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POET Psalms 33 and 38: On Translating 22-verse Psalms as Double Acrostics

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Abstract: Drawing on the author's 2024 book *Poetic Opus English Translation of the Psalms* (*POET Psalms*), this article discusses composing Psalms 33 and 38 using a revised set of twelve principles for translating poetry. The use of double acrostics is introduced and defended despite their absence in Biblical Hebrew. This study demonstrates how the integration of poetic structures, rhetorical devices, and recommended melodic settings yields cohesive, performative English compositions. Since such heightened-language translations reflect more accurately the art of the Hebrew, they should be adopted as best practice for translating biblical poetry. Finally, genre discovery research is encouraged to support other heightened language translations.
Keywords: translation principles, biblical poetry, double acrostics, alliteration, assonance, heightened language, unified compositions

1 Introduction

While training to be involved in Bible translation, we were told that when translating the poetic passages of the Bible we should try to identify a speaker of the target language who was a poet and recruit that person to join the team. Regrettably, that one sentence was the only pre-field instruction we received on translating poetry. My husband and I were advisors to the Natügu (Natqgu) [ntu] translation project, working in an Anglican area on Santa Cruz Island, Solomon Islands, South Pacific. Following the Anglican lectionary, Psalms were read twice daily in English from *A Melanesian Prayer Book with Hymns* (Anglican Church of Melanesia 1985) during morning and evening prayer services. This meant their translation into Natügu was a felt need in the community.

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As it turned out, it was not difficult to identify a poet to join us, namely Simon G. Meabö. He was the senior translator hired by our predecessors and already had poetic skills through composing song lyrics for celebrations throughout the church year and setting them to indigenous tunes. In addition, my own academic background included two creative writing poetry courses taught by published poets. So our translation team had a good foundation for translating the Psalms.

The main translation resource available at the time was Bratcher and Reyburn (1991), which did not routinely make suggestions regarding the poetic aspects of the text. Given the complexity of poetry, while we were working on the Psalms I decided not to ask Simon to attempt to follow the guidance in Bratcher and Reyburn without also attempting it myself in English.[1] For the English poetic forms in my work, I consulted Turco (2000).

Recalling that initial instruction about working with a poet, from the outset of our work on the Psalms (Natqgu New Testament, Ruth, and Psalms 2008), my colleague Simon and I were of one mind that whenever possible the Natügu translation should include both target language (TL) and source language (SL) poetic devices, as well as those from English as the national language (Boerger 2009a; 2009b). As we worked, I found myself extending the basic translation objectives of accuracy, clarity, and naturalness when applied to poetry. I argued for ten principles, divided into the four categories of accuracy, clarity, naturalness, and literary license, showing how I applied them to translations of the acrostic Psalms 111, 112, and 119 (Boerger 1997). Since then, the objective of compatibility has been added and includes two further principles as shown in Table 1. I have also added a corollary to principle 8, shown in square brackets, as a result of argumentation in section 4.1.3 of this article. I continue to develop the idea that accuracy involves poetry being translated as poetry, and especially sung poetry (Boerger 2016), showing that one of music's positive cognitive effects on the brain is to increase the ease of memorization of lyrics.

[1] Special thanks to two anonymous reviewers and the editorial staff at *JOT*, all of whom helped make this a stronger paper. All errors remain my responsibility.

Table 1. Twelve translation principles for Biblical poetry

	Accuracy can include:
1	Representing source language (SL) styles by target language (TL) styles, i.e., poetry by poetry, and sung forms by sung forms.
2	Representing SL literary and poetic devices when compatible with the TL (e.g., check function of puns and wordplay in TL), since languages in contact borrow from one another, including forms and devices.
3	Inserting SL literary and poetic devices when the text lends itself to a device (e.g., wordplay, acrostics, alliteration, metaphor) to reflect their common presence in Hebrew scriptures.
	Linguistic naturalness can include the fact that:
4	Borrowed SL literary and poetic devices often change to conform to TL structures, including literary forms and devices.
5	TL rhetorical or poetic devices can be combined with SL ones.
	Literary license makes it legitimate to:
6	Alter SL or insert TL metaphorical imagery if meaning is preserved.
7	Apply reordering, combining of verses, and other translation principles across a broader range of sentences (verses) than is customarily done in non-literary or prose translation.
8	Express meaning in alternate ways, such as adjusting relative order, implicitness, and word choices to accommodate the literary form [even though this at times can create passages that are less natural or less clear, or both].
9	Adjust the literary and poetic devices being used to accommodate the meaning of the text.
	Compatibility means:
10	Planning ahead in order to represent parallel poetic passages using similar poetic forms and vocabulary, thereby accommodating both Old and New Testament quotations of a passage.
11	TL poetic forms and song tunes should be compatible with the SL genre of the poetry.
	Clarity means:
12	When form or aesthetics make clarity inaccessible for a majority of TL speakers or readers, the exegetical accuracy and TL clarity and naturalness must take precedence over form or aesthetics, or a footnote is required to explain the unnatural or unclear passage.

In the years since Bratcher and Reyburn was published, more resources for the translation of psalms have become available. I often consult and follow guidelines in Wendland's work with regard to what he calls "literary (oratorical) translation" (Wendland 2002; 2013; 2017). The result of nearly thirty years of work "on the side" is my book, *POET Psalms: Poetic Opus English Translation* (Boerger 2024), often shortened to *POET*.

My target audience is adult native speakers of English. Earlier review edition translations of *POET Psalms* have been used for scripture memory with elementary-aged Sunday school students. In spite of the American English spellings and phrasings, drafts have also been used in ministry by English speakers from Australia, New Zealand, and England, as well as the United States and Canada. When producing the extra-textual sections of *POET Psalms*, I did not assume readers had access to Bible study resources, but instead curated notes to summarize my findings and conclusions without detailed citations. That being said, basic references used are included at the end of the book.

In sections 2 and 3, I lay out terminology, rationale, and challenges in translating double acrostics. Sections 4 and 5 discuss Psalms 33 and 38, respectively, showing how the semantics of the source text, the poetics of the double acrostic form, and the suggested tunes work together to create unified compositions. Finally, section 5 concludes with implications for translating biblical poetry.

2 On translating acrostics

2.1 Simple acrostics

Acrostics have sometimes been used to spell words down the page, but our focus here is the alphabetic acrostics of the Hebrew Scriptures, namely Psalms 9–10 (one composition), 25, 34, and 37 of Book One, plus Psalms 111, 112, 119, and 145 of Book Five. These Psalms use words starting with the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet in sequence at the beginning of each verse. There is variation in how consistent the Hebrew acrostics are. Historically, the biblical acrostics have not routinely been represented in translation, although over the centuries there have been a handful of writers and publishers who have undertaken this. The question I explore here is how do we best translate them or any biblical poetry into English and other target languages.

The brief history of acrostic translations is discussed by Lowe (2020), referencing van Eijzeren (2012) regarding the practice of translating biblical acrostics acrostically. Calling on that MA thesis and bringing in more recent works, he notes early acrostic translations from 1599 and 1870, including two from the text of Binnie (1886:140–151), who translates Psalms 111 and 112 for

illustrative purposes. (In both of these, Binnie skips the letters <i>, <v>, <x>, and <z>.)

Over fifty years after Binnie's work, the better known Knox (1954) translation, the Old Testament of which was published in 1949, translates the full Bible with all the acrostics translated acrostically, except Psalms 9 and 10. His translation of Psalm 111 skips <k> and ends at <w>. The *New Jerusalem Bible* (1985) translates Psalm 25 as an acrostic, without skipping any letters from <a> to <v>, but verse 22 is not incorporated as part of the acrostic, imitating the pattern in Hebrew where verse 22 is also outside the alphabet (Bratcher et al. 1991:244). In my earlier work (Boerger 1997), I referenced Wilt and agree with his stance that acrostic translations should represent the full alphabet in a target language, since "completeness" is one of the proposed functions of the acrostics (1993:208, 211), as discussed at the end of this section.

Rather than skip letters, another way to handle the discrepancy between the number of letters in the two languages is to break some of the Hebrew lines so that just as each letter of the source language is represented in alphabetical order, so too is each letter of the target language (Wilt 1993:208). This approach, which I follow in my acrostic translations, has the advantage of reflecting that "completeness", i.e., the normal Hebrew use of the whole alphabet.

In acrostic work from this century referred to by Lowe, he cites Raabe (2000), a professor of Old Testament, who advocates for at least attempting to reflect word plays and sonic effects of the Hebrew and Greek texts in our biblical translations. He agrees that acrostics are possible and gives an example of Psalm 111, using the letters <a> to <v>. Furthermore, the *EasyEnglish Bible*[2] translates Psalms 9–10 and 145 as acrostics. In their combined acrostic of 9–10, the letters <u>, <v>, <w>, <x>, and <z> are skipped, and letters are only featured in a bold font when they fit the acrostic, with quite a few lines and/or verses having no featured letter. Their Psalm 145 acrostic does have approximately one focus letter per line, but skips <q>, <u>, <x>, and <z>.

A full psalter translation has been shared by Bob MacDonald on his 2024 blog,[3] where he translates the Hebrew acrostics into English using the English letter that most closely corresponds to the Hebrew. This means it is no longer in alphabetical order for English speakers, but it does reveal the underlying Hebrew sequence. Similarly, a *Metrical Psalter* with musical notation included with the

[2] The *EasyEnglish Bible* may be found here: https://www.easyenglish.bible/bible/easy/. In addition to the written text, one can also hear the text read aloud.

[3] Here is a link to Psalm 111 from MacDonald's work: https://meafar.blogspot.com/2024/11/psalm-111.html.

lyrics has been composed by Dru Brooke-Taylor, who uses the same Hebrew-English letter correspondences as MacDonald.[4]

Van Popta (2017) follows the English alphabet order, but to reach 22 letters rather than 26, like others he eliminates some letters, these being <q>, <x>, <y>, and <z>. He also set his translation to music, here using the Genevan Psalter tune for Psalm 119[5]. In order to use that tune, he compresses the semantics of each stanza of eight lines of Hebrew into six lines of English, with a section heading for each stanza comprised of the focus letter and the verse numbers it represents. There are no verse numbers at the left margin, and he begins each of the six lines of each stanza with its focus letter. His word choices are creative and vibrant, and his syntax and word order remain refreshingly natural.

One of my motives for translating the Hebrew acrostics into English was to address the dissatisfaction which arises from having a footnote say, "This was an acrostic in Hebrew," but then failing to show what that might look like in English. In the past, some have claimed that acrostics cannot be translated (Nida 1982), but others have disagreed (Wilt 1993; Boerger 1997). The lack of poetic translations as models led me to assert **principle 1** in my earlier work. That is, that accuracy can (and should) include translating SL poetry as TL poetry. By definition, this includes the acrostics. As shown by this brief literature review Wilt and I are not alone, as articulated by van der Spuy:

> I conclude that an alphabetic acrostic translation is possible and that it preserves the essence of what the original poet strived to present. It contributes towards the cognitive, mnemonic, visual (even more when the letters are written as headings to each stanza) and aural (especially when the letters are mentioned as the poem is read) effectiveness and it evokes a sense that it is one fully complete unit. (2008:531)

This quote encompasses most of the six purposes of the acrostics also given by van der Spuy, for which he cites Rabbinical scholarship alongside Christian references (2008:516–519). I summarize them with short descriptions:

i) Mnemonic: assists memory and recitation by being alphabetically predictable;
ii) Enumeration: a list has both a beginning point and ending point;
iii) Completeness: explores a topic thoroughly, as in "from *aleph* to *taw*", or in English, "from A to Z";

[4] Brooke-Taylor's work may be found at: https://psalmsandpsimilar.wordpress.com/how-to-find-what-you-are-looking-for/. Psalm 111 is in Book5A, pages 25–26.

[5] The *Genevan Psalter* was a metrical psalter in French created in the sixteenth century. The *Psalter* tune for Psalm 119 may be found at: https://genevanpsalter.com/music-and-lyrics/psalm-119/.

iv) Aesthetics: displays the beauty of the form by remaining within its constraints;
v) Visual and aural features: the alphabetic structure of the acrostics can be both seen by readers and heard by listeners;
vi) Cognitive feature: Hebrew speakers associate particular meanings with each letter of the alphabet, such as *aleph* 'to study', *beth* 'understanding', *dalet* 'door', and ending at the goal of reading the Torah *taw* 'truth', citing Shimoni (2004).

All but the sixth purpose are relevant to the English acrostics, whether simple or double, and support the position of using the full English alphabet, rather than eliminating some letters. The sixth purpose is not a factor here, since we do not associate meanings with the names of English letters.

2.2 Double acrostics

In the English double acrostic form, the focus sound, letter, or sequence occurs both at the beginning and the end of each line (Turco 2000:121). Such compositions sometimes push the boundaries of naturalness in order to focus attention on the beauty of the form. This correlates with the degree of unnaturalness and repetition also found in Hebrew acrostic compositions (Bratcher et al. 1991:997).

In composing both simple and double acrostics in English, the 22 letters of Hebrew and the semantic content of the verses they represent need to be redistributed over the 26-letter English alphabet. This for me is a high value since it favors the structure of the target language in translation. Using the double acrostic calls on **principle 4**, which states it is natural for borrowed SL literary and poetic devices to change in order to conform to TL structures, including literary forms and devices. Here, the English double acrostic target form is the host for two psalms with 22 verses.

In fact, it is natural for languages in contact to also borrow lexical items from each other, and English is especially suited to double acrostics due to having borrowed extensively. New vocabulary resulting from borrowing often violates established English spelling rules, giving useful acrostic target letters at the ends of words. For example, in the innovated English double acrostic of Psalm 33, I use two words borrowed into English: the Hindi borrowing *raj* 'domain of a raja, leader' for its final <j> and the Arabic borrowing *suq* 'market place' (sometimes spelled *souk*), for its final <q>.

To create double acrostics, one of four strategies was used for words at the end of the line which should technically end in the target letter:

i) the target **letter** itself,
ii) a syllable which pronounces **the name of the letter**,

iii) **the sound** made by the letter even if the letter does not occur word-finally, and

iv) **foreign borrowings** into English, as just noted.

Using the (double) acrostic form means that some stress patterns are a bit unnatural or do not align perfectly with the suggested tune, because focus letters need to fall in their assigned places. This variation in strategies used is not seen as a weakness since the strategies all give priority to the poetic form. As Wilt (1993:208) has said:

> I would add here that though unusual stylistic patterns should be limited as much as possible, their occasional necessity is not a sufficient reason for giving up the attempt to represent the acrostic form. The use of the acrostic form occasionally resulted in awkward, unusual, or ambiguous forms and reduced clarity of meaning in the Hebrew poetry as well.

But can it legitimately be called "translation" when a 22-verse source text becomes a 26-line double acrostic? Or is it rather a paraphrase or a song inspired by a particular psalm? Some will disagree with me, based on differing translation philosophies, but I argue here, based on the twelve principles, that translating 22-verse psalms as double acrostics does legitimately fall into the category of translation. In some people's thinking, acrostics may belong to a separate category from other English poetic forms. For example, I predict that those who might object to acrostics (or double acrostics) being used for translations of non-acrostic texts "because it wasn't an acrostic in Hebrew" would be less likely to object to translating a psalm as a sonnet, even though there are no sonnets in the Hebrew scriptures either.

Based on **principle 1**, which translates poetry as poetry, my goal is to translate into TL poetic forms, with the focus being the TL. Furthermore, accuracy **principle 3** allows the use of poetic devices in one place to reflect their presence elsewhere. Since Hebrew already uses acrostics, incorporating them in Psalms 33 and 38 is compatible with the existing psalter.

Creating *double* acrostics is also supported by two naturalness principles: **principle 4** regarding borrowing as mentioned above and **principle 5** which states that it is natural to combine TL and SL poetic devices. Here, the simple alphabetic acrostic found elsewhere in Hebrew is combined with the double acrostic of English, along with two poetic devices used in both languages—alliteration and assonance. In **alliteration**, words in a sequence mostly start with the same initial sound, and in **assonance**, words in a pattern share the same vowel or vowel quality. I show later how alliteration emphasizes the target letter/sound of a verse and assonance contributes to the psalm's rhyme scheme. Others of the twelve principles are called on in the discussion of particular verses.

Psalms 33 and 38 both have 22 verses, which scholars say would suggest an acrostic to Hebrew readers (Bratcher et al. 1991:310). Therefore, translating them as acrostics makes explicit for English readers something which is only hinted at in Hebrew. Translating them as (double) acrostics adds two further acrostics to those of the Psalter previously listed in section 2.1. David is attributed as author of all but 111, 112, and 119, which have no author indicated. Psalms 33 and 38 fall within the acrostic cluster late in Book One, adding one Davidic and one unattributed psalm to the set of acrostics found in *POET Psalms*, where a footnote explains that these were not acrostics in the Hebrew source text.

A further motivation for me here is to bring a focus on aesthetics, as in van der Spuy's fourth proposed purpose of acrostics, but one less often commented on (Boerger 2025). In that vein, I endeavor to display the beauty of the double acrostic using meter, alliteration, rhyme, and assonance. In doing so, I continue to counter claims that simple acrostics cannot be translated by translating the even more complex *double acrostic*, using the poetic devices just mentioned, as well as setting the psalms to a particular meter and tune.

3 Working with the English alphabet

I reiterate here what English readers already know at some level: the letters of the English alphabet are not all created equal, and the spelling system is not phonemic. Conscious awareness of these discrepancies and distinctives is relevant to our discussion of acrostics, as illustrated in Table 2. The English represented in Table 2 is based on my own American English dialect. Similar generalizations can be made for other varieties of English with variation in the particular details.

Table 2. Distinctives of the letters and sounds of English

#	Distinctive	Description	Letters/Sounds
		Consonants	
1	Well-behaved consonants	Letters can occur word-initially and word-finally and maintain their sound quality; except that [s] sometimes voices to [z], but keeps the <s> spelling.	p, t, k, b, d, g, m, n, f, (s), z, r, l
2	Word-initial consonants with final sounds	Some letters occur initially, but not word finally (except in borrowings). But their sounds do occur word-finally.	j [dʒ] 'judge', 'haj' ge [dʒ] 'courage' v 'victory', 'love'

3	Word-initial consonant without final sound	The letter <qu> occurs frequently word-initially and sounds like [kw], but word-finally (and sometimes medially) it sounds like [k] (often in borrowed words).	q ‘quit’ [kw] ‘suq’, ‘conquer’ [k]
4	Different sounds at beginning and end of words	The semi-vowels [w] and [y] act as consonants word-initially and as vowel-like glides word-finally.	w ‘**w**ait’, ‘ho**w**’ y ‘**y**es’, ‘wa**y**’
5	Idiosyncrasies of <h>	Similar to the semi-vowels, word initially <h> has a voiceless sound (depending on dialect), but is silent word-finally when preceded by a vowel. Words ending in a vowel + <h> are interjections or borrowings. Most word-final <h> tokens are in digraphs with consonants or in an <...ough> sequence.	*Silent <h>:* ‘hurrah’, ‘challah’, ‘oh’, ‘pharaoh’, ‘duh’ *Digraph <h>:* See #6. Ps 33 ‘froth’, ‘swath’ cf. ‘though’, ‘through’
6	Missing consonant symbols	Some consonant sounds do not have unique symbols; and for some, like <th>, even their digraphs do not have a one-to-one sound-symbol correspondence. Other sounds, like [ʒ] do not have any orthographic convention for representing them.	ch [č] or [k] ‘ache’ sh [š] — [ʒ] th [θ] th [ð] ng [ŋ]
7	Word-final consonants	Some consonants only occur word-finally, except in borrowings or coined words.	ng [ŋ] x [ks] *final* *word-initial* [ɛks] ~ [z] ‘exam’, ‘x-ray’, ‘xerox’, ‘fox’
8	Unnecessary consonant symbols	Some letters are unnecessary because their sounds are already represented by a different letter or letters.	c [k], [s] q [kw] [k] x [ks], [ɛks], [z]

		Vowels	
9	Well-behaved vowel letters	Occur both word-initially and word-finally	a, e, i, o, u
10	Vowel letters are not unique phonemes	The same vowel symbols represent more than one sound, as in "long" and "short" vowels, silent vowel sounds [—], and the fact that vowels in unstressed syllables reduce to [ə]. Plus some vowels in borrowings retain their SL quality.	a [e], [æ], [a], [ə] e [i], [ɛ], [—], [ə] i [ai], [ɪ], [i], [ə] o [ou], [a], [u], [ə] u [u], [ʊ], [ə]
11	Missing vowel symbols	Some vowel sounds do not have a unique grapheme and their spellings are inconsistent.	[ə] all vowels [ɔ] <ou>, <au>

This list shows that the English spelling system is considerably less well-behaved than languages having more phonemic orthographies. If we eliminate <c>, <q>, and <x> as being represented by other consonants, but include the phonemic sounds represented by digraphs, English can be said to have 23 consonant sounds, which is closer to the 22 total letters of Hebrew. Were we to instead include all of the vowel sounds, not just their letters, the number of vowels would be 11, for a total of 34 phonemic sounds in English, far beyond the 22 letters of a Hebrew acrostic source text.

Before studying the compositions themselves some notes regarding style and formatting are in order. First, in alignment with the completeness purpose proposed for acrostics, I assigned them all a title starting with the phrase, "The A to Z of..." in order to prepare readers for the coming acrostic. Second, the focus letters of the acrostics are formatted in a bold typeface to make them more visible, thereby highlighting the form, and contributing to the mnemonic, enumeration, and visual purposes of acrostics. In addition, for direct or reported speech in acrostics, italics are used without quotation punctuation, so that nothing precedes or follows a potential focus letter.[6]

Regarding the subtitles and subheadings, the attributed author follows the Hebrew source text, the genres indicated follow Wendland (2002:32–60) with some variation in terminology, and the poetic forms along with meters and hymn tunes are explained in the footnotes and glossary of *POET Psalms*. Furthermore, hymn tunes referenced are on-line at http://www.hymntime.com/tch/. Readers are encouraged to download the midi files and sing through each psalm in this

[6] Elsewhere double quotation marks are used for direct quotes, and for readability, embedded quotes receive single quotes, as well as a change to a sans serif font.

article, with the goal of enhancing comprehension of the paper through familiarity with how the two compositions sound when set to music. Doing so can help evaluate whether the musical settings contribute to the internal coherence of the psalms translations, as I claim they do.

4 Psalm 33

POET Psalm 33 is composed as a set of seven stanzas of eight lines, i.e., seven octaves. It has the hymnal meter 8.7.8.7.D, which indicates a quatrain of alternating lines of eight and seven syllables, doubled, for a total of eight lines. The fact that it is formatted into seven stanzas, calls on the symbolic meaning of seven in the Bible to mean completeness or totality (Ryken et al. 2000:774). This in turn aligns with the third "completeness" purpose of acrostics. Each octave features four target letters. This yields 28 total focus letters, where <ch> and <sh>, representing sounds of English without unique graphemes, are included to bring the 26 letters of English up to 28, in alignment with the stanza pattern of the suggested tune. The sections following the translation of Psalm 33 discuss semantic and poetic considerations. The footnotes from *POET Psalms* are not included, since those relevant to this article are discussed in detail here.

Psalm 33
THE A TO Z OF DELIGHTING IN THE MASTER
a psalm of praise
double acrostic
Tune: 8.7.8.7.D. *Ode an die Freude* (*Ode to Joy*)

1 **A**ll God's subjects, give him praises.
Sing with joy, *Hallelu-Y**a**!*
Because praise becomes the blameless,
Praising him should be your jo**b**.
2–3 **C**raft for God your songs and dances,
You lyre-strumming mania**c**.
Chant new songs your harp enhances,
Using skill no one can mat**ch**.

Drum your joy; join as you're able.
Harmonize each melo**dy**.
4 **E**very action shows God's faithful.
Yahweh keeps his word, you se**e**.

5 **F**or God's good and right; he planned it—
Lovingly, he keeps earth sa**f**e.
6 **G**od's word made the stars and planets,
Crafting heaven as he san**g**.

7 **H**ouses made where salty seas froth;
He heaps oceans in one swat**h**.
8 **I** say, worship Lord El Shaddai.
Stand in awe of Adona**i**.
9 **J**ust think how his word begot it—
Everything within his ra**j**.
10 **K**ing Yahweh sees kingdoms plotting,
Conquers each barrage, attac**k**.

11 **L**ord God's plans stand firm, eternal,
Following his law and wil**l**.
12 **M**ark then gifts for Jacob's clansmen—
Chosen by the great I A**M**.
Named as heirs of what God granted—
Every woman, child and ma**n**.
13 **O**n high, we are seen by God who
Knows all that we think and d**o**.

14 **P**eering down, sees men and women,
Testing every people grou**p**.
15 **Q**uickened by God; he made humans;
He knows those at home or su**q**.
Recognizing hearts are hollow
He perceives them from afar.
So his judgments always follow
From their actions, words, and heart**s**.

16 **Sh**rewdest kings lose with battalions.
Heroes, too, fall in the cla**sh**.
17 **T**riumph's not found in one's stallions.
War horses don't furnish tha**t**.
18 **U**nrelenting, Yahweh cares for
Those who say, *I'll worship yo***u**.
Victory meets hearts prepared for
Trusting that his love he'll pro**v**e.

19 **W**hen there's famine, God redeemer
Rescues from starvation's ja**w**.
20 E**x**pectant, wait, God will answer.
He's your help, shield, battle a**x**.
21 **Y**es, delighting in the savior,
We trust Yahweh's holy wa**y**.
22 **Z**ion's hope, we wait for favor,
Which your loyalty display**s**.

4.1 Content augmentation

Going from the 22 verses, letters, or couplets of Hebrew toward this 28-letter frame required augmenting the source text contents by the use of two strategies: semantic amplification and making implicit information explicit. These are an application of **principle 8**, which allows adjustments in semantic content, implicitness, and word choices in order to accommodate a poetic device.

4.1.1 Ps 33:2–3 amplification

For example, in the New International Version (1984) verses 2–3 read:

2 Praise the LORD with the harp;
make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre.
3 Sing to him a new song;
play skillfully, and shout for joy.

Compare this to *POET*'s:

2–3 **C**raft for God your songs and dances, You lyre-strumming mania**c**.
Chant new songs your harp enhances, Using skill no one can mat**ch**.
Drum your joy; join as you're able. Harmonize each melo**dy**.

POET captures all the semantic content: praise, harp, make music, lyre, sing, new song, skillful, and joy, and repackages it by combining and reordering the verses, while making praise implicit, then includes the words: craft, song, lyre, new songs, harp, skill, and joy, with semantic amplification calling on other words in the music domain as well, such as dances, chant, drum, harmonize, and melody. The third line in vv 2–3 patterns with the next song stanza and targets the letter <d> and 'joy' from NIV 3b.

4.1.2 Ps 33:12 rephrasing and implicit → explicit

Verse 12 is expanded by reiterating what is said with different words and making implicit information explicit. NIV reads:

12 Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,
the people he chose for his inheritance.

But the *POET* translation requires four lines, covering two letters rather than one.

12 **M**ark then gifts for Jacob's clansmen —
Chosen by the great I A**M**.
Named as heirs of what God granted —
Every woman, child and ma**n**.

The semantic content is spread over the four clauses, with Jacob mentioned explicitly as the nation being blessed by explicit gifts and the Tetragrammaton, NIV's 'LORD', translated by *POET* as 'I AM'. Then NIV's 'people' becomes 'every woman, child, and man', in *POET*.

4.1.3 Ps 33:15 explicit → implicit, amplification

Verses 13 and 14 talk about God looking down from heaven and seeing mankind on earth. These give context to verse 15, which reads in NIV:

15 he who forms the hearts of all,
who considers everything they do.

The expanded content of *POET* encompasses three letters, rather than one, reading:

15 **Q**uickened by God; he made humans,
He knows those at home or su**q**.
Recognizing hearts are hollow
He perceives them from afa**r**.
So his judgments always follow
From their actions, words, and heart**s**.

The Q- and R-lines expand on the semantics of verse 15 by including what he sees when he looks down and considers all that humans do from verses 13 and 14. The S-letter line adds implied information regarding what happens after he looks down and sees humans. The content of this line is supported by scripture elsewhere. That is, he sees them wherever they are (Ps 139:7–10); he knows their hearts (Ps 44:21); and he bases his responses on what they do, say, and think (Jeremiah 17:10).

4.1.4 Ps 33:18 semantic amplification, implicit → explicit

The fourth place that augmentation was used is in verse 18, which reads in NIV:

18 But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him,
on those whose hope is in his unfailing love...

The same verse in *POET* encompasses two focus letters and reads:

18 **U**nrelenting, Yahweh cares for
Those who say, I'll worship yo**u**.
Victory meets hearts prepared for
Trusting that his love he'll pro**v**e.

Here, *POET* takes the two clauses of the U-line to reflect NIV 18a and unpacks what it means: i) for "the eyes of the LORD to be on (someone)" (which is different from the meanings of verses 13 and 14) and ii) to "fear the LORD" (*POET*'s "I'll worship you"). Then the V-line of *POET* unpacks NIV 18b, such that the people in 18a are the same ones in 18b (*POET*'s "hearts prepared for") who hope (*POET*'s "trust") in his love. The concept of victory, with its requisite V-word, is implicit in the Lord's care of those who fear him and hope in his love.

4.2 Discussion of Hebrew key term *hesed* in Ps 33:18 and 22

In the last line of 33:18, the word translated 'love' is the *POET* rendering of Hebrew key term חֶסֶד *hesed*, and deserves further examination. In recent English translations there has been a move away from the traditional translation of *hesed* as 'lovingkindness', such that NASB (2020) uses the following translations of it in the Psalms: faithfulness, mercy, favor, graciousness, goodness, and kindness.

In *POET*, my first target term was 'committedness'. But I also allowed the poetic needs or the context of a passage to lead to a different choice. Here in stanza 6, *POET*'s phrase "his love he'll prove" echoes the V-line focus sound-finally, but not letter-finally, in 'love' and 'prove'. Substituting a different word for the key term 'love' would eliminate the chance to feature the letter <v>. Here, the translation choice of 'love' and poetic form work together to strengthen the overall composition.

Recent work by Kroneman (2024) explores three facets of *hesed*:

i) a free, undeserved, and praiseworthy action toward another person;
ii) love that goes beyond its normal or habitual kindness; and
iii) commitment and loyalty.

My target, 'committedness', has components of all three of Kroneman's aspects of *hesed*, since it can be undeserved, can go beyond what is required, and thereby act with loyalty.

Table 3. *POET Psalms* translations of *hesed* (* indicates the eight uses in Ps 119)

Undeserved good	**Surpassing love, kindness**	**Loyal commitment**
Mercy (3)	Love (4+18 in Ps 136)	*Committedness (28)
*Goodness (2)	Faithful love (1)	Commitment (2)
Bless (1)	Love dependable (1)	Loyal committedness (1)
Charity (1)	Great love (1)	Loyal (3)
Clemency (1)	Loyal love (12)	*Loyalty (11)
Confidence (1)	*Unwavering love (1)	Allegiance (1)
*Favor (2)	Committed love (1)	Dedication (1)
Grace (1)	*Lovingkindness (1)	Dependable (2)
Graciousness (1)	Kindly (1)	Faithfulness (2)
	Kindness(es) (2)	Fidelity (3)
	*Divine kindness (1)	Gracious loyalty (1)
	Committed kindness (1)	Keep the faith (1)
	Committed care (1)	Keeps vows (1)
	Faithful care (1)	*Relationship (1)

As noted earlier in this section regarding choosing 'love' for the acrostic letter <v>, other poetic needs of a passage, such as the number of syllables and where stresses fall, plus the sound of the final syllable in rhyme schemes can all lead to choosing different translation options. Furthermore, which aspect of *hesed* is in focus can vary in different contexts, so it is misguided to insist on a single English word to use in translation for all contexts. Given this, like NASB and others, *POET Psalms* uses a wide range of terms as shown in Table 3. Note that the word pairs with an adjective and noun, occurring mostly in column two, usually join components from two of the columns, but they are listed in the column where the noun fits best. Table 3 shows that the three majority core semantic concepts of *hesed* in *POET Psalms* are 'committed' (34), 'loyal' (28), and 'love' (40), where 'love' and 'loyal' overlap in twelve of the terms and eighteen instances of 'love' occur in Psalm 136. At the same time, thirteen terms used in *POET* relate to undeserved good in the first column. In that vein, note too that Hebrew has lexemes other than *hesed* for many of the English terms listed as aspects of *hesed*. *POET* therefore tries to avoid using the identical English word for two separate Hebrew lexemes in parallel lines, but instead chooses a translation option for *hesed* which differs in some way from the semantically similar parallel term in the other line. For example, consider the words 'love' and 'faithfulness' in Psalm 36:5 in the NIV translation:

Your love, LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.

In it, 'love' is חֶסֶד *hesed* and 'faithfulness' is אֱמוּנָה *'ĕmûnâh*. Since 'faithfulness' is a component of *hesed*, I (and others) avoid using 'faithfulness' twice in this verse and other such similar word pairs in the scriptures.

Note also the treatment of *hesed* in 33:22, which reads as follows in NIV:

22 May your unfailing love be with us, Lord,
even as we put our hope in you.

This is translated by *POET* as:

22 **Z**ion's hope, we wait for favor, Which your loyalty display**s**.

NIV's 'unfailing love' is another occurrence of *hesed*, as discussed in 4.1.4 regarding verse 18. NIV translates them the same way, and both verses have a very similar focus on 'hope' and *hesed*. *POET* uses the acrostic to explore *hesed* more deeply, in that both 'favor' (Table 3, column 1) and 'loyalty' (column 3) found in verse 22 are components of it.

4.3 Psalm 33 and its poetic and target letter considerations

Now that the 28-letter frame has been draped with the content from the 22-letter text of the Hebrew as discussed in 4.1, it is appropriate to discuss how the double acrostic focus letters were arranged and augmented poetically.

Stanzas three and four have been revised and poetically tightened for this paper from their original forms in *POET Psalms*. This only serves to emphasize the following two truths about the nature of translation: i) there are always improvements which can be made in translation and ii) one must let go of perfectionistic leanings in order to make translations available to the target audience, who can in turn give input for further revisions.

The acrostics and double acrostics in *POET* attempt to keep in mind all the variation in relationships between letters and sounds in English, as shown previously in Table 2. The goal is to make those features work to achieve the sound effects desired, rather than merely look for a target letter. For Psalm 33, in general, in each pair of couplets, the ends of the A-lines rhyme (or assonate), while the ends of the B-lines, with the focus letter/sound at the end, generally assonate by sharing the same vowel. An in-depth discussion of each rhyming or assonating pair is perhaps of interest primarily to poets, as opposed to linguists or translators. Since it can be tedious to read, and the exact details are not critical to the major points of the paper, a stanza by stanza delineation of the poetics of Psalm 33 is included as Appendix A.

5 Psalm 38

Like Psalm 33, *POET* Psalm 38 is composed as a set of seven octaves, once again aligning with the 'completeness' purpose of acrostics. Rather than 28 focus letters, there are only 27, with the digraph <ch> included. Y and Z are each composed as a quatrain, rather than the norm of one couplet per letter. The sections following the translation of Psalm 38 discuss further semantic and poetic considerations.

Psalm 38
THE A TO Z OF SIN'S CONSEQUENCES
by David
a psalm of repentance
LXX: for remembrance concerning the Sabbath Day
double acrostic
Tune: 10.9.10.8.D. *Caleb*

1 **A**nger, don't use it, admonishing me.
Don't reprimand in wrath, is my ple**a**.
2 **B**ecause your hand besets me with jabbing;
I feel the burn as arrows sta**b**.
3 **Ch**astised by your rage—Lord, I am chastened.
My bones lack soundness for they all a**ch**e.
4 **D**rowning in guilt now, through burdens wading,
I'm weighed down for I disobeye**d**.

Ever encased, I'm sinking in deep seas.
I am pulled down due to my disea**s**e.
5 **F**oul body wounds are festering, seeping,
My foolish sin withheld beli**f**.
6–8 **G**roaning in anguish, I'm crushed and grubby,
Knowing it was my own grave I'd du**g**
Here I mourn hourly; someone please help me.
See how I've sacrificed my healt**h**.

Infirmity, back aches agonizing,
Dazed, crushed, and so exhausted am **I**.
9–10 **J**ust moaning deeply, for I'm so wretched.
You know I'm losing my coura**ge**.
King, you hear my cries, *I feel so sunken!*
My heartbeat falters, clink, clank, and clun**k**.

Light from my eyes grows ever more feeble,
And soon I'm going to die, I fee**l**.

11–12 **M**y kin and loved ones fear this contagion.
Sores mean my chance of living is sli**m**.
Now no one ventures into my bedroom.
My foes set snares for my rui**n**.
Opponents pound me with lies so cruel,
In their desire to witness me g**o**;
Plotting, conspiring, they keep on scheming;
Their hatred plunges very dee**p**.

13 **Q**uite deaf, I quote the falsehood that says I
Cannot hear them. So I keep **qu**iet.
14 **R**eactions now will not be appearing;
Faking I'm powerless to hea**r**.
15 **S**overeign Lord, trust in your will was chosen,
Confident you will answer my foe**s**.
16 **T**riumph—don't grant it to their armed host or
I'll tumble down and they'll all boas**t**.

17 **U**selessly, I endeavor, enduring.
My pain will conquer me without yo**u**.
18 **V**erily I know I have done evil,
And I lament the sins I ha**v**e.
19 **W**oe to me, for they're foes without motive.
With not one cause, aversion does gro**w**.
20 **Ex**changing my good with their viciousness;
I choose graciousness, they say ni**x**.

21 **Yahweh**, don't leave me; I hope you're staying.
God, I don't want you to go away.
Yes, don't forsake me; I really mean it,
I need you at my side each da**y**.
22 **Z**oom Lord to bring me your great salvation,
Zeroing in on how I might miss.
Come now, I beg you, bring revelation.
My Savior, help, quick as a whi**z**.

5.1 Content augmentation in Psalm 38

Like for Psalm 33, going from the 22 letters of Hebrew to the 27-letter frame here also necessitated augmenting the source text content by using the same two

principle strategies—semantic amplification and making implicit information explicit—as well as a third strategy of repetition by rephrasing. Five such passages warrant comment regarding the adjustments made.

5.1.1 Ps 38:4 implicit → explicit, semantic amplification

The first place content augmentation occurs is verse 4 which features two letters in *POET*, as opposed to one in Hebrew. NIV reads as follows, with verse 5 as context:

4 My guilt has overwhelmed me
like a burden too heavy to bear.
5 My wounds fester and are loathsome
because of my sinful folly.

The *POET* translation spreads the content over four lines, covering two letters which fall in different stanzas of the psalm tune. The D-line represents the source text and gives disobedience as the implied reason for his guilt, in application of **principle 8**. The metaphor of guilt being heavy and causing one to sink is semantic amplification which is included for poetic effect by **principle 6**. The E-line continues the heaviness metaphor in line A and foreshadows the disease from verse 5 in line B.

4 **D**rowning in guilt now, through burdens wading,
I'm weighed down for I disobeye**d**.

Ever encased, I'm sinking in deep seas.
I am pulled down due to my disease**.**
5 **F**oul body wounds are festering, seeping,
My foolish sin withheld belie**f**.

The disease introduced in line-E of verse 4 occurs in the source text in verse 5, where once again *POET* applies principle 8, making the content of the psalmist's folly explicit, saying 'withheld belief'.

5.1.2 Ps 38:6–8 reordering with implicit → explicit

Verses 6–8 are combined and reordered, by the half-line of the source text. But the three verses, in three lines, still represent three target letters. Implicit information is made explicit with regard to the psalmist's reflection on how he got into this situation and explicitly asking for help. The NIV reads:

6 I am bowed down and brought very low;
all day long I go about mourning.

7 My back is filled with searing pain;
there is no health in my body.
8 I am feeble and utterly crushed;
I groan in anguish of heart.

Compare NIV with *POET*'s verses 6–8, where the I-couplet translates NIV 7a, and 8a and belongs with the next stanza.

6–8 **G**roaning in anguish, I'm crushed and grubby,
Knowing it was my own grave I'd du**g**.
Here I mourn hourly; someone please help me.
See how I've sacrificed my healt**h**.

Infirmity, back aches agonizing,
Dazed, crushed, and so exhausted am **I**.

5.1.3 Ps 38:9–10 implicit → explicit, semantic amplification

Another content augmentation passage occurs in verses 9 and 10, which are stretched to cover three letters, rather than two. The NIV reads:

9 All my longings lie open before you, Lord;
my sighing is not hidden from you.
10 My heart pounds, my strength fails me;
even the light has gone from my eyes.

The expanded content of *POET* uses three letters, reading:

9–10 **J**ust moaning deeply, for I'm so wretched.
You know I'm losing my coura**ge**.
King, you hear my cries, "I feel so sunken."
My heartbeat falters, clink, clank, and clun**k**.

Light from my eyes grows ever more feeble,
And soon I'm going to die, I fee**l**.

The source text verse 9a is represented by the J-couplet of *POET* where implicit information—"I'm losing my courage"—is included by **principle 8**. The source text thought in vs 9b, "my sighing is not hidden from you", relates to the line A of the K-couplet, *POET*'s "you hear my cries". Then source text verse 10 leads to the remaining three clauses in the stanza, with NIV's 10a, "my heart pounds", being rendered in *POET* as, "my heartbeat falters, clink, clank, and clunk." This unusual rendering is clearly there to achieve the final <k> of the line, as well as to rhyme with the stressed syllable of 'sunken' in the previous line, as an application of **principle 3**. The L-couplet uses semantic amplification to

expand NIV 10b into two clauses. It translates 10b in its A-line, then unpacks its meaning in its B-line. That is, the light goes from a person's eyes when he dies.

When composing acrostics, there is a recurring tension between naturalness and clarity on one hand and literary license on the other. To address this, I added the corollary to principle 8 in square brackets below, which now reads,

> Poetic license makes it legitimate to express meaning in alternate ways, such as adjusting relative order, implicitness, and word choices to accommodate the literary form, [even though this at times can create less natural and/or less clear passages].

This refinement of principle 8 will be used in any further publications. As discussed in section two, this lack of naturalness is also true of the alphabetic acrostics in Hebrew, where the authors sometimes altered the naturalness of the syntax or repeated an initial word multiple times to get the desired focus letter at the start of the relevant verses or lines. By doing so they gave the poetic form preference in the creation of the psalm.

5.1.4 Ps 38:11–12 implicit → explicit, semantic amplification

Augmentation was also used in verses 11–12, which cover four letters in *POET*, but only two letters in the five lines of Hebrew. *POET*'s 'contagion' represents a word נֶגַע *neḡaʿ*, which is also used in Psalm 91:10, as well as other places. In Leviticus chapters 13 and 14 this same word refers to a skin disease or to mold and mildew on clothing and houses. Taking these two contexts together, it may be that in 38:11 no one would come near the psalmist because he was contagious. A number of skin diseases are also contagious, including fungal infections, which would correlate with the idea of mold and mildew.

Verses 11 and 12 are also viewed as a Messianic passage, foreshadowing the NT passages of Matthew 27:55–56, Mark 15:40, and Luke 23:49 which talk about Yeshua's friends standing far away from him while he was on the cross.

The NIV for Psalm 38:11–12 reads:

11 My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds;
my neighbors stay far away.
12 Those who want to kill me set their traps,
those who would harm me talk of my ruin;
all day long they scheme and lie.

The same verses in *POET* read:	As compared with NIV:
11–12 **M**y kin and loved ones fear this contagion.	*Fear* is implied by 11a

Sores mean my chance of living is sli**m**.	Phrase is implied
Now no one ventures into my bedroom.	11a–b, *avoid me*; *stay far away*
My foes set snares for my rui**n**.	Translates 12ab
Opponents pound me with lies so cruel,	Expands 12c *lie*
In their desire to witness me g**o**;	Translates 12a *want to kill me*
Plotting, conspiring, they keep on scheming;	Expands *scheme* 12c
Their hatred plunges very dee**p**.	Thought follows from 12b

Since the semantic content of the source text is woven throughout the eight lines of *POET*, instead of writing out all of the adjustments in prose, it is easier to mentally process the adjustments by looking at the short explanations following each line. Verse references in the annotations refer to the NIV.

5.1.5 Ps 38:21–22 repetition by rephrasing, implicit → explicit

As mentioned in the introduction to section 4, content augmentation was also used in verses 21 and 22 to fill out the octave and make it singable to the suggested tune. This involved repetition and rephrasing. The NIV reads:

21 LORD, do not forsake me;
do not be far from me, my God.
22 Come quickly to help me,
my Lord and my Savior.

These two verses take eight lines, but only two letters in *POET*:

21 **Yahweh**, don't leave me; I hope you're staying.
God, I don't want you to go away.
Lord, don't forsake me; I really mean it,
I need you at my side each da**y**.
22 **Z**oom Lord to bring me your great salvation,
Zeroing in on how I might miss.
Come now, I beg you, bring revelation.
My Savior, help, quick as a whi**z**.

The Y-quatrain basically says the same thing in both couplets using different words, with its fourth line, "I need you at my side each day", being inferred from the context. The Z-quatrain spreads the semantics of verse 22 over the four lines, with some repetition and duplication. For example, *POET*'s 'salvation' is implied by the Lord being the psalmist's 'savior', as in NIV 22b also in the last line of *POET*. The Z-quatrain <z> words '**z**oom-whi**z**' represent NIV 22a, 'quickly'. The second and third lines of *POET* vs 22 make explicit what kind of help the psalmist needs.

POET preserves the contrast between יְהוָה *Yahweh* in verse 21 and אֲדֹנָי *Adonai* 'lord' in verse 22 by using Yahweh in verse 21 to start the Y-quatrain, which also preserves its presence in the psalm.[7] The four vocatives in verses 21 and 22 which use 'Yahweh', 'Lord', 'God', and 'Savior' are preserved in *POET*.

5.2 Psalm 38 and its poetic and target letter considerations

Now that the 27-letter frame reflects the content from the 22-letter text of the Hebrew, we turn to an analysis of the patterning of the double acrostic focus letters, account for any compromises in their execution, and point out the interplay with alliteration and assonance, along with relevant points regarding the suggested tune. Rather than being set to a specific English poetic form, Psalm 38 is composed to be sung to the hymnal meter 10.9.10.8.D, which is used by the hymn tune named *Caleb*. This meter gives two quatrains with line lengths of ten, nine, ten, and eight syllables per quatrain for a total of eight lines per stanza.

Due to the rhythm of the hymn tune, for each focus-letter couplet, the odd-numbered lines end in unstressed syllables, while the even-numbered lines, with the final target letters, end in stressed syllables. This pattern makes perfect rhyme within a couplet impossible due to vowel reduction in unstressed syllables. *POET* addresses this by having the stressed syllable of the last word in the odd-numbered line either rhyme or assonate with the final (stressed) syllable of the even-numbered line of each target-letter couplet.

In composing Psalm 38, the relationships between letters and sounds in English as shown in Table 2 are used to emphasize target sounds, as well as letters. The in-depth discussion of each poetic sound pattern is included as Appendix B for those interested in finer detail.

In general the poetic composition of Psalm 38 aligns with the meter of the song. But when it does not, the deviations do not make the composition unsingable to the suggested tune.

6 Conclusions and implications

In the discussion above I have made several observations and demonstrations. First, poetic translations of biblical poetry are possible, and second, by using the refined twelve principles as a guide we create boundaries to keep us from deviating from the intended meaning and context of the source text. As a third

[7] There were places in *POET* when *Yahweh* was translated 'Lord' due to poetic needs of a passage, such as in Psalm 144:15. But it is always the goal to preserve the presence of the Lord's name in a psalm whenever possible, even if it means moving it to a verse where it better fits the flow and poetic form.

point, I also showed that the poetic devices of rhyme and assonance can be used to enhance the double acrostic form in English, making it resonate as poetry to English ears. Fourthly, setting the two psalms to hymn tunes meant that there was a predictable meter, which contributed another aspect of what English speakers perceive as poetic, as well as lending cohesion to the compositions holistically.

As seen from the detailed discussion of how *POET Psalms* translations compared to NIV, for example, translations like this allow more rearranging of content (by **principle 7**) and substitution of vocabulary and metaphor (by **principles 3** and **8**). This makes such translations considerably more challenging for consultants to check in that the meaning is woven into the fabric of the translation in different ways. Therefore, if as a community of practice we agree to value heightened language translation of biblical poetry, our translation consultants must also agree to value it and to willingly acquire the necessary skill sets and undertake the extra effort required for checking such translations.

It seems disingenuous to say we are translating biblical poetry if the result is not perceived as poetic by the target audience. That fact is reflected in my **principle 1**—"Accuracy can (and should) include representing source language styles by target language styles, i.e., poetry by poetry and sung forms by sung forms." That principle is the foundation of this work. This stance is eloquently articulated by Wendland (2013:105):

> Yet what do we observe when we peruse virtually all available translations today, whether in a language of wider communication (LWC) or some major lingua franca? Usually it is only a pale or largely indistinct reflection of the original, completely unworthy of being called even a 'mediocre', let alone a 'satisfactory', literary equivalent. In other words, most versions simply try to express the text's basic content, displaying little cognizance of or concern for its poetic appeal and rhetorical persuasiveness in Hebrew.

So what do we do with this information? How can we compose poetic translations in target languages which are less well studied? Just as all languages have grammars which regulate how the pieces are put together, they also all have some means of heightening in their linguistic genres. Only by knowing the TL poetic devices for such heightening is it possible to apply the twelve translation principles for biblical poetry, since half of them refer to these TL devices.

Heightening devices may have not been previously called poetry, per se, due to the languages being under-described. As I have been advocating for over a decade, it is critically important to do documentary language research before translation. The target language genres of narrative, description, conversation, and genealogy are prerequisites to translating a Gospel. In fact, a language

documentation corpus serves many purposes in a translation project. For example, collecting word lists contributes to phonology and later to orthography design; collecting stories contributes to an analysis of narrative parameters in the target language, whether a fairy tale or a factual account. Then, following careful analysis, the texts collected can be used as literacy resources. A documentary corpus, then, gives translation practitioners a foundation to build on as they move forward in their translation and language development work (Boerger 2012; Boerger et al. 2016; Schrag and Van Buren 2018; Frost 2024).

Likewise, before undertaking poetry, it is equally imperative to study how the target language signals heightening in all of its genres, especially through collecting songs, epics, and sagas, which often unveil more about a language's heightening devices. Some devices are common to many languages, for example repetition, alliteration, assonance, hyperbole, symbolism, and synecdoche. Then the TL devices can be applied to translation with the goal of making a composition special, focused, or beautiful.

Even undertaking such documentary collection and description after a translation has already been started can allow the discovery of what constitutes "poetry" in the target language before moving into translating biblical poetic passages. Doing so equips practitioners to contribute to a more effective overall translation product. Furthermore, since language is primarily spoken (or signed) and since poetry is meant to be heard (seen), as much as it is meant to be read, principles and practices from the field of oral Bible translation (Frost et al. 2024) can contribute to elicitation of natural and dynamic recitations of poetry and song, as well as giving the community access to these psalms in oral formats prior to being available in print.

In sum, familiarity with the target language poetic (heightening) devices is a prerequisite to being able to apply the principles for translating biblical poetry. Then, using the indigenous poetic devices and applying the twelve principles can help produce effective and cohesive literary translations in target languages around the world, whether oral, written, or signed.

Appendix A: Psalm 33 poetics

Ps 33, stanza one—A B C Ch, verses 1–3

Stanza one features A, B, C, and Ch, and for this stanza there are no deviations in the pattern when also ending each line with the focus letter. In the A-line, Hallelu-Ya is spelled without its usual final <h> in order to get the right target letter. The word which might create discomfort for some is 'maniac' at the end of the C-line. While somewhat unusual, it is not outside the type of worship which might be ascribed to King David, for instance. This is another instance of applying **principle 8** to adjust word choice due to the poetic form. Each two-letter quatrain has a rhyme-assonance scheme of *abab*, as in quatrain A–B's 'dances-enhances' and 'Hallelu-Ya-job'.

In using the suggested tune, all of the beats in this stanza fall on stressed syllables, creating no conflicts.

Ps 33, stanza two—D E F G, verses 3c–6

The second stanza focuses on D, E, F, and G. There are several adjustments to point out here, in that while the initial letters follow the pattern, the final targets exhibit some variation in how they are fulfilled. In the D–E quatrain, the D-couplet ends with 'melo**dy'**, where the final syllable pronounces the name of the letter <d>, rather than ending with its letter or sound. This works well since 'melody' is in the semantic domain of music. The final syllable of 'melody' also rhymes with 'see' at the end of the E-couplet, which tightens the poetic composition. In the F–G quatrain, the F-couplet ends with *safe*, which has the target sound, but not the letter. In the opposite direction, the G-couplet ends with *sang*, where <ng> has the correct letter, but not the target sound. Once again each two-letter quatrain, has the rhyme-assonance scheme of *abab*, except for 'safe-sang', which have different vowels, but ones with similar qualities which approximate assonance. In addition, both words start with <s>, lending more similarity. The priority for the ends of line-final words is that they should either look right or sound right, preferably both, and compatibility with the B-line endings in the same quatrain is highly valued.

The musical beats and word stresses also align in this stanza.

Ps 33, stanza three—H I J K, verses 7–10[8]

In the stanza focusing on H, I, J, and K, the initial letters conform to the pattern, while all four line-endings require discussion. In the H–I quatrain, the rhyme-assonance scheme is *aabb*, rather than *abab* as seen in many of the quatrains. Here, the H-couplet's final word is 'swath' in its B-line, which ends with the target

[8] Adjustments were made here in stanza three to tighten it poetically. These will be reflected in the next edition of *POET Psalms*.

letter <h> and is phonetically similar to 'froth' in the A-line of the same couplet; so the couplet patterns with itself sonically.[9] The *aabb* schema concludes in the I-couplet, where the ends of both lines are names or titles of God transliterated into English—*El Shaddai* 'God Almighty' and *Adonai* 'Lord'. In *POET*, the names are explained in footnotes and the glossary. The source text has *Yahweh*, so the inclusion of alternate names is allowed by **principle 8**, since the referent remains the same.

The J–K quatrain goes back to the *abab* rhyme-assonance scheme. The J-couplet ends with 'raj' (explained above), having both the correct letter and sound. The A-lines of J–K have 'begot it-plotting', with near rhyme. The final K-couplet word should rhyme or assonate with 'raj', but nothing was found which ended with <k> and fit the semantics. Instead, the final K-couplet line reads, "Conquers each barrage, attack," having several sound correspondences. In it, 'conquers' contains the target sound (but not letter) [k] twice and 'barrage' nearly rhymes with 'raj', even though it is not line-final. This leaves 'attack', with its requisite final <k>, at the line's end.

The stanza aligns with the suggested tune.

Ps 33, stanza four—L M N O, verses 11–13[10]

Stanza four features L, M, N, and O, where the initial letters need no comment. In it, the rhyme-assonance scheme is again *aabb*, as seen in stanza 3. The L-couplet line endings are 'eternal-will' which both end in the target letter and sound. The M- and N-couplets share some features, in that they both feature the vowel [æ] plus a nasal in all four line endings, with 'clansmen-I AM' in the M-couplet and 'granted-man' in the N-couplet. The first syllable of 'clansmen' has the target vowel and stressed syllable. 'I AM' is the English translation of the meaning of the Tetragrammaton in the source text, and as such fits both the target letter and the vowel assonance requirements. At the end of the N-couplet, the word 'man' violates the normal word order of the three terms "man, woman, and child". The reordering, with 'woman' first, maintains the beat of the song.

This concentration of similar sound features in verse 12 occurs in the middle four lines of the octave of the central stanza of the composition, in effect marking the center of the psalm phonologically. Semantically, this is the verse which most directly refers to Yahweh's relationship to Israel.

Ps 33, stanza five—P Q R S, verses 14–15

The fifth stanza focuses on P, Q, R, and S and returns to the *abab* rhyme-assonance scheme in both quatrains. The initial and final words of each line all have the

[9] I discuss idiosyncrasies of English word-final <h> in section 4.2.2.

[10] Adjustments were also made for poetic reasons in stanza four. These will appear in the next edition of *POET*.

focus letter. In the P–Q quatrain, the word *suq* at the end of the Q-line was discussed above as a borrowing from Arabic. In the R–S quatrain, the word 'hearts' at the end of the S-couplet, has a voiceless plural marker -s, pronounced [s], unlike the third person -s, pronounced [z] following a voiced sound, as seen with 'displays' in the Z-stanza.

The meter of the poetry and suggested tune again align well.

Ps 33, stanza six—Sh T U V, verses 16–18

Stanza six features the sounds/letters Sh, T, U, and V. Once again, the initial and final sounds or letters of each line are all those expected, except that the V-line ends in 'prove', with the final sound, but not the final letter. The *abab* rhyme-assonance scheme continues in both quatrains, as exemplified by 'battalions-stallions' and 'clash-that' in the Sh–T quatrain, along with 'cares for-prepared for' and 'you-prove' in the U–V quatrain.

Ps 33, stanza seven—W X Y Z, verses 19–22

The last stanza finishes the alphabet with W, X, Y, and Z. Interestingly, the X-line reverses what we have seen so far, in that the initial word starts with <ex>, since there are few x-initial words in English and the line-final word ends in <x>, for which more English options exist. The beginning of the X-couplet requires two syllables on the first beat of the suggested song. There are also only a few z-initial words relevant to biblical texts. This led to *POET* introducing 'Zion' in the last line to get a z-initial word. The last word of the Z-line is *displays*, which ends in the sound [z], but not the letter. There is once again the *abab* rhyme-assonance scheme, except that the last words in the first couplet, 'jaw' and 'ax', are not similar in any way.

Appendix B: Psalm 38 poetics

Ps 38, stanza one—A B Ch D, verses 1–4a

Stanza one features A, B, Ch, and D, and for this stanza there is only one final focus letter which deviates from the form. This is the word 'ache' at the end of the Ch-line. In it the <ch> is not word-final nor does it have the voiceless affricate sound of [č], but rather the voiceless stop sound of [k]. Note the alliterating words in each line, along with words which have the target letter internally: A—anger, admonishing, repri**mand**, wr**ath**, ple**a**; B—because, besets, ja**bb**ing, burn, sta**b**; Ch—chastised, chastened, a**ch**e; D—drowning, bur**dens**, wa**ding**, down, **d**isobeye**d**. In the A-couplet the meter of the song and the normal word stresses do not align well. For an example of stressed syllables rhyming or assonating, see the B-couplet's 'jabbing-stab' at the ends of the two lines, where 'jab' and 'stab' rhyme, as well as the Ch-line's 'chastened-ache' where the stressed syllables assonate with the same vowel sound.

Ps 38, stanza two—E F G H, verses 4b–8a

The second stanza focuses on E, F, G, and H, which occur at the beginning and end of each couplet. Alliteration whether word-initially or medially occurs in this stanza, as well. The E-couplet alliterates with '**e**ver, **e**ncased', and 'seas' and 'disease' rhyme. Note that the F-couplet with its voiceless labiodentals also includes words with labial sounds to emphasize a similar place of articulation as in the <b> and <p> of '**b**ody, see**p**ing', and '**b**elief', augmenting the F-couplet words: 'foul, festering, foolish,' and 'belie**f**.' The G-couplet uses alliteration with '**g**roaning, an**g**uish, **g**rubby, **g**rave, and du**g'**, with 'grubby' and 'dug' assonating in their stressed syllables. The H-couplet has alliteration with '**h**ere, **h**elp, **h**ow', and '**h**ealt**h'**, and the <h> letter, but not sound, in '**h**ourly'. Similarly, 'help' and 'health' at the ends of the lines assonate.

Ps 38, stanza three—I J K L, verses 8b–10

In the next stanza focusing on I, J, K, and L, the initial letters conform to the pattern. The I-couplet has minimal alliteration, with only the two focus letter words, '**i**nfir*i*ty' and 'I', the latter of which assonates with the stressed syllable of 'ago**niz**ing'. It is worth noting the J-couplet's final word, *courage*, which ends in the correct [dž] sound, but is spelled with <ge> rather than <j>. Here, the English stress pattern of *courage* violates the hymn tune's meter, but is used for its meaning and final sound. At the end of the first line of the J-couplet, the sound [č], the voiceless counterpart to <j>, occurs in the middle of *wretched*, to echo the phonic effect of alliteration. The K-couplet was discussed in 4.1.2.

Ps 38, stanza four—M N O P, verses 11–12

Stanza four features M, N, O and P, where both the initial and final letters of the couplets need no comment. The assonance in this stanza is less pronounced, but there are still hints of it. In the M- and N-couplets the final sounds in each line cross over, with an <m> in the N-line and vice versa, as in 'contagio**n**/sli**m**' and 'bedroo**m**/rui**n**'. The stress pattern on 'ruin' does not align with the tune.

Ps 38, stanza five—Q R S T, verses 13–16

The fifth stanza targets Q, R, S, and T. All couplets except for Q have the requisite beginning and ending letters. Here, the psalmist pretends he cannot hear or speak in order to not respond to his enemies' verbal assaults. The word ***q**uiet* at the end of the Q-couplet starts with the target letter, rather than ending with it. Like *ruin*, above, *quiet* also misaligns with the song meter, which has a final stressed syllable. The rest of the stanza continues the pattern of the final stressed syllable of a couplet's A-line rhyming with the final stressed word its B-line.

Ps 38, stanza six—U V W X, verses 17–20

Stanza six features U, V, W, and X. Once again, the initial and final sounds or letters are mostly the ones we expect. However, the V-couplet ends in *have*, with the final sound, but not the final letter. Rather than assonance or rhyme, to link the end of line A with the end of line B, the word 'evil' is used, which contains the target sound. As in the M- and N-couplets discussed above, the W-couplet features several words with labial places of articulation, such as <v>, in 'moti**v**e, a**v**ersion', as well as <f> in '**f**oes'. Both the V- and W-couplets, then, feature labial sounds. For the X-couplet, as seen for Psalm 33, the focus letter patterning is reversed, in that the initial word starts with <ex> and the couplet-final word ends in <x>, due to English spelling conventions. The first syllable of 'viciousness' [vɪš] at the end of the X-couplet's A-line has near rhyme with 'nix' at the end of that couplet and they share the same vowel. Furthermore, there is cross rhyme between 'viciousness' at the end of the A-line and 'graciousness' in the middle of the B-line, adding weight to the contrast between the psalmist and his enemies.

Ps 38, stanza seven—Y Z, verses 19–22

Finally, the last stanza in Psalm 38, finishes the alphabet with letters Y and Z. This stanza was discussed in section 4.1.5 on semantic expansion, where the Y-quatrain is introduced by 'Yahweh'. For the Z-quatrain, rather than the two more recognizably biblical z-words 'zeal' and 'Zion', used in other acrostics, here *POET* uses more informal words 'zoom' at the beginning of the quatrain and 'whiz' at the end. The <z> sound play is highlighted by 'zeroing' in the B-line of the Z-quatrain. This is another place where the poetic form is allowed to take precedence over a more literal or neutral word choice, by principle 8. There are a few less natural stress and meter alignments, but they do not make the psalm unsingable to the suggested tune.

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