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## Poetics of Desolation: The Integration of Poetic Technique in Lamentations 1

*Benjamin Larson*

### INTRODUCTION

In 587 B.C.E., Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian army captured Jerusalem, deported her people, and burned Solomon's temple to the ground.<sup>1</sup> The book of Lamentations is a five-poem meditation on the immediate aftermath. It is titled *איכה*, "how!" in Hebrew, after the first word in the book, an exclamation expressing bewilderment as to how such a catastrophe could have befallen Israel. The first chapter of Lamentations has been called "an exceptionally impressive poetic depiction of the desolation of the city of God."<sup>2</sup>

Classical Hebrew poetry might seem strange to readers more familiar with Greek and Latin. First of all, there is much less of it—the entire corpus is contained in the Hebrew Bible. Grammatically (and therefore, stylistically) it is quite different, because of its home in the family of Semitic languages. Nouns (with the exception of a few pronouns, as in English) do not decline, nor is the Hebrew verb anything like the labyrinth of the Greek. In these ways, the grammar is much simpler. However, prepositions and direct objects can be tacked onto the beginnings and endings of words, respectively. Due to these features, combined with the common poetic technique of elision, one is often confronted with very few words of poetry per line. Hebrew's low word count, though, can pack a large semantic content. Additionally, the

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<sup>1</sup> This paper would not have been possible without the patience and encouragement of Nanette Goldman. She read countless drafts and is largely to thank for its readability (any remaining inadequacies are my own responsibility). She has been an inspiration, intellectual and otherwise, from the beginning of my college education to the end. I would also like to thank the *SMAC* board for its careful reading and intelligent suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> Dilbert R. Hillers, *Lamentations: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Anchor Bible, vol. 7A. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 78.

(relatively) small vocabulary of biblical Hebrew necessitates multiple senses for the same root word, which in poetry provides for layers of meaning unavailable to languages with more precise and abundant lexica.

Not surprisingly, biblical location implies biblical themes. Classical Hebrew poetry—whether in prophetic works, wisdom literature, or songs of praise or lament—is concerned above all with one thing: the actions of Yahweh in the history of the Israelites, and their relationship with him. Various manifestations of this basic poetic theme include meditations on righteousness as dictated by Yahweh, warnings by prophets against idolatrous behavior, reflections on destruction meted out by God for straying from his covenant, and so on.

Current scholarship on biblical poetry is still largely concerned with articulating what I will call (with Hobbins)<sup>3</sup> the “classical description,” which reaches all the way back to Robert Lowth. In the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, he realized that “two phenomena are interacting” in biblical poetry—parallelism and meter.<sup>4</sup> This has been the point of departure for generations of scholars, who have critically tested this formulation and remained reasonably glad to work within its confines, because it continues to yield fresh insights.

The objective of this paper is to elucidate the poetics of Lamentations 1. Although it has features besides parallelism and meter, these two phenomena will necessarily figure prominently in my discussion. The precise formulation of the classical description I use, however, must be defended. I will attempt to show that parallelism in the Hebrew Bible has only two distinct formulations, semantic and syntactic, and that both can be observed in this poem. This discussion in the context of Lamentations will be novel, because this book has been largely neglected in

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<sup>3</sup> John Hobbins, “Retaining and Transcending the Classical Description of Ancient Hebrew Verse,” unpublished article, February 6, 2007, <[http://ancienthebrewpoetry.typepad.com/ancient\\_hebrew\\_poetry/files/retaining\\_and\\_transcending\\_the\\_classical\\_description.pdf](http://ancienthebrewpoetry.typepad.com/ancient_hebrew_poetry/files/retaining_and_transcending_the_classical_description.pdf)> (October 15, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Michael O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1980), 4.

major scholarship on parallelism.<sup>5</sup> With respect to meter, I will argue that it does exist in biblical poetry, but in a form much different from that in Greek and Latin poetry.

Once the classical description has been sufficiently articulated, I will describe the poetics of the poem. This will include an examination of its parallelism and metrical structure in light of my treatment of the classical description, and its use of other poetic devices, such as anticlimax. Although I will discuss many of its poetic features, my main argument about Lamentations 1 is that it integrates poetic technique at all its levels. The poet achieves this using parallelism, anticlimax, and meter.

I will adopt some conventions with which to discuss Lamentations. *The poem* always refers to its first chapter. An entire verse—e.g., Lam 1:1, three lines as printed in the Masoretic Text (hereafter MT) of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*—is either a *strophe* (general) or a *tricolon* (specific). In other words, in the context of this poem, strophe and tricolon are synonymous. By strophe I mean the dominant sense unit made up of some regular number of cola, whereas tricolon simply refers to the fact that Lamentations 1 is divided by sense and alphabetical acrostic into strophes of three lines each.<sup>6</sup> Lam 1:20 is an example of a strophe (which is also a tricolon):<sup>7</sup>

(β)	(α)
מעז חמרמרו	ראה יהוה כז-צר-לי (a)
כז מרו מרזתז	נהפך לבי בקרבי (b)
בבזת כמות	מחוזן שכלה-חרב (c)

<sup>5</sup> The exceptions are the unpublished dissertations of B. B. Kaiser (1983) and P. J. Owens (1997), both from the University of Chicago.

<sup>6</sup> There is one exception: the strophe which is v. 7 is made of up four cola. There is no scholarly consensus as to whether the extra colon is original.

<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

(α)	(β)
(a) <i>look, Lord, at my distress</i>	<i>my bowels burn</i>
(b) <i>my heart has been poured out within me</i>	<i>for I have gravely rebelled</i>
(c) <i>outside, the sword bereaves</i>	<i>in the home it is like death</i>

One line, then, is a *colon*, the fundamental unit of sense in the poem. E.g., Lam 1:20c: -מחוץ שכלה-חרב בבית כמוה, “outside the sword bereaves / in the home it is like death.” One half of a colon is a *hemistich*, e.g. Lam 1:20cβ: בבית כמוה, “in the home it is like death.” These definitions will prove useful, as long as the reader bears in mind that they largely describe structural inventions of the Masoretes.<sup>8</sup> The alphabetical acrostic of the poem makes it clear where strophes begin and end, but it is impossible to be sure the poet intended the cola and hemistich divisions we have inherited.

#### THE CLASSICAL DESCRIPTION: PARALLELISM

Lowth either discovered or invented parallelism. He may have done both—the observation of what is probably the major feature of biblical poetry was certainly a discovery in the broad sense. But his description of its features, as Kugel argues, was an unhelpful invention: “Lowth mistook parallelism for the *whole idea* of this biblical style, then gave the impression of a system operating in what is, really, not systematic at all.”<sup>9</sup> Kugel refers to Lowth’s tripartite division of parallelism into synonymous, antithetical, and synthetic formulations, categories which current scholars consider quaint or simplistic at best.

<sup>8</sup> The Masoretes were copiers and editors of the Hebrew scriptures. They are responsible for the earliest complete Hebrew Bible that has survived, which dates from the 10<sup>th</sup> century C.E. This complete codex and other surviving manuscripts comprise the authoritative textual tradition, known as the Masoretic Text (MT).

<sup>9</sup> James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 57 (emphasis in original).

Almost every treatment of parallelism in the Hebrew Bible is an attempt to describe its features and effects in general, using examples within the corpus to support a certain conception of it. In this section, I will look at Lamentations 1, and examine how different theories of parallelism operate within its confines. (This will be an original approach, because Lamentations is by and large neglected in theoretical discussions about parallelism. Almost every other collection of poems gets more treatment: the Psalter, poems within the prose books of the Pentateuch, the prophetic books, Proverbs, and Song of Songs.) Later, I will return to parallelism and discuss how it works on different levels of the poem.

A definition of parallelism is hard to pin down. Its use by scholars and literary critics makes the word unavoidable. At the same time, that very usage has made its referents myriad and often contradictory. The problem is not necessarily resolved by specifying what *kind* of parallelism one refers to, because discussing a subset of “parallelism” necessarily involves making theoretical assumptions about the whole category. I will use the term “parallelism” very generally: in my treatment, it will refer to the phenomenon of proximal<sup>10</sup> cola or hemistichs exhibiting conspicuous grammatical, semantic, metrical, or mathematical relationships to each other. I take as given that scholars in general know parallelism when they see it. This assumption breaks down around the edges—scholars will argue about whether a given example fits into their conceptual framework in order to defend their scheme. But this does not obscure the fact that in most instances, e.g. Lam 1:5a,

היו צריה לראש      איביה שלו

*her enemies are on top      her foes are at ease*

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<sup>10</sup> Kaiser, op. cit., has suggested that Lamentations 1 requires a uniquely expanded concept of parallelism to include “non-contiguous” lines. Thus, she takes a syntactic position on parallelism in Lamentations which does not require parallels to be proximal, and believes that she can find a parallel for almost every line somewhere in the poem. I will not discuss her argument in this essay; it will suffice here to point out that the classical description of parallelism requires that the lines be contiguous.

it is clear what we mean when we say two sense-units are related by parallelism.

It is my contention that there are only two distinct conceptions of parallelism: the semantic and syntactic schools. By semantic school, I mean a theory focused on meaning—these scholars are concerned with the explaining how the structure of parallelism supports a movement of ideas. The syntactic school, in contrast, understands parallelism in terms of (usually tautological) grammatical and mathematical relationships between units. It is important to point out that these are my own categories. Each scholar positions him or herself as a uniquely insightful contributor to the debate about parallelism, which often necessitates creating a new category. I am arguing that, while there may be interesting differences in degree between these scholars, the only difference in kind exists between the syntactic school and the semanticists.

The syntactic school is represented by Michael O'Connor,<sup>11</sup> Terence Collins,<sup>12</sup> and Wilfred Watson.<sup>13</sup> In general, they ask the question, “How do we know and classify parallelism when we see it?” and only then seek to describe its effects. The *symmetry* is primary; this school tends to see parallelism as equation. Mathematical or grammatical relationships cannot prioritize a particular half of an instance of parallelism.

A dramatic example is Watson, who begins his discussion of parallelism by noting, “To talk about parallelism is to use an analogy based on mathematical (or, rather, geometrical) concepts and scholars have failed to see the deeper implications resulting from this commonly accepted notion.”<sup>14</sup> He offers a very precise set of permutations that put *his* definition of parallelism alongside its analogues. His argument is that geometrically, parallelism is an  $x_1 x_2 //$

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<sup>11</sup> O'Connor.

<sup>12</sup> Terence Collins, *Line-Forms in Hebrew Poetry: A grammatical approach to the stylistic study of the Hebrew Prophets* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978).

<sup>13</sup> Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> Watson, 114.

$x_1 x_2$  pattern. The other three permutations involve alternating the second pair, and using (-) to represent antithesis. Somewhat confusingly, Watson uses “parallelism” to refer both to his strict mathematical definition (also “proper congruence”), as well as the general set of all his permutations.

Watson lists what he sees as the four most basic configurations: given units  $a_1 a_2$ , one may reflect them and vary either the sign (+/-) or the sequence.<sup>15</sup>

$x_1 x_2 // x_1 x_2$  : proper congruence (strict parallelism)

$x_1 x_2 // x_2 x_1$  : reflexive congruence (chiasmus or mirror symmetry)

$x_1 x_2 // -x_1 -x_2$  : proper anti-congruence

$x_1 x_2 // -x_2 -x_1$  : reflexive anti-congruence

Lam 1:13a-b is an example:

בעצמתי וירדנה ( $x_2$ )	ממרום שלה-אש ( $x_1$ )
השיבני אחור ( $x_2$ )	פרש רשת לרגלי ( $x_1$ )
<i>from on high he hurled fire</i>	<i>and sank it into my bones</i> <sup>16</sup>
<i>he cast a net for my feet</i>	<i>he has turned me back</i>

This is an example of Watson’s proper congruence. פרש רשת, “he cast a net,” and שלה-אש, “he hurled fire,” correspond to  $x_1$ . They are congruent because the direct objects have the same gender (“net” is feminine, and “fire” usually is), the verbs have the same morphology (3<sup>rd</sup> person, masculine, singular), and verb, object (hereafter VO) order<sup>17</sup> is observed in both cases. The

<sup>15</sup> Watson, 118.

<sup>16</sup> I follow Hillers, 72; this translation of 13a $\beta$  is his. The MT has רדה, “to rule” here, which makes little sense. Hillers proposes switching the first two letters of the verb to yield וירדנה, “it sank down into them.” He notes that ירד, “to go down,” in *hifil* is often used in conjunction with fire from heaven, and this emendation also solves the problem of the singular direct object suffix in the MT seemingly referring to the plural “my bones.”

<sup>17</sup> Classical Hebrew tends, all things being equal, to prefer a verb first, followed by the subject, and then the objects (VSO). An example is the first line of Genesis: בראשית ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ. The verb (ברא, “he created”) comes first, followed by the subject (אלהים, “God”), and then the two direct objects (השמים, “the heavens” and הארץ, “the earth”).

pieces corresponding to  $x_2$  are less precisely congruent, בעצמתי וירדנה, “he sank it into my bones,” and השיבני אהור, “he has turned me back,” but both are results associated with physical actions taken against Zion’s body.

Here is another example, from Lam 1:2b-c, which illustrates reflexive congruence:

מכל-אהביה ( $x_2$ )	אין-לה מנחם ( $x_1$ )
היו לה לאיבים ( $x_1$ )	כל-רעיה בגדו בה ( $x_2$ )
<i>she has no consoler</i>	<i>from among all her intimates</i>
<i>all her lovers have betrayed her</i>	<i>they have become her enemies</i>

In this case,  $x_2$  corresponds with מכל-אהביה, “from all her intimates,” and כל-רעיה בגדו בה, “all her lovers have betrayed her,” which are united by their use of כל (“all”) and the synonyms אהביה and רעיה, “her lovers.” The  $x_1$  components are less obviously linked, but both share the word לה (“to her”) and deal with states of being, signaled by היו, “they are,” and אין, the negative particle of existence. This bicolon, then, falls into Watson’s  $x_1 x_2 // x_2 x_1$  pattern.

The opposing paradigm, advocated by the semantic school, is represented most famously by Kugel<sup>18</sup> and Robert Alter.<sup>19</sup> Theirs is an understanding of parallelism which starts with meaning and only then attempts to describe its structure. In Kugel’s pithy formulation, “A is so, and *what’s more*, B.”<sup>20</sup> Alter has a similar description, parallelism being a “characteristic movement of meaning [which] is one of heightening or intensification.”<sup>21</sup>

The only passage from Lamentations Alter cites directly in *The Art of Biblical Poetry* is Lam 1:2a:

בכו תבכה בלילה      ודמעתה על לחיה

<sup>18</sup> Kugel.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Book, 1985).

<sup>20</sup> Kugel, 1 (his emphasis).

<sup>21</sup> Alter, 19.

*she weeps on through the night and her tears are on her cheek*<sup>22</sup>

He describes this as an example of a “pattern of a verb or verbal phrase paralleled by a nominal or adjectival phrase that is a concretization or crystallization of the verbal process” (20). The verbal phrase comes first here, Jerusalem crying herself to sleep. The nominal phrase follows, providing the concrete image of a tear on the cheek of the holy city. This is what Alter and Kugel mean by “intensification.” Here, there is a kind of movement from the general to specific that is decidedly (according to these two scholars) *not* a simple equation of two units. The progression is the whole point, and the parallelism serves precisely to emphasize the *difference* between them. Lam 22a-b is another example of this intensification via progression:

חבא כל-רעתם לפניך      ועולל למו  
 כאשר עוללת      על כל-פשעי

*let all their evil come before you      and do unto them*  
*that which you did unto me      for all of my sins*

Here, the thought of each  $\alpha$  hemistich is continued and elaborated on in  $\beta$ . The halves do not show a geometrical or tautological relationship, but instead one of progression and emphasis.

I argue that the semantic and syntactic schools are the only two *distinct* conceptions of parallelism. They are irreconcilable yet uniquely useful. They cannot be harmonized because they prioritize form and meaning completely differently, and one may be better than another to explicate a given example, as we will see.

Now that we have considered the first half of the classical description of biblical poetry, let us turn to the second.

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<sup>22</sup> Alter's translation.

THE CLASSICAL DESCRIPTION: METER

Moses also composed a song unto God [Exodus 15], containing his praises, and a thanksgiving for his kindness, in hexameter verse.<sup>23</sup>

-Josephus, *Antiquities* II.xvi.4

Ever since readers of the Hebrew Bible have been interacting with and reacting to Greek poetry, they have tried to find the meter of the latter in the former. I will argue that meter does exist in Hebrew poetry in general and Lamentations 1 in particular, but it is unlike that of the Greek and Latin poets, who consciously wrote with a very precise rhythm.

The first thing we must do is agree what is meant by meter. To enter into the scholarship on the metrics of Hebrew poetry is to wade into a whirlpool of polemic and competing definitions that are less clear-cut in their similarities and differences than are discussions of parallelism.

In finding an acceptable definition of meter, one must make a judgment about the relationship between it and rhythm. Compare the definitions of rhythm offered by Petersen and Richards<sup>24</sup> on one hand, and Watson on the other. The former authors, taking their formulation from Brogan, define it as “a cadence, a contour, a figure of periodicity.”<sup>25</sup> Watson defines it as “a recurring pattern of sounds.”<sup>26</sup> These definitions are as similar as they are vague, an inherent problem with clarifying such a slippery concept. I would suggest we think of rhythm as half of a binary consisting of rhythm and not-rhythm. The latter would be randomness in a given literary work with respect to accents, stress, phonemes, whatever. Rhythm, then, is an absence of that randomness. While Watson reminds us that “the listener tends to group sounds together in

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<sup>23</sup> Trans. William Whiston, *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, (Philadelphia: J. Grigg, 1829), 77.

<sup>24</sup> David L. Petersen and Kent Harold Richards, *Interpreting Hebrew Poetry* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

<sup>25</sup> T. Brogan, *The Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms*, 238. Quoted in Petersen and Richards, *Interpreting Hebrew Poetry*, 37.

<sup>26</sup> Watson, 87.

patterned bundles, even when no pattern is in evidence,”<sup>27</sup> there may also be periodicities not immediately clear to a listener, requiring statistical demonstration (so, Freedman).<sup>28</sup>

Watson, Petersen, and Richards have definitions of rhythm that are similar; let us compare their definitions of meters. Most scholars agree that meter is a subcategory of rhythm. The latter scholars use Fry’s formulation, as a “more or less regular poetic rhythm; the measurable rhythmical patterns manifested in a verse, or the ‘ideal’ patterns which poetic rhythms approximate...If meter is regarded as the ideal rhythmical pattern, then ‘*rhythm*’ becomes meter the closer it approaches regularity and predictability.”<sup>29</sup> And Watson: “Metre is a ‘sequential pattern of abstract entities,’ in other words, the moulding of a line (of verse) to fit a preconceived shape made up of recurring sets.”<sup>30</sup>

The point of reproducing these formulations is to illustrate the point at which Petersen and Richards part with Watson—it is a post-definitional disagreement. Both pairs of definitions basically agree that meter is a regular type of rhythm. Watson, noticing that Hebrew meter is not as ordered as a Shakespearian sonnet is, simply refuses to equate a “lack of regular meter” with a lack of meter *in toto*.<sup>31</sup> Petersen and Richards look at Hebrew poetry and decide its rhythm is not regular enough to be called meter, so they just use “rhythm” in its place.<sup>32</sup> It should by now be clear that whatever we decide to call Lowth’s “other category”—besides parallelism—is irrelevant. I will call it meter for discussion’s sake.

Even if we show a willingness to understand meter broadly, does it actually exist in Hebrew poetry? It is at least important to understand that very question in terms of Greek poetry,

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<sup>27</sup> Watson.

<sup>28</sup> David Noel Freedman and Erich A. von Fange, “Metrics in Hebrew Poetry: The Book of Lamentations Revisited,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No. 4 (October 1996), 279-305.

<sup>29</sup> P. Fry, “Meter,” *The Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms*. Quoted in Petersen and Richards, *Interpreting Hebrew Poetry*, 37-38 (my emphasis).

<sup>30</sup> Watson, 88.

<sup>31</sup> Watson, 98.

<sup>32</sup> Petersen and Richards, 41.

because it was Philo and Josephus who were the first to ask it.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, they answered in the affirmative, even going so far as to having “attributed hexameters, trimeters, and other Greek meters to Hebrew poetry.”<sup>34</sup> Kugel notes, as an example, that Josephus read the Song of Moses (Deut 32) in hexameter.<sup>35</sup>

In modern scholarship, both Kugel and O’Connor come down strongly for the lack of meter in Hebrew poetry.<sup>36</sup> These scholars, like Philo and Josephus before them, equate “meter” with the phenomenon in Greek and Latin poetry. The difference is, they look for it in Hebrew poetry and do not find it. I will argue with Watson, though, that irregular meter does not mean *no* meter. Equating meter with Greco-Roman meter in scholarship is actually a normative assessment; it prioritizes classical western poetics without taking into account ancient poetry’s diversity, whether in the Levant or elsewhere.

Lamentations has long been recognized, by those who believe meter exists in ancient Hebrew, as one of the most regularly metrical books. Karl Budde, writing in 1882, was the first to notice this and attempt to explain it.<sup>37</sup> His argument requires dividing each colon into two hemistichs (in my terminology). Doing this, count “the number of major word-stresses in the half line” and notice that, in almost every colon, the first hemistich is longer than the second.<sup>38</sup> “The lines are of the pattern 3+2, 4+3, 4+2, and so on.”<sup>39</sup> The classical term for this type of meter, following Budde, is *qinah* (קִנָּה, “elegy, dirge”), because of its usage in Lamentations 1-4 and other “laments over the dead.”<sup>40</sup> In the secondary literature, *qinah* can either refer to cola made

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<sup>33</sup> Kugel, 140-142.

<sup>34</sup> Kugel, 140.

<sup>35</sup> Kugel, 141.

<sup>36</sup> Petersen and Richards, 42.

<sup>37</sup> Karl Budde, “*Das hebräische Klagelied*,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 2: 1-52.

<sup>38</sup> Hillers 1992, 17.

<sup>39</sup> Hillers 1992.

<sup>40</sup> Hillers 1992, 18.

up of long-short hemistichs generally, or 3+2 stresses specifically. Current caveats to the classical concept of *qinah* in Lamentations are (1) the meter described by Budde is not nearly as regular in Lamentations 1-4 as he claimed, and (2) *qinah* meter is not exclusively found in laments in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., it occurs in the erotic poetry of Cant 1:9-11).<sup>41</sup>

An example of what would be considered a classically *qinah* line is Lam 1:10c:

אשר צויתתה לא-יבאו בקהל לך

*which you commanded, "they shall not enter into your assembly"*

Without delving yet into the minutiae of counting stresses, Budde's description would break up the line in this way (as the Hebrew, right to left):

<i>β, beat 2</i>	<i>β, beat 1</i>	<i>α, beat 3</i>	<i>α, beat 2</i>	<i>α, beat 1</i>
לך	בקהל	לא-יבאו	צויתתה	אשר
which is yours	into the assembly	they shall not enter	you commanded	which

This "stress/accental theory" of Hebrew meter is, following Budde, advocated by Watson.

The other viable possibility for Hebrew meter, advocated most famously by D. N. Freedman, is syllable-counting. "It is, in effect, a mechanical reckoning of the number of vowels per colon."<sup>42</sup> Watson does not believe this is an actual metrical theory,<sup>43</sup> perhaps because it does not confine itself to the hemistich. But this is simply a judgment about the level in Hebrew poetry which metrics must operate on. There is no reason why the number of syllables per line may not, *a priori*, constitute the meter characteristic of Hebrew poetry. The question is whether it is more convincing than the accentual theory, and the answer is no.

<sup>41</sup> Hillers 1992, 18-19.

<sup>42</sup> D.N. Freedman, quoted in Watson, 104.

<sup>43</sup> Watson.

The two problems Watson rightly identifies with syllable-counting are that the vowels of Masoretic text must be relied upon instead of the consonantal text, and that syllable counting ignores one of the most perceptible oral features of Hebrew poetry, stress.<sup>44</sup> Although syllable counts have the benefit of being statistical and thus avoid “the virtuoso handling of individual lines,”<sup>45</sup> their explanatory power is inferior to that of the accentual theory. For example, Freedman tabulates the syllables in Lam 1-3, and concludes that “the average line length hardly varies at all from poem to poem. It is 12.7...with a maximum deviation of 0.2 in either direction...The median is in approximately the same position, just under 13.”<sup>46</sup> What Freedman does not consider is that, were the accentual theory correct and the *qinah* meter predominant in Lamentations 1-3, it would likely *cause* the syllables to work out the way he describes. But the accentual and syllable-counting theories do not have two-way explanatory power: one cannot use common syllable counts to explain why the *qinah* stress pattern occurs.

The syllable-counting method is also deficient when comparing different poems. For example, if we compare Lamentations 1 and 4, we notice that the average line lengths are 12.9 and 13.8 syllables, respectively. Accentual theorists tell us that these two poems are related in that both display the *qinah* meter, and one gets the metrical sense of relation when reading them side by side. But what does the syllable difference tell us? Is a one syllable discrepancy between their averages a lot or a little, especially given that Lamentations 1 and 2 display *identical* average line lengths? The syllable-counting theory cannot tell us. We will see, though, that when syllable-counting is used to *bolster* the accentual theory, it can be a useful helpmate.

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<sup>44</sup> Watson, 105.

<sup>45</sup> David Noel Freedman, “Acrostics and Metrics in Hebrew Poetry,” *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (July, 1972), 368.

<sup>46</sup> Freedman 1972, 377.

The best way to characterize Hebrew meter is accentual. This meter is not like the steadfast dactyls of Homer, but instead an irregular periodicity that, in the final analysis, approaches predictability. I understand, with Watson, that meter emerges in Hebrew poetry if stress is tabulated. However, the insights of Freedman need not be rejected wholesale: his theory will be revisited and used to supplement Watson's below, in the context of the poem itself.

#### POETICS: PARALLELISM AND ANTICLIMAX

What follows is a treatment of the poetics of Lamentations 1, necessarily making use of the classical description articulated above. In this section I will also describe the major structural organizer of the poem, alphabetical acrostic, and its primary artistic feature, anticlimax. First, though, a few words about the poem generally.

Many commentators have noted a clear division cutting the poem in half, either at verse 12, or 11c.<sup>47</sup> In the first half of the poem (vv. 1-12), the poet refers to Jerusalem in the third person, personifying the holy city in her agony. Her temple has been desecrated and razed, her friends have abandoned her, and she is herself, supposedly, to blame. Verse 8 is a typical strophe:

חטא חטאה ירושלם	על-כן לנידה היתה
כל-מכבדיה הזלזה	כי-ראו ערותה
גם-היא נאנחה	ותשב אחור

*Jerusalem sinned egregiously*                      *therefore she has become defiled*<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> The choice depends on whether one sees 11c, ראה יהוה והביטה כי הייתי זוללה, "look, Yahweh, and mark! for I have become abject," as a first-person interjection in the third-person first half of the poem (analogous to 9c), or the beginning of the first-person half. Given that 11c is almost exactly paralleled earlier in v. 9, it seems best to read v. 12 as the true beginning of the second half of the poem.

<sup>48</sup> The Hebrew word נידה, "defiled," has strong connotations with ritual impurity, especially menstrual. In the violently patriarchal language of the poem and of the Hebrew Bible generally, Jerusalem is here being described in the most abrasive language available to the poet.





occupied by words or phrases that for various reasons are not nearly as interesting as the more colorful beginnings.”<sup>57</sup> E.g., v. 9b:

ותרד פלאים      אין מנחם לה

*and she has fallen wonderfully      she has no consoler*

The first hemistich is lovely in its simplicity and its deft use of פלא, a word which is at base a noun meaning “wonder,” but it is used here, almost mockingly, as an adverbial accusative. The second hemistich, in contrast, is a stock phrase used no less than five times throughout the poem (vv. 2, 9, 16, 17, and 21).

Hillers points out this example of anticlimax in the final two hemistichs of 9cβ and 16cβ:

כי הגדיל אויב

*for the enemy has made himself great*

כי גבר אויב

*because the enemy prevailed*

These terminal hemistichs illustrate one of Hillers’ points about anticlimax: “Stock phrases find a home in final position.”<sup>58</sup> The word אויב, “enemy,” occurs five times Lamentations 1 alone (vv. 2, 5, 9, 16, 21). Its synonym, צר, occurs six times when it means “enemy” (vv. 5a, 5c, 7c, 7d, 10, 17), and another time when it means “distress” (v. 20). The syntax of 9cβ and 16cβ is identical: The particle כי, “because,” is in front, followed by a perfect verb with the same morphology except the *binyanim* (verbal conjugation), and the same noun in the final position. The proliferation of אויב and צר in the poem, and the syntax of these two hemistichs, identifies them as stock phrases.

<sup>57</sup> Hillers 1992, 28.

<sup>58</sup> Hillers 1992.

Hillers fails to see that anticlimax also works at other levels of the poem. Using his example (16cβ), we can see it on the intra-strophic level, when final hemistichs don't necessarily follow from their antecedents. For example, the entirety of verse 16 reads,

על-אלה אני בוכיה	עיני עיני ירדה מים
כי-רחק ממני מנחם	משיב נפשי
היו בני שוממים	כי גבר אויב
<i>my eye, my eye<sup>59</sup> runs with water</i>	<i>over these things I cry</i>
<i>a restorer of my life</i>	<i>for he went far from me, a comforter</i>
<i>because the enemy prevailed</i>	<i>my children have become desolated</i>

The images leading up to the final hemistich are concrete and moving, focusing on the results of the city's fall. These are pieces of knowledge we would not have access to had the poet not written them. The final hemistich, though, is out of keeping with the rest of the strophe. It offers us no new information; the victory of the Babylonians is the one thing we take for granted at the start of the poem. So far we have seen two ways in which a hemistich can be anticlimactic: 16cβ (כי גבר אויב, "because the enemy prevailed") is an intra-colon stock phrase, and saps the energy from its entire strophe by blunting the more interesting images preceding it.

There is an even larger scale of anticlimax in Lamentations 1, at the level of the entire poem. The very first strophe (Lam 1:1) is without question the most beautifully crafted tricolon:

איכה ישיבה בדד      העיר רבתי עם

<sup>59</sup> Though not all textual problems pertain to this paper, the repetition of "my eye" has bearing on the style and meter of the poem, and should be addressed. Gordis, 159 would like to break with the tradition of removing one instance of עיני as dittography, because "the repetition of the noun adds poignancy to the line and has a striking parallel in Jer. 4: 19; [מעני מעני אחולה]. The meter, too, is unexceptionable, representing a legitimate variation of the *Qinah* meter." While it may be true that the repetition of the noun is aesthetically pleasing, Hillers, 75 convincingly throws it out. The Dead Sea Scrolls have a portion of this poem, Lam 1:17 and the beginning of 1:18. This fragment from the Judean desert does not contain the repetition, so we have "welcome confirmation of an old conjecture...read simply [עיני, "my eye,"] with 4QLam<sup>a</sup>, LLX, Syriac, and Vg. Note that the normal meter, with the second colon shorter than the first, is obtained by deleting one [עיני] as dittography."

רַבְתִּי בְּגוּיִם	הִיְתָה כְּאַלְמָנָה
הִיְתָה לְמָס	שְׂרָתִי בְּמַדִּינֹת

<i>how she sits alone</i>	<i>the city, full of people</i>
<i>she has become like a widow</i>	<i>great among the nations</i>
<i>a princess among the states</i>	<i>she has gone into slavery</i>

There follows an in-depth analysis of the poem’s first strophe. I hope to show why the subsequent 21 verses should be read in its shadow.

It is not immediately obvious how one should translate this strophe. I have rendered the Hebrew as literally as possible, above, to demonstrate the ambiguity. How can Jerusalem be alone, *and* full of people? How can she be a widow *and* great among the nations? The second and third cola give us a clue with a linking verb, thus “she *has* gone into slavery,” hinting that the previous  $\alpha$  hemistichs are meant to be read as a contrast between then and now as well.

Also helpful for interpretation is the striking parallel in Isa 1:21, noted by Hillers:<sup>60</sup>

קְרִיָּה נְאֻמָּה	אֵיכָה הִיְתָה לְזוֹנָה
וְעַתָּה מְרֻצָּחִים	צְדָק יֵלֵךְ בָּהּ
	מִלְאַתֵּי מִשְׁפָּט
<i>how she has become a whore</i>	<i>a faithful city</i>
<i>full of justice</i>	<i>righteousness tarried in her</i>
	<i>but now, murderers</i>

The first half of this verse employs an identical construction to Lam 1:1a: איכה, “how!” is followed by the present debasement of Israel in the first hemistich, followed in the second half by an *implicit* contrast with a glorious past (עתה, “now,” used to signal the temporal contrast).

Again, as with Lam 1:1, the latter part of the verse has more explicit grammatical cues emphasizing the contrast between then and now. A final interesting point of comparison between

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<sup>60</sup> Hillers 1992, 64-66.

these two verses is the word מלאתי, “full of,” with the same unusual construct form as רבתי, “full of,” and שרתי, “princess of,” in Lam 1:1.

Hillers argues that an intricate sort of irony is achieved in the first colon:

As suggested to me by D. N. Freedman, the first [hemistich], with its collocation of [ישבה, “she sits”] and [בדד, “alone”], is ironic. Although the initial [איכה, “how!”] signals that we must understand [ישבה בדד, “she sits alone”] as a reference to present misery, this combination of verb and noun (or with a semantically related verb, [שכן, “dwell”]), is used elsewhere (see Jer 49:31; Deut 33:28) to express, not loneliness and desertion, but solitary security.<sup>61</sup>

This is an interesting proposition; the evidence for reading “sits alone” as “solitary security” is reasonable, e.g. the noted parallel in Deut 33:28:

וישכן ישראל בטח בדד

*Israel dwelled in safety, alone*

Hillers and Freedman are suggesting that, because the reader would be expected to associate the image of Zion sitting solitary as a reference to comfort and safety, pairing it with the initial incredulous exclamation is what achieves the irony in this first colon. However, the words וישכן, “[Israel] dwelled,” and בדד, “alone,” are not precisely word pairs, nor are they next to each other in this example (as are בדד and the verb in Lam 1:1), and the verb is not the same as in Lam 1:1a.

I would argue for a different conception of irony in Lam 1:1a. It seems more reasonable to read the first hemistich, “how she sits alone,” as a reference to the abandonment of Zion, because it divides the colon more evenly and seems to reflect the plain sense of the words. We also have the parallel in Isa 1:21, discussed above, as evidence for this reading—recall how the city is called a whore in that first hemistich but faithful in the second. If I am correct, the irony in Lam 1:1a is reflected in the contrast between how Israel is now—alone—and how populous she

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<sup>61</sup> Hillers, 1992. I have changed his transliterations back to the Hebrew, and adapted his structural terminology to correspond to mine. Hillers terms a “colon” what I call a “hemistich.”

once was. Whichever reading of Lam 1:1a one adopts, it is hard to disagree that there is very careful craft at work in the first colon of Lamentations 1.

Gene Schramm provides an interesting alternative interpretation of the artistry in Lam 1:1. He claims the best way to understand its technique is in “parallelism of ambiguity,” more specifically in the “false syllogism” he reads here. False syllogism “consists of three terms, A, B, and C, such that B is the pivot. A and B are equated in some way, homophony or synonymy, as are B and C; A and C, however, share nothing in common directly.”<sup>62</sup> In this verse, רבתי, “full, great” is both A and B (linked by homophony), and B and C are the second רבתי, “great,” and שרתתי, “princess of,” respectively (linked by synonymy and rhyme). If Schramm is correct in saying that “false syllogisms occur throughout Lamentations, but with decreasing frequency as the poem progresses,”<sup>63</sup> we have another way to understand anticlimax in Lamentations 1

There are still more features of Lam 1:1 that demonstrate its superior artistry and separate it from the strophes following it. For example, of all the 22 verses in the poem, it is the only one in which every verb has Zion as its subject.<sup>64</sup> This serves to focus our attention sharply on the

<sup>62</sup> Gene M. Schramm, “Poetic Patterning in Biblical Hebrew,” in *Michigan Oriental Studies in Honor of George G. Cameron*, ed. Louis L. Orlin (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1976), 179.

<sup>63</sup> Schramm, 180.

<sup>64</sup> If one looks at the poem from the perspective of how verb subjects are grouped, the first strophe is indeed unique. Any grouping of subjects is somewhat arbitrary, but I would propose that there are really four main types of verb subjects in Lamentations 1: The city herself (feminine singular); Yahweh (masculine singular); a group including Israel’s enemies, other nations, false friends, and personified objects associated with this group (e.g., חרב, “sword”); and the group comprised of Israelites (plural), pilgrims, and associated objects (e.g., מחמדיה, “her treasures”). There are no strophes besides Lam 1:1 where Jerusalem is the only subject of all the verbs. Yahweh has two such verses (vv. 13 and 15), Israelites et al. have two (vv. 4 and 6), and enemies et al. have none. The verses with only one or two of four subject categories break down like this:

Yahweh	/	17	22	13, 15
Enemies et al.	/	2, 3, 8	/	
Jerusalem	/	1		
Israelites et al.	4, 6			
	Israelites et al.	Jerusalem	Enemies et al.	Yahweh

Strophes with three or all four:

Enemies et al. + Israelites et al. + Jerusalem	7, 16, 18, 19
Enemies et al. + Israelites et al. + Yahweh	5

holy city and her suffering, even as the poem picks up various subjects including Yahweh, Israel's enemies, her old friends who have abandoned her, etc.

Also, striking assonance appears throughout the whole strophe, with the repetition of the vowels *patach* and *kametz* (both “ah”). This is especially sonorous in the first hemistich, where *patach* is five out of the six vowels, coupled with a ב—ג—ד—ה—ו consonant pattern supporting the vowels. In the first colon, *patach* and *kametz* account for nine vowels out of twelve.

An inclusio (poetic envelope structure) in the first and last tricola of the poem (רבתי / רבות) “full/great”) not only highlights the first verse, but makes the large scale tendency toward anticlimax abundantly clear. Whereas we have seen how carefully crafted the first strophe is, “the poem comes to a quiet close” in Lam 1:22:<sup>65</sup>

כי-רבות אנהתי ולבי דוי

*for many are my groans and my heart is sick*

Chiasm nicely balance Lam 1:1, more so than any other strophe. The major one is in the second and third cola, with היתה, “she is,” enveloping two feminine nouns with the same unusual construct forms, תי-ה.<sup>66</sup> The dominant chiasm in the last two cola is linked to the first, because רבתי, “full,” occupies the same position in the first colon as it does in the second. Also, in the final two cola, each hemistich ends with a single word preceded by a preposition, in the pseudo-chiasmus of ל—ב—ג—כ.<sup>67</sup> The symmetry appears this way visually:

איכה ישבה בדד העיר רבתי עם

Enemies et al. + Yahweh + Jerusalem	9, 10, 12, 21
Israelites et al. + Jerusalem + Yahweh	11, 14
Enemies et al. + Israelites et al. + Jerusalem + Yahweh	20

<sup>65</sup> Hillers 1992, 91.

<sup>66</sup> See Gesenius 90*.l*.

<sup>67</sup> Read the order of prepositions right to left, as in Hebrew. What I am calling “pseudo-chiasm” Watson, 150 refers to as “terrace parallelism,” where there is half of a chiasmus and the link is on the inside of the mirror structure, as here.

רַבְתִּי בְּגוֹיִם

הִיְתָה כְּאַלְמָנָה

הִיְתָה לְמָס

שָׂרְתִי בְּמַדְיָנוֹת

From here, we can begin to see how the two schools of parallelism are each useful in understanding Lamentations 1. Looking at the verse under discussion, the syntactic school could quite easily describe Lam 1:1 in terms of its chiasmic balance.

The semantic school would read this strophe differently, with a primary emphasis on its second parts supporting, instead of simply reflecting, the first ones. In fact, Kugel and Alter would probably support Hillers’s emphasis on the complex question of irony in the first colon, and the way the second hemistich always reframes the first:

How she sits alone, *the city, [the very city who was once] full of people[!]*

She has become like a widow, *[the very city who was] great among the nations[!]*

A princess among the states, *she has gone into slavery[!]*

Thus, a semantic understanding of parallelism is useful in emphasizing the contrast between the two hemistichs of a colon.

To sum up, the goal of this careful look at the single strophe Lam 1:1 has been to show its complexity and artistry—its subtle irony, false syllogism, single verbal subject (Zion), assonance, inclusio, and chiasmi, and its both syntactic and semantic parallelism. Only when one has been convinced of the superiority of the poem’s first strophe can one realize how anticlimax does indeed operate at the level of the entire poem.

But the astute reader will by now have noticed that there is perhaps a conflict between the appellation of “anticlimax” to every level of the poem, and the semantic school’s interpretation of parallelism. Is not anticlimax the antithesis of “heightening or focusing”?<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Alter, 21.

The question is a good one, but the paradox turns out to be resolvable. To understand how, we need to revisit the syntactic and semantic schools of parallelism, and notice how they may operate at different levels of the poem as well. There may be parallelism<sup>69</sup> between two hemistichs of the same colon, e.g. v.5a:

היו צריה לראש      איביה שלו

*her enemies are on top      her foes are at ease*

The nouns in each hemistich (איביה and צריה, “her enemies”) are masculine, synonymous, and grammatically parallel (each has the same pronominal suffix). They each govern *qal* verbs agreeing in gender and number (שלו, “they are on top,” and היו, “they are”), but the order of noun and verb are chiasitic. In the first hemistich, the paradigmatic VSO grammar of Hebrew is observed, only to be turned around in the second hemistich (Watson’s reflexive congruence). So, the syntactic view.

However, semantic parallelism can be observed in Lamentations 1 at the level of the cola.

E.g., v.11a-b:

מבקשים לחם      כל-עמה נאנחים

להשיב נפש      נתנו מחמדיהם באכל

*all her people are groaning      searching for bread*

*they have traded their treasures for food      to maintain life*

The words לחם, “bread, food” and נפש, “soul, life” are masculine and feminine, respectively; both follow a verb of striving (seek, restore) and are located at the end of their cola.

Semantic or syntactic parallelism may be uniquely useful, depending on how one decides what constitutes the two parallelistic halves. Consider Lam 1:3a-b:

<sup>69</sup> I am now referring to my general definition of parallelism, i.e., some relationship between proximal hemistichs or cola that are in line either with the syntactic or semantic formulations.

מעני ומרב עבדה	גלתה יהודה
לא מצאה מנוח	היא ישבה בגוים
<i>Judah has gone into exile</i>	<i>in affliction and great toil</i>
<i>she dwells among the nations</i>	<i>she finds no rest</i>

Syntactically, we can read the bicolon:

$a_1$  : גלתה יהודה

$a_2$  : מעני ומרב עבדה

$a_1$  : היא ישבה בגוים

$a_2$  : לא מצאה מנוח

According to the syntactic description, this is an instance of proper congruence:  $a_1$  refers to the exile of Israel, and  $a_2$  refers to her miserable experiences as a result.

It is possible to read this parallelism semantically at the level of the colon—i.e., not only has Judah gone into exile, she is now wandering among the nations—but semantic parallelism here is more convincing considering hemistichs. In each colon, the second hemistich crystallizes and gives emotional weight to the first. The combination of semantic parallelism between the hemistichs of single cola, and syntactic parallelism between multiple cola themselves, gives the bicolon its aesthetic balance.

An analogous coexistence at different levels exists between anticlimax and semantic parallelism. I refer again the example above, verse 16:

עני עיני ירדה מים	על-אלה אני בוכיה
משיב נפשי	כי-רחק ממני מנחם
כי גבר אויב	היו בני שוממים

*over these things I cry*                      *my eye, my eye runs with water*  
*for he went far from me, a comforter*                      *a restorer of my life*  
*my children have become desolated*                      *because the enemy prevailed*

Now, instead of focusing on the final hemistich and how it achieves anticlimax at the strophic level, notice 16a-b. The first colon (16a) is a perfect example of the second colon crystallizing the thought of the first: “Over these things I cry / my eye runs with water.”<sup>70</sup> There is little about this colon to suggest syntactic parallelism; the semantic school’s reading works well.

If we continue to the next colon, though, we find מנחם, “a comforter,” from the stock *shoresh* (verbal root) נחם, “console,” we saw earlier. Also, משיב נפשי, “a restorer of my life,” is a formulaic idiom encountered in both v. 11 (להשיב נפש, “to restore life”) and v. 19 (וישיבו את-נפשם), “they sought to restore their lives”). Clearly, then, what we have in the second colon is an anticlimactic finish to the poignant first colon. We have also resolved our paradox. It is true that anticlimax exists at various levels of the poem. In v. 16 we observe two kinds: colon 16b providing anticlimax to colon 16a, and the final hemistich of the strophe anticlimactically ending the entire tricolon. It is also true that there exists the type of parallelism identified by the semantic school. In v. 16, we find it especially prominent in the first colon, where the second hemistich sharpens the image created by the first. What we can say, in summary, is that these poetic techniques can coexist nicely, if we only know how to look for them at different structural levels.

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<sup>70</sup> Deleting the second case of “my eye” from dittography; see above, n. 59.

POETICS: METER

We are beginning to glimpse new vistas of structure not previously imagined or explored. We are finding patterns of syllabic structure interwoven with patterns of stresses analogous to the ancient art of contrapuntal writing, the art of the fugue.

-D. N. Freedman<sup>71</sup>

Finally, a unified account must be given of meter in Lamentations 1. I will make use of Watson's fundamental insight that Hebrew meter is at base accentual, and supplement it with Freedman's concern with syllables. In the final analysis, the ideas of both scholars can be used to paint a picture of *qinah* metrics that is less ideal, line by line, than the classical description of meter in Lamentations, yet one which operates on more levels than previously understood.

Let us consider Lam 1:15 as a preliminary example:

אדני בקרבי                      סלה כל-אבירי

לשבר בחורי                      קרא עלי מועד

לבתולת בת-יהודה              גת דרך אדני

*He tossed aside all my mighty ones                      The Lord did, in my midst*

*He summoned upon me an assembly                      to crush my young men*

*The Lord tread the wine press                      belonging to virgin daughter Judah*

For our purposes, it will suffice to notice where the verse adheres and departs from the expected 3+2 *qinah* meter. The most basic assumption is that, without any other qualifiers, one Hebrew word should get one stress. The particulars of any accentual description are concerned with the exceptions to this rule.

First of all, notice the *maqfef* (-) connecting words in two places (כל-אבירי, "all my mighty ones," and בת-יהודה, "daughter Judah"). In general, the *maqfef* "shows each particular

<sup>71</sup> David Noel Freedman and Erich A. von Vange, "Metrics in Hebrew Poetry: The Book of Lamentations Revisited," *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No. 4 (October 1996), 288-289.

word group to have only one stress.”<sup>72</sup> This gives us what we “expect” in 15cβ: a two stress hemistich comprised of לבתולה, “virgin,” and בת-יהודה, “daughter Judah.”

However, Holladay and others have argued that כל- “all,” is a special case, and should only receive one stress.<sup>73</sup> His argument is from parallelism; there are numerous instances in Hebrew where כל- is clearly parallel to another full word (e.g. Ps 70:5a). There are few examples like this in Lamentations 1, but there are examples (including v.15, above) where כל- does “make the meter work.” Though not ironclad, neither is this an entirely circular observation. If many cola in Lam 1 are 3+2, and most instances of כל- accomplish this if we count it as a unit, the argument for doing so becomes statistical instead of completely arbitrary. The entire verse scans 3+2 / 3+2 / 3+2. This is an example of an “ideal” *qinah* tricolon, where there is general agreement that each colon is composed of a hemistich of three units followed by a hemistich of two.

“Capable scholars disagree over the particulars of accent-based scansion,”<sup>74</sup> and the first line of the entire poem is a good example:

איכה ישבה בדד      העיר רבתי עם

*how she sits alone      the city, full of people*

Freedman scans this line 4+2,<sup>75</sup> which means he must take העיר, “the city,” as part of the first hemistich. This is not the way the text is printed in the Leningrad Codex, but again, the MT is not a reflection of the poet’s artifice, only the Masoretes’ preference. Hillers makes a critical point: we usually use parallelism to know where to divide the hemistichs in a colon. “But when

<sup>72</sup> Watson, 102.

<sup>73</sup> William L. Holladay, “Hebrew Verse Structure Revisited (I): Which Words ‘Count?’” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 118.1 (Spring, 1999), 25.

<sup>74</sup> Petersen and Richards, 40.

<sup>75</sup> Freedman and von Vange, 299.

parallelism is not present, the question of where to divide the verse becomes acute.”<sup>76</sup> Verse 1, lacking a parallelism between its hemistichs, wants for any empirical criteria which might help us choose between 4+2 and 3+3.

Lam 1:15 may be an ideal *qinah* verse, but many others are not. Verse 4 reads:

מבלי באי מועד      דרכי ציון אבלות

כהניה נאנחים      כל-שעריה שוממין

והיא מר-לה      בתולתיה נוגות

*the roads of Zion mourn      for lack of pilgrims*<sup>77</sup>

*all her gates are desolate      her priests sigh*

*her young women are troubled      and she is bitter*

This tricolon cannot be scanned to fit the classical *qinah* meter. Freedman scans it 3+3 / 3+2 / 2+2. If we read כל-שעריה, “all her gates,” with Holliday as one stress, rendering the second colon 2+2, none of the three cola would fit the classical 3+2 description. While this is only one example, it shows generally that the classical view of *qinah* is not tenable for the poem as a whole.

I would suggest we expand the concept of *qinah* in Lamentations in two ways. First, we must admit (as many have) that although the long-short hemistich pattern in Lamentations is well established, “there is interplay between the ideal meter of the book and the phonetic and syntactic actualities.”<sup>78</sup> The average first hemistich in the poem is 2.77 beats, compared with 2.12 beats for the second.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Hillers 1992, 20.

<sup>77</sup> Literally, “comers of a gathering.”

<sup>78</sup> Hillers 1992, 23.

<sup>79</sup> Based on Freedman’s counts.

The second and more novel addition to metrical theory for this poem is that *qinah* (i.e. long-short) metrics, like parallelism and anticlimax, operate at multiple levels of the poem. The classical theory puts *qinah* at the level of hemistichs, but Freedman has noticed it at the level of the colon. On average, the first colon of a verse is longer (in syllables) than the second or the third:<sup>80</sup>

Syllable comparisons by colon:	a = b	a > b	a < b	a = c	a > c	a < c
Number of instances:	2	16	4	5	11	6

Although stress is a more rigorous way to understand metrics than syllable counts, noting the way syllables weave into that stress/accentual metrical pattern helps illuminate the extent of the poem's craft. Freedman makes another interesting argument: "One might suppose that syllable-counts and stress-counts are tied closely to one another, but...the two may run quite different courses independent of one another."<sup>81</sup> He shows that in Lamentations 1, (a) cola have statistically significant correlations between mean syllable and stress counts, but cola (b) and (c) do not. At the same time, the mean syllable counts for cola bear the long-short pattern out: for Lamentations 1, (a) cola have an average of 13.6 syllables, (b) cola have 12.5, and (c) cola have 12.7.

What we have, in sum, is a metrical concept of Lamentations 1 that takes the classical concept of *qinah* as its starting point, and uses syllable counts to *compliment* this paradigm. Also, it appears that the long-short metrical pattern, while not being as uniform as Budde believed at

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<sup>80</sup> Freedman and von Vange, 292. It bears noting that in comparing (a) and (b) cola, the number of strophes where  $a > b$  is *statistically* significant; in a  $\chi^2$  test,  $p < 0.05$ . That is to say, when comparing (a) and (b) cola in this way, the chance of the variation observed being due to chance is less than 5%. This is the arbitrary but agreed upon gold standard for statisticians. The data for (a) and (c) cola do not meet this standard for statistical significance. So, although a plurality of the (a) cola are longer than the (c) cola, there is a greater than 5% chance this could be random. I will leave it to the reader to decide whether a lack of statistical significance equates with a lack of significance generally.

<sup>81</sup> Freedman and von Vange, 288.

the level of the hemistich, is wider in its usage than he noticed. Not only does it operate at the hemistich level, but at the level of the cola as well.

#### CONCLUSION

I have attempted to give a thorough account of the poetics at work in the first chapter of Lamentations. To accomplish this, I first laid out the classical description of biblical poetry, parsing theories of parallelism and meter. With the exception of a few unpublished dissertations (see n. 5, above), this has been a unique undertaking because of Lamentation's relative neglect in modern scholarship on parallelism. In the first section, I argued that there are only two distinct concepts of parallelism in biblical poetry, semantic and syntactic, and used examples from the poem to illustrate the distinction. In the second section, I argued that the major theorists of Hebrew meter actually agree on its description, regardless of whether they term it "rhythm" or "irregular meter." I also made the case for accepting a fundamental stress/accentual theory of Hebrew meter instead of a syllable counting theory, though the latter can be used to supplement the former.

Then, in the third and fourth sections, I described the poetics particular to the poem. In the third section, this included gross structure, alphabetical acrostic, assonance, chiasmus, and inclusio, but especially anticlimax and parallelism. The salient feature of Lamentations 1 is integration of poetic technique at multiple levels; we saw how anticlimax can be read at the colon and strophic levels, but also at the level of the entire poem. Finally, this section explained how syntactic and semantic theories of parallelism can be harmonized by applying them to different levels of the poem. In one example, Lam 1:3a-b, syntactic parallelism was observed

within the bicolon, but semantic parallelism in each of the two cola. Parallelism and anticlimax, then, are two poetic devices that operate on multiple levels in Lamentations 1.

Finally, I attempted to present an updated understanding of *qinah* meter. I argued that meter is yet another device operating at multiple levels, like parallelism and anticlimax. Using Freedman's syllable-counting method along with Watson's fundamental stress/accentual metrical theory, we observed a more liberally understood *qinah* (long-short) meter at the levels of both the colon and strophe.

This paper has presented a case for reading Lamentations 1 as complex and sophisticated poetry. Its most ingenious element is its seamless integration of three poetic techniques on all its structural levels. If we moderns overlook its faults—the blatant misogyny, the (provincial and incorrect) hypothesis of urban destruction as a punishment for sins against Yahweh—we are left with a haunting and moving expression of desolation, the mourning song of a people who have lost their city to imperial conquest and violence.

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