

# BAKHTIN REVISITS DEUTERONOMY:

## NARRATIVE THEORY AND THE DIALOGICAL EVENT OF DEUT. 31:2 AND 34:7

by

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*The one who understands . . . becomes himself a  
participant in the dialogue (Mikhail Bakhtin).<sup>1</sup>*

### I

- 1.1. Critical approaches to the text of the Bible have commonly employed some type of “divide-and-conquer” hermeneutic to deal with its variegated nature. Typically, scholarship has segregated textual discrepancies and discontinuities into composite sources and/or traditions, at the expense of the unity of the final form composition. However, recent interpretive innovations have developed methods to “conquer” the Bible’s paratactic style while synthesizing the text’s disparate parts within a comprehensive whole.
- 1.2. The book of Deuteronomy challenges the critical reader to explain how its multiple genres and voices cohere within a unified literary text. Presented as a farewell address by the prophet Moses, Deuteronomy is the lengthiest uninterrupted speech of any biblical character, one mediated by the voice of a mostly unassuming narrator. Few scholars however demonstrate awareness of the mediating presence implicit in the opening and closing passages of Deuteronomy. Robert Polzin’s *Moses and the Deuteronomist* (1980) is an exception, engaging the narrative of Deuteronomy with the assistance of the literary theories of Mikhail Bakhtin. Yet, despite Polzin’s auspicious efforts, both the narrator and Bakhtin remain relatively foreign to critical Deuteronomical discussions.<sup>2</sup> In having Bakhtin revisit the narrative of Deuteronomy, this paper will demonstrate the viability of narratology to account

for Deuteronomy's diversity within unity. A close reading of Deut. 31:2 and 34:7 within a narrative structure will also demonstrate the untapped potential of Bakhtin's literary theory for interpreting the biblical narrative.

## II

- 2.1. Bakhtin's theory of *dialogic* is based on his understanding of the dynamics and potentialities reverberating in all conversational dialogue. Dialogic is open-ended and indeterminate, it values relational truth situated between and within speaking subjects and revels in the diversity and difference of voiced plurality. The antithesis of dialogic is *monologic*, a (mostly heuristic) concept which asserts propositional truth (in abstraction from a speaking subject) and demands monovalent unity (usually through reductionism and/or totalization).
- 2.2. The primary building block in Bakhtin's theory of dialogic is the utterance, that is, any written or spoken statement integrated within a discourse and embodied in a clearly defined speaking subject. Between any two utterances there exists the possibility for a dialogic event, provided that these utterances in some way collide. Every utterance is also internally dialogic, for in Bakhtin's view, all speech is linked to the words, ideas, and utterances of others. In this sense all human discourse inhabits an intertextual universe; no discourse utters the original word on any subject. And so every discourse is twice dialogized—it carries within itself the utterances and ideas of others, as it is spoken from a specific situation to a specific audience. No utterance, and by extension no person, arrives at completion or conclusion. Monologic attempts to sum a statement, to finalize a life, or to somehow reduce an utterance are anathematic to dialogic thought and process.<sup>3</sup>

### III

**3.1.** Deuteronomy's narration of Moses' death is of biblical proportion: brief, and to the point. Within sight of the land from which he is barred, Moses is granted his last breath and buried by God in a place of no fixed address.

Following interment, 34:7 makes the following statement:

וּמֹשֶׁה בֶּן־מֵאָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה בָּמָתוֹ לֹא־כָהָתָה עֵינָיו וְלֹא־נָס לַחָה

*“Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died; his eye was not dim, nor his natural force diminished.”*

This enigmatic comment is made more so by a prior utterance in 31:2:

בֶּן־מֵאָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה אֲנֹכִי הַיּוֹם לֹא־אוּכַל עוֹד לְצֵאתָ וּלְבוֹא

וַיְהִי וְאָמַר אֵלַי לֹא תַעֲבֹר אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן חֲזָה

*“I am a hundred and twenty years old this day; I am no longer able to go out and to come in.*

*Yahweh has said to me, ‘You shall not go over this Jordan’”*

These two verses, individually and together, have challenged the interpretive resources of biblical readers for centuries.

**3.2.** The curious phrase “to go out and to come in” can refer either to general day-to-day motility or to public leadership.<sup>4</sup> Context is usually sufficient to determine which of these two meanings is intended. In Exod. 28:35, Moses employed the idiom to describe some of the cultic duties of Aaron: “And [the golden bell] shall be upon Aaron when he ministers, and its sound shall be heard when he goes into the holy place (בְּבֹאוֹ אֶל־הַקֹּדֶשׁ) before Yahweh and when he comes out (וּבְצֵאתוֹ), lest he die” (Exod. 28:35). Leadership was again on Moses' mind in Num. 27:16-17 when he petitioned God to appoint a successor to not only “go out and to come in” before the congregation (אֲשֶׁר־יֵצֵא לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְאֲשֶׁר יָבֹא לִפְנֵי יְהוָה), but also to shepherd the people so that they themselves might “go out and come in” (וְאֲשֶׁר יוֹצִיאֵם וְאֲשֶׁר יְבִיאֵם; note *hiphil* form).

**3.3.** In 31:2 however, Moses' intention is elusive, for the phrases flanking his idiomatic confession generate ambiguity, not clarity. Earlier in this final address, Moses employed the “going out and coming in” idiom to detail the potential windfall available, should the people uphold their end of the contractual God-Israel bargain (ch. 28).

The “blessings and curses” passage contains six blessings (vv. 3-6) grouped neatly into three pairs, each introduced anaphorically with the word “blessed” (ברוך):

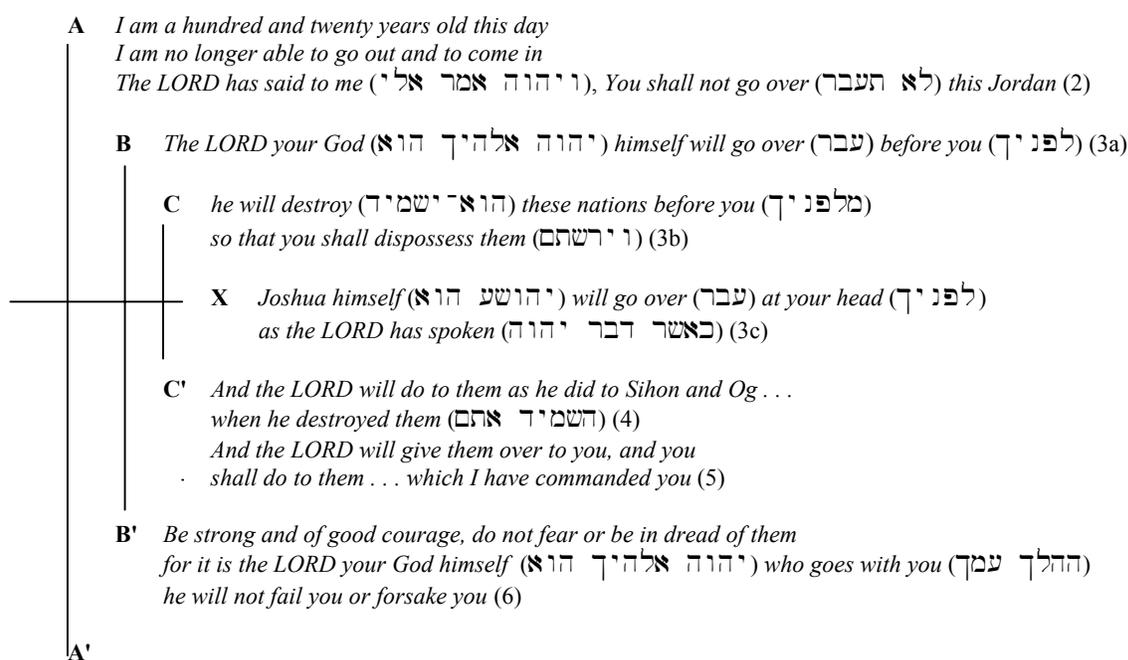
*Blessed shall you be in the city  
Blessed shall you be in the field*

*Blessed shall be the fruit of your body . . . ground . . . beasts . . .  
Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading-trough*

*Blessed shall you be when you come in  
Blessed shall you be when you go out*

**3.4.** All blessings mentioned in this textual unit are in some way connected to everyday biological concerns: motility, productivity, fecundity, security, and so on (cf. Deut. 7:13-14). The “going out and coming in” idiom at the close of the unit gives an all-inclusive summary to the unit, its reversed syntax paralleling nicely the blessings of field and city introduced at the outset (Tigay 1995:259).<sup>5</sup>

**3.5.** The upbeat mood of 28:3-6 has disappeared in Moses’ second use of the idiom, for his admission is most decidedly negative. However, the meaning behind the idiom in 31:2 is less than certain. Does Moses’ inability pertain to his leadership, or, following 28:6, does he suffer from a more pervasive disability that restricts his general physical movement?<sup>6</sup> Close analysis of Moses’ ambiguous confession reveals it to be part of a larger textual unit, framed by the narrator’s perfunctory directions (vv. 1-2a and 7a), and configured in the following chiasmic arrangement:



- 3.6.** The pivotal centre of the chiastic structure focuses on Joshua heading the crossing of the Jordan river (X). Enveloping this centre are a series of concentric circles whose first ring (C) contains a promise that God will destroy (יִשְׁמַד) the nations in preparation for Israel's possession (וַיִּרְשָׁתֶם). This promise is then expanded (C') with a recollection of recent military successes under God's command (הַשְׂמִיד אֲתֵם), followed by a reminder of previously stated commands that alludes to Israel's forthcoming program of ethnic cleansing (cf. Deut. 7:1-5, 12:2-3, 20:16-17). The second ring (B) promises God's escort for the Jordan crossing and then expands (B') with a number of imperatives exhorting courage on the eve of military conquest.
- 3.7.** A number of shifts occur between the structure's third and second rings (A-B) which highlight Moses' disfranchisement. A shift in subject, from Moses to other characters, is accompanied by a shift in focus as the speaker moves from self-characterization (v. 2) to an extended characterization of God, Joshua, and Israel (vv. 3-6). With changes in subject and focus comes a shift in mood as Moses' gloomy self-deprecation gives way to an optimistic description of Israel's tomorrow. Throughout the structure a number of subtleties emphasize Moses' exclusion. The prohibition of the leader is stated at the edge of the chiasmus (A), while the inner rings pick up on the verb of the divine interdiction (הִעֲבֹר) and transform it into a positive *leitwort* (B and X) which separates those able to cross the boundary from the one who must remain in the region beyond (עֲבֹר). Moses' exclusion is further emphasized with the repetition of the word לִפְנֵי יְיָ (B, C, and X), which casts Joshua *himself* and God *himself* (note the emphatic אֲנִי in B, C, X, and B') in Moses' traditional role of crossing "before" Israel and destroying the nations "before them." On the far side of the chiastic centre, "crossing over" gives way to actions and verbs in keeping with the task of Canaanite subjugation. Particularly important is the use of the word הִהֲלֵךְ to describe a God who "goes *with you*" (B'), as opposed to the former עֲבֹר (B) describing a God who "goes *before you*."<sup>7</sup> All acts of "crossing over" (עֲבֹר) and "going before" (לִפְנֵי יְיָ) have been left behind with Israel's transition into God's promise. Left behind too is Israel's aged leader, his fate sealed (A) by a divine prohibition ("and the Lord said"—וַיֹּהֲרֶה אֱמֹר אֱלֹהִים) that stands in sharp contrast (X) to Joshua's divine affirmation (כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה —"as the Lord has spoken" [cf. Deut. 1:38, 3:28]).<sup>8</sup>

**3.8.** The contrast between the able figure of Joshua at the centre and the disabled 120 year old figure at the periphery is clearly explicated by the structure's patterns and shifts. However, at the edge of the chiasmic structure the consistent pattern of statement plus expanded restatement suddenly breaks down, leaving the hero's negative announcement (A) without parallel augmentation (A') and the chiasmic unit without appropriate inclusio. This chiasmic incongruity forces a re-examination of 31:2, which reveals an important gap in Moses' self-disclosure. The last phrase of v. 2 ("you shall not go over this Jordan") is an exact repetition of God's words directly quoted in 3:27. This phrase provides Moses' audience and the narrator's reader with a link to the prophet's feisty petitions and face-saving arguments (1:37, 3:23-27, 4:21-22). Yet in 31:2—at the very moment when Moses' narrative coincides with his narration—no sign of protest or petition is heard from the speaker, no hint of Israel's alleged culpability ("the Lord was angry with me on your account") is alluded to. Are these omissions indicative of physical exhaustion? Or do they reveal a dispirited leader resigned to the fate that cuts him off one crossing short of his life-time goal? Such questions cry out for a parallel explanation, but all answers are left to dangle in the crucial silence of the chiasmic gap (A').<sup>9</sup>

## IV

**4.1.** No mention of inadequacy or limitation appears in 34:7. Instead, the two comments following the repetition of Moses' age portray anything but an effete or exhausted character. The meaning of the first comment, "his eye was not dim" (לֹא־כִהְתָּה עֵינָיו), is relatively straightforward. The second comment, "nor was his natural force diminished" (וְלֹא־נִסַּח לְחָהֱ), contains a difficult *hapax legomenon* (לְחָהֱ).<sup>10</sup> Several ancient interpreters, influenced perhaps by the preceding reference to Moses' eyesight, understood לְחָהֱ as a derivative of חָהֱ (cheek, jaw) and explained it as a reference to Moses' youthful appearance at the time of his death (perhaps due to a full dentition).<sup>11</sup> More commonly, scholars have interpreted לְחָהֱ as a reference to Moses' retention of "natural force" or "vigour," an interpretation favoured by some medieval grammarians<sup>12</sup> and most modern English translations. This interpretation is largely derived from the adjective חָהֱ, which describes the "dampness" or "moisture" of healthy trees, ripe fruit, and "green" wood (cf. Gen. 30:37-43, Num. 6:3, Judg. 16:7, 8, Ezek. 17:24).<sup>13</sup> A colourful variation to the "vigour" interpretation is forwarded by W. F. Albright, whose Ugaritic-informed reading of לְחָהֱ leads him to state: "The precise connotation . . . is undoubtedly 'sexual power,' the

decline of which is the most painful aspect of senescence among all primitive peoples” (1944:33n). Albright concludes that  $\text{לְחַהֵל}$  refers to Moses’ sexual virility, a euphemistic testimony to Moses’ tremendous strength and vitality even at the advanced age of 120 years.

**4.2.** Jeffrey H. Tigay takes exception to all interpretations (especially Albright’s) that see in  $\text{לְחַהֵל}$  a reference to “vigour” or “virility,” preferring instead to find a connotation of “moistness” that might harmonize with 31:2.<sup>14</sup> Following Jonas Greenfield (1984:223-24), Tigay finds a parallel with the Northwest Semitic root  $\text{לְחַהֵל}$ , a word which Tigay notes is well attested in rabbinic literature as a description for youthful, luxuriant skin. From this comparison, Tigay concludes that 34:7 is a reference to the condition of Moses’ skin.<sup>15</sup> However, Tigay’s attempt to parallel  $\text{לְחַהֵל}$  with the Northwest Semitic  $\text{לְחַהֵל}$  is a puzzling *non sequitur*, while his reliance on 31:2 to obviate any sense of “vitality” or “vigour” for the word  $\text{לְחַהֵל}$  is unacceptable (as already seen, 31:2 cannot be read unequivocally as the description of a decrepit dotard). Whether  $\text{לְחַהֵל}$  refers to “vigorous vitality” or “lubricious skin” is perhaps not all that important, for the implication of either is similar: Moses departed from Israel in possession of a significant degree of youthfulness.

**4.3.** Given the differences between 31:2 and 34:7, scholars have remained divided over whether these two verses are consonant or dissonant. Many follow Martin Noth (1981:176) and apportion the two verses to different authorial sources: the seemingly enfeebled man of 31:2 the portrayal of the deuteronomistic historian; the invigorated individual of 34:7 the product of the Priestly writer.<sup>16</sup> Others join Tigay in harmonizing the two verses, arguing that although Moses had lost his privileged status as leader (whether through antiquation or prohibition), he was neither blind nor hidebound at his time of death.<sup>17</sup> Can narrative theory, in co-operation with Bakhtin’s dialogic, move the reader beyond these simplistic categories of consonance versus dissonance?

## V

**5.1.** From a narratological perspective, 31:2 and 34:7 are intoned by two different voices. The description of incompetence and/or limitation in 31:2 is Moses’ self-characterization as he prepares to be “gathered to his people” (Deut. 32:50). The description of youthfulness in 34:7 is the reporting voice of the narrator as he draws his discreet narration to a conclusion. Rather than conflate these verses into a single unified description, a

narratological approach interprets them in their respective narrative situations and levels. Conversely, rather than tatter the text into separate sources, a narratological approach ties these verses together in dynamic tension within the narrative fabric of Deuteronomy.

**5.2.** The stage is set for a dialogic event. But the two primary speakers do not stand on a level platform, for the utterance belonging to Moses' discourse (31:2) is embedded within the framing discourse of the narrator.<sup>18</sup> The dialogic angle between quoted and quoting voices is therefore drawn by the boundary separating the host discourse and the adopted speech. As adopted speech, Moses' address simultaneously serves two speakers, each of whom are "dialogically interrelated." The embedded discourse is re-accentuated in another's voice and is subject to the narrator's dialogic evaluation and interpretation. When these two voices, speaking from two discrete contexts, converge on the same object of reference, they create a *double-voiced* effect which intensifies the dialogic action.

**5.3.** Double-voiced discourse, according to Bakhtin, comes in varying degrees of dialogic intensity. If a speaker assumes another's discourse and "objectifies it" for his own purposes, the double-voicing is a *stylization* of the original. The "stylizer" assumes the assimilated discourse to be essentially correct and in agreement with his own aims. Stylization turns to *parody* when the intentions of the quoting discourse are somehow different from the intentions of the quoted discourse. "In contrast to stylization," says Bakhtin, "parody introduces . . . a semantic intention that is directly opposed to the original one" (1984:193). Parody turns to *hidden polemic* when the speaker delivers a calculated polemical blow against another's discourse. Hidden polemic is a common practice; few day-to-day conversations take place without at least one "dig" or "barbed word" tossed in someone's direction.<sup>19</sup>

## VI

**6.1.** To the dialogically sensitive ear, 34:7's restatement of Moses' age is more than superfluous repetition. The reiterated age of Moses represents a shift to double-voicing as the narrator deliberately borrows, stylizes, and objectifies for his own framing purposes a phrase lifted from the hero's disclosure in 31:2.

**6.2.** What is the intonation of the voice that stylizes these words? Does the narrator evince reverence and respect as he eulogizes the death of the prophet? Hardly have these questions surfaced before the reader is caught off guard as the stylization moves to parody: “*His eye was not dim nor his natural force diminished.*” Whereas 31:2 portrays Moses in depressingly negative terms, 34:7 paints a much brighter picture of the seasoned leader. One does not require Albright’s carnivalesque interpretation to sense a radically different tone (though the absence of any erectile disfunctionality certainly goes a long way in enhancing the hero’s legendary potential). The dialogic angle between 31:2 and 34:7 is clearly visible when compared synoptically:

<b>31:2</b>	_____	<b>34:7</b>
<i>I am 120 years old this day</i> (בֶּן־מֵאָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה)		<i>Moses was 120 years old when he died</i> (בֶּן־מֵאָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה)
<i>I am no longer able to go out and to come in</i>	_____	<i>his eye was not dim, nor was his “natural force” diminished</i>
<i>Yahweh said to me, You shall not cross this Jordan</i>	_____	

**6.3.** The narrator’s stylized quotation of Moses’ first phrase represents a dialogic of agreement. The narrator then contrasts Moses’ confession with two negatively-stated comments (fused with a co-ordinating conjunction) which transform Moses’ admission into a parody, “[borrowing] a style and [applying] it to expressive purposes that are in some sense the reverse of the original purpose” (Lodge 1990:36). The narrator’s superlative evaluation of Moses’ physical health problematizes any conflation that would see Moses disqualified from leadership for reasons of physical debilitation. Rather, the narrator’s positive evaluation shifts the responsibility for Moses’ inability in the direction of the one who suppresses the hero. With this dialogic, the narrator’s utterance suggests that, given the opportunity, Moses *could* have led the people into their possession.<sup>20</sup> Moses’ retirement was premature, the result of a binding dictate from a monologizing God rather than the physical exigency of a tired duodecogenarian (cf. 32:48-52). With his dialogic of difference, the narrator’s potent evaluation *unfinalizes* the hero,<sup>21</sup> in the process delivering an indirect critical comment towards/against the divine character.

**6.4.** The dialogic collision between 31:2 and 34:7 is reinforced with the realization that 34:7 is not only the narrator’s stylization and parody of Moses’ confession, but also the missing piece of the chiasmic unit in 31:2-6. The narrator’s intrusion at 31:7 pre-empts an explanation, *from the perspective of the hero*, of the multiple issues surrounding his statement in 31:2. Instead, the external narrator has taken upon himself the task of resolving the

open-ended ambiguities in Moses statement. In the process of breaking frame, the implied author's poetic of double-voicing is exposed. The resulting dialogic collides across narrative voices, levels, and situations, pressing further questions to the fore. Why did the narrator deny the hero his own explanation? Did Moses' inclusio perhaps express his capitulation to the monologizing Other, a capitulation in some way offensive to the narrator's (dialogic, theologic, or ideologic) sensibilities?

- 6.5.** There is still one dialogic remaining, one which leaves the reader the task of filling yet another gap. In the face of God's prohibition (*'You shall not cross this Jordan'*) the narrator silently retreats. Why this critical gap in the midst of a full-blown chapter of narratorial evaluation? Bakhtin claims that any speaker engaged in hidden polemic "literally cringes in the presence of the anticipation of someone else's word, reply, objection" (1984:196). Does this narratorial gap indicate the recriminating presence of a fear deep within the soul of the behind-the-scenes author? In whose presence does he "cringe" in anticipation? Whose ideology is promoted in this dialogic of silence? Against whose ideological position has the author's narrator delivered a barbed hook?<sup>22</sup> Or does the Deuteronomic author, like Bakhtin himself, cower beneath the gaze of some ancient "Stalin?"

## VII

- 7.1.** The voicing of two of Deuteronomy's more problematic verses to different narrative voices and situations maintains the obvious tensions between these utterances while locking them together in tight literary (mis)step. Furthermore, a Bakhtinian reading of Deut. 31:2 and 34:7 demonstrates the potential of narrative theory and dialogic to raise important questions and to provide alternative approaches to old issues. The dialogic event between these two verses invites the reader to become a co-partner with the narrator in reading the hero's struggle in the monologizing presence of God. In the process of reading, the reader is manoeuvred by the narrator into many ambiguities and gaps left open when Israel's greatest prophet was silenced in the region beyond the Jordan. These gaps beckon the reader to reread the narrative, to grapple with its moral issues and questions, and ultimately, to participate in its dialogue. For Deuteronomy, like all great literature, is not only to be read, but reread.<sup>23</sup>

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> As quoted by Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist (1984:1).

<sup>2</sup> For some applications of Mikhail Bakhtin's thought to the Bible, see Carol A. Newsom (1996), Walter L. Reed (1993), Herbert Levine (1992), and David McCracken (1992).

<sup>3</sup> For further discussions on the dialogic nature of speech and utterance, see Bakhtin (1984:183-184; 1986:91-3), Keith M. Booker and Dubravka Juraga (1995:16), Michael Holquist (1990:60), Clark and Holquist (1984: 9-10, 241), Newsom (1996:293-95).

<sup>4</sup> Outside Deuteronomy, the general sense of the idiom is found in Ps. 121:8 and Jer 37:4. More frequently however, the idiom is used with reference to leadership, particularly military leadership; see Josh. 14:10-11, 1 Sam. 18:13, 16, 29:6, 1 Kgs. 3:7, 2 Kgs. 11:8 (// 2 Chron. 23:7), and 2 Kgs. 19:27.

<sup>5</sup> Most commentators interpret 28:6's idiom in a general sense, either as a reference to a person's "daily round" (Anthony Phillips 1973:190; Peter C. Craigie 1976:336) or as a blanket statement covering "the whole range of man's life" (J. A. Thompson 1974:270; Ian Cairns 1992:242; Eugene H. Merrill 1994:354; A. D. H. Mayes 1991:352; S. R. Driver 1986:305).

<sup>6</sup> In contrast with 28:6, many interpreters connect the idiom in 31:2 with public leadership (George W. Coats 1988:149; Cairns 1992:271; Mayes 1991:373; Jeffrey H. Tigay 1996:289).

<sup>7</sup> The phrase "*the LORD your God*" (יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ) is used whenever Moses speaks of the leadership and guardianship of Israel's God (B and B'). Elsewhere in this unit (A, X, and C'), Moses refers to the divine character simply as יְהוָה, "*the LORD*."

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, were it not for the mediating performance of the Deuteronomic narrator standing on this side of the Jordan, even Moses' final address would have remained in the beyond (הִירָדָה בְּעֵבֶר; cf. Deut. 1:1).

<sup>9</sup> An extensive discussion of the biblical technique of leaving gaps is found in Menahem Perry and Meir Sternberg (1986:275-322) and Meir Sternberg (1987:186-229).

<sup>10</sup> The *BDB Lexicon* (1979:535) translates the word לֶחֶל as *moisture* or *freshness*, while Ludwig von Koehler and Walter Baumgartner (1974:499) give the definition as (*Lebens-*) *Saft, Frische*.

<sup>11</sup> Tigay (1995:345). R. Joseph Qimhi negates this ancient reading, pointing out that the final *yod* is missing in לֶחֶל, while it is retained in the suffixed forms of לֶחֶל־י, for example לֶחֶל־יֹ in Job 40:26 (Eng 41:2) (Tigay 1995:346).

<sup>12</sup> Tigay documents the dictionaries of Ibn Janah and Qimhi, the translation of Saadia, and the *Samaritan Targum* (1995:346).

<sup>13</sup> Interpreters who understand this word to mean “freshness” include Coats (1993:181-94), Driver (1986:424), and G. E. Wright (1953:311-30).

<sup>14</sup> R. Eliezer b. Yaakov (*Sipre*) understood לחה esoterically: Moses’ *post mortem* corpse never dried up, but was preserved in perpetuity (Tigay 1995:347).

<sup>15</sup> Tigay notes that in Gen. 18:12 ׀עד is contrasted with the word בלה: “*After I have grown old (בלה), and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure (עדנה).*” He writes:

[T]he noun עדנה is used in contrast to בלותי ‘I am withered’ and it refers to “lubricious quality of the skin due to its being moist and freshened;” . . . This was understood in the Talmud, which describes the fulfilment of Sarah’s words thus: “After the skin had withered (נתבלה) and wrinkles multiplied, the skin was freshened (נתעדן) and the wrinkles became smooth and beauty returned . . . [T]he restoration of Sarah’s skin led to the disappearance of her wrinkles.

This suggests that Moses’ moistness, לחה, may also refer to unwrinkled skin” (1995:349).

<sup>16</sup> For example, Dennis T. Olson (1994:167), Phillips (1973:231), Mayes (1991:413), Cairns (1992:305), Coats (1993:186-187), and Driver (1986:424).

<sup>17</sup> For example, Thompson (1974:320), Craigie (1976:405n), and Tigay (1996:338).

<sup>18</sup> Embedded utterances are quotidian fare, occurring whenever we quote, ridicule, mock, or evaluate another person’s discourse (Bakhtin 1983:340, 1984:195).

<sup>19</sup> On the complex subject of double-voicing, see Bakhtin (1984:324-25), Simon Dentith (1995:98f), David Lodge (1990:85), Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson (1990:150), and Tzvetan Todorov (1984:68f).

<sup>20</sup> Many interpreters have recognized the premature nature of Moses’ death. Coats, for example, views Moses as a tragic figure (1988:152), while both Olson (1994:172-82) and Patrick D. Miller (1990:243-44) interpret Moses’ untimely passing as (respectively) a “decentering element” or a “subversive element” in the book of Deuteronomy.

<sup>21</sup> In *Problem’s of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Bakhtin writes: “Nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future, and will always be in the future” (1984:109). In Bakhtinian scholarship, the open-ended nature of dialogic truth finds English expression in the (somewhat clumsy) word “unfinalizability.” According to dialogic, no human person nor any human dialogue can ever be “finalized.” Newsom explains: “Whereas monologic conceptions make it possible to “sum up” a person, a dialogic orientation is aware that persons have never spoken their final word and so remain open and free” (1996:294-95, cf. also 1996:296).

<sup>22</sup> Bakhtin states that in hidden polemic, “discourse is directed toward an ordinary referential object, naming it, portraying, expressing, and only indirectly striking a blow at the other’s discourse, clashing with it, as it were, within the object itself. As a result the other person’s discourse begins to influence authorial discourse from within .. .” (1984:196).

<sup>23</sup> Special thanks to Dr. Lyle Eslinger for his numerous editorial and conceptual suggestions during the various stages of the writing of this piece.