

THE QUATRAIN IN ISAIANIC POETRY*

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Isaiah was a master of Hebrew poetry as well as a grand theologian. He was fond of integrating couplets into various four-lined structures (i.e., quatrains) that fall into three basic categories. This integration was often achieved by sophisticated interplay on the grammatical, semantic, and rhetorical levels. What is of deeper significance, however, is that Isaiah used these poetic forms to enhance his theological meaning. By activating all levels of language, the prophet was able to impress God's word upon his hearers in compact, four-lined structures that would otherwise take many lines of prose to communicate.

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ALTHOUGH the pairing of lines by means of grammatical, semantic and rhetorical parallelism to form couplets is the basic feature of Isaianic poetry, the pairing of couplets to form quatrains is also a distinctive device used by Isaiah.¹ In this article, we will differentiate and categorize these structures, but will also see how Isaiah uses them to communicate his message by artfully blending form with meaning.

Before we start with the analysis of the quatrains, some preliminary considerations are in order. Basic to the goal stated above is the position that a methodology of analyzing parallel lines must be able to account for both grammatical and semantic parallelism, and the rhetorical effect as well. It is our intention to avoid stressing one aspect of parallelism over another.² The method employed here, which was

*This article is based on the results of an analysis of 529 lines of Isaianic verse in my unpublished dissertation *Parallelism in the Poetry of Isaiah 1-18*, written for the Dropsie College, 1986.

¹Out of the 529 lines there were 208 units: 127 independent couplets, 42 quatrains, 29 triplets, 8 single lines and two possible hexastichs.

²See S. Geller, ("Theory and Method in the study of Biblical Poetry," *JQR* LXXIII No. 1 [1986]) 65-77. With regard to the debate over which aspect has primacy, A. Berlin's metaphor of grammar being the skeleton and semantics being the flesh and blood is helpful, for one is surely meaningless without the other. See A. Berlin, *The dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1985) 23-25, 64.

adapted from Stephen Geller's *Parallelism in Early Biblical Poetry* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1979) is an attempt to account for parallelism on these levels.³ Central to the method is a device called a "schema," which will be explained below.

The lines used in the analysis had to meet certain criteria.⁴ The first is that the lines analyzed should be regarded as Isaianic by most scholars.⁵ Secondly, the lines must be "highly parallelistic" as opposed to prose without any parallelistic features (e.g., 7:1-6, 10-17 and 8:1-4), or prose that contains parallelistic features, referred to here as "parallelistic prose" (e.g., 2:20, 3:6-7, 7:18-25, 8:12A-D and 10:10-12). What exactly constitutes "highly parallelistic" lines is a subject of ongoing debate. For our purposes we have delimited this category to lines that display a basic grammatical and semantic correspondence⁶ coupled with the limitation of line length,⁷ and the requirement that the parallel lines are relatively equal in length. The vast majority of Isaianic lines fall in this highly parallelistic category. Finally, the lines used had to be textually sound in the opinion of a consensus of scholars.⁸

Although the corpus was not subjected to a metrical analysis,⁹ certain patterns of line length emerged. The term "line pattern" denotes the ratio of grammatical units in one line to another. "Grammatical unit" is a term used to denote a word that is significant in the structure of parallel verse (i.e., words that are objects of parallelism). Some words, such as particles (e.g., ׀ and ׀) are not used as objects of parallelism in the corpus and are therefore not awarded the status of "grammatical unit."¹⁰ For example, a couplet with three grammatical units in each line would be referred to as a "3:3" line pattern. An example would be 17:10A-B:

³My debt to Stephen Geller is evident throughout this article.

⁴It was felt that a minimum of 500 lines would offer an adequate representation of Isaianic parallelism.

⁵Our corpus is based upon what S. R. Driver, O. Eissfeldt, G. Foher, G. B. Gray and J. Skinner, among others, unanimously considered to be Isaianic. This does not reflect the present writer's opinion of Isaianic authorship.

⁶This excludes, for example, 2:20, for although it can be divided into four fairly equal lines, they are all grammatically enjambed and semantically non-parallel

⁷Or "terse," cf. J. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) 85.

⁸The passages ultimately included were 1:2-27, 29-31, 2:7-8, 10-17, 19, 21, 3:1-5, 12C-26, 4:1, 5:1-28, 6:7B-D, 8B-C, 9-13B, 7:7B-9, 8:9-10, 13-15, 9:7-13, 15-17B, 19-20, 10:1-4, 6-9, 13-15, 17:1, 2B-C, 3A-B, 4-6, 10-14, 18:1-2D, 3-6.

⁹It is not denied that Isaianic poetry is "metrical" in some sense. Rather, an in-depth metrical analysis would confront many uncertainties which would require a major study of its own.

¹⁰See Geller, p. 8.

*Text of 17:10A–D**Translation*

- A. כִּי שָׁכַחְתָּ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁעֶךָ For you have forgotten the God of
your salvation,
- B. וְצוּר מְצוּדָךְ לֹא זָכַרְתָּ and the rock of your refuge you do
not remember.

In this couplet we see that each of the three basic grammatical units in the A line have a grammatical counterpart in the B line (verb: שָׁכַחְתָּ כִּי // לֹא זָכַרְתָּ // אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁעֶךָ // (צוּר מְצוּדָךְ), which are semantically parallel as well (the verbs are synonymous and the direct objects are epithets in that they give description one to another). Here we should note that aside from a very few instances of grammatical rearrangement, often done for a rhetorical effect (e.g., 1:19–20 and 5:11 analyzed below) there is a basic grammatical and semantic correspondence between units in the parallel line structures in Isaiah.¹¹

Isaianic quatrains, like the couplets,¹² come in a variety of line patterns. Some, like 5:27A–D below, consist predominantly of lines with two grammatical units.¹³

*Text of 5:27A–D**Translation*

- A. אֵין עֵיֶךְ None is weary,
- B. וְאֵין כּוֹשֵׁל בּוֹ none stumbles among them,
- C. לֹא יָנוּם none slumbers,
- D. וְלֹא יִישָׁן none sleeps.

It may be objected, of course, that what we have here is really a 5:4 couplet rather than a 2:3:2:2 quatrain.¹⁴ Granted that it is not always

¹¹However, see the few examples of the “semantic” quatrains below, which display semantic parallelism with little or no grammatical parallelism.

¹²Among the couplets alone there were 10 different line patterns: the 2:2, 2:3, 3:2, 3:3, 3:4, 4:3, 4:2, 4:4, 5:3 and the 5:2. Of these, the 3:3 and the 3:2 were the most common, but there were a significant number of “short lined” couplets (There were 27 occurrences of the 2:2. For example, see 1:23A–B, 2:10A–B, 5:3C–D, 7:9C–D, and 8:9C–D).

¹³Some other examples of quatrains with predominantly 2 unit lines are 1:18C–F, 1:19A–20B, 1:29A–D, 5:5C–F, 5:7E–H, 5:9B–E, 5:12D–G, 6:9B–E, 9:9A–D, 17:6C–G.

¹⁴The negative existential partical אֵין is considered a grammatical unit in the corpus since it functions as the predicate of a noun sentence throughout. The A line therefore consists of two grammatical units and the B line three units, for prepositions with suffixes (e.g., בּוֹ above) are often objects of parallelism in the corpus. The problem lies with the negative particle לֹא, which usually functions as a proclitic and forms a unit with the following term (hence not an independent grammatical unit, cf. לֹא זָכַרְתָּ in 17:10B above). In this instance, however, לֹא parallels אֵין on the semantic level and occupies the same emphatic position in the parallel line structure. It is therefore given a grammatical unit status in lines C and D.

easy to determine a couplet from a quatrain, two facts tend to discount understanding these lines as a couplet. First, long lines (i.e., lines with four or more units) without a caesura are relatively uncommon in Isaiah (see footnote 12 above). That is, Isaiah tends to use shorter three or two unit lines.¹⁵ Secondly there are clear grammatical caesuras that naturally break this text into four short, distinct phrases. Indeed, in this instance the brief, hurried line structure enhances Isaiah's description of these swift, relentless destroyers. As we shall see, this is not the only place where Isaiah uses form to enhance his meaning.

With this example we begin our study of the Isaianic quatrain. As we mentioned at the outset, the quatrain is essentially two couplets bound together. This "binding" is done in a variety of ways, and with the help of a continuum we can see that three basic quatrain patterns emerge. On one end of the continuum there is what we shall call the "interlocked" quatrains in which the two sets of paired lines are intertwined (hence "interlocked") in such a way that the quatrain must be viewed as one unit. This interlocking is the result of alternating or chiasmic patterns in which parallel lines are separated from each other (i.e., ABA'B', ABB'A').¹⁶ In the middle of the continuum there are the "integrated" quatrains. Here the parallelism is usually between the A and B lines and between the C and D lines, but it is obvious that all four lines are parallel on the basis of grammatical, semantic and usually rhetorical similarities (i.e., [A//A']/[A''//A''']). These structures are not considered to be as tightly bound as the "interlocked" types, for they can be analyzed as two couplets without obscuring the overall structure of the quatrain. Finally, at the end of the continuum we have the "semantic" quatrains in which, like the "integrated" quatrains above, the primary parallelism is between the A and B lines, and between the C and D lines, but the parallelism between the paired couplets is basically semantic and/or rhetorical, with no grammatical parallelism.¹⁷ Let us consider the tightest quatrains on the one end of the continuum, and proceed to the looser structures at the other end.

¹⁵Isaiah's use of the short, 2 unit line in couplets, triplets, and quatrains (often in association with 3 unit lines, e.g., a 3:2:2 triplet) is a characteristic that sets him apart from early Hebrew poetry. See Geller, pp. 282-84.

¹⁶That is, the A line parallels the C line and the B the D line in the alternating type, and the A line parallels the D line and the B the C line in the chiasmic type.

¹⁷This is a small category, for as noted above, Isaiah tends to employ lines that are parallel on both the grammatical and semantic levels. These quatrains are considered the "loosest" of the quatrains on the continuum because of the lack of grammatical parallelism. It should be emphasized again that grammar, although an important aspect of parallelism, is but one aspect, and the more aspects implemented (i.e., grammar, semantics, rhetorical devices), the "tighter" the parallelism. There are no examples of quatrains grammatically parallel with no semantic parallelism.

I. THE "INTERLOCKED" QUATRAIN:
ALTERNATING AND CHIASTIC STRUCTURES

Judging from the abundance of examples, the alternating quatrain must be considered a favorite Isaianic device.¹⁸ In half of the examples analyzed,¹⁹ the grammatical and semantic correspondence is complete between the alternating lines in that each unit, or group of units (i.e., word compounds) is grammatically and semantically parallel to its corresponding unit. To gain a clear and convenient view of the parallelism between these units, we employ what we term a "schema." This is a purely heuristic device intended to display syntagmatic and paradigmatic structures.²⁰ It merely arranges the syntax (syntagmatic/horizontal level) of the lines so that the parallel units can be placed vertically (paradigmatic level). By means of this device, one may observe at a glance the grammatical and semantic parallelism between the parallel lines. 1:10A–D will allow us to illustrate the use of the schema as well as offer an example of "complete" parallelism.

<i>Text of 1:10A–D</i>	<i>Translation</i>
A. שְׁמַעוּ דְבַר־יְהוָה	Hear the word of YHWH
B. קְצִינֵי סֹדִם	you rulers of Sodom.
C. הִאֲזִינוּ תוֹרַת אֱלֹהֵינוּ	Listen to the teaching of our God,
D. עַם עֲמֹרָה	you people of Gomorrah.

Schema of 1:10A–D

A.	יְהוָה	דְבַר	שְׁמַעוּ		
B.				סֹדִם	קְצִינֵי
C.	אֱלֹהֵינוּ	תוֹרַת	הִאֲזִינוּ		
D.				עֲמֹרָה	עַם

The imperatives and the direct objects of the A and C lines correspond grammatically and semantically (שְׁמַעוּ // הִאֲזִינוּ: synonyms, דְבַר // תוֹרַת: synonyms, יְהוָה // אֱלֹהֵינוּ: epithet), as do the subjects in the B and

¹⁸See 1:10A–D, 1:15A–D, 1:18C–F, 1:19A–20B, 1:29A–D, 2:7A–D (a pentastich?), 5:5C–F, 5:7E–H, 5:9B–E, 5:10A–D, 5:11A–D, 5:12D–G, 6:9B–E, 9:9A–D, 17:6C–G, 17:12A–D.

¹⁹Cf. 1:10A–D, 1:19A–20B, 1:29A–D, 2:7A–D (a pentastich?), 5:5C–F, 5:12D–G, 6:9B–E, 9:9A–D.

²⁰Cf. S. Geller's "reconstructed sentence," pp. 15–21.

D lines (קְצִינִי // עַם: part-whole,²¹ סֵרֵם // עֲמֹרָה: paradigmatic).²² The parallelism is therefore complete, and the quatrain, by virtue of the alternation (ABA'B'), must be considered as one unit of four lines, and cannot be analyzed as two couplets or as four single lines.²³ It is therefore a very tight quatrain.

In the other half of the examples of alternating quatrains, one finds that a word that is in one line (usually the A line) is deleted in its parallel line (C line), but is nevertheless understood in that line to complete its meaning. On a deeper level of linguistic analysis, however, this parallelism does not really differ from the complete parallelism in the example above, for the deleted word is necessary to the meaning of the line. This phenomenon of word deletion, referred to here as "ellipsis"²⁴ is illustrated by the quatrain in 5:7E-H.

<i>Text of 5:7E-H</i>	<i>Translation</i>
A. וַיִּקֹּר לְמַשְׁפָּט	and He looked for justice,
B. וַהֲגִה מִשְׁפָּח	but behold, bloodshed;
C. לְצַדִּיקָה	for righteousness,
D. וַהֲגִה צְעָקָה	but behold, a cry! ²⁵

Shema of 5:7E-H

A. וַיִּקֹּר לְמַשְׁפָּט	וַיִּקֹּר	
B.	מִשְׁפָּח	וַהֲגִה
C. לְצַדִּיקָה		
D.	צְעָקָה	וַהֲגִה

²¹The קְצִינִי may be considered a part of the whole (עַם), or the relationship between the two words may be described as a merism (i.e., establishing the two extremes "rulers" and "common people," and implying everyone in between).

²²Words related paradigmatically belong to the same semantic field in that they denote a common concept, or in other words, are related by an understood common denominator. In this example, the stock word pair סֵרֵם and עֲמֹרָה belong to the same paradigm of "wicked cities."

²³The phenomenon of line parallelism, whether involving 2, 3, 4 or more lines, must be considered normative for Isaianic verse structure. This is so because the independent, single line is rare and its very existence is debatable (e.g., 1:15E; see footnote 1).

²⁴This phenomenon has also been referred to as "gapping." See E. L. Greenstein ("Two variations of Grammatical Parallelism in Canaanite Poetry and their Psycholinguistic Background," *JANES* of Columbia University, 6[1974]) 94.

²⁵This quatrain is primarily an alternating quatrain in that the A and C lines, and the B and D lines are grammatically identical and semantically parallel (even semantically identical in the repetition of וַהֲגִה in the B and D lines). It is however, "integrated" as well in that the A and B lines, and the C and D lines are semantically and rhetorically parallel

It is obvious that הוֹי is understood with the prepositional phrase in the C line, for the C line would be incomplete without it. For all practical purposes, therefore, we must conclude that there is very little difference between the alternating quatrains with ellipsis and alternating quatrains that are “completely” parallel, for the grammatical and semantic parallelism is complete in both, even though one line may have an additional grammatical unit that its parallel line does not have.²⁶

Rarely, Isaiah may vary the grammar of one line to achieve a certain poetic effect. The quatrain in 5:11 illustrates this.

<i>Text of 5:11A–D</i>	<i>Translation</i>
A. הוֹי מִשְׁכִּימֵי בִבְקָר	Woe! ²⁷ those who rise early in the morning,
B. שָׁכַר יִרְדְּפוּ	that they may run after beer, ²⁸
C. מֵאַחֲרֵי בִנְשָׁף	who tarry late in the evening,
D. יֵין יִדְלִיקֶם	till wine inflames them.

Schema of 5:11A–D

A.	בִּבְקָר	מִשְׁכִּימֵי	הוֹי
B.			שָׁכַר יִרְדְּפוּ
C.	בִּנְשָׁף	מֵאַחֲרֵי	
D.			יֵין יִדְלִיקֶם

Apart from the interjection הוֹי, the A and C lines are grammatically identical (both having participles and prepositional phrases) and semantically parallel (merism). The הוֹי may be regarded as extrametrical and applying to the quatrain as a whole, or as a grammatical unit in the A line that is understood elliptically (i.e., “gapped”) in the C line.

by means of the paranomasia between מִשְׁפָּח and מִשְׁפֹּט, and צָדָקָה and צַעֲקָה (similar sound but opposite meaning).

²⁶Ellipsis can occur in any line structure whether they are couplets, triplets, or quatrains with other types of parallel line patterns.

²⁷The הוֹי (as opposed to אוֹי, which almost always occurs with prepositions לְ, עַל, or אֶל) is understood by this writer to be a pure interjection, most probably a cry of funerary lamentation (the nuance being “woe!” or “alas!” rather than “woe unto . . .”). Cf. H. W. Wolff, *A Commentary on the Prophets Joel and Amos* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977) 242–45.

²⁸It is not evident how שָׁכַר differs from יֵין. שָׁכַר almost always occurs paired with יֵין and all but once precedes it. It probably is not liquor (usually translated “strong drink”), for there is no evidence of distillation in ancient times. Here it is understood to be a beer—perhaps a grain beer as opposed to wine. Cf. R. L. Harris, Ed., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980).

But what is of immediate interest is that the grammar of the D line is not what one would expect after having read the B line. The reader, having encountered a direct object and a transitive verb in the B line, is now surprised to find the noun as a subject in the D line. This probably was not done just for variation, but rather to set up a pun on the verb דלך. This root has a double meaning: that of “burn” or “inflamm” (cf. Ezek 24:10) and “hotly pursue” (cf. Gen 31:36). In this context, the primary meaning is no doubt “inflamm,” but it must not be overlooked that דלך (in the *Qal*) is a synonym of דרך in the B line, having the latter nuance of “pursuing.”²⁹ The pun is that the drinkers, making a fresh start in the morning and in full control (they are the subjects of ירדפו in the B line), are pursuing beer in the first couplet. However, by evening the situation is reversed. Wine is now in control (it is the subject of the D line) and is the pursuer in the second couplet. We see that the poet is actually combining grammar and line structure with the meaning (semantic nuances of דלך and the morning-evening merism) to impress an image upon his hearers of these ambitious fellows; they set out at the first light of dawn to make bold conquests of beer, but by evening they are stumbling their way back home with wine, the real victor in the contest, hard at their heels. By such synthesis, Isaiah is able to communicate a profoundly effective caricature in four short lines that would take many more lines of prose to describe.

The chiasmic quatrain is not so well represented as the alternating quatrain and must therefore be considered less characteristic of Isaianic quatrain devices. Out of the four possible examples (1:11C–F, 5:6A–D, 5:7A–D and 6:11B–C), there are no line structures as clear as the alternating line structures mentioned above. Be this as it may, the prophet will use chiasm as a device to tighten other types of quatrains. Perhaps the tightest quatrain in Isaiah is the famous one in 1:18:

<i>Text of 1:18C–F</i>	<i>Translation</i>
A. אִם־יְהִי־חַטָּאֵיכֶם כַּשָּׁנִים	If your sins are like scarlet,
B. כִּשְׁלֵג יִלְבִּינוּ	shall they be white as snow?
C. אִם־יֵאָדְדִימוּ כְּחוֹלֶעַ	If they are red like crimson,
D. כִּצְמֶר יְהִי	shall they become like wool?

²⁹On a deep level an underlying grammatical parallelism is evident if one rewrites the *Hiph* singular imperfect יִדְלִיקֶם to the *Qal* plural imperfect יִדְלִקוּ (dropping the 3 m pl suffix), with the second meaning of the verb's root “pursue” understood. Both the B and D lines would then have nouns functioning as subjects of plural imperfect verbs. For such grammatical “transformations,” see Geller, pp. 21–29.

Schema of 1:18C-F

A.	כְּשֵׁנִים	אִם־יִהְיֶה	חֲטָאֵיְכֶם	
B.				כְּשֶׁלֶג יִלְבִּינוּ
C.	כְּתוֹלַע	אִם־יִאֲדִימוּ		
D.				כְּצֶמֶר יִהְיֶה

This quatrain has a primarily alternating structure (note the ellipsis of חֲטָאֵיְכֶם in the C line). However, chiasm can be observed on two levels. First, there is the chiasmic verb, prepositional phrase, prepositional phrase, verb structure within both the AB couplet and the CD couplet. The result is that the prepositional phrases take the central, or inside, position in the overall structure of the quatrain, while the verbs are at the extremities. Secondly, a further chiasm can be observed between the verb יִהְיֶה in the A and D lines, and the *Hiph* imperfects of the B and C lines. The inclusio of יִהְיֶה further tightens the quatrain. What must be determined at this point is whether or not this structure is in fact a vehicle to further the meaning of this quatrain. To begin with, we understand that the poet's intention is to offer a well-reasoned, or "tight" argument to the people (verse 18A: לְכֹרֶנָּה וְנִנְכָחָה). Certainly the skill in which he blends alternation with chiasm to produce such a tight structure enhances the meaning he wished to convey; that YHWH's terms are so tightly logical and reasonable that there is no room for objection. But can we go further and suggest that the form may even be valuable in the actual interpretation of this quatrain? It is well-known that the B and D lines can be understood either as statements (i.e., "they shall be white as snow/wool") or as questions, as in the above translation. The difficulty with the former interpretation is that it is not evident how or why red sins (sins of bloodshed, cf. verse 5) should become "white sins." Such an ambiguity in what one would expect to be a well-reasoned argument is out of place. Rather, it is more fitting in this context of tight logic to understand the B and D lines as rhetorical questions, expecting negative answers (cf. Jer 13:23).³⁰ Therefore, in presenting His argument, YHWH is backing the people into a corner by reminding them of their bloody guilt in crimes that cannot be left unpunished by law. Tightness of form mirrors inexorability of logical argument.

By itself therefore, this quatrain would leave the people with little comfort. However, this quatrain was never meant to be read by itself as

³⁰It is admissible that these lines be regarded as questions without interrogative pronouns or adverbs (see G-K 150 a).

is evident by its close similarities of structure with the next lines, which also form an alternating quatrain.

<i>Text of 1:19A-B—20A-B</i>	<i>Translation</i>
A. אַם־תֹּאבִי וְשָׁמַעְתָּם	If you are willing and obey,
B. טוֹב הָאָרֶץ תֹּאכְלוּ	you will eat of the good of the land.
C. וְאִם־תִּמְאָנוּ וּמְרִיתֶם	But if you refuse and rebel,
D. חֶרֶב תֹּאכְלוּ	you will be devoured by the sword.

Schema of 1:19A-B—20A-B

A.	אַם־תֹּאבִי		
	וְשָׁמַעְתָּם ³¹		
B.		טוֹב הָאָרֶץ	תֹּאכְלוּ
C.	אִם־תִּמְאָנוּ		
	וּמְרִיתֶם		
D.		חֶרֶב	תֹּאכְלוּ

The continuation of the particle אַם and the similar “outside” position of the imperfect verbs with the alliterative ת / א combination (rhetorical considerations) forces the reader to connect the two quatrains on the semantic level (i.e., meaning) as well. Indeed, this quatrain brings us into the second phase of YHWH’s argument. In spite of their guilt, if they are willing and obey, then they shall eat the good of the land. The alliteration and assonance between תֹּאבִי and טוֹב further strengthens the reasonableness and attractiveness of a willing heart toward God. However, if they refuse and rebel, then they shall be “the eaten” rather than “the eaters.” With this pun between תֹּאכְלוּ and תֹּאכְלוּ,³² which occupies the final position in this two quatrain unit, we reach the peak of YHWH’s argument. As in the case of 5:11 analyzed above,

³¹Note that two grammatical units are parallel within the same line (i.e., “internal parallelism”) and are placed in the same column of the schema.

³²The תֹּאכְלוּ of the D line is most probably a *Qal* passive (see G-K 52 c). Usually, חֶרֶב is understood prepositionally either by reading בַּחֶרֶב (cf. IQIs^a) or by considering it as an accusative functioning prepositionally in a passive construction (for details see G-K 121 c). Some prefer to emend the verb to תֹּאכְלוּ (you shall eat the sword), but this has no versional support and is not idiomatic to Hebrew which would prefer the חֶרֶב as the subject (cf. 2 Kgdms 2:26, 18:8 and Jer 2:30). Others emend חֶרֶב to חֲרוֹב which means “carob” (a poor man’s food) in late Hebrew and Aramaic, but this word is not used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible and such a reading involves the emendation of the passive verb as well as חֶרֶב. However, it is possible that Isaiah was making a pun on חֶרֶב and חֲרוֹב.

Isaiah altered the grammar of the D line to achieve this pun. One would expect תאכלו rather than the passive תאָפְלוּ to parallel the תאכלו of the B line, with תִּרְבּ, a direct object, paralleling טוב הָאָרֶץ. By reversing the expected grammar (i.e., active to passive) the alternative of eating rather than being eaten is underscored. The tightness of the two quatrain unit is further enhanced by the inclusio of the יֵאמֵר יְהוָה and the יְהוָה דִּבֶּר of the 20C line.

The “interlocked” quatrain is an important Isaianic poetic device. Most characteristic of it is the alternating quatrain (ABA'B'; 16 clear examples in the corpus), although there is evidence of chiasmic structures (4 possible examples), and at times a mixture of both. Also there is a basic grammatical and semantic correspondence between word units of the parallel lines in spite of ellipsis and an occasional grammatical rearrangement. Often, Isaiah will use this “interlocked” structure, along with grammatical and rhetorical forms, to enhance the meaning of his oracle.

II. THE “INTEGRATED” QUATRAIN

The combination of couplets whose parallel lines are not actually intertwined but are associated by virtue of grammatical, semantic and often rhetorical parallelism is common in Isaiah.³³ Usually, all four lines are grammatically and semantically parallel, although in a few instances one line, either the A line or the D line, is non-parallel (A line: 1:18A-D, 1:14A-D, 10:8A-9C; D line: 17:5A-D). These quatrains occupy the center of the continuum, for they are somewhat less bound than the “interlocked” type in that the primary parallelism is often between the A and B lines, and between the C and D lines. (They therefore could be analyzed as two couplets without blurring the overall structure, unlike the alternating quatrains.) The oft analyzed quatrain in 1:3 illustrates this type.³⁴

<i>Text of 1:3A-D</i>	<i>Translation</i>
A. יָדַע שׁוֹר קִנְיָהוּ	The ox knows its owner,
B. וְחִמּוֹר אָבוּס בְּעֻלָּיו	and the ass its master's crib,
C. יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יָדַע	(but) Israel does not know,
D. עַמִּי לֹא הִתְבוּנָן	my people do not understand.

³³There are at least 15 clear examples of this in my corpus: 1:3A-D, 1:4A-D, 1:7A-D, 1:8A-D, 1:14A-D, 3:3A-D (list), 3:16C-F, 3:24A-D, 5:27A-D, 7:8, 7:9, 8:9:A-D, 8:13A-D, 10:3A-D, 10:8A-9C, 10:14A-D, 10:15A-D?, 17:5A-D, 17:10A-D?

³⁴Cf. J. Kugel's treatment of this quatrain in *Idea*, 9.

Schema of 1:3A-D

A.	קָהוּ	שׁוֹר	יָדַע
B.	אֲבוֹס בְּעֵלָיו	חֲמוֹר	
C.		יִשְׂרָאֵל	לֹא יָדַע
D.		עֲמִי	לֹא הִתְבוּנָן

On the surface, the primary grammatical and semantic parallelism is between the A and B lines, and between the C and D lines. In the AB couplet, both lines have direct objects (שׁוֹר and חֲמוֹר) that are semantically parallel (both are farm animals). In the CD couplet, both lines have negatives with verbs (יָדַע and לֹא יָדַע) that are semantically parallel (both express Israel's lack of knowledge). All four lines are grammatically parallel in spite of the fact that not all elements (i.e., verb, subject, direct object) are in each of the four lines except the A line. However, below the surface, we see that grammar, semantics and rhetorical devices all contribute to give a deeper perception of Israel's condition. What Isaiah has done was to make use of the simple form of a quatrain to create a rather complex message that unfolds when one examines the similarities and contrasts between the grammatical units of the parallel lines. To begin with, it will be noticed that all four lines have a subject which associates senseless beasts (the subjects of the AB couplet) with Israel (the subject of the CD couplet) on the semantic level. The similarity between the beasts and Israel is further strengthened on the phonetic level by the alliteration of the sibilants שׁ / שׁ and the ר in שׁוֹר and יִשְׂרָאֵל, and the gutturals ח / ע with the מ in חֲמוֹר and עֲמִי. However, one is encouraged not to stop at this unflattering association, for one is invited to contemplate the contrasts as well as the similarities. But what is the basic contrast between these beasts and Israel? Is it that the beasts are instinctively faithful to their benefactors as opposed to Israel's infidelity?³⁵ Although יָדַע has a broad semantic range that includes knowledge on the emotional and volitional levels (and therefore associated with obedience and piety) as well as on the intellectual level, its parallel is with הִתְבוּנָן, which clearly implies actual knowledge or perception derived from examination. Moreover, the contrast between Israel and these domesticated beasts demands that intelligence, rather than faithfulness, is the issue, for oxen, as far as we can tell, were known for their fidelity, loyalty and obedience.³⁶ Since oxen are relatively uncommon to the experience of many western

³⁵J. Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I-XXXIX* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1925) 4.

³⁶In contrast to the רִים (wild ox) that is not dependable like the domesticated ox (see Job 39:9-12).

urbanites, perhaps Lassie would offer us a more vivid image. One would not say: "even Lassie is faithful to his master, he knows his doggie dish." The comparison with Lassie implies that the real issue is not Lassie's fidelity, but intelligence. The point in our passage is that even dumb (although faithful) beasts are intelligent enough to know something that Israel doesn't know. But what could this be? Surely it cannot be ignorance of God's raising them and that Israel has rewarded Him by rebelling (verse 2), for the prophets assumed that Israel was aware of their special status with YHWH and their responsibility to Him. Rather, a moral ignorance is implied, not of their crimes, but of the consequences of their crimes, that is, punishment. This is not explicit in the text, but is implicit in the dynamics of the parallelism.³⁷ The beasts possess a certain cunning with regard to their welfare that Israel lacks. They are fed not because they are loyal, but they are loyal because they are fed. What they know is the price of disobedience. The negatives of the D and C lines add a new dimension to Israel's ignorance of their fate. They do not know what the animals know because they *will not* know it. Their ignorance is a willful ignorance. The stupidity of such an ignorance is grammatically and structurally enhanced by the conspicuously missing direct objects in the CD couplet. The animals are fed for their simple logic, for their knowledge has an object (their master and his food trough). Israel, by its willful ignorance, has no object of knowledge and will soon starve (i.e., suffer punishment). That Israel is foolish in regard to the consequences of her crime is a standard prophetic argument (cf. Deut 32:6 "עַם נָבָל וְלֹא חָכָם").

Another example of this type of quatrain is found in 3:16, where Isaiah is scathing in his description of the daughters of Zion.

<i>Text of 3:16C-F</i>	<i>Translation</i>
A. וַתֵּלְכֵנָה נְטוּת גְּרוֹן	and they walk with outstretched necks,
B. וּמִשְׁקֵרוֹת עֵינֵיהֶם	and ogle with their eyes,
C. הַלֹּוֹךְ וְטַפֵּף תֵּלְכֵנָה	mincing along as they go,
D. וּבְרִגְלֵיהֶם תֵּעַבְסֵנָה ³⁸	tinkling with their feet.

³⁷The fact that the overall context of Isaiah I is that of a רֵיב (pronounced "rēv"; it is the term given for a legal law suit) intensifies the expectation of judgement in this quatrain.

³⁸In spite of the fact that there are three instances of *hapax legomena* in this quatrain, the precise definitions of which may not be known, our analysis is not adversely affected, for the context of these attention getting actions helps to provide close enough definitions. The *Pi* of the root שִׁקַּר refers to some bawdy, wanton look, unless with Jastrow we understand it to mean "paint" (cf. שִׁקַּר II, *Pi*). The infinitive of טַפַּף may be onomatopoeic, related to the little steps taken by children (i.e., "tap," cf. Gray). The *Pi* of עֵבַס denotes something done with the feet which must be related to some sort of article which makes noise or draws attention (cf. v. 18 for the noun form).

Schema of 3:16C–F

- A. נטוֹת גְרוֹן ותִּלְכְּנָה
 B. ומְשַׁקְרוֹת עֵינַיִם
 C. הַלֹּךְ וְטַפַּף תִּלְכְּנָה
 D. וּבְרַגְלֵיהֶם תַּעֲבֹסְנָה

All four lines are grammatically and semantically parallel. The imperfects of הלך, although actually occurring in the A and C lines, are “gapped” in the B and D lines as well. Each line contains a “compound,” or a unit consisting of two inseparable words, that modify the הלך imperfects: the A and B lines have participles in construct, the C line has a compound of two infinitive absolutes, and the D line contains a preposition with a verb. These compound modifiers, which describe actions while walking, are basically interchangeable grammatically and semantically. What is unique about this quatrain of four parallel lines, however, is the way in which Isaiah blends alternation and chiasm into his overall structure.

Text of 3:16C–F with Couplets Placed on Same line

נטוֹת גְרוֹן / ותִּלְכְּנָה ומְשַׁקְרוֹת עֵינַיִם /
 וּבְרַגְלֵיהֶם תַּעֲבֹסְנָה / הַלֹּךְ וְטַפַּף תִּלְכְּנָה

We see that there is a special relationship between the A and C lines and between the B and D lines (alternation), and this relationship is chiasmic in nature. The imperfects of הלך are obviously parallel, as are the indivisible compounds נטוֹת גְרוֹן (extended necks) and הַלֹּךְ וְטַפַּף (mincing along), which are parallel adverbially on a higher level. (Note the assonance of the long *u* vowels that further associates these compounds.) Likewise, the participle ומְשַׁקְרוֹת and the verb וּבְרַגְלֵיהֶם תַּעֲבֹסְנָה (“ogling” and “tinkling”) describe similar actions, and the attention getting עֵינַיִם (eyes) and וּבְרַגְלֵיהֶם (feet) are also parallel. This complex structure which consists of parallel body parts and simultaneous actions helps to enhance our mental picture of these women skilled in the art of seduction. It should be noted that the use of alternation and chiasm within a quatrain of four parallel lines places this “integrated” quatrain very close to the “interlocked” quatrains on the continuum.

An example of an “integrated” quatrain that is positioned toward the other end of the continuum (i.e., the “loose” end where there is no grammatical parallelism) is the structure found in 10:15.

Text of 10:15A–D

- A. הִתְפָּאֵר הַגֵּרֶזֶן עַל הַחֶצֶב בּוֹ
 B. אִם יִתְגַּדֵּל הַמְשׁוֹר³⁹ עַל מְנִיפּוֹ
 C. כִּהְנִיף שֵׁבֶת וְאָת(מְרִימוֹ)⁴⁰
 D. כִּהְרִים מְטָה לֹא־עֵץ

Translation

- A. Shall the axe boast itself over him who hews with it?
 B. Shall the saw exalt itself over him who wields it?
 C. As if a rod should wield him who lifts it,
 D. as if a staff should lift him who is not wood.

Semantic Diagram of 10:15A–D

- A. a b c
 B. a' b' c'
 C. a'' b'' c''
 D. a''' b''' c'''

The grammatical parallelism is very exact within the AB couplet in that both lines have an interrogative particle, a *Hitpa^cel* intransitive verb, a subject and a prepositional phrase. The grammatical parallelism within the CD couplet is also exact in that both lines are prepositional phrases containing an infinitive construct, a subject and a direct object. Although there is a certain compatibility between these two couplets (i.e., the verbal element in the infinite constructs of the CD couplet with the intransitive verbs of the AB couplet: the parallel subjects), it is evident that the grammatical parallelism is weak. Rather, the emphasis of this quatrain is on the semantic parallelism, for every word on each line is semantically parallel, as the semantic diagram shows (using the standard a b c // a' b' c' method).

The “integrated” quatrains are better thought of as two couplets that are connected grammatically, semantically and usually rhetorically.

³⁹*משור* is a *hapax*, the root of which is *נשר* which has the meaning “saw” in various Semitic languages.

⁴⁰If the *ו* on the direct object marker (*וְאָת*) is original, it may be explained as a *waw explicativum* (see G–K 154 a N 1b). It is believed by many that the plural *מְרִימֵי* was subsequently added to make the reference to YHWH more clear (i.e., the “plural of majesty,” cf. Gray, p. 202; G–K 124 k; note also the singular in the versions).

Some, like the 3:16 quatrain analyzed above, are structurally and grammatically “tighter” than others of its class (e.g., 10:15 above) and are therefore closer to the “interlocked” end of the continuum. We now consider the “semantic” quatrains at the “loose” end of the continuum.

III. THE “SEMANTIC” QUATRAIN

There are fewer instances in which the connection between the two couplets is completely semantic and/or rhetorical, resulting in correspondingly looser relationships.⁴¹ 18:6A–D provides an example.

Text of 18:6A–D

- A. יַעֲזֹבוּ יַחְדָּו לְעֵיט הַרִים
 B. וּלְבַהֲמַת הָאָרֶץ
 C. וְקָץ עָלֵיו הָעֵיט
 D. וּכְל־בַּהֲמַת הָאָרֶץ עָלֵיו תִּתְחַרֵּף

Translation

- A. They shall all be left to the birds of prey of the mountains,
 B. and to the beasts of the earth;
 C. and the birds of prey will spend the winter on them,
 D. and the beasts of the earth will spend the harvest on them.⁴²

There is no grammatical parallelism between the AB couplet and the CD couplet. The result is that the attention of the reader is automatically drawn away from the comparison of lines and repetitive grammatical units between couplets, which sets this quatrain apart from the interlocked and integrated types. Rather, the reader is drawn to a more general comparison of the two couplets on the semantic level, and upon examination, it is evident that the CD couplet explains in more detail the meaning of the AB couplet (general-specific relationship). The repetition of “birds of the mountains” and “beasts of the earth” is purely semantic (i.e., they are prepositions in the AB couplet, but subjects in the CD couplet). The quatrain is therefore categorized as “semantic.” It should be noted that rhetorical features such as alternation (A and C lines—birds; B and D lines—beasts; note also the

⁴¹There are four examples in the corpus: 1:6C–F, 1:13A–D, 1:31A–D, and 18:6A–D.

⁴²The verbal denominatives קָץ and תִּתְחַרֵּף occur only here. To remain consistent with the vine metaphor in the preceding verses 4 and 5, it is understood here that the ruined vines (i.e., the Ethiopians) will become a barren haunt of wild birds and beasts year around, rather than become carrion for these creatures.

chiasm in the CD couplet—summer, birds, beasts, winter), and alliteration (the profusion of gutturals throughout all four lines) serve to strengthen the connection between these two couplets.

Finally, at the end of the continuum is an interesting example in which two couplets form a somewhat loose quatrain primarily on the rhetorical level.

<i>Text of 1:6C-F</i>	<i>Translation</i>
A. פָּצַע וְחִבְּרָה	(but) bruises and blows,
B. וּמָכָה טְרִיָּה ⁴³	and raw wounds;
C. לֹא זָרוּ וְלֹא חִבְּשׁוּ ⁴⁴	they are not pressed out, nor bound up,
D. וְלֹא רִכְּכָה בְּשֶׁמֶן	nor softened with oil.

Schema of 1:6C-F (so as to show the rhetorical structure)

A.	וְחִבְּרָה	פָּצַע
B.	וּמָכָה טְרִיָּה	
C.	וְלֹא חִבְּשׁוּ	לֹא זָרוּ
D.	וְלֹא רִכְּכָה בְּשֶׁמֶן	

The AB couplet and the CD couplet are essentially two lists placed together. Each list contains three elements, two of which are internal in the first lines of their respective couplets (i.e., internal parallelism in the A and C lines). The two lists are not grammatically parallel to each other in that the first consists of nouns while the second consists of verbal phrases. Only secondarily are the two couplets semantically parallel (i.e., general-specific relationship: the CD couplet gives more information on the AB couplet). Rather, the primary parallelism is structural and phonetic. Structurally, as already noted, these two couplets are lists, and these lists are of increasing length. That is, the first unit of both couplets is the shortest (פָּצַע and זָרוּ). The second is a bit larger (וְחִבְּרָה and וְלֹא חִבְּשׁוּ). The third is the largest and most grammatically involved (וּמָכָה טְרִיָּה and וְלֹא רִכְּכָה בְּשֶׁמֶן). Corresponding to this increasing unit length is a semantic progression, most evident in the last line of each couplet where the picture is made more vivid by the adjective and adverb (i.e., raw, open, hardening wounds). Phonology also serves to connect the corresponding units of these two couplets (the צ of פָּצַע and the ז of זָרוּ are both sibilants; the ח, ב sequence in

⁴³The attributive is used elsewhere only in Judg 15:15, where it modifies “jawbone” (i.e., a fresh jawbone rather than an old, brittle one). Here the idea is “newly opened” or “raw.” Note the use of collective singulars in the AB couplet.

וְחִבּוּרָהּ and תִּכְשׁוּ; the doubled כּ in מָכָה and רָכְכָה together with the קָ endings). These obvious rhetorical features are not only the main ingredients that hold this quatrain together structurally, but also intensify the meaning. Israel has untended bruises that are not pressed out, blows that are not bound up, and raw wounds that are not softened with oil. The increasing unit length underscores the semantic progression that describes an infection that is progressing beyond a cure.

CONCLUSION

Although this study is not based on a complete analysis of all of Isaiah's material, we can nevertheless observe certain features of the Isaianic quatrain emerging. First of all, we may ascertain the different types of couplet combinations he employs, and gain a general idea of the frequency of these types. Making use of the continuum, we noticed that at one end the "interlocked" quatrain, most usually of the alternating type rather than the chiasmic, was the most highly represented in the corpus with 20 examples. The parallel lines of these quatrains are so structurally intertwined that they cannot be analyzed in smaller units (i.e., couplets). Toward the middle of the continuum there are the "integrated" quatrains in which the primary parallelism is between the A and B lines, and between the C and D lines, but both couplets are nevertheless tightly joined on the basis of grammar, semantic, and rhetorical parallelism. This group is also well represented with 15 examples. Finally, there are only a few examples where the grammatical parallelism breaks down completely, producing "semantic" quatrains that are connected only by semantic and/or rhetorical parallelism, at the very end of the continuum.

Secondly, and perhaps more important than the categorization of these structures, is the fact that Isaiah frequently uses these structures, along with grammar, semantics, and rhetorical devices to enhance his meaning. Isaiah's genius as a poet and theologian lies in the sophisticated interplay of all these aspects. By means of such art he is able to impress upon the mind of his hearers in a few short parallel lines (in our case, the four lines that make up the quatrain) concepts and images that would take paragraphs of ordinary prose to express. Ultimately, this compactness is the result of parallelism that activates all levels of language, melding together form and meaning.⁴⁵

⁴⁴זָרַי (note the long וּ vowel) is best explained as a *Qal* passive of זָרַר, a *hapax* with the meaning of "pressing out" (i.e., a wound, cf. G-K 67 m).

⁴⁵R. Jakobson, "Grammatical Parallelism and its Russian Facet," *Language* 42 (1966) 399-429.