

## Poetry

comprises one-third of Hebrew Bible—not found in only seven books: Lev, Ruth, Ezra, Neh, Est, Hag, Mal

primary characteristics of Hebrew poetry discovered by Robert Lowth in 1753, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*: parallelism & meter

other characteristics: literary devices (figures of speech), exalted language, archaic language & references (mythological)—rhyme little if ever important

### Parallelism

Synonymous (second stich repeats idea of first)

Ps 24:1-3—3 distichs, all synonymous: a b : a' b':

The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof,	a b
<u>the world and those who dwell therein;</u>	<u>a' b'</u>
for he has founded it upon the seas,	a b
<u>and established it upon the rivers.</u>	<u>a' b'</u>
Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?	a b
<u>And who shall stand in his holy place?</u>	<u>a' b'</u>

Jr 17:9-10a—2 distichs, incomplete synonymous:

Wicked the heart above-all	a b c
<u>And corrupt-it</u>	<u>a' b'</u>
I Yahweh try the-heart	a b c d
<u>test the-reins</u>	<u>c' d'</u>

Ps 103:7—1 distich, incomplete synonymous with compensation (ballast variant):

He-made-known his-ways to-Moses	a b c
<u>to-the-sons-of-Israel his-deeds</u>	<u>C' b'</u>

Antithetic (second stich contrasts with idea of first)

Ps 1:6—1 distich, incomplete antithetic:

For the Lord knows the way of the righteous	a b c d
<u>but the way of the wicked will perish</u>	<u>c d' b'</u>

Pr 15:17—1 distich, incomplete antithetic:

Better a-meal-of-vegetables and-love-there	a b c
<u>than-a-fattened-calf and-hatred-in-it</u>	<u>b' c'</u>

Synthetic (Formal) (second stich continues idea of first)

Ps 14:1a—1 distich, synthetic:

The-fool says in-his-heart,  
"There-is-no God."

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Ps 2:1-6—synthetic & synonymous:

Why do the nations conspire	
<u>and the peoples plot in vain?</u>	<u>synonymous</u>
The kings of the earth set themselves	
and the rulers take counsel together	synonymous
<u>against the Lord and his anointed, saying,</u>	<u>synthetic</u>
Let us burst their bonds asunder	
<u>and cast their cords from us.</u>	<u>synonymous</u>
He who sits in the heavens laughs,	
<u>the Lord has them in derision.</u>	<u>synonymous</u>
Then he will speak to them in his wrath	
<u>and terrify them in his fury, saying,</u>	<u>synonymous</u>
I have set my king	
<u>on Zion, my holy hill.</u>	<u>synthetic</u>

### Other Types Suggested

emblematic (one literal, other figurative): Ps 103:11-13

stairlike/climactic (repetition with progression): Ps 29:1-2

chiastic (X-shaped, a b b a): Isa 59:8a

external parallelism extends concept to include relationship between larger units (e.g., strophes):

Isa 1:10—internal synthetic, external synonymous

Hear the word of the Lord,		
<u>you rulers of Sodom!</u>	<u>synthetic</u>	
Give ear to the teaching of our God,		synonymous
<u>you people of Gomorrah</u>	<u>synthetic</u>	

### Meter

various methods of determining meter: syllables, stressed syllables, words, syntactic structures

meter subordinate to needs of parallelism

## Literary Devices

1. word-pairs: pair of synonyms or near-synonyms frequently found in parallelism, often in a fixed order (hear / give ear; word / teaching; Yahweh / Elohim; Sodom / Gomorrah)
2. alliteration: repetition of consonants or vowels (Ps 58:5-6 [4-5 Eng], 20 of 58 consonants ן or ם)
3. paranomasia: word plays, puns
  - a. Amos 8:2: קָיִץ, קָיִץ ripe fruit, time is ripe
  - b. Isa 5:7b: וַיִּקְוֶה לְמִשְׁפָּט וַהֲנִה מִשְׁפָּח  
לְצִדִּיקָה וַהֲנִה צַעֲקָה  
he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; good, blood  
for righteousness, but behold, a cry. right, fright
  - c. Sus 54-59: σχῖνον, σχίσει clove/cleave πρίνον, καταπρίση yew/hew
4. metaphors: figurative language (Pss 69:1-2; 36:7)
5. personification: referring to or addressing non-human objects as human (Ps 24:7; 98:7-8)
6. mythological language: references to beings or events known from mythology rather than history (Pss 74:12-14; 18:4-19)
7. repetition (Ps 118:2-4, 10-12, 15-16)
8. inclusio: repetition of first line at close of section (Pss 8; 118)
9. chiasm: X-shaped pattern, a b b a, a b c b a, etc. (Ps 9:11-14, a b c b a)
10. alphabetic acrostic: each strophe or group of strophes begins with a successive letter of the alphabet (Pss 9-10; 119; Lam 1-4)

## Exegesis of Poetry

take parallelism & literary devices into account when interpreting verses—ex:

Where there is no vision, the people perish;  
But happy is he who keeps the law. (Prov 29:18)

I have killed a man for wounding me,  
and a boy for striking me. (Gen 4:23)

Lift up your heads, O gates,  
And be lifted up, O ancient doors. (Ps 24:7)