

Num	Numbers
pl.	plural
Pr	Proverbs
Ps	Psalms
RSP	<i>Ras Shamra Parallels</i> (ed. L. Fisher). All references to RSP are to M. Dahood's "Ugaritic-Hebrew Parallel Pairs"
RSV	Revised Standard Version
Sam	Samuel
sing.	singular
Song	Song of Songs
UF	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
Zeph	Zephaniah

# I

## PARALLELISM AND POETRY

In 1753, in the third of his *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, Robert Lowth observed "a certain conformation of the sentences" which is

chiefly observable in those passages which frequently occur in the Hebrew poetry, in which they treat one subject in many different ways, and dwell upon the same sentiment; when they express the same thing in different words, or different things in a similar form of words; when equals refer to equals, and opposites to opposites: and since this artifice of composition seldom fails to produce even in prose an agreeable and measured cadence, we can scarcely doubt that it must have imparted to their poetry . . . an exquisite degree of beauty and grace.

The phenomenon which Lowth described here (and again in Lecture XIX) was more precisely defined in 1778 in his introduction to *Isaiah*.

The correspondence of one Verse, or Line, with another, I call Parallelism. When a proposition is delivered, and a second is subjoined to it, or drawn under it, equivalent, or contrasted with it, in Sense; or similar to it in the form of Grammatical Construction; these I call Parallel Lines; and the words or phrases answering one to another in the corresponding Lines Parallel Terms.

Although Lowth was not the first to recognize parallelism,<sup>1</sup> he promoted it to a place of prominence in biblical studies. His definition became classic, and his tripartite subdivision of its types (explicated in Lecture XIX of *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* and also in *Isaiah*) remained the standard for many years—the skeletal model which subsequent scholars fleshed out in their own studies, some adding to it or modifying it, but none until recently breaking free from it completely. Lowth had identified

a feature which has continued to fascinate readers of the biblical text. Parallelism has both delighted us, for its effect is unmistakable, and frustrated us, for the way that it works is elusive. We have sought it by collecting and classifying its types, as Lowth began, and when the three original types could not capture its essence we added more types and subtypes; so that now we hear not only of synonymous, antithetic, and synthetic parallelism, but also of incomplete parallelism, staircase parallelism, janus parallelism, metathetic parallelism, and so on. Given the powers of discrimination that the human mind possesses, the longer we examine parallelism the more discrete types we are likely to find.

I do not come to propose new types, nor to reclassify old ones. What is sorely needed is a fresh approach to parallelism as a whole. We have been so busy dissecting the trees, branches, and leaves that we have lost sight of the forest. The forest is a dynamic microworld in which many different components function in relation to each other. It is not enough to recognize the individual components; we have not perceived the essence of the forest until we have seen that its various components belong to a multifaceted, balanced system. Parallelism, like a forest, has many aspects. Some are well known, others little studied. But more than anything, we must begin to see all these aspects—and all types and subtypes of parallelism—as parts of a total system of linguistic usage.

Parallelism is a linguistic phenomenon. It uses language—words, phonemes, grammar—in a variety of interesting ways. It is therefore fitting that we should approach it from a linguistic perspective, as well as from the perspective of biblical studies. Great advances have been made in both of these areas since Lowth's time, and there is no reason that his views of parallelism should remain canonized. But though we leave these views behind in search of more adequate ones, the fundamental insight which he provided should not be lost. Lowth may have been mistaken in some of his ideas, and he was certainly limited in his linguistic knowledge, but he was right about the essence of parallelism; it is a *correspondence of one thing with another*. Parallelism promotes the perception of a relationship between the elements of which parallelism is composed, and this relationship is one of correspondence. The nature of the correspondence varies, but in general it involves repetition or the substitution of things which are equivalent on one or more linguistic levels. The notion of *equivalence*, and its counterpart *opposition* or *contrast*, will emerge again and again in the various areas of linguistics to which we will have recourse; but the amazing thing is that it is already present in a primitive form in Lowth's observation that "equals

refer to equals, and opposites to opposites." Lowth, however, did not understand this as broadly as we do, for he did not understand linguistics as we do. We are able to see many more equivalences and oppositions on many more linguistic levels. It is these linguistic equivalences that we wish to examine in greater depth, for they constitute the phenomenon called parallelism.

The definition of parallelism offered here is much broader than that found in most biblical studies, in which parallelism is usually considered to involve only semantic and/or grammatical equivalences and to operate only between two or more consecutive lines. This narrow view of parallelism would seem to be a legacy of Lowth, who spoke of the correspondence of one verse, or line, with another. Once we admit smaller segments as being parallel—e.g., words, phrases, even sounds—though the lines to which they belong are not parallel, we raise the incidence of parallelism within a text. And if we do not restrict our search for linguistic equivalences to adjacent lines or sentences, but take a global view, finding equivalences anywhere within a text, we raise the incidence of parallelism still more. This more encompassing definition of parallelism is the one developed by Roman Jakobson, and it should be borne in mind that it differs from the definition used by most biblical scholars. Jakobson's view is preferable because it enables us to unify phenomena whose relationships have not been perceived. For instance, the device known as *inclusio*, in which the first and last lines of a text contain the same words or phrases, is actually a form of parallelism and should be recognized as such.<sup>2</sup> (However, in actual practice, most of our examples of parallelism will come from adjacent lines, for that is where it is most manifest.) Furthermore, Jakobson's approach allows us to see more readily that the parallelisms touted as indicators of poetry are no different from the linguistic equivalences in prose texts. Certain linguistic usages, including a systematic exploitation of equivalences, are a mark of biblical style as a whole. They are not limited to one genre, although they may be more prominent in the one usually called poetry.

#### PARALLELISM AND POETRY IN BIBLICAL STUDIES

This brings us to the difficult matter of prose vs. poetry as it relates to the Bible, and especially as it relates to parallelism. Biblicists have long

equated parallelism with poetry. No doubt this is another of Lowth's legacies, although a careful reading of his Lecture III will show that he recognized "this artifice of composition" in prose as well. Nevertheless, since biblical poetry lacks any easily discernable meter, or any comparable feature that marks it as verse,<sup>3</sup> the burden of identification came to rest on the presence of parallelism—more specifically, on the parallelism of consecutive lines. This is not to say that every line of poetry had to be paralleled, but that, by and large, where there was parallelism there was poetry. (When taken to an extreme this resulted in the "discovery" of snippets of poetry in otherwise prosaic contexts.)

The matter rested here, with little argument and much vagueness, until the recent discussion by James Kugel in *The Idea of Biblical Poetry*. Kugel not only questioned the equation of parallelism with poetry, but attacked the whole notion that one can differentiate prose from poetry in the Bible. It is the first point that is of interest to our study, but Kugel's line of argument cannot be understood without reference to his view of the prose-poetry issue.

Kugel begins by citing a number of parallelisms from Genesis and Exodus, that is, passages normally considered prose, and goes on to find parallelism<sup>4</sup> in the Moabite Stone, an inscription whose very literariness may be questioned. This leads him to the observation that "the same traits that seem to characterize Hebrew 'poetry' also crop up in what is clearly not poetry" (*Idea*, 63). This, of course, is true, and it applies not only to parallelism but to other rhetorical figures. The converse, that not all lines in poetry are parallelistic or symmetrical, is also shown, mainly from Ps 119 and 122. In other words, Kugel sees, as I have already suggested, that not all poetry is parallelisms and not all parallelisms are poetry. But this does not prove that there is no difference between prose and poetry, as Kugel would appear to have us believe;<sup>5</sup> it only proves that the distinction cannot be made solely on the basis of parallelism. Kugel falls prey to a faulty premise. He tacitly accepts the equation of parallelism with poetry (even as he rejects it—*Idea*, 70) and then, wherever he finds parallelism he is forced to call it poetry—but, since he knows it isn't poetry, he calls it "elevated style." The truth is, as linguists have shown (cf. Hiatt and Werth), that parallelism is not in and of itself a mark of poetry as opposed to prose, or even of elevated style as opposed to ordinary discourse; it is a common feature of all language. And yet, as we will soon see, in a certain sense parallelism is the essence of poetry.<sup>6</sup>

But we leave this apparent paradox for the moment and return to Ku-

gel's argument. Kugel's struggle with terms like "prose" and "poetry" is part of a large reluctance he has about any form of labelling of the biblical text outside of the Bible's own. In the end, he will not even admit that it can be called literature: "One might well ask: what is literary about the Bible at all? Certainly it does not identify itself as literature, and often such self-definition as does occur seems clearly to place it elsewhere" (*Idea*, 303).<sup>7</sup> Clearly, if Kugel rejects the Bible as literature—i.e., as "artful composition"—then to distinguish literary subtypes on the basis of artfulness becomes a meaningless exercise. Thus Kugel pushes his view to an extreme that in the end threatens to defeat his purpose.

But despite what has been perceived as Kugel's nihilism, he fortunately does not heed his own advice and goes on to discuss those features which make the text literary, or in his words, elevated in style. Here he has something to contribute to the prose-poetry problem and to the role of parallelism in it.

If one puts aside the notions of biblical poetry and prose and tries to look afresh at different parts of the Bible to see what it is about them that distinguishes one from another, it will soon be apparent that there are not two modes of utterance, but many different elements which elevate style and provide for formality and strictness of organization. Consistently binary sentences, an obvious regard for terseness, and a high degree of semantic parallelism characterize some sections; less consistent (and less consistently semantic) parallelism is found in other parts. . . . This represents a continuum of organization or formality, with parallelism of different intensity and consistency characterizing a great span of texts. [*Idea*, 85]

Kugel is saying, and I basically agree, that there is a continuum of elevated style in the Bible. Some passages are more elevated than others, but, to some extent, one can find this elevated style throughout. Elevated style is largely the product of two elements: terseness and parallelism. Where these two occur to a high degree we have what would be called (by everyone but Kugel) poetry; where they are largely (but never entirely) lacking, we have less-poetic expression, which corresponds to what we call prose.

It is not parallelism per se, but the predominance of parallelism, combined with terseness, which marks the poetic expression of the Bible. And since the difference between poetic and less-poetic sections is a matter of degree, we would not expect different *kinds* of parallelism in "prose" and "poetry," but only different perceptions of their dominance.<sup>8</sup> The perception of the dominance of parallelism in poetry is not only a factor of its

quantity, for large amounts can be found in prose, but also a factor of the terseness which tends to produce phonetic and syntactic balance in parallel lines. As we will see shortly, parallelism appears to be the constructive principle on which a poem is built, while a prose passage might have just as much parallelism but not seem to be built on this structure.

The notion of terseness plays a central role in another description, not unlike Kugel's, of the essence of poetic expression. Speaking in reference to a translation of a Chinese poem, W. Empson says:

Lacking rhyme, metre, and any overt device such as comparison, these lines are what we should normally call poetry only by virtue of their compactness; two statements are made as if they are connected, and the reader is forced to consider their relations for himself. The reason why these facts should have been selected for a poem is left for him to invent; he will invent a variety of reasons and order them in his own mind. This, I think, is the essential fact about the poetical use of language. [24-25]

What is left, Empson asks, if we strip away all devices and structures from a poem? Only its "compactness" and its sense of "connectedness." These correspond to what we have been calling terseness and parallelism. A poem distills and condenses its message, removing "unnecessary" words and leaving only the nucleus of the thought. At the same time, without losing its terseness, it constructs relationships between its parts such that the final product is unified.

Relevant to all of this is the paratactic style of biblical poetry. The lines are placed one after another with no connective or with the common, multivalent conjunction *waw*; rarely is a subordinate relationship indicated on the surface of the text. This has bearing both on the terseness of the poem and on its connectedness. The lines, by virtue of their contiguity, are perceived as connected, while the exact relationship between them is left unspecified. Empson understood that such contiguity creates the impression of connectedness and forces the reader to "consider their relations for himself" and to "invent a variety of reasons" to explain the relationship.<sup>9</sup> Here parallelism plays a significant role, for parallel lines are perceived as "more" connected. Parallelism, because it involves linguistic correspondences, increases the feeling of connectedness between its parts; in parallelism there is no doubt that "two statements are made as if they were connected," so the reader cannot avoid considering their relationship. It is parallelism more than anything else that creates the perception of "couplets" in biblical poetry. And because the lines in these couplets are terse, that is, stripped

of all but their essential components, they tend to correspond in the number of components that remain, thereby appearing "balanced" in length or rhythm.<sup>10</sup> In this sense we can say that biblical poetry is characterized by a high incidence of terse, balanced parallelism.

#### PARALLELISM AND POETRY IN LINGUISTIC STUDIES

\* The definition of poetry and the place of parallelism in it has occupied not only biblical scholars but also linguists. At the center of this effort was Roman Jakobson, who, probably more than any other person, has influenced the linguistic study of parallelism in the many languages in which it is used (cf. Fox). For Jakobson, parallelism—and, as mentioned earlier, he used the term in a broader sense than do most biblical scholars—is the core of poetic language. His most famous pronouncement on the subject, piercingly insightful and maddeningly general, states that "the poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination. Equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of the sequence" (LP, 358). The same idea appears in a different form in his "Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry": "One may state that in poetry similarity is superimposed on contiguity and hence 'equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of the sequence'" (602).

There are a number of terms that require explanation, and, to the extent feasible, I will present them in Jakobson's own words. "Selection" and "combination" [this also corresponds to "similarity" and "contiguity," "paradigmatic" and "syntagmatic"] are "the two basic modes of arrangement used in verbal behavior." One selects from a group of similar or paradigmatic elements, and one then arranges the selected item, along with items selected from other groups, into a contiguous or syntagmatic chain. As Jakobson puts it:

If "child" is the topic of the message, the speaker selects one among the extant, more or less similar, nouns like child, kid, youngster, tot, all of them equivalent in a certain respect, and then, to comment on this topic, he may select one of the semantically cognate verbs—sleeps, dozes, nods, naps. Both chosen words combine in the speech chain. The selection is produced on the base of equivalences, similarity and dissimilarity, synonymy and antonymy, while the combination, the build up of the sequence, is based on contiguity. [LP, 358]

We can illustrate using Jakobson's own example. If we take a sentence like

1. The child sleeps.

and apply to it Jakobson's principle in which equivalent elements (those in the same paradigmatic class) are arranged in a contiguous sequence, it yields sentences like

2. The child sleeps; the youngster dozes.
3. The child, the little tot, gently dozes and sleeps.
4. The child dozed off, and, as they talked, the youngster slept.

It is clear from sentences 2 and 3 that the type of parallelism found in the Bible is at least one realization of Jakobson's principle. Actually, sentence 4 could be considered a parallelism, too; in fact, "the principle of equivalence appears to be equated with parallelism" (Werth, 24).

The parallelisms in these examples involve semantic classes (words for "child" and "sleep") and grammatical classes (nouns and verbs). But this does not exhaust the linguistic classes that come into play in parallelism, for in Jakobson's words, "pervasive parallelism inevitably activates all the levels of language" (GPRF, 423); so phonetic and phonologic equivalences, as well as lexical and grammatical ones, will be activated in parallelism. Jakobson thus subsumes rhythm, rhyme, and meter under his definition of parallelism. Parallelism alone, in this broad sense, comes to be equated with "the poetic function": "Or, to quote another master and theoretician of poetic language, G. M. Hopkins, the artifice of poetry 'reduces itself to the principle of parallelism': equivalent entities confront one another by appearing in equivalent positions" (GPRF, 423). This is not far from Kugel's statement, arrived at from a different direction, that "it would be incorrect to call parallelism a rhetorical figure or trope. . . . It was more like *the* trope, the one shape of elevated speech" (*Idea*, 86).

Kugel's "elevated speech" includes prose and poetry but presumably excludes ordinary discourse. Jakobson's "poetic function" is a more abstract concept. It is used most often in connection with poetry or poetic language, but actually it is broader than "poetry" and "elevated speech," for it may occur in all speech.

Jakobson outlines six functions of language which may be present in a message in any combination (LP, 353-57). The *referential* function orients the message toward the referent or context—the person or object being discussed. The *emotive* function focuses on the addresser, expressing his

attitude about the message. The *conative* function orients toward the addressee, often employing vocatives and imperatives. The *phatic* function sets up and maintains contact between the addresser and addressee, and often consists of ritualized or stereotyped exchanges like "How are you?" In the *metalingual* function, language is used to explain itself; words define or gloss other words or messages, as in "What do you mean?" The *poetic* function is "the set (*Einstellung*) toward the MESSAGE as such, focus on the message for its own sake" (LP, 356). The poetic function is, of course, present in poetry, but it is not limited to poetry; nor is the poetic function the only function found in poetry. "Any attempt to reduce the sphere of poetic function to poetry or to confine poetry to poetic function would be a delusive oversimplification. Poetic function is not the sole function of verbal art but only its dominant, determining function, whereas in all other verbal activities it acts as a subsidiary, accessory constituent" (LP, 356). Indeed, parallelism, which is the way in which the poetic function manifests itself, is illustrated by Jakobson in ordinary speech: *Joan and Margery*, with the shorter term before the longer, sounds better than *Margery and Joan*; a speaker prefers *horrible Harry*, because of its alliteration, to *dreadful Harry*. Once again, but from a linguist instead of a biblicist, we see that the same device which marks poetry as poetic also occurs in nonpoetic verbal art and even in ordinary speech.

It is, then, not the mere presence, even in large amounts, of the poetic function that distinguishes poetry, but its "dominance." In poetry, the poetic function overrides the other functions. This cannot be shown by a quantitative measure; the dominance of the poetic function cannot be calculated solely by the number of parallelisms in a text. True, as Jakobson has shown in his many analyses of Russian, English, French, and even biblical poems, there is plenty to be found in these. But when parallelisms were sought in prose, linguists discovered that there was also much recurrence of sound, words, and grammar in such things as newspaper articles, modern fiction, and scholarly treatises. In fact, one can hardly surpass the telephone directory for its repetitive patterns of phonological, lexical, and morphological items (Werth, 54), and the same can be said of the Bible's genealogical lists.<sup>11</sup> A computer study of parallelism<sup>12</sup> on the sentence level from a cross-section of standard English prose published in the United States in 1961 shows that of a sample of 7315 sentences, 46% contained at least one parallelism (Hiatt). Nonpoetic texts not only have parallelism—they have a lot of it!

The question is not how much parallelism a text has, but how much of it

is effective and meaningful in terms of focusing the message on itself (the poetic function). There is bound to be a certain amount of random repetition of equivalent linguistic categories in any kind of writing; since a language has a limited number of phonemes and morphemes, they will, sooner or later, be used again within a text. And when it comes to lexical-semantic items, which are less limited than phonemic and grammatical ones—if one continues to discuss a particular subject, one is bound to use the same or similar terms to refer to it (cf. Werth, 60). It is really a question of the “poetic effect” of these parallelisms—their “psychological validity” or “perceptibility,” or how striking they are (Werth, 61).<sup>13</sup> The poetic effect is the result of an interaction between verbal form and meaning (Werth, 63). One cannot simply list formal equivalences without taking into account their semantic impact, for one does not know a priori which equivalences or oppositions are perceptible or meaningful to the reader. Werth, whose critique of Jakobson is reflected in the foregoing remarks, suggests that

the impact of the repetition varies according to the type of repetition . . . and the type of linguistic unit. . . . For example, simple phonological repetition is usually euphonious [has no relevance to meaning], though it can be used to give emphasis to a higher level repetition. . . . Simple lexical repetition almost always carries emphasis rather than being purely euphonious. . . . Much the same is true for simple syntactic repetition. Lexical category repetition would tend to lack impact, though syntactic category repetition . . . would almost always be emphatic . . . , as in antithesis. . . . Semantic repetition (i.e., complete or partial synonymy), of course, occurs only at the lexical and syntactic levels. [68]

Werth here distinguishes three types of effects: semantic effects, emphatic effects, and euphonious effects. The effect varies according to the type of parallelism, with semantic parallelism having the greatest effect and phonological repetition having the least. (We shall see in the following chapters that biblical parallelism in “poetry” has a great deal of semantic and syntactic parallelism—precisely the kinds that Werth finds poetically meaningful.) But Werth also notes that the notion of effect is essentially subjective and still beyond the capabilities of linguistics to identify and describe formally (cf. also Erlich, 26).

Some of the same ideas that Werth expressed in 1976 as an attack on Jakobson appear in L. Waugh’s 1980 clarification in support of Jakobson’s views. I cite those that explain, once again, the relationship between parallelism and poetry, and that correlate with the ideas presented so far.

Waugh, like the others, notes that there are parallelisms in prose, but she emphasizes that despite their presence, they are not systematically

used there—they do not constitute *the constructive device* of the text as they do in poetry.

This is not to say that in prose there are no parallelisms or repetitions or any other of the devices particularly associated with poetry; but rather to say that such symmetries are not the constructive device of prose and are not as systematically used. . . . Such parallelisms as may occur in prose are subordinated to the referential (or other) function. And they are used . . . only when their use would not contradict or combat the main referential thrust of the discourse. . . . Similarly, equivalence relations of various sorts . . . may be important for relations within prose, but again it should be repeated that equivalence does not thereby become the constitutive device of the sequence. [64–65]

“Constitutive device” means the formal device upon which the poem is constructed; this is apparently what Jakobson meant by “equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of the sequence” (LP, 358), and it is a crucial part of his definition of the poetic function.

The matter of the perceptibility of parallelism is touched on by Waugh’s next comment.

Of course, the other side of equivalence is difference and the other side of similarity is dissimilarity. By projecting equivalence (and perforce difference) into the axis of combination, the *contrast* between or within parallelistic elements comes to the fore and indeed contrast, as much as equivalence, becomes an important part of the structuration of the poem. . . . [as E. Holenstein indicates] “In addition to the projection of the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination, there is also in poetry a projection of the principle of contrast for the significative, selective, and combinatorial operations into the level of a patent ‘palpable,’ and ‘perceptible’ form. . . .” In the referential use of language, contrast very often resides not in elements linked by various equivalence relations but rather in elements which are in simple contiguity with each other. The poetic function is different from the strictly referential function by the strong *linkage of contrast with equivalence*. [65]

It is the idea of *contrast*, perceptible opposition, that is important in the poetic function. For it is not only that parallelism involves equivalence, but that within that equivalence there is an opposition. For example, one can parallel any adjective with any other adjective and create a morphological parallelism, but the combination of *the weak boy // the strong boy* is, under normal circumstances, a more effective parallelism than *the weak boy // the blond boy* because within the equivalent terms *weak* and *strong* there is an inherent contrast, whereas this contrast does not exist between

*weak* and *blond*. (But in a text with pervasive parallelism, which sets up the expectation of effective parallelism in the mind of the reader, there will be a tendency to equate or contrast *weak* and *blond*.) Thus the perception of contrast (and that includes positive or negative contrast) within a set of equivalences makes a parallelism effective. The contrast may exist as a semantic fact (as in synonyms, antonyms, etc.) or may be a product of the formal structure of the text. In a text where the generation of such contrasts is the constructive principle, we have poetry.

To illustrate this let us compare one small section from the prose and poetic accounts concerning what Sisera was given to drink.

Jud 4:19                      ויאמר אליה השקיני נא מעט מים כי צמתי  
                                     ותפתח את נאוד החלב ותשקהו ותכסהו

He said to her, "Please give me a little drink of water,  
 for I am thirsty. And she opened the milk container  
 and gave him a drink, and covered him.

Jud 5:25                      מים שאל  
                                     חלב נתנה  
                                     בספל אדירים הקריבה חמאה

Water he asked,  
 Milk she gave;  
 In a princely bowl she offered curds.

The prose account contains parallelism. Jud 4:19 repeats the same root, *השקה*, and uses *water* and *milk*, both potable liquids (a semantic equivalence) and both nouns used as direct objects (a grammatical equivalence). But not much is made, on a structural level, of the correspondence between *water* and *milk*. There is a subtle semantic dissonance between Sisera's request and Yael's compliance, but because the clauses expressing them are syntactically different (i.e., not equivalent), the contrast between them is not brought sharply into focus. In Jud 5:25, however, the contrast between *water* and *milk* is unmistakable because the clauses in which they occur are exactly parallel syntactically (even in the order of the components), and there is an inherent semantic contrast in *asked* and *gave* and a morphological contrast in the gender of *he asked* // *she gave*. This forces the contrast between *water* and *milk* into the mind of the reader; not only are the two nouns parallel in the sense that they come from the same morphological class, but they take on a *semantic* contrast as well. That is, they involve semantic effects, as Werth calls them. These effects are enhanced by the addition of *הקריבה חמאה בספל אדירים*, which is not to be misun-

derstood as yet a third action, but as a repeated expression (a semantic equivalent) of the action of *חלב נתנה*. The semantic equivalence of *חלב נתנה* with *בספל אדירים הקריבה חמאה* underlines the semantic contrast with *מים שאל*. *מים שאל* and *חלב נתנה* have their own contrasts within their equivalences: the second clause upgrades the first, making a noble-religious [*הקריבה-אדירים*] gesture out of a common, everyday one.) As Waugh has indicated, in the poetic function there is a strong *linkage of contrast with equivalence*. Such contrast as there is in prose is mainly a product of the *contiguity* of elements rather than a product of equivalences. If there is a perceptible contrast between *water* and *milk* in Jud 4:19, it is because the two occur contiguously, but there is no structural reinforcement for this contrast.

Waugh goes on to point out that

this projection of both equivalence and contrast is not only a way of giving an internal, autonomous structure to the poem, but is also a way of *transcending the linearity* proper to any linguistic text. Through parallelisms the text is no longer a linear string but is subdivided in various ways. . . . Again, the more strictly linear character of prose is separated from the more non-linear character of poetry. [65]

Jud 4:19 contains linear actions; the story moves from one thing to the next: he asked for water, she opened the milk container, she gave him drink, she covered him. Jud 5:25 breaks the linearity first of all by expressing what looks like three actions but what really represents two. Thus each clause does not have a unique temporal slot in a sequence as it does in the prose version. The synonymity or simultaneity of the last two phrases can then be read back into the first, so that the asking and giving are not sequential but simultaneous—two parts of one picture. The poetic version is more nonlinear.<sup>14</sup>

This can be seen even more clearly in the description of Sisera's murder. The prose account, which I have set out clause by clause for the sake of clarity, is found in Jud 4:21; the poetic account, following the massoretic arrangement, is in Jud 5:26–27.

Jud 4:21                      ותקח יעל אשת חבר את יתד האהל  
                                     ותשם את המקבת בידה  
                                     ותבוא אליו בלאט  
                                     ותתקע את היתד ברקתו  
                                     ותצנח בארץ  
                                     והוא נרדם ויעף  
                                     וימת

And Yael, Heber's wife, took the tent peg,  
 And she placed the mallet in her hand,  
 And she approached him stealthily,  
 And she drove the peg into his skull,  
 And it sank down to the ground—  
 [he was asleep, having been exhausted]—  
 And he died.

Jud 5:26–27

ידה ליתד תשלחנה  
 וימינה להלמות עמלים  
 והלמה סיסרא מחקה ראשו  
 ומחצה וחלפה רקתו  
 בין רגליה כרע נפל שכב  
 בין רגליה כרע נפל  
 כאשר כרע שם נפל שדוד

Her hand to the peg she stretched,  
 And her right hand to the workmen's hammer,  
 And she hammered Sisera, crushed his head,  
 And split and pierced his skull.  
 At her feet he crumpled, fell, lay,  
 At her feet he crumpled, fell,  
 Where he crumpled there he lay, destroyed.

The clauses in the prose account are parallel in that they all begin with verbs, and two of them (ותחקע את היתד ברקתו and ותשם את המקבת בידה) have the same syntax and a number of other equivalences. But the overwhelming impression is one of linearity; we are shown step by step what Yael did and then what Sisera did. Now the same sequence is present in the poetic account: the taking of the murder weapons, the piercing through of Sisera's skull, the collapse and expiration of Sisera—but the stringlike quality is gone. The parallel structure subdivides the action into a *continuous but yet overlapping sequence*. As she took the peg she also grasped the hammer; with it she hammered Sisera, crushing his head; she crushed it as she pierced through his skull. Sisera's expiration is described by a series of repeating verbs: he crumpled, fell, lay, crumpled, fell, crumpled, fell dead. Does this represent one action or many? The "synonymous" parallelism here may not be a repeated expression of one action, but an expression of several similar and repeated actions—the writhing of the dying Sisera. The careful temporal structure laid out in the prose—1) Sisera had been exhausted (ויעף), 2) he had fallen asleep (נרדם), 3) and now died (וימת)—is refashioned into a nontemporal picture of a man dying, dead, dying, dead at Yael's feet.

The tension between prosaic linearity and poetic contiguity is perhaps best illustrated in the scholarly discussion of Jud 5:26a, especially in regard to the word pair יד // ימין ("hand // right hand"). A "prosaic" reading of this verse specifies that it refers to two separate actions (either sequential or simultaneous), as found also in Jud 4:21. These two actions presumably involved the use of two different hands, since the alternative would be to have Yael juggling both the peg and the hammer in one hand—a patently ridiculous, if not impossible, feat. But the parallelism has equated the two actions, partially by its syntax (notice that the syntax is not parallel in Jud 4:21), and partially by the use of the pair יד and ימין. In other words, the verse may enumerate two physical actions but it has fused them together into a unity representing Yael's preparations to murder Sisera.<sup>15</sup>

This unity is undermined by scholars who insist, wrongly in my opinion, that יד means "left hand" when it is paired with ימין.<sup>16</sup> To do so suggests that the verse wishes to contrast what the right hand and the left hand were holding; but if this had been intended the pair ימין // שמאל ("right // left") would have been used (cf. Jud 7:20). If there is a contrast to be made in our passage it is between Yael's hand and Sisera's head (and then Yael's feet). יד // ימין are not coordinates, but rather a term // subordinate; that is, יד is the more general term and ימין is a subcategory of it (see below, chapter 4). A look at other verses containing this pair will prove the point.

Ps 138:7b

תשלח ירך  
 ותושיעני ימינך

You extend your hand;  
 Your right hand saves me.

Isa 48:13

אף ידי יסדה ארץ  
 וימיני טפחה שמים

My own hand founded the earth;  
 My right hand spread out the sky.

Ps 89:26

ושמתי בים ידו  
 ובנהרות ימינו

I will set upon the sea his hand;  
 And upon the rivers his right hand.

In these verses it is even doubtful that reference is being made to two distinct actions; certainly it is not a question of two separate hands. God does



not extend one hand and save with the other, nor did he use one to form the earth and the other to form the sky. Even a distributional reading, yielding something like "My right and left hands made the earth and sky" for Isa 48:13, will not help, for here again ימין // שמאל would have been used, as in

Pr 3:16

אֶרֶךְ יָמִים בְּיְמִינָהּ  
בְּשִׁמְאֵלָהּ עֹשֶׁר וְכָבוֹד

Length of days is in her right hand;  
In her left hand are wealth and honor. [Cf. also Isa 9:19]

In all of these verses, whether they involve one actual action or two, the separateness of the parts is suppressed and homogenized. The parallelism forges oneness out of twoness. The point in Jud 5:26, and in the other verses employing יד // ימין, is not which hand did what, but that the actions were performed, as we say in English, handily.

Finally, the idea of terseness, which we found in Kugel and in Empson, is also present in more technical language in Waugh.

In any linguistic discourse, there is a constant interplay of two major dichotomies: *explicitness* vs. *ellipsis* on the one hand and *redundancy* vs. *ambiguity* on the other hand. Moreover, these two dichotomies share the common property of posing the problem of the amount of information conveyed by the given discourse. . . . Redundant signs are those signs which inform about other signs in the text and thus cannot be said to provide independent information. . . . Ambiguous signs are those which, even when in context of other signs, provide more than one interpretation. . . . Elliptical structures are those in which certain signs have been left out, but are assumed to be known to the addressee, while explicit structures are those fully replete with signs. . . . Now, the poem, which is focussed upon itself and upon the sign as sign, plays with both of these dichotomies, and while on the one hand poetic expression may be elliptic, on the other hand it extracts from the reduced expressions a multiplicity of meaning (ambiguity). [73]

In a later chapter we will explore in greater detail the role of parallelism vis à vis redundancy and ambiguity. For now we can conclude that terseness and parallelism seem to be the characteristics of poetic language whether one examines it from the point of view of a linguist, literary critic, or biblical scholar. Poetry uses parallelism as its constitutive or constructive device, while nonpoetry, though it contains parallelism, does not structure its message on a systematic use of parallelism.

In biblical poetry, as elsewhere, the structuring of the poem involves parallelism on many levels of language at once. Syntactic and semantic parallelism are the most obvious, but there are others as well. The combined effect of these parallelisms makes parallelism, the poetic function, operative as the dominant function of the poem.

The subject of my discourse is biblical parallelism, not biblical poetry, but because the two are closely allied, it was important to separate them as well as to show their interconnection. There are several benefits to be derived from the study of biblical parallelism. One is to increase our understanding of biblical Hebrew, its elasticity, the possibilities for its expressive permutations. Parallelism activates all levels of language, and what better way is there to observe these levels than to see them at work in parallelism. Second, through the study of parallelism we come to a better understanding of poetic texts. If, indeed, parallelism is the constructive device of poetry, then we cannot comprehend a poem's structure, its unity, until we have discovered which things it equates and which it contrasts. And related to the unity of a poem is its message, its meaning. The poetic function—the "focus on the message for its own sake"—is achieved through parallelism; and so parallelism becomes our entrée into the message. Through the relationships which parallelism creates we are shown the poem's meaning.