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Dialogic exegesis of the Sennacherib episode:

The need for a method that is both literary and historical

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The following pages contain first a short version of my presentation of Bakhtin's analysis of double-voiced discourse, from chapter 1 of my coming dissertation, and second some excerpts from chapter 3, where I attempt to use Bakhtin's method for the analysis of a biblical text.

Some points that I would like to discuss: Is it correct, do you think, that this method can be employed to hold literary and historical approaches together? Do you agree that it is desirable to do so? This text opens towards many large fields: the exegesis of the Former Prophets (or the D work, or Genesis–2 Kings), Isaiah, Assyriology, etc. If you can help bringing me up to date on details touched upon in the pages below (e.g., the *bāmôt*) I will be grateful. There is no room for any excerpts from my second chapter (exegetical analysis) here, but if you want you are welcome to comment on my guess presented at the end concerning a possible historical situation behind Account B1, even if you do not have access to my exegetical argumentation. I have placed the origin of B1 a few decades earlier than in Hardmeier's well known hypothesis, although I think that much of his analysis may be correct for a later version of the account.

In my analysis of the sources behind 2 Kings 18:13–19:37, I follow the majority view with some modifications: in outline, I take Account A to have comprised 18:13–16, 19:36f., and I suggest that the joint between B1 and B2 is to be located to 19:9. I view B1 and B2 as augmentations, rather than originally separate sources.

Bakhtin and dialogics

I am not writing a book about Mikhail Bakhtin. For accounts of the fascinating story of his life, and of his many-sided contributions to philosophy and the humanities, I must refer the reader to other books. What will be found here is a bare outline of Bakhtin's analysis of double-voiced discourse. (Those interested will find a fuller account – of

which the following is an abridgement – in an Appendix-pdf that I am preparing.)

Doublevoicing

The analysis of double-voiced discourse[1] provides for Bakhtin the foremost example to show how traditional (including Saussurean) linguistics fails to account for the 'metalinguistic' (= pragmatic) features of the utterance. The phenomenon of doublevoicing, Bakhtin claims, cannot be satisfactorily dealt with within the framework of traditional linguistics. An utterance is double-voiced when it 'has a twofold direction – it is directed both toward the referential object of speech, as in ordinary discourse, and toward *another's discourse,* toward *someone else's speech*.'[2] To appreciate parody, for example, one has to realize that it *is* parody, i. e. that the author is using the discourse of someone else in a ridiculing way. 'The second voice, once having made its home in the other's discourse, clashes hostilely with its primordial host and forces him to serve directly opposing aims. Discourse becomes an arena of battle between two voices.'[3]

1. I use the term *discourse* in a modest, linguistic sense for spoken or written communication, i. e. the basic focus of pragmatics. In discussions of Bakhtin, the reader should be aware of the fact that in English translations of his work, 'word' and 'discourse' translate one and the same Russian term (*slovo*). Thus, there is no difference between 'double-voiced word' and 'double-voiced discourse'.
2. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* 185. Italics in the original.
3. Ibid., 193. In a way, Bakhtin contradicts himself here; he later explains that it is only in active double-voiced discourse that there is any real struggle going on. In parody, the other's discourse is defenceless. A better formulation regarding parody would be to say that in it the discourse of one person (or of one group, or of a cultural epoch) becomes a weapon in a struggle, a weapon used by another against the original owner of the discourse.

Not always, though, is there such violent conflict between the two voices in double-voiced discourse. Bakhtin presents us with a whole taxonomy of discourse types and varieties, both single-voiced and double-voiced.[4] There are three main *types,* of which the first two are single-voiced:

1) Direct, unmediated discourse.
2) Objectified discourse (of a represented person).
3) Double-voiced discourse.

Of the third type, there are three *varieties:*

a) Uni-directional passive double-voiced discourse.
b) Vari-directional passive double-voiced discourse.
c) Active double-voiced discourse.

This taxonomy should not be taken too strictly. For example, 'one can find many gradations between passive and active double-voiced words. This distinction is one of several in which Bakhtin defines opposite tendencies not in order to postulate an unbridgeable opposition, but in order to gesture toward the complexity of the space between.'[5] It is also important to be aware of the fact that the kind of discourse perceived will vary with the perspective adopted. Seen in one context (say, a dialogue in a literary work), a

4. Ibid., 186–99. Cf. Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin,* 146–61.
5. Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin,* 155.

person's words may exemplify active doublevoicing, while in another context (when the dialogue in question is seen in its relation to the work as a whole) the very same words may be seen as an example of vari-directional passive doublevoicing. This play of different aspects of doublevoicing will be illustrated in the analysis below.

Objectified discourse, or 'words of the second type', is discourse of a represented person, formulated by the author to sound characteristic of that person, either as an individual or as a member of a social group. It is counted by Bakhtin among the singled-voiced forms of discourse, because, even if there are really two speech centers (the author's and the character's), this kind of discourse is not shaped by any awareness of another person's words, words that the character relates to.

Parody belongs to the vari-directional variety of passive double-voiced discourse. The two voices, the author's and the one hinted at, are here opposing one another. Different kinds of vari-directional discourse are frequent in daily life, 'especially in dialogue, where one speaker very often literally repeats the statement of the other speaker, investing it with new value and accenting it in his own way – with expressions of doubt, indignation, irony, mockery, ridicule, and the like.'[6]

In the unidirectional variety of this discourse type, there is no conflict between the two voices. For example, '[s]tylization stylizes another's style in the direction of that style's own particular tasks. It merely renders those tasks conventional.'[7]

In active double-voiced discourse, as found, for example, in 'the word with a sideward glance at someone else's hostile word',[8] the relation between the voices is again different. If passive doublevoicing *makes use of* another person's discourse for its own purposes, active doublevoicing *is influenced by* another person's discourse. In the passive varieties of doublevoicing the discourse of the other remains a passive tool. In the active variety, it functions as an active, shaping force.

The difference between passive and active double-voiced discourse

When the relations backwards and forwards, to earlier and future discourse, become visible in what we say, Bakhtin speaks of doublevoicing. In double-voiced discourse of the *passive* varieties, the presence of other voices in our discourse is part of the 'project that discourse has set itself', so that what we say does 'contain a deliberate reference to someone else's words'.[9] In active double-voiced discourse, on the other hand, the direction of influence between the voices is reversed. Characteristic for the active variety of double-voiced discourse is that it does *not* make use of the other person's word. 'In the third variety, the other person's discourse remains outside the limits of the author's speech, but the author's speech takes it into account and

6. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* 194.

7. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* 193.
8. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* 196.
9. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* 187.

refers to it.'[10] Active double-voiced discourse is double-voiced, but not by way of making use of the discourse of another, penetrating it with an intention of its own. On the contrary, active double-voiced discourse is itself penetrated by the other person's word.

This means that in active double-voiced discourse the indications of influence from someone else's words, though detectable by the reader, may not be consciously intended by the speaker. The question of the speaker's intention is of less interest here. This fact becomes important when we approach the biblical texts, since I will analyse them not only with an eye to the dimension of artistic doublevoicing, but also to what I will call organic doublevoicing, in which the doublevoicing is definitely present, but not because of any artistic intention.

Organic doublevoicing

One thing that I will try to do in this chapter is to extend the Bakhtinian analysis of doublevoicing beyond the narrative world into the historical world of the author(s). Such an investigation asks about a kind of doublevoicing that is not artistic, but organic.

Bakhtin's own focus in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* is not primarily the features of doublevoicing present in all discourse *per se,* but intentional, artistic double-voiced discourse. In this sense, there are works who's authors try to accomplish doublevoicing, and others who's authors do not.

10. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* 195.

But there is also, at another level, the kind of doublevoicing that permeates all discourse, in its everyday as well as its artistic forms. As Bakhtin reminds us: 'Our practical everyday speech is full of other people's words: with some of them we completely merge our own voice, forgetting whose they are; others, which we take as authoritative, we use to reinforce our own words; still others, finally, we populate with our own aspirations, alien or hostile to them.'[11] The discourse of professional authors is not exempt from this rule. It would be possible, therefore, to augment Bakhtin's investigation of Dostoevsky's artistic doublevoicing with an investigation of the doublevoicing that is present in Dostoevsky's writings, not as intentional artistry, but organically: how *he himself* (as distinct from his characters) relates to other authors, to critics, and so on, by his way of writing. In a way, Bakhtin enters this level of analysis too, especially when he discusses the passive varieties of double-voiced discourse. There, he often analyses the employment of different genres, like stylization and parody. An author's employment of a genre, even if it is an intentional, artistic decision, is at the same time a way to relate to other authors, who's works are parodied, for example, and from that perspective it is a form of organic doublevoicing.

It does therefore not seem to me as if Bakhtin actively draws the distinction between artistic and organic levels of double-voiced discourse, and guards it. But even if one could argue that Bakhtin himself already enters the dimension of organic doublevoicing when he considers the

11. Ibid., 195.

author's use of languages and genres of an era for stylization or parody, in the analysis below I will take one further step into the extra-literary world when I ask about the author's intentions in his own religious and political situation, and how the words of the real author – and not only of the characters or the author-narrator in the world of the story – can be seen as doublevoiced. Just as Bakhtin emphasizes that artistic doublevoicing is basically emulating the kind of doublevoicing that is everywhere present in ordinary day-to-day conversation, it is fully possible to use the categories worked out by Bakhtin for the analysis of artistic doublevoicing also for the analysis of organic double-voiced discourse, discourse that is double-voiced not because of any artistic intention, but because all our words share in this basic feature of human language – whether we are biblical authors writing on the Sennacherib episode, or modern scholars writing a book on the work of these biblical authors, or are simply involved in a conversation at the dinner table.

In the analysis that follows, the threshold between the narrative world and the world of the author will be a special focus for me, in that I explore the possibilities of moving back and forth over that threshold by way of an analysis that makes connections between the two worlds via the relations of the artistic and organic levels of doublevoicing. In this way, the analysis of double-voiced discourse becomes a tool not only for literary analysis, but also for historical-critical analysis. This double use constitutes for me an important step in one of the overarching projects of this book: to find ways to make the historical-critical and literary approaches interconnect and mutually enrich each other.

From chapter 3:

I will begin the investigation of doublevoicing at the level(s) of the story-world (or narrative world), but not because it is the most basic. It is not. Rather, it is one of the most derivative, high up in the hierarchy of levels and based upon a series of several more basic levels. And therefore, it is the right place to start. From this level, I will then proceed to levels that are more basic, such as the level of the socio-historical context.

Even though not at all the most basic, the level of the story-world is the natural element of reading. But of course, reading is no uncomplicated matter. The comprehension of a narrative world demands of us that we use several sophisticated hermeneutical strategies, although we normally do not reflect on it, since the human mind is equipped with a default predisposition for this kind of interpretive activity. Moreover, the story-world is not only *the* natural element of reading. It is also *an* element of the reading process, having no existence 'in itself' apart from the relation between text and reader in the process of reading.

We do not leave the world of reading behind when we ask questions about the more basic levels 'behind' the story world. We make imaginative excursions, 'armchair travels', into the worlds of authorial and redactional dynamics and the concrete socio-historical dialogue situation 'behind' the

story world, without ever leaving our seat in the world of the story. We have to increase, not lessen, the amount of imagination in our efforts to dig down into the more basic levels below the story world.

I will divide my analysis of the story-world into the levels of the pericope in itself, and the pericope in literary context (sometimes narrow and wider context). This is a division for analytical purposes only, and coincides only partially with the natural reading process, which moves to and fro between these different aspects. The level of the pericope in itself will mainly come up for analysis in connection with Account A (18:13–16, 19:36–37) and the speeches of the Rabshakeh. Thereafter, all that is said will in one way or another relate to what has already been said in such an obvious way that there will not be much to discuss concerning the pericope in itself, before such relations to the narrow context are drawn in.

The next step will be an analysis of relations between 2 Kings 18–19 and texts outside what I have taken here as its primary literary context, Genesis–2 Kings. The book of Isaiah occupies a middle position here, being the primary context of Isaiah 36–37, the twin text of 2 Kings 18–19. For the purpose of comparison, therefore, Isaiah will come up for mention, and sometimes more extended analysis, already in connection with the analysis of the story world of 2 Kings 18–19. But the book of Isaiah does also have relevance as a secondary context for the text in Kings as well as for the analysis of questions of redaction and transmission, at the level of function (see below), as will become clear at some points in the following analysis. Beyond Isaiah, I will pick out some further contexts, to analyse possible relations of doublevoicing of 2 Kings 18–19 to discourses of other kinds, for example, Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions. When bringing the biblical text into contact with Assyrian texts, I do not in the first place look for possible genetic relations. The rhetoric of official Assyrian texts is uniform enough to make it meaningful to look for general patterns and formulations with which the text of 2 Kgs 18:13–19:37 seems to be in dialogue. The double-voiced relations studied will thus be with a genre in the first place (as it is often also in the work of Bakhtin); this does not exclude, however, the possibility that there once existed specific Assyrian texts (most of which would be unknown to us) that the biblical authors had in mind when they wrote. See the discussion in chapter 2, pp. xyz–yz.

One specific document that will at several points come up for comparison in the following analysis is the 'Letter to Ashur' written on occasion of Esarhaddon's campaign against the king of Shubria. I have chosen this text because it seems to me to come especially close to the Sennacherib episode both in its subject matter and in its literary profile, filled as it is with detailed accounts of strongly rhetorical letters and other messages between the Assyrian king and the besieged king of Shubria, with symbolic actions, with military operations, and divine interventions.

Let it be said at once, that if my analysis of the text in its narrow context is, in the case of some parts of the text, fairly detailed (although far from exhaustive), when I come to the infinite territories of possible doublevoiced relations with texts (and other discourses) outside of 2 Kings 18–19,

I have simply gathered some that I found to be of interest (or that I happened to stumble upon), to illustrate the possibilities. The same goes for the next step of the analysis, when we enter the dimension of function, and the analysis of authorial and redactional dynamics.[12]

Doublevoicing in 2 Kings 18:13–36

Account A

Concerning Account A (18:13–16, 19:36–37) we notice that it seems to relate at least to two audiences: one Judean and one Assyrian. It says what can be officially said, what can be said under the eyes of officials loyal to the king of Assyria. Thus, it gives us an example of a discourse 'with a sideward glance',[13] anxious not to cause any controversy. There is no suggestion of any Assyrian setback, unless we are to find one in the report about the murder of Sennacherib; but that report is paralleled in a Babylonian chronicle,[14] and is thus not without counterpart in other quarters under Assyrian supervision. [*Is this a correct analysis?*] It was probably not considered problematic, as long as the death of Sennacherib was not given the 'wrong' interpretation. That he was killed was well known. The controversial question was: who killed him? And, as I have suggested in chapter 2, we probably find in Account A the same point of view concerning the murder of Sennacherib that was also officially propagated in Assyria under Esarhaddon.[15]

When Hezekiah says 'I have done wrong (or: sinned)', this echoes the language of Assyrian propaganda.[16]

But Account A also says as little as it can about the Judean failure and the Assyrian superiority. Neither does it mention any Assyrian Gods. When compared with Assyrian texts praising the military achievements of its kings, Account A is obviously very restrained. From this perspective, too, this may be seen as a discourse 'with a sideward glance', in this case at a Judean audience. The restraint, and the way the account is keeping to the reporting of fairly uncontroversial facts, can be seen as a strategy employed to avoid that any part of the audience takes offence. If this account, as most interpreters think, emanates from official Jerusalem records, we can perhaps hear in it a hint of an Assyrian presence in the capital at the time of writing. Account B1, to which we now turn, instead would seem to give us the story as the Judeans would have told it in a context where they did not have to worry about the presence of Assyrian officials in the audience. In principle (although this is of course not necessary), it would be possible to see it as emanating from the same circles as Account A, the differences

12. See the extract from chapter 1 in the Appendix for my use of the terms 'meaning' and 'function'.
13. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* 196.
14. Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles,* 198f.
15. Concerning possible later changes in the text of Account A, see chapter 2.
16. In Gbr. II i lines 12, 15 and 21, for example, the king of Shubria employs the term *ḫaṭû* of himself. See chapter 2 (at 18:14) for the terminology used.

between the accounts being explainable from their different audiences.

The speech of the Rabshakeh

At first, Sennacherib's voice is mediated by that of the Rabshakeh. This Rabshakeh has a voice of his own when he speaks for his master.[17] His way of arguing contains elements that has made of him an apostate Israelite in later Jewish tradition: among other things he knows about Hezekiah's cult centralization, and he speaks the language of Judah.[18]

There are several levels of doublevoicing in the way the Rabshakeh speaks of Yhwh's agency in history. Basically, considered as direct speech of a character, his discourse is single-voiced (of the 'second type', what Bakhtin calls 'objectified discourse'). But within this general framework, there are many different forms of doublevoicing to be observed in the Rabshakeh's speech.

The level of the narrative world in 2 Kings 18:19–35 (The speech in itself)

When analysing this level, I will try to arrest and depict a reading process, focusing on the text in its extant form. As will be seen, this will lead to some wandering in the viewpoint expressed: a first interpretation of a certain passage is sometimes revised in light of what is encountered further on.

17. Cf. Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech,* 108: 'this is no longer a message that is literally repeated, but one that is elaborated.'
18. Cf. Weisman, *Political Satire in the Bible,* 128.

The Rabshakeh's speech has two parts, 18:19–25 and 18:28–35, interrupted by the exchange over language and addressees between the Rabshakeh and the three Judean officials. Formally, the first part of the speech uses singular address, the second part plural. In v. 22 in the first part, however, the plural is used. This may be an appropriate variation, the Rabshakeh addressing the Judean officials, or it may be a trace of an interpolator's hand. It will come up for analysis below, with some other inconsistencies, in the section on authorial and redactional dynamics. The second part of the speech is addressed to the people sitting on the wall, while the first part is initially, in its introductory words, addressed to Hezekiah (through his officials). In v. 27, however, the first part of the speech is secondarily readdressed to the people sitting on the wall, who, according to the Rabshakeh, are to be considered its real addressees. This readdressing does not affect the form of the first part of the speech, of course, and there are certain inconsistencies among the two parts that are best understood in the light of the difference in addressees between them. I suggest, therefore, that verse 27 is to be taken primarily as an apostrophing of the audience, in preparation for the second part of the speech, which is directly addressed to the people. Still, it is clear that the Rabshakeh is portrayed as having been aware all the time of the people sitting on the wall, and as consciously adapting his words to this audience, and it is of interest for my analysis of doublevoicing that he himself makes this doubleness of address explicit.

We saw in chapter 2 that the two parts of the speech have been consciously balanced by the use of the two key-words

bṭḥ ('trust') and *nṣl* ('deliver'). This balance and interweaving of the two parts is matched by an intertwining of the explicit and implicit addressees, as will now be discussed.

To whom does the Rabshakeh address himself, and against whom does he speak? My suggestion is as follows: in the first part of the speech, the Rabshakeh's explicit addressee is Hezekiah, while the people on the wall are the implicit addressees. In the second part of the speech, the case is the opposite: the people on the wall are the explicit addressees, while Hezekiah is the implicit one; the Rabshakeh expects him to get a report about what the Assyrian has said to the people.[19] If the Rabshakeh in the first part of his speech addresses himself to the king but also tries to influence the people, in the second part he addresses himself to the people, but does this not least to influence the king. This doubleness of address shapes the wording and content of the speech, a shaping that will be analysed further below.[20] In Bakhtin's view, this is exactly what is to be expected.

However, besides these general relations among explicit and implicit addressing there are also some more complicated patterns of doublevoicing in the speech. One instance is found in v. 22, where the Rabshakeh expressly anticipates and replies to an argument of his antagonists that they trust in Yhwh. When saying in his refutation that Hezekiah has removed the *bāmôt* and altars of Yhwh and therefore cannot rely on help from his God, the Rabshakeh may at first be perceived as consciously echoing internal Judean polemic against Hezekiah's reform, which he counts on and wants to make use of. This aspect of his argument would be (taken in itself, before we hear the sharper tone used in vv. 30–32, and especially in vv. 33–35) unidirectional passive doublevoicing, the use of the discourse of another precisely as other, not to parody it, but still for another purpose than the original.[21] The Rabshakeh does not simply imitate the Judean opposition, making its words his own; in his mouth the polemic is unavoidably perceived as quoted from people among those and/or known to those listening, and even more so a little later, after his explicit apostrophing of 'the people on the wall'.

But the Rabshakeh does not stay with the unidirectional relation to the discourse of the Judean opposition. What looked like an unaggressive stance of concord with those among his hearers who were in opposition to Hezekiah's religious policy, turns into a much more provocative attitude when he addresses 'the people on the wall' directly, especially in vv. 33–35. Here, there is no longer any portrayal of Yhwh as being on the side of the Assyrians (and the internal

19. Cf. 19:4, 6, where Hezekiah and Isaiah, respectively, seem to relate more to the second part of the speech than to its first part.

20. As will be made clear below, in Sennacherib's letter (19:10–13), the arguments of the second part of the speech are redirected, so that the arguments addressed by the Rabshakeh to the people on the wall are now directed to Hezekiah. This coincides with a sharpening and transposition of the polemic, in which the 'alien voice' presupposed is no longer that of Hezekiah, but that of Yhwh.

21. Cf. Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, 189f. Bakhtin here discusses a stylistic aspect of unidirectional doublevoicing, while I focus on a content aspect.

Judean opposition) against Hezekiah. Yhwh is simply characterized as one of those non-Assyrian Gods who cannot deliver their peoples out of the hand of the king of Assyria. Such a stance towards Yhwh affects our apprehension of the Rabshakeh's earlier words. His question if Yhwh is not the deity whose *bāmôt* and altars Hezekiah has removed now sounds more mocking, not only against Hezekiah, but against all in Jerusalem. It is no longer the words of someone who wants to show himself to be in understanding with an internal opposition; rather, his words are a malicious way of pointing out that he, the enemy, is aware of the fact that Hezekiah's religious policy is not uncontroversial in all quarters; that the city he is about to besiege is already plagued by internal strife. He feels no need to appeal to any internal opposition by way of pretending a common understanding of the religious situation; his only appeal is for the people to surrender before an overwhelmingly superior force – militarily as well as religiously.

There is a repressive undecidedness over the speech. Is there anything in the words of the Rabshakeh that can be trusted as giving the audience his basic attitude towards the Jerusalemites, or is everything just a hollow groping for effective arguments? When he promises the people peace and a new, good land to live in if they surrender to him, this may sound attractive in the ears of the credulous, but the suspicious must take it as irony.[22] When he speaks first as if he counted Yhwh as being on his side, and even seems to be criticizing Hezekiah for removing the cult locales of Israel's God, but in the next breath assures his hearers that Yhwh can do nothing to prevent the Assyrians from taking Jerusalem, this simply tells the discerning listener that the Rabshakeh has no interest in Yhwh other than to counter arguments where this God plays a part. That his attitude to Yhwh will seem incoherent to attentive readers/listeners is just a consequence of his strategy to provide the audience with all the arguments he can find to sow doubts and resignation about the prospects of resistance. What he presents is not so much a line of coherent arguments as a smorgasbord of causes for defeatism, offering something for everyone.

This insight does not make the speech less frightening to an attentive listener. It reveals the Rabshakeh as untrustworthy, but that trait only makes him more dangerous. Of the different stances towards Yhwh that he takes up, the last one (Yhwh is powerless against the Assyrian king) remains as the one closest to his own position in the eyes of wary hearers, but his addressees, even when realizing that this is the case, may still for their own part find another of his arguments more dismaying.

22. 'Rabshakeh's words are the opposite of historical reality' since enemy troops in the land are likely to 'eat up your vines and your fig trees' (Smelik, 'Distortion of OT Prophecy' (*OtSt* 24, 1986), 90 n. 66, citing Jer 5:17). A similar interpretation is put forth by Ruprecht: '[In 18:31–32a] bietet sich der Assyrerkönig mit einem Friedensangebot ironisch als Heilsbringer an … Die eigentliche Ironie liegt darin, wie er das Land, in das er sie wenig später verschleppen will, in den gleichen paradiesischen Farben [wie in 1 Kön 5:5; Mi 4:4 das Land der Heilszeit geschildert ist] schildert, – als ob Zwangsarbeiter seine Früchte genießen könnten.' ('Die ursprüngliche Komposition' [*ZTK* 1990], 47.)

Strangely, some historical scholars seem to be content with staying at this first level of the speech in itself in their analyses – or, rather, they move directly from this level to the level of a possible historical course of events depicted in the narrative (perhaps by way of a comparison with Assyrian royal inscriptions or other extra-biblical sources, i.e., the level of dialogic relations with discourses outside of the literary work), skipping over the levels of literary contexts more or less completely. But then, the historian's task of critically examining the sources is skipped over, too.

For our part, we will now examine the world of literary connections of the Rabshakeh's speech to the biblical books in which it is situated. This will show us how much of the intended impact of the speech upon the audience that remains hidden when it is considered in a myopic close reading, as it has been above, without taking note of its context. The same failure to see important dimensions occurs when the speech is considered as a piece of self-contained Assyrian rhetoric that has dropped down into the text from the history of the 701 events and can be removed from the text to be examined separately in a study of what happened in that same year without this affecting the original sense of the speech. The problem that so much of the intended impact of the speech remains hidden in such a case has to do with the fact that when doublevoicing takes the form of irony of the author over against the speaking character, what is said becomes to a large degree ambiguous, having meanings undisclosed to the character speaking, but obvious to the reader.

It is not possible to distinguish sharply between the level of the author/redactor and the level of the narrative in its literary context. To speak of doublevoicing from the perspective of the literary context is to speak of authorial composition, as when the author makes a character say things that the audience, because of what they know from earlier parts of the story, will understand in a way that differs from the one obviously intended by the character. The Rabshakeh, as a character, does not exist on the same plane as the author-narrator, and therefore we cannot speak of any double-voiced linguistic communication between them. The doublevoicing that we detect in compositional irony is situated outside the narrative world, in the world of the writers. However, I make a distinction, as I explain in chapter 1, between a text's meaning, on the one hand, and its function, on the other, and when I focus questions of meaning, I do this mainly under the heading of the level of the narrative world in literary contexts, while when I focus questions of function, I do this under the heading of the level of authorial and redactional dynamics. In the following section, on literary context, I will thus speak more of irony than of doublevoicing. The irony will then, in the section on authorial and redactional dynamics, be interpreted as double-voiced discourse in the world of the writers.

The level of the narrative world in literary context

Above, I have sought to show that it is possible to read the Rabshakeh's speech, from the point of view of the character himself, as an effective piece of political intimidation. But the existence of this reading option does not prove the

speech historical. Rather, it is an essential ingredient of effective narrative irony that the character who is the target of the author's irony does not show any signs of awareness of the real state of things. The more persuasive the rhetoric of the Rabshakeh is perceived to be, the greater the ironical effect is when the narrative proves him wrong. But a reading of the speech on the Rabshakeh's conditions will seldom occupy other than a subordinate position in the reading process, the audience noting its possibility, no more, since they will usually from the outset expect the Rabshakeh to be the object of authorial irony. The words of an enemy are seldom handled without recourse to some such kind of irony at the compositional level, i.e., without letting the reader, often beforehand, share some knowledge revealing that what the enemy says is either untruthful or in some way mistaken. This case is no exception. The larger context of the Rabshakeh's speech announces plainly and unmistakably that the Assyrian official is wrong, no matter how eloquently he puts his case. However, when the expectations are fulfilled, and the audience catches sight of the first, more obvious ironical counter-readings of the Rabshakeh's speech, they will become even more aware of this dimension, and also find ironies that are less conspicuous (and perhaps even such that were never intended by the original writers).

A first observation in this connection is of course that the major thrust of the Rabshakeh's speech, that neither Yhwh nor anyone else can save Jerusalem out of the hand of the Assyrian king, becomes falsified – to say the least – at the end of the narrative (19:35f.). For an audience familiar with the foregoing story in Kings, this outcome will seem clear already by the prophet Isaiah's first utterance, promising Jerusalem's deliverance (19:6f.; compare, for example, 1 Kgs 20) – although, in this case, the expectation is temporarily frustrated by the unexpected turn of the plot in 19:9.

But, in addition to this major drawback for the Rabshakeh's credibility, there are also other points in his speech that will make the reader of Kings suspect that his case is lost from the outset. Some of them depend on the wider literary context for their ironical force, others are inherent to the speech. Consider the following:

In his very first attack on Hezekiah, the Rabshakeh says: 'You think: indeed, a word of the lips equals counsel and strength in war' (18:20). As the introduction to an extended attempt to make the Jerusalemites give up without a fight, by the pure strength of rhetoric, this line of argument is self-defeating if anything is. (In this connection, the reading in the Isaiah version – with the verb in the first person, 'I think …' – takes on added significance. One might imagine, e. g., that the scribe made a Freudian slip, letting the underlying irony reach the surface, and thereby made the Rabshakeh do the same.)

As noted in chapter 2, there is a doubleness in the sense of the verb *bṭḥ* ('feeling secure' or 'trust'). In 18:19, the first sense of the word as 'feeling secure' is used, and then the (more religious) sense of 'trust' is employed in later verses. But when the Rabshakeh in 18:19 uses the word in the first sense, the audience will recall what has been said about Hezekiah in 18:5: it was characteristic for him that

he trusted Yhwh.[23] In this way, a counter-reading has been prepared for. Thus, when the Rabshakeh first suggests that Hezekiah trusts in Egypt (18:21), the audience 'knows' this is wrong: he does not trust in Egypt, but in Yhwh. The words of the Rabshakeh are perceived to be true in another way than he himself is aware of; and thus, his rhetoric is undermined.

In 18:22, the Rabshakeh speaks ironically of Hezekiah's purportedly vain trust in Yhwh, when he has taken away Yhwh's *bāmôt* and altars. But the audience of Kings is well aware that it has been stated again and again that exactly the abolishing of the *bāmôt* is what Yhwh demands (1 Kgs 14:22f. etc.). In the foregoing chapter, the *bāmôt* are mentioned several times in a thorough listing of the sins of the Northern Israelites that made Yhwh give them up to the Assyrian king. And as noted in chapter 2, 17:9 and 18:8 share an idiom that is found only in these two verses: 'from watchtower to fortified city'. This use creates an intertextual connection that adds to the contrast between Hezekiah and the Samarians: in 17:9 we have *bāmôt* 'from watchtower to fortified city', while in 18:8 we have attacks against the Philistines (associating Hezekiah with David) 'from watchtower to fortified city'.[24]

The level of authorial/redactional dynamics

When dealing with the level of authorial and redactional dynamics, our main focus is the function of the text, rather than (but not to the exclusion of) its meaning. If we take a look at what the Rabshakeh has to say in 18:22, to begin with, we note that since the author is here obviously making the Rabshakeh say something that the reader knows to be the opposite of the truth, we can very probably infer that if the question of centralization was a controversial one in the author's own time, we are supposed to hear in this verse the voice(s) of the author's opponents. Irony at the level of the literary work (textual meaning) goes hand in hand with doublevoicing at the level of authorial/redactional dynamics (textual function). And the ways we perceive meaning and function are related, not only because the meaning (in this case, that we perceive irony) decides the function (polemical), but also the other way around: already before coming to this verse, we had probably made us a picture of the author as a person with strong convictions concerning the *bāmôt,* and this perception made us catch an ironical tone here.

The Rabshakeh's words about Hezekiah's abrogation of the *bāmôt,* at the literary level of the speech in itself, first seemed to express a kind of understanding with an internal opposition, and then, in the light of the continuation of his speech, rather looked like a way of pointing out that he was aware of the controversial nature of Hezekiah's religious policy. At the level of the literary work, the same passage was most probably to be understood as a case of irony of the author over against the narrative character of the Rabshakeh: what he says is obviously mistaken. At the authorial/redactional level (the level of the text's function, rather than meaning), however, those words probably

23. I argue in chapter 2 that 18:5 presumes Account B1. See below, in the section on authorial and redactional dynamics.
24. See chapter 2, p. xyz.

served a different but related purpose. At some point, or points, in history the question of cult centralization to Jerusalem must have been a controversial one. And it is at such a point that we can imagine hearing in the words of the Rabshakeh the words of the author's opponents. When the Rabshakeh is made the target of compositional irony, the opponents of cult centralization are made the target of passive, vari-directional double-voicing. Their words are made use of to counter their arguments; by placing their opposition in the mouth of the Rabshakeh, they are made enemies of Yhwh.

The argument of the Rabshakeh concerning Hezekiah's abrogation of the *bāmôt,* does not, as I see it, constitute independent evidence that the reform of Hezekiah (as reported in 18:4) was really a historical fact. Rather, it probably presupposes 18:4, and all the previous condemnations of Judean kings for not having taken away the *bāmôt*.[25] The evaluation in 18:4 shows that Yhwh was in no way disappointed with Hezekiah's cultic politics. The Rabshakeh is wrong, as the audience expects him to be. But there is one more aspect: to understand how the Rabshakeh's argument can be implicitly directed to the people on the wall, we must presuppose that he takes for granted that there are those who would oppose Hezekiah on the question of centralization. This can only be the case if centralization is an issue, already made alive to the audience. But it would not be, were it not for the evaluations of the kings (and 17:9–11), where it has been brought to the fore. So, to understand 18:22 the way we have done above, I think we have to presuppose a previously known narrative that includes the condemnations of the *bāmôt*.

I believe that it is probable that the original source behind the B1 account is to be situated within a historical context in late Neo-Assyrian times. To suggest what such a context might look like, I will conduct an analysis of the features of doublevoicing that come to the fore when the Rabshakeh's speech is compared to examples of Assyrian royal rhetoric. My hypothesis, which I think stands in continuity with the results of the analysis in chapter 2, is that the speech (even with later accretions deleted) cannot be taken as a transcript of what was said by an Assyrian official outside the walls of Jerusalem in 701, but should rather be taken as a polemical version of what Judean authors knew, or thought they knew, of the Assyrian viewpoint concerning Hezekiah, Jerusalem, and Yhwh in this year. This 'knowledge' may have been based on oral tradition, or on extrapolation from more or less similar cases, but it may also, to some degree, have been based on different kinds of documents. It is inherently probable, from what we know of Assyrian practice, that there was some kind of correspondence between Sennacherib and Hezekiah in 701.[26] Copies of such correspondence

25. Although this is not the only possible interpretation; see the analysis in chapter 2 for some of the problems.

26. This does not mean that I think that the passus about the letter of Sennacherib in 19:9–14 should be defined as a direct report of a historical event. Somewhat paradoxically, I think it is more probable that Account B1 is based in part on a letter, than that Account B2 is so. B2 is in this case rather based on B1; see below (not present in this paper).

in a royal archive in Jerusalem may have been possible to access by Judean authors. We might also speculate that Sennacherib left some kind of inscription commemorating his deeds in the vicinity of Judah (cf., e. g., Sargon's Tang-i Var inscription, or the Sinjirli inscription of Esarhaddon). There may also have been other means by which a Judean author might get to know Assyrian views – or by which the Assyrians might let their subjects know them. For example, if it is true that an Assyrian king's 'letter to Ashur' served political purposes in the way argued by Oppenheim, it follows that the contents of such letters were meant for quite a large audience. Thus, whether or not the Assyrian authorities actively propagated the views found in these letters also to subject nations, it cannot have been impossible for resourceful people with the right connections to become informed about these letters and what they contained. For short, I do not find it improbable that the authors of the source behind Account B1 were reacting polemically to Assyrian views.

I also think that a certain situation of conflict among the leading circles in Jerusalem in connection with the demise of Assyria (cf. the death of Amon) provides a suitable background for the coming into being of the original form of B1. The question was: shall we stay loyal to Assyria or break away? In such a situation, the interpretation of the 701 events could become a battleground for pro- and anti-Assyrian groups.