

THE DISPARATE ELEMENTS OF THE INCLUSIO IN PSALMS

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ABSTRACT: The "inclusio" is that "rhetorical device also called cyclic composition in which the author returns to the point where he began" (Dahood, *AB Psalms*, I, p.5).

The growing literature on biblical stylistics indicates the importance of the inclusio as a prevalent technique of ancient Hebrew poetic composition. The literature, for the most part, adduces examples of the figure illustrating the correspondence of its two parts, at the beginning and end of a unit, without analyzing the nature of that correspondence.

This paper examines the inclusio with a finer focus. It concentrates on a variation of the familiar figure. Whereas most works point to the mere repetition or verbal association of the two elements of the figure, this paper identifies an inverted, reversed or somehow opposed and varied relationship of the two parts of the inclusio. The widespread employment of this variation of the figure in the Book of Psalms is demonstrated and its aesthetic and rhetorical motivation and effect are discussed.

The "inclusio" is that "rhetorical device also called cyclic composition in which the author returns to the point where he began" (Dahood, 1966, p. 5). This literary stratagem is found in individual poems marking the beginning and end of strophes, and marking the beginning and end of entire poems. "Ringcomposition" is the term used for this same poetic technique applied to larger structures in Homeric oral composition (Notopoulos, 1951, p. 97-99). This device has also been called "bracketing" and "envelope figure," "by which a series of parallel lines running to any length are enclosed between an identical (or equivalent) opening or close" (Moulton, 1895, p. 56).

I propose to examine the dissimilar elements in the corresponding parts

of the inclusio of the Psalter.¹ Most works point to the mere repetition or verbal association of the two elements of the figure.² I shall identify a particular type of correspondence wherein the artist repeats the literal stem of a word but in so doing he alters the morphology, phonetics, semantics or syntax of the closing element. The inverted, reversed or somehow opposed relationship of the two parts of the inclusio constitutes a widespread variation of that device in Hebrew poetry, a rhetorical embellishment in the work, and a complement to its theme.

The motivation for and effect of this altering of the conventional inclusio is perhaps the same as the motivation for metrical irregularities as explained by Freedman: “. . . artistic necessity as a guard against mechanical composition and the constant threat of monotony in the creation of metrically repetitive poetry” (1977, p. 13). Similarly, the same may be said of this variation as was said of chiasmus. It serves to “vary the steady drumbeat of the normal pattern” (Holladay, 1966, p. 409). The charm and artistry of poetry is the balance between recurrence and variation. It “is so delicately kept that monotony itself becomes the signal for a fresh surprise.”³

Each of the inclusios illustrated and discussed below may be contrasted to the classic perfect example of this figure seen in Psalm 8. The seven opening words and the seven closing words are, in Psalm 8, identical and repeated verbatim and “all that intervenes . . . [is] read in the light of this envelopment” (Moulton, 1895, p. 543). The deflection from the verbatim repetition provides a significant aesthetic nuance. The literary device with its variation also complements the significance of the psalm.

Psalm 26

Delbert R. Hillers reminds us that “there is a tendency for imperatives which characteristically occur at the beginning of a hymn to recur at the end” (1978, p. 325). This envelopment by imperatives is in evidence in Psalm 26 in which *bhny* and *nsny* of vv 1 and 2 are balanced by *pdny* and *hny* in v 11. The opening and closing of the psalm are replete with

1. Those inclusios or refrains occurring within the body of a psalm or those identified by some as marking intermediate strophes or stanzas will not be investigated in this study.

2. David Noel Freedman (1972) does point to one particular type that differs from the general inclusio. Jack R. Lundbom (1975) also recognizes diverse types of inclusio and warns against defining the inclusio too narrowly. His study remains, nevertheless, a study of the inclusio in general.

3. John Livingston Lowes (1919, p. 98), cf. Daniel Grossberg (1980 and 1982) for other variations of literary conventions.

various types of ringcomposition markers of which this recurrence of imperatives is but one. The repetition of 'I, in my integrity' *'ānî bəṭummî* in v 1 and v 2 is another; and the root *hlk* 'to walk' is a third. Psalm 26 exhibits these several inclusios, and others which we shall discuss below, which all complement the content of the psalm. The psalmist begs for judgment and protests his innocence in v 1 and v 11. In v 1, 'I, in my integrity, have walked' *'ānî bəṭummî hālaktî*, the *qtl* form of the verb *hlk* is balanced by 'and I, in my integrity, have walked' or 'will walk' *'ānî bəṭummî 'ēlāk*, the *yqtl* form of the same verb. Despite the frequent usage of the *yqtl* form to express past time, the significance may be the imperfect in v 11. At the outset the psalmist protests innocence and begs for judgment. The dynamism of the work is noted in the movement from cries about past performance to promise of future action and security on the part of the poet. As a result of the psalmist's devotion and the Lord's judgment, the psalmist gains strength and proclaims that he 'will [continue to] walk in integrity.' This is an illustration of a widespread reiteration with variation formula in the Psalms which parallels the meaning.

A phonetic or assonantal inclusio, with a distinctive reversal, also appears in the psalm. The last verb in the opening verse is echoed in the first verb of the closing verse. *'Amədā* 'has stood firm' in v 12 repeats the three consonants, *m'd* that appear in the word *'em'ād* 'I shall [not] waver/falter' in v 1. The assonance constitutes an inclusio, the metathesis of letters notwithstanding. The reversal of the sequence of the consonants is striking as is the antonymous relationship of the two verbs. The negative statement in v 1, 'I have not wavered/faltered' is similarly reversed in the positive declaration in v 12 'has stood firm.'

A second phonetic or assonantal inclusio is formed by the symmetrical collocation of the imperatives mentioned above. At the opening, the psalmist calls 'Test me, O Lord, and try me' *bəḥānēnî Yahweh wənassēnî*; and at the close, a phonetically and syntactically corresponding phrase in v 11 *pəḏēnî wəhonnēnî* 'redeem me and show me favor.' The strong identification of the two phrases is even closer in the Septuagint which has 'O Lord' between the two imperatives in v 11 just as in v 2. The interposed vocative is omitted, however, in the Hebrew, but the paralleling is still clear. The close phonetic association of the two verbs, *bəḥānēnî* and *wəhonnēnî* is obvious. The verbs are, moreover, placed in a chiasmic or reversed order; the first verb in v 2 corresponding to the last verb in v 11. This reversal as well as the labial *w* plus *honnēnî* echoing the labial *b* plus *hānēnî* at the opening constitutes a significant alteration. Barbara Hernstein Smith recognized this tension between recurrence and variation in

poetry in general and wrote “. . . the effective closure will always *involve* the readers' expectations regarding the termination of a sequence—even though it will never be simply a matter of fulfilling them” (1968, p. 110).

Psalm 29

The psalmist in Psalm 29 calls upon the ‘sons of God’ to declare the sovereignty of *Yahweh* whose power is manifest in the storm. The opening cola

Ascribe to *Yahweh*, you sons of God
 Ascribe to *Yahweh* glory and might (*'ōz*)
 Ascribe to *Yahweh* the glory due His name
 Bow down to *Yahweh* . . .

are echoed in the closing verses with which they form an inclusio

Yahweh has sat (enthroned) since the flood
 and *Yahweh* has sat (enthroned), the king from eternity
Yahweh will give might (*'ōz*) to his people
Yahweh will bless his people with peace.

The four cola of vv 1 and 2 have an arresting fourfold repetition of the appellation *Yahweh* immediately following the preposition *lō*. The final four cola of vv 10 and 11 also give evidence of the striking fourfold repetition of the name *Yahweh*. In the closing verses, however, *Yahweh* is in the nominative. This variation in the syntactic function of the divine name is one aspect of the altered inclusio. ‘*Might*’ (*'ōz*) appears in v 1 and v 11 (and nowhere else in the psalm) and forms a second inclusio. In the recurrence of this word, moreover, there are marked alterations. In v 1, this word occurs in the second colon and upon its reiteration in v 11 it appears in the second colon. A more significant variation of the inclusio is to be seen in the circumstances attending this ‘*might*.’ In v 1, the sons of God are directed to give ‘to *Yahweh* glory and *might*.’ At the psalm’s close, ‘*Yahweh* will give *might* to his people.’ The inclusio is apparent and moreover there is a noteworthy nuance created by the variation. The movement of this dynamic hymn is from God’s transcendence to His immanence; from His remoteness to His immediacy. At the outset, He is acclaimed and to Him are ascribed glory and *might in the divine pantheon*. As the hymn develops, God demonstrates His dominion over the tempest which is described with pungent vividness. Finally, God is portrayed as conferring *might* on His people, *here on earth*. The aspects of the inclusio,

including the multi-repetition of *Yahweh*, together with the shift in syntactic function and the recurrence of the gift of might with a reversal of bestower and recipient, tie the entire psalm together, and highlight the theme of the work. The poet, at one and the same time, associates the close with the opening and opposes the one to the other. By so doing, the variation of the familiar rhetorical device complements the content of the psalm.

Psalm 47

In Psalm 47, explicit, literal inclusions are formed by the repetition of *mlk 'al*, '*ammîm*, '*ĕlōhîm*, the root '*lh*, *kî* and '*eres* in the opening two verses (following the superscription) and the closing two verses. In vv 2 and 3, 'all the nations,' '*ammîm*, are called upon to clap hands and to acclaim the 'God,' '*ĕlōhîm*, with shouts of joy. For *Yahweh* the 'Most High,' '*elyôn*, is awesome and a great 'king over,' *melek 'al*, all 'the earth,' *hā'āres*. This theme and these key words reappear in the body of the psalm also. At the close of the work, in the penultimate verse, we read, 'For God rules over (*mālak 'ĕlōhîm 'al*) the nations (*gōyim*)' and in the final verse, 'The princes of the nations (*'ammîm*) assemble, . . . For the mighty ones of the earth (*'eres*) belong to God (*'ĕlōhîm*), and He is raised very high (*mā'ōd na'āta*).'

In the psalm, *Yahweh* is being enthroned as the universal *sovereign* over all the *gods* and over all the *nations* of the *earth*. Indeed, these are the recurring words which form the *inclusio*. Again, we note that the psalmist eschewed verbatim repetition in the formation of the *inclusio*, but rather crafted his closure with an alteration pregnant with meaning and artistry. At the outset, the divine epithet, '*elyôn* 'Most High' is used; at the close the same root '*lh* is employed in the phrase *mā'ōd na'āta* 'raised very high.' The same root is used, moreover, at the middle point of the psalm in v 6, 'God has gone up (*'āta*) with shouts of acclamation.' The consonantal assonance here is a unifying element and serves to form a strong *inclusio* which establishes a connection between the beginning, middle, and end of the work. The morphological variation or shift on each occurrence of the root provides for a dynamism replete with suggestive nuances. More than mere paronomastic word play is at work here. A punning on the divine appellative, '*elyôn* 'Most High' is apparently intended at each collocation of the root '*lh*. Dahood recognized this "theological wordplay" (Dahood, 1966, pp. 285, 287). The artistry of the psalmist, however, rests as much in the varying and opposing of the ele-

ments of the inclusio as in the commonality among them. The poet uses the root once in the divine appellation (v 3); once in the *qal* verb form (v 6); and at the close (v 10) in the *nip'al* form.

Similar grammatical shifts in form are to be noted in the root *mlk*, occurring four times. Each appearance presents the reader with a variant of this key root. The reiteration with variation maintains the reader's interest and highlights the psalm's meaning: in v 3, the simple noun with no affixes; in v 7, the nominal stem with a performative preposition, *l-* and a pronominal suffix; in v 8, the noun in the construct; and finally in v 9, forming the general inclusio of the entire psalm with v 3, the verbal *qal* form. It further demonstrates the artist's virtuosity in balancing the fulfillment and satisfaction of the reader's expectation with his surprise.

Psalm 82

In this psalm, we see an inclusio formed by the repetition of the divine name, *'ēlōhîm* 'God' immediately followed by the root *šp!* 'judge' or 'rule' in vv 1 and 8. In the opening verse, *'ēlōhîm* 'God' is portrayed as presiding in the divine council or pantheon (1a), in the midst of the *'ēlōhîm* 'gods' (1b). The collocation of the same Hebrew word *'ēlōhîm*, in its two meanings of 'God' and 'gods' in v 1, is the initial presentation in the psalm of a tension that runs throughout this poem and is resolved in the final verse. In v 8, *'ēlōhîm* again appears, this time in a vocative expression with its singular denotation, 'God.' The opening verse also has the declarative *yqt!* form of the verb *šp!* 'He judges' or 'rules.' The echoing root in v 8 shows a grammatical shift to the imperative form. These two changes in the key words 'God' ('gods') and the root *šp!* 'judge' or 'rule' are significant rhetorical variations of the conventional inclusio.

The repetition at the end of words used at the beginning produces an effective closure. It highlights the formal unity of the work and its artistic completeness. This rhetorical device also complements the ideas in Psalm 82 by strategically presenting dissimilar elements in the close of the inclusio. Both the shared elements and the disparate elements are at work in the psalm. The reiteration recalls the original and the circumstances surrounding that initial mention; the variation obtrudes the development and movement of the psalm. There is a progression which the varied inclusio features. At the outset, God is in the pantheon among or in the midst of the gods. In the course of the poem God severely censures the pagan gods for their wickedness and their corruption of social justice (vv 2–5). He further declares that they will die like mankind (v 7) because of their injustice. At the close, the psalmist calls upon God to arise alone

and rule the world and rule or take possession of all the nations. The demise of the socially corrupt gods over whom and amidst whom God ruled now enables God to emerge and rule supreme over all the nations. The shift from rule over the 'gods' in the 'pantheon' (v 1) to rule over 'the earth' and over 'all the nations' (v 8) is significant. The early attention called to the gods, the pantheon and their social injustice gives rise to the explicit mention of the terrestrial realm of the one God and His rule over all the nations. The psalmist calls God's attention (and the reader's attention, too) to man and his society. The change suggests a concomitant focus on social justice. Several psalms end with a judging motif. The author of Psalm 82 however weaves the motif into the fabric of his poem. This thread appears at the beginning—God's judging of the gods; in the course of the psalm—the iniquitous judging by the gods; and at the close—the call to God to judge the nations.

Psalm 97

An inclusio is formed in Psalm 97 by the collocation of the divine name *Yahweh* and the root *śmh* in v 1 and v 12. Verbatim repetition constitutes the classic inclusio but the Hebrew poet is fond of variation. Reversal of the sequence of the members of the inclusio is one such variation. In v 1, *Yahweh* appears first, and only at the end of the verse does the root *śmh* appear; in v 12, *Yahweh* is the last element in the colon that begins with the root *śmh*. The chiasmic order of appearance of these elements is coupled with another change that serves to oppose the opening and closing of the inclusio while at the same time it serves to associate them. The initial *śmh* in the jussive forms an inclusio with the final *śmh* in the imperative. This grammatical substitution of the indirect imperative, or the jussive, for the imperative is a minor variation that contributes to the opposition between the opening and close of the poem and, at the same time, ties them together. On the semantic level, this tension between contrast and correlation is noted. Both in the beginning and end of the psalm, the eschatological rejoicing in *Yahweh* is depicted. In the opening, the entire universe, represented by the 'earth' and the many 'isles,' are to be glad and rejoice in the rule of *Yahweh*. At the close, the focus is on the righteous or just who are to rejoice in *Yahweh*. This shift from the general to the specific is seen even more clearly when we note the intermediate position of the rejoicing of Zion and the cities of Judah at the judgments of *Yahweh* (v 8). We thus see the two parts of the inclusio answering one another but at the same time differing enough to reflect and underscore the content of the psalm.

I have focussed on the disparate elements in the two parts of the inclusio device in the Psalter. We have seen that the altered inclusio is an effective rhetorical variation of the familiar ringcomposition. The artist concludes his poetic work by returning to the point where he started. In so doing, he creates symmetry and unity. By introducing a dissimilar element in the close he disturbs the pattern and achieves a special effect known as "defeated expectancy" or "disautomatization."⁴ The final variation also features the development that occurs in the course of the poem. It simultaneously associates and opposes the beginning and the end of the psalm.

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4. For this concept, see J. Mukarovsky (1964).