THE ART OF BIBLICAL POETRY

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I

The Dynamics of Parallelism

The detail is everything.
—VLADIMIR NABOKOV

WHAT ARE the formal elements that make up a poem in the Hebrew Bible? The incorrigible naïveté of common sense might lead one to suppose that the rudiments of an answer would be self-evident, but in fact there is no aspect of biblical literature that has elicited more contradictory, convoluted, and at times quite fantastical views, from late antiquity to the latest scholarly publications. To many it might have seemed that after Robert Lowth's *De sacra poesi Hebraeorum* (1753) semantic parallelism between the two (or sometimes three) components of a line was firmly established as the chief organizing principle of the system; but questions have been raised about the actual prevalence of such parallelism, about how it is to be conceived if it is really there, and about whether it might not be an entirely secondary feature of biblical poetry. One influential contemporary theory imagines syllable count to be the defining characteristic of ancient Hebrew verse, with parallelism appearing, as one adherent of this notion rather lamely puts it, when the poet (thought of, without much evidence, as an oral-formulaic composer) needs more syllables to pad out his idea to the end of the line.[1] A still newer theory proposes a bewilderingly elaborate system of "syntactic constraints" as the basis of biblical verse, though this analysis entails, among other intrinsic difficulties, an arbitrary chopping up of poetic lines into units that will confirm the proposed pattern.[2] Others have argued for a combination of syntax and stress as the basis of versification.[3]

The dismaying range of discussion on this topic is vividly illustrated by two extremes. At one end of the spectrum, an Orientalist in the 1930s, Paul Kraus, set out to show that the entire Hebrew Bible, once properly accented, could be demonstrated to have been written in verse (a project in which he had been anticipated three decades earlier by the German Old Testament scholar Eduard Sievers). When he discovered two-thirds of the way through his analysis that the texts no longer bore out his thesis, he took his own life. At the other end of the spectrum, an ambitious recent study, James L. Kugel's *The Idea of Biblical Poetry,*[4] after a splendid first chapter full of incisive comments on what happens in semantic parallelism, comes perilously close to concluding that there is no poetry in the Bible, only a "continuum" from loosely parallelistic structures in what we think of as the prose sections to a more "heightened rhetoric" of parallelistic devices in what we misleadingly label verse.

Despite the grim fate of Paul Kraus, I don't think the attempt to describe the system of biblical poetry need be a suicidal enterprise, and it is obviously important to get some handle on the system in order to understand what kinds of meaning, what representations of human and divine reality, are made possible by this particular poetic vehicle. But it does seem wise to state clearly at the outset what we do not know and are unlikely to recover. The actual sound of biblical poetry will remain at least to some extent a matter of conjecture. Certain distinctions among consonants have shifted or blurred over the centuries, and what is worse, we cannot be entirely sure we know where accents originally fell, what the original system of vowels and syllabification was, or whether there were audible changes in these phonetic features during the several hundred years spanned by biblical poetry. (The indications of stress and vocalization of the Masoretic text were codified well over a millennium after the composition of most of the poems and centuries after Hebrew had ceased to be the vernacular.) On the level of meaning, although comparative Semitic philology in a remarkable age of archaeological discovery has done heroic work in restoring the original sense of poorly understood words, it would be foolhardy to imagine that we can always recover the real nuances of biblical terms, or the relation between poetic diction and colloquial diction (of which there is no record) or between poetic diction and other specialized usages of the ancient language. Moreover, because the language of poetic texts presents a higher concentration of rare locutions and other stylistic difficulties—difficulties even, apparently, for an ancient Hebrew scribe—one encounters in the poetry phrases, lines, or sometimes whole sequences of lines that look thoroughly

corrupted and that read as little more than gibberish unless one has sufficient faith to accept someone's radical emendation of the text. To these problems of sound and meaning, one must add a formal problem: because the poems are not set out as poetry in the traditional Hebrew text, there are sometimes serious questions as to where the line breaks should come and, especially in some of the Prophets, ambiguities about the boundaries between prose and poetic passages.

All these puzzlements should be kept in mind, for there are aspects of the system of biblical poetry, and certainly features of individual poems, that will continue to elude us from where we stand, two and a half millennia—and, in the case of a few texts, perhaps three millennia—after the creation of the poems. The difficulties, however, need not be overstated. There remains much that can be understood about biblical verse; and sometimes, as in the text I am about to quote, even where there are doubts about the poem's meaning, it may exhibit perfectly perceptible formal patterns that tell us something about the operations of the underlying poetic system. My initial example, then, Genesis 4:23–24, is an instructive enigma, and only the second instance of clearly demarcated formal verse in the Bible (the first being the two-line poem in Genesis 2:23 that Adam uses to name his helpmate Woman). It is a poem, addressed by Lamech to his two wives, that would seem to be almost entirely dependent on context, some obscure story of an injury or insult perpetrated on Lamech and the vengeance he exacts. The trouble is that no context whatever is offered. All we know about Lamech is that he is the fifth linear descendant of Cain, of whom God had said, "Whoever slays Cain will be avenged sevenfold," and that he begat with his two wives the inaugurators of the archetypal civilized activities of flock tending, music making, and metal forging, and a daughter with no designated archetypal role. This frustrating lack of context for the poem, however, can be taken as the occasion to look without distraction at the formal configuration of meanings and rhythm and word order that constitute its three lines:

'adáh vetzilláh shemá'an qolí	*neshéi lémekh ha'zéna'imratí*
ki 'ísh harágti lefitz'í	*veyéled leḥaburatí*
ki shiv'atáyim yúqam-qáyin	*velémekh shiv'ím veshiv'áh*
Ada and Zilla, hear my voice.	Wives of Lamech, give ear to my speech.
A man I have killed for my wound,	a boy for my bruising.
If sevenfold avenged is Cain,	Lamech then seventy-seven.

Since doubts have now been raised, at least by James Kugel, as to whether it is justifiable to speak of poetry in the Hebrew Bible, let me begin with a brief consideration of the most fundamental question: Is this text indisputably a poem? To answer that question, we need some notion of what it is in general that enables us to distinguish poetic from nonpoetic discourse, and I should like to cite as a helpful point of reference Barbara Herrnstein Smith's apt proposal on this issue in her book on poetic closure. "As soon as we perceive," she writes, "that a verbal sequence has a sustained rhythm, that it is formally structured according to a continuously operating principle of organization, we know that we are in the presence of poetry and we respond to it accordingly . . . , expecting certain effects from it and not others, granting certain conventions to it and not others." We shall soon be concerned with precisely what those expectations and conventions might be in the case of biblical poetry, but first we need to reflect on the presence or absence in this and other biblical texts of a "sustained rhythm" that works as "a continuously operating principle of organization." Barbara Smith, as she goes on to make clear, has in mind a model of perceptual psychology in which a relatively structured pattern is perceived as a figure against a ground of more random data. "One of the most significant effects," she concludes, "of meter (or, more broadly, of principles of formal structure) in poetry is simply to inform the reader that he is being confronted by poetry and not by anything else. . . . Meter serves, in other words, as a frame for the poem, separating it from a 'ground' of less highly structured speech and sound."[5]

The term "meter," because of its associations with a Greco-Roman system of carefully regulated sequences of vowel quantities, may not be the best one to apply to our text, but the continuously present frame of formal structure of which Barbara Smith speaks is quite conspicuous here. To be sure, there are also certain elements of symmetry and repetition in the surrounding prose, but, set against the tight formal organization of these lines, the narrative text all around is surely perceived by reader or listener as a "ground" of nonpoetic discourse. And it will not do to argue, as Kugel does, that the syntactic, rhythmic, and semantic strategies of biblical verse are simply part of a "continuum" with what we designate as prose because roughly analogous configurations of language can be discovered in the prose. In fact, it is rare to find anywhere a poetic style that does not bear some relation to the literary prose of the same culture; or rather, it turns out in many instances that literary prose is influenced by contemporary or antecedent poetry in the

same language, often seeking knowingly or unwittingly to achieve for itself a quasi-poetic status without the formal constraints of verse. Fielding's splendid satiric style, with its pointed antitheses and poised symmetries, surely owes something to his experience of Pope's handling of the heroic couplet, and Melville, striving to shape a prose of the sublime, is famous (or notorious) for his Miltonic and Shakespearian effects, sometimes producing whole passages that almost scan as blank verse; but neither of these instances is evidence that readers and writers of English make no sharp generic distinction between poetry and prose.

Now, what clearly sets our text off from the surrounding prose is the strictly observed principle of parallelism on which it is organized, something perfectly apparent even in translation, but it is important to recognize what is involved in the parallelism and where parallelism begins to turn into something else. The most obvious thing is the parallelism of meaning, observed by the poet with what seems almost schematic regularity in the opening line, every component of the first half of the line being precisely echoed in the second half: Ada and Zilla / wives of Lamech, hear / give ear, my voice / my speech. This semantic parallelism is reinforced by a perfect syntactic parallelism, the word order in each of the half-lines exactly mirroring the other, with each corresponding term in the same syntactic position. The syntactic parallelism continues in the second line, with the minor modification that the verb ("I have killed") does double duty for both halves of the line. (This very common configuration of ellipsis, usually of the verb but sometimes of another part of speech, opens certain poetic possibilities to which we shall presently attend.) The last line of the poem, which also has a double-duty verb ("is avenged"), exhibits a further deviation from parallel word order: "If sevenfold avenged is Cain, / Lamech then seventy-seven." This is a careful maneuver by the poet: embedding in his poem a precise citation from the preceding narrative (Gen. 4:15) about the sevenfold vengeance that will be exacted for Cain, he then reverses the word order for Lamech, thus producing a chiastic structure in which Cain and Lamech are set back to back and bracketed by "seven" at the beginning and "seventy-seven" at the end of the line. This neat chiasm underscores the contrast between Cain and Lamech (more of which in a moment) while providing, through the switch from the regular syntactic parallelism of the two preceding lines, a sense of closure at the end, terminal variation of repeated structure being a common closural device in many kinds of poetry. Finally, the poem reflects a parallelism of stresses between the half-lines. If the Masoretic

text can be taken at least as an approximate guide to the original stress system, the distribution of accents would be as follows: 4/4, 3/2, 3/3, with perhaps some margin of flexibility to "regularize" the middle, rhythmically asymmetrical line by giving weight to the secondary stress in the word I have translated as "for my bruising" *(leḥaburatí)*.

Any reader of biblical poetry ought at this point to object that I have made things far too easy for myself by choosing such an untypically neat example, even if it happens to be one of the first poems in the Bible. Such a perfect accord of parallel meaning, syntax, and rhythm as we find in the first line of Lamech's poem is not, after all, so very common: syntax often changes from one half-verse to the next, the number of stresses is often not duplicated, and worst of all, there are many lines of biblical verse, and in Psalms sometimes whole poems, where semantic parallelism appears to be very weak or entirely absent.

Such discrepancies between the theory of parallelism and the variegated evidence of the poetic texts have led, as I indicated at the outset, to the most dizzying feats of critical acrobatics in the effort either to "save" parallelism or to replace it with some other principle. But perhaps there is no real need for acrobatics. Benjamin Hrushovski, in a synoptic article on the history of Hebrew prosody[6] whose extraordinarily compact paragraphs on biblical versification have unfortunately been ignored by biblical scholarship, offers an account of the system that seems to me thoroughly convincing precisely because of its elegant simplicity and its lack of strain. Hrushovski proposes a "semantic-syntactic-accentual rhythm" as the basis of biblical verse. "In most cases," he observes, "there is an overlapping of several such heterogeneous parallelisms [that is, semantic, syntactic, prosodic, morphological, phonetic, and so on] with a mutual reinforcement so that no single element—meaning, syntax, or stress—may be considered as purely dominant or as purely concomitant." The result is what Hrushovski defines as a "free rhythm," which is to say, "a rhythm based on a cluster of changing principles," but this does not imply, as Kugel would have it, that poetry in the Bible is not a formally distinct mode of expression, for the freedom of the rhythm "is clearly confined within the limits of its poetics." These limits are in part numerically demarcated, as Hrushovski goes on to note: "[Since] by rule no two stresses are permitted to follow each other, . . . each stress dominates a group of two, three, or four syllables; there are two, three, or four such groups in a verset; and two, three, or four parallel versets in a sentence."[7]

Some analysts, with an eye to the number of stresses in a verset, have sought to detect a system of "meters" in biblical poetry. It is true that in many poems a particular count of stresses in each of the matched versets tends to predominate, the most common combinations being 3:3 and 3:2, but there is little evidence that the counting of stresses was actually observed as a governing norm for a poem, in the way a Greek or Roman poet watched his iambs or hexameters throughout a poem, and so the term meter should probably be abandoned for biblical verse.

The rhythmic and to some extent the syntactic aspects of the system will be invisible in translation, and so in what follows, while assuming the general validity of this account, I will be concentrating on the operation of semantic parallelism. I will also emulate Hrushovski in designating the line-halves, or the line-thirds in the case of triadic parallelism, "versets," because the older scholarly term "hemistich" and the current "colon" (plural "cola") both have misleading links with Greek versification, the latter term also inadvertently calling up associations of intestinal organs or soft drinks. In place of Hrushovski's concept of the "sentence," which seems to me a little problematic to decide on for biblical verse, I will speak simply of the two or three parallel versets constituting a poetic line.

Let us then consider more closely the operation of semantic parallelism as it is illustrated in Lamech's chant. There would seem to be some satisfying feeling of emphasis, for both the speaker and his audience, in stating the same thing twice, with nicely modulated variations. Like rhyme, regular meter, and alliteration in other poetic systems, it is a convention of linguistic "coupling" that contributes to the special unity and to the memorability (literal and figurative) of the utterances,[8] to the sense that they are an emphatic, balanced, and elevated kind of discourse, perhaps ultimately rooted in a magical conception of language as potent performance.

But the recognition of such repetition in biblical verse has unfortunately led to a view of it as essentially a system for the deployment of synonyms or, as it is sometimes put, "thought-rhymes." A characteristic expression of this prevalent understanding of parallelism is the following observation by T. H. Robinson in a standard handbook on biblical poetry: "So the poet goes back to the beginning again, and says the same thing once more, though he may partly or completely change the actual words to avoid monotony."[9] This view has not gained in conviction by being recast conceptually with the apparatus of more recent intellectual trends,

as one can see from a lively and ultimately misconceived description of the mechanism in Structuralist terms by Ruth apRoberts in an article entitled "Old Testament Poetry: The Translatable Structure."[10] She proposes that biblical poetry has proved so remarkably translatable because self-translation is the generative principle within the text itself, the way one verset leads to the next, and thus the clear manifestation of the "deep structure" of the text. What this and all the conceptions of biblical parallelism as synonymity assume[11] is a considerable degree of *stasis* within the poetic line: an idea or image or action is evoked in the first verset; then forward movement in the poetic discourse is virtually suspended while the same idea, image, or action is rerun for the patient eye of the beholder, only tricked out in somewhat different stylistic finery. What I should like to propose, and this is the one respect in which my own understanding of the phenomenon is close to James Kugel's, is that a diametrically opposite description of the system—namely, an argument for dynamic movement from one verset to the next—would be much closer to the truth, much closer to the way the biblical poets expected audiences to attend to their words.

Literature, let me suggest, from the simplest folktale to the most sophisticated poetry and fiction and drama, thrives on parallelism, both stylistic and structural, on small scale and large, and could not give its creations satisfying shape without it. But it is equally important to recognize that literary expression abhors complete parallelism, just as language resists true synonymity, usage always introducing small wedges of difference between closely akin terms. This general principle was nicely formulated early in the century by the Russian Formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky in "Art as Technique," an essay that has proved to be one of the seminal texts of modern literary theory: "The perception of disharmony in a harmonious context is important in parallelism. The purpose of parallelism, like the general purpose of imagery, is to transfer the usual perception of an object into the sphere of a new perception—that is, to make a unique semantic modification."[12] What I should like to suggest in the case of the semantic parallelism on which so many lines of biblical verse are constructed is that, with all the evident and at times almost extravagant repetition of elements of meaning from one verset to the next, "semantic modifications" of the sort Shklovsky has in mind are continually occurring. This operation was nicely perceived two centuries ago by J. G. Herder in a response to Bishop Lowth's path-breaking theory, but scholarship by and large has sadly neglected Herder's

observation that "the two [parallel] members strengthen, heighten, empower each other."[13]

It may be easiest to see how this dynamics of repetition operates in our poem by working back from the last line to the first. What does a poet do with numbers in semantic parallelism? If the system were really based on a principle of synonymity, one would expect to find pairings on the order of "twelve" and "a dozen," but in fact this never happens. The invariable rule, as scholars have long recognized without making the connection with an underlying poetic principle, is that if you introduce a number in the first verset, you have to go up in the second verset, either by adding one to the number or by moving to a decimal multiple of the first number or a decimal multiple plus the number itself. A paradigmatic instance occurs in Moses' valedictory song (Deut. 32:30): "How could one pursue a thousand / and two put a myriad to flight?" Thus the logic of numbers in parallel versets is not equivalence but an assertion of *a fortiori*, "how much more so," and this impulse to intensification is also the motor force in thousands of lines of biblical poetry where no numbers are present.

The first verset in the concluding line of Lamech's chant rehearses a grimly monitory notion apparently already proverbial in this world of dim beginnings—that sevenfold vengeance would be exacted for the murder of Cain. The second verset uses that piece of familiar lore as the springboard for a more startling statement—that Lamech's vengeance will be seventy-seven-fold. It should be observed, moreover, that the pattern of intensification is not limited to the two versets but is interlinear, which, as we shall see, is an extremely common feature of biblical verse and will have important implications for the structure of longer poems. The logic, that is, of "how much more so" goes back from the numbers of the third line to the "wound" and "bruising" of the second line. Manifold vengeance, we recall, was to be exacted for the *killing* of Cain, but Lamech's boast is that he will be avenged many times more than Cain for a mere injury. There is clearly also a movement of intensification between the two versets of the second line, although with such scanty context for the poem we may be a little uncertain about what precisely is involved. Some commentators have construed "boy" as "young man," which would yield a meaning something like this: it is not any man I have killed, but a young fellow at the height of his powers. The trouble with this reading is that *yeled* in the sense of "young man" occurs quite rarely and mostly in later biblical usage; in the vast majority of instances

it means "child," or even "newborn baby," with a stress on the tenderness and vulnerability of the child. The more philologically likely, if also more morally unpalatable, meaning—Lamech is, after all, an archaic figure, long before the Mosaic dispensation!—would be: there is no limit to my vengeance; I have killed not only a man for wounding me but even a child for bruising me. I have tentatively assumed, perhaps quite falsely, that *haburah*, "bruise," is less serious than *petz'a*, "wound," and so participates in the heightening of assertion from the first verset to the second. This is a minor illustration of how we sometimes cannot be certain about the precise differences between semantically related terms, but I would like to emphasize a general principle that would indicate there is no absolute necessity to insist on a differentiation here: it is by no means expected or obligatory that every paired set of terms in parallel versets reflect development or intensification. Poets may sometimes choose to step up all the parallel terms in a line, but in the majority of instances it is rather one key set of matched terms that carries the burden of development.

Development of what and for what? The manifold and necessarily qualified answer to that question will take us to the heart of biblical poetics, but before broaching the general issue, I should like to move upward to the opening line of Lamech's chant, which, in contrast to the second and third lines, would seem perfectly to confirm the synonymous conception of parallelism: "Ada and Zilla, hear my voice. / Wives of Lamech, give ear to my speech." Anyone familiar with biblical poetry will recognize this as a formulaic beginning of a poem, following a convention in which the poet/speaker calls attention to his own utterance and invokes an audience—or more often a witness—for his utterance. (This very convention, by the way, and other formal introductions to poems like "Then Moses sang" and "He [Balaam] took up his theme and spoke" are clear indications that the original framers of the lines regarded them and ostentatiously presented them as poetry, set off in its formal organizing principles from the surrounding prose.) The line is formulaic not merely in invoking a convention of poetic beginnings but also in being made up of conventionally fixed pairs: voice/speech, listen/give ear.

The presence of such fixed pairs in biblical verse, a good many of them apparently inherited from the same Syro-Palestinian tradition reflected in Ugaritic poetry, several hundred years earlier than most of the biblical texts, has led some scholars to conclude that the poems were oral-formulaic compositions. That is, the fixed pairings were ready-made

rhythmic-semantic units that the improvising bard could build with as his Homeric counterpart is presumed to have introduced formulaic epithets as part of a repertory of formulaic devices that helped him retell his familiar tale in regular hexameters. There are several intrinsic problems in this hypothesis, but even if it could be demonstrated to obtain for what we know of the Syro-Palestinian poetic tradition antecedent to the Bible, the elaboration and variegation of supposedly fixed pairs in biblical verse lead one to suspect that oral composition was at most a fact of the prehistory of our texts. A telling difference is that the *sequence* of bracketed terms appears to have been fixed in Ugaritic, whereas biblical poetry reveals a good deal of flexibility in this regard as well as in the substitution of a new term in ostensibly formulaic pairings. In any case, the idea of stock pairings should not lead to the misconception—a misconception, in fact, for oral-formulaic as well as other kinds of verse—that there was something automatic and mechanical in the way the Hebrew poets bracketed synonyms.[14]

But are they ever altogether synonyms, even in a formulaic case like the one before us? In the strictest sense, of course, no language has entirely true synonyms, and imaginative writers in both poetry and prose, by virtue of their necessary sensitivity to their chosen medium, have always been keenly conscious of this. Six inches and half a foot may be exact quantitative equivalents, but they are not true synonyms, as the eighteenth-century novelist Tobias Smollett was perfectly aware when in *Peregrine Pickle* he described a character with a grotesque face overshadowed by a nose half a foot long—which for the affective reader is a good sight longer than six inches. In other words, what is constantly exploited in literary expression is not merely the definable referendum of the word but also the frame of reference to which the word attaches (in the example from Smollett, feet as against inches), the related semantic fields toward which it points, the level of diction that it invokes, the specialized uses to which it may be put. The predominant pattern of biblical poetry is to move from a standard term in the first verset to a more literary or highfalutin term in the second verset. That happens in our formulaic line (from *qol*, "voice, to *'imrah*, "speech," or, perhaps better, "utterance," and from *shema'an*, "hear," to *ha'zena*, "give ear," though elsewhere, in keeping with what I said about the flexibility in the use of conventional formulas, "give ear" precedes "hear"). Admittedly, there are no remarkable consequences here of this slight shift in diction. Nevertheless, the general pattern in which this movement from standard to literary term participates is an especially instructive one, and I should

like to pursue it before returning to Lamech's wives, whom I, in proper patriarchal fashion, have left standing by their tent, still sadly uncommented on.

One might assume that a literary synonym is simply a fancier or more *recherché* way of saying the same thing, and I would guess that this could be the case in some of the pairings of this sort we find in the Bible—as, say, in some of the uses of *kos/quba'at* (cup/chalice), *ra'oh/shur* (see/behold), *rosh/qodqod* (head/poll). But the more one looks at this phenomenon of "doubling" ordinary words by poetic equivalents, the more one sees a dynamic of meaning emerging from one verset to the next. Thus the Psalmist (Ps. 88:12–13): "Will Your steadfast care be told in the grave, / Your constancy in Perdition? // Will Your wonders be known in the darkness, / Your bounty in the land of oblivion?" In these two lines, as is quite typical, one set of matched terms remains stable, being a complementary series of linked concepts: steadfast care, constancy, wonders, bounty. The other set of matched terms, on the other hand, carries forward a progressive imaginative realization of death: from the familiar and localized "grave" to *'avadon*, "Perdition," a poetic synonym that is quasi-mythic and grimly explicit about the fate of extinction the grave holds; then, to another everyday word, "darkness," which is, however, a sensory realization of the experience of death, and then to a second poetic term for the underworld, "the land of oblivion," which summarizes and generalizes the series, giving emphatic closure to the idea that death is a realm where human beings are utterly forgotten and extinct, and where there can be no question of God's greatness being recalled. We ought to note as well in passing that the parallelism is conspicuously interlinear (in fact, the line that precedes these two is also part of the pattern), another very frequent feature of sequences of lines, despite the claim some have made that a line of biblical poetry is semantically self-contained and prosodically end-stopped.

Let us look at a second pair of lines, where we can observe how the movement from ordinary to literary term is associated with an allied developmental pattern. Here, too, we will see emphatic interlinear parallelism, which goes on to an intriguing third line, but I must resist the temptation to use the third line as well because it hinges on a word found only here that is uncertain in meaning. The verses are from Isaiah 59:9–10: "We hope for light and look! darkness, / for effulgence, and in gloom we go. // We grope like blind men a wall, / like the eyeless we grope." The first line follows the pattern of moving from ordinary to poetic term for both the nouns in each verset—from simple "light" and

"darkness" to the more literary *negohot* and *'afelot*, "effulgence" and "gloom," which moreover are cast in the feminine plural form, elsewhere used to give nouns an abstract or adverbial force, and which seems to endow the words here (I would guess) with an aura of vastness. The second line intensifies the assertion of the first line by making the outer darkness an inner darkness, the total incapacity to see, and transforming the general image of walking in the dark of the preceding verset into a more concrete picture of a blind man groping his way along a wall. The "blind men" of the first verset become "no-eyes" (*'eyn 'eynaim*) in the second verset, which is the substitution not of a term from literary diction but of a kind of kenning or epithet. The effect, however, is like that in the move from "grave" to "Perdition"—a realization of the first term (or, as Shklovsky would have put it, a defamiliarization of it) that calls our attention to its essential meaning.

Again and again, the biblical poets will introduce a common noun in the first verset and match it with a kind of explanatory epithet—or, more interesting, a metaphorical substitution—in the second verset. Sometimes, the substitution would appear to be rather automatic and not particularly strong in expressive effect, as in these two separate lines from the prophet Joel (Joel 1:5 and 13): "Rise, drunkards, and weep, / and wail all *drinkers of wine.*" "Gird yourselves and keen, you priests, / wail, you *ministrants of the altar.*" In other instances, it is hard to be sure whether the term in the second verset represents a "realization" of its counterpart in the first, because we don't know to what extent a particular kenning may have become an automatized substitution for the Hebrew listener. Thus, when Micah (6:7) says, "Shall I give my firstborn for my trespass, / *the fruit of my loins* for my own sins?" perhaps the kenning of the second verset communicates nothing more than the idea of offspring, though I would be inclined to suspect that it reinforces the sense of intimate bodily connection between parent and child. A similar pairing occurs in Job (15:14), where, however, the likelihood of dynamic progression from the first term to the second may be somewhat higher. "What is man that he should be guiltless, / that he should be in the right, *he born-of-woman?*" At any rate, the replacement of the general term *'enosh*, "man," by the kenning *yelud 'ishah*, "born-of-woman," would seem to stress man's creaturely frailty, his dependence upon the cycle of biological reproduction, which fits in with the emphasis the speaker (Eliphaz) goes on to make, that the very heavens are guilty before God, and how much more so lowly man.

A kenning, one recent study has suggested,[15] is a riddle transformed

from the interrogative into the declarative, which one can see by turning it back into a riddle: What is a whale-road? The sea. What is fruit of the loins? A child. Kennings are minimal metaphors, usually, as in the examples I have cited, more or less self-explanatory. In other words, the metaphorical vehicle of a kenning may often have rather limited saliency in relation to the tenor to which it refers. Sometimes, however, either context or the intrinsic formulation of the kenning or a combination of the two will lead to a greater actualization of the metaphor, and in such instances in biblical poetry the substitution of kenning for literal term in parallel versets is manifestly an instrument for the forceful development of meaning that I have described. In Jacob's blessing of Judah, for example, we encounter these parallel terms: "He washes his garment in wine, / in *the blood of grapes* his cloak" (Gen. 49:11). However much "blood of grapes" might have been a formulaic equivalent of "wine," going back to Ugaritic precedents, it does not call up the same image or associations as the prosaic term. It immediately brings to mind the crushing of the grapes (as opposed to the finished product, wine), something reinforced in context because the preceding line has twice mentioned a vine. The paradoxical intimation of violence embedded in a pastoral image is also exploited in the poem: the already extravagant action of laundering in wine (as a demonstration of affluence?) threatens to become, without quite becoming, a still more extreme action of laundering in blood, and this suggestion is contextually reinforced by the following line, which sets in counterpoint wine-bright and milk-white. The effect, in any event, is clearly to introduce a "new perception" through the device of parallelism.

Finally, one encounters in biblical poetry this sort of replacement of a literal term not merely by a kenning or explanatory epithet but by an original metaphor. Let me cite just one elaborate instance, where a metaphor is worked out through three lines. The passage is from Jeremiah 48:11:

Moab has been placid from youth,	settled in his lees.
Never emptied from vessel to vessel,	in exile never gone.
And so his taste has kept,	his fragrance has not changed.

The elegance of the formal structure is also a subtle instrument for the development of meaning. The first line moves from the literal statement, Moab's state of unruffled security, to a metaphorical elaboration, the settled lees. The next line reverses the order of literal and figurative so as to develop the metaphor—"never emptied from vessel to vessel"—

before returning to explain its historical tenor, that Moab has never been exiled. Thus the two lines are built on a chiastic structure of literal/figurative//figurative/literal. The poet/prophet, moreover, plays with the ambiguity of whether the figurative condition of being like unstirred wine is a good or a bad thing. The first two lines, beginning with a possibly ambiguous word, *sha'anan* ("placid," "secure," but sometimes with overtones of "complacent"), and the image of the lees, which are undrinkable, might lead us to a negative inference. The third line, devoted entirely to a further elaboration of the figure with no literal assertion, would appear to turn this inference around by stressing that it is a happy circumstance for wine to be undisturbed, as all its desirable qualities are thus preserved. This sets us up (perhaps in a way inviting us momentarily to adopt the Moabite perspective) for a final reversal, as the prophet will proceed to pronounce grim doom on Moab, now seen in fact to have been complacently settled into its lees and foolishly oblivious to the imminent smashing of vessels that is to befall it. One sees that the progression from literal to figurative and back to literal again, far from being a matter of juggling semantic equivalents, can become the means for setting in motion a delicate dialectic interplay of meanings.

Let me emphasize that the cognate patterns of movement from prosaic to poetic and literal to figurative locution are simply one recurrent instance of a more general developmental impulse of biblical verse, and it will be important to get a bearing on some of its other major manifestations. All this has taken us rather far afield from Lamech's simple chant, but I have been concerned to show that the underlying principle of poetics that could issue in these rather complicated examples is already detectable in our first three-line poem.

The time has now come to return to Ada and Zilla and say something about what may have happened to those two neglected ladies between the first verset and the second. By now it should be evident that they fall under the rule of substitution of epithet for simple designation: having been addressed by their proper names in the first verset, they are called "wives of Lamech" in the second half of the line. (Elsewhere, a person's name in the initial verset is followed by his patronymic in the second verset.) The substitution seems automatic enough, but I would like to raise the possibility, as a kind of limiting case of this definition of semantic parallelism, that even here there might be at least a minor "semantic modification" in the introduction of the parallel term. Biblical narrative, we might remind ourselves, is exquisitely deliberate in its

choice of relational epithets: Michal is called the daughter of Saul precisely when the narrator wants to stress her connection with the jealous king and is referred to as the wife of David when that link is thematically appropriate. It is certainly possible that the poets exercised similar selectivity, though I must admit that in the example before us it is hard to think of another relational epithet for Ada and Zilla—unless they, like Leah and Rachel, had the same father—that would have worked rhythmically. Be that as it may, it does not seem far-fetched to hear some new emphasis in the second verset. First, Lamech calls Ada and Zilla by name; then he summons them as wives of Lamech, and it is in their capacity as his wives that they are invited to attend to his chant—for this is, after all, a song of triumph, and he wants them as his consorts to recognize what a man of insuperable strength and implacable principle they have in their husband. Admittedly, my attempt to recover a differentiation of meaning in the vocatives that begin Lamech's poem could be a wrong guess, but the evidence of line after line of biblical verse suggests that we are too quick to infer automatic and formulaic rhetorical gesture of repetition when more than that is going on. In any case, my purpose in scrutinizing each set of paired terms in this rather rudimentary instance of biblical verse is not to offer exegesis but to suggest how precisely the flow of meaning is channeled in the system of poetic parallelism.

Let me now sketch out a more general account of the related varieties of semantic development that typically occur in biblical parallelism. My understanding of what happens semantically is in some respects similar to that of James Kugel, an indefatigable opponent of the synonymous conception of parallelism, who speaks of the "*emphatic* character" of the second verset, its function "as a kind of strengthening and reinforcing." His generalization about the relation of second verset to first is apt, if far from exhaustive: "B was connected to A, had something in common with it, but was not expected to be (or regarded as) mere restatement . . . for it is the dual nature of B both to come *after* A and thus to add to it, often particularizing, defining, or expanding the meaning, and yet to harken [*sic*] back to A and in an obvious way connect to it."[16] Before I go on to amplify and illustrate this general pattern, a couple of important qualifications should be made. Kugel speaks of A and B rather than of bicola or hemistichs or versets because he is unwilling to grant that these two members constitute a line of poetry. Once one recognizes that there is a formal system of biblical versification distinct from the prose, the nuances of relation between parallel formulations come into sharper

focus and, equally important, it is easier to see the interplay between lines as well as the possibilities of relation between the internal structure of the line and the structure of the poem. The formula, moreover, of B "going beyond" A, as Kugel puts it, is extended by him to include all those lines of biblical poetry in which there is no semantic parallelism between first and second verset (to offer my own example, Psalm 137:2, "On the willows there / we hung our lyres."), whereas to me it seems less forced to assume with Hrushovski that such instances are manifestations of the "free rhythm" of biblical versification in which the semantic component of the parallelism is dropped. In fact, the relatively late poet who composed Psalm 137 virtually avoids semantic parallelism throughout the poem, and when the relation between versets turns out to be one between adverbial phrase and main clause, or between subject and object, it hardly makes sense to speak of the second verset as a "going beyond" or a "seconding" of the first.

In the abundant instances, however, in which semantic parallelism does occur in a line, the characteristic movement of meaning is one of heightening or intensification (as in the paradigmatic case of numerals), of focusing, specification, concretization, even what could be called dramatization. There is, of course, a certain overlap among these categories, but my concern is to point to the direction in which the reader can look for meaning, not to undertake an exercise in taxonomy. The rule of thumb, then—and in all of what follows I shall be talking, necessarily, about rule of thumb, not invariable law—is that the general term occurs in the first verset and a more specific instance of the general category in the second verset. "Your granaries will be filled with *abundance,* / with *new wine* your vats will burst" (Prov. 3:10). (The verbs in this line reflect a movement not of specification but of intensification, from being filled to bursting.) "His heart is as solid *as stone,* / as solid as *the nether millstone*" (Job 41:16).

If the first term is spatial or geographical, the second is usually a smaller spatial entity contained within the first (thus an instance of what I call focusing): "I shall put an end *in the cities of Judea* / and *in the streets of Jerusalem* // to the sound of gladness and joy, / the sound of bridegroom and bride" (Jer. 7:34). (The second line, of course, reflects the movement from general category to specific instance.) "Who gives rain *to the earth* / and sends water over *the fields*" (Job 5:10). (If the sequence of "rain" and "water" here does not follow the pattern of specific term after general, that is because the water in the fields is the *result* of the rain, and the relation between process and consequence of

process often obtains between first verset and second.) Deutero-Isaiah, in a beautiful piece of interlinear parallelism, twice in succession illustrates this tendency to offer first the spatial field and then something contained within it: "I made *the earth* / and *man* upon it I created. // I, my hands stretched out *the heavens,* / and *all their host* I mustered" (Is. 45:12).

Another strategy, which illustrates the connection of all this to the movement from literal to figurative that we reviewed earlier, is to use first the general term and then a synecdochic substitution, which is still another variety of focusing: "Your *lot* you will throw in with us, / let us all have *one purse* together" (Prov. 1:14). Not surprisingly, in many instances it is hard to separate the parallelism of specification from the parallelism of intensification because as the general term is transformed into a specific instance or a concrete image, the idea becomes more pointed, more forceful. Thus Isaiah (17:1), in an initial verset, announces, "Look, Damascus *will cease to be a city,*" then goes on to say, "will become *a heap of ruins.*" One finds elsewhere this pattern of a verb or verbal phrase paralleled by a nominal or adjectival phrase that is a concretization or crystallization of the verbal process: "She *weeps on* through the night / and *her tears are on her cheek*" (Lam. 1:2). "My son, *eat* goodly honey, / nectar is *sweet on your palate*" (Prov. 24:13). Perhaps more commonly, a verb appearing in the first verset will be matched with one in the second verset that is more specific, more extravagant, or even explanatory of the initial verb. Here is a two-line example from that most elegant of biblical poets, Deutero-Isaiah: "God *has redeemed* His servant Jacob, / and they *did not thirst* in the wastelands where He led them. // Water from a rock He *made flow* for them. / He *split* the rock and water *gushed*" (Is. 48:20–21).[17] Note how the interlinear parallelism carries on this movement of specification in what amounts to an explanatory chain: What does it mean that God "redeemed" Israel (first verset)? They were not thirsty in the desert (second verset). How could they not have been thirsty?—because He made water flow from a rock (third verset). How did He make water flow from a rock?—by splitting it so the water gushed (fourth verset).

The greater specificity of the verbal activity in the second verset can be a way of dramatically realizing the initial verset, as is evident in these lines from Isaiah or, more compactly, in Balaam's formula of poetic self-introduction: "Who *beholds visions* from the Almighty, / *falls down with eyes unveiled*" (Num. 24:4), where the general visionary capacity is transformed into an image of ecstatic seizure. And not infrequently the

heightened specificity becomes a hyperbolic stepping-up of the initial verb: "Face to the ground they *will bow to you,* / they *will lick the dust of your feet*" (Is. 49:23). A similar parallelism occurs in Psalm 72:9: "Before him the desert dwellers *will kneel,* / his enemies *will lick the dust.*" Job 30:10 offers another instance of the bracketing of two physical actions expressing the same relation, with the second action more extreme than the first: "They *despised* me, *drew away* from me, / and from my face they *did not hold back their spittle.*" Or, the movement toward the extreme may be coordinated with the characteristic swing from general to specific and from literal to figurative, as in Job 29:23: "They *waited* for me as for rain, / they *held their mouths wide open* for the showers." Here, the simile "as for rain" of the first verset is carried into the verb of the second verset and turns the activity of waiting into the hyperbolic gaping of the mouth for drops of water.

I have illustrated the movement of heightening or focusing through verbs and their attendant adverbial phrases, but other syntactic configurations and parts of speech can be used to the same effect. A noun in the first verset can be focused adjectivally in the second verset: "For I was a *son* to my father, / a *tender only child* to my mother" (Prov. 4:3). (In the Hebrew "only child" is adjectival in form.) A pair of nouns where focusing occurs may be bracketed with a pair of verbs that reflect intensification: "For You *smote* all my foes on the cheek, / the teeth of the wicked You *smashed*" (Ps. 3:8). The pattern of a large spatial image followed by a smaller entity contained within it may be coordinated with the tendency to concretization, creating a similar kind of mutual reinforcement within the line: "They *will lay waste* his land, / his cities *will be razed without inhabitants*" (Jer. 2:15). Intensification can also be achieved by the introduction of a simile or metaphor in the second verset that brings out the full force of meaning of an image occurring in the first verset. "You will smash them with an iron mace, / *like a potter's vessel* shatter them" (Ps. 2:9). Here, the simile of the fragile vessel compounds the violence of the initial image of the iron mace in an almost startling way. Or, an image may be taken to the "second power" in a similar fashion by introducing a hyperbole in the second verset: "Your light will shine in darkness, / and your gloom *like noon*" (Is. 58: 10). This last instance illustrates with special deftness the raising of meaning to the second power: the naturalistic shining of light in darkness of the first verset becomes a supernatural event (in rhetorical terms, a figure compounding a figure) when Israel's very gloom is to shine like

noon; and the progression is reinforced by an implied temporal image from dawn to midday because the verb for "shine" in the first verset, *zarah*, is associated with the beaming of dawn.

All that I have said is meant to orient the reader of biblical poetry, but I do not want to mislead by overstating the case. In a few very exceptional instances, one actually encounters a reverse movement from specific to general or from figurative to literal, as in "Their tongue is *a sharpened arrow*, / they *speak deceit*" (Jer. 9:7) and "*My innards seethed* and were unquiet, / days of *affliction greeted me*" (Job 30:27). But these instances are so rare (I have been able to find only half a dozen clear-cut examples) that they hardly disprove the general rule. Much more commonly, however, there are semantically parallel versets where only tortured ingenuity would infer development and where it looks as though the line has really been shaped on a principle of relatively static synonymity. "A false witness will not get off, / a lying testifier will not escape" (Prov. 19:5). "Did my lips speak iniquity, / did my tongue utter deceit?" (Job 27:4). (It is instructive, however, for the general case of parallelism that the line from Proverbs just cited also appears in a variant form, Prov. 19:9, in which the change of the final verb makes it a paradigmatic instance of inter-verset intensification: "A false witness will not get off, / a lying testifier *will perish*.") Static parallelism may work with close synonyms, as in these two examples, or with a combination of synonyms and complementary terms (often formulaically linked), as in this line from Isaiah (10:2): "For widows to be their booty, / and they plunder orphans." But even in many instances such as these the stasis proves to be relative. In this line from Isaiah, for example, though "booty" and "plunder" are bound synonymous terms, only the second verset has a transitive form of the verb. It is worth noting that the bracketing of complementary notions—that is, two coordinate items belonging to the same category, like "green pastures" and "still waters"—is at least as common a form of static parallelism as synonymity.

There would seem to be differences between one poet and the next and one poem and the next, and perhaps also between different periods, in regard to the preference for heightening and focusing within semantic parallelism. In some texts, such as Moses' valedictory song and the Book of Job, this intensifying tendency of biblical verse is entirely dominant; elsewhere, as in some of the Psalms, the poet seems to have preferred relatively static semantic parallelism. Interestingly, however, where static parallelism prevails, one may discover that developmental movement is projected from the line to the larger structure of the poem, as in Psalm

145, where the poet moves through a series of relatively synonymous lines in a progression from the general praise of God to an affirmation of His compassion, His kingship, His daily providing for those who truly call unto Him. And, as one might expect, many of the poets are alive to the aesthetic possibilities of counterpointing a predominant intensification or specification of meaning in parallelism with lines founded on synonymity or balanced complementarity. In any case, the system of versification as a whole definitely encourages dynamic interplay between versets in which feelings get stronger, images sharper, actions more powerful or more extreme. This predominant tendency of biblical poetry has important consequences in regard to both what listeners or readers are expected to attend to within the line and how the poem is articulated as a developing structure from line to line. That process of articulation deserves careful attention in its own right, but before we undertake that, it may be instructive to look at one final recurring pattern that takes place within the line and that illustrates how the formal constraints of the system are used to produce a certain movement of meaning and imaginative experience.

In showing how semantic modifications are introduced through seemingly equivalent terms, I have said nothing of the role of literal repetition from one verset to the next, although a couple of our examples (Is. 59: 10 and Job 41:16) exhibit such repetition. The most common pattern in this regard is one of incremental repetition: something is stated; then it is restated verbatim with an added element. The Song of Deborah makes repeated use of this device: "Curse Meroz, says the Lord's angel. / Curse, O curse *its inhabitants*. // For they came not to the aid of the Lord, / to the aid of the Lord *among the warriors*" (Judg. 5:23). This pattern in itself illustrates the general tendency I have been describing, for as the restatement is made, an emphasis of meaning is introduced in the increment that was no more than implicit in the original statement.

But far more prevalent in biblical poetry than incremental repetition is what might be characterized as "hidden" repetition—that is, the very common maneuver of ellipsis in which a word in the first verset, usually a verb, governs the parallel clause in the second verset as well. (Very occasionally, one also finds retrospective ellipsis, in which the double-duty term occurs in the second verset rather than in the first.) I would suggest that it is useful to recognize this device as a hidden or implied repetition because despite its prosodic difference from incremental repetition, it is closely related to the latter in the way it is used to introduce an increment of meaning.

Now, the conventional scholarly description of what occurs in elliptical parallelism is that the semantically corresponding term in the second verset is a "ballast variant" of its counterpart in the initial verset. For example: "He suckled him with honey *from a rock* / and oil *from the flinty stone*" (Deut. 32:13). That is, since the verb *vayeiniqeihu,* "He suckled him," does double duty for the second verset, a whole rhythmic unit with its governing stress is absent from the second verset and so must be replaced by a kind of periphrastic substitution for "rock" *(sel'a)* that will restore the otherwise lacking accent, and thus we have *ḥalmish-tzur* ("the flinty stone"). Such an account strikes me as a serious misconception of what goes on in lines like this and is therefore a warrant for misreading them. The parallel term in the second verset, as I have sought to show through a wide variety of examples, is by no means merely a "variant" of its counterpart, and it is certainly not "ballast," that is, deadweight or padding brought in to fill out the metrical requirement of the line.[18] In the example just quoted from Deuteronomy, "flinty stone" follows the rule of a specific instance of the category coming after the general term and by so doing effects an intensification or focusing of meaning. The first verset might even be read "naturalistically," as a hyperbolic poetic allusion to the discovery of honeycombs in rocky crags, but no such construal is allowable in the second verset, both because here it is oil that is provided and because the focusing effect of "flinty stone" leaves no alternative to a recognition of the miraculous character of the event.

Let me spell out the general principle involved. Every literary tradition converts the formal limitations of its own medium into an occasion for artistic expression: the artist, in fact, might be defined as a person who thrives on realizing new possibilities within formal limitations. In a system of semantically corresponding versets, it is understandable that quite frequently a single verb or noun would do double duty for two parallel utterances. But from the viewpoint of the poet, what is accomplished through this simple syntactic maneuver is a freeing of space in the second verset (through the absence of one whole rhythmic unit out of two or three or four), which can then be used to elaborate or sharpen meaning. This freeing of space, moreover, nicely accords with the formal focusing effect of the absence of the verb in the second verset, which has the consequence of *isolating for attention* this second object of the verb. Often what happens is that the second term, where the poet has room for introducing a compound form or a compact cluster of nouns or nouns and qualifiers, is an elaboration of the first term that makes its

meaning more vividly present to the imagination, as in this prophetic image of the return from exile: "They shall renew ruined cities, / the desolations of generations untold" (Is. 61:4). The general idea, that is, of cities laid waste becomes an emphatic picture of ruins that have stood in their desolation from time immemorial. In some cases, the second, elaborated term is a striking dramatization of the first, as in another line from Moses' valedictory song: "He found him in a desert land, / in an empty howling waste" (Deut. 32:10). It is clear that the general geographical indication "desert land" *('eretz midbar)* undergoes a forceful realization in the second verset, with its intimation of howling winds, jackals, or whatever; its onomatopoeic alliteration, *yeleil yeshimon;* and its oblique allusion to the primal void and chaos *(tohu)* in the word rendered here as "empty."

Elsewhere, the room opened up for elaboration through ellipsis in the second verset leads to a kind of development that might almost be thought of as incipient narrative. "The ox knows its owner," Isaiah (1:3) pronounces, and then goes on in the second verset, "the ass its master's crib." Now, there may be a progression here on an axis of increasing closeness of connection from the ox, a beast of the field, to the ass, which you ride and which might be tethered at your door. What is clear, however, is the difference in *concreteness* and thematic insistence between simply knowing a master and knowing a master's crib, the feeding-trough through which the palpable benefits flow from owner to owned. The image in the second verset of the ass at the crib begins to look like a miniature illustrative dramatic scene.

Or again, in one of those vivid warnings in the Book of Proverbs against the wiles of the seductress, we find this line: "To save you from a foreign woman, / from an alien woman who talks smoothly" (Prov. 2:16). (In my translation I have not used the more felicitous "smooth-talking," because I wanted to preserve the verbal force of the Hebrew, and I have rendered her foreignness literally to keep the synonymity, though the reference is actually to her sexual morality, not to her national identity.) Since the verb "to save" does double duty for both versets, the poet has space in the second verset to make the dangerous temptress the subject of a brief subordinate clause. We see her, that is, in both the literal and the figurative sense of the term, going into action, and thus we begin to understand why it is that the young man who is addressed in the poem must be warned away from her. This "going into action" that is the elaboration of the parallel term in our elliptical line then *generates* a recognizable narrative in the next three lines (Prov. 2:17–19),

a monitory tale in which the forbidden woman, whether because of the addictive dissipation she offers or the venereal diseases she may conceal, becomes a mythic figure of the all-consuming female:

Who leaves the friend of her youth,
Her house inclines toward death,
All who come to her will not return,
the pact of her God forgets.
her steps to the shades.
will never regain the paths of life.

The "smooth-talking," that is, of our first line, which at first might have seemed like mere adjectival "filler," proves to be a characteristic action introducing a compact narrative sequence: the woman's initial betrayal of husband and God, the dangers of her home and company, the irrevocable fate of those who fall victim to her.

By this point, the consideration of the dynamics of the line has brought us to the brink of two more "macroscopic" aspects of biblical poetics: How do elements of narrative emerge in a verse form that is used overwhelmingly for nonnarrative purposes, and what sorts of larger structures are produced, or at least encouraged, by this kind of poetic line? Each of these issues deserves separate treatment.