

**A Dialogic Reimagining of a Servant's
Suffering: Understanding Second Isaiah's
Servant of Yahweh as a Polyphonic Hero**

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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ABSTRACT

A definitive identification of the Servant figure of Second Isaiah is notoriously difficult, as attested by centuries of conjecture and debate. The interpretive obstacles are profuse: the Servant is addressed as Israel-Jacob, but then spoken of in terms that are not consistent with the nation's experience; in some texts he seems to represent a community, while in others he speaks as an individual; he seems to suffer extreme hardship and persecution, but then is said to experience new life; some of his experiences appear to be historical, while others are best described as idealistic.

But a primary reason the Servant is so difficult to pin down is rarely considered, and that is that there exists no objective image of the Servant anywhere in Second Isaiah. As a literary character he is constituted entirely by dialogue; that is, by discourse addressed to him or directly concerning him, spoken by him, and spoken about him by others in the form of a confession. His actions are never described, and his person is never defined. Scholars have referred to this as his "fluid" nature, but have lacked the methodological tools for a fuller study of this literary curiosity.

The ideas of literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin speak to this type of characterisation. His "polyphonic hero" is a fictional character who is constituted by dialogue, and who embodies a unique point of view of the world. This thesis develops a reading strategy based on Bakhtin's theories. It reimagines the internal discourse of the Servant in order to comprehend him according to the dialogue by which he knows himself. In the process it discovers that there is only one Servant, Israel-Jacob, whose self-knowledge as the faithful Servant of Yahweh calls empirical Israel to faith in a time of national distress.

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