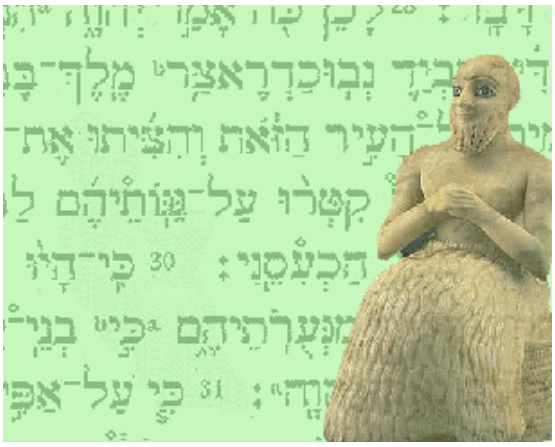
The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures

ISSN 1203-1542

http://www.jhsonline.org and

http://purl.org/jhs



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VOLUME 7, ARTICLE 4

SCOTT B. NOEGEL, "WORD PLAY" IN QOHELETH

"WORD PLAY" IN QOHELETH

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בִּקֵּשׁ קֹהֶלֶת לִמְצֹא דִּבְרֵי־חֵפֶץ

Qoh 12:10

Despite centuries of scholarly awareness of "word play" as a literary phenomenon in ancient Near Eastern literature, the topic remains under-researched. While for the most part, scholars have been content to note examples of "word play" or punning in various Near Eastern texts, typically in footnotes, few full-scale studies on "word play" exist.[1] In fact, we currently lack a comprehensive and consistent taxonomy for the various devices usually categorized as "word play" and their proposed functions. This is especially the case with regard to the Hebrew Bible,[2] for which no exhaustive examinations of any one "word

[1] I resist citing the numerous contributions on the subject and instead cite only recent representative examples: Mario H. Beatty, "Translating Wordplay in the Eighth Petition of the Eloquent Peasant: A New Interpretation," *Cahiers Caribéens d'Egyptologie* 9 (2006), pp. 131–141; Jonathan Grossman, *Ambiguity in the Biblical Narrative and its Contribution to the Literary Formation* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Bar-Ilan University, 2006) (in Hebrew); "The Use of Ambiguity in Biblical Narratives of Misleading and Deceit," *Tarbiẓ* 73/4 (2006), pp. 483–515 (in Hebrew); Joel Kalvesmaki, *Formation of the Early Christian Theology of Arithmetic Number Symbolism in the Late Second Century and Early Third Century* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Catholic University of America, 2006); Ludwig Morenz, *Sinn und Spiel der Zeichen: Visuelle Poesie im Alten Ägypten* (Köln/Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2006); Scott B. Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers: The Punning Language of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* (American Oriental Series, 89; New Haven, CT, 2007); Noegel and Kasia Szpakowska, "'Word Play' in the Ramesside Dream Manual," *Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur* 35 (2007), 193–212. For a comprehensive and up-to-date bibliography on "word play" in ancient Near Eastern texts please visit:
http://faculty.washington.edu/snoegel/wordplay.html.

[2] Compare, e.g., the very different taxonomies and approaches presented in

play" device exist. Indeed, not a single biblical book has ever been mined for all of its various types of "word play." This brief contribution, which is part of a more comprehensive project,[3] intends to help in filling this gap by offering analyses of the various types of "word play" found in the book of Qoheleth, a book largely neglected in terms of research on punning.[4]

However, before providing said analysis, I note that I have placed the term "word play" in quotation marks in order to draw attention to its problematic nature. Indeed, neither the term "word" nor "play" is particularly useful when discussing the phenomenon of punning in ancient texts. This is because in Near Eastern languages, the word does not constitute the basic linguistic unit upon which puns are based. In Akkadian and Egyptian, for example, it is the sign that constitutes the fundamental element.[5] In Hebrew and other consonantal scripts, it is arguably the syllable that serves as the basic linguistic unit for punning.[6] Moreover, there is little that is "playful" about punning in the ancient Near East. On the contrary, it appears to have been a rhetorically serious device of some performative power. Nevertheless, the term

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Immanuel M. Casanowicz, "Paronomasia in the Old Testament," *JBL* 12 (1893), 105–167; Jack M. Sasson, "Word Play in the Old Testament," *IDB Supplement* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), pp. 968–970; and Edward L. Greenstein, "Wordplay, Hebrew," in D. N. Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. VI (New York: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 968–971.

[3] I currently am writing a monograph entitled *"Word Play" in Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, in which I survey the various functions of "word play" in ancient Near Eastern texts and provide a comprehensive taxonomy for the phenomenon. Also discussed in the book are issues of terminology, genre, audience, grammaticality, interpretation, and methodology. Languages included in the study include Akkadian, Egyptian, Ugaritic, biblical Hebrew, and Aramaic.

[4] Consequently, since so few commentaries refer to the phenomena discussed herein, I cite commentaries only where relevant. Indeed, I am able to locate only one article devoted to "word play" in Qoheleth: Anthony Ceresko, "The Function of Antanaclasis (*mṣ*ʾ) 'to find' // (*mṣ*ʾ) 'to reach, overtake, grasp' in Hebrew Poetry, especially in the Book of Qoheleth," *CBQ* 44 (1982), 551–569. Casanowicz, "Paronomasia in the Old Testament," offers only a few examples from Qoheleth.

[5] For a preliminary discussion along these lines see Scott B. Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*. Friedrich Junge, "Zur Sprachwissenschaft der Ägypter," in F. Junge, ed., *Studien zu Sprache und Religion Ägyptens zu Ehren von Wolfhart Westendorf*, Band I (Göttingen: Seminar für Ägyptologie und Koptologie, 1984), pp. 257–272, argues that it is the colon that constitutes the basic linguistic element in Egyptian.

[6] The same can be said of Greek and Roman punning. See F. Ahl, *Metaformations: Soundplay and Wordplay in Ovid and Other Classical Poets* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

"word play" is so pervasive in the literature, that it is often heuristically useful to use it. But I opt throughout to use the term "punning," which is general enough to encapsulate all the devices collected in this study.[7]

With this in mind, I proceed to the data. I have divided the study into six sections, according to the six types of punning found in Qoheleth. The first focuses on alliteration, or the repeated use of consonants.[8] This is the largest of the six categories. The second section collects examples of assonance, the repeated use of vowel patterns. Though both alliteration and assonance both fit generally under the category of paronomasia or "similarities of sound," it is important to keep in mind that all examples of paronomasia are also effective on a visual register. The third section focuses on illustrations of polysemy; cases in which words bear more than one meaning in a single context. The fourth section, which is related to polysemy, details cases of antanaclasis. Antanaclasis occurs when a word is used multiple times, but with different meanings. In the fifth section, I provide an example of allusive punning, i.e., the use of words or forms that imply by way of similarity of sound another word that does not occur in the text.[9] The sixth section is devoted to instances of numerical punning. After providing the data for each of these devices, I offer some general observations on punning in Qoheleth.

1. ALLITERATION

Qoh 1:4–6

4 דּוֹר הֹלֵךְ וְדוֹר בָּא וְהָאָרֶץ לְעוֹלָם עֹמָדֶת
5 וְזָרַח הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וּבָא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וְאֶל־מְקוֹמוֹ שׁוֹאֵף זוֹרֵחַ הוּא שָׁם
6 הוֹלֵךְ אֶל־דָּרוֹם וְסוֹבֵב אֶל־צָפוֹן סוֹבֵב סֹבֵב הוֹלֵךְ הָרוּחַ
וְעַל־סְבִיבֹתָיו שָׁב הָרוּחַ

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[7] See, e.g., Andrew Welsh, "Pun," in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetics*, p. 1005, who notes that verbal puns "play with sound and meaning."

[8] Like Casanowicz and others since him, I do not consider the repetition of the same root, even if found in a different form, to constitute alliteration. Thus, while a line like הֲבֶל הֲבָלִים אָמַר קֹהֶלֶת הֲבֶל הֲבָלִים הַכֹּל הָבֶל in 1:2 may have an overall alliterative effect by repeating the root הבל, it lies outside this study (though some alliteration perhaps obtains in the consonants ה and ל which appear in both הבל and קהלת). Similarly, I leave out instances of the so-called cognate accusative construction, e.g., תִּדֹּר נֶדֶר in Qoh 5:3.

[9] On this form of punning see the many examples found in Moshe Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Name Derivations and Puns* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991).

This passage provides an excellent instance of alliteration of the consonants ד and ר, which we hear twice in v. 4 in דּוֹר "generation," and again in דָּרוֹם "south" in v. 6. In addition, the use of the verb הלך in v. 6 creates the anticipation that דּוֹר will appear, as it did twice in v. 4, but instead the poet uses the alliterative word דָּרוֹם. Thus, the repetition of דּוֹר in v. 4 and the use of הלך in vv. 4 and 6 permit the alliteration to be perceived over the stretch of an intervening line.10 Also, the consonants ש and מ in the repeated word שֶׁמֶשׁ in v. 5 echo in the word שָׁם at the end of the verse.

Qoh 2:2

לִשְׂחוֹק אָמַרְתִּי מְהוֹלָל וּלְשִׂמְחָה מַה־זֹּה עֹשָׂה

Alliteration is achieved in this verse by repeating the consonants שׂ and ח in the words לִשְׂחוֹק and וּלְשִׂמְחָה. The alliteration serves to strengthen the relationship between "laughter" and "merriment," underscored also by their parallelism. Also alliterative is the consonant מ, which appears four times in this brief line.

Qoh 3:3

עֵת לַהֲרוֹג וְעֵת לִרְפּוֹא
עֵת לִפְרוֹץ וְעֵת לִבְנוֹת

In this line it is the consonants פ and ר that appear in the words לִרְפּוֹא and לִפְרוֹץ. The repeated use of ל to mark the infinitive and the consonant ר in לַהֲרוֹג add to the alliterative effect. The alliteration here helps to connect the chain of famous merisms and lends cohesiveness to them.

10 While alliteration is more effective when the consonants that alliterate are in close proximity, such devices help fill the gap. Moreover, I would argue that the peoples of the ancient Near East generally were more attuned to such devices, given their common practice of reading texts aloud. If we consider also the importance placed on the memorization of text, especially among the erudite elite, then we may assume that some visual puns also functioned even when not in close proximity. I develop this argument more thoroughly, and the evidence in support of it, in my forthcoming monograph *"Word Play" in Ancient Near Eastern Texts.*

Qoh 3:5–6

5 עֵת לְהַשְׁלִיךְ אֲבָנִים וְעֵת כְּנוֹס אֲבָנִים
עֵת לַחֲבוֹק וְעֵת לִרְחֹק מֵחַבֵּק
6 עֵת לְבַקֵּשׁ וְעֵת לְאַבֵּד
עֵת לִשְׁמוֹר וְעֵת לְהַשְׁלִיךְ

This passage repeatedly employs the consonants ב ,ח, and ק. See the two-fold use of the root חבק in v. 5, the use of לִרְחֹק in v. 5, and the word לְבַקֵּשׁ in v. 6. Bolstering this example is the fact that, unlike the other merismic pairs in this list, חבק does not have an antonymic root. Instead, it is negated by the alliterative phrase לִרְחֹק מֵחַבֵּק. As in the previous example, here alliteration binds the sequential merisms and strengthens the cohesiveness of the list.

Qoh 3:11

אֶת־הַכֹּל עָשָׂה יָפֶה בְעִתּוֹ גַּם אֶת־הָעֹלָם נָתַן בְּלִבָּם
מִבְּלִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִמְצָא הָאָדָם אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֶׂה אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים
מֵרֹאשׁ וְעַד־סוֹף

Here Qoheleth offers alliteration between the consonants ל ,ב, and מ in the words בְּלִבָּם and מִבְּלִי, and with the word הָעֹלָם, which echoes just the ל and the מ. The device serves to draw into contrast the concept of eternity (הָעֹלָם) that God has put in the human mind (בְּלִבָּם) with humankind's inability (מִבְּלִי) to fathom it truly.

Qoh 3:18

אָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בְּלִבִּי עַל־דִּבְרַת בְּנֵי הָאָדָם לְבָרָם הָאֱלֹהִים
וְלִרְאוֹת שְׁהֵם־בְּהֵמָה הֵמָּה לָהֶם

Similarly, Qoh 3:18 echoes the consonants in the word בְּלִבִּי by employing the words דִּבְרַת, which uses the closeness in sounds between the liquids ל and ר, and לְבָרָם, which resounds both the ב and ל. Here the alliteration connects the matter (דִּבְרַת) of humankind to which Qoheleth has set his mind (בְּלִבִּי), and his pondering that God has established it to test them (לְבָרָם). In addition, the words וְלִרְאוֹת שְׁהֵם־בְּהֵמָה הֵמָּה לָהֶם provide two illustrations of epanastrophe, a

subclass of alliteration in which the final syllable of one word is repeated in the next word.[11]

Qoh 4:6

טוֹב מְלֹא כַף נָחַת מִמְּלֹא חָפְנַיִם עָמָל וּרְעוּת רוּחַ

The alliteration of the consonants ח, פ, and נ in the uncommon expression כַּף נָחַת and rare word חָפְנַיִם helps to emphasize the contrast between the small handful of ease and the two fistfulls of toil. The contrast is supported by additional alliteration of the מ and ל in the root מלא, which appears twice, and the word עָמָל.

Qoh 4:13

טוֹב יֶלֶד מִסְכֵּן וְחָכָם מִמֶּלֶךְ זָקֵן וּכְסִיל
אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַע לְהִזָּהֵר עוֹד

Here again Qoheleth uses alliteration, specially of the consonants ס, מ, ל, and נ, to strengthen a contrast, this time between a poor wise youth (יֶלֶד מִסְכֵּן וְחָכָם) and an old, but foolish king (מִמֶּלֶךְ זָקֵן וּכְסִיל).[12]

Qoh 4:14–15

14 כִּי־מִבֵּית הָסוּרִים יָצָא לִמְלֹךְ
כִּי גַם בְּמַלְכוּתוֹ נוֹלַד רָשׁ
15 רָאִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־הַחַיִּים הַמְּהַלְּכִים תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

In this passage, the poet alliterates the consonants ל, מ, and כ in the words בְּמַלְכוּתוֹ, לִמְלֹךְ, and the rare piel participial form הַמְּהַלְּכִים. Qoheleth has set up a motif of reversal in which one born without status, and presumably unfit for rule, comes to rule a large body of apparently willing followers. The alliteration underscores this reversal by drawing into comparison the institution of kingship (לִמְלֹךְ and בְּמַלְכוּתוֹ) and those who follow (הַמְּהַלְּכִים).

[11] First noted by M. Casanowicz, "Paronomasia in the Old Testament," p. 112, and repeated in Sasson, "Word Play in the Old Testament," p. 969.

[12] The contrast is bolstered also by a partial assonance between the segholates יֶלֶד and מֶלֶךְ.

Qoh 5:7

אִם־עֹשֶׁק רָשׁ וְגֵזֶל מִשְׁפָּט וָצֶדֶק תִּרְאֶה בַּמְּדִינָה אַל־תִּתְמַהּ
עַל־הַחֵפֶץ כִּי גָבֹהַּ מֵעַל גָּבֹהַּ שֹׁמֵר וּגְבֹהִים עֲלֵיהֶם

This verse contains two words in which the final ה is pronounced: תִּתְמַהּ and גָּבֹהַּ, the latter of which appears three times. The rarity of such words in biblical Hebrew suggests that the usage was deliberately chosen for reasons of alliteration. While I can see no immediate reason for the alliteration other than poetic choice, perhaps the repeatedly pronounced ה helped to add emphasis to the statement.

Qoh 5:9

אֹהֵב כֶּסֶף לֹא־יִשְׂבַּע כֶּסֶף
וּמִי־אֹהֵב בָּהָמוֹן לֹא תְבוּאָה גַּם־זֶה הָבֶל

In this verse Qoheleth alliterates the consonants ה and ב in the word אֹהֵב, which appears twice, and in the words בָּהָמוֹן and הָבֶל. The consonant ב resounds also in תְּבוּאָה. The alliteration serves to connect the love of wealth with futility (i.e., הָבֶל).

Qoh 6:6

וְאִלּוּ חָיָה אֶלֶף שָׁנִים פַּעֲמַיִם וְטוֹבָה לֹא רָאָה הֲלֹא אֶל־
מָקוֹם אֶחָד הַכֹּל הוֹלֵךְ

Note in this passage the repeated use of the א and ל in the words וְאִלּוּ (rarely used in Qoheleth) and אֶלֶף, and in the phrase לֹא רָאָה הֲלֹא אֶל... The use of the liquids ל and ר also may be considered alliterative. The repeated use of these consonants helps to place reiterated emphasis on the hyperbolic אֶלֶף שָׁנִים, which is contrasted ultimately with the same (אֶחָד) place all go upon death. As such the verse also contains an example numerical punning (more on this below).

Qoh 7:1

טוֹב שֵׁם מִשֶּׁמֶן טוֹב וְיוֹם הַמָּוֶת מִיּוֹם הִוָּלְדוֹ

Alliteration occurs here between the word שֵׁם and מִשֶּׁמֶן, as noted already by Casanowicz.[13] Here the device underscores the contrast that the poet has established between the value of a good name and the value of fine oil. A similar alliteration appears in Song 1:3: שֶׁמֶן תּוּרַק שְׁמֶךָ.[14]

Qoh 7:4

לֵב חֲכָמִים בְּבֵית אֵבֶל וְלֵב כְּסִילִים בְּבֵית שִׂמְחָה

Qoheleth employs an anagramic use of the consonants ל and ב in the words לֵב, which occurs twice, and אֵבֶל. The alliteration allows him to state that the לֵב of the wise rests both figuratively and literally within the אֵבֶל. The alliteration is reinforced by the two-fold use of the ב in the word בְּבֵית, which also appears twice.

Qoh 7:5–6

5 טוֹב לִשְׁמֹעַ גַּעֲרַת חָכָם מֵאִישׁ שֹׁמֵעַ שִׁיר כְּסִילִים
6 כִּי כְקוֹל הַסִּירִים תַּחַת הַסִּיר כֵּן שְׂחוֹק הַכְּסִיל
וְגַם־זֶה הָבֶל

As also noted by Casanowicz,[15] this passage repeats the consonants ס and ר, in the words הַסִּירִים and הַסִּיר. The consonant ס is also repeated in the words כְּסִילִים and הַכְּסִיל. The liquids ר and ל alliterate in the words הַסִּירִים and הַסִּיר, on the one hand, and the words כְּסִילִים and הַכְּסִיל, on the other. The word שְׂחוֹק also alliterates with קוֹל, and possibly with הַכְּסִיל. In addition, the words כְּסִילִים and הַכְּסִיל also illustrate antanaclasis (see below). According to Jacob Klein and Michael Fox,[16] the alliterative effect is onomatopoeic, providing the crackling sounds that passage's image evokes.

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[13] Casanowicz, "Paronomasia in the Old Testament," 161.

[14] Noted also by Rashbam. See Sara Japhet and Robert B. Salters, *The Commentary of R. Samuel ben Meir Rashbam on Qoheleth* (Jerusalem/Leiden: Magnes Press, E. J. Brill, 1985), pp. 150–151.

[15] Casanowicz, "Paronomasia in the Old Testament," 128. Also observed by R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes* (AB 18; New York: Doubleday, 1965), p. 235, who includes the word שִׁיר. If we are to include שִׁיר, however, because of the ש, then we also should include שֹׁמֵעַ, which appears twice, and אִישׁ.

[16] Jacob Klein and Michael Fox, "Qoheleth," in *ʿOlam ha-Tanakh* (Tel-Aviv: Davidzon-ʿIti, 1997), pp. 191 (in Hebrew). Repeated in Michael V. Fox, *JPS Torah Commentary: Ecclesiastes* (Philadelphia, PA.: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), p. 45.

Qoh 7:8–9

8 טוֹב אַחֲרִית דָּבָר מֵרֵאשִׁיתוֹ טוֹב אֶרֶךְ־רוּחַ מִגְּבַהּ־רוּחַ
9 אַל־תְּבַהֵל בְּרוּחֲךָ לִכְעוֹס כִּי כַעַס בְּחֵיק כְּסִילִים יָנוּחַ

רוּחַ, which appears three times in this short verse, and יָנוּחַ demonstrate again Qoheleth's interest in alliteration. Both words employ the consonant ח. In addition, the consonants ר and ח in the word רוּחַ are anticipated by אַחֲרִית. Moreover, the words רוּחַ and יָנוּחַ also demonstrate assonance, specifically rhyme (see below). The use of alliteration again emphasizes the difference between patience and pride, the latter of which is connected with fools. Additional alliteration is achieved in v. 9 between the repeated consonants כ and ס in the words לִכְעוֹס, כַעַס, and כְּסִילִים. The sound effect connects angry behavior (כַעַס) with fools (כְּסִילִים).

Qoh 7:14

בְּיוֹם טוֹבָה הֱיֵה בְטוֹב וּבְיוֹם רָעָה רְאֵה
גַּם אֶת־זֶה לְעֻמַּת־זֶה עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים

Here the expression רָעָה רְאֵה serves to alliterate the ר. Though the ע and א cannot be considered alliterative, the close juxtaposition of the two in words bookended by identical consonants achieves an alliterative effect. As we have seen, alliteration tends to emphasize or establish contrast. Here again the poet has contrasted good times with bad times in life. His use of alliteration here serves to emphasize the importance of being circumspect (רְאֵה) when times are bad (רָעָה).

Qoh 8:8

אֵין אָדָם שַׁלִּיט בָּרוּחַ לִכְלוֹא אֶת־הָרוּחַ וְאֵין שִׁלְטוֹן בְּיוֹם הַמָּוֶת
וְאֵין מִשְׁלַחַת בַּמִּלְחָמָה וְלֹא־יְמַלֵּט רֶשַׁע אֶת־בְּעָלָיו

This passage reverberates three consonants (ל, מ, and ח) in the words מִשְׁלַחַת and בַּמִּלְחָמָה, two of which reverberate also in the word יְמַלֵּט. Additional alliteration obtains by way of the consonants ש and ל in the words שַׁלִּיט and מִשְׁלַחַת, and by way of the consonants ט and ל in the words שִׁלְטוֹן, שַׁלִּיט, and יְמַלֵּט. The contrastive purpose of alliteration is again clear. This time the poet contrasts the lack of control (שַׁלִּיט) that one has over determining one's future, and the absolute control that wickedness has, allowing none to escape (יְמַלֵּט), in a way similar to not receiving a discharge (מִשְׁלַחַת) during wartime (בַּמִּלְחָמָה).

Qoh 8:12–13

12 אֲשֶׁר חֹטֶא עֹשֶׂה רָע מְאַת וּמַאֲרִיךְ לוֹ
כִּי גַּם־יוֹדֵעַ אָנִי אֲשֶׁר
יִהְיֶה־טּוֹב לְיִרְאֵי הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יִירְאוּ מִלְּפָנָיו
13 וְטוֹב לֹא־יִהְיֶה לָרָשָׁע וְלֹא־יַאֲרִיךְ יָמִים כַּצֵּל
אֲשֶׁר אֵינֶנּוּ יָרֵא מִלִּפְנֵי אֱלֹהִים

This passage alliterates the consonants ר, א, and י in the hiphil form of the roots ארך and the root ירא, the first of which appears twice, and the latter three times. The alliteration allows Qoheleth to bring into sharp relief the acts of evil doers that may appear to prolong punishment and the long lives of those who fear God.

Qoh 9:5

כִּי הַחַיִּים יוֹדְעִים שֶׁיָּמֻתוּ וְהַמֵּתִים אֵינָם יוֹדְעִים מְאוּמָה
וְאֵין־עוֹד לָהֶם שָׂכָר כִּי נִשְׁכַּח זִכְרָם

Note in this line the alliteration between the consonants כ and ר (and possibly the שׂ and ז) in words שָׂכָר and זִכְרָם.[17] The consonant כ also reverberates twice in the phrase כִּי נִשְׁכַּח in the same stich. Observe also how the word יוֹדְעִים, used twice in this line, resounds in the preposition עוֹד in the expression וְאֵין־עוֹד לָהֶם. As Johannes Hempel long ago noted, the "wortspiel" here serves to contrast "...die Toten wissen gar nichts, haben keinen Dank (*śaḵar*), denn ihrer denkt (*zaḵar*) keiner!"[18] Indeed, by linking שָׂכָר and זִכְרָם via sound, and by preceding these words with the expression וְאֵין־עוֹד לָהֶם, Qoheleth allows his audience to perceive a contrast between the lack of any knowledge or reward among the dead and the forgotten knowledge of them among the living.

[17] Suggested first by Casanowicz, "Paronomasia in the Old Testament," 157, and n. 144, who noted that the poet has opted to use שכר instead of חלק or יתרון, as elsewhere in Qoheleth, for the sake of paronomasia.

[18] Johannes Hempel, *Die althebräische Literatur und ihr hellenistisch-jüdisches Nachleben* (Wildpark-Potsdam, Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft Athenaion, 1930), p. 192.

Qoh 9:11

שַׁבְתִּי וְרָאָה תַחַת־הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כִּי
לֹא לַקַּלִּים הַמֵּרוֹץ וְלֹא לַגִּבּוֹרִים הַמִּלְחָמָה
וְגַם לֹא לַחֲכָמִים לֶחֶם וְגַם לֹא לַנְּבֹנִים עֹשֶׁר
וְגַם לֹא לַיֹּדְעִים חֵן כִּי־עֵת וָפֶגַע יִקְרֶה אֶת־כֻּלָּם

In this verse, the poet repeats the consonants מ, ל, and ח in the words לַחֲכָמִים, הַמִּלְחָמָה, and לֶחֶם. The aim of the alliteration here again appears to be to create a comparison and contrast, in this case between the warrior's ability to achieve victory in battle (הַמִּלְחָמָה) and the ability of the wise (חֲכָמִים) to obtain food (לֶחֶם). Qoheleth then subverts his own comparison by concluding that עֵת וָפֶגַע יִקְרֶה אֶת־כֻּלָּם.

Qoh 10:1

זְבוּבֵי מָוֶת יַבְאִישׁ יַבִּיעַ שֶׁמֶן רוֹקֵח

In this line, Qoheleth twice repeats the consonant ב in יַבְאִישׁ יַבִּיעַ in a way that reverberates the onomatopoeic word זבוב "fly." The alliteration is perhaps strengthened by the consonant מ in מָוֶת and שֶׁמֶן, which is also a bilabial.

Qoh 10:5–11

5 יֵשׁ רָעָה רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ כִּשְׁגָגָה שֶׁיֹּצֵא מִלִּפְנֵי הַשַּׁלִּיט
6 נִתַּן הַסָּכָל בַּמְּרוֹמִים רַבִּים וַעֲשִׁירִים בַּשֵּׁפֶל יֵשֵׁבוּ
7 רָאִיתִי עֲבָדִים עַל־סוּסִים וְשָׂרִים הֹלְכִים כַּעֲבָדִים עַל־הָאָרֶץ
8 חֹפֵר גּוּמָּץ בּוֹ יִפּוֹל וּפֹרֵץ גָּדֵר יִשְׁכֶּנּוּ נָחָשׁ
9 מַסִּיעַ אֲבָנִים יֵעָצֵב בָּהֶם בּוֹקֵעַ עֵצִים יִסָּכֵן בָּם
10 אִם־קֵהָה הַבַּרְזֶל וְהוּא לֹא־פָנִים קִלְקַל
וַחֲיָלִים יְגַבֵּר וְיִתְרוֹן הַכְשֵׁיר חָכְמָה
11 אִם־יִשֹּׁךְ הַנָּחָשׁ בְּלוֹא־לָחַשׁ וְאֵין יִתְרוֹן לְבַעַל הַלָּשׁוֹן

A close examination of this pericope reveals an astonishing abundance of sibilants—twenty-two in all (sixteen *shin*s, five *samekh*s, and one *sin*).[19] In addition, the word לָחַשׁ alliterates in the passage the

[19] For sibilants as a category of alliteration, see already Casanowicz, "Paronomasia in the Old Testament," 28–29, and W. G. E. Watson, *Classical*

with the words הַנָּחָשׁ in one direction, and הַלָּשׁוֹן, in another. One wonders whether the many words containing sibilants were chosen in order to mimic the sound of the snake mentioned in vv. 8 and 11. In any event, the alliteration between the words לָחַשׁ, הַנָּחָשׁ, and הַלָּשׁוֹן underscores the irony of a snake charmer being bitten before having the chance to charm the snake.

The pericope is a veritable tapestry of alliteration. Note also the alliteration between יִשְׁכָּנּוּ in 10:8 and יִסָּכֶן in 10:9; the repeated פ and ר in חֹפֵר and וּפֹרֵץ in 10:8; ע and צ in יֵעָצֵב and עֵצִים in 10:9, and the ב and ר in הַבַּרְזֶל and יְגַבֵּר in 10:10. The device here appears to have been used to strengthen the cohesiveness of the occurrences listed.

Qoh 10:11–12

11 אִם־יִשֹּׁךְ הַנָּחָשׁ בְּלוֹא־לָחַשׁ וְאֵין יִתְרוֹן לְבַעַל הַלָּשׁוֹן
12 דִּבְרֵי פִי־חָכָם חֵן וְשִׂפְתוֹת כְּסִיל תְּבַלְּעֶנּוּ

A brief demonstration of anagramic alliteration occurs in these two verses between the words לְבַעַל and תְּבַלְּעֶנּוּ. In addition, two of the consonants in these words (ב and ל) appear also in בְּלוֹא in v. 11.[20] The alliteration allows Qoheleth to bring into contrast the irony of a snake charmer being bitten before being charmed and the fool's lips which likewise have a destructive result.

Qoh 10:18

בַּעֲצַלְתַּיִם יִמַּךְ הַמְּקָרֶה וּבְשִׁפְלוּת יָדַיִם יִדְלֹף הַבָּיִת

Here we find alliteration between the words וּבְשִׁפְלוּת יָדַיִם יִדְלֹף. Note how they reverberate the consonants ד, פ, and ל.

Qoh 10:20

גַּם בְּמַדָּעֲךָ מֶלֶךְ אַל־תְּקַלֵּל וּבְחַדְרֵי מִשְׁכָּבְךָ אַל־תְּקַלֵּל עָשִׁיר
כִּי עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם יוֹלִיךְ אֶת־הַקּוֹל וּבַעַל הַכְּנָפַיִם כְּנָפַיִם יַגִּיד דָּבָר

Note here the frequent appearance of the consonants ק and ל in the verb תְּקַלֵּל, which appears twice, and the word הַקּוֹל. The ק and ל also alliterate with the כ and ל in the words מֶלֶךְ and יוֹלִיךְ. The ל also

Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques (JSOTSup, 26; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), p. 225, who categorizes them as cases of "near-alliteration."

[20] For a similarly alliterative use of these words see Prov 19:28 (with בְּלִיַּעַל and יְבַלַּע) and 23:2 (with the *hapax legomenon* בְּלֹעֶךָ and בַּעַל).

resounds in the word וּבַעַל. According to Graham Ogden, the words וּבַעַל הַכְּנָפַיִם also echo לְבַעַל הַלָּשׁוֹן in 10:11 cited above.[21] Again the alliteration provides contrast by connecting one's cursing of another with its possible consequence.

Qoh 11:1

שַׁלַּח לַחְמְךָ עַל־פְּנֵי הַמָּיִם כִּי־בְרֹב הַיָּמִים תִּמְצָאֶנּוּ

Another example of alliteration appears in this verse in the first two words שַׁלַּח לַחְמְךָ, which repeat the consonants ל and ח in the same sequence. This particular form of alliteration is again a form of epanastrophe (see above). There is additional alliteration between the words הַמָּיִם and הַיָּמִים. The latter encourages the reader to connect action and consequence.

Qoh 12:3

וּבָטְלוּ הַטֹּחֲנוֹת כִּי מִעֵטוּ וְחָשְׁכוּ הָרֹאוֹת בָּאֲרֻבּוֹת

Particularly striking here is the alliteration of the consonant ט three times in the first stich. The deliberateness of the alliteration is further suggested by the fact that this is the only place in biblical Hebrew where the root בטל occurs.[22] Perhaps this alliteration aimed to mimic onomatopoeically the sound of grinding. If so, it is noteworthy that the consonant is not repeated again until the sound of the mill (קוֹל הַטַּחֲנָה) is said to grow dim in the next verse (12:4). Additional alliteration (and partial assonance) occurs in the words הָרֹאוֹת בָּאֲרֻבּוֹת.

Qoh 12:6

עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִרְחַק יֶרֶתֶק חֶבֶל הַכֶּסֶף וְתָרֻץ גֻּלַּת הַזָּהָב
וְתִשָּׁבֵר כַּד עַל־הַמַּבּוּעַ וְנָרֹץ הַגַּלְגַּל אֶל־הַבּוֹר

Alliteration obtains here by way of the repeated use of the consonants ג and ל in the words גֻּלַּת and הַגַּלְגַּל, the consonants ר and צ in the words וְתָרֻץ (from רוץ, see below under allusive punning) and וְנָרֹץ (niphal of רצץ), and the consonants ב an ר in וְתִשָּׁבֵר and הַבּוֹר.[23] The

[21] Graham Ogden, *Qoheleth* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), p. 175.

[22] Though it appears in biblical Aramaic (e.g., Ezra 4:21, etc.).

[23] The שׁ and ב in וְתִשָּׁבֵר also resound in the verb ישׁב, which occurs twice in the next verse.

alliteration lends cohesiveness to the line and abets the polysemy contained therein (see below).

Qoh 12:11

דִּבְרֵי חֲכָמִים כַּדָּרְבֹנוֹת וּכְמַשְׁמְרוֹת
נְטוּעִים בַּעֲלֵי אֲסֻפוֹת נִתְּנוּ מֵרֹעֶה אֶחָד

Here I note the alliteration between the words דִּבְרֵי and כַּדָּרְבֹנוֹת, which are essentially anagrams of each other.[24] The alliteration brings the two words into comparison, thus underscoring the power of the simile.

2. ASSONANCE[25]

Qoh 7:8–9

8 טוֹב אַחֲרִית דָּבָר מֵרֵאשִׁיתוֹ טוֹב אֶרֶךְ־רוּחַ מִגְּבַהּ־רוּחַ
9 אַל־תְּבַהֵל בְּרוּחֲךָ לִכְעוֹס כִּי כַעַס בְּחֵיק כְּסִילִים יָנוּחַ

The words רוּחַ and יָנוּחַ provide one of the clearest examples of assonance in the Bible. Moreover, since both words occur at the end of their respective stichs they also demonstrate a rare use of rhyming.

Qoh 10:11

אִם־יִשֹּׁךְ הַנָּחָשׁ בְּלוֹא־לָחַשׁ וְאֵין יִתְרוֹן לְבַעַל הַלָּשׁוֹן

I have discussed this line above with regard to its alliteration, but as Ogden also has observed, assonance occurs between the words הַנָּחָשׁ and לָחַשׁ.[26]

Qoh 10:18

בַּעֲצַלְתַּיִם יִמַּךְ הַמִּקְרֶה וּבְשִׁפְלוּת יָדַיִם יִדְלֹף הַבָּיִת

[24] Casanowicz, "Paronomasia in the Old Testament," 131.

[25] As with alliteration, I do not include here the repetition of similar grammatical forms. Thus the list of merisms in Qoh 3:2–8, which makes repeated use of infinitival forms, does not appear in this study. For other examples of assonance in the Hebrew Bible, see Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, pp. 222–225.

[26] Ogden, *Qoheleth*, p. 171.

Assonance here occurs between the dual forms בַּעֲצַלְתַּיִם and יָדַיִם, and also with הַבַּיִת. Scholars have had difficulty understanding the form of בַּעֲצַלְתַּיִם, but regardless whether one understands it as a dual of intensity or as a metaphor for the hands (i.e., "the two lazy ones"),[27] it here serves the poet's need for assonance.

3. POLYSEMY

Qoh 1:7–8

7 כָּל־הַנְּחָלִים הֹלְכִים אֶל־הַיָּם וְהַיָּם אֵינֶנּוּ מָלֵא
אֶל־מָקוֹם שֶׁהַנְּחָלִים הֹלְכִים שָׁם הֵם שָׁבִים לָלָכֶת
8 כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים יְגֵעִים לֹא־יוּכַל אִישׁ לְדַבֵּר
לֹא־תִשְׂבַּע עַיִן לִרְאוֹת וְלֹא־תִמָּלֵא אֹזֶן מִשְּׁמֹעַ

As noted by Fox,[28] the use of כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים in v. 8 is ambiguous. It can mean "things" or "words." Not noted by Fox, however, is the fact that as such, the passage constitutes an example of Janus Parallelism, a device in which a word points back to the previous stich in one of its meanings, and ahead to the following stich, in another of its meanings.[29] In this case, when read as "things," הַדְּבָרִים points back to the natural phenomena described in the previous verses that weary Qoheleth.[30] But as "words," הַדְּבָרִים looks ahead to לֹא־יוּכַל אִישׁ לְדַבֵּר "one is unable to speak" and the weariness of the other human senses (i.e., seeing, hearing) in v. 8.

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[27] The various approaches to this word are summarized by A Schoors, *The Preacher Sought Pleasing Words: A Study of the Language of Qoheleth* (Leuven: Department Oriëntalistiek/Peeters, 1992), pp. 70–72. Compare similarly the form וְשִׂפְתוֹת in 10:12 instead of the expected dual form. Perhaps it was chosen to anticipate the two feminine abstract forms in the following line.

[28] Fox, *JPS Torah Commentary: Ecclesiastes*, p. 6.

[29] The list of Janus parallels continues to grow. See Scott B. Noegel, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job* (JSOTS, 223; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), and the online bibliography cited above for publications on the subject.

[30] So Rashbam who translates כל מעשה עולם יגיעים הם. See Japhet and Salters, *The Commentary of R. Samuel ben Meir Rashbam on Qoheleth*, p. 95.

Qoh 1:13–14

13 וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־לִבִּי לִדְרוֹשׁ וְלָתוּר בַּחָכְמָה עַל כָּל־אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמָיִם
הוּא עִנְיַן רָע נָתַן אֱלֹהִים לִבְנֵי הָאָדָם לַעֲנוֹת בּוֹ
14 רָאִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־הַמַּעֲשִׂים שֶׁנַּעֲשׂוּ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וְהִנֵּה הַכֹּל הֶבֶל
וּרְעוּת רוּחַ

The polysemy in this passage occurs in the expression לַעֲנוֹת בּוֹ which may be translated either as "to busy him with it" or "to afflict him with it."[31] The device is anticipated by the phrase עִנְיַן רָע which could mean a "wicked or harmful task or business." The expression לַעֲנוֹת בּוֹ appears again in Qoh 3:10, where again its meaning may be ambiguous,[32] but there הָעִנְיָן appears without the adjective רָע.

Qoh 2:25–26

25 כִּי מִי יֹאכַל וּמִי יָחוּשׁ חוּץ מִמֶּנִּי
26 כִּי לְאָדָם שֶׁטּוֹב לְפָנָיו נָתַן חָכְמָה וְדַעַת וְשִׂמְחָה וְלַחוֹטֶא
נָתַן עִנְיָן לֶאֱסוֹף וְלִכְנוֹס לָתֵת לְטוֹב לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל וּרְעוּת
רוּחַ

Here the verb יָחוּשׁ in v. 25 is ambiguous, meaning "feel pain" or "feel pleasure."[33] As such it allows Qoheleth to encapsulate and anticipate the two men mentioned in v. 26, i.e., the one who pleases God and enjoys himself, and the other who displeases God and suffers loss in the end. With one breath he rhetorically asks "For who eats and feels pain/pleasure other than me?" and thus captures the futility of merriment.[34]

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[31] Fox, *JPS Torah Commentary: Ecclesiastes,* p. 9, notes that "both connotations may come into play here."

[32] Thus Fox, *JPS Torah Commentary: Ecclesiastes*, pp. 22–23.

[33] It also can mean "hurry, excite" (e.g., Job 20:2), and this is how Ibn Ezra understood it, but I do not see how this meaning is operative here unless it refers to the rapid gathering of personal wealth. On the various translations of this word see Fox, *JPS Torah Commentary: Ecclesiastes*, p. 19.

[34] Perhaps this verb was selected for its aid in creating partial alliteration with the late idiom חוּץ מִמֶּנִּי.

Qoh 3:14

יָדַעְתִּי כִּי כָּל־אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה הָאֱלֹהִים הוּא יִהְיֶה לְעוֹלָם
עָלָיו אֵין לְהוֹסִיף וּמִמֶּנּוּ אֵין לִגְרֹעַ
וְהָאֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה שֶׁיִּרְאוּ מִלְּפָנָיו

This passage contains polysemy in the words שֶׁיִּרְאוּ מִלְּפָנָיו, which one can read either as "(mankind) will fear him" (from the root **ירא**, and as implied by the *metheg*) or as "see him" (from the root **ראה**), in the sense of "observe him, learn from" (e.g., the idiom in Judg 7:17 with **מן**), or perhaps in the sense of "choose him" (e.g., 2 Kgs 10:3 also with **מן**).[35]

Qoh 4:3–8

3 וְטוֹב מִשְּׁנֵיהֶם אֵת אֲשֶׁר־עֲדֶן לֹא הָיָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא־רָאָה
אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֶׂה הָרָע אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ
4 וְרָאִיתִי אֲנִי אֶת־כָּל־עָמָל וְאֵת כָּל־כִּשְׁרוֹן הַמַּעֲשֶׂה כִּי הִיא
קִנְאַת־אִישׁ מֵרֵעֵהוּ גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל וּרְעוּת רוּחַ
5 הַכְּסִיל חֹבֵק אֶת־יָדָיו וְאֹכֵל אֶת־בְּשָׂרוֹ
6 טוֹב מְלֹא כַף נָחַת מִמְּלֹא חָפְנַיִם עָמָל וּרְעוּת רוּחַ
7 וְשַׁבְתִּי אֲנִי וָאֶרְאֶה הֶבֶל תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ
8 יֵשׁ אֶחָד וְאֵין שֵׁנִי גַּם בֵּן וָאָח אֵין־לוֹ
וְאֵין קֵץ לְכָל־עֲמָלוֹ גַּם־עֵינָיו לֹא־תִשְׂבַּע עֹשֶׁר
וּלְמִי אֲנִי עָמֵל וּמְחַסֵּר אֶת־נַפְשִׁי מִטּוֹבָה

Although he does not elaborate, Fox notes that the expression וּרְעוּת רוּחַ in v. 5 (but also v. 4) is "rich in the potential for wordplays and secondary connotations."[36] This is because the orthography of the word רְעוּת, especially in the consonantal text, permits us to derive it from several Proto-Semitic roots: **רעה** "pursue, shepherd" (PS $r^{ʿ}y^{1}$), **רעה** "associate with, be friends or companions with (PS $r^{ʿ}y^{2}$). **רעה** "desire, longing" (PS *rḏy*), **רעע** "break, destroy" (PS *rḍḍ*), or **רעע** "be

[35] The polysemy is made possible by the defective spelling of **יראו** for the expected **ייראו**. See similarly וַיֵּחַתּוּ וַיִּרְאוּ מְאֹד in 1 Sam 17:11. A similar pun may be at work in Qoh 12:5.

[36] Fox, *JPS Torah Commentary: Ecclesiastes*, 2004), p. xx.

bad, evil" (PS *rʿʿ*).[37] In addition, this passage exploits the double meaning of רוּחַ as "wind" and "spirit." The doubly polysemous phrase here constitutes a Janus parallel, but one of the most elaborate examples of it in the Bible. In this instance, the expression וּרְעוּת רוּחַ in v. 4, when understood as "wickedness of spirit," points back to הָרָע אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ "every evil under the sun" in v. 3. But when understood as "befriending the wind" or as "longing for the wind" it points ahead to קִנְאַת־אִישׁ מֵרֵעֵהוּ "mankind's envy of his friend" in v. 5. However, when the expression וּרְעוּת רוּחַ appears again in v. 4 it exploits the other meanings inherent in these words to form another Janus parallel. This time, when read as "destruction of spirit," the same expression points back to וְאֹכֵל אֶת־בְּשָׂרוֹ "eats his own flesh" in v. 5, an idiom for destruction (see, e.g., Ps 27:2, Mic 3:3, Isa 49:26), and when read as "pursuit of wind," it points ahead to הֶבֶל "vanity, breath" in v. 7.[38] Similar polysemy may be at work wherever the expression appears in Qoheleth (e.g., 1:14).

Qoh 5:8–9

8 וְיִתְרוֹן אֶרֶץ בַּכֹּל הִיא הוּא מֶלֶךְ לְשָׂדֶה נֶעֱבָד
9 אֹהֵב כֶּסֶף לֹא־יִשְׂבַּע כֶּסֶף
וּמִי־אֹהֵב בָּהָמוֹן לֹא תְבוּאָה גַּם־זֶה הָבֶל

The case of uni-directional polysemy in this passage involves the word תְּבוּאָה, which can be rendered either as "agricultural produce" (e.g., Exod 23:10) or as "revenue" (e.g., Isa 23:3). In its former meaning תְּבוּאָה points back to the words לְשָׂדֶה and וְיִתְרוֹן אֶרֶץ, and in its latter meaning, back to כֶּסֶף and בָּהָמוֹן.

Qoh 8:8

אֵין אָדָם שַׁלִּיט בָּרוּחַ לִכְלוֹא אֶת־הָרוּחַ וְאֵין שִׁלְטוֹן בְּיוֹם הַמָּוֶת

As in Qoh 4:6, here again Qoheleth employs the word בָּרוּחַ for its dual meaning of "wind" and "spirit."[39] Upon reading the first stich in this verse, readers are encouraged to think that he is contemplating the

[37] On the various interpretations of the root, see already George Aaron Barton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary of the Book of Ecclesiastes* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908 [1959]), pp. 85–86.

[38] The words are a pair in Isa 57:13: וְאֶת־כֻּלָּם יִשָּׂא־רוּחַ יִקַּח־הָבֶל "The wind will carry all of them off, a mere breath will blow them away."

[39] Noted by Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, p. 241; Fox, *JPS Torah Commentary: Ecclesiastes*, 2004), p. 56.

futility of life by likening it to controlling the wind. However, when one reads the second stich, the mention of בְּיוֹם הַמָּוֶת suggest that רוּחַ indeed meant "spirit."

Qoh 12:2

וּזְכֹר אֶת־בּוֹרְאֶיךָ בִּימֵי בְחוּרֹתֶיךָ
עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָבֹאוּ יְמֵי הָרָעָה
וְהִגִּיעוּ שָׁנִים אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר אֵין־לִי בָּהֶם חֵפֶץ

As has long been recognized, the word בּוֹרְאֶיךָ in v. 1 suggests several meanings.[40] Two in particular are possible: "your creator" (from ברא) and, with Fox,[41] "your vigor, health" (from a homophonous root ברא). Both make sense in the passage, and both point back to the end of the last chapter where Qoheleth admonishes his audience to enjoy life in your youth because God will call one to account (11:9).

Qoh 12:6–7

6 עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִרְחַק יֵרֵתֵק חֶבֶל הַכֶּסֶף וְתָרֻץ גֻּלַּת הַזָּהָב
וְתִשָּׁבֵר כַּד עַל־הַמַּבּוּעַ וְנָרֹץ הַגַּלְגַּל אֶל־הַבּוֹר
7 וְיָשָׁב הֶעָפָר עַל־הָאָרֶץ כְּשֶׁהָיָה
וְהָרוּחַ תָּשׁוּב אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר נְתָנָהּ

Of specific interest here is הַבּוֹר in v. 6, the common meaning for which is "cistern." However, the same word can mean "grave" (e.g., Isa 14:9, 45:15, 38:18, Prov 28:17). In its meaning "cistern," הַבּוֹר faces back to הַמַּבּוּעַ "spring" in the same line, but as "grave" it faces ahead to the description of death in the next line;[42] thus, another Janus Parallelism.

[40] R. Aqiva understood it midrashically as suggestive of "your well" (semen) from באר, "your pit (the grave) from בור," and "your creator" (God) from ברא. Cited in Fox, *JPS Torah Commentary: Ecclesiastes*, p. 78.

[41] Fox, *JPS Torah Commentary: Ecclesiastes*, p. 78.

[42] See, e.g., Ezek 31:14, 31:16 where בור and ארץ with the same meanings occur in parallelism.

4. ANTANACLASIS

Qoh 4:1

וְשַׁבְתִּי אֲנִי וָאֶרְאֶה אֶת־כָּל־הָעֲשֻׁקִים אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשִׂים תַּחַת
הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וְהִנֵּה |
דִּמְעַת הָעֲשֻׁקִים וְאֵין לָהֶם מְנַחֵם
וּמִיַּד עֹשְׁקֵיהֶם כֹּחַ וְאֵין לָהֶם מְנַחֵם

The existence of antanaclasis in this passage was identified first by Jack Sasson, who observed that the expression וְאֵין לָהֶם מְנַחֵם occurs twice, the first time meaning "no one to comfort them," and the second time, meaning "no one to avenge them."[43]

Qoh 7:5–6

5 טוֹב לִשְׁמֹעַ גַּעֲרַת חָכָם מֵאִישׁ שֹׁמֵעַ שִׁיר כְּסִילִים
6 כִּי כְקוֹל הַסִּירִים תַּחַת הַסִּיר כֵּן שְׂחוֹק הַכְּסִיל
וְגַם־זֶה הָבֶל

In addition to demonstrating alliteration, the words הַסִּירִים and הַסִּיר also illustrate the poet's use of homophonous nouns in the service of antanaclasis. The first time the lexeme occurs it means "thorns" (as in Isa 34:13). The second time it appears it means "pot" (as in Ps 60:10).[44]

Qoh 7:12

12 כִּי בְּצֵל הַחָכְמָה בְּצֵל הַכָּסֶף
וְיִתְרוֹן דַּעַת הַחָכְמָה תְּחַיֶּה בְעָלֶיהָ

In this verse the word צֵל means "shelter." However, we have previously heard these consonants used to refer to "shade" in 6:12.[45] Its use here for "shelter," thus constitutes a case of antanaclasis.

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[43] Sasson, "Wordplay in the Old Testament," p. 970.

[44] Noted by Greenstein, "Wordplay, Hebrew," p. 969. The polysemy of these same words is similarly exploited in the vision of Jeremiah in Jer 1:13.

[45] Is it possible that the juxtaposition between צֵל "shadow" in 6:12 and הַמָּוֶת in the next verse (7:1) is meant to allude to צלמות "darkness"? This would be especially meaningful in light of the statement in 6:12 that one cannot know what will occur under the sun after one is gone. If such is intended, it

Qoh 7:23–29 and 8:17

7:23 כָּל־זֹה נִסִּיתִי בַחָכְמָה
אָמַרְתִּי אֶחְכָּמָה וְהִיא רְחוֹקָה מִמֶּנִּי
24 רָחוֹק מַה־שֶּׁהָיָה וְעָמֹק עָמֹק מִי יִמְצָאֶנּוּ
25 סַבּוֹתִי אֲנִי וְלִבִּי לָדַעַת וְלָתוּר וּבַקֵּשׁ חָכְמָה וְחֶשְׁבּוֹן
וְלָדַעַת רֶשַׁע כֶּסֶל וְהַסְכְלוּת הוֹלֵלוֹת
26 וּמוֹצֵא אֲנִי
מַר מִמָּוֶת אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר־הִיא מְצוֹדִים
וַחֲרָמִים לִבָּהּ אֲסוּרִים יָדֶיהָ
טוֹב לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים יִמָּלֵט מִמֶּנָּה וְחוֹטֵא יִלָּכֶד בָּהּ
27 רְאֵה זֶה מָצָאתִי אָמְרָה קֹהֶלֶת אַחַת לְאַחַת לִמְצֹא חֶשְׁבּוֹן
28 אֲשֶׁר עוֹד־בִּקְשָׁה נַפְשִׁי וְלֹא מָצָאתִי
אָדָם אֶחָד מֵאֶלֶף מָצָאתִי וְאִשָּׁה בְכָל־אֵלֶּה לֹא מָצָאתִי
29 לְבַד רְאֵה־זֶה מָצָאתִי אֲשֶׁר
עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם יָשָׁר וְהֵמָּה בִקְשׁוּ חִשְׁבֹּנוֹת רַבִּים

8:17 וְרָאִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי לֹא יוּכַל הָאָדָם לִמְצוֹא
אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֶׂה אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת־הַשָּׁמֶשׁ
בְּשֶׁל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲמֹל הָאָדָם לְבַקֵּשׁ וְלֹא יִמְצָא וְגַם אִם־יֹאמַר
הֶחָכָם לָדַעַת לֹא יוּכַל לִמְצֹא

In his study of the antanaclastic use of the verb **מצא** in Qoheleth, Anthony Ceresko pointed out that the verb occurred eight times in 7:23–29 with four different nuances: "grasp, understand" (7:24), "find" (7:26, 7:28a, 7:28b, 7:28c), "learn" (7:27a, 7:29), and "reach" (7:27b).[46]

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would belong in the category of allusive punning above.

[46] Ceresko, "The Function of Antanaclasis (*mṣʾ*) 'to find' // (*mṣʾ*) 'to reach, overtake, grasp' in Hebrew Poetry, especially in the Book of Qoheleth," 551–569, especially 565–569. According to Ceresko, the sophisticated employment of **מצא** in Qoheleth may be due to two proto-Semitic roots concealed by the orthography of **מצא**: the first is *mṣʾ*/*mẓʾ* "find," and the second is perhaps derived from *mgʹy* "reach, arrive, overtake." On the punning use of this verb in Qoheleth, see also Diethelm Michel, *Untersuchen zur Eigenart des Buches Qoheleth* (BZAW, 183; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), p. 236. Perhaps we should include the verb **מצא** among the many key words used by Qoheleth and noted by Fox, *JPS Torah Commentary: Ecclesiastes*, pp. xvii-xxi. According to Greenstein, "Wordplay, Hebrew," p. 970, "word play" can serve to enforce what he calls

In Qoh 8:17, he observed that the verb appears three times. The first and third times it requires that we translate "grasp, understand," since there it parallels the verb ידע "know." However, the second time it occurs, we must render it "find," because of its connection there with the verb בקש "seek." As he concluded:

> Qoheleth exhausts the possibilities of the verb *mṣʾ* as he exhausts all avenues of investigation to try to understand (*mṣʾ*) "what God is doing under the sun." Despite his skill in the use of language in his rigorous search (Qoh 12:9–10) he cannot find (*mṣʾ*) the answer; in honestly admitting such, he marks the boundaries for human wisdom beyond which one dare not attempt to reach (*mṣʾ*) in order to grasp (*mṣʾ*) the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and bad.[47]

Qoh 10:4

אִם־רוּחַ הַמּוֹשֵׁל תַּעֲלֶה עָלֶיךָ מְקוֹמְךָ אַל־תַּנַּח
כִּי מַרְפֵּא יַנִּיחַ חֲטָאִים גְּדוֹלִים

Antanaclasis in this passage is demonstrated by תַּנַּח and יַנִּיחַ. Though both forms derive from the same root (נוח), the first instance means "leave, forsake" and the second "put to rest."[48]

5. ALLUSIVE PUNNING

Qoh 2:1–3

1 אָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בְּלִבִּי לְכָה־נָּא אֲנַסְּכָה בְשִׂמְחָה
וּרְאֵה בְטוֹב וְהִנֵּה גַם־הוּא הָבֶל
2 לִשְׂחוֹק אָמַרְתִּי מְהוֹלָל וּלְשִׂמְחָה מַה־זֹּה עֹשָׂה
3 תַּרְתִּי בְלִבִּי לִמְשׁוֹךְ בַּיַּיִן אֶת־בְּשָׂרִי וְלִבִּי נֹהֵג בַּחָכְמָה וְלָאֱחֹז
בְּסִכְלוּת עַד אֲשֶׁר־אֶרְאֶה אֵי־זֶה טוֹב לִבְנֵי הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשׂוּ
תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם מִסְפַּר יְמֵי חַיֵּיהֶם

Allusion in this passage is achieved by way of the word מְהוֹלָל in v. 2, which ordinarily means "praiseworthy," but here "madness" in the sense of "folly."[49] But the mention of wine in v. 3 suggests that מְהוֹלָל

"leading words."

[47] Ceresko, "The Function of Antanaclasis (*mṣʾ*) 'to find' // (*mṣʾ*) 'to reach, overtake, grasp' in Hebrew Poetry, especially in the Book of Qoheleth," 569.

[48] Noted by Sasson, "Wordplay in the Old Testament," p. 970.

[49] Thus already Rashbam. See Japhet and Salters, *The Commentary of R. Samuel ben Meir Rashbam on Qoheleth*, p. 65.

may mean "drunkenness," as it does in Jer 25:16. In addition, אֲנַסְּכָה "I will test you" in v. 1 suggests by way of sound the verb נסך "pour out," again reinforcing the allusions to liquids and drinking.

Qoh 2:20–21

20 וְסַבּוֹתִי אֲנִי לְיַאֵשׁ אֶת־לִבִּי עַל כָּל־הֶעָמָל שֶׁעָמַלְתִּי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ
21 כִּי־יֵשׁ אָדָם שֶׁעֲמָלוֹ בְּחָכְמָה וּבְדַעַת וּבְכִשְׁרוֹן וּלְאָדָם שֶׁלֹּא
עָמַל־בּוֹ יִתְּנֶנּוּ חֶלְקוֹ גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל וְרָעָה רַבָּה

This passage is very sophisticated in the way it alludes to the word אָדָם twice used in v. 21. Note, for example, how both the verbal *hapax legomenon* לְיַאֵשׁ and the phrase כִּי־יֵשׁ echo the word **איש** "man," which is not present in the text. Here the allusion underscores the mortality and fragility of mankind that is the focus of the passage.

Qoh 10:8

בַּעֲצַלְתַּיִם יִמַּךְ הַמְּקָרֶה וּבְשִׁפְלוּת יָדַיִם יִדְלֹף הַבָּיִת

Allusive punning occurs in this line in the *hapax legomenon* הַמְּקָרֶה "the rafter," which reminds us by dint of sound of Qoheleth's repeated use of the word מִקְרֶה "fortune, fate" (e.g., Qoh 2:14, 2:15, 3:19 [3X], 9:2, 9:3). The allusion allows readers to equate poor fortunes with laziness. This allusion is bolstered by the presence of the verb יִמַּךְ (from מכך) "be low," which appears elsewhere means "humiliation" (e.g., Ps 106:43, Job 24:24).[50] Ogden also sees here a "play" between the lowering of the rafter in 18a and the lowering of hands in 18b.[51]

Qoh 12:5

וְיֵנֵאץ הַשָּׁקֵד וְיִסְתַּבֵּל הֶחָגָב וְתָפֵר הָאֶבְיוֹנָה

The phrase וְתָפֵר הָאֶבְיוֹנָה has evoked a good deal of comment from exegetes because of its difficulty. The versions make it clear that the word הָאֶבְיוֹנָה means "caper-berry" or "caper bush,"[52] though the word is a *hapax legomenon* in Hebrew. On the other hand, the verb וְתָפֵר, presumably a hiphil form of the root פרר "frustrate, make ineffectual," makes little sense here. Some interpreters have opted to resolve this difficulty by seeing the line as a metaphor for the diminishment of

[50] The root שפל also carries the connotation of "humiliation, baseness."

[51] Ogden, *Qoheleth*, p. 178.

[52] Thus LXX, Syriac, and Vulgate.

sexual desire or ability in old age, since the caper-berry appears to have been considered an aphrodisiac (hence its derivation from the root אבה "desire").[53] Others have suggested that we emend the verb to ותפרח "and buds."[54] I suggest that we have allusive punning at work. Though the pointed text forces us to translate וְתָפֵר הָאֶבְיוֹנָה as "(even) the (aphrodisiac) caper-berry is ineffectual," the verb is close enough in sound to suggests also a hiphil form of the root פרה "bear fruit,"[55] especially since it immediately follows the mention of the almond tree.

Moreover, the phrase וְיָנֵאץ הַשָּׁקֵד is similarly allusive. The mention of the almond suggests that we read the verb as a hiphil of the root נצץ "blossom," but its orthography demands that we derive it from נאץ, "contemn, spurn." In addition, early interpreters saw the almond here as denoting the testicles.[56] Read in this way, this stich too would suggest the lack of sexual appetite or ability in old age.

Qoh 12:6

עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִרְחַק (יֵרָתֵק) חֶבֶל הַכֶּסֶף וְתָרֻץ גֻּלַּת הַזָּהָב
וְתִשָּׁבֵר כַּד עַל־הַמַּבּוּעַ וְנָרֹץ הַגַּלְגַּל אֶל־הַבּוֹר

In addition to employing fine examples of alliteration, this passage contains examples of allusive punning. On the one hand, the Qere in the expression יִרְחַק חֶבֶל הַכֶּסֶף suggests that we read the stich as referring to the snapping of a silver chord (seeing here the root רתק), i.e., "the cord of life." On the other hand, the fact that the word חֶבֶל may also mean one's lot or portion suggests that we may retain the Kethib and render the stich "...before the portion of silver becomes distant," i.e., one is separated from one's wealth upon death (cf., Job 1:21).

The words וְתָרֻץ גֻּלַּת הַזָּהָב are typically translated as if the verb here derives from the root רצץ "crush, break." However, the way the verb is pointed, coupled with the fact that גֻּלַּת הַזָּהָב can refer to a lamp

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[53] Cf., C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament: Psalm LXXXVIII to Isaiah XIV*. Trans. German by M. G. Easton (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1886 [1960–1969]), pp. 1119–1120, who point out that its use as an aphrodisiac is not attested until the Middle Ages.

[54] See Fox, *JPS Torah Commentary: Ecclesiastes*, 2004), p. 81.

[55] I.e., the form וְתַפֵּר.

[56] Note the comment of Keil and Delitzsch, *Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament: Psalm LXXXVIII to Isaiah XIV*, p. 1116, "...we leave to those interpreters who derive ינאץ from נאץ, and understand השקד of the *glans penis* (Böttch, Fürst, and several older interpreters) to follow their own foul and repulsive criticism."

containing golden oil (e.g., Zech 4:12)[57] suggests that we derive the verb from the root רוץ "run,"[58] and see the line as referring to the running out of golden oil, i.e., the end of one's life.

6. NUMERICAL PUNNING

Qoh 4:8–14

8 יֵשׁ אֶחָד וְאֵין שֵׁנִי גַּם בֵּן וָאָח אֵין־לוֹ
וְאֵין קֵץ לְכָל־עֲמָלוֹ גַּם־עֵינָיו עֵינוֹ לֹא־תִשְׂבַּע עֹשֶׁר
וּלְמִי אֲנִי עָמֵל וּמְחַסֵּר אֶת־נַפְשִׁי מִטּוֹבָה גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל וְעִנְיַן רָע הוּא
9 טוֹבִים הַשְּׁנַיִם מִן־הָאֶחָד אֲשֶׁר יֵשׁ־לָהֶם שָׂכָר טוֹב בַּעֲמָלָם
10 כִּי אִם־יִפֹּלוּ הָאֶחָד יָקִים אֶת־חֲבֵרוֹ וְאִילוּ הָאֶחָד שֶׁיִּפּוֹל וְאֵין שֵׁנִי לַהֲקִימוֹ
11 גַּם אִם־יִשְׁכְּבוּ שְׁנַיִם וְחַם לָהֶם וּלְאֶחָד אֵיךְ יֵחָם
12 וְאִם־יִתְקְפוֹ הָאֶחָד הַשְּׁנַיִם יַעַמְדוּ נֶגְדּוֹ וְהַחוּט הַמְשֻׁלָּשׁ לֹא בִמְהֵרָה יִנָּתֵק

This passage exploits the idiomatic use of numbers in a way that constitutes numerical punning, a device also known from elsewhere in the ancient Near East.[59] Though Fox notes here the presence of key words based on the number "two," which can mean "'companion' or 'fellow,' and possibly 'successor,'"[60] the numerical punning operating in this passage is more elaborate. While words based on two do appear in vv. 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12, the number one (אֶחָד) also appears in vv. 8, 9, 10 (2X), 11, and 12, as does the number "three-fold" (מְשֻׁלָּשׁ) in v. 12.[61]

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[57] See the discussion in Keil and Delitzsch, *Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament: Psalm LXXXVIII to Isaiah XIV*, p. 1123. Charles F. Whitley, *Koheleth: His Language and Thought* (BZAW, 148; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1979), p. 100, points out that the verb could derive from the root רצץ if we take it as an imperfect Qal form יָרוּץ on analogy with from the root רנן (e.g., Prov 29:6).

[58] As does the Vulgate's *recurrat*.

[59] See A. G. Wright, "The Riddle of the Sphinx Revisited: Numerical Patterns in the Book of Qoheleth," *CBQ* 42 (1980), 38–51. It also has been identified as an important device in so-called "Wisdom Literature." See, e.g., W. M. W. Roth, *Numerical Sayings in the Old Testament* (VTSup, 13; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965); "The Numerical Sequence x, x + 1 in the Old Testament," *VT* 12 (1962), 301–308; Graham Ogden, "The Mathematics of Wisdom: Qoheleth iv:1–12," *VT* 34 (1984), 446–453.

[60] Fox, *JPS Torah Commentary: Ecclesiastes*, p. 27.

[61] The word הַשֵּׁנִי apparently meaning "successor" appears also in v. 15. On

The numerical punning here adds significance to the Qoheleth's main point that the more companions one has, the better off one is.

Qoh 6:6

וְאִלּוּ חָיָה אֶלֶף שָׁנִים פַּעֲמַיִם וְטוֹבָה לֹא רָאָה הֲלֹא אֶל־
מָקוֹם אֶחָד הַכֹּל הוֹלֵךְ׃

In this line numerical punning occurs in the words אֶלֶף "thousand," פַּעֲמַיִם "two times," and אֶחָד "one" (here meaning "the same [place]"), but also the word שָׁנִים "years," which subtly suggests the word שנים "two." The numerical punning follows closely upon another use of numbers in v. 3 which mentions מֵאָה "one hundred," וְשָׁנִים "years" and שָׁנָיו "his years," themselves perhaps puns on the number two (אִם־יוֹלִיד אִישׁ מֵאָה וְשָׁנִים רַבּוֹת יִחְיֶה וְרַב שָׁנָיו וְגַם־נַפְשׁוֹ לֹא תִשְׂבַּע מִן־הַטּוֹבָה).

The examples of numerical punning given above makes sense in light of the numerical idiom that Qoheleth later employs in 7:27 to express the process of reasoning that lies behind his words: אַחַת לְאַחַת לִמְצֹא חֶשְׁבּוֹן.[62]

CONCLUSION

The aggregate evidence shows Qoheleth to be a linguistically sophisticated text. Its manipulation of language, especially by way of alliteration and numerical punning, serves to underscore the many contrasts to which Qoheleth draws our attention.[63] His puns contribute to Qoheleth's rhetoric of ambiguity. As Doug Ingram observes, the ambiguity of his words "...often leaves the reader in a state of perplexity, confusion or indecision. By doing so, the implied author has consciously constructed a text which he experienced in real life."[64]

Qoheleth's use of numbers, see also J. L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia, PA.: Westminster Press, 1987), p. 112; Schoors, *The Preacher Sought Pleasing Words*, pp. 75–76, 218–219; See also the observations in Klein and Fox, "Qoheleth," pp. 182, 184. However, the aforementioned authors do not remark on the other numbers "hidden" in the text.

[62] The numbers one and ten also appear in 7:19 as do one and one thousand in 7:28, and one hundred in 8:12, but there they are used literally. The idiomatic uses of seven and eight in 11:2 and of one and two in 11:6 do not constitute punning, though the use שָׁנִים "years" of in 11:8 may be a play on two.

[63] On these contrasts see E. H. Horton, "Koheleth's Concept of Opposites," *Numen* 19 (1972), 1–21.

[64] Doug Ingram, *Ambiguity in Ecclesiastes* (Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies, 431; London: T&T Clark, 2006), p. 263.

Indeed, the text's clever use of ambiguity, in the form of polysemy, allusive punning, and antanaclasis, forces readers to contemplate the meaning of Qoheleth's words at every turn, and thus, to participate in the quest for meaning that is central to the book. Both in its content and in the manner in which that content is delivered, Qoheleth conveys his frustration with words and deeds, and his inability to know anything with certainty. As he reminds us in 8:17: כִּי לֹא יוּכַל הָאָדָם לִמְצוֹא אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֶׂה אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת־הַשָּׁמֶשׁ. It is as if Qoheleth uses ambiguous words in a way that embodies the impossibility of interpreting the vagaries of life. Indeed, as Qoheleth puts it in 8:1: וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ פֵּשֶׁר דָּבָר, "who is (wise and) able to interpret any thing/word"?[65]

[65] On the interpretation of this line as posing the following stich as a riddle, see Klein and Fox, "Qoheleth," p. 196.