

Psalm 77 and the Book of Exodus

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In the words of A. A. Anderson, Psalm 77 “consists of two main parts: verses 1–10 [= MT 2–11] form an Individual Lament, while verses 11–20 [= MT 12–21] resemble a Hymn.”¹ The contacts between what Anderson describes as the hymnic section of Psalm 77 and the Song of the Sea in Exodus 15 have often been noted.² Compare, for instance, Exod. 15:11 and Ps. 77:14–15a:

Exod. 15:11	A my kmkh b'lym yhwh B my kmkh n'dr bdqš nwr' bthlt C 'šh pl'
	Who is like you among the gods, O Yahweh? Who is like you, O Glorious among the holy ones? Awesome in praises, doer of wonders
Ps. 77:14–15a:	B 'lhym bdqš drkk A my 'l gdwl k'lhym C 'th h'l 'šh pl'
	O God, over the holy ones is your sovereignty; ³ what god is great as our god? You are the god who does wonders

A subtler echo of the Song of the Sea is contained in vv. 16 and 21 of the psalm. Alluding to Exod. 15:13, these verses frame the theophany of Ps. 77:17–20 in an envelope

1 A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, (NCB: Greenwood, SC: Attic Press, 1977), 2:555. The lament section of Psalm 77 has both individual and communal characteristics, as recognized by H.-J. Kraus (“Alle seine [the psalmist’s] Gedanken und Sinne kreisen um Israel. Die Gemeinde Gottes ist der tragende Grund und das Mittelpunkt seines Existenz” [*Psalmen I* (BKAT XV/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener-V., 1966), 533]) and E. Beaucamp (“Le psaume 77 . . . fait parler un personnage isolé; il s’intéresse moins cependant à son propre sort qu’à celui d’Israël” [*Le Psautier: Ps 73–150* (Sources Bibliques; Paris: Gabalda, 1979), 26]), among others.

2 In addition to the standard commentaries cf. J. Jeremias, *Theophanie: Die Geschichte einer alttestamentlicher Gattung* (2nd ed.; WMANT 10; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener-V., 1977), 26–28; H. G. Jefferson, “Psalm LXXVII,” *VT* 13 (1963), 87–91.

3 The similarity of *'lhym bdqš drkk* to *n'dr bdqš* makes more likely Dahood’s understanding of the verse that has been adopted here (*Psalms II* [AB 17; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968], 230).

construction,⁴ employing (in reverse order) the two verbs of Exod. 15:13 (*nhyt*, *g'lt*):⁵

Exod. 15:13	A <i>nhyt</i> <i>bhšdk</i> B 'm <i>zw</i> <i>g'lt</i>
	You led with your kindness the people that you redeemed
Ps. 77:16 21	B <i>g'lt</i> <i>bzrw'</i> 'mk <i>bny</i> <i>y'qb</i> <i>wywwsp</i> A <i>nhyt</i> <i>kš'n</i> 'mk <i>byd</i> <i>mšh</i> <i>w'hrn</i>
	You redeemed with your arm your people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph; you led your people like sheep by the hand of Moses and Aaron ⁶

There is a third allusion to Exodus 15 in Psalm 77 that has gone unnoticed. In v. 11 of the psalm, the final line of the lament section, is the charge that God is no longer working to bring about the salvation of his people. Given the obvious importance of Exodus 15 in the hymnic section of the psalm, we can see in v. 11 another echo of the Song of the Sea, where Yahweh's right hand is active in the redemption of Israel:

Ps. 77:11	<i>w'mr</i> <i>hlwty</i> <i>hy'</i> <i>šnw</i> <i>ymin</i> 'lywn
	And I said, "This is my sorrow, that <i>the right hand of Elyon</i> has changed." ⁷
Exod. 15:6	<i>ymink</i> <i>yhwh</i> <i>n'dry</i> <i>bkh</i> <i>ymink</i> <i>yhwh</i> <i>tr'š</i> 'wyb
	By <i>your right hand</i> , of Yahweh, glorious in power, ⁸ by your right hand, O Yahweh, you smashed the enemy

4 On "envelope construction" see D. N. Freedman, "Prolegomenon" to a reprinting of G. B. Gray, *The Forms of Hebrew Poetry* (Library of Religious Studies; NY: KTAV, 1972), xxxvi–vii (= *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy: Studies in Early Hebrew Poetry* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1980], 46). The index to F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea* (AB 24; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 659, will direct the reader to other instances of the phenomenon.

5 Beaucamp, *Le Psautier*, 26: "Il est plus significatif, à cet égard, que cette théophanie, évoquant le combat des origines, soit placée à l'intérieur d'un couplet sur l'Exode (v. 16 et 21)." See n. 10 below.

6 Note the exact parallelism of vv. 16 and 21: *g'lt* // *nhyt*; *bzrw'* // *byd*; 'mk // 'mk; *y'qb* *wywwsp* (two figures from the patriarchal era, with Joseph forming the link between the patriarchs and the exodus) // *mšh* *w'hrn* (two figures from the age of the Egyptian oppression and the exodus). For another example of *g'l* + *zrw'*, cf. Exod. 6:6; and note that *bzrw'* in Ps. 77:16 recalls *bgdl* *zrw'k* in Exod. 15:10.

7 Literally, "My sorrow is this: the changing of the right hand of Elyon." For this translation see W.-A. Goy, "Dieu a-t-il changé? Psalm 77," *Hommage à Wilhelm Vischer* (ed. J. Cadier; Montpellier: Causse Graille Castelnau, 1960), 56–62. For other suggestions cf. S. Grill, "Textkritische Notizen," *BZ* 3 (1959), 102; H. J. Spital, "'Um deine Handlungen muss ich klagen . . . ' Eine Betrachtung zu Ps 77, 11–12," *Bibel und Leben* 5 (1964), 50–56; and Dahood, *Psalms II*, 229. As this paper will indicate, context supports the translation proposed by Goy and many modern translators of the OT.

8 Or perhaps "glorious among the powerful ones [= gods]." C. Cohen, "Studies in Early Israelite Poetry I: An Unrecognized Case of Three-Line Staircase Parallelism in the Song of the Sea," *JANES* 7 (1975), 13–17, proposes that vv. 6–7c form a tricolon, with *n'dry* *bkh* modifying *yhwh*, not *ymink*. The adverbial translation of *ymink* adopts a suggestion of D. N. Freedman (cf. *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy*, 188).

Exod. 15:12

n̄yt ymynk
tbl'mw 'r̄šYou stretched out *your right hand*;
the nether world swallowed them up⁹

Merely to point out the allusions to Exodus 15 in Psalm 77 does not advance our understanding of the psalm to any appreciable degree. Such understanding comes rather from a consideration of *function* (i.e., how does the hymnic theophany of Psalm 77, dependent as it is on Exodus 15, function in the poem?), of *context* (are there other allusions in the psalm to the Book of Exodus, beyond those to the Song of the Sea?), and of *structure* (is Psalm 77 a unity, or is it, as some have suggested, composed of originally independent pieces? How do the lament and the hymn work together?).

It is the thesis of this paper that the hymnic representation of God's mastery over the sea in Ps. 77:17–20 is employed by the poet to answer a series of questions posed at the end of the lament section of the psalm, vv. 9–10:

<i>h'ps ln̄šh ḥsdw</i>	Has his steadfast love ceased forever?
<i>gmr 'mr ldr wdr</i>	Has his word of promise failed for all generations?
<i>h̄šk̄h ḥnwt 'l</i>	Has El forgotten to be gracious?
<i>'m q̄p̄š b'p r̄ḥmyw</i>	Has he in anger withheld his compassion?

In these verses, the central affirmation of Israel's creed, the enduring commitment of Yahweh to Israel, and his very act of redemption in liberating Israel from the oppression of Egypt, are called into question. We can be even more specific: the particular credal statement called into question by Ps. 77:9–10 is that found in Exod. 34:6:

<i>yhwh yhwh</i>	Yahweh, Yahweh,
<i>'l r̄ḥwm w̄ḥnwn</i>	El compassionate and gracious,
<i>'rk 'pym</i>	slow to anger,
<i>wrb ḥsd w'mt</i>	and abundant in kindness and fidelity

Ps. 77:9–10 is in effect a commentary on Exod. 34:6, taking up and questioning each point of the credal formula:

Has his steadfast love (<i>ḥsdw</i>) ceased forever?	= <i>wrb ḥsd (w'mt)</i>
Has his word of promise failed for all generations?	
Has El ('l) forgotten to be gracious (<i>ḥnwt</i>)?	= <i>'l r̄ḥwm w̄ḥnwn</i>
Has he shut up his compassion (<i>r̄ḥmyw</i>) in anger (<i>b'p</i>)?	= <i>'rk 'pym</i>

By calling to mind the paradigmatic act of wonder and power from Israel's past, Yahweh's victory over Egypt and his mastery over the sea, the psalmist answers the questions of Psalm 77 by asserting that God's mighty power to save is still active. The God who

⁹ Ps. 77:17 (*r'wk mym yḥylw 'p yrgzw thmw*): "The waters saw you and trembled; the very depths were terrified") recalls the language of Exod. 15:14, where it is the human enemies of Israel rather than natural elements that are described (*šm 'w 'mym yrgzwn ḥyl 'hz yšby pl̄š*: "The peoples heard, they were terrified; trembling gripped the inhabitants of Philistia"). For the parallelism of the trembling of nature and the trembling of people in the same text, cf. Exod. 19:16, 18; Ps. 99:1. On this motif, cf. S. E. Loewenstamm, "The Trembling of Nature during the Theophany," *Comparative Studies in Biblical and Ancient Oriental Literatures* (AOAT 204; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener-V., 1980), 173–89.

delivered Israel from Egypt can deliver the psalmist from the present distress as well.¹⁰ And so the poet can confidently answer each of the questions posed in vv. 9–10 by confessing that the truth of the creed in Exod. 34:6 is demonstrated by God's gracious act of salvation and by his display of steadfast, faithful love in the deliverance at the sea.

We need not be surprised by the appearance of Exod. 34:6 in Psalm 77. We find this confession explicitly in three other places in the Psalter:

(1) Ps. 86:15:	<i>'th 'dny</i>	You are the Lord,
	<i>'l rḥwm wḥnwn</i>	El compassionate and gracious,
	<i>'rk 'pym</i>	slow to anger,
	<i>wrb ḥsd w'mt</i>	abundant in steadfast love and fidelity

Ps. 86:15 is the only psalm text that quotes the Exodus creed fully.¹¹ The other instances of the use of Exod. 34:6 in the Psalter omit *w'mt*, as does Psalm 77.

(2) Ps. 103:8:	<i>rḥwm wḥnwn yhw</i>	Compassionate and gracious is Yahweh,
	<i>'rk 'pym</i>	slow to anger,
	<i>wrb ḥsd</i>	abundant in steadfast love

Parunak has pointed out that vv. 9–13 of Psalm 103 are a virtual commentary on the creedal formula in v. 8: v. 9 comments on *'rk 'pym*, v. 10 on *ḥnwn*, v. 11 on *rb ḥsd*, and v. 13 on *rḥwm*.¹² This is similar to the point we are making about Ps. 77:9–10, a kind of interrogative commentary on Exod. 34:6.

(3) Ps. 145:8:	<i>ḥnwn wrḥwm yhw</i>	Gracious and compassionate is Yahweh,
	<i>'rk 'pym</i>	slow to anger,
	<i>wgd¹³ ḥsd</i>	great in steadfast love

The order of the first two elements (*ḥnwn wrḥwm*) in Psalm 145 is the same as in Psalm 77 (*ḥnwt . . . rḥmyw*) and in Joel 2:13 and Jon. 4:2, two other passages where Exod. 34:6 is

10 Since the hymn in Psalm 77 not only draws on the exodus traditions but interprets them mythically in the light of the *Chaoskampf*, we are reminded of Job, whose lament is answered by God with the language and imagery of creation. Cf. C. Westermann, *The Structure of the Book of Job: A Form-Critical Analysis* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), esp. chaps. 3 ("The Laments of Job," pp. 31–61) and 9 ("The Speeches of God," pp. 105–23).

11 There are other contacts between Psalms 77 and 86, as the following chart demonstrates:

Ps. 77: 2	<i>wh'zyn 'ly</i>	Ps. 86: 6	<i>h'zynh yhw tply</i>
3	<i>bywm srty 'dny dršty*</i>	7	<i>bywm srty 'qr'k*</i>
14b–15a	<i>my 'l gdwl k'lhym</i>	10	<i>ky gdwl 'th</i>
	<i>'th h'l 'šh pl'</i>		<i>w'šh npl'wt 'th 'lhym lbdk</i>
15b	<i>hwd't b'mym 'zk</i>	16	<i>tnh 'zk l'bdk</i>

(*For the equivalence of, *dršty* [77:3] and *'qr'k* [86:7] note their occurrence in parallelism in Isa. 55:6; and cf. Jer. 29:12–13.) The number of such contacts adds some support to the thesis that both psalms share common concerns and themes, including the creed of Exod. 34:6, either explicitly (Psalm 86) or by allusion (Psalm 77).

12 H. Van Dyke Parunak, "A Semantic Survey of *NĦM*," *Bib.* 56 (1975), 523: "After Ps 103,8 lists the four attributes, vv. 9–13 give an exegesis on them. Verse 9 discusses the slow anger of the Lord, verse 10 his grace, verse 11 his lovingkindness, and verse 13 his mercy. In vv. 11 and 13 the same root used in describing the respective attribute is mentioned explicitly."

13 The use of *gdwl* in Ps. 145:8 in place of *rb* is not surprising, given their synonymy and use in parallelism. For *rb // gdwl* cf. Josh. 17:17; Jer. 25:14, 27:7, 32:14, 50:41; Ezek. 17:7–9, 38:15; Ps. 147:5; Dan. 11:3.

quoted.¹⁴ In Psalm 145 the initial position of *hnwn* is due to the acrostic arrangement of the poem.

To sum up the discussion thus far, I have argued that vv. 9–10, at the end of the lament section of Psalm 77, allude clearly to the credal statement of Exod. 34:6. In these verses the psalmist questions whether one can still maintain this credal affirmation of the character of Yahweh as gracious and compassionate in the present distress (described in vv. 1–3). The memory of God’s past activity at first gives the poet no comfort, but rather puts in sharper relief the psalmist’s present condition (vv. 4–7), raising more acutely the question, “Will the Lord be angry (*znh*) forever, no longer showing his favor (*lršwt*)?”¹⁵ This general question introduces and is specified by the questions that follow, which ask whether God can still be confessed as “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abundant in steadfast love” (vv. 9–10). And just as these questions find their answer finally in the theophany of vv. 17–20, in the conviction of the psalmist that the victorious savior-god of Exodus 15 is still controlling the destiny of his people, so the assertion that Elyon’s right hand has changed (v. 11), that it is no longer active for Israel’s salvation, is countered by the psalmist’s assertion that Yahweh is still redeeming his people as he once did, with his powerful arm (v. 16):

g'lt bzrw' 'mk
bny y'qb wywsp

You redeemed with your arm your people
the sons of Jacob and Joseph

And just as in Exodus 15 the movement of the poem is from God’s victory over Egypt (vv. 1–12) to God’s guidance of Israel (vv. 13–17),¹⁶ so the reference to God’s victorious arm in Ps. 77:16 is complemented by a reference to the guiding hand of Moses and Aaron in the last line of the poem (v. 21):

nhyt kš'n 'mk
byd mšh w'hrn

You guided like sheep your people
by the hand of Moses and Aaron

There is not only a semantic relationship between vv. 16 and 21, but a stylistic relation as well: in each case a 2nd masc. sing. perfect verb + prepositional phrase + *'mk*, with *y'qb wywsp* in v. 16 balanced by *mšh w'hrn* in v. 21.

14 Like Psalms 103 and 145, the passages in Joel and Jonah use the abbreviated *rb hsd* (Joel 2:13: *šwbw 'l yhwšh 'lhykm / ky hnwn wrhwm hw' / 'rk 'pym wrb hsd / wnhm 'l hr'h*; Jonah 4:2: *'th 'l hnwn wrhwm / 'rk 'pym wrb hsd / wnhm 'l hr'h*). The quotation of the formula in Nehemiah is slightly different: *w'th 'lwh slyhwt / hnwn wrhwm / 'rk 'pym wrb hsd* (Neh. 9:17). For further allusions to Exod. 34:6 elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible cf.

R. C. Dentan, “The Literary Affinities of Ex. 34:6f.,” *VT* 1 (1963), 34–51; J. Scharbert, “Formgeschichte und Exegese von Ex. 34.6f.,” *Bib.* 38 (1957), 130–50. The most recent treatment of the passage is R. W. L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32–34* (JSOT Supplement Series 22; Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1983), 83–88, 128–30.

15 For *znh* = “be angry,” cf. Dahood, *Psalms II*, 77. For the connection of *ršh* (“be pleased with, show favor to”) with *rhm* and *hnn* cf. Ps. 102: 14–15 (*trhm . . . 't lhnnh . . . ršw . . . yhnw*); for the connection of *ršh* with *hsd* cf. Ps. 147:11 (*rwšh yhwšh 't yr'yw 't hmyhlym lšsdw*); Ps. 69:14 (*'t ršwn . . . brb hsdk . . . b'mt ys'k*); and possibly Job 37:13 (M. Pope, *Job* (2d ed.); AB 15; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973), 283–84). And for *znh*, *rhm* and *hsd* associated in one text cf. Lam. 3:31–32 (*'t znh . . . wrhm brb hsdw*).

16 Freedman, *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy*, 215: “The main body of the poem falls into two parts (vss 3–10, and vss 12–18). The principal theme of the first part is the victory of Yahweh over the Egyptians at the Reed Sea. The principal theme of the second part is Israel’s march through the wilderness and passage into the promised land under the guidance of the same Yahweh.”

Before moving to the final question of the integrity and structure of Psalm 77, there is one minor issue that ought to be considered, in relation to the psalm's use of Exod. 34:6. We pointed out above that the absence of *'mt* (or *'mwnh*) in vv. 9–10 presents no difficulty, given the abbreviation of the formula in Psalms 103 and 145 (*wrb/wgdl ḥsd*), as well as in the quotations of the creed in Joel, Jonah, and Nehemiah. However, the regular parallelism of *ḥsd // 'mt* (*'mwnh*) has led a number of scholars to suggest emending *'mr* in v. 9 to *'mt*.¹⁷ T. K. Cheyne's statement of the reasons for the emendation are typical: "The parallelism [of *'mr* with *ḥsdw*] suggests אֱמֵת [sic] or, better, אֱמֵתוּ . . . ; מֵר [of *'mr*] comes from dittography."¹⁸ Also relevant is the parallel text of Ps. 12:2:

<i>ḥwšy'h yhwḥ ky gmr ḥsyd</i>	Help, O Yahweh! For the loyal have disappeared;
<i>ky psw 'mwnym¹⁹ mby 'dm</i>	the faithful have vanished from mankind

While it is true that the second and third consonants of *gmr* in Ps. 77:9 (and the final *reš* of the other two words in the colon, *ldr wdr*) could have triggered the change of *'mt* to *'mr*, it is also worth noting that the consonants *reš* and *nun* are occasionally interchanged, especially for euphonic reasons; in an environment like that of v. 9b, in which every word ends with a *reš*, euphony might have triggered intentional change, rather than an unconscious and unintended corruption.²⁰ If such were the case, *'mr* might represent a change from an original *'mn* (*'ēmūnā*, written defectively) rather than *'mt*, *'mtw*, or the like. However, given the omission of *'mt* in the texts mentioned above, the emendation, although not impossible, is unnecessary for the thesis that Exod. 34:6 forms the background and the source of Ps. 77:9–10.

Having discussed function (the relationship of Ps. 77:9–10 to the theophanic passage in vv. 17–20) and context (both Exodus 15 and Exodus 34 as employed by the poet of Psalm 77), we can turn now to our final consideration, the structure of the psalm. At the beginning of this paper I noted Anderson's division of the psalm into lament and hymn. The structure of the poem is a good deal more complex than this. First of all, against those who argue that the psalm is a composite, and that at least vv. 17–20 were originally a

17 Compare for example BHK, where the note in the apparatus proposed the emendation of *gmr 'mr* to *gmrh 'mtw*, and BHS, where that proposal goes unmentioned. An emendation could be simpler than that proposed by BHK: the suffix of **'mtw* is unnecessary, since that of *ḥsdw* could be double-duty (Dahood, *Psalms II*, 228); or both *'mt* and *gmr* could be written defectively, without *matres lectionis*. Characteristically Dahood maintains *'mr* of the consonantal text but assigns it a different meaning ("vision").

18 T. K. Cheyne, *The Book of Psalms* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1904), 2:13. Cf. also C. A. Briggs and E. G. Briggs, *The Book of Psalms (ICC)* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1907), 2:174. More typical of contemporary exegetes is H.-J. Kraus, who dismisses the emendation as "unnötig" (*Psalmen I*, 530).

19 According to Dahood, *Psalms I* (AB 16; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 73, "Abstract *'emūnim*, 'fidelity,' acquires a concrete meaning ["'faithful ones'] from its pairing with concrete *ḥasid*." Also possible is the suggestion of E. Pödechard (*Le Psautier I: Notes critiques. Psaumes 1–75* [Lyon: Facultés Catholiques, 1949], 57) to read *'mwnym* as the plural of the concrete *'āmūn*, as in 2 Sam. 20:19 and Ps. 31:24. The parallelism of plural *'mwnym* with singular *ḥsyd* would present no difficulty, since the parallelism of a singular with a plural is a common phenomenon; cf. H. Ringgren, "A Law of Stylistic Balance in Hebrew," *Horae Soederblomianae* 6 (Lund: Gleerup, 1964), 9–14; A. Berlin, "Grammatical Aspects of Biblical Parallelism," *HUCA* 50 (1979), 30–35. Alternately one could emend *ḥsyd* to abstract *ḥsd* in parallelism with abstract *'mwnym*, as some commentators suggest. Less likely is the proposal to emend *psw* of Ps. 12:2 to *'psw*, to accord with *h'ps* of Ps. 77:9; rather, *psw* and *'ps* are probably byforms (cf. F. I. Andersen, "Biconsonantal Byforms of Weak Hebrew Roots," *ZAW* 82 [1970], 270–75).

20 A. Fitzgerald, "The Interchange of *L*, *N*, and *R* in Biblical Hebrew," *JBL* 97 (1978), 481–88.

separate entity,²¹ I have attempted to show that the two parts of the poem, individual lament and hymn, form on the level of content a theological unity in which the questions posed in the lament are answered by the affirmations of the hymn. While it is possible that this unity is the result of the editing and joining of originally disparate and independent pieces, the rhetorical unity of the poem makes it more likely, in my view, that the poem we have in Psalm 77 is the literary creation of a single poet, drawing on the national traditions of the Book of Exodus.

Second, if we turn our attention from content to form, the contention that the poem is a unity is sustained by a number of structural features:

1. There is an inclusion that connects the beginning of the lament to the hymn. The word *qwly* is used twice in v. 2, where it refers to the psalmist's utterance of the lament. Correspondingly, the lament is answered by the *qwl* of God's thunder in the theophany of vv. 17–20, again used twice (v. 18: *qwl ntnw šhqym*; v. 19: *qwl r'mk bglgl*).
2. Like the inclusion created by *qwl*, another inclusion appears in the contrast of the outstretched hand (*ydy*) of the psalmist in v. 3, and the guiding hand of Moses and Aaron in v. 21. In addition to this inclusion at the outer limits of the psalm, *ydy* in v. 3 and *ymyn* in v. 11 mark off the lament, just as *bzrw'h* in v. 16 and *byd* in v. 21 frame the theophany. The interplay of these four elements is effective: in the lament the psalmist's hand outstretched in appeal is balanced by the apparently "changed" non-redemptive character of Elyon's right hand, while in the hymn we encounter the redeeming arm of God and the guiding hand of his agents, Moses and Aaron.
3. The poem is further unified by the fourfold repetition of the root *zkr*. In the lament, '*zkrh*' occurs twice, in vv. 4 and 7.²² Following the two occurrences in the lament, *zkr* occurs as well at the beginning of the hymn in v. 12, again twice:

'zkyr²³ m'lly yh
ky 'zkrh mqdm pl'^{k24}

I remember the deeds of Yah,
Indeed I remember your wonders of old

And interposed between the two instances of *zkr* in vv. 4 and 7, and the two in v. 12, we find its antonym in the series of questions that end the lament: *hškh . . . 'l*.²⁵

4. The repeated '*šyhh*' is also a fusing device; in vv. 4 and 7 it has negative associations appropriate to a lament, while in v. 13, where '*šyhh*' is part of the hymn, it is given a positive cast.

21 Dahood, *Psalms II*, 224; Kraus, *Psalmen I*, 533; Jefferson, *Psalm LXXVII*, 91.

22 The connection of vv. 4–7 formed by the key word *zkr* is reinforced by the similarity of the two verses:

v. 4: '*zkrh . . . 'šyhh wtt'tp rwhy*

v. 7: '*zkrh . . . 'šyhh wyhps rwhy*

23 Reading the qere '*ezkōr*.

24 The quotation of the Exod. 34:6 creed in Neh. 9:17 (see n. 14 above) is prefaced by a phrase reminiscent of Ps. 77:12: *wl' zkrw npl'wtyk 'šr 'šyt 'mhm*.

25 Other instances of repetition include *mqdm* in vv. 6 and 13; '*wlmym*' in v. 6 and *h'wlmym* in v. 8; *drkk* in vv. 14 and 20.

5. Finally, there is a concentric structure that cuts across the division of Psalm 77 into lament and hymn—a chiasmus²⁶ that binds together vv. 9–21:

- A vv. 9–10: The psalmist's questioning of the creedal confession in Exod. 34:6
- B v. 11: End of the lament: the psalmist's statement that Elyon's right hand has changed
- C vv. 12–14: Beginning of the hymn: the incomparability of God, whose acts and wonders in the past serve as the basis for the psalmist's hope in the present
- B vv. 15–16: The answer to B (v. 11): God still redeems his people with his mighty arm
- A vv. 17–21: The answer to A (vv. 9–10): the hymnic theophany shows God to be still the God who redeemed Israel whom he guided at the sea with his *hesed* and who revealed himself to Moses as *rab hesed*.

If this analysis is correct, then the central affirmation of the poem (the incomparability of God) is located in the center of the structure.²⁷

Thus both content and form lead to the same conclusion: Psalm 77 is a unity, a composition by a gifted poet who called upon the traditions and the sacred past of the people of Israel to answer the questions that distressed both poet and people.

26 Two other instances of chiasmus call for mention. One instance, which links v. 6 to v. 11, the last line of the lament, is formed by the synonymous pair *yym* // *šnwt* (v. 6) and the chiastically ordered *šnwt yym* (v. 11), with wordplay of *yāmīm* ("days") and *yēmīn* ("right hand"), *šānôt* ("years") and *šēnôt* ("changing"). This chiasmus is an example of semantic-sonant chiasmus, most recently discussed by W. G. E. Watson, "Further Examples of Semantic-Sonant Chiasmus," *CBQ* 46 (1984), 31–33. Another example of this device is found in vv. 12–13:

v. 12: *m'ly yh* *pl'k*
 v. 13: *bkl p'lk* *b'lylwtyk*

27 Edward L. Greenstein has pointed out that Ps. 77:17 occurs at the highpoint of the psalm, as its thematic climax: "The petitioner knows that God can turn history around, because God has manifested wonders to his people before. It is the staircase in v. 17 that documents the Lord's marvelous power" (*A Sense of Text: The Art of Language in the Study of Biblical Literature* [JQR Supplement; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983], 56). Further, the presence of staircase parallelism in both Exodus 15 and Psalm 77 is another stylistic point of contact between them. I am grateful to Dr. Greenstein for bringing these considerations to my attention in a private communication (June 12, 1984).