



The structure and homogeneity of Psalm 32

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Psalm 32 is widely regarded as a psalm of thanksgiving with elements of wisdom poetry intermingled into it. The wisdom elements are variously explained as having been present from the beginning, or as having been added to a foundational composition. Such views of the *Gattung* have had a decisive influence on the interpretation of the psalm. This article argues, on the basis of a structural analysis, that Psalm 32 should be understood as a homogeneous wisdom composition. The parallel and inverse structure of its two stanzas demonstrate that the aim of its author was to encourage the upright to foster an open, intimate relationship with Yahweh in which transgressions are confessed and Yahweh's benevolent guidance on the way of life is wisely accepted.

Introduction

For scholars who approach Psalm 32 from a form-critical perspective, the psalm has a confusing mix of forms. On the one hand, it has features which remind the reader of a song of thanksgiving. On the other hand, there are clear indications of wisdom influence in the psalm. The solution for some was to suggest that an original song of thanksgiving¹ was reworked by exponents of wisdom poetry. Others thought that the wisdom influence was present from the beginning and that it resulted in a modified form of thanksgiving. Only a small number of exegetes have proposed that it is a homogeneous composition with didactic aims, which is the minority point of view put forward also in this article. The problem that will be investigated is, firstly, whether the psalm was conceptualised from the beginning in the form in which we have it now (in other words, whether it is homogeneous), and secondly, how it was conceived to serve as a means of communication. It is here proposed that a structural analysis and description of its dominant textual strategy will give answers to these research questions.

To understand the dominant view of Psalm 32 as being a mixture of forms, it is necessary to consider the impact that Hermann Gunkel's view on its *Gattung* had. He regarded it as having a mixed genre in which the characteristics of a song of thanksgiving dominate. He described it as a song of thanksgiving of an individual intermingled (*durchsetzt*) with motifs of wisdom poetry (Gunkel 1986:135). According to Gunkel, wisdom teaching infused both the contents and the form of the psalm, thereby pointing to a relatively late date of origin for Psalm 32 (Gunkel 1986:136).

This notion was subsequently accepted and taken over by many scholars who followed in Gunkel's footsteps. Hans-Joachim Kraus (1972:254), for example, simply says that the psalm belongs to the *Gattung* of individual song of thanksgiving, but that the beatitudes in verses 1–2 and the didactic aphorisms in verses 6–7 and 10 make it probable that elements of wisdom poetry were present from the conceptualisation of the psalm. According to Kraus, individual songs of thanksgiving usually contain a retelling of the experience of the individual, and consequently they also contain elements of teaching, confession and exhortation. It is among these aspects that wisdom poetry in later times gained entrance into songs of thanksgiving (Kraus 1972:254).

Klaus Seybold's (1996:134) view is very similar to that of Kraus: 'Psalm 32 is a song of thanksgiving with a strong wisdom impetus.'² Artur Weiser (1955:189) similarly describes the psalm as a psalm of thanksgiving, but asserts that the juxtaposition of motifs of thanksgiving and teaching has created a mixed style in which the prayer of thanksgiving was intermingled (he uses the exact word of Gunkel – *durchsetzt*) with pieces that have a close affinity with wisdom literature.³ Beat Weber also prefers to describe Psalm 32 as a psalm of thanksgiving, although he qualifies it as '*ein weisheitlich eingekleidetes Danklied*' originating from the experience of forgiveness of sins (Weber

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1. Sometimes called the 'original psalm' (*Grundpsalm*). Cf. Hossfeld (1993:204)

2. My translation of the German.

3. For similar views, see also Craigie (2004:265).

2001:158). It therefore seems that Psalm 32 is understood by the majority of form-critical scholars to be a psalm of thanksgiving with wisdom features. There is only a vague consensus about which verses relate to thanksgiving, but there is greater uniformity about the wisdom features of the psalm. The introductory beatitudes, for example, are interpreted by some as a modified expression of thanks (e.g. Nötscher 1953:61), while most exegetes explain this as one of its wisdom characteristics. The wisdom-teacher-like address by Yahweh in verses 8–9 in turn is interpreted by some as a divine oracle, possibly spoken by a cultic prophet (Hossfeld 1993:204), while others identify it as one of the important wisdom features. One of the few scholars who have suggested that Psalm 32 actually is a wisdom psalm and not a psalm of thanksgiving is Roland E. Murphy (1963:161).

The typical elements from the genre of song of thanksgiving in Psalm 32 about which there is greater consensus are the description of distress and deliverance (vv. 3–5), the declaration of trust (v. 7), and the call to praise (v. 11) (see Hossfeld 1993:200). But in addition to the features of a song of thanksgiving which were supposedly modified by an exponent of wisdom according to the form critics, exilic redactors are said by some to also have made additions. They are said to have added verses 6 and 9–10 to make Psalm 32 fit into the arrangement of Psalms 31–33 (see Hossfeld 1993:201).

There are also other views about the original form and growth of Psalm 32. Briggs and Briggs (1927:276) argue that the psalm originally was a penitential psalm that consisted of verses 1–6 (comprising a proclamation of blessedness in 1–2; a description of the author's suffering under the punitive hand of Yahweh in 3–; a confession of sin and report of forgiveness in 5; and an exhortation to the pious to pray to Yahweh in a time of distress in 6). To this original psalm was then added a description of Yahweh as the hiding place (v. 7); an exhortation to walk in the right way and not be stubborn (vv. 8–9); and a contrastive description of the sorrows of the wicked with the joys of the righteous (v. 10). It is therefore basically the second half of the poem which was later added, according to those writers.⁴

It would seem that Gunkel and others who followed him were right about the psalm's late origin and about wisdom as its cradle from its birth. Seybold (1996:134) noted the absence of Psalm 32 from the two collections at Qumran (both 4QPs^a and 4QPs^b), as well as from the psalm fragments from *Nahal Hever*. If this absence gives any indication of its date of origin, it would seem understandable that it was composed in its entirety by exponents of wisdom theology.

But it is not the wisdom influence in the psalm or its absence from Qumran as much as the structure of the poem that argues for its homogeneity. Contrary to all the proposals of segmented growth in the psalm, it is submitted here that a structural analysis suggests that the psalm was composed from the beginning in two stanzas, consisting of verses 1b–5 and 6–11. The first stanza is a tightly interwoven, but subtle, exhortation to confess one's sins to Yahweh, since this would lead to a

4. A different proposal by Snyman (2003:515) describes verses 3–7 as the original part of the psalm that was later extended with a wisdom frame in verses 1–2 and 8–10. Verse 11 was, in his view, added as a fitting call to the religious community at a later time when the psalm was allocated a place in the sanctuary and cult.

blessed and happy life. The second stanza is an equally tightly constructed exhortation to trust in Yahweh, since he alone can provide protection against the sorrows typically encountered by the wicked. The two stanzas are bound together through similar construction and through wordplay formed between אָשֶׁר in verses 1 and 2 and יִשְׂרָאֵל in verse 11, as well as through the singular purpose to demonstrate that happiness is possible only when one's life is in harmony with the teaching of Yahweh. In addition, the strophes of the two stanzas have been composed in such a way that they form a chiasmus, so that strophe A corresponds to F (=A'); B corresponds to E (=B'); and C corresponds to D (=C').⁵

The method followed here is to offer a stichometric and poetic analysis (Table 1), followed by a proposition on what the psalm was supposed to communicate and how its textual strategy was devised to attain this purpose. The express purpose is to work intratextually and to disregard for the time being, and as far as this is possible, any intertextual connections that the psalm might have with material which possibly antedated it.⁶

It will be noted that the Masoretic disjunctive accents have been honoured in the demarcation of cola in the text above. The majority of modern interpreters would argue that verse 2 could be better represented in the form of a tricolon (4+3+3 rather than the present 7+3); verse 4 should rather be read as a bicolon (6+4 rather than 6+2+2); that verse 6 has been spoilt and should be restored to form two bicola (4+2 and 4+3 rather than the 6+4+3 segmentation of the Masoretes); that verse 7 should be read as a bicolon (5+3) rather than a tricolon (5+2+1!); that verse 9 forms two bicola (2+3 and 3+3) rather than one tricolon (5+3+3); and that verse 10 is a bicolon (5+2) instead of a tricolon.⁷ It must be conceded that a number of disjunctive accents in the psalm are difficult to explain, notably the placement of an *Atnach* before the last word in verse 7. As a matter of principle, however, the Masoretic tradition of how the text should be phrased was retained, which makes no difference to the strophic segmentation. The psalm, it seems, then consists of two stanzas, I: 1b–5 and II: 6–11. Each stanza in turn comprises three strophes: 1b–2; 3–4; and 5 for the first stanza, 6–7 and 8–9, and 10–11 for the second.⁸ As Pieter van der Lugt (2006:325) remarks, the conspicuous verbal repetitions in the psalm serve a structuring function, since they display two including patterns in the two stanzas, with 1b–2 forming an inclusio with 5, and 6–7 forming an inclusio with 10–11.

Stanza I

The most conspicuous feature of stanza I is the chiasmic repetition of the keywords נָשָׂא (to forgive) and כָּסָה (to cover) from verses 1–2 in verse 5, coupled with the chiasmic repetition of the synonyms 'transgression,' 'sin,' and 'iniquity' (חַטָּאת, פְּשָׁע and עוֹן) found in verse 1 and repeated in verse 5 (where these

5. This characteristic has been noted by many investigators. See, for example, Van der Lugt (2006:325) and Weber (2001:158).

6. This investigation is a joint project with colleague Phil J. Botha, who will take care of the literary context for the interpretation of Psalm 32.

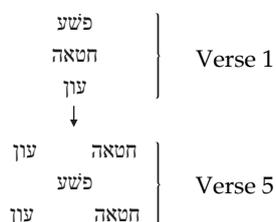
7. See the segmentation by Van der Lugt (2006:320).

8. According to Van der Lugt (2006:325), this *strophic* segmentation is favoured by so many investigators that 'there is almost universal consensus' about this.

TABLE 1: The text and a translation of Psalm 32 and discussion of its structure.

Stanza	Strophe	No	Hebrew	English translation	
				לְדוֹד מִשְׁכִּיל	¹ A Maskil of David.
I	A	1	אֲשֶׁרִי גָשׁוּר־פֶּשַׁע	Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,	
			כִּסּוּי חַטָּאתָה:	whose sin is covered.	
		2	אֲשֶׁרִי אֵד לא יחשב וְהָיָה לוֹ עוֹן	² Blessed is the person against whom Yahweh counts no iniquity,	
			וְאִין בְּרוּחוֹ רַמְיָה:	and in whose spirit there is no deception.	
	B	3	כִּי־הִתְקַרְשְׁתִּי כָּלוּ עַצְמֵי	³ When I kept silent, my bones became brittle	
			בְּשִׂאֲגוֹתַי כָּל־הַיּוֹם:	through my groaning all day long.	
		4	כִּי יוֹמָם וּלְיָלֵיָהּ תִּכְבֵּד עָלַי יָדָךְ	⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;	
			נִהְפָּךְ לִישָׁדִי	my strength was changed	
			בְּתַרְבְּנֵי מַזְוֵן קָלָה:	as by the dry heat of summer. Selah	
	C	5	חַטָּאתַי אֹדוּיָךְ וְעֹנֵי לא־כִּסִּיתִי	⁵ I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity;	
			אָמַרְתִּי אֹדָה עָלַי פֶּשַׁעַי לַיהוָה	I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to Yahweh,'	
			וְאַתָּה נָשָׂאתָ עוֹן חַטָּאתַי קָלָה:	and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah	
II	D (C')	6	עַל־זוֹת יִתְפַּלֵּל כָּל־חַסִּיד אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְעֵת מִצָּא	⁶ Therefore, let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found;	
			רַק לִשְׁעָה מִיַּם רַבִּים	surely in the rush of great waters,	
			אֵלָיו לא יָגִיעוּ:	they shall not reach him.	
		7	אַתָּה סֹתֵר לִי מִצָּר תִּצְרַנִּי	⁷ You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble;	
			רִנֵּי פִלַט	with shouts of deliverance	
			תִּסְבְּבֵנִי קָלָה:	you surround me. Selah	
	E (B')	8	אֲשַׁלְּךָ וְאֹדוּךָ	⁸ I will instruct you and teach you	
			בְּדַרְכֵי־יְיָ תֵלֵךְ	in the way you should go;	
			אֶעֱצֶה עָלֶיךָ עֵינָי:	I will counsel you with my eye upon you.	
		9	אַל־תִּהְיֶה כַּסּוּס כְּפָרָד אִין קִבּוּן	⁹ Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding,	
			כִּמְתַגֵּר־רֶסֶס עֲדוּיו לְבָלוֹם	the going of which must be curbed with bit and bridle,	
			כִּל קָרֵב אֵלֶיךָ:	or it will not come near you.	
	F (A')	10	רַבִּים מְכַאוֹבִים לְרִשָׁע	¹⁰ Many are the sorrows of the wicked,	
			וְהַבּוֹטֵחַ בַּיהוָה	but the one who trusts in Yahweh,	
			חֶסֶד יִסְבְּבֵנּוּ:	with steadfast love he surrounds him.	
		11	שִׂמְחֵהוּ בַיהוָה וְגִילוּ צְדִיקִים	¹¹ Be glad in Yahweh, and rejoice, O righteous,	
			וְהִרְנִינוּ כָּל־יֹשְׁרֵי־לֵב:	and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!	

'synonyms' appear in the inverted sequence עון, פשע, עון, הטאה (הטאה). It also seems that פשע (offence, wrongdoing) is given a central position in the repeated part. The occurrence of these terms in verses 1 and 5 thus forms a complex chiasmic pattern:



These chiasmic connections between strophe A (vv. 1–2) and strophe C (v. 5) serve to form an inclusion that binds stanza I together. Stanza I therefore appears to be a well-rounded unit, and this perception is further strengthened by the two instances of wordplay found at the beginning (in v. 2) and end of the stanza (in v. 5). In verse 2, there is a play on the similar sounding forms לא [not] and לו [to him], and in verse 5 there is a similar play with אודיעך לא ... [I acknowledged ... not] and ל ... אודה [I will confess

... to]. Furthermore, strophe B (vv. 3–4) is bound into a unity through the parallel formed between the opening (anaphoric) morphemes of the hemistichs in כִּי, כִּי, כִּי, כִּי. There also is another (semantic) parallel in this strophe formed between כָּל־הַיּוֹם (all day long) in verse 3 and יוֹמָם וּלְיָלֵיָהּ (day and night) in verse 4.

Strophe A consists of an external synonymous parallelism, constituted by two internal parallelisms. External connections are the formula of blessing and the semantic fields of sins which are forgiven; verses 1b–c form an internal parallelism by the use of two *gal* passive participles that signify the removal of sin (and that consequently rhyme) connected with a word from the semantic field of sin. Verses 2a and 2b form a parallelism by the use of negative particles and repetition of the semantic idea of being innocent.

Strophe B also consists of an external parallelism, constructed with the help of the repetition of כִּי and כִּי (anaphora) and the semantic parallels formed by the idea of dryness ('brittle,' 'dry heat of summer') and the idea of wasting away

(‘groaning all day long’ and ‘day and night’ and ‘my strength was changed’). The parallel is enhanced through the rhyme of the line-openers and of עֲצָמַי with עָלַי.

Strophe C consists of one verse line which is bound together by the repetition of the form הִטָּאתִי which occurs as the opening word and also happens to be the last word (inclusio). Its first two cola contain a threefold parallel, a feature that is highlighted by the wordplay between אֹדוּיֶנֶךָ [I acknowledge to you] and אִוִּידָהּ [I confess]. It further forms a pattern of positive statement, parallel negative statement, and parallel positive statement. The stanza is, as has been pointed out, neatly concluded in verse 5c by taking up three words that were encountered in verses 1 and 2.

The structure of stanza I is thus determined by the two parallel verse lines found in verses 1 and 2 to form strophe A; two parallel verse lines in verses 3 and 4 to form strophe B; and the single, tristichic verse line in verse 5 that constitutes strophe C and connects back to strophe A via keywords.

There is a logical progression of thought from A to C: A pronounces a blessing on those whose sins are forgiven and who harbours no deceit; B describes the personal experience of the speaker during a time when he did not comply with the requirements of strophe A – he suffered as a result of Yahweh’s hand resting heavily on him when he kept silent about his transgressions. There is an antithesis between strophe A and B because of the lack of blessing when the speaker kept silent, that is, when he did not confess his sins. There is also an antithesis formed between strophe B and C, since the ‘silence’ of verse 3 is replaced by two words of speaking and one of revealing: ‘I acknowledged,’ ‘I did not cover,’ and ‘I will confess.’ Strophe C thus resolves the tension created by strophe B, since it describes how the suppliant confessed his sins and was forgiven, thereby (by implication) immediately qualifying for the blessing pronounced at the beginning of the stanza. The only comparison in the stanza is the note about the dissolving of the speaker’s strength ‘as by the dry heat of summer’ found in the middle strophe, in verse 4.

The argument in stanza I can be summarised as follows:

A	Blessed is the person whose sins are forgiven
B	For: When I kept silent, my strength wasted away
C	I confessed my sins and you forgave my guilt

According to Van der Lugt (2006:325), the conspicuous repetition of words has a structuring and rounding-off function in this stanza (or ‘canto,’ in his terms) and in the psalm as a whole. According to him, it should be noted that the first strophe contains a statement about humanity in general (cf. אָדָם in v. 2). This general statement is supported by the suppliant’s personal experience, which is described in strophes B and C.

Stanza II

Stanza II has a structure similar to that of stanza I, as there are similarities between the first and last strophe, namely D and F. The conspicuous similarities between D and F are the repetition of the adjective רַבִּים [‘great, many’ in vv. 6 and 10]; the repetition of the verb סָבַב [‘to surround’ in vv. 7 and 10]; the semantic parallel formed by צָר (‘trouble’ in v. 7) and מַכְאוֹבִים (‘sorrows’ in v. 10); the repetition of the theme of joy found in verse 7 (‘shouts of deliverance’), in verse 11 (‘be glad,’ ‘rejoice,’ ‘shout for joy’); and, finally, the references to the righteous group of people which are found only in these two strophes: ‘everyone who is godly’ (כָּל־חַסִּיד in v. 6) and ‘the one who trusts in Yahweh,’ ‘the righteous,’ and ‘all you upright in heart’ בִּיהוָה in v. 10, and צְדִיקִים and כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל in v. 11). Another similarity between stanza I and stanza II is the use of comparison in the middle strophe, as the righteous person is exhorted not to be ‘like a horse or a mule’ in strophe E. The repeated use of the preposition בְּ at the beginning of certain hemistichs in verses 8 and 9 also reminds one of the similar anaphoric repetition of בְּ in verses 3 and 4.

Strophe D contains two parallelisms: in verse 6, there is a parallel between לַעֲתָ מִצָּר [‘at a time when you may be found’]⁹ and לְשֹׁטֵף מִיַּם רַבִּים [‘in the rush of great waters’]. The first expression points to an opportune time; the second to a time of danger and distress. The message is that those who seek Yahweh in times of calmness will be protected by him in times of distress.¹⁰ Verse 7 comprises a threefold parallelism: Yahweh is a hiding place, he preserves the suppliant from trouble, and he makes the suppliant part of a celebrating community of people who give thanks for deliverance. Repetition of the long ē sounds point out this parallel.

Strophe E consists of two internal parallels that establish an additional external parallel in terms of its teaching that Yahweh would like to provide guidance to believers. Verse 8 has parallels between ‘I will instruct you,’ ‘I will teach you in the way you should go,’ and ‘I will counsel you with my eye upon you.’ The parallel verbs of instruction are followed (in the case of the second and third verbs) by a prepositional phrase that describes the intended action more fully. Verse 9 strengthens the announcement of guidance with a double comparison.¹¹ It forms an internal parallelism, since ‘horse’ is parallel to ‘mule,’ and ‘bit’ and ‘bridle’ are parallel. In both verse 8 and 9, alliteration and assonance as well as rhyme serve to create a feeling of elevation in the words spoken by Yahweh: in verse 8 there is alliteration of א and rhyme of הָ, while the כ also alliterates with דָּרַךְ and תִּלְךָ. In the last colon of verse 8, there is conspicuous alliteration of ע. In verse 9, ב and ל are repeated to connect the words to one

9. There is no pressing need to rearrange the consonants to read קֵל שֹׁטֵף קֵל שֹׁטֵף. The form מִצָּר would then be read as a variant of מִצָּר [‘distress’]. See Van der Lugt (2006:320). The time when Yahweh is to be found is expressed in Isaiah 55:6 with the help of a *nifal inf cstr* of בָּצַע, while it seems that the translator of the LXX understood the Hebrew *Vorlage* in the same way that it is translated here: ‘Therefore let all the devout pray to you in a fit time ...’

10. Auffret (1988:276) has also drawn attention to this.

11. This constitutes an intensification of the single comparison in the first stanza.

another, while the repetition of *seghol* and ם in an end position also binds the exhortation into a memorable saying.

Strophe F consists of an antithetic parallel between the 'wicked' with their 'many' 'sorrows' and the one who 'trusts in Yahweh,' who is said to be surrounded by the 'steadfast love' of Yahweh. This idea is parallel to the 'sorrows' that, in a way, 'surrounds' the wicked. The stanza concludes with a direct address of the 'righteous' and 'upright in heart,' who should 'rejoice' and 'shout for joy.' The two sets of parallels thus also form an internal parallelism. The motif of joy establishes a connection with strophe D.

The argument in stanza II can be summed up as follows: since real happiness is possible only for those whose sins have been pardoned (the conclusion of stanza I), every pious person should pray to Yahweh while it is propitious to do so, for he will protect them from the 'onrush of a flood' – a metaphor for the power of chaos. Yahweh provides a hiding place and protection from trouble for the pious and gives occasion for celebration (v. 7). Yahweh subsequently offers advice in the first person, calling upon the pious not to be stubborn like an untamed animal which must be forced to follow a specific road, but to be wise and accept his loving guidance on the way of life. Strophe F is a summary which describes the difference between those who oppose Yahweh and those who trust in him. The stanza ends on a happy note, similar to the happy beginning of stanza I. The sound-play created by the repeated anaphoric אֲשֶׁר ['happy is...'] in verses 1 and 2 and the ישר־יֵלֵב of verse 11b establishes a connection between the beginning and end of the psalm, a feature that embraces the whole poem and unites it (inclusion). In this regard, it is also significant that the inner being of mankind is represented in verse 2b, at the beginning of the psalm, with the expression ברוּחוֹ 'in his spirit', while the upright is described in verse 11b as the ישר־יֵלֵב, 'the upright of heart'. This portrayal also establishes a connection between the beginning and end of the psalm, since those 'whose spirit' is 'without deceit' are, in fact, the 'upright in heart'. A contrast is also formed between the 'Blessed' people of verses 1 and 2 and the 'many sorrows' of the wicked in verse 10.

The flow of the argument in stanza II can be represented in the following manner:

- D — On the basis of the definition and experience of the blessed life (in stanza I), the pious should seek Yahweh when it is opportune to do so, since he provides a hiding place, preservation, and deliverance.
- E — Yahweh announces his intention of providing torah ('teaching', *hiphil* imperfect of ירה) to the pious and that it is his desire to have an intimate relationship with his followers rather than to discipline them.
- F — The psalm is summarised with a wisdom aphorism on the hardships typically suffered by the wicked (they experience many sorrows) and the blessing of those who trust in Yahweh (they are surrounded with steadfast love), something which gives a reason for joyous celebration to the upright.

The structure of the whole psalm is represented in Figure 1.

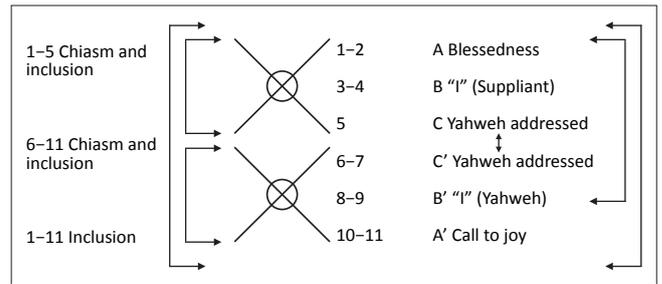


FIGURE 1: Schematic of the structure of the whole psalm.

The textual strategy and message of Psalm 32

There can be little doubt that the dominant textual strategy of the poet was the construction and inclusion of word patterns in both stanzas and a polarity between the two central strophes. As far as repetition is concerned, the name Yahweh, various synonyms for transgressions and words indicating forgiveness are repeated in the first stanza. The general statement about happiness for those people whose sins are forgiven (note the use of אָדָם) at the beginning of this stanza is given a personal flavour towards the end of the stanza by the admission that the suppliant suffered when he kept silent (about his own transgressions), but experienced forgiveness when he confessed his (own) sins. The stanza thus moves from an initial discourse *about* transgressions and forgiveness and *about* Yahweh in the third person to a *direct address* of Yahweh in which personal transgressions were confessed and forgiven.

In the second stanza, the words that are repeated at the beginning and end are כל ['every, all']; רבים ['great, many']; סבב ['surround']; and the stems רָן ['shouts'] and רִנָּן ['shout']. This seems to emphasise the experience of 'all' believers (everyone who is 'godly,' the 'righteous' and all the 'upright in heart') of the protection of Yahweh against danger (the rush of 'great waters' and the 'many' sorrows that the wicked experience), because Yahweh 'surrounds' them (with 'shouts of deliverance' and with 'steadfast love'). The process moves, at the same time, in the opposite direction from the first stanza, because it moves from a *direct address* of Yahweh, coupled with a personal confession that Yahweh is the hiding place of the suppliant and the one who preserves him from trouble, to a more *general* pronouncement about the happy state of those who trust in Yahweh and a call to all the righteous to rejoice.

In view of the inverse parallel formed between the two stanzas, the identity of the speaker in the middle strophe of stanza II cannot be anyone but Yahweh. It is not the wisdom speaker who addresses an unidentified person, but Yahweh who reacts to the confession of the suppliant that Yahweh is his hiding place and the one who preserves him from trouble and surrounds him with shouts of deliverance. Yahweh's intention in strophe E, the middle strophe of stanza II, to 'instruct' and 'teach' and 'counsel' the suppliant, stands in stark contrast to the suppliant's 'keeping silent' and 'groaning'



all day long recounted in strophe B, the middle strophe of stanza I. A marked polarity is created between the *hand* of Yahweh which presses heavily *on* the suppliant in strophe B and the offer of Yahweh to let his *eye* rest benevolently *upon* the suppliant in strophe E.¹² The impression is given that the psalmist, when he remained silent in view of his transgressions, acted like a dumb animal that has to be forced onto a certain road; when he confessed his sins, he was given the offer of being taught by Yahweh so that he would be able to choose the correct way to follow. Yahweh does not want the suppliant to suffer in silence, but wants a close and personal relationship with the suppliant. Keeping silent about one's sins is acting like a horse or a mule. A bit and bridle is necessary to guide these animals, but Yahweh has provided his teaching in a literary tradition of authoritative material, implicated as the 'torah' or 'teaching' available to the suppliant.

The most important teaching of the psalm is therefore not that 'God forgives the sins of the righteous who trust in him', as Van der Lugt (2006:326) formulates it, but that true happiness and blessedness on the road of life can be attained only through a close, personal relationship with Yahweh. In such a relationship, the suppliant would not want to hide transgressions from Yahweh, since he or she would know that confession leads to forgiveness, a happy state in which one can be healthy in body and soul. In such a relationship of complete trust in Yahweh, one can be assured of the preservation and steadfast love of Yahweh – a knowledge that leads to rejoicing and joy among the entire group of believers.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to determine, through a stichometric and poetic analysis of the Hebrew text, the dominant textual strategy of the author of Psalm 32. The most important poetic devices used by the author seem to be the careful repetition of keywords, the chiasmic ordering

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12. This was also noted by Auffret (1988:273).

of elements, and the creation of inclusions in both stanzas and in the psalm as a whole. This precise structuring indicates that the psalm is no haphazard conflation of ideas stemming from different periods, as some exponents of form-criticism seem to suggest. On the contrary, the analysis has shown that the psalm is homogenous, the careful composition of a meticulous poet, created at a time when wisdom had already begun to infuse theological thinking. It can therefore be described as a homogenous wisdom teaching psalm.

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Competing interests

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