

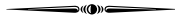
F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp



ON
BIBLICAL
POETRY

On Biblical Poetry

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F. W. DOBBS-ALLSOPP

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on acid-free paper

for Les, Will, and Henry

*the Hebrew Poems are written
in Verse, properly so called*

—ROBERT LOWTH,

Isaiah. A New Translation (1778)

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xiii
<i>List of Figures</i>	xv
Introduction: Biblical Poetry beyond Parallelism	3
1. “Verse, Properly So Called”: The Line in Biblical Poetry	14
Terminology	20
Manuscript Evidence for the Line	29
The “Verse Line” in Oral Poetry	42
The Line from the Other’s Perspective	57
Internal Evidence for the Line	67
2. The Free Rhythms of Biblical Hebrew Poetry	95
Through Whitman’s Eyes	95
Biblical Hebrew Poetry Is Not Metrical	99
The Shape of Poetic Rhythm	103
Orality, Song, and Music	114
The Free Rhythms of Biblical Poetry	120
3. The Idea of Lyric Poetry in the Bible	178
The Hebrew Lyric	178
Lyric <i>in extenso</i> : Probing (Some) Possibilities in the Song	214
Beyond Lyric: Toward a Richer Understanding of (Other) Biblical Poems	226

4. An Informing Orality: Biblical Poetic Style	233
Some Preliminary Points of Orientation	233
Prob(lematiz)ing the Question of Hebrew Narrative Poetry	236
Nonnarrative Oral Poetry, Or: Orality Poeticized Otherwise	254
Signs of (Nonnarrative) Orality in Biblical Poetry	260
Emergent Textuality	298
5. The Way of Poetry in Psalm 133	326
I	327
II	330
III	341
IV	342
<i>Notes</i>	351
<i>Work Cited</i>	525
<i>Selective Index of Authors, Primary Sources, and Subjects</i>	565

Figures follow page 232

Acknowledgments

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Some material from my “The Poetry of the Psalms,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms* (ed. W. Brown; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) gets sprinkled throughout, especially in chapters 1 and 4. Portions of these same two chapters represent slightly reworked sections from “Space, Line, and the Written Biblical Poem in Texts from the Judean Desert,” in *Puzzling Out the Past: Studies in Northwest Semitic Languages and Literatures in Honor of Bruce Zuckerman* (ed. M. Lundberg et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 19–61. At several points I draw on material initially published as “Acrostic,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* (ed. H.-J. Klauck et al.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009). Chapter 5 represents a somewhat longer and refocused version of “Psalm 133: A (Close) Reading,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 8 (2008) (<http://www.jhsonline.org/jhs-article.html>, article_97.pdf). And chapter 3 draws on, significantly reworks, and broadens the scope of “The Psalms and Lyric Verse,” in *The Evolution of Rationality: Interdisciplinary Essays in Honor of J. Wentzel van Huyssteen* (ed. F. L. Shults; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 346–79. Many of the ideas elaborated here were first aired in presentations, lectures, seminars, and colloquium discussions through the years at: SBL, MARSBL, the Columbia Hebrew Bible seminar, the Old Testament Research Colloquium at Princeton Theological Seminary, the Biblical Colloquium, Emory University, and the University of Chicago. I am grateful to all the rights holders for granting me the necessary permissions to reuse these materials and for the various entities and organizations that supported my initial thinking on topics treated in this volume.

F. W. D.-A.

March 2015

Abbreviations

Abbreviations are according to *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines* (2d ed.; ed. B. J. Collins et al.; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014) and/or *The Assyrian Dictionary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956–), unless otherwise noted. Abbreviations for extrabiblical Hebrew inscriptions follow F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp et al., eds., *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

√	root
LBH	late biblical Hebrew
N	noun
NP	noun phrase
NPEPP	Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan, eds. <i>The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics</i> . Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
O	object
P	preposition
PEPP	Stephen Cushman, et al., eds. <i>The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics</i> . Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012. (Kindle ed.)
PP	prepositional phrase
S	subject
SBH	standard biblical Hebrew (sometimes also referenced as classical bible Hebrew)
V	verb
VP	verb phrase

List of Figures

- 1a–b R. Lowth, *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum Praelectiones Academicae Oxonii Habitae* (London: Clarendon, 1753), pp. 185–86, showing his lineation of the Hebrew of Psalm 93:3–4.
- 2 4QPs^b includes col. XXVI (Ps 112:4–5). Plate 999/1 B-298338. Photo Shai Halevi, COURTESY ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY. One verse line per column line format.
- 3 Aleppo Codex, folio 4 recto (Deut 32). Courtesy Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi. Illustrates one of the special formatting layouts specifically prescribed by the rabbis during the Middle Ages: two blocks of writing per columnar line with a large intervening span of uninscribed space.
- 4 B19a (Leningrad Codex), folio 139 recto (Judg 5). D. N. Freedman et al., *The Leningrad Codex: A Facsimile Edition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Photograph by Bruce and Kenneth Zuckerman, West Semitic Research, in collaboration with the Ancient Biblical Manuscript Center. Courtesy Russian National Library (Saltykov-Shchedrin). Illustrates the other major special format prescribed by the rabbis during the Middle Ages: a single column of text the width of the folio page with columnar lines composed of either (portions of) three blocks of writing divided by two large spans of white space or (portions of) two blocks of writing separated by one large span of space.

- 5 B19a (Leningrad Codex), folio 397 recto (Job 1:1–1:21A).
D. N. Freedman et al., *The Leningrad Codex: A Facsimile Edition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).
Photograph by Bruce and Kenneth Zuckerman,
West Semitic Research, in collaboration with the
Ancient Biblical Manuscript Center. Courtesy
Russian National Library (Saltykov-Shchedrin).
Illustrates the typical manner in which the
Masoretes formatted most biblical texts (except
for Ps, Prov, Job): three narrow columns per page
with columns filled with a running text.
- 6 B19a (Leningrad Codex), folio 397 verso
(Job 1:21B–3:1A). D. N. Freedman et al., *The
Leningrad Codex: A Facsimile Edition* (Grand Rapids:
Eerdmans, 1998). Photograph by Bruce and
Kenneth Zuckerman, West Semitic Research,
in collaboration with the Ancient Biblical
Manuscript Center. Courtesy Russian National
Library (Saltykov-Shchedrin). Typical columnar
layout for the three specially formatted poetic books
of the Bible (Ps, Prov, Job): two wider columns
per page. The last two-thirds of the left-hand
column also show the typical spacing that
distinguishes the individual verse lines in this
formatting convention; the right-hand column,
in contrast, is laid out in a running format
(with no intervening spacing).
- 7 P.Oxy. LXV 4443 (LXX, Est E16-9.3). Courtesy
of The Egypt Exploration Society and Imaging
Papyri Project, Oxford. Typical Greek prose format
with narrow, squared-off columns of writing.
- 8 Timotheos papyrus, U. von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff,
Der Timotheos-Papyrus (Leipzig: Heinrichs', 1903):
col. V (Courtesy Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin—Prussian
Cultural Heritage, Shelf mark: 2" Uk 1103-1/4). Early
(ca. fourth century BCE) Greek papyrus roll in which
verse appears in a running format.
- 9 P.Mil. Vogl. VIII 309, col. XI. G. Bastianini and
C. Gallazzi (eds.), *Posidippo di Pella Epigrammi*
(*P.Mil. Vogl/ VIII 309*) (Milan: LED, 2001), 2,

- Tav. V (digital images included on two CDs).
An early example of the one-verse-per-line format, showing wide column with ragged right-hand margin typical of Greek poetic manuscripts.
- 10 4QH^{c, d, e}. Plates 513, 522, 352 B-284559 (PAM: M-43531). COURTESY ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY. Running format of a nonbiblical poetic text.
- 11 MasPs^a col II 3–7 (Ps 82:1–4). (SHR 5255, Courtesy the Israel Museum, Jerusalem). Two verse lines per columnar line separated by medial spacing.
- 12 4QProv^b (Prov 13:6–15:31). Plate 1153 B-284257 (PAM: M-43016). COURTESY ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY. Space inserted between individual verse lines but not centered on the column line.
- 13 Abbott Papyrus, EA 10221, 1 (AN334341001, © Trustees of the British Museum). Late New Kingdom hieratic roll showing typical column layout.
- 14 A fragment from Gilgamesh, Tablet X, Rm.621 (AN326205001, © Trustees of the British Museum). The fragment displays well the columnar layout typical of cuneiform literary tablets more generally.
- 15a 11QPs^a (recto). Plate 978 B-385953. Photo Shai Halevi, Full Spectrum Color Image, Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. All psalms in this scroll (except viz. Ps 119) are written in a running format.
- 15b 11QPs^a frag. C II (Ps 102:18–29; 103:1). Plate 977 B-280834 (PAM: M-42180). COURTESY ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.
- 16 B19a, folio 386 reverse (Ps 99:9–102:24A). D. N. Freedman et al., *The Leningrad Codex: A Facsimile Edition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Photograph by Bruce and Kenneth Zuckerman, West Semitic Research, in collaboration with the Ancient Biblical Manuscript Center. Courtesy Russian National Library (Saltykov-Shchedrin). Shows the customary special formatting for the three poetic books (Ps, Prov, Job) in MT.

- 17 Codex Sinaiticus (Song 1:8–2:15). London, British Library folio 148b (scribe A). © The British Library Board. Illustrates *per cola et commata* formatting, with indentation. Rubrics, introducing speakers, are rendered on separate lines in red ink.
- 18 1QIsa^a (Isa 61:4–63:4) (PAM 43.783). Courtesy Israel Museum, Jerusalem.
- 19 Nestor's cup (ca. eighth c. BCE), from www1.union.edu/~wareht/greek3/writing_nestor.jpg, accessed March 5, 2015.
- 20 Auct. F.I. 15, 57^v (*De consolatione Philosophiae*) (The Bodleian Library, Oxford University). Formatting—one verse line to a line of writing, initial capatals, endpoints—typical for the copying out of Latin verse in Anglo-Saxon England (from the eighth century on).
- 21 London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A XV, 1^r (Beowulf). © The British Library Board. Exhibits the running format (“long lines across the writing space”) typically used in copying Old English verse.
- 22 First tablet from Kirta (CAT 1.14 obv), showing running format written in horizontal lines and in columns, with word dividers. [InscriptiFact Text ISF_TXT_01254, InscriptiFact Digital Object ISF_DO_17450, 1K14P01]. Photograph by Wayne Pitard, West Semitic Research. Courtesy Department of Antiquities, Syria.
- 23 From Ahiqar (*TAD Cl.1*, col. 6) [InscriptiFact Text ISF_TXT_00071, InscriptiFact Digital Object ISF_DO_05705, AT_91_P13446E R_P]. Photograph by Bruce and Kenneth Zuckerman, West Semitic Research. Courtesy Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin.
- 24 Deir ‘Alla (KAI 312). [InscriptiFact Text ISF_TXT_00825, InscriptiFact Digital Object ISF_DO_06542]. Photograph by Bruce Zuckerman and Marilyn Lundberg, West Semitic Research. Courtesy Department of Antiquities, Jordan.
- 25 Kuntillet Ajrud 4.2. S. Ahituv, E. Eshel, and Z. Meshel, “The Inscriptions” in *Kuntillet ‘Arud*

- (*Horvat Teman*): An Iron Age II Religious Site on the Judah-Sinai Border (ed. Z. Meshel; Jerusalem: IES, 2012), 111, fig. 5.53. Reproduced with permission of Zeev Meshel.
- 26 Carpentras stele (KAI 269). S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and Topography of the Books of Samuel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), pl. 3.
 - 27 R. Lowth, *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum Praelectiones Academicae Oxonii Habitaе* (London: Clarendon, 1753), 39. Shows Lowth's lineated rendering of the Hebrew of Genesis 4:23–24, which was set in a running format by the Masoretes.
 - 28 Lowth, *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum Praelectiones Academicae Oxonii Habitaе* (London: Clarendon, 1753), 301. Shows Lowth's lineation of Isaiah 62:5, which corresponds to the extra spacing in the corresponding section of 1QIsa^a.
 - 29 Lowth, *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum Praelectiones Academicae Oxonii Habitaе* (London: Clarendon, 1753), 302. Shows Lowth's lineation of Isaiah 62:5, which corresponds to the extra spacing in the corresponding section of 1QIsa^a.
 - 30 Lowth, *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum Praelectiones Academicae Oxonii Habitaе* (London: Clarendon, 1753), 242. Shows the first portion of Lowth's Hebrew translation of Ben Sira 24.
 - 31 Cambridge University Library T-S 12.871 (B I recto). A Geniza fragment of Ben Sira (Sir 10:19–11:2) showing special formatting for verse. Used with permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.
 - 32 RS 24.281 (CAT 5.20). A double abecedary from Ugarit. © Copyright 2009 Eisenbrauns. Reproduced from Pierre Bordreuil and Dennis Pardee, *A Manual of Ugaritic* (Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic 3; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 284, pl. 58. Reprinted by permission of Eisenbrauns.
 - 33 Abecedary from Izbet Sartah. F. M. Cross, "Newly Found Inscriptions in Old Canaanite and

- Early Phoenician,” *BASOR* 238 (1980), 8, fig. 9 (complete article can be located on JSTOR). Reproduced with permission of the American Schools of Oriental Research.
- 34 Kuntillet Ajrud abecedaries, 3.11–14. S. Ahituv, E. Eshel, and Z. Meshel, “The Inscriptions” in *Kuntillet ‘Arud (Ḥorvat Teman): An Iron Age II Religious Site on the Judah-Sinai Border* (ed. Z. Meshel; Jerusalem: IES, 2012), 102, fig. 5.45. Reproduced with permission of Zeev Meshel.
- 35 11QPs^a, cols. XII–XIII (Ps 119:128–42, 150–64). Plates 979, 975, B-285186 (PAM: M-43784). COURTESY ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY. A biblical acrostic that is specially formatted.
- 36 11QPs^a, cols. XVI–XVII (Ps 145:1–7, 13–21). Plates 975, B-285190 (PAM: M-43786). COURTESY ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY. A biblical acrostic in a running format.
- 37 Samaria Ostrakon 53. [InscriptlFact Text ISF_TXT_00897, InscriptiFact Digital Object ISF_DO_06815]. Courtesy Harvard Semitic Museum. Shows typical use of word dividers in the “old Hebrew” script.
- 38 A tomb-painting from Nebamun (near Thebes, 18th Dynasty). EA37981. Depicts a banquet scene, divided into two registers: upper—men and women sit together and are attended by one standing servant-girl; lower—four musicians (two shown full-face) are shown seated on the ground while two dancers provide entertainment for the guests. © Trustees of the British Museum.
- 39 Gypsum wall panel relief from the North Palace in Nineveh (Ashurbanipal, 645–35 BCE). 118916. Depicts a harpist and lyre player, one a woman wearing a fillet of great beads, the other a youth (?), wearing feather headdress, with tame lion beneath palms and cypresses. © Trustees of the British Museum.
- 40 6QCant (Song 1:1–8). Plate 646 B-284841 (PAM: M-42943). COURTESY ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

- 41 B19a (Leningrad Codex), folio 423 recto
(Ruth 4:13B–Song 2:5A). D. N. Freedman et al.,
The Leningrad Codex: A Facsimile Edition
(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Photograph
by Bruce and Kenneth Zuckerman, West Semitic
Research, in collaboration with the Ancient Biblical
Manuscript Center. Courtesy Russian National
Library (Saltykov-Shchedrin).
- 42 B19a, folio 394 recto (Ps 133). D. N. Freedman et al.,
The Leningrad Codex: A Facsimile Edition
(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Photograph
by Bruce and Kenneth Zuckerman, West Semitic
Research, in collaboration with the Ancient Biblical
Manuscript Center. Courtesy Russian National
Library (Saltykov-Shchedrin).
- 43 Aleppo Codex, folio 267 recto (Ps 133). Courtesy
Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi.
- 44 11QPs^a, col. XXIII (Ps 133). Plate 978 B-285198
(PAM: M-43789). COURTESY ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES
AUTHORITY.
- 45 Codex Sinaiticus (Ps 133). London, British Library
folio 124b (scribe A). © The British Library Board.
- 46 Victory stele of Naram-Sin, King of Akkad
(Akkadian Period, c. 2250 BCE; ART161684).
Musée du Louvre. © RMN-Grand Palais/
Art Resource, NY.
- 47 Gypsum wall panel relief: showing a formal scene.
Bearded Ashurnasirpal II appears holding a bow
and bowl flanked by a human attendant with
a fly-flapper (865–60 BCE). North-West Palace,
Room G, Panel 10. London, British Museum
ME 124569 © Trustees of the British Museum.
- 48 Greek coin depicting image of Persian ruler
(with beard), presumably Darius I. London,
British Museum ME 1917, 1103.6 © Trustees
of the British Museum.
- 49 Upper part of a red granite colossal statue
of Ramses II (19th Dynasty, ca. 1280 BCE).

- London, British Museum ME EA67 © Trustees of the British Museum.
- 50 Detail (no. 5 of 28) of the bearded King Jehu of Israel paying tribute to Shalmaneser III from the Black Obelisk (825 BCE). London, British Museum ME 118885 © Trustees of the British Museum.
- 51 Detail (no. 15 of 28) of Israelite porters (all bearded) from the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III (825 BCE). London, British Museum ME 118885 © Trustees of the British Museum.
- 52 Gypsum wall panel from the South West Palace of Sennacherib (700–692 BCE; Room XXXVI (OO) Panel 8). Depicts the siege of Lachish, showing Judaeans prisoners moving in families, taking goods and animals into exile. The adult male is bearded. London, British Museum ME 124907 (no. 2 of 16) © Trustees of the British Museum.

On Biblical Poetry

Introduction

BIBLICAL POETRY BEYOND PARALLELISM

*there are other indications of Verse in the
Poetical and Prophetical parts of the
Hebrew Scriptures*

—R. LOWTH, *Isaiah. A New Translation* (1778)

SIR ROBERT LOWTH is remembered among biblicists best for his diagnosis of what he called *parallelismus membrorum*—“the poetical conformation of the sentences consists chiefly in a certain equality, resemblance, or parallelism between the members of each period; so that in two lines (or members of the same period), things for the most part shall answer to things, and words to words, as if fitted to each by a kind of rule or measure”—in that now famous Lecture XIX from his *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum Praelectiones Academicæ Oxonii Habitæ*, which he delivered as Professor of Poetry at Oxford between 1741 and 1751.¹ Indeed, parallelism remains to this day the best known and best understood feature of biblical Hebrew verse. However, biblical poetry is not reducible to its best known feature, and this even on Lowth’s own analysis. The topic is treated belatedly and substantively in only a single lecture (XIX) in Lowth’s original statement—the *Praelectiones* (thirty-four lectures in total), which surveys all facets of biblical poetry as understood by Lowth. And the mature Lowth, though very much taken with his own analysis of parallelism (“I the more readily embrace the present opportunity of resuming this subject, as what I have formerly written upon it seems to have met with the approbation of the learned”),² was well aware, nonetheless, of the surpassing nature of biblical Hebrew poetry beyond “the correspondence of one Verse, or Line, with another,” which he called “Parallelism,” as he remarks in the *Preliminary Dissertation*: “there are other indications of Verse in the Poetical and Prophetical parts of the Hebrew Scriptures.”³

Biblical Hebrew poetry, in many respects, is a construction of Lowth, his lectures, and their reception over the last two and half centuries. This book is self-consciously fashioned as an exercise in the literary criticism Lowth inaugurated and, in particular, means to reclaim the broader purview of the Lowthian pose, to conceive biblical poetry again beyond the idea of a defining parallelism. This is pursued piecemeal and thus gesturally through a series of five essays on selected facets of biblical verse other than parallelism (though the latter comes in for comment throughout). My temperament, unlike Lowth's, hews decidedly more toward focused, deep soundings of singular topics. The general approach of the book is guided, moreover, by two central Lowthian dispositions: on the one hand to think of biblical poetry as just another verse tradition, and thus to read and interpret biblical poems like other poems, with the same critical tools and the same kinds of guiding assumptions in place; and on the other hand to recognize that what distinguishes the verse of the Bible is its historicity and cultural specificity, those peculiar encrustations and encumbrances that typify all human artifacts. Lowth was a decidedly literary man. His appointment was as Professor of Poetry at Oxford. He wrote his own poetry, was foundational for the birth of Romanticism, and published one of the first modern grammars of the English language.⁴ For Lowth and his eighteenth-century compatriots, the poetry of the Bible was thought to be the oldest known corpus of poetry in the world and thus a natural topic to be investigated by the Professor of Poetry at Oxford. His literary sensibilities and orientation have long been recognized—and continue to wear well. Less appreciated has been Lowth's insistence on the necessity of the historical imagination and his call to historicize: "we must see all things with their eyes, estimate all things by their opinions; we must endeavour as much as possible to read Hebrew as the Hebrews would have read it."⁵ To be sure, there were precursors to Lowth who shared this historicist bent, not the least his father, William Lowth, whose words here he borrows.⁶ Still, his efforts to elaborate and inculcate such a thoroughgoing historically (and philologically) oriented kind of criticism, especially apparent in the late *Isaiah. A New Translation; with a Preliminary Dissertation*,⁷ are noteworthy. Lowth was not only the father of an explicit kind of literary criticism of the Bible, he was also among the early practitioners (certainly in England) of a burgeoning historical criticism.⁸ The strict dichotomy between literary and historical approaches to the Bible that so many in the field today insist on is shown in Lowth already by the middle of the eighteenth century to be something of a false dichotomy.⁹ There is even a case to be made that Lowth articulated new standards for literary criticism that were "evolved from the Bible itself"¹⁰—yet another part of the Lowthian pose I mean to reclaim.

An important consequence of my own hypersensitivity to historicity is an awareness (not so apparent to Lowth) that the poetry of the Bible emerged out of a traditional and predominantly oral culture, and thus the kind of “high” literary (and highly literate) criticism practiced by Lowth (and most biblical critics since), which has proved so revealing and informative of biblical poetry generally, now needs to be ready to temper or reframe its governing assumptions and preferred technologies of criticism in light of the requirements of a potentially very different kind of literacy and textuality forged at the interface of a deeply informing orality. If the literary and the historical, then, are in view throughout this volume, so, too, is the oral and aural, especially as it chastens my own fully literary assumptions and orientation.

Lastly, there is a strong comparative orientation to much of the thinking in this volume. This, too, may be rooted in Lowth’s originary work. R. Wellek, in fact, recognizes Lowth as an early pioneer of a distinctly comparative method of literary study.¹¹ This propensity for comparison, “the capacity to see first sameness in difference, then difference in sameness,”¹² is most evident in the analogical shape of so much of Lowth’s way of thinking (see chapter 1 for examples) and permits him both to know his subject matter for what it is—“verse, properly so called”—and to appreciate its distinctiveness; so most famously his recognition of the place of parallelism in the biblical tradition. Lowth’s chief standards of measure, the classical poetic traditions and their neoclassical heirs, were mostly inherited by him from his eighteenth-century cultural milieu. A benefit of J. D. Michaelis’s otherwise peculiar re-presentation of the *Praelectiones* was to enmesh Lowth’s work (through his various annotations) within a more sophisticated and richer understanding of known cognate languages and literature (at the time, especially Syriac and Arabic).¹³ And to this day comparative work on biblical literature tends to privilege (as it should) the languages and literatures of the ancient Near East.¹⁴ Yet comparisons made from farther afield are always potentially just as revealing—the insights won by Lowth because of his neoclassical assumptions provide sufficient (local) warrant on this score. So while my own work habitually sights biblical poetry within its broader ancient Levantine milieu, I also profit from knowledge of other, often geographically and/or chronologically disparate and noncontiguous poetic traditions. Indeed, the latter are crucial for much of the argumentation that follows. Mine is an emphatically inclusive comparative project.

I have two principal audiences in view throughout, students of the Bible and students of comparative literature. My chief subject matter is biblical Hebrew poetry, and it is toward a richer understanding of this verse tradition that these essays (individually and collectively) and the thinking that they

evolve are angled in the first place. That is, I am intent on taking a large swipe at articulating what biblical poetry is all about and exemplifying one (albeit heterogeneous) way of approaching it. The large ambition of the whole, then, is nothing less than to evolve a way of thinking about poetry and poetics that can enable a more perspicuous accounting of biblical Hebrew poetry and open onto ever richer and more pleasurable readings of biblical poems. Specific contributions are of two kinds. First, each of the first four essays addresses a specific aspect of biblical poetry—line, rhythm, lyric, orality/textuality—that in my judgment is crucial to any substantive understanding of this poetry and that generally has been underappreciated by scholarship to date. In this sense, each is importantly programmatic. The final essay elaborates a close reading of Psalm 133, both to model the art of close reading itself, something I believe we need more of in the field, and as a means of cashing out my efforts to think through aspects of biblical prosody and poetics in the earlier chapters—such construals are only as compelling as the readings they enable. In a real way, then, the reading on offer in the final chapter enacts the final movement to the set of arguments mounted throughout the book—this is especially true for chapters 1 and 2, where the logic of my explication of the line and of rhythm requires holistic staging. The second kind of contribution envisioned comes in how questions are posed, in what spirit and from what angle. This is admittedly a far more nebulous aspiration but not the less crucial for that. My pose means to be gracious and generous at every turn—before the texts I interpret and with colleagues whose ideas and opinions I engage—without (I hope) sacrificing rigor and sharpness of insight. I do not come to these topics innocently but by way of insights of those who have labored before and beside me. Mine is a distinctly dialogic or conversational means of writing and thinking. One of the great privileges of scholarship for me has been the opportunity to interact with other thinkers, scholars, writers. Indeed, I seem only to find my own voice through such interaction. My debt to others is made abundantly clear throughout. And like many recent contributors,¹⁵ my efforts to understand biblical poetry are thoroughly embedded within the study of poetry, poetics, and prosody more generally. In fact, all of the various subfields and disciplines that make up biblical studies are indisputably a part of the larger humanities. As such there is nothing particularly special about how biblical scholars approach the business of criticism, or at least nothing methodologically or theoretically that would distinguish biblical studies (in all of its many facets) from any other area-oriented studies in the humanities (e.g., American studies, French, East Asian studies). What sets this field apart from others is the distinctiveness of its object(s) of study—in this case, the poetry of the Hebrew Bible. This poetry stems from a particular

time and place, the Levant during the first millennium BCE, comes enmeshed in local practice and custom, and eventually gets written down in a specific script and language, Hebrew. Biblical scholars are always unavoidably accountable to the historical, cultural, and linguistic peculiarities of their subject matter, and so, too, must they be responsible to the wider discussion of the theories and methods that frame and authorize their every act of criticism, no matter that this wider discussion will often span the breadth of the humanities, inevitably and untidily transgressing discipline boundaries. Gone are the days when disciplines in the humanities could remain confined to a narrowly parochial form of intellectual discourse. My choice of interlocutors throughout the book from fields beyond my own, then, is most intentional and means, among other things, to make a bid to break open the all too frequently insular nature of our scholarly discourse in biblical studies and to implicate my own work (at any rate) *as a biblical scholar* in a much broader discussion about poetry and poetics.

With respect to the nonbiblicist, the contributions I seek to make are also of two kinds. The first is to place before students of literature more generally an accounting of biblical poetry that is knowledgeable of its subject matter and that also proves by dint of the questions posed, and also the manner of their posing and in whose name, to be familiar and accessible to them, and thus readable by them. Biblical poetry stands as one of the fountainheads of the Western poetic canon (as Lowth, for example, well understood) and not surprisingly, then, literary scholars of every stripe seem ever eager to draw the Bible into their critical discourse. Unfortunately, too often this engagement with the Bible is pursued naively and at times even in ignorance. The historical and linguistic knowledge required to tackle this material with any kind of authenticity and rigor is substantial. Therefore, one way biblical scholarship may serve the larger literary guild is by mediating access to this particular body of literature, yet this can only happen if it is pitched such that it can win a hearing from literary-minded colleagues across the humanities. My aim throughout has been to pitch these essays in just such a manner, each consciously pursued as an exercise in a kind of literary criticism that will be familiar to a broad spectrum of scholars. There are always potential gains to be had from engaging a different or new or other poetic corpus, and thus insofar as this book facilitates such an engagement for those with specialties in textual corpora beyond the Bible it makes an important contribution. Beyond conveying information and such about biblical poetry per se, I also mean to speak more broadly about the several issues addressed in these essays, namely lineation, lyric verse, free verse prosody, orality, and close reading. For example, my discussion of the nature and role of the verse line in biblical

Hebrew poetry in chapter 1 addresses a critical prosodic issue in the biblical corpus, but means to do so in a way that is informative at any number of points about the phenomenon of lineation more generally. Like H. Dubrow,¹⁶ I maintain that literary analyses with a particular historical inflection (e.g., my focus on biblical poetry), insofar as the issues explored have broader occurrence in other historical eras and traditions, may rightly aspire to have a genuine transhistorical reach and significance, to implicate themselves beyond the necessary confines of their originating motivation and focus. There are also occasions (as in the discussion of the Hebrew lyric in chapter 3) where I believe the encounter with the biblical corpus is fundamental, adding something unique or vital to the larger conversation about a given issue, phenomenon, or practice. In other words, the aim in these essays is always at least twofold: to convey positive knowledge about a certain aspect of biblical poetry or poetics and to advance or otherwise enrich the broader scholarly discussion of the particular matters of prosody or practice that are being scrutinized.

Chapter 1, as noted, focalizes the issue of the poetic line in biblical poetry. The question of what counts as poetry is at heart always a historical question. Poems as language art come necessarily mired in cultural, historical, linguistic peculiarities. Therefore, there can be no question of identifying in any meaningful way essential, transcendent, unexceptional characteristics that are everywhere definitive of poetry. Cultural artifacts simply do not behave in such a manner. Rather, at best what is manageable is to isolate from a comparative perspective (itself always staged theoretically and with prejudice) those features that prototypically show up time and again in poems cross-culturally and transhistorically. One such feature is a unit of rhythm, audition, and syntax the segmentation of which periodically interrupts or breaks the otherwise continuous flow of language.¹⁷ This is the (verse) “line.” Empirically, there is a vast amount of extant written poetry throughout the world that is specially formatted in ways that graphically isolate the verse line and thus provides eloquent testimony to the widespread facticity of this poetic phenomenon.¹⁸ The very concept of a “line” as “a row of written or printed letters” (*OED*), however, is itself belated and hyperliterate, emerging out of a chirographic world (Hellenistic Greece) with specific conventions in place for how to spatialize the technology of writing. But the phenomenon that the term “line” has come to name in the (English) vernacular of Western literary criticism subsumes whatever culturally specific conventions (if any at all) are in place for spatializing it.¹⁹ In fact, much (if not all) traditional oral verbal art, insofar as it depends primarily on human cognition for reception, consists of such periodically segmented discourse.²⁰

Surprisingly, however, the question of the biblical Hebrew poetic line (variously called colon, verset, half-line, stich, or hemistich) though everywhere

assumed, has nowhere been substantively scrutinized (aside, perhaps, from the issue of syntax and how syntax interfaces with and is staged by the line).²¹ This is no small desideratum. To a large extent, the very sensibility of referring to portions of the Hebrew Bible as *poetic* rests with the ability to successfully articulate the presence and nature of the biblical Hebrew poetic line. The overarching ambition of chapter 1, then, is to suggest why I, for one, think there are lines of verse in the Bible, and therefore, why I continue to think it appropriate to speak about *biblical Hebrew poetry*.²² To this end, the greatest amount of my attention is dedicated to issues of discernment—what evidence positively shows the existence and importance of segmentation in biblical verse (e.g., special formatting in manuscripts) and more particularly in what does this segmented line consist, what are its leading characteristics (e.g., concision, simple clause structure, parataxis). I also offer some initial observations of a prosodic nature, on how the line factors in a poem's various structures of meaning. As it turns out, not only is the line crucial to the very sensibility of biblical poetry, it is also important prosodically, since so much of what goes on in biblical poems does so at the level of the line.²³ The topic of line grouping also comes in for discussion, both as a means for triangulating on the line as a structural singularity and because biblical poetry is dominantly distichic, its lines come mostly grouped in pairs, as couplets, with the triplet (a gathering of three poetic lines) otherwise being the most common complementing alternative grouping scheme attested in the biblical corpus.

The question of meter in biblical poetry, by contrast, is an old one, dating at least as far back as the Greco-Roman period (Philo and Josephus). Lowth himself asserted quite trenchantly the existence of (biblical) Hebrew meter—in the eighteenth century verse was all but inconceivable outside of a metrical framework—though he did have the good sense to admit that the specifics (namely quantity, rhythm, etc.) were “altogether” unknowable.²⁴ Others since have not always been so prudent. Until quite recently, in fact, the search for Hebrew meter has been a constant preoccupation of scholars. However, the simple fact is that biblical verse is not metrical—at least not in any way that the term “meter,” which “is an organizing principle which turns the general tendency toward regularity in rhythm into a strictly patterned regularity that can be counted and named,”²⁵ retains any recognizable sense. Rather, biblical verse is nonmetrical, and thus its prosody consists in “rhythmical organization by other than numerical modes”;²⁶ it is, as the comparatist B. Hrushovski [Harshav] has seen best, a kind of free verse, or what he calls free rhythm.²⁷ Though a consensus about the absence of meter in biblical verse now exists, no one to date has tried to work out Hrushovski's ideas in a thoroughgoing way, or to read biblical Hebrew poetry against the backdrop of the free verse

tradition more broadly.²⁸ In chapter 2 I propose to do just that, albeit in an initially circuitous but hopefully provocative way. In 1933 G. W. Allen published his seminal essay “Biblical Analogies for Walt Whitman’s Prosody,” in which he contends that Whitman’s prosody owes much to biblical models (as mediated through the King James Bible; Whitman did not know Hebrew).²⁹ Though “free verse” may be approached in various ways, in most genealogies Whitman looms large. The English phrase “free verse” itself most transparently connotes freedom from metrical constraints, and no doubt there was some consciousness of this sort on Whitman’s part (and in other early modern practitioners of free verse). Still, it nevertheless is clear, as Allen’s essay shows, that there is more to the underlying prosody of Whitman (and other writers of free verse) than a mere revolt against metrical norms. In fact, many of the prosodic features characteristic of free verse are typical of the oral and written poetries from ancient Mesopotamia (Sumerian, Akkadian), Egypt, and the Levant (biblical Hebrew, Ugaritic).³⁰

My aim in viewing biblical verse (initially) through a Whitmanesque looking glass is to underscore the fact that this verse is itself a variety of non-metrical or free verse, and therefore it is to free verse that biblical scholars should look if they want to fully appreciate the nature and dynamics of biblical poetry. I elaborate an understanding of biblical poetry as a variety of a free rhythmic system of verse, building on Hrushovski’s seminal insights and expanding them in light of contemporary work on free verse prosody.³¹

Lyric is the topic I take up in chapter 3. As a practical matter, R. Alter notices that biblical verse is used for all manner of things except telling stories,³² which invariably in the Hebrew Bible is rendered in prose. This is not a given. Epic narrative verse is well known from the period and region (e.g., Gilgamesh, Kirta), so biblical poets could well have chosen to tell stories in verse had they so desired—and no doubt their oral storytelling colleagues and forebears did. To be sure, there are individual poems that incorporate narrative runs and sometimes even develop characters, but for the most part these forms are restricted in scale and put mainly to nonnarrative ends (e.g., Exod 15, Prov 7). Alter has also identified varieties of what he calls “incipient narrativity” in certain Hebrew poems (e.g., 2 Sam 22).³³ But mainly poetry is not a medium used in the Bible for sustained narrative purposes. S. R. Driver, who much earlier also recognized the Bible’s lack of epic verse,³⁴ divided the non-narrative poetry of the Bible into two broad types, *lyric* and *gnomic*. Though surely reductive, leaving many verse forms in the Bible unaccounted for (e.g., much prophetic verse), the two types are indeed pervasive. I specifically focus on the lyric given the general primordially of this verse kind and because the genre is foundational for any more surpassing understanding of biblical

poetics—and it is also pragmatically beneficial for understanding other kinds of verse in the Bible, such as gnomic or didactic verse, which as Driver notices is not always so easily distinguished from lyric proper.³⁵ Drawing on a range of theorists,³⁶ I locate a specifically lyric kind of verse in the Bible by situating it with respect to lyric's chief properties and leading sensibilities as prototypically known from other lyric corpora. What emerges, in the end, is a tradition of lyric verse that is as ancient as (if not more ancient than) that of the Greeks and that through some of its common features (e.g., prominence of a communal voice, dialogic profile, notable rituality) may well open up new possibilities for understanding the capacity and nature of lyric discourse more generally. Among the myriad of important implications to which the lyricism of so much biblical verse gives rise, none is more important than the demand for reading strategies specially attuned to the discourse's key features and practices. Narrative approaches, which still dominate the literary study of the Bible, will only illuminate this kind of poetry to a limited degree. I also consider the possibility of lyric discourse beyond its typical conciseness and how an understanding of the poetics of lyric may advantage a richer understanding of biblical poetry more broadly.

To state that the roots of biblical poetry are oral in nature will elicit little surprise. After all, it has now been over a century since H. Gunkel started articulating his program of form criticism, at the heart of which stood the firm conviction that the poems and stories of ancient Israel and Judah emerged initially as oral productions.³⁷ And the recent spate of monographs in the field on the broad topic of orality and literacy has underscored the overwhelming and thoroughgoing orality of ancient Israelite and Judahite culture in general.³⁸ Indeed, as M. O'Connor maintains, much biblical poetry appears "comparably close to the oral poetic situation,"³⁹ and most (though not all), however originally composed and transmitted, was likely intended for oral performance of one kind or another (e.g., 1 Chron 16:7, 36; cf. Deut 31:30; 32:44–46; 2 Sam 1:17–18; Jer 36:4–8). The central aim of chapter 4 is to elaborate O'Connor's idea and to flesh out the nature and kind of orality that informs so much of this poetic tradition. Orality is not of just one kind or inevitably pure. Rather it is stubbornly pluralistic. Moreover, biblical verse, however indebted its poetics to oral performance, nonetheless has only come down to us in writing, and thus by its very medium of inscription is indubitably marked by textuality and literacy.⁴⁰ Indeed, orality and literacy are not monolithic descriptors, at least not in reference to ancient Israel and Judah, where the art of writing would have been well recognized (writing emerges in the ancient Near East during the middle of the fourth millennium BCE) and begins to intersect and interface with orality from a relatively early period (Iron IIB). "Orality and

literacy,” in the southern Levant during the Iron Age, then, as in medieval England, “are parts of a subtle, complex, lengthy process of change,” and thus “do not occupy discrete and conflicting cognitive spheres.”⁴¹ And just because oral poems begin to be written down and copied or composition itself begins to take place in writing does not entail the immediate loss of all (or even most) informing oral sensibilities, for the simple reason that these very sensibilities are the only idioms known for articulating poetry.⁴² Even narrative prose—a specifically written genre—as it first emerges, everywhere after the writing down of poetry, bears the telltale signs of an originary oral poetics.⁴³ Therefore, the picture I begin to paint of biblical poetry’s informing orality (and much remains yet to be done on this topic) in this chapter is ultimately a complex one, mindful of cultural specifics, orality’s operative pluralities, and how textuality in this context impinges on and stages orality on the one hand and on the other how textuality is itself enabled and shaped by this same orality. Indeed, the last part of the chapter is given over to an exploration of emergent textuality in ancient Israel and Judah as it interfaces specifically with the poetic tradition.

To recognize the informing orality of much biblical verse is an important historical datum. It will also crucially constrain how contemporary readers engage these poems, if only as a reminder that their textuality is complicated, and many will not have originated in writing, as specifically writerly compositions.

The book’s first four chapters, then, are given over wholly to “thick” descriptions of specific elements crucial to any fully surpassing account of the prosody and poetics of biblical poetry. Each chapter incorporates here and there brief readings of poems or (more often) parts of poems as a means of gesturing toward what I believe is the ultimate *raison d’être* for all prosodic analysis—reading. My lone, extended effort in this vein comes in the final chapter, in a reading of Psalm 133. In service to the larger book, it provides the kind of in-depth and close reading of a single poem that some of my argumentation in the earlier chapters requires, namely, to sight the poetic line, for example, not only abstracted and hypostasized (through the fixity input by writing) but as it resolves itself as such in the very process of enacting the poem it helps to compose. It also means to gesture toward what is consequential about prosodic analysis of the kind I undertake in the first place, a practical cashing out of why do it. In the end, however, the essay, like the others in the book, stands on its own and means beyond the logic of the larger whole of which it is a part. For me, poetry is always finally about reading and about the production of readings. And therefore the celebration of reading (and readings) is also very much at the heart of my reading of Psalm 133. It is a long,

luxuriating look at this singularly delicious psalm. It is expressly literary in orientation and pointedly philological in manner—philology is the principal disciplinary means at our disposal for fixing and thus accessing poems through their words and worlds,⁴⁴ and thus it is, as Nietzsche well appreciated, the ultimate method of close, or as he prefers, “slow” reading: “it teaches to read well...to read slowly, deeply, looking cautiously before and aft, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers.”⁴⁵ There is, of course, no one right way of reading, no tidy, preset template or calculus guaranteed to generate meaningful construals, sure and compelling readings. Reading is a practice, with many modes and an inestimable number of different and competing aims and outcomes. Mine, with a distinct affinity for literary theory and a strong taste for philology, is but one example of what is possible, what is imaginable, what is readable.

The book with its component studies falls well short of any kind of comprehensive statement on the nature and art of biblical poetry. There remain still many topics beyond parallelism (to again recall the wider frame of Lowth’s original *Lectures*) that require (renewed) attention. To continue to have work to do is no bad thing. And yet I also am confident that for any who work their way through the whole of this book a basic and substantial orientation to biblical Hebrew poetry, even beyond the immediate focus of the individual chapters, will be had.

I

“Verse, Properly So Called”

THE LINE IN BIBLICAL POETRY

in the Hebrew poetry the line was the unit

—J. H. GARDINER, *The Bible as Literature* (1906)

AFTER SEVERAL INTRODUCTORY lectures focused on poetry generally, R. Lowth begins to address biblical poetry specifically in the third of his field-founding *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*.¹ His topic here is meter. The discussion for Lowth is both foundational and an embarrassment. It is foundational because as an English scholar writing and speaking in the middle of the eighteenth century Lowth was unable to conceptualize poetry in the absence of meter:

But since it appears essential to every species of poetry, that it be confined to numbers, and consist of some kind of verse, (for indeed wanting this, it would not only want its most agreeable attributes, but would scarcely deserve the name of poetry) in treating of the poetry of the Hebrews, it appears absolutely necessary to demonstrate, that those parts at least of the Hebrew writings which we term poetic, are in a metrical form, and to inquire whether anything be certainly known concerning the nature and principles of this versification or not.²

For Lowth biblical Hebrew poetry had to be metrical. Indeed, so foundational is meter to Lowth's way of thinking that the lecture by itself constitutes the first part of his study—all else logically and structurally follows from Lowth's initial positing of Hebrew meter. The embarrassment arises in the fact that “as to the real quantity, the rhythm, or modulation, these from the present state of the language [i.e., Hebrew] seem to be altogether unknown, and even to admit of no investigation by human art or industry.”³ Only the merest vestiges remain discernible—Lowth put little stock in the vocalization traditions

preserved by the Masoretes, else, as he notes, "we must be under the necessity of confessing, not only, what we at present experience, that the Hebrew poetry possesses no remains of sweetness or harmony, but that it never was possessed of any."⁴ The surest evidence of meter—verse "confined to numbers"—lies in the alphabetic acrostics: "in these examples the verses are so exactly marked and defined, that it is impossible to mistake them for prose."⁵ Lowth was more specific in his later "preliminary dissertation" to the *New Translation* of Isaiah, his most mature expression (and in his own English) of his conception of biblical Hebrew verse structure.⁶ There, isolating the "perfectly Alphabetical" acrostics "in which every Line is marked by its Initial Letter" (i.e., Psalms 111–12),⁷ he writes that "we may safely conclude" of these poems that they "consist of Verses properly so called; of Verses regulated by some observation of harmony or cadence; of measure, numbers, or rhythm."⁸ Lowth goes on to reason, by way of analogy, that the other acrostics, where the initial letters determine the beginning of stanzas and not lines, must be presumed to be "of the same kind of composition" and to "equally consist of Verses"; and so, too, "in regard to the rest of the Poems of the Hebrews, bearing evidently the same marks and characteristics of composition with the Alphabetical Poems in other respects, and falling into regular lines . . . ; that these likewise consist of Verse."⁹ As it turns out, Lowth was dead wrong about meter. It is not that the loss of the "true pronunciation of Hebrew" makes the pursuit of Hebrew meter and its enabling principles "vain,"¹⁰ but that biblical Hebrew verse is simply not metrical. This Lowth could not have seen, but it is a finding fully compatible with his own analysis, and now, two and a half centuries later, it is a finding that commands wide consensus in the field (see chapter 2).

Two aspects of Lowth's thoughts on meter retain broad value. First, his strong desire to ground his estimation of the poetic in the poems themselves (and the poetic phenomena they exhibit)—as opposed, say, to the versions of the poems as preserved in particular manuscripts—is laudable. That is, here I see Lowth reaching after those sure signs by which he may know his topic to be what he assumes it to be, seeking to answer the "uncommonly difficult and obscure" question "concerning the nature of the Hebrew verse."¹¹ Literary scholars continue to debate to this day the distinguishing differentia of poetry. There still is no wide agreement on this issue, with much depending on one's theoretical disposition. D. Attridge sums the current status of the question well:

Is poetry a definable distinctive type of literature? Much ink has been spilled on this question, and it is evident that if what is implied are intrinsic markers or clear-cut boundaries the answer is no. Just as the borderline between the literary and non-literary is shifting and porous,

so is the borderline between what is called “poetry” and what is not. Several different variables map onto this distinction, and isolating one will always be a somewhat artificial act. And even if we simplify the issue by focusing on one variable, it will be more helpful to think in terms of the degree to which any literary work is poetic, or invites the kind of response we normally accord to poetry, rather than imagining that we can distinguish absolutely between poems and non-poems.¹²

Still, saying what we can say about what distinguishes biblical Hebrew poems, being ever mindful of how we say it (in what language, for example, and with what theoretical commitments) and that the saying is itself always provisional and never fail-safe, is a desirable ambition. Second, just as poetry qua poetry for Lowth had to be metrical, it also had to be arranged in lines. This assumption, too, Lowth owed to his larger cultural milieu, as most of the written poetry known to him was arranged in literal lines.¹³ Lowth himself from an early age read classical Greek and Latin poetry and composed his own verse—all lineated. The topic of the line does not receive sustained treatment by Lowth. He does notice it (briefly) as one of the observable manifestations of the metrical norm that he presumes governs biblical verse generally and the most “perfectly Alphabetical” poems in particular. So every single line in Psalms 111 and 112, Lowth says, “is distinguished by its Initial Letter.”¹⁴ Moreover, in these poems, he observes, the “Pauses of the Sentences coincide with the Pauses of the Lines.”¹⁵ And at one point, as he launches into his discussion of parallelism in his “preliminary dissertation,” Lowth explicitly glosses “Verse” with “Line.”¹⁶ The lengthiest, and perhaps most explicit, characterization of the line comes in Lowth’s assessment of the nonalphabetical poems of the Bible, which he contends “likewise consist of Verse”:

of Verse distinguished from Prose, not only by the style, the figures, the diction; by a loftiness of thought, and richness of imagery; *but by being divided into Lines*, and sometimes into Systems of Lines; which Lines, having an apparent equality, similitude, or proportion, one to another, were in some sort measured by the ear, and regulated according to some general laws of metre, rhythm, harmony, or cadence.¹⁷

Still more pervasive and far more telling than these few comments is Lowth’s unfailing practice in the *Praelectiones* of arranging the Hebrew text of his examples in lines (fig. 1a–b).¹⁸ In fact, he sets the Hebrew (and accompanying Latin translation) one verse line per manuscript line, a practice mostly nonexistent in the Masoretic manuscripts to which he would have had access

but normative for the classical verse (Latin and Greek) Lowth knew so well, and now attested in Hebrew manuscripts of the Bible from Qumran.¹⁹ Indeed, 4QPs^b preserves a few verses from Psalm 112 (vv. 4–5), lineated as Lowth describes,²⁰ according to the acrostic (see fig. 2):²¹

זרח בחש אור לישרים
חנן ורחום וצדי[ק]
טוב אי[ש] חנן ומלוח

Lowth’s practice of lineation underscores the (however literally understated) centrality of the line in his notion of verse and, by extension, his estimate of its role in biblical verse more specifically. Unfortunately, G. Gregory’s translation of the *Praelectiones* into English (on which all English editions of Lowth’s *Lectures* are based) does not include the Hebrew text of the examples Lowth originally cited throughout, and thus this visual aspect of his argumentation is accessible to only those who consult the Latin original.

My interest in this chapter lies precisely with that topic that Lowth (and apparently everyone else since) felt did not warrant, presuming its primordially, extended discussion: “Verse, properly so called.”²² My use of this phrase aims both to honor Lowth’s insight and to elaborate it, to work out from it (“elaboration” in Gramsci’s sense, i.e., *e-laborate*) a sense of verse more properly so called. What Lowth meant by *verse* is closely in line with what the *OED* gives as the primary gloss for the English term: “A succession of words arranged according to natural or recognized rules of prosody and forming a complete metrical line; one of the lines of a poem or piece of versification.” Apparent in both Lowth (as I have tried to show briefly, namely, “Verse distinguished . . . by being divided into Lines”) and the *OED* (“one of the lines of a poem”), however, is a slightly narrower sense of the term as poetry arranged in lines. In this sense, the English verse approaches more closely its Latin etymon, *versus*, “a line or row, spec[ifically] a line of writing (so named from turning to begin another line), verse” (*OED*)—not surprisingly, Lowth uses *versus*, and also *versiculus* (lit. “a short line of writing,” *OLD*), throughout his *Praelectiones*. It is in the latter sense of the term—an isolate of a structural modality, namely, being arranged in lines—that I take “verse” (here following the Lowth of the *Praelectiones*, especially, quite literally), “properly so called.” As such, its chief terminological and categorical correlate, strictly speaking, is the term *prose*, and it is the line that differentiates the two: *verse* is set in lines, *prose* is not.²³

The term *poetry*, which is often taken (by laypeople and scholars alike) as a rough synonym for verse (a practice I will continue) and which the *OED* glosses as “imaginative or creative literature in general,” is more wide-ranging

in English, less amenable to a narrow and precise definition. Most would likely give assent to T. V. F. Brogan's notion that at its core poetry (habitually) involves a heightening of discourse—though admittedly, like the *OED*'s gloss, this brings us only so far. Yet to go much further, to become more specific and explicit, would entangle us in large theoretical and historical considerations. For my purposes, several further but still relatively general observations will suffice. First, to reiterate, poetry is used frequently to mean an instance of verbal art set in lines, and thus a synonym for verse. Second, this common usage notwithstanding, there are good reasons to underscore the categorical distinction between verse and prose on the one hand, which are correlate structural modes (of which the line is the differentia), and poetry on the other hand, which, for the lack of a better word, as Brogan notes, is something more like a genre—in this respect it is (somewhat) akin to *drama* and *fiction*.²⁴ The point here is that poetry, like these other similarly broad overarching genres, may be realized “in either of the modes or any mixture thereof.”²⁵ The reverse cannot be said. The same asymmetry is pointed up by M. Perloff. She notes that if lineation may be rightly said to distinguish prose and verse, it does not so distinguish prose and poetry. Perloff, mindful of the need to account for nonlineated kinds of poetry (such as the modern “prose poem”), goes on to argue that what counts as poetry is always a configuration of historical, cultural, and ideological factors. This leads to a third and final observation. Almost all premodern (prior to ca. 1850 CE) poetry consists of language periodically interrupted, which most frequently was represented in writing as verse, that is, in lines (following the ancient Greek practice for writing out stichic verse).²⁶ And thus, in addition to common English usage, I find in this strong empirical warrant for my own habit of using verse and poetry interchangeably as synonyms. More significantly, the observation reveals more precisely the chief issue at stake in this chapter: to a large extent, the very sensibility of referring to portions of the Hebrew Bible as *poetic* rests with our ability to successfully articulate the presence and nature of the biblical poetic line. Any minimally compelling definition of biblical Hebrew poetry will need to specify features or characteristics beyond or other than the line,²⁷ but if there are no lines, then there is no verse (at least as current literary theory understands this term), and our notion of biblical Hebrew poetry will require radical rethinking—“line is what distinguishes our experience of poetry as poetry.”²⁸ What follows in the body of this chapter will suggest, in fact, that there are lines of verse in the Bible, and therefore, it is most appropriate to speak specifically about *biblical Hebrew poetry*.

Behind the “proper” of Lowth’s “properly so called” stands an entire theoretical machinery, however tacitly assumed, a specific take on what poetry is and why the poetry of the Hebrew Bible qualifies as such. This theory, as I have

tried to indicate in an abbreviated way, is not without certain blind spots—the presumption of meter, from our vantage point, being chief among them. But even so it is a powerfully enabling theory as well, one that allowed Lowth to see so much and to see it so well. In many respects, biblical Hebrew poetry is itself the invention of Lowth and his *Lectures*. This is not to deny that Lowth himself was taking part in and greatly enabled by a larger conversation, involving others whose insights were crucial, too;²⁹ nor to imply that there is no “there” there, in this case, some primordial textuality that Lowth could in fact call poetry. Rather, by underscoring Lowth’s inventiveness I mean to recognize the act of criticism required of Lowth, as M. O’Connor notes, “to observe the crucial phenomena *and* conceive a vocabulary with which to describe them.”³⁰ Someone had to construe what we have since come to call biblical Hebrew poetry as poetry in some initial way in order for such a construal to have any sensibility. And if such a construal is itself not made up out of whole cloth and by necessity considers that which it did not invent, the thoroughgoing nature of its constructedness remains nonetheless. And whatever ongoing sensibility we want to attribute to biblical poetry will itself result from similar acts of construal, feats of criticism, interpretation. These will be judged “proper” (or “improper”) based on a whole range of considerations, including the nature of the theories espoused and how they comport with the textual entities being considered. My own championing of the line as the leading differentia of verse, however widely shared and inclusive of both theoretical and empirical considerations, is itself, in the end, an active act of judgment, as in fact is the discernment of every poetic line in the biblical corpus. Therefore, my chief ambition for my different sense of the properness of what I call verse is that however ultimately judged, whether in fact it is finally found to be “proper,” it might, like Lowth’s “Verse, properly so called,” help us to see further and to see better, to eventuate a more perspicuous accounting of biblical verse, and ultimately to open onto ever richer and more pleasurable readings of this poetry.

The discussion that follows, substantial and ambitious, has as its principal focus the line, which, according to B. H. Smith, is “the fundamental unit of poetic form”³¹ and, according to many others, is the one widely-agreed-on feature that is distinctive of poetry (verse)—prose has no line structure, poems (most) often do.³² And yet, aside from the issue of syntax and how syntax interfaces with and is staged by the line (a not unimportant issue),³³ the topic of line structure in biblical Hebrew poetry has not been routinely or closely considered.³⁴ This is no small desideratum, and my chief ambition here is to begin to address this lack. In particular, attention is dedicated, one, to issues of discernment—what are the kinds of evidences that positively show the existence and importance of the line in biblical Hebrew verse—and two, to scrutiny of the

nature and character of the line so revealed: in what does this line consist.³⁵ In my judgment, the line is both the prosodic motor and the defining feature of biblical verse, and thus the major foci of this chapter are intended to give substance to these claims. In the end, however, the most compelling witness to the presence and importance of the line in biblical poetry comes in readings of those individual poems that are alive to the possibilities that line structure puts into play. (See chapter 5 for one extended effort at such a reading.)

Terminology

Some prefatory remarks on terminology are in order before embarking in earnest on my topic, both for the sake of clarity and for theoretical purposes. The central phenomenon I am considering here—the *line*—in fact nowhere gets named as such in the Bible. This is not surprising given the absence of any early, indigenous metadiscourse about biblical verse and the overwhelming orality of the biblical world (the two are not unrelated). The concept of a line—“a row of written or printed letters” (*OED*)—is itself a product of writing, of a chirographic world. In Greek, for example, *stichos* emerges out of a context in which the practice was to represent the verse line on its own corresponding line of writing (i.e., the columnar line), and Latin *versus* is so named from the turning (from Lat. *vertere* “to turn”) to begin a new line of writing. When some (still mostly spare) comment does arise in the Talmud (e.g., *b. Meg.* 16b; *j. Meg.* 3:7), it is with respect to the special formatting for the two lists in Joshua 12:9–24 and Esther 9:7–9 and a number of the festival songs embedded in prose texts (specifically Exod 15, Deut 32, Judg 5, and 2 Sam 22). The observations are highly literate and pertain to what is literally seen on the manuscript page, that is, the nature of the special formatting used in these texts. The key terms employed, *’ariaḥ* and *lēbēnā*, “small brick” and “brick” (i.e., the normal, larger brick), respectively, describe a block of writing (“small brick”) on a columnar line circumscribed by intervening spans of uninscribed text (“large brick”).³⁶ Two dominant patterns prevail. Deuteronomy 32, and 2 Samuel 22 and Qoheleth 3:2–8 in some manuscripts, is written with two blocks of writing per columnar line with a large intervening span of uninscribed space (i.e., “white space”). In all succeeding lines (as one moves down the folio page) inscribed and uninscribed spaces are aligned with one another so that the basic perception of the page is of “two rows of writing separated by a row of blank spaces” (see fig. 3).³⁷ The rabbis called this kind of layout “small brick over small brick, large over large” and prescribed it specifically for Deuteronomy 32 (*b. Meg.* 16b; *Sof.* 1.11; 12:8–12; 13:1) and for the two lists in Joshua 12:9–24 and Esther 9:6–9 (*b. Meg.* 16b; *j. Meg.* 3:7). A second kind of layout, what the rabbis

called "small brick over large brick, large over small" (the governing image is that of "the interlocking construction usual with bricks and ashlar masonry"),³⁸ is stipulated for the poems in Exodus 15 and Judges 5 (see *b. Meg.* 16b; *j. Meg.* 3:7; *b. Menaḥ* 31b; *Sof.* 12:8–12). These are written in a single column of text the width of the folio page (leaving room for margins) with columnar lines composed of either (portions of) three blocks of writing ("small bricks") divided by two large spans of space ("large bricks") or (portions of) two blocks of writing separated by one large span of space. The two columnar line types then alternate as they run down a page (fig. 4).

As J. Kugel suggests, the motivation for these Talmudic prescriptions likely lies in the unusual nature of the layout of these poems.³⁹ When poems are specially formatted in MT (and they are not always so formatted), as in the three poetic books of Job, Proverbs, and Psalms (תנ"ך), the usual practice is to lay out the writing in two wide columns (per page) instead of the three narrower columns that are otherwise used throughout Masoretic manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible, with the columnar line composed (prototypically) of two blocks of writing separated (where appropriate or possible) by space (of varying lengths, see figs. 5–6).⁴⁰ With some exceptions (e.g., Ps 119), the blocks of writing with intervening spacing follow in a running manner across and then down the column. The dominant resulting visual effect is to have columns of text with lines consisting of blocks of writing typically punctuated or broken by a (variable) span of space.⁴¹ Amid the differences in layout, observe that both this *usual* Masoretic practice for formatting poems in the "תנ"ך books," which is not commented on, and the explicitly prescribed *unusual* practice for writing out the several festival songs agree in their presentation of columnar lines consisting of blocks (or bricks) of writing (i.e., the *ʾārīḥīn*) segmented by spans of space—a graphic strategy of representation that matches well P. Zumthor's explicitly nonchirographic characterization of the structural equivalent of the written verse line in oral poetry as "an autonomous unit between what comes before and what after."⁴² This segmented block of writing is the focus of the special formatting of poetic texts in MT that otherwise remains graphically undifferentiated in the columnar line of MT's prevailing running format.

Modern scholarship (i.e., since Lowth) has mostly failed to evolve a consistent and transparent manner of referencing this segmented block of writing and its perceived phenomenological equivalent in nonspecially formatted (portions of) manuscripts (following Lowth), what I have so far (mostly naively) referenced as the line. There are multiple reasons for this, but two stand out for me: one, the lack, already mentioned, of an indigenous vocabulary for the phenomenon, and two, the general failure of scholars to approach the study of biblical poetry from within an explicitly articulated theory of poetry. In

the final analysis, my own preference for the term *line* as a means of designating this entity, though admitting a long-standing scholarly tradition of use within biblical studies and having linguistic currency in English usage, is a choice made in deference to the discipline of Western literary criticism and its enabling vocabulary and theoretical machinery. The larger project, of which this chapter is a piece, is undertaken as a specifically literary endeavor, and thus, not surprisingly, my terminology and the informing theory on which I draw are reflective of this broader orientation. More significantly, a chief benefit of speaking specifically about *lines* of biblical verse comes precisely in bringing the phenomenal entity that the term *line* itself denotes into critical view, allowing it to be theorized and thus available to the discourse of criticism. Terminology is not neutral. It already disposes one to a particular orientation—in this case, to seeing lines and in seeing them to be positioned to probe their rhythmic, semantic, and structural significance. The lack of attention to date paid by scholars to this (lineal) entity within biblical poetry has everything to do with its critical invisibility. Theory—whatever its nature—matters because it provides the necessary framework for such entities to take on meaning, to be conceptualized as something worthy of our cognitive attention. Part of my insistence on reading biblical poems *as poems*, as all other poems are read across the world, within a specifically theorized literary paradigm is to leverage the insight and knowledge enabled by the theoretical machinery of literary criticism that, among other things, gives us the very concept of a line of verse.

This lack of indigenous terminology and general disinterest in theory has meant that commentators over the centuries have tended to use whatever terms seemed convenient to hand, and as a consequence, a bewildering and sometimes confusing array of terms for the segmented block of writing called an *ʾariaḥ* by the Masoretes appears in the literature on biblical Hebrew verse. In fact, if some of the more idiosyncratic terms are bracketed out (e.g., Sievers's *Reihe* "row"), almost all the most common terms in current use derive from ancient Greek or Latin words for the verse line. I want to briefly survey these terms, in the first place to get straight what and how they reference, and second, to provide a basis from which to judge their fit for talking about biblical verse.

Stichos. There is a whole set of terms (*stich*, *stichos*, *hemistich*; *mono-/di-/tristich*; *stichometry*, *stichographic*) that features (etymologically) the Greek nominal *stichos*, most literally a term for a row or line of objects (soldiers, numbers; a course of masonry) and, when applied to writing, signifying a line of verse (prototypically) or prose.⁴³ In the latter sense, the significance of the Greek term in any given context depends on the nature of the writing in view, whether it is prose or poetry, and if the latter, how the line is divided, metrically or by sense. By convention Greek prose is written out continuously in narrow,

squared-off columns of writing, separated by uniform intercolumns of un-inscribed space (fig. 7). The individual lines of writing are relatively short (e.g., often only fifteen to twenty-five letters for well-written texts of history, oratory, or philosophy) and have no inherent structural significance, that is, line-ends fall where they may depending on the predetermined width of the column. By contrast, for Greek (stichic) verse, which is metrical, the line of writing is meaningful, and its length, except in very early papyri (e.g., Timotheos, see fig. 8), which are copied in continuous lines like prose, is determined usually by the meter; that is, it is normally the length of the complete metrical verse (e.g., hexameter, iambic trimeter). Each (metrical) line of verse, then, is written out on a corresponding (columnar) line of writing, and the resulting columns of writing tend to be wider than corresponding columns of prose, in order to accommodate the natural lengths of the meters (e.g., hexameter verse has the longest lines, consisting of sixteen syllables and thirty-four to thirty-eight letters), and have ragged right-hand margins (fig. 9).⁴⁴ An alternative method of line division, at least for lyric verse and the lyric components of drama (i.e., the choral passages), develops in the Hellenistic period with Aristophanes of Byzantium (ca. 258–180 BCE). He initiates the practice of measuring the length of the verse line by sense-divisions known as *kōla*—the prosodic subparts of a particular meter (e.g., the Greek hexameter is often composed of four such *kōla*)—and of allotting to each *kōlon* a separate line (or *stichos*) of writing.⁴⁵ But whether divided by meter or colometry, the distinguishing feature of written Greek verse from the Hellenistic and Roman eras is its stichic layout, that is, the stich. The Greek *stichos* was used to reference the biblical verse line at least as early as Origen (ca. third century CE), who uses the term in a Scholion on Psalm 119:1.⁴⁶ Its English derivative, *stich* (or *stichos*), continued in prominence as the usual term for a "line of verse" into the early 1960s in biblical scholarship;⁴⁷ it still can be found in the literature today.

Kōlon. Perhaps the most widely used term today for the verse line in biblical scholarship is *colon* (pl. *cola*; also *bi-/tricolon*).⁴⁸ S. Mowinckel, writing in the early 1960s, credits the rise of the term to the ambiguity caused by the use of both "stichos" and "hemistichos" (lit. a "half-line" and "half-verse"; from Gk. *hēmistichion*)⁴⁹ to designate a "line of verse."⁵⁰ And certainly one of its key virtues is the clarity of reference that it provides with respect to biblical verse—there is no question as to the entity so designated, or as to the grouping of two or three such entities (bicolons and tricolons, respectively). Nonetheless, the term harbors within itself its own potential for ambiguity.⁵¹ Like *stich* (and the like), *colon* is of Greek derivation (*kōlon* "limb, member").⁵² The Greek term most concretely designates a literal limb or member of a body (especially a leg) but gets extended early on in Greek rhetoric (e.g., Aristotle) to designate a

clause (member!) of a *periodos* and then as a subpart—a single prosodic component—of a particular meter.⁵³ Certain kinds of cola are even “capable of being used as verses (short periods)” in their own right,⁵⁴ and with Aristophanes of Byzantium, as noted, the practice of lineating lyric poetry according to the shorter metrical cola begins. Sometime prior to Jerome (ca. 347–420 CE) the latter writing practice was applied to the prose works of rhetoricians, such as Demosthenes and Cicero,⁵⁵ and then Jerome used this “new style of writing” in his translation of Isaiah (and also of Ezekiel) as an aid for reading—though he made sure to annotate his writing practice lest there be confusion as to the (posited) underlying medium of Isaiah:

Let no one who has seen the Prophets written down in stichs (Lat. *versibus*) judge them to be in verse (Lat. *metro*) among the Hebrews and at all similar to Psalms or the works of Solomon. But, because it is customary to write Demosthenes and Cicero *per cola et commata* (even though both of them wrote prose and not verse [Lat. *versibus*, lit. “in verses, stichs”]), we too (out of concern for a usable text for readers) have used the new style of writing to make divisions in the new translation.⁵⁶

Subsequently (esp. from the fifth through ninth centuries CE),⁵⁷ other scribes would emulate this “new style,” extending its manner of layout to other books of the Bible. Hesychius of Jerusalem (ca. 433 CE) is a good example. He treats the Greek text of the Book of the Twelve in this way, writing them out *per cola et commata*.⁵⁸ And M. B. Parkes exemplifies the practice with a folio page from the eighth-century Latin Codex Amiatinus in which the Psalms have been copied (*per cola et commata*) like a prose text: “Here the Psalms are laid out *per cola et commata*: each new verse, and each of its constituent parts, begins on a new line close up to the margin. When the unit of sense is too long to be accommodated in a single line the remainder is inset on the next line and the inseting is continued until the end of the unit.”⁵⁹ Jerome distinguishes his new practice of copying from the stichic layout of verse in the Bible (e.g., Psalms), and Hesychius of Jerusalem, too, knew of manuscripts in which some poetic books of the Bible (e.g., Psalms, Job, Song of Songs) were divided into *stichoi* (*outō meristhenta tois stichois*).⁶⁰ The lengths of the verse lines in the poetical books in Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, for example, are such that the scribe could only manage two columns of writing instead of the usual three or four (see fig. 17).⁶¹

Versus. There are a host of words used by biblical scholars for *verse* that derive from Latin *versus* (or its congeners, e.g., *verse*, *versicle*, *verset*, *half-verse*), which, as is evident in J. Treat’s foregoing translation of Jerome, is simply the

comparable Latin word for Greek *stichos*.⁶² And as noted, both Latin *versus* and *versiculus* feature prominently in Lowth's *Praelectiones*, and Gregory mainly translates both of them literally as "verse(s)" but occasionally as "line(s)" as well (e.g., "the initial letters of each line [*versus* in the original Latin] or stanza following the order of the alphabet").⁶³

Membrum. The English term *member* (from Lat. *membrum*) in its now rare sense signifying "a division or clause of a sentence" (*OED*) retains a peculiar currency in biblical studies due entirely to the enormous influence of Lowth's conceptualization of *parallelismus membrorum* ("parallelism between the members") in Lecture XIX of the *Praelectiones*. As A. Baker observes, Lowth's use of *membrum* with this sense "is straight from the usage of classical rhetoricians like Cicero."⁶⁴ In fact, Lowth's initial diagnosis of parallelism in the *Praelectiones* is offered chiefly in rhetorical and grammatical terms. This is not surprising since for Lowth "the sententious style" was "the primary characteristic of the Hebrew poetry,"⁶⁵ by which he means that "perpetual splendour of the sentences, and the accurate recurrence of the clauses" that "seem absolutely necessary to distinguish the verse."⁶⁶ Indeed, there is, writes Lowth, "so strict an analogy between the structure of the sentences and the versification, that when the former chances to be confused or obscured, it is scarcely possible to form a conjecture concerning the division of the lines or verses, which is almost the only part of the Hebrew versification that remains."⁶⁷ So when in Lecture XIX Lowth turns to his celebrated analysis of parallelism, the accent is on the "conformation⁶⁸ of the sentences," which, Lowth says, "consists chiefly in a certain equality, resemblance, or parallelism between the members of each period; so that in two lines (or members of the same period), things for the most part shall answer to things, and words to words, as if fitted to each by a kind of rule or measure."⁶⁹ This way of phrasing his analysis gives Lowth a vocabulary (member, clause, period, proposition) for elaborating the rich play of parallelism in biblical poetry that if always staged by the verse line nonetheless routinely focuses and features subparts of the line: elements—words, phrases, and clauses—that are not necessarily coterminous with the line. The confusing factor comes in the "sententious style" of this poetry, the tendency, as Lowth notes well, for "the close of the verse generally" to fall "where the members of the sentences are divided,"⁷⁰ that is, where "every member constitutes an entire verse," and for "periods," too, to divide "into verses, most commonly couplets, though frequently of greater length."⁷¹ Gregory already blurs the distinction between member and line by his occasional glossing of Lowth's *membrum* with an added "line" in translation, as in "frequently one *line* or member (the Latin only has *unum membrum*) contains two sentiments."⁷² In this, Gregory is likely influenced by Lowth's later (and more mature) articulation

of his understanding of parallelism in the *Preliminary Dissertation*, which Gregory actually cites.⁷³ There more attention is given expressly to the framing function of the line—"the correspondence of one Verse, or Line, with another, I call Parallelism."⁷⁴ Still, nowhere in either the *Praelectiones* or the later *Isaiah*, as far as I can discern, is there any confusion on Lowth's part in his use of member/*membrum* and verse/line/*versus*/*versiculus*.

In a way the situation with respect to the terminology just reviewed is well understood. Most handbooks dutifully register (and lament) the terminological diversity and confusion and seek to define and chart the various terms in use and to get straight the phenomenon in view. The latter is no small accomplishment and should be noted, emphasized, and appreciated. Despite the wide array of terms and the competing, mostly tacit, theoretical orientations to understanding verse, there is no real confusion as to the underlying phenomenon that is the focus, namely, what Origen calls a *stichos* and the rabbis (however restrictively) an *'ariaḥ* or "small brick." No matter the terminology, then, this segmented block of language and its recurrent patterns of grouping in biblical poetry are both well in view. What is presented in the body of the essay consciously builds on this wide-ranging consensus understanding of the field. I intend to name and to flesh out this understanding, to probe it, elaborate it, enfold it within and think it through from a particular theoretical perspective, but the phenomenon itself—the periodic and recurring interruption or checking of the flow of sense, sound, and rhythm and its resultant segmentation in language that the Masoretes, for example, sometimes wrote out in small bricks (or chunks) of writing circumscribed by spans of spacing—is well known.

The chief problem with all of these terms is obsolescence. *Member* may be the most glaring example in the lot. If in Lowth's day it was entirely intelligible as a designation for a sentential clause, today that sense is all but lost,⁷⁵ and with it the ability to fully appreciate the original discriminating force of Lowth's terminology. As a result, *member* becomes simply, and mistakenly, a rough equivalent for *line*, *stich*, *verse*, and *colon*.⁷⁶ *Colon*, too, in the sense of a lineal unit, only rarely occurs outside of a few narrow fields of academic study—and even there, as in biblical studies, it is not always apparent that scholars totally appreciate the significance of the term, a situation that provides part of the punch to R. Alter's lampoon of the term as "inadvertently calling up associations of intestinal organs or soft drinks."⁷⁷ To varying degrees similar kinds of obsolescences, in fact, infect the rest of the terms as well. None of them in current English usage naturally, idiomatically denominates a line of verse. For that, as Brogan and R. J. Getty note in their treatment of "stichos" in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*,⁷⁸ "the noun form now used is 'line.'"

Also problematic for many of these terms, as Alter notices,⁷⁹ is the misleading links they have with classical, and especially Greek, versification. So, for example, the distinctions between *stichos*, *kōlon*, and *komma* (a shorter colon or even a division of a colon),⁸⁰ when confined to Greek and Latin works, whether prose or verse, are plain enough. Each involves writing in lines, literally in *stichoi*. The difference is in whether the lines are intentionally divided (as they are not in prose) and if so how they are measured, whether according to meter (the default mode for writing out stichic verse) or sense (as *per cola et commata*). But when these terms are transposed, first, into a discussion of how biblical verse is written out in Greek (and Latin) translation, and then, applied directly to biblical Hebrew poetry itself, the potential for confusion and ambiguity is great. Since biblical Hebrew verse is nonmetrical, there is no meaningful distinction between *stichos* and *kōlon*, as the two become synonymous designations for writing in lines (as opposed to the continuous writing of prose in a running format);⁸¹ nor is there much to differentiate graphically the practice of writing verse in lines because it is verse from the practice of writing prose *per cola et commata* (as in Jerome) as an aid for reading (out loud)—the formatting looks alike in both, hence Jerome's notice in his *Preface to Isaiah* (though obviously other means beyond formatting persisted for distinguishing verse from prose, at least for Jerome). There is also the seemingly ever-present ghost of meter that gets smuggled in under cover of this terminology and that never has been entirely banished from the field's collective imagination. And in the case of a term like *colon*, used in literary discussions from the earliest Greek grammarians and layered with a variety of distinctive if overlapping connotations, a lack of precision accompanies its general usage in reference to biblical poetry.⁸²

In the end, the only term in English with currency both in common usage and in the vernacular of literary critical discourse is *line*. As it happens, it is also a term with a pedigree in English-language discussions of biblical verse, at least dating back as far as the Lowth of the *Preliminary Dissertation* and *Isaiah*.⁸³ Indeed, the terminological shift from the Latin of the *Praelectiones* (*versus*, *versiculus*) to Lowth's native English in *Isaiah* (verse and line) is striking. In a very literal way, then, "Verses properly so called," for the Lowth of *Isaiah*, are most specifically "laid out according to a scale of division" and thus fall "into regular Lines."⁸⁴ *Line* is the preferred English gloss for and terminological heir to the Greek *stichos*, as Brogan and Getty indicate, and also for most of the other terms I have reviewed here, including the Latin *versus* and the Greek *kōlon*. And it is, on my accounting, the Hebrew (and West Semitic even) phenomenological equivalent to the Greek *stichos* (following Origen) and the like that are in view here. What is potentially most discomfiting about employing

the term *line* in descriptions of biblical poetry is the transparency with which the term foregrounds its etymological origins in a culturally specific manner of writing out verse, *in lines*, a manner that, at the same time, mostly fails to align closely with the normal conventions for formatting biblical verse in the received manuscript traditions (MT). The classically derived terms (e.g., *stich*, *colon*, *verse*), with the one exception (*member*), similarly emerge out of chirographic contexts and name practices of writing. In fact, as they are all ultimately rooted in the Greek tradition, they, like the English line, refract the same basic convention for writing out verse, in lines. The vocabulary of the Talmud—*ʿariaḥ* and *lēbēnā*—is just one more example of this pattern of denomination. It, too, is thoroughly chirographic in etymology, differing from that of the classical sources, for example, only by dint of the underlying formatting practices that give rise to this specific way of naming—Masoretic conventions foregrounding blocks of writing set amid intermittent spans of uninscribed space, as opposed to the stichic formats of ancient Greek practice. Language, of course, always comes clothed in cultural and historical specifics. It cannot be otherwise. Therefore, we should not become overly distracted by the English term's (or its classical forebears') etymological privileging of one kind of (culturally specific) writing practice. That the interrupting segmentation so characteristic of verse eventually, belatedly gets named for the way it comes to be written out, always in light of culturally specific practices, is a fact (or accident) of history and not terribly surprising or remarkable.

J. Longenbach opens his wonderfully stimulating *The Art of the Poetic Line* by defining poetry as “the sound of language organized in lines” and then says of the line, “More than meter, more than rhyme, more than images or alliteration or figurative language, *line* is what distinguishes our experience of poetry *as poetry*.”⁸⁵ Longenbach's focus here is not on terminology per se but on the phenomenal reality his chosen terminology (“line”) makes visible, namely the shapes, cadences, sounds, and even pulses of thought that the line gives expression to and organizes. I, too, am ultimately interested in this underlying phenomenal reality in biblical verse, by whatever name it may be called. But in calling it specifically a line, in talking about lines as opposed to colons or stichs, for example, we are ushered unmistakably into a world of poems and into a way of talking about poems. This is not insignificant. If what is at stake in the (phenomenal) line is the very sensibility of biblical poetry, then it is the term *line* itself that today in English most readily reveals that fact, that disposes us to encounters with the likes of Longenbach (and Lowth) where lines matter and get theorized. Terminology, as I have said, is never neutral. The English term *line*, with its history of usage by biblicists and its currency in the spoken language as well as in the specialized vernacular of

literary criticism, I judge, offers the best chance for coming to know what is at stake in the discussion that follows and for evolving a meaningful and even illuminating way of talking about it, indeed, of having that discussion. The line, phenomenologically and terminologically, is what finally distinguishes our experience of biblical poetry *as poetry*.

Manuscript Evidence for the Line

The question of the line's existence arises, in the first place, because of the lack both of original autographs for ancient biblical poems (only copies of copies have survived) and of a vibrant and contemporary indigenous commentary tradition (like that of fifth-century Athens) that could inform us explicitly about such things as literary norms and conventions, and because the manuscript evidence that has survived does not uniformly deploy metascript conventions for marking poetic line structure. Thus, it must be admitted from the outset that the line in biblical verse will forever be contestable and in need of arguing. Nonetheless, when considered broadly and cumulatively, there is much that points positively and empirically to the existence of the verse line in biblical Hebrew poetry.

I begin by considering the manuscript evidence that does exist. Historically, the visual representation of verse through distinctive page layouts was the leading indicator that something like biblical Hebrew poetry even existed. O'Connor rightly stresses that the breakthrough by Lowth and his eighteenth-century contemporaries came about chiefly because they were "*looking* and not listening."⁸⁶ That is, they took their cues *visually* from the manuscript evidence available to them, mainly as embodied in the medieval Masoretic manuscripts.⁸⁷ I have already described both the usual pattern of verse formatting that prevails in the three "נ"מא books" and the unusual patterns commented on explicitly by the rabbis in reference to the various festival songs. In addition, the Masoretes also employ a different accentual system (*ṭ'mym*) in the three books of Job, Proverbs, and Psalms. In actual practice, the scope of what gets specially formatted by the Masoretes is larger still, as Kugel elaborates: "Throughout the Middle Ages, it was common practice for Jewish scribes to use some sort of special spacing at least for the "poetic" books of Psalms, Proverbs, and Job... moreover, isolated songs like the Song of Asaph (1 Chron. 16:8–36), and occasionally Lamentations... as well as lists such as Eccles. 3:2–8, 1 Sam 6:17, Ezra 2:3ff., 1 Chron. 24:7ff., 25:9–14, etc. received special spacing."⁸⁸ To summarize, then, the medieval Masoretic manuscripts, through a variety of spatial, columnar, and even lineal formats and a distinctive system of accents, often graphically distinguish a not insubstantial portion of the biblical Hebrew

poetic corpus, *though normally the Masoretes wrote out verse in the same manner as prose, in a running format* (e.g., the Latter Prophets).

Special spacing and layout also appear in many copies of the poetic texts of the Bible recovered from the Judean Desert and surrounding environs, some of these predating the earliest medieval Masoretic manuscripts by almost a millennium (e.g., 4QDeut^b, ca. 150–100 BCE; 4QpaleoJob^c, ca. 225–150 BCE). E. Tov, in his recent survey of this material,⁸⁹ isolates some thirty scrolls⁹⁰ in total that exhibit some form of special layout for poetic texts (4QRP^c [Exod 15]; 1QDeut^b, 4QDeut^c, 4QDeut^d, and 4QpaleoDeut^r [all only Deut 32; if other chapters are preserved, they are in a running format]; 1QPs^a [only Ps 119]; 4QPs^b,⁹¹ 4QPs^c, 4QPs^d (parts of Ps 104); 4QPs^e, 4QPs^h, 4QPsⁱ, 4QPs^w, 5QPs; 8QPs; 11QPs^a and 11QPs^b [only Ps 119]; 5/6HevPs; MasPs^a, MasPs^b, 4QJob^a, 4QpaleoJob^c; 4QProv^a; 4QProv^b; 3QLam; 5QLam^b; 2QSir; MasSir; 4QMessianic Apocalypse).⁹² As he observes, in every instance but one (4QMessianic Apocalypse), stichographic format in the scrolls from Qumran is reserved for biblical texts only (including Ben Sira).⁹³ The range of poetic texts specially formatted is roughly consistent with what is found in the later Masoretic manuscripts, though at Qumran the formats utilized are more variable and an equal number⁹⁴ of manuscripts exists of (often the same) poetic compositions that are set in a running format (4QExod^c and 4QExod^d [with respect to Exod 15]; 4QDeutⁱ XII [Deut 32]; 1QPs^a [except Ps 119]; 1QPs^b; 1QPs^c; 4QPs^a; 4QPs^c; 4QPs^d [col. III.5 onward]; 4QPs^e; 4QPs^f; 4QPs^j; 4QPs^k; 4QPs^m; 4QPsⁿ; 4QPs^o; 4QPs^p; 4QPs^q; 4QPs^r; 4QPs^s; 4QPs^u; 4QPs89; 4QPs122; 6QpapPs [?]; 11QPs^a and 11QPs^b [except Ps 119]; 11QPs^c; 11QPs^d; 2QJob; 4QJob^b; 4QLam^a; 4QCant^{a-c}; 5QLam^a; 6QCant; 11QapocrPs)⁹⁵—that is, special formatting for poetic texts apparently was not required at Qumran.⁹⁶ Tov describes three principal systems for formatting poetic texts at Qumran. The first utilizes the line of writing as a means for framing the verse line, either with one verse line per columnar line (e.g., 4QDeut^c; 4QPs^b; 4QPsⁱ; cf. Deut 32 in the Greek P.Fouad inv. 266; 4QDeut^q [contains a combination of one and two lines per columnar line]; see fig. 2)⁹⁷ or two (e.g., 4QDeut^b; 4QPs^b (cols. 34–35); 4QPs^g; 4QPs^h; 11QPs^a [only Ps 119]; 4QJob^a; 4QpaleoJob^c; 4QMessianic Apocalypse). Both varieties lack (perceptible) line-internal spacing.⁹⁸ The second system recognized by Tov entails two verse lines written on one line of writing, with a space (of uninscribed text) separating the two verse lines and roughly centered in the middle of the columnar line; the first line starts from a straight right margin (e.g., 4QpaleoDeut^r [only Deut 32]; 1QPs^a [only Ps 119]; 4QPs^c,⁹⁹ 5QPs; 8QPs; 5/6HevPs; MasPs^a; 4QProv^a; 3QLam; 2QSir; MasSir; see fig. 11). These tend to give the appearance of the “bi-columnar arrangement” typical of Deuteronomy 32 in the Masoretic tradition.¹⁰⁰ In the third system, space is inserted

between the individual verse lines (as in the second system) but is not centered on the line of writing, that is, it may occur at different points along the columnar line (e.g., 4QProv^b; MasPs^b; see fig. 12). This system resembles (to greater and lesser degrees) the variable Masoretic spacings in the "ת"מ" books."

In general, the specially formatted poetic texts at Qumran do not show any further distinction in their columnar arrangement. All literary compositions, whether verse or prose, from the Judean Desert are organized in columns of writing of more or less uniform dimensions.¹⁰¹ This follows the general practice evident in both Egyptian papyrus rolls and cuneiform clay tablets—in neither instance does the columnar arrangement vary with regard to the nature of the discourse being copied (figs. 13–14).¹⁰² By contrast, for example, it (eventually) becomes conventional in Greek papyrus rolls from the Hellenistic and Roman eras to display prose in narrower, squared-off columns of writing, separated by uniform intercolumns of uninscribed space (fig. 7), and poetry in wider columns of writing to accommodate the natural lengths of the (metrical) verse lines, which are almost always longer than lines of prose (the hexameter line—sixteen syllables, thirty-four to thirty-eight letters—is the longest verse line), with ragged right-hand margins (fig. 9).¹⁰³ The major variation of note in the specially formatted manuscripts from the Judean Desert comes in copies in which the columnar line frames a single verse line. These columns are (comparatively) very narrow (ca. 3.7–4.5 cm; cf. 4QPs^b; fig. 2).¹⁰⁴

Two brief observations may be offered with respect to the "special layout" of poetic texts at Qumran. First, it exists—poetic texts are formatted as verse (in a variety of ways)¹⁰⁵ already almost a millennium before the earliest Masoretic manuscripts. Second, not all verse compositions at Qumran receive special formatting. Why this is so, as Tov observes, is not entirely clear.¹⁰⁶ However, such variation does effectively demonstrate that verse (*qua* verse) at Qumran is ultimately separable from the technological formatting it receives in writing at Qumran, that is, specific psalms, for example, retain a recognizable (though variable) compositional identity whether or not they also happen to be arranged in writing with a special layout. Two examples may be offered by way of illustration. Psalm 102:18–29 is formatted with one verse line per column line in 4QPs^b (fig. 2) and as a running text in 11QPs^a (see fig. 15a and b). And in B19a (i.e., the Leningrad or St. Petersburg Codex, fig. 16) space (of varying dimensions) is used to delimit the several verse lines in a columnar line. A similar kind of formatting diversity is exhibited with regard to Psalm 18:39–41, which is set as a running text in 11QPs^d and with two verse lines per columnar line with intervening medial space in 4QPs^c; and two still different formats are attested in the Masoretic tradition, depending on where the psalm appears, as a part of the Psalms or as a part of Samuel. In both instances, the

words and phrases of the psalms remain relatively stable, and the poetic works they enact are identifiably the same.

There are several other early manuscript traditions in which the verse line is graphically displayed. The Samaritan Pentateuch exhibits certain idiosyncrasies in page format but also shares broad similarities with both the medieval Masoretic and Qumran traditions in laying out the poems in Deuteronomy 32 and Exodus 15.¹⁰⁷ Significantly, in the Samaritan Pentateuch the latter conventions are extended to include the list of blessings in Leviticus 26:3–13 and the poems in Numbers 23–24 (23:7–10, 18–24; 24:3–10, 15–24). Septuagint manuscripts (including some of the oldest uncials, such as Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and Alexandrinus) and papyrus fragments frequently arrange portions of the biblical poetic corpus *per cola et commata*.¹⁰⁸ These regularly include the same poetic texts that receive special formatting in the Hebrew manuscript traditions (especially Psalms, Job, and Proverbs but also a part of Deuteronomy 32 in P.Fouad 266b). However, in several instances, the Greek manuscripts provide our earliest examples of special formatting for several biblical poetic collections, including most spectacularly that of the Song of Songs (see fig. 17).¹⁰⁹ Both Jerome and Hesychius of Jerusalem, as noted, explicitly state their awareness of verse formatting for Psalms, Proverbs, Qoheleth, Job, and Song of Songs. Treat cites the much earlier commentary on the Song by Hippolytus of Rome (ca. second century CE) in which the stichometry of the Song is tallied.¹¹⁰ He goes on to remark, “examination of the manuscripts at our disposal [Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and Alexandrinus, among others] gives some comfort to the notion that the Song of Songs was arranged *per cola et commata* from a very early period.”¹¹¹ The general practice answers well to Parkes’s description of the layout of the Psalms in Codex Amiatinus: each line of verse is written on a corresponding manuscript line, and should the verse line need to be carried over to a second manuscript line, the latter is indented.¹¹² What is especially significant about the stichographic layout of the Song in the various Septuagint manuscripts—and it should be stressed that Septuagint manuscripts without line divisions of the Song are also preserved (e.g., 952, Venetus)—is that while the lineation generally (though not always by any means) follows the sense divisions suggested by the Masoretic tradition of accentuation,¹¹³ the Masoretes do not themselves distinguish line structure in the Song visually through special page layout. And thus, the Greek tradition substantially expands the graphic evidence for verse formatting of this poetic collection from the Bible.

The later Greek and Latin manuscript traditions also preserve evidence for the stichographic arrangement of some poetic portions of the Hebrew Bible. But after Jerome, of course, the simple fact of a text laid out in lines according to sense cannot be taken on its face as evidence of verse. Jerome himself makes

this clear in his insistence on the prosaic nature of Isaiah despite his choice of layout schemes. Still, one might choose to dispute this contention, for example, as most contemporary scholars now do (following Lowth), in which case, given the "sententious style" of biblical verse, one may—and in fact should—choose to consult Jerome's sense-based lineation when attempting to discern the shape and form of individual lines of verse in any of the Isaianic traditions. In other words, even post-Jerome *per cola et commata* layouts, regardless of their originating motivations, ultimately are not irrelevant for understanding and appreciating biblical Hebrew poetic line structure.

In sum, it may be fairly (empirically) stated that the several manuscript traditions I have reviewed here—Masoretic, Qumran, Samaritan Pentateuch, and the various Septuagint manuscripts and papyri fragments—display through columnar and stichographic formats a substantial portion of what contemporary scholars, post-Lowth, recognize as verse in the Bible—a small bit of Third Isaiah (Isa 61:10–62:9) in 1QIsa^a (a manuscript otherwise formatted as a running text) containing extra spacing that displays the poetry's line structure (fig. 18)¹¹⁴ shows that even verse from the Latter Prophets, at least on this one occasion, could receive special formatting in antiquity. Moreover, in terms of coverage (i.e., what gets formatted; compare especially the Qumran and Masoretic traditions), of the nature, content, and extent of the verse line itself, and even of the techniques of formatting (i.e., the use of spacing and the line of writing—obviously leaving aside the Greek and Latin manuscripts in this instance as they reflect entirely different cultural conventions for writing out verse), these traditions exhibit "within large bounds" noticeable similarities and a rough consistency.¹¹⁵ O'Connor's estimation that these traditions of writing biblical "verse as line units" are the "greatest source" for our knowledge of biblical Hebrew verse¹¹⁶ and, more specifically, of the verse line itself is surely right, and, if anything, deserves underscoring. Indeed, we in the West are so accustomed to seeing lineated verse in writing that it is easy to forget that neither the graphic display of verse in writing nor the specific convention of *lineation* ("division into lines," *OED*) are themselves inevitable or ubiquitous. Special formatting for verse in writing, whatever its nature, is a "metascript" convention of the kind that is "always incorporated into a writing system."¹¹⁷ Such conventions, though peripheral to a writing system's main visual component, the grapheme, nonetheless, provide readers with important, supplementary information like direction of writing, word division, punctuation, paragraphing, and so on that is "essential to the writing system."¹¹⁸ The material particulars of any "metascript" convention, when and if they eventually occur, whether they are deliberately designed or arise incidentally, will vary with time, place, and script tradition. That is, "metascript" conventions, like the script traditions and writing systems of which they

are a part, are themselves artifactual in nature. They are technologies,¹¹⁹ practices (of writing) that arise and take on meaning only locally, in culturally and historically specific environments. Therefore, whether or not verse structure, for example, is given explicit, graphic representation in any particular writing system is not a given but falls out (if it falls out) as a matter of local practice.

The usual practice of displaying verse in writing (or print) by setting individual verses on a line of their own most familiar to those of us in the West is a case in point. It has a specifiable genealogy. The convention may be traced back through the various European vernacular traditions (e.g., Old English, Old French) to Medieval Latin models, which in turn were themselves borrowed and adapted from Greek forerunners.¹²⁰ In fact, the practice of writing hexameter verse with each verse on a line of its own appears to date as far back as the eighth century BCE (e.g., “Nestor’s cup,” see fig. 19).¹²¹ However, there is no reason to think that this manner of representation is the only way to display verse in writing. To the contrary, even the most cursory of surveys reveals not only a bewildering array of spaces, points, wedges, lines, and other forms of punctuation (individually or in combination) used to display verse in known writing systems but also writing systems in which verse is *not* distinguished (graphically) from prose. Three examples may be offered by way of illustration. Consider, initially, one of the earliest writing traditions, Mesopotamian cuneiform, where special formatting conventions for verse were in place from an early period and predate the advent of any written Greek conventions by millennia (see fig. 14). B. R. Foster describes the typical means for representing Akkadian verse: “each line tends to be divided into halves, sometimes indicated, especially in later manuscripts, by a blank space in the middle of the [columnar] line.”¹²² Also a “colon,” consisting of either a diagonal or vertical wedge, or even two vertical wedges, could be used to separate the two poetic lines on a columnar line. Other times, one line per column line was used, with additional spacing between signs when the number of words was insufficient to fill up the line completely.¹²³ Here, then, there is a use of lineation for formatting verse, but it has an entirely different profile from the Greek one-verse-line-per-column-line convention and is often combined with a use of spacing and/or extra cuneiform wedges. The presence of the latter (cuneiform wedges) further makes apparent the always informing imprint of local custom and culture on the practices of writing, including layout. It is the materiality of the writing surface (on clay) and the manner of impression (with a reed stylus) that leads to the employment of cuneiform wedges as verse dividers.

Medieval Latin verse conventions offer another telling example. Here it is the variability and plurality of the conventions that are of note, especially since their defining feature, the one verse per line format, is so obviously indebted to Greek

forerunners.¹²⁴ Parkes identifies three basic layouts for medieval Latin poetry, in each the individual verse was copied on a line of its own: hexameter verse was aligned against the left margin, with one verse following another without any formal grouping; in elegiac couplets, the first line of the couplet (hexameter) was aligned against the margin, and the second (pentameter) was indented; in lyric stanzas, the first line was set against the margin, and all remaining lines were indented.¹²⁵ Variations on these basic layouts abound, and all may get overlaid with multiple forms of punctuation (e.g., points marking the end of verses, braces joining rhyme words, a *littera notabilior* heading individual verses or stanzas (fig. 20)—Latin hymns, for example, were often written continuously across the manuscript line with only points separating the individual verses.¹²⁶

A final example by way of illustration is the customary Egyptian practice of writing everything (including verse) continuously across the writing space.¹²⁷ Sometimes Egyptian verse compositions are graphically distinguished. For example, there is a Third Intermediate Period copy of the *Teaching of Amenemope* in which "each line of verse was written on a separate line," and red "verse points" would be used (often inconsistently) in some verse compositions (beginning already in the Middle Kingdom but becoming widespread only in the New Kingdom) to mark the ends of lines¹²⁸—the latter practice even influenced the writing down of two Akkadian compositions in Egypt.¹²⁹ But in Egyptian "texts were generally written continuously."¹³⁰ And this is normative—"stichic writing is extremely rare."¹³¹ The "tendency *not* to distinguish verse from prose in writing," as R. Parkinson and S. Quirke observe, "is far from unique" (see fig. 13).¹³² Old English verse as a rule "is copied in long lines across the writing space" (fig. 21), with no consistent scribal distinctions for marking verse (at least until very late, when some line-end pointing is evidenced, e.g., Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 11). The use of nonlinguistic spatial and graphic conventions as aids for decoding and reading in Old English manuscripts develops only gradually over time.¹³³ The same is true of the ancient Levant. Verse compositions were not initially set out with any kind of special formatting, at least as far as we can tell. Admittedly, there are only two major corpora of verse currently extant, the Ugaritic mythological texts (ca. thirteenth century BCE; fig. 22) and the collection of Aramaic proverbs attached to the figure of Ahiqar (Elephantine, ca. fifth century BCE; fig. 23). There are also several display inscriptions (ink on plaster), those from Deir 'Alla (KAI 312; 800–750 BCE; fig. 24) and one from Kuntillet Ajrud (KA 4.2; ca. 800 BCE; fig. 25), whose patently high literary registers (which contrast noticeably with the workaday register of West Semitic epigraphs) are suggestive of West Semitic and biblical poetry more generally.¹³⁴ Neither, however, manipulates space or the like systematically for the specific purpose of displaying line format. In the case of Ugaritic, although

the normal practice is to write verse, like prose, continuously across the column, there are some notable exceptions, such as CAT 1.10 and, to a lesser extent, CAT 1.23 (cf. CAT 1.96, 161), where the verse line corresponds to the columnar line on the tablet.¹³⁵ Otherwise only in the so-called Carpentras stele (KAI 269; fig. 26), an Aramaic funerary inscription of the fifth or fourth century BCE, do we have a kind of graphic display of line format in West Semitic prior to Qumran. Even in Greek papyrus rolls, early finds, such as the Timotheos papyrus (ca. fourth century BCE; fig. 8),¹³⁶ suggest that Greek verse was not always written out in the one-verse-per-line format that eventually became the norm for Greek stichic verse and ultimately was taken over by the European vernacular traditions during the Middle Ages and Renaissance.¹³⁷

The large point to be made in light of these several examples is that there is no zero-sum, universally applicable standard for the presentation of verse forms in writing. It simply does not follow that verse will inevitably be distinguished in writing, let alone lined out, for example, in the fashion of Greek metrical verse. This suggests that any notation of line structure in the biblical manuscript traditions is noteworthy. The manuscript traditions' major blind spot—the Latter Prophets—remains somewhat obscure, though it is probably not inconsequential that prophetic verse is treated all but uniformly—recall the small bit of Third Isaiah (Isa 61:10–62:9) that is specially formatted in 1QIsa^a. And on all current evidence, it appears that poetic texts (verse) from the biblical period, like their prosaic counterparts, were written normatively in a running format—that Egyptian practice was the principal model for writing on papyrus and leather at this time and in this region cannot be overemphasized.¹³⁸ Moreover, that the lack of visual distinctiveness in the writing down of verse (vis-a-vis prose, for example) is no impermeable barrier to the ultimate apprehension and appreciation of the underlying medium also needs underscoring. The addition of spatial and graphic cues, such as the special layout schemes in evidence for poetic texts from the Judean Desert or in the various Masoretic manuscripts, surely assisted readers in decoding by providing additional interpretive information.¹³⁹ But just as surely written poetic texts are readable as “verse” even in the absence of such spatial cues. As Brogan, for example, emphasizes, line structure in verse is not only or even primarily a graphic entity, something which must always be made manifest in writing, on the page. To the contrary, the poetic line has rhythmic, sonic, and even syntactic structure such that its shape is ultimately apprehensible no matter the manner of presentation.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, allowances are also to be made for the different kinds of demands that different kinds of formatting require of readers. What is required in those cases in which verse compositions are not laid out with any special format is a different kind of readerly contribution,

one that involves bringing a great deal of predictive knowledge and expertise to the reading process.¹⁴¹ So ancient readers (mostly scribes) of biblical poems, who still would have been profoundly shaped by a predominantly oral world and thus their reading practices mediated (to a large extent) by voice,¹⁴² would not have come to these kinds of texts *de novo*, but would have encountered them within a context of expectations, knowing, for example, the (general) content and relevant poetic conventions,¹⁴³ and thus the presence of parallelism, a relative terseness or concision of phrasing, uniformity and simplicity of clause structure, and other (nongraphic) indicators of biblical verse, like the presence of rhyme in some medieval Latin lyrics written in a running format, would have been sufficient "to arouse a reader's expectations of a poetic text."¹⁴⁴

Spacing as a means for graphically distinguishing line units, as at Qumran and in the later Masoretic tradition, only begins to evolve during or just before the Hellenistic period, out of specifically (later) Aramaic scribal practices.¹⁴⁵ Therefore, that large portions of the poetic materials from the period—especially the poems (or parts of poems) that eventually get embedded in the Former Prophets or amassed in the various collections of the Latter Prophets—should continue to be found in a running format is perhaps unremarkable.¹⁴⁶ Even at Qumran not only are there versions of biblical verse in running format but nonbiblical verse is copied as a rule in a running format (e.g., 4QH^{a-f}; 4QShirShabb^{a-f}; the one exception is 4QMessianic Apocalypse, written with two verse lines per columnar line). Moreover, it seems likely that Kugel is correct in his assumption that at some point the rabbinic discussion interfered with and eventually blocked the evolution and possible expansion of the special formatting traditions to biblical Hebrew verse more generally.¹⁴⁷ One notices here and there in the various manuscript traditions signs of analogical extension of the practice(s) of spacing and lineation (e.g., Ben Sira at Qumran and Masada, Lamentations in B19a [Leningrad Codex], Num 23–24 in the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Song in OG), but ultimately the scribal convention as to what of biblical verse gets specially marked (for whatever reason) becomes more or less fixed as described above. Finally, however important is page layout for our scholarly ability to discern the facticity of biblical verse—and it is absolutely crucial—the belatedness (quite literally so with respect to all extant manuscripts of biblical poems) of these practices, their "epiphenomenality,"¹⁴⁸ requires underscoring. What Parkes says of classical antiquity, that "there is little evidence before the sixth century [CE] that . . . punctuation . . . originated with the author,"¹⁴⁹ would surely apply as well to the scribal cultures of the ancient Near East. That is, even were archaeologists to uncover, say, a seventh-century manuscript containing biblical poems, not only would it likely have been written in a running format, given the prevailing scribal conventions

of the day (e.g., KA 4.2), but even were there to be some graphic indications of verse (e.g., the use of the columnar line to frame a parallel couplet, as in the Carpentras stele or the display of several of the proverbs from the Ahiqar collection) those would still not likely go back to a presumptive “author.”¹⁵⁰ The widespread assumption on the part of many biblical scholars that the graphic display of the verse line in writing is inevitable, somehow inherent to the very nature of verse itself, is more naive than anything else, reflective, I suspect, of the strong (and mostly unexamined) literate bias of contemporary Western scholarship, but at any rate running counter to all expectations based on current understandings of ancient scribal and authorial practices.

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TO CONCLUDE THIS section’s survey of manuscript evidence for the verse line, I want to return to Lowth, for importantly this eighteenth-century divine did not share the rabbis’ convention-bound inhibitions as to what of the biblical text could and could not be specially formatted.¹⁵¹ As O’Connor recognizes, one of Lowth’s truly remarkable achievements comes precisely in expanding what is to be considered verse in the Bible.¹⁵² The magnitude of this accomplishment is not to be missed. O’Connor emphasizes the latter by observing on the one hand the “unusual selection of verse” that is “presented in lineation” in the manuscript traditions known to Lowth and on the other hand the lack of even a “hint” that “the poetic character of the rest of Hebrew verse was recognized.”¹⁵³ And yet Lowth, in what remains a mostly compelling way, manages “to observe the crucial phenomena *and* conceive a vocabulary with which to describe them.”¹⁵⁴ The logic that undergirds Lowth’s project of expansion is analogy. He reasons that “whatever plain signs or indications there yet remain of metre, or rhythm, or whatever else it was, that constituted Hebrew Verse”¹⁵⁵ in the so-called poetic books (Psalms, Proverbs, Job)¹⁵⁶ similarly should be construed as signs of verse in other parts of the Hebrew canon. This logic is verbalized explicitly in a number of places, and is especially elaborated and exemplified in the *Preliminary Dissertation*.¹⁵⁷ Here, however, I want to return to the visual component of Lowth’s argumentation remarked on briefly earlier, a dimension that has not always received adequate attention. One of the distinctive features of Lowth’s three Latin editions of the *Praelectiones* (1753, 1763, 1775) is the inclusion in them of the Hebrew text of the biblical passages he cites throughout.¹⁵⁸ The following exemplifies his practice (see fig. 1a–b):

מקולות מים רבים
 אדירים משברי ים
 אדיר במרום יהוה:
 (Ps 93:4)¹⁵⁹

יאבד יום אולד בו
והלילה אמר חרה גבר:
(Job 3:3)¹⁶⁰

כמים הפנים לפנים
כן לב האדם לאדם:
(Prov 27:19)¹⁶¹

יערף כמטר לקחי
תזל כטל אמרתי:
כשערים עלי דשא
וכרביים עלי עשב:
(Deut 32:2)¹⁶²

In each case, the Hebrew is unvocalized and right adjusted, and each verse line is set on a single line on the page—the latter convention, no doubt, inspired by the formatting of the Greek and Latin poets Lowth had read and studied since his school days at Winchester College and by the English verse conventions of his own day. (Lowth after all was a poet himself.)¹⁶³ These examples come from the three poetical books and Deuteronomy 32, and the line breaks in them match the spacing typically used to divide lines in the Masoretic manuscripts of these books, as may be judged by comparing, for example, the appropriate folios in the Aleppo Codex and B19a.¹⁶⁴

This is Lowth's practice throughout the *Praelectiones*, even—and this is the significant bit—in those cases where the Masoretes did not use any special kind of spacing or stichographic format. That is, Lowth extends his line format to passages that he establishes on other grounds (e.g., from the presence of parallelism) as poetic. So, for example, his first cited poetic text (coming in Lecture IV) is Genesis 4:23–24, which he sets in lines contrary to what he would have seen in any of the Masoretic manuscripts to which he had access or even in Michaelis's printed edition (see fig. 27):¹⁶⁵

עדה וצלה שמען קולי
נשי למך האזנה אמרתי:
כי איש הרגתי לפצעי
וילד לחברתי:
כי שבעתים יקם קין
ולמך שבעים ושבעה:

In this manner, Lowth extends the graphic presentation of biblical Hebrew verse beyond anything known at that time. It would still take roughly another