The Presence of YHWH:

Psalm 27 and the Audience's Horizon of Expectation

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According to literary theorist Hans-Robert Jauss, the "relationship between the individual text and the series of texts formative of a genre represents itself as a process of continual founding and altering of horizons" (Jauss 1970–71, 14). In other words, when a literary work appears, its audience brings to it a set of expectations that may be challenged in the course of reading the work. As a new text evokes in the audience an horizon of expectations based on the experience of reading other similar types of texts, the audience's horizon of expectations can be varied, extended, corrected, transformed, crossed out or reproduced "through negation of familiar experiences or through raising newly articulated experiences to the level of consciousness..." (Jauss 1970–71, 25). On occasion, a work will break through the horizon of expectations so completely that an audience only gradually develops an appreciation of it.

According to Jauss' criteria, Psalm 27, as a so-called mixed-type of psalm, does indeed challenge an audience's horizon of expectations, that perspective which enables the audience to perceive, understand and represent the literary, cultural and social world in its relationship with the world of the text (Jauss 1989, vii). By means of a close examination of Psalm 27, this paper intends to enter into, at a preliminary level, the much larger contemporary literary discussion about audiences, the act of reading and where precisely meaning is to be located—in the text or in the reader.

It is my belief that reading Psalm 27 is an event (Fowler 1992, 50–1) in which the audience plays a key role. As the text sends out generic signals in the form of traditional words, phrases and images about the pres-

ence of YHWH, a particular generic background is evoked in the audience. Then, just when the audience thinks it knows the 'rules of the game', the text subverts the audience's understanding. The result of this kind of dialogue between Psalm 27 and the audience is to demand more of the audience by offering them an opportunity to consider a newly articulated experience for understanding the meaning of the presence of YHWH.

A Brief Outline of Jauss' Theory

Hans Robert Jauss (b. 1921) was professor of Romance languages and literary theory at Heidelberg, Münster and Giessen before his appointment at the University of Constance in 1966. His early work focused on investigating the structural relationships among groups of texts. He became one of the central figures in the Constance School and is best known for his "aesthetics of reception," a hermeneutically-based approach to literature and literary history influenced primarily by the Russian formalists and by Jauss' teacher, Hans-Georg Gadamer. His acclaim is due to his ability to apply the principles of Gadamerian hermeneutics to the sphere of literature and poetic theory.

In his article "Theory of Genres and Medieval Literature" (1982), Jauss criticized the commonly held belief that groups of texts must be defined only in terms of prescriptive, 'essential' characteristics of form, content and style. Instead, he argued that texts should be grouped into "families" (1982, 80) that should be historically determined by the succession of works by one author or by a period style. On the other hand, they could be described by focusing on a particular literary device, or on a constant and recurring theme. For Jauss, the value of grouping texts along these lines was the opportunity to examine "families" of texts not only in light of their own intrinsic formal or essential characteristics, but also in understanding their relationship to other families, including those that appear to be "mixed." This insight led Jauss to conclude that texts which appear to contain diverse language and imagery should be considered within a family of texts and, therefore, exhibit some kind of intrinsic, processual (rather than static) relationship within that family.

In order to test his theory, Jauss explored the nature of generic families and the value of mixed texts by conducting cross-section analyses of a variety of texts. During his analysis Jauss noticed that neither formal elements (i.e., words, phrases, and images) nor thematic elements of texts are fixed. Instead, they tend to appear in other texts, often combined in very creative ways. For example, a satiric element which had functioned originally in the background of a family of medieval texts (which included the sermon, the moral didactic, the 'chastising poem', the ani-

mal epic and the verse farce) had changed into a new more predominant element which later shaped the satirical works of Cardenal, Rutegeuf and Angioliere (Jauss 1982, 81). Of special interest to Jauss was how the fusion of two French genres (the heroic epic and the knightly romance) resulted in a new genre, the so-called romance epics (Jauss 1982, 82). Jauss observed further how two previously distinct and independent formal elements—a magic belt and a balsam tree—had been fused together into a new single formal element in the text, *Fierabras*, and Artus-Romance (Jauss 1982, 83).

The results of this kind of analysis of families of texts led Jauss to the general conclusion that genre "cannot be decided according to one-sided formal and thematic characteristics" (Jauss 1982, 82). Rather, the value of the mixed text was an opportunity to observe how elements from originally distinct families of texts had been fused into new structures. The effect of this combination of elements was to create texts that developed a higher principle of organization, often resulting in a shift of emphasis quite different from the original.

Another important idea in Jauss' theory of genre was the role the audience played in reading texts. Jauss argued that an audience builds up a "horizon of expectation" about certain types of related texts. Sometimes, however, an individual text breaks away from the "family." As a result it may challenge an audience's horizon of expectation. When this occurs, the audience tends to be caught "off-guard" and must reassess the value of the text and in what way the text has varied, extended, or transformed their horizon by raising new experiences of reading to a higher level of consciousness (Jauss 1970–71, 25).

In the following sections, I shall be drawing upon these ideas as heuristic models in order to explore how Psalm 27 and the audience are in some kind of dialogical relationship. In the next section I will explore in more detail how psalms of trust and complaint exhibit various understandings of the relationship between the speaker and the presence of YHWH. Then I shall focus closely on the words, phrase, and images evidenced in Psalm 27 that describe this relationship. Finally a summary will set out what has been learned and make a few general comments.

The Presence of YHWH in Trust and Complaint Psalms

Psalm 27 is commonly divided into two psalms. The first (vv. 1–6) is generally considered to be a psalm of trust while the second (vv. 7–14) is a psalm of complaint (Birkland 1933, 216–21). Although this has been the classic argument, it may be more accurate to describe Psalm 27 as having two principal sections (Craigie 1983, 230). However one describes the relationship between these two sections, the words, phrases and images

found within each section are intended to evoke certain ideas about the relationship between the speaker and YHWH. Verses 1–6 appear to express a general feeling of confidence, the "absolute certainty that banishes fear, regardless of the dimensions of the threat" (Craigie 1983, 231). On the other hand, verses 7–14 appears to be less certain about this relationship. The speaker is determined to seek God's face as had been done in the past (vv. 8–9a), but this determination is modified by the recognition that any divine answer may be only an act of graciousness (v. 7b). The speaker feels that YHWH may still turn from her in anger (v. 9b-c). At best, this section may be described as a prayer of determination, qualified by a sense of humility and unworthiness (Craigie 1983, 233). Thus, according to traditional interpretations of Psalm 27, section one conveys a theme of trust while section two conveys qualified complaint.

Traditional language in the psalms of trust tends to describe a close relationship with YHWH. Words and phrases such as taking "refuge" in YHWH (Ps. 11:1), keeping YHWH near because "he is at my right hand" (Ps. 16:8), thinking of YHWH in terms of a "keeper" of "life," as the guardian of the speaker's "going out and coming in," or as the one who delivers the speaker from "all evil" by providing a "shade of [his] right hand" (Ps. 121:2, 5, 7, 8) tend to pervade psalms of trust. The presence of YHWH is understood as being near the speaker.

On the other hand, the individual psalms of complaint tend to express an idea that the speaker considers herself away from the presence of YHWH. In these types of psalms, the speaker expresses suffering at the hands of "enemies," and experiences physical ills, psychological torment and/or socio-political oppression. On occasion even YHWH is considered as being the enemy because of his apparent forgetfulness and hiddenness (Ps. 13:1), his aloofness (Ps. 10:1), his abandonment of the speaker (Ps. 22:1) or his decision not to answer the speaker (Ps. 22:2).

It is interesting to note how the language describing descent often appears as a powerful description of the distance perceived between the speaker and YHWH, often characteristic of complaint psalms. Based on the Hebrew verb, *yrd*, 'to go down', 'to descend', complaint psalms often use words and images to describe the speaker's "going down to the Pit" (Pss. 28:1; 88:4; 143:7), to the "dust" (Ps. 22:29) or to "silence" (Ps. 115:17) where one is forsaken among the dead (Ps. 88). One "goes down," "sinks," "is swallowed up" and "descends" into the earth or into the primeval waters of chaos. To be cut off, forsaken, or cast off in the depths of the Pit is to exist in the regions of the dark and deep where YHWH has hidden his face.

Thus we have seen that in the trust types of psalms the speaker generally uses language to articulate being in the presence of YHWH. In the

individual lament type, on the other hand, the speaker tends to consider her position generally away from the presence of YHWH, often expressed in words, phrases and images about descent. In the following section I shall examine clusters of words and phrases that appear to resonate with similar characteristics generally found in psalms of trust and complaint.

Psalm 27 and the Audience's Horizon of Expectations

Psalm 27:1 is replete with images, some of which draw from other psalms while others occur only here, clustered together to present an image of protection and security. The images of "light," "salvation" and "refuge/stronghold" in verse 1 resonate with other psalms. It is interesting to note that although these images appear in various psalms (such as complaint, royal and wisdom psalms, e.g., Pss. 36:9; 18:28; 43:3; and 53:11), none of these images appears in a typical trust type of psalm. What is significant about this verse is the use of the personal pronoun "my" within the phrase "my light," "my salvation" and the "refuge/stronghold of my life." This seems to indicate that the speaker considers herself and YHWH to be within some kind of personal relationship. Moreover, the combination of these three images does not occur anywhere within the entire family of psalms. In fact, there are only four instances where the word "light" occurs, all of which are in psalms of complaint (cf. Pss. 4:6; 27:1; 43:3; 56:13). The word "salvation" tends to occur more often in complaint psalms (e.g., Pss. 25:5; 51:12; 69:13). The final phrase, "refuge/stronghold of my life" does not occur in any of the psalms. The only places where the phrase "my refuge" occurs is in Psalm 31:5 and Psalm 43:12, both of which are classified traditionally as complaint types. This seems to suggest that although the speaker considers herself to be in the presence of YHWH, this relationship is being expressed in language often associated with the complaint psalms. I suspect the audience, who may have known the 'rules of the game', would have been quite surprised to hear these new combination of words, normally associated with complaint psalms, now being used to express a theme of trust!

In contrast to the light, refuge and salvation of YHWH, the cluster of images in verses 2 and 3 describes the enemies as evil-doers who intend to "eat" her flesh. This latter phrase is difficult to understand. Whatever the image of eating flesh may mean, it seems to suggest the speaker considers herself threatened by those around her. It is interesting to note, however, the confidence the speaker has that the enemies will "stumble and fall." Even though the enemies present a potential threat to her position in the presence of YHWH, the speaker's "heart shall not fear." These

verses stand in contrast to the words and images presented in verse 1. Having figured out that the language of verse 1 suggests Ps. 27 should be understood as a complaint psalm, the cluster of images which appears in verses 2 and 3 then requires the audience to readjust its thinking.

In verses 4 to 6, an unusual combination of words, phrases and im-ages commonly associated with trust and complaint psalms appears. Not only does the speaker want to "seek after" YHWH, to "dwell in the house of YHWH," to "perceive with desire the beauty of YHWH" and "con-template in his temple," the speaker desires to be hid in his "shelter," to be concealed "under the cover of his tent" and be "set up high upon a rock." The speaker intends to "offer sacrifices in his tent with shouts of joy" and "sing and make melody with YHWH." It is interesting to note how verse 6 bears similarities to Psalm 5, a typical complaint psalm, by its use of the verbs, to sacrifice, to worship, and to sing for joy in the Tem-ple. These verses suggest that these words, phrases and images have been lifted from their usual use and meaning in traditional trust and complaint psalms and are now being used in new and creative combinations. Fur-ther to this, the audience, drawing upon its traditional understanding of the language of trust and complaint psalms, must have had to re-adjust its thinking radically about the meaning of being in the presence of YHWH.

Verses 7–10 appear to employ again a variety of images borrowed from both trust and complaint psalms, the effect of which suggests an oscillation between these types of psalms. In verse 7, for example, YHWH is implored to be "gracious" and "answer" the speaker. Here we have language that is typical of introductory statements found in many other psalms of complaint (e.g., Pss. 5; 6; 7; 22). Likewise, the words "seeking YHWH's face" (v. 8) normally are found in trust psalms. Verse 9 appears to be drawing upon language normally found in both trust and complaint. First, the speaker considers herself away from the presence of YHWH by the use of descent language implied by the phrase "hide not thy face," and "turn not thy servant away in anger." Next, the speaker considers herself in the presence of YHWH by her assertion, "you are my help." Following this, however, two further phrases resonate with others we have seen in the complaint psalms—"being cast off and forsaken." Curiously, the next phrase appears to reiterate an earlier statement in this verse about the presence of YHWH: "God of my salvation." Verse 10 continues this same kind of oscillation between trust and complaint by introducing the phrase "my father and my mother have forsaken me," immediately upon which the speaker acknowledges that YHWH will take her up. This suggests that as a result of this combination of words, phrases and images from both trust and complaint psalms, the audience

has been surprised and has had its traditional expectations challenged as to what it means to be in or out of the presence of YHWH.

Verse 11 introduces an interesting image not previously present before in this psalm: "Teach me your way, O YHWH, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies." The ideas of teaching and leading the speaker on level paths appear to resonate with a similar expression in Psalm 25:4–5, a typical complaint psalm. What is new here, however, is the addition of the phrase "my enemies." A precise determination of the meaning of this complete phrase can only be tentative. However, two suggestions have been offered. First, Bratcher (Bratcher and Reyburn 1991, 232–3) suggests it should be understood in its literal sense. The "path of smoothness" could be describing the level place in the Temple court. If this reading is correct, then the audience would need to draw upon its experience of being at the most sacred place where YHWH's presence is traditionally located. This understanding could resonate, then, with typical language found in other trust psalms. On the other hand, it could have been used figuratively. Thus, it might require the audience to consider how right conduct might induce YHWH to rescue the speaker from potential danger and restore her to the presence of YHWH. If this reading is correct, then this phrase resonates with images normally associated with complaint psalms. In any case, what may be more significant is the fact that, to the audience, this phrase could be understood as offering a choice of meaning, which may have thrown off the audience in its ability to determine precisely the phrase's meaning.

In verse 12 images of the enemies resurface. This verse may have acted then as a reprise of verses 2 and 3, yet it has no sense of the potential for adversaries to arise—they have arisen! In language which typically describes the activities of the enemies, those "false witnesses" who "have risen" and who "breathe out violence," it seems clear this verse resonates with other complaint psalms. Curiously, however, language of descent is missing. This suggests that the audience, who may have expected descent language to occur here, was surprised by its absence.

Verses 13 and 14 are interesting because there are no other parallels of the combined phrase "goodness of YHWH" and "the land of the living" in the psalms. The sense of these verses appears to be one of trust yet no other words, phrases or images appear to suggest the speaker considers herself in the presence of YHWH. Rather, the phrase "goodness of YHWH" occurs in only three other psalms: Psalm 31:19 (a complaint psalm); Psalm 65:4 (a psalm of thanksgiving) and Psalm 145:7 (a psalm of praise). On the other hand, the phrase "the land of the living" occurs in two lament psalms, Psalm 52:5 and Psalm 142:5, and in one psalm of thanksgiving, Psalm 116:9. It would appear then these phrases have been

used in creative ways to surprise the audience. Using language typical of complaint psalms, the sense of these verses appears to be quite the opposite, expressing trust and confidence in YHWH's deliverance.

Conclusion

I have attempted to show how the words, phrases, and images normally found in trust and complaint psalms have been used creatively in Psalm 27, in turn producing at least two effects: requiring the audience to play a major role in determining the meaning of Psalm 27, and challenging the audience's horizon of expectations to think in new and creative ways about the presence of YHWH. I suspect that Psalm 27, with its ability to break through an audience's previous generic expectations of trust and complaint type psalms, may have been an attempt to re-shape and/or respond to an audience's new understanding of the nature of the presence of YHWH.

Endnotes

1. See the discussions by: Eagleton 1983; Holub 1984; Lategan 1987; and Tompkins, 1980.

2. By traditional I mean particular language that is used consistently throughout the psalms to express certain ideas. See: Culley 1988, 289–302; 1991, 29–39; 1994, 194.

3. For an overview see: Briggs and Briggs (1906-07); Weiser (1962); and Barth (1966). Anderson notes that "[a] collection of two different Psalms is not an unknown phenomenon in the Salter. E.g., Pss. 114 and 115 are regarded as one unit in the LXX, although they are two separated" (1972, 219). Throughout his analysis, Westermann (1981) discusses the different sections of Psalm 27 as separate units. Gunkel found unity and meaning in the definition of the psalm genre and its relationship to its proper cultural matrix. He argued that Psalm 27 had been joined together as a process of extended collecting (1966, 436). Birkeland argued that the theme and tone of Psalm 27 was one of national and royal scope (1933: 216–21). Lawrence Toombs (1971) identifies Psalm 27 as a mixed type.

4. Psalms of trust include, for example, 11, 16, 23, 62, 63, 121, 125, and 131, to name a few.

5. A number of psalms have been classified as individual psalms of complaint. This list includes the following examples: Psalms 3–7, 9–10, 13, 14, 17, 22, 25, 26, 28, 31, 35, 38, 41–3, 52, 54–7, 59, 61, 64, 69–71, 77, 86, 88, 89, 102, 109, 120, 130, 139, and 141–3.

6. Gerstenberger (1988, 125) finds this language unusual and complex in contrast to its use in Psalm 3:2 and 4:2 but similar to its use in Psalm 11:1 and 23:1. Bratcher and Reyburn (1991, 261–62) argue that the questions in which these words are found is significant because they appear to be emphatic ways of stating that because of the confidence placed in YHWH's power to protect, the speaker has no reason to be afraid. For Weiser (1962, 246), the content and form of these verses draw heavily upon Psalm 23. Common to all of the passages in which this language is used is the idea that YHWH is responsible for life, vitality, prosperity and health. Characterized as the light or lamp of Israel, YHWH's light may not only be a mere expression of his metaphysical nature but also of a salvation and deliverance experience. Intimately connected with the word "light" are the words "salvation" and "refuge."

7. It is interesting to note how this phrase resonates with Psalm 23:3 and the figure of a shepherd leading his flock. In this case, these paths are those which avoid dangerous places which lead to abundant pastures where sheep graze in safety (Bratcher and Reyburn 1991, 267; Weiser 1962, 253).

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