group with cattle and foreigners.

In the Song, men sing first, theirs is the extended song with elaborate praise and elements of the exodus narrative. God is described with metaphors of male connotation and with warrior and kingship imagery. In relation to the singing men, Yahweh is the God of the *fathers* (v. 2). The (male) enemies are feminized by derogatory rhetoric that connotes their fate and behaviour with impotence and passivity. They are described as weak, trembling, and fearful; they go down in the liquid sea or they are liquefied themselves (v. 15) which associates them with female gender concepts.

The women have an own part assigned to them in the drama. They have less text, but more means of expression: song, dance, musical and rhythmic instruments. The women sing and dance together and invite bystanders to join in. Miriam starts by taking a tambourine and singing to the women. She animates the women to join in, upon which they follow her with tambourines and dancing. Miriam infects the other women with her enthusiasm and exaltation which inspires readers, too. It is not to be underestimated that Miriam is called a prophetess

[239] Exceptions are the Hebrew midwives (Ex 1:15–22) and Pharaoh's daughter (Ex 2) where women become important for the story of Moses.

and put in family relationship with Aaron as his sister (and as such as Moses' sister, too, cf. Ex 7,2). Miriam is honoured and given an important position, indeed.

From a contemporary Christian perspective:

Women are largely muted in the Bible and its stories mainly centre on male actors. This is the case in the Book of Exodus, too. How, then, is male and female agency represented in the event, the story and the Song of Sea as act of worship?

Women do play an important role in the celebration of the Sea event. Although they had to remain silent and narratively absent in the Exodus story, they were not absent in the event. Now they reappear with a song of praise. This short song probably is the older tradition in Ex 15:1–21, similar to the Song of Deborah (Jdg 5); in any case the couplet is at least as old as the extended song. Although the couplet follows the longer song in the literary sequence, it is not a response to the song. The framing narrative verses present the couplet as an individual unit and as a direct reaction to the Sea event. A re-discovery of the part which women play at the Sea of Reeds is a call for giving a voice to the muted women in the Bible. This episode shows that women must not remain silent. The designation of Miriam as a prophetess lifts her into a special status more important than a simple side character. Her name, title, and song are traces of a hidden story in the Book of Exodus which challenge interpreters to give her a place in the story. Miriam could become a role model for women today who are encouraged to assume important positions in modern societies and contemporary church structures.[240] The way in which Miriam wants to sing together with the women and prompts everybody present in the scene can be an inspiration and invitation for more cooperation and inclusion.

The spontaneous and spirited celebration encourages women today to express themselves in the worship of their congregations and in the public proceedings of their

[240] In fact, my current German congregation developed the tradition of a "Miriam Sunday" once a year to consider the role of women in the Bible and the charisms of women in their congregation.

communities. If it is their gift to sing and dance, it is perfectly appropriate to do so in the context of worship – this is a visible and audible richness and treasure of African women and of women in many other cultures, too.

2.7. Historicity of the Exodus – Story and History

The Song of the Sea is constructed in reference to a "historic"[241] event: the crossing of the Sea of Reeds after the exodus from Egypt. Yet the text itself betrays this notion of historicity by its asynchronous composition. The Song refers so aspects in the history of the Israelites that will happen only later in the narrative (the Canaanite people, the mountain as final destination). Whether historically true or not the story becomes history by continual repeating, remembering, and re-enacting. What is told about the past is believed to have happened and is accepted as the formative ground of the present time. Where there is no modern historiography based on sources and critical scholarship an imagined history is as good to explain the past and a community's origins.

A history that is told in stories and re-enacted in rituals continually keeps alive normative "historic" models of power distribution and legitimation of power. This aspect is illustrated in the OT by the extant genealogies that construct the Israelite people as one family tied together by old legacies. An imagined history is more likely to stabilize the status quo. It also functions as a model of a wished-for future that is fashioned according to the imagined past. In dark times, a positive picture of the past serves as a solace.

From a contemporary Christian perspective:

The "history" of biblical Israel – whether historically true or not by critical standards – is adopted by the Church. Believers interpret their lives, their time and personal history in terms of biblical narrated "history". The collective memory contained in the Bible is adopted and mediated by its continuous communal use, especially in the case of the Old Testament. The

[241] By putting the word "historic" in inverted commas, I want to indicate that I refer to the exodus as part of a narration about the past and not in the sense of verified historical data.

Hebrew Bible tells about a remote time in history. Originally, the Hebrew Bible collected the stories, texts and traditions that constitute the history of Israel and the early Jewish time.

The Church understands herself as a sister of Israel. She identifies with Israel and her traditions as her prehistory. This identification leads to an indirect reference: Israel's experience of the event at the Sea of Reeds becomes a story the church can relate to "as if it were" the Church's own historic experience. OT stories are assertions from the past that tell about God's saving presence. They give hope that God is acting continuously in the world. For both Christians and Jews it can be said that the Exodus might not be historical in a modern, critical sense, but in terms of collective memory, imagined history and identification the Exodus nonetheless is true. Scott Langston quotes an American Rabbi who concludes from the biblical account and scholarship that the Exodus most likely did not happen the way it is reported in the Bible. Nevertheless, he asserts with reference to the Exodus and Pesach that it "has been proved true in virtually every generation of the Jewish people" and that "this story has inspired people searching for freedom and liberation for thousands of years."[242] In conclusion, it is not a question of historical evidence but of personal, spiritual truth. The "history" recorded in the Bible has the ability to inspire and enliven those who read it with their personal, present question.

3. A Theology of Hope and Justice and the Exodus

Taking in view the seven issues I elaborated on, I would now like to offer a theological synthesis to my interpretation of the Song of the Sea.

The story of the saving God related in the Book of Exodus gives hope to succeeding generations of readers. It is part of the collective "history" of Jews and Christians. The story and the Song remind believers of God's deeds and his saving power. Conversely, the re-enactment in liturgical use reminds God of his previous acts and the promise of the covenant.

[242] Langston 2006, *Exodus,* 151.

Despite these positive aspects, the Exodus story is a contested story: The Exodus from Egypt brought freedom for the Israelite party, but death and destruction to the Egyptians, and oppression and displacement for the Canaanite people, subsequently. "The biblical Exodus was bracketed by stories of annihilating Egyptians and Canaanites."[243] A system of oppression and domination was established by the previously oppressed.

The Exodus paradigm, though having been used in liberation theology for a long time, needs critical review and re-evaluation. In South-Africa, the Exodus legend was used by Boer Voortrekkers[244] as well as by Black liberation theologians[245]. J.N.K. Mugambi recognizes problems with the exodus paradigm, contrasting primarily the difference between the Israelite experience and the African colonial experience. Instead, he opts for a reconstruction paradigm using Ezra and Nehemiah as central biblical texts.[246]

> "So at the beginning of the twenty-first century the exodus theme as a model for social and political change has begun to be questioned. Yet it still remains a useful tool for challenging oppression wherever it may arise, including by the formerly oppressed. The problem seems to lie more with those using the exodus than the paradigm itself. When the oppressed do not consider the possibility of their becoming oppressors and take action to guard against this frequent development, then the exodus ceases to liberate. As has been seen, it becomes the tool of bondage and in need of an exodus itself. This paradigm cannot create a just society; it can create only the opportunity to build such a society. The exodus journey, therefore, must be both linear and circular, moving ahead to break oppression that stands outside itself, but also looping back on itself to uproot the nascent signs of injustice within it."[247]

The hidden transcripts of the Song of the Sea and the Song of Miriam give rise to such a circular hermeneutical endeavour. The expression of hope and trust, the goal of a peaceful and prosperous life, and the strands inclusive of women and the surrounding people open up the text to liberating readings. These observations lead the way from the exodus legend to the exodus paradigm that has its goal in establishing a peaceful and just society. Critically evaluated and read in the light of contemporary hermeneutical, political, and theological discourse, the Song of the Sea becomes a powerful biblical text fostering hope for peace and justice.

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[243] Langston 2006, *Exodus*, 152 with reference to Robert P. Carroll 2001, *South Africa*.
[244] Cf. Carroll 2001, *South Africa*, 198, quoted in Langston 2006, *Exodus*, 152.
[245] Tutu 1996, *Rainbow*, 256, quoted in Langston 2006, *Exodus*, 151.
[246] Cf. Mugambi 1995, *Liberation*, referred to by Langston 2006, *Exodus*, 152f.
[247] Langston 2006, *Exodus*, 153.

VII. Conclusion

This thesis proceeded from hermeneutical and methodological considerations to a close analysis of the Song of the Sea and concluded with a contextual interpretation.

The hermeneutical deliberation discussed the basic preconditions of understanding ancient literary texts and located them in a contemporary reading context. This resulted in a constructive framework of a trans-historical language community. The author exposed his place of reading in a double context of South African and German biblical scholarship and church life. His ideo-theological commitment to peace-making, global justice and intercultural dialogue with an interest in contextual reconstructive theological practice resulted in a tri-polar contextual hermeneutics foregrounding the context of interpretation and the socio-political location of the exegete.

The methodological chapter introduced biblical rhetorical criticism with its attention to form-content relation as a mode of analysis of elements of composition and persuasion in a biblical poetic text. This methodology is convinced that the proper analysis of form-content yields a proper understanding of actual meaning and reveals the persuasive effect on the reader or audience. Rhetorical criticism proceeds by close analysis of structural and stylistic features of a defined text unit.

The analysis of structure and style in the Song of the Sea, the subsequent Song of Miriam and the connecting prose framework revealed the Song's unity, its strophic structure, its means of persuasion, and its main scope: The Song of the Sea is a hymn of praise to the incomparable and triumphant God Yahweh. Though being a text replete with violence, it does not legitimate human aggression and violence as a response to oppression or persecution. Rather, it calls for solidarity and care for the oppressed and contains the hope for universal peace under the reign of Yahweh.

A contextual interpretation of the results of the exegetical work confronted the issues of the biblical text with a contemporary Christian perspective. This part included newer church documents on the question of violence and peace as well as the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and the Basic Law of Germany as related to the issues touched upon by the Song of the Sea. This step unearthed helpful and liberating aspects of Ex 15 as well as oppressive and restrictive tendencies of the biblical text. As a result, a critical review and re-evaluation of the exodus paradigm is needed, replacing an uncritical use of the exodus-conquest legend.

Furthermore, the Song of the Sea, in combination with the couplet of Miriam and the women in the narrative context of singing, dancing and using musical instruments, disclosed its potential to encourage women to participate in social and religious activities and contribute with their own gifts of expression and worship. Conversely, all members of the congregation are encouraged to develop expressions and forms of worship that give account of their personal way of living embodied faith.

In its universal perspective of the reign of God, the Song of the Sea aims at the establishment of peace and justice of all humanity and the whole creation. Despite the shortfalls and risks of Ex 15 as a text of violence, it has liberating power and contributes to a theology of hope and justice. The identification with the Israelites under Egyptian oppression and the experience of liberation is mediated through the “historical” event and its pertaining narrative and can lead to solidarity with sufferers of oppression today. Christian churches see their responsibility as peace-makers in the light of the Gospel of God’s universal love. The Song of the Sea can be used with good reason as a voice that contributes to such a theology of hope and justice.

VIII. Abbreviations

BBR	Bulletin for Biblical Research
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft des Alten und Neuen Testaments
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CBQ.MS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
DictBI	Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation
DictOTWisd	Dictionary of the Old Testament. Wisdom, Poetry & Writings
DictTheolIB	Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible
EThL	Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses
FS	Festschrift
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JSNT.SS	Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series
JSOT.SS	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series
NABPR	National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion
OTE	Old Testament Essays
OTSSA/OTWSA	Old Testament Society of South Africa
PRSt	Perspectives in Religious Studies
SJOT	Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament
VT	Vetus Testamentum
WCC	World Council of Churches
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testamen
WTJ	Westminster Theological Journal
ZAW	Zeitschrift für Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

IX. Bibliography

Short titles in the footnotes quote the first noun or first group of words from their respective bibliographic reference. For abbreviations look in section VIII.

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