

**The Study of Classical Hebrew Poetry: Methodological Issues**

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The methodological quest that stays in front of us is complicated by the very nature of Semitic poetry and the heritage of hundreds of years of research. As always, some restrictions have to be put in place in order to limit the field and allow us a comprehensive coverage of the matter. Consequently, we will survey only those authors and their respective works that bestow some light on the ongoing debate of delimitating POETRY from PROSE where it is more likely for us to have a contribution. As our present overview indicates, there were two main directions of research that tempted researchers during the years: descriptive and comparative.

**1. The descriptive facet of the analysis**

A descriptive approach to poetry, or any text by extension, does not mean that the text is to speak for itself, because it does not. However, searching for stylistic devices (henceforth, SDs), construing them in the context of Classical Hebrew literature itself as valuable signs of an author's intended meaning, comparing texts with texts, and organizing them in literary categories of genres and subgenres, result in a procedure that in spite of its elaborateness might eventually allow a text to speak.

Collins, O'Connor, Wendland and Niccacci represent good examples of the descriptive approach. They are dealing mostly with the Hebrew text, on which they base all their conclusions, a reason good enough to term their method as inductive. **Terence**

**Collins** (1978) pioneered the syntactic approach to Hebrew verse. He applied it to prophetic writings, trying to prove their poetic style by considering the word order at the sentence level, a practice promoted as 'close criticism' by Nowotny and other representatives of Prague School of Linguistics. Collins perceives his study as part of the rhetorical tradition magisterially represented by Alonso-Schökel and Muilenburg (pp. 17–20). Axiologically, Collins justifies his method by a compilation of quotations from credible, however divergent, linguists. However, as soon as he has admitted his method as being inspired by contemporary linguistics, Collins confuses us by declaring his awareness of the *error of addition*, though never noticing how close he is himself to it (pp. 14–5). Terminology offers a supplementary reason to believe that Collins intended his study to be more of a stylistic nature but it could not relate it to grammar, thus he admitted it as a rhetorical analysis. His taxonomy combines four types of general line-types with four types of basic sentences, but the biblical data elude the mathematical precision. Thus, only 40 specific line-types can be identified in the prophets (see table I, p 25).

Quite a strong criticism to Collins work was offered by Niccacci (1980, 450-53). He recognizes Collin's good intention to find a new way of describing Hebrew verse (beside the traditional parallelism and syllable count), a new way which promises to be a syntactical one. His main positive comments were summarised by the words «interesting» and «stimulative». Otherwise, the method is not clear enough, either in terms of application to the poetical texts, or in their distinctiveness as opposed to the traditional rendition of the verse from the threefold semantic parallelism perspective. Whereas the first verse type seems to be completely arbitrary, the second type, which is the most frequent one too, deserved a more careful and detailed study.

Although he proposed a similar syntactic approach to Hebrew verse, O'Connor (1980b) evaluates Collins' work as wanting in certain fundamental areas. Among them to be mentioned the following: insistence on bi- and tricolonic character of Hebrew verse and the recognition of one word cola, inclusion of PROSE in the corpus, no acknowledgment of the role of particles in Hebrew verse, no recognition of the complex status of verbal nouns and participles, misjudgment of direct objects and verbs.

A sharper analysis of Collins was to be awaited until Talstra (1984, 453-457), a Dutch linguist, launched his fierce attack. His main critics regard the methodological construct, which founded Collin's study. It is admitted to be a study of grammatical parallelism, not more, although the intentions forwarded from the outset of the study tended to promote it as more of a transformational-generative grammatical study. In spite of author's claims, the method does not fit either functionalism or stylistics. Its subjectivity derives from diverse factors. First, the method is applied to prophetic texts, of which some prove not being pure POETRY. Second, it selects word order as the main parameter to describe the syntactic function of a clause (although there were others to be considered, such as verbal form, person, number, deictic particles). Third, it lacks consistence when applied to text itself. The most interesting and productive suggestion comes at the end of the review, when the chain of verbal forms in POETRY is in focus by saying:

Cf. Is. 49,1-4 (Why not 1-6)? Essential for the grammatical analysis of this text and of the coupling of its clauses and sentences is the use and the ordering of the verbal forms: imp. – perf. – ipfc. What is [the] function of the repeated ipfc. in this poetic text? How is it combined with the other tense forms? One simply cannot describe this piece of poetry without taking that into consideration (Talstra 1984, 457).

Though a pupil of Freedman, **Michael Patrick O'Connor** (1980a) goes his own way in his literary criticism of HPy. Kiparsky's insights, Cooper-Ross Principles and

Panini's Law provided the theoretical background and the linguistic platform from which O'Connor launches his assessment of linguistic input into the poetic analysis. Unanimously recognized by its reviewers as complex, *Hebrew Verse Structure* has the merit of trying to discern the basic unit of Hebrew verse by means of syntax.

Methodologically, O'Connor tries to prove that there are two main phenomena sensed from the outset, and continued throughout the history of research on HPy. Previously labelled as *parallelism* and *metre*, both were taken into consideration by different scholars during the two main periods, those of the Standard Description and Modified Standard Descriptions. As far as his own method is concerned, O'Connor continues Kosmala's characterization of the line on syntactic parameters, and even that of Collins, of which he is not aware, however, working independently, but with more specificity. Berlin (1985, 25) agrees that O'Connor had no intention of proving or disproving parallelism either as a state-of-mind, or as a rhetorical device, but rather to lay a grammatical base for POETRY.

Thus, a poetic line, defined in terms of grammar, consists of a series of syntactic constraints, limiting the number of units, constituents and clauses it may contain. A line denotes a traditional hemistich (colon in some studies). Metrical components of POETRY are replaced by a system of syntactic 'constrictions' at the three levels previously mentioned, and parallelism is redefined as a 'congeries of phenomena', more narrowly called 'tropes', which similarly can occur at three levels, word, line, and supra-linear. This awareness of levels is highly esteemed by Watson (1983, 134) but its finalization is not that highly appreciated. Tropes bind together lines into groups of twos, threes or more, and they are as follows: repetition, coloration, matching, gapping, dependency and mixing. O'Connor's preference for new terminology is criticised by Watson (1983),

who believes that the field is not sufficiently innovative to permit such new terminology.

For scholarly safety and for a greater objectivity of his conclusions, O'Connor admits a comparative dimension as the ultimate requirement for the observations gathered on HPy (henceforth, HPy). Based on the close relatedness that defines the cognate languages, a comparative analysis might have a great value if studies on Ugaritic, Punic or Aramaic verse are taken seriously. This axiom is recognized only to support O'Connor's proposal for syntax as defining the nature of Canaanite verse in particular and for Levantine POETRY in general, because the verse description in the midst of the dialectal traditions has to refer largely to common features. Consequently, it does not need to be applied on the phonological level or morphological structures, since both fields are subject to changes (O'Connor 1980a, 25). As far as length is considered, the unmarked poems are comparatively proved to be medium (with an approximate length of between 7 and 200 lines). Short poems (see for example the poems in Gen 1.27, 7.11; 2 Sam. 3.33-4, and also riddles, proverbs, apophthegmai and gnomai) are atypical of Canaanite POETRY (O'Connor 1980a, 27-8).

By far the most caustic review of O'Connor is that by Kugel, who considers the syntactical interpretation of metre as not sufficient. Kugel senses that, despite the complicated appearance of the theoretical apparatus, it cannot hide the failure to address the relationship between sentences with irregular syntactic profiles. Although the terminology is new and the unit of Hebrew verse is redefined (*line* is preferred to Kugel's *half-line*), O'Connor seems to miss the point of actually defining the basic unit. In Kugel's terms '[line] is a potentially arbitrary entity which conforms to O'Connor's *constraints* because these alone define it in the first place' (Kugel 1981, 317). A study

of HPy's syntax would have to consider particularly the sequence A + B as a whole, keeping close to the Masoretic understanding of lines, expressed through medial and final pauses. Miller P.D. (1983, 629) agrees with Kugel on the issue of the character of poetic lines (cola) and the nature of poetic syntax, which were not considered deeply enough.<sup>1</sup>

Geller (1982) offers more of a mature and sound criticism. He evaluates O'Connor in opposition to Kugel. As a defender of parallelism in Hebrew verse, Geller has no cordial words for either of these two Hebrew Poetry theorists. Without reproaching the value of a syntactic description of a line, Geller (1982, 69-70) rejects the idea of metre understood syntactically. Syntax is not a matter of sound unless the craft of the poet designed it to be so. By no means can it be invoked as an 'uniformitarian principle', as O'Connor tries. With regard to Kugel's *Idea of Biblical Poetry*, Geller (1982, 74) assesses that as one preserves the binary structure of lines and replaces parallelism with sequentiality, ambiguity is just a natural result. The two scholars are united only when it comes to demolishing the "standard description". Though they are inspired by different theories, both are invalidated by the scientific mind, as Geller proves. Promoting O'Connor's rigid descriptive method is as much destructive as retreating into Kugel's literary obscurantism; it is to travel between Scylla and Charybdis.

Among other good things already accepted, O'Connor's idea of Hebrew verse being organized according to some principles that surpass structural and poetic language is of value. Although they escape the reader's grasp, we are still able to locate them and

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<sup>1</sup> Although O'Connor's main interest is in the lower level of HPy, he dedicates the third section of his book to gross structure, where features that describe the poem as a whole are discussed. Initially, a close observation of Psalm 106 traced down several of the structures working at the verse level. The assessment of different relationships extant between contiguous lines (fine structure) followed. Conclusions were drawn from a sample of 1225 selected lines.

even apprehend them, without speculating on their formal definition and function (O'Connor 1980a, 13-4). This level called by O'Connor syntax, and by others 'paralinguistics', into which we move intuitively without much theoretical knowledge, reminds us of Aviram's bivalent perception of POETRY. O'Connor's attempt to define syntactically the basic unit of the Hebrew verse was not very convincing, leaving room for further elaboration and profound study, but his syntactic analysis of Hebrew verse can be used with good results for our study.

**Ernst R. Wendland** (1994) proposed a multifaceted (all relevant features of the discourse are considered), eclectic (various techniques are employed), integrative (an attempt is made to weave the different facets of the analysis into a holistic procedure), and inductive approach (it begins and is guided by the text itself), or simply a discourse analysis approach. Although the 'plurality of voices', quoting Gillingham, was sensed by many others, behind the pretentious title assumed for the method, the anxiety generated by the lack of a precise method is concealed. This is rooted in the literary qualities HPy displays.

Intended for Bible translators, Wendland's method follows the process of recognising poetic devices in a given text. Listed in an approximate order of importance, these are as follows: parallelism of any level, repetition, terseness (he includes here 'compaction' of linguistic structures and drastic reduction in the use of Hebrew PROSE particles), marked syntactic arrangements of words and phrases, word play, imagery, affective devices, dramatization of discourse by implying direct speech with interactive forms, the usage of traditional poetic forms (clichés, themes, motifs, different patterns such as acrostic). Wendland is very much in favour of the bipolar

spectrum Aviram and Longman promoted, and many of his poetic devices are not new at all.

Wendland's method follows an elaborate ten steps process: (1) apprehending the original *Sitz im Leben*; (2) delimitating a self-contained unit; (3) considering textual problems; (4) spatialization of the text (syntactic chart); (5) segmenting the text into its subsequent structural parts (starting with parallelism); (6) confirming the textual organization by evaluating the coherence of the text (disjunctive and conjunctive markers are to be considered here as well as other discourse markers); (7) tracing the points of prominence (topic, focus, background); (8) formulating the thematic summary; (9) interactional analysis in terms of speech event/acts; (10) comparison and contextualization (relating the poetic unit to the larger context).

In the case of a stylistic analysis of a poem, the pain of recognizing POETRY from PROSE might be deliberately postponed because the prosodic quality of a literary piece is already assumed, though not proven. The method applied in such situations, may still be inspired by Wendland's, but it has to be more selective. Consequently, #1, as opposed to #9 has more of an informative quality. It may be reduced to a condensed data or it can be derived from the study, since inductiveness is such an important ingredient of the method. Step 2 is not necessary, because the psalms are already self-containing well defined units (with very few debatable exceptions). The question of superscripts as titles or endnotes might still have relevance (Waltke 1991). Steps 3–8 are of value and imply different levels of linguistics: semantics, syntax, and pragmatics. Eventually, #10 will allow us to relate the findings from individual pss and construe the outcome.

More recently, **Alviero Niccacci** (1997) proposed a similar method. He alludes to Berlin's method by analysing Deborah's Song in part, but connects it to the



distinction between PROSE and POETRY. There are three characteristics proposed for POETRY as opposed to PROSE: (1) segmented communication, (2) parallelism of similar bits of information, and (3) a non-detectable verbal system. The overall conclusion is that POETRY is structured at the most basic level in parallel lines, arranged mainly grammatically in direct order (A B // A' B') or in chiasmic order (A B // B' A'). The choice of illustrating such a method with Hebrew proverbs, we suspect, is not the best choice since the canonical book of Proverbs, especially the last two-thirds from which it is quoted,<sup>2</sup> is by its own nature composed of binary-structures with compositional unity and self-sufficient content.<sup>3</sup> However, among other things proposed for future research Niccacci has in mind to implement his method on larger units (1997, 91). His method is of interest for us because it promotes the study of HPy in the field of linguistics, where semantics and syntax meet. Although only occasionally recognized, Niccacci's method departs from the traditional analysis of HPy in terms of rhetorical devices, trying to identify a method that will transcend the limited approaches previously applied. It can be seen in the mixed type of parallelism promoted from Hrushovski via Berlin, but mostly in his reluctance to accept the insufficient, however complex, methods of his predecessors.

The third principle mentioned above by Niccacci is presented briefly at the end of the paper but its eligibility is indirectly stated. The study of the verbal system as it is applied in POETRY is considered 'the most remarkable area of disagreement' between PROSE and POETRY. The undetectable alternation of qtl, yqtl and wqtl forms in POETRY allowed him to catalogue it as a free alternation. The linguistic category that allows such

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<sup>2</sup> The only exception is Pr 6.8 quoted on p 86.

<sup>3</sup> Niccacci is actually recognizing the limits of this application rather indirectly (1997, 89 n.52), but seems not to be aware of the lack of representativeness of his passage selection for the method he is proposing.

a discussion is that of word order and more likely to belong to syntax (see *infra*). Nevertheless, he admits that the parallelization of selfsame verbs proves to be a characteristic of Canaanite and biblical poetry as well as Amarna letters (Niccacci 1990, 194-95). He even notices the list Dahood provided of all occurrences of *qtl//yqtl* (*yqtl//qtl*) alternation between verbs of different roots.

Such a purely descriptive approach raises the methodological problem of persisting in errors scientifically arguable, because HPy finds itself in a very vulnerable position of not being able to define itself, even if texts are to construe other texts. If in our undertaking we allow description to be balanced by a comparative effort, we might ensure a greater proficiency in our conclusions. The element to which we compare HPy may be any of the world poeties or the poeties of the cognate literatures. These provide for the two main streams of analytical studies in the history of criticism as we understand it. Obviously, versions might have been generated also but, broadly, these are the categories we suggest to be used for a good understanding of the phenomena. The aforementioned scholars sensed in one voice the thrust that style and syntax as cooperative principles have on HPy, and how the study of such incidents might illuminate its obscure side. Such a basic assumption, that syntax can be used as a stylistic device, is worth considering as part of one's methodological approach to HPy.

A final note is required. Without trespassing into other world literatures, some scholars suggested that we should rather compare Hebrew narrative passages, by far better understood, with their parallel depictions in POETRY (Hauser 1987, Ogden 1994). Such parallels can be offered by the crossing of the Reed Sea (Exod 14 cf Exod 15), the victory over Jabin's Canaanite army (Jdg 4 cf Jdg 5), the healing of Hannah's barrenness

(1 Sam 1 cf 1 Sam 2.1-10), David's victorious campaigns (2 Sam 1-21 cf 2 Sam 22), and the recovery of Hezekiah from his deadly illness (Is. 38.1-8 cf Is 38.9-20).

Trying to isolate differences between them, we can identify the most original ones as particular signs for one of the two genres. For example, Alter uses it to compare some of these texts in order to prove the clear-cut distinction between PROSE and POETRY as the two main genres in use in Classical Hebrew literature, and to assign to POETRY a tendency to define itself as less narrative but still incorporating narrativity. Hebrew narrative is believed to have exercised a continuous pressure upon the poets due to its inspirational inner quality and well established tradition.<sup>4</sup>

## **2. The comparative facet of the analysis**

In the previous chapter, we have noticed that a descriptive approach has its limitations. Neither synchronically nor diachronically can it provide enough data for an objective consideration of the Hebrew text to take place. Therefore, whilst O'Connor is only theoretically open to a comparative evaluation of his conclusions, both Wendland and Niccacci give them a more appropriate place. Nevertheless, there are other scholars who defined their method almost exclusively in terms of comparative studies,

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<sup>4</sup> See chapter II in (Alter [1985]1990). As we noticed above, this theory is closely linked with the theory of the development of literary forms in traditional societies and different answers were given to its trajectory in Ancient Hebrew society. The classic view on the matter is rather the opposite, i.e. Hebrew narrative developed later on from POETRY, a process that coheres with the development of cognate literatures in ANE, where the epic was originally written in POETRY (see Gilgamesh Cycle and The Story of Athrahasis in Mesopotamia, and Aqhat Tale and The Story of King Keret in Ugaritic). Watson (1984a, 66-86) shares this theory. Weitzman supports the idea that behind the act of integrating songs into the story lay different reasons of the final editor, in accordance with the literary genre that incorporated the respective song (1997, 36). For example he suggested that the First Song of Moses (Ex. 15) and Deborah's Song (Jdg. 5) serve a similar purpose to the songs bodied in the military Egyptian military narratives, namely to give credit to the monarch for the victory the army gained on the battle field, in our case the monarch being the Lord (1997, 15-36). As for the Last Song of Moses (Deut. 32), this is perceived as a deathbed pronouncement, a final testament, as many others in ANE literature, which has a double function, didactic and legal/accusatory. Therefore, its purpose is to challenge the sinning generation and to warn future generations that great pedagogues do not automatically grant great students (1997, 37-58).

calibrating their descriptive method according to its comparative side, which was obviously prevalent.

### 2.1. Hebrew–non-cognate POETRY comparison

The first option to be considered here is to compare HPy with POETRY from other national literatures. Philo, as the first one to expose the connection between Hebrew song and Greek POETRY, is credited by Kugel with being the one who guided biblical criticism on the wrong path, by attributing Greek metres to HPy by mere assumption.<sup>5</sup> Josephus was more specific than Philo, asserting that the Songs of Moses were composed in hexameter form (*Antiquities* 2.16.4, and 4.8.44 respectively), and David composed his songs in trimeters or pentameters (*Antiquities* 7.12.3). Nevertheless, applying concepts of classical metre to HPy can be interpreted also as an apologetic stratagem, in order to draw the attention of some readers with a Classical education to a literature otherwise unintelligible, and therefore ignored by them (Eissfeldt 1965, 59).

Church Fathers, who through their secular erudition admitted much Graeco-Roman literary theory into their analysis of HPy, generalized this tendency. However, they accepted also that some preeminence Hebrew literature might have had on the

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<sup>5</sup> Further studies on this field are considered to have been a useless investment of time and energy and a fruitless study (Kugel 1981, 140-1). Unless we avoid confronting the huge amount of metrical versifications of the *Psalter* published during the seventeenth and eighteenth century and the multitude of studies on prosodical issues done within the same time span, there is no way to come to such a conclusion. For a list of bibliographical information consider the chapter on metre in (Watson 1984, 87-113). See also the revival of this method as seen by Hans Kosmala (1964 and 1966). Kugel persists in his ignorance concerning the metrical studies during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, saying that ‘the seventeenth century lost its belief in the existence of hexametres, trimetres, etc., in biblical POETRY, and fell to feuding over whether there was no metre at all, or something so abstruse and complicated that the very rules and exceptions took dozens of pages to explain’ (Kugel 1984, 113).

classic literatures.<sup>6</sup> Those who applied a stichometric approach to HPy are Athenagoras, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius of Caesarea, Origen, Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose of Milan, Jerome, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Augustine of Hippo, Cassiodorus, Isidore of Seville, and the Venerable Bede. This situation must have sprung from the assumption all heads of the Church admitted, namely good classical education makes one a good interpreter of the Bible too.<sup>7</sup>

Later on, Jewish poetic theory was indebted to Arabic literary theory, but in most cases, Greek literary theory was recalled. HPy is different from Medieval HPy, not only in layout, but also in style. Arab civilization flourishing during the tenth-twelfth centuries profoundly influenced Hebrew secular POETRY. A tendency towards creating a new POETRY was felt during the previous centuries, but it was confined to liturgical use. The *piyyut* had to embellish a prayer or a religious ceremony for the community or private use for Sabbaths, fast days, weddings, circumcisions, mourning, or even for regular weekdays. The *paytanim* originally got inspired from the biblical poems, but in time they refined their own methods and even produced a new vocabulary and style. Piyyut POETRY had started sharpening its tendency to depart from the classic biblical

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<sup>6</sup> The first ones to support such ideas were Aristobulus of Paneas, Aristeas and Josephus, who tried to prove the superiority of Jewish wisdom (philosophy) over the Greek one (Kugel 1981, 143-4).

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed exposition of their respective views, see chapter four in (Kugel 1981, 142-70). Far from being exhaustive, this list may be completed with at least a few more names of commentators who engaged themselves and even their disciples in HP studies or adjacent fields during antiquity and medieval times: Hippolytus of Rome (third cent.), Appolinarius of Laodicea, Athanasius, Basil of Ancyra, John Chrysostom, Didymus the Blind, Diodore of Tarsus, Gregory of Nyssa, Hilary of Poitiers (fourth cent.), Cyril of Alexandria, Arnobius Junior, Hesychius of Jerusalem, Petrus Chrysologus, Theodoret of Cyrillus (fifth century), Gregory I (the Great – sixth cent.), Alcuin of York (eighth cent.), Remigius of Auxerre, Walafrid Strabo, Haino of Halberstadt (ninth cent.), Euthymius Zigabenus (eleventh/twelfth cent.), Honorius Augustidunensis, Peter Lombard, Gerhoh of Reichersberg, Joachim of Fiore (twelfth cent.), Albertus Magnus, Thomas of Aquinas (thirteenth cent.), Savonarola (fifteenth cent.), Jean Calvin, Jacobus Faber, Martin Luther, Philip Melancton, Paracelsus, Ulrich Zwingli (sixteenth cent.). These are regarded as classic Christian commentators on the book of Psalms (Wittstruck 1994).

POETRY under Yannai,<sup>8</sup> and reached its peak through Saadia Gaon and his poetic school in Babylon. In Spain, the other centre of Jewish culture closely related to Arabic culture, *piyyut* gained more from its emancipation from religious POETRY, and become closer to secular POETRY.

Rhythm of the anonymous *piyyut* used to divide each line into four feet, each having two or three stresses. Since its rediscovery by Yannai, rhyme took over rhythm studies of the former generations of poets. Occasionally, Central European *paytanim* reconsidered writing in rhythmical lines of a specific number of stresses or words. It is with Spanish poets that a specific type of *piyyut* originated, defined by a more rigid quantitative metre, mainly syllabic.<sup>9</sup>

M. Waxman connects the introduction of metre into HPy with the grammarian Dunash ben Labrat from Spain, who borrowed it from Arabic POETRY during the tenth century. Hebrew metre is quantitative and refers to vowels (measured vowels and semi-vowels). The simple metre was very seldom applied, a large number of combinations being preferred instead.<sup>10</sup> Parallelism, ‘a rhyme of thought’, alphabetical form and acrostic, characterizing biblical POETRY, continued to be in use in Western Europe except Spain, where metre was employed more and more (Waxman 1960, 206-10). Eventually, the Spanish poetic school produced the greatest Medieval Jewish poets: Samuel Ibn Nagdila, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Judah Halevi, Abraham Ibn Ezra, and Judah ben Solomon Al-Harisi (Waxman 1960, 216-37).

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<sup>8</sup> Yannai’s contribution to launching a new style in HPy is far from being sorted out. He is still considered as one of the principal representatives of the old Palestinian *piyyut*, one of the few named predecessors of Saadia Gaon (Schirrmann 1972, 712-4).

<sup>9</sup> See Fishoff (1972, 573-602) compensated by a more detailed history of the Hispanic Jewish poets in Habermann (1972, 670–93).

<sup>10</sup> Opinions differ, but there are at least 19 different metres and not more than 52.

Hrushovski admits parallelism based on free rhythm (rhythm based on a cluster of changing principles, i.e. semantic, syntactic, accentual), with a freely distributed embellishment of the text with sound patterns, as the poetic inspiring principle for extra-canonical Jewish POETRY. Post-biblical POETRY is not considered a clearcut category either. It seems as if the authors are merely epigones rather than original creators. Referring to *piyyut*, Hrushovski agrees on the matter that rhythm studies apply in this case to words. It takes some more centuries for the quantitative metre based on syllables to be promoted in HPy, and that happens in medieval Spain and Italy. Syllabic metre will find its way into HPy only later on, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Central and Eastern Europe (Hrushovski 1972, 1195–1240).

In contrast to their Christian scholarly fellows, Jewish medieval commentators appealed to Aramaic and Arabic studies as the key to a better understanding of Hebrew as a language, and to their respective literatures in order to perceive the artistry of Hebrew literature. Though it might have had political explanations, this vigorous interest in Aramaic and Arabic was founded on an innovatory perception of the role that other Semitic languages have for the understanding of Hebrew in terms of comparative Semitic studies. Adele Berlin includes in her list of Jewish POETRY theoreticians who were in close connection with Arabic POETRY Judah Ibn Quraysh, Moshe Ibn Ezra, Quntres Bediqduq Sepat ‘Eber, Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera, Moshe Ibn Habib, Don Isaac Abravanel, Judah Messer Leon, Yohanan Allemanno, Samuel Archivolti, Abraham Portaleone, and Immanuel Frances.<sup>11</sup> Judah Halevi (twelfth cent.) is an exception due to the polemic character of his work *The Kuzari*, where he tried to define Judaism as against secular philosophy (Aristotelianism), Christianity and Islam. Therefore he argues

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<sup>11</sup> For short commentaries on all these Jewish authors and their respective text translated into English [see Berlin (1991, 59-172)].

against prosody as a characteristic of HPy and so does Solomon Ibn Parhon, his twelfth century disciple, Samuel Ibn Tibbon and Moshe Ibn Tibbon (twelfth cent.), his translators into Hebrew, and Joseph Ibn Kaspi (fourteenth cent.),<sup>12</sup> whose thoughts are continued magisterially by Azariah de’Rossi (sixteenth cent.).

The comparative method on the grand scale assumes the universals as its basis and then builds upon the similarities that transcend cultures even though they are not related. A term used since the 1970’s in regard to this procedure is *ethnopoetics*, which promotes redefining POETRY in terms of cultural specifics, avoiding the biased terminology ‘pagan’, ‘gentile’, ‘oral’ or ‘ethnic’.<sup>13</sup> Kugel himself uses the argument provided by literary critics to prove that parallelism is just one of the universals, being present in different national literatures such as Chinese, Japanese, Finnish, Old Turkish, Mongolian, Romanian, Sanskrit (Kugel 1981, 23 n. 54).<sup>14</sup> Other languages also attracted the attention of the linguists, such as Quiché (Norman 1980), or various American Indian languages (O’Connor 1986). Although a disciple of Kugel, Weitzman does not within the limits of this strand that, anyway, Kugel did not follow up by either, but promotes the study of the cognate literatures. Besides, Weitzman criticizes James Watts, namely the anachronistic usage of proofs, wherein Kugel fails.<sup>15</sup>

This procedure might be considered guilty of what Riffaterre terms as an *error of addition*, i.e. projecting modern reactions into ancient texts, thus discovering stylistic

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<sup>12</sup> In his commentary on *Canticles* (fourteenth cent.), he noticed that a verse is divided into halves which are in different types of relationship one to another: continuing the previous idea, opposing it, continuing it but with an ellipsis, or explaining it Berlin (1991, 101-2).

<sup>13</sup> For the first time used by Turner (1978, 337-42).

<sup>14</sup> Whereas S.R. Levin, Roman Jakobson, R. Austerlitz, M. Riffaterre for a more general use and Newman & Popper, T.M. Tschang, W. Steinitz, P. Kiparsky, D.C. Freeman, G.B. Gray, V.M. Zirmunski, N. Poppe, L. Ionescu, J.Gonda, R.C. Culley, P.B. Yoder for the perspective of national literatures on parallelism.

<sup>15</sup> In order to prove the role of POETRY quoted in the midst of prose texts, Watts used hymnic material from Mesopotamian and homeric epics, Egyptian narratives, which although originated in ANE they are not very similar to the biblical situations and were created within a wide variety of times and places. For these reasons, their significance is dull and the comparison lacks methodological validity (Weitzman 1997, 9).



effects never extant there. The opposite procedure can be accepted as being that of not recognizing stylistic values sometime extant but subsequently vanished. In such a case, Riffaterre speaks of an *error of omission*. Omission errors are very plausible in all circumstances displayed below unless more objective criteria validate them (Riffaterre 1959, 166).

## 2.2. Hebrew–cognate POETRY comparison

A second option, very seminal especially during recent decades, would be to compare HPy with POETRY from cognate literatures. One of the earliest scholars to notice the similarity in style and structure between Ugaritic and HPy was **Cyrus Herzl Gordon**, who traces his interest towards this topic to C. Brockelman (1941). His contribution to the field is mainly related to the *Ugaritic Textbook*, which represents the pinnacle of Gordon’s scholarship. It waded across a continuous revision and adnotation process that includes four successive editions, chronological order (alphabetical order too): *Ugaritic Grammar* (1940), *Ugaritic Handbook* (1947), *Ugaritic Manual* (1955), and *Ugaritic Textbook* (1965). As Dahood rightly said: ‘Four editions in 25 years bespeak of vitality of Ugaritic research’ (Dahood 1965, 2). Suffice to say that Gordon’s scholarship in the field exposed parallelism as the main characteristic of UPy, to which added refrains and sentence structure, all having their own correspondent in the Hebrew literature (see the chapter ‘Syntax and the poetic structure’).

**Abraham Meir Habermann** (1971, 670-93) admits an original connection between POETRY and music, and an interconnection between neighbouring cultures. This is the case with HPy that owes much to Canaanite aesthetics, reckoned to be a pre-eminent culture among the Semites. As main characteristics, Habermann lists action,

imagery, simplicity, vigor, and concreteness which are portrayed, due to the extremely concreteness of the Hebrew language, by parallelism, strophe structure, metre, genre, and style. Although Habermann's approach to Hebrew poetic devices is diachronic, it resembles more of an outsider's approach. He offers a good, cautious resumé of the *status quo* in research but does not attempt to reconstruct the Hebrew devices from inside.

Concerning Biblical verse, **Benjamin Hrushovski** does not argue against rhythm and metre but he discusses it with great caution.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, he has more to say about parallelism and sound structures. Hrushovski (1971, 1202a) rather redefines the term parallelism so that it can include as many characteristics as possible. Therefore he speaks of 'free-rhythm' or 'semantic-syntactic-accentual rhythm' as a creative principle for biblical verse. As suggested by its own name, this method implies that parallelism involves multiple strata of linguistic levels and is not a device, but an organizing principle. In most cases, the individual levels where parallelism functions, namely semantic, syntactic, prosodic, morphological, phonological etc., may overlap with a mutual reinforcement.<sup>17</sup>

In spite of his deconstructionist ironic exercise, **James L. Kugel** supported also multiple-criteria for discerning POETRY from PROSE. Although he declared himself as

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<sup>16</sup> Hrushovski admits as the main characteristic of HPy from all the times, its diversity due to the creative interaction with other systems of language and POETRY. He opposes the lack of originality as a possible interpretation of this diversity by sustained efforts to prove its preeminence as supported by its versatility (Hrushovski 1971, 1196-203).

<sup>17</sup> Kugel's refusal to accept parallelism as the mark of HP is compensated by its support for a general applicability in Biblical narrative, but contradicts the first part where he proposed that it is not a genuine characteristic of HPy (1981, 23-5). This time he admits that there are many instances, even in prose texts, where parallel constructions can be traced although the level they appear can differ, lexical, semantic, grammatical, stylistic, 'B always means something beyond A' (Kugel 1981, 101). His lack of coherence in the argument determined Baruch Halpern to assert that, whilst the first part of the book is more of a repeated assertion than a systematic argumentation, the second part of the book is unimpeachable however, 'a bit from silence'. The work is valuable for its second part where the history of ideas approach to the issue of parallelism is both coherent and stimulative (see Halpern's book review in *JR* 65 (1985), 118-20). Kugel himself admits the 'neutral, if not to say weak-kneed, indecisive, fence-sitting position' his book adopted (Kugel 1984, 115).

anti-Lowthian,<sup>18</sup> other give him credit for producing a newer, more refined, definition of parallelism (Berlin 1985). Landy (1984, 62–3) even sees in him the ‘saviour’ of the most criticized section of Lowth’s theory, that on synthetic parallelism.<sup>19</sup> What is seems that Kugel really did was to prove that parallelism is not a poetic device but rather a mental paradigm which stimulated the creative energies of the authors, under the pressure of tradition and cultural interchange.<sup>20</sup> Kugel (1981, 26–8) admits that the three main characteristics of UPy, namely frequent ternary rhymes, repetition of words and/or phrases, and word-pairs, represent fertile soil for searching poetic devices into HPy, but he leaves this as a mere theory.

Right from the outset, **Robert Alter** admits the fact that Classical Hebrew literature consists of two main genres, PROSE and POETRY, to which he actually dedicated two parallel volumes, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (1981), and *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (1985, 1990). In the case of HPy, he noticed a particular avoidance of narrative, i.e. a lack of epic works extant in all ANE literatures except Hebrew. Historical psalms (i.e. 78, 105, 106) are just a few exceptions catalogued more precisely as ‘catechistic rehearsals of Israelite history’, namely doctrinal materials which have no meaning in themselves unless their historical version is known (Alter 1990, 27). He seems to give value to the distinction that might be perceived within the group of

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<sup>18</sup> Alter evaluates Kugel’s contribution as ‘a bold step forward, together with a giant step backward, in understanding the nature of biblical POETRY.’ Kugel’s sarcasm, so much tasted by Landy, is registered as stubborn resistance by Alter (see Alter 1998, 226-7). Kugel has no problem in aiming at the anti-Lowthian target, agreeing with Lowth only where he was most vehemently criticised, synthetic parallelism, but only after preliminary redefinitions have taken place (Alter 1985, 12ff).

<sup>19</sup> Landy anticipates the third solution given to the issue, which is related to context markers, pragmatics in one word.

<sup>20</sup> This perception coheres with Meschonnic’s distinction between Hellenistic perception of POETRY where reason has priority over rhythm and the Jewish perception of POETRY that is essentially intrinsically rhythmical, as codified by the Masoretic accents (Meschonnic 1985, 466–75). Nevertheless, Kugel shares a contradictory opinion to the role of Masoretic accents in Judaism, namely obscuring the structure of the Hebrew verse, contributing to the forgetting of parallelism (Kugel 1984, 111-16).

biblical poetical sub-genres because he approached each poetic section under a different entry.

However, Alter is more interested in tracing the characteristics that unite them, namely parallelism, narrativity and the use of keywords. In other words, Alter prefers Hrushovski's concept of semantic parallelism, which provides for the right tools to understand the relationship between units and lines. It seems that, Alter believes in two pre-existing literary forms, PROSE and POETRY, of which PROSE represented a continuous attraction for the Hebrew bards who tried to render its characteristics into poetic lines. Thus is explained the logical intensification sequence that marks parallelism and that projects it on to a temporal axis.<sup>21</sup> Narrativity lay latent in these poems, by their minute articulations, from line to line, from unit to unit, articulation mainly generated by synonymy. This sense of articulation may be defined as consequentiality both in logical and temporal terms. Although narrative is ignored in POETRY, a sense of narrativity is still extant by the fact that metaphors are given a strong narrative realization (Alter 1990, 40).<sup>22</sup>

Next, Alter tries to propose a few elements that mark POETRY as opposed to PROSE and vice versa. Dialogue is considered a standard practice of biblical narrative that defines the action and relation between the actors. In POETRY, the characters have a rather emblematic presence without interacting one with another in terms of dialogue (Alter 1990, 48-9).<sup>23</sup> The difference between genres (POETRY vs PROSE) is weighed

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<sup>21</sup> See also Alter's explanations on David's Song (2 Sam 22), Joel 2 and Deborah's Song (Jdg 5).

<sup>22</sup> For example, 'the right hand' is a metaphor for authority but in Judges it is acted by Jael, who with her 'right hand' killed Sisera. Similarly, 'the way' a stereotypical metaphor for the moral life in wisdom literature, is performed literally in Proverbs 7 by a young man going astray to the luscious woman (Alter 1990, 45, 61).

<sup>23</sup> Although just imagined, a short dialogue still can be traced in Jdg. 5 as if maidens are responding to their mistress, Sisera's mother. Furthermore, dialogue can be encountered in prophetic POETRY. For types and discussion of this 'technique of style' see (Alonso-Schökel 1988, 170-9). The

stylistically but the distinctive marks of the poetic sub-genres refer to other criteria: the quality of the hearers (fictitious vs realistic), tone (exhortative vs vocative), hermeneutic value (individualistic vs archetypal). As a poet he is this is what Alter could do for his best. Without grounded reasoning, he rejects completely O'Connor and Collins's attempt to prove syntax as the governing principle of Hebrew verse.<sup>24</sup>

More specific and detailed is the method of **Marjo C.A. Korpel** and **Johannes C. de Moor**. De Moor's first attempt towards a methodological technique and a coherent terminology was published in 1978.<sup>25</sup> Later on, he noticed that a similar approach can also be applied to texts traditionally labelled as 'narrative texts' such as Ruth.<sup>26</sup> What exactly does this method offer? As the authors themselves admit, the colometric analysis is a structural method that assumes pre-existing traditional literary forms which were known among the poets on the Eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. However, no subgenres were identified and there were no intentions to provide for a comprehensive understanding of the distinction between PROSE and POETRY.

Korpel and de Moor identified in UPy and HPy structural units of concentric sustenance, a pattern of organizing thought and two principles of originality. The

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personal participation of the characters in Job and Song of Songs are not considered literary dialogue, but rather monologic speeches. Similarly, there are some liturgical pieces in pss which are responsorial.

<sup>24</sup> We imply here *Hebrew Verse Structure* by M.P. O'Connor and *Line-Forms in Biblical POETRY* by T. Collins (see Alter 1990, 215 n. 2).

<sup>25</sup> The article 'The Art of Versification in Ugarit and Israel, part I: The Rhythmical Structure' was incorporated as part of the *Festschrift* dedicated by Y. Avishur and J. Blau to S.E. Loewenstamm (pp. 119-39). Its continuation was published by *Ugarit-Forschungen* as 'The Art of Versification in Ugarit and Israel, part II: The Formal Structure' (10, 1978: 187-217) and 'The Art of Versification in Ugarit and Israel, part III: Further Illustrations of the Principle of Expansion' (12, 1980: 311-15). A more recent, revised and updated version of this material was prepared with the support of Marjo A. Korpel and published again by the two in *Ugarit-Forschungen* under the title 'Fundamentals of Ugaritic and Hebrew Poetry' (18, 1986: 173-212). The article appears again in 1988, as the opening article to the volume Johannes C. De Moor edited with Willem van der Meer on *The Structural Analysis of Biblical and Canaanite POETRY* (JSOT Suppl 74). It is this latest version that makes the object of our comments here.

<sup>26</sup> See 'The POETRY of the Book of Ruth' published in two sections in *Orientalia* (53:262-83 and 55:2-32). William T. Koopmans will apply his master's ideas on Joshua 24. Koopmans' dissertation was published in 1990 as part of JSOT Supplement Series, but his interest in matters like this can be traced to his previous article on 'The Poetic Prose of Joshua 23,' (Meer and Moor 1988, 83-118). Similar undertakings can be found in the mentioned essay collection.

concentric structures from a top-down perspective are: canto (subcanto) > canticle > strophe > verse > colon > foot. The identification of the smallest building block with a word containing at least one stressed syllable (foot) proves that we deal again with a new prosodic theory that amalgamates counting syllables with counting stresses. Whereas the pattern on which supposedly Ugaritic and Hebrew thinking is moulded is parallelism, the two principles by which the originality of the authors was evaluated were expansion and contraction of the concentric structures, previously mentioned.<sup>27</sup> We have already discussed the terminological issue and we will not rewind it here (see *supra*).

**Baruch Margalit** promoted his method as means to understand UPy, yet others considered his method for HPy too. If innovation or thoroughness triggered their interest it is to be appreciated after careful evaluation. Nevertheless, he succeeded in attracting a wave of criticism against his work and his method in particular due, probably, to his blunt intention to provide the much needed commentaries to the Ugaritic texts, and, mostly, to his unparalleled interpretations to the text. In short, Margalit proposed *Wortmetrik* as the main rule towards identifying the Ugaritic poetic lines and the structure of poetic units. Thus, he noted the preference of Ugaritic bards towards lines of not more than four words each, and binary verses. Similarly, a monostih preferably opened and closed a strophe. Frequent strophe-opening structures are the hypercatalectic-distichs, and regularly strophe-closing units are either brachycatalectic-distichs or tristichs (Margalit 1989, 93-105).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The closeness of this method with Kosmala's should be noted, a connection which is admitted by Koopman. Kosmala's unit is the word (whether it has an accent or three), the organizing principle is parallelism but there is no intention to recognize the author's originality. Any deviation from the norm is interpreted as a scribal error (Kosmala 1964, 426-7).

<sup>28</sup> Pardee contested rather naively this apparent regularity. Moreover, the 'high incidence of word-units being divided in one word or spread over two or more words' kind of prove that the Ugaritians were not concerned with poetic lines in terms of word count (Pardee 1991, 326). Although regularity may

Except the technical terminology, there is nothing intriguing in this, though. It was Margalit's rules of scansion that stirred the waters of academics. Initially six (Margalit 1975), the three rules of scansion as synthetically presented in (Margalit 1980), and reiterated in (Margalit 1989) are as follows:

(1) Scansion is defined as the process of determining the number of verse-units per line and verse.

(2) Each vocable or lexeme counts as an independent verse-unit unless otherwise indicated (i.e., connected by a *maqeph*), or with a number of syllables that does not fit the gate from two to five.<sup>29</sup>

(3) There are subunital and double-unit verse-units. Subunital verse-units are considered the conjunctions, the prepositions, the construct forms of monosyllabic nouns (not nouns with pronominal suffixes). Double-unit verse-units can be considered words with more than five syllables, word-clusters (trinomial names, name + epithet + another word).

In short, a verse-unit is what counts, and unless subunital or double-unit, verse-units are credited with valence one (1).

Several scholars has noted by now that Margalit's method lacks in objectivity when attributing valence one (1) to a list of particular lexemes. A long list of problematic non-lexical items complicates the situation. Even so, since the constraint would remain intact, independent of the number of verse-units per line (with a variation of  $\pm 1$ ), a measure of scholarly arbitrariness is acceptable. In the case of problematic items, objectivity can be achieved if 'their syllabic structure and syntactic degree of

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contradict the oral character of Ugaritic literature (Clifford 1982, 127), he is ready to admit that the use of formal prosodic indicators to mark the strophe is wise (1982, 126).

<sup>29</sup> Syllable counting refers to the original form of the words. Thus, for example, segolate nouns receive valence 1 unless pronominal suffixes or preformatives are attached to them.

boundness to following lexical items is determined' (Zevit 1983, 294). Consequently the definition of a verse-unit is refined by Zevit as follows: 'an independent semanto-syntactic unit consisting of no less than two nor more than five syllables' (1983, 295). Its corollary would admit that any semanto-syntactic unit consisting of more than five syllables receives a valence 2 (at least).

Although primary or secondary accents were not marked in Ugaritic literature, their usage is regarded as probable in relation to its younger offspring, Hebrew. Secondary accents are easier to be noted in the MT because Masoretes used to mark it with *meteg*.<sup>30</sup> The basic rule assumes that any open antepenultimate syllable has to be secondarily stressed. If that is a closed one, the previous syllable has to be secondarily stressed, without respect to it being closed or not. Secondary accents usage is attested also at the level of word cluster, if their boundness is not indicated by a *maqeph*. Since its presence is not consistently marked, concluded Zevit, 'it may be taken as the remaining traces of an ancient pattern imperfectly preserved in the reading traditions which came to be recorded in the massoretic schools' (Zevit 1983, 296). Of course, Zevit reckons that his conclusions are not construed on the basis of objective Ugaritic phonology (which are wanting), but depend on reasoning from analogy.<sup>31</sup>

In conclusion, Margalit's method is of use to Ugaritic and even to HPy given the following coridenda: (1) it may only be used as a validating instrument for prosodic systems based on Wortmetrik; (2) the term 'word' as a valence carrier is to be extended,

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<sup>30</sup> It should be noted, though, that this tradition is quite recent (*terminus ad quem* around tenth cent. AD). Nevertheless, as standardized and quite consistent how it is used, we might infer by analogy either a venerable history or a very conservative supporting community.

<sup>31</sup> By this he seems to have been avoiding the criticism Parker is directed towards him when saying that: 'While Zevit's proposal is plausible, the construction of a hypothetical metrical system on a hypothetical system of stree in a hypothetical form of Northwest Semitic is not likely to prove convincing' (Parker 1989, 8).



so that it can include semanto-syntactic complexes not only lexical items (Zevit 1983, 298).

Pardee does not take for granted Margalit's assumptions of illuminating the area of Ugaritic studies through his method. On the contrary, Pardee does not see in Margalit's work on Baal Cycle more than 'a prosodic analysis with philological notes' (Pardee 1982, 267). The reasons for this low perception of Margalit, as we assess them, are not entirely objective. Although Pardee is ready to accept some of Margalit merits, such as marking the beginning of a strophe by a monocolon: 'the lack of parallelism may signal a juncture; or, vice versa, when a sense juncture is obvious, we must exercise care lest we force non-parallelistic material into a parallelistic mold' (p. 268).

Furthermore, Margalit's dedication to his *Wortmetrik* is incriminated as too passionate because he tends to ignore almost completely parallelism and is too hasty to amending the text, even before parallelism was considered. It is only a comprehensive and exhaustive study which will do justice to the Ugaritic corpus: comprehensive in terms of literary incidents considered (both qualitative and quantitative), and exhaustive in terms of the Ugaritic corpus to be examined). The prosodic system proposed by Margalit is improbable, not only because its implausible terminological connections (prosody implies metre and poetic foot, which are impossible to prove as extant in UPy), but also for the paucity of information we possess concerning the Ugaritic phonology (Pardee 1982, 269). Besides, if such a system would really work, it should have been seen at work in shorter poems. Supposedly, it is a workable system for long poems (with strophe and stanza structures), its relevance to HPy may not be severely damaged for many Hebrew poems are relatively short.

Pardee's criticism dies out as he approaches the end of his review where he seems rejuvenated by the extensive study of alliteration<sup>32</sup> (not integrated in grammatical parallelism of the verses, though), the ability to interpret the corpus as a whole (at times interpretation is getting too far), quality of the indexes provided and the original style used in writing (Pardee 1982, 270).<sup>33</sup>

Clifford is criticizing Margalit for a particular blindness he displays when oral formulaic language is concerned. Probably due to the same confidence that made him insensitive to inner parallelism of the verse, of which Pardee accused him, Margalit does not consider what became obvious for so many others. One cannot ignore a linguistic cliché such as 'upon lifting her eyes, she beheld' without prompting heavy criticism (Clifford 1982, 126). We are entitled to conclude that, at large, Margalit's method is of value for literary analysis of the UPy and HPy as long as it is tempered by a careful observation of other SDs, especially parallelism and is not granted the overall control of poetic verses. Its main applicability might prove of high value when extended poems are considered and the integration of verses into strophe and other larger structures are envisaged.

**Wilfred G.E. Watson** surpasses his predecessors by his tendency towards exhaustiveness in terms of artistic devices usage. Despite the detailed technique promoted in his books, he is far from being dogmatic about the procedure proposed. Hence, he declares 'Ultimately, the decision owes a great deal to mature reflection which will consider content as well as form, with an eye on traditions both in Classical Hebrew and in ancient Near Eastern literature generally.' (Watson 1984a, 55)

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<sup>32</sup> Also applauded by Clifford (1982, 126).

<sup>33</sup> Later on, when Margalit published a second commentary on the Ugaritic texts, Pardee did not renew his critique on the method, but preferred to refer back to his earlier review instead. The only issues that were questionable this time concerned the book layout and excesses in interpretation (Pardee 1991, 327).

Poetic devices can be met in PROSE too, suggested Watson (1984a, 15-20), but a greater density of them, the interplay of poetic devices, or the supportive presence of other secondary techniques (such as expansion, tours, lists, inversions) are signs that confirm the poetic status of a work of literature. POETRY can be defined in opposition to PROSE (*negative* indicators) or by an analysis of its own (*positive* indicators). For this last case, there are three categories of indicators: *broad*, *structural*, and *other*. This systematization of the indicators already offered us a clue about the level on which the poetic devices are functioning. Although structural terminology is implied, rhetorical analysis is intended, as can be discerned from the general outline of the method itself. Watson's analytical method bears four main phases: (1) identifying the poem within its natural limits; (2) sorting out its inner structure; (3) finding the poetic devices and interpreting their function, and (4) comparing it with other similar works from cognate literatures.

There is little doubt about the comprehensiveness of Watson's method (Watson 1984a, 46-54).<sup>34</sup> Unexpectedly, at the end of a very convincing discourse on the multiplicity of facets HPy has, Watson admits the collateral factor of content in ANE POETRY. Whereas PROSE is the vehicle used to render the language of letters, treaties, economic documents, etc., POETRY is preferred only for religious and mythological texts (Watson 1984a, 60). A similar association between form and social function is rendered latter but asserting that myths, wisdom literature, and liturgical texts are cast in forms that resemble better the interest of their respective authors for more of an ornamented use of language (de Moor and Watson 1993, xvii).

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<sup>34</sup> Although comprehensive at the level of its study object, methodologically Watson's approach is considered a clear reflection of the old school of biblical studies which conceive HP in general and parallelism in particular a 'mechanically combinational system'. Alter continues by considering that Watson's taxonomy is endless and his perception of the relation between form and meaning is seldom correct (1998, 228).

If this is truly the case, then the quest for a definitive SD to mark poetical texts, as opposed to PROSE, texts become less focused. Nevertheless, since the Hebrew text is more recent than the Ugaritic and Akkadian texts, one might expect particular SD to come out in time as a marker for POETRY, and even traces of its function as such to be found in the cognate literatures.

As they wrote the introductory article for the thematic volume on *Verses in Ancient Near Eastern Prose*, de Moor and Watson synthesized the importance of several criteria to distinguish POETRY from PROSE, surfacing from the studies included in the collective work. Among them are included acrostic patterning, rhythm, repetition, ellipsis, and most of all parallelism, including here half-line parallelism (Watson 1993), and panverse structures (such as chiasmus) (de Moor and Watson 1993, xiv). The particular markers of poetical units or subunits, such as colometric orthography of some Ugaritic and Akkadian documents, or the accents, the traditional division into  $\text{P=tWj}^{\text{t}}$  and  $\text{s=tWm}^{\text{t}}$ , and the use of  $\text{s=}\text{>}$  in Biblical documents preserved by the Masoretes, are of interest for the diachronic study of POETRY in ANE literature (de Moor and Watson 1993, xv).

Although his interest for Semitic POETRY started earlier, **Dennis Pardee's** contribution to the research of HPy did not reach a comprehensive state until 1988 when his study, *Ugaritic and Hebrew Poetic Parallelism: A Trial Cut ('nt I and Proverbs 2)*, was published by Brill. His main theory is built upon the old tradition disclosed in Western Europe by Bishop Lowth, according to which parallelism is the main characteristic of Semitic verse, Hebrew included. Pardee tried to prove that parallelism, with all its intricacies, is the principal feature of HPy. Of course, the use of parallelism is not promoted as originating in Hebrew literature, but in other Semitic literatures. One

good reason is that this feature can be traced in the Ugaritic literature, namely in the mythological text of 'nt tablet I. Pardee's acknowledgement of parallelism can be dated back to 1980, while surveying HPy and UPy. Then he admitted that parallelism is the structural principle of Semitic POETRY, and the basic structural unit is consisting of  $x + 1 (+ n \dots)$  lines. Thus, he opposed the dream of a monoclonic line as the structural unit of POETRY. When it comes to metre, he is not in favour of syllable count because the metrical pattern of Semitic POETRY, if there is such a thing, is rather stress than syllable based. Several reasons were invoked here, namely the uncertainty of vocalization of the Ugaritic texts, the comparable length of lines when stress units are considered, and counting stress units is convergent with semantic parallelism (Pardee 1981, 126-30).

Both papers preceding the monograph<sup>35</sup> do speak about repetitive, semantic, grammatical, and phonetic parallelism as proofs for supporting the bicolon, sometimes the tricolon, as the nuclear structure of Semitic POETRY. By doing that, Pardee is turning away from the theory promoted by O'Conner and Collins, without throwing over board their methodology entirely. Actually, he is implying their terminology and method when discussing parallelism, granting them originality and insight into the method to be applied to Semitic POETRY.

A particular insight of Pardee drew our attention. Considering Kaiser's evaluation of grammatical parallelism of UPy, he justly raised the following question: 'V-S-O may be the least marked order for a prose sentence, but should it be made normative for poetry?' (Pardee 1988, 42). The justice of such a question was based on

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<sup>35</sup> The two papers 'Ugaritic and Hebrew Poetry: Parallelism' (Communication Prepared for the First International Symposium on the Antiquities of Palestine, Aleppo, September, 1981), and 'Types and Distributions of Parallelism in Ugaritic and Hebrew Poetry' (Communication Prepared for the Annual Meeting of SBL, New York, December 21, 1982), were published as appendixes to the quoted monograph. The second paper is following the first in terms of emphasis, but lacks in specificity and application on the original texts.

the technique preferred by Kaiser in evaluating parallelism, namely noticing the place of major constituent elements at the line level, such as Verb, Subject, Object, and Modifier. Unhappily the issue is not followed up, Collins' method being preferred instead, on grounds of its specificity and ability to narrow down and define the diversity of grammatical phenomena. Nevertheless, Pardee trusted Kaiser's analysis for the way it made things visible and even recognized the superiority of its interpretation to Collins' when abnormal word order is concerned. Too sad that Pardee did not cross the border of syntax into pragmatics where better explanations would have been available.

In a similar fashion, when it comes to its applicability to *Proverbs* 2, Pardee disregards the usage of Kaiser's method even without arguing against it. His only comment is: 'again one must wonder about the propriety of assigning a normative word order' (Pardee 1988, 129). Although used for both texts, Kaiser's method did not earn a place in the gallery of so-called 'systems of analysis', alongside with those of Collins, O'Connor, Geller (Pardee 1988, 165). Pardee either disregarded the use of the method or he did not comprehend it entirely; it is certain that he did not appreciate it well enough to give it some room in his concluding pages. Now it is true that a normative word order is not yet completely proved, but it could have been proposed as if true the word order so stable in use in PROSE texts and its normativity tested for poetical texts. Pardee preferred to stick with the more traditional way of analysing parallelism instead.

Of some greater help would have been Wilson's paper on word order in the Ugaritic poem of Krt (1982, 17-32). If the content has to be considered pre-eminent, as Watson proposed, then it is hard to decide on Krt's character. Supposing that its poetical character is assumed, then Wilson conclusions are of some relevance for HPy. Thus, he could notice that all *yqtl*, *qtl* and imperative verb forms prefer the initial position of

sentences. Workable they might be, Wilson's conclusions are not entirely supportive for the observation of verb sequence in POETRY. The reason for that owes much to the fact that both Wilson and Collins tended to atomize the poetic texts into their respective sentences, although too many times a sentence is not coextensive with the poetic line for various stylistic reasons (half parallelism and verb gapping to be considered among them).

Besides the refusal to accept the terms POETRY and PROSE without further clarification, **Steven Weitzman** (1997, ix) suggests that a qualified answer to the issue of a distinction between them may be found easier once answers are provided to other questions, such as: What was the relation of literary practice in ancient Israel to that of other cultures in the Ancient Near East? What impact did the canonization have on literary practice in early Judaism and on the literary development of narrative? By doing that, he argues for a proper interpretation of literature in its original context and follows closely the leadership of his mentor, James Kugel.

Weitzman (1997, 8) favors a comparative study which correlates objects from the same culture or from cultures in contact with one another. Similarity is understood not on the basis of universals but on previous convergence: common ancestor, mutual intermediary, direct influence one on the other. This variant is preferable for heuristic purposes because it allows one to apply what is known about one object of the comparison to gain a better understanding of the other. As previously noticed the comparison is to be kept in the limits of cognate literatures. Memorable in this regard are the parallel studies of *Deuteronomy* and Hittite treaties, but later Neo-Assyrian vassal treaties proved to be of much closer contingency, and therefore took preeminence over the Hittite treaties that inspired them.

Some of the criteria for assessing the merits and weaknesses of such comparisons, although there is no consensus on these, could be some of the following: (1) dependency upon a configuration of many similarities and not upon one isolated similarity; the more similarities the greater the probability of interconnection between texts; (2) evidence showing a text influencing another, or sharing a common ancestry is very significant; (3) differences between the objects of comparison are highly evaluated, reflecting the complexity of the multilevelled process; (4) the outcome of such a process is eventually tied to interpretation because they shed light on the exegetical issues (Weitzman 1997, 10-11).

We have indicated how important several scholars view comparative studies of BH and cognate POETRY. Many other names could have joined the gallery, but the criterion that prompted this selection was a common belief they shared regarding the significance literary studies have on discerning POETRY from PROSE. Yet, such comparative studies have their own imperfections. O'Connor was concerned of the so-called homogeneity that characterizes Canaanite POETRY across its major genres. As Ugaritic myths and legends are written in a uniform medium that lacks genre specificity, so are Hebrew lyrics and historical recitations too. This should restrain the use of the comparative method (O'Connor 1980, 42). Nevertheless, there are other failures which need to be considered.

In a paper dedicated to folklore studies in Ugaritic literature, Sasson warned folklore students of several specific failures they might encounter while engaging the research of ancient literature. The focus of such a study regards the assessment of origin, development and spread of literary traditions, relation between the author and its document, mental paradigms, which inspired the original texts, or even the worldview



that molded them.<sup>36</sup> Methodologically someone can approach the Ugaritic texts from a historical or hermeneutical viewpoint.

The historian will struggle with five limitations and difficulties of the Ugaritic texts, due to the fact that these literary achievements are masterminded to give the appearance of exemplary or paradigmatic behavior. (1) Content and mortality of its characters channeled scholarly judgement to label Baal's cycle as a myth and Keret's story as an epic. If literary structure of the narrative is taken into consideration then the distinctions between myth, on the one hand, and epic, legend, saga, on the other, would be minimal. The story of AQHT is difficult to label as one single category, because its content spans the realms of myths and epic. (2) It is very unlikely that the content will suffice either to date Ugaritic texts or to locate them within a linear development in literary creativity. Yet a *terminus ad quem* can be established. (3) It is very unlikely that our understanding of Canaanite society can rely on the poems of AQHT and KRT that are mainly esthetic not historical narratives. (4) It is hazardous to extract historical information from Ugaritic tales due to the paucity of documents, their 'historicizing' and fictitious tendencies. (5) Ugaritic narratives most probably were not created in the rural milieu, and were not transmitted orally. The use of formulaic expressions, repetitions or other rhetorical devices is not proof towards their lower origin. Their 'one-dimensional' character Sasson talked about is rather a proof toward their elitist origin and transmission (Sasson 1981, 86-88).

Hermeneutical considerations will need to consider properly the originality of each piece of literature's author. By saying that a folk-tale followed a particular

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<sup>36</sup> Although Sasson does not admit that folklore research should have such a declared purpose (considered a futile mission right from the outset), hermeneutical insights of folklore research can reveal aspects of the social, cultural, and political context in which this literature is set (as suggested by Bascom in Alan Dundes, *The Study of Folklore*, 1965, 279-98).

structure it is not implied that 'their creators were esthetically hamstrung'. The authors had different alternatives to intrude creatively in the literary tradition: describing the characters, their surroundings, their motivations; secondary characterization to round the proportions of a given narrative; remembering past actions in a slightly different manner than previously; even inventing new devices. The solution proposed by Sasson is very technical, yet so easy to apply. It concerns the evidence any text incorporates: textual evidence (e.g., colophon, handwriting and errors), and narrative evidence (e.g., paronomasia, rhetorical devices, and performance).<sup>37</sup> It is interesting how much he relates folklore studies (tended to be included into mimetics) to semiotics (the study of language incidents, in our case poetic) [Sasson 1981, 91-4].

When it comes to Ugaritic literature's relevance, Parker suggested a threefold defence. First, since it represents primarily literary, esthetic, values, the study of Ugaritic literature allows us to understand the Ugaritic society and religion (Parker 1989, 218). Second, due to its usage of recurrent themes in ANE literature (e.g., miraculous birth as answer to a prayer, dream teophany, expedition for a spouse, sickness and recovery), the study of Ugaritic literature enables us to perceive its qualities in relation to others (Parker 1989, 220). Third, Ugaritic literature throws light on the study of biblical literature to which the greatest resemblance is noted (Parker 1989, 225-32).

As back up for the latter, Parker refers to several realities, already accepted among the scholars. Ugaritic literature proves that oral material was available in the period and cultural area relevant to Israel's ancestors. Moreover, it gives support concerning the sources and composition of some biblical narratives, it reveals some the

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<sup>37</sup> Paronomasia is indeed a rhetorical device, but Sasson gave to it prominence, because of its importance for the study. Depending on the type of wordplay (oral or visual), paronomasia would betray an oral composer and usage of the poem or a scribal context.

compositional techniques available and heightens our appreciation for biblical narrative. Besides, such knowledge gives us a better appreciation of monotheism and theology in Israel, and supports a better understanding of the role attributed to humankind in relation to God in Israel's theology (Parker 1989, 226-32). Reason enough to give ear to what Ugaritic literature has to say about ancient literature in Levant.

From a comparative perspective of the Hebrew and cognate literatures one might suggest that a thorough research of poetic terminology linked with the observation of its respective content and form might prevent us from the aforementioned fallacies and provide for revelatory information concerning a proper understanding of the literary value of such genres, if there was such a thing.<sup>38</sup>

### **3. Conclusions**

What all approaches surveyed here are more or less aware of is the exceeding importance the minute details of the HB have in any discussion that concerns it. There might be other aspects of interest such as its setting-in-life, its author or its reader but nobody is so absurd as to ignore the text totally. Unlike other aspects of the utterance, the text is most likely to be understood without Sisiphan efforts. Whereas foreign texts are in need for further clarification of some elements in order to achieve the minimum culturalization necessary for a proper understanding, old cultures themselves with their traditions and rites rely on ancient texts for insight. Therefore, it is more than natural to subscribe to the primacy of texts right from the outset of our undertaking.

Among the methods discussed above, a general dissatisfaction as to their general applicability was sensed too. Generally, promoting a complex approach and multi-

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<sup>38</sup> Luis Alonso-Schökel is convinced that the Israelites had no fixed system of literary categories (1988, 8-10). He quotes the more elaborate study of G. Rinaldi, 'Alcuni termini ebraici relativi alla letteratura,' published in *Biblica* 40 (1959), 267-89.

levelled criteria seems to solve the lack of satisfaction with any particular research method. Terminologically, one may prefer a more neutral terminology in order to favour a better description and evaluation of the literary and stylistic phenomena in Hebrew and cognate literatures.

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