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JAMES M. KENNEDY,
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READING**

PSALM 29 AS SEMIOTIC SYSTEM: A LINGUISTIC READING

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1. INTRODUCTION

The title of this article is indebted to an essay by Herbert T. Eagle that offers an introduction to the poetics of Jurij Tynjanov, Roman Jakobson, Jan Mukařovský, and Jurij Lotman.¹ Eagle focuses on a particular theoretical agreement that unites these scholars. Representing Russian Formalism and Czech Structuralists, they all understand poetry as manifestations of verbal signification that form their own semiotic systems of meaning. Such semiotic systems operate on the analogy of how a natural linguistic system works. Just as the meanings of words in a natural linguistic system lie in how the words relate to the nearly infinite variables that comprise the language, so a poem can be read as a cumulative building up of a semiotic system. Psalm 29 is a poem that, in my opinion, yields interesting possibilities when explored in this way. In a sense, my choice of it is arbitrary; yet, even since I began to study biblical Hebrew earlier in my education it has held a particular fascination for me. Other readers will have chosen different poems. I hope they will.

Out of these four scholars Roman Jakobson and Jurij Lotman are the two who specifically provide the theoretical basis on which this essay builds. One of the signs that the way they interpret poetry is of some interest to biblical scholars is the publication of Adele Berlin's second and revised edition of *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*.² Berlin draws on Jakobson's insights about parallelism to explore the creativity and imagination with which biblical poets juxtaposed adjacent lines. The following article takes a different path from Berlin's employment of Jakobson and seeks to describe *how* a specific poem, namely Psalm 29, means in its existence as an

¹ "Verse as a Semiotic System: Tynjanov, Jakobson, Mukařovský, Lotman Extended," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 25 (1981), 47–61.

² Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

instance of verbal art. Jakobson proves a fertile mind for Jurij Lotman who carries Jakobson's ideas forward in ways that refine them in more detailed theoretical discussion and that provide an entire volume of examples of how poetry can work as semiotic systems.

By way of procedure, this article first explores Jakobson's definition of the poetic function of language. It then supplements and extends Jakobson's insights by reference to the work of Jurij Lotman. The study then moves through the text of Psalm 29 and suggests not so much what it means but how it means. The point is not to provide a reading of Psalm 29 that could be called Jakobsonian or Lotmanian, but to apply their basic theoretical program to a discrete poetic piece that happens to be particularly dramatic.

2. THE POETIC FUNCTION

Jakobson interpreted poetry on the analogy of the study of a general language system; hence his use of the descriptor "linguistic." He describes a poem as a "structured system, a regularly ordered hierarchical set of artistic devices."³ His delineation of a poem treated it as a system of meaning, the components of which interact and define each other in ways similar to, but not identical with, how the components of a language work. In her discussion of Jakobson's explanation of the poetic function of language, Linda R. Waugh observes that a poem—for example, one in English—read linguistically "bears to the code of English the same relation as any particular instance of the use of English bears to the overall system itself."⁴ Indeed, Jakobson framed his interpretation of poetry within a more comprehensive program for linguistic description; hence, his explanation of language as exhibiting a variety of functions due to the specific needs relative to the circumstances of a given act of communication. In the myriad quotidian acts of communication, the functions overlap and intertwine. The particular function of language that guides the following essay is the poetic function.

Jakobson isolates what he considers to be six functions of language, that is, six ways by which language works for communication.⁵ For our purposes it is the poetic function that is central. Jakobson described the poetic function of language as the "set (*Einstellung*) toward the message as such, focus on the message for its own sake."⁶ He is careful to articulate as a principle, that the

³ Roman Jakobson, "The Dominant," in Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (eds.) *Language and Literature*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1987), 41–46.

⁴ Linda R. Waugh, "The Poetic Function in the Theory of Roman Jakobson," *Poetics Today* 2 (1980), 57–82.

⁵ Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," in *Language and Literature*, 62–94.

⁶ Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," 69.

poetic function of language does not restrict itself only to poetry, but that in poetry it is the dominate function. He states: "Any attempt to reduce the sphere of the poetic function to poetry or to confine poetry to the poetic function would be a delusive oversimplification."⁷ Jakobson expands on the word "set" with the German, *Einstellung*. This is a significant amplification. Jakobson clearly hopes not to be misunderstood. Out of respect to his scholarship, a few words about this German word seem appropriate. *Einstellung* is a more varied word than the English "set" indicates. *Einstellung* may suggest the determination that one takes toward an undertaking, one's attitude toward such an undertaking, or an outlook regarding ideological convictions. In the context of optics, it may exhibit the sense of focus. In Jakobson's construal of the poetic function of language, the phrase "the set (*Einstellung*) toward the message as such" thus refers to the consolidation of, or focusing on, or delineation of the components of the linguistic contexture itself. That is, the "set (*Einstellung*) toward the message as such" is, in Solomon Fishman's terms, "the determinate verbal structure of the poem."⁸ Richard Bradford explains that "set" (*Einstellung*) as Jakobson employed it involves apperception, that is, the mind's capacity to comprehend itself as conscious.⁹ This is to say that "set" relates to the involvement of both the writer of the linguistic object and its reader in the act of signification. *Einstellung* connotes a psychological act whereby the thinking subject—the reader in this case—adjusts her or his awareness of interpretation from thinking about *what* the poem means to *how* it means.¹⁰ To read a poem successfully involves the reader's understanding that what the poem means is the aggregate of the components of the poem in their own, unique consolidation. When language functions poetically, it draws the focus of attention to itself. To paraphrase Jakobson's definition of the poetic function, one might describe it as involving the superimposition of *how* the message is conveyed with what the message is.

Jakobson's configuration of the poetic function as "the set (*Einstellung*) toward the message as such," expresses a variation of the operation of the poetic function as the projection of "*the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination.*"¹¹ In the phrase, "the principle of equivalence," the word "principle"

⁷ Jakobson, "A Postscript to the Discussion of Grammar of Poetry," *Diacritics* 10 (1980), 22–34.

⁸ Solomon Fishman, "Meaning and Structure in Poetry," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 14 (1954), 453–461.

⁹ Richard Bradford, *Roman Jakobson: Life, Language, Art* (New York/London: Routledge, 1994), 24.

¹⁰ Christopher Collins, *The Poetics of the Mind's Eye: Literature and the Psychology of Imagination* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1991), 50–51.

¹¹ Jakobson, "Linguistic and Poetics," 71. Italics are Jakobson's.

designates “the idea about” or “the axiomatic nature of.” Thus, the phrase, “the principle of equivalence” refers to the axiom—or premise—that, given a system, a certain number of variables in it may relate to each other in ways that reveal them to be capable of mutual identification. Thus, the principle of equivalence refers to the concept that similarity between components of a system inevitably occur. The poetic function projects, extends, or applies the idea or concept that systems contain components that may substitute for each other from the task of selecting the appropriate word into the task of combining the words so that the resulting linguistic structure, namely, “the set (*Einstellung*) toward the message itself,” invariably attracts attention.

The “axis of selection” refers to the operations that are necessary to extrapolate from a language system the specific words that are to occur in the act of communication. The “axis of combination” refers to the operations that are necessary to arrange or to combine the words into a meaningful sequence. In poetry, the axis of selection relates to diction; the axis of combination relates to syntax. Even the operations of combination depend on the poet’s choices. Semantics and syntax converge. To depict the poetic function of language as projecting the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection to the axis of combination means that both operations are of equal significance for advancing an interpretation of a poem. In poetry, the choices of diction and the arrangement of the choices into meaningful wholes are of equal value. This is because the arrangement derives from choices regarding sequence. The axis of selection and the axis of combination form an inseparable identity. An analysis of a poem’s diction (axis of selection) that does not treat it in a mutually defining relationship with the poem’s syntax (the axis of combination) will fail. Jurij Lotman notes that one of the implications of Jakobson’s discussion of the relation of selection and combination in the poetic function is to render a poetic work from simply being a collection of words in a certain sequence to a semantically indissoluble whole.¹²

Jakobson amplifies his definition of the poetic function of language by stating that “equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of the sequence.”¹³ In context, equivalence is elliptical for “the principle of equivalence,” which becomes clear when in the same paragraph Jakobson stresses that the forming of sequences is the outcome of the coalescing of selection and combination. In relation to poetry, Jakobson’s definition of the poetic function configures the poem itself as the only vehicle for conveying its meaning. The verbal organization of the poem itself exhibits its

¹² Jurij Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, trans. Gail Lenhoff and Ronald Vroon (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1977), 34.

¹³ Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics,” 71.

meaning.¹⁴ By “message” Jakobson does not mean a paraphrase of the poem’s content, “but simply the utterance itself in linguistic form.”¹⁵ It is the “peculiarly stylized poetic text.”¹⁶ The poem *per se* is the message.

If an interpreter accepts Jakobson’s premises, the task becomes one of unfolding the poem and its components on the analogy of how a structural semantic approach to language operates. In this respect, Jakobson is aware that not all interpreters see the poem the same way; they also do not agree on how to go about interpreting a poem. He is clear that no careful, open-minded reader of poetry will deny the intrinsic value of monographic studies that focus on metrics, strophics, alliterations, rhyme, and philological programs of the study of the poet’s vocabulary.¹⁷ His own interpretations of poems involve reference to the relevance of such items.¹⁸ The challenge exercises the interpreter’s capacity to think about the poem in the poet’s own words—the *Einstellung* toward the message as such—and to imagine the variety of connotations the poet could plausibly have considered. The task, in part, is to entertain any number of possibilities of signification and to allow the free play of nuance and imagination. After all, for Jakobson, ambiguity is “an intrinsic, inalienable character of any self-focused message, briefly, a corollary feature of poetry.”¹⁹ The poem is not so much a cadaver to be dissected, as it is a living entity that is observed. In its observation, the poem becomes the thing that is cherished. In the agenda this essay advocates, the scholar’s primary task to read poetry *ars poetica*.

As a structure, a poem expresses unity in the buildup of sequences that become equivalent. Jakobson’s use of the word “equivalent” may or may not be fortuitous; he does not use it in its mathematically precise sense, but rather to indicate the mutually evocative character of the components of sequences that can be adjacent or dispersed throughout a poem. Sequences that are mutually evocative are parallel codes and inevitably involve variation and difference. Variation and difference do not mean opposition or imply a counter claim, but rather differentiations of the components that occasion similarity. Similarly, Yuri Lotman observes that equivalence in an artistic text does not mean that the semantic elements all have the same denotatum, but that the various systems an artistic text encompasses establish similarities that do not work

¹⁴ Fishman, “Meaning and Structure in Poetry,” 457.

¹⁵ Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 56.

¹⁶ Collins, *Poetics of the Mind’s Eye*, 51.

¹⁷ Jakobson, “A Postscript,” 23.

¹⁸ See for example Jakobson, ‘Shakespeare’s Verbal Art in “Th’ Ex-pence of Spirit”’, in *Language in Literature*, 198–215.

¹⁹ Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics,” 85.

in the natural language, that is, the lexicon.²⁰ Thus, equivalence manifests itself in the play of differences. So understood, parallelism is a structural element of the poem, and with all other elements, it operates at every level of the poem's set (*Einstellung*).²¹

Lotman deals more extensively than does Jakobson on the variations of semantics that occur in poetic texts. The natural language provides the raw material for the language of the poem but as the poet disperses the components from the raw material into syntagmatic form, they begin to evoke a system of semantic meanings secondary to that of the natural language. Poetry sustains the capacity to transform different words into synonyms and to make the same word semantically unequal to itself in various structural allocations. For Lotman, this dual existence—in the natural language and in the poem—explains, in part, the richness of poetic meanings.²² Scholars such as Jakobson and Lotman recognize that the semantic properties of the words a poet employs do not remain under the rigid control of the lexicon. Poets chaff against semantic positivism. Poetic language diversifies the selection from the lexicon and, depending on the poetic context, creates new semantic markers. Regardless of the denotation of the words a poet employs, the poem multiplies meaning. For many biblical scholars, this is distressingly subjective and allows for far-fetched interpretations; as if poetry were not essentially a vehicle for far-fetched expression!

3. PSALM 29

The following reading of Psalm 29 does not attempt to delineate strophes, cola, stanzas, or syllables. A number of more or less convincing formulations of this type are available.²³ As the Masoretes have preserved it, Psalm 29 yields 23 syntactic units. For purposes of reference, the study that follows refers to these units as lines. Scholars will inevitably, one can seriously hope, have different per-

²⁰ Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, 47.

²¹ Jakobson, "A Postscript."

²² Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, 171.

²³ See for example K. Fullerton, "The Strophe in Hebrew Poetry and Psalm 29," *JBL* 48 (1929), 274–290; David Noel Freedman and C. Franke Hyland, "Psalm 29: A Structural Analysis," *HTR* 66 (1973), 236–256; Siegfried Mann, "Komposition und Redaktion von Psalm xxix," *VT* 28 (1978), 172–194; J. P. van der Westhuizen, "A Proposed Reinterpretation of Psalm 29 Based on a Stylistic-Exegetical Analysis," *Journal for Semitics* 5 (1993), 111–122; Johannes F. Diehl, Anja A. Diesel, Andreas Wagner, "Von der Grammatik zum Kerygma: Neue grammatische Erkenntnisse und ihre Bedeutung für das Verständnis der Form und des Gehalts von Psalm xxix," *VT* 49 (1999), 462–486; Pierre Auffret, "Voix de YHWH dans la splendeur! Etude structurelle du psaume 29," *BN* 112 (2002), 5–11; Erich Zenger, "Psalm 29 als hymnische Konstituierung einer Gegenwart" in Klaus Kiesow, Thomas Meurer, et. al. (eds.) *Textarbeit* (Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2003), 569–583.

spectives on this issue. To focus on cola, strophe, stanza, syllables, or cultural provenance is not wrong or misguided, but simply incomplete.

This study assumes the importance of analyses that relate the psalm to its Canaanite or Phoenician provenance but it does not speak to the issue. There are already adequate studies that have provided enough evidence about the psalm's cultural provenance to make a convincing case for it.²⁴ Indeed, Erhard S. Gerstenberger, without need of argumentation, assumes the Canaanite provenance of Psalm 29.²⁵ No reasonable scholar would dismiss these studies, but reasonable scholars will agree that there is more to the psalm than its cultural provenance and the quantification of its components. There is its language; hence the essay's focus.

For enhancing reference, I include the complete text of the psalm below.

מְזֹמֹר לַדָּוִד	1Aa
הָבוּ לַיהוָה בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים	1Ab
הָבוּ לַיהוָה כְּבוֹד וְעֹז:	1B
הָבוּ לַיהוָה כְּבוֹד שְׁמוֹ	2A
הַשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לַיהוָה בְּהַדְרַת־קֹדֶשׁ:	2B
קוֹל יְהוָה עַל־הַמַּיִם	3Aa
אֱלֹהֵי־כְבוֹד הַרְעִים	3Ab
יְהוָה עַל־מַיִם רַבִּים:	3B
קוֹל יְהוָה בַּפֶּחַח	4A
קוֹל יְהוָה בְּהַדָּר:	4B
קוֹל־יְהוָה שֹׁבֵר אַרְזִים	5A
וַיִּשְׁבֶּר יְהוָה אֶת־אַרְזֵי הַלְּבָנוֹן:	5B
וַיִּרְקִידֵם כְּמוֹ־עֵגֶל	6A
לְבָנוֹן וְשֵׁרֵץ כְּמוֹ בָזְרָאִים:	6B
קוֹל־יְהוָה חֹצֵב לְהַבּוֹת אֵשׁ:	7A
קוֹל יְהוָה יַחִיל מִדְּבָר	8A
יַחִיל יְהוָה מִדְּבַר קֹדֶשׁ:	8B
קוֹל יְהוָה יַחֲלֵל אֵילֹת	9Aa

²⁴ H. L. Ginsberg, "A Phoenician Hymn in the Psalter," in *Atti Del XIX Congresso Internazionale Degli Orientalisti, Roma, 23-29 Settembre 1935* (Rome: G. Bardi, 1938), 472–6; Peter C. Craigie, "Parallel Word Pairs in Ugaritic Poetry: A Critical Evaluation of Their Relevance for Psalm 29," *UF* 11 (1979), 134–40.; John Day, "Echoes of Baal's Seven Thunders and Lightnings in Psalm XXIX and Habakkuk III 9 and the Identity of the Seraphim in Isaiah VI," *V/T* 29 (1979), 51; Johannes Schildenberger, "Psalm 29: Ein Hymnus auf den Machtvollen Gott zu Beginn eines Neuen Jahres," *Erbe und Auftrag* 57 (1981), 5–12.; Michael L. Barré, "A Phoenician Parallel to Psalm 29," *HAR* 13 (1991), 25–32.

²⁵ Erhard S. Gerstenberger, "The Psalms: Genres, Life Situations, and Theologies—Towards A Hermeneutics of Social Stratification," in *Diachronic and Synchronic Reading the Psalms in Real Time: Proceedings of the Baylor Symposium on the Book of Psalms*, eds. Joel S. Burnett, W. H. Bellinger, Jr., and W. Dennis Tucker (New York: T & T Clark, 2007), 81–92.

וַיִּחַשְׁף יַעֲרוֹת	9Ab
וּבְהִיכְלוֹ כָּלוּ אִמְרַי כְּבוֹד	9B
יְהוָה לְמַבּוֹל יֹשֵׁב	10A
וַיֵּשֶׁב יְהוָה מִלֶּדֶךְ לְעוֹלָם:	10B
יְהוָה עֹז לְעַמּוֹ יִתֵּן	11A
יְהוָה יִבְרַךְ אֶת־עַמּוֹ בְּשָׁלוֹם:	11B

3.1. LINES 1AB–2B

Whatever adaptation of Jakobson and Lotman one employs, a basic point of continuity will be that, in the exposition of a poem, the distinction between the axis of selection and the axis of combination disappears. By building the sequence, these two axes resolve themselves into each other to form a poem's structure. Syntagmatics—the axis of combination—determines the words' meanings and paradigmatics—the axis of selection—emerges from the poem with a newly formed interchangeability of lexemes. Substitutions become appropriate that would not register in the external natural language. The first quatrain offers a banner opportunity to illustrate Jakobson's perspective of equivalence as a component of the building of the sequence. With the vocative, **בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים**, line 1Ab establishes the psalm's scene as the divine assembly. Lines 1B and 2Ab reveal what the members of the assembly are commanded to ascribe to YHWH. Except for the last two words of 1B and 2A (**וְעֹז** and **שְׁמוֹ**), these lines are verbally identical. Jakobson and Lotman both propose that a poetic work may construct etymological relationships between words that do not have such relationships in the natural language. One way this occurs is by the juxtaposition of two similar phonemic sequences near each other. Jakobson states that, "words similar in sound are drawn together in meaning."²⁶ Similarly, Lotman notes that the repetition of sounds may establish semantic bonds between the words.²⁷ Apart from the paradigmatic relationship between **וְעֹז** and **שְׁמוֹ**, the identity of the sequence of the vocalic structure of these two words (/ě/-/ō/, /ě/-/ô/), in tandem with the verbal equivalence between the first three words of 1B and 2A, presses **וְעֹז** and **שְׁמוֹ** into a fusion of connotations. The psalmist superimposes the connotation of **שְׁמוֹ** on to **וְעֹז**. From the semiotic point of view that accounts for the force of poetry, **וְעֹז** and **שְׁמוֹ** carry forward into the rest of the psalm the equivalence established by their sequence in 1B and 2A. The penultimate line of the psalm, therefore, not only expresses the hope that YHWH may give **עֹז** to the people, but that YHWH may give the power of the divine name as well.

As a verb taking **כְּבוֹד** as its object, the root **יִהַב** shares the semantic field of roots such as **נָתַן** and **שָׂם**, both of which may take **כְּבוֹד** as object. The imperative of **יִהַב** occurs with **כְּבוֹד** as its object

²⁶ Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," 86.

²⁷ Lotman, *Structure of the Artistic Text*, 107.

in Ps 96:7, 8 and 1 Chron 16:28, 29. Similarly, in Josh 7:19 Joshua advises Achan, **שִׁים־נָא כְבוֹד לַיהוָה**. Like **נָתַן יְהוָה**, may convey the meaning of transferring ownership from one person to another whether as a loan or a possession, as when Jacob demands of Laban in Gen 29:21 **הִבָּה אֶת־אֲשֶׁתִּי**. In Ruth 3:15, Boaz tells Ruth, **הִבֵּי הַמִּטְפָּחַת אֲשֶׁר־עָלַיךְ**. The nuance of **יְהוָה** in any given instance depends on its object. Although in the external language, the root **יְהוָה** may relate paradigmatically to the imperatives of **נָתַן** or of **שִׁים**, in Psalm 29 **הִבֵּנוּ** does not portray **בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים** as giving **כְבוֹד** to YHWH as if **כְבוֹד** were something YHWH lacked. In this case, **כְבוֹד** is not a gift.

M. Weinfeld observes that **כְבוֹד** may exhibit a number of semantic variables.²⁸ As in Gen 30:1; Isa 10:3; Qoh 6:2; and Esther 5:11 it may refer to wealth and substance. In Isa 14:18; Ps 21:6; and Prov 25:2, **כְבוֹד** refers to esteem, respect, or honor. **כְבוֹד** participates as well in the semantic field of words for radiance or light as in Isa 58:8 and 60:1. The phrases **כְבוֹד שְׁמוֹ** and **כְבוֹד וְעֹז** sustain a paradigmatic relationship to each other. That is, they are the grammatical objects of the imperative and so constitute what the worshippers are to acclaim about YHWH. This suggests a relationship of equivalence between the two. However, the climactic quality of the former affords it the privilege of conceptual priority and superior signification over the latter.

Like Jakobson, Lotman suggests that paradigmatics allows mutually marked but differentiated elements to intimate each other.²⁹ How 2B works in relation to the lines that precede it illustrates Lotman's suggestion. In its anaphoric function, the three-fold repetition of **הִבֵּנוּ** in 1Ab–2A sets up an expectation of regularity regarding sound and rhythm. In 2B, the imperative **הִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ** doubles the syllable count of **הִבֵּנוּ** and presents the reader with a more complex phonemic structure as well as with a line longer than expected. The increase of phonemic complexity and length of the line reinforces the largo of stately movement and indeed, allows the reader to envision that the convening of the assembly is complete. Thus, 2B exhibits a marked differentiation from the shorter lines that precede it. Nevertheless, Lotman's comments on paradigmatics have consequences for a poetic transformation of 2B. To fall down before the Lord does not necessarily imply an act of honor and devotion; it may be coerced or deceitful. The juxtaposition of **הִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ** with **לַיהוָה** sets it in a paradigmatic relationship with **הִבֵּנוּ** and its objects. The cumulative semantic force of 1Ab–2A is strong enough to superimpose itself on to 2B. In this way, the prostration

²⁸ M. Weinfeld, “כְבוֹד *kābôd*” *TDOT*, 7.22–38; See also *DCH*, 4.353–357.

²⁹ Jurij Lotman, *Structure of the Artistic Text*, trans. D. Barton Johnson (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1976), 37.

2B commands results from sincere confession. Thus 2A and 2B are conceptually parallel.

The psalmist's choice of the word הַשְׁתַּחוּ to describe the act of submission seems so reasonable and so expected that a reader's familiarity with it may preclude any reflections as to why the psalmist selected it or of its effect. The psalmist could have selected other roots, such as כָּרַע, סָגַד, and נָפַל. First, the use of הַשְׁתַּחוּ allows an echo of the /h/ phoneme from the two occurrences of הָבוּ as well as the /u/ phoneme that closes them. Second, because the first word of the line begins with a word encompassing the /š/ phoneme it prepares for its echo in the last word, קִדַּשׁ. Such a phonemic repetition consolidates the poem linearly and renders it almost unimaginable that the psalmist would have selected any other word to depict the act of proskynesis. Harold Bloom refers to such diction as exhibiting the quality of "the *inevitable*."³⁰

With the phrase בְּהִדְרֵת־קִדָּשׁ, 2B introduces a meaningful ambiguity in the poem. F. M. Cross refers to the phrase as a "troublesome expression" and with a number of scholars employs the Ugaritic cognate *hdt*, "vision, appearance," to disambiguate it.³¹ Kraus is confident that the Ugaritic has solved the problem.³² Certainly, the Canaanite provenance of the psalm's conceptualization of divine power lends support to Cross' proposal. However, it is to a singularly employed Ugaritic word that occurs in a line contiguous with one that includes *hlm*, "dream" to which Cross appeals. If a reader should consider בְּהִדְרֵת־קִדָּשׁ as "troublesome," the singular nature of the use of *hdt* in Ugaritic does not definitively dispel its troublesome character. Nevertheless, from a semiotic point of view, the phrase offers an invitation to do what poems have been doing for millennia, namely, evoking the reader's capacity for imagination and creativity.

In place of the phrase in question, LXX reads ἐν ἀύλῃ ἀγία αὐτοῦ, leading many scholars to propose that the Hebrew *Vorlage* read חֲצֵרָה instead of הִדְרָה. This is speculation, but it is eminently reasonable. Another speculative proposal that is just as reasonable is to reject textual emendation and to allow the referential uncertainty to play a role in exploring the system of signification the psalm offers. As Jonathan Culler reminds his readers, comprehending poetry is not merely a process of replacing referentially difficult words with others that make more sense.³³ Post-biblical Hebrew

³⁰ Harold Bloom, *The Art of Reading Poetry* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 36, 37.

³¹ Frank Moore Cross, "Notes on a Canaanite Psalm in the Old Testament," *BASOR* 117 (1950), 19–21. See also Freedman and Hyland, "Psalm 29: A Structural Analysis," *HTR* 66 (1973), 237–256; M. Dahood, *Psalms I:1-50*, (AB; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965), 176.

³² H.-J. Kraus, *Psalmen 1-59* (BKAT, XV/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1961), 381.

³³ Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and*

knows the root הדר and employs it to mean not only “to adorn,” but “to enclose, to go around, and to crown.”³⁴ This suggests the option of associating הדרה with a site of enclosure. Conceivably, the post-biblical use of הדר as “to go around” derives from a metaphorical transition by which the root consolidates into a nominal lexeme denoting an object that is circular or that refers to an enclosed place. This same dynamic works with regard to the roots סבב and עטר. The former yields סָבִיב, a substantive expressing the semantic datum of something that is characterized as circular. The root עטר generates עֲטָרָה, “wreath,” “crown,” or “garland.” Readers might also consider the denotata of “circle” and “council” in biblical Hebrew סוד (Jer 23:18, 22). Like all suggestions for rendering הדרה, this explanation does not solve the issue of its obscured denotation. Who can say that the psalmist did not intend an ambiguity? The poetic value of the phrase בְּהִדְרֵת־קֹדֶשׁ does not rest on empirical demonstration, but on the imaginative moves the reader must make to sustain plausible renderings. Whereas Cross describes בְּהִדְרֵת־קֹדֶשׁ as a “troublesome expression,” it is more likely a playful one. As Jakobson noted, “the machinations of ambiguity are among the very roots of poetry.”³⁵ By “roots,” Jakobson does not only refer to the essence of poetry, but to the heritage of poetry that reaches into antiquity.

Apart from “holiness,” scholars have proposed a variety of ways to render קֹדֶשׁ, often in relation to the problem of the sense of הִדְרָה. Freedman and Hyland render it as “the sanctuary.”³⁶ Dahood, who agrees with Freedman and Hyland’s treatment of הִדְרָה as “appear,” proposes the epithet, “the Holy One.”³⁷ Kraus suggests reading קדשו and configures it as characterizing the nature of YHWH’s appearance [*seiner heiligen Erscheinung*].³⁸ The elliptic character of poetry, however, makes adding the suffix unnecessary. Another equally plausible rendering would be to treat the genitive phrase, בְּהִדְרֵת־קֹדֶשׁ, as adjectival, “the holy court,” referring to the meeting place of the divine council. Semioticians would certainly appreciate Jakobson and Lotman’s insight about poetry multiplying meaning. The psalm refuses domestication.

Biblical scholars have employed a variety of terms to categorize the parallelism in lines 1Ab and 2A. W. G. E. Watson notes that scholars have assigned a number of terms to specify the parallel relationship between the two lines. The superabundance of terms is almost comic. Watson nominates the descriptor, “staircase

the Study of Literature (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1975), 186.

³⁴ Marcus Jastrow, *ספר מלים Dictionary of the targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (New York: Judaica Press, 1996), 334.

³⁵ Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics,” 85.

³⁶ Freedman and Hyland, “Psalm 29: A Structural Analysis,” 238

³⁷ Dahood, *Psalms 1.1-50*, 176.

³⁸ Kraus, *Psalmen 1-59*, 376–377.

parallelism,” drawing on terminology he derives from Greenstein and Cohen.³⁹ However, an appropriate term has been available all along. Grammatically, lines 1Ab and 1B comprise a periodic sentence. The periodic sentence exhibits one or more verbal clauses that alone are grammatically incomplete. The second clause completes the sentence. In a periodic sentence, the main point emerges in the concluding clause. Biblical poetry, like Ugaritic, employs the periodic sentence to great effect as it repeats the grammatically incomplete clause and then completes it.

As Jakobson notes, parallelism works on the basis of the distribution of variation and invariables.⁴⁰ In the periodic sentence the separation of the invariables with elements of variation slows the poem’s forward momentum. By juxtaposing the vocative **בני אלים** to follow the imperative phrase instead of opening the psalm with it, the psalmist avoids the headlong rush that would tempt the reader if **הבו ליהוה** occurred consecutively, that is, at the end of 1Ab and beginning of 1B. It is as though the lines take on the stately quality of a largo. The beginning of Psalm 29 is thus an exercise in restraint; the periodic sentence provides it a way to exhibit a sense of the stately formalities of the gathering of **בני אלים** to honor YHWH in solemn assembly.

3.2. LINES 3AA–5B

With line 3Aa, the psalm’s speaker launches into a depiction of **קול יהוה** that plausibly displays the poetic figure of hypotyposis. That is to say, the speaker takes the readers into a world that cannot be seen; it is an imaginative construct that characterizes the power of **קול יהוה** as only the **בני אלים** could witness it. Biblical scholars have often invoked the thunderstorm as the controlling image of Psalm 29. This is a reasonable interpretive gesture. Indeed, the poet may have intended it. Yet, as the psalm’s sequences consolidate, it will become clear that the impact of **קול יהוה** on the terrestrial world would imply something far more ominous than even a violent thunderstorm. The psalm prefigures the literary topos of cosmic horror in which all life on earth faces possible extinction.

In 3A the word **קול** makes its first appearance in the psalm. If phonemic repetition is a unifying factor in poetry, then lines 2B and 3Aa illustrate its importance. The /q/ phoneme that begins the last word of 2B is the first phoneme in line 3Aa. The phonemic repetition preserves and carries forward the psalm’s structural phonemic unity. In its own way, **קול** will not only quicken the poem’s

³⁹ Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (JSOTSup, 26; Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1984), 150.

⁴⁰ Roman Jakobson, “Grammatical Parallelism and Its Russian Facet,” in Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (eds.) *Language and Literature*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1987), 145-179.

momentum, but will correlate the quickened momentum with a vivid exhibition of onomatopoeia. W. G. E. Watson defines onomatopoeia as matter of lexical necessity.⁴¹ His discussion assumes that the onomatopoeic character of a word is inherent to it. L. A. Schökel similarly reduces onomatopoeia, describing it as a word that has phonic qualities that imitate a sound.⁴² Like Watson, Schökel erroneously links onomatopoeia to the meaning of a word as a categorical necessity. Watson and Schökel are not necessarily wrong, but limited in their descriptive understanding of onomatopoeia.

To illustrate onomatopoeia, Watson uses the phrase קול גָּדוֹל from Isa 29:6 as suggesting thunder and translates it as “a mighty boom.”⁴³ The word “boom” is an English example of onomatopoeia understood in the figure’s simplest definition, but that ancient Hebrew knew קול as inherently onomatopoeic in Watson’s sense is not at all evident. Schökel employs the use of קול in Jer 51:55 to illustrate its onomatopoeic function alluding to thunder.⁴⁴ However, what relates קול to thunder in Jer 51:55 is not the word itself, but its close association with the sound of the chaos waters in the same verse. The use of קול in the Hebrew Bible does not suggest that it is always an onomatopoeic word evoking loud, crashing, or thunderous sounds. To convey a sense of being loud, קול must receive an appropriate adjective or occur in a context that provides the necessary information to understand it as a loud, booming sound. For example, Elijah tells Ahab of having heard קול הגֶּשֶׁם “a sound of roaring rain,” suggesting an approaching thunderstorm (1 Kings 18:41). Later, as he seeks refuge from Jezebel in a cave in the desert, Elijah senses קול דְּמָמָה דְּקָה, “a quiet, hushed sound” (1 Kings 19:12). A word that is onomatopoeic for thunder seems extreme as a description of the sound of sheep and oxen in 1 Sam 15:14 or for the sound of a flute in Job 21:12. In Psalm 29, the linguistic system that comprises the psalm—the set [*Einstellung*] toward the message as such—allows קול to serve an onomatopoeic role evoking thunder as a working image. In the context of this psalm, the deep guttural of the /q/ phoneme, and the liquid /l/, linked by /ô/, combine to evoke initially the auditory sensation of thunder.

Insofar as Psalm 29 initially evokes the image of a thunderstorm, setting קול in syntagmatic associations with images of devastation, its onomatopoeic role in the psalm surfaces quickly. Similar to the use of קול in Jer 51:55, the sequential juxtaposition of קול על-הַמָּיִם in 3Aa and the verb הִרְעִים in 3Ab brings קול and רעם

⁴¹ Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 234.

⁴² L. A. Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics* (transl. A. Graffy; Subsidia Biblica, 11; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2000), 26–27.

⁴³ Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 236.

⁴⁴ Schökel, *Manual of Hebrew Poetics*, 27.

together in a mutually defining way. The poet invokes the image of a thunderstorm, but will develop it in ominous ways and eventually subvert it. Indeed, the rest of the psalm will confront its readers with an image of a force far more violent than a thunderstorm. Lines 3Aa–3B develop a portrayal of קול יהוה relative to two concepts. First, lines 3Aa and 3Ab build on the initial evocation of the thunderstorm located על־הַמַּיִם. The location of קול יהוה in 3Aa is ambiguous. The phrase על־הַמַּיִם could refer to the Mediterranean Sea or to the waters of the primeval deep.⁴⁵ The former interpretation may seem initially plausible in so far as the references to Lebanon and its trees in 5A–B might suggest that a violent storm has swept inland from the sea. However, line 3B evokes the cosmic waters.⁴⁶ In this way, 3B clarifies the reference for על־הַמַּיִם in 3Aa to indicate the waters of chaos.⁴⁷ Although הִרְעִים is the verb of the subject אֵל־הַכְּבוֹד, it links 3Ab to 3B in a dynamic way. A nominal clause, יהוה על־מַיִם רַבִּים nevertheless draws on הִרְעִים as a component of what YHWH is doing over על־מַיִם רַבִּים.

Contingent on the function of בָּנָח and בָּהֲדָר in 4, 4A–5A possibly presents another periodic sentence. The preposition on בָּנָח and בָּהֲדָר may indicate agency or instrumentality so that they adverbally modify שָׁבַר.⁴⁸ In that case, 4A and 4B are two fragments that require a complementary independent clause to complete them. 5A provides this clause. The *vav* consecutive on וַיִּשְׁבַּר suggests a confirmation of the results of the participle in 5A. Majestically and powerfully, קול יהוה shatters cedars; and so YHWH surely shattered them!

Fokkelman refers to the effect of the cola that carry קול יהוה forward as having a staccato resonance.⁴⁹ The disconnection that the musical analogy of staccato suggests seems hardly appropriate given the brevity of each colon and the cumulative force that builds as they unroll one after the other from vv. 3A to 5A. If musical terminology can provide an appropriately descriptive term, then *legato* seems more to the point. Verse 3A sets into motion a smooth but rapidly accelerating pace. The comparatively verbose quality of v. 5A interrupts the *legato* and briefly introduces a

⁴⁵ A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms: Psalm 1-72* (New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 235.

⁴⁶ Herbert Gordon May, “Some Cosmic Connotations of Mayim Rabim ‘Many Waters,’” *JBL* 74 (1955), 9–21.

⁴⁷ Note Berlin, *Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (pp. 96–99), where she discusses the tendency of second lines to clarify lexical or semantic ambiguities.

⁴⁸ D. Pardee, “On Psalm 29: Structure and Meaning,” in Peter Flint and Patrick Miller (eds.) *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 153–183.

⁴⁹ J. P. Fokkelman, *Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible at the Interface of Prosody and Structural Analysis Volume III: The Remaining 65 Psalms* (Studia Semitica Neerlandica; Aasen: Van Gorcum, 2003), 47.

countermotion that has the effect of reinforcing the reader's awareness that קול יהוה has moved from the great deep to strike land. The effect is comparable to the counter-motion that relates v. 2B to vv. 1–2A. Thus, the juxtaposition of a set of short, muscular lines before a longer, concluding one is a function of motion and counter-motion, or at least, motion and its brief impediment.

3.3. LINES 6A–9AB

Line 6A presents a simile portraying the uprooted cedars skipping about like calves. In 6B, MT sets לִבְנוֹן וְשִׁרְיוֹן as new referents for the plural pronoun on וַיִּרְקְדוּ in 6A. On the one hand, the suffix works with אֶת-אֲרִזֵי הַלִּבְנוֹן from 5B as its antecedent. On the other hand, 6B may relate appositionally to 6A. In this case, the phrase כְּמוֹ בְּוַדְאִים in 6B relates to וַיִּרְקְדוּ as simile just as does כְּמוֹ-עֵגֶל in 6A. Ostensibly, the description of קול יהוה evokes the image of a powerful thunder storm at first; but with the retroactive role of לִבְנוֹן וְשִׁרְיוֹן as relating to the pronoun on וַיִּרְקְדוּ, the poet blasts the image of a thunderstorm into pieces. Severe thunderstorms may produce dangerous lightning and spin out tornados, but they do not dislodge mountains or send them skipping. There is nothing earlier in the psalm that would lend itself to predicting this development. Indeed, information theorists teach that unpredictability itself is information and that unpredictability resulting in shock carries more information than a simple surprise would.⁵⁰

If בִּפְתָח and בְּהֶדֶר in lines 4A and 4B can modify the participle שָׁבַר in 5A, from a semiotic linguistic perspective, they can modify the participle הִצֵּב in 7A. In Jakobson's terms, the building of the sequence allows readers to understand the qualities that define קול יהוה in 5A to operate for its depiction in 7A. The word לְהִבָּה evokes both blade and flame. Its use in the plural in line 7A conceivably allows it to function as a plural of majesty. In construct with אֵשׁ, it calls flames to mind; in its juxtaposition with הִצֵּב, it enables the sense of blades or points. That 5A and 7A are not “adjacent lines” does not minimize the parallelism that the building up of the sequence between them allows them to display. From a linguistic point of view, lines 5A and 7A are as meaningfully parallel as they are to either of the adjacent lines that precede or follow them.

Line 8B reverses the syntax of subject and verb from 8A but maintains the order of the sequence of the direct object. In 8A קול יהוה causes the wilderness to writhe, evoking any number of images about how land behaves in an earthquake. Depending on the geology of a particular area and the nature of the shift of plates, an earthquake can produce liquefaction, topographical uplift, or lateral and longitudinal shifts. The earth truly writhes. The occur-

⁵⁰ N. E. Enkvist, “Styles as Parameters in Text Strategy,” in Willie Van Peer (ed.) *The Taming of the Text* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 121–151.

rence of the phrase קול יהוה as the first element of line 8A emphasizes what makes the wilderness writhe. Taken alone, 8A is a general statement describing how קול יהוה can affect מדבר. In 8B, the singular use of יהוה as opposed to קול יהוה, as well as the specific location מדבר קדש, suggests that 8B works in relation to 8A in a way similar to how 5B consolidates the image of קול יהוה shattering cedars. The occurrence of the Deity's personal name and the localization of seismic activity transform the rather general statement of 8A into a more personally relevant description.

Although קול יהוה does not occur in 5B–6B, these lines provide an arresting meditation on the phrase. The interplay of sound that weaves these lines together makes the diction, in Bloom's sense of the term, inevitable. The verb וישבר in 5B carries forward the phonemic values of /š/, /ē/, and /r/ from the participle of the same root in 5A. The phonemic sequence of /ar/ in וירקידם in v. 6 is sequentially close enough to the same phonemic sequence in ארזי in 5B as to sustain a unified phonemic structure between the two lines. Lines 3–5A display a high occurrence of the /m/ phoneme. The plosive phoneme /b/ in בכח and בהדר in 4 is phonetically similar to the /m/ phoneme in 3–5A. Relative to the lengths of the lines from 3–5A, the longer 5B extends the amount of time the reader thinks about the power of קול יהוה. From 4A to 5A, the lines lengthen incrementally. Verse 4A consists of 5 syllables, 4B of 6, verse 5A of 8, and 5B has 12. The increasing lengths of the lines suggests a crescendo effect that 5B brings to a climax. With the culmination of the crescendo, finite verbs emerge as the prevailing mode of describing action in the remaining lines of the poem. This has implications for how a reader might think of motion and counter-motion.

Movement is integral to a successful poem and Psalm 29 is an exemplar in this regard. In poetry, the issue of motion deals with the variety of ways a poem accelerates and slows down.⁵¹ Sensitivity to the poem's indicators of momentum is a condition of reading poetry that comprises the heart of understanding it, as best as one can understand a poem. Short lines tend to accelerate a poem's pace while long lines with polysyllabic words tend to delay it.⁵²

One of Psalm 29's enduring ambiguities is the word אילות in line 9Aa. The ambiguity this word exhibits depends on its vocalization, or lack thereof. As MT has it, it clearly means “doe” or “hind.” However, pointed אילות, it suggests “oaks.” Kraus suggests this possibility but adds that it is problematic. In poetry, the problematic is hardly easily dismissed. Poems *are* problems. If its readers entertain the plausibility of Jakobson's perspective, that it may be unintended does not diminish its significance. Indeed, in Jakob-

⁵¹ Stephen Dobyns, *Best Words, Best Order: Essays on Poetry* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 131.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 142.

son's linguistic approach, both poets and readers can respond to the contrivances in a poem's structure without uncovering its foundations.⁵³ This is what scholars are doing when they advocate textual emendation in this case—dealing with *poetic* ambiguity, not textual corruption.

Line 5B has already introduced language describing a forest. Line 9Ab possibly reinforces a forest scene with **וַיַּחֲשֹׁף יַעֲרוֹת אֵילוֹת**. That **אֵילוֹת** refers to oaks is therefore reasonable. And yet, in 6A–6B, the psalm introduces the language of fauna, namely **עֲגֹל** and **בְּזֵרְאִיִּים**. To take Psalm 29 seriously as a poem is to allow the ambiguity to play its role. Readers cannot know what the poet intended. Thus, the total structure of the psalm, from the level of the morpheme to that of completed work, does not clarify the ambiguous situation. Whether the psalmist intended an ambiguity is not recoverable. Furthermore, if readers take Jakobson seriously, the use of **אֵילוֹת** here—the axis of selection—as it coalesces with the axis of combination—the sequences in the poem, illustrates the fusion of semantic variation into one lexeme. In this case, 9Aa conveys *both* the premature parturition of the hind and the uprooting of oaks. Not pointed, the line **קוֹל יְהוָה יַחֲלֵל אֵילוֹת** does not yield semantic transparency. In Lotman's terms,⁵⁴ the line becomes semantically dense and rich with information.

3.4. LINES 9B–11B

In line 9Ab, the rolling or trilling of the /r/ phoneme of **יַעֲרוֹת** carries forward the four-fold phoneme /l/ from 9Aa. The same phoneme figures prominently in the juxtaposition of **וּבְהִיכְלוֹ** before **כְּלוֹ**. The MT accents in the string, **וַיַּחֲשֹׁף יַעֲרוֹת וּבְהִיכְלוֹ כְּלוֹ** mark it with strong disjunctives. The **אֶתְנַחַּח** in **וּבְהִיכְלוֹ** briefly isolates it in the flow of reading but it is the disjunctive accent, **עוֹלָה וַיִּזְרַד** the stronger of the two, in **יַעֲרוֹת** that accentuates the brief pause surrounding **וּבְהִיכְלוֹ**. Despite the **עוֹלָה וַיִּזְרַד** in **יַעֲרוֹת** and **אֶתְנַחַּח** in **וּבְהִיכְלוֹ**, the continuation of the rolling /r/ phoneme in **יַעֲרוֹת** and the /l/ phoneme in **וּבְהִיכְלוֹ** collaborate to insinuate a striking phonemic chain.

To what **הִיכָל** refers in 9B is not a matter of determination but of ambiguity. Does it depict YHWH's cosmic abode or the temple in Jerusalem? As Gerhard von Rad did before them, H.-J. Kraus along with Freedman and Hyland argue for the former, ruling out the temple in Jerusalem.⁵⁵ M. Weinfeld interprets it as the

⁵³ R. Jakobson, "Subliminal Verbal Patterning," in *Language and Literature*, 250–256.

⁵⁴ *Analysis of the Poetic Text*, 72.

⁵⁵ G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (vol. 1; transl. D. M. G. Stalker; New York: Harper & Row), 360; Kraus, *Psalmen 1-59*, 377, 383; Freedman and Hyland, "Psalm 29: A Structural Analysis."

temple and views כְּבוֹד at as an endowment on the temple.⁵⁶ Erich Zenger interprets the suffix on וּבְהִיכָלוֹ as lending to the word an association with the celestial place of assembly, where בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים pay homage to YHWH.⁵⁷ He adds that the word כָּלוֹ stresses the inclusive character of the divine abode as involving the temple in Jerusalem as well. Zenger's suggestion is plausible.

However, that the pronoun on כָּלוֹ refers to הִיכָל is not a syntactic or grammatical necessity. The grammatical singularity of the pronoun does not prohibit it from referring to a corporate body. It may be read as referring to בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים in 1Ab.⁵⁸ With von Rad, H.-J. Kraus views lines 9B and 10A as establishing a link with the introduction in 1Ab–2B. The psalm returns the reader to the place it depicts at its beginning.⁵⁹ The participle אָמַר plausibly relates to בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים who cry out כְּבוֹד. Jakobson advocated the notion that when a word or phrase enters a poem built on pervasive parallelism, the system that is the poem itself, constrains the word or clause to partake in what he called “the tenacious array of cohesive grammatical forms and semantic values.”⁶⁰ In such a scenario, lines 9B–10A form a conceptual parallel with 1Ab–2B. The phrase כָּלוֹ אָמַר כְּבוֹד thus can conceivably be taken to evoke בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים declaring the glory of YHWH. This reading does not settle the issue or relieve the ambiguity of הִיכָל; instead it strengthens it and in so doing refuses to let the reader have the last say.

Lines 1Ab–9B express an excited, nearly uncontrollable tone. The components of the psalm move forward fiercely. They simulate, even if faintly, the terror-inspiring phenomena that accompany קוֹל יְהוָה. At 10A, the tone shifts to one of solemn awe. If the word מְבוֹל refers to the heavenly deeps that await YHWH's distribution upon the earth, its use suggests that the scene is still the divine assembly that 1Ab–2B suggested. Nothing can successfully counter the ambiguity the word הִיכָל presents to readers, but if line 10A returns readers' attention back to the divine assembly of 1Ab–2B, the word הִיכָל can plausibly designate YHWH's cosmic abode and not the temple in Jerusalem.⁶¹ Indeed, the reader comes to realize that scene had never changed. Just as 1Ab–2B conducted the reader into the divine assembly anticipating YHWH's seating, now the psalm relates that YHWH appeared and took the seat of the divine judge and monarch. That the reader never left the divine assembly leads to the realization that 3–9Ab are the lyrics that express the qualities to which כְּבוֹד וְעֹז and כְּבוֹד שְׁמוֹ in vv. 1 and 2

⁵⁶ Weinfeld, “כְּבוֹד kābôd.”

⁵⁷ Erich Zenger, “Psalm 29 als hymnische Konstituierung einer Gegenwart,” in *Textarbeit*, 569–583.

⁵⁸ von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* I, 360.

⁵⁹ Kraus, *Psalmen 1-59*, 383.

⁶⁰ Jakobson, “Grammatical Parallelism and Its Russian Facet,” 179.

⁶¹ Kraus, *Psalmen 1-59*, 383; von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* I, 360.

refer. Verses 3–9 provide the reader with a model for ascribing greatness and strength to the name of YHWH.

Moving from the spirited and energetic momentum of v. 1–9, marked by noise and fury, with lines 10A, B a silence falls suddenly and heavily, suggesting a quiet solemnity, perhaps alluding to the imposition of silence as the appropriate response of the world to the presence of YHWH in the divine temple (cf. Hab 2:20). The sequential proximity of the lines in 10A, B with the use of הֵיכַל in 9B reinforces the plausibility that the latter term refers to the celestial temple. As far as הַדְרָה in line 2B can suggest not only the court that surrounds the throne of the divine judge but simultaneously serve to suggest that YHWH is about to appear in the assembly, the affix form of the verb יָשַׁב in 10A allows the reader to see it pronouncing that YHWH has appeared and now sits enthroned in the assembly. To depict YHWH as sitting enthroned לְמַבּוּל likewise suggests the celestial assembly. The poet's use of מַבּוּל reinforces the significance of considering the axis of selection. D. T. Tsumura proposes that מַבּוּל does not refer to the same chaos waters that occur in v. 3, but to the waters of the celestial reservoir that cascaded from the sluice gates of the heavens in Gen. 6:17; 7:6, 7, 10, 17; 19:11, 15; 9:11, 15.⁶² Read this way, the poet obliquely reminds the reader of YHWH's power to keep the same thing from happening again and signals that the scene is the divine celestial assembly. For readers familiar with the entire Psalter, Psalm 29 evokes Ps 82:1 where YHWH is seated נָצַב in the assembly.

Lines 11A and 11B present the problem of whether to read their verbs as jussive or indicative. E. Zenger proposes that both verbs are indicative.⁶³ Insofar as they follow closely on a declaration of YHWH's cosmic kingship, they exhibit the definitive and positive blessings of such kingship on YHWH's people. The syntactic priority of the divine name in lines 11A and 11B brings to bear the force of the power of קוֹל יְהוָה that occurs so frequently in the psalm. Furthermore, Zenger points to texts such as Pss 28:8 and 68:36 that expressly portray YHWH giving strength to Israel. Zenger has succeeded in making a plausible case for the indicative, but has not demonstrated it to the point that there is now no ambiguity.

Regardless of whether יִתֵּן and יִבְרַךְ are indicative or jussive, lines 11A and 11B fulfill the expectation of the divine council type-scene that someone will set a petition before the divine judge or the divine judge will issue an edict in response. D. E. Bokovoy has shown that the deliberative body of the assembly may at times make such petitions to the divine judge.⁶⁴ Conceivably, בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים

⁶² D. T. Tsumura, “‘The Deluge’ (mabbûl) in Psalm 29:10,” *UF* 36 (1988), 351–355.

⁶³ Zenger, “Psalm 29 als hymnische Konstitutierung,” 575.

⁶⁴ David E. Bokovoy, “שמעו והעידו בבית יעקב,” Invoking the Council

offer a petition to their sovereign, who is also Israel's sovereign. Simultaneously, the lines suggest what YHWH's decision will be.

Psalm 29 is irreducible. It is sinuous and lean, concentrating a depiction of great power with minimal description as it depicts קול יהוה sweeping over the land, uprooting not only trees but mountains as well. Verse 11 evokes the image of supplicants who have appeared before the divine king to petition for blessing. The undefined character of the prefixed verbs, יתן and יברך, suggests both the hope that YHWH will so act and the assurance that the divine king will grant the request. As the psalm concludes, the reader may envision Israel's representatives to the divine assembly, who are as much the object of address in vv. 1Ab, B and 2 as are בני אלים, as being acutely, frightfully, but hopefully aware that קול יהוה can protect the nation or toss it from the surface of the earth.