

## **QOHELETH 1:3-11: PROSE OR POETRY? <sup>1</sup>**

**Wong Tin-sheung**

SOAS, University of London  
Thornhaugh Street Russell Square  
London WC1HOXG  
U.K.

### **Introduction**

The many questions raised by the Book of Qoheleth involve not only the concepts that exist in the book, which diverge from traditional Israelite religious thought,<sup>2</sup> but also certain grammatical problems that reflect various features of the Hebrew language in a later period.<sup>3</sup> The

---

<sup>1</sup> This forms part of a term paper the author wrote while attending the Biblical poetry course at Jerusalem University College. Here the author mainly follow Pardee's methodology. The content has been revised slightly.

<sup>2</sup> Many scholars have suggested that the unfamiliar concepts in the Book of Qoheleth reflect the influence of Egypt, Babylon and Greece. See Whitley 1979:152-75.

<sup>3</sup> Dahood argues that the author of the Book employed a Phoenician orthography and way of using words, while Ginsberg suggests that it is written in Aramaic. Most scholars suggest that the language of the Book belongs to a later, post-Exilic period, although Fredericks (1988) proposes a pre-Exilic period.

Book of Qoheleth seems to have been ignored in the study of poetry.<sup>4</sup> Lowth (1969:175), for example, maintains that it has a very few of the relevant characteristics of poetry.<sup>5</sup> Though many scholars have claimed that the book is a prose, some do believe that a large portion of the book is poetry.<sup>6</sup> The purpose of this paper is to analyze Qoheleth 1:3-11 and to examine its distinctive features from various aspects. All these aspects will be the criteria to assess whether Qoheleth 1:3-11 is a poem or not.

### Quantitative Analysis<sup>7</sup>

Since many scholars emphasize the semantic, grammatical or syntactical parallelisms in poems, quantitative analysis might seem to have a minor role to play in the study of poetry.<sup>8</sup> However, there are various methods of measuring each colon: word count, syllable count, consonant count and verse-unit count.

---

<sup>4</sup> Thus no examples from the Book of Qoheleth are quoted in the works of Gray (1972), Geller (1979) or O'Connor (1997).

<sup>5</sup> In his own words (1969:174), "The style of this work [Book] is singular; the language is generally low, I might almost call it mean or vulgar; it is frequently loose, unconnected, approaching to the incorrectness of conversation; and possesses very little of the poetic character."

<sup>6</sup> In the historical development of interpretation, the Books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Lamentations together with Qoheleth have been considered to be composed in metrical verse. (For more details, see Kugel 1981:168-70, 188, 208, 223, 228.) Silberschlag (1975:339) points out that the authors of Job and Qoheleth are poets. Von Rad (1972:121) holds a similar view and Ogden (1987:30) explicitly calls this section a poem. For discussion on the question of prose versus poetry, see Whybray 1989:31.

<sup>7</sup> Here the Pardee's study of quantitative analysis of poetry is followed. For more details about the contribution of each method of counting, see Pardee 1988:4-5 n.7-9.

<sup>8</sup> The author ignores the stress theory of meter in this paper for two reasons. First, stress is usually at the end. Blau (1993:32) suggests that in the last period of stress change in Biblical Hebrew, there was a strong inclination towards stressing on the last syllable. (For more details about the development of stress in Biblical Hebrew, see Blau 1993:30-37.) The meter in a Hebrew poem is therefore less significant than it is in a poem in other languages. Second, there are limitations on stress in Hebrew, such as avoidance of two contiguous stressed syllables, although this is not consistently observed (See Qoh. 18d, "תִּקְלָא אֶתְּ"). Lambdin (1973:207-208) points out three ways of avoiding it: proclisis, retraction of stress and conjunctive daghesh. Conjunctive daghesh can be found elsewhere after the word מָה in Qoh 1:3, 9ab. The author suspects that the proclisis marked with *maqpef* in 1:10b is רָאָה־זָה, not רָאָה־זָה as now shown in the Bible. Whether this is correct or not, there is no significant occurrence in Qoh. 1:3-11, regardless of Gordis' suggestion (1968:203) that the dominant meter is the four-beat stich in v. 5 and 6, the three-beat stich in v. 3, 4, 7.

Verse	Word Count	Syllable Count	Consonant Count	Vocable Count	Verse-Unit Count
3	5//3	11//9	18//12	34//25	3//3
4	4//3	6//10	12//14	21//29	4//3
5	4//3//3	11//7//5	15//12//9	31//20//16	4//2//3
6	3//3//4//4	5//6//9//10	10//11//15//16	17//19//29//28	2//2//4//3
7	5//3//4//4	11//8//11//7	18//12//18//12	34//25//32//24	3//3//3//4
8	3//4//4//4	8//7//7//11	13//13//14//14	24//23//22//32	2//3//3//3
9	2//2//2//2//5	4//4//6//5//10	6//8//8//8//16	12//13//15//16//30	2//2//2//2//4
10	3//4//3//3	6//6//8//9	10//11//12//12	21//19//24//25	3//3//3//3
11	3//3//4//3	7//10//8//9	15//15//14//13	24//28//26//25	3//3//3//3

Table 1: Quantitative analysis of Qoheleth 1:3-11

Table 1 shows that verses 5, 6, 7 and 8 are characterized by reasonably good parallelism. In terms of word count, verses 5, 6 and 7 are well-balanced, and verse 8 also displays good parallelism with respect to consonant count. In vocable count, verses 6 and 7 have the pattern of ABAB. In verse-unit count, the parallelism is more significant, especially in verses 10-11.

## Parallelism

### *Repetitive Parallelism*

Pardee (1988:194) suggests that there are two kinds of repetitive parallelism: verbatim repetitive parallelism, which involves the exact forms of the same root being used; and weak repetitive parallelism, which involves different forms of the same root being used. As Table 2 shows, Qoheleth 1:3-11 has a high incidence of repetitive parallelism. Of the total of fifty roots used in this poem, only twenty-two roots, that is less than half, occur only once of the twenty eight roots which occur more than once, and about half (thirteen) occur more than twice. Despite the frequent occurrence of minor elements, particles such as ו, ל and על etc, verbatim repetitive parallelism can be found in verses 4 and 5, in which the words הָיָה and הַשְׁמֵשׁ respectively are repeatedly used. The word הָיָה used in verse 7 and the verb הָיָה in lines 10b and 10c can be classified in this group. There is weak repetitive parallelism in verse 9, where the suffix and prefix conjugation of the verbs הָיָה and עָשָׂה are repeated.

These kinds of parallelism are found in four types of environment: (1) Colon or half-line parallelism: occurring within a colon; (2) Regular parallelism: occurring within a bicolon; (3) Near parallelism: occurring immediately in adjacent bicola; (4) Distant parallelism: separated by at least one bicolon. (Pardee 1988:187) In Qoheleth 1:3-11, more than thirty words are used repeatedly. The distribution of words according to type of parallelism is summarized in Table 3, noting in which verse each occurs. The preposition ל is not discussed for two main reasons. Firstly, this preposition has various functions in the text, such as combining two elements with the preposition in Line 3a and combining the infinitive constructs in lines 8b and 8c. Lumping together the various roles of ל as a case of parallelism would be an unreasonable oversimplification. Secondly, due to its different positions in various verses, ל can be assumed as a grammatical device rather than a poetic one.<sup>9</sup> A similar example is the conjunctive *waw*, which is used inconsistently in the text. It is difficult to imagine any convincing argument that this is a poetic device.<sup>10</sup>

As Table 3 shows below, colon parallelism and near parallelism do not play an important role in Qoheleth 1:3-11. Those we do find are all cases of verbatim parallelism, such as דור in line 4a, תשמש in line 5a, ס(ו)בב in line 6c (colon parallelism), בא in lines 4a and 5a, and הנחלים in lines 7a and 7c (near parallelism). There are no cases of weak repetitive parallelism. Regular and distant parallelisms are the major structural feature of the text. Sometimes verbatim repetitive parallelism such as

<sup>9</sup> In his study of Ps. 111, Pardee (1992:123) admits that he is unable to explain the structure of the composition created by repetition of particle. No pattern of distribution appears meaningful because "the prepositional repetitions in regular distribution tend to be followed by semantically dissimilar nouns and the prepositional phrases tend to have different syntactic functions." Kugel (1981:22) suggests that the two different prepositions ל and מ in lines 8c and 8d can be construed as parallelism of "prepositional alternation". This seems unconvincing if the criteria of parallelism are determined only by preposition. According to him, parallelism is determined necessarily by the same pattern of negative particles, different conjugations of verbs and infinitive constructs, but not solely by two prepositions. Furthermore, compared with Qoh 6:3 where מן is attested after the verb תשבע, this ל may have a special function here. (See Schoors 1992:192) If this is true, the so-called "preposition alternation" parallelism is inappropriate and not applicable.

<sup>10</sup> Although the author guesses that the conjunctive *waw* is used in line 4a for reasons of quantitative harmonization (word count 2//2, syllable count 3//3 and consonant count 6//6), no other example can be found in this text. Also, the use of the conjunction at the beginning of line 5a is strange, which is unlike in other verses. The omission of *waw* between סבב סבב in line 6c is difficult to explain.

---

תחַתּוּשׁ in lines 3b and 9c is involved, sometimes weak repetitive parallelism such as the verb from the root עָשָׂה in lines 9c and 9d is involved. In Qoheleth 1:3-11, almost every verse shows the characteristics of distant parallelism.<sup>11</sup> This means that the structure is interposed throughout the passage, and thus one verse is closely related to others not only horizontally by colon or regular parallelisms, but also vertically by near and distant parallelism. The verb from the root of הִיָּה, for instance, is used in different forms (different conjugations with different numbers) throughout verses 9 to 11, not only with regular parallelism in lines 9a and 9b, but also with distant parallelism in various cola (9a, 10c and 10d, 11b, 11c and 11d).

---

<sup>11</sup> The proof may be that these verses form a whole unit.



Type of Parallelism	Repetitive Words	Verse
Colon	dwr	4a
	hšmš	5a
Regular	sbb	6c
	ʿml	3ab
	sbb	6bcd
	ym	7ab
	hlk	7cd
	dbr	8ab
	ʔ	8bcd
	hyh	9ab
	ʿšh	9cd
	hyh	10cd, 11bcd
Near	bʔ	4a, 5a
	nḥlym	7ac
	mh	9ac
	hwʔ	9bd
	zkrwn	11ac
Distant	mh	3a, 9ab
	kl	3a, 7a, 8a
	š	3b, 7c, 9abcd, 10a, 10d, 11d
	tḥt hšmš	3b, 9c
	hwlk	4a, 6ac, 7acd
	ʿlmym	4c, 11c
	zrḥ	5ad
	mqwm	5c, 7c
	ʔl	5c, 6ab, 7ac,
	hwʔ	5d, 9ab, 10b
	šm	5d, 7d
	mʔl	7b, 8d
	dbr	8a, 10a
	rʔh	8c, 10b
	hyh	9ab, 10cd, 11bcd

Table 3: Repetitive parallelism in Qoheleth 1:3-11

### Semantic Parallelism

3 מה־יִהְיֶה לְאָרְצָם בְּכָל־עֲמֻלוֹ שֶׁיַּעֲמֹל תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ:  
F E D C B A

4 הוֹר הַלֶּךְ וְדוֹר בָּא וְהָאָרֶץ לְעוֹלָם עֹמֶת:  
E D C B' A B A

5 וְזָרַח הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וּבָא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וְאֶל־מְקוֹמוֹ שׂוּאֵף זֹרַח הוּא שֵׁם:  
C' B' A" D C B A' B A

6 הוֹלֵךְ אֶל־דְּרוֹם וְסוֹבֵב אֶל־צָפוֹן סוֹבֵב סָבֵב הוֹלֵךְ הָרוּחַ וְעַל־סִבְיָתָיו שָׁב הָרוּחַ:  
D A" B" D A A' A' B' A' B A

7 כָּל־הַנְּחָלִים הַלְכִים אֶל־הַיָּם וְהַיָּם אֵינָנוּ מֵלֵא אֶל־מְקוֹם שֶׁהַנְּחָלִים הַלְכִים שֵׁם הֵם שָׁבִים לְלֶכֶת:  
B B' A'C" B A C' E D C C B A

8 כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים יָגֵעִים לֹא־יִוָּכַל אִישׁ לְדַבֵּר לֹא־תִשָּׁבַע עֵין לְרֹאוֹת וְלֹא־תִמְלֵא אֵין מִשְׁמַע:  
E" D" C" E' D' C' E D C B A

9 מִדֵּה־שִׁהֲיָהּ הוּא שִׁהֲיָהּ וּמִדֵּה־שֹׁנְעָשָׂה הוּא שֹׁנְעָשָׂה וְאֵין כָּל־חֶדֶשׁ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ:  
G F E D C' B A' C B A

10 יֵשׁ דְּבַר שִׂיאֵמֶר רְאוּהֶיָה חֶדֶשׁ הוּא כְּבָר הָיָה לְעֹלָמִים אֲשֶׁר הָיָה מִלְּפָנָיו:  
K H J I H G F E D C B A

11 אֵין זְכָרוֹן לְרֵאשִׁינִים וְגַם לְאַחֲרָנִים שִׁהֲיָהּ לֹא־יִהְיֶה לָהֶם זְכָרוֹן עִם שִׁהֲיָהּ לְאַחֲרָנָה:  
C" E G B C" E' E C' D C B A

Table 4: Semantic analysis of parallelism

Turning to semantic parallelism, antonymous pairs are found in verses 5, 6, 7 and 11. In verse 4, two Qal active participles, בָּא and הֶלֶךְ (goes // comes) form an antonymous parallelism. The same interpretation can be applied to verse 5, וּבָא and זָרַח (rises // sets),<sup>12</sup> verse 6, הוֹלֵךְ and סוֹבֵב or שָׁב (goes // returns) and verse 7 הַלְכִים and שָׁבִים (goes // returns). Two other kinds of antonym are the extremity of two poles, as in verse 6, אֶל־דְּרוֹם and אֶל־צָפוֹן (to the south and to the north) and in verse 11, לְרֵאשִׁינִים and לְאַחֲרָנִים (the earliest and the later), and simply negation of the verb in verse 11, לֹא־יִהְיֶה and יִהְיֶה.

To use Geller's categories, a series of לֹא־יִוָּכַל and לֹא־תִשָּׁבַע and לֹא־תִמְלֵא comes under the category of "list", a type of paradigm in which members are related by an understood common denominator, but are not

<sup>12</sup> Here are two Qal suffix conjugations. The author would like to argue that these two actions, the rising and setting of the sun (east and west), together with line 6a and 6b, the wind blowing to the south and returning to the north, form a merism, including all the text in between.

interchangeable logically. In verse 9, the pairs, *מִהַשְׁהִיָּה* and *וּמִהַשְׁנַעֲשָׂה* and *שִׁיעֵשָׂה* and *שִׁיהִיָּה* and *שִׁיעֵשָׂה* and *שִׁיהִיָּה*, belong to the same category. Under the category of "part-whole relationship", a type of paradigm in which one parallel member is an individual constituent of the other, *דְּרוֹם* (the south) and *צָפוֹן* (the north) can be considered as individual members of the whole concept, *סְבִיבֵתוֹ* (its circuit) in verse 6. The reverse pattern is found in verse 8, in which *אִישׁ* (a man) is a whole but *עֵין* (an eye) and *אָזֶן* (an ear) are parts. Another category is "merimus", a statement of extremes, which may imply everything that comes in between. Verse 8, where *לְדַבֵּר* (to speak), *לְרֹאוֹת* (to see) and *מִשְׁמַע* (to hear) imply every kind of human activity comes under this category. The last category, "pronoun", in which the term in line b is a pronoun and the term in line a is its antecedent, can be applied to verse 5, *הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ* and *הוּא* (the sun // it), verse 7, *הַמַּיִם* and *הֵם* (the rivers // they) and verse 11, *לְאַחֲרָיִים* and *לָהֶם* (for the later generations // for them).

The author proposes a further category, which pairs a noun of place and its substitute constituent, an adverb of place, *שָׁם*. Significant pairs of this type can be found in lines 5b and 5c and 7c and 7d. The structural parallelism is shown below:

<i>זוֹרַחַּ הוּא שָׁם</i>	<i>וְאֵל־מְקוֹמוֹ שׁוֹאֵף</i>	5b, 5c
Adverb of place	place	
<i>שָׁם הֵם שְׁבִים לְלֶכֶת</i>	<i>אֵל־מְקוֹם שֶׁהַנְּחָלִים הַלְּכִים</i>	7c, 7d
Adverb of place	place	

According to Watson (1995:276-78), there are three kinds of repetition: repetition-initial, end repetition and immediate repetition. These kinds of repetition are fully utilized in Qoheleth 1:3-11: repetition-initial is found in 4a, 8b, 8c, 8d; end repetition in 1:5a; and immediate repetition in 9 and 11.<sup>13</sup>

### *Grammatical Parallelism*

#### Micro-analysis

Pardee (1990:255) points out that there is no satisfactory system for grammatical micro-analysis. Here his methodology is simply to parse

<sup>13</sup> Watson (1995:278) points out that these two verses are less clear.

the text arranged as poetic lines. Parallelisms in a bicolon are indicated by boldface type and those in a colon by italics. If parallelisms occur both in the colon and in the bicolon, both boldface and italics are used.

From Table 5, good grammatical parallelism can be seen to occur in every verse, with the sole exception of verse 3,<sup>14</sup> which is an introductory rhetoric question. From verses 4 to 6, the pattern of expression is clear.

- 4 noun + G participle  
noun + G participle  
noun + (prep n) + G participle
- 5 G sc + noun  
G sc + noun  
(prep n) + G participle + noun
- 6 G participle + noun  
G participle + noun  
G participle + noun  
prep n + G participle + noun

The colon semantic parallelisms in Qoheleth 1:3-11 that occur only in these three verses are grammatically similar or identical,<sup>15</sup> all involving morphological differentiation to some degree. In lines 4a and 4b, the gender in 4a is masculine (דֹר) whereas a feminine word is used in line 4b (הַאֲרִיזָה); thus the genders of the following two participles are different. Furthermore, the substantive, "the sun" (הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ), is replaced by the third person independent pronoun (הוּא) in verse 5, a so-called "noun // pronoun" parallelism by Berlin's term (1985:33). The verb, זָרַח, in line 5a is a Qal suffix conjugation, but it is changed to a Qal active participle (זֹרֵחַ) in line 5b, a phenomenon Berlin (1985:36) calls "qtl // yqtl" parallelism. This kind of contrast in tense can also be found in verses 8-9, which are expressed in their own grammatical structure:

<sup>14</sup> However, there is a weak repetitive parallelism, בְּכֶל-עֲמָלוֹ שֶׁיַּעֲבֹל.

<sup>15</sup> In line 5a, the form, זָרַח, of the Qal suffix conjugation is identical to that of the Qal active participle in line 4a. Is it possible that the verb may be "vocalized" as Qal active participle as well, by changing from זָרַח to זֹרֵחַ in order to construct the whole unit as parallelism, though Isaksson (1987:93) rejects this idea? If this assumption is correct, these three verses are of identical grammatical parallelisms. Nevertheless, they are grammatically the same in each verse, both from the perspective of colon (lines 4a and 5a) and from the perspective of bicolon (lines 4a, 4b, 5a, 5b, 6a, 6b, 6c and 6d).

- 8b אָל + Qal prefix conjugation 3ms + noun (ms) + D infinitive construct  
 c אָל + Qal prefix conjugation 3ms + noun (ms) + G infinitive construct  
 d אָל + Niphal prefix conjugation 3ms + noun (ms) + G infinitive construct  
 9a interrogative pronoun + relative pronoun + Qal suffix conjugation 3ms  
 b pronoun + relative pronoun + Qal prefix conjugation 3ms  
 c interrogative pronoun + relative pronoun + Niphal suffix conjugation 3ms  
 d pronoun + relative pronoun + Niphal prefix conjugation 3ms

The structure is distinctive in both verses. 8b and 8d begin with אָל together with prefix conjugation and infinitive construct. The only difference is the stem. The same phenomenon occurs in 9a and 9b with Qal and 9c and 9d with Niphal, from the widened perspective of 9ab // 9cd (contrast in conjugation, Berlin 1985:36). However, 9ab and 9cd are parallel on their own, that is, 9a // 9b, 9c // 9d. The stems in these two parallels are the same, but the conjugations are different: suffix conjugation with prefix conjugation in Qal (9ab) and Niphal (9cd) respectively (contrast in tense, Berlin 1985:35). Thus, it can be concluded that 8bcd form a tricola parallel (8b // 8c // 8d) and 9abcd form two bicola parallels (9ab // 9cd) that consist of two internal pairs of bicola parallels (9a // 9b, 9c // 9d). Watson (1995:279-80) suggests that the reason for this kind of frequent change in tense and conjugation is avoidance of repetition. Loader (1979:10) suggests that 1:11 is a chiasmic unit: *ziqrōnA - rīšōnīmB - 'ahārōnīmB - ziqqārōnA*.

### Syntactical analysis

The system of analysis in Table 6 is developed by Barbara Kaiser.<sup>16</sup> She divides clauses into four elements: subject or substantive (S), verb (V) or predicate (P), object (O) and adverbial modifier (M). A distinctive feature of Qoheleth 1:3-11 is that the subject is repeated in one colon or in a bicolon. For example, the word דִּיר is repeated in line 4a, הַשֵּׁמֶשׁ in line 5a within one colon and the word הָרְדִיחַ in lines 6c and 6d, in a bicolon. Object is never used in main clause. There are only two instances where a direct object is used: one is the relative clause in verse 3b, the other is the quotation after the imperative in verse 10b.

<sup>16</sup> Barbara Kaiser applied this system in her doctoral study of Lamentations. (For more details, see Pardee 1988: 40 n 50.) Apart from different names for various terms, her division is in fact identical to that of Collins's. Collins uses NP<sup>1</sup> and NP<sup>2</sup> instead of subject and object respectively (1978:26).

3	int pron + n.ms / prep + def n.ms / prep + n.ms + n.ms + 3ms suff r pron + G pc 3ms / prep / def n.ms	3	מודיתרון לארם בכל עבדו שעמל פתח השמש:
4	<b>n.ms / G act ptc ms / conj + n.ms / G act ptc ms</b> conj + def n.ms / prep + n.ms / G act ptc fs	4	הוה הלק ודור פא הארץ לעולם עמדת:
5	conj + G sc 3ms / def n.ms / conj + G sc 3ms / def n.ms conj + prep + n.ms + 3ms suff / G act ptc ms / G act ptc ms / pron 3ms / adv	5	זורה השמש ובה השמש ואל מקנבו שאף זורה הוא שם:
6	<b>G act ptc ms / prep + n.ms</b> <b>G act ptc ms / prep + n.ms</b> G act ptc ms / G act ptc ms / G act ptc ms / def n.ms conj + prep + n.fp + 3m suff / G act ptc ms / def n.ms	6	הלק אל ידום וסכב אל יצפון סוכב סכב חלק ירח ועל סכביו שב ירח:
7	adv + def n.mp / G act ptc mp / prep + def n.ms conj + def n.ms / adv + 3mp suff / adj ms prep + n.ms / r pron + def n.mp / G a ptc mp adv / pron 3mp / G act ptc mp / prep + G inf const	7	כל יתנולם הלכים אל יתום היום אינו קלא אל מקום שתנולם הלכים שם הם שבים ללכת:
8	n.ms + def n.mp / adj mp neg part + G pc 3ms / n.ms / prep + D inf const neg part + G pc 3ms / n.ms / prep + G inf const conj + neg part + N pc 3ms / n.ms / prep + G inf const	8	כל יתברים יעום לא ייביל איש לירב לא יתשבע עין לראות ולא תקלא און קשמע:
9	int pron + r pron + G sc 3ms pron / r pron + G pc 3ms conj + int pron + r pron / N sc 3ms pron / r pron + N pc 3ms conj + adv / n.ms + adj ms / prep / def n.ms	9	מוד שנתה הוא שנתיה הוא שנתיה ואין כל ירחש פתח השמש:
10	adv / n.ms / r pron + G pf 3ms G inv.ms + dem pron / adj ms / pron 3ms adv / G sc 3ms / prep + n.mp r pron / G sc 3ms / prep + n.mp const + 1cp suff	10	יש דבר שאמר ראו זה חדש הוא כבר היה לעמים אשר היה מקימי:
11	adv / n.ms / prep + adj mp conj + adv / prep + adj mp / r pron + G pc 3mp neg part + G pc 3ms / prep + pron 3mp / n.mp prep / r pron + G pc 3mp / prep + adj fs	11	אין זכרון לראשונים נמ לאחדים שנתיה לא יתיה להם זכרון עם שנתיה לא יתיה:

Table 5: Grammatical analysis in Qoheleth 1:3-11

Verse and line	Verb / Predicate	Subject	Object	Modifier
3a		mh- ytrwn		Pdm bkl- <sup>c</sup> mlw
3b	y <sup>c</sup> ml		š	tḥt ḥšmš
4a	hwlk b <sup>ʔ</sup>	dwr wdwr		
4b	<sup>c</sup> mdt	wh <sup>ʔ</sup> rš		l <sup>c</sup> wlm
5a	wzrh wb <sup>ʔ</sup>	ḥšmš ḥšmš		
5b	šw <sup>ʔ</sup> p			w <sup>ʔ</sup> l-mqwmw
5c	zwrḥ	hw <sup>ʔ</sup>		šm
6a	hwlk			<sup>ʔ</sup> l-drwm
6b	wswbb			<sup>ʔ</sup> l-špwn
6c	swbb sbb hwlk	hrwḥ		
6d	šb	hrwḥ		w <sup>c</sup> l-sbybtyw
7a	hlkym	kl-hnhlym		<sup>ʔ</sup> l-hym
7b	<sup>ʔ</sup> ynnw ml <sup>ʔ</sup>	whym		
7c	hlkym	šnhlym		<sup>ʔ</sup> l-mqwm
7d	šbym	hm		llkt šm
8a	yg <sup>c</sup> ym	kl-hdbrym		
8b	l <sup>ʔ</sup> -ywk1	<sup>ʔ</sup> yš		ldbr
8c	l <sup>ʔ</sup> tšb <sup>ʔ</sup>	<sup>c</sup> yn		l <sup>ʔ</sup> wt
8d	w <sup>ʔ</sup> -tml <sup>ʔ</sup>	<sup>ʔ</sup> zn		mšm <sup>c</sup>
9a	š hyh	mh		
9b	š yhyh	hw <sup>ʔ</sup>		
9c	š n <sup>c</sup> šh	wmh		
9d	š y <sup>c</sup> šh	hw <sup>ʔ</sup>		
9e	kl-ḥdš tḥt ḥšmš	w <sup>ʔ</sup> yn		
10a	dbr y <sup>ʔ</sup> mr	yš š		
10b	r <sup>ʔ</sup> h ḥdš	hw <sup>ʔ</sup>	zh	
10c	hyh			kbr l <sup>c</sup> lmym
10d	hyh	<sup>ʔ</sup> šr		mlpnnw
11a	zkrwn l r <sup>ʔ</sup> šnym	<sup>ʔ</sup> yn		
11b	wgm l <sup>ʔ</sup> hmym yhyw	š		
11c	l <sup>ʔ</sup> -yhyh			lhm zkrwn
11d	yhyw			<sup>c</sup> m š l <sup>ʔ</sup> hmh

Table 6: Syntactical analysis in Qoheleth 1:3-11, according to Kaiser

Verse 9 is a significant instance of the phenomenon of syntactic parallelism. The subjects<sup>17</sup> in the first four cola, מָה and הוּאֹ form an ABAB sequence with two pairs of four verbless predicates "...מָה שֶׁ" and "...הוּאֹ הוּאֹ" (What is that... it is that). The word הוּאֹ becomes a pleonastic pronoun that has a verbless substantival predicate. Four clauses, in which two verbs הוּאֹ and עָשָׂה are used, can act as a nominalization of relative clauses. The analysis below shows that the syntactical structures in various cola in verse 9 are identical.

Predicate		Subject		
Predicate	Subject	Predicate	Subject	
Subject + Verb שֶׁהָיָה	הוּאֹ	Subject + Verb שֶׁהָיָה	מָה	9ab
שֶׁעָשָׂה	הוּאֹ	שֶׁעָשָׂה	וְמָה	9cd
Adverbial Modifier תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם:		Predicate	Subject	9e
		כָּל-חַדָּשׁ	וְאֵינִי	

Syntactical relationships are shown in Table 7 below. In Qoheleth 1:3-11, discounting certain verbless predicates in the sequence subject (substantive) plus predicate, all verbal clauses follow the order of Hebrew syntax: verb plus subject, with the exception of verses 4 and 7. In these two verses, the concept of "marked topic" by Buth's terminology can be applied.<sup>18</sup> In verses 4ab, two subjects, הַדּוֹר and הַאֲרָצָה, that precede the verb may be identified as marked topics. This analysis can also be applied to verse 7ab. Sometimes, we find an adverb particle or adverbial phrase at the beginning of the clause, as in lines 5b (וְאֵל-מְקוֹמוֹ), 6d (וְעַל-סִבִּיבֹתָיו), 7c (אֶל-מְקוֹמֵם) and 7d (שָׁם). All of these function as marked foci.

<sup>17</sup> It may also be called "substantives" in the case of substantival predicates. In Tables 6 and 7, the cover term "subject" is used for simplicity.

<sup>18</sup> Buth (1992:83-86) studies Psalm 51 and distinguishes the concept of "marked topic" from "marked focus" in the poetry of Biblical Hebrew. He assumes that "preverb word order" is used for both focus and topic. According to him, marked focus is "a choice to use a marked, special structure to highlight a salient constituent of a clause for reasons of completion, contrast, or counter-presupposition" (1992:83). Marked topic "uses a special, marked structure to set off a constituent as a point of relationship to the context – either forwards (cataphoric) or backwards (anaphoric) or both." (1992:84)

v. 3	māh-yyitrôn lā'ādām bəkol-ʿāmālô S P šeyya'āmōl táhat haššámes (DO)V(S) M	v.8	kol-haddəbārīm yəgē'im S P lō'-yúkal ʔiš ləɖabēr V S M lō' tišbba' ʿayin lɾ'ôt V S M wəlō' timmalē' ʔózen miššəmo <sup>ak</sup> V S M
v. 4	dôr hólēk wədôr bā' S V S V wəhā'āreš lə'ólām ʿomádet S M V	v.9	māh-ššəhāyāh S P hū' šeyyihyeh S P úmā <sup>b</sup> -ššenna'āšāh S P hū' šeyyē'āšeh S P wə'ēn kol-hādāš táhat haššámes S P
v. 5	wəzārah haššəmes ʔbā' haššámes V S V S wə'el-məqómô šō'ēp M V zōrē <sup>h</sup> hū' šām V S M	v.10	yēš dābār šeyyō'mar S P rə'eh-zeh hādāš hū' V DO P S kəbār hāyāh lə'ólāmīm M V(S) M ʔāšer hāyāh milləpənēnū (S) V M
v. 6	hólēk ʔel-dārôm V M wəsōbēb ʔel-šāpôn V M sōbēb sōbēb hólēk hārū <sup>h</sup> V V V S wə'al-səbībōtāw šāb hārū <sup>h</sup> M V S	v.11	ʔen zikrôn lār'šōnīm S P wəgam lā'əhārōnīm šeyyihyū P [(S)V] lō'-yihyeh lāhem zikkārôn V M DO ʿim šeyyihyū lā'əhārōnāh V(S) M
v. 7	kol-hānnəhālīm hóləkīm ʔel-hayyām S V M wəhayyām ʔenénnú mālē' S P ʔel-məqôm šəhannəhālīm hóləkīm M S V šām hēm šābīm lālāket M S V M		

Table 7: Syntactical analysis in Qoheleth 1:3-11

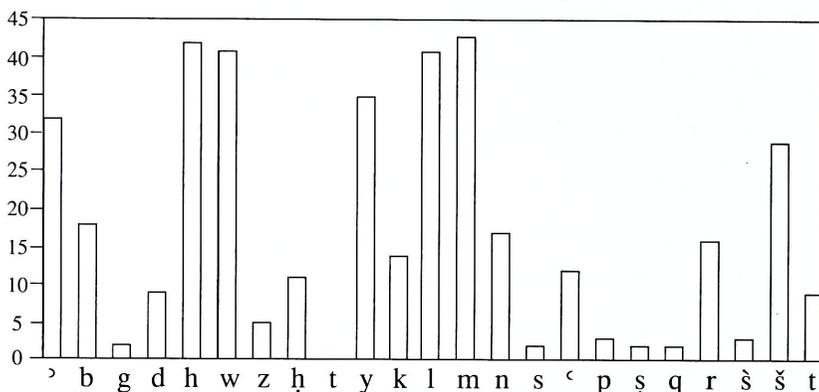
(DO = direct object; M = adverbial modifier; P = predicate; S = subject; V = verb)

**Phonetic Parallelism**

Chart 1 below shows that various consonants, /p/, /h/, /w/, /y/, /l/, /m/, /š/ occur frequently in Qoheleth 1:3-11. This phenomenon is not a mystery, since the first four letters are almost always used as *matres lectionis*. /l/ is a preposition, either as ל or as a part of לָשׁ, /m/ is a plural ending in common nouns and participles, and /š/ is a relative pronoun.

All these influence the frequency of occurrence in the text. The letter /t/ is not found in the text.

Chart 1: Statistical count of consonants in Qoheleth 1:3-11



The poem in Qoheleth 1:3-11 seems to make use of this phonetic feature and display its parallelism. In lines 9a, 9b, 9c and 9d, for example, a group of *matres lectionis* and relative pronouns are put together so as to "tighten up" its structure:

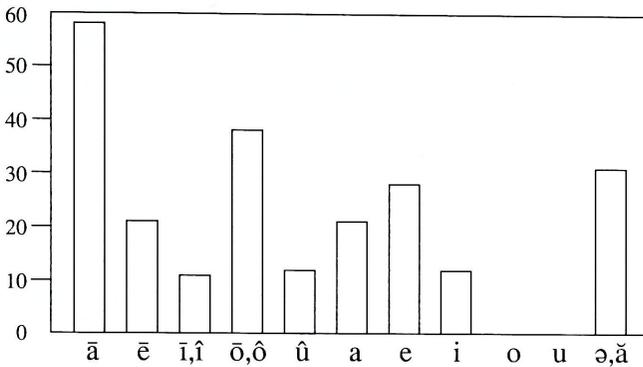
- 9a mh-šhyh  
 9b hwʾ šyhyh  
 9c wmh-šnʿšh  
 9d hwʾ šyʿšh

There is another example in verse 6ab, where /w/ and /l/ are fully exploited, as *matres lectionis* and as a part of the preposition (ʾl) respectively.

- 6a hwlk ʾl-drwm  
 6b wswbb ʾl-špwn

As shown in Chart 2 below, the vowels in Qoheleth 1:3-11 seem to be dominated by /ā/, which occurs in 28 out of 32 cola in the text, with 16 cola having two or more occurrences. However, no significant examples of phonetic parallelism can be found. The vowels /o/ and /u/ are absent in the text.

Chart 2: Statistical count of vowels in Qoheleth 1:3-11



Leech (1969:89) suggests that there are six types of sound patterns in English poetry:<sup>19</sup>

- |                            |                   |                  |
|----------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| 1. CVC <b>great/grow</b>   | send/sit          | ('alliteration') |
| 2. CVC <b>great/fail</b>   | send/bell         | (ASSONANCE)      |
| 3. CVC <b>great/meat</b>   | <b>send/hand</b>  | (CONSONANCE)     |
| 4. CVC <b>great/grazed</b> | send/sell         | (REVERSE RHYME)  |
| 5. CVC <b>great/groat</b>  | <b>send/sound</b> | (PARARHYME)      |
| 6. CVC <b>great/bait</b>   | <b>send/end</b>   | ('rhyme')        |

Applying these categories to Qoheleth 1:3-11, all kinds of sound patterns can be found.

Pattern	Type	Example	Line
1. CVC	alliteration	<b>h</b> ôlêk <b>h</b> ârû <sup>h</sup>	6c
2. CVC	assonance	sô <b>b</b> êb sô <b>b</b> êb h <b>ô</b> lêk	6c
3. CVC	consonance	š <b>am</b> h <b>em</b>	7d
4. CVC	reverse rhyme	lâ <sup>o</sup> lâm 'ô <b>m</b> âdet	4b
5. CVC	paraphyme	<b>h</b> ännê <b>h</b> äl <b>im</b> h <b>ô</b> lêk <b>im</b> 'el-hayy <b>am</b>	7a
6. CVC	rhyme	šehannê <b>h</b> äl <b>im</b> h <b>ô</b> lêk <b>im</b>	7c

Here Segert's method (1992:172) is followed; only those features that occur at the end of each colon are taken into consideration in the survey.<sup>20</sup> The most significant example for consonance appears in verse

<sup>19</sup> Leech indicates the unvarying parts with bold face; C symbolizes a consonant cluster, not a single consonant.

<sup>20</sup> Segert (1992:172) only pays attention to the end of the cola because special features in this position contribute most significantly to the cohesion of verses and their groupings.

7, in particular in 7cd, a sequence of words almost all end in /m/:<sup>21</sup>

7a kol-hännəḥālīm hōləkīm ʾel-hayyām

7b wəhayaām ʾēnēnnū mālē

7c ʾel-məqōm šehannəḥālīm hōləkīm

7d šām hēm šābīm lālāket

A pair exhibiting the pattern of assonance is found in verses 6ab:

6a hōlēk ʾel-dārōm

6b wəsōbēb ʾel-šāpōn

The ABAB sequential pattern of assonance and rhyme (A: assonance; B: rhyme) is found in lines 10bcd and 11ab:<sup>22</sup>

10c kəbār hāyāh ləʿōlāmīm

10d ʾāšer hāyāh milləpānēnū

11a ʾēn zikrōn lārʾšōnīm

11b wəgam lāʾaḥārōnīm šeyyihū

<sup>21</sup> Segert (1992:174) cites the work of Getty and suggests the Greek term *Homoeoteleuton* (ending alike) despite the fact that Getty (1975:353) defines it as "similiar case ending" especially in Greek and Latin literature. This concept of *Homoeoteleuton* can be applied here since case endings disappeared early on the history of the Hebrew language.

<sup>22</sup> Segert points out that the structure of this alternating sequence, but with alternation of /-am/ or /-tam/ with /-hem/, is also found in Yeshu ben Sira's šəbaḥ ʾābōt ʿōlām. For more examples of this pattern, see Berlin 1985:114-21.



Verse	Vowels	
v.3	māh-yītrōn lā'ādām bakol-'āmālō šeyyā'āmōl tāhat haššāmeš	ā.ā.ā.ā.ā e.e ō.ō.ō ā.ā.ā.ā ā.ā.ā ō.ō.ō
v.4	dōr hōlek wadōr bā' wehā'āreš lō'ōlām 'ōmādet	ō.ō e.e.e a.a
v.5	wazārāh haššēmeš tībā' haššāmeš we'el-maqōmō šō'ēp zōe'ēh hīp' šām	ō.ō.ō ō.ō ō.ō ā.ā.ā ā.ā e.e
v.6	hōlek 'el-dārōm wasōbēb 'el-šāpōn sōbēb sōbēb hōlek hārū'h	ō.ō.ō ō.ō.ō ā.ā.ā ā.ā.ā ā.ā e.e
v.7	wə'al-sabībōtāw šāb hārū'h kol-hannehālīm hōlekīm 'el-hayyām wehayyām 'ēnēnū māle' 'el-maqōm šehanna'ālīm hōlekīm	ī.ī ē.ē ō.ō ā.ā.ā.ā ī.ī a.a ō.ō ō.ō.ō ā.ā.ā
v.8	šām hēm šābīm lālāket kol-haddabā'īm yəgē'fīm lō' yūkāl 'īš ledabēr	ī.ī a.a ō.ō ō.ō.ō ā.ā.ā
v.9	wəlo' tūmmāle' 'ōzen miššēmō' māh-ššehayāh hīp' šeyyihyeh ūmāh-ššemma'āsāh	ī.ī, i ī.ī e.e ā.ā e.e ā.ā
v.10	hīp' šeyyē'āsēh wə'en kol-hādās tāhat haššāmeš yəš dābār šeyyō'mar rə'ēh-zeh hādās hīp'	e.e ā.ā.ā ā.ā ā.ā ā.ā.ā.ā ā.ā.ā ī.ī a.a ō.ō ī.ī
v.11	kəbār hayāh lō'ōlānīm 'āšer hayāh mīllepānēnū 'ēn zīkrōn larr'ōnīm wegam lāzahārōnīm šeyyihyū lō' yīthyeh lāhem zīkkārōn 'īm šeyyihyū lāzahārōnāh	ā.ā.ā ā.ā ā.ā ā.ā.ā.ā ā.ā.ā ī.ī a.a ō.ō ī.ī ā.ā ā.ā

Table 9: Distribution of vowels in Qoheleth 1:3-11

## Conclusion

Although some scholars have suggested that the Book of Qoheleth is an instance of prose rather than poetry, this study shows that many of the distinctive features of poetry can in fact be found in Qoheleth 1:3-11. As with most other poetry in the Bible and in Northwest Semitic literature as a whole, parallelism is undoubtedly the main structural feature of Qoheleth 1:3-11. It can be concluded that this passage is not prose, but rather a poem.

## Bibliography

- Berlin, Adele. 1985. *The dynamics of biblical parallelism*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Blau, Joshua. 1993. *A grammar of biblical hebrew*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.
- Buth, Randall. 1992. "Topic and focus in hebrew poetry: Psalm 51." In *language in context: Essays for Robert E. Longacre*. Edited by Shin Ja J. Hwang and William R. Merrifield, 83-96. Texas: Summer Institute of Linguistics and University of Texas at Arlington.
- Collins, Terence. 1978. *Line-forms in hebrew poetry: A grammatical approach to stylistic study of the hebrew prophets*. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute.
- Cotterell, Peter and Turner, Max. 1989. *Linguistics and biblical interpretation*. Illinois: Inter Varsity Press.
- Crenshaw, James L. 1988. *Ecclesiastes*. Old Testament Library. London: SCM Press.
- Fredericks, Daniel C. 1988. *Qoheleth's language: Re-evaluating its nature and date*. Vol. 3: *Ancient near eastern texts and studies*. Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwing Mellen Press.
- Geller, A Stephen. 1979. *Parallelism in early biblical poetry*. Harvard Semitic Monographs 20. Missoula, MT: Scholars Press.
- Getty, Robert J. 1975. "Homoeoteleuton." In *Princeton encyclopedia of poetry and poetics*. Edited by Alex Preminger, 353. Enlarged ed. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Gordis, Robert. 1968. *Koheleth-the man and his world: A study of Ecclesiastes*. NY: Schocken Books.

- Gray, George Buchanan. 1972. *The forms of hebrew poetry: Considered with special reference to the criticism and interpretation of the Old Testament*. NY: KTAV Publishing House.
- Isaksson, Bo. 1987. *Studies in the language of Qoheleth: With special emphasis on the verbal system*. Sweden: Uppsala.
- Kugel, James L. 1981. *The idea of biblical poetry: Parallelism and its history*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Lambdin, Thomas O. 1973. *Introduction to biblical hebrew*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.
- Leech, Geoffrey N. 1969. *A linguistic guide to english poetry*. London: Longman.
- Loader, J.A. 1979. *Polar structures in the book of Qohelet*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Lowth Robert. 1969. *Lectures on the sacred poetry of the hebrews (1787)*. Introduction by Vincent Freimarck. Vol. I and II. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag.
- O'Connor, M. 1997. *Hebrew verse structure*. 2<sup>nd</sup> printing with Afterword. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.
- Ogden, Graham. 1987. *Qoheleth. A New Biblical Commentary*. Sheffield: JSOT Press.
- Pardee, Dennis. 1988. *Ugaritic and hebrew poetic parallelism: A trail Cut 'nt I and Proverbs 2*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- . "Structure and meaning in hebrew poetry: The example of Psalm 23." *Maarav* 5-6 (1990): 239-80.
- . "Acrostics and parallelism: The parallelistic structure of Psalm 111." *Maarav* 8 (1992): 117-38.
- Rashbam, R. Samuel. 1985. *The commentary of R. Samuel Ben meir rashbam on Qoheleth*. Edited and translated by Sara Japhet and Robert B. Salters. Jerusalem-Leiden: Magnes and E.J. Brill.
- Rousseau, François. "Structure de Qohelet I 4-11." *Vetus testamentum* 31 (1981): 200-17.
- Schoors, A. 1992. *The preacher sought to find pleasing words: A study of the language of Qoheleth*. Leuven: Peeters.
- Sergert, Stanislav. "Assonance and rhyme in hebrew poetry." *Maarav* 8, (1992): 171-79.

- Silberschlag, Eisig. 1975. Hebrew Poetry. In *Princeton encyclopedia of poetry and poetics*. Edited by Alex Preminger, 336-43. Enlarged ed. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Watch, Wilfred G.E. 1994. *Traditional techniques in classical hebrew verse*. JSOT Supplement Series, vol. 170. Sheffield: JSOT Press.
- . 1995. *Classical hebrew poetry: A guide to its techniques*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. JSOT Supplement Series, vol. 26. Sheffield: JSOT Press.
- Whitley, Charles F. 1979. *Koheleth: His language and thought*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Whybray, R.N. 1989. *Ecclesiastes*. Old Testament Guides. Sheffield: JSOT Press.

## ABSTRACT

Qoheleth is not commonly referred to in the study of Hebrew poetry, perhaps due to the continuing controversy as to whether it is in fact poetry or prose. This paper aims to prove that Qoheleth 1:3-11 is indeed poetry, by means of a new analysis of parallelism in the work.

## 撮 要

在研究希伯來詩時，傳道書常常被忽略，或許由於其體裁較具爭論性。本章主要透過各種平行句的分析，證明傳道書一章 3 至 11 節是詩的體裁。