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## Ancient Hebrew and Ugaritic Poetry and Modern Linguistic Tools: An Interdisciplinary Study

### Abstract:

*This article introduces the reader to the issue of verbal sequence in the poetry of the Hebrew Bible, a topic that was studied in-depth as a doctoral dissertation. After noticing the peculiarities of the poetic discourse, it surveys the solutions offered to this crux interpretum to date, but concludes that these solutions are insufficient. Several limitations of such a study are assumed from the outset. We confine ourselves to the Psalter for various reasons given below. Terminologically, we resist the temptation of modern terminology by making use of terms that are as neutral as possible. Methodologically, we employ Systemic Functional Grammar to describe the grammatical incidents wherein verbs are included. Lastly, the paper concludes with an overview of the potential contributions of such a study.*

Reading Hebrew literature, and for that matter any literature, intelligibly is a painstaking exercise, involving interdisciplinary knowledge, exquisite sensitivity, and elevated literary ability, to name just a few prerequisites. One does not perceive form without content; meaning is a natural outcome of the balanced observation of the two.

Nevertheless, besides the text itself (utterance), the hermeneutical circle comprises an encoder (writer), a decoder (reader), and the proper response of the decoder to the encoder's stimuli. All these elements are important for the interpretation of the text. This theory of the process of communication guarantees that our expectations of finding meaning in literary forms may be met, if our response to the original stimuli is sensitive to the author's intention.

### 1. Differentiating poetry from prose

The general distinction between poetry and prose leaves disregarded a large diversity of texts. Critics generally agree on the matter that if there is such a thing as literature, there have to be at least two main literary genres, prose and poetry. Both of them, whether oral or written, are responsible for creating a specific effect on the audience. Judging them on the level of aesthetics, poetry is generally associated with subjectivity, vivid expression, and atemporality, whereas prose is completely the opposite. Theoretically, however, defining poetry as opposed to prose proves to be a rather diffi-

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cult task. This delimitation proves to be extremely difficult in the post-modern context, where relativism replaced standardization, and deconstruction became the norm (cf. Jakobson 1987, 368 ff.).

Aviram avoids the traditional definition of aesthetics, refraining from defining pure categories of poetry and prose. Instead, he promotes poetry and prose as hypothetical directions (Aviram 1994, 44f). The two opposite extremes are by themselves theoretical probabilities and factual impossibilities. Both of them represent asymptotic ends<sup>1</sup>. Consequently, at one end of the spectrum lies ordinary language, which is supposed to be transparent, i.e., it draws the reader's attention not to its rhetorical features (style, images, figures), nor to its formal features (how it sounds), but rather to its thematic content. Expository and scientific writing share this quality. At the other end of the spectrum is opaque language, i.e. language with a strong interest in sounds, and therefore very difficult to understand. One can discover its meaning only in the larger context of a conventional system of signs with potential meaning (Aviram 1994, 49)<sup>2</sup>.

Although he admits a diachronic evolution of poetry, Aviram is promoting a unique organizing principle, that of rhythm, with particular embodiments throughout history, because the concept of poetry is conditioned temporally. Jakobson militates for a more liberal, though holistic, approach to poetry, according to which poeticity is not to be reduced mechanically to its components. Instead, he invokes emotivity and opacity as the main characteristics of such texts (Jakobson 1987, 378).

It is obvious that both 'emotivity' and 'opacity' display a high degree of subjectivity. As we relate these observations to ANE literature, if the means to stir emotions in the mind of an Ancient Semite were different from those of a modern human, what were they? If rhythm as a state of mind was embodied in a particular way in ANE literature, how was it done? The matter of the conscious use of structures by the ancient poets, noted by modern scholars, remains with the purposive value of poetic language (Jakobson 1987, 250-61). Spontaneous creation is not excluded, particularly where revelatory texts are concerned, but this cannot restrict us from consciously and painstakingly undertaking the mission of careful analysis of the texts.

## 2. Particularities of the prose/poetry debate in Hebrew literature

One scholar who has applied the idea of binary scale to biblical criticism is Tremper Longman III (1987, 120-21), who concluded that poetry is characterized by a higher level of artistry than prose<sup>3</sup>.

Robert Alter subscribes to the idea that Hebrew literature consists of two main genres, prose and poetry, to which he actually dedicated two parallel volumes, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (1981), and *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (1985). In the case of Hebrew Poetry (henceforth HPy), he noticed a particular lack of epic works extant in all ANE literature except Hebrew<sup>4</sup>.

Alter believes in two pre-existing literary forms, prose and poetry, of which prose represented a continuous attraction for the Hebrew bards ever trying to render its characteristics into poetic lines. Narrativity lies latent in the Hebrew poems, in their minute articulations, from line to line, from unit to unit, articulation mainly generated by synonymy. This sense of articulation may be defined as consequentiality both in logical and temporal terms<sup>5</sup>.

Alter also tried to propose several elements marking poetry as opposed to prose.

Dialogue is considered a standard practice of prose, which defines the action and relation between actors. In poetry, characters have a rather emblematic presence without interacting with one another in terms of dialogue (Alter 1990, 48-9)<sup>6</sup>. poetry is denser than prose stylistically, but the distinctive marks of the poetic sub-genres refer to other criteria: the quality of the hearers (fictitious vs. realistic), tone (hortative vs. vocative), and hermeneutic value (individualistic vs. archetypal).

Wilfred G.E. Watson admits that poetic devices can be met in prose too (Watson 1984a, 44-62), but their presence in poetry is higher in density and in poetry they sometimes interplay with one another. poetry can be defined in opposition to prose (negative indicators) or by an analysis on its own merits (positive indicators, of which there are three categories: broad, structural, and other, see *infra*). Unexpectedly, at the end of a very convincing discourse on the multiplicity of facets of HPy, Watson refers to the factor of content in ANE poetry. Thus, prose is the vehicle used to render the language of letters, treaties, economic documents, etc., and poetry is preferred only for religious and mythological texts (Watson 1984a, 60)<sup>7</sup>.

Despite the detailed technique promoted in his books, he is far from being dogmatic about the procedure proposed. Therefore, he declares:

Ultimately, the decision owes a great deal to mature reflection which will consider content as well as form, with an eye on traditions both in Classical Hebrew and in ancient Near Eastern literature generally. (Watson 1984a, 55)

Alternatively, one can investigate HPy in comparison with poetry of Northwest Semitic origin or from world literature, looking for common features, provided the poetic features of that literature are clearly understood in their particular context. Invariably, one has to rely on the ability to identify and explain poetic devices specific to each piece of literature. The following section surveys several of the most significant contributions to the literary criticism of poetic devices specific to Hebrew literature.

### 3. Features of Hebrew poetry

Modern research has promoted various poetic devices as significantly important, even decisive, for the description of HPy. Robert Lowth's theory of parallelism in the prophetic Hebrew literature (Lowth 1753), so influential for centuries, has lost its hold on literary studies of Hebrew literature<sup>8</sup>. With George B. Gray (1915), parallelism received a sharper definition, making room for several specific categories, such as complete/incomplete and alternative parallelism. Hrushovski (1971, 1202a) redefined it as 'free-rhythm,' loose enough to accommodate various categories.

The syntactical theory of parallelism that O'Connor (1980) promoted does not seem to have gained overall scholarly support. It would be very difficult to prove that parallelismus membrorum functions at the syntactic level in HPy. His theory was applied first to prophetic texts, which are well known as being inspired by the HPy found outside the Canonical oracles. Despite the severe criticism received (Kugel 1981, 317; Miller, P.D. 1983; Geller 1982, 69-70), O'Connor's idea that Hebrew verse is organized according to principles that surpass structural and poetic language is of value. Although these principles escape the reader's grasp, we are still able to locate them and even apprehend them, without speculating on their formal definition and function (O'Connor 1980, 13-14).

Lowth's theory was severely assaulted by James L. Kugel. Although he declared

himself anti-Lowthian, others give him credit for producing a newer, more refined, definition of parallelism (Berlin 1985, 64)<sup>9</sup>. This is so much so that Landy (1984, 62-3) even sees in him the 'saviour' of the most criticized section of Lowth's theory of synthetic parallelism. What Kugel really did was to prove that parallelism is not a poetic device but rather a mental paradigm, which stimulated the creative energies of the authors, under the pressure of tradition and cultural interchange<sup>10</sup>. Kugel (1981, 26-8) admits that the three main characteristics of Ugaritic Poetry (henceforth UPy), namely frequent ternary rhymes, repetition of words and/or phrases, and word-pairs, represent fertile soil for searching for poetic devices in HPy, but he left this as a mere theory.

Once believed to be uniquely characteristic of HPy, parallelism is nowadays accepted not only as a traditional rhetorical device present in some other classic literature, but also as a common feature of literary writing. Whether quantitative in terms of metre and elements of clause structure, or qualitative in terms of phonetics and semantics, parallelism is found in much of world literature. Since Hebrew verse can hardly exist without it, it was inferred that in ancient literatures such as Hebrew and Ugaritic, parallelism is not a mere rhetorical device but an organizing principle that ties together two clauses in a meaningful unit.

Upon admitting a connection between poetry and music and an interconnection between neighbouring cultures, Abraham M. Habermann (1972, 670-93) agreed that HPy owes much to Canaanite aesthetics. As main characteristics, Habermann listed action, imagery, simplicity, vigour, and concreteness, which are portrayed, due to the extreme concreteness of the Hebrew language, by parallelism, strophe structure, metre, genre, and style. Although Habermann's approach to Hebrew poetic devices is diachronic, it resembles more of an outsider's approach offering a good and cautious resumé of the status quo in research.

Although parallelism of thought is the most highly esteemed device of HPy, there have been many scholars through the years who have suggested that metre or rhythm best describes HPy, be it number of syllables or number of words in each line<sup>11</sup>. Christensen (1986, 62-3) promotes an even older method, that of counting 'morae' (i.e. vowels) and disjunctive accents.

Korpel (1998) illustrates from the book of Isaiah that, apparently, the Hebrew verse-line is made of two or three words that have an average of eight syllables. This process seems to be hindered by some irregularities of the Masoretic system, such as the frequent use of the conjunctive *māqqēp*, which permitted them to connect two or more words into one single stressed unit. Again,

far from being a tool enabling the scholar to emend the transmitted text metri causa, the rhythmical balance may sometimes function as an additional argument in the delimitation of cola and verse-lines. (Korpel 1998, 12)

In terms of syllable counting, Freedman and Geoghegan discovered that, in the case of the first three chapters of Lamentations, the average couplet length is 12 syllables, while line A has an average of 7.2 or 7.3, and line B an average of 5.7 or 5.8 (Freedman & Geoghegan 1999, 241)<sup>12</sup>.

Christensen himself concluded that the careful assessment of verse-lines in relation to their 'morae' and disjunctive accents indicates a balanced and rhythmical construction of verses (1986, 68 and again 1988, 35).

Watson's contribution to the description of poetry in ANE literature is extremely valuable. The numerous indicators categorised into broad and structural types are more

or less members of two general categories, namely, conciseness and parallelism, and the result of their interplay. Although they vary in terms of the grammatical level at which they appear, from phonetics to morphology, word order, and semantics, parallelism is assumed as the fundamental principle that binds smaller units into larger ones.

Watson's arsenal of poetic devices includes the ellipsis, unusual vocabulary, conciseness, unusual word-order, archaisms, metre and rhythm, regularity and symmetry (as broad indicators), parallelism, word-pairs, chiasmic patterns, envelope figures, break-up of stereotyped phrases, gender-matched parallelism, tercets (as structural indicators), rhyme and sound patterns (as other) (Watson 1984a, 44-62), as well as numerous figures of speech (Watson 1984a, 251-348). Some of these features resurface intermittently in his later studies.

Of particular interest for the diachronic study of poetry in ANE literature is the recognition of particular markers of poetical units or subunits. Among them, de Moor and Watson (1993, xv) include colometric orthography of some Ugaritic and Akkadian documents, or the accents, the traditional division into *p<sup>e</sup>tûhôt* and *s<sup>e</sup>tûmôt*, and the use of *s<sup>e</sup>lâ* in the Hebrew documents preserved by the Masoretes.

More recently, Alviero Niccacci (1997) proposed three characteristics as specific to HPy: (1) segmented communication, (2) parallelism of similar bits of information, and (3) a non-detectable verbal system. Niccacci's overall conclusion is that HPy is structured at the most basic level in parallel lines, arranged mainly grammatically in direct order (a b // a' b') or in chiasmic order (a b // b' a')<sup>13</sup>.

So far, sufficient evidence has not been found to support the promotion of a particular poetic device as definitive for HPy. Therefore the poetic qualities of texts in Hebrew literature are still promoted heuristically, and the categories of poetry and prose are used only as qualifiers for those literary texts that manifest an obvious tendency towards opacity or transparency, respectively. A sharp distinction between the two types of texts is less probable when authors employed a mixture of devices to serve their particular purposes.

#### 4. The verbal sequence variation in Hebrew poetry

Unlike narratives, poems allow a more flexible use of verb tenses, which can often frustrate the search for the intended meaning. The translators of HPy will find this situation especially difficult to handle. For instance, Psalm 6.10 says 'The Lord hear (*qāṭal*) my plea // the Lord answer (*yiqṭōl*) my prayer.'<sup>14</sup> Most English translations consulted prefer to render the first lexical verb as a past perfect, with the exception of TNK, which prefers the simple present instead. Most translations continue by rendering the second verb as the habitual simple present (RSV, NRSV, NAB, NAS, NIB, NIV, ESV), although some opted for the future tense (KJV, NLT, NKJV, NJB, GNV), and a few others preferred the simple past (JPS, TNK), or even the past perfect instead (BBE).

It is obvious from the above selection that there is a clear lack of consensus in relation to how this passage should be translated. Whereas the large majority of translations agree on translating the *qāṭal* verb form as a past perfect, the consensus is lost when translating the verb of the second verse-line. However, it is the case that *yiqṭōl* verbal forms are more open to free translation, since they have the ability to function in various ways.

Despite his long experience as a scholar within the fields of HPy and of transla-



tion work, Wendland refrains from being dogmatic about translating verbal sequences. For Wendland, variations in verb usage, both in tense/aspect and voice, reflect a situation common to HPy wherein a 'logic' different from that of prose texts inspired the original poets (2002, 167-8).

As a general rule of thumb, he proposes that verbs are to be translated in relation to their near context, that is the strophe, and to their larger context, that is the poem. The presence of temporal adverbs or adverbial time phrases helps by suggesting a past time reference, whereas a vow to perform some religious activities indicates a future time reference. This treatment of HPy is commonplace among contemporary Bible translators.

Grammars also lack objective criteria to decide what translation to prefer, especially in terms of the tense of verbs in HPy. Non-perfective verbal forms fit well with gnomic perfect (IBHS, 506) and would make a good parallel as progressive and habitual non-perfective (pp. 504-6). Nonetheless, IBHS places greater value on the ability of *yiqṭōl* to represent a situation that arises as a consequence of another, particularly as a situation in the future, and illustrates copiously with samples from Psalms (pp. 512-3). The 'enigma' of the Hebrew verbal system is far from being elucidated, though<sup>15</sup>. The two main options, tense and aspect, are still disputed. Among the more recent and original contributors in relation to the verbal system as used in HPy, one can mention the divergent opinions of Diethelm Michel<sup>16</sup> and Jan Joosten, which epitomize the ongoing debate over the function of verbal forms in Hebrew.

Michel proposes the aspect theory of the Hebrew verbal system based on a thorough investigation of *qāṭal* and *yiqṭōl* in the Psalms. Methodologically, he assumed that literary contexts (poetic genres) have influence on the syntactic usage of verbal forms. Hence, Michel progressed carefully in his study, considering the variations of *qāṭal* functions in relation to various poetic genres found in Psalms: lamentations, thanksgiving, reports of salvation<sup>17</sup>.

According to Michel, the suffix conjugation is not employed in the Psalms to express time, but rather to report an action that stands independently, that is 'self-important' (pp. 98-99). Such an action is considered absolute and factitive ('Fakt'). At the same time, the actions expressed by perfect have an 'akzidentiellen' character with regard to the acting person (p. 127). Michel noticed that the prefix conjugation is not expressing time either, but is used when meaning is derived from outside the action the verb expresses, and is therefore relative to it, and expressing an action ('Handlung') (Michel 1960, 176). In this case, the actions designated by *yiqṭōl* verbs have a 'substantiellen' character with regard to the acting person (p. 127).

The only place where the analysis of *qāṭal* and *yiqṭōl* interact in Michel's work is his chapter on the syntax of the conditional sentence. Four verbal sequence types are identified, some invariable with *yiqṭōl* or *qāṭal* throughout, and some displaying verb form shifting, from *yiqṭōl* to *qāṭal* and vice versa (Michel 1960, 190-2). Michel understands them as facts (*qāṭal*) and actions (*yiqṭōl*) in interaction (p. 194). Most of the samples extend over many clauses and verse-lines, and volitives are included in the category of 'imperfects.'<sup>18</sup> Only two samples stay within the limits of couplets, namely Ps. 127.1 and 63.7.

The possibility that the Hebrew verb has aspect was contested repeatedly despite its venerable history, traced back to the German Arabic grammarians of the nineteenth century<sup>19</sup>. Most recently, Joosten (2002) rightly challenged the validity of aspect by attempting to prove that the most prominent functions attached to the imperfective in

acknowledged aspect languages, such as real present and attendant circumstances in the past, are not regularly expressed by *yiqṭōl* in Hebrew. Conversely, the predicative participle takes over such functions in Hebrew, whereas *yiqṭōl* expresses modality.

Verb usage is particularly important in the study of a verb-initial language, as Classical Hebrew has proved to be. Its importance is increased by the role of the verb in the analysis of prose, as recent research indicates (Andersen 1974; Longacre 1989; Eskhult 1990; Niccacci 1990; Schneider 1994; Hataf 1997; Goldfajn 1998 inter alia). Therefore, a careful look into the use of the verb in poetry may be illuminating for the understanding of its function both at the syntactic and pragmatic levels.

As becomes clear from rendering the Psalms into poetic lines, there are several tendencies to be noticed in the use of verbs between the parallel lines. Arguably, the couplet is the regular poetic unit in HPy, with one predicate per line and similar verbal forms in both lines being favoured due to parallelismus membrorum<sup>20</sup>.

Consequently, verses with multiple lines<sup>21</sup>, couplets with multiple predicates per line<sup>22</sup>, the elision of the verb in one of the lines<sup>23</sup>, and the *qāṭalnniyiqṭōl* verbal sequence or its variant *yiqṭōlnnqāṭal* would be exceptions.

Niccacci intuitively noted that the study of the verbal system as it is applied to poetry is “the most remarkable area of disagreement” between prose and poetry. The unanalysable alternation of *qāṭal*, *yiqṭōl* and *wayyiqṭōl* verbal forms in poetry allowed him to catalogue it as a free alternation. Although he mentions it only in passing, he admits that the parallelization of same root verbs proves to be a characteristic of UPy, HPy, and epistolary literature in Amarna (Niccacci 1990, 194-95)<sup>24</sup>.

Several scholars have analysed verses with the QYYQ verbal sequence in Psalms in particular, some even in relation to UPy, as well as in other poetic canonical books,<sup>25</sup> thereby legitimating it as an object of study. Further limitations concerning the extent of our research, as well as terminological and methodological options, are detailed in the following sections.

## 5. The Psalter as a corpus of poetic texts

Our investigation will be limited to couplets in Psalms<sup>26</sup>. Although this particular verbal sequence appears in HPy of various periods, including Archaic Hebrew, we prefer to limit our study to Psalms for several reasons.

The first reason to limit our study to Psalms is that there is a strong consensus among scholars that Psalms is a collection of poems representative for HPy. Second, Psalms stands as a united corpus of Hebrew literature. However, one cannot maintain that this document allows synchronically valuable observations, since it encompasses poems of a wide variety of origins (cf. discussion infra). Third, the phenomenon of couplets with **QYYQ** verbal sequence appears to be extensively represented in this document. Fourth, since the main thematic in Psalms is liturgical, there is a greater chance that its poetry would be less transparent than that of wisdom literature or prophecy, and hence more poetic than prose. Fifth, because a thorough investigation of the whole corpus of the Psalter was too demanding to permit extending it to other documents from Hebrew literature, despite the need and desire to do so.

At this point, some clarifications of the nature of our research corpus are necessary. Approaching the MT in order to localize our primary text, several problems arise. First, the age of the literary pieces that the original text consists of varies within rather

large limits, because the Psalter is a collection of poems. Second, Hebrew itself is no longer seen as a monolithic language. What is the impact of these matters on our study?

In recent years, scholars have viewed Hebrew as a language with a diachronic development in its own right. Early Hebrew (also called Archaic),<sup>27</sup> Standard Hebrew (or pre-exilic)<sup>28</sup> and Late Hebrew (or post-exilic)<sup>29</sup> were the idioms apparently known in the Holy Land and employed for written documents (Kutscher 1982, 12)<sup>30</sup>. The picture is further complicated by the existence of diglossia (the existence of two varieties of the same language, one for literary and formal purposes, another for colloquial and informal purposes) and that of local dialects (such as Judahite/Southern or Israelite/Northern)<sup>31</sup>.

Several scholars have offered detailed studies on what the characteristic of the Ancient HPy may be. In 1975 (when their joint 1950 PhD thesis was finally published), Cross and Freedman provided orthographic, grammatical, lexical, and stylistic evidence for the ancient origin or influence of several poems outside the Psalter<sup>32</sup>. In his 1976 Harvard PhD dissertation, Geller provides us with structural evidence inspired by parallelismus membrorum displayed by ancient HPy<sup>33</sup>.

More recently, Hadas-Lebel (1995, 70-72) traced the characteristics of Archaic HPy in several poems outside the Psalter (Exod 15.1-11; Jdg 5; Num 23-24; Deut 32; 33; Gen 49; 1 Sam 2.1-10) and in some poems from Psalms as well (Pss 17; 103; 116; 135). Sáenz-Badillos (1993, 57) also classified Psalm 68 as an archaic poem. Hadas-Lebel does not localize any post-exilic influences in any of the Psalms, although she admits that books like Job, Ecclesiastes and Canticles must have been written during this period (Hadas-Lebel 1995, 103). A similar approach is taken by Sáenz-Badillos (1993, 115)<sup>34</sup>.

Of course, such a perception contradicts the expectations of the historical criticism school, which tended to hold, with very few exceptions, that the poems in the Psalms were composed in the exilic and post-exilic period<sup>35</sup>. As becomes apparent from the study of the Psalms by means of the historical criticism method, a precise dating is beyond our reach. The criteria most preferred for dating Psalms include the historical evaluation of superscriptions, generally considered as editorial additions, internal references to cultic ceremonies or religious institutions, assessing the general tenor of poems in relation to historical incidents and character development accounted for in the historical books<sup>36</sup>.

Although historical critics have also investigated the preference of terms in Psalms, it was only later that this type of study satisfactorily reached a higher degree of specificity and relevance<sup>37</sup>. Tsevat's 1953 Jerusalem PhD dissertation proposes, on lexicographical grounds, the originality of the Psalms devotional language compared to other biblical documents, conserving ancient terminology specific to ANE lyricism of Canaanite and Ugaritic origin and even of Akkadian hymnic-epic origin (Tsevat 1955, 55-60). In terms of dating the Psalter, after comparing its language to that of the poems in Chronicles and noticing that they are very different, Tsevat (1955, 61-72) concludes that the Psalter must have been completed by 400 B.C., when the academic consensus indicates that the writing of Chronicles took place.

That leaves us with a corpus of poems produced during the monarchic and exilic periods of Israel's history, with several poems displaying characteristics specific to Archaic Hebrew or even originating before the monarchy. Although we cannot expect the same consistency as in a corpus of poetry that originated during a fifty years peri-



od, we are not left with a corpus that extends over almost a millenium either. But five hundred years is still a long period, and many changes must have been taking place diachronically in terms of style preferences. Nonetheless, as we will see below, the QYYQ verbal sequence is one of those poetic devices that has found a place in the literature of all these ages.

As any respectable linguistic exercise would demand, we rely extensively on a given text. Its quality should be established by its age, accuracy, and authority among MSS of similar persuasion. Although there are other Heb MSS available that are older than this, the only complete Heb MS known to date is Codex Leningradensis published as *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Its main weaknesses derive from its Western Masoretic origin, relatively late, though strong and coherent.

## 6. Terminology

Where terminology is concerned, there have been three main solutions offered so far. The first compared HPy with poetry from other world literatures more or less cognate with Hebrew and evaluated them from the perspective offered by the poetry theory at use at a given time. The second solution represents the other extreme, since it refutes any foreign influence upon Hebrew literature, preferring the original Hebrew terminology<sup>38</sup>. A more balanced, mediating solution offered neutral terms, since Greco-Roman terminology was indeed alien to the Hebrew literature, while the original Hebrew terminology was completely obscure.

This work develops Margalit's terminology, valued for its coherence, for using neutral terms, and for being well defined and tested both in Hebrew and in Ugaritic literature (Margalit 1980, 219-28)<sup>39</sup>. Thus, the verse (line for others) represents the main unit of poetry; it corresponds to the sentence in prose, meaning that it is at once a grammatical and a prosodic entity<sup>40</sup>. The verse is subdivided by principal caesure into verse-lines (verset for others, A and B). The basic verse-type is the binary structure, called couplet (distich for others), which consists of two verse-lines divided by a caesura<sup>41</sup>. Monolines (monostichs for others), tercets (tristichs for others), and even quatrains (tetrastichs for others) are its structural variations with one, three, or four lines, respectively<sup>42</sup>.

The verse-line is subdivided by blanks into verse-units, mostly co-extensive with the individual vocabule or lexeme. There is a tendency towards limiting the number of verse-units per verse-line to three, but there are exceptions. The number of verse-units per verse is called the valence of that verse. The pattern of a verse, according to the valence of its corresponding lines, is represented as the numerical sum of the verse-units in the component lines (e.g., 4 + 3; 3 + 3; 3 + 2). Scansion stands for the process of determining the verse valence. The strophe is a conventionally structured sequence of verses in indeterminate quantity<sup>43</sup>.

## 7. Method

Our investigation has two main stages, both applied to the primary text: verse-line delimitation and systemic functional analysis.

### 7.1. Verse-line delimitation

Verse-line delimitation is a heuristic process, meaning that a solution is proposed and then its alternatives assessed. As Kaddari (1973, 168) noticed, complex semantic units may appear (compound words, 'series,' 'expressions') and 'essential semantic links' (single semantic units whose constituent parts do not have any exact parallels) may be present as well.

A practical way to check the results is by identifying the topic of the semantic field as a whole. Units can stand in a topical relationship, although particular words may stand alone without explicit counterparts (Kaddari 1973, 170)<sup>44</sup>. Once this analysis is completed, the semantic critic identifies only parallels sharing a common semantic field. Further more detailed analysis will reveal the relationship between semantic units belonging to a common field<sup>45</sup>.

The result is checked against the Masoretic accents. When accents happen to contradict the fluency of syntax, they may also hinder the ease of interpretation (Kugel 1981, 109-16). Given their failure to provide strictly objective criteria for verse division, the Masoretic assessment of Hebrew verse is supplemented by a careful evaluation of the rhythmical balance of each line produced.

It appears that in terms of predication, the basic rule points to the fact that each poetic line has to contain not more than one predicate. In those cases where more than one finite verb is present in a particular line, one has to assess their role as predicates. Occasionally even non-finite verbs (such as absolute infinitives or participles) can function predicatively. The nominal clause represents the most notable exception to the previous observations, because of its implied verb and/or non-verbal predicators.

Adapting Margalit's terminology, we speak of kernel elements (verse, verse-lines, and verse-units) as well as expanded elements (strophes). Whenever more than one verse appears in a verset, verses are marked with small Latin letters (a, b, c). Since we work with the Hebrew text as preserved by the Masoretes, versets are marked according to the Masoretic text (henceforth MT), although it does not coincide entirely with all Christian traditions. The psalm headings are not included in our analysis because they lack the poetic character of the verse-lines of the poems.

Following the scanning of the poems, we identify the couplets with one verb per line, either *qāṭal* or *yiqṭōl*, but differing from one verse-line to another, and not necessarily of the same verb root. The division into verse-lines is compared with the divisions suggested by various ancient witnesses and modern interpreters of the MT<sup>47</sup>. Variant relevant readings are given in the footnotes. Then, the couplets displaying a QYYQ verbal sequence are collected in two entirely new databases, one for the *qāṭal*//*yiqṭōl* verbal sequence and one for the reverse sequence (cf. Appendices 1 and 2). In order to make the analysis easier to understand, original texts appear in transliteration with a rendering in English accompanying them.

### 7.2. Systemic Functional analysis

When the first stage of our research has been completed, we can embark on the more elaborate second stage. Systemic Functional Grammar (henceforth, SFG) is a linguistic tool that integrates meaning with form and intentionality. Each of the couplets that display a QYYQ verbal sequence will be analysed at the three levels at which SFG holds that meaning is realized: textual, interpersonal, and ideational (experiential and logical). Individual constituents can have different functions at each of the three levels of

meaning. They will be analysed in their relationship with adjacent constituents with focus on the verbs.

The results of such analysis are printed in tables accompanying each verse-line, so that the multiplicity of functions is notable at a glance. Before interpreting the general results of the couplets with a QYYQ verbal sequence identified, one entire Psalm is analysed at each of the three levels of meaning in order to compare the use of the QYYQ verbal sequence in relation to other verbal sequence types.

## 8. Relevance of this study

Particularizing the ongoing debate on the difference between prose and poetry to Hebrew literature, critics agree that there is room for further refinement. There is an increasing consensus among scholars, though, with regard to the lack of decisive features that would provide the long expected criteria that distinguish a text as being poetry.

This study argues that the QYYQ verbal sequence is a poetical feature that allows the reader to distinguish with more accuracy between prose and poetry. Since it is not present in prose texts, with the exception of some conditional clauses, the QYYQ verbal sequence could be the feature that uniquely marks poetic language.

HPy is described by a multitude of features, of which parallelism (at various levels), rhythm, conciseness and ellipsis, inter alia, are particularly important. More recently, the QYYQ verbal sequence has entered the gallery of poetic devices as well.

This study defends the idea that the QYYQ verbal sequence is a poetic device in its own right, used successfully by ancient poets in the HPy of the psalms. Evidence of its usage also includes the alphabetic cuneiform tradition of UPy.

### 8.2. Relevance to the grammar of Classical Hebrew

Translators of the Hebrew Bible are not at ease with the deviation from the regular usage of verbal forms that is found in poetry. The lack of theoretical consensus one finds in grammars in relation to the use of Hebrew verbs aggravates the practical dilemma. Based on the careful observation of verbal usage in prose, it is noticed that scholars have relied on mere intuition in promoting the QYYQ verbal sequence as a valuable research topic and poetic device specific to HPy.

This study argues that *qāṭal* and *yiqṭōl* verbal forms, when part of the QYYQ verbal sequence in Psalms poetic couplets, can be used primarily for aesthetic reasons, with no individual reference to time or aspect. Arguably, the SFG analysis of lexicogrammar can provide a comprehensive interpretation of form and function, and an integrated approach to phonetics, morphology, and syntax.

### 8.3. Relevance to the exegesis of the Hebrew Psalms as preserved by the

#### Masoretes

Various practical and theoretical reasons have necessitated that the researcher limit the object of research to Psalms. Admittedly, Psalms is a variegated corpus in terms of authorship, implicit style, origin, topic, inter alia. At the same time, though, Psalms stands as a unified corpus of Classical Hebrew poems that does not display the features of Late Hebrew texts, and only some Psalms would convey features specific to Ancient

HPy. This study proposes a method for verse-line delimitation of HPy that integrates various contributions into a coherent step-by-step approach.

It also argues that the Masoretic text of the HB provides the best complete document for the study of the Psalter. Had this thesis not been correct, the Masoretic text could still be successfully employed for the study of the Psalter, since it stands as the instantiation of a civilization whose cultural values and language are dead.

At the same time, it generates a resourceful and fully retrievable database on the Masoretic text of the Psalter, which includes references to ancient, mediaeval, and modern authorities. Moreover, it argues that SFG offers the tools that allow the exegete to access information beyond the form, through the various functions a constituent can simultaneously hold at various levels of meaning.

The main contribution of this study consists in the SFG interpretation of the QYYQ verbal sequence it offers. Although previously accounted for as a rhetorical device and explained by means of pragmatic devices, this study argues that the preference for one verbal form or another in a couplet with QYYQ sequence can be explained successfully in relation to thematic, mood, transitivity/ergativity, and clause complex structure.

#### 8.4. Relevance to Systemic Functional Grammar

Since its first theorisation in English, SFG was written and rewritten for various world languages and dialects. One of the basic assumptions of Systemic theory is that the language concerned is privileged for the description of each language. In other words, SFG offers only a general linguistic theory, not a theory of universals, and it must be applied to particular linguistic descriptions.

This study attempts to apply the principles of systemic functionalism for the first time to a corpus of Standard Hebrew prose texts, producing a tentative Systemic Functional Grammar of Hebrew lexicogrammar.

#### 8.5. Relevance to Ugaritic studies

The connection between the Ugaritic literary tradition and its Hebrew counterpart has long been admitted, based on various poetic features common to both. Assuming that the QYYQ verbal sequence is a genuine poetical feature, its presence in literary texts originated in both traditions proves their kinship once again. This paper argues that the Hebrew literary tradition moves away from its Ugaritic kin when the use of the QYYQ verbal sequence is concerned.

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## Notes:

1. By doing so, Aviram hopes 'to isolate the qualities that serve as criteria for what is more poetic or less poetic,' so that he may formulate a definition of poetry (Aviram 1994, 46).

2. One can render the binary opposition transparent: opaque as the two extremes

of a bipolar spectrum as an expression of the dual nature of the linguistic sign, as first described by de Saussure. Transparent language focuses our attention on the signified, whereas opaque language focuses it on the signifiers, which always mean more than just one thing. Signifiers are bound together into a network of contexts, and can easily lose their meaning, reverting to meaninglessness.

3. Longman defines artistry in terms of rhetoric. He identified three synthetic characteristics of HPy as present in all works of Hebrew literature, i.e. parallelism, imagery and terseness. One may reproach the school of New Criticism for mixing rhetorical devices with stylistics and structuralism (O'Connor 1980a, 10).

4. The historical Psalms (e.g. 78, 105, 106) are just a few exceptions catalogued more precisely as 'catechistic rehearsals of Israelite history,' doctrinal material that has no meaning in itself unless the historical account is known (Alter 1990, 27). However, Alter is more interested in tracing the characteristics that unite them, namely parallelism, narrativity, and the use of keywords.

5. See also Alter's explanations on David's Song (2 Sam. 22), Joel 2, and Deborah's Song (Jdg. 5). Although narrative is ignored in poetry, a sense of narrativity is still extant by the fact that metaphors are given a strong narrative realization (Alter 1990, 40). For example, 'the right hand' is a metaphor for authority, but in Judges it is used of Jael, who with her 'right hand' killed Sisera. Similarly, 'the way,' a stereotypical metaphor for the moral life in wisdom literature, is performed literally in Proverbs 7 by a young man going astray to a prostitute (Alter 1990, 45, 61).

6. Although imaginary, a short dialogue can still be traced in Jdg. 5 as if maids are responding to their mistress, Sisera's mother. Furthermore, dialogue can be encountered in prophetic poetry. For types and discussion of this 'technique of style,' see Alonso-Schökel (1988, 170-9). The personal participation of the characters in Job and Song of Songs are not considered literary dialogue, but rather monologues. Similarly, there are some liturgical responsorial pieces in Psalms.

7. A similar association between form and social function was suggested later, but asserts that myths, wisdom literature, and liturgical texts are cast in forms that better reflect the interest of their respective authors in a more ornamented use of language (de Moor & Watson 1993, xvii).

8. A complementary reading of O'Connor (1980), Kugel (1981) and Berlin (1985) can offer a panoramic history of parallelism.

9. Alter evaluates Kugel's contribution as 'a bold step forward, together with a giant step backward, in understanding the nature of biblical POETRY.' Kugel's sarcasm, enjoyed by Landy, is registered as stubborn resistance by Alter (see Alter 1998, 226-7). Kugel agrees with Lowth only where he was most vehemently criticised, on synthetic parallelism, but only after preliminary redefinitions have been stipulated (Alter 1985, 12ff).

10. This perception coheres with Meschonnic's distinction between the Hellenistic perception of poetry, where reason has priority over rhythm, and the Jewish perception of poetry, which is intrinsically rhythmical, as codified by the Masoretic accents (Meschonnic 1985, 466-75). Kugel, however, holds a contradictory opinion on the role of Masoretic accents in Judaism, namely, that they obscures the structure of the Hebrew verse, contributing to the forgetting of parallelism (Kugel 1984, 111-16).

11. For a criticism of the classical theories of stress counting of Ley-Sievers see W.H. Cobb, *A Criticism of Systems of Hebrew Metre* (Oxford: Clarendon; 1905, 111-28) or Gray (1915, 123-54).



12. This study was done on a peculiar type of text, with a specific rhythm (3 + 2), also known as Qina, but the measures of the first verse-line match the average length of a verse-line as discovered by others. This theory is not unanimously accepted among scholars, though (cf. de Hoop 2000).

13. The choice of illustrating such a method with Hebrew proverbs, we suspect, is not the best choice, since the canonical book of Proverbs, and especially its last two-thirds, from which this quote was taken (with the exception of Prov 6.8 [p. 86]), is by its own nature composed of binary-structures with compositional unity and self-sufficient content. Niccacci indirectly recognizes the limits of this application (1997, 89 n.52), but seems to be unaware of the lack of representativeness of his selection for the method he is proposing.

14. We prefer the more neutral *qāṭal* and *yiqtōl* for what traditional grammar terms the perfect and imperfect verbal forms, respectively, and will be used as such henceforth.

15. McFall's monograph *The Enigma of the Hebrew Verbal System: Solutions from Ewald to the Present Day* (1982), doctoral research presented to the University of Cambridge in 1981, provides a good historical overview of the main solutions given not only to the thorny issue of *wayyiqṭōl* in particular, but also to the Hebrew verbal system in general.

16. Michel's work is virtually unknown, for, to our knowledge, there were no reviewers of his work until his contribution was included in IBHS (470-4) and summarized by Gosling (1992, 5-15).

17. Isaksson (1987, 15-17) displays a similar awareness of the relationship between genre and grammatical categories that is so often exploited by text-linguists, although none of them give credit to it.

18. Cf. Ps 40.6; 141.5 (impf. - perf. without a conditional particle); 27.3b; 73.21-22; 120.7; 127.1; 139.8-11 (impf. - perf. with a conditional particle); 17.3; 37.21; 69.33 (perf. - impf. without a conditional particle); 7.4-6; 21.12; 41.7; 44.21-22; 63.7 (perf. - impf. with a conditional particle).

19. G.H.A. Ewald, *Grammatica critica linguae arabicae* (2 vols., Leipzig: Hahn, 1831).

20. Korpel and de Moor (1988, 1-4) advanced the idea that the basic unit of Ugaritic and HPy is the colon, the unit of the oral rendering of the poem, which developed into a couplet only later. For them, the smallest building block is the foot (i.e. a word containing at least one stressed syllable).

21. Verses with three lines can be produced by expanding a couplet (Loewenstamm 1969), while verses with four lines can be the result of rearranging two adjacent couplets producing an alternative couplet (Gray 1915, 62-4) or split-couplet (Watson 1997). Larger verses can be produced by means of numerical parallelism (Watson 1984a, 148-9; Watson 1991), enumeration and repetition (Watson 1984a, 187-90), vertical parallelism and Janus parallelism (Watson 1984a, 158-9).

22. Internal parallelism represents one notable exception (Watson 1984c, 1985a, 1988b, 1989b).

23. For the ellipsis of the initial verb in the secondary line, see Watson (1984a, 174-6).

24. Moshe Held (1962, 281-2) noticed occurrences of various verbal forms with the same root verb in HPy and explained them stylistically, proposing a similar rendering of both verbs as preterites (past simple).

25 Rata (2004, 12-13) quoted Nahum Sarna's 1955 Dropsie PhD thesis, *Studies in the Language of Job*, wherein the Jewish scholar recorded twenty-five cases of perfect verbal forms followed by imperfect ones and twenty-seven more cases of imperfect verbal forms followed by perfect ones. Gosling (1992, 514-21) noticed the existence of this phenomenon too and offered four samples (Job 3.3; 4.3; 15.7; 15.18), of which the last three are genuine. He proposed that the verbal forms in these last three samples should be translated similarly with reference to the past. Rata himself discussed occasionally such cases, but, since his interest resided with the verbal forms, his samples are scattered. Job 38.17, 22 on pp. 128-9 and Job 23.12 on p. 135 illustrate the use of long yqtl's with past reference. Job 6.25, 15.9, 33.13b and 35.6c illustrate the use of long yqtl's with present time reference in interrogative clauses (pp. 148-9). Job 21.29, 22.15 on pp. 159-160 illustrate the use of qtl's with past time reference. Job 9.2 on p. 163, Job 33.13 on p. 167 and Job 37.15 on p. 169 illustrate the use of qtl's with present time reference. The use of qtl alongside short yqtl, long yqtl and even wayqtl gives evidence to Rata for the classification of qtl as perfective and for the use of verbal forms in Job marked for aspect and not for time (Rata 2004, 227-8, as well as the final conclusions).

26. A discussion of their verbal structure follows (cf. chapter 3).

27. The biblical documents that fit in this category mainly include the poems from the Pentateuch and the Historical Books.

28. The texts in Standard Hebrew regularly include Genesis-Kings, a terminus ad quem of about 500 b.c.e. being maintained for them.

29. As main representatives of LH, Kutscher and others also list Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah.

30. These are followed by Mishnaic Hebrew, Rabbinic Hebrew, Mediaeval Hebrew and Israeli Hebrew.

31. Rendsburg defends the case of an Israelite origin of several Psalms (the Korah and Asaph collections and Ps 29), referring to linguistic evidence while applying Hurvitz's linguistic approach (1990, 14-15). Goulder (1982, 1996) is particularly fond of the theoretical northern origin of psalms from Korah and Asaph's collections.

32. Here are included Exod 15, Gen 49, Deut 33, 2 Sam 22, and even Jdg 5, and 1 Sam 2.20-26.

33. His corpus includes also the Song of Lamech (Gen 4.23-24), the Song of the Ark (Num 10.35), the Psalm of Habakkuk (Hab 3), and Psalms 24, 29, 68, 77 (only v. 17), 89, and 114.

34. For important studies on the lexical indications of post-exilic dating see A. Hurvitz, *A Linguistic Study of the Relationship between the Priestly Source and the book of Ezekiel: A New Approach to an Old Problem* (Cahiers de la Revue Biblique, 20; Paris: Gabalda, 1982). At the syntactic level, other studies could be useful, such as R. Corwin, *The Verb and the Sentence in Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah* (Borna, 1909), R. Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew: Towards an Historical Typology of Biblical Hebrew Prose* (HSM, 12; Missoula, MO: 1976), A.R. Guenther, *A Diachronic Study of Biblical Hebrew Prose* (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1977), M. Eskult, *Studies in Verbal Aspect and Narrative Technique in Biblical Hebrew Prose* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1990) as well as "Traces of Linguistic Development in Biblical Hebrew" (Hebrew Studies 46: 353-70) and Jan Joosten (2005).

35. Although there is agreement in principle, historical critics do not agree on the historical date of the Psalms individually. Following closely Ewald's *Commentary on the Psalms* (German edition 1866, English edition 1880), Arnold, Kitchener, Potts, and

Phillipotts (1867) accepted few Psalms as pre-exilic, namely 15, 19, 24, 29, 60. Briggs and Briggs (1906, lix-lxxix) proposed thirty-four psalms as belonging to the monarchic period (cf. pp. xc-xci). Buittenwieser (1938) reduced the number of pre-exilic psalms to twenty, but only six of them coincide with the ones that Briggs and Briggs list (i.e. 19, 20, 21, 24, 45, and 60).

36. This association of a given poem and its respective narrative (historical context) is particularly visible in Goulder's approach to setting psalms from Book Five in the context of Nehemiah, rebuilding the Temple, and Ezra, respectively (cf. Goulder 1998).

37. Various authors noticed several features that hold together individual poems into collections such as the Prayers of David (Pss 51-72) (cf. Goulder 1990, 20-30), the psalms of the Sons of Korah (cf. Goulder 1982, 1-23), or the psalms of Asaph (cf. Goulder 1996, 15-36 and 190 ff; and Nasuti 1988), the psalms of Ascent (cf. Crow 1996, 129-58, Goulder 1998, 24-7). Nasuti (1999, 141-62) defends the idea that the typicality of David's experience in the poems that are ascribed to his name functions as a hermeneutical key allowing the reader to unlock the meaning of individual poems that were built on a similar genre model.

38. For an expanded debate over similar terminological issues, see Tatu (2005).

39. Launched in 1975 (*Studia Ugaritica I: Introduction to Ugaritic Prosody*, Ugarit-Forschungen 7: 289-313), the method was applied extensively to Ugaritic literature in *A Matter of Life and Death: A Study of the Baal-Mot Epic* (CTA 4-5-6) [AOAT 206; Kevelaer: Butzon and Bercker, Neukirchener-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1980], and in *The Ugaritic Poem of Aqht: Text, Translation and Commentary* [Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1989].

40. Prosody is a term that assumes metre, whose presence, particularly in Ugaritic literature, has long been a serious bone of contention.

41. Although the idea that the couplet stands as the main prosodical and meaning unit of HPy is still debated, one can certainly argue that it as the most frequent type of verse. Our investigation indicates that 84% (381) of the verses in the Psalter are couplets, followed by a 15% presence of tercets. Even though van der Lugt's computation is lower, only 350 (2006, 425), closer to Fokkelman's 348 total (2000, 348), the variation is too low to count.

42. Both Fokkelman (2000, 17 and 41) and van der Lugt (2006, 523), against Korpel and de Moor (1988, 27-28), do not accept larger verses than the tercet.

43. For the most recent study of strophe as a structural unit in Psalms, see van der Lugt's 2006 monograph.

44. Nevertheless, Kaddari made use of the grammatical-syntactic structure of the utterance; he examined it in order to validate the parallelism traced down semantically. This procedure is considered 'a prerequisite for the proper establishment of a parallelism in regard to any word or phrase' (Kaddari, 1970-3, 172). By doing that, he actually discarded everything that did not fit the synonymous and antithetic categories, those previously named synthetic parallels.

45. According to Kaddari, there are two main situations semantic units can find themselves in. Sometimes they are in a parallel relation, although they regularly occur separately, outside the sphere of parallelism. At other times, semantic units appearing regularly together, even in non-parallel contexts, are split into the cola of a parallel verse. Semantic units belonging to the first category can develop three types of relations: synonymous, heteronomous, and partially antynomous. Semantic units belonging to the second category create two types of relations: composites of linked phrases are divided into

two co-ordinated parallel cola, and a series of co-ordinated types is split in parallelism (Kaddari 1970-3, 172-4). Despite all these ramifications, the author is realistic enough to accept that there are poetical units that do not display semantic parallelism, and also non-poetical texts that can be constructed in the style of semantic parallelism as well.

46. Commentators such as Talstra (1999, 114ff) give more prominence to the clause in their analysis than to the line, so that may find its value when poetical texts are analysed syntactically. Nonetheless, the main deficiency of such an approach is that it disregards the binding force of parallelism in HPy, whereby incomplete clauses or even groups of constituents can echo each other and hence produce artistic lines (though not co-extensive with clauses). Therefore the syntactic analysis cannot be done in a vacuum, as Talstra suggests, without endangering the understanding of the text. Syntactic variations can indeed have non-syntactic explanations.