THE STYLISTICS OF HEBREW POETRY
A (Re)New(ed) Focus of Study

by JOHN H. STEK

THE STUDY of Hebrew (OT) poetry as an art form—its prosody, rhetoric (including rhetorical conventions), and architectonic forms—has had a checkered history. No doubt this has been due, on the one hand, to overriding devotional, homiletical, theological and religious (history of religions, comparative religions) interests in this literature; and, on the other hand, to the fact that professional students of the OT texts, while receiving (more or less adequate) training in languages, history, theology, and religion, have not been trained in the aesthetic aspect of OT literature—or any literature, for that matter. Even Gunkel's work on the Psalms (Formgeschichte: investigation into the inter-relationship of content, form and function), which has had such revolutionary effect on biblical studies (New Testament as well as Old), failed to spark that general interest in the aesthetic dimension that it ought to have. Investigations remained sporadic, the hobby of a few; and areas of investigation have remained fragmentary. A recent survey of work done in this area in the modern period ends on the disconsolate note: "General agreement on the structure of Hebrew poetry is little more advanced than it was two or three centuries ago."[1]

This is to be greatly regretted since the OT documents do not present us with mere words strung together in dull syntactical relationships, but with the greatest literature the ancient (only Semitic?) world produced. In its sophistication, subtlety, beauty and power it rivals the best literature of any people at any time. The Hebrews were not artists with the brush, the chisel, or the architects' tools, but their masters knew how to narrate a tale, compose a poem or fashion a proverb. They did it with an amazing mastery of language—and economy of words

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[1] Donald Broadribb, "Historical Review of Studies of Hebrew Poetry," *Abr-Nahraim,* 13 (1972-73) 66-87.

—together with an exquisite union of form and content that has rarely been matched and perhaps never surpassed. And, as with all great works of art, the reader or student of this literature (especially its poetry) who fails to understand its forms and their function will stumble at the very threshold of understanding the content—a sad fact to which many a sermon and many a learned commentary and monograph alike bear witness.

Happily there are now signs of a reawakened interest, at least in some quarters. During the last twenty-five years a growing list of studies has appeared in the journals dealing with various aspects of this many-faceted subject. As evidence I point to the article of Broadribb referred to in note 1 (above), to the recent reprint of George Buchanan Gray's *The Forms of Hebrew Poetry*, significantly updated by a "Prolegomenon" from the pen of D. N. Freedman[2]—a student of Albright who has long interested himself in these matters—to the appearance of Nic. H. Ridderbos' *Die Psalmen*: Stilistische Verfahren and Aufbau, mit besonderer Berucksichtigung von Ps 1-41,[3] and to the useful bibliographies listed in all three.

Broadribb's lament that these studies remain badly fragmented clearly antedates his acquaintance with Ridderbos' work (which he does not list in his bibliography). This last is one of the most detailed and exhaustive analyses of stylistic phenomena in the Psalms ever to be published—including an introductory classification of the phenomena, followed by an analysis of the stylistics of each of the first 41 psalms. Dr. Ridderbos does not make use of syllable counting in his analysis of poetic lines, a tool of investigation shown to be of great usefulness by a number of scholars trained in America, but there is little else that he has missed. Unhappily his work on the aesthetics of the psalter has itself about as much aesthetic quality as a Hebrew grammar—to be studied and consulted, not to be enjoyed. But more to be regretted is the fact that it was translated into German before publication, rather than

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[2] New York, KTAV Publishing House, 1972. (First published in 1915.)

[3] Beiheft zur Zeitschrift fur die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, Berlin: New York, Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1972.

into English, in defiance (?) of the fact that English is rapidly replacing German as the international language for publication in biblical scholarship (which, as I have learned since coming to Europe, is for economic reasons as much as any other—the cost of publishing theological works on the continent for the continental market is becoming astronomical).

To attempt a systematic description of all the aspects of Hebrew poetic stylistics which have come to light would go far beyond the purpose of this brief article—which is only to inform the reader of one of the newer areas in O.T studies, and to stimulate interest in a much-neglected, but fascinating important field of investigation. It will suffice to illustrate, somewhat at random, a few of the more interesting phenomena, some long noted, others but recently recognized.

Anyone who has read in the Hebrew poetry of the OT will have observed that, although it does not manifest a pattern of rhyming, the poets of ancient Israel had a keen ear for sound. When Jeremiah (in the name of Yahweh) appealed to his wayward brothers *Shubu banim shobabim 'erpah meshuboteykem* (Return 0 sons of apostasy, I will heal your apostasies—3:22a), he was playing (in all seriousness) with sounds precisely as the Israelites had learned to expect from their poets. And so was the author of Ps. 22 when he penned the words of vss. 4-5:

"In you (B^eka) our fathers trusted; (*bat^ehu*)
   They trusted, (*bat^ehu*) and you delivered them ($\sqrt{}$ *plt*).
  To you they cried, and were saved; ($\sqrt{}$ *mlt*)
   In you (b^eka) they trusted (*bat^ehu*), and were not
                                              disappointed."

And when one hears this same poet complain:

  Yabesh kaheresh hoki (emended from *kohi*)
  (My mouth has dried up like a potsherd)

he hears the harsh, brittle echoes of sherd fragments rattling and cracking under dusty feet. Poets and public alike were intensely sensitive to sound.

Also repetition was for the biblical poets (and the whole literary tradition in which they stood) a particularly common device. Sometimes it served passion, as in the *Eli, eli* (My God, my God) of Ps. 22:1, the four-fold *'ad—'anah* (How long? of Ps. 13:lf., or the lament of Isaiah (24:16):

> *Razi li, razi li, 'oy li.*
> *Bog^edim bagadu, ubeged bog^edim bagadu.*
> (I pine away, I pine away, woe is me!
> Treacherous, they deal treacherously; treacherous of the
>   treacherous, they deal treacherously.)

Sometimes urgency, as in Jud. 5:12:

> "Awake, awake, Deborah!
>   Awake, awake, utter a song!" (Cpr. Is. 51:9; 52:1); or in

Is. 40:1:

> "Comfort, comfort my people . . .."

Sometimes emphasis and concentration, as in S of S 1:15:

> "Behold, how beautiful you are, my love;
>   behold, how beautiful . . .."

or in the three-fold *'eyn* in I Sam. 2:2:

> "There is none holy like Yahweh,
>   there is none besides you;
>   there is no rock like our God."

(Cf. also the repetition in Ps. 22:4-5—cited above; and in Is. 24:16—also cited above.)

Related to this last, but serving a larger and more complex function within the body of a composition, is the extensive use of key—or motif-words—a device that concentrates attention on primary themes and weaves the whole into an artistic as well as thematic unity. A clear and uncomplicated example can be found in Ps. 11. Within this short composition of 9 poetic lines, four words sound on the ear again and again: "Yahweh" 5 t.—vss. 1:42, 5, 7), "'righteous" (3 t.—vss. 3, 5, 7; also "righteous-ness, vs. 7), "wicked" (3 t.—vss. 2, 5, 6), and "upright" (2 t.—vss. 2, 7). These very words highlight the central theme of the psalm.

Martin Buber has done perhaps more than any other scholar to focus attention on this important phenomenon in Hebrew poetry. In an article devoted to Psalms 34 and 145, L. J. Liebreich lifts a significant quotation from one of Buber's English works (*Good and Evil*; New York, 1953):

> "The recurrence of the key-words is a basic law of com-
> position in the Psalms. This law has a poetic significance—
> rhythmical correspondence of sound values—as well as a
> hermeneutical one: the Psalm provides its own interpre-

tation, by repetition of what is essential to its understand-
ing," p. 52.[4]

Careful attention to the use of words by the Hebrew poets bears
out Buber's contention. It also has critical value, not infrequently
establishing literary unity where scholars for various reasons have
posited disunity. A striking example of this has been offered by
James Ward in his study of Ps. 89.[5]

A special use of repetition is that which has come to be termed
"inclusion" (or the Latin *inclusio*), otherwise known as the
"envelope figure."[6] By this is meant the repetition at or near
the end of a poetic composition of key words (or phrases, or
clauses, or concepts) employed at the beginning. Liebreich[7] ar-
gues that this device is utilized in "half of the Book of Psalms."
Not all his examples are convincing, but even so, its occurrence
is frequent. A good example is afforded by Ps. 12 where the
bene 'adam of vs. 1 is repeated at the very end of vs. 8. In Ps.
8 the repetition is more extensive. Here the whole poetic line
with which the psalm begins is repeated to form the conclusion.

Often the poets employed inclusion to wrap an "envelope"
around a subsection within a larger composition, as in Ps. 32:
1-5, where *pesha'* (rebellious act), *hata'ah* (sin), and ʻ*awon*
(iniquity), which are used in the first two poetic lines, are re-
peated in vs. 5; or Ps. 18:20-24, where "according to my righ-
teousness, according to the cleanness of my hands" appears as
the central phrase of the beginning and closing lines of a poetic
"paragraph." See also Ps. 30:9-11, which begins and ends with
a two-fold "Yahweh," in the vocative.

Repetition sometimes is but an echo of liturgical usage, as in
Pss. 135, 136, 150, and also in 96:7-8; 118:2-4; 114:12; etc.
But there are times when it is clearly subjected to a numerical
principle that contributes its own significant dimension of mean-
ing. Perhaps this is nowhere clearer than in Ps. 29, which beyond

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[4] Leon J. Liebreich, "Psalms 34 and 145 in the Light of their Key
Words," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, XXVII. (1956) 181-192.

[5] James M. Ward, "The Literary Form and Liturgical Background of
Ps. LXXXIX," *Vetus Testamentum* XI (1961) 321-339.

[6] A name coined by R. G. Moulton in his *The Literary Study of the
Bible* (Boston, 1896).

[7] In the article cited in note 4.

much doubt includes a powerful polemic against the Tyrian Baal.
The whole poem is enclosed in the "envelope figure," with the
name Yahweh repeated precisely four times in both introduction
and conclusion. But even more significantly, within the body of
the psalm "the voice of Yahweh" (allusion to thunder) is
sounded *seven* times, and "Yahweh" is named ten times. These
numbers are not coincidental. In Ps. 30, a psalm of praise, "Yah-
weh" is named *seven* times, twice he is called "Yahweh my
God" (vss. 2a, 12b-inclusion), and once "Adonay"--for a total
of ten references. In Ps. 19, a praise offering, "Yahweh" occurs
also precisely seven times. In Ps. 15, a seven-fold *lo'* (negative
particle) is employed in description of the one who is acceptable
at Yahweh's sanctuary.[8]

A still different form of repetition widely employed by the
Hebrew poets is the piling up of synonyms (or near synonyms).
This device has been widely recognized even by those who read
the OT only somewhat superficially, especially in Pss. 1; 19: 7-
9; and 119. Out of the many available, two additional examples
must suffice. Ps. 5 begins with the repetitive cry:

"Give ear to my words . . ;
  give heed to my groaning.
Hearken to the sound of my cry . . . ."

The author of Ps. 22 elaborates on the theme of deliverance by
means of no less than four distinct verbal roots: *plt*, *mlt*, *ntsl*,
and *ys'*.[9]

Since the discovery of a large body of Phoenician docu-
ments,[10] comparative study of this treasure of Canaanite (to use
the term loosely) poetry with that of the OT has alerted stu-

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[8] The most common form of repetition is the triplet, but this appears
often to be controlled by the demands of Hebrew poetic rhythm. It oc-
curs most often in couplet lines in which the repeated element appears
in three of the four hemistichs, but yields to a variation in the fourth
(or one of the four). For examples of this pattern see Ps. 29:1f. (cf.
96:7-9), and Ps. 22:3-5; vs. 24; 5:4f.

[9] Much of this discussion of repetition has been based on the work of
Ridderbos cited above, and an article by James Muilenburg, "A Study
in Hebrew Rhetoric: Repetition and Style," *Vetus Testamentum: Suppl.*
I (1953) 97-111.

[10] Generally known as the Ras Shamra Tablets; brought to light since
1929.

dents of the OT to certain other interesting devices widely employed within this shared poetic tradition. The scope of this article will permit mention of only three of the most common.

It has long been recognized that Hebrew poetry is far more elliptical than Hebrew prose, and more elliptical than acceptable English style will tolerate. It is now known that ellipsis was employed even more frequently than was supposed, but that the obscurities this creates are often eased by the associated device of "double-duty." A few examples will clarify. In Ps. 9:18 the Hebrew seems literally to say:

"For the needy shall not always be forgotten,
    and the hope of the lowly shall perish forever."
This involves a manifest contradiction--until it is recognized that the second hemistich is elliptical, with the negative particle *lo'* in the first hemistich doing "double-duty" for both half-lines (rightly recognized by RSV). Ps. 38 appears to begin:

"0 Yahweh, do not rebuke me in your anger,
    but (the conj. is ambiguous) in your wrath chastise me."
But once again the second half-line is elliptical and the negative particle *'al* serves "double-duty" ("and do not chastise me in your wrath," as RSV has recognized). RSV renders 25:9:

"He leads the humble in what is right,
    and teaches the humble his way."
But it is better to recognize with Dahood that the first hemistich is elliptical and that the personal pronoun of the second hemistich serves "double-duty," and should be understood as qualifying *bammishpat*; thus:

"He leads the humble in his just manner;
    and he teaches the humble his way." (Cpr. vs. 5.)
Similarly, RSV's traditional rendering of 17:8:

"Keep me as the apple of the eye;
    hide me in the shadow of your wings...."
is improved by the recognition in NAB[11] that the possessive pronoun of the second hemistich is to be read with the elliptical first hemistich:

"Keep me as the apple of your eye."

[11] *The New American Bible:* Sponsored by The Bishops' Committee of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine; New York, P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1970.

Examples could be multiplied. In his "The Grammar of the Psalter" (appendix to the Third Volume of his commentary),[12] Dahood lists no fewer than 275 passages in the Psalter alone where he finds ellipsis and "double-duty." Perhaps upwards of half of his proposals may be challenged by various scholars, but most will acknowledge that the recognition of this poetic device has put the study of ellipsis in Hebrew poetry on a new basis.

A second device newly recognized to be employed by the poets of the OT is the use of conventional pairs of synonyms within the framework of poetic "parallelism." That is to say, certain synonyms had come to be conventionally paired in the poetic tradition in which the OT poets stood, so that when they used one of these, convention readily supplied the other for use in the parallel line or line-segment. For example, if a poet had occasion to refer to his (blood-) brother(s) in one line, convention supplied him the synonymous expression "son (s) of my mother" for the parallel component (cf. Ps. 50:20; 69:8; cpr. S of S 1:6). Similar pairs are "foe"//"the one hating" (Ps. 21:8; 106:10; 18:40; 68:2); "to judge," *shpt*//"to judge," *din* (Ps. 9:8, cpr. 7:8-9; 140:12; 9:5; 76:8-9), "good"//"pleasant" (Ps. 135:3; 147:1), "days"//"years" (Ps. 61:6; 77:5; 78:33), "sea"//"stream" (24:2; 66:6; 89:25; cpr. 72:8). Again the examples could be multiplied. Of special interest is the fact that many of the same pairs (all of the above) occur in the Ras Shamra tablets as well as in the OT—demonstrating that the poets of ancient Israel stood in a venerable (the Ras Shamra tablets antedate the OT document by some centuries) and rather widely dispersed (Ras Shamra was located near later Antioch) poetic tradition. Some scholars place the number of such pairs in common to both literatures at more than a hundred. Dahood cites 157 pairs,[13] but by no means all of these are convincing.

A third device of the Hebrew poets discovered first in the Ras Shamra tablets is the breakup of stereotype phrases and the distribution of their components between two parallel lines or

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[12] Mitchell Dahood, S.J., *Psalms* (The Anchor Bible), Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday & Company, Inc., Vol. I, 1966; Vol, II:, 1968; Vol. III, 1970.

[13] *Psalms III*, pp. 445-456.

line segments. A few illustrations will make the matter clear. There can be little doubt that "friendship and faithfulness" (*hsd w'mt*) is a very common stereotyped phrase in the OT (cf. Ps. 25:10; 40:11; 61:7; 85:10; 86:15; 89:14), yet in a number of places the phrase is divided and its components distributed between two parallel hemistichs or lines, as in Ps. 36:5:

> "Your friendship, 0 Yahweh, extends to the heavens,
>   your faithfulness to the clouds."

(cf. also Ps. 26:3; 57:10; 40:10; 108:5; 117.2.) "Day and night," in the sense of "continuously," is another common phrase (Ps. 1:2; 32:4; 42:3; 55:10). It too appears frequently in distribution, as in Ps. 22:2:

> "0 my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
>   and by night, but get no relief."

This is the poet's way of saying: Day and night I cry to you to no avail. (cf. 42:8; 91:5f.; 121:6.) So when the author of Ps. 11 writes: *Yhwh beheykal qsodsho/Yhwh bashshamayim kis^e'o* (vs. Aab), parallelism strongly suggests that godsho (his holy) is to be understood as modifying *kise'o* (his throne), rather than *heykal* (temple--so Dahood, contra modern English versions. (Cpr. Ps. 47:8.) Interpreters of Hebrew poetry must now keep a keen eye for similar instances.

A special application of this device is the breakup and distribution of the components of compound divine names. The compound name *'el 'elyon* is attested in Gen. 14:18-20 and Ps. 78:35, but in Ps. 73:11; 77:9-10; 78:17-18; 107:11 the two components are distributed. *Yhwh `elyon* occurs in Ps 7:17b and 47:2, but its components are distributed in Ps. 18:13 21:7; 91:9; 92:1. "Yahweh my (our) God" was a common way of referring to the deity in ancient Israel (cf. Ps. 7:1, 3; 13:3; 18:28; 30:2, 12; etc.), and this phrase too is frequently distributed, as in 18:6:

> "In my distress I called upon Yahweh
>   to my God I cried for help."

(cf. also vss. 21, 31; Ps. 25:lf.; 38:21; 48:8; etc.) It is generally recognized that Dahood has pushed the possibilities of this device much too far in his search for new compound names for God in the Psalms, but the phenomenon is there and must be reckoned with in the study of all OT poetry.

Chiasmus as a rhetorical device has long been recognized as a particular favorite of Hebrew poets. This involves a reversal of the order of components in parallel literary units. The most common is that found within a single poetic line:

"The heavens tell the glory of God;
    and proclaims his handiwork, the firmament" (Ps. 19:1);
or in a couplet:

"Indeed, you are the one who drew me from the belly;
    you made me secure on my mother's breasts.
I was cast on you from the womb;
    from the belly of my mother you have been my God."
                                                    (Ps. 22:9f.)

Notice how lines A and D both contain emphatic "you" referring to Yahweh, and the expression "from the belly," while lines B and C are built around the "on" phrases. Such constructions are frequent within couplets (the above example represents two lines of Hebrew poetry).

Such instances are rather obvious to even the casual reader of the Hebrew text. But scholars are becoming increasingly convinced that chiasmus was also employed in the composition of larger units. It seems clear enough (and has often been noted) that the hostile figures in the prayer of Ps. 22:20f. (sword, dog, lion, wild oxen) are a precise repetition in chiastic order of those mentioned in the lament of vss. 12-18. But often overlooked is the chiasmus in Ps. 18:33-36 (which details the theme of vs. 32), where the motif development follows the order: feet/hands/ hands/feet. Similarly in vss. 20-24 there is to be observed an a-b-c-b-a ordering in the theme development. See also Ps. 9:11-14 where the pattern is: praise—motive/motive—praise. Sometimes whole compositions have been constructed on the chiasmus pattern. Ps. 1, for example, progresses thematically (by verses) in the order of a-b-c-c'-a'-b'. Ps. 2, which is obviously composed of four "paragraphs," reflects the pattern: a-b-b'-a'. The interpreter of Hebrew poetry clearly must be alert to similar patterns elsewhere.[14]

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[14] Ridderbos discusses a number of other instances in the first book of the Psalter, *op cit*., pp. 61-62.

An unusual application of chiasmus was discovered by Albert
Condamin already early in this century. It involves the chiastic
ordering of key-words in a long lament poem (Lam. 1) :

rbt in vss. 1 and 22
'yn mnhm in vss. 2 and 21
tsr in vss. 3 and 20
khn in vss. 4 and 19
hlk shby in vss. 5 and 18
tsywn in vss. 6 and 17
prsh in vss. 10 and 13
r'h nbt in vss. 11 and 12[15]

It is to be observed that this last example bespeaks also a
highly developed sense of symmetry. Symmetry is further evi-
denced by the number and rich variety of examples that have
come to light. Although Hebrew poetry was not controlled by a
rigid metrical construction of lines—all attempts to scan Hebrew
poetry on this principle have failed—Hebrew poets would some-
times fashion a couplet in which each of the four hemistichs
was composed of precisely the same number of syllables, as in
Ps. 22:4f. (9 + 9/9 + 9), or even a "paragraph" of three lines
in which each line has precisely 17 syllables (Ps. 22:6-8).

In a series of articles, Hans-Kosmala[16] has called attention to
yet another kind of symmetry evident in Hebrew poetry.[17]
Analyzing poetic lines by counting the number of significant
sense units within each line, he discovered certain interesting
symmetrical series. He found in Is. 5:1f., for example, the pat-
tern: 5 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 5; in 7:7-9 the pattern: 4 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 4; and in
30:29-31 the pattern: 6 | 4 | 5 | 7 | 5 | 4 | 6. Although he was
sometimes compelled to resort to emendations (not in the ex-
amples given here) in order to "discover" his patterns, he might
in one instance have extended his pattern, if he had not done so.

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[15] *Journal of Theological Studies* 7 (1906) 137-140. Cited by both
Muilenburg and Broadribb, see notes 8 and 1 respectively. For a some-
what similar pattern in Ps. 139 see Jan Holman, "The Structure of
Psalm CXXXIX, *Vetus Testamentum* XXI (1971) 298-310.

[16] "Form and Structure in Ancient Hebrew Poetry (A New Ap-
proach)," *Vetus Testamentum* XIV (1964) 432-445; XVI (1966) 152-
180.

[17] His examples are all taken from Isaiah.

Accepting the Masoretic text as it has been preserved for us in the tradition, and scanning the poetic lines according to Kos-mala's principles, the pattern for the whole "vineyard song" in Is. 5:1-7 proves to be: 5 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 5—5 | 4 | 7—6 | 7 | 8 | 7 | 6— 5 | 4 | 7.

Symmetry is to be observed also in the structural pattern (ar-chitectonic form) of many Hebrew poems. Ps. 110 is made up of two precisely balanced divisions: Each contains exactly 74 syl-lables (or 73, depending on the analysis of certain words).[18] Although there is general agreement that Hebrew poetry does not commonly employ a strict strophic (stanza) structure after the manner of classical poetry in our western tradition, some poems in the OT do reflect a symmetrical "strophic" structure. Good examples are the alphabetic acrostics, especially those that are regularly built up of two-line (Ps. 10-11; 37), three-line (Lam. 3), or eight-line (Ps. 119) units. Although not acrostics, Lam. 1 and 2 are each constructed of 22 (the number of letters of the alphabet) three-line units, and ch. 4 of 22 two-line units.[19] All of these, however (together with those cited in note 18), appear to be controlled by an extraneous pattern (the number of letters in the alphabet). There are those not so controlled and yet they manifest a symmetrical structure. Ps. 114 is constructed of four couplets; Ps. 57 has two subdivisions of 7 lines, each fol-lowed by a recurring refrain (vss. 5 and 11).

Of even greater interest is the pattern of such a poem as Ps. 48. When properly scanned (RSV has badly jumbled the lines at both beginning and end), the thematic development is seen to be built on the symmetrical line pattern: 2 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 2. Ps. 82 has an equally interesting architectonic structure. With one introductory and one concluding line, the remaining seven lines divide into two subdivisions of three lines each, with a central compact line in which the kernel of the indictment against the gods is set forth with great concentration:

"Not do they know,
   and not do they understand!"

[18] Noted first by D. N. Freedman, cited by Dahood: *Psalms III*, p. 113.

[19] Lam. 5 (not acrostic) is similarly patterned, with precisely 22 lines, as is also Ps. 33 (not acrostic).

But even further: Each of the three-line units has an intro-
ductory line (vs. 2ab; 5cd), followed by a two-line elaboration
(vss. 3f. and 6f., resp.). To cite but one more example, Ps. 137,
an emotional recollection of the Babylonian captivity, manifests
a symmetry unexpected in a prayer-song of such passion. Count-
ing line segments (instead of full lines) the theme pattern is
5 | 4 | 8 | 4 | 5 — the first line of both introduction and conclu-
sion is a tristich.[20] The abrupt and surprising reference to Edom
in the fourth division is more understandable in view of the
deliberate structure of the psalm as a whole.

Psalm 44 also has a marked (and remarkable) pattern to its
structure. Composed of 28 poetic lines, it develops its theme in
a steady progression of a decreasing number of lines as it ad-
vances toward its climax—an urgent prayer for deliverance. At-
tention to content discloses the pattern: 10 | 8 | 6 | 4. Ridderbos
has likened it to a Mesopotamian ziggurat (step-pyramid with
sanctuary on the summit). He observes that the poet seems to
be mounting up to God on praise (vss. 1-8), lament (vss. 9-16),
and confession of worthiness (vss. 17-22), before urging his pe-
tition in the presence of God.[21]

The symmetry is carried even further, however, since each
"step" in the "ziggurat" configuration is constructed of two
equal layers (5 + 5 / 4 + 4 / 3 + 3), while the prayer itself
manifests a chiastic pattern: prayer -- lament — lament —
prayer.

Overlooked in the various studies on Hebrew poetic forms is
the fact that a similar pyramidal structure is to be found in the
second half of Ps. 19. Scanning vss. 7-12 according to the sys-
tem of Kosmala (referred to above) , and observing the limits of
the sense units, the pattern emerges: 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 3
3 | 2 | 2. What is equally striking for this psalm, the unity of
which has so often been impugned, is that this "pyramid" is
built up of precisely the same number 1:48) of "building stones"
as the first half of the psalm. Moreover, the first half has its own

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[20] Notice the triple "if"-clause in the center section—concentration
and emphasis by reiteration.

[21] Nic. H. Ridderbos, *De Psalmen* (Korte Verklaring), Kampen, J. H.
Kok, *Deel* I: Pss. 1-41, 1962, p. 42.

peculiar "hourglass" form. By lines it counts 8 | 8 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 8 | 8. (Perhaps the 6 |6 lines should be counted as 7 | 7?)

As a final example of poetic devices employed by the OT poets I call attention to a recent suggestion proposed by D. N. Freedman.[22] Noting the fact that, when speaking of Israel's impending exile, Hosea often links Egypt and Assyria in parallel constructions (cf. 7:11; 9:3; 11:5, 11; 12:2), he observes that the line segment in 8:9 which speaks of Israel's "going up to Assyria" lacks a parallel statement. In vs. 13, however, there is a line segment that speaks of Israel's "returning to Egypt," and it also lacks a parallel. His bold suggestion is that we have here a "form of inclusion (or envelope construction) " in which parallel segments have been deliberately separated by intervening elaborating material.

This is a surprising phenomenon, if its presence can be demonstrated. But I am convinced that Freedman's suggestion must be taken seriously. I had independently (and somewhat hesitantly) come to the same conclusion in regard to the difficulties encountered by interpreters in Amos 5:10-13. These difficulties evaporate if it be recognized that vs. 13 constitutes the sense continuation of vs. 10, with vss. 11f. intervening as elaborating material.

Recognition of this phenomenon may also provide the solution to the problems created by the unbalanced line segments in Ps. 29:3b, 7ab and 9c.23 It is even possible that Ps. 19:5c and 7c constitute an "envelope" around the elaborating material in vss. 6-7ab." If so, the sense of this recovered "line" would be:

[22] In his "Prolegomenon" to the reprint of Gray's *The Forms of Hebrew Poetry*, pp. XXXVI - XXXVII; see note 2, above.

[23] Freedman has promised an article on Ps. 29 in the light of his suggestion, but to my knowledge it has not yet appeared. For an attractive alternative suggestion for the troublesome lines in Ps. 29 see already Kemper Fullerton,, "The Strophe in Hebrew Poetry and Psalm 29," *Journal of Biblical Literature,* 48 (1929) 274-290. Ernst Vogt's attempt to solve the problem of these unbalanced line segments is much too- radical to be convincing. Among other emendations he transposes 3b and 7ab to a position between 9b and c. Fullerton calls for but one transposition: 3b to follow immediately after 4b. *The Jerusalem Bible* transposes 3b to a position between 9b and c.

"In them he has set a tent for the sun,

.   .   .   .

.   .   .   .

and nothing is hid from its heat."

Kissane has suggested that Ps. 50:21c has possibly become misplaced from an original position immediately following vs. 16a.[24] It would be better to account for 16a[25] and 21c as yet another example of Freedman's suggested inclusion construction. The "line" then reads:

"But to the wicked God says,

.   .   .   .

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.   .   .   .

.   .   .   .

'I will reprove you and lay the charge before you.'"
The intervening lines then detail the elements of Yahweh's rebuke.

In my judgment Freedman's suggestion holds promise for un-raveling difficulties in other passages as well.

A new day appears to be dawning for what Muilenburg has somewhere called "rhetorical criticism" (perhaps better named more broadly "stylistics criticism"). If so, it must be welcomed. Israel's literary masters (and that the OT writers were, although they were more) employed more than mere words linked in grammatical relationships in order to speak the word of Yahweh to Israel, or to speak in response to Yahweh. A rich store of literary and rhetorical conventions lay ready to hand in their literary workshops, and their own considerable powers of literary creativity were put under tribute in the composition of their inspired writings. Adequate and responsible interpretation of those writings demands full appreciation for and understanding of their *literary* quality. Biblical scholarship may no longer

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[24] Edward J. Kissane, *The Book of Psalms*, Dublin, Browne and Nolan, Ltd.; vol I, (Ps. 1-72) 1953, p. 223.

    [25] Often questioned as a possible gloss.

neglect this task. And ministers who are largely dependent on commentaries for exegetical assistance may expect and must demand that the newer commentaries they use do full justice to this dimension.

After the type had already been set for this article, the study of Ps. 29 referred to in note 23, above, came into my hand: D.N. Freedman and C.F. Hyland, "Psalm 29: A Structural Analysis," Harvard Theological Review, 66 (1973), 237-256. For a good example of the kinds of investigation into Hebrew poetic stylistics currently being pursued by American scholars, this article should now be consulted.