Toward a Theory of the Poetry of the Hebrew Bible: The Poetry of the Psalms as a Test Case

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This article is intended to be an exegetically useful foundation for a theory of Biblical Hebrew (lyric) poetry, with the center of gravity in the psalms. I take up the research on poetry of pioneer linguists and literary theorists Bühler-Jakobson and Lotman and its application to Biblical Hebrew poetry by, among others, Alter, Berlin, and Nel. I describe “repetition” (or recurrence) as the basic phenomenon. It subsumes not only parallelismus membrorum but also other forms of poetic and structural equivalence. This characteristic feature of biblical poetry establishes a multidimensional network of intra- and extratextual connections that produces a compaction and polysemy not found in the same density and complexity in other literary genres. Important insights are exemplified by three psalms that I have selected for their appropriateness (Pss 3, 13, and 130). The purpose is to elucidate the theory and make it useful for the exegesis of lyrical biblical texts.

Key Words: Biblical Hebrew poetry, literary theory, Psalms, recurrence, equivalence

What is holy or solemn is put in poetry.
Gerhard Fecht

It is not enough to receive the text only in “linear” fashion, line by line (the first dimension). Simultaneously, its passages must be read “palindromically,” from the outer edges to the center (the second dimension), and citations and allusions to other places in Scripture allowed to contribute to the text’s meaning (the third dimension).
Martin Mark

Author’s note: This article is a revised and updated version of my essay “Entwurf einer Poetologie der Psalmen,” in Lesarten der Bibel: Untersuchungen zu einer Theorie der Exegese des Alten Testaments (ed. Helmut Utzschneider and Erhard Blum; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2006) 127–54. The goal is to make my reflections on the study of the form and function of poetry (of the psalms) in the Hebrew Bible available in English. I wish to thank Dr. John Hobbins and Prof. Phil Botha for translating the article and adapting it to the needs of the readers of this journal and Dr. Philip Sumpter for proofreading.


2. “Es genügt nicht, den Text nur ‘linear’ längs seiner Leserichtung zu rezipieren (erste Dimension). Parallel dazu müssen seine Abschnitte jeweils palindromisch von ihren Rändern
It has been more than 15 years since I noted in my thesis at Basel, Psalm 77 and Its Context, that a linguistic and literary approach to “the poetry of the psalms suggested itself, even if applications so far have been exploratory in nature and have so far found little echo in (German-language) research on the psalms.” In my monograph, I attempted to explore “avenues of scientific approach to the poetry of the psalms and to test their usefulness in the case of Ps 77.” Some of those insights I have shared and developed further in various publications. In the meantime, a notable number of essays, monographs, and handbooks on Biblical Hebrew poetry have appeared.

In this essay, I seek to list and explain some insights into the unique and typical characteristics of Biblical Hebrew verse from the point of view

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5. Ibid., 2.


of my research focus, the psalms. I will use a number of examples from the Psalter. The first part of the essay lays a theoretical foundation for a poetics of the psalms. The second part demonstrates how that theoretical foundation may be rendered operational. I offer three case studies: Pss 3, 13, and 130. The dual approach of theoretical foundation and exemplary application has a heuristic intent and is meant to stimulate further discussion about how best to approach Biblical Hebrew poetry.

Laying the Foundations of a Theory of the Poetry of the Psalms

A Point of Departure: Verse-Rhythm and “Parallelismus Membrorum”

In contrast to what we have received from Greek antiquity, discussions of the craft and theory of poetry have not come down to us from the Semitic—and in particular the Hebrew-speaking—ancient Near East. For some texts, we must infer the underlying linguistic and poetic structures. As far as ancient Hebrew verse is concerned, a broad consensus holds that the distinctive features of its prosody consist of two interrelated phenomena: (a specific kind of) rhythm or “meter” and parallelism.

With respect to the first phenomenon, Benjamin Hrushovski (Harshav) speaks of a “free rhythm” determined by a cluster of flexible rules. The system of rules involves the dimensions of semantics, syntax, and stress. In contrast to classical meter, the number of stressed syllables and particular sequences of stressed and unstressed syllables are not fixed entities in a poem in Biblical Hebrew but are subject to variation within specifiable limits. Extant ancient biblical manuscripts that are arranged colometrically demonstrate that the difference between narrative and poetry (that is, language in verse form) was recognized by ancient readers (e.g., 4QPs²b). That the difference between narrative and poetry (that is, language in verse form) was recognized is (also) shown by its layout, because ancient biblical manuscripts arranged colometrically are extant (e.g., 4QPs²b). The specific rhythm of ancient Hebrew poetry comes to expression in the smaller and larger caesurae at the end of versets, lines, and larger units. The rhythm

10. In this sense, it is more exact to speak of “rhythm” rather than “meter.”
12. Translator’s note: Here and elsewhere, I translate “Verzeile” and “Vers” in the original with “verset” and “line,” respectively. This terminology is used by Hrushovski (Harshav) and Alter and is equivalent to “colon” and “verse” in the system of Fokkelman.
modulates the text-stream and may serve as an objective criterion for distinguishing texts in verse from texts in prose.

The second fundamental phenomenon, a recurrent feature of the two or three contiguous versets that make up a line, is what Robert Lowth designated with a geometrical concept: *parallelismus membrorum* (hereafter, PM). Regarding this, Hrushovski says the following:

The foremost principle dominating biblical poetry is parallelism. Usually two versets... are parallel to each other in one or several aspects. The parallelism may be complete or partial; either of the verset as a whole or of each word in it; of words in the same order or reversed. It may be a parallelism of semantic, syntactic, prosodic, morphological or sound elements, or of a combination of such elements.  

This phenomenon was already known and described in classical rhetoric. There the designation “isocolon” is used. PM lends cohesion to the unit over which it occurs. Lowth elaborated on three major types of PM: synonymous, antithetical, and synthetic. Since then, the complexity and multiformity of the phenomenon’s inner dynamics have received greater attention. Parallelism is now seen to involve linguistic dimensions beyond the semantic.

I thus conclude that a specific kind of verse-rhythm and “*parallelismus membrorum*” combine to describe a state of affairs in which Hebrew verse divides into subunits bound together by equivalences. In other words, Hebrew verse is shot through with repetition (recurrence), be it in terms of identity, similarity, or polarity. Built up out of inner-textual relations, these recurrences, be they of a semantic, syntactic, morphological, phonological, prosodic, or structural-configurational nature, are characteristic of Biblical Hebrew poetry. They are not merely ornamental phenomena but are relevant to semantics. In a theoretical perspective, said inner-textual relations are productive of meaning through the “poetic function” language is capable of having. It transpires therefore that verse-rhythm and *parallelismus membrorum* are part and parcel of a larger state of affairs the elucidation of which is the task of a theory of the poetry of the Hebrew Bible. On the basis


of the aforementioned hallmarks of the craft of ancient Hebrew verse, and in connection with the assumption of theoretical models from the field of linguistics and literary theory, the attempt to advance to an understanding of the proprium of Biblical Hebrew poetry ought to be made. I base this assertion in particular on the insights of the linguist Roman Jakobson, the literary theorist Yurij M. Lotman, and the application of these theories to Biblical Hebrew poetry by Adele Berlin and Philip J. Nel.\textsuperscript{17} It will be helpful at this point to sketch the different functions language may have according to the model developed by Bühler and Jakobson.\textsuperscript{18}

\textit{A Theoretical Model: The Functions of Language according to Bühler and Jakobson}

In everyday communication, the objective of speech (or written correspondence) is primarily the passing on of information. A nonlinguistic reality or external referent stands in the foreground. By means of language, information about a reality external to the communication is passed on from one person (the \textit{sender}) to another (the \textit{receiver}). Everyday speech, of course, is not always and exclusively about the passing on of information. Insofar as someone brings joy or a need to expression, it is not information per se that is foregrounded but rather an emotion. Correspondingly, communication may involve an invitation to empathize and not just a request to register a fact. If someone challenges or invites someone else to do something, then the primary goal of the communication is still another: not the passing on of information or the expression of emotion but the setting in motion of an action. In each of these examples, a different function of language stands in the foreground: in one case, the communication of information; in another case, the communication of emotion; in the third case, an invitation to action.

Building on the model of speech acts developed by Karl Bühler in the 1930s, who differentiated between the entities \textit{sender}, \textit{receiver}, \textit{content}, and \textit{referents}, along with the three speech functions (SFs) \textit{expression}, \textit{appeal}, and \textit{description}, the Prague school of linguistics expanded the model to include six functions of verbal communication. Roman Jakobson presented the model in its definitive form for the first time in 1960. The model may be


Jakobson explains the factors, which codetermine the various speech functions, as follows:

The *sender* sends a *message* to the *receiver*. To be operative, the message requires a *context* to which it relates, graspable by the receiver, either verbal or capable of being verbalized; a *code* fully, or at least partially, common to the sender and the receiver [in other words, to the coder and decoder of the message]; and finally, a *contact*, a physical channel or psychological connection between the sender and the receiver that enables both of them to enter and stay in communication.\(^{20}\)

According to his student Elmar Holenstein, the multiplicity of speech genres depends not on the discrete realization of the individual functions but on the differing importance of one function relative to the others. In his own words: “There is hardly a verbal act of communication which fulfills

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one and only one function. The function which dominates in a specific case determines the structure of the communication.”

Applied to the poetry of the psalms, that means that the poetic SF acts as a “turntable” for the other SFs. Besides the referential and expressive functions,22 the appellative in particular is significant, given the fact that the psalms have to do with “address” (insofar as prayer is an address to God). The texts are thus to be understood as “vignettes” describing a process of communication; intention is inherent to them.23 The poetic SF and the dialogic SF are together the most important characteristics of the poetry of the psalms, and as such are explored in further detail in the following sections.

Poeticity: The “Poetic Speech Function” according to Roman Jakobson

According to Jakobson, one of the least-used speech functions in everyday language is dominant in poetry, regulates the other speech functions, and makes poetry what poetry is: the poetic (esthetic) SF. By that he means “attention on the message as such, focus on the message for its own sake.”

The poetic SF in other words is autoreflexive and directs attention to the linguistic mediation itself and the structure it embodies. A foregrounding of form, of technique, makes itself felt.

21. “Es gibt kaum eine sprachliche Mitteilung, die nur eine einzige Funktion erfüllt. Die jeweils dominierende Funktion bestimmt die Struktur der Mitteilung” (Holenstein, Strukturalismus, 158).
22. Referential function: Extralinguistic and extratextual content relations play a role throughout ancient Near Eastern psalms. These relations are not to be construed in terms of modern concepts in which a “literary” text is equated with a “fictional” text. An example of the referential speech function is the “remanding” character of language to realia in the extratextual world. Thus, the simile, “like a tree planted by water canals” (Ps 1:3a), has a point of connection with climate and vegetation conditions of the time and place in which it was written. Expressive function: Expressivity finds remarkable expression in the psalms. Nonetheless, the “lyrical I,” which is all too often foregrounded in today’s anthropocentrism, is not be taken for granted in the psalms. Subjectivity, interiority, and expression of mood are lyrical topoi of the modern age but cannot be assumed for ancient Near Eastern texts. In this sense, the dominance of the expressive or emotive speech function is not typical of the poetry of the psalms, apart from a part of the psalms that are collective in terms of genre.
24. “[D]ie Einstellung auf die BOTSCHAFT als solche, die Ausrichtung auf die Botschaft um ihrer selbst willen” (Jakobson, “Linguistik,” 92, emphasis in the original).
25. Compare the following statements in a recent introduction to lyrical poetry, Christoph Bode, Einführung in die Lyrikanalyse (WVT-Handbücher zum literaturwissenschaftlichen Studium 3; Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2001) 17: “The difficult language of verse is the chief inner-textual means by which the attention of the reader is directed to the text itself, to its craft. . . . In poetic texts, the auto-referential function overlays the referential function,
A simple example of the poetic SF may serve to illustrate. There is a Swiss advertising slogan: “Der Kluge reist im Zuge” (“Smart people take mass transit”). The statement comes across in the first instance as information, pure and simple, but is in fact “polysemantic.” It awakens emotions and contains an implicit invitation. All of this happens on the “turnstile” of the poetic SF, which is foregrounded. The sentence escorts the listener by the sound orchestration and rhyme into reflecting on it for its own sake. The verbal combination by means of sound repetitions leads one to feel and re-elaborate the close connection between the contiguous words Kluge and Zuge. The listener, just as the advertiser wishes, sees clearly that really smart people (the “Kluge”) take mass transit (that is, “Zuge”), not an (ecologically less-wise) automobile.  

Without ulterior economic motives found in advertising, poetic compositions such as the psalms work in a similar way. The autoreflexivity characteristic of the poetic SF impels hearers and readers to listen to the text itself. The poetic “form” is like light that shines on “content” such that the uniform grayness it would have had without it turns to color. In poetry, the “what” of communication is bound up with the “how” (the art and craft, the “vessel” of communication). A firm grasp of form in poetic texts such as the psalms is therefore extraordinarily important.  

Jakobson says that, in speech acts, two operations come into play, the process of selection and the process of combination (see table 2). In the process of selection, I chose a word from a semantic field. With respect to “der Kluge” in the example above, there were selective options, such as the expressions “der Weise (the wise),” “der Intelligente (the intelligent person),” “kein Dummkopf (no fool),” “kein Narr (no idiot),” and so on. This vertical axis of selection is also called the paradigmatic speech axis. In the process of combination, I insert the selected expressions into a syntactic whole, in the examples “Der Kluge reist im Zuge,” “Der Intelligente benützt die Eisenbahn (the intelligent person uses the railway),” and so on.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selection (Paradigmatics)</th>
<th>Combination (Syntagmatics)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Der Kluge reist im Zuge</td>
<td>Eisenbahn</td>
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such that the former function cannot be overlooked or not heard.” (“Die schwierige Sprache der Dichtung ist also das hauptsächliche innertextliche Mittel, die Aufmerksamkeit des Lesers auf den Text selbst, auf seine Machart zu lenken. . . In poetischen Texten überlagert die autoreferentielle Funktion unübersehbar oder unüberhörbar die referentielle.”)  

26. Translator’s note: Advertising slogans in English also exploit the poetic potential of language: “Nothin’ says lovin’ like somethin’ from the oven.” “Everything’s better with Blue Bonnet on it.” “Next to myself, I like BVD best” (about a brand of underwear).  

The process of combination takes place on the horizontal axis. This axis is also known as the syntagmatic axis. In short, two operations are effected in the event of speech creation, selection and combination, which correspond to two linguistic axes, the vertical or paradigmatic axis, and the horizontal or syntagmatic axis. Jakobson goes on to affirm—I cite now his famous dictum: “the poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection onto the axis of combination.”

“In other words, the linear sequence of the speech stream (the axis of combination, syntagmatics) is overlaid with similarity relationships (the axis of selection, paradigmatics).” Thus, the poetic function spans a network of cross-references, synonymic or antonymic, in which all linguistic and structural levels are interwoven.

This may be clarified through the cited example, the slogan “Der Kluge reist im Zuge.” The text-weaver consciously chose “der Kluge” and not the synonymous “der Weise” because he wanted to create equivalence on the syntagmatic axis: Kluge and Zuge are of course not semantically but phonologically equivalent. Nonetheless, by means of the rhyme pair, a semantic connection between the two sound-related concepts is suggested: “being smart” and “using mass transit” go together.

Jakobson says:

> Similarity is overlaid on contiguity and lends to poetry its thoroughly symbolic, multi-layered, and polysemic essence . . . polysemy is an unconditional and unalterable consequence of every communication that is centered on itself, a core characteristic of poetry.

Through the poetic function, polysemy is generated. Polysemy is also typical of Biblical Hebrew poetry. Polysemy brings a density and a fullness of meaning with it. Through the poetry of verse, a linear stream of language is overlaid with paradigmatic cross-references set in place by means of similarity and polarity relationships.

From the above, it is clear that the phenomenon of *parallelismus membrorum* (PM) is classifiable as an essential element of a general framework. Through PM, cross-references are built up and built in by means of
equivalences across lines and parts of lines, cross-references that are not ornamental but carry meaning. But in Biblical Hebrew poetry, the inter-textual references are not limited to the phenomenon of PM; they involve all linguistic and structural levels.

In taking up and adapting the insights of Jakobson (and Lotman) to the phenomenon of Biblical Hebrew poetry, two approaches are possible: either the central concept of PM is widened so as to designate all connections across a poem or psalm—this approach was taken by Adele Berlin—33—or the concept of PM is left to be the specific designation of the domain of interdependence across lines and parts of lines, and the attempt is made to understand PM as an integral part of a more comprehensive phenomenon. This last approach was taken by Philip J. Nel, 34 and I follow his lead. As a designation for the various relationships of equivalence of poetic verse, he employs the comprehensive concept of “recurrence.” Nel affirms: “I shall argue that recurrence is the dominant principle by which contiguity is established in a poetic text.” 35

Nel seeks at the same time to develop a theory of narrative texts (narratology) in contradistinction to a theory of lyric texts (poetics). For him, the differentiation of signs in a narrative literary text is “basically syntagmatic,” that is, meaning comes to expression by means of a linear sequence of signs. The descriptive terms of narratology are: primacy of the syntagmatic axis, linearity or temporal continuity, and causality. Once more, Nel: “Temporal continuity is, therefore, the absolute principle of a narrative. Without temporal continuity no story can be a story; it is the minimum requirement.” 36

Against that, the literary system of poetic verse is “basically paradigmatic.” According to Nel, in lyric the vertical axis of inter-textual cross-reference is dominant. In a descriptive poetics, it follows that recurrence, not temporality and causality, are the primary subject matter. Recurrence, that is, cross-referentiality within a text, constitutes the first principle of lyrical poetics. In Nel’s words:

The ordering of the signs, therefore, is basically not linear, but vertical and associative. . . . This basic poetic principle in terms of which contiguity is created and recognized in a poetic text, I shall call recurrence. Recurrence, in other words, is that principle which inter-relates signs within selected paradigms to create a meaningful whole or structure. 37

Nel’s taxonomy is valid, however, only if one gives the adverb basically the necessary weight. At stake is not an “either/or” of textual taxonomy but a principle of dominance. Typically syntagmatic features such as linearity, temporality, and causality also occur in the psalms. Conversely, recur-

33. See Berlin, Dynamics.
34. See Nel, “Parallelism.”
35. Ibid., 138.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., 139.
rence, that is, equivalent elements (“catchwords,” for example), occur in narrative often enough. One can say, even so, that recurrence in biblical verse is more frequent than in narrative. That comports with another phenomenon: in the poetry of verse—by virtue of the dominance of the paradigmatic axis—“multidimensional constructions” are characteristic, the full understanding of which will depend on recursive reading, in which a “cyclical moment” is added into the process. In that regard, the reflections of Yurij M. Lotman, the literary critic, complement the propositions of Jakobson, the linguist. Lotman takes into consideration the text as a whole and its structure to a greater degree.

The Essence of Poetry according to Lotman: The Text Whole as a Multidimensional Construction Crisscrossed by Correlations

Jakobson the linguist thinks through a text analytically as a phenomenon of language. As a literary critic, Lotman’s point of departure is the text as a whole; his approach is more starkly integrative. This is a helpful corrective, so long as the respective strengths of both approaches are brought into the discussion (in heuristic fashion). In his “structural poetics,” Lotman says: “The poem is a complex, built-up meaning. All of its elements are elements of meaning.” In full agreement with Jakobson’s “poetic function,” Lotman observes: “In art in which language is the material employed—in word-art—a separation between sound and meaning is not possible . . . The musical quality of poetic discourse is at the same time a means of imparting information.” Once again, in agreement with Jakobson, he sees repetition in literary texts as the first principle of organization, whereby elements are put in relation to one another through an “equivalence-creating construction.” He writes: “The universal structural principle of the poetic genre is the principle of anaphoric referral. It provides to the language out of which a literary text is built up with a broadness it does not usually have and creates the foundation for a specifically literary structure.” In fact, the modulation of language through verse-rhythm also belongs to the structure of repetition. However, the interrelations in the text only have

41. “[V]ergleichende Zusammenstellung.”
42. “Das universale strukturelle Prinzip des poetischen Werkes ist das Prinzip der Rückverweisung. Es vermittelt der Sprache, die als literarischer Text konstruiert ist, eine ihr gewöhnlich nicht eigene räumliche Ausgedehntheit und bildet die Grundlage der eigentlich literarischen Struktur” (ibid., 71–72).
their function in the text as a whole and must therefore be understood in the larger context.

It is in principle impossible for a word to exist in a poetic text as an isolated semantic unity. Every isolated unity in non-literary language appears in poetic language as a functional element in a larger semantic operation. What are referred to as “tropes,” as transferred meaning—the modification of the semantics of a word through the influence of meaning in its environment—this constitutes the general law of poetic texts.43

According to Lotman, a poem is characterized by extraordinary complexity and density. It is a multidimensional, space-filling structure. This fullness of sense can only be captured through repeated hearing or reading. The cyclical quality of the text is instantiated not only through the internal repetition of elements but through the design of the poem such that it lends itself to being repeatedly heard.

In Lotman’s cultural-semiotic perspective, a poetic construction is not a self-enclosed system but stands in a relationship of reciprocity with an extratextual as well as inner-textual world. The text does not embody “sense” in static fashion, but creates sense dynamically through the reciprocal interaction of structures in the world of the text on the one hand and between text and (extratextual) “culture” on the other. With respect to the poetry of the OT Psalms, Lotman’s approach is open to engagement with the historical, cultural-linguistic, and institutional situations that the psalms take for granted, as well as to the psalms’ oft-noted allusions to other texts and traditions.44

Further Characteristics of Biblical Hebrew Poetry

I have sought to identify, clarify, and integrate into a comprehensive poetics key concepts such as parallelismus membrorum (PM), equivalence, repetition, recurrence, structure, complexity, and polysemy. It is clear that a great part of that which is typical of poetry can be placed under the umbrella-concept of recurrence. In this sense, the various kinds of PM are examples of recurrence of syntactic and semantic elements; the recurrence of prosodic units through features of stress and quantity give verse its rhythm or “meter”;  

43. “Also ist es im Grunde genommen unmöglich, im poetischen Text ein Wort als isolierte semantische Einheit hervorzuheben. Jede in der nicht-literarischen Sprache isolierte Einheit erscheint in der poetischen Sprache nur als Funktiv einer komplizierten semantischen Funktion. Das, was man als ‘Tropen,’ als übertragene Bedeutung bezeichnet—die Veränderung der Semantik des Wortes unter dem Einfluss der Bedeutung seiner Umgebung—stellt das allgemeine Gesetz des poetischen Textes dar” (ibid., 129).

the recurrence of consonants and vowels gives expression to sound constructions referred to as alliteration, assonance, rhyme, etc.\textsuperscript{45}

Hallmarks of poetry which cannot be subsumed under the concept of recurrence, but are nonetheless characteristic and in need of discussion, consist first of all of ellipsis; secondly, of specifically poetic grammatical and lexical forms; thirdly, of tropes in the traditional sense.\textsuperscript{46}

Terseness is a phenomenon observable in relation to the text as a whole—the psalms as a rule are (relatively) short textual constructions—but also, in relation to a text’s inner organization. With respect to the poetry of the psalms, elliptical means of expression are to be taken into account, for example, the omission of a word, most commonly a verb (“gapping”), but also, abbreviation through the dropping away of an article, a relative pronoun, and the \textit{nota accusativi} (את). In a certain sense, ellipsis is the flipside of ambiguity. Terseness, and therewith openness of language, is a means by which to attain or leave the door open to polysemy.

Peculiar linguistic forms occur in lyric poetry. As far as Biblical Hebrew verse is concerned, the rare, archaic vocabulary, which appears (almost) exclusively in poetic texts, requires consideration. An archaism preserved in older examples of poetry: the use of \textit{yiqtol} as a preterite tense. Additional grammatical and lexical peculiarities are attested, some of which may have an origin in a regional dialect or a situation of diglossia.\textsuperscript{47}

As far as tropes in the traditional sense are concerned,\textsuperscript{48} hyperbole, metonymy, and metaphor are typical examples. Compared to narrative literature, poetry is more metaphorical, and image-rich language is without a doubt an important characteristic of the poetry of Biblical Hebrew verse. It might be said that the ambiguation of language in poetry goes hand in hand with its metaphorization. The function of metaphors, which give to poetry a multifaceted “atmosphere” and character, is important and deserves a treatment of its own, which will not be offered here. In-depth studies on specific examples of imagery in the poetry of the psalms have been undertaken.\textsuperscript{49} In addition, Othmar Keel has made a valuable study


\textsuperscript{46} To simplify matters, in the part of this essay with worked examples, poetic patterns of the kind noted here are discussed under the umbrella of recurrence.


of ancient Near Eastern iconography in connection with the imagery of the psalms.50 Further work is necessary in the directions already indicated.

Poetry as a Medium of Dialogue: Boundaries and Contours in the Case of the Poetry of the Psalms

Harold Fisch, a Jewish professor of English literature and a literary theorist, broaches the question at hand by qualifying it and tailoring it in terms of an aesthetic-literary approach to OT texts as “works of art.” On that basis, he seeks an understanding of the poetry of the psalms in Hebrew, their language of composition.51 Fisch concedes that both aesthetic and nonesthetic approaches have their places, that the first demonstrates the high literary quality of the Bible while the second engages the challenge of its claim on the reader such that a distance-maintaining estheticism is shown to be impossible. As Fisch notes,

Because if the Bible is literature, even supreme literature, it is also anti-literature. And this is not because it is rough or uncouth, as Augustine thought in the early days after his conversion, but because its authors, capable of all the richness of the epic, all the sophistication of the romance and the lyric as they were known in their time, were also conscious of being involved in an enterprise that called into question, banished, and condemned all merely “literary” effects.52

Fisch sees this dialectic as a given in the psalms. In my view, it is advantageous to take his words to heart.

The distinctive nature of the poetic speech function, its autoreferentiality, is not being called into question but, rather, the tendency to put too much emphasis on it. The poetic SF has a place as a regulator of the poetry of verse, but no more. Furthermore, an oft-employed concept of literary theory, fictionality, is to be set aside. In my view, it is a concept that is foreign to the biblical material. It transfers aspects of a modern horizon of understanding to the ancient Near Eastern literature of the psalms (and the biblical narrative), aspects that do not correspond to it. In short, the literariness and poetic quality of the psalms are to be affirmed with the qualifications of Fisch, but not equated with fictionality.53

52. Ibid., 2.
A measure of relativization and decoding of the poetry of the psalms occurred in the process of canonization. First of all, the incorporation of the psalms into a book of psalms and the contextualization of the poetry in a kind of narrative overlay led to the composition of a “book of prayer and meditation” in accordance with the instructional (“wisdom”) emphasis of the editors of the book. Coupled with that, there was a shift from individual psalms and their interpretation within the frame of a lectio repetitiva (poetica) towards a (canonical) reading of a book within the context of a lectio continua (narrativa). This led in the canonical shape to the sense of each Psalm as a word to God being overlaid by an understanding of the Psalter as a word from God. In this way, the poetry serves a theological purpose. The texts are examples of literary-poetic art, but they are such in subordination to the identity of the Psalter as a component part of Holy Scripture.54

The Dialogic Character of the Psalms, Voicing of the Text, Directionality of Speech, Plus: Intertextuality

Simplifying somewhat, three levels of communication come to expression in the psalms: (1) prayer as (individual or collective) address to God: human being(s) → God; (2) human-to-human communication in a variety of forms: human being(s) → fellow human being(s); and (3) the (prophetic) word of God: God → human being(s). In this context, a few remarks on the multiple levels of communication that the psalms instantiate will have to suffice.55

Notwithstanding the objection that all too often the psalms have been seen from the point of view of modern lyric poetry with its strong emphasis on the subjectivity and mood of the speaker, it would be a mistake not to take into consideration the speaking “I” and/or “we” as an expressive side of the text and its wealth of nuances and to leave that dimension out of an interpretation of the poetry of the psalms. Furthermore, the text’s “I” is not necessarily to be equated with the authorial “I,” because many psalms are in the first instance to be understood not as biographical but as exemplary-paradigmatic and, as such, open to reuse in a range of situations with a range of “I”s. Eberhard Bons goes so far as to affirm that the text’s “I,” at least in Ps 31, in which the perspectives of a generic need-situation and a specific need that is addressed come into conflict, is to be understood in an inclusive sense, insofar as one must differentiate between a text-internal


55. On this, in greater detail, see ibid., 130–37.
speaking “I” and a generic “I” whose situation of need the psalm addresses (the effect of oscillation in terms of the referentiality of the “I”).

A further accent comes into play in the text, to be considered new with respect to an older situation, by means of prescriptions for reading (“belonging to David,” and so on, along with provided situations) such that the reader is invited to read the “I” or “we” in terms of David and his life. David becomes the example of the poet-singer who prays. It should already be clear that the multiple layers of the text just described are to be taken into account in interpretation, multiple layers in terms of speakers and applicants, with their horizons included. In the case of the “I” of the psalms, it is possible to speak on an internal dialogue in this sense.

A careful consideration of the dialogic character of the psalms is advisable. A number of “voices” are discernible in the text, at times in conversation with another. Despite the terseness of their contouring in verse, (biblical) narratology can provide points of departure for an analysis of characters and their textual presentation therein. Besides I-presentation and I-speech, the contouring of “enemies” as well as all relations between the speaker / “the one in the right” and the “enemy” merit precise observation. Allusions and citations from whatever source, that of the speaker or another, including the words of hostile parties but also the (prophetic) word of God, also deserve special attention. Analogous attention is to be given to other exchanges, from the dialogue of prayer between an “I” and God (with second-person and third-person address establishing differences in nuance) to dialogue among humans, for example, in hortatory discourse and appeals to the assembled community (e.g., in the thanksgiving Psalms).

Besides the “sender” of the text and voices in the text, aspects of the reception-orientation of the text require consideration. Appeals and attempts to motivate and produce an effect on God fall in this category, as do challenges directed by the speaker to himself or to human counterparts. Speech-act theory is a helpful tool for considering and unpacking the various action-oriented speech events and their dialogical character.

In an exemplary study, Hubert Irsigler pioneered the use of speech-act...
theory in relation to the psalms. He understands Ps 13 to be "a literary account of a speech process made up of speech-acts, affirmations, attempts to produce an effect, and pointers to effective speech carried out by the speaker." With respect to the identification and interpretation of the conative-directive speech function in the psalms, approaches to literature that focus on reader-response offer an instrumentarium for analysis. Dorothea Erbele-Küster analyzed the reading models of Wolfgang Iser, Hans Robert Jauss, and Stanley Fish and applied them to the psalms. Recently, Egbert Ballhorn offered a programmatic reader-oriented canonical reading of the Psalter (with a focus on Pss 90–150).

The dialogic character of the individual psalms is first of all demonstrated by the fact that, in a majority of cases, they are prayers directed to God. In these prayers, speech directed toward humans—for example, confession in thanksgiving psalms, exhortation—are interwoven. There are commonalities with prophetic literature, insets of divine speech included. When the Psalter came into being as such, a book with a beginning and an end, the dialogic moment was strengthened and modified at the same time. The individual psalm can continue to be received as a (semi-autonomous) poem but at the same time must be viewed as part of a book, the Psalter. Given that the Psalter exhibits a structured macroorganization, each individual psalm enters into "dialogue" with other psalms, in particular with those in its immediate vicinity. With the authorization and (proto-) canonization connected to the coming into existence of the Psalter, the third-listed communicative function is strengthened. (Prophetic) divine speech is already found here and there in individual psalms (for example, rather often in the Asaph psalms). Insofar as the Psalter as a whole is "God's word," speech in the psalms directed to God and to third parties is understood as "God's word."

63. Psalm 13 is a "literarischer Niederschlag eines Redeprozesses von Sprecherhandlungen und Aussagen, Bewirkungsversuchen und Merkmalen tatsächlicher (sprecherbezogener) Redewirkungen" (ibid., 63).
66. The pattern is particularly clear in Ps 81. See my "Prophetische Predigt im Asaph-Psalter Psalm 81," JET 17 (2003) 35–44.
Finally, one may also speak of “dialogue” when a Psalm text alludes to other texts and in so doing assumes them (“metalepsis”; more generally, “intertextuality”). With the incorporation and contextualization of the Psalter in the canon of Holy Scriptures, new inner-biblical linguistic constellations came into existence. Ps 1 opens the Psalter and at the same time connects the Psalter with the other sections of the canon, the Torah and the Prophets.

This summary overview of the dialogical aspect of the poetry of the psalms must suffice. Given the multidirectionality and importance of the dialogical process in the psalms, one can safely say that, next to its poetic character, its dialogic character turns out to be the second chief hallmark of the OT psalms. In the second part of this essay, the poetic and dialogic characters of three selected psalms will be demonstrated. The theoretical foundations just explored are exemplified and applied.

**Typical Applications of Poetics in the Psalms**

*Psalms Texts*

*Psalm 3*

1 A Psalm—concerning David—when he fled before Absalom, his son.

I A 2 a YHWH, how have they become many, my adversaries,

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69. The Davidic superscripts with their biographical informations open interrelations with narrative traditions, especially in the book(s) of Samuel; see Vivian L. Johnson, *David in Distress: His Portrait through the Historical Psalms* (LHBOTS 505; London: T. & T. Clark, 2009).


71. These three psalms were selected because of the peculiar structural form of each, the fact that they are short psalms, and the fact that the author has already engaged more intensively with each of them in earlier publications.

72. For the purpose of illustrating poetic patterning the following translations of the three Psalms are rather literal renderings of the Hebrew, resulting in grammatical and stylistic unevenness in the target language.

many are rising up against me!

Many are saying concerning my person:

“There is no deliverance for him through God!”

But you, YHWH, are a shield around me,

my honor and the one who lifts up my head.

Aloud I cried to YHWH repeatedly,

then he answered me from his holy mountain.

I laid myself down and slept;

I woke up—because YHWH sustains me.

I am not afraid of ten/many thousands of military people,

who have set themselves up around against me.

Please rise up, YHWH!

Deliver me, my God!

Since you have struck (down) all my enemies with regard to the jaw;

d [the] teeth of the wicked you have shattered.

To YHWH is the deliverance!

On your people [is/comes/may come/will come] your blessing!

Psalm 13

1 To the musical director—a Psalm—belonging to David.

How much longer, YHWH, will you are you going to forget me forever?

How much longer will you are you going to hide your face from me?

How long must/should/will I entertain worry in my soul?

How long must I entertain grief in my heart all day long?

How much longer will my enemy elevate himself over me?

Please pay attention! Answer me, YHWH!

My God, please light up my eyes!

So that I will not go / have to go to sleep [into] death;

so that my enemy will not be able to say/will not say “I have overlapped him!”;

lest my foes may/will cheer when/because I stumble.

But I, because of your grace I have trusted.

My heart should rejoice because of your saving acts:

“I will sing to YHWH, for he has treated me [well].”

Psalm 130

1 A song of the Ascents.
I b From the depths I called to you, YHWH:
  a "Lord, hear my voice!
  b May your ears hearken
c to the voice of my supplications."
II 3 a If you should guard transgressions, YH,
  b Lord, who could/would exist?!
  a Certainly, with you there is forgiveness,
  b so that you may be feared!
III 5 a I hope in YHWH,
  b my soul hoped,
c yes, for his word I have waited.
  a My soul [waited] for the Lord –
  b more than watchmen for the morning,
c [more] than watchmen for the morning.
IV 7 a Wait, Israel, for YHWH!
  b Certainly, with YHWH [there is] grace,
c and with him [there is] much redemption!
  a Yes, he himself will redeem Israel
  b from all his transgressions.

Considerations on Perception, Weighing, and Interpretation of Recurrences

The following comments on the individual psalms are not complete, but selective. It is not meant to present an exegetical investigation of the particular psalms. In imitation of the poetological model of Nel, who fittingly identifies recurrence as the foundational poetic phenomenon of Psalms poetry, I will try to describe figures of recurrence on the levels of language and structure by way of example. A full poetic analysis would actually have three distinct phases:

1. Cognizance of recurrences within a poem (inventory)
2. The weighing of recurrences within a poem (weighing of meaning);
3. The interpretation of recurrences within the structure of a poem (a survey of meaning)

Subsequently, I will focus largely on the first point and only touch on the other two, although they are equally important. The following basic rules could be considered in the selection and weighing of recurrences:

1. Identity/Contrast: The grade of similarity or contrast between recurring elements has a direct influence on the strength of the cognizance and effect.
2. Closeness: The closer the recurring elements are to one another, the stronger the effect and cognizance will be.
3. Accumulation/Degree: The more often elements are repeated or the bigger the extent of repetition, the more importance should be attached to their relevance for meaning.
4. Multiplicity: The number of different levels of speech and structure involved in the recurrence has a direct bearing on the relevance of the repetition in terms of meaning.
5. Hierarchizing: Lexical or semantic recurrence will usually enjoy greater importance than morphological or syntactical recurrence. In between these two forms one would probably locate phonological or prosodic recurrence.

Finally, it should be pointed out that equivalence or recurrence—in other words, the interaction between two or more elements of language or structure—can happen in various different modi, namely:

1. Equality
2. Similarity
3. Opposition (contrariness/contrast)
4. Presence or omission (ellipsis)
5. Superordination or subordination
6. Congruence (other forms of agreement)

Recurrences on the Level of Language

The following examples are taken from the spheres of grammar (morphology and syntax), semantics (including lexicography) and phonology/prosody. It should be noted that the spheres cannot be neatly separated, since they overlap. A morphological recurrence can, for instance, be a semantic one at the same time.

Morphology and Syntax (Including Word Order)

Psalm 3. As an example of a morphological (and semantic) variation of the same word stem which plays a structuring, keyword type of role in Ps 3, the root \( \text{בָּרָב} \) “be much, numerous” can be mentioned. It has the variants “become many” (\( 
\text{בָּרָב} \) v. 2a, verb qtl 3p)—“many” (\( 
	ext{רָבִים} \) vv. 2b and 3a, noun I, mp)—“ten/many thousands” (\( 
	ext{רֵבְבָּת} \) v. 7a, noun II, fp). The accumulation of evidence in vv. 2–3 evokes a threatening situation; in the context of the whole, the instance of the root in verse 7a forms a stark contrast to this, with growing effect (and hyperbole) to emphasize the trust in God. With the sequence “have become many” (v. 2a) → “many” (v. 2b) → “many” (v. 3a) → “ten/many thousands” (v. 7a) → “all” (v. 8c), a number of poetic devices are involved, namely, amplification, gradation, and climax.

77. See in this regard especially Berlin, Dynamics.
Psalm 13. The lament is formulated in a consistently morphosyntactic manner in vv. 2–3 with verbs being conjugated in the yqtl. Corresponding to the interrogative הֶעַד אֲנָה (“how much longer?”), the emphasis is not on a retrospective look at the distress but on the presently persisting condition, the temporal lengthening or the question about a possible or early end (see also the temporal markers נֶצַח, “forever” [v. 2a], and יָמִם, “all day long” [v. 3b]). Within the question sequence of יֹאמֵו אֲנָה, there is a morphological movement with regard to the verbs from pronouncements in the 2ms (v. 2ab) through 1s (v. 3a[b]) to the 3ms (v. 3c). This development coincides with a movement of reduction (diminuendo-effect) (two full sentences [v. 2ab] → two sentences with ellipsis in the second [v. 3ab] → one sentence [v. 3c]). The lament (Stanza I) in this psalm is consequently expressed variously in terms of the three social dimensions of God-focused lament (accusation, v. 2ab), I-centered lament (bemoaning, v. 3ab), and an enemy-focused lament (filing a lawsuit, v. 3c), although God remains the only one who is addressed (no monologue and no dialogue with the “enemy” takes place). This pattern—reference to God, reference to the self, reference to the enemy—in turn characterizes the prayer stanza, stanza II, although this is done in a different morphosyntactical configuration.

Psalm 130. In this psalm, the reader encounters the synonymous concepts “hope” (ָָּפֶּּע) and “wait” (ָָּסֶּּע). The attitudes referred to by these synonyms are offered morphologically and syntactically in a varied way: “I hope in YHWH” (ָָּפֶּּע v. 5a, verb in qtl, Piel 1s)—“my soul hoped” (ָָּפֶּּע v. 5b, verb in qtl, Piel 3fs)—“Yes, for his word I have waited” (ָָּפֶּּע v. 5c, verb in the final position, qtl, Hiphil 1s)—“my soul waited for the Lord” (v. 6a, elliptical sentence construction: the verb from v. 5b or 5c virtually codetermines the pronouncement)—“wait Israel, for YHWH!” (ָָּסֶּּע v. 7a, verb in the imperative, Piel ms). The repetition and variation underline the persistent moment of hoping and waiting. The writer’s own waiting serves as a foundation for the plea to Israel to also wait.

Lexicality and Semantics

Psalm 3. Stanza III (strophes E and F, vv. 8–9) is bound together through the lexical or semantic repetition of the contrasting concepts “deliverance” (ָּשֶּּע Hiphil, יָשַׁע, יָשַׁע), on the one hand, and “strike/shatter” (ָּסֶּּע Hiphil / שַׁבְּר), on the other. The arrangement of elements further creates a mirror-like symmetry (according to the scheme a-b-b’-a”), so that the prayer for salvation and confession of salvation in vv. 8ab and 9ab correspond with one another. Verse 8cd, which lies between these elements, describes YHWH as the one who “strikes” (the warrior) the enemies, while the two synonymous verbs form an inclusio with the verse. In v. 4, there is metaphorical speech (God as “shield,” possibly also as “uplifter of the head” of the harassed suppliant), in v. 6b (God as “supporter”) and in the judgment poetry of v. 8cd, where the parallelism is combined with an intensification (“striking [with regard to the] jaw” → “shattering the teeth”).

Psalm 13. Stanza I (vv. 2–3) is characterized by the repeated interrogative “How much longer?” This repetition involves weighting, modifica-
tion, and escalation (amplification/gradation). The question of the temporal delay is highlighted with the help of poetic devices as the central problem while God is by way of comparison “pounded” with it. It is found at the beginning of almost each stich (עֵצָה) (virtually also present in v. 3b).

The word pair “worry” (עֵצָה fp, v. 3a) and “grief” (יָגוֹן ms, v. 3b) creates gender-number-complementarity (as a kind of meristic inclusiveness?). The triplet created by “heart” (v. 3b), “eyes” (v. 4b), “heart” (v. 6b) is structurally divided among the three stanzas. Bodily or internal pronouncements with reference to God (“face,” “perceive”) and especially with reference to the suppliant (“soul,” “heart,” “sleep into death,” “stumble,” “sing”) are very characteristic of this psalm.

The new accent of stanza III in comparison to the preceding strophes can also be seen in the contrast of the verb בָּטַח, “trust” (v. 6a), with that of מָטַת, “stumble” (v. 5b).

Psalm 130. In the final verse, there appear, in addition to the designation “Israel” (cf. v. 7a), two concepts that were already used in the psalm: The verb פָּדָה, “redeem” (qal yqtl 3ms) in v. 8a takes up the (rare) noun פָּדוֹת (“redemption”) which is derived from the same stem and which occurs at the end of v. 7b. The suffixed noun עונתו, “his transgressions” (v. 8b), which closes the psalm, clearly refers back to עונות, “transgressions,” in v. 3a (both times fp). Through these connections, a double reference is created in the closing verse, and the pronouncement of certainty for the future in v. 8ab is made possible. On the one hand, it intensifies the insight won from personal experience of the answer to prayer and of deliverance (vv. 1b, 2a, 2bc) that YHWH does not preserve the transgressions of the suppliant, but guarantees forgiveness (vv. 3–4), and the certainty that this also applies to “Israel” (v. 8b; cf. also the escalation: “from all his transgressions”). On the other hand, the call to Israel to wait (in distress for God’s help) because there is with him “much redemption” (v. 7ab), is carried forward to a pronouncement of certainty that YHWH will “redeem” Israel (v. 8a).

The reference to the “ears” of God (v. 2b) is an anthropomorphic expression. The comparison of the supplicator with “guards,” who have to guard the walls of the city during the long and dangerous night and therefore eagerly await the break of day with its accompanying light, is metaphoric (see also the image of guards of the city in Ps 127:1 and Isa 62:6–7).

Psalms 3, 13, and 130. With reference to the parallelisms within the three psalms, in addition to the frequent variants of synonymous parallelism (inter alia in Ps 3:2ab, 8ab, 8cd; 13:2ab; 130:5abc), there also are instances of repetitive parallelism (Ps 130:6bc), reciprocal parallelism (Ps 3:5ab), and other progressive, “synthetic”) types of parallels (inter alia in Ps 3:3ab, 6ab; 13:6abc; 130:1b2a, 2bc, 4ab). Their profiles of pronouncement in the particular psalms lead in each instance to various different emphases.

Phonology and Prosody

Psalm 3. The psalm begins with an exclamation (v. 2ab), but ends in sedate cadence with an apostrophe or an epiphone (v. 9ab, with ellipsis in 9b). In vv. 3–4, the contrast between those who threaten the suppliant and deny
him any salvation from YHWH, and YHWH, who lifts up his head, is emphasized through the sound pattern and wordplay between the participial expressions of the מראים, “(many) are saying” (v. 3a), and the מראים, “the one who lifts up” (v. 4b).

Forms of telestichic rhyme (end rhyme), with the effect of bracketing the poetic lines, are found in Ps 3—for instance, in v. 2ab (עלי/عزي) and v. 4ab (final sound on long i), with altogether a dominance of line endings with the vowel i. This effect results in making the supplicating “I” more prominent in the psalm as a whole.

Psalm 13. The fact that four verse lines of Ps 13 open with עדאנא (and two with פן) can be described as an anaphoric acrostic (opening rhyme) device. Through this acoustic pattern of repetition, the beginning of the verse lines is emphasized and a strong parallel between the lines is attained.

In v. 4, the two unrelated lexical morphemes ענני, “answer me,” and עיני, “my eyes,” are connected acoustically, namely, with an alliterative-assonantic connection, and also through inner rhyme. This link emphasizes the connection between the answer of God and the “giving light (again)” to the eyes of the supplicant.

Psalm 130. The psalm has ellipsis in v. 6a (it lacks a verb). This leads to a rhythmic parallelization with the two subsequent repetitive verse lines (2 + 2 + 2). The concept of the מטלמקים (“depths”) is one of the rare unique words of poetry in the Hebrew Bible (see further Ezek 27:34 and Ps 69:3, 15). It has an onomatopoetic quality, somewhat reminiscent of ימים. Its meaning oscillates between reality (“cisterns,” “ditches”) and metaphorical expression (fear of death, the netherworld).

Recurrences on Structural Levels

A psalm or a poem is a carefully structured edifice that normally consists of the following building blocks (moving from the smaller to the larger ones): verset → verse line → strophe → stanza (→ canticle → canto) → psalm/poem. Normally, a verse line consists of two–three cola (infrequently, one), a strophe mostly of two–three verse lines (infrequently, one or four), a stanza of a series of strophes and a poem of a series of stanzas. In the case of small poems, a stanza consists of strophes; in larger creations, there could be additional building blocks creating a level of structure between a stanza and a poem.

There is no contention about the fact that verse parallelisms exist between cola, but similar patterns on the level of macro structural units (strophes and stanzas) have not enjoyed the same acceptance for a long time. The reality of their existence and the perception and interpretation of equivalences on these macro-level structures are, however, gaining more and more acceptance.

78. For the various forms of acrostics, see my “Akrostichische Muster in den Asaph-Psalmen,” BN 113 (2002) 79–94.

79. On this, see Julius Ley, Grundzüge des Rhythmus, des Vers- und Strophenbaues in der hebräischen Poesie: Nebst Analyse einer Auswahl von Psalmen und anderen strophischen Dichtungen
larger building blocks of a psalm are also interconnected or related by way of equivalences (parity, similarity, oppositeness). The perception of such equivalences is important in order to recognize the structuring and flow of thought. I will subsequently make a distinction between equivalences that occur between strophes and equivalences that concern the structure of the whole psalm.

Recurrences in View of the Arrangement of Verse Lines and Strophes One after the Other

At this point, it is necessary to make a distinction between intrastrophic and interstrophic recurrences. The first of these refers to equivalences between the verses of a strophe; the second to equivalences between verses of different strophes and therefore also indirectly between strophes. Mirror images such as these could be brought about by similarities on the level of contents and theme but could also involve opposites or the mere repetition of words. Basically, three modes of equivalence could be distinguished: concatenation, responsio, and inclusio.

Concatenation. A pattern of linking or concatenation (concatenatio) results when adjacent verse lines in the same strophe or beyond the borders of a strophe are interconnected closely (this is sometimes also called an “external parallelism”). In Ps 3, this trope is constituted through the bracketing of verse lines 2 and 3 within strophe A by the keyword רבם, “many” (vv. 2b and 3a; cf. also רבו, “have become many” in verse 2a).

2 a Yhwh, how have they become many (רבו), my adversaries,
b many (רבם) are rising up against me!

3 a Many (רבים) are saying concerning my person:
b “There is no deliverance for him through God!”

selah

Responsio. One could speak of equivalence/analogy or responsio when the verse lines in comparable or similar positions within a strophe or stanza (for example, the opening verse lines) are connected.80 This device can, for example, be detected in Ps 3, where the opening verse lines of strophe A (v. 2ab) and strophe E (v. 8ab) have a connection, the vocative use of divine

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80. A special form of responsio is the circumstance that not only one verse line but all lines in the same sequence are constructed parallel with reference to certain aspects (alternating pattern).
names and the use of the morpheme קם, “rise up,” at the beginning of the verse line containing the lament (v. 2ab) and its repetition in the prayer for intervention (v. 8ab):

2 a YHWH, how have they become many, my adversaries,
   b many are rising up (קום) against me!
   . . .

8 a Please rise up (קום), YHWH!
   b Deliver me, my God!

**Inclusio.** The third pattern of interrelatedeness is framing or inclusio. In this case, the verse lines, which form a frame, have similarities within a strophe or stanza or between different strophes or stanzas. An inclusio of the type $a$-$b$-$a'$ connects the last two strophes of Ps 3 (E + F = stanza III). The root of the concept for “deliverance” (הישע) is used for this in the prayer for rescue (8b) and the confession of being saved (9a). This serves to frame the verse in between (note also the divine name in the framing verse lines):

8 a Please rise up, YHWH!
   b Deliver me (הושע), my God!
   c Since you have struck (down) all my enemies [with regard to the] jaw;
   d [the] teeth of the wicked you have shattered.

9 a To YHWH [is] the deliverance (הישע)!
   b On your people [is/will come] your blessing!

**Recurrences within the Complete Structure of a Poem**

The perception of the uniqueness of a whole poem, and thus of the interpretation of the whole as though it were a spatial construction, rests heavily on the successful perception of the dependence of the larger building blocks of strophes and stanzas on one another. There are numerous possibilities of combinations, but these should be seen as variations of three basic forms.

**Linearity.** One of the patterns is lining up or linearity (narrativity), following the scheme $a$-$b$-$c$, $a$-$a'$-$b$-$b'$, and so on. A lined up or ranked sequence of strophes or stanzas such as this is often combined with an element of heightening and growing emphasis toward the end of the series. In my view, the whole structure of Ps 13 furnishes an example of such a pattern: stanzas I–III = $a$-$b$ $→$ $c$. The sequence of stanzas corresponds to the form-critical structuring (individual lament): lament (I), supplication (II), confession of trust/praise or promise of praise (III). While the style of stanzas I and II is similar, there is clear break between II and III (see also the opening with ואני, “but I”). The focusing on the self-declarations of the final stanza (III) is supported by a funnel-like structure (a decrease in size of the strophes toward the end). Strictly speaking, one can perceive a si-

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81. A special form of inclusio is encountered when not only the outer verse lines correspond but also the inner lines. This creates a pattern of mirror-like symmetry.
multaneous diminuendo and crescendo effect: The lament, with its strong expressive character (note the lining up of initial עד־אנה, “how much longer?” questions), gradually decreases, while the emphasis on praise grows as the poem progresses toward its end.

**Alternation.** The second basic form is of alternating or interchange. This is characterized by the fact that the corresponding building blocks are not situated adjacent to each other but are interchanged with a second pattern of corresponding elements. If the whole structure is characterized by this, the purpose would have been to present the reader with two (or more) juxtaposed “passages” or “corridors,” a synoptic presentation of multidimensional contents. One can describe this—in borrowing from the (sacral) fine arts—as a diptych (pattern: $a-b-a'-b'$ or similar). 82

From the three psalms used as examples, the complete structure of Ps 130 proves to be alternating (diptych): stanzas I–IV = $a-b-a'-b'$. This conclusion is reached when one studies the “tempora” and poetics of the psalm carefully. 83 According to this, stanzas I and III ought to be interpreted as being interrelated: The first has an “I—You” (prayer-) pattern; the second an “I—he” pattern and both concern the past (qtl forms). Stanzas II and IV have a similar parallel relationship: A connection is established through the use of לעות “transgressions” (3a, 8b) which can be interpreted as the consequence or result of I/III, while they both have a call-to-praise concern for the present time (yqtl/imperative).

**Centering.** The pattern of centering, finally, is characterized by the fact that the stressed, strongly underlined pronunciation of the poem is not located (only) at the end, but in the center, in the “heart.” The sequence of corresponding parts further also forms a mirror-like symmetry. In one instance, the central element appears on its own (pattern: $a-b-c-b'-a'$); in another, it also forms a pair with another section (pattern: $a-b-c-c'-b'-a'$, and so on). Interpreting a poem that is structured in this way requires one to identify the central pronunciation as such and to unlock its significance in a dual movement from the periphery to the center and from the center to the periphery.

Among the three example psalms used here, Ps 3 makes use of a centering structure: stanzas I–III = $a-b-a'$. Accordingly, the prayer sections, with their pronouncements about the present time I (a) and III (a') correspond to one another. This form-critical observation is supported by identical or similar conceptual contents in the frame sections: v. 2b: “(many) are rising up” (קמים) / v. 8a: “please rise” (קומה); v. 3b: “(no) deliverance (for him)” (ישועתה) / v. 8b: “deliver me” (הושעני) / v. 9a: “the deliverance” (הישועה). 84

82. A special form of recurrence in view of the whole structure is encountered in psalms with refrains. In this regard, see Ps 42–43 with the refrain in 42:6, 42:12, and 43:5. On this, see the discussions of Raabe, Structures.

83. For more details, see my “Vergehnen,” 147–53.

84. See also further the correspondence of the “enemy”-synonyms, רע, יר, “my adversaries” (2a), קמים עלי, “(many) are rising up against me” (2b), איבי, “my enemies” (8c), and רשע, “wicked” (8d).
Embedded in the middle (II), one finds descriptions of past happenings and prayer. Its purpose is to gather confidence and trust for the elimination of present distress by taking recourse to earlier experiences of deliverance. Every stanza closes with a confession (vv. 4ab, 7ab, 9ab), while the final strophe (F, v. 9ab) also situates the psalm within a context of worship.

Forms and Characteristics of Dialogical Quality

The descriptive term poetics refers specifically to the autoreferential function of language and its central lyrical characteristic, namely, the various forms of recurrence. “Dialogical quality,” in turn, does justice to the other functions of language. It also refers to the truth that psalms formed part of a process of communication and that they are continually initiating this process again. To begin with, the “voices” within the text must be noted and particulars of the speaker, the direction of communication, and the addressees should be considered. After that, there are the considerations of allusions to other texts (intertextuality) and influences emanating from the psalm (the Wirkungsgeschichte or reception history of the psalm). The influence of the context of the psalm (such as the heading given to the psalm and its embeddedness within the Psalter) is also to be considered. There could, for instance, also be equivalences external to the text when, by way of citation or allusion, a pretext is “drawn into” consideration or when, viewed in terms of reception history, the text under investigation or a part of it becomes a pretext for other texts. Moreover, the contextualizing of a psalm opens up new hermeneutical horizons—on the one hand, through the heading, and on the other, through its being contextualized in the book of Psalms—creating new forms of “conversation” with the text and thus overtly forming a dialogue.

“Voices” in the Text, Directions of Address, and Addressees

Psalm 3. The main voice speaking in this psalm is that of an individual. His voice is heard at first as a prayer-suppllication to YHWH (vv. 2–4). It consists of a description of distress (vv. 2–3) and a declaration of trust (v. 4). In the description of the distress, the voice of an enemy is heard in the form of a quotation. This represents the distress in a plastic way while it renders the reprehensibleness of the enemy audible (v. 3b). The denial of salvation for the suppliant, as expressed by these opponents, is consequently handed over to God himself, so to speak. In the retrospection of vv. 5–7, there is a change of direction of speech, because the direct you-God-speech (prayer) changes to him-God-speech, so that this description causes fellow human addressees (whether listeners and/or co-suppliants) to become involved as well. In stanza III, there is a return to the direct address in prayer, but this time supplications for intervention and motivations for that (v. 8) occupy center stage. In the final strophe (F), a confession-like word is first delivered (also) toward the listeners (v. 9a), while the last verse line constitutes a kind of inclusive prayer in which the speaker understands himself in association with the co-listeners as “people” of God, establishing a connection
between this and the blessing (the nominal style leaves the question open whether this is a prayer or an address).

Psalm 13. In this lament of an individual, sections I and II constitute a lament and a prayer, respectively. Both are addressed to YHWH (concerning the three addressed social dimensions, see p. 178 above). Similarly to Ps 3, Ps 13 also contains an enemy quotation, namely, the triumphant exclamationHALAL, “I have overpowered him!” (5a). Strictly speaking, in the context of a rhetoric of avoidance, this is a virtual quotation—in the sense that the suppliant says: “May it never come to that, O God, that the enemy can say this about my life.” The purpose of this enemy pronouncement is to move God to intervene and therefore to prevent this sort of proclamation or any event that can form the basis for it. In the slightly removed (“But I . . .”) final verse line (v. 6 = III), the suppliant articulates a confession of trust, a speech act that one could describe with Hubert Irsgler as an “implicit performative affirmation and guarantee of one’s own trust.” In v. 6b, a promise of praise, the pronouncement switches from the perfect tense to a jussive. The avowal of praise (with motivation) in v. 6c announces a future thanksgiving song. Presumably, v. 6c itself is a quotation, namely, a quotation of praise (from the beginning of a song?). It forms a diametrically exact opposite of the enemy quotation in v. 5a.

Psalm 130. The psalm is, in my view, no individual lament, but a song of thanksgiving (todah). The “I”-speeches are found in stanzas I and III, once in the form of a prayer (I), and once as a promulgation to the assembled congregation. In v. 1b, the speaker addresses God about a speech act from the past. Verse 2abc then quotes the invocation, which was articulated in the distress. Stanza II, which was inserted between the “I”-speeches, is formulated similarly to the prayer in stanza I (note the vocatives), but it has a certain proximity to wisdom meditations and consists of a rhetorical question (v. 3ab), which leads to an emphatic “No!” and a synoptic conclusion (v. 4ab). This is combined with a change in perspective from the past to the present time of speaking and an implicit address to the listening congregation. Consequently, there is a peculiar oscillation between indirect requests for forgiveness (addressed to God) and an implicit confession of forgiveness (addressed to the congregation). After stanza III, with its description again focused on the past, stanza IV changes once more (as stanza II has already done) to the present time. At the same time, the introduction of the figure of “Israel” implies a change from a personal to a collective level (probably the assembled congregation in a religious setting of worship). It is possible that stanza IV has the same speaker, but a second speaker in the background is quite conceivable. Israel is now directly addressed and called to “wait” with the necessary motivation (v. 7abc). The psalm closes with a pronouncement of trust, which defines what the individual has experienced as the future destiny of Israel.

Intertextuality and Contextuality

Psalm 3. The prayer for YHWH to intervene as judge and savior (v. 8ab) is connected by way of motivation with a pronouncement about earlier actions of salvation or triumph by YHWH in favor of the suppliant (v. 8cd):

Since you have struck (down) (הכית) all my enemies [with regard to the] jaw (לב),
[the] teeth of the wicked you have shattered.

This possibly is (also) an allusion to the heroic deed of Samson against the Philistines in Judg 15:15–16 (and can be compared with additional Davidic connections between Ps 3:1 and 7 and 1 Sam 18:7 and 2 Sam 18:7). In this way, a kind of dialogue is created in the mind of the audience between this background text and the contents it refers to (see also in both texts the important motif of the superior number of the opponents):

And he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey (לבחי החמור), stretched out his hand, took it and struck down (ויך) with it a thousand men. And Samson said: “With the jawbone of a donkey (בלחי החמור) [I struck down] one heap, two heaps! With the jawbone of a donkey (בלחי החמור) I struck down (הכיתי) a thousand men!”

Psalm 3 is the first psalm in the Psalter with a prescript. The heading, which contains a description of the Gattung, the ascription to David and a historical location, reads as follows: “A Psalm—concerning David—when he fled before Absalom, his son.” The statement refers to the events described in 2 Sam 15–19. Against this hermeneutic background, Ps 3 attains a new imprint as a Davidic and royal psalm. The “numerous” harrassers and the experience of being surrounded get a three-dimensional character against the background of the rebellion of Absalom and the flight of David (see especially 2 Sam 15:12, 14, and 31–32; 18:3 and 7). Together with David, the suppliant (who is similarly in distress) can also express a trust in God as well as similar experiences of salvation.

In the context of the psalms, this psalm opens the first “Davidic” collection after the double entrance portal formed by Pss 1–2. The suppliant and meditator of the Psalter, who has arrived at Ps 3 via the two opening psalms, will obtain new insights through this psalm—Ps 3 turns out to be part of the overture, which introduces the Psalter and its theology and spirituality. The insight is that whoever holds fast to YHWH and his Torah (see Ps 1) can also count on God in times of distress, because he (YHWH) is concerned with the way of this person and will make him successful. David (and the true Israel with him), who has been established by God himself as king on Zion, the holy mountain of God (Ps 2), will experience, even during the suffering caused by the enmity of his own son, that, when in distress, YHWH supports his anointed and answers him from his holy mountain.86

Psalm 13. After a declaration of trust (v. 6a) and a promise of praise (v. 6b), the psalm ends with the following citation of praise: “I will sing to

86. See more on this in Weber, “Buchouvertüre.”
YHWH (אֱלֹהִי לְיהוָה), because (כִּי) he has treated me [well].” The psalmist chants the beginning of the song at the Sea of Reeds (Exod 15:1b): “I will sing to YHWH (אֱלֹהִי לְיהוָה), for (כִּי) he is highly exalted.” He thus causes the song of triumph of his people—which celebrates their constitutive experience of redemption—to sound again. At the same time, however, he modifies this song after the motivational particle into a song of thanksgiving of an individual (תודה).

Psalm 13 is the second-to-last psalm of the first minor collection (Pss 3–14) within the first collection of Davidic psalms, a collection that is also called the First Book of the psalms (Pss 1/3–41). After the display of judgment on the wicked in Ps 11, the lament in Ps 13 is intensified in relation to Ps 12. In Ps 12:6, there is a divine proclamation, which announces that the intervention on behalf of the miserable people is about to happen “now.” This announcement is qualified, so to speak, as going into fulfillment through the repeated question “how much longer?” in Ps 13. Psalm 14, which concludes this minor collection, “answers” this question (to the reader who reads the psalms linearly and consecutively) as the measure of wickedness is now full and judgment has come. Both psalms end with a reference to a future (liturgical) “rejoicing” (יהי Pss 13:6; 14:7).

Psalm 130. This psalm has a definitive proximity to the prayer of dedication of the temple (1 Kgs 8:22–53) and the penitential prayers in Neh 1:5–11, Neh 9, and Dan 9. Direct dependence can hardly be proven, but there probably is a shared postexilic relationship in terms of milieu. The same applies to the connections with Isa 62:6–7. Inversely, there are at least indications of an innerbiblical reception history of Ps 130. The angel who appears, according to the Gospel of Matthew, to Joseph in a dream in order to announce the birth of Jesus as the one who would “save his people from their sins,” can draw support from this word (Matt 1:21; cf. Ps 130:8). In Titus 2:13–14 (cf. Rom 3:24) there also is a call to “await” the blessed hope and the appearance of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave himself “to redeem us from all lawlessness” (cf. Ps 130:7–8).87 In the history of the church, the stream that issued from Ps 130 as one of the seven “psalms of penitence” of the early church became disproportionately wide and brought a rich florescence that can here be mentioned only but not expounded.

The heading שיר המעלות situates Ps 130 within the group Pss 120–34, which all display a characteristic, Zion-focused profile. While there are only a few links between Ps 129 and Ps 130, the situation is much differ-

ent in the case of Ps 130 and Ps 131. The most marked communality is the identity of the cola in Ps 130:7a and Ps 131:3a, which no doubt serves a cohering function, while it also marks their “closeness” within the context of a lectio or meditatio continua. Although the context differs, there also is a contact of contents perceivable: In Ps 130, there is an indirect confession of personal guilt and consequently a pronouncement about the need for salvation; the author of Ps 131 in contrast professes an innocent style of living in his prayer to YHWH and specifically denies any haughty inclination. A reader proceeding from Ps 130 to Ps 131 would also be carried forward, as it were, from the metaphor of keeping guard (which suggests an element of danger) and the restlessness of “waiting” (Ps 130), toward the rest and safety of the child with its mother in Ps 131. 89