

## “I”-Voice, Emotion, and Selfhood in Nehemiah<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

*Working towards the advancement of character studies in the HB, this essay represents an attempt of internal profiling of the character Nehemiah through his first-person “I”-voice (I-texts in Nehemiah). The role of emotionality serves as a “port of entry” into the genre-analysis of memoir, the function of “apologia,” and the compositional strategy of the book (a combination of Nehemiahic memoir[NM] and inserted narrative accounts [INA]).<sup>2</sup> Along this methodological path, I sought to first, uncover new dimensions of the Nehemiahic self; and second, to demonstrate the dynamics of an “imaginative, affective, experiential” reading—which I believe, is not only a chosen reading strategy, but a necessity.*

**Key words:** character, Nehemia, memoir, form-content-function, self-identity.

### A PREAMBLE

As one of the first-person texts<sup>3</sup> of the OT, the book of Nehemiah distinguishes itself with a unique literary genre—memoir (or more Nehemiah-specific, “personal apologia”).<sup>4</sup> Digging into the Nehemiahic “self” behind his “I”-voice and

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<sup>1</sup> This is a revised version of a paper presented at the Bible and Emotion Consultation at the Society of Biblical Literature, Baltimore, Md., November, 23-26, 2013. It represents my ongoing research towards the internal profiling of Hebrew characters, an advancement in the field of character studies. This is also an extension of my 2011 monograph, Barbara M. Leung Lai, *Through the “I”-Window: The Inner Life of Characters in the Hebrew Bible* (HBM 34; Sheffield: Sheffield-Phoenix Press, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> See Genre-analysis of Nehemiah by Arching on p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> I refer to texts in which the character speaks (or the speaking voice is) in the first-person “I.”

<sup>4</sup> I shall argue from the perspective of “form-content-function” of the memoir genre. Though the book primarily carries the literary form of memoir, as far as its function is concerned, *apologia* is the defense of Nehemiah (content), it serves the function of appealing for vindication from God. Recent studies tend to see that the Nehemiahic memoir itself is not an unified text but rather a “core wall-building” narrative, supplemented by later editions that are fundamentally different from the underlying text. See Hugh G. M. Williamson, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (WBC 16; Dallas: Word, 2002); Jacob L. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity: The Nehemiah Memoir and Its Earliest Readers* (BZAW 348; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004); Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The

self-expressed *felt* emotions through the literary vehicle of memoir is a delicate task. The same could be said of uncovering the internal profile of the sage Daniel and the prophet Isaiah through their “I”-voice.<sup>5</sup> It demands an approach that is intentionally refined. I shall employ a “*historically inquiring synchronic reading*” proposed by Odil Hannes Steck.<sup>6</sup> With conscious awareness of the issues related to authorship, dating and composition (or whether Ezra and Nehemiah is one book or two), this is a “text-anchored and reader-oriented” reading endeavour with due attention paid to the “world of the text.”<sup>7</sup>

Meaning-making comes at the intersection between text and readers. There should be no disinterested readers in undertaking the present task—the Nehemiahic “self.” This targeted goal calls for a reading strategy that is *imaginative, affective, and experiential*. Readers of the ancient texts should seek to use imagination and engage the whole “self” in affective and experiential reading. My reading perspectives often emerge within the imaginary space at the intersection between text and reader. It is my hope that the “empirics” of this reading will be demonstrated through my reading of the book.<sup>8</sup>

## B POINT OF DEPARTURE

Interdisciplinary approaches to character and emotion, self and emotion, autobiography and self, and autobiographer and persona offer promising insights into the internal profile of Hebrew characters. While each attempt has yielded

Nehemiah Autobiographical Memoir,” in *Language, Theology and the Bible: Essays in Honour of James Barr* (ed. Samuel E. Balentine and John Barton; Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 199-212; and Sean Richard B., *The Contradictions of Genre in the Nehemiah Memorial* (Ph.D. Thesis, Duke University, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> For the “I”-texts in both books, I worked with chs. 7-12 of Daniel and the following fifteen identifiable “I”-passages in Isaiah: 5:1-30; 6:1-13; 8:1-18; 15:1-16:14; 21:1-12; 22:1-14; 24:1-23; 25:1-12; 26:1-21; 40:1-8; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 51:17-23; 61:1-11; 63:7-9. See Leung Lai, *Through the “I”-Window*, esp. chs. 3 and 4.

<sup>6</sup> See Odil H. Steck, *The Prophetic Books and their Theological Witness* (trans. J. D. Nogalski; St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> I affirm that “reader’s perspective” shapes all the three worlds (i.e., the world behind, the world of, and the world in front of the text).

<sup>8</sup> Izaak J. de Hulster provides a comprehensive discussion on the informed and controlled use of “imagination” in reconstructing the background of texts. Further, imagination can also be deployed in order to discover and uncover the hermeneutical and homiletical strength of the biblical texts. See Izaak J. de Hulster, “Imagination: A Hermeneutical Tool for the Study of the Hebrew Bible,” *BibInt* 18 (2010): 114-36. Anthony C. Thiselton’s remark best sums up the strength and power of imagination—he states, “most (not necessarily all) biblical texts are optimally understood with reference to a directedness willed by an author towards a situational context for which some constructive imagination and enquiry is invited.” See Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Harper Collins, 1992), 120.

its goal-oriented results, it is my intention here to extract from these outcomes a collection of interpretive tools towards a methodology for textual construction of the Nehemiahic selfhood. Chapter 2 of my monograph, *Through the “I”-Window*<sup>9</sup> provides a carefully hammered out methodology for internal profiling. Substantiated by research in humanities and social sciences, the following four maxims will be employed as theoretical basis and interpretive tools for the “I”-texts in Nehemiah (1:1b-2:20; 3:33-7:3 [ET 4:1-7:73]; 12:27-43; 13:1-31—i.e. the four collections of Nehemiahic memoir, hereafter, “NM”) in their broader narrative contexts (3:1-32<sup>10</sup>; 8:1-18; 9:1-38 [ET 9:1-38]; 10:1-40; 11:1-35 [ET 11:1-36]; 12: 1-26; 12:44-47—i.e. the seven blocks of “inserted narrated accounts,” hereafter, “INA” by the editor/author).<sup>11</sup>

- (i) As a basic axiom in the field of emotion studies, emotions are major manifestations of one’s self. They are “markers of the construction of the self.”<sup>12</sup> In this sense, “emotion language not only attests a self, it is constitutive of a person.”<sup>13</sup>
- (ii) Language of religious faith like prayers, laments, praises, fasting, mourning are emotive language.
- (iii) There is established interconnectedness between “voice and interiority” on the one hand, and “voice and ideology” on the other. “Voice evokes the interiority of a person and an intimation beyond the horizon.”<sup>14</sup> A personality’s own sense of self is best acknowledged through self-expressions (i.e. one’s “I”-voice).

<sup>9</sup> See n. 1 above.

<sup>10</sup> I see because of 1:17, “Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be disgrace,” ch. 3 is an intentional portrayal in response to the Nehemiahic call. In this sense, with the repetitive “next to him” (3:1, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 25, 29, 30, 31), the Nehemiah “I” was present there.

<sup>11</sup> Whether it is by Nehemiah himself (Williamson, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, xxiv-xxviii) or by someone else, based on Neh 1:1a, I take the bulk of the literature as memoir (first person texts with the “I”-voice attributed to Nehemiah). Within the broader literary framework, the non-“first-person” materials are inserted narrated accounts (INA) on listing and naming.

<sup>12</sup> See June M. Crawford, et al., *Emotion and Gender: Constructing Meaning from Memory* (G&P; London: Sage, 1992), 126; Hazel R. Markus and Shinobu Kitayama, “The Cultural Construction of Self and Emotion: Implications for Social Behavior,” in *Emotion and Culture: Empirical Studies of Mutual Influence* (ed. Shinobu Kitayama and Hazel R. Markus; Washington: American Psychological Association, 1994), 89-130.

<sup>13</sup> Timothy Polk has argued throughout his book that “emotion language not only attests a self, it is constitutive of a self.” See Timothy Polk, *The Prophetic Persona: Jeremiah and the Language of the Self* (JSOTSup 32; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 24.

<sup>14</sup> See Francis Landy, “Vision and Voice in Isaiah,” *JSOT* 88 (2000): 19-36 (36).

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(iv) Mikhael M. Bakhtin’s ideas about polyphony and dialogism have profound implications on reading the “self” in “I”-texts. In particular, first-person texts imply a conversation with the “self” of the speaker and they are dialogic. This dialogue is something into which the reader may also enter as a continuing participant.<sup>15</sup>

## C POINTS OF ENTRY: TOWARD A TEXTUAL CONSTURCTION OF THE NEHEMIAHIC SELFHOOD

### 1 Memoir, Emotion and Self Identity

Reading the book of Nehemiah as Nehemiahic memoir dominates recent research and commentaries on the book. This “official memorial” genre was a literary form used widely throughout the ANE, from Mesopotamia to Persia and to Egypt in form of inscriptions.<sup>16</sup> While the autobiography spans a lifetime, a memoir tends to deal with a more specific period or theme in one’s life. The memoir narrows the view and it is focused either in time or event.

A powerful memoir consists of highlights that point out an underlying theme. The highlights are linked in a story form, with an emphasis on something happened. In the case of Nehemiah, the emerging theme from his memoir is the incidents within the twelve years since he was permitted to return to Jerusalem to rebuild, appointed as governor and served there. I am going to argue below that his rebuilding is more than the walls of the city, but the integrity of a nation—transforming their life of worship.

Although a memoir follows a story form, it has a particular voice—the writer’s. This could be perceived as a *window* into dimensions of the Nehemiahic self. Memoirs are not just concerned with what happened, but with how “what happened” *felt* by the writer. In essence, a memoir is not about what happens, but the *person* to whom things happen.<sup>17</sup> Memoirs are usually fueled by *emotion and sensory details*. It is the emotions and physical sensations surrounding events that linger in our minds and our lives. Therefore, the genre of

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<sup>15</sup> See Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (ed. Michael Holquist; trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 281. See also Carol A. Newsom, “Bakhtin, the Bible and Dialogic Truth,” *JR* 76 (1996): 302.

<sup>16</sup> Memoir comes from the Latin word *memoria*, meaning memory. Memoir is an evolution of autobiography. An autobiography is a story written by the author about his/her life so far. A Comparative approach of the NM with Egyptian and Mesopotamian inscriptions commemorating the establishments of the rulers of cities and states indicates some significant similarities. See Blenkinsopp, “The Nehemiah Autobiographical,” 199.

<sup>17</sup> Jūra Avižienis, “Mediated and Unmediated Access to the Past: Assessing the Memoir as Literary Genre,” *JBS* 36/1 (2005): 39-50; DOI: 10.1080/01629770400000231.

memoir has the capacity to compel the reader to read on and to *experience* the life narrative of the memoir. Therefore, memoirs are to be experienced and not read only. The same dynamics could be said of the Nehemiahic memoir which serves as a literary vehicle to capture the powerful emotions—as markers of the construction of his selfhood.

One would find the language used as well as the emotions expressed are overwhelmingly in the realm of “anger.” Emphatic words like “greatly incensed” (רָבָה, 3:33 [ET 4:1]), “they were very angry” (וַיָּחֹר לָהֶם מָאָד), 4:1 [ET 4:7]) are used to describe the enemies. Strong emotive words such as “I was very angry” (וַיָּרַע לִי מָאָד, 5:6); “And it grieved me greatly” (וַיָּרַע לִי מָאָד, 13:8) and drastic and graphic actions towards his enemies: “I rebuked (וְאָרַבָּה) the nobles/officials” (5:7; 13:17, 25); “I testified against them” (וְאָעִידָה בָּהֶם, 13:21); “I will lay hands on you” (13:21); “I beat some of them and pulled out their hair” (13:25); “I drove him away from me” (13:28)—collectively point to an “angry” soul. His *felt* emotions are laid raw in front of his first audience/recipients of the book through the memoir.

## 2 Personal Apologia and Selfhood

Represented by Blenkinsopp,<sup>18</sup> others argued that “apologia” characterizes the form, content and function of the Nehemiahic memoir. As a genre, *apologia* is a speech in defense or as a vindication of a person. In ancient Greece, such a defense was considered a significant genre of rhetoric and 5:1-19 can best fit in an “apologia” context. When faced with outcries from the poor over the mistreatment they have endured, Nehemiah ordered the priests, nobles and officials to stop charging interest and give back to the poor their fields and vineyards, with severe warnings if they did not obey (vv. 9-13). On this occasion, Nehemiah apologetically stated the fact that he did not claim any rewards (shekels of silver, land, food or wine) which he was entitled to receive as governor. Instead, he provided food for hundreds, Jews and official and the needy, out of reverence for God (vv. 14-18). Moreover, the passage ends with an intriguing direct address to God—“Remember me with favor, my God, for all I have done for these people” (v. 19). Reading in the context of *apologia*, Nehemiah’s personal defense extends to an appeal to God for his vindication.

Nehemiah’s last reform as self-narrated in 13:1-30 is another clear indication of “apologia.” When the priest Eliashib provided Tobiah the kind of provision that was prohibited by the Law, Nehemiah did a series of radical actions upon the officials—warning and rebuking them (vv. 1-12). When peo-

<sup>18</sup> See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Judaism: The First Phase-The Place of Ezra and Nehemiah in the Origins of Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), esp. 86-116; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1990), 247; Tamara C. Eskenazi, review of Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary*, *JBL* 109 (1990): 525-27.

ple failed to observe the Sabbath (vv. 15-22), and others married gentile women, the same drastic actions were performed—warning, rebuking, driving them out (vv. 23-30). More strikingly within this chapter, Nehemiah addressed to God directly and repeatedly for three times (vv. 14, 22, 30b), requesting God to remember (זָכַר)<sup>19</sup> him “with favor/mercy” for what he has done for the people. By praying this unique Nehemiahic prayer,<sup>20</sup> the need to defend himself among his contemporaries and for vindication from God is evident.

Within the memoir section of the book, the works or actions (big or small) that Nehemiah performed were always plainly-narrated. Yet we observe the general pattern in the flow of the memoir – “Because xx things happened, I reacted/responded in xx ways.” The key concern for Nehemiah is seeking justification for his *felt* emotions as well as responsive actions.

One readerly question I ask of the text is the reason behind Nehemiah’s internal need for justification among his contemporaries and from God, as governor of Judah. I believe there are layers of submerged psychological needs emerging here. In the broader narrative context of the memoir, if one connects the self-expressed emotions and feelings in chapters one and two, this internal need becomes evident. His weeping, mourning and fasting were done in private. He was afraid to reveal anything to the king (2:2b “I was very much afraid”). The bottom line of his desire to rebuild Jerusalem was only if “it pleases the king” (3x—2:4b; 6; 7). My reading leads me to search for the answer through his dual, yet conflicted roles—as “God’s servant” and as “a servant to the king.” In his brief address to God in 1:11, “your servant” appears three times. Self-consciously, he introduced himself to his first audience as “a servant to the king” (2:5) with a specific, lowly role of a “cupbearer” (1:11). There was a drastic role-change along with their respective role-expectations. This was from the service of a “cupbearer” whose role was to taste the wine (safeguarding the king from getting poisoned) to that of an appointed governor of Judah. Not only was he responsible to rebuild the walls of the city but the integrity and pride of a struggling people. This self-consciousness may account for his internal need—seeking justification from his contemporaries and vindication from God.

Reading Nehemiah as “memoir” and “personal apologia” may have profound implications on the construction of the Nehemiahic self, one that is more complex than apparently surfaced from the text. Potentially, it would further enrich and expand our understanding of the Nehemiahic internal profile.

<sup>19</sup> This has been referred to as the זָכַר formula in the book which occurs nine times, and four times in the same context of seeking vindication from God (5:19; 13:14; 13:22b; 13:31b). The other occurrences are—1:8; 4:8 [ET 4:14]; 46:14 (2x); 13:29.

<sup>20</sup> Burt has commented that this repeated direct address requesting God to remember him have few, if any, parallels in biblical narrative text. See Burt, *Contradictions*, 2.

### 3 Language of Religious Faith, Emotion, and Selfhood

Language of religious faith like mourning, fasting (1:4; 9:1-2) and prayers is emotive language. Characteristic to the Nehemiahic memoir is the frequent prayers, invocations, and imprecations. He prayed before bringing his petition to the king (2:4b); twice he prayed when faced with opposition to the rebuilding (4:4; 6:9b). He acknowledged that the “gracious hands of God was with him” (also twice in 2:8b; 18); and it was God who strengthened his hands in 6:9b.

The most distinctive phrase in the Nehemiahic memoir is the repetitive use (9x) of the “remember (*זכור*) me” formula/motif scattered unequally throughout the book (1:8; 4:8 [ET 4:14]; 6:14 (2x); 13:29; 5:19; 13:14; 13:22b; 13:31b). The whole emotive realm of the word *זכור* in the OT signifies that through the act of remembering, it brings effectual impact upon the present and the future.<sup>21</sup> With the frequent use of this highly emotive word in invocations and imprecations, dimensions of the interiority of Nehemiah are brought to the foreground.

### 4 Polyphony, Dialogism and Self: The Bakhtinian Perspectives

Employing the Bakhtinian perspectives on polyphony and dialogism to the reading of the Nehemiahic self, one has to proceed with certain degree of sophistication. In fact, there is no one single methodology that can accommodate the whole spectrum of the Bakhtinian theories on polyphonic discourse and dialogism. According to Bakhtin, any utterance or discourse, whether written or spoken, is always addressed to someone, and therefore possesses a dialogic quality.<sup>22</sup> Thus, at the foundation of Bakhtin’s ideology is the view that any form of discourse is a reply, and therefore, always takes shape in response to what has already been said. This classification of dialogism leads to what Bakhtin calls “dialogic truth.” Dialogic truth exists at the point of intersection of several unmerged voices (polyphony).<sup>23</sup> Along the similar line of

<sup>21</sup> The book of Deuteronomy provides a good demonstrated example. As the key word within the book. Moses urged the second generation Israelites, to “remember” (*זכור*) the ways that God has delivered them out of slavery in Egypt (7:18-21) and led them through the vast and dreadful desert (8:2). The effectual impact on the present would be the courage to fight the foreign nations, with the future fixed on “go and take possession of the promise land” (1:8, 21).

<sup>22</sup> See Mikhail M. Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genre,” in *Speech Genre and Other Late Essays* (ed. Mikhail M. Bakhtin; trans. V. W. McGee; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 60-102; Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 281; Andrés A. Haye, “Living Being and Speaking Being: Toward a Dialogical Approach to Intentionality,” *IPB* 42 (2008): 157-63 (esp. 160-61).

<sup>23</sup> Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (ed. and trans. C. Emerson; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 81.

examination, Alonso Schökel also qualifies monologue as “the breaking into a context of dialogues with a reflection directed to oneself.”<sup>24</sup>

Appropriating Alonso Schökel’s notion of monologue-dialogue and the Bakhtinian perspectives on polyphony and dialogism to the Nehemiahic memoir seems to be an uncharted path. The genre of memoir, by ancient or modern usage is distinct from that of a “monologue” (whether interior or exterior). It is meant to engage the readers in a dialogic fashion. Reading the Nehemiahic memoir as *apologia*, Nehemiah’s “I”- is always in dialogue with his contemporaries, as response to something already been said or happened. The book of Nehemiah is also a polyphonic text. Nehemiah’s I-voice was in constant, ongoing dialogue with the multiplicity of speaking voices—the speaking voices of his adversaries Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem (2:19-20; 3:33-35 [ET 4:1-3]); the priests, nobles and officials in Judah whom he rebuked in 5:6-13 and during his final reforms in ch. 13; the collective voice of the communal prayers in ch. 9; the outcries of the poor in ch. 5; and the people who kept reporting to him before, during, and after his return to rebuild (1:2-3; 6:19; 13:7, etc.). Since the interconnectedness of voice and ideology is a firmly established maxim,<sup>25</sup> readers can hear the unmerged Nehemiahic “I” in the context of a polyphonic narrative. Behind the “I”-voice of Nehemiah, is the Nehemiahic ideology which enters into an ongoing dialogue with the competing ideologies represented in the other speaking voices in his contextual situatedness.

Read in this light, the emerging Nehemiahic selfhood takes on a new dimension of depth—something that is beyond his self-expressed emotions. Mark Boda has remarked that within the narrative framework of the Nehemiah text, the shifting of the speaking voice from the first-person memoir to the narrated voice (though quite awkward to some) may signify a change of the “point of view” (from the memorist to the narrator).<sup>26</sup> It is in this vibrant, dialogic dynamics, a fuller Nehemiahic “self” emerges.

<sup>24</sup> L. Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics* (Rome: Editrice Pontifico Istituto Biblio, 1998), 178.

<sup>25</sup> I draw on the same connectedness between “voice and ideology” in my reading of the multiplicity of speaking voices in Ecclesiastes. See Barbara M. Leung Lai, “Voice and Ideology in Ecclesiastes: Reading ‘Cross the Grains,’” in *Interested Readers: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David J. A. Cline* (ed. James K. Aitken, Jeremy M. S. Cline and Christl M. Maier; Atlanta, Ga.: SBL, 2013), 265-78.

<sup>26</sup> Mark Boda, *Unity and Disunity in Ezra-Nehemiah: Redaction, Rhetoric, Reader* (ed. Mark J. Boda and Paul Redditt; HBM 17; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), 25-54.

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## 5 Emotionality and Structural Uniqueness of the Book (See Appendix, “Arcing by Genres”)

A genre-analysis of the book shows that Nehemiah is composed of four blocks of “Nehemiahic memoir” (**NM**—1:1b-2:20; 3:33-7:73 [ET 4:1-7:73]; 12:27-43; 13:1-31) and seven blocks of “inserted narrated accounts” (**INA**—3:1-32; 8:1b-18; 9:1-37 [ET 9:1-38]; 10:1-40 [ET 10:1-39]; 11:1-35 [ET 11:1-36]; 12:1-26; 12:44-47). On the surface, these inserted narrative accounts are oddly positioned within the highly emotive memoir sections of the book. In particular, while the Nehemiahic “I”-seeks to engage the readers into experiencing his memoir, the narrative materials are primarily listing and naming, emotion-less recording of the commemorative events.

I am going to argue that it is the editor/author of the book’s intention to interweave the two distinct blocks of literary genres to produce a highly poignant final text that is of superb emotional quality. This could not be done with memoir alone or perceived only from the point of view of the narrator in recording the events, providing detailed naming and listing. The memoir and narrated accounts are complimentary to each other.

According to Andrew Steinmann, the overall objective of the book is to weave the Nehemiahic memoir (1:1b-8: 1a; 12:27-43; 13:1-31) and the narrated materials together to produce a powerful moving account of God’s gracious works among his people.<sup>27</sup> The narrative accounts are: a) account of the builders of the wall (3:1-32); b) account of convocation in Jerusalem (that followed the completing of the wall) (8:1-18); c) the highly emotive penitential prayer in ch. 9; d) dedication of the walls of Jerusalem (10:1-40 [ET 11:1-39]); with e) records of the new inhabitants of Jerusalem (11:1-35 [ET 11:1-36]); f) records concerning Priests and Levites (12:1-26); and g) information about temple services (12:44-47).

Reflecting on the “Remembrance Day” ceremonies across Canada held annually on Nov. 11, the yearly commemorative events of the 9/11 tragedy in the States, and the 25th anniversary memorial service of the June 4<sup>th</sup> Massacre in Hong Kong in 2014, I have come to a better understanding and appreciation of the emotive impact of the naming, listing and recording in the narrative materials. At least two functions emerge. *First*, it is to build up the solidarity among the people who was to face such enormous task of rebuilding not only the wall of the city, but the integrity and pride of the people.<sup>28</sup> The communal prayer in ch. 9; the call for recommitment and rededication on the occasion of the assembly of the people as well as the dedication of the wall—all contrib-

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<sup>27</sup> Andrew E. Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah* (ConComm; St. Louis: Concordia, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> E.g., in the INA of the rebuilding of the wall in ch. 3, the repetitive “next to them/next to him” highlights the notion of “solidarity” among the leaders/people.

uted to this goal. A listing of the early as well as subsequent returnees to Jerusalem would have meant a lot to the first re-inhabitants as well as those later inhabitants. The encouragement included the security provided in guarding the city wall; the administrative system was in place for the new society and new life in Jerusalem. *Second*, the listing and naming by family or tribe function as a solemn memorial to the first readers of the book. One may observe that the mention of names was on the one hand, from a long list (3:1-32; 11:1-35 [ET 11:1-36]; 12:1-26). Yet on the other hand, the names were mentioned one by one, not only as a group. The same practice has been repeated year after year at the 9/11 memorials across many places in America and also in Canada. This practice would have meant a lot to the survivors and family members of the 9/11 tragedy. The same impact would have been upon the later communities of Israel.

The interweaving of the “Nehemiahic memoir” (NM) and the “inserted narrated accounts” (INA) is meant to evoke in the first audience a deep level of emotive response. Readers approaching the ancient text with the Nehemiahic emotion and selfhood as the interpretive goal will certainly benefit from reading the book with such a powerful emotional appeal.

#### D CONCLUSION

Using the memoir as a “port” of entry, I have established several promising paths as “points of entry” to look into the Nehemiahic selfhood. The role of emotionality plays a strategic role—in analyzing the functions of the genre of memoir and apologia; the language of religious faith self-expressed by Nehemiah; and the emotive impacts of the interweaving genres in the final edition of the book. As a result, the Nehemiahic “self” represented through his “I”-voice—which is blunt, open and explicit—has taken on new dimensions of depth. The Bakhtinian notions of the dialogic self within a polyphonic text like Nehemiah provide another window of perception. A deeper level of the Nehemiahic selfhood is made known to us—his “internal need” for justification and vindication from God. Adopting the Bakhtinian view of dialogism and polyphony, the Nehemiahic-self enters into an ongoing dialogue with other competing ideologies represented by his enemies and contemporaries—priests, nobles and officials.

On the one hand, a less sophisticated Nehemiahic selfhood emerges as one compares his internal profile with that of Daniel and Isaiah—both are deep, pathos-laden, and at times, hidden or emotively explosive.<sup>29</sup> The Nehemiahic “I”-is explicit, open and emotively-controlled. Yet on the other hand, I’ve found the book of Nehemiah a highly emotive text. Through examining aspects of the Nehemiahic memoir in its specific nature of personal apologia, new depths of the Nehemiahic self is made known to us. In a way, this endeavour is

<sup>29</sup> See chs. 3 and 4 of Leung Lai, *Through the “I”-Window*.

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another demonstrated example of the “empirics” of reading, one that is *imaginative-affective-experiential*.

As a uniquely Nehemiahic genre in the HB, “memoir” calls for further examination along this line of emotion studies. Distinct from other first-person “I”-texts in the HB (Ecclesiastes,<sup>30</sup> Jonah, Habakkuk, Ezra, part of Zechariah and Ezekiel, Jer 12-20, Dan 7-12, the fifteen identifiable I-passages in Isaiah,<sup>31</sup> the so-called God-Talks in Job [38-40], as well as the Book of Psalms)—the Nehemiahic “memoir” in its relationship to his selfhood remains very much an unexplored domain, yet, perhaps, a promising “window” into the respective internal profile of other biblical characters. Expectedly, emotion studies plays a major role in these anticipated advances—reinvigorating the significance of internal profiling of biblical characters for the 21st century reader. We have indeed come a long way from Rudolf Kittel’s *Great Men and Movements in Israel*.<sup>32</sup>

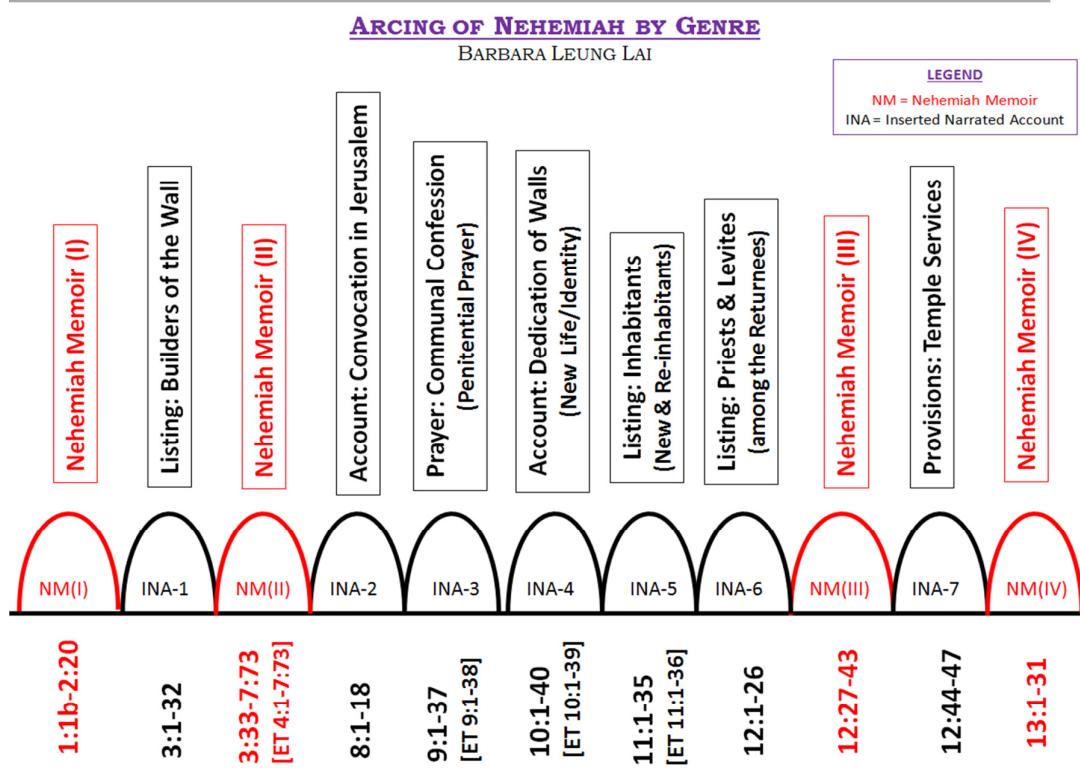
The interplay of emotion studies and biblical studies is still very much in its infancy. Internal profiling of Hebrew characters is now in its early stage of development, both on the methodological and practice levels. This essay is, in a small way, my “two cents” worth towards this goal.

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<sup>30</sup> See two of my recent publications, Leung Lai, “Voice and Ideology”; Barbara M. Leung Lai, “Ecclesiastes: The Preacher and One’s Text-of-Life,” *Global Perspectives on the Old Testament* (ed. Mark Roncace and Joe Weaver; Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2014), 208-16.

<sup>31</sup> The fifteen identifiable “I”-passages in Isaiah are: 5:1-30; 6:1-13; 8:1-18; 15:1-16:14; 21:1-12; 22:1-14; 24:1-23; 25:1-12; 26:1-21; 40:1-8; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 51:17-23; 61:1-11; 63:7-9.

<sup>32</sup> Rudolf Kittel, *Great Men and Movements in Israel* (New York: KTA Publishing House, 1968).



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