THE ROYAL TRAVESTY (QOH 1:12-2:26) AND SOME OF ITS READER-ORIENTING FUNCTIONS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE BOOK OF QOHELET

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Preface

This paper summarizes fundamental considerations from my current work - it is therefore "work in progress". Within the overall framework of my dissertation, which deals with the *motif of joy* and its communicative mediation in the book of Qohelet, the current section focuses on the initiation of the book's internal communicative processes. Another of the initial considerations of my work is the question of whether a communicational context can be made visible on the level of the given text, which elucidates the reader-side reception of the sometimes-unconnected themes and reflections within the words of Qohelet. This question is based on the frequently made observation that the book Qohelet addresses its readers with an extremely *vivid*, *individual* and *timeless* voice, while the messages of this voice are difficult to unite with a basic intention or purpose. If and how a *call to joy* can become noticeable alongside Qohelet's ambiguous and sometimes pessimistic world view is to be clarified in the context of my dissertation. This paper first poses the simple question of the initial contact between the book, its central voice and its readers.

In view of the multifaceted forum of the OTSEM network, I would like to connect the presentation of my work with the following questions:

> **1. Is the approach presented a comprehensible perspective that is appropriate to the content of the book?**
>
> **2. To what extent would its consistent implementation – in your view – lead to a new perception of the book?**
>
> **3. Are there any aspects or approaches regarding the communicative connection between book and reader that I do not (yet) have in mind, but that could possibly lead further?**

I am also pleased to receive lively feedback on the traceability of the structuring approach and other aspects.

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1. Introduction

> *Qohelet constantly interposes his consciousness between the reality observed and the reader. It seems important to him that the reader not only know what the truth is, but also be aware that he, Qohelet, saw this, felt this, realized this. He is reflexively observing the psychological process of discovery as well as reporting the discoveries themselves.*[1]

The content of Qohelet's words has often challenged readers and exegetes. This has a reason: Namely, it seems difficult for the reader to find lines of argumentation or a central theme within the different reflections of Qohelet. Thus, many questions have evolved regarding the structure, composition and literary integrity of the book. Research history had shown that there are different ways to solve this problem. An increasingly less considered approach can be found in classical redaction criticism, whose supporters searched for a "hidden structure" that has been lost in course of the text's history.[2] In contrast, recent research has led to an increasing number of approaches not assuming a hidden structure but rather considering "ambiguity" as a substantial part of the text.[3] This ambiguity could possibly lead a way to the text's pragmatic intention and the message "which the author is seeking to convey to his readers"[4]. Specifically, this entails that contradictions are a part of the text meant to irritate the reader and thereto a new opening against the text. This phenomenon could be a part of the author's strategy, which leads to a number of new questions and a new perspective on text. This approach is promising because it examines the text in its tangible form and investigates an important layer: the interaction between text and reader.[5]

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[1] MICHAEL V. FOX, *Qohelet and His Contradictions* (BiLiSe 18), Sheffield 1989, 93.

[2] For a detailed summary cf. DIETHELM MICHEL, *Qohelet* (EdF 258), Darmstadt 1988, 9–45; LUDGER SCHWIENHORST-SCHÖNBERGER, *Kohelet: Stand und Perspektiven der Forschung* in *Studien zum Alten Testament und seiner Hermeneutik*, ed. Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger (SBAB 40), Stuttgart 2005, 123–156; LUDGER SCHWIENHORST-SCHÖNBERGER, *Neuere Veröffentlichungen zum Buch Kohelet (1998-2003)*, in: *ThLZ* 128/ (2003), 1123–38; METTE BUNDVAD, *Time in the Book of Ecclesiastes*, Oxford 2015, 9–20. et al.

[3] Cf. the reception-oriented interpretations of NORBERT LOHFINK, *Das Koheletbuch: Strukturen und Struktur* in *Das Buch Kohelet: Studien zur Struktur, Geschichte, Rezeption und Theologie*, ed. Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger (BZAW 254), Berlin, New York 1997, 44; NORBERT LOHFINK, *Kohelet* (NEB.AT), Würzburg 1980; THOMAS KRÜGER, *Kohelet: (Prediger)* (Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament), Neukirchen-Vluyn 2000..

[4] BUNDVAD, *Time in the Book of Ecclesiastes*, 14.

[5] This pragmatic interpretation is closely related to the idea of identifying a didactic orientation within the words of Qohelet (which is mainly based on the understanding of the epilogue in Qoh 12:9-11.12-14) – cf. MICHAEL V. FOX, *Frame-Narrative and Composition in the Book of Qohelet*, in: *HUCA* 48/ (1977), 83–106; LUDGER SCHWIENHORST-SCHÖNBERGER, *Kohelet: Ein Schulbuch?* in *Juda und Jerusalem in der Seleukidenzeit: Herrschaft - Widerstand - Identität ; Festschrift für Heinz-Josef Fabry*, ed. Ulrich Dahmen, trans. Heinz-Josef Fabry (BBB 159), Göttingen 2010.

My paper aims to adopt such a *pragmatic* approach. [6] This should be achieved through the analysis of the so called "royal travesty" at the beginning of the book (Qoh 1:12-2:26). This text seems to be one of the very few reasonably distinguishable texts in Ecclesiastes and also to have a great value for the basic design of the book. The fact that Qoh 1:12-2:26 (as well as 1:1-11 and 3:1-15) is a fundamental section for the understanding of the book has already been well recognized.[7] In this context, the attention was mainly focused on the structural cohesion and the thematic (or philosophical) design of this section. These basic considerations should be assumed at this point and combined with a new perspective that focuses more on communicative aspects of texts. This seems appropriate because Qoh 1:12-2:26 makes important basic decisions about the communicative context of the book. These can be found, for example, where the first chapters introducing the communication subject of the text, which is the 'I-voice' of Qohelet. In the course of Qoh 1:13-2:26, he is introduced as a communicative counterpart to the reader. This can be seen where 1:12 makes use of the development of a communicative setting between Qohelet and his readers that has already been roughly defined in the book's frame (1:1-3). It turns out that this setting is underlined by a multi-layered characterization of Qohelet which must be developed in cooperation with the reader. However, the king's travesty also seems to take on establishing functions in other respects. This can be seen, for example, in the introduction of fundamental questions, topics or keywords to which reference will be made again in the further course of the book. The treatment of these questions, but also their unanswered aspects, are to be examined as part of the establishing functions of this text.

In order to get closer to its adjusting functions, this paper is intended to collect initial thoughts on essential aspects of Qoh 1:12-2:26. It should be demonstrated that the *royal travesty* can be examined as a self-contained unit with a specific text-pragmatic function, which has orientating functions with regard to the entire book.

For this reason: three questions in particular are to be examined: Firstly, to what extent does the royal travesty contribute to the constitution of a communication partner and its characterization within the text? (3.) And secondly, which basic questions and topics are developed within royal travesty and how are they connected? (4.) The treatment of these two questions will be framed by a basis study of the structure of Qoh 1:12-2:26 (2.).

[6] *Pragmatic* in this case means – according to SIEGFRIED SCHMIDT'S definition – the use of textual language to initiate communication between the text and its readers – cf. SIEGFRIED J. SCHMIDT, *Texttheorie: Probleme einer Linguistik der sprachlichen Kommunikation*, 2nd ed., München 1976, 9 f.

[7] Michel, for example, has shown this by highlighting chapters 1-3 as the basic treatise of the Koheletbuch (cf. MICHEL, *Qohelet*, 1-83). Also see ALEXANDER A. FISCHER, *Skepsis oder Furcht Gottes?: Studien zur Komposition und Theologie des Buches Kohelet* (BZAW 247), Berlin 1997, 183–225.

2. Remarks on form and structure of Qoh 1:12-2:26

Qohelet 1:12 introduces an entire new section of the book. It was sometimes mentioned that this verse could also have been the introduction to an original set of the book.[8] Thought this suggestion would certainly challenge the position and understanding of Qoh 1:1-11, it leads to some substantial characteristics regarding place and content of V12 and, of course, the following text. First of all, it can be observed that Qoh 1:12 interrupts a clause which was originally introduced by Qoh 1:1 – the "common" headline of the book. It seems that V12 sets a new beginning with a slightly modified focus:

דִּבְרֵי קֹהֶלֶת בֶּן־דָּוִד מֶלֶךְ בִּירוּשָׁלָם:	Qoh 1:1
Words of Qohelet, son of David, king in Jerusalem:	

Reflections about the consistent cosmos and human exploration of the world. ↓ VV2-11

אֲנִי קֹהֶלֶת הָיִיתִי מֶלֶךְ עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּירוּשָׁלָם:	Qoh 1:12
I, Qohelet, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.	

Fig. 1: Relation between Qoh 1:1 and 1:12

By comparing the two verses, it is quite interesting that in all the similarities there are still some noteworthy differences. These are, for example, some changes regarding the genealogical function (בֶּן־דָּוִד – only in V1) and the addition of עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל in V12. Both are characterizing Qohelet's functional scope and his historical background – in a different way – based on the idea of a Davidic King who rules over Jerusalem.[9] Thought this does not entail a consequent change of the functional attribution, it is with no doubt a shift of emphasis that addresses the same idea: Qohelet in the garment of Salomon.

In fact, this is accompanied by a modification of personal reference: whereas in V1 Qohelet was introduced by an impersonal voice, it becomes clear that in V12 Qohelet introduces himself by using the verb היה. Hence, the introduction of Qohelet becomes here a self-declaration that consistently affects the following text section.[10]

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[8] Cf. Aarre Lauha, *Kohelet* (BK 19), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1978, 44 f. This approach was often criticized by the more recent literature.

[9] בֶּן־דָּוִד and עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל (מֶלֶךְ) could be understand analogical as they are both references to Salomon as king who was directly related to the sonship of David and the rule over Israel in Jerusalem – cf. Antoon Schoors, *Ecclesiastes* (HCOT), Leuven 2013, 105.

[10] Regarding the הָיִיתִי, it seems unclear whether the 1. Sg. Perf. indicates a *completed condition in the past* ("I have been king"/ "I was King" – cf. Schwienhorst-Schönberger et al.), *duration* ("I have become king" cf. Delitzsch) or an *information with no time-related reference* ("I am king" – cf. Fox). The interpretation of this phrase has tremendous effects on the overall understanding of Qoh 1:12-2:26 and depends (in reverse)

Therefore, Qoh 1:12 has the function of *joining* the words of Qohelet (דִּבְרֵי קֹהֶלֶת - 1:1) with a speaking "I" – the I of Qohelet, equipped with the attributes of a salomonic king. Thus, Qoh 1:12 marks here the beginning of a new segment in the book which is well connected with a detailed of I-bounded reflection in 1:13 ff. Additionally, the detailed characterization of Qohelet as King over Jerusalem overlaps these reflections with the guise of Salomon.[11]

Correspondingly, it must be asked how long this fiction endures. Indeed, it has been mentioned that an ending of the travesty in Qoh 2:26 can be doubted with good reasons. Galling and Michel, for example, claimed that the fiction ends in 2:11, [12] where the retrospect of the king ends and the reflections of the wise (as found in 1:2-11) find their resumption.[13] There are also some voices arguing for an end in *2:26* (Hertzberg, Schwienhorst-Schönberger et al.[14]), in *3:22* (Backhaus[15]) or after *4:16* (Fox/ Reinert[16]). All those suggestions utilize different criteria to find a delimitation of Qohelet's royal voice. This is, generally, the use of content-related references indicating an end of royal issues. Such a reference is often found in 2:11 where the small parable of the king's deeds ends. It seems obvious that Qoh 2:3-11 shows a detailed list of royal deeds and, that 2:12 constitutes a break here – but there is no reason for a *change of the reflecting I* which further depends on the voice's introduction in Qoh 1:12. The latter assumption already implies another criteria: the delimitation by grammatical marks – especially by the *acting* or *speaking* person.

Regarding this, it has been well-recognized that there is only one significant change of voice after 1:12 concerning the verses where Qohelets words shift back to a frame of a 3rd-person-voice (esp. 7:27; 12:8) as already introduced in 1:1f.[17] From the grammatical point of view, the royal I-voice of Qohelet persists until the end of book with exception of the 3rd and 2nd-person-insertions as mentioned above.

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on further interpretation of form and integration of this passage. The specific textual effects of this dependence are part of my explanations about the "I" of Qohelet in section 3 (p. 10-14).

[11] The word "fiction" implies different functions of Qohelet's characterization which are to be described in its wide context - cf. as well Section 3. of this paper.

[12] Cf. KURT GALLING, *Der Prediger* in *Die Fünf Megilloth*, 2nd ed., ed. Kurt e. a. Galling (HAT I 18), Tübingen 1969, 87; MICHEL, *Qohelet*, 132.

[13] This is closely related to Annette Schellenberg who divides two different voices: the voice of the (pessimistic) king in Qoh 1:12-2:11 and the voice of the wise men in Qoh 1:2-11; 2:12-12,8 – cf. ANNETTE SCHELLENBERG, *Kohelet* (ZBK.AT 17), Zürich 2013, 11 ff.

[14] Cf. HANS W. HERTZBERG, *Der Prediger (Qohelet)*, 2nd ed. (KAT 17), Leipzig 1963, 95; LUDGER SCHWIENHORST-SCHÖNBERGER, *Kohelet* (HThKAT), Freiburg im Breisgau 2004, 181.

[15] Cf. FRANZ J. BACKHAUS, *"Es gibt nichts besseres für den Menschen": Studien zur Komposition und zur Weisheitskritik im Buch Kohelet*, Bodenheim 1998, 186 ff.

[16] MICHAEL V. FOX, *Ecclesiastes* (JPS.BC), Philadelphia 2004, 11–32 ("Reflections and Meditations"); ANDREAS REINERT, *Die Salomofiktion* (WMANT 126), Neukirchen-Vluyn 2010, 77.

[17] Additional, because of its impersonal character, the passage 3:1-9 seems to stick out from the rest of the text. The close relationship to the literary character of 1:3-11 suggests that both are somehow dependent on the introduction of Qohelet's words in 1:1f and 3:1-9 is further on a part of the "third voice" of Qohelet.

Nevertheless, it seems impossible or unnecessary to find another explicit characterization of Qohelet's voice in Qoh 3:1-12:8 than the royal one as found in 1:1 and 1:12. Therefore, it might be reasonably to assume that the royal fiction and reconnection of the voice resonates until the end of Qohelet's I-bounded words in 12:8.[18] However, from the grammatical point of view, it seems quite evident to set a break behind 2:26, thereupon the words of Qohelet change back into an impersonal reflection of another thematic circle (time).[19]

Besides that, also the internal structure of Qoh 1:12-2:26 is more or less indistinct. A first glance at the commentaries reveals that there are a number of different ways to structure the text and the reflections it contains.[20] First of all, these structural attempts rely on the preliminary decision, which *type of text* has to be organized. Is Qoh 1:12-2:26 just a collection of different independent reflections and proverbs (מָשָׁלִים) randomly selected and compiled for the book's first chapters? Or is there any compositional intention on which the unit – framed by the poems of cosmos and time – releases a well-considered development of an idea?

It was often mentioned, that the royal travesty firstly consists of a small narrative, the narrative of the King Qohelet.[21] This should be assumed here since this passage actually shows a narrative character.[22] It has been shown that Qohelet's words are embedded in a temporal stretch based on the difference between *now* and *then* which affects the outer framework of the book.[23]

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[18] Cf. MELANIE KÖHLMOOS, *Kohelet: Der Prediger Salomo* (ATD 16,5), Göttingen [u.a.] 2015, 46; ERIC S. CHRISTIANSON, *A Time to Tell: Narrative Strategies in Ecclesiastes* (JSOT.S 280), Sheffield 1998, 33 ff. et al. Conversely DIETHELM MICHEL, *Untersuchungen zur Eigenart des Buches Qohelet* (BZAW 183), Berlin 1989, 9; GALLING, "Der Prediger," 87.

[19] There is, additionally, the fact that "the limits to 1:12-2:26 is further supported by the presence of an inclusion. At the beginning and end of the literary unit there is the mention of God [...]" (Y. V. KOH, *Royal Autobiography in the Book of Qoheleth* (BZAW 369), Berlin 2006, 26 f.).

[20] A more or less *common* structural scheme was given by KRÜGER, *Kohelet*, 123–52), who defined the units Qoh 1:12-2:11 (*Die Unverfügbarkeit des Glücks im Leben*), 2:12-21 (*Die Unverfügbarkeit des Glücks angesichts des Todes*) and 2:22-26 (*Ergebnis: Die Entwertung des unverfügbaren Glücks*). Another example was given by MICHAEL V. FOX FOX, *Ecclesiastes*, 7–19), who roughly divided 1:12-18 (*Koheleth introduces himself and his undertaking*) and 2:1-26 (*An experiment with pleasure*).

[21] Also see the high similarity with other ancient genres like the "royal testament" in which the king narrates his own career for the purpose of glorification – cf. LEO G. PERDUE, *Wisdom & Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature*, Nashville 1994, esp. 198-202; TREMPER LONGMAN, *The Book of Ecclesiastes* (NIC.OT), Grand Rapids 1998, 75 f.; MICHAEL V. FOX, *A time to tear down and a time to build up: A rereading of Ecclesiastes*, Eugene 2010, 170 f. For a concise summary of the discussion see JENNIFER L. KOOSED, *(Per)mutations of Qohelet: Reading the body in the book* (Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament studies 429), New York 2006, copyright 2006, 16 f.

[22] Cf. LONGMAN, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, 75 f.

[23] For an clear overview of reading Qohelet as narrative cf. CRAIG G. BARTHOLOMEW, *Ecclesiastes* (BC.OT), Grand Rapids 2009, 61–82 and also again CHRISTIANSON, *A Time to Tell*, 19–51.

In the royal travesty, this narrative presentation mainly depends on the usage of the perfect הָיִיתִי in Qoh 1:12 as well as on fact that all predicates relating Qohelets (reflecting) activities are used as *perfect*.[24] As initiated in 1:12, this narrative style continues until 2:20 which introduces the justifying part of the text.[25] This formal narrative character is responsible for arranging the backward-looking "I"-statements in a time-related dependence from the actual speaking I of Qohelet as it was introduced by itself in 1:12.[26] A good example for this stylistic remark can be found in Qoh 2:3-11 where Qohelet looks back on his great deeds as king:

> 2:3 I tried cheering myself with wine and embracing folly- my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was good for people to do under the heavens during the few days of their lives.
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | 2:4 I undertook great projects [...] | הִגְדַּלְתִּי מַעֲשָׂי |
> | 2:5 I made [...] | עָשִׂיתִי |
> | 2:6 I made [...] | עָשִׂיתִי |
> | 2:7 I bought [...] | קָנִיתִי |
> | 2:8 I amassed [...] | כָּנַסְתִּי |
> | 2:9 I became greater [...] | וְגָדַלְתִּי |
> | 2:10 I denied [...] | וּפָנִיתִי אֲנִי |
>
> 2:11 Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.[27]

Fig. 2: Narrative structure of Qoh 2:3-11

Apparently, this passage presents *a narrative in a narrative*: by connecting different single deeds or actions to a series of past events, these verses form a review of Qohelet's royal story – a review that is *framed*, *introduced* and *concluded* by an also narrating I of Qohelet.

The narrative guise of Qoh 1:12-2:26 overlaps a fabric of different self-related *undertakings* each connected with the narrating I of Qohelet. Thus, it is now possible to use this fabric to structure the disparate statements and sayings of the travesty by arrange them according to their respective undertaking.

[24] Cf. e.g. וְנָתַתִּי (1:13), דִּבַּרְתִּי (1:16), and אָמַרְתִּי (2,1). – Regarding the use of perfect especially in 1:12 cf. THOMAS M. BOLIN, *Ecclesiastes and the riddle of authorship*, New York 2017, 45.

[25] Qoh 2:21-26 certainly does not illustrate a typical narrative structure as found in 1:12-2:20, but especially the כִּי-pattern in 2:21-23.25f entails a strong dependence from the previous narrative statements – at latest 3:1 interrupts this narrative pattern.

[26] This is means the narrated time in which the words of Qohelet were inserted in by the frame-narrator who can be found in 1:1.2; 7:27; 12:8. Cf. those researchers who read Ecclesiastes as narrative: FOX, "Frame-Narrative," 83–106; CHRISTIANSON, *A Time to Tell*.

[27] All English translations are given by the New International Version (NIB)

Following the I-statements, there are different functions regarding the investigative I-narrative of Qohelet and its formal setup:

Verses	Expression		Function
1:13.17	וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־לִבִּי	I applied my mind	Introducing an undertaking
2:1	אָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בְּלִבִּי לְכָה־נָּא	I said to myself: "come now!"	
2:3	תַּרְתִּי בְלִבִּי	I tried	
1:14; 2:13	רָאִיתִי	I saw	Introducing an observation or conclusion
1:16	דִּבַּרְתִּי אֲנִי עִם־לִבִּי	I said to my heart	
2:15	וְאָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בְּלִבִּי	I said to my heart	
2:11f	וּפָנִיתִי אֲנִי	I turned towards	
2:20	וְסַבּוֹתִי אֲנִי	I turned my heart	Introducing a change of perspective/ focus or an emotional response
2:17f	וְשָׂנֵאתִי	So, I hated	

Fig. 3: Functions of I-statements in Qoh 1:12-2:26

According to this representative overview, every expression of the "I" commits to one functional part of the royal investigations of Qohelet and it seems clearly appropriate to take them into account for the purpose of structure and, especially, to locate the super-ordinated verses introducing smaller units.

Nevertheless, it is quite necessary to consider the *functional counterparts* of those introductions and conclusions which can be found in *thematic design* (development of questions, focuses and keywords)[28] as well as in other recurrent elements. Since Qoh 1:12-2:26 complies with the genre of reflection,[29] those elements can be equated with the *conclusions* of the respective reflections. Here, Qohelet's reflections contain a specific fabric of concluding phrases, sometimes combined with a הבל-statement, adding a *judgement of volatility* to the previous observation.[30] In 1:13-2:2, those statements were directly placed after the introducing verse, building a justifying transition between the *undertaking* (1:13.16; 2:1a) and an *elaborating proverb* (1:15.18; 2:1b). This succession changes into an own narrative presentation after 2:3 which is also concluded with a הבל-statement in 2:11.

[28] See section 4 (p. 14-21).

[29] It seems obvious to classify most parts of Qoh 1:13-2:26 as „reflection" depending on the use of לֵב and further criteria – cf. ROLAND E. MURPHY, *Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, and Esther*, Grand Rapids, Mich. 1981, 134.

[30] On the importance of הבל in the book of Qohelet and its difficult understanding see MICHAEL V. FOX, *The meaning of "hebel" for Qohelet*, in: *JBL* 105/3 (1986), 409–27; FOX, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 29–51; CHOON L. SEOW, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AncBq 18 C), New York 1997, 101 f.

According to a change of focus in 2:12 (אֲנִי וּפָנִיתִי), the following unit is also concluded with Qohelet's justification of vanity (V15) – aside of the elaborating explanation of 2:12-15 which one may find in V16. Therefore, Qoh 2:12-16 could probably be defined as separate unit.

Conversely, V17 opens a new point of view introduced by an emotional statement "So, I hated the life" (וְשָׂנֵאתִי אֶת־הַחַיִּים). It seems obvious that V17 is an anaphoric expression which refers on previous reflections by adding an emotional response to the findings of the wise king.[31] V18 emphasizes this turn using the same expression וְשָׂנֵאתִי אֲנִי with another object (כָּל־עֲמָלִי). Both verses are combined by V19 which concludes this unit with a rhetoric question and – once more – with a הבל-statement (גַּם־זֶה הָבֶל) that arranges this text in an order with its context.

This textual structural scheme changes somewhat during the following verses. There are a lot of different suggestions made for the delimitation of Qoh 2:12-2:26 – sometimes uniting 2:18-2:21[32] –, but it seems obvious that 2:17-19 and 2:20ff should be considered separately as 2:20 illustrates a turning point in perspective.[33] It can be argued that the sequence of כִּי-sentences (V21-23) and the preceding change of focus (וְסַבּוֹתִי אֲנִי) are intended to develop a new substantiating unit here. It is doubtful, whether V24-26 serves as an independent threat, since the אֵין־טוֹב in V24 interrupts the continuing substantiations only for the addition of another statement, but not to introduce a completely new observation. However, the הבל in V23 asserts the meanwhile well-known scheme of concluding a reflection using a justifying statement. Therefore, it can be assumed that V24-26 forms a separate section and formal conclusion to Qoh 1:12-2:26 that needs to be specifically addressed.

In view of the above arguments, I would suggest the following expandable structure of Qoh 1:12-2:26 for the purpose of thematic examination:

1:12 **Title and self-introduction of Qohelet the King**

1:13-15 **Reflections on human toil (נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמָיִם)**
Introduction (V13) – observation & conclusion (V14) – proverb (V15)

1:16-18 **Reflections about the value of wisdom (חָכְמָה)**
Introduction (V16) – observation & conclusion (V17) – proverb (V18)

2:1f **Reflections about joy and pleasure (חָכְמָה)**
Introduction (V1a) – conclusion (V1b) – proverb (V2)

[31] This is supported by the use of הַכֹּל (V17c) which refers back to 2:12-16 and thus applies the judgement to the previous observations and findings (also see the use of וְהִנֵּה הַכֹּל הָבֶל at the end of 2:3-11).

[32] Cf. Alexander A. Fischer, *Beobachtungen zur Komposition von Kohelet 1,3-3,15*, in: *ZAW* 103/1 (1991), 72–86 et al. A good overview of the discussion is given by Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 100–03.

[33] According to the use of introductory statements (see fig. 3), וְסַבּוֹתִי אֲנִי indicates here a change of perspective and thereby the beginning of a new subunit.

2:3-11 A new undertaking to find out what is good for humankind
Introduction (V3) – A list of great deeds (VV4-10) – conclusion (V11)

2:12-16 Reflections about the value of wisdom in light of mortality
Introduction (V12) – observations (VV13-14)
– self-application & conclusion (V15) – explanation (V16)

2:17-23 Reactions and substantiating conclusions
Emotional Reactions (V17f) – self-application & conclusion (V19)
- emotional turn (V20) – reasoning & conclusion (V21)
– rhetoric question (V22) – reasoning & conclusion (V23)

2:24-26 Ultimate finding
Tôb-Spruch[34] (V24) – proverb (V25) – reasoning & conclusion (V26)

3. The constitution of Qohelet's I-voice

Even a first glance at the structure and literary character of the royal travesty shows a distinctive presence of the first person in Qohelet's words. A phenomenon that could be described as a typical feature of Ecclesiastes and thus received some attention in past research.[35] While many parts of the book are characterized by this tendency towards the first person, Qoh 1:12-2:26 takes over essential tasks in the foundation and design of this voiceal allocation. These consist mainly in the fact that Qohelet takes the floor for the first time in 1:12. As already been shown, this self-introduction is synonymous with the beginning of direct speech and - therein - with the self-reference of Qohelet's words. Inside the royal travesty, the introduction of the "I" exercises two important functions regarding the *communicative setting* of the book.

This is, first of all, the introduction of a communicative counterpart that becomes the central focal point of readers' attention. This becomes particularly clear at the beginning of the text when Qohelet introduces himself by taking up the voice. This self-introduction has also a structuring function from both a communicative and a formal point of view. From a *formal point of view*, it marks a repeated use in the context of section introductions: wherever a new train of thought begins, or a change of perspective takes place, this is expressed by a verbum of the first person.[36]

[34] Regarding the use of the so called *Tôb-Spruch* in Qoh 2:24 see GRAHAM S. OGDEN, *The "better"-proverb (Tôb-Spruch), rhetorical criticism, and Qohelet*, in: *JBL* 96/4 (1977), 489–505 and GRAHAM S. OGDEN, *Qoheleth's use of the "nothing is better"-form*, in: *JBL* 98/3 (1979), 339–50.

[35] An early but still relevant study can be found at OSWALD LORETZ, *Zur Darbietungsform der "Ich-Erzählung" im Buche Qohelet*, in: *CBQ* 25/ (1963), 46–59. Also cf. MICHEL, *Qohelet*, 78–81.

[36] This is usually done by using verbs that initiate a cognitive process or perceptions – like רָאִיתִי (1:14; 3:10.16; 4:15 et al.) or יָדַעְתִּי (1:17; 3:12.14). However, this is also shown (even more frequently) by those verbs that indicate an "internal focus": אָמַרְתִּי (2:1; 3:17f) or וּפָנִיתִי (2:11f).

This reflection mode, which can easily be found in the royal travesty, plays a paradigmatic role in the further course of the book.[37] Besides this, it can be observed that the introduction of a literary I takes a decisive contribution to the development of a tangible identity behind Qohelet's words. A fact that ensures above all a great closeness to life, but also a tangible perception of the world.[38] On the other hand, the introduction of the first person adds another level of communication to the narrative framework of the book. This enables an immediate contact between Qohelet's message and its readers – an effect that becomes particularly clear when Qohelet's I-voice (later in the book) addresses a counterpart in a way that is common in wisdom literature. [39]

Within this outer framework, Qohelet's voice gets its very own characterization in the course of the royal travesty. The self-declaration as King over Israel in Jerusalem, which one may find in 1:12, seems to be 'well embedded' in the narrative of the King Qohelet as it was introduced by 1:1. If we assume that 1:1-3 partially established a *frame-narrative*, which assigns different sayings to the narrated voice of Qohelet, it seems obvious that the הָיִיתִי (1:12) initiates a new level of narrative closeness here. The fact that Qohelet puts himself on a royal garment has caused many researchers to apply genre questions and understanding the whole book as some kind of autobiography.[40] This seems conceivable, because the following text (at least until 2:20) has clear features of a completed self-related narrative. On the other hand, this impression becomes more and more blurred as the book progresses after 2:21 or 2:26. At no point does the reader seem to find a narrative as linear as in Qoh 1:12-2:20(26). The autobiographical effect of Qohelet's speech and its "binding function"[41], however, seems to be only maintained in reference to the characterization that has been created here.

[37] On a formal level this can be seen above all in the use of sentence introductions, which also create an essential reference to reflection in the further course of the book. These occur mainly in 3:10-15 and 3:16-22 again in a condensed form.

[38] Cf. LORETZ, "Zur Darbietungsform der "Ich-Erzählung" im Buche Qohelet," 56.

[39] Cf. The impersonal use of the second-person in Proverbia (Prv 22:17-29 et al.) as well as the use of the phrase "my son" (בְּנִי) which establishes a teaching dialogue-form in the younger parts of Proverbia (cf. Prv 1:8.10.15; 3:21; 7:1 et al.). Also cf. the broad use of dialogical forms in Job (Job 32-37; 38-42:6 et al.).

[40] The identification of Ecclesiastes as *autobiography* is commonly linked to different suggestions – like the close relationship to ancient royal testaments as it was suggested by Galling (KURT GALLING, *Kohelet-Studien*, in: *ZAW* 50/1 (1932), von Rad (GERHARD V. RAD, *Weisheit in Israel*, 2nd ed., Neukirchen-Vluyn 1982, 292 f), and recently by KOH, *Royal Autobiography in the Book of Qoheleth*.

[41] Cf. Christianson: „Thanks to the ‚I', Qoheleth's thousand and one selves speak with a wonderfully coherent voice" (CHRISTIANSON, *A Time to Tell*, 37.

In view of this characterization, however, it is questionable whether the royal characterization (אֲנִי קֹהֶלֶת הָיִיתִי מֶלֶךְ) refers to a historic person whose words were narrated here by a frame-narrator.[42] Most scholars argue that *Qohelet* is more likely the fictional construct of an author that was put under the guise of a (fictional) king's identity. This seems possible because there is no historical information about a king named Qohelet. Nevertheless, the characterization of Qohelet as it is presented by Qoh 1:1.12 refers in various aspects to the traditional picture of King Salomon.[43] Although Salomon's name appears nowhere in Qoh 1:12-2:26 or in other parts of the book,[44] there are quite a lot of other references to salomonic tradition – especially regarding the presentation of Qohelet's deeds[45] and wisdom[46]. The readers of Qohelet are hereby referred to a greater traditional discourse that is located behind the text's design and its historic formation.[47] However, the close relationship between a well-known real biography and (fictional) self-characterization as is can be found here does in fact blurring the lines between real authorship and (fictional) first-person-narration.[48] Nonetheless, this indistinctness must not be confused with an identity of author and I-voice which seems to be always refracted by the difference between the books narrational frame (1:1-3; 7:27; 12:9 ff.) and the *narrated* words of Qohelet.[49]

However, the ambiguous character of this very specific characterization must also be questioned with regard to its specific intentions. Why did the author(s) choose such a robe to connect the *telling I* of the book frame with a fictitious reality? At this point, there could be several reasons for this, which play a role in terms of textual pragmatism. This concerns, first of all, the tradition of the book, whose place within the canon could have been guaranteed by the conscious assignment to a typical wisdom author.[50]

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[42] Cf. BARTHOLOMEW, *Ecclesiastes*, 122.

[43] Cf. Krüger: *„'König über Israel in Israel in Jerusalem' waren nach dem AT nur David und Salomon. Nach 1,1 müsste ‚Kohelet' demnach Salomo gewesen sein. Schon die Differenz der Namen lässt freilich jeden unbefangenen Leser diese Identifikation als fiktive Travestie durchschauen"* (KRÜGER, *Kohelet*, 133).

[44] As for example in Prov 1:1; 10:1; 25:1.

[45] Especially Qoh 2:3-11 represents an allusion to Salomon's building activity (cf. 2 Chr 3-5).

[46] The great number of reflections about possibilities and limits of wisdom are strongly connected with Salomon's dream in 1 Kg 3:5-15.

[47] The tradition of Salomon represents an own discourse within the late second-temple-period. Different scriptures and OT texts took up this discourse each with an own interpretation of the salomonic guise. To follow Köhlmoos here, the reference text of that tradition can be found in 1 Kg 3, 1-15 – cf. KÖHLMOOS, *Kohelet*, 42 ff.

[48] Regarding the limits and possibilities of *I-narration* see again LORETZ, "Zur Darbietungsform der "Ich-Erzählung" im Buche Qohelet.".

[49] Cf. LORETZ: *"Es geht ferner nicht an, vom Buch her unbedacht auf Qohelet selbst zu schließen, da ein Werk mit seinem Autor nie identisch ist"* (ibid., 54).

[50] In this context, however, the considerations presented below regarding the tradition-critical reference of Qohelet's words should be particularly considered. It can be assumed that this tradition-specific function can rather be found in the epilogue of the book 12:9-14.

Thus, the use of the salomonic fiction possibly ensures the authority and plausibility of the book's reflections.[51] On the other hand, Qohelet's words gain credibility by being bound to a "known" tradition. It can be assumed that the first recipients of the book were not unfamiliar with the Solomonic tradition, whereby they could possibly associate the content of his words with a well-known *wisdom discourse*.[52] Thus, the protagonist behind the book's *telling I* gets a certain relevance.

Within the text, however, the salomonic fiction seems to take on another function. There, the person Qohelet seems to be something like a *narrative figure* whose royal guise in some way supports his reflections. This finds its starting point in the interaction between the ideal-typical characterization of Qohelet and the understanding of his name, which - as has been mentioned more than once - could be understood as a functional term.[53] Lohfink, for example, has recognized that the Qoheletbuch presents itself as a form of the ideal wisdom speech (Diatribe).[54] It does this by operating with a *tension between past and present* and a differentiation between frame-narrator and Qohelet's voice.[55] Within this ideal speech, Qohelet's specific description as *salomon-like* king seems to take on the function of idealization.[56] Qohelet thus assumes the function of a narrative character with a "typically wise" imprint.

In the area of Qoh 1:12-2:26 this ideal-typical impression seems to take over a few functions, of which only a few should be mentioned here. First, on an implicit level, the fictional character conveys the impression that the king Qohelet is – within his project – able to use all the possibilities of a human being in an exceedingly wise and powerful way. Regarding this, Gordis argues that "Koheleth, in his assumed role of Salomon, wishes to assure the reader that he has experienced the ultimate in both wisdom and pleasure and there is no need for anyone else to repeat the experiment"[57].

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[51] Cf. KÖHLMOOS, *Kohelet*, 74.

[52] The environment of such a discourse has recently been highlighted in an article by Markus Saur – cf. MARKUS SAUR, *Sapientia discursiva: Die alttestamentliche Weisheitsliteratur als theologischer Diskurs*, in: *ZAW* 123/ (2011), 236–49.

[53] This mainly addresses the functional semantics of the lexeme קֹהֶלֶת. Also cf. MICHEL, *Qohelet*, 4–8; NORBERT LOHFINK, *Qoheleth: A Continental Commentary*, Augsburg 2003, 9 ff. et al.

[54] Cf. LOHFINK, "Das Koheletbuch," 59 ff. This proposal can also be found in LUDWIG LEVY, *Das Buch Qoheleth: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Sadduzäismus*, Leipzig 1912, 59 f. A discussion about the genre Diatribe in Ecclesiastes can also be found in THOMAS KRÜGER, *Theologische Gegenwartsdeutung im Kohelet-Buch*, München 1990, 54 ff.; SCHWIENHORST-SCHÖNBERGER, "Kohelet," in Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Das Buch Kohelet*, 21 ff. as well as in more detail at FRANZ J. BACKHAUS, *Kohelet und die "Diatribe": hermeneutische und methodologische Überlegungen zu einem noch ausstehenden Stilvergleich*, in: *BZ* 42/2 (1998), 248–56.

[55] Cf. LOHFINK, "Das Koheletbuch," 57.

[56] Nevertheless, Lohfink notes that the "biographical data" of the Solomonfiction are less reliable than those of the epilogue – cf. ibid., 55 f.

[57] ROBERT GORDIS, *Kohelet, the man and his world: a study of Ecclesiastes*, 3rd ed. (TSJTSA XIX), New York 1968, 211. Also see his reference to a similar interpretation in Midrash Koh. Rabba (ibid.).

If this can be assumed, Qohelet's characterization as a "salomon-like" king could serves as a *theoretical de-limitation* of his possibilities. This enables the readers to recognize that he started his project with the greatest possible wisdom and greatness.[58]

Conversely, this conceptual empowerment also undergoes a reinterpretation in the course of the royal travesty. At the latest from 2:20, his royal abilities are massively questioned. The retelling of the transformation of the traditional image of a fictitious king into a figure that massively questions even the possibilities of his own wisdom becomes the hallmark of this text. The consequences of the insight that even with the *seemingly unlimited abilities* of a Solomonic king neither the profit of human activity can be found, nor even the reason for the ever-emerging joy can be laid, substantiates Qohelet's anthropology. The parable narrated within the royal travesty, which leads to this insight, is taken up in later parts of the book again. This is also a form of criticism - of both the optimism of traditional wisdom[59] and the idealized image of Solomon in Qohelet's time.[60] However, the exact form of this criticism should be the subject of a separate study. Nevertheless, the textpragmatic meaning of the ambivalent narrative figure Qohelet can be seen in the interplay between his fictitious role and the train of thought unfolded in it. In the context of Qoh 1:12-2:26, the latter is vividly unfolded as a cognitive movement in the guise of a narrative.

4. The development of thematic progression

Qoh 1:12-2:26 combines different thematical focuses that are sequentially and cautious developed by the I-voice of Qohelet. A closer look reveals that this thematic approach is accompanied by an inner movement that combines individual reflections. This seems to contribute substantially to the fact that the different topics can build up and unfold before the eyes of the reader. A glance at the subjective framework of royal travesty already shows that this inner movement seems to be equivalent to the re-narration of Qohelet's own cognitive movement. Within the narrative of a fictitious king, different questions, undertakings and reflections are evolved. The frame of this narrative takes its course in 1:12 and seems to blur slowly after 2:26.[61]

[58] See 1:16: "'Look, I have increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge'".

[59] This is particularly evident in sections 2:12-17 and 18-23 where Qohelet recognizes the limitations of wisdom. - cf. SCHWIENHORST-SCHÖNBERGER, *Kohelet*, 197.

[60] Cf. KÖHLMOOS, *Kohelet*, 42 f.

[61] Nevertheless, traces of this thought can also be found later in the book. This becomes visible, for example, where Kohelet looks back on his own undertakings as in Qoh 8:16 or takes up basic themes addressed there again with similar reasoning.

At the heart of the thought process, demonstrated here, are the questions about the *gain of human toil* (1:13-15), the *value of wisdom* (1:16-18) and the *meaning of joy* (2:1f). These three questions form the basic framework of Qohelet's search for the meaning of human labor under the sun. As mentioned above, Qoh 1:12-2:26 in particular takes on an important role by linking them to a tangible *Lebenswelt*. This seems to be realized by an unchangingly inner connection to the perspective of a single human being[62] and – at the same time - a visible *questing movement* of that being, which is Qohelet. What questions does he pursue and how are they connected? How does the presentation of his reflections provide a framework in which orientating functions become visible to the reader? This should be examined in the following by briefly re-drawing his thematic presentation in Qoh 1:12-2:26.

First of all, the starting point of Qohelet's quest certainly becomes visible in 1:13a where Qohelet is looking back on his past project as king over Israel:

וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־לִבִּי לִדְרוֹשׁ וְלָתוּר בַּחָכְמָה עַל כָּל־אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמָיִם

I applied my mind to study and to explore by wisdom
all that is done under the heavens

Here, Qohelet presents his own project and clearly shows what his object of investigation is (הַשָּׁמָיִם כָּל־אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת) and, additionally, how he wants to achieve it (לִדְרוֹשׁ וְלָתוּר בַּחָכְמָה). This introduces the reader to the basic conditions of the following investigations. At the same time, Kohelet characterizes his fictitious and past self as king by addressing classical "wisdom attributes" in terms of both *wisdom* and *the search for the basic conditions of human doing*. The aim of his search also alludes to questions that already played a role in the course of the first chapter (cf. 1:3) and will continue to play a role in the further course of the book (cf. 2:22; 3:9; 6:12 et al.).

At this point this question is given a broader space, which is outlined in Qohelet's words in retrospect. The importance of this leading questions is also made clear by the fact that Kohelet dedicates his entire heart to this search - a fact that is constantly reminded of in the further course of the royal travesty.[63]

[62] The orientation towards this central character depends on several basic conditions. This includes the design of a narrated world of perception, his (self-)characterization, and the exploration of what he presents to readers as part of his message. The design of "Qohelet's world", which readers can participate in, is shaped not only by the cosmic reflection in Qoh 1:4-11, but also by the repeatedly inserted designations of reflection space. These can be found for example in 1:13 (תַּחַת הַשָּׁמָיִם), 1:14 (תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ) or in those passages, where Qohelet faces god as perceptional counterpart (cf. 1:13 or 2:24-26).

[63] See 1:16f; 2:1.3.20.22.

The placement of his undertaking in the heart addresses both *emotional* and *rational aspects* of the OT's concept of the heart. [64] The investigation of the human possibilities of action itself describes a remaining basic topic of Qohelet's anthropology, which was already developed in the prologue (1:3-11). In 1:8, for example, he set out the limits of human possibilities by denying them the ability to see through the cosmic processes and their own existence to the very last detail. Thus, its own existence is more than wearisome in light of world's immutability.[65] For this reason, one repeatedly encounters negative allusions in the terminological context of human activities (הַשָּׁמֶשׁ) in the course of Qohelet's speech. These negative connotations can be found, for example, in the use of the phrases *toil/labor* (עָמָל)[66], *a burden given by god* (עִנְיָן)[67] or *miserable business* (עִנְיַן רָע)[68]. Such a negative view can already be found in the second part of verse 13: there Qohelet describes - in the form of a preliminary judgment - a finding that seems relevant to him in view of human activity under the sun.[69]

The project formulated in 1:13 initiates a further investigation within the scope of 1:14f. Although already mentioned in the context of 1:3-11, this project is connected here for the first time with the first-person voice of Qohelet (וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־לִבִּי). This effects that the previously developed questions are now also clearly connected to the voice of Qohelet for the reader. Moreover, it also turns the thematical issue itself from an impersonal treatise into a reflection with subjective meaning.

[64] The "heart" (לֵב) is used here (1:13.16f; 2:1.3.10.15.20.22.23) to connect different mental activities but especially the rational and emotional mind – cf. Hans W. Wolff and Bernd Janowski, eds., *Anthropologie Des Alten Testaments*, 1st ed. (Gütersloh 2010), 76–96. In Qoh 1:12-2:26 and elsewhere in the book of Qohelet, the heart is primarily used to express mental adjustment and reorientation – cf. Qoh 1:17; 2:1.3.10.15.20; 3.17.18 et al. Also see REINERT, *Die Salomofiktion*, 80.83.

[65] See 1:8 "All things are wearisome (כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים יְגֵעִים), more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing". This idea is getting further developed by Qoh 3:10-15 where Qohelet describes the relationship between divine determination and human activity.

[66] See 1:3; 2.10f.18-22.24; 3:9.13 et al. (37x in Qoh). This lexeme does not have necessarily a negative meaning but emphasizes the duration and effort of human activity.

[67] See 1:13; 2:23.26; 3:10

[68] See 4:8; 5:13 (contextual linked).

[69] The curious addition that "God has laid a heavy burden on mankind" contrasts human and divine activity in a typical way for Qohelet. It seems, however, difficult to decide whether this small addition describes the *starting point* or the *conclusion* of Qohelet's quest. Concerning the narrational structure of Qoh 1:12-2:26, it is conceivable that this judgement serves as an element of *proleptic tension* that anticipates Qohelet's later conclusions about the conditions of human activity (cf. 2:11.17-23.24-26; 5:14) in sight of the reader. This assumption seems to be sustained by the following verses where Qohelet tells about his first findings about what is done (מַעֲשֶׂה) under the sun: it is a "chasing after wind" and elusive (מַעֲשֶׂה) – a conclusion that is derived from his own observations.

However, the investigation of human activities will be further deepened in the further course of 1:12-2:26. Although 1:13-15 already seems to provide ultimate findings,[70] the question is taken up again in 2:3-11. In between, two further thematic complexes receive reflectional space. After finding that human activity is transient under the sun, Qohelet first tells of another undertaking: the discovery of wisdom (1:16-18). In doing so, he takes up a term that he had already introduced in the context of his previous project and combines it with an own reflection. This reflection is clearly self-reflective, since he does not problematize wisdom impersonally, but in the context of his own past existence as a king. In view of his own greatness, he asked himself the question of the nature of wisdom - strictly speaking: he questions the basic conditions of his own greatness. But even this plan ultimately leads him to realize that this, too, is volatile.[71] Thereafter, this finding is illustrated again - as in 1:15 - by a proverb. Neither the search for the meaning of human effort nor for the essence of wisdom (and its value) seems to be successful at this point. However, the Qohelet's cognitive movement does not come to a standstill there – he takes another try in 2:1:

אמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בְּלִבִּי לְכָה־נָּא אֲנַסְּכָה בְשִׂמְחָה וּרְאֵה בְטוֹב וְהִנֵּה גַם־הוּא הָבֶל׃

I said to myself, 'Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.'
But that also proved to be meaningless.

Recognizing that both the search for the meaning of human effort and the essence of wisdom is pointless, Qohelet dares to look at joy as a possible solution. Joy takes on the character of an alternative, which is not seen as an area of investigation (understanding the nature of joy), but as an alternative for acting and behavior. This is also made clear by the fact that this undertaking is addressed with an expression of self-motivation (cf. cohortative אֲנַסְּכָה in 2:1) and a reference to specific behavior. But even this trial remains without success - both the expression of joy (laughter) and the joy itself remain meaningless for Kohelet.

This short attempt, which is also framed with a proverb (2:2), is followed by a longer section, which reveals a "experimental character". In 2:3-11 this following investigation takes the form of a small narrative in which Ecclesiastes completely wraps himself in the garment of a king. The initiation of this project (2:3) is certainly of an experimental nature: enjoying wine and orienting the heart towards wisdom and folly, he wants to find the good in all man's efforts. At this point the central theme of 1:13 appears again - but in conjunction with wisdom and an embodiment of pleasure.

[70] The character of a final finding seems to be conveyed by the absolute hewel statement in 1:14 and the connection with a proverb in 1:15 that entails the invariability of the existing.

[71] See 1:17: יִדַּעְתִּי שֶׁגַּם־זֶה הוּא רַעְיוֹן רוּחַ׃.

To follow up his question, he stresses the behavior of a great king to demonstrate greatest imaginable deeds (מַעֲשַׂי הִגְדַּלְתִּי) in context of a single human life. Although this passage is characterized by retrospect and thus narrative elements (which possibly reminds us of Salomon's deeds in 1 Kg 5-11), it appears to be possible that it has its own pragmatic purpose: Qohelet or rather the author behind his words wants to build up some kind of a "sandbox-environment" in which Qohelet is able to follow up his quest under greatest possible conditions.[72]

Obviously Qohelet finds no answer to his original question despite all efforts and great deeds - except the observation that he found joy in his efforts (2:10). This is certainly a positive finding but not equal to "what was good for people to do" (2:3).[73] For this reason, his joy also experiences a clear devaluation in the following, as Kohelet summarizes in 2:11 that "all that my hands had done" is *hewel* and a chasing after wind. Especially the end of this experiment is characterized by a curious opposition between the *joy* he found in his greats deeds (V10) and the *gain of his toil* that is still missing (V11). This juxtaposition is accompanied by a terminological interplay between חֵלֶק ("portion") and יִתְרוֹן ("gain"): although his actions have led him to joy as a part of his efforts, it still seems impossible to find something like profit in it.[74] In his narrated quest, Qohelet therefore concludes that there is no *profit* from all what is done under the sun but only a small portion, which is joy.[75] At the same time, this introduces a complex of issues that will become increasingly important later on.[76] In face of his narrated experiment, the reader becomes aware that this undertaking cannot be successful and that toils are limited to itself, even though they are the greatest deeds of a king. Thus, Qohelet and his readers are possibly reaching a “dead end” or at least a turning point of argumentation here.[77]

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[72] See Gordis' suggestion mentioned above (cf. ann. 57).

[73] Cf. KRÜGER, *Kohelet*., 140.

[74] For the meaning of חֵלֶק and יִתְרוֹן in context of the book of Qohelet cf. A. SCHOORS, *The preacher sought to find pleasing words: A study of the language of Qoheleth* (OLA 143), Leuven 1992, 198 ff. 423 ff.

[75] In addition, it remains the question what is meant by *gain* or *profit* here. According to 2:17-23, it seems likely that יִתְרוֹן describes something that remains at the end of one's life - Cf. Schoors "Thus the question is not limited to profit in this world, it is about the yield or profit of a whole life of toil in this world" (ibid., 424). There quite a few references for this interpretation – for example the fact that the *limits of earthly life* (e.g. מִסְפַּר יְמֵי חַיֵּיהֶם (2:3), הַיָּמִים הַבָּאִים (2:16), and וְשָׂנֵאתִי אֶת־הַחַיִּים (2:17)) were sporadically placed within the further discourse about the value of humankind's toil.

[76] See especially those passages where חֵלֶק is closely linked with joy as a tangible act of human activity that is given by god (Qoh 3:22; 5:17f; 9:9).

[77] This assumption coincides with structural observations: as frequently proposed, this verse could also have been the end of the royal travesty. This was mainly suggested by FRIEDRICH ELLERMEIER, *Qohelet I: 1. Untersuchungen zum Buche Qohelet*, Herzberg am Harz 1967, 82 f.; GALLING, “Der Prediger,” 87; MICHEL, *Qohelet*, 132. However, there are a lot of voices in favour of a continuation of the royal travesty after 2:11. This seems likely because the perspective of king continues in 2:12 (אַחֲרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ). For an detailed discussion cf. FISCHER, “Beobachtungen zur Komposition von Kohelet 1,3-3,15.”

Nevertheless, at this point, the reader once again comes across a change in perspective. Qoh 2:12 introduces this change (cf. וּפָנִיתִי) with a renewed look on the advantages of wisdom, which gives the impression of a final attempt that revives the earlier reflections of 1:16-2:1. In terms of content, this passage is once again characterized by the search for the nature of wisdom and thus picks up the question of 1:16-18. At the same time, this new section seems to raise the question whether there is any profit for a wise man at all. According to traditional wisdom, [78] Qohelet recognizes that there are for certain benefits for the wise compared the fool (2:13f). Nevertheless, this profit is useless considering the fate (מִקְרֶה) that meets both the fool and the wise.[79] Hence, Qohelet came to a similar conclusion as in 1:16-18: the investigation of the qualities of wisdom is just leading to the recognition of wisdom's transience. With regard to his own future, his wisdom has no relevance for the *remembrance* (cf. זִכְרוֹן in 1:11) of his deeds. It is noticeable that Qohelet now seems to fill the term *hewel* with personal relevance. The reader will find the personal consequences of this "relevance" at this juncture in the rhetorical question of Qohelet: "What then do I gain by being wise?" (2:15). This little rhetoric question certainly marks a culmination point of his narrated quest that results in a sequence of emotional reactions (V17-20). The only thing that remains in light of his powerlessness is hatred (שָׂנֵאתִי) towards his toils and life.

This *emotional turn* also changes the character of his narration which leaves the level of reflection and switches to a description of the emotional consequences of those reflections. The self-reflexive manner of this description goes along with a change of focus. This also affects the readers and possibly takes them into a new closeness to Qohelets desperation. In any case, this emotional trip creates a certain credibility for Qohelet's tiring search for answers and finally his despair.

After 2:20, the character of Qohelet's words slightly changes from a retrospective narration to a more present focus. This is possibly supported by Qohelet's own change of focus (וְסַבּוֹתִי אֲנִי).[80] Especially in 2:21, Qohelet examines his previous findings in the light of individual and current cases. This way of adding a current example – as it happens here for the first time – has an important place in reflections of Qohelet.[81]

[78] See Prov 10:23.31; 14:8; 16:16; 17:24 et al. Also cf. SCHWIENHORST-SCHÖNBERGER, *Kohelet*, 225.

[79] According to Crenshaw, the word מִקְרֶה has an "ominous" meaning within the book of Qohelet and "refers to events that occur without warning and especially to the event that closes the curtain on a person's life." – cf. JAMES L. CRENSHAW, *Ecclesiastes: A Commentary*, 1st ed. (OTL), Philadelphia 1987, 85.

[80] According to Schoors, it seems possible that וְסַבּוֹתִי here does not really introduce a new section, since the desperation of his heart "is rather the result of what precedes than the introduction of what follows" (SCHOORS, *Ecclesiastes*, 196 It is more likely that this phrase introduces a new focus of inwardness.

[81] The adverb יֵשׁ often introduces real events with specific contextual relevance, which is sometimes in connection with evaluative conclusions – see 4:8; 5:12; 6:1; 7:15; 8:14 et al.

Similarly, Qoh 2:22 poses the question of 1:3 anew – applying it to a generally context: *is there anything that remains in humankinds labour in light of their sorrowful days?*[82] This rhetoric question, which formally stands in a row with V21 and V23,[83] emphasizes again the key issue of Qohelet's reflections. This is followed by the conclusion that there is only anger and sorrow during all days of human's lifetime which is also *hewel*.

It is common ground that 2:24-26 forms an important but also confusing conclusion to Qohelet's previous reflections in 1:12-2:23.[84] At the beginning of this passage, the אֵין־טוֹב is certainly forming a field of absolute *validity* that affects the following statements.[85] Additionally, it is uncertain how the relative particle שֶׁ in V24b should be understand. According to the LLX, it seems possible to understand an *ontological meaning* ("Nothing is good in a person: to eat…") here,[86] whereas other translations and interpretation also allow a *comparative meaning* ("nothing is better than…").[87] However, it can be cautious assumed here that this has a comparative meaning which emphasizes the preference of the following (also cf. 3:12). Therefore, V24 clearly introduces an important finding that possibly concludes the thematic quest of Qohelet's royal travesty and gives an answer to V22. This is also supported by the occurrence of טוֹב which reminds the reader to the aim of Qohelet's quest in 2:3 (אֵי־זֶה טוֹב לִבְנֵי הָאָדָם) that now may be answered: nothing is better for a person "than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his toil". At this point, the *recommendation of pleasure* introduces another key topic within the book of Qohelet.[88]

Here, the pleasure/joy appears for the second time within the royal travesty. Qohelet did already found joy in his toil at the end of his experiment: in 2:10, the qualified the joy as his *portion* of all his toil. Conversely, it can now be observed that in 2:24 joy does not primarily mean an outcome of his own effort, but rather a gift of god's hand (מִיַּד הָאֱלֹהִים הִיא) that seems to be almost independent from any human endeavor.[89] On the other hand, this seems to be connectable in light of the other joy passages: to eat and drink and to see the good in his toils could be both a gift by god and an attitude of human living.[90]

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[82] Also see 3:9 and 1:13 where Qohelet strives a quest with general significance.

[83] The small sequence of כִּי-sentences seems to be an arguing continuation of V20..

[84] Cf. SCHWIENHORST-SCHÖNBERGER, *Kohelet*, 238 f.

[85] Cf. above, ann. 34. Here, the "inverted" use of the *Tov-Spruch* turns the connected statement into an absolute contrast to aforementioned findings. Therefore, it does not need a clear comparative couple like in Qoh 4:6.9.13 and, for instance, in Prov 8:19; 12:9; 15:16 or Ps 118:8f.

[86] Cf. οὐκ ἔστιν ἀγαθὸν ἐν ἀνθρώπῳ ὃ φάγεται (Qoh 2:24^{LXT}) which follows the MT.

[87] Cf. SCHOORS, *Ecclesiastes*, 206 f.

[88] Also see 3:12.22; 5:17; 8:15; 9:7; 11:9.

[89] Cf. SCHWIENHORST-SCHÖNBERGER, *Kohelet*, 239.

[90] See 3:12 and 22 where human pleasures are strongly connected with gods gifts *and* the advisable outcome of their own toil. Additionally, both aspects seem to be connected by the word חֶלְקָ that could be understand as a *portion* given by god (cf. 3:4 and 22).

However, the relationship between human activity and passivity, which meets here in the terms of joy and the search for profit under the sun, seems to form a lasting problem in the understanding of Qohelet's words.

In the context of 2:24-26, Qohelet presents his conclusions from a theological perspective. The range of solutions shown here seems to lie outside the human sphere of action. In this way, Qohelet's efforts in the search for good in human action (2:3-11 and partially 1:13-2:2) also obtain an indirect interpretation. This marks a further turning point of his narrated quest: in contrast to his own actions to find the good in human activity, here he has no other choice than to observe (וְהֶרְאָה) and to describe circumstances not depending on his own actions. His quest led him to the understanding that the good in human doing is first, limited by the boundaries of their life, and second, a thing that they could possible captured but not enabled by their selves. The ambiguous understanding of V26 supplements this impression by stating that those circumstances were given by divine justice and outside the scope of human codetermination. The meaning of the opposition טוֹב לְפָנָיו נָתַן and לַחוֹטֶא נָתַן has often been disputed but it can be assumed here that it does not entail a moral sense.[91] Moreover, this finding ultimately separates between human achievements and their gain – which can be knowledge, wisdom or pleasure. Additionally, this conclusion reminds the reader to Qohelet's previous observations according to the obscure and impenetrable fact that the gain of human work is exposed to fate and injustice.[92] In the end, the success of his quest is in god's hands and exposed to uncertainty, which is also hewel and a chasing after wind.

With the conclusion of V24-26, the inner thematic movement of the royal travesty comes to a formal end. In 3:1 a completely different unity follows. In addition to the thematic continuations already described, the reflective units from Qoh 1:12-2:26 are also taken up again later in retrospective view. The best example of this is 8:16 f., where Qohelet looks back on his search introduced here and combines it with an own conclusion. This shows that not only individual questions but also the narrative complex of this fundamental text remain important in the further course of the book.

[91] According to Braun, Qohelet uses the phrase טוֹב לְפָנָיו for the first time in OT wisdom literature. Considering possible Hellenistic contexts, it seems likeable that god's judgement can be understood here as an act without any reference to previous ethical behaviour – cf. RAINER BRAUN, *Kohelet und die frühhellenistische Popularphilosophie* (BZAW 130), Berlin 1973, 52 f. Also see the use of טוֹב לְפָנָיו in 7,26.

[92] See 2:12-16.18f.21.

5. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to obtain access to orienting features of the royal travesty by looking into its form, structure and content. The fact that this is an initial and by no means completed project is shown, for example, by the still superficial access to the depth and ambiguity of his Qohelet's. Moreover, the problem-relatedness of his reflections could only be investigated very roughly in the context of this paper. At the end of this elementary look, however, some findings can be gathered for further work on the communication structure of the book of Qohelet.

This is first of all the fact that Qoh 1:12-2:26 is a passage that has the character of a largely structured unit within the overall framework of the book. In its present form, this unity seems to be assured by a discernable self-narrative character, which - if the book Qohelet is to be understood as a narrative - can be perceived as an elementary component of the book's internal narrative structure. The clear presence of Qohelet's first-person voice also contributes to this formal density. Especially the I-voice, which is introduced here, becomes a formal and communicative point of orientation *in*, *behind*, and *besides* the book's sometimes unallocated reflections. Here, the telling I of Qohelet takes on the function of a *leading perspective* that draws the reader's attention to the various aspects and steps of his reflections. Besides this, especially the identification of "self" behind this voice is of great significance. By placing the garment of a fictional king over the "telling I" in 1:12 (and also afterwards), a visible but elusive protagonist emerges behind the words of Qohelet. The fictitious identification of Qohelet with a Solomonic king leads to a role play that seems to resonate in the background of the book's further reflections. In many respects, this "use" of a royal disguise seems to stimulate the readers to an interpretive co-operation.

Regarding the thematic orientation, it can be observed that Qoh 1:12-2:26 takes up previous questions and unfolds them in a larger setting. Within this setting, Qohelet reflects both the capability of wisdom and the possibilities of human activity. This leads to a discourse on the efficiency of one's own acting *under the sun*. Doing this, the special achievement of royal travesty seems to be found in the fact that these great questions are not developed within a wisdom that is impersonal and universally valid, but rather within the frame of a tangible and individual reflection. The first-person voice of Qohelet anchors the search for *the "good" in human activity under the sun* in a specific and – at the same time - ideal-typical experience of the world, which reaches its limits in course of this self-reflexive quest.

However, a further investigation of this orientation requires to include the surrounding texts at the beginning of the book. In this context, it seems in particular promising to investigate the specific functions of the poems framing the royal travesty and to examine their establishing functions focusing a 'perceptual space' of Qohelet's

words. Furthermore, a look at the person Qohelet and the ideas associated with him throughout the whole book (but especially in the framing texts) could also provide important insights for a new pragmatically oriented approach to the book's communicative structure.

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