

Moreover, Lowth's stance could not be won without sacrifice. In order to relieve himself of the mental discomfort of something that was only inconsistently consistent—sometimes parallelism was regular in binary line after line, sometimes only an emphatic turn ending most lines, sometimes less than that—he treated it as evidence of a neat but irretrievable system. Like a sheet thrown over a reportedly beautiful statue, parallelism's bulging and bunching now took on a most enticing allure: however irregular and ungainly an artifice it might seem on its own, did not its very irregularities now turn seductive in the suggestion of an infinitely rich and detailed harmony underneath?

In the end, the most significant long-term result of Lowth's presentation has been the equation of "parallelism" with poetry. Even today, critics are busy discovering "poetic fragments" in Genesis and other "prose" books.¹⁹² This is right and it is wrong, for the whole notion of biblical poetry is both right and wrong. But before Lowth, in any case, the discovery of exergasia, or anadiplosis and epizeuxis, or repetitio, expolitio, and so forth, in a passage of Genesis did not therefore suggest its kinship with the Psalter, or a resemblance of both with Homer, Horace, and the Western tradition. Lowth's argument, as we have seen, was aimed largely at the Prophets; he wished to suggest that prophecy is a kind of "Divine poesy." Revolutionary enough: but he could not confine poesy to the books he named precisely because "parallelism" was not an either/or matter; and so "biblical poetry" has spilled over from the poetical Isaiah and the semipoetical Jeremiah to other books with their histories, genealogies, blessings, curses, speeches, and so on. In this way, more than any other, Robert Lowth changed the way we read the Bible.

192. See most recently J. S. Kselman, "The Recovery of Poetic Fragments from the Pentateuchal Priestly Source," *JBL* 97 (1978): 161–73; also chapter 2 above.

SEVEN

A METRICAL AFTERWORD

1

With Robert Lowth, "parallelism" took on its definitive form. The rhetorical approach to this stylistic feature, pursued so successfully by Schoettgen and earlier writers, was now dropped in favor of Lowth's newly discovered structural constant which, in one of its three forms, was infallibly present in biblical "poetry." In this apparent regularity lay its great appeal. Lowth's specific categories were subsequently supplemented and redefined—George Buchanan Gray even proposed doing away with them in favor of the Schoettgen-like distinction between "complete" and "incomplete" parallelism¹—but Lowth's underlying notion has survived these tamperings, survived even the "linguistic" and "structuralist" approaches of the past decades.² Even the texts from Ugarit, whose "paralleling" is so often asymmetrical, and so obviously emphatic, have only been read as confirmation of Lowth's claims.³ Boling's point, that in a given pair

1. See G. B. Gray, *The Forms of Hebrew Poetry* (reprinted New York, 1972), pp. 112–13.

2. One of the best such studies is A. J. Ehlen, "The Poetic Structure of a Hodayah from Qumran" (Harvard Ph.D. dissertation, 1970), which in turn is dependent on R. Jakobson, "Grammatical Parallelism and its Russian Facet," *Language* 42 (1966): 399–429. Ehlen painstakingly searches out correspondences in the Qumran hymn 1QH 3:19–36 on all levels, auditory, grammatical, and semantic (his approach here also recalls that of L. Alonso Schökel's analysis of Isaiah in *Estudios de Poetica Hebraea*). Yet the results are strangely old-fashioned: "There are three basic modes of correspondence which can exist between the referents of two words: they may be identical . . . they may be in polar contrast with respect to some characteristic . . . even though they belong to the same order of being; or they may be associated in various ways, e.g., as separate aspects of a larger whole, or as contiguous, one leading to the other, coming next to mind, or the like" (p. 87). Is not this Lowth all over again?

3. Thus C. Gordon, *Ugaritic Handbook* (Rome, 1955), p. 108; John Gray, *Legacy of Canaan* (Leiden, 1965), pp. 292–302; *Psalms I*, p. xxxiii; etc. etc.

the B words were often rarer and more literary than the A words,⁴ was not seized upon as evidence of the basically “seconding” nature of this feature; instead, the fixity of the order was taken as an instance of formulaic language, hence evidence of spontaneous, oral composition.

One lone voice in the post-Lowth period might well have been heeded. It belonged to an itinerant nineteenth-century rabbi and preacher, Meir Loeb b. Yehiel Michael (1809–79), generally known by his acronymous surname Malbim. His uncompromising stand on parallelism we shall examine presently, but it is worth noting that Malbim was uncompromising in nearly all things. He was an opponent of the new Reform Judaism, and his disputes with Jewish communal leaders led to his imprisonment by Rumanian authorities and eventual banishment from Rumania. Thence he served as rabbi in Leczyca, Kherson, and Mogilev “and was persecuted by the assimilationists, the *maskilim*, and the Hasidim,”⁵ certainly a well-rounded selection of enemies. Somehow amidst all these travels and controversies he managed to write an impressive collection of biblical commentaries, halakhic works, sermons, and poems.

In his biblical exegesis Malbim was a careful yet colorful expositor. He saw himself as a champion of the *משפ*, the literal or simple meaning of Scripture: “Here you shall find no homily and no science, no mysticism or allegory, just the simple *משפ*.”⁶ He felt that deviation from the simple meaning had since the Middle Ages (with whose expositors, incidentally, he shows a profound familiarity), led to numerous abuses which he now indicted for the religious laxities of his own day. The literary approach to the Inspired Word, that is, the reading of it as if it obeyed the canons of human rhetoric, he rejected utterly, and this brought him into conflict even with such medieval expositors as Abraham ibn Ezra. His approach to the Bible is, in this sense, profoundly retrograde, the product of a thoroughly talmudic outlook.

About the nature of biblical style, and parallelism in particular, he discourses at length in his introduction to the Book of Isaiah. He begins by stating the three principles of his commentary’s approach:

1. In prophetic discourse there is no such thing as “repetition of the same idea in different words” [ibn Ezra’s phrase] no repetitions of

4. R. G. Boling, “Synonymous Parallelism in the Psalms,” *JSS* 5 (1960): 221–55. This fact had been noticed by previous writers, especially Moshe Held in his unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, “Studies in Ugaritic Lexicography and Poetic Style” (Johns Hopkins, Baltimore, 1957). He is cited by Boling, p. 223.

5. Y. Horowitz in *EJ* 11:822.

6. M. L. Malbim, *נבאים וכתובים* (Vilnius, 1923), 5, p. 2b.

speech, no rhetorical repetitions, no two sentences with one meaning, no two comparisons of the same meaning, and not even two words that are repeated.

2. Prophetic discourse and sayings, whether simple or doubled, contain no words which were set there haphazardly without some special purpose; so that all the nouns, verbs and other words out of which each utterance is composed not only must by necessity come in that particular utterance, but also it would have been impossible for the divine orator to substitute even one word for another, for every word in the divine speech is weighed upon the scales of wisdom and knowledge, and all are arranged, appointed, preserved and counted by the measuring standard of almighty wisdom, which alone is capable of speaking in this fashion.

3. Prophetic discourse has no husk without a kernel, no body without a soul, no garment without a wearer, no utterance void of lofty idea, no expression in which discernment does not dwell, for the words of the living God all have the Deity alive within them, the breath of life is in their nostrils, the awesome, noble, exalted, moving spirit.⁷

If the reader hears in this the ring of Jewish fundamentalism, he will not be mistaken. Malbim’s notion of prophecy rejected utterly the approach to biblical style that had been adopted increasingly by Jews and Christians since the Renaissance. Although he was clearly aware of the binary structure and semantic pairing of parallelism (note in 2 above, “whether simple or doubled”), he frequently stated that repetition as such did not exist, that even when the same word appears twice in a single verse, its significance in the second appearance must by definition be different from its first use; moreover, apparent synonyms are never synonymous, and it is wrong to suppose that “the divine orator might have taken the words that appear in the first of a pair of clauses and put them in the second clause corresponding to it.”⁸

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” It was precisely Malbim’s unyielding ideology that eventually led him to argue the emphatic character of the B-clause, and to recognize wherever possible (and, in truth, sometimes elsewhere) B’s “what’s more” quality. For, he says, even in the few cases where the text appears to use absolute synonyms, some nuance in form or scope may

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

be salvaged;⁹ however, the great bulk of restatements or apparent repetitions are not absolute synonymities, and it would be an error to treat the differences as insignificant. Malbim lists the three main sorts of distinctions he invokes in his commentary (many of them based on readings found in the Targum, in R. David Kimḥi, and Abravanel):

1. In some cases I have shown that each of the restated clauses contains some element which makes it different from the other, such as “I shall be comforted from mine enemies, and avenged of my foes” [Isa. 1:24], “Whom shall I send and who will go forth for us?”¹⁰ [Isa. 6:8], “A shoot shall go forth from Jesse’s stock, and a plant shall flower from his roots” [Isa. 11:1]. Similarly with two comparisons that seem to have the same import, I have shown that each referent is somewhat different, as “As a leaf falls from a vine, and a fruit from a fig-tree”¹¹ [Isa. 34:4], and “Like a garment they will grow worn, a moth shall eat them”¹² [Isa. 50:9].

2. Elsewhere we have shown that the repeated utterances are two matters that have come into existence one after the other or one beside the other, in two distinct times or locations, such as “Like a

9. To illustrate this, Malbim cites some of the verses already seen in Moses ibn Ezra’s (and Jonah ibn Janāḥ’s) discussion of synonymity and repetition. Thus Isa. 41:4, *מי פעל ועשה*, “who acted and did,” Malbim reads as a distinction between the performing of an action and the bringing of an act to its conclusion; both ibn Ezra and ibn Janāḥ treat these as synonymous (see chapter 5). Similarly, Isa. 43:7 *בראחתי יצרתיו אף עשיתיו*, “I created, I shaped, yea I made him” Malbim takes as representing (1) creation ex nihilo, (2) formation, and (3) completion (reading the root *עשה* as in the previous *מי פעל ועשה*). David Kimhi (Radak) and earlier interpreters argue the same line on this verse in somewhat more specific terms: (1) insemination, (2) formation of the joints and limbs, and (3) creation of the outer skin. About this whole approach Moses ibn Ezra wrote: “This is the commentator’s own hair-splitting, for the text’s purpose is emphasis (*al-ta’kid*).” (See *Kitāb al-muḥāḍara*, ed. A. S. Halkin [Jerusalem, 1975], p. 162). Pursuing such “hair-splitting,” Malbim further argues the difference between “din” and “tumult” (i.e. *המון* vs. *שאון*) in Isa. 5:14 is the difference between the “usual” sound of the city and “unusual” tumult. Similarly, the difference between *חלה* and *עבר* in Isa. 8:8 is temporariness vs. permanence. Malbim, *נבאים וכתובים*, p. 36b.

10. Here it is not the “for us” that is the differentiating element, as one might imagine. For Malbim, the two questions reflect two conditions necessary for sending a messenger: Who is worthy to go? and Who is willing to go? See his comments in *ibid.*, p. 30b.

11. Our translation reflects Malbim’s [and Radak’s] understanding: “The fruit of the fig-tree is [indicated by the feminine] *nobelet*, not the leaf, which would be masculine.” *Ibid.*, pp. 114a and b.

12. That is, worn out from use (conflict) as distinct from being consumed because of neglect; *ibid.*, p. 169b.

harvest-booth in a vineyard, and as a shed in a field, like a city under siege”¹³ [Isa. 1:8], “Raise up a standard and lift your voice, wave your hand”¹⁴ [Isa. 13:2], “To take booty and seize spoils”¹⁵ [Isa. 10:6].

3. Or I have shown that the second clause always adds something to the first clause paired with it, such as “Ah, sinning nation,” (and more than this) “people heavy with transgression,” (and more than this they are a) “family of evil-doers,” (and more than this they are) “wicked children” (and more than this that they) “abandoned the Lord,” and so forth [Isa. 1:4]. And similarly “if your sins be as crimson,” (and more than this) “if they are redder than the dyeing worm [from which crimson dye is made]” [Isa. 1:18].

Eventually Malbim’s stance leads where we cannot go, to finding significance in the slightest alternations¹⁶ and (the talmudic corollary shown clearly in our history) so focusing on the distinguishing nuance as to lose sight of the obvious structuredness of the speech. But his approach is the proper beginning. If his espousal of omnisignificance leaves him easy prey to snipers, let it be noted that his distortion is no

13. Malbim explains in greater detail *ibid.*, p. 9b: “The booth in the vineyard has within it only the guard of the vineyard; so similarly Jerusalem has no outsiders, only its inhabitants; the second time-frame comes when he compares it to a shed in a field, that is, a booth built in a gourd-field, whose guardian only stays there at night but during the day it is completely vacant (since the gourds are hard and need not be guarded during the day from birds, but only at night against thieves)—so the Jerusalemites used to secrete themselves in caves during the day and hide for fear of the enemy and were in the city only at night. And in the third period of time he turns to Jerusalem itself and its surroundings, which now was like a city besieged in a siege.” (Cf. the Jonathan targum and Radak.)

14. The standard can be seen from afar, “and after they are closer to them they will ‘lift up their voice,’ for now they can hear, and they will follow it [the voice] closer and when they are still nearer ‘they will wave hands’ (to them), beckoning by hand for them to approach and enter the city.” Malbim again elaborates on Radak; *ibid.*, p. 52a.

15. The root *שלל* he takes as the undivided booty left in a city after its inhabitants have fallen in war; the root *בז* refers to the share of goods taken by each despoiler. See his proof-texts *ad* Isa. 8:1.

16. Indeed, Malbim later notes that his task as an exegete would have been easier if he had contented himself with finding for each pair only one nuance to separate them, as other commentators had done; instead, he insisted on distinguishing each and every word! “But I set down this rule inviolable, that no words came by chance into the council of the Lord,” and consequently “in two clauses each composed of numerous words, I have been obliged to show that all the words that come in each clause must come only in that clause and not in the clause paralleling it,” *נבאים וכתובים*, p. 4a.

greater than, indeed is the precise converse of, *parallelismus membrorum*. To say that there is no synonymity is just as much an approximation as to say that B means the same thing as A. Furthermore, the former is at least a positive and productive stand; it is rooted, as we have seen, in the very essence of parallelism, and is demonstrably the only reasonable reading of numerous "sharp" sayings and verses; and it is a reading that favors the text, allows it room to be precise and to slice sharp as a blade.

But Malbim's commentaries were unknown or ignored by the emerging movement of modern biblical criticism. It was Lowth's approach that prevailed and has continued to prevail, and the notion of poetic structure it supports has since his time generally complemented that other popular area of inquiry, the search for biblical meters. Lowth, as we have seen, thought Hebrew meter irretrievable, but his followers did not agree, and with the principle of parallelism basically unarguable, interest in Hebrew poetics since Lowth has largely centered on systems of scansion.

2

The always-difficult job of summarizing previous writers' researches is rendered still greater when one is not in sympathy with their approach or conclusions; and since, happily, other critics have recently shown great zeal in recounting the history of biblical metrics over the last two centuries, I will refer the curious reader to their compilations.¹⁷ Let us here confine ourselves to the barest outline.

The modern period offers no radically new departures in Hebrew poetry: what it has been able to provide is more detailed development of themes already seen in the pre-Lowth period, and an integration of these with new evidence from archaeology and the study of cognate literatures. Investigations along the lines of classical prosody continued in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by E. J. Greve, C. G. Anton, and others.¹⁸ J. Bellermann's *Versuch über die*

17. See *EPH*, pp. 119-93; *PsIW*, pp. 261-66; *OTI*, pp. 57-64; T. H. Robinson, "Basic Principles of Hebrew Poetic Form," *Festschrift A. Bertholet* (Tübingen, 1950), pp. 438-50; and many others, listed, inter alia, in the bibliography of D. N. Freedman's "Prolegomenon" to G. B. Gray's *Forms of Hebrew Poetry* (New York, 1972).

18. Anton published a *Conjectura de metro Hebraeorum* in 1770, and several other works, including a scansion of the Psalms (1780) after that. Greve, following Lowth's urging about the poetic nature of the Prophetic books, scanned Nahum, Habbakuk, and Isaiah.

Metrik der Hebräer (1813) analyzed syllables in terms of duration and deduced prosodic patterns from the syllabic distribution of *morae* (in Latin prosody, a *mora* was the amount of time required for the pronunciation of the simplest syllable). Meanwhile, the notion of word stress as a possible element in scansion was in the ascendant. Understandably, this line of inquiry was particularly popular among speakers of Germanic languages, and two of its strongest advocates in the nineteenth century were Julius Ley and K. Budde. Ley¹⁹ postulated stress accent as the sole significant element in Hebrew prosody. Lines were determined according to parallelism, and, depending on the total number of stresses, were scanned as "hexameters," "pentameters," "octameters," and so forth. Budde's most important contribution was an analysis of the meter of Lamentations and other dirges,²⁰ in which he observed the tendency of A verses to be somewhat longer than their corresponding B's. Seeking to isolate the independent (*selbständige*) terms on each side of the "caesura" and assuming each such term received one stress in performance, Budde found that A usually had three stresses (but sometimes four), while B usually had two (though sometimes three). This would make for a truncated, "limping" gait (here the classical analogues are uncomfortably obvious) appropriate to a dirge; the *qinah* (lament) meter was born. (Budde remained admirably skeptical about all other metrical hypotheses that sprang up in the wake of his article.) It has since been pointed out that this 3:2 line, as it has been styled, can be "discovered" in many other Hebrew compositions that are not the least bit dirgelike.²¹

The ideas of Ley and Budde were passed on to Eduard Sievers. Sievers had started as a metricist interested in the special problems surrounding Old English and Germanic prosody; he wrote a classification for syllabic patterns first in *Beowulf*, then for Old Germanic poetry in general.²² In these systems, which, in modified form, are still in use today, Sievers attributed primary and secondary stresses to important syllables in the line, as well as an unstressed notation to lesser syllables and even some small words—pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, demonstratives, and articles. Through this approach he was able to isolate what he felt to be the five basic

19. See his *Grünzüge des Rhythmus, des Vers- und Strophenbaues in der hebräischen Poesie* (Halle, 1875).

20. "Das hebr. Klagelied," *ZAW* 2 (1882): 1-52.

21. See G. B. Gray, *Forms of Hebrew Poetry*, p. 116; T. H. Robinson, "Hebrew Poetic Form" in *SVT* 1 (1953): 134.

22. E. Sievers, *Altgermanische Metrik* (Leipzig, 1893).