# 摘　要

随着国际上把《圣经》提高到西方文学源头的地位，我国对圣经文学的研究也在向纵深方向发展。诗歌是文学的灵魂，具有独特的文体风格。古希伯来人在其诗歌的创作中有其独特的艺术手法，本文拟采用结构主义的文论方法：从其诗歌构成的不同因素的分析中，总体把握圣经诗歌的文体特征。

本文共分五章

第一章是定义了《圣经》诗歌。从其语言：意象、比喻、平行体的运用上，从其高度凝练的结构和模式上，举例分析、说明了什么是《圣经》诗歌。

第二章总体介绍了圣经诗歌的语言。主要运用弗莱原型理论和俄国形式主义理论对圣经诗歌的语言：意象、原型进行了分析。大量修辞手法尤其是隐喻的使用，增加了诗歌的审美情趣，使得诗歌更加凝练、形象、生动和耐人寻味。本章还分析了圣经诗歌的最重要形式：平行体。平行体是圣经诗歌最主要的结构形式，它是古希伯来人独特的诗歌创作形式。平行体的运用使得诗歌语言结构更加的凝练、简洁、生动有趣、便于记忆、耐人寻味。

第三章分析了圣经诗歌的艺术特征，主要采用了俄国形式主义的文学分析方法对其主题，结构变化等诗歌创作的艺术手法进行了分析，然后又分析了主要的诗歌结构形式：三段式抒情诗结构。文章又对其特有的文体形式—离合体（贯顶体）和其它的文体特征：对语和副歌（启应体）等进行了相关分析。圣经诗歌艺术手法的运用使得诗歌所表达的情感具有强烈的感染力，也免得诗歌在结构上流于俗套，增加了形式的美感。

第四章主要对圣经中最具有代表性的诗歌集《诗篇》展开了文体分析。首先，无论是作为表现手法使用的意象，还是诗歌所表现的意象，都大大丰富了诗歌的内容和形式。《诗篇》另一明显的特征是其丰富的诗歌类型：赞美诗，祈愿诗，敬拜诗，颂词等，这些诗歌无论从精神上还是从文化上都反映了古希伯来人的生活风貌。简洁幽邃是《诗篇》的另一特征，此风格反映了古希伯来人

高度的诗歌艺术修养。

第五章主要运用弗洛伊德的精神分析理论和女性文论的视角对《雅歌》展开全面的文体分析。首先确定它是一部浪漫的田园爱情诗集。然后对其爱情--婚姻--爱情的主题风格展开分析。再就对其独特的诗歌语言特征及诗集的意识流结构等作了全面的分析。

风格即其文章本身。通过对圣经诗歌语言，艺术手法等的探讨，再就对《诗篇》、《雅歌》两部诗集的具体文体分析，人们可对圣经诗歌的总体特征有一个更好的理解，从而对古希伯来诗人如何表达情感有一个更加清晰的认识。

**关键词：《圣经》诗歌；意象；比喻性言语；艺术性；抒情性**

# Abstract

The Christian Bible has been considered one of the sources of Western literature. And the research into the literary value of the Bible has been developing in depth both at home and abroad.

Poetry is the soul of literature, and it is one of the main literary genres in the Bible. This thesis aims at the analysis of the stylistic features of biblical poetry based on the theory of structuralism, through which people can have an organic picture about how the ancient Hebrew poets created their literature.

The thesis consists of five chapters:

Chapter one mainly illustrates what biblical poetry is through the analysis of imagery, metaphor, parallelism and the highly compressed sentence form.

Chapter two puts its emphasis on the stylistic analysis of the language of biblical poetry. Northrop Frye's theory and Russian Formalism are applied in the analysis of the usage of image and archetype; figurative language permeated in biblical poetry especially the use of metaphor enriches the poetry form and reinforces the effect of the utterance, too. Parallelism also consists of the language style of biblical poetry. It is the main verse form. Parallelism is an example of the skillful handling of language, and it satisfies the artistic urge for balance, symmetry, rhythm, and shapeliness.

Chapter three makes an analysis of the artistry of biblical poetry. The artistry of arranging theme and variation, pattern and design, and three-part-lyric form shows great poetry cultivation of the ancient Hebrew poets. Acrostic form; repeated refrain and word pairs add great artistic effects to the style of the poetry, too.

Chapter four carries out a stylistic analysis of the book of Psalms. Imagery fills the book, and it embodies vividly both the empirical world and

metaphysical conception, which makes the book universal. The book is also rich in poetry genres or subtypes, the generic feature of which reflects the life of ancient Hebrew people spiritually and culturally. And the whole writing style is simple and sublime, which embodies the great artistic mastery of the ancient Hebrew poets.

Chapter five analyzes the style of the book of Song of Solomon. First it is a collection of love lyrics. Romantic love is the main theme. The structure of love-marriage-love through the technique of stream-of-consciousness adds great effect to the love motif. Analysis of figures of speech based on the Freudian theory shows that the language of the book is very metaphorical, imagistic and elegant. The successful female image in the book is another great scene of the book. Through the stylistic analysis people can figure out that the poetry reflects the ancient Hebrew's pursuit of love and their yearning for a better life.

Style is the book itself. Structuralism emphasizes the integrity of literature which is based on different elements of literary work. Through the stylistic analysis of biblical poetry people can have an organic picture of how the ancient Hebrew poets expressed their sentiments, and can appreciate the ancient Hebrew nation's life style culturally.

**Key words:** biblical poetry; imagery; figurative language; artistry; lyric

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# Introduction

The Bible is unique. Three types of writing predominate and are intermingled throughout the Bible. They are: theological or moral exposition, history, and literature. For so many centuries, the Bible had been considered only theological or historical; but from last century, the new direction of the Biblical study which is going on in the world is that: to study the Bible as it is a work of literature and it has been given the status of one of the sources of western literature, that the methods of literary scholarship are a necessary part of any complete study of the Bible.

The most obvious feature of literature of the Bible is that it images its subject matter. It prefers the concrete to the abstract. This is why it is often called imaginative literature: it appeals to our image—making and image perceiving capacity. The result is that the subject of literature is not abstract information but human experience. The Bible gives us pictures of life and reality as well as ideas. Its truth sometimes consists of ideas and propositions, but in its literary parts truth often takes the form of *truthfulness* to *reality* and *human experience.* "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall *eat*, or what ye shall *drink*; nor yet for your body, what ye shall *put on*. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" (Matt.6:25-34). The Bible is true that it is the portrayal of life, when we read we recognize and experience that it is the way life is. A literary approach takes the images of the Bible seriously as something that embodies and communicates truth rather than tells it.

One of the commonest ways of defining literature is by its literary genres or types. Through the centuries, people have agreed that certain genres are literary in nature. Story and poetry are the most notable categories. The concept of literary genre is very important in the analysis of literature. Each genre has its distinctive features and its own rules or principles of operation. This, in turn, affects how the readers read and interpret a work of literature. How important is the notion of genre to literature and the Bible?

Because the Bible is an anthology of separate works, it contains a mixture of genres, some of them literary and some nonliterary. The main literary genres in the Bible are narrative or story, poetry (especially lyric poetry) which can be divided into sub-types, proverb, and visionary writing (including both prophecy and apocalypse). Literary genres that appear less often include satire, epic, tragedy, epithalamion (wedding poem), elegy (funeral poem), drama, and encomium (a work that praises a quality or character type).

Another criterion of literature is artistry. Literature is an art form, characterized by beauty, craftsmanship, and technique. With literature, we focus not only on what is said but also on how it is said. Literary artistry includes both skill with words and patterned composition. The elements of artistic form that all the arts share include pattern or design, theme or central focus, organic unity, coherence, balance, contrast, symmetry, repetition or recurrence, and unified progression. The purposes of artistry are at least two: artistry intensifies the impact of an utterance and is pleasurable for its own sake.

Literature uses resources of language such as metaphor, simile, pun, allusion, paradox, and irony. Word play is particularly important in the literature of the Bible, and not just in the poetic parts. Literary language calls attention to itself. It strikes us as more carefully crafted or more concentrated than ordinary discourse: "And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." (Matt.6:28-29), in these two verses, the author uses a rhetorical question to intensify the effect; he also uses an analogy, and an allusion to express the truth. In one way or another, it tries to do more with language than straightforward expository prose does. By this criterion, too, the Bible is a literary book.

This thesis mainly focuses the stylistic analysis of the biblical poetry from its language, imagery, artistry, genres, etc, through which people can have an organic picture about the poetry style, and know how the ancient Hebrew poets express their sentiments. The study mainly uses the theory of structuralism to illustrate the analysis. Claude Levi-Strauss, who is the representative of the theory claims:

(1) If there is a meaning to be found in mythology, it cannot reside in the isolated elements which enter into the composition of a myth, but only in the way those elements are combined. (2) Although myth belongs to the same category as language, being, as a matter of fact, only part of it, language in myth exhibits specific properties. (3) Those properties are only to be found above the ordinary linguistic level, that is, they exhibit more complex features than those which are to be found in any other kind of linguistic expressions. Under the three points above, two consequences will follow; (1) Myth, like the rest of the language, is made up of constituent units. (2) These constituent units presuppose the constituent units present in language when analyzed on other levels—namely, phonemes, morphemes, and sememes –but they, nevertheless, differ from the latter in the same way as the latter differ among themselves; they belong to a higher and more complex order. (Zhugang, 2001: 159)[1]

For this reason, we shall call them *gross constituent units*. The article will analyze the stylistic elements of the biblical poetry, such as: the *image and archetype* belong to the part of language; *the theme and variation* belong to the part of the artistry, they are all the *constituent units*, and the language and artistry, they serve the stylistic analysis and they belong to the *gross constituent units*—biblical poetry.

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[1] Zhugang. *Twentieth Century Western Critical Theories* (Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2001)

# Chapter 1 What Is Poetry?

Poetry speaks to man on all the levels of his being; it stimulates his thoughts; it evokes his emotions; it arouses his senses; it supplies him with beauty; it fuses the expected with the unexpected; it says much in little; it allows for the manipulation of language so that words mean more--and they mean more exactly and more provocatively--than they do in any other context; it uses rhythms and sounds to make content meaningful and moving; in short, it is a means of communication that represents one of man's highest achievements.(James R. Kreuzer, 1955: 204)[1]

Poetry is the most prevalent type of writing in the Bible. Some books of the Bible are entirely poetic in form: Psalms, Song of Solomon, Proverbs, and Lamentations. Many others are mainly poetic: Job, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, Hosea, and numerous other prophetic books. There is no book in the Bible that does not require the ability to interpret poetry to some degree, because every book includes some figurative language. What, then, is poetry? Here is the example, Psalm 1:

1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

3 But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

4 The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.

5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

6 For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

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[1] James R.Kreuzer. *Elements of Poetry* The Macmillan Company, 1955

Even the external arrangement of the material strikes us as more highly patterned than expository prose. This portrait of the godly person alternates between positive and negative descriptions. The opening beatitude, strongly positive, is followed by three lines that describe this person negatively, in terms of what he does *not* do. This is followed by the positive description in verse 2. Verse 3 has a positive–negative-positive sequence. Verse 4 balances a negative construction with a positive one. Verse 5 consists of two negatives, while verse 6 culminates the whole movement with balanced positive and negative assertions.

The individual lines, as well as the overall movement of the poem, are also highly patterned. Virtually the entire poem falls into pairs or triplets of lines that express the same idea in different words. This is the verse form known as parallelism and is an obviously poetic way of speaking. Poetry like this is more concentrated and more artistic than prose.

Psalm 1 also shows that poetry is a language of images. It puts us in touch with such tangible realities as pathway, seat, tree, water, leaf, chaff, and law court. Poets are never content with pure abstraction, though they usually include enough conceptual commentary (words such as "blessed," "the wicked," "the righteous") to allow us to know what the images mean.

Psalm 1 is also figurative rather than literal much of the time. The second line speaks of walking in the counsel of the wicked. The wicked do not literally walk down a path called "The Counsel of the Wicked." They do not literally pass legislation or conduct legal seminars entitled "The Counsel of the Wicked." Nor do people literally stand together on a platform called "The Way of Sinners." People in a scoffing mood do not take turns sitting in a chair with a sign over it that reads "The Seat of Scoffers." Verse 1 is thoroughly metaphoric rather than literal.

Poetry, it is clear, uses what is commonly called poetic license. Another example occurs in verse 2, which states that the godly person meditates on God's law "day" and "night." There are several possible interpretations of this statement, none of them literal. No one consciously reflects on God's law twenty-four hours a day. Perhaps the statement

is a hyperbole—an exaggerated way of showing how thoroughly the godly person is controlled by God's law. Perhaps, on the other hand, it is the word "meditates" that is used figuratively to mean "is influenced by" rather than "consciously thinks about." Or perhaps "day and night" is a colloquial expression meaning "in the morning and in the evening."

Another poetic tendency illustrated by Psalm 1 is the strategy of comparing one thing to another. The poetic imagination is adept at seeing resemblances and using one area of human experience to cast light on another area. The productiveness of a godly person is like that of a tree beside a stream. Wicked people are like the chaff blown away during the process of winnowing.

Aristotle (*Poetics*) considered the essence of poetry to be imitation and harmony, two instincts of the human nature. Psalm 1 supplies some good initial answers. Poetry is a language of images. It uses many comparisons. It is inherently fictional, stating things that are not literally true or comparing one thing to something else that it is literally not. Poetry is also more concentrated and more highly patterned than ordinary discourse. In short, poets do things with language and sentence structure that people do not ordinarily do when speaking. Poetry is the utterance of a passion for truth, beauty and power, embodying and illustrating its conceptions by imagination and fancy, and modulating its language on the principle of variety in uniformity.

# Chapter 2 the Language of Biblical Poetry

The most important thing to know about poetry is that it is a distinctive type of language. Poetry differs from ordinary prose by its reliance on images and figures of speech, and by its verse form.

Poetry is heightened speech, far more compressed than prose. Whereas expository prose uses the sentence or paragraph as its basic unit, and narrative the episode or scene, the basic unit of poetry is the individual image or figure of speech. It requires a more contemplative approach and requires more continuous interpretation than ordinary language. As we shall see, it has a power and beauty all its own, and it has its own style.

Perhaps that is why poetry pervades the Bible. Some books of the Bible are wholly poetic: Psalms, the Song of Solomon, and Proverbs. Others are mainly poetic: Job, Ecclesiastes (where even the prose passages achieve poetic effect), Isaiah, and numerous other prophecies. But even parts of the Bible that are written in prose use the resources of poetic language. It would be hard for us to find a page of the Bible that does not require us to know the elements of poetry. That is why the ability to interpret poetry is a requirement, not an option, when we read the Bible. The poetry of the Bible is written originally in Hebrew language, and Hebrew poetry does not employ rhyme or regular meter often the way most English verse before the Twentieth Century does; instead its major tropes are parallelism and metaphor, and moreover, during the translation, something is lost. And the article will do the stylistic analysis on the basis of the English biblical poetry in King James Version of the Bible

## 2.1　Master Images and Archetypes

The Bible is a universal book. Even though its world often seems strange and remote, it has an elemental feel that enables any reader to walk into it and be at home. The experiences portrayed in biblical literature are the ones that we all know—work, love,

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worship, birth, death, nature, family, state, evil, guilt, suffering, salvation. The very vocabulary of the Bible is compact of the primal stuff of our common humanity—of its universal emotional, sensory experiences.

A major aspect of the universality of the Bible is its use of recurring master images. "My heart is smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread." (Ps.102:4), "I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert."(Ps.102:6) "But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." (Isaiah 41:31). The simplest principle of poetic language is perhaps also the most important.

"Art is thinking in images." (Zhugang, 2001: 5)[1] This maxim is put forth by early Formalists, the idea has spread like this: without imagery there is no art, and in particular no poetry. From this point, it more or less points out the importance of image in comprising poetry. Many still believe that thinking in images is the chief characteristic of poetry. Poets think in images. When the poetic imagination formulates reality, it does so in pictures.

Human emotions are perhaps the commonest subject of poetry in the Bible, and the typical strategy of the poet is to picture an emotion as a series of concrete images. Terror, for example, is not an abstraction but fire and water (Ps.124:1-5):

1 If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, now may Israel say;

2 If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, when men rose up against us:

3 Then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us:

4 Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul:

5 Then the proud waters had gone over our soul.

When the poet-king prays for national prosperity, he thinks in concrete images (Ps.144:12-14):

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[1] Zhugang. *Twentieth Century Western Critical Theories* (Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2001)

12 That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace:

13 That our garners may be full, affording all manner of store: that our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our streets:

14 That our oxen may be strong to labour; that there be no breaking in, nor going out; that there be no complaining in our streets.

: The poet suffering from depression and loneliness does not give us a psychological analysis but a series of pictures (Ps.102:3-11):

3 For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth.

4 My heart is smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread.

5 By reason of the voice of my groaning my bones cleave to my skin.

6 I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert.

7 I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top.

8 Mine enemies reproach me all the day; and they that are mad against me are sworn against me.

9 For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping.

10 Because of thine indignation and thy wrath: for thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down.

11 My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass.

Most of the images in this passage involve comparisons in the form of metaphors and similes, but metaphors and similes are first of all images and pictures.

Literary critics of Myth and Archetypal Criticism are accustomed to call these recurrent images and symbols *archetypes*. Archetypes recur throughout literature because they are also pervasive in life. These master images are the building blocks of the literary imagination—the forms to which the imagination gravitates when it organizes reality and human experience.

Russian formalists have figured out:

Images change little from century to century, from nation to nation, from poet to poet, they flow on without changing. Images belong to no one: they are "the Lord's." Poets are much more concerned with arranging images than with creating them. Images are given to poets; the ability to remember them is far more important than the ability to create them. (Zhugang, 2001: 6)[1]

Being sensitive to archetypes is one of the most fruitful literary approaches we can take to the Bible. These master images are an important part of the unity of the Bible. As we read the Bible, we are constantly aware of being in a world of archetypes. Although the Bible appears at first glance to be a heterogeneous collection of fragments, it turns out to be a composite whole and a unified world in our imaginations.

The archetypal content of the Bible also helps to make the Bible a universal book. In Northrop Frye's words, "Some symbols are images of things common to all men, and therefore have a communicable power which is potentially unlimited." (Northrop Frye,1957: 99.) [2]The archetypes of the Bible are one of the things that allow us to see our own experience in the world of the Bible.

The most basic of all poetic principles is that poets think and write in images. The prevalence of master images in the Bible alerts us to how thoroughly the Bible is a work of the literary imagination. It communicates truth in image as well as abstraction. By images poets evoke a sensory experience in our imagination. Poetry avoids the abstract as much as possible and the fullness of the images in the Bible writing makes the book very beautiful and poetic.

## 2.2   Metaphor and Simile

Next to the use of concrete imagery, the use of simile and metaphor is most

pervasive in biblical poetry. The essential feature of both is comparison. A simile draws a correspondence between two things by using the explicit formula "like"or "as": But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

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[1]  Zhugang. *Twentieth Century Western Critical Theories*   (Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2001)
[2]  Northrop Frye. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton University Press,1957)
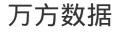
(Isaiah 40:31).

As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. (Ps.42:1).

Metaphor adopts a bolder strategy. It omits the "like" or "as" and asserts that A is B: "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Ps.23:1); "their throat is an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue" (Ps.5:9); "whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword". (Ps: 57:4)

Both metaphor and simile operate on the premise of similarity between two things. When the psalmist writes that God's law "is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."(119:105), he is drawing a connection between the properties of light used to illuminate a pathway for walking and the moral effect of God's law on a person's behavior. When a mature poet says that God "maketh the clouds his chariot" (Ps.104:3), he intends us to see a correspondence between the swift movement of clouds across the sky and that of a chariot over a road.

The word "metaphor" itself implies such a transfer, since it is based on the Greek words *meta*, meaning "over," and *pherein*, meaning "to carry." When the psalmist speaks of someone "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (91:1), the first task of the reader is to reflect on the human experience of living in a home. These domestic associations of security, safety, provision, protection, love, and belonging must then be transferred from a human, family context to the realm of faith in God.

It is obvious that metaphor and simile work by indirection. This is what Robert Frost had in mind when he defined poetry as: saying one thing and meaning another. The psalmist says that "For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory." (84:11), but he means that God is the ultimate source of all life and provision and that God protects people from harm. The poet says that he lies "in the midst of lions" (Ps. 57:4), but he means that his enemies' slander inflicts pain and destroys him in a number of nonphysical ways.

Metaphor and simile are bifocal statements. We need to look first at one half of a comparison and then transfer certain meanings to the other half. The exposition of biblical poetry needs to do justice to the richness of meanings that metaphor and simile convey, and this means not quickly reducing the two-pronged statement of metaphor or simile to a single direct statement. There is an irreducible quality to metaphor and simile *that we should respect, both as readers and expositors.*

Another aspect of metaphor and simile is that they are a form of logic rather than illogic. The connection between the two halves of the comparison is a real connection. It can be validated on the basis of observation and rational analysis. When the poet asks God to "Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips" (Ps.141:3), we need to explore by what logic care in one's speech can be compared to a soldier or prison guard watching the door of a house or prison. If the threat of death on the battlefield can be described as the rope of a strangler and the water of a flood (Ps.18:4), we must look for a logical explanation behind the poet's assertion.

This is another way of saying that metaphor and simile are rooted in reality. The two halves of the comparison are not illusory but real. In the metaphor that declares God to be "A father of the fatherless" (Ps.68:5), for example, the bond between human fathers and the character of God is real. There are qualities (e.g., love, care, provision, nurture, discipline) inherent in being a good father that are also true of God's character and acts. Poets do not invent comparisons but discover them. They could not create metaphor and simile if they tried; the relationship between the two phenomena joined in a metaphor or simile either exists in reality or does not exist. The poet's quest is to discover the right expressive metaphors and similes for his particular subject matter. But metaphor and simile, though a form of logic, also go beyond abstract or mental logic. For one thing, they offer an experience of the topic being presented. As a result, the total meaning that is transferred from the one phenomenon to the other is partly nonverbal or extra logical. When a biblical poet pictures God's provision as God's making him "lie down in green pastures" and leading him "beside still waters" (Ps.23:2), the poet taps feelings and memories within us that can never be adequately put into words. Metaphor and simile

are affective as well as intellectual, experiential and intuitive as well as verbal and logical. A metaphor or simile involves both a thinking and a seeing, this is another way of saying that the total meaning of a metaphor or simile can never be fully expressed in intellectual or propositional terms for the simple reason that it speaks to more than our intellect or reason. If a proposition adequately stated the truth the poet wishes to communicate, the metaphor or simile would be unnecessary.

Psalm 23 is the best to illustrate the dynamics of metaphor.

1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

The theme of the poem is the security and contentment of resting in God's providence. The approach is affective, as the poet uses pastoral images to make a certain way about God's providence. The main structural principle in the poem is a catalogue of God's acts of provision. There is also an implied journey motif, as the sheep are led from their sheepfold to places of grazing and rest and then back to the sheepfold at the end of the day. The chronology of a typical day in the life of a shepherd thus also organizes the details in the poem. The poem is further unified by a controlling metaphor, as God's care for his people is compared to a shepherd's provision for his sheep.

The poem begins by announcing the central image: *The LORD is my shepherd*, the sheep-shepherd metaphor is the "lens" through which cause contemplation of God's

providence at a human level. Verse 2: "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters" is the most pictorial and evocative verse in the whole Bible, the primary picture is one of rest and refreshment, and the scene is a kind of oasis. Peace, contentment, beauty, rest, freedom from anxiety are pictured metaphorically here, and it provides a feeling of being safe and satisfied. Verse 3: "*He restoreth my soul*" here the verb "restoreth" describes a bringing back to a previous condition. The use of restoration at a human level is physical: God restores physical life for people, too, through sleep, rest, food, and healing. We also experience emotional and psychological restoration after conditions of fear and anxiety, depression and sorrow. A third level of application is spiritual: God restores people by his forgiveness and reconciliation. In short, it is possible to see physical, psychological, and spiritual applications of the metaphor of life restored.... Anyway, Psalm23 is first of all concrete images or pictures from life. Once we have the literal picture in our imagination, we need to draw the connections between it and the topic of the poem.

Why do poets use so many similes and metaphors? One advantage of metaphor and simile is vividness and concreteness. They are one way of overcoming the limitations of abstraction. Metaphor and simile achieve wholeness of expression by appealing to the full range of human experience, not simply to the rational intellect. They also possess freshness of expression and thereby overcome the cliché effect of stereotyped language. This arresting strangeness not only captures a reader's initial attention; it also makes a statement memorable. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Ps.119:105), is aphoristic and unforgettable. Metaphor and simile have another built-in tendency that accords well with the purpose of the Bible: they force reader to ponder or meditate on a statement. Simile and metaphor resist immediate assimilation. They contain a retarding element, stemming the current of ideas (and in this are very similar to Hebrew parallelism).

Poetry is a meditative or reflective form. It deliberately compresses many meanings into a few words or a single picture. Metaphor and simile are prominent in biblical poetry, they are not only poetic devices; they are also a way of thinking and formulating

reality. They are an important way in which the human race expresses meaning.

## 2.3    Other Figures of Speech

Image, archetype, metaphor, and simile are the backbone of biblical poetry. Other figures of speech, however, occur often enough that we need to become familiar with how they operate.

### 2.3.1  Poetic Symbols

Image, metaphor, and simile are the backbone of poetry. Perhaps we can add symbol to the list, since it is often interchangeable with the others. A symbol is a concrete image that points to or embodies other meanings. "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." (Ps.97:11).Thus, light is a common biblical symbol for God, goodness, truth, blessing, etc. Milk and honey are Old Testament symbols for material prosperity, and the throne for political power. But in most of these instances it makes little difference whether we call them images, metaphors, or symbols. The important thing is that we first construct the literal picture and then attach the right corresponding meaning to them.

### 2.3.2  Allusion

An allusion is a reference to past literature or history. The Bible is a book full of allusions, Psalm 133:1-2 provides a good example:

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments;

The fellowship the pilgrims experience en route to Jerusalem to worship God in the temple is like oil (simile), but not just any oil. It is specifically like the oil of Aaron (allusion). The passage to which this alludes is Exodus 30:22-33, where we learn that this

oil was a "sacred anointing oil" that was used only in connection with official worship at the tabernacle or temple. Having identified the source of the allusion, we can interpret it: the fellowship of the pilgrims is, like the anointing oil, a holy thing and a preparation for worship at the temple.

The full usage of the allusion in the Bible makes the book extending chronologically and makes it a book with great unity.

## 2.3.3 Hyperbole

Hyperbole is conscious exaggeration for the sake of effect. It does not claim to express literal truth but instead conveys emotional truth. Here are some specimens from the Psalms: "For by thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall." (Ps. 18:29); "My tears have been my meat day and night" (Ps. 42:3); "Mine eye is consumed because of grief" (Ps. 6:7).

Sometimes hyperbole consists of bigger units. For example, the Psalms contain a number of hyperbolic accounts of God's rescue, as in this portrait (Ps. 18: 7-8):

7 Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth.

8 There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it.

Even more frequent are the exaggerated pictures of the speaker's enemies in the psalms of lament, as in Psalm 56: 1-2:

1 Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up; he fighting daily oppresseth me.

2 Mine enemies would daily swallow me up: for they be many that fight against me, O thou most High.

Hyperbole obviously falls into the category of poetic license, and it is accordingly not intended to be interpreted as literal fact. What is the rationale behind hyperbole? We

might begin by noting that it is not only poets who talk this way. We all use hyperbole when we feel strongly about a matter or when we are trying to be persuasive, hyperbole is a literal "lie" used for the sake of emotional effect. Since biblical poetry tends to express emotion, we should not be surprised to find hyperbole appearing frequently. Hyperbole appears not only in biblical poetry, it is one of the popular techniques, and Jesus is an expert in hyperbole, it appears frequently in the New Testament: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." (Matthew:19:24); "Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire" (Matthew: 18:8-9).

It is not difficult to see that whatever degree hyperbole is reaching literally, it does not reduce at all the fact that it indeed affects the reader's impression upon the theme which is expressing.

### 2.3.4  Apostrophe

An apostrophe is a direct address to someone or something absent as though it were present. It is frequently combined with personification, in which an abstract quality or physical object is treated as though it were a person. In lyric poetry we can find an abundance of apostrophe. Given this impulse toward poetic license, virtually anything can be addressed in the form of apostrophe: "Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity; for the LORD hath heard the voice of my weeping."(Ps.6:8); "Lift up your heads, O ye gates;" (Ps.24:7); "Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God." (Ps. 87:3); "Bless the LORD, O my soul" (Ps.103:1). The most extended example is Psalm 148, which is a catalogue of apostrophes:

1 Praise ye the LORD. Praise ye the LORD from the heavens: praise him in the heights.

**2 Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts.**

**3 Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light ...**

Apostrophe is one of the conventions and artificialities of poetry. Apostrophe is above all a way of expressing strong feeling and generating a sense of excitement. When apostrophes appear in poetry, they often erupt without warning, as though the poet were carried away with excitement and blurted out an address to something or someone who could not possibly reply. Apostrophes require a reader to be receptive of the emotional intensity that they represent and to respect the right of a poet to speak figuratively rather than matter-of-factly.

## 2.3.5 Personification

Personification is a figure of speech in which a poet treats something nonhuman (and perhaps even inanimate) as though it were a person. Here, too, the range of things that get personified in biblical poetry is immense. Abstractions are sometimes personified: "O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles." (Ps.43:3). On other occasions, forces of nature are apostrophized: "Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together" (Ps.98:8)

Personification is a way of making a subject (especially if it is an abstraction) vivid and concrete. By personifying forces of nature, a poet suggests the close kinship between people and nature. And personification is a way of showing either the human community or the forces of nature acting with a unified purpose.

Hyperbole, apostrophe, and personification are scattered throughout the poetry of the Bible. Poems are rarely built around these figures of speech the way Psalm 23 is constructed around a central metaphor. Psalm 114, however, is a compressed poem that relies heavily on the three figures of speech just discussed.

Psalm 114 is a patriotic poem that celebrates the miracles surrounding the exodus from Egypt and the entry into Canaan. The poet begins by identifying this as the subject of his poem, and in doing so he personifies the nation as though it were a person or

family:

1 When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language;

2 Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion.

This personification of the nation serves to show the unified purpose with which the people went through the events of the exodus.

Then, in an obviously hyperbolic account of what actually happened, the poet further personifies the forces of nature that were present on the occasion:

3 The sea saw it, and fled: Jordan was driven back.

4 The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs

Personification here functions to heighten the vividness of the event and to add a spirit of celebration.

The next four lines of the poem repeat, line by line, the imagery of the four lines in verses 3 and 4, only this time the poet employs the technique of apostrophe:

5 What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back?

6 Ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams; and ye little hills, like lambs?

Poets obviously use license. They express truth in terms that are not literally or factually true. The sea did not literally look, nor did the mountains and hills jump in high spirits.

At the poem's close, the poet offers a general conclusion about how people should respond to the God who has delivered his nation, and again he employs apostrophe and personification to make the point vivid:

7 Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob;

8 Which turned the rock into a standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters.

Metaphor and simile appear also in the prose of the Bible. The same thing is true of other figures of speech, such as metonymy, synecdoche, pun, paradox, irony, satire, parable, and so forth. Word play is particularly important in the literature of the Bible, and not just in the poetic parts. The Bible is a very poetic book, even in its narrative and expository parts.

## 2.4 Parallelism

In addition to figurative language, biblical poetry consists of a distinctive type of sentence structure. This, too, is part of the special language that biblical poets use. It is called parallelism and is the verse form in which all biblical poetry is written. Biblical parallelism is delightful and effective. The first order of business with biblical poetry is to interpret figurative language, especially metaphor and simile. Parallelism adds greatly to the affective power and artistic beauty of an utterance, but in only a small number of cases does it add to the thought.

Parallelism is best defined as two or more lines that use different words but similar grammatical form to express the same idea. Whereas the basic element of recurrence in English poetry occurs at the level of rhyme and meter, which are lost in translation, recurrence in biblical poetry occurs at the level of thought or meaning, which survives in translation. C.S. Lewis describes the principle behind parallelism as "the practice of saying the same thing twice in different words." (C.S.Lewis, 1958: 3)[1]. The phrase *thought couplet* (or, if three clauses are involved, *thought triplet*) is a good synonym for parallelism. There are several main types of parallelism in the Bible. Since parallelism is the key to know biblical poetry, now let us have a look at it:

*Synonymous parallelism* consists of expressing similar content more than once in consecutive lines in similar grammatical form or sentence structure:

The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah (Ps. 46:7)

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[1] C.S.Lewis. *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958)

God is gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet (Ps.47:5)

*In antithetic parallelism,* the second line states the truth of the first in a contrasting way. Sometimes one line states the idea positively and the other negatively:

My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother (Prov. 6:20)

More often, the second line simply restates the idea in a contrasting way:

∴ Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life. (Prov.13:12)

The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour: but the way of the wicked seduceth them. (Prov.12:26)

In *climactic parallelism,* the second line completes the first by repeating part of the first line and then adding to it:

Give unto the LORD, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the LORD glory and strength. (Ps.96:7)

The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves (Ps.93:3)

Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. (Exod. 15:6)

*A chiastic parallelism,* a form of envelope structure, inverts the word order in the second line:

To deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words (Proverbs 3:16) and The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me (Psalm 18:20).

*Emblematic parallelism* is one parallel unit with a simile and metaphor, implied or actual, so that the emblem of one colon is compared to the thought of the other.

As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.

(Psalm 42:1)

As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. (Song of Songs 2:2).

Another type of parallelism is *synthetic parallelism* (growing parallelism). It consists of a pair of lines that together form a complete unit and in which the second line completes or expands the thought introduced in the first line (but without repeating part of it, as *climactic parallelism* does):

Who laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever (Ps.104:5)

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. (Ps.23:3)

*External parallelism* (formal parallelism) is where an entire verse is parallel to the next verse, or perhaps the first verse is parallel to the third verse and the second verse is parallel to the fourth verse:

7 Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.

8 Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle.

9 Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.

10 Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah. (Psalm 24:7-10).

Understanding even the basics about parallelism gives us a greater appreciation of the poetic sections of the Bible.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over (Ps.23:5).

Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him (Ps.103:13)

To call this parallelism is something of a misnomer, since strictly speaking nothing in the second line parallels the first. But these units are obviously thought couplets in which the two lines together form a unit, as in the other types of parallelism.
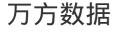
The principle underlying all these forms of parallelism is balance or symmetry. The parts of a parallel construction in some sense balance each other and set up a rhythm. They require each other to complete the unit of thought. When we hear one shoe drop, as it were, we wait for the other one to do the same.

Biblical parallelism is not a rigid and confining thing. It is based on the premise of freedom within form, and its stylistic feature is like this: it is clear that there is repetition in the parallel lines. But almost invariably something is added, and it is precisely the combination of what is repeated and what is added that makes of parallelism the artistic form that it is. This intimate relation between the old and new elements is an important feature of Hebrew composition and Hebrew thought. On the one hand we observe form and pattern; on the other form and pattern are radically altered.

The prime function of any verse form, including biblical parallelism, is artistic beauty and its enjoyment. Parallelism is an example of the skillful handling of language, and it satisfies the artistic urge for balance, symmetry, rhythm, and shapeliness. Biblical poets were artists with a love of beauty and eloquence. When the writer of Ecclesiastes stated that he "sought to find pleasing words" (12:10), he expressed a theory of writing that applies to all of the poets of the Bible.

One function of biblical parallelism is thus artistic enjoyment. In reality, parallelism is a very pure example of what all pattern, and therefore all art, involves. Parallelism is the characteristically Hebrew form of poetry. It is beautiful and delightful in itself. A second effect of parallelism is to increase the impact of a statement. In particular, it produces a concentration of attention and is very much a meditative form. Parallelism focuses attention on a thought and resists immediate shift to another idea. Parallelism has within it a retarding element, stemming the current of ideas. The poet allows himself plenty of time. A scene, before being succeeded by another, is presented twice, in different lights. All the content is squeezed out of it. The complementary parts of a parallel

construction reinforce an idea in our consciousness. There can be no doubt that if we read biblical poetry as slowly as it is meant to be read, it is a very affective form of discourse. The meanings sink into our consciousness with great force because of the element of repetition and retardation. The two parts of a parallel construction say more together than either would alone. A third function of parallelism is mnemonic. Because much of the Bible was originally oral literature, and parallelism makes it easier to memorize and recite a biblical passage, and it helps an audience to assimilate it when hearing rather than reading it.

In summary, According to Russian Formalism, the retarding feature of the images, the metaphors and similes and other figures of speech and also the artistic use of the parallelism all foregrounding and defamiliarize the language of the biblical poetry, which make the language of the Bible powerful, majestic, impassioned, and which make up the affective style, in its prose as well as its poetry.

# Chapter 3 Artistry in Biblical Poetry

Poetry, like the rest of literature, is the interpretive presentation of human experience in an artistic form. It is the purpose of the present chapter to illustrate the artistic element with examples in biblical poetry. The elements of artistic form, whether in literature, visual art, or music, include these: pattern or design, unity, theme or central focus, balance, contrast, unified progression, recurrence or rhythm, and variation.

Artistry serves two main purposes. One is enjoyment and delight. Artistic beauty is one of God's gifts to the human race, whether in a tree or mountain or human face or poem. Secondly, the presence of artistry heightens the impact of an utterance. An artistically excellent piece of writing communicates more effectively than a flat piece of writing.

## 3.1 Theme and Variation

Every poem has its own topical units based on either changing ideas or changing images. It is important to mark out the successive units in a poem, thereby showing the flow of thought or feeling. The most important of artistic effects is unity. It can be said like this: unity in variety, the whole-part relationship, the whole in every part or the same in the other. The theme of a poem is the idea that governs the entire development of the poem. It might be a topic (such as God's providence in Psalm 23), an idea (such as that the godly person is blessed in Psalm 1), or an emotion (such as praise in a typical praise psalm). The variations are the successive units (either topical units or imagistic units) that support this theme as the poem unfolds.

The principle of theme and variation in a poem imposes a double obligation on a reader. The first is to identify the unifying theme and to state it in sufficiently broad terms that it covers every detail in the poem. The second is to divide the poem into its separate parts and to observe how each of these units contributes to the main theme.

Psalm 103 is a psalm of praise. It is a moderately long psalm, but the principle of theme and variation insures that it will produce a unified impression in our mind as we read and ponder it. The unifying theme of the psalm is that God is worthy of praise for his wonderful acts. The main structural principle in any praise psalm is the catalogue or listing of the praiseworthy acts and attributes of God. Having thus identified the element that remains constant throughout the poem, we are ready to observe the changes that the poet rings on that theme.

The poem begins, as all lyric poems begin, by introducing the theme:

1 Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:

Often a poem will contain within it words or phrases that explicitly state the controlling theme, either for the whole poem or for a specific unit. The phrase *all his benefits* summarizes what this psalm of praise is about.
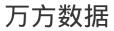
The first variation on that theme is a catalogue of God's acts in the life of the speaker:

3 Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases;

4 Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;

5 Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Several things contribute to the artistry within the unit. One is the very precise parallelism of clauses. We get a series of five consecutive "who" clauses. At the end of the series, just as monotony threatens, the poet varies the pattern (v.5): instead of yet another "who" clause, he shifts from synonymous parallelism to synthetic parallelism, adding to rather than restating the ideas in the previous line. We might also note the cumulative effect of the evocative verbs in the series: *forgiveth, healeth, redeeths, crowneth, satisfieth.*

The next variation on the theme of God's praiseworthy acts and attributes broadens the scope by listing God's acts in the believing community, or in history:

6 The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.

7 He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.

The abstractions of verse 6 are balanced by the specific historical allusion in verse 7.

*The next section focuses on the attributes of God's character:*

8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

9 He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever.

10 He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

Here is prime illustration of the artistic impulse to balance one thing with another. Verse 8 names four positive attributes of God, and verses 9-10 state four negatives (things that God does not do). Furthermore, the four attributes in verse 8 are balanced by four parallel clauses that describe God's actions.

Verses 11-13 constitute a unit that uses the technique of simile to praise God's actions:

11 For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.

12 As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

13 Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.

Even within a unit like this, the principle of theme and variation is at work. The *element that remains constant in the three verses is that each one expresses a comparison* that says something about God. But there is also an element of contrast. The first two comparisons are pictures of measureless space that make us feel the bigness of God and the magnitude of his grace. By contrast, the simile that compares God to a father who

pities his children makes God's mercy intimate, warm, personal, and relational.

The unit that follows continues to praise God. It is built on a contrast in which the mortality of people heightens the permanence of God's love:

14 For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.

15 As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.

16 For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.

17 But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children;

18 To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.

The final movement of the poem rises to a crescendo of praise. The controlling image for these verses, the universal kingship of God, is announced at the outset and then elaborated:

19 The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.

20 Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word.

21 Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure.

22 Bless the LORD, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul.

The unity of the passage is amazing. The image of kingship is introduced with the image of throne and then echoed with the images of kingdom and dominion. The opening line of the section also introduces the ideas of transcendence and universality with the phrase in the heavens. Once introduced, the motif pervades the passage, with such phrases as over all, all his works, and in all places. The apostrophes are appropriately addressed to angels in God's heavenly court.

The strategy of ending the poem with the same line as that which opened it is brilliant. By returning to the beginning and repeating the opening sentiment, the poet gives his poem an envelope structure that conveys a sense of shapeliness and completeness.

## 3.2 Pattern and Design

Pattern and design are important to all of the arts: art, ultimately, is organization. It is a searching after order, after form. The primal artistic act was god's creation of the universe out of chaos, shaping the formless into form; and every artist since, on a lesser scale, has sought to imitate Him-by selection and arrangement to reduce the chaotic in experience to a meaningful and pleasing order. (Laurence Perrine, p.217)

The parallelism in which biblical poetry is written is of course its most obvious element of artistic patterning.

Psalm 19 is one of the high points in the psalms—so much so that Lewis calls it "the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world." (C.S. Lewis, p.63). It happens to be one of the most highly patterned psalms as well. The impulse to arrange things in an artful way is as evident in the individual parts of the psalm as in the overall structure.

1The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.

These lines announce the theme of the first six verses, namely, what the heavenly bodies tell us about God. The poet expresses the idea metaphorically by portraying the silent stars and plants as engaged in an ongoing act of speech. The synonymous parallelism is matched in the verse:

2 Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge

Within the pattern of recurrence, there is the antithesis between day and night. These are not opposites but complementary halves of an unbroken cyclic succession that adds up to a harmonious whole.

Having asserted that the heavenly bodies are energetically proclaiming God's glory in an unbroken succession, the poet next provides a countermovement:

3There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.

This comes as something of a surprise, since on the surface it refutes what the poet has said in the previous verses. This further description serves the purpose of calling attention to the fact that the earlier description had been figurative. The heavenly bodies are literally silent and nonverbal. The usage of the words of *declare, sheweth, uttereth speech* is really metaphorical. But then the poet balances his figurative picture with a reminder of the literal facts of the matter that the stars and moon do not speak in words. One countermovement quickly gives way to another, however, for in the very next verse, the poet is back to his bold, imaginative idea that the heavenly bodies "speak" about God:

4 Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun,

The strict parallelism of the utterance is quite an appropriate technique in a poem about the artistry and beauty of nature. Putting verses 2, 3 and 4 together. It is not difficult to see that the poet is using the poetic device of paradox, personification, metaphor in the parallelism structure. It causes the reader to meditate upon the deep meaning of the lines. The main idea in verse 4 is that nature's witness to God is a universal witness, a theme that the poet accentuates by the balanced phrases *through all the earth* and *to the end of the world.*

Halfway through the opening movement of the poem, the poet narrows the focus from the skies in general to the sun in particular; the course of the sun is then described in two balanced similes:

5 Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race.

Here the poet personifies the sun and surrounds its daily course with all the excitement and emotion of a wedding and a race. Like a runner, the sun follows a

prescribed course or track.

Verse 6 then elaborates the picture of the daily cycle of the sun:

His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.

This is a descriptive verse, but as was true in the two previous similes, the poet's real purpose is not to convey information but to express wonder at the mystery and majesty of the sun's daily circuit. Part of the design in a carefully crafted poem consists of inner coherence, which is often achieved by echoing motifs that have been introduced earlier. In this verse, the ideas of cycle and universality, already introduced in verse 4, are reinforced by the balanced references *from the end* and *to the end*. This poem has two distinct ideas: nature and law on the surface, how will the poet get from one topic to the other while retaining the unity of his poem? The last line of verse 6 provides the transition. The sun pierces everywhere with its strong, clean ardour, there is nothing hid from the heat thereof. Then at once, in verse 7 he is talking of something else, the Law, which seems to the poet something else because it is so like the all-piercing, all-detecting sunshine. The Law is "undefiled", the law gives light, it is clean and everlasting, and it is "sweet." The two halves of the poem are thus linked by the theme of God's revelation of himself and the idea of law (in nature as well as morality).

The description of the moral law that follows is one of the most intricately patterned passages in the Bible:

7 The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul:

the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

8 The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart:

the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever:

the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

Each pair of lines constitutes a unit, and each of these six units follows the same

pattern, consisting of three parts: first the law is named by a title, then a quality is attributed to it, and finally an effect of the law is named. The number of words and the syntactical structure remains generally constant from unit to unit, reinforcing the patterned effect. As was true in the first half of the poem, the poet describes a subject not primarily as a way of informing us but as a way of praising with the device of repetition in the poetic form of parallelism.

Just as the poet had earlier introduced two comparisons for the glory of the daily circuit of the sun, he now brings in two comparisons to assert the value and desirability of God's law:

10 More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb

"Gold" and "honey" have both recognized standards of excellence in nature, and poet use these two comparisons only to declare that the object of his praise (God's law) is even better.

Next verse completes the first half of the praise of God's law by returning to the idea of the beneficial effects of the law:

11 Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.

This is also a note of transition that anticipates the final movement of the poem, the final verses of the poem move from lyric praise to petitionary prayer:

12 Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults.

13 Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.

14 Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

Throughout the second half of the poem the poet has asserted that God's law *produces results, and it demonstrated in the poet's own prayer. Furthermore, the*

piercing ray of the sun, so dazzling in the first half of the poem, now finds its counterpart in the poet's desire for the law to find and purge his *hidden faults.*

The sheer beauty and artistry of a psalm like this are not extraneous to its meaning. They are part of the total effect of the poem. In a poem like this, all the details work together to produce the total effect, and the careful design binds everything together.

## 3.3 Three –Part Lyric Form

Almost all of the poems of the Bible are lyrics. To call something poetry is to identify the special idiom in which it is written. A lyric can be defined as a short poem, often intended to be sung, that expresses the thoughts and especially the feelings of a speaker. Lyrics begin with a statement of the controlling theme. This unifying umbrella in the poem can be an emotion, an idea, or a situation to which the poet is responding. There are various ways to establish the theme. The poet can describe a situation (Ps.12:1-2), invoke God (Ps.55:1), address a human audience, (Ps.66:1), or state an idea (Ps.32:1). No matter how the theme is introduced, it comes early and serves the purpose of giving the poem a focus from the very beginning.

The main part of any lyric is the development of the controlling theme. There are four main ways by which a poet can go about this. One is *repetition*, which consists of restating an idea or emotion in different words or images. Often a lyric theme is developed through *contrast*, as when Psalm 1 develops an extended contrast between the ways of the righteous and the wicked. The *list or catalogue* is very common in lyrics. It occurs when the poet names or responds to various aspects of the theme. All of the praise psalms, for example, list God's praiseworthy acts or qualities. Finally, some poems are structured on the principle of *association*. Here the poet branches out from one topic to a related one, as when Psalm 19 moves from God's revelation in nature to his revelation in the law.

Lyric poems are rounded off with a note of finality as the poet resolves the meditation or emotion into a concluding thought, feeling, or attitude. Whatever form it

takes. This phase of a lyric is a moment of closure:

So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever, that I may daily perform my vows. (Ps.61:8)

O God, thou art terrible out of thy holy places: the God of Israel is he that giveth strength and power unto his people. Blessed be God. (Ps. 68:35)

The presence of a formal close like these is part of the shapeliness of the lyric poems of the Bible.

Psalm 121 is one of the best examples in all of literature of the beauty of the simple:

1 I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.

2 My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth.

The motif of the pilgrim poem is a journey which pervades the references in the poem. There is also an underlying conflict between the dangers of the journey and the protecting acts of God. These two verses employ a question-and-answer construction. Faced with the danger, the poet asks and answers, the repeated phrase *my help* announces the unifying idea of the psalm. Verse 1 establishes the need for God's protection, while verse 2 asserts that protection is a fact to be relied on. The development of the theme is a catalogue of God's protecting acts:

3 He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber.

4 Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

To elaborate the idea of "he will not suffer thy foot to be moved", the poet moves from an instance of God's protection of him to a more general comment about God's character. The repetition of the words: "keepeth", "neither slumber", "nor sleep" give an emotional emphasis, this is very affective.

Verse 5 combines an epithet that names a role of God and a concrete illustration of protection:

**5 The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand.**

To call God a shade is to draw a picture of a tree that protects a traveler from the scorching heat of the sun. "upon thy right hand" means that God of protection is on the side of the persons who are on the journey.

**6The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.**

The first line refers to protection from the very real dangers of sunstroke and heat exhaustion. The second line balances this picture of peril by day with a reference to peril by night. With the catalogue of God's protecting acts finished, the poet now completes his lyric with the customary note of finality. In many psalms, this final movement involves moving from something specific to something general, or from the present moment to a vision of the future.

**7 The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul.**

**8 The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.**

The physical journey to Jerusalem here expands into the archetypal journey of life. God's protection from the dangers of the trip has broadened to protection *from all evil*. The focus on the present experience of the pilgrimage has enlarged in scope to *for evermore*. In this poem, the poet also uses the device of contrast or symmetry to balance each other, which is a characteristic biblical way to express totality, such as, in verse 6 "the sun by day" and "the moon by night," in verse 8 it encompasses "going out" and "coming in".

Something does not have to be big and embellished in order to qualify as an example of the beautiful. This moving poem illustrates to perfection three time-honored principles of artistic form—*unity, coherence, and emphasis.*

## 3.4 Other Stylistic Features

"Art as Technique," (Zhugang, 2001:9)[1] and art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object. The ancient Hebrew poets are the mastery of great artistry. Besides the above there are still other obvious artistic phenomena such as: acrostic form, word pairs, and repeated refrain.

### 3.4.1 Acrostic Form

Acrostic or "alphabet" psalms are poems in which the successive units (either lines, verses, or groups of verses) begin with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Acrostic is a unique artistic poetry form in the Bible. In Psalms 9,10,25,34, and 145, the verses begin with words whose first letters are, consecutively, the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The same is true of the encomium in praise of the virtuous wife in proverbs 31:10-31. Another variation occurs in Psalm111, where each line begins with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The most elaborate acrostic biblical poem is Psalm 119. This artistically shaped poem consists of twenty-two section, each comprised of eight verses. These units feature, in order, the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, with all eight verses of a given unit beginning with the same letter of the alphabet. This orderliness reinforces the subject of the poem, which is the law of God. Acrostic form only applied in the Bible is a special poetry form created by ancient Hebrew poets.

Anyway, acrostic form is a special and novel stylistic feature in biblical poetry, and the use of it beautifies the effect the poems.

### 3.4.2 Word pairs

The choice of word pairs for parallelism can sometimes become a matter of fixed, traditional association. Through long usage, certain words become connected as expected

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[1] Zhugang. *Twentieth Century Western Critical Theories*, (Shanghai Foreign Education Press, 2001)

parallels balancing their respective lines. *Wisdom* is normally balanced by *folly*. The *wicked* are most often paralleled by the *righteous*. *Heaven* is most often linked with *earth*. *Man* [Hebrew 'adam] finds its reflex in many instances in *Son of Man* [ben 'adam]. Many other commonly employed word pairs have been recognized as operative in Hebrew poetry.

The frequent appearance of so many fixed pairs in parallel lines caught perhaps caution against making too much of the possibilities for theological expansion in such cases. Is the poet's choice of terms driven by a desire to nuance the literary context? Or is it determined by the expectations of the fixed word pair? Such caution is probably appropriate. However, it must be mentioned that the use of words as fixed pairs does not prohibit their use singly in other contexts, or even in connection to other words in parallel lines. *Man* ['adam] is not always paralleled by *Son of Man* [ben 'adam]. Nor is *wicked* inexorably connected to *righteous*. Fixed pairs represent only one possible word choice that Hebrew poets could employ to good effect.

A specialized use of some fixed word pairs is the coupling of words describing opposites or extremes to refer inclusively to all that lies between. This is known technically as *merism* or *merismus*. Some obvious examples include *great* and *small*; *rich* and *poor*, *far* and *near*. Such merisms often appear as fixed word pairs in parallel lines of Hebrew poetry.

The following can be helpful to understand the more inclusive intent that lies behind a *merism*.

5 Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by *night*; nor for the arrow that flieth by *day*;

6 Nor for the pestilence that walketh in *darkness*; nor for the destruction that wasteth at *noonday*. (Ps.91:5-6)

The intent of these verses and their obvious merisms are not to note those times of the day when those who trust in God should be unafraid? Suggesting by implication that there are *other* times when fear is entirely appropriate. The clear affirmation of the

psalmist is rather that there is *never anytime* that God fails to protect those who fear him. The use of merismus brings this point home in a particularly artistic and forceful manner.

Merismus also plays a significant role in these verses from Psalm 103.

11 For as the *heaven* is high above the *earth*, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.

12 As far as the *east* is from the *west*, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

The tension produced and maintained by *heaven* and *earth*; *east* and *west*, magnify the absolute character of God's redemptive forgiveness. Heaven and earth mark the boundaries of God's creative work. Elsewhere together they represent all that God has made. Coupled with east and west, they suggest that God in his mercy has removed our transgressions and their consequences to the furthest distances of the creation.

The use of the word pairs reinforce the theme and embrace the perfection the form.

### 3.4.3 Repeated Refrain

A form of repetition that appears prominently in some psalms is the use of a *repeated refrain*. In this technique, a line or series of lines is repeated almost *verbatim* at intervals throughout the poem. The result is somewhat akin to the *chorus* alternating with the verses of a hymn or ballad. A straightforward example of the repeated refrain is found in Psalm 49, where the verbatim refrain "Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish" appears at the mid-point (verse 12) and conclusion (verse 20) of this psalm.

Refrains punctuate their compositions and break the flow of the poetry. They therefore provide an obvious means of structuring compositions into smaller components. In Psalm 49, after an introductory preface (verses 1-4), the remainder of the psalm is divided into two equally weighted components of eight verses each (5-12 and 13-20). The repeated refrain serves to drive home the poet's pessimistic evaluation of human

self-reliance, since humans and animals alike perish regardless of their wealth or status. As a result, the wise will rely wholly on God who can ransom their souls from Sheol. Therefore, refrains can serve to emphasize (repeatedly) the key point or focus of a psalm.

A more complicated refrain is featured in Psalm 107. Once again this refrain serves to structure the psalm into smaller components. The introductory verses (1-3) calls those whom YHWH has redeemed and gathered in from where they have been scattered throughout the world to sing praises for God's enduring goodness and steadfast love. The body of the poem is then structured into a series of vignettes illustrating how groups of these scattered peoples met trouble on their way, cried out to God, and experienced redemption.

The refrains that conclude these sections (verses 6+8; 13+15; 19+21; 28+31) contain sections that are *verbatim* repetitions. Then each is subtly adapted to its particular section by the addition of phrases reflecting the characteristic experience of that group of witnesses.

13 Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses.

*14 He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder.*

15 Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!

*16 For he hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder.*

(Psalm 107:13-16)

The italicized portions mark the variations directed to the experience of the first group of witnesses. Compare now the second refrain.

19 Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distresses.

20 He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.

**21 Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!**

**22 And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing. (Psalm 107:19-22)**

The most extreme demonstration of repetition in the Psalter occurs in Psalm 136, where each half verse is followed by the fixed response "for his mercy endureth for ever." Without these repeated refrains, the psalm presents a straightforward narrative of God's history with his people Israel, including his creative acts (verses 1-9) and his powerful protection against the enemies of his people (verses 10-26). The constant refrain suggests the liturgical use of this composition in antiphonal performance in worship, and may imply that other repeated refrains likewise provided opportunities for the congregation (or choir) to add their affirmation to the poet's declarations in the body of these psalms.

So repeated refrain is a stylistic composition form of biblical poetry, it is an artistic technique in the composing structure, and it indeed add great emphasis to the meaning and the beauty of the poetry form.

Many things go to make up the artistry of biblical poetry. The effects range from the big to the small. The skillful handling of language is everywhere evident and is seen especially in the ease with which biblical poets speak in the verse form of parallelism. Big artistic effects include unity (with theme-and-variation the best way to deal with the subject in analysis), pattern and design, and three-part lyric form. Much could also be said about the stylistic excellence of biblical poetry—acrostic poetry, word pairs, repeated refrain. Biblical poetry is written in the high style. Poets take more words than necessary to express an idea (as the technique of parallelism itself requires). The handling of language and the mastery of figurative language result in a style far removed from the ordinary speaking voice.

# Chapter 4 Book of Psalms

The book of Psalms consists of 150 ancient Hebrew lyrical poems. Scholars agree that it is the first lyrical collection in the history of Hebrew literature. The book is the representative of the Hebrew poetry, and it is the literary consummation of the ancient Hebrew people. All the poems are lyrics, and three-lyric-part structure (it is analyzed in chapter3) is the main structure.

## 4.1    Imagery

The book of Psalms cements the importance of imagery. The book's popularity with Bible readers through the centuries stems partly from the way its images connect to our emotions and experiences. As Hebrew poetry the psalms ("songs of praise" from Hebrew), lyric poems in their genre, are marked by concise wording and frequent parallelism. A reader can expect a stated topic, a development of thoughts and emotions about the topic, and a resolution of emotions at the end. Word precision and structured phrases are methods of distillation that heighten the concentration of meaning.

### 4.1.1  Images of God in the Psalter

The psalmist expresses the difficulty of describing a God who is unlike anything in creation: "For who in the heaven can be compared unto the Lord? who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the Lord?"(Ps 89:6). The psalmist's images glimpse individual aspects of God's nature; he catalogs facets of God's character.

Three prominent images of God are King, Warrior, and Fortress. From these we observe the power of images to communicate God's character: first, by applying their implications to God. Other images of God in Psalms can be addressed in the same way.

Consider a king: seated on a throne, crowned and robed, surrounded by nobles in waiting, sovereign over the people of his kingdom, often ruler of vast domains, lawgiver

and peacekeeper judge, maker of covenants with his vassal people. A king's glory is created by his wealth, his power and the loyal praises of his subjects; in this sense the whole book to Psalms can be understood as a collection of covenant hymns from loyal subjects to their great and mighty King. The details of a king's role, appearance and ability remind us of God's authority, magnificence, strength and sovereign power.

Along with the image of God as king, we see him in Psalms as a warrior, Being a king requires ability as a warrior and commander of an army. The psalmist highlights God's superiority over the nations' kings by describing the physical elements as his subjects and indeed soldiers: "Fire goes before him and consumes his foes on every side. His lightning lights up the world" (Ps 97:3-4). The psalmist calls on God to do battle for him, he finds comfort in the fact that God protects him during a battle, and he celebrates the victories God has won on his behalf (Ps 18; 24; 68; 98).

Psalm 18 pictures an army commander on the battlefield. The psalmist begins with the physical feats of the warrior: "And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind."(Ps18:10). He camps on the battlefield, making "He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies."(Ps18:11). He sends preliminary troops ahead: "At the brightness that was before him his thick clouds passed, hail stones and coals of fire."(Ps18:12). He issues preattack threats and warnings (Ps18:13) and then attacks with "arrows and...great bolts of lighting" (Ps18:14). By using nature as his weapon, this warrior exceeds all other kings in his ability to defend his people from attack.

Fortress, like rock, shield and stronghold in this psalm and shelter elsewhere, indicates that God provides protection for his people. Fortress too is a military image and thus feeds the picture of God as warrior, but it is more defensive than much other military language associated with God.

The psalmist's images of God extend beyond relational references to objects that express God's strength or mysterious nature. God is compared to a shield (Ps3:3), a cloud rider (Ps68:4), a shadow (Ps91:1), a bird (Ps 91:4) and light(Ps:104:2). These metaphors are the work of poets who observed qualities in the created realm that reflect

the Creator.

Images of God in the psalms deal primarily with who he is in relationship to humanity. The things, to which he is compared, the pictures drawn of him, are as varied as species. Though commonly depicted as a protector and ruler, God is also imagined by the psalmist as being mysterious and in some ways beyond description, so that every image contributes to the integrate understanding of his nature.

## 4.1.2 Images of the Righteous and the Wicked

The psalmists do not restrict their imagination to describing God and his relationship with people. A survey of the psalms shows frequent imagery associated with the nature and behavior of both those who follow God and those who hates him.

The wicked wear pride as their necklace; they clothe themselves in violence (Ps73:6). They are not in touch with divine reality; indeed their reality is an illusion, like a dream (Ps73:20). Thus they do strange and evil things, especially against godly people. They hunt down the righteous (Ps 10:2; 11:2), casting their nets to catch them (Ps25:15;31:4). They eat them like bread (Ps14:4;53:4)...evil people are like snakes, wild boars, dogs, bees, wild beasts, however, the animal most often associated with the wicked is the lion(Ps7:2;10:9;17:12;22:13;34;35:16;57:4;58:6). In such pictures lions are dangerous, hostile and ruthless.

Because of their hostility and the danger that the wicked represent, the psalmist calls on God to make them like a stillborn baby. In other words, the psalmist wanted them eradicated and shamed. Poetically, the poets of the psalms also express their confidence that God will not let the pride of the wicked go unpunished.

Opposed to the wicked are the righteous. They are described in images conveying God's special love and care for them. They are trees planted next to water (Ps1:3), the sheep of God's special pasture (Ps74:1), a fruitful vine (Ps80:8) and the apple of God's eye (Ps17:8). The righteous will blossom like a palm tree and grow like the magnificent cedars of Lebanon (Ps92:12). God's blessings on them are rich because they stay near his

presence and so are like a "green olive tree in the house of God" (Ps52:8). While God makes the wicked stumble on the way (Ps73:18), he makes the righteous as sure-footed as the deer (Ps 18:13).

### 4.1.3 Images of Experience

A survey shows that images of God and of the righteous and wicked are more numerous than any other category of image in the Psalter. Even so, these just begin to describe the incredible variety that the reader of the psalms encounters. A handful of other metaphors and similes will serve as examples of images that throw new light on things, concepts, experience, relationships and people.

Things. The psalmists employ their poetic imagination to stimulate reflection about many tangible and intangible things, setting unexpected pictures side by side. The manna in the wilderness is the " angels'food" (Ps78:25), while the quantity of meat God provided to the Israelites during that period is described as so abundant that it was "as dust" or even "like as the sand of the sea"(Ps78:27). The violence of the wicked during their attack causes blood to run "like water round about Je-ru-sa-lem" (Ps79:3). Nature is used as imagery to describe other things because it is easily recognizable, familiar.

But imagery of human-made objects is also used to describe things made by God. For instance, in Psalm19:4-6 the psalmist describes how God pitched a tent in the heavens for the sun, which comes bursting out in the morning with all the glory and exuberance of a bridegroom on his wedding day. Compared to God himself, however, the creation wilts. God will always remain the same, but his creation "will wax old like a garment...and shall be changed" (Ps102:26).

The psalmists surround God's word with images of esteem, images that capture its qualities and effect on the reader. God's word is flawless "as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times" (Ps 12:6).Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path (Ps119:105). God's word, specifically his law, is given extended attention in Psalm 19, where it is said to surpass gold in preciousness and honey in sweetness. The

poets set images of *beauty, purity, value and pleasure* beside the thing they most treasure.

Concepts. A concept is an abstraction, often hard for us to grasp. The poets of the book of Psalms help us by associating abstract concepts with concrete images. For instance, we may have only a vague understanding of such concepts as *forgiveness, retribution* or the *bonds* that exist between human beings. Our understanding is heightened when we read that forgiveness is analogous on a spiritual level to a good physical washing:

Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean:

wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. (Ps51:2, 7)

The idea of *retribution—that is, that people ultimately get what they deserve—*Is conveyed powerfully by the frequent image that the wicked dig a hole into which they themselves later fall (Ps7:15;9:15) or they get stuck in the *trap* that they themselves set (Ps9:15;57:6).

Psalm 133 is a poem celebrating the unity in a family or community. Such intimate communion is "It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aa-ron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments;" "As the dew of Her-mon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zi-on: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore." (Ps133:2-3)

Images associated with concepts often evoke emotion: the satisfaction and relief of being clean; the frustration, surprise and anger of being suddenly caught; the soothing effect of a fragrant covering. One way to understand an image, then, is to consider the emotion that might be evoked by the scene described.

Feelings. Like concepts, experiences are often inchoate and hard to grasp. The psalmists can illuminate such experiences, whether *states of mind or emotions,* by drawing a comparison to something concrete and better known. The utter depression of the poet in Psalm 88 is made strikingly real by its concluding line, "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness" (Ps88:18). The psalmist

expresses the overconfidence that led to his downfall by saying his "mountain" stood "firm" (Ps30:7). On a more positive note, the psalmist articulates his intense desire to know God more intimately with the image of a deer that *thirsts for water*(Ps 42:1)

People. We have seen how the psalmists poetically describe the wicked and the righteous as classes of people. They also recognize the similarity between humanity as a whole and the dust of the earth (Ps90:5) or the lowly *worm* (Ps22:6), or even a phantom (Ps39:6). A psalmist will frequently turn to imagery to describe himself in his poems. In his distress he is "poured out like water" and his heart is "like wax" (Ps22:14). When irrational, he is "as a beast" (Ps73:22). In his weakness the psalmist is like a "bowing wall" or a "tottering fence" (Ps62:3). When he laments, he sounds like a "desert owl" (Ps102:6).

Obviously the effect of the use of imagery in the book is strong and moving. The imagery which fills the book of Psalm is not a facile rehearsal of the familiar. It makes the meaning of the book clear and the form vivid; meanwhile, it reinforces the impression upon the readers, making it sublime and powerful.

## 4.2    Genre

The book of Psalms is a collection of poetry and generally all the poems are lyrics. But, obviously there are various genres or subtypes of poems in it. The most prominent feature of the book is its types of psalms, which makes the Psalms fall into groupings.

### 4.2.1  General Classification

The usual Hebrew title for the collection is *Tehillim*, "Praises," a noun derived from a verb frequently used by the psalmists, *hallel*, "to praise," and familiar to Western readers in the form *hallelujah* ("praise the Lord"). Perhaps this designation was chosen because of the prominence of poems celebrating God's greatness in the Temple rites, or even because of the sequence of five hallelujah poems (Ps.146-150) that forms a kind of coda to the collection. In fact, however, the total number of supplications—well over a third of all the poems in the collection—is slightly larger than the number of psalms of

praise. These two categories are the two principal kinds of psalms; together they make up more than two-thirds of the collection. Each may reasonably be divided into subcategories. Some supplications have an individual character (for example, entreaties to God in the throes of physical illness) and some are collective (pleas for help in time of famine, plague, siege, or exile). Psalms of praise may be general celebrations of God's majestic attributes, of his power as Creator manifested in the visible creation, or they may be thanksgiving poems, which, again, can be either individual or collective in character.

In addition to these two dominant categories, there are various lesser genres, most of which are represented by only half a dozen or so psalms: Wisdom psalms (there are actually a dozen of these, Psalms1 and 37 being particularly clear examples, and Wisdom motifs also appear in a good many supplications); monarchic psalms (for example, Ps.21and 72); pilgrim songs (Ps.24,48 and 84); historical psalms (essentially, catechistic recapitulations of the major way-stations of early Israelite history, such as Ps.68 and 78); nature psalms (Ps.8,19,29.104).

## 4.2.2    Generic Features of Subtypes

All of the psalms are lyric poems, which has been talked about in the former chapter. The generic features mentioned here do not replace the more general lyric considerations, but they will yield a more precise understanding of the poems that fall into these subtypes than the lyric framework by itself will provide.

### 4.2.2.1 Lament Psalms

The most numerous category of psalms is the lament or complaint that is designated in the above by the word—supplication. Complaint poems contain the poet's strategy for mastering a crisis, and they can be either private or public in focus.

Lament psalms are a fixed form consisting of five elements, which can occur in any order and can occur more than once in a given poem:

1. *An invocation or introductory cry to God. This usually (but not always or only)*

comes at the very beginning of a lament psalm. It may be accompanied by exalted epithets for God, and it often already contains an element of petition. Here is a typical invocation: "Hear me, O God, as I voice my complaint" (NIV Ps.64:1).

2. *The lament or complaint.* This is a definition of the crisis, a description of the speaker's direful situation. It is the stimulus behind the entire poem, the thing to which the poet is responding. This means that lament psalms are what we call *occasional poems*—poems that arise from a specific occasion in the poet's life. This occasion is usually hinted at in the complaint, though some of the lament psalms paint the crisis in very general terms. Some common occasions for laments in the Psalter are mockery or slander by personal enemies, military threat, disease, the burden of sin and guilt (as in the penitential psalms), or drought.

3. *Petition or supplication.* Here the poet outlines what he is asking God to do to remedy the distressing situation.

4. *Statement of confidence in God.* This means that lament psalms are built on a principle of reversal. The poet begins by convincing us that his situation is hopeless and that he is about to be destroyed. But at some point he recants: it turns out that he will not be destroyed after all, for God can be trusted to act on his behalf. Here is a typical statement of confidence in God (Ps.54:4-5):

Behold, God is mine helper: the Lord is with them that uphold my soul. He shall reward evil unto mine enemies: cut them off in thy truth.

5. *Vow to praise God,* or its variant of simply praising God. Psalm 35 ends with a typical vow to praise God:

And my tongue shall speak of thy righteousness and of thy praise all the day long.

Such is the general pattern. Lament psalms are easy to recognize because of the fixed form that they follow. They are also evidence that biblical poets wrote as self-conscious artists aware of the conventions or "rules" of their craft. The technical generic label *complaint* is usually referred by the biblical poets. There are too numerous lament psalms to list. Typical specimens of the form include Psalms10, 35, 38, 51, 54, 64, 74 and 77. The form of lament psalms is highly affective. It aims to move the reader and

God, and to express adequately the feelings of the speaker himself. This involves doing justice to the problem itself and not hiding the painful truth. Naming the crisis is itself part of the strategy for coping with the problem. These functions explain the five elements that comprise the lament psalm and the emotions that we find portrayed.

Finally, psalms of lament rest on at least two assumptions: that there is a right and a wrong, and that God can be trusted to vindicate the cause of the right. Usually the poet makes a third assumption as well: that he is on the side of the right (an assumption that is reversed in the penitential psalms, where the speaker takes God's side against himself). Without these premises, the lament psalm would be impossible.

### 4.2.2.2　The Psalm of Praise

The second largest grouping of psalms is the psalm of praise. The psalm of praise has a fixed form, just as the lament psalm does. It consists of three lyric parts discussed in earlier chapter.

The psalm of praise almost always begins with a formal *call to praise*. This call might consist of as many as three elements: an exhortation to sing to the Lord, to praise, to exalt; the naming of the person or group to whom the exhortation is directed; mention of the mode of praise. Psalm 149:1-3 is an introduction possessing all three elements:

PRAISE ye the Lord. Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints.

Let Is-ra-el rejoice in him that made him: let the children of Zi-on be joyful in their King.

Let them praise his name in the dance; let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp.

Here it must be pointed out that some psalms of praise intersperse such calls to praise throughout the psalm.

The main element in any psalm of praise is the actual praise of God. This normally consists of a *catalogue* or listing of God's praiseworthy acts and attributes. A much less frequent technique is the *portrait* that praises God. Given the central importance of the

catalogue, a main feature of explicating a praise psalm is to divide the list into its topical units. This may have more to do with content than form, but it is bound to loom large. A good strategy is to pay attention to repetition of words, images, or ideas within a unit, and to use these as the basis for dividing the catalogue into its constituent parts. Usually God's praiseworthy acts occur in three main arenas: nature or creation, history, and the personal life of a believer. The technique of allusion is always potentially important in a catalogue of praiseworthy acts.

The final element in a typical praise psalm is the *concluding resolution* that ends the praise on a note of finality and closure. It often takes the form of a *brief prayer or wish*. Here are a few specimens:

O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever. (Ps.30:12)

God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear him. (Ps.67:7)

Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous; and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness. (Ps.97:12)

The psalms of praise are among the most exalted in the Psalter. And it is abundant in the literary quality of the sublime in the Bible. Praise was a way of life for the psalmists and the believing community that they represented. C.S.Lewis in his *Reflections on the Psalms* observes that "all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise," and praise is "inner health made audible." And praise makes the soul "be in supreme beautitude" (C.S.Lewis, pp90-98)[1]. Praise belongs to life and life without praise is inconceivable.

### 4.2.2.3 Psalms of Worship

Worship is another dominant subject in the Psalms. One of the chief values of the worship psalms is that they give us concrete pictures of worship, including its emotions, which the psalmists experienced. The actual pictures of temple worship and pilgrimages are remote from our own experience.

One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the

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[1] C.S.Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958)

house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple. (Ps.27:4)

The poet opens his statement with hyperbole: he obviously asks for many things from God, not just one. But by means of this technique he forcefully conveys the supremacy that he accords the worship of God. In a similar vein is the comment about wishing to live in God's house all the days of one's life.

We notice secondly the important role that the place of worship plays. The most customary metaphor by which the psalmists express their feelings toward the temple is that of a house. References in the Psalms to *dwelling in the house of the Lord* are of course metaphoric, since no worshiper literally lived in the temple. Nor should we overlook the word *beauty*. The aesthetic dimension of worship keeps coming to the fore in the Psalms.

Psalm 42 and 43, are a concise record of the longing for worship in the Psalms. The situation underlying the poem is that the speaker is living in exile, in pagan territory, and is therefore prevented from traveling to Jerusalem to worship God. This strongly psychological poem runs the gamut of emotions associated with worship at the temple. The poem opens with a memorable simile that pictures longing for God (Ps.42:1-2).

As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee. O God.

My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?

The poetic equivalent for strong feeling is often a sensation. Writing from deep depression, the speaker is nevertheless sustained by the hope of someday returning to Jerusalem to worship God, a hope captured in the famous refrain that occurs three times:

Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance. (Ps.42:5)

Equally evocative is the poet's personification of light and truth as guides to Jerusalem:

O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles.

Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God. (Ps. 43:3-4).

Permeating the whole passage is the note of joy in worship that has a restorative effect. A number of worship psalms recreate for us the excitement of the pilgrimages, with Psalm121 being the supreme example. Psalms 120-134 are a group of psalms that bear the common heading "A Song of Ascents," meaning that they were sung on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. By putting poetic fragments from the worship psalms together, we can trace the sequence of emotions associated with worship all the way from the anticipation of worship to the final feelings as the pilgrim left Jerusalem. Psalm 122 begins with the anticipation and ends with the concluding feelings:

1. I WAS glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.

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6. Pray for the peace of Je-ru-sa-lem: they shall prosper that love thee.

7. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces.

8. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee.,

9. Because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek thy good.

These concluding feelings illustrate what a wide range of experiences converged for the Old Testament worshiper in a trip to Jerusalem: city, peace, security, fellow believers, temple, and God.

As for the actual worship that occurred at the temple, the songs of Zion provide us vivid and kaleidoscopic glimpses, all of them suffused with high excitement:

Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. (Ps.100:4)

And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the Lord. (Ps.27:6)

Walk about Zi-on, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof.

Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following.

For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death. (Ps.48:12-14)

The following are the famous verses that show the patriotic feelings, the specimens of the sentiment are:

If I forget thee, O Je-ru-sa-lem, let my right hand forget her cunning.

If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Je-ru-sa-lem above my chief joy. (Ps.137:5-6)

With the king of poetry we have been looking, it is the cumulative effect—the total world that builds up in our imagination—that is important. Pilgrimages to Jerusalem, worship in a temple, strong religious sentiment associated with a city, and a merging of patriotic and religious spheres. The value of entering the world of the songs of Zion is that we can identify universal experiences through particulars, which are cultural and spiritual.

### 4.2.2.4 Encomium

The encomium is one of the most refreshing and artistic forms in the Bible. An encomium is a work of literature written in praise of an abstract quality or general character type. In elaborating their theme, writers of encomia draw upon the following motifs:

1. Introduction to the subject that will be praised. This may include a brief definition of the subject.

2. The distinguished and ancient ancestry of the subject; praise "by what kind he came of."

3. A catalogue or description of the praiseworthy acts and qualities of the subject.

4. The indispensable or superior nature of the subject. The superiority of the

subject might include a description of the rewards that accompany it (something distinctively important in biblical encomia).

5. A conclusion urging the reader to emulate the subject.

All encomia have a lyric quality comparable to a psalm of praise.

## Psalm 1

Psalm 1 (already explicated in the previous chapter) is an encomium praising the godly person. The praise is conducted by describing both the inner quality and outward actions of such a person. The praise of the godly person is heightened by the presence of the foil of the wicked person.

The poem begins with a positive evaluation of the godly person in the evocative form of a beatitude "Blessed is the man…." Three parallel clauses then narrate what the godly person avoids (v.1). Positively "his delight is in the law of the Lord, / and on his law he meditates day and night" (v.2). An encomium can be trusted to give a precise definition of the subject that it praises, as the first two verses of Psalm 1 already demonstrate.

From the catalogue of activities the poet turns to a portrait of the godly person. It takes the form of a simile that pictures a productive tree growing by streams of water (v.3), with the meanings of that picture elaborated by a contrasting simile that compares the wicked to chaff (v.4). These similes are not merely decorative. They require readers to analyze how godly and wicked persons are like these phenomena.

To complete the praise of the godly person, the poet shifts the focus to the future judgment of both the wicked and the godly (vv.5-6). What emerges from this final verdict is a strong impression of the superiority of the godly way of life, a standard formula in an encomium.

## Psalm 15

Psalm 15 is similar to Psalm 1, taking as its object of praise the holy person. When an encomium praises a general character type, it is a brief descriptive sketch of a

character type who exemplifies a single dominant principle. The portrait can be either a moral type (e.g., the proud person), a social type (the overdressed person), or a vocational type (the preacher). The sketch can include both external appearance and actions and inner character traits. The basic structure of a character sketch is repetitive—we see a single principle maintained under a variety of different forms. The person is not individualized but treated as a common type.

Not surprisingly, the encomia in the Psalms praise spiritual and moral qualities. Psalm 15 paints a picture of the holy person. The sketch, in fact, is couched as the answer to a question of far-reaching importance, namely, who can worship God acceptably? The question is addressed to God:

LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill? (Ps.15:1)

The imagery of the tabernacle and hill refers to worshiping God in the temple.

The answer to these questions, which also constitutes the encomium, is a catalogue of the acts of the holy person. The list alternates between positive and negative descriptions in a manner reminiscent of Psalm 1:

2. He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart.

3. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour.

4. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.

5. He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent.

In analyzing such a list, one should look for patterns or clusters of related ideas.

The conclusion of the encomium, syntactically isolated from the catalogue, is a comprehensive generalization about the person just described:

He that doeth these things shall never be moved. The effect of this concluding assertion is to make the reader want to be such a person, which is always the final impression left by an encomium. An encomium is an affective form. Its hidden agenda is always to persuade or move the reader to emulate the thing being praised.

## 4.3　Simplicity

The simplicity of language is the obvious style of the Book of Psalms. The notion of simplicity, however, must be adopted with caution because it has been used too readily to attribute to these poems a kind of sublime naive, to see in them a purely spontaneous outpouring of feeling. In fact, many of the psalms show evidence of fairly intricate rhetorical and structural elaboration. The "simplicity" of Psalms is rather the ability of subtle poets, sure in their tradition, to call on archetypal language, to take unabashed advantage of the power of repetition, and, when the occasion seems to require it, to displace figuration by stark literal assertion. Psalm 121, a very different sort of poem about divine protection, displays just these stylistic features, which has been discussed in Chapter3; here it is no need to talk about it again. Psalm 117 is the shortest poem in the book of Psalms. It has only two verses:

1 O praise the LORD, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people.

2 For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the LORD endureth for ever. Praise ye the LORD.

In verse 1, it uses the synonymous parallelism, two "praises" for emphasis, "nations" and "people", the pair of words is expressing the same meaning. In verse two the consecutive clauses also convey the same structure and meaning. And the coherence in this poem is conveyed by causality with the help of the word "for". And by returning to the opening sentiment, the last line uses apostrophe to achieve the perfect completeness. Even from the shortest poem in the Bible, we can see that the poets are so artistic in searching after the beautiful pattern and design, it is in parallelism, the unity coherence, and emphasis is conveyed so perfectly and delightfully.

Anyway, simplicity is a quintessential expression of the poetic beauty of Psalms in its artful use of a purposefully limited, primary language to suggest a kind of luminous immediacy in the apprehension of the world through the eyes of faith.

The Book of Psalms reflects the real life of the ancient Hebrews historically, culturally and spiritually. The style of the book has a deep influence upon the western literature and even some famous Chinese authors.

# Chapter 5 Book of Song of Solomon

*The Song of Solomon*, also *The Song of Songs*, is a flower of *The Bible*, with very precious literary value. All through the ages many scholars have different opinions about it. For example, they treat it as an idyllic drama, or as lyric love poetry, especially as spiritual allegory, which is explained as the original reason of being edited into *The Bible*. With the increasing influence of *The Bible*, the version of "religious poems" is more solid, while its pure literary value is gradually neglected. Whereas, this paper attempts to focus on explaining it as a collection of love lyrics from its love style, figures of speech, the structure of the book, etc.

## 5.1 What Kind of Book Is It?

As a component part of written literary legacy of Hebrews, poetry reflects the ups and downs of the historic life of Hebrews from a specific angle. The national history of Hebrews is a history full of hardships, but Hebrews are not only brave but also optimistic. They yearn for secular happiness and pursue sweet marriage life. They think that their future will be bright, however dark the plight they face because of God in their heart. Meanwhile, they are so wise that they're good at summarizing experience of life and society. Like other ancient civilized nations, Hebrews have produced oral poems since the age of mythology and legend. Then the poems are passed down from one generation to another. Their plastic arts, such as carving, painting are not very developed, while time arts, such as poem, music and dancing are well developed. Undoubtedly, the excellent poetry--the Song of Solomon is the crystallization of wisdom and labor. There really can be no doubt that the *Song of Solomon* is a collection of love poems. "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine." it is obvious that the main characters in the book are rapturously in love and that the main action of the book is romantic love between a man and a woman. As in other love poetry, the main subject matter is the emotions of love. The book covers a whole range of romantic emotions: the

rapture of falling in love, impatience for the love to progress to marriage, longing to be with the beloved, the frustration of separation between lovers, and above all the voice of romantic passion satisfied: "My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies."(2:16).

To say that the content of the poem is human passion is to say that this is a collection of *love lyrics*, they include courtship lyrics, poems in praise of the beauty and virtue of the beloved, expression of longing to be with the beloved, invitations to the beloved, songs of separation, vows of eternal constancy, and poems that celebrate the joys of being with the beloved —of seeing, hearing, touching, kissing, and so forth.

The middle chapters of the Song of Solomon, moreover, are an epithalamion, or wedding poem. Common motifs include impatience over the slow arrival of the wedding, a picturing of the events of the wedding, and a celebration of the sexual joys of the marriage. The lyrics that make up this collection portray a single romance. At the face value of the Song of Solomon the implied situation revolves around a courtship and marriage between a king named Solomon, called "the beloved," and a Shulamite girl called "love." We can infer that Solomon met and fell in love with a beautiful rustic girl. Alternately, the rustic identity of the girl might be a fictional disguise, since the king's rustic identity in the work is obviously fictional and it is a common technique in pastoral literature. Solomon invited the girl to the palace to be part of the royal harem in Jerusalem. The love progressed and was consummated in marriage. The references in the book will make most sense if we assume that the king fell in love with and married a farm girl. Obviously the poet has transformed any real-life romance into a highly idealized and poetically embellished piece of literature. No one in real life talks the way the speakers in the Song of Solomon do. The book makes no attempt to tell us the factual history of a romance. Its truthfulness consists of truthfulness to the emotions of romantic love, presented as ideal norms.

## 5.2    The Style of the Love

Poem is the soul of literature; love is the eternal theme of literary and artistic works.

Moreover, being a basic pattern for giving vent to one's feelings, poem takes love as the main melody.

9 I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots.

10 Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels, thy neck with chains of gold.

11 We will make thee borders of gold with studs of silver.

12 While the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof. (1:9-12)

From the words used to describe the style of such a passage, it is obviously a *sensuous* style. It means something to do with the senses, but not sensual. In fact, its metaphoric or symbolic mode has in it a built-in sense of reserve. Other descriptive terms also help us identify the style of the passage at which we are looking. It is a *pictorial* style. In this passage, we picture or imagine the woman's jewels, the king on his couch, and the woman's perfume. The style is also *passionate*. The style is *hyperbolic*, giving us an exaggerated version of the attractiveness of the two lovers. The style is *pastoral*, deeply rooted in the world of nature and growing plants. A final thing to note about the style of the Song of Solomon is that it proceeds chiefly by an association of images and feelings. It is indeed, a *stream-of-consciousness* style, not a narrative style. The mention of the adorned horses of a king's chariot (v.9) leads to a picture of the jewelry that adorns the woman (vv.10-11). Another evidence of the fluidity of the style is the way in which we move from one speaker to another without transition.

The Song of Solomon is the largest repository of biblical teaching on the subject of romantic love. This alone would make it a necessary part of the Bible. Without the view of love presented here, the Bible's teaching on the subject would be incomplete. (Leland Ryken, 1992: 278)[1]

To begin, the love celebrated in the Song of Solomon is *love because of*, not *love in spite of.* On this basis alone, the attempt to allegorize the book to mean God's love for people should be rejected, because God loves in spite of people's sinfulness. The love portrayed and celebrated in the Song of Solomon exists between a man and woman and

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[1] Leland Ryken. *Words of Delight: A literary Introduction to the Bible* (Baker Book House Company, 1992)

has a strong dimension to it. The clear implication of the poem is that the mutual physical attractiveness that a man and woman feel toward each other is good and ennobling.

The love in the poem is also *romantic*. It is highly refined and conducted according to elaborate social pattern of compliments, wooing, acceptance, and so forth. This romantic strain removes the love from two perversions. Despite its frank acceptance of sexual passion, the romantic love here portrayed could not possibly be mistaken for mere animal or physical appetite. This distinctly human identity of the love removes it from lust. On the other side, the romance of it all removes it equally from any matter-of-fact, routine, unromanticized relationship between husband and wife.

A third characteristic of the love depicted in the work is that it is *idealized*, that is, held up as an ideal. The love of the couple is portrayed as an ennobling human sentiment. It awakens such moral qualities as gentleness, humility, modesty, high regard for another person, and loyalty in love. This idealization of romantic love removes the poem from asceticism, which holds that romantic love is never a good thing in itself.

Finally, the romantic love that is celebrated in the poem is *married love*. Its assumed context is marriage. As the love deepens, it becomes directed toward marriage. The physical consummation of the love is described as occurring after the wedding. In chapter 4 and 5 the lady is six times referred to as Solomon's *bride*.

To summarize, the ideal that is celebrated in the Song of Solomon is *wedded romantic love*. This love is not put into a spiritual context of faith in God. A work of literature is a distillation of life. In this poem, the poet distills the attractiveness of the lovers and the serene joy of their relationship, though we all know that there are other sides to a romance and marriage.

## 5.3 Figurative Language

Song of Solomon is a metaphoric or symbolic book, and it is full of images and figures of speech. The striking thing stylistically about the Song of Solomon is the strange

nature of its metaphors.

### 5.3.1 The Emblematic Blazons

Blazon is a kind of genre of love poetry. Such a poem praises (blazons forth) the beauty or virtue of the beloved by cataloguing his or her attractive features and comparing them to objects or emblems in nature. There are four emblematic blazons in the Song of Solomon, three praising the woman (4:1-5; 6:4-7; 7:1-5) and one praising the man (5:10-15). The pattern in the first three is downward movement, beginning with the eyes or hair, with the pattern reversed in the last one.

1 Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks: thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from mount Gilead.

2 Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing; whereof every one bear twins, and none is barren among them.

3 Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely: thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks.

4 Thy neck is like the tower of David builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men.

5 Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies. (4:1-5)

The images seem ludicrous. They lack unity and coherence. They mix the most extravagant and dissimilar metaphors which distract from and in no way describe what they are intended to represent. Hebrew poetry is not primarily visual, but appeals to a wide range of associations and senses. Here the poet is not painting a picture of the woman's body, and the main point of the comparisons is not primarily visual correspondence. The main point of the comparisons is the *value* that the woman represents. The imagery in such passages is primarily *affective* rather than visual or pictorial. Another explanation is that the imagery appeals primarily to the *nonvisual* senses. "Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins," the image is not visual

but *tactile*; the sensuousness of the description is nearly overwhelming. Yet another interpretation is that the imagery is symbolic rather than sensory, "Thy neck is like the tower of David builded for an armoury," this simile seems absurd, but the comparison exists in the value. As for the poet, his aesthetic realization is independent of close sensory congruity. The tower is a symbol to him—a symbol of excellence, a recognized standard of value, and a tower raised to transcendent value through glorious historic and functional associations. The poet's imagination is perfectly satisfied with the most shadowy, the most partial, and the most superficial physical or qualitative correspondence to the standard of value.

The effect of such a grouping is not a picture of the beloved but an affective impression of value and desirability. As an attempt at a unified and coherent picture, these blazons are contradictory (in 5:11 His head is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy, and black as a raven.). But as a combination of acknowledged standards of excellence, they evoke a strong feeling of the worth of the person.

### 5.3.2 Pastoral Invitation to Love

There are two pastoral invitations to love in the Song of Solomon (2:10-15; 7:10-13). Here are the verses from the first one, which epitomizes the Song of Solomon as a whole: chapter 2

10 My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.

11 For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone;

12 The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land;

13 The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

14 O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy

countenance is comely.

15 Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes.

The strategy in such a poem is to invite the beloved to go for a walk in the countryside and to use the appeals of the landscape as a way of making the invitation persuasive. There is a metaphoric overtone to the invitation, which in effect becomes a marriage proposal—an invitation to share a life together. The style of the excerpt shows the heart of the Song of Solomon, the style is sensuous, evocative, and pastoral. The world that it creates in our imagination is an ideally beautiful and fruitful world. The short lines and parallel clauses produce a musical, songlike quality. The aphoristic line like "the time of the singing of birds is come" sums up the mood of the book.

### 5.3.3 The Consummation of the Love

The epithalamion that comprises the middle of the Song of Solomon reaches its climax with a figurative description of the lovers' consummation of their love. The passage begins with a long address by the groom to his bride in which he praises her beauty and chastity (4:9-15):

9 Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck.

10 How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices!

11 Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon.

12 A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.

13 Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard,

14 Spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense;

myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices:

15 A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.

The consummation of love is obviously moves to a riot of sensations. The controlling metaphor compares the bride to a precious spice garden. The emphasis on the enclosed nature of the garden praises the bride's chastity. In this passage the poetic equivalent for emotion is a picture. The claim that the beloved's love is better than wine appears several times in the Song of Solomon and means that the beloved is , figuratively speaking, more intoxicating than wine. The overall impression is the extreme value of the garden and hence of the bride.
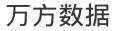
The bride responds to the groom's description by expressing her wish to be desirable to her husband (4:16):

16 Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.

The imagery of the spice garden continues to be the basic frame of reference, but the locked garden is now opened to the beloved. We cannot read the passage without getting a strong impression of the worth of happy sexual love in marriage.

The passage reaches its climax as the husband claims his garden, that is, his bride (5:1): I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.

This barrage of metaphors creates a sense of love as an appetite and marriage as the thing that satisfies it. There is no attempt at providing a coherent picture. Instead, the poet mixes the most evocative sensory images he has at his disposal. To eat a honeycomb with the honey is to possess the very source of life's sweetness. We might note in passing that the symbolic mode of the Song of Solomon, in which sexual consummation, for example, is pictured as claiming a sensuous garden, has built into it a certain reserve that keeps the poem far from pornography.

### 5.3.4 The Request for Permanence in Love

The most customary way to structure a long work of literature is to move it toward some climactic moment of epiphany or insight near the end. Verses 6 and 7 of the last chapter are such a moment in the Song of Solomon, as the woman makes an eloquent request for permanence in love:

6 Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.

7 Many waters cannot quench love; neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned. (8:6-7)

Love songs the world over are full of vows of eternal constancy, since love at its most intense wants to be bound to the beloved. True or permanent love is the subject of the Song of Solomon.

The imagery of this poem is powerful. The request to be set as a seal upon either the heart or arm has two meanings. In ancient times, a seal was an engraved stamp for making an imprint, which carried the force of an official signature. To put a seal upon something was to claim it as a possession. The lady's request is, "stamp me on your heart and thereby claim me as yours." The second meaning is that seals were worn on either the hand (Gen. 41:42) or on a chain around the neck (Gen.38:18), where they would be easily accessible when needed to stamp a document. Thus, the meaning of the images is not simply possession but closeness. In asking to be set as a seal on the man's heart or arm, the woman is asking to be always close to her beloved.

Following her request, the woman explains why she has made it: *for love is strong as death*. How strong is death? No one can conquer it. It is both irresistible and permanent. The same is true of love. The next line is parallel in meaning.

True love is next compared to fire. This is an archetypal image for love, because both fire and love are uncontrollable. The fire of love, in fact, is so powerful and

uncontrollable that floods of water cannot quench or drown it, defying the laws of nature. To close this impassioned definition of true love, the poet declares its supreme value: it is so valuable that all of a person's wealth is tawdry when put beside it. Such love is not for sale.

To theorize the language style used in the Song of Solomon, Freud's theory of psychology is the best to explain this:

The Freudian psychology is the one which makes poetry indigenous to the very constitution of the mind. Indeed, the mind, as Freud sees it, is in the greater part of its tendency, exactly a poetry-making organ. For it seems to make the working of the unconscious mind equivalent to poetry itself, poetry is a kind of beneficent aberration of the mind's right course. Freud has not merely naturalized poetry; he has discovered its status as a pioneer settler and he sees it as a method of thought. And in a scientific age, we still feel and think in figurative formations and to create, a science of tropes, of metaphor and its variants, synecdoche and metonymy. Freud showed too how the mind, in one of its parts, could work without logic, yet not without that directing purpose, that control of intent from which, perhaps it might be said, logic springs. The unconscious mind in its struggle with the conscious always turns from the general to the concrete and finds the tangible trifle more congenial than the large abstraction. Freud discovered in the very organization of the mind those mechanisms by which art makes its effects, such devices as the condensations of meanings and the displacement of accent. (Zhugang, pp121-122) [1]

As is shown in the Song of Solomon, though the images used for comparison seem strange, they do not lack the coherence and unity contently and formally, just because the directing purpose of the logic springs are working.

## 5.4 The Structure of the Book

To say that the content of the poem is human passion is to say that this is a collection of love lyrics, not a story or a drama. The content of the book is far too thoroughly interior and psychological for this to be regarded as narrative or drama. It is almost

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[1] Zhugang. *Twentieth Century Western Critical Theories* (Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2001)

continuously an outpouring of feelings. The structure of the book is even farther removed from narrative. The basic structure is what in modern literature we call the stream of consciousness, meaning that it follows the shifting flow of actual thought and feeling. The rapid shifts, the flashbacks, the lack of a clear progression—all these add to the reading of the book as a collection of love lyrics.

The book of Song of Solomon is not structured on a chronological principle. In fact, the wedding poems come in the middle, not in the end as expected usually. Some of the late lyrics are more appropriate to the courtship phase of the romance. This suggests that the book is structured on the principle that biblical scholars call chiastic (crossing) structure but that literary critics are more likely to call ring composition. In such a structure, the second half of the work takes up the same motifs as were present in the first half, but in reverse order. In Song of Solomon, the first and last chapters (approximately) portray sentiments appropriate to falling in love—an early phase of romance and in the very middle is the wedding.

Generally speaking, Song of Solomon is a collection book of lyric poems, but the whole book is united either from the theme or from the form. The theme is about wedded romantic love, and the structure is *love-marriage-love*, which is developed through *stream-of-consciousness* technique. The first part is about falling in love with each other, and naturally the second part comes to the marriage, and the third part is the flashback of the repeated motif about falling in love in the first part, this form pattern seems kind of envelope structure, it reinforces the love theme, and completes the shapeliness of the whole book, so it achieves the result of aestheticism contently and formally.

## 5.5 The Female Image

It is really rare to have so great esteem for love in the ancient literature in the whole world, and especially the love in a patriarchal society. Another characteristic of the book of Song of Solomon is the establishment of a successful feminist image. In a patriarchal society, to pursue love seems to be only the male's right. It is a big surprise that the Song of Solomon has so different a style. The poet gives the heroine first an opportunity to

express directly her strong feeling of love:

2 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine.

3 Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee.

4 Draw me, we will run after thee: the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee. (1:2-4)

From the above verses, the bride puts forth actively two wishes: one is "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth", this sincerely expresses the maturity of their love; and the other will is: "Draw me, we will run after thee: the king hath brought me into his chambers" here the bride asks her beloved to be her king, and this shows her respect for her husband.

5 I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon.

6 Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept. (1:5-6)

The above verses are the voices of the bride to introduce her appearance and her own brothers; this kind of self-introduction exhibits the bride's frankness and sincerity. She admits that she is black as the tents of Kedat, but she denies that she isn't comely; she is comely as the curtains of Solomon. There are many scenes to describe the bride's upright expression of love:

I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys. (2:1)

"Sharon" is famous for its roses, and roses are a symbol for love, and lily is known for its purity and beauty, these two metaphors here depict that she will love her bridegroom for ever and her love for him will be pure and beautiful.

My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies. (2:16)

By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. (3:1)

*The bride expresses her real feeling from the bottom of her heart, it depicts that she longs for her beloved's present existence, and it shows that she wants to be with her beloved twenty-four and seven.*

6 Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.

7 Many waters cannot quench love; neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned. (8:6-7)

*The poet puts these beautiful descriptions about ideal love into the bride's mouth* and uses the bride as the spokeswoman to utter the poet's attitude about what true love is. It is not difficult to see that there is no sex discrimination at all in the whole poetry.

*From the feminist literary perspective, the Song of Solomon provides a perfect* ancient female image in pursuing her love. And she has the equal right with the male to pursue and express her love sentiments. The Song of Solomon is a classic in up-building the successful female character in literary history, and this is also an obvious characteristic of the book.

The Song of Solomon is the most thoroughly poetic book in the Bible. The way to read it is simple: read it as love poetry and abandon yourself to the rapture of the images and sentiments. The Song of Solomon is affective, not analytic, in its approach to love. Both its style and its lyric content require a sense of abandonment on the reader's part. The book of Song of Solomon is the highest praise for love, which inspired, is inspiring and will inspire the poets of love poetry forever.
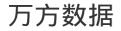
# Conclusion

The Christian book of Bible has been considered as one of the sources of western literature. It has great literary value-- either its own literariness or the impact upon the western literature.

Imagery is one of the biggest features in the book, let alone in the part of poetry. Art is thinking in images. Images are the main device that the ancient Hebrew poets employed to write their literature. Images give pictures of life, reality and human experience. The fullness of imagery makes abstract conception understandable and makes the emotions of the poets communicable. Imagery shows the truth rather than tells it.

The resources of language are rich in biblical poetry. Figurative language especially metaphor is the main device used by ancient Hebrew poets. Metaphor not only beautifies the language of poetry, it also makes the meaning much more covert and causes the reader to meditate or ponder about it. Metaphor embraces the elegance and sublime of biblical poetry.

Parallelism is the main verse form in poetry; it is one of the main tropes the poets used to arrange the poetry structure. The artistry of three part-lyric form, word pairs, repeated refrain and the capacity to organize the poem all convey the great artistic cultivation of the ancient Hebrew poets.
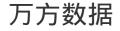
Genres are the main characteristic of the book of Psalms. Generic features of subtypes of the book give an organic picture about the life of the ancient Hebrew people, which are exotic culturally and spiritually. Imagery and simplicity are the other main characters of the book, which show the great ability of the ancient poets to create their art.

Romance is the love style of the book of The Song of Songs. Figurative language adds great beauty to the theme. The structure of love-marriage-love through the technique of stream-of-consciousness affects the love motif too. The book also carves the female image successfully. The entire book reflects the pursuit of the ancient Hebrew people in love and their yearning wish for bright life.

Style is the book itself. Structuralism emphasizes the nature of integrity, and the *integrity* is based on different constituent elements. The stylistic analysis of the biblical poetry above gives an organic picture of how the ancient Hebrew poets created their poetry, and meanwhile it conveys the exotic Hebrew way of life culturally and spiritually.

The thesis is only a tentative research. It remains open to be discussed and improved.

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# 附 录

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