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Leung Lai, Barbara M. "Uncovering the Isaian Personality: Wishful Thinking or Viable Task?" In *Text and Community: Essays in Memory of Bruce M. Metzger Volume 2*, edited by J. Harold Ellens, 82-100. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007.

## UNCOVERING THE ISAIAH PERSONALITY: WISHFUL THINKING OR VIABLE TASK?

Barbara M. Leung Lai

As one among the fifteen identifiable ‘I’-passages (places where Isaiah speaks in the first person singular voice),<sup>1</sup> Isa. 21.1-12 serves as a demonstrated example of using the ‘I’-window as the ‘port’ of entry in uncovering aspects of the inner life of the prophet. As far as the Isaian personality is concerned, this is still an uncharted area in the current interpretive scene. The interpretive tools employed in this study exemplify a biblical scholar’s passage from modernity to post-modernity. Specific to Isaian studies, the paradigm shift with regards to the unity issue opens up new avenues for looking into the personhood of the prophet. With the employment of a psychological lens among other interdisciplinary tools, interpretive interests that were formerly dormant in my modern mind and repressed in my reader perspective are now placed at the foreground of exploration. In the first part of this study, I will lay out the macro reading strategy applicable to the 15 ‘I’-passages in the book of Isaiah. This will be followed by the ‘points of entry’ geared towards 21.1-12.

### 1. *The Isaian Personality: Revisiting a Dead-end Issue in Post-modern Times*

#### a. *Current State of the Inquiry and Prospects*

Traditional approaches to the personhood of the prophets are governed by a variety of goal-oriented interests, primarily the ‘identity’ and ‘prophetic consciousness’ issues.<sup>2</sup> This is evident in the spectrum of research done along

1. The 15 identifiable ‘I’-passages are: 5.1-30; 6.1-13; 8.1-18; 15.1–16.14; 21.1-12; 22.1-15; 24.1-23; 25.1-12; 26.1-21; 40.1-8; 49.1-6; 50.4-9; 51.17-23; 61.1-11; 63.7-19. Among the 15 passages, three distinct literary genres are represented: Narrative (6.1-13; 8.1-18); Prophetic Oracle/Speech (15.1–16.14; 21.1-12; 22.1-25); and Poetry/Song (the rest of the ‘I’-passages).

2. For example, T.R. Hobbs, ‘The Search for Prophetic Consciousness: Comments on Methods’, *BTB* 15 (1985), pp. 136-39; D.L. Petersen (ed.), *Prophecy in Israel: Search for an Identity* (Issues in Religion and Theology, 10; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

and adjacent to this line of inquiry and the variety of methods employed.<sup>3</sup> To different extents, these approaches have provided a methodologically workable proposal to the question: What manner of men are the prophets? Directly or indirectly, they have touched on the periphery of the prophetic personality with marginal results.<sup>4</sup>

With the emerging literary currents in the last two decades, portraiture of the persona of Jeremiah have flourished. To many, they are considered as ground-breaking, synchronic-oriented endeavours.<sup>5</sup> Yet relative to the host of works devoted to the so-called ‘Confession of Jeremiah’ (Jer. 11–20), the ‘personhood’ of Isaiah has attracted little attention thus far.<sup>6</sup> Christopher R. Seitz summed up the state of the inquiry toward the end of the 1980s: for him, ‘attempts to pull a prophetic figure out of 2 Isaiah have proven difficult, and out of 3 Isaiah, *nearly impossible*’.<sup>7</sup> On another front, Isaian studies

3. With some degree of overlapping in methodology, inquiry into the prophetic persona has been approached from a number of perspectives. First, the *biographical* perspective is represented in the works of J. Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion: Studies in the Life of Jeremiah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), and A.J. Heschel, *The Prophet* (2 vols.; New York: Harper & Row, 1962). Secondly, the collection of essays in the discussion of Prophecy and Society in R.P. Gordon’s edited volume represent the *sociological* approach; see ‘*The Place is Too Small for Us*’: *The Israelite Prophets in Recent Scholarship* (Sources for Biblical and Theological Study, 5; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), pp. 271–412. Characteristic to the *theological* approach is the focus on the religion or ethos of the prophets. This theological approach tends to deprecate the ‘personal’ in the prophet’s faith and being in order to emphasize the corporate. A typical example is found in Heschel’s discussion on the theology of pathos, in that he expounds the inseparable relationship between the prophetic pathos and the pathos of God. He argues that the prophets felt the emotions of God and God in turn suffered through the prophets (see ‘The Theology of Pathos’, in *The Prophets*, II, pp. 1–11). Traces of the *psychological* approach are found in standard works on prophetism, such as J. Lindblom’s *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962); cf. also R.P. Carroll’s cognitive psychological approach in ‘Ancient Israelite Prophecy and Dissonance Theory’, *Numen* 24 (1997), pp. 135–51; reprinted in Gordon (ed.), ‘*The Place is Too Small for Us*’, pp. 377–91. The psychoanalytical approach as represented in these reference works is highly speculative and most distant from the text.

4. I think primarily the diachronic interests are being served in the past decades.

5. T. Polk (*The Prophetic Persona: Jeremiah and the Language of the Self* [JSOTSup, 32; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984]) has set a milestone in prophetic research on the person of the prophets. Specific to his approach is what he describes as ‘synchrony and intentionality’ (cf. pp. 8–18).

6. Note that C.R. Seitz (‘Isaiah 1–66: Making Sense of the Whole’, in Seitz [ed.], *Reading and Preaching the Book of Isaiah* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988], pp. 105–26) has devoted a section on ‘The Prophetic Persona in Isaiah’.

7. Seitz, ‘Isaiah 1–66’, p. 120 (italics mine).

have developed new approaches in ‘reading strategy’ and in the ‘inner hermeneutical dynamics’<sup>8</sup> during the last decade.

Essential to any ‘both-diachronic-and-synchronic’ approach<sup>9</sup> to biblical personality portrait is coming to terms with the issue of the authenticity and the overarching coherence of the book.<sup>10</sup> Specific to the Isaian personality is the long-debated *unity* issue. J. Clinton McCann’s 2003 article, ‘The Book of Isaiah—Theses and Hypotheses—Critical Essay’,<sup>11</sup> offers a comprehensive synthesis of the most current state of the inquiry. A major emerging consensus among Isaian scholars is that the book should be read and interpreted as a unity, and this unity is a complex one.

The idea of this Isaian ‘unity’ differs among scholars. While affirming that unity does not mean uniformity in the case of Isaiah,<sup>12</sup> the different processes (editorial and redactional) in arriving at this unity and the diverse interest-driven approaches to the unity issue (e.g. the pan-Isaianic language and themes)<sup>13</sup> underscore the nature and extent of this ‘complexity’. No

8. These two areas have become the major foci in the recent past. E.W. Conrad (*Reading Isaiah* [Overtures to Biblical Theology; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991]) is regarded by many as a ground-breaking endeavor on reading strategy. For a comprehensive survey of the state of Isaian research in the last decade, cf. M.A. Sweeney, ‘The Book of Isaiah in Recent Research’, *CR:BS* 1 (1993), pp. 141–62. This observation is also evident in the *SBL Seminar Papers* on Isaiah published between 1991 and 1994.

9. In his *The Prophetic Books and their Theological Witness* (trans. J.D. Nogalski; St Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), O.H. Steck calls for both a diachronic and synchronic reading of Isaiah, in that he sees ‘(t)he task is more precisely a *historically inquiring synchronic reading* of the book’ (p. 20 [italics mine]). My own adaptation of this ‘historical inquiry’ is through looking into the psychology of the first audience/recipients.

10. Cf. Barbara M. Leung Lai, ‘Immersing Ourselves in the Visionary Experience of Daniel: Reading, Emotive-Experiencing, Appropriation’ (paper presented at the Psychology and Biblical Studies Section at the Annual Meeting of the SBL, San Antonio, Texas, 20 November 2004).

11. J. Clinton McCann, ‘The Book of Isaiah—Theses and Hypotheses—Critical Essay’, *BTB* 33.3 (2003), pp. 88–94.

12. On the basis that this ‘complexity of the unity’ exists as a result of the editorial and redactional processes; cf. D. Carr, ‘Reaching for Unity in Isaiah’, *JSOT* 57 (1993), pp. 61–80; P.D. Quinn-Miscall, *Reading Isaiah: Poetry and Vision* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001).

13. Such as the reference to God as ‘the Holy One of Israel’, the significance of Zion, the centrality of sin and forgiveness, ‘the meta-historical final events,’ and the role and destiny of the nations (Steck, *The Prophetic Books and their Theological Witness*, pp. 20–65). Cf. also M.A. Sweeney, ‘The Book of Isaiah as Prophetic Torah’, in R.F. Melugin and M.A. Sweeney (eds.), *New Visions of Isaiah* (JSOTSup, 214; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), pp. 50–67 (64–65), for a summary; C.R. Seitz, *Isaiah 1–39* (Interpretation; Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993), pp. 3, 16–17, 261–66.

single or direct adaptation of the results in the past suffices for a reading strategy that seeks to embrace a three-world approach to the Isaian personality.<sup>14</sup>

b. *A 'Historically Inquiring Synchronic Reading'*

With regards to the personhood of Isaiah, inquiry into the psychology of the first audience may serve as a ‘point of entry’.<sup>15</sup> I am going to undertake ‘a historically inquiring synchronic reading’ proposed by Steck,<sup>16</sup> and to build on the contributions of Seitz in the past decade. Affirming the book of Isaiah as ‘a book of paradoxical linkages’,<sup>17</sup> Seitz’s 1999 work<sup>18</sup> offers a new paradigm for the authorship and unity issues of Isaiah, and the man as a biographical figure. Seitz has convincingly argued from a distinct angle of vision—the ‘acceptance of the original community’ (or a ‘theology of reception’).<sup>19</sup> This acceptance is based on two factors: (1) the community’s acknowledgment of the divine origin of the book (that it is from God, with the *book of Isaiah* as the inspired *object*); and (2) the recognition of a larger coherence (or an overarching perspective) prevailing within the 66 chapters.<sup>20</sup>

First, shifting the focus from the authenticity of Isaiah, the *prophet* to the *book of Isaiah* as the inspired *object*, it is in essence a move from a diachronic to a synchronic reading—that is, the book’s presentation of the prophet. The fifteen ‘I’-passages spread out through the traditional three-divisions of the book (chs. 1–39; 40–55; 56–66) representing three distinct genres (first-person narratives: 6.1–13; 8.1–18; prophetic oracles/speeches: 15.1–16.14; 21.1–12; 24.1–23; and poetries/songs: 5.1–30; 25.1–12; 26.1–21; 40.1–8; 49.1–6; 50.4–9; 51.17–23; 61.1–11; 63.7–9). Unique to Isaiah is the absence of the so-called sandwich-structure ‘Messenger Formula’,<sup>21</sup> and the presence of heavily laden poetic materials (especially in chs. 40–66). As a character, Isaiah plays a minor background role in the third-person narrative section of the book (chs. 36–39). However, in the literary context of the

14. Using the common ‘world-imagery’ in biblical interpretation, the three worlds are: the world behind the text, the world of the text, and the world in front of the text. D. Andrew Kille (‘Psychology and the Bible: Three Worlds of the Text’, *Pastoral Psychology* 51.2 [2002], pp. 125–33) invites the undertaking of a holistic, three-world approach to psychological biblical studies.

15. As suggested by J. Harold Ellens, ‘Guest Editorial’, *Pastoral Psychology* 51.2 (2002), pp. 97–99 (98).

16. Steck, *The Prophetic Books and their Theological Witness*, p. 20.

17. Seitz, *Isaiah 1–39*, p. 17.

18. C.R. Seitz, ‘Isaiah and the Search for a New Paradigm’, in *The Papers of the Henry Luce III Fellows in Theology* (ATS Series in Theological Scholarship and Research, 3; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), pp. 97–114.

19. Seitz, ‘Isaiah and the Search for a New Paradigm’, pp. 107–13.

20. Seitz, ‘Isaiah and the Search for a New Paradigm’, pp. 107–13.

21. Cf. Amos 1–2.

fifteen ‘I’-passages, especially in the first-person narratives in 6.1-13 and 8.1-18, the Isaian ‘I’-voice is placed on the foreground and he emerges as a main character in those chapters.

Consistent with the rest of the prophetic corpus, the four oracles/speeches (15.1–16.14; 21.1–12; 22.1–25; 24.1–23) all attest to their divine origin. While more than half of the ‘I’-passages is poetic, the emotional theory of Hebrew poetry construes them as the spontaneous outpouring of powerful feelings<sup>22</sup> (the case in point is the Isaian emotions and feelings). The same emotive impact would have been at work upon the audience/recipients of the original community as well as the contemporary readers. Reading the poetry portion of the Isaian ‘I’-passages in the literary context of the language of religious faith, and given that the very nature of the language of religious faith (e.g. prayers, petitions, and praises) is emotive language, the Isaian ‘I’-voice would have engaged the intellect and emotion of the original community and they would have acknowledged the ‘I’-voice behind the poetries as authentically Isaian.

Second, the recognition of a larger coherence within the 66 chapters has been approached from a variety of angles, from the search for an overall macro-structure to the identification of pan-Isaianic language and themes. With the presence of contradictions and contrasts within the book, redactional activities are evident.<sup>23</sup> Several of the ‘I’-passages (chs. 6; 8; 40) are located at crucial places where internal hermeneutical links have been established.<sup>24</sup> Since the ‘I’-passages spread out sporadically throughout the book, a reading with attention to the internal hermeneutical dynamics suggests a promising, coherent portrait of the Isaian personality. In essence, depending on which level of coherence one is aiming at, the 66 chapters do exhibit elements of coherence within the inner hermeneutical dynamics. Simply put, one can easily distance oneself from the diachronic issues and come up with a certain degree of unity and authenticity for the ‘I’-voice represented here.

22. For a discussion of the theories on reading Hebrew poetry, cf. D.L. Petersen and K.H. Richards, *Interpreting Hebrew Poetry* (GBS; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 12; M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1958), pp. 3–29. See also Phyllis Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), pp. 10–13 for a precise analysis.

23. McCann, ‘The Book of Isaiah: Theses and Hypotheses’. See also n. 12.

24. For example, ch. 6 can be read in relation to ch. 40 (the commissioning). Chapter 40’s pivotal location in relation to the ‘vision’ marks the transition from the old setting to the new—the future community of receptive audience. This observation provides hermeneutical clues in reading chs. 49 and 50. Moreover, when ch. 8 is read in the context of 7.1–9.6 and in relation to chs. 36–39, it brings to the foreground the contrast between the two kingly images in times of crisis.

What, then, are the psychological implications to the first audience as they listened to the authentic ‘I’-voice of Isaiah? Inspired by Steck, I am going to propose ‘a historically inquiring synchronic reading’ as a heuristic reading strategy for the ‘I’-passages. As far as the personhood of Isaiah is concerned, the locus of my investigation is based on the developmental aspect of the Isaian personality through conscious diachronic reading.<sup>25</sup> From the embedded anxiety and dilemma he received at the time of his call (6.1-13) and the notion of divine constraint in fulfilling God’s command (8.1-18),<sup>26</sup> to the explosively emotive response (21.3-4, 10; 22.4) and the repressed emotions and feeling of helplessness in fulfilling his role as a watchman (21.6-9, 11-12), further extending to the spontaneous outpouring of his powerful feelings and emotions through the language of religious faith in the poetic portion of the ‘I’-passages (the last portion of the book), some sort of developmental dynamics can be detected. In other words, with the existence and continuum of the textual indicators, the Isaian personality is developing and approaching ‘individuality’.<sup>27</sup> This new line of inquiry offers a promising prospect towards uncovering the Isaian personality and it also illustrates the general direction as I work on each individual ‘I’-passage.

## 2. *The Case of 21.1-12: Methodology Employed and Points of Entry*

This is a text-centered and psychologically oriented reading. Any three-world approach to character portrayal would necessitate an integration of competing methods and tools. My interpretive interest is sharply focused on the Isaian internal profile. The proposed ‘historically inquiring synchronic reading’ strategy is an important port of entry, integrating the world behind the text and the world of the text. Given that the three worlds of reading are intimately interconnected and that the interface of the text and reader shapes

25. Note that a precise historical setting is provided in all the narrative portions of the ‘I’-passages (6.1; 8.1-4), and to a certain extent, in all the prophetic oracle/speech sections (15.1-16.14; 21.1-12; 22.1-25; 24.1-23). To a limited degree, the historical setting can be detected from some of the poetic portions (5.3, 14, 19; 26.1-21; 40.1-8; 49.1-6; 50.4-9; 51.17-23; 61.1-11; 63.7-19).

26. The succinct description of the events, and the way that this coherence is attained (by connecting the events with ‘consecutive *waws*’) give the impression that the entire process follows God’s instruction and serves his purpose. The notion of divine constraints is more explicitly brought to the foreground in the monologue of v. 11.

27. Cf. F.W. Burnett, ‘Characterization and Reader Construction of Characters in the Gospels’, *Semeia* 63 (1993), pp. 1-28. Burnett argues for the legitimacy of reader’s construction of the characters as ‘persons’. Provided that there are sufficient and continual textual indicators, characters in biblical texts could be read as real persons with developing ‘individuality’ (p. 19).

all the three worlds, the employment of a psychological lens would be an ‘appropriate fit’ for an exploration on the Isaian internal profile. Using the case of 21.1-12 as a demonstrated example, the following points of entry suffice for a reading that is both ‘diachronic-synchronic’ (or in Steck’s terminology, ‘historically inquiring synchronic reading’) and with psychological imagination: (1) from the Hebrew concept of emotion to Isaian pathos; (2) from the function of monologue and imaginary dialogue to aspects of the Isaian self (or the first-person projection of third-person view); and (3) from aspects of exteriority in vision to aspects of Isaian interiority through voice. Putting my world in front of the world of the text, I shall further develop my theory and practice on appropriation.

### *3. ‘A Harsh Vision is Revealed to Me’ (21.1-12): A Reading*

Characteristic to the **שְׁמַרְנָה** in this chapter is its designation as a ‘harsh (**רָעֵב**)<sup>28</sup> vision’ (v. 2). The visionary character, the atmospheric elements, the rather fearful watching for calamity in the midst of partying and hilarity (vv. 1-5) set the background of the Isaian emotive response.

#### *a. From the Hebrew Concept of Emotion to Isaian Pathos*

The use of the ‘heart’ and ‘inward parts’ of a human body is the Hebrew way of communicating emotions. Mark S. Smith has demonstrated convincingly that the heart is the locus of the description of many emotional states in the Psalms and other Old Testament books.<sup>29</sup> The ‘heart’ (**לֶב**) is the organ expressing strong emotions of joy (Pss. 4.8; 9.2; 13.6; 16.9) and grief (Pss. 13.3; 34.19; 51.19; 147.3; Isa. 61.1; Jer. 23.9). It is interesting to note that while both thought and emotions are attributed to the heart,<sup>30</sup> the internal organ ‘liver/innards’ (**בָּבֶן**) appears only in emotional expressions (Lam. 2.11; Jer. 4.19). Moreover, ‘loins’ (**מִתְגַּנִּים**) are regarded as the seat of

28. **רָעֵב** is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to denote the idea of severity (2 Sam. 2.17; Isa. 27.8); fierceness (Gen. 49.9); cruelty (Exod. 6.1); hardship (Exod. 1.14; Deut. 26.6); and great difficulty (Gen. 35.17). The notion of severity and intensity is dominant.

29. Cf. Mark S. Smith, ‘The Heart and Innards in Israelite Emotional Expressions: Notes from Anthropology and Psychology’, *JBL* 117 (1998), pp. 427-36. The studies of A.R. Johnson, *Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 2nd edn, 1992); H.W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974); and A.J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (2 vols.; New York: Harper & Row, 1962), II, Chapter 3, are classic works in this area of investigation.

30. In this regard, H. Schüngel-Straumann, is mistaken in stating that ‘heart’ in the Old Testament is not the seat of emotions but primarily of decision-making and will-power. Cf. H. Schüngel-Straumann, ‘God as Mother in Hosea 11’, *TD* 34 (1987), pp. 3-8 (3). For a listing of occurrences, see BDB, pp. 524-25. Cf. also R. North, ‘Brain and Nerve in the Biblical Outlook’, *Bib* 74 (1993), pp. 592-97.

intimate affections and of keenest pain (Isa. 21.3; Nah. 2.11; Ps. 66.11).<sup>31</sup> Using this internal organ as an imagery together with ‘girded with/wearing sackcloth’, the realm of mourning is portrayed (Gen. 37.34; Amos 8.10; Isa. 20.2; 1 Kgs 20.31, 32; Jer. 40.37).

Three points can be drawn from the above textual descriptions. First, the heart as well as other internal organs (like loins and liver) are used to conveyed a broad range of emotions (from joy to lament). Second, regardless of whether the realm of emotions portrayed is pleasant or unpleasant, the idea of ‘intensity’ is behind these expressions. Third, in Ps. 147.3, Jer. 23.9 and Isa. 21.3, the link between physical and emotional pain is evident. Cross-cultural studies in emotions also provide a model for understanding Hebrew perceptions of emotions.<sup>32</sup> They are something to be felt physically—which may account for the association of emotions with various internal body parts in Hebrew literature.

A statement that has gained much consensus within the various fields of emotion studies is: ‘Emotions are the markers of the construction of the self’.<sup>33</sup> Timothy Polk also argues convincingly that ‘emotion language not only attests a self, it is constitutive of the self. People become selves as they use such language.’<sup>34</sup> The same point of entry is employed here as I seek to correlate the Isaian emotional response with aspects of his individuality.

Two distinctive aspects stand out in the expression of the Isaian pathos here: (1) the extent and intensity of the impact of the grievous vision upon the prophet (vv. 3-4, 10); and (2) the ways that the more hidden, embedded Isaian emotions are expressed (vv. 6-9, 11-12).<sup>35</sup> In v. 3, the ‘loins’ (מִנְחָיִם) and ‘heart’ (כֶּלֶב) are used together in a highly expressive way to describe the extent and intensity of the ‘harsh’ vision upon the prophet—profound physical pain, disabilities and emotional turmoil.<sup>36</sup> Using the travailing woman

31. BDB, p. 608.

32. Cf. R.B. Hupka (ed.), ‘Anger, Envy, Fear, and Jealousy as Felt in the Body: A Five-Nation Study’, *Cross-Cultural Research* 30 (1996), pp. 243-64. For a more general background to the correlations between emotions and body parts, see R. Plutchick, *The Psychology and Biology of Emotions* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994).

33. J. Crawford (ed.), *Emotion and Gender: Constructing Meaning from Memory* (London: Sage Publications, 1992), p. 126; C.A. Lutz and L. Abu-Lughod (eds.), *Language and the Politics of Emotion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 162. See especially N.K. Denzin’s threefold structure of ‘emotion as feeling-for-the-self’ in *On Understanding Emotion* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1984), p. 4; and ‘Emotion as Lived Experience’, *Symbolic Interaction* 8 (1985), pp. 223-40 (224).

34. *The Prophetic Persona*, p. 24. Note that Polk’s centre of study (constructing the prophetic persona of Jeremiah from the personal ‘I’-passages) is akin to my focus in the present study.

35. This will be dealt with in a later section.

36. For the argument that Isa. 21.3-4 represents a widespread literary convention depicting the reaction of bad news in biblical literature, cf. D.R. Hillers, ‘A Convention

simile,<sup>37</sup> the severity of the pain and the extent of its effect is brought to the foreground—the experience is so intense that he is unable to hear ('I am bent [תִּשְׁעַט]<sup>38</sup> from hearing'), being too disturbed to see ('I am troubled/disturbed from seeing'). His heart wanders about (נָגַן)<sup>39</sup> and his powers of perception desert him.

The crux of the Isaian self-presentation here is that the severity of his suffering turns a skillful and perceptive prophet into a disabled person who is incapable of hearing, seeing and perceiving. His present condition (being blind and deaf) signifies a complete 'reversal' of his ability to carry out the prophetic functions (of hearing, seeing and perceiving) as implied in vv. 1-2. Overwhelmed by terror, the twilight pleasure<sup>40</sup> that he used to long for has become yet another complete reversal—uncontrollable trembling.

in Hebrew Literature: The Reaction to Bad News', *ZAW* 77 (1965), pp. 86-99. Hillers concluded that 'these passages (Isa. 21.3-4 and others) must be used much more cautiously in discussing prophetic psychology. The poet's use of traditional literary formulae prevents us from drawing any conclusions as to his *individual* psychological reaction. We can only say that he was concerned to describe himself as reacting in a typical, normal way... The parallels show that the disturbing thing is not the approach of the divine word or vision, but the fact that the word is bad news, a "hard vision" (Isa 21.2), the approach of "the evil day" (Hab. 3.16)' (p. 89). However, Hillers fails to realize that among the passages cited (Exod. 15.14-16; 2 Sam. 4.1; Isa. 13.7-8; 21.3-4; Jer. 4.9; 6.22-23; 30.5-6; 49.23; 50.43; Ezek. 21.11-12; Hab. 3.16; Dan. 10.16, etc.), only Isa. 21.3-4 and Hab. 3.16 are in the first-person 'I'-voice—monologue. Monologue is a refined form of depiction of a literary character's self-awareness and self-reflection. It seems rather unusual for Isaiah to break into his 'I'-voice and spontaneously adopt a literary formula (of reaction to 'bad news') as a channel for his own emotive response.

Second, the use of conventional literary formula is not necessarily devoid of emotional elements. This is true in Chinese culture. The term '*tong ding si tong*' ('reflective-grieving'), which is a well-known literary convention signifying an intense yet reflective mode/process of grief, appears in many dirge-discourses. This literary formula has been used by generations of Chinese in appropriating to the occasions of deep sorrow (with lasting effects; e.g. commemorating the dead in the June 4th Massacre).

37. The labour pain analogy is used elsewhere to describe people struck by disasters (Isa. 13.8; Jer. 4.24; 30.6; Ezek. 30.4, 9; Nah. 2.11).

38. Literally, 'I am bent, bowed down, twisted'. The proposition 'from' merits two different interpretations. I favour taking the 'from' as privative (so J.N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986], p. 393), meaning that the pain is so severe that he is incapable of hearing and seeing. The other interpretation takes the casual meaning of 'from'—that is, because of what he has heard and seen he experiences this pain (E.J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* [3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965-72], II, pp. 64-65, esp. n. 13).

39. The word means 'to err', 'physically wander about'. The imagery behind this word in our present context is that Isaiah is incapable of having 20/20 vision.

40. In the literary world of this chapter, the twilight in Palestine is normally appreciated as a time of leisure and for the enjoyment of family life. Elsewhere in the Old

Figurative language such as simile and metaphor is strong emotive language. As K. Darr has observed, the emphasis is on what lies behind the imagery and thus the act of interpretation will always be more intense.<sup>41</sup> The simile of a travailing woman (v. 3) and the ‘twilight pleasure’ metaphor (v. 4) are used here to highlight the expanded meanings behind the surface level of the unpleasant Isaian emotions. The intensity (anguish-filled pain in v. 3) and the extent of the impact of the ‘harsh’ vision (twilight pleasure turning into trembling, v. 4) are forcefully brought to the foreground.

b. *From the Function of Monologue and Imaginary Dialogue to Aspects of the Isaian Self*

Unique to Isa. 21.1-12 is the intertwining of the speaking voices. There are monologues within dialogues and imaginary dialogues within monologues. As Meir Sternberg has precisely pointed out, speaking voices within dialogue and monologue are often ‘indeterminate’ because there are pockets of monologue in dialogue and imaginary dialogue in monologue.<sup>42</sup> In identifying the different speaking voices of Isaiah 21, one faces the same degree of difficulty. However, if reading vv. 6-9 and 11-12<sup>43</sup> as the Isaian ‘I’-voice presented in the literary forms of monologues and imaginary dialogues, the movement behind the literary level is the key for investigation. My reading will focus on (a) the function of monologue and (b) the function of imaginary dialogue (or the first-person projection of the third-person view) and the Isaian self.

Testament, ‘twilight pleasure’ is used figuratively (e.g. Job 3.9; 7.4; Ps. 119.147; Isa. 59.10; Jer. 13.16, etc.). The significance of the contrast lies in the strong notion of a complete ‘reversal’—the much-appreciated pleasure has become terror.

41. K. Darr, *Isaiah's Vision and the Family of God* (Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), p. 43, and ‘Two Unifying Female Images in the Book of Isaiah’, in L.M. Hopfe (ed.), *Uncovering Ancient Stones: Essays in Memory of H. Neil Richardson* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), pp. 17-30. Cf. also Janet Soskice’s significant contribution to the study of metaphor and simile in *Metaphor and Religious Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 1-14. She rejects both the mere ‘substitution’ and ‘emotive’ theories of metaphor and favors a version of the ‘incremental theories’ (i.e. viewing metaphors as both ‘non-dispensable’ and ‘meaning-expanding’). Thus the most distinctive function of metaphors is how they are capable of extending reference.

42. See Meir Sternberg, ‘The World from the Addressee’s Viewpoint: Reception as Representation, Dialogue as Monologue’, *Style* 20 (1986), pp. 295-318. L.A. Schökel also remarks that ‘monologue must be understood in its relationship to dialogue’ in *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics* (Subsidia Biblica, 11; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988), p. 178.

43. With v. 10 as clearly the Isaian ‘I’-monologue.

(1) *Function of monologue and the Isaian self: Foregrounding of a character's inner feelings in the realm of tension, struggles and debate.* Biblical research on the function of monologue is overwhelmingly done on narrative only. Isaiah 21.1-12 is a prophetic oracle; therefore, examination of the narrative's depiction of a character's inner thoughts through monologue will have to be refined with more sophistication (in our case, with a psychological lens). Within the context of an 'I'-passage, my reading is sharply focused on the Isaian self-representation of his inner thoughts and feelings through monologic speeches.

As a literary device, the function of monologue is to depict the self-consciousness and other aspects of the inner life of the character. Attention has been particularly drawn to literature of a specific genre such as 'stream of consciousness' novels and drama.<sup>44</sup> L. Alonso Schökel has successfully linked monologue with 'interior dialogue', which functions to bring about an internal 'doubling' of the individual. Therefore, stylistically speaking, monologue is not one person speaking, but 'the breaking into a context of dialogue with a reflection directed to oneself'.<sup>45</sup> By citing numerous examples from the Psalms, Schökel has insightfully explicated the function of this 'doubling-of-onceself' in that the notions of 'internal tension' and 'inner struggle/inner debate' within the inmost part of the individual are expressed forcefully and dramatically through the monologue.<sup>46</sup> M. Niehoff also suggests the notion of 'inner debate'. In a monologue, the character's externalized self is portrayed as being confronted by his/her internal self.<sup>47</sup>

The climax of Isaiah's emotion is found in his response to the announcement in v. 9 and the monologue in v. 10, and both are in the form of a lamenting cry. The construction 'Babylon has fallen, has fallen!' (**נָפְלָה בָּבֶל**) find its parallel both in form (dirge) and in content (lamenting for the dead) with 2 Sam. 1.19 and Amos 5.2. The anxiety and anguish associated with the all-night watching are accumulated at this point before the

44. E.g. L.T. Rosenberg, *The Theory of the Stream of Consciousness: Its Development by William James* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); J. Harvie and R.P. Knowles, "Dialogic Monologue"—A Dialog: The Dialogic Function of Monologue in Some Contemporary Canadian Plays', *Theatre Research in Canada* 15.2 (1994), pp. 136-63.

45. Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics*, p. 178. Cf. also Meir Sternberg, 'The World from the Addressee's Viewpoint', and 'Double Talk: The Indirections of Biblical Dialogue', in J.P. Rosenblatt and J.C. Sitterson, Jr (eds.), *'Not in Heaven': Coherence and Complexity in Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 28-57.

46. Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics*, pp. 178-79.

47. M. Niehoff, 'Do Biblical Characters Talk to Themselves? Narrative Modes of Representing Inner Speech in Early Biblical Fiction', *JBL* 111 (1992), pp. 577-95 (595).

announcement finally comes in the form of a dirge (v. 9).<sup>48</sup> In a lamenting spirit, Isaiah now turns to his people. With the deepest pain and agony, he cries ‘O my threshed people!’<sup>49</sup> If vv. 3 and 4 depict the intensity of Isaian emotions, then v. 10 is a portrayal of the depth of his grief over the fate of his people under God’s judgment.

In the film ‘The Bridges of Madison County’,<sup>50</sup> the same notions of inner struggle and ‘divided self’ are dramatically portrayed through the monologue genre. The character Francesca’s<sup>51</sup> ‘second character’ or ‘hidden self’ is uncovered during the four days she spent with Robert. Engaging in the affair, her struggle is then between her ‘divided self’ and the two versions or possibilities of her life. Her inner struggle is also between (1) her craving for a romance that has eluded her in her youth (contrasting her now quiet life in the mid-west), and (2) the domesticity of a marriage in which she feels tired and bland.<sup>52</sup> In a scene in which Francesca is seen as performing very mundane chores in the kitchen, this drama of her inner struggle within her ‘divided self’ is brought forth forcefully through a series of interior monologues.

Through this device, Francesca is depicted as struggling through different states of mind, reflecting on different stages of the romance and debating within her ‘divided self’ as to whether to leave with Robert or stay. From my audience perspective, it is interesting to note that ‘dialogues’ cannot convey the ‘inwardness’ of the struggle. ‘Actions’ cannot even come close to portraying a struggle that is both emotional and mental. Through the course of these unspoken inner thoughts, these inward silent acts, I perceive the developing, accumulating, intensifying, deepening results of her inner struggles being brought to the foreground. It seems that ‘monologue’ is the most powerful and effective means by which something that is embedded and inward (e.g. emotions) can be brought to the foreground.

48. Isaiah’s reaction over the fall of Babylon in the form of a lamenting cry creates a puzzle here. Some try to move the setting of the chapter from the clear historical reference in ch. 20 to a sixth-century setting, while others try to argue for the depiction of a normal, unemotional reaction to a distressing vision as repressed here (cf. n. 35 and my reading of vv. 1-2).

49. Literally, it reads ‘O my threshed, the son of my threshing floor!’ Threshing is a form of trampling (Isa. 10.6; 14.19; 16.10). It is interesting to observe that here, as well as elsewhere in the Old Testament, ‘threshing’ is used exclusively and in a figurative way as referring to the judgment of God (cf. Isa. 41.15; Jer. 51.33; Mic. 4.12-13; Hab. 3.12). This may shed light on the relation between the two laments in v. 9 (over Babylon) and v. 10 (over Judah). In both cases, the lament is over the fate of the people under God’s judgment. Cf. also Isa. 28.27, 28; 41.15, 16; Amos 1.3; Mic. 4.13.

50. Directed by R.J. Waller, 1992.

51. Played by Meryl Streep.

52. Note that she describes her husband as ‘clean’, yet serene and comfortable.

Through the same device, aspects of the Isaian self are being uncovered. The anxious and prolonged wait expressed in v. 8 ('My Lord, I stand on my watchtower continually; and I am stationed at my post all the night'), climaxing at the announcement of a dirge ('Babylon has fallen, has fallen!'), resulting in a painful cry in v. 10, all point to the emotive notion of 'inner struggle', or the externalization of Isaiah's inner feelings.

In both biblical and contemporary literary studies, monologue has been regarded as the most refined literary depiction of a character's self-consciousness. In the case of our passage, this self-reflection clearly conceptualizes what might otherwise be unconscious feelings or dormant emotions.<sup>53</sup> In the case of Isaiah, his ability to address himself dramatically in the form of a lamenting cry (v. 10) 'presupposes a highly complex character who has a strong sense of his individuality'.<sup>54</sup>

(2) *Imaginary dialogue within monologue: A first-person projection of a third-person view and the Isaian self.* The more hidden, embedded side of the Isaian pathos is represented within the literary framework of imaginary dialogues (vv. 6-9, 11-12) or monologue within dialogue (v. 8). The intriguing movement of these verses opens up newer perspectives to view the description here as a third-person projection of a first-person view'.

The opening word 'וְ' in v. 6 connects the vision of God's command to Isaiah to station a watchman (v. 6) and the watchman's report (vv. 7-9). With the majority of commentators,<sup>55</sup> I favor a contextual reading<sup>56</sup> with Isaiah identifying himself with the watchman in vv. 6-9.<sup>57</sup> The episode (vv. 6-9) is structured with (1) God's command to the prophet retold in a first-person report (vv. 6-7) and (2) the watchman's dialogue with God in the first person with news of the fall of Babylon reported in the third person (vv. 8-9). Reading the pronominal shifts within the immediate context of a vision (v. 2), the inner feelings of Isaiah are being expressed without the constraint of time and space—through imaginary dialogues. Within this framework, Isaiah gives his reports to the watchman in the third-person singular voice (vv. 7, 8a, 9). In doing so, he is distancing himself from the immediacy of the impact felt as a result of the endless watch. By identifying

53. Niehoff, 'Do Biblical Characters Talk to Themselves?', p. 577.

54. Niehoff, 'Do Biblical Characters Talk to Themselves?', p. 577.

55. Watts, however, identifies the watchman with Sheba (Isa. 22.15). Cf. Watts, *Isaiah 1–39*, p. 272.

56. Note that in vv. 11-12, Isaiah specifically presents himself as the watchman. Also, the portrayal of the prophetic function as watchman is firmly established in the larger context of prophetic literature (e.g. Ezek. 33.1-9; Hab. 2.1, 9).

57. It is obvious that the watchman in vv. 11-12 is Isaiah—'He calls to me out of Seir, Watchman...'

himself with the experiences of the watchman (in his ‘I’-voice, v. 8b), he is self-expressing aspects of his inner life: the feelings associated with the duties, and his consciousness of the qualities that are required of him. While fulfilling his duties with diligence (‘all the night’, v. 8b) and persistent watchfulness (‘let him pay attention, full attention’ (v. 8b), he expresses a deep groan of impatience in his cry to God—‘O Lord, I stand on my watchtower always, and I am stationed at my post all the night’ (cf. Ezek. 33.7). This rich portrayal of the more hidden aspects of the Isaian pathos is brought forth through the literary device of imaginary dialogue within the monologue (vv. 6-8).<sup>58</sup>

As a continuation of the watchman motif, vv. 11-12 features yet another imaginary dialogue between an unidentified voice calling from Seir and Isaiah (v. 11). Two features characterize the ‘hidden-ness’ of this dialogue: First, it is presented in the third-person view—thus there exists a distance and an objectiveness to whatever message it conveyed. Second, it is structured with a subtle question (repeated twice, v. 11) with a corresponding silent answer (v. 12). The question—‘What of the night?’—is asked twice and both times Isaiah is addressed as ‘watchman’. The repetition points to the questioner’s sense of the indeterminability of the night, the feeling of anxious waiting. It also implies that it is the watchman’s duty to attend to such inquiry—to be on guard through the night till morning comes. It is against this background that the ‘embedded’ aspect of the Isaian self is revealed.

In attending to the inquiry, Isaiah replies, ‘morning is coming, but also the night’. Against the background of the feelings associated with the watchman duties (impatience, v. 8; anxiety over an endless wait, v. 9; the constant demand for diligence and perseverance, vv. 7-9), I find here a direct reference to a ‘hidden’ emotion—a deep sigh over the fact that the dawn will certainly come, but before it arrives, there will still be a long period of darkness.<sup>59</sup> The second part of the answer—‘if you earnestly inquire, Inquire! Return! Come!’ (v. 12b)—is puzzling to many.<sup>60</sup> Apparently it

58. Since the dialogue in vv. 6-9 is imaginary, the ‘I’-voice in v. 8 could be read as an Isaian monologue with embedded emotion(s), particularly when v. 8 is interpreted in the light of vv. 10-11.

59. Oswalt has pointed out here that the watchman’s answer is enigmatic and is capable of at least three interpretations: (1) while morning is coming, another night will follow; (2) morning for some will be night for others; and (3) while morning will come, it is still dark (*The Book of Isaiah, 1-39*, p. 399). With Isaiah’s invitation for the people to inquire again, I have adopted the latter interpretation in my reading.

60. P.D. Mischall notes that since the word דָמָה in Hebrew means ‘silence’, so are the question and answer a type of silence; see Mischall, *Isaiah (Readings)* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1993), p. 60. The Hebrew construction in v. 12b is rather puzzling: אַמְתָחֶבֶן בְעִוּשָׁבוּ אֲתָיו. I take this to be an encouragement or invitation for inquiry.

gives no specific reply. However, if it is cast in the context of an anxious and earnest quest for knowing as implied in the question, then it means a lot to those who ask. In other words, when Isaiah is asked what is going to happen in the night before morning finally comes, he replies: 'I don't really know, but don't give up, I invite you to keep asking'.

This episode is introduced as a 'burden' and it is taken as such by Isaiah. When he has nothing specific to offer to people's inquiries, and when his role as the watchman demands him to keep watching and attending to people's on-going quests (vv. 7-9, 11-12), he is truly in a burdensome spirit. In this context, I find a reference of deep, yet subdued emotive language in v. 12b. Isaiah is helpless and frustrated. This emotive state could only be brought to the foreground through this imaginary dialogue, or dialogue cast within the literary context of a monologue. There exists a powerful link between monologue as a literary device and 'self' as a pivotal constituent in a person.

In modern computer game designs, players are given the option of choosing to play the game from a first-person view or from a third-person view.<sup>61</sup> Using a small amount of imagination, the shift from the first-person to the third-person view enables the player to be a player as well as an observer of the game at the same time. This creates a 'suitable distance' and a broader angle of perception, allowing the player to strategize from a more detached third-person perspective in the game-world. It 'allow(s) the player to be in control'.<sup>62</sup> This logical and imaginary analysis may shed some light to the function of a first-person projection of a third-person view. Adapting the same empirical theory to the function of the imaginary dialogue in monologue (or monologue within dialogue) in vv. 6-9 and 11-12, creates a space for Isaiah to relieve his tension and anxiety (vv. 8b-9), his feelings of helplessness and frustration (vv. 11-12). Through distancing himself from the immediacy and impact of these felt emotions, Isaiah leaves himself room to strategize, to cope, and to resolve the inner tensions associated with his watchman duties.

### *c. Exteriory and Interiory in Vision and Voice and the Isaian Self*

(1) *Speaking voices.* Multiple voices are represented in 21.1-12: God's (vv. 2, 6, 11a); the obvious Isaian 'I'-voice (vv. 3-4, 5, 8b, 10, 12); the watchman's (or the Isaian first-person projection of the third-person voice: vv. 7, 8a, 12); and lastly, the messenger's (v. 9).

61. Cf. Richard Rouse III, 'Gaming and Graphics: What's Your Perspective?', *Computer Graphics* 33.3 (1999), pp. 9-12. Also available online at <http://www.paranoidproductions.com/gamingandgraphics/fifth.html>.

62. Rouse, 'Gaming and Graphics: What's Your Perspective?', p. 3.

In a study devoted to vision and voice in Isaiah, Francis Landy has come to the conclusion that ‘if vision suggests clarity and exteriority, voice evokes the interiority of the person and an intimation beyond the horizon’.<sup>63</sup> The ‘I’-passages such as 21.1-12 and 40.1-8 are notoriously complex in their interweaving of speaking voices. As far as the Isaian personality is concerned, identification of the pockets of Isaian monologue within dialogue, or imaginary dialogue emerging out of the Isaian interior monologue is integral towards the Isaian internal profile. Moreover, the interplay between vision and voice in the dynamics of the depiction of the visionary experience provides yet another promising window of perception.

(2) *Seeing—hearing—experiencing*. The motif of seeing—hearing—experiencing frames the whole background for Isaiah’s ‘I’-voice and his emotive response. From the reader perspective, this coherent theme also engages readers into the literary world of the text and allows them to hear the Isaian ‘I’-voice. Isaiah 21.1-12 is presented as a ‘burden’—a ‘harsh’ vision. Isaiah has to witness with his own eyes the severity of the destruction (‘like storm sweeping through...from a land of terror’, v. 1), and the nearness and certainty of the invasion (vv. 7-8). The emphatic description of the continued acts of deceiving and spoiling of the attackers also functions to heighten the harshness of the situation (v. 2a). He has to hear with his own ears God’s call to Elam and Media to lay seige (v. 2b), for God has ‘caused all groaning to cease’ (v. 2c);<sup>64</sup> the announcement of the fall of mighty Babylon (‘Babylon has fallen, has fallen!’, v. 9); and the serene but hard question ‘What of the night?’ (twice) from the inquirers. As a result of this seeing—hearing—experiencing, he has to embrace the full impact—profound physical and emotional pain (v. 3), disabilities (v. 4) and the repressed feeling of helplessness and anxiety (vv. 11-12).

#### d. *Toward an Isaian Internal Profile*

The complexity of the speaking voices represented in ch. 21 demonstrates the refined and sophisticated techniques of Isaiah’s self-presentation (monologues within dialogues and imaginary dialogues within monologues). Emotions such as fear, pain, agony, lamenting cries, anxiety, impatience and helplessness are depicted with explicitness and intensity. Unique to this passage is the presentation of the physical and emotional pain upon the

63. F. Landy, ‘Vision and Voice in Isaiah’, *JSOT* 88 (2000), pp. 19-36 (36). For the contemporary discussions of voice in literature, cf. Landy’s ‘The Impersonal Voice in First-Person Narrative Fiction’, *Narrative* 12.2 (2004), pp. 113-51.

64. For a critical review of the translation and meaning of v. 2d: בְּלַא נִיחָדָה דְּשֶׁבֶת, see A.A. MacIntosh, *Isaiah XXI: A Palimpsest* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

prophet. Another characteristic feature is the way that the more hidden emotions are depicted through the subtle/silent question and answer.

Aspects of the Isaian interiority are brought to the foreground through his identification with the watchman duties. While many still hold that textual indications of a character's inner life, feelings and emotions are rather minimal,<sup>65</sup> a rich yet complex self-presentation of the Isaian personality emerges as a result of my reading. This demonstrated example provides promising prospects in uncovering the Isaian personality, or aspects of his inner life through the 'I'-window. As far as the Isaian internal profile is concerned, it is no longer a wishful thinking, but a viable task.

#### *4. Appropriation*

Appropriation is a two-way trip—from the world of the text to the contextual situatedness of the reader (and vice versa).<sup>66</sup> This essay is, in essence, an exercise on reading strategy and the 'empirics' of reading.<sup>67</sup> The visionary nature of Isaiah 21 and the depiction of the consciousness and duties of the watchman form the context of my appropriation.

Focusing on the rhetoric of prophetic speeches, Abraham J. Heschel concludes that since the primary aim of the prophetic speech is to move the soul and to engage the attention of the audience, it is out of imagination and passion that a prophet speaks.<sup>68</sup> In other words, prophetic utterance is, in essence, emotive language. This serves as the point of departure for my reader response—from 'the Isaian pathos out of his visionary experience and watchman duties' to 'my emotive response out of my own context-situatedness as a watchwoman'. Therefore, the act of my appropriation is from 're-living' to 're-expressing'.<sup>69</sup> I will spell out the dynamics as follows:

65. E.g. R. Scholes and R. Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), in which it is stated that: 'The inward life is assumed but not presented in primitive narrative literature, whether Hebraic or Hellenic' (p. 166). See also R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981), p. 114.

66. H.-G. Gadamer has long been an advocate of this view. He affirms the centrality of appropriation in that in order to understand the ancient text, the interpreter 'must not seek to disregard himself and his particular hermeneutical situation. He must relate the text to his situation if he wants to understand at all' (*Truth and Method* [New York: Seabury Press, 1975], p. 289; cited in S. Brown, *Text and Psyche: Experiencing Scripture Today* [New York: Continuum, 1998], p. 47).

67. I borrow the term coined by Brown, *Text and Psyche*, p. 47.

68. Heschel, *The Prophets*, II, pp. 1-11.

69. Based on Andrew Kille's theory on appropriation in 'Psychology and the Bible', I have further developed my two-step appropriation (re-living and re-expressing) in my presentation paper, 'Immersing Ourselves in the Visionary Experience of Daniel'.

- (1) First, Isaiah ‘saw’ with his own eyes the ‘harsh’ vision (v. 2). He fearfully ‘watched’ the calamity in the midst of partying and indifference of the people (vv. 5, 7-8). He ‘heard’ with his own ears God’s announcement of severe judgment (v. 9), and he ‘felt’ the pain like that of a ‘travailing woman’ (v. 4). This recurring theme of seeing, hearing and feeling, and the corresponding intensities, highlights the extent of Isaiah’s engagement in fulfilling his role as a lookout. He has to engage himself and experience this ‘hardness’ both sensibly and emotionally. In fulfilling my role as a watchwoman, I could never stay detached from the calamity witnessed and from the ‘harshness’ of the collective lived experience under the sun. Even re-living may bring back painful memories and identifying oneself with the mega-narrative could be emotionally draining.
- (2) Second, Isaiah fully embraced the dilemma and inner struggles in coping with the ‘hard’ and repeated question that is asked of him—‘Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?’ With a notion of helplessness, Isaiah replied, ‘Morning is coming, but also the night’. Apparently, he gave no specific answer. However, when it is cast in the context of an anxious and earnest quest for knowing, it means a lot to those who ask. First, Isaiah gave an affirmation: ‘The dawn shall certainly come, but before it arrives, there will still be long period of darkness’ (v. 12). Second, Isaiah issued an invitation and encouragement. Using three imperatives together, v. 12b reads: ‘if you earnestly inquire, Inquire! (וְעַדְתָּה) Return! (שׁׁבָּה) Come! (וְיִתְּהַלֵּךְ).’

As I re-live the global experience in recent years—the catastrophe of the South Asian Tsunami, the devastations of hurricane Katrina, the calamity of the Kashmiri earthquake—I am more convinced than ever that helping the faith community to come to terms with all these realities is becoming immensely difficult. Earnest inquirers from all walks of life and from all age groups are asking the same question metaphorically, ‘What of the night?’ The same feeling of helplessness is evident among counselors, pastors and helping professionals. As I seek to absorb the Isaian silent, open-ended answer—‘The morning comes, and the night too; if you earnestly inquire, Inquire! Return! Come!’—I then realize that the role of the lookout is to affirm the faith, to encourage faith seeking understanding and to lead people heavenward back to God. The words in the classic hymn ‘The Church’s One Foundation’<sup>70</sup> best captures a slice of the reality (i.e. a version of my re-expression):

70. Music by Samuel S. Wesley and words by Samuel J. Stone.

Yet saints their watch are keeping;  
Their cry goes up—‘How long?’  
But soon the night of weeping  
Shall be the morn of song.

The text has beautifully planted an irony to mark the end of the **מִשְׁׁנֶה** ('burden') concerning **שְׁמַע** ('silence') in v. 12. Yes, burdensome, yet amid the apparent silence, there is an affirming voice saying: ‘Inquire! Return! Come!’