

THE ORACLES AGAINST BABYLON IN JEREMIAH 50-51:
STRUCTURES AND PERSPECTIVES

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Of the many questions raised by the oracles against Babylon in Jeremiah 50-51, few have proved more problematical than the literary structure of the composition. On the one hand, whilst it is generally agreed that these chapters are not a literary unity but a collection of poems, there is little agreement concerning either their number and delimitation or the nature and extent of any redactional additions.¹ On the other hand, even the more straightforward outlining of the contents into sections for 'convenience' of commentary commands little more consensus regarding the

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1. Thus, e.g., T. H. Robinson ('The Structure of Jeremiah 50, 51', *JTS* 19 [1918] 251-265) isolates some fifty or so separate oracles or fragments; P. Volz (*Der Prophet Jeremia* [KAT] [Leipzig: 1928²] 422-441) finds a basic stock of five poems with numerous additions, including the sayings relating to Israel in 50:4-7,17-20,28,33-34; 51:5a,10,11b,24; G. Fohrer ('Vollmacht über Völker und Königreiche (Jer 46-51)', *BZAW* 155 [Berlin: 1981] 50-52) separates out twenty speeches along with several more or less extensive redactional strata, to one of which he assigns, like Volz, the sayings relating to Israel in 51:5,10,11b,24, adding 51:34-39,49-50,51, whilst those in 50:4-7,17-20,33-34 he assigns to the stock of separate speeches. Fohrer considers motivation for the fall of Babylon throughout the chapters to be redactional; W. Rudolph (*Jeremia* [HAT] [Tübingen: 1968³] 297-316) isolates fifteen independent poems or pieces with only a very few additions (notably, 50:17b-18,38b; 51:10,11b,28,46,57); A. Condamin (*Le Livre de Jérémie* [EB] [Paris: 1936³] 350-352) takes the chapters to be comprised of four separate compositions.

natural divisions within the material as it stands.² Indeed, the composition is commonly viewed as a loose and amorphous conglomerate in which the same stock themes recur time and time again without rhyme or reason, order or progression, and without, for the most part, indication of boundaries and interconnections between separate units - and hence viewed as lacking semblance of structure giving shape and coherence to its parts and to the whole, such coherence as it has being one simply of general theme.³

But is such a view - often expressed with pejorative implication - a fair assessment of the literary character of the composition?⁴ It is our impression that its shapelessness and structural incoherence is most often simply taken for granted and made a presupposition for the study of the text without this question being asked. One suspects that this is as much because of lack of concern with the final form of the text as a meaningful context for its interpretation⁵ as lack of any obvious patterning within it. Be that as it may, the question should be asked, and it is to this question that our paper is addressed. To anticipate, we hope we demonstrate that the composition is not a disordered and chaotic conglomerate of at best thematically related elements but rather a well-ordered complex of structurally related elements. Specifically, it will be submitted that the composition is comprised of six *movements* - as we shall call them - set within a common framework, each one of which forms a unified and relatively independent structural pattern; further, that

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2. Cf. J. Bright, *Jeremiah (AB)* (New York: 1965) 359; E. W. Nicholson, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah: Chapters 26-52 (CNEB)* (Cambridge: 1975) 201; J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah (NICOT)* (Grand Rapids: 1980) 731.
 3. C. Budde, 'Ueber die Capitel 50 und 51 des Buches Jeremia', *JDT* 23 (1878) 456-459; B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia (KHC)* (Tübingen: 1901) 360; J. P. Hyatt, *Jeremiah (IB)* (New York: 1956) 1124; A. Weiser, *Das Buch des Propheten Jeremia (ATD)* (Göttingen: 1960⁴) 427; Bright, *Jeremiah* 359; Rudolph, *Jeremia* 297; Thompson, *Jeremiah* 731.
 4. Cf. already M. Kessler, 'Rhetoric in Jeremiah 50 and 51', *Semitics* 3 (1973) 18-35.
 5. The need to reckon seriously with the final form of Old Testament prophetic texts and not just the primary literary units into which they may be deconstructed has been increasingly recognized in recent years: see, conveniently, J. F. A. Sawyer, 'A Change

through its structure each movement articulates its own particular and, in essential respects, its own distinctive perspective on the general topic of the composition, and, finally, that the six movements themselves are structured together in such a way as to articulate a perspective now informing the composition as a whole.

Before we proceed, something should be said by way of explanation of the kind of structures and perspectives that will form the object of our analysis. This we may do by describing briefly the concerns of the several steps in the analysis.

The first step is to divide the composition into its major blocks of material, that is, to delimit the several movements. For ease of presentation this division will be assumed; and in any case it stands or falls with the following steps.

The next step is to divide the movement into its major thematic or topical sections and to determine how these are structured together rhetorically. Here thematic balances, verbal repetitions and echoes will be found to play the key role in binding the sections together into a rhetorical unity. On this basis the structure of the movement will be delineated as a pattern of themes at the surface level of the text.

The third step is to restate this pattern at a deeper level, that is, to express the surface structure in terms of an underlying deep structure of which it may be regarded as an actualization.⁶ Here it is essential

of Emphasis in the Study of the Prophets', in *Israel's Prophetic Tradition: Essays in Honour of Peter R. Ackroyd*, ed. R. Coggins et al. (Cambridge: 1982) 233-249; further, K. Koch et al., *Amos untersucht mit den Methoden einer strukturalen Formgeschichte* (AOAT 30) (Neukirchen-Vluyn: 1976).

6. Here we make use of a distinction between surface and deep structures such as is found in structural analysis (cf., in general, D. Patte, *What is Structural Exegesis?* [Philadelphia: 1976]) without, however, conscious presupposition concerning the nature of deep structure or model for its analysis. As B. Nathorst states: 'Every researcher must himself set up the goals for his analysis and choose the analysis, the "recurrent units", the "relational

to define clearly the structural level at which this part of the analysis operates.⁷ A cursory reading of the text suggests that its statements can be classified into three categories. First, there are statements concerning the *situation*. These centre on Babylon's past actions against Israel, Yahweh or the nations/the whole earth, and the present conditions resulting therefrom, or, less frequently, on Israel's past actions against Yahweh. Secondly, there are statements concerning the *intervention*. These centre around Yahweh's judgement of and the fall of Babylon. Thirdly, there are statements concerning the *outcome*. These focus on the consequence of Babylon's fall as it concerns either Israel or the nations/the whole earth. It may be reasonably assumed that perspectives within the composition can be defined within the terms of these three categories. We may therefore postulate a deep structure consisting in the matrix 'situation - intervention - outcome'.⁸ The individual units within the matrix can, for convenience, be termed *ground-elements*.

qualities" and the "limits" which he conceives will best serve these goals' (*Formal or Structural Studies of Traditional Tales* [Stockholm Studies in Comparative Religion, No. 9] [Stockholm: 1969] 31).

7. 'It is important to distinguish among various levels of structural analysis and to be explicit about the level on which the analysis is being performed' (D. Patte, 'An Analysis of Narrative Structure and the Good Samaritan', *Semeia* 2 [1974] 2).
8. B. Wiklander ('The Context and Meaning of NHR 'L in Jer. 51:44', *SEA* 43 [1978] 46-50) identifies a rather similar pattern (namely, 'before - Yahweh's future intervention - after') to which he considers most of the semantic features within the text can be related. Wiklander, however, examines the pattern in relation to each of the '*dramatis personae*' (Yahweh, Babylon, Yahweh's people, the nations) and does not consider how this pattern may be actualized, in full or in part, in different sections of the composition.

We can now express the purpose of this third step as being to restate the surface structure in terms of the ground-elements specified by its parts. Thereby the structure of the movement will now appear as a pattern of ground-elements. As will emerge, the pattern establishes pairings of ground-elements in which any two may stand together in close structural relation. Throughout the composition, therefore, there are three basic kinds of pairings, namely, 'Situation - Intervention', 'Situation - Outcome', and 'Intervention - Outcome'. Each movement will be found to be made up of at least one such basic pairing, more usually of two or all three. We shall describe these pairings as the *structural components* of the movements. From the patterning of ground-elements within the movement, then, two things can be read off which together may be taken as definitive of the movement's perspective. The first is the structural components which make up the pattern, and the second is the order of precedence which the pattern accords to its structural components. This latter may be taken to reflect a gradation from the primary or major concern of the perspective to more subordinate concerns within it. Accordingly, at this level the lineaments of the movement's perspective can be defined in terms of (1) its structural components, and (2) the gradation between the components.

The next step is to flesh out the bones of this admittedly somewhat abstract definition by returning through it once again to the surface structure and examining now the nature of the specification and integration of the structural components within the text. The thematic and rhetorical aspects of the surface structure will thus now be viewed in relation to the underlying meaning-pattern which they articulate. Thereby a concrete but corresponding definition of the movement's perspective will emerge at the surface level of the text.

After each movement has been analysed in this way, the final step is to examine the relations between the movements themselves in the light of their structures and perspectives with a view to determining the structure and perspective of the composition as a whole at its highest degree of integration.

Broadly, therefore, it is the object of our paper to test and elucidate the rhetorical and semantic coherence of the composition through its several parts and as a whole, viewed as complementary and inter-related aspects of its structuring.

A word of reserve. The analysis which we are about to undertake must be regarded as being provisional in nature. This for two main reasons: first, because the method of analysis which we have just outlined is somewhat experimental in nature, and secondly, because the sheer length of the composition makes it necessary to present the analysis in a more summary and skeletal fashion than the complexity of the material analysed would merit. Reservation on these accounts should be borne in mind as we proceed.

THE FRAMEWORK: 50:2-3; (50:46); 51:54-58

First, the framework. This is found in 50:2-3, (50:46), and 51:54-58. A sequence of echoing verbal repetitions links these passages together. Thus: 50:2, *הגידו בגוים והשמיעו* 'declare among the nations and make it heard'; 50:46, *זעקה בגוים נשמע* 'a cry among the nations is heard'; 51:54, *קול זעקה מבבל* 'hark! a cry from Babylon'. The introductory summons to make heard among the nations the news of the capture of Babylon is echoed by the declaration that upon its seizure its cry will be heard among the nations. Babylon's cry now becomes the herald of its own doom. This, in turn, is echoed by the exclamation at the conclusion, as once again Babylon's cry becomes the signal to others of its downfall. The sequence forms an interlocking inclusion around the first half of the composition in chapter 50 and around the composition as a whole.⁹

In 50:2-3 and 51:54-58 the general theme of Babylon's fall is expressed through a series of salient thematic elements that recur, often in more elaborate form, within the composition. The framework may therefore be seen to perform an integrative function,

9. Neither the collocation *גוים שמע* plus *זעקה* nor *זעקה* recurs elsewhere in these chapters.

the first part being a foreshadowing of¹⁰ and the last part being a retrospection to¹¹ some of the major lines in the development of this theme.

MOVEMENT A: 50:4-20

The first movement comprises 50:4-20. It has five sections: vv.4-7, 8-10, 11-13, 14-16 and 17-20.

A close thematic correspondence and chiasmic balance binds sections one and five together. In the first (A) proclamation of the return of a repentant Israel to Zion (vv.4-5) is followed by (B) recollection of the people's past fate (vv.6-7); in the fifth (B') recollection of the people's past fate (v.17) leads through an announcement of Babylon's punishment (v.18) to (A') proclamation of Israel's restoration to their land divinely forgiven (vv.19-20). The balance AA' is reinforced by repetition of *בנימים ההמה ובעת ההיא* 'in those days and in that time', of *ישראל* 'Israel' in parallelism with *יהודה* 'Judah', and forms of the verb *בקש* 'seek', and the balance BB' by the echo between *לאן אברוח היה עמי* 'a flock straying were my people' and *שה פזורה ישראל* 'a flock scattered is Israel', and by repetition of the verb *אכל* 'devour'.

Sections two and four are similarly linked. In the second, (C) flight from Babylon (v.8) is motivated by

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10. *E.g.*, the capture (*נלכד*) of Babylon, *cf.* 50:9,24; 51:31,41; the discomfiture of Bel, *cf.* 51:44; the advent of the foe from the north, *cf.* 50:9-10,41-43; 51:48 and also the summonses to battle; the desolation and depopulation of the land, *cf.* 50:13, 39-40; 51:26,37,43.
11. *E.g.*, great destruction (*שבר גוול*, v.54), *cf.* 50:22; the advent of the enemy likened to the roaring of the sea (v.55b - so, *e.g.*, Condamin, Bright; otherwise [with emendation], Rudolph, Weiser), *cf.* 50:42; 51:42; the advent of the 'destroyer' (*שווד*, v.56), *cf.* 51:48, 53; Yahweh's requital of Babylon (v.56), *cf.* 50:29; 51:6,24; to make drunk (v.57), *cf.* 51:39; princes and wise men, governors and commanders (v.57), *cf.* 50:35 together with 51:23; sleeping a perpetual sleep (v.57), *cf.* 51:39.

(D) the imminent advent of the foe (vv.9-10); in the fourth, (D') the advent of the foe (vv.14-16a) results in (C') flight from Babylon (v.16b). The balance CC' is strengthened by the echo between נָדוּ 'flee' and יִנְסוּ 'will flee', and DD' by the echo between חֲצִיזוֹ כְּגִבּוֹר 'their arrows are like a skilled warrior' and אֶל-חַמְלֵן אֶל-חַמְלֵן אֶל-חַמְלֵן...קֶשֶׁת דֹּרְכֵי 'who handle the bow...spare no arrows', and by repetition of the verb עָרַךְ 'take up positions'.

Through these symmetries the sections are disposed in chiasmic balance around the central pivot provided by section three, in which the doom that will befall the plunderers of Yahweh's heritage is presented (vv.11-13). The movement thus has a concentric structure which may be delineated as follows:

- | | | |
|-------|----|---|
| Sec 1 | A | Israel's return (vv.4-5) |
| | B | Israel's past fate (vv.6-7) |
| Sec 2 | C | Flight from Babylon (v.8) |
| | D | The foe against Babylon (vv. 9-10) |
| Sec 3 | E | The plunderers meet their doom (vv.11-13) |
| Sec 4 | D' | The foe against Babylon (vv. 14-16a) |
| | C' | Flight from Babylon (v.16b) |
| Sec 5 | B' | Israel's past fate (v.17) |
| | F | Babylon's punishment (v.18) |
| | A' | Israel's return (vv.19-20) |

12. For MT מִשְׁכִּיל.

If we now restate this structure in terms of the ground-elements specified by its parts, it appears thus:

- A Outcome (vv.4-5)
 - B Situation (vv.6-7)
 - C Outcome (v.8)
 - D Intervention (vv.9-10)
 - E Situation - Intervention (vv.11-13)
 - D' Intervention (vv.14-16a)
 - C' Outcome (v.16b)
 - B' Situation (v.17)
 - F Intervention (v.18)
 - A' Outcome (vv.19-20)

The structure establishes three kinds of pairings of ground-elements. First, outcome and situation are brought together in AB and B'A', thereby forming the starting-point and the climax of the movement. Next, outcome and intervention are brought into connection in CD and D'C'. Finally, situation and intervention are brought together in E and again through B'F. The lineaments of the movement's perspective as articulated by its structure can therefore be defined in terms of the descending gradation between the three components: I. 'Outcome - Situation', II. 'Outcome - Intervention', and III. 'Situation - Intervention'.

I. 'Outcome - Situation' - AB:B'A'

The outcome is the return of Israel to their land. It is presented from two different but complementary view-points: first in terms of Israel's repentant return to Zion and the renewal of covenant relation with Yahweh (vv.4-5), and then in terms of Yahweh's rehabilitation of Israel in the land and the bestowal of forgiveness upon them (vv.19-20).

The situation centres on the 'devouring' (אכל) of Israel by their enemies, but each formulation has its own emphasis. In vv.6-7 the chief emphasis falls on Israel's sin which led to their falling an easy prey, whereas in v.17 the emphasis falls entirely on the fate Israel suffered at their hands.

Verses 4-5 and 6-7 are linked by repetition of the key words הלך 'go, come' and שכח 'forget' to express a contrast between Israel's future return seeking Yahweh 'weeping as they come' (הלוך ובכו ילכו) and the permanency of the covenant relationship into which they will enter (לא תשכח) 'which will not be forgotten' - between that and Israel's past desertion of Yahweh when they 'went' (הלכו) from mountain to hill as sheep who had 'forgotten' (שכחו) their fold. A contrast is drawn, then, between Israel's past and future relationship to Yahweh.

A similar though more lightly drawn contrast is made between Israel's expulsion from their land in v.17 and their restoration to the land in vv.19-20. More substantially, however, vv.19-20 are linked with vv.6-7. They share several key words which again contrast Israel's past and future, now along these lines: as once their shepherds (רעייהם) turned them away (שוּבְנִיִּם) on the mountains (הריִים), and their sin (חטאו) led to their being 'found' (מוצאיהם) by their enemies (vv.6-7), so Yahweh will turn them back (שׁוּבְנִתִּי) to graze (רעה) as sheep in security upon their mountains (הר...), for no longer will sin (חטאת) be found (תמצאנה) in Israel (vv.19-20).

At all points, therefore, Israel's future will be a commensurate reversal of its past: the outcome will reverse the situation.

II. 'Outcome - Intervention' - CD:D'C'

In vv.8 and 16b the outcome receives specification through the theme of flight from Babylon. The summons to flight is a call to Israel to return to their own land (v.8),¹³ and in their flight they will be joined by other peoples also fleeing to their homelands (v.16b).

13. Cf. D. L. Christensen, *Transformations of the War Oracle in Old Testament Prophecy* (Missoula, Montana: 1975) 259-260.

The intervention is realised through the theme of the foe as the agent of Yahweh's judgement. First, in vv.9-10 Yahweh declares his intent to bring the foe against Babylon, and then in vv.14-16a this is fulfilled as the foe is now summoned.

The intervention is introduced in vv.9-10 by way of motive for flight, and in vv.14-16a it results in flight. It is thus through the advent of the foe that the way becomes open for Israel to return: the outcome is enabled by the intervention.

III. 'Situation - Intervention' - E, B'F

The situation as presented in vv.6-7 brings into focus two aspects of Israel's fate: the guilt of Israel by reason of which they were devoured, and the enemies' claim to innocence in devouring a guilty Israel. Therewith is created a certain tension that this formulation leaves unresolved. The first aspect, that of Israel's guilt, finds ample resolution through the integration between situation and outcome. The second aspect now finds its resolution through the integration between situation and intervention.

Babylon's claim to innocence was based on the assumption that because of their sin Yahweh had severed all relations with Israel and left them entirely at their mercy. Against this, however, the formulation of the situation in v.11a affirms that Yahweh had not washed his hands of Israel; Babylon has wantonly plundered Yahweh's heritage; hence it stands indicted and its doom is proclaimed (vv.11b-13). The situation thus now motivates the intervention.

Situation and intervention are once more brought together in vv.17-18. We have already remarked on the difference in emphasis between the situation in v.17 and its earlier formulation in vv.6-7. In v.17 Israel's offence against Yahweh, so conspicuous in vv.6-7, is left unremarked. Moreover, the pastoral imagery which there gave expression to it is here picked up and transferred to express rather the enemies' offence against Israel, and with that the formulation now serves as an explicit and further indictment motivating the intervention (v.18). The evident balance between vv.6-7 and v.17, on the one hand, and these significant

shifts in view-point and function,¹⁴ on the other, nicely highlights in the last section of the movement the resolution of the tension raised by Babylon's claim to guiltlessness in the first, for which v.11a provides the pivot.¹⁵

The perspective of the movement may be summarized as follows:

| | | | |
|-----|---|------------|---|
| I | OUTCOME | - | SITUATION |
| | Israel's repentant return to Zion and the renewal of covenant relation; Yahweh's rehabilitation of Israel in their land divinely forgiven | reverses | Israel's sinful desertion of Yahweh; devoured by their enemies and driven from their land |
| II | OUTCOME | - | INTERVENTION |
| | Flight from Babylon | enabled by | The advent of the foe |
| III | SITUATION | - | INTERVENTION |
| | Babylon plundered Yahweh's heritage; devoured Israel and drove them from their land | motivates | Babylon's punishment and doom |

MOVEMENT B: 50:21-32

The next movement is found in 50:21-32. It divides into three major sections: vv.21-25, 26-28 and 29-32. Each begins with a summons to battle, which is then followed by other material elaborating on aspects of

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14. Along with which the undefined enemies of v.7 are now identified as the king of Assyria in earlier times and the king of Babylon of late.
 15. The formulation of the situation in v.14b as motivation for the summons of the foe (intervention) fits well into this progression from 50:6-7 through 11a to 17, though it is usually regarded as a gloss (LXX omits).

Babylon's judgement.

The summonses are linked through repetition of key words in step-like progression: v.21, חרב והחיים 'slay¹⁶ and utterly destroy'; vv.26-27a, החרימוה אל-תהי-לה שארית, חרבו 'utterly destroy it, let there be none remaining; slay'; v.29, אל-יהי- <לה> פלטה 'let there be no escapees!'. Further, the summons beginning the second and third section is linked by repetition to the end of the preceding section. Thus: פתח 'has opened' (v.25) / פתחו 'open' (v.26); פלטים 'escapees' (v.28) / פלטה 'escapees' (v.29). These two sequences of repetitions at the extremities serve to dispose the material into the three sections and to bind them together into a unified series.

Viewed according to length, the sections evidence an ABA' pattern. This is exemplified also, and more significantly, by a marked shift in focus within the material following the summons to battle. The first and last have in common an indictment giving the reason for judgement (v.24b,29b), whereas the middle section alone contains a saying concerning Israel (v.28). The consequent balance is reinforced by the echo between the indictments, with כִּי בִיהוּה תַגְרִית 'for it has "waged war" against Yahweh' in v.24b echoed by כִּי אֶל-יְהוָה זָרָה 'for it arrogantly defied Yahweh' in v.29b.

The structure of the movement may therefore be outlined as follows:

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|-------|-----|--|
| Sec 1 | A | Summons of the foe and Babylon's judgement
(vv.21-24a,25) |
| | B | Babylon's offence against Yahweh
(v.24b) |
| Sec 2 | A' | Summons of the foe and Babylon's
judgement (vv.26-27) |
| | C | Israel's flight to Zion (v.28) |
| Sec 3 | A'' | Summons of the foe and Babylon's judgement
(vv.29a,30-32) |
| | B' | Babylon's offence against Yahweh
(v.29b) |

16. A denominative from חרב, 'sword' (so Rudolph, Bright, Thompson).

Expressed in terms of ground-elements, the structure is now:

- A Intervention (vv.21-24a,25)
- B Situation (v.24b)
- A' Intervention (vv.26-27)
- C Outcome (v.28)
- A" Intervention (vv.29a,30-32)
- B' Situation (v.29b)

The structure exhibits two different pairings of ground-elements, namely intervention with situation, brought together in the first and last sections of the movement (AB:A"B'), and intervention with outcome, brought together in the middle section (A'C). The basic character of this movement's perspective is thus definable in terms of the gradation between the two components: I. 'Intervention - Situation', and II. 'Intervention - Outcome'.

I. 'Intervention - Situation' - AB:A"B'

In each of the three sections the intervention is first realised through a summons to battle. The repetition linking them together highlights their common emphasis on the totality of Babylon's destruction: it must be utterly destroyed (v.21), utterly destroyed without remainder (v.26), and with none escaping (v.29).

The situation centres on Babylon's offence against Yahweh himself: it has 'waged war' against Yahweh (v.24b) and has presumed in high-handed arrogance to challenge and rebel against his authority (v.29b). Besides these two explicit formulations and reinforcing them, this same situation also receives implicit specification through the designations of Babylon as the 'land of Merathaim', that is, of 'Two-Fold Rebellion',¹⁷ in v.21 and as the 'Defiant One' (דַּבְּרָה) in vv.31-32. The basis for Babylon's offence against Yahweh receives in passing particularization in v.23 through the description of Babylon as the 'hammer of the whole earth'. It is thus through its bid for world dominion, in the course of which Babylon waged war against the

17. For the play on the words involved, see the commentaries.

whole earth, that it has rebelled and 'waged war' against Yahweh in proud defiance of his authority.

In their immediate context, v.24b provides motivation for Babylon's capture and v.29b for the summons of the foe. In v.21 'land of Merathaim' stands in parallelism with 'inhabitants of Pekod', that is, 'Punishment',¹⁸ and likewise in v.31 the designation 'Defiant One' occurs in connection with the time of its punishment, the implication being in each case that Babylon is punished for its rebellion against Yahweh. Thus, varied but complementary expressions of the situation are woven together with various aspects of the intervention to provide its motivation. Moreover, they are woven together in a carefully balanced manner within the movement, first implicitly at the beginning (v.21) and again at the end (vv.31-32) through designations for Babylon linked with its punishment (תַּפֹּס), and then explicitly through corresponding indictments in the middle of the first (v.24b) and last (v.29b) sections. Thereby the relation between intervention and situation places its stamp upon the development of the movement as a whole.

II. 'Intervention - Outcome' - A'C

Following the intervention in vv.26-27, the outcome receives specification in v.28 as the focus now shifts to Israel in the course of fleeing from the land to declare to Zion Yahweh's vengeance upon Babylon. Israel becomes the herald of Babylon's judgement. Here, therefore, the outcome is viewed essentially in terms of making declaration of the intervention.

We may summarize the perspective of the movement as follows:

| I | INTERVENTION | - | SITUATION |
|---|---|--------------|---|
| | The advent of the foe and Babylon's total destruction | motivated by | Babylon's rebellion against Yahweh in proud defiance of his authority in its bid for world domination |

18. For the play on the words involved, see the commentaries.

| II INTERVENTION | - | OUTCOME |
|---|---|----------------------------|
| The advent of the
foe and Babylon's
total destruction | | Israel's
flight to Zion |

MOVEMENT C: 50:33-46

The third movement comprises 50:33-46. It has five sections: vv.33-34, 35-38, 39-40, 41-43 and 44-46.

A certain balance can be discerned between sections one and five in that, as we shall see, they share a marked emphasis on Yahweh's ability to execute his purpose and Babylon's inability to frustrate it. Further, they are linked by the repetition and assonance between *חַרְגִּיעַ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ* 'give rest to the earth' (v.34) and *אֲרִיגְעָה אֲרוּצִים* 'I will suddenly chase them away' (v.44).

Sections two and four appear likewise to be balanced around section three. The third section centres directly on Babylon's final doom, whereas they centre on the agents of its doom, as now the sword is summoned and now the foe advances against Babylon. In addition, however, both these sections also evidence links with section one. The first and second are linked by repetition of *יֹשְׁבֵי בָבֶל* 'inhabitants of Babylon' (vv.34,35),¹⁹ and by the strong assonance between *רִיב יִרְיֵב אֶת־רִיבָם* 'he will surely take up their cause' (v.34) and the emphatic six-fold *חֶרֶב* 'sword' (vv.35-38).²⁰ The first and fourth sections are linked through repetitions of the root *חָזַק* (vv.34,35,42,43).

19. These are the only two instances of the expression within chapter 50.

20. Reading *חָרַב* for MT *חֶרֶב* in v.38.

The structure of the movement may, accordingly, be delineated as follows:

- Sec 1 A Israel's captivity and Yahweh's ability to
 deliver them (vv.33-34)
- Sec 2 B The sword against Babylon (vv.35-38)
- Sec 3 C Babylon's doom (vv.39-40)
- Sec 4 B' The foe against Babylon (vv.41-43)
- Sec 5 A' Yahweh's ability to exact judgement upon
 Babylon (vv.44-46)

Restated, the structure now appears thus:

- A Situation - Intervention (vv.33-34)
- B Intervention (vv.35-38)
- C Intervention (vv.39-40)
- B' Intervention (vv.41-43)
- A' Intervention (vv.44-46)

It will be observed that the concentricity as it appears at the surface level is not reflected at the deep level. Here situation and intervention are brought into connection in the first section, but thereafter intervention occurs throughout the remaining sections. The structure thus establishes only the one pairing of ground-elements, namely 'Situation - Intervention' (A), with the Intervention then evidently receiving several amplifications (BCB'A'). Hence the lineaments of the movement's perspective are definable in terms of the single component 'Situation - Intervention'.

'Situation - Intervention' - A; BCB'A'

The situation in v.33 has two related aspects: that Israel is held captive, and that their captors refuse to release them.

The intervention in v.34 is realised through an affirmation of Yahweh's strength as Israel's Redeemer, followed by a declaration that he will take up his people's cause and 'give unrest' (זַרְגִּיט) to Babylon.

Verses 33 and 34 are bound together by contrastive repetition and play on the root חזק. Thereby both the situation and the intervention receive sharpened and complementary focus: the crux of the situation is Babylon's presumption to thwart Yahweh's purpose for the deliverance of his people by keeping a 'strong hold' (חזיקו) on them, and the crux of the intervention is its manifestation of the strength (חזק) by which Yahweh will compel Babylon to release its grip on Israel. Situation and intervention come together, therefore, as a contest of strengths between Babylon and Yahweh with Israel as the prize; but an uneven one - assurance is given - for in the event Babylon's determination to retain hold of Israel will prove of little consequence.²¹

In vv.44-46, which stand in balance with vv.33-34, the intervention is now realised along the lines of a comparison of Yahweh's judgement to the attack of a lion against a sheep-fold. The phrase ארבעה ארוצם 'I will suddenly chase them away' in v.44, through its link with הרגיע את-הארץ 'give rest to the earth' in v.34, contrasts Yahweh's purpose for Babylon with his purpose for the earth across the limits of the movement as a whole in much the same way as they are contrasted within v.34 itself through the assonance between הרגיע 'give rest' and הרגילו 'give unrest'. This marked, albeit indirect, link-up with הרגילו 'give unrest', the key word denoting Yahweh's action against Babylon in v.34, underlines the last section of the movement as being an amplification of the intervention adumbrated more briefly in the first. And significantly, here also the emphasis on the power and ability of Yahweh so to intervene receives amplification through the series of rhetorical questions in v.44: there is none like him, none who can summon him, no ruler who can withstand him; in short, none who

21. Since v.34 reflects Yahweh's purpose as being the redemption of Israel and the giving of rest to the whole earth, the outcome may also be considered to receive implicit specification. However, the central concern in v.34 lies less with the nature of Yahweh's purpose than with his ability to execute it by taking action against Babylon in view of its determination to frustrate it - it lies less with the outcome than with the intervention. The following amplifications of the intervention without further reference to Israel comport with this central concern governing its introduction in relation to the situation in these verses.

can frustrate his purpose. In the light of this balance between these two sections, the qualification of the sheep-fold as אֵיתָן in v.44 assumes greater force. It evokes the notion of firmness and permanency, and thus of the strength and endurance of Babylon by whom Israel is strongly held; but it will prove to be fragile and transient when the lion attacks. The contest of strengths will be a 'no-contest'!

In the balancing sections vv.35-38 and 41-43, the intervention is now presented through the summons of a 'sword' and then through a description of the advance of the foe. The repetition of יֹשְׁבֵי בָבֶל 'inhabitants of Babylon' between vv.34 and 35, first designating those against whom Yahweh will take action and then those against whom, comprehensively, the sword is summoned, together with the assonance between רִיב and חֶרֶב, serves to present the sword as the agent through which Yahweh will take action in his people's cause as adumbrated in v.34. Similarly, the contrastive repetition of the root חֶזַק by which vv.41-43 are linked to vv.33-34 serves to present the advance of the foe as yet a further amplification of the intervention in v.34. In both cases the amplification maintains and expands the relation of the intervention to the situation as a contest of strengths. Thus, in vv.35-38 the sword is summoned against the representatives of Babylon's political, religious, military and economic strength - the strength, indeed, by which Israel is held and which poses a challenge to Yahweh's purpose for their deliverance. Against the sword, however, they prevail nothing: its princes and wise men fall, its diviners become fools, its soldiers are seized with dismay and its mercenaries become as women, its treasures are plundered and its irrigations are destroyed. The sword, through which Yahweh manifests his strength, brings about a reversal in which Babylon's strength dissolves into weakness. Then, within vv.41-43 the repetition of the root חֶזַק draws a contrast between the threat of the advancing foe and its effect upon the king: the very report of the foe's advance, of its fierceness and formidable strength as they 'grasp hold' (יִחְזִיקוּ, v.42) of bow and blade, evokes such terror in the king that anguish 'grasps hold' (הִחְזִיקָהוּ, v.43) of him, rendering him helpless and impotent. Thus once more, now through the foe and even before battle is joined, there is brought about a reversal in which the strength of Babylon, as represented by the king, dissolves into weakness. When Yahweh manifests his strength to break

Babylon's hold on his people through the foe, no longer will it be Israel that is held fast (החזיקו, v.33) by Babylon, but Babylon that will be held fast (החזיקתהו, v.43) by a paralysing terror.

Finally, the intervention in vv.39-40 centres on Babylon's ultimate doom likened to the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah. Here too there appears to be a link back to v.34 through the echo between ישבי בבל 'inhabitants of Babylon' and its four-fold recurrence of the verb ישב 'to inhabit'. The designation 'inhabitants of Babylon' emerges as ironical, for Babylon's fate is to become a habitation of desert creatures, without human inhabitant.

The perspective of this movement can be summarized as follows:

| SITUATION | - | INTERVENTION |
|---|--------------|---|
| Babylon's presumption to thwart Yahweh's purpose for the deliverance of Israel by keeping a strong hold on them | contested by | Yahweh's manifestation of his strength to exact judgement on Israel's behalf: through the sword and the foe
Babylon's strength dissolves into weakness and it meets its doom |

MOVEMENT D: 51:1-33

The fourth movement comprises 51:1-33. It may be divided into six sections of greater or lesser complexity: vv.1-2, 3-5, 6-10, 11-19, 20-26 and 27-33.

A marked thematic contrast expressed through repetition of key words binds sections one and five together: Yahweh will stir up the 'spirit of a destroyer' (משחית, v.1) on the 'day of evil' (רעה, v.2), against the 'Destroyer' (המשחית, v.25), who has done 'evil' (רעה, v. 24).

The three sections enclosed within this thematic frame evidence a certain symmetry in that each begins with a summons - either to battle (vv.3,²² 11aa,12a²³) or to flight (v.6) - and ends with a saying concerned with Israel (vv.5,10,15-19). Moreover, they are disposed in an ABA' pattern through the summonses to battle enclosing the summons to flight.

Within the third section itself a further ABA' pattern emerges. The summons to flight in v.6 is balanced by an echoing summons in v.9b, to which v.10 is connected. They enclose the 'cup' and 'healing' sayings in vv.7-9a, which elaborate on Babylon's doom.

The sixth section begins with a summons to battle and ends with a divine proclamation of judgement in which Babylon is likened to a threshing floor levelled in preparation for the harvest (v.33). This imagery connects with the winnowing of the land in v.2 to link the first and last sections together and to provide an inclusion around the movement as a whole.

On the basis of these observations, the structure of the movement can be outlined as follows:

- | | | |
|-------|-----|--|
| Sec 1 | A | The destroyer on the day of evil (vv.1-2) |
| Sec 2 | B | Summons of the foe, for Israel is not
'widowed' (vv.3-5) |
| Sec 3 | C | Summons to flight (v.6) |
| | D | Babylon's doom (vv.7-9a) |
| | C' | Summons to flight and Israel's
vindication (vv.9b-10) |
| Sec 4 | B' | Summons of the foe and Israel's God
(vv.11-19) |
| Sec 5 | A' | The destruction of the Destroyer for evil
done (vv.20-26) |
| Sec 6 | B'' | Summons of the foe (vv.27-33) |

22. Deleting אַל and אַל with LXX, and קַרְבַּן with Qere in v.3a and rendering 'Let the bowman bend his bow, let him assail in his armour' (so Condamin; cf. Volz).

23. Omitting v.11ab,b as a gloss with most commentators.

Restated in terms of ground-elements, the structure now appears:

- A Intervention (vv.1-2)
- B Intervention - Situation (vv.3-5)
- C Outcome (v.6)
- D Intervention (vv.7-9a)
- C' Outcome (vv.9b-10)
- B' Intervention (vv.11-19)
- A' Intervention - Situation (vv.20-26)
- B" Intervention (vv.27-33)

The structure exhibits two kinds of pairings of ground-elements, namely 'Intervention - Situation' through the symmetry AB:B'A', and 'Outcome - Intervention' through the symmetry CDC'. There is, however, an imbalance in the distribution of intervention and situation between the balancing sections AA' and BB'. Intervention stands alone in A and B', but stands alongside situation in B and A'. Further, there is a disproportion in length between AB with its five verses and B'A' with its sixteen verses. These together tend to offset or at least reduce the force of the balance between the sections in favour of intervention. The disproportion, moreover, tends to shift the weight of emphasis to the second half of the concentric structure as against a balance of emphasis between both halves. Hence it would appear that working alongside the concentric there is also a climactic ordering of material within the movement giving emphasis to intervention. It is to be observed that the final lengthy section with its exclusive focus on intervention fits into the climactic aspect of the movement's structure, even though it lies outside the concentric pattern.

Allowing for the climactic force of intervention, the movement's perspective can therefore be defined in terms of the gradation between the two components: I. 'Intervention - Situation', and II. 'Outcome - Intervention'.

I. 'Intervention - Situation' - AB:B'A'; B"

In vv.1-2 the intervention is realised through Yahweh's declaration that he will stir up the 'spirit of a destroyer' against Babylon and bring winnowers²⁴ to winnow the land. This is balanced by vv.20-26. The import of the 'hammer speech' in vv.20-23 is uncertain, since it is not clear whether the hammer refers to Babylon, and is therefore a realisation of situation,²⁵ or to the agent of Yahweh's judgement upon Babylon, and is therefore a realisation of intervention.²⁶ Though it is difficult to decide, its context within the section and the balance of the section with vv.1-2 weigh in favour of the latter, and this would also accord better with the climactic build-up in the second part of the movement which lays emphasis on intervention. In that case, Yahweh's declaration in vv.1-2 is here amplified as, now under the figure of the hammer by which he 'destroys' (הַשְׁחִיב), the 'spirit of a destroyer' is summoned into being and its destructive powers enunciated.

In the course of the further presentation of the intervention in vv.24-26, the situation also receives specification. Here it has two foci: Babylon's offence against Israel, more specifically, against Zion (v.24b), and its offence against the whole earth (v.25a). Babylon's offences provide motivation for the intervention within this section, but at the same time also link up with the intervention as formulated earlier in vv.1-2, through which connection intervention and situation are contrasted in the same terms and made commensurate: Yahweh will bring a destroyer against the Destroyer of the whole earth; he will bring an evil day upon Babylon for the evil it has done in Zion.

The expression of the intervention in vv.1-2 as a response motivated by the situation, which emerges through its balance with vv.20-26, seems already to be

24. Reading זָרִים for מַרְיָם.

25. So, e.g., Volz, Rudolph, Weiser, Bright, Thompson.

26. So, most recently, G. Fohrer, *Die Propheten des Alten Testaments*, IV (Gütersloh: 1975), 36-37; Nicholson; cf. also the NEB rendering.

adumbrated in v.1 itself through the designation 'inhabitants of *לב קמלי*', literally, 'the heart of those who rise up against me'. Although an *Atbash* for 'Chaldea', in divine speech *לב קמלי* is suggestive of Babylon's rebellion against Yahweh.²⁷ It is thus an implicit specification of the situation focused on Babylon's offence against Yahweh himself, which, together with the intervention of vv.1-2, is expanded in vv.20-26 as its offence now becomes particularized.

Within this structural and thematic framework, in the balancing sections vv.3-5 and 11-19 the intervention is specified through a summons to battle, as now the 'spirit of a destroyer' and the 'hammer' assume shape in the foe. In vv.3-5 motivation for the summoning of the foe is given in v.5. The presentation of the situation in v.5 complements its presentation in v.24b by setting out the present circumstance resulting from Babylon's past offence against Israel - as we should construe the text:²⁸ by reason of its offence Babylon is guilty before Yahweh, whilst its victim Israel is neither bereft nor forsaken by him. Then, in vv.11-19 the summons to battle is followed first by a pronouncement of divine judgement reinforced by solemn oath and then by a hymn of praise. The hymn in vv.15-19 contrasts the impotence and worthlessness of images - by implication the images of Babylon - and the power and effectiveness of the God of Israel. The expression 'Yahweh of Hosts' at the end of the hymn links it most directly with the preceding oath sworn by 'Yahweh of Hosts' in v.14, and it would appear that the hymn likewise serves to reinforce the certainty of Babylon's judgement by affirming Yahweh's power to intervene, their images notwithstanding.

The climactic build-up emphasising the intervention, which begins with this section and continues through the next, is brought to a fitting conclusion in vv.27-33. The summons to battle with which it begins links it in climactic series with sections two and four, but the summons to battle is now at its most elaborate and is now also developed almost in narrative style by a description of the outcome of the battle on the land, Babylon's warriors and the city itself, followed by a report of its outcome to the king. The proclamation of

27. Cf. Volz and Rudolph.

28. With Rudolph; cf. Bright.

judgement with which it ends in v.33 then links it with section one by means of its imagery, hence bringing the intervention back to its starting-point.

II. 'Outcome - Intervention' - CDC'

In vv.6 and 9b-10 the outcome is specified through the theme of flight. In view of v.5, the summons in v.6 would appear to be addressed to Israel. Whether v.9b also has Israel in view is less clear.²⁹ In any event, the significance for Israel of flight from Babylon is crystallized in v.10 as they make exclamation of Yahweh's work of vindication and head for Zion to make it known.

The intervention in vv.7-9a centres on Babylon's doom set against its former role as the 'golden cup in Yahweh's hand' poured out in judgement upon the nations. This description of Babylon represents a further formulation of the situation which amplifies v.25a: as the destroyer of the whole earth, Babylon was the instrument of Yahweh's judgement. Babylon itself, however, is now judged: the 'cup' is shattered, fatally wounded, without healing.

Verses 7-9a develop by way of an expansion of the intervention as stated summarily as the motivation for flight in v.6, and, correspondingly, are summarized as the motive for flight in v.9b. Accordingly, within this section as a whole the intervention is integrated with the summons to flight by providing its motivation. The outcome will be enabled by the intervention.

We may summarize the perspective of the movement as follows:

29. אִישׁ לְאַרְצוֹ best suits a reference to other peoples, as in 50:16b, perhaps more specifically to foreign doctors summoned to heal Babylon (Volz, Rudolph, Weiser). The continuation of 1st person speech into v.10 suggests, however, that Israel might also be in view in v.9b.

| | | | |
|----|---|---|---|
| I | INTERVENTION | - | SITUATION |
| | The advent of the destroyer/the hammer/the foe; Yahweh's power to intervene | | motivated by Babylon has risen up against Yahweh, destroyed the whole earth and done evil in Zion: Babylon is guilty; Israel is not 'widowed' |
| II | OUTCOME | - | INTERVENTION |
| | Flight from Babylon and Israel's vindication | | enabled by Babylon's judgement and doom |

MOVEMENT E: 51:34-44

The next movement is found in 51:34-44. It has five sections: vv.34-35, 36-37, 38-40, 41-43 and 44.

The first and last sections are linked by contrastive repetition of the key-word בלע 'swallow'. Thus, in the first, the king of Babylon has 'swallowed' (בלענן, v.34) Zion like a monster; in the last, Yahweh will take out of the mouth of Bel, the divine king, what he has 'swallowed' (בלעו, v.44).

A close thematic correspondence likewise binds sections two and four together. In the second Yahweh proclaims the doom of Babylon, and in the fourth this then becomes the subject of a lament over Babylon. The balancing of these sections is reinforced by repetition of ים 'sea' (vv.36,42), גלים 'rubble heaps, waves' (vv.37,42), and שמה 'horror' (vv.37,41,43), and by the echo between אין יושב 'without inhabitant' (v.37) and לא ישב 'there shall not inhabit' (v.43).

The movement has therefore a concentric structure, with the speech concerning the banquet Yahweh will prepare for Babylon in section three (vv.38-40) forming the central pivot. It can first be outlined and then restated appropriately as follows:

- Sec 1 A The king of Babylon has swallowed Zion
 (vv.34-35)
- Sec 2 B The doom Yahweh will meet upon Babylon
 (vv.36-37)
- Sec 3 C The banquet Yahweh will prepare
 for Babylon (vv.38-40)
- Sec 4 B' Lament over Babylon's doom (vv.41-43)
- Sec 5 A' Yahweh will take out of the mouth of Bel
 what he has swallowed (v.44)
- A Situation (vv.34-35)
- B Intervention (vv.36-37)
- C Intervention (vv.38-40)
- B' Intervention (vv.41-43)
- A' Outcome (v.44)

It is evident that the concentricity is not well reflected in the distribution of ground-elements, since situation appears in A but outcome in A', whilst intervention appears throughout BCB'. It seems, then, that working alongside the concentric ordering of material there is also an ordering according to a line of progression from situation through intervention to outcome.

The structure exhibits three kinds of pairings of ground-elements. First, situation and outcome are connected through the symmetry AA'. Next, intervention stands in connection with both situation and outcome through the symmetry AB:B'A', with intervention receiving further elaboration in C. Inasmuch as intervention is connected with situation and outcome at balancing points within the structure, there is no differentiation in precedence between the two pairings. Hence the perspective of the movement is definable in terms of the gradation between the components: I. 'Situation - Outcome', and II. 'Situation - Intervention / Intervention - Outcome'.

I. 'Situation - Outcome' - AA'

The situation in vv.34-35 centres on Babylon's offence against Israel, expressed figuratively through the imagery of Nebuchadrezzar swallowing Zion like a gluttonous monster, shredding its flesh and shedding its blood. In v.44 the outcome is the deliverance of Israel, expressed through the corresponding imagery of Yahweh compelling Bel to disgorge what he has swallowed.³⁰ The situation will thus be reversed by the outcome.

II. 'Situation - Intervention / Intervention - Outcome'
- ABCB'A'

In vv.34-35 the situation is presented in the form of a lament by Zion over its fate, followed by a plea for Yahweh to exact retribution upon Babylon. Yahweh responds, in the first instance, in vv.36-37. He declares that he will take up his people's cause and proclaims Babylon's doom: its sea (ים) will be dried up and it will become a rubble heap (גללים), an object evoking horror (שמה), without inhabitant (אין יושב). The intervention is therefore here introduced by way of divine response to the oppressed Zion's plea for retribution.

In vv.38-40 the divine response is now presented along the lines of a banquet which Yahweh will prepare. Yet another feast awaits those who feasted on Zion, but one in which Babylon's role is reversed with the devourer now becoming the devoured: Babylon, like avaricious lions eager to devour, will fall into a drunken stupor and be carried off like lambs to the slaughter.

With this reversal, appropriately lament is now made in taunt over the doom of Babylon in vv.41-43, balancing the divine response to Zion's lament in vv.36-37: Babylon has become an object of horror (שמה), another sea (ים) has swept over it engulfing it in its waves (גלים), leaving it uninhabited (לא ישב).

30. See the discussion by Wiklander, 'Context and Meaning of NHR 'L' 56-61.

In the first line of v.44 the intervention receives summary formulation through Yahweh's affirmation that he would punish Bel. This then leads directly to the formulation of Israel's deliverance from oppression. The intervention thus enables the outcome.

The movement's perspective can be summarized thus:

| | | | |
|---|------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------------|
| I | SITUATION | - | OUTCOME |
| | Babylon has swallowed Israel | reversed by | Yahweh makes Babylon disgorge Israel |

| | | | | | |
|----|---|---|--------------|---|---------|
| II | SITUATION | - | INTERVENTION | - | OUTCOME |
| | Babylon has swallowed Israel; Israel pleads for retribution | | | | |

motivates

Yahweh takes up
his people's
cause: the
banquet and
Babylon's doom

enables

Yahweh makes
Babylon disgorge
Israel

MOVEMENT F: 51:45-53

The final movement comprises 51:45-53. It divides into five sections: vv.45-46, 47-48, 49, 50-51 and 52-53.

The first two and last two sections share the same basic pattern consisting of a summons to flight, an exhortation, and a proclamation of judgement. The symmetry between the two sequences is strengthened by balancing terms. The summonses are linked by the echo between מלטו 'save' and פלטים 'escapees' (vv.45,50), the exhortations by repetition of לנבוכם (vv.46,50) and the root שמע 'hear' (vv. 46,51), and the judgement speeches

(vv.47-48,52-53) by the repetitions לכן הנה ימים באים 'therefore behold days are coming', פקדתי על-פסילי בבל 'I will punish the images of Babylon', כל-ארצה 'its whole land', חלל 'slain, wounded', שמים 'heavens' and יבוא-לה השודדים 'destroyers will come against it'. The third section forms the pivot between the two corresponding sequences, and is linked most closely with the judgement speeches through its recurrences of חלל 'slain'.

The movement, accordingly, has a panel-like ABA' structure, with two panels balanced around a central pivot.³¹ Its structure may be delineated and thereupon restated as follows:

- | | | |
|-------|----|---|
| Sec 1 | A | Summons to flight and exhortation not to fear (vv.45-46) |
| Sec 2 | B | Babylon's judgement (vv.47-48) |
| Sec 3 | C | Babylon falls for the slain of Israel (v.49) |
| Sec 4 | A' | Summons to flight and exhortation to remember Yahweh and Jerusalem (vv.50-51) |
| Sec 5 | B' | Babylon's judgement (vv.52-53) |
| | A | Outcome (vv.45-46) |
| | B | Intervention (vv.47-48) |
| | C | Intervention - Situation (v.49) |
| | A' | Outcome (vv.50-51) |
| | B' | Intervention (vv.52-53) |

31. Vv.44b-49a are omitted by LXX through haplography. In light of the symmetries within the composition to date, the suggestion that 44b-49a and 49b-53 are old variants conflated in MT (J. G. Janzen, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah* [Cambridge, Mass., 1973] 119) seems unnecessary.

The perspective of this movement can be defined as a gradation between the components: I. 'Outcome - Intervention', brought together in AB:A'B', and II. 'Intervention - Situation', brought together in C.

I. 'Outcome - Intervention - AB:A'B'

In vv.45 and 50 the outcome receives specification in the form of a summons to Israel to flee from Babylon. Each summons is immediately followed by an exhortation. In v.46 Israel is exhorted not to be faint of heart (לִבָּ) nor fearful, and in v.50b they are exhorted to remember Yahweh and let Jerusalem be upon their hearts (לִבָּ). The exhortations are designed to counter despondency and despair, and in each case the source of this is then introduced as something 'heard' (שָׁמַע). In v.46 what is heard is a seemingly endless stream of reports concerning disturbances in the land: the vyings of powers and potentates for domination, which readily engendered in Israel feelings of helplessness and insignificance as well as uncertainty about the future.³² In v.51 what is heard is reproach brought upon Israel by the desecration of the sanctuary of their God, which bode ill for the power of Yahweh to help them.

The presentations of the intervention in vv.47-48 and 52-53 provide grounds for the exhortations: Yahweh will exact judgement upon Babylon; its gods, mere images, will be cast down and throughout its whole land the slain will fall, for Yahweh is bringing destroyers against them.

Within the movement, the immediacy of the outcome as implied by the summonses to flight is qualified in the judgement speeches as 'not yet'. Yahweh's intervention, which will enable Israel's flight home, will be in days coming. The exhortations, which represent a new element within the composition, seek to inculcate for the time being faith in Yahweh and confidence in the future of Jerusalem.

II. 'Intervention - Situation' - C

In v.49 the intervention receives further brief realization through the affirmation that Babylon must fall, giving emphasis, as in the judgement speeches, to

32. So, e.g., Bright and Thompson. Volz and Rudolph view the disturbances in v.46, however, as eschatological in nature.

its certainty. Here, however, it is now presented as being on account of the 'slain of Israel',³³ and thus as motivated by way of retaliation for Babylon's offence against Israel.

The movement's perspective can be summarized as follows:

| I | OUTCOME | - | INTERVENTION |
|---|---------------------|------------|---|
| | Flight from Babylon | enabled by | Punishment of Babylon and its images through the advent of destroyers |

provide grounds for

EXHORTATION

present faith in Yahweh and confidence
in the future of Jerusalem

| II | INTERVENTION | - | SITUATION |
|----|----------------|--------------|--|
| | Babylon's fall | motivated by | The slain of Israel who have fallen to Babylon |

THE COMPOSITION AS A WHOLE

Having examined the structures and perspectives of the individual movements, we now move on to the question of the structure and perspective of the composition as a whole.

The inclusion noticed earlier between 50:2 and 50:46 connects the first three movements together and separates them, in the first instance, from those in chapter 51.

33. Reading לללל for MT ללל in v.49a.

There is a marked symmetry between movements A and C. Both consist of five major sections arranged in concentric form. The first section in each movement comprises a speech concerned with Israel (vv.4-7, 33-34). They have in common specification of the situation. Though their viewpoints differ, the specifications are formulated in a corresponding manner, with the lament **צאן אברות היה עמי כל מוצאיהם** 'a flock straying were my people...all who found them' in vv.6-7 echoed by the lament **עשוקים בני ישראל כל שביהם** 'oppressed are the children of Israel...all who captured them' in v.33. Then again, their second and fourth sections have in common specification of the intervention through the theme of the foe as the agent of Yahweh's judgement (vv.8-10, 14-16, 35-38, 41-43), specialized, however, in the second section of C in terms of the 'sword' wielded against Babylon (vv.35-38). Further, by contrast, in their third section the focus of the intervention now shifts from the agent to Babylon's ultimate doom (vv.11-13, 39-40). Different here as the presentations are, they have in common the theme of Babylon becoming a waste in which no man dwells (**לא תשב**, vv.13,39). The fifth section in each movement is quite different in that in A it centres on Israel (vv.17-20) whereas in C it centres on Babylon's judgement (vv.44-46). Both sections, however, share the imagery of a lion ravaging sheep, in v.17 expressing the fate of Israel and in vv.44-46, appropriately, expressing now the fate of Babylon.

This distribution of related thematic material to identical positions within the concentric structure of movements A and C is remarkable. But alongside this marked symmetry, there is a no less marked difference and, indeed, progression in perspective. The leading concerns in the perspective of A is to announce the prospect of the return of Israel to Yahweh and to their land as a reversal of their past fate and as made possible through flight from Babylon when Yahweh takes action against it. The prospect it is at pains to proclaim, accordingly, hinges on Yahweh's intervention. But - and here movement C - the Israelites are held captive by no mean power, and their captors are determined to keep hold of them, assuming - and the Israelites would fear, with justification - that they had the power to do so. Is Yahweh able to execute his purpose for the deliverance of his people? It is the sole concern in the perspective of this movement to

affirm that Yahweh is indeed able to accomplish it and Babylon unable to frustrate it.

The major concern in the perspective of movement B centres on the intervention as motivated by the situation posed by Babylon's arrogant rebellion against Yahweh in its bid for world domination. Focus on the prospect of Israel's return is, nevertheless, sustained as a subordinate concern. In the movement, therefore, Israel's return is set within the context of Yahweh's judgement of the world-power.

The inclusion of movement B between the balancing movements A and C serves likewise to place their leading concerns with the situation and prospects of Israel within this same larger context. If we take the three movements together, however, the precedences accorded within movement B are inverted, with now Israel occupying the position of major concern and Yahweh's judgement of the world-power forming its subordinate contextualization.

Chapter 51 also has three movements. Movements E and F share two features that link them together over against movement D. First, the theme of the foe as the agent of judgement, so conspicuous in D, finds only indirect allusion in E and F. They contain no summonses to battle and their military imagery is slight. Secondly, the community of Israel comes into view in a way that is quite distinctive of the last two movements. In E the voice of the community is heard for the first time in its present state of oppression, and in F the community is now addressed for the first time with exhortations designed to sustain them in their oppressed state. These features, however, set E and F apart not only from D but also from A, B and C, and, conversely, align D more closely with the first three than with the last two movements.

The major concern in the perspective of D centres on the intervention as motivated by the situation. Most striking are its several presentations of the situation. These bring together Babylon's offence against Israel, against Yahweh, and against the whole earth. There is thus a more comprehensive range to the presentation of the situation in D than in any other movement, in which its main areas of concern are drawn together. Further, the elaborated summons of the foe which forms its climax is the fullest presentation of this kind of

specification of intervention not only within D itself but also within the composition, and thereafter it is not specified in this manner. Hence both aspects of the major concern of the movement, both situation and intervention, bear a summary or climactic character within the composition.

The summary character of D in relation to the first three movements is further exemplified in the three sayings concerned with Israel in 51:5, 10 and 15-19. First, 51:5 echoes 50:6-7, where Babylon asserted that it was not guilty (לֹא נִשְׂאָא) on the assumption that because of their sin Israel had been deserted by Yahweh. This is picked up and reversed in 51:5: Israel are not 'widowed' by their God, and Babylon is guilty (שֹׂאָא) before him. Next, 51:10 echoes 50:28. There Israel flees from Babylon to declare in Zion (לְהַגִּיד בְּצִיּוֹן) Yahweh's vengeance, and here to recount in Zion (בְּסִפְרָה בְּצִיּוֹן) his work of vindication. Finally, 51:15-19 connects with the tenor of movement C, which has a like emphasis on Yahweh's power and ability to intervene. And both the hymn and the affirmation of Yahweh's strength in 50:34 contain the expression יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת שְׁמֵן 'Yahweh of Hosts is his name'. Movement D thus evidences close links with the first three movements as they pertain especially to Israel, following exactly the same sequence as the three movements themselves. The situation in 51:5 echoes the situation in A, the outcome in 51:10 echoes the outcome in B, and the intervention in 51:15-19 echoes the intervention in C.

In its basic character, therefore, movement D is less a progression beyond the first three movements than a summarizing formulation of their concerns as the composition achieves a certain climax devolving primarily on the theme of the advent of the foe. The climactic thrust which we found earlier to mark the second part of the movement itself is thus a corollary of its role within the composition.

The last two movements, as we have remarked, share a distinctive kind of focus on the community of Israel in its present state of oppression.

In movement E the community is heard for the first time giving voice to its plight by lamenting its fate at the hands of Babylon. This provides the starting-point of the movement, and it ends with a divine proclamation of the people's deliverance. The lament and its

reversal, through which the situation and the outcome are realised, form the major concern in the movement's perspective.

Elsewhere in the composition situation and outcome are brought together into direct relation only in movement A, where also they form the leading concern. The formulation of the situation in 51:34-35 is, indeed, directly linked with its formulation in A at 50:17 through repetition of אכל 'devour' as a theme word expressing Israel's fate, and by repetition of 'Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon' as the offender. Moreover, the imagery of the banquet in 51:38-40 stands in contrast not only with the devouring of Israel in 51:34-35 but also again in 50:17 through contrastive repetition of אריות 'lions'. Movement E thus returns to the major concern of A, but with the significant difference that it is now the community itself which gives expression to its fate at the hands of Babylon, and, correspondingly, that now its reversal flows from Yahweh's response to the pleas of his people.

The lament of the community in movement E prepares for movement F. In this movement the community are now addressed for the first time with exhortations meant to encourage and sustain them in their oppressed state: they must not be fearful, but in faith and expectancy they must remember Yahweh and think on Jerusalem.

The despondency which the exhortations are designed to dispel seems not too far removed from that which may be presumed to underlie movement C. In 50:33 the lament that Israel's captors retain a strong hold on them and refuse to release them implies that the people themselves saw little prospect of deliverance. As in C it is affirmed that Yahweh had the strength to intervene on his people's behalf, so here in F assurance of Yahweh's intervention against Babylon and its images is given as grounds for the faith and hope inculcated by the exhortations. It would appear, therefore, that movements C and F share a common concern in their presentations of the intervention, namely to counter despondency and cultivate faith. Movement F evidently returns to the major concern of movement C and elaborates it more explicitly through exhortations addressed directly to the community. At the same time, since cognizance is taken of Yahweh's intervention and with it Israel's deliverance as being 'not yet' but in

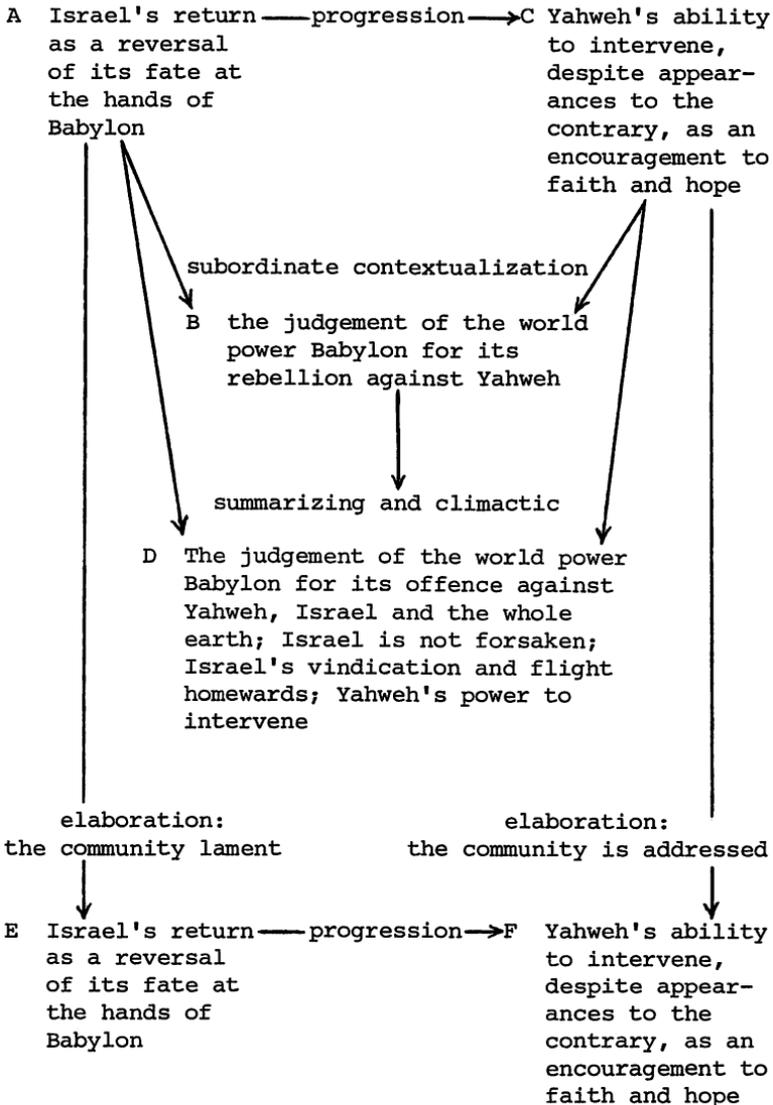
days coming, it is also made explicit in F that the movement's concern has in view the people's present and continuing state of oppression until such times as Yahweh should intervene.

The progression between movements E and F, therefore, reflects the earlier progression between movements A and C, with A and E announcing the prospect of Israel's return as a reversal of their fate, and movements C and F emphasizing, in their own ways, that despite appearances to the contrary Yahweh can and will intervene to bring about Israel's deliverance as an encouragement to faith and hope. In movement E and F, however, this progression takes place, formally at least, in more direct and intimate touch with the community itself.

It may be observed that announcement of the prospect of Israel's return as reversal is developed most fully in movement A, and emphasis on the ability of Yahweh to intervene as providing a ground for faith is developed most fully and explicitly in movement F. Consequently, the same kind of progression as between movements A and C and movements E and F is further reflected and is at its most articulate between movements A and F, where - the framework aside - it comprises the starting-point and end-point of the composition as a whole.

The perspective articulated through the structure of the composition as a whole is therefore comprised of three main aspects: (1) Israel's return as a reversal of their fate - the major concern of movements A and E, (2) Yahweh's power to intervene as a ground for faith - the major concern of movements C and F, and (3) the judgement of the world power as motivated by its offences - the major concern of movements B and D. The aspects of the return of Israel as reversal and Yahweh's power to intervene as a ground for faith are so disposed and interconnected that the progression between them seems clearly to form the major concern in the perspective informing the composition as a whole, in relation to which Babylon's judgement as motivated by its offences is of subordinate concern.

By way of summary, therefore, we can outline the structure and perspective of the composition as a whole as follows:



We may remark here on the important and central role played by the speeches and sayings concerned with Israel within the structures and perspectives as it has emerged through the analysis. The structuring of the composition would seem to suggest the purpose and intention of the oracles against Babylon in their

present form as being to assure the exiled people of their return to their homeland in days future, and to encourage faith in Yahweh's power and lively expectation of their return to Jerusalem in days present, when such a prospect seemed little more than wishful thinking.

To conclude. We have tried to show in this paper that the oracles against Babylon in Jeremiah 50-51 are not a loose and amorphous conglomerate of thematic elements tacked together at random, but that they have structural organization and coherence, and also to show wherein this may be found to subsist within the text. It is unnecessary to try and summarize here the structures and perspectives of the composition as these have been elucidated, but it is perhaps as well to note again the provisional nature of the analysis. Nevertheless we indulge in the hope that this paper might promote a more fruitful appreciation of the literary character of the composition as an integral whole.