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Polysemy

Polysemy is the capacity for a sign, word, phrase, or sentence to bear multiple meanings in a single context. It was observed in the Hebrew Bible, both in poetry and in prose, as early as the medieval times, but became the topic of scholarly publications only after Casanowicz's ground-breaking study (1893). Nevertheless, despite more than a century of scholarly attention, the study of polysemy in the Hebrew Bible remains in its infancy. We lack not only a consistent taxonomy for the various types of polysemy and their functions (e.g., Sasson 1976; cf. Beitzel 1980; Greenstein 1992), but also a useful vocabulary (but see now Noegel 2013). Consequently, scholars have long used the terms 'punning' and 'wordplay' for all forms of polysemy (and paronomasia), even though the former does not distinguish types and the latter implies that the device had a playful aim, which is not always the case (→ Paronomasia).

Scholars have proposed a number of different functions for the various types of polysemy. Some types have been seen as demonstrations of erudition and literary or rhetorical flare (Bohl 1926; Herzberg 1979; Hoffman 1980). Others appear to have mnemonic or organizational functions (Freedman 1986; Hurowitz 2001). Still others seem to have comedic or satirical aims (Watson 1986:245). Some polysemes also have a hermeneutic function (Fishbane 1977; Lieberman 1978; Tigay 1983, Noegel 2007a). More recently, scholars have proposed that some forms of polysemy are mechanisms for unleashing or harnessing the illocutionary power of words (Noegel 2007a; 2009a; 2010; 2013), especially when employed in prophetic or ritually empowered contexts (Schorch 2000). Regardless of its many possible functions, it is clear that Israelite writers, like their counterparts in Mesopotamia and Egypt, were particularly skillful at employing polysemy. We also should note that, while polysemes are extremely difficult to capture in any translation, there is evidence for attempts to do so in the Septuagint, Targumim, Vulgate, and other ancient witnesses (Noegel 1995; 1996a; 2011b).

Unlike the hieroglyphic and Akkadian writing systems, in which individual signs bear multiple phonetic and logographic readings (Bottéro 1977; Farber 1986; Loprieno 2000; Noegel

2007a; Morenz 2008), most of the Hebrew consonants have only one phonetic value and none bear logographic readings. Thus, polysemy in the Bible is primarily restricted to the levels of word, phrase, and sentence. Accordingly, there are three primary ways that Israelite authors could achieve polysemy—by exploiting homonyms, homographs, or single words with broad semantic ranges. Job's lament in Job 9.30–31 demonstrates polysemy by way of homonyms.

אִם־הִתְרַחַצְתִּי בְּמִי־שֶׁלֶג וְהִזְכֹּתִי בְּבָר כַּפֵּי:
אִז בְּשַׁחַת תִּטְבְּלֵנִי

'im-hitrāḥaštī bə-mē-šālēg wa-hāzikkōtī bə-bōr
kappāy
'āz baš-šaḥat tiṭbālēnī

Even if I should wash my hands with snow water,
and clean my hands בְּבָר *bə-bōr*,
You still would dip me in the pit.

In this passage the phrase בְּבָר *bə-bōr* can mean 'with lye' or 'in a pit'. Though the readings derive from different roots, the former, from ב"ר *b-r-r*, and the latter, from ב"ר *b-w-r*, the nouns are indistinguishable. Of course, the primary meaning of בְּבָר *bə-bōr* is 'with lye', since it makes little sense for Job to wash his hands in a pit. Nevertheless, the mention of a synonym for pit (שַׁחַת *šaḥat*) just afterwards leads the reader to recontextualize the meaning of בְּבָר *bə-bōr*.

A second way Israelite authors achieved polysemy was by means of homographs; words that look alike, but whose pronunciations differ. This form of polysemy obtains strictly on a visual level. A textbook example appears in Job 26.12–13.

בְּכֹחוֹ רָגַע הַיָּם וּבְתַבּוּנָתוֹ מָחַץ רָהַב:
בְּרוּחוֹ שָׁמְיִם שִׁפְרָה חִלְלָה יָדוֹ נָהַשׁ בְּרִיחַ:

bə-kōḥō rāga' hay-yām u-bi-təbūnātō māḥaš
rāḥab
bə-rūḥō šamayim šiprā ḥōlāl yādō nāḥāš bārīaḥ

By his power, he רָגַע *rāga'* the sea, and by his skill he smashed Rahab.

By his wind the heavens were calmed, his hand pierced the Fleeing Serpent.

The verb רָגַע *rāga'* in this passage usually is rendered 'quieted, stilled', or the like, thus presupposing the Proto-Semitic root *r-g-g'*. However, we also may derive the verb from Proto-Semitic *r-g-g'* and translate it 'disturbed'. Both readings

are possible, though they are likely to have been distinguished in speech at an early period (Blau 1982). Thus, this polyseme operates only on a visual register.

A third way of creating polysemy was to exploit the semantic range of a single word. An example of this appears in Pharaoh's command to Moses in Exod. 5.18: וְעַתָּה לָכֵן עֲבֹדוּ *wə-attā lakū 'ibdū* 'Now get to your work!'. In this passage the verb עֲבֹדוּ *'ibdū* can mean 'work, labor' or 'worship, serve'. In the former sense, the statement fits Pharaoh's command that the taskmasters increase the workload for the Israelites. However, as 'worship', it prefigures Pharaoh's release of the Israelites to worship Yahweh at Mt. Sinai.

To date scholars have identified at least fifteen types of polysemy in the Hebrew Bible. These include: contronymic polysemy, *double entendre*, antanaclasis, unidirectional polysemy, Janus parallelism, double polysemy, bilingual polysemy, polysemy clusters, numerical polysemy, *gematria*, notariqon, acronymy, acrostics (also telestichs and menostichs), *atbash*, and amphiboly. Each of these may perform different functions depending on their contexts. Moreover, these types and their functions can, and often do, overlap. Thus, a case of double polysemy or of amphiboly may also constitute a Janus parallelism, and also be part of a polysemy cluster; basic polysemy and antanaclasis also can serve as *double entendres*, and so on. There appears to be no limit to the sophistication of the Israelite writers.

1. CONTRONYMIC POLYSEMY

A word that bears its own meaning and its opposite is called a contronym (known as *'addād* 'opposites' in Arabic; Nöldeke 1910; Gordis 1936–1937). An English example is 'cleave', which means both 'join' and 'separate'. We already have seen a strictly visual contronym in Job 26.12. A contronym that operates aurally appears in Job 4.6 in Eliphaz's sarcastic query to Job: הֲלֹא יִרְאֶתֶּךָ בְּסִלְתֶּךָ *תִּקְוֹתֶיךָ וְתִם הֲלֹא יִרְבִּיךָ *hā-lō' yir'ātākā kislātēkā tiqwātākā wə-tōm dārāḱēkā* 'Should not your piety be בְּסִלְתֶּךָ *kislātēkā*, and your hope be the blamenessness of your ways?' The query is a subtle barb that relies on the dual meaning of כֶּסֶל *kesel* as both 'confidence' and 'stupidity'.

2. DOUBLE ENTENDRES

A *double entendre* is an idiom or other figure of speech that may be understood in two ways. The first is straightforward, innocuous, and not the primary meaning intended by the user, whereas the second is the intended meaning. Often *double entendres* serve as euphemisms, as in the command of David to Uriah, whom he has just summoned from the battle field: רֵד לְבֵיתְךָ וְרַחֵץ רַגְלֶיךָ *rēd lə-bētākā ū-rḥaṣ raḡlēkā* 'go down to your house and wash your feet' (2 Sam. 11.8). Uriah realizes that David is using the polysemous idiom 'wash one's feet' as a euphemism for 'have sex'. This is clear from Uriah's reply to David the next morning, when asked why he did not return to his home: 'and I should go to my home to eat and drink and sleep with my wife!?' (v. 11).

3. ANTANACLASIS

Antanaclasis is the repetition of the same word or expression each time with a different meaning (Sasson 1976). While antanaclasis can have a paronomastic effect, it does not involve homonyms, but rather words or expressions of a single etymological derivation. Thus, it more properly belongs to the realm of polysemy. The device appears predominantly in poetry (Sasson 1976:970; Ceresko 1982; Noegel 2007b:21–23). However, a classic prose example appears in the narrative concerning the dreams of Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker (Gen. 40). In this short pericope, we find two different uses of the phrase הֲרֹאשׁ אֵת נַפְשׁוֹ *nāšā' 'ēt hā-rōš* 'lift up the head' (Marcus 1990). In Gen. 40.13 Joseph uses it to predict that Pharaoh will 'lift up your head', i.e., pardon the cupbearer. However, when interpreting the baker's dream, Joseph employs the same idiom with reference to his death by 'beheading' or perhaps 'impaling' (Gen. 40.19).

4. UNIDIRECTIONAL POLYSEMY

Unidirectional polysemy is polysemy that produces two meanings that face a single direction. The example of homographic polysemy above (i.e., Job 26.12–13) is also a case of unidirectional polysemy. Whether read as 'stilled' or 'disturbed', רָגַע *rāḡa'* 'faces forward' to both the calming of

the heavens and the smashing of Rahab. There are also cases in which unidirectional polysemy faces backwards (Noegel 2011b).

5. JANUS PARALLELISM

Janus parallelism (sometimes called pivotal polysemy [Grossberg 1986]) is distinguished from unidirectional polysemy in that it exploits a single word that has two meanings, one of which ‘faces backward’ to the previous line, while the other ‘faces forward’ to the next line. Since the initial discovery of Janus parallelism (Gordon 1978), dozens more have been found in the Hebrew Bible and in other ancient Near Eastern texts (e.g., Rendsburg 1992; Ceresko 1994; Gordon 1994; Noegel 2007a). There are two types of Janus parallelism: symmetrical and asymmetrical (Gordon 1982). The former obtains in three stichs of poetry while the second occurs in two (Noegel 1996a:154–155). An example of symmetrical Janus parallelism appears in God’s promise to Abram in Gen. 15.1:

אֶל־תִּירָא אָבְרָם
אֲנִכִּי מִגֵּן לְךָ
שְׂכָרְךָ הִרְבֵּה מְאֹד:

ʿal-tīrā ʿabrām
ʾānōkī māḡēn lāk
śākārkā harbē mōʾod

Fear not, Abram!
I am a מִגֵּן *māḡēn* to you.
Your reward shall be very great!

The noun מִגֵּן *māḡēn* bears the meaning ‘shield’ (if derived from the root גִּן *g-n-n* ‘protect’) or ‘gift’ (if from the root מָגַן *m-g-n* ‘grant, bestow’). As ‘shield’ it faces back to God’s protective command to ‘fear not’, and as ‘gift’ it faces ahead to ‘your reward’ (Rendsburg 1992). While ‘shield’ is the far more common meaning of מִגֵּן *māḡēn*, the reader is primed for the latter connotation, because Melchizedek has just blessed Abram in Gen. 14.20 saying: ‘Blessed is El Elyon who has delivered (מִגֵּן *miggēn*) your enemies into your hands’. As such this case of polysemy also functions like antanacsis, though here the two Hebrew roots are not identical.

6. DOUBLE POLYSEMY

Double polysemy exploits two words in successive stichs, each of which projects multiple

meanings (Rendsburg 1982). In Gen. 49.6, Jacob declares to Simeon and Levi:

בַּסֶּדֶם אֶל־תָּבֹא נַפְשִׁי
בְּקִהְלָם אֶל־תְּהַד כְּבֹדִי

bə-sōdām ʿal-tābō napši
bi-qhālām ʿal-tēhad kəbōdī

Let not my person תָּבֹא *tābō* in their council,
Let not my being תְּהַד *tēhad* in their assembly.

Two polysemes are active—the verbs תָּבֹא *tābō* and תְּהַד *tēhad*. The former is vocalized as if it derives from the root בו"א *b-w-ʿ* meaning ‘enter’. However, we also can derive it from the root הב"ה *b-h* meaning ‘desire’. The verb תְּהַד *tēhad* is pointed as if it derives from the root יח"ד *ḡ-h-d*, in which case it means ‘unite with, be one with’. However, it also could derive from the root חד"ה *ḥ-d-h*, and be translated ‘rejoice’. Both verbs require revocalization to achieve their dual meanings. To read ‘desire’ one must point the verb as תָּבֵא *tōbē* and to read ‘rejoice’ we must vocalize תִּהַד *tīhad* (a similar double polysemy appears in Job 3.6). So, to be precise, the polysemy here exists in the written consonantal text, but not in the reading tradition reflected by the vocalization. It is likely, nevertheless, that the writer exploited this graphic polysemy, which existed before the creation of the vocalization system in the Middle Ages.

7. BILINGUAL POLYSEMY

Bilingual polysemy occurs when a word may be read as reflecting more than one language. Thus far, scholars have proposed Hebrew-Egyptian (Rendsburg 1988b), Hebrew-Akkadian (Machinist 1983:734–735), Hebrew-Aramaic (Greenstein 1992:971; Noegel 1996a:43–44; 2000:171; 2013), Aramaic-Akkadian (Noegel 2007a:148–149), and Hebrew-Greek bilingual polysemes (Wolters 1985).

A couple of cases of Hebrew-Egyptian polysemy will demonstrate. In Pharaoh’s insult to Moses in Exod. 10.10 we read: רָאוּ כִּי רָעָה נִגַּד רָאוּ כִּי רָעָה רָאוּ כִּי רָעָה נִגַּד *raʾu kī rāʿā neḡed panēkem* ‘See, indeed evil is before you!’ The noun rendered ‘evil’ (i.e., רָעָה *rāʿā*) also can be read as the name of the Egyptian solar god Ra, thus allowing us to translate the line: ‘See, indeed Ra is against you!’ The same bilingual polysemy occurs in Exod. 32.12, and possibly also in Exod. 32.22 and Num. 11.1 (Rendsburg 1988a; 1988b). It also has been suggested that we read the

name **חַם** *Hām* in Gen. 9–10 bilingually, both as a personal name and as the Egyptian noun *ḥm* ‘servant’. The latter underscores his role as the progenitor of the Egyptians (Gen. 10.6) and anticipates Noah’s curse (Gen. 9.25) that Ham will become a servant to his brothers (Rendsburg 2000:144–145).

It is likely that further examples of bilingual polysemy remain to be discovered. The device certainly continued to be employed well after the Second Temple Period, as is evident from rabbinic texts (Noegel 2007a:235–244).

8. POLYSEMY CLUSTER

When multiple polysemes appear in close proximity they constitute a polysemy cluster. The clustering of polysemes creates an unraveling effect in which the contextual meaning must be continually rethought. Polysemy clusters relate to the poetic strategy of clustering other devices in biblical Hebrew poetry (Greenfield 1990; Noegel 2004; 2011a). An exquisite polysemy cluster can be found in Job 29.20–23.

כְּבוֹדִי חֲדָשׁ עִמָּדִי וְקִשְׁתִּי בְיָדִי תַחְלִיף׃
 לִישְׁמְעוּ וַיַּחֲלוּ וַיִּדְמּוּ לְמוֹ עֲצָתִי׃
 אַחֲרַי דְּבַרִּי לֹא יִשְׁנּוּ וְעַלִּימוּ תִּטְּוּ מִלְּתִי׃
 וַיַּחֲלוּ כַמָּטֶר לִי וּפְיָהֶם פָּעֲרוּ לְמַלְקוֹשׁ׃

kəbōdī ḥādāš ‘immādī wə-qaštī bə-yādī taḥālīp
lī-šāmə‘ū wə-yihēllū wə-yiddəmū ləmō ‘āšātī
‘ahārē dəbārī lō’ yišnū wə-‘ālemō tittōp millātī
wə-yihālū kam-māṭār lī ū-ḥihem pā‘ārū lə-malqōš

My vigor refreshed,
 my bow **תַחְלִיף** *taḥālīp* in my hand.
 Men would listen to me and **וַיַּחֲלוּ** *wə-yihēllū*;
 at my counsel they would **וַיִּדְמּוּ** *wə-yiddəmū*.
 After I spoke they did not **יִשְׁנּוּ** *yīšnū*;
 my words **תִּטְּוּ** *tittōp* upon them.
 They waited for me as for rain,
 for the late rain, their mouths open wide.

There are no fewer than five polysemes in this brief passage. The first, **תַחְלִיף** *taḥālīp*, can be rendered ‘renews’ (חל"ף, Proto-Semitic *h-l-p*) or ‘made to pierce’ (חל"ף, Proto-Semitic *h-l-p*). We may understand the second, **וַיַּחֲלוּ** *wə-yihēllū*, as ‘they awaited’ (from **יחל** *y-h-l*) or ‘they pierced’ (from **חל"ל** *h-l-l* and repointed as a *pi‘el* **יחלו** *yəḥallū*). The third polyseme, **וַיִּדְמּוּ** *wə-yiddəmū*, means both ‘they waited’ (from **דמ"ה** *d-m-h*) or ‘they were silent’ (from **דמ"ם** *d-m-m* and repointed as a *nif'al* **וַיִּדְמּוּ** *wə-yiddammū*), and the fourth, **יִשְׁנּוּ** *yīšnū*, we can translate as ‘reply’ (from **שנ"ה**, Proto-Semitic *t-n-y*) or ‘was sharpened’ (from **שנ"ן**, Proto-Semitic *š-n-n*

and repointed as a *nif'al* **יִשְׁנּוּ** *yīššannū* [cf. Isa. 49.2]). Each of these polysemes is strictly visual. Capping off the polysemous cluster is the verb **תִּטְּוּ** *tittōp*, whose semantic range includes ‘drivel, prophesy, argue against’ (Deut. 32.2; Amos 7.16; Mic. 2.6) and ‘dew upon’ (Job 36.27). The result is a concatenation of multiple meanings.

A special type of polysemous cluster exploits the literal meanings of idioms containing body parts by using them in tandem with literal references to body parts as well as polysemes that suggest body parts. The result is an assembly of human features that provides a subtext to reinforce key themes. The device has been identified in Exod. 4.1–17; Judg. 3.12–30; 7.1–25; 1 Sam. 5.1–6; Jon. 2.3–10; Prov. 6.1–35; and Prov. 8.1–36 (Noegel 2011a). Thus, in the episode detailing Gideon’s campaign against the Midianites (Judg. 7.1–25), one finds **יָד** *yād* ‘hand’ used abundantly as a keyword (7.2 [2×], 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 14, 15, 16, 19; 20 [2×]). In addition, the word ‘hand’ constitutes a partial anagram with the name **מִדְיָן** *midyān* ‘Midian’, with which it is collocated three times (7.7, 14, 15). The frequent idiomatic use of this body part heightens one’s awareness of other body parts in the story including: ‘ears’ (7.3), ‘tongue’ (7.5), ‘knees’ (7.5, 6), and ‘mouth’ (7.6), as well as idioms that contain body parts, such as **שֵׁפַת הַיָּם** *šəpaṭ hay-yām*, literally ‘lip of the sea’ > ‘seashore’ (7.12), **רֹאשִׁים** *rāšim*, literally ‘heads’ > ‘men’ (7.16), **רֹשׁ** *rōš*, literally ‘head’ > ‘beginning’ of the middle watch (7.19), **שֵׁפַת אֲבֵל** *šəpaṭ-‘ābēl*, literally ‘lip of the meadow’ > ‘border’ (7.22), and **רֹאשׁ עֵרֶב וְזֵעֵב** *rōš ‘ōrēb ū-z‘ēb* ‘head(s) of Oreb and Ze‘eb’ for ‘leaders’ (7.25). In turn, these are reinforced by other words that suggest body parts, such as **וַיִּשְׁכֶּם** *wayyaškēm* ‘get up early’ (7.1; cf. **שֶׁכֶם** *šəkem* ‘shoulder’) and **עַיִן** *‘ēn* ‘spring’ (7.1; cf. **עַיִן** *‘ayin* ‘eye’). The combined impact of the numerous body parts, and the audible connection between **יָד** *yād* ‘hand’ and **מִדְיָן** *midyān* ‘Midian’ intensifies the narrative’s central theme that Yahweh has promised Gideon that he would deliver the Midianites into his hand (7.7)

9. NUMERICAL POLYSEMY

Numerical polysemy occurs when the names of numbers are exploited extensively for non-numerical meanings (Garsiel 1994:326). An example of this appears in Qoh. 4.8–14:

יש אֶחָד וְאִין שְׁנַי גַּם בְּוּ וְאֶחָד אֶיְלֹו
 וְאִין קָן לְכָל־עֲמָלוֹ גַּם־עֵינֹו לֹא־תִשְׂבַּע עֹשֶׁר
 וְלִמִּי | אֲנִי עֹמֵל וּמַחֲסֵר אֶת־נַפְשִׁי מִטּוֹבָה גַּם־זֶה הַכֵּל
 וְעֵינֹו רַע הוּא:
 טוֹבִים הַשְּׁנַיִם מִדְּהֶאֶחָד אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלָהֶם שְׁכָר טוֹב
 בְּעַמְלָם:
 כִּי אִם־יִפְּלוּ הָאֶחָד יָקִים אֶת־חֲבֵרוֹ וְאֵילֹו הָאֶחָד שִׁיפֹל
 וְאִין שְׁנַי לְהַקִּימוֹ:
 גַּם אִם־יִשְׁכָּבוּ שְׁנַיִם וְחָם לָהֶם וְלֹא־אֶחָד אִיד יִחַם:
 וְאִם־יִתְקַפוּ הָאֶחָד הַשְּׁנַיִם יַעֲמְדוּ נַגְדוֹ וְהַחוּט הַמְשֻׁלָּשׁ
 לֹא בְּמַהֲרָה יִנָּתֵק:

yēš 'ehād wā-'ēn šēnī gam bēn wā-'āh 'ēn-lō
wā-'ēn qēš la-kāl-āmālō gam-ēnō lō-tišba' 'ōšer
u-l-mī 'ānī 'āmēl u-māḥsēr 'et-nafšī mit-tōbā gam-
ze hebel wā-'inyan rā' hū
tōbīm haš-šānayim min-hā-'ehād 'āšer yēš-lāhem šākār
tōb ba-āmālām
ki 'im-yippōlū hā-'ehād yāqim 'et-hāḥērō wā-'ilō hā-
'ehād šey-yippōl wā-'ēn šēnī lahāqimō
gam 'im-yiškabū šānayim wā-ḥam lāhem u-lā-'ehād
'ek yēhām
wā-'im-yitqāpō hā-'ehād haš-šānayim ya'amdū negdō
wā-ha-ḥūt ha-māšullāš lō bi-mhērā yinnāteq

The case of one person (אֶחָד *'ehād*), with no companion (שְׁנַי *šēnī*), who has neither son nor brother.

Yet he amasses wealth without limit, and his eye is never sated with riches (לֹא־תִשְׂבַּע עֹשֶׁר *lō-tišba' 'ōšer*).

(He never asks) 'For whom, now, am I amassing it while denying myself enjoyment?'

That too is a futility and unhappy business.

The two (הַשְּׁנַיִם *haš-šānayim*) are better off than the one (הָאֶחָד *hā-'ehād*), in that they have greater benefit from their earnings.

For should they fall, the one (הָאֶחָד *hā-'ehād*) can raise his friend; but woe to the one who is alone (הָאֶחָד *hā-'ehād*) and falls with no companion (שְׁנַי *šēnī*) to raise him!

Further, when two (הַשְּׁנַיִם *šānayim*) lie together they are warm; but how can one alone (אֶחָד *'ehād*) get warm?

Also, if the one (הָאֶחָד *hā-'ehād*) attacks, the two (הַשְּׁנַיִם *haš-šānayim*) can stand up to him. A three-fold (הַמְשֻׁלָּשׁ *ha-māšullāš*) cord is not easily broken!

Note how the number one (אֶחָד *'ehād*) is used idiomatically for someone who is 'alone' in vv. 8, 9, 10 (2x), 11, and 12, and how the number 'two' (הַשְּׁנַיִם *haš-šānayim*) appears variously in vv. 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12, often with the meaning 'friend, companion'. Moreover, in the consonantal text, the phrase לֹא־תִשְׂבַּע עֹשֶׁר *lō-tišba' 'ōšer* 'never sated with riches', also resembles the numbers שֶׁבַע *šeba'* 'seven' and עֶשֶׂר *'ešer* 'ten'. The passage concludes by making reference to a 'three-fold' (הַמְשֻׁלָּשׁ *māšullāš*) cord in v. 12 (Noegel 2007b:26–27). The numerical

polysemy underscores Qoheleth's point that it is best not to be alone.

10. GEMATRIA

Another form of polysemy that involves numbers is *gematria* (also called isopsephy). *Gematria* involves reading the consonants that comprise a word for their numerical values. In Hebrew alphabetic letters double for numbers. Thus, the first letter א *'aleph* = one, ב *bet* = two, and so on up to ten; subsequent letters hold values of ten, i.e., twenty, thirty, forty, etc., through ש *šade* '90'; and then the last four letters of the alphabet connote '100' through '400'. The earliest discussion of *gematria* in the Hebrew Bible occurs in rabbinic texts. Consequently, scholars debate whether these are later readings imposed on the text. However, the presence of *gematria* as an exegetical tool in much earlier Akkadian materials demonstrates that the device could have been known during the time in which the biblical texts were written (Lieberman 1978; Tigay 1983). Some scholars have proposed the presence of a *gematria* on the name Gad in Gen. 46.16, because the numerical value of Gad is seven, and the name appears in a chapter replete with sevens and multiples of seven (Sasson 1976:969). A well-known case of *gematria* found in a rabbinic comment states that the 318 soldiers who battled alongside Abram against the kings of the east (Gen. 14.14) is a *gematria* for Abram's servant Eleazar, whose name equals 318 (Babylonian Talmud, Nedarim 32a).

11. NOTARIKON

Notarikon is the practice of reading the consonant of a word or successive words acronymically. For example, in Jer. 7.4 the phrase 'temple of Yahweh' is repeated verbatim three times and followed by הֵמָּה *hēmmā* 'these'. The odd line has led some to conclude that the three consonants that comprise the word הֵמָּה *hēmmā* (i.e., ה *h* + מ *m* + ה *h*) are an acronym for הַיְהוָה [הַיְהוָה] *h[am]-m[āqōm] h[az-ze]* 'this place' (Sasson 1976; though Corré 1973 argues that הֵמָּה *hēmmā* is equivalent to 'sic'). Like *gematria*, notarikon is more common in later rabbinic texts; however, it too is an attested

exegetical tool in much earlier Akkadian materials (Lieberman 1978; Tigay 1983).

12. ACRONYMY

Acronymy is the opposite of notarikon and requires that one read the initial consonant of successive words. One example of acronymy that has been proposed appears in Esther's statement to the Persian king in Esth. 5.4: [בָּוֹא]! [הַיּוֹם] [הַמָּוֶן] [הַמְּלִךְ] הַיּוֹם *y[ābō] h[am-melek] w[ə-hāmān] h[ay-yōm]* 'Let the king and Haman come'. The initial consonants of each of these words (i.e., ה-ו-ה-י *y-h-w-h*) spell out the divine name Yahweh, which is nowhere explicitly mentioned in the book of Esther (Beitzel 1980:7–8).

13. ACROSTICS (ALSO TELESTICHS AND MENOSTICHS)

An acrostic (also called an abecedarius) is a form of polysemy that works by reading vertically the initial letter of each successive word in a poem. Since each of the lines also bear meanings horizontally an acrostic may be considered a structural form of polysemy. A telestich is an acrostic that reads the final letters of successive lines. A mesostich is an acrostic that reads the middle consonants of a word (on this form see below under Atbash). When an acrostic, telestich, or mesostich spell out a name, word, or sentence it is called a menostich (Brug 1990; Guillaume 2009). Many biblical menostichs have been suggested, but have met with varied levels of acceptance (e.g., Ps. 2 [Treves 1967; refuted by Lindars 1967]; Ps. 9 [Skehan 1965]; Ps. 10 [Treves 1967; refuted by Lindars 1967]; and Lam. 5.17–18 [Bergler 1977; and supported in part by Guillaume 2009]). Though telestichs and menostichs are more frequently attested in Akkadian and Egyptian texts (Clère 1938; Stewart 1971; Soll 1988), a few do appear in the Hebrew Bible.

Most acrostics in the Hebrew Bible proceed alphabetically from the first letter (א *'aleph*) to the last (ת *taw*), but there are a variety of ways this is achieved. A new letter can commence with every line (Ps. 25; 34; 145), or couplet (Ps. 37; Prov. 31.10–31; Lam. 1, 2, 4), or even every half-line (Ps. 111; 112). The acrostics in Lam. 1; 2; 4 move to a new alphabetic letter every fourth verse (Renkema 1995). Lam. 3

does the same, but repeats the acrostic letter in each of the three successive verses. The acrostic in Ps. 119 starts with a new letter every ninth verse. Some broken or fragmentary alphabetic acrostics are also present in Nah. 1.2–8 (Christensen 1987; Spronk 1998; Pinker 2006); Prov. 24.1–22 (Hurowitz 2000); and Prov. 29.22–27 (Hurowitz 2001). Acrostics may have been employed as mnemonics (Soll 1988) or to convey a sense of order. Those in Lamentations may have provided readers with a tool for rationalizing their emotions.

14. ATBASH

'Atbash' (אתבש"ש) is a polysemy of consonantal transposition. It replaces the first letter of the alphabet with the last, the second with the penultimate, the third with the antepenultimate, and so on (hence, the name 'atbash' which combines the first, last, second, and penultimate letters of the alphabet, i.e., א *'aleph* and ת *taw*, ב *bet* and ש *šin*). Though atbash is sometimes thought to be an exegetical device of the Rabbinic period, the clear use of atbash on a 12th century B.C.E. abecedary from Izbet-Şarta shows it to have been in use well before the period of the Israelite monarchy. Moreover, scholars often treat atbash as if it functions as a cipher (Steiner 1996), though there is limited evidence that it served such a purpose (Korpel 2009). Others see atbash as a performative device of illocutionary power (Noegel 2009a).

There are three types of atbash. The first employs a word that makes little sense unless it is read as an atbash. A second type of atbash makes perfect sense both as it appears and when read as an atbash (Noegel 1996a; 1996c; 1996d). A third type of atbash is even more sophisticated, in that the consonants to be transposed appear vertically in the form of a mesostich (Korpel 2009).

I demonstrate the device by way of the first group, to which belongs Jer. 25.26; 51.1, 41, and a possible fourth spotted by Cyrus H. Gordon in 1 Kgs 9.1 (noted in Sasson 1976:969). The best known atbash appears in Jeremiah's prophecy that a number of nations will drink the wrath of Yahweh: 'And last of all, the king of שש"ק *šēšak* shall drink' (Jer. 25.26). As the Targum translates and medieval Hebrew commentators observe, the consonants in the word שש"ק *šēšak* are an atbash for בבל *bābel*

‘Babylon’. Here the meaning ‘Babylon’ is the only one that makes sense. Jeremiah has encapsulated the destruction of ‘Babylon’ by turning its name into a meaningless heap of letters.

15. AMPHIBOLY

Amphiboly (also called amphibology) is the employment of an ambiguous grammatical structure for polysemous effect. Three types of amphiboly appear in the Bible. The first suggests multiple readings by combining two different morphologies, while at the same time making a clear reading of one or the other impossible. This type of amphiboly is sometimes referred to as *forma mixta* or *portmanteau*. An example of this appears in Job’s statement about Yahweh in Job 26.9.

מֵאֲחִזְּ פְּנִיכֶסֶה פֶּרְשָׁז עֲלֵיוּ עֲנָנֹו

mā'ahēz pənē-kissē paršēz 'ālāw 'ānānō

He seizes (his) throne, פֶּרְשָׁז *paršēz* his cloud upon it.

The verb פֶּרְשָׁז *paršēz* is a rare example of a blend word in ancient Hebrew, created by combining two different roots to form a quadriliteral verb and *hapax legomenon*. The first, פֶּרַשׁ *pāraś* means ‘spread out, extend’; the second, פָּרַז *pāraz*, means ‘muster, separate’. The use of the verb creates a polysemy, suggesting both meanings while conforming morphologically to neither verb.

A second type of amphiboly seamlessly combines the morphology of two different, but normative grammatical structures. The amphiboly of these structures is marked in the Masoretic vocalization. See, for example, Jotham’s parable in Judg. 9, where the olive tree replies to the other trees that would make him king: ‘Have I ceased yielding (הִתְחַלְתִּי *he-ḥāḏaltī*) my rich oil, through whom God and men are honored, that I should go and wave above the trees?’ (v. 9). The highlighted verb combines two different morphologies—either it is a first person singular perfect *hiph'il* of the verb ‘cease’ or first person singular perfect *qal* of the same root, preceded by an interrogative *he*. If the former, the vowel under the *het* should have been *šewa* or *hateph-seghol*. If the latter, then we would expect to see a *qameṣ* rather than *hateph-qameṣ* as the vowel marking the first syllable of the

verb (Joosten 1990). While both readings are possible in the consonantal text, neither is possible in the vocalized text. The vocalization could be interpreted as reflecting elements of both readings. Other *formae mixtae* of this type appear in Gen. 16.11; Judg. 13.5; 2 Sam. 11.1; Isa. 59.3; Jer. 23.6; Lam. 4.14; and Ps. 68.3.

A third type of amphiboly combines an infinitive absolute derived from one root with a finite verb derived from another (Noegel 1998a; 1998b). Only a handful of these appear in the Bible (Isa. 28.28; Jer. 8.13; 42.10; 48.9, Zeph. 1.2). The prophecy against Judah in Jer. 8.13 will demonstrate.

הִבְשׂוּ כִּי תֹעֲבָה עֲשׂוּ
גַם־בֹּשׂ לֹא־יִבְשׂוּ וְהַכֹּלֵם לֹא יִדְעוּ
לִכְּוֹן יִפְלוּ בַּנְּפִלִים בְּעֵת פְּקֻדָּתָם יִכְשְׁלוּ אָמַר יְהוָה:
אֶסְףְּ אֶסְיִפִּים נְאֻם־יְהוָה אִין עֲנָבִים בְּדִפְן
וְאִין תְּאֲנִים בְּתֵאנָה וְהָעֵלֶה נָבֵל וְאֶתֵּן לָהֶם יַעֲבְרוּם:

hōbšū kī tō'ebā 'āsū

gam-boś lō-yēbšū wa-hikkālēm lō yādā'ū

lākēn yiṣpālū ban-nōplīm bā-'et paquddātām yikkāšlū

'āmar YHWH

'āsōp 'āsīpēm nā'um-YHWH 'ēn 'ānābīm bag-

gephen

wa-'ēn tā'enīm bat-tā'enā wā-he-'āle nābēl wā-'ettēn

lāhem ya'abrūm

Are they ashamed of the abomination they commit? Indeed, they are verily not ashamed, they do not even know to blush.

Therefore, they will fall among the fallen, in the time of their punishment they shall stumble, says Yahweh.

אֶסְףְּ אֶסְיִפִּים *'āsōp 'āsīpēm* declares Yahweh. No grapes upon the vine,

No figs on the fig tree, the leaves all withered, that which I gave them shall pass from them.

Yahweh’s proclamation אֶסְףְּ אֶסְיִפִּים *'āsōp 'āsīpēm* is amphibolous. The infinitive absolute derives from the root אסף *'s-p* ‘gather’, but the finite verb derives from the root סו *'s-w-p* ‘sweep away, destroy’. By suggesting the meaning ‘gather’, the phrase anticipates the agricultural reference in the next line: ‘No grapes on the vine, no figs on the fig tree, the leaves all withered’ (Jer. 8.13). By suggesting a violent ‘sweeping away’, the pronouncement follows Jeremiah’s guarantee that the people of Judah ‘will fall among the fallen, in the time of their punishment they shall stumble’ (Jer. 8.12). Thus, the amphiboly in this passage functions also like a Janus parallelism, but does so by combining different roots where a single root would be normative.

This taxonomy most likely does not exhaust the possibilities for polysemy in the Hebrew Bible, and doubtless, as scholars continue to give attention to such devices, new discoveries will be made.

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Popular Music

Secular popular music in Hebrew first emerged with the rise of national sentiments among Jews in the 1880s. The nation-building efforts of the Jewish national movement was accompanied by a project of transforming Hebrew into a spoken language, to be used by the emergent speech community for all its communication needs. All realms of endeavor, including popular culture, had to be catered to. The creation of songs was an integral component of this general trend.

Two main phases may be observed in the evolution of Hebrew popular music (Regev and Seroussi 2004). Between the 1880s and the 1960s the field was dominated by music which consciously reflected and supported the hegemonic Zionist ideology. This tradition, named by musicologists שירי ארץ ישראל *šire 'eres yišra'el* 'Songs of the Land of Israel' (henceforce