COVENANT
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Electronic Thesis & Dissertation Collection

J. Oliver Buswell Jr. Library
12330 Conway Road
Saint Louis, MO 63141

www.covenantseminary.edu/library

Reading Poetry as Learning:

The Pedagogical Impact of the Readerly Interpretive Process in Proverbs 31:1-9

By
Victoria K. Tatko

A Project Submitted to
the Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Exegetical Theology.

Saint Louis, Missouri

2022

Reading Poetry as Learning:
The Pedagogical Impact of the Readerly Interpretive Process in Proverbs 31:1-9

By
Victoria K. Tatko

A Project Submitted to
the Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Exegetical Theology.

Graduation Date January 14, 2022

Dr. C. John Collins
Faculty Advisor _____

Dr. Arthur J. Keefer
Second Reader _____

Dr. David C. Chapman
Director of MAET Program _____

Mr. Steve Jamieson
Library Director _____

Abstract

This study investigated the poetic pedagogy of Proverbs 31:1-9 by considering the readerly interpretive process of an imagined cooperative early canonical audience. While some assess 31:1-9 as if readers' interpretive process does not contribute meaningfully to its teaching, this study tested the hypothesis that the readerly process—navigating hermeneutic difficulties and participating in its poetry—contributes significantly to the text's pedagogy.

Anne Stewart and Suzanna Millar were the study's scholarly models. Per Stewart, understanding the pedagogy of a Proverbs' text requires participation in its poetry. Per Millar, Proverbs' poetic openness engages readers as dynamic participants and has formative pedagogical impact. Millar's methodology, which leverages high-level cognitive linguistics' blend theory to investigate readers' mental construction of meaning during the interpretive process, was heuristically supplemented by Relevance Theory to study the readerly process in Proverbs 31:1-9.

A close reading of 31:1-9 attentive to the readerly process was simulated through two sequential readings—word-by-word, phrase-by-phrase, line-by-line—using standard exegetical and literary methods. Three dynamics, as modeled by Millar, were used to trace readerly engagement:

- openness/closure (the imaginative opening of meaning possibilities through textual ambiguity or suggestiveness vs. the closing of those meanings based on textual inputs, discerned context, and imaginative "blending" of readers' encyclopedic knowledge);
- resonance/dissonance (what coheres with literary context vs. what jars);

- trust/scrutiny (readers' trust of the textual personae and/or their own interpretive ability vs. readers' attentiveness to textual inputs).

These factors were assessed, per the text's most recently directed hermeneutic focus, at four points per verse on the first reading and once per verse on the second. Qualitative measurements were graphed and discussed.

The readerly process of 31:1-9 was found to be undulating and complex, and its pedagogy to be richly multi-faceted. The inferred pedagogic desired change for canonical readers certainly *includes* what mainstream scholarship discerns: leaders must reject indulgent living and advocate for the poor. Yet considering the interpretive process uncovered *more*: a poetic pedagogy designed to engage the whole person and shape toward right living within God's covenant even in post-exilic circumstances. It was suggested that the readerly effort demanded by the text's interpretive challenges propels readers deep into the text, Proverbs, and the canon; the search for interpretive context leads to key framing texts, e.g., Proverbs 9, Psalm 2, and 1 Samuel 1-4. Persistent ambiguity and seeming false leads (vv. 2, 9) suggest second-order communication (*showing* versus *telling*) is at work. Such *showing* seems designed to engage the senses and imagination of God's suffering people, calling them to return to Him, trust in His coming deliverance, develop discernment, and reflect His character in consecrated living as they wait. Participating in the poetry of 31:1-9 uncovers a call of hope and warning unto covenant remembrance. Such *showing* informs the difficult משא (31:1) as perhaps inviting a readerly hermeneutic in line with canonical prophetic 'oracle'.

It was determined that the tested hypothesis had been confirmed: the interpretive process for the original canonical audience does contribute meaningfully to the poetic pedagogy of Proverbs 31:1-9. Recommendations for further study were made.

For Brett, my favorite,

and for fellow students of the Scriptures, who recognize the call, cost, and joy to become continually better readers, learners, and stewards of God's Word

Contents

Illustrations

Tables

Figures

Acknowledgements

I offer my gratitude to those whose support has made this project possible. I am thankful for the wise and kind guidance of Dr. Jack Collins, my thesis advisor, from whom I have learned much, and for the constructive feedback of Dr. Arthur Keefer, my second reader. I also am grateful for Dr. Aaron Goldstein, who has been in my corner from start to finish and provided accountability, help, and encouragement when the way forward seemed dim. I thank my friend and literary scholar Bethany Selle for timely, helpful feedback on earlier drafts. This project has also stood on the shoulders of the invaluable training in literary, poetic, and biblical analysis I received from former thesis advisor Dr. Anne Ricketson Zahlan (Eastern Illinois University) and former mentors Jim McGowan (Parkland College) and Linda Yates, respectively. I am also indebted to scholars Wilma Mancuello González for stellar work on Proverbs 31:1-9 and Suzanna R. Millar for her clear argumentation and innovative reading of Proverbs 10:1-22:16. My parents, Richard and Marjorie Klein, instilled in me a love for learning, reading, asking questions, and thinking critically. They trained me in the way I should go, and I thank them for this valuable gift.

I am also profoundly grateful to those who partnered with me at key points in this multi-year project: Theresa “Pinky” Lindell and Kaitlyn Harrier for countless “Proverbs chats,” and Anna Tatko and Noah Tatko, who cheerfully helped me with visual diagramming and data analysis, respectively. Many others have prayed for, challenged, and encouraged me in various ways, and I hope they each know how appreciative I am for them: Dr. Brian Aucker, Christi Brandenstein, Dr. Tasha Chapman, Julie Geisz, Tommy Hannah, Matt James, Lee Anne Litzsinger, Dr. Bob Yarbrough, my dear Bible

Study Fellowship family, the stalwart Theological Fellowship, Covenant's outstanding library staff, and many more.

My family has cheered me on in practical ways, and I thank them. My mom Marjorie Klein and son and daughter-in-law Noah and Jess Tatko have visited me in my travail, brought meals, and found countless other creative and practical ways to help. My most steadfast champions—husband Brett Tatko, son Jacob, and daughter Anna—have graciously borne my hundreds of books in the living room and thousands of hours spent typing. I give them my deepest thanks. In short, I have been blessed with so much kindness and help. What a gift! With such support, surely, this project's many shortcomings are my own.

After such an investment in an obscure biblical text, my heart is humbled and glad for such a kind God. As King, He certainly has the right to call His people to study and keep His Word. But only a supremely compassionate and wise King would make reading His Word so beautifully complex, so delightfully interesting, and so deeply worthwhile. To be governed, disciplined, and valued by Him, I am eternally grateful.

Abbreviations

ANE	Ancient Near East(ern)
BDB	Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon.* Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2014.
BH	biblical Hebrew
BHS	Elliger, K., and W. Rudolph, eds. *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia.* Peabody, MA: Henrickson Publishers, 2016.
CDCH	Clines, David J. A., ed. *The Concise Dictionary of Classical Hebrew.* Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009.
ESV	English Standard Version
fem	feminine
GKC	Kautzsch, E., and A. E. Cowley, eds. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar.* 2nd ed. 1910. Reprint, Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1988.
HALOT	Koehler, Ludwig, and Walter Baumgartner, eds. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament: Study Edition.* 2 vols. Translated by M. E. J. Richardson. Boston: Brill, 2001.
HB	Hebrew Bible (including Aramaic portions)
hiph	*hiphil*
impf	imperfect
impv	imperative
ISV	International Standard Version
inf con	infinitive construct
JM	Joüon, P., and T. Muraoka. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew.* 2nd ed. Subsidia Biblica 27. Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2011.
JPS	*JPS Hebrew-English: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation.* 2nd ed. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999.
juss	jussive

LXX	Rahlfs, Alfred, ed. *Septuaginta: Id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes.* 2 vols. Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1962.
KJV	King James Version
masc	masculine
MT	Masoretic Text, according to BHS
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NIV	New International Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
pl	plural
ptc	participle
RT	Relevance Theory
sg	singular
TgJ	Targum Jonathan to the Prophets, per Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon, based on *Mikraot Gedolt HaKeter* (Bar Ilan University Press, 1992-).
TDOT	Botterweck, G. J., and Helmer Ringgren, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.* Translated by T. Willis et al. 15 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974-2015.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Near the end of the canonical book of Proverbs lies Proverbs 31:1-9, a compact, easily overlooked poem of nine Hebrew lines, the words of an otherwise unknown King Lemuel.[1] This short poetic unit offers readers both interpretive simplicity and complexity. The unit's overt didacticism is widely acknowledged as "one mother's teaching for her royal son."[2] As such, its educational thrust for a wider readership seems simply comprehended: it instructs leaders on the dangers of indulgent living while encouraging advocacy for the marginalized.[3] Even its genre classification as ANE Instruction (or subgenre Royal Instruction) seems straightforward to many, and within Proverbs, 31:1-9 is often compared with the paternal Instructional discourse of Proverbs 1:8-9:18.[4]

On the other hand, Proverbs 31:1-9 presents complexity. In it, readers encounter numerous hermeneutic difficulties: unusual syntax and vocalization, obscure vocabulary,

---

[1] On underrepresentation of Proverbs 31:1-9 in scholarship, see Wilma Mancuello González, *La lección de una madre hebrea: Exégesis de Pr 31,1-9,* Suplementos a la Revista Bíblica 4 (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Asociación Bíblica Argentina, 2018), 15; Mercedes L. García Bachmann, "A Foolish King, Women, and Wine: A Dangerous Cocktail from Lemuel's Mother," in *The Bible and Feminism: Remapping the Field,* ed. Yvonne Sherwood and Anna Fisk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 310n3.

[2] James L. Crenshaw, "A Mother's Instruction to Her Son (Proverbs 31:1-9)," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 15, no. 4 (Winter 1988): 22. See also, e.g., Mancuello González, 15; Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "The Book of Proverbs: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *Introduction to Wisdom Literature: Proverbs; Ecclesiastes; Song of Songs; Book of Wisdom; Sirach,* vol. 5, *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), 257.

[3] Cf. David Hubbard, *Proverbs,* Mastering the Old Testament 15A (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989), 473-76; Arthur Jan Keefer, *Proverbs 1-9 as an Introduction to the Book of Proverbs,* Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 701 (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 116-17; Van Leeuwen, 258.

[4] Cf. Crenshaw, "A Mother's Instruction," 1-22; William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach,* Old Testament Library (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1970), 407-12; Catherine Petrany, "Fathers, Mothers, Sons, and Silence: Rhetorical Reconfiguration in Proverbs," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 50, no. 3 (2020): 154-60; Van Leeuwen, 257-59.

unusual word pairings and patterning, dialectical elements, and questions of identity and context. Those classifying its genre as ANE Instruction often simultaneously note the unit's uniqueness as the only extant *maternal* ANE Instruction.[5] Though "ludicrously brief" to receive its own subtitle in Proverbs, the unit betrays masterful construction: complex parallelism, ambiguity, repetitions, imagery, sound play, and dialectical style- or code-switching.[6] Such poeticism hints, as Mercedes L. García Bachmann observes, that "this is not a text that can be made to yield one rounded, easy to grasp message".[7] Others argue the tiny poem has a specific function within Proverbs' literary whole.[8] Perhaps the teaching of Proverbs 31:1-9 is not so straightforward after all.

Recent developments in Proverbs' scholarship may open new understandings for 31:1-9. Knut Heim, Peter T. H. Hatton, and others have offered increasing evidence of Proverbs' literary complexity and called for new ways of reading.[9] Research by Suzanna

---

[5] Cf. McKane, 407; Van Leeuwen, 257; R. N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs,* The Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 180.

[6] Kenneth A. Kitchen, "Proverbs and Wisdom Books of the Ancient Near East: The Factual History of a Literary Form," *Tyndale Bulletin* 28, no. 1 (1977): 101. On its stylism, see Mancuello González, 69-82; Raymond Apple, "The Two Wise Women of Proverbs 31," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (2011), 176.

[7] García Bachmann, "A Foolish King, Women, and Wine," 316-17.

[8] Cf. Claudia V. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Sheffield, UK: Almond/Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Press, 1985), 184-91. Camp suggests Prov 31:1-9 is a fitting parallel to what was anticipated in 1:8—a mother's teaching. More recently, Wilma Mancuello González has argued 31:1-9 functions as a conclusion for Proverbs 10-29. Mancuello González, 199-255. Less overtly but with such implications, cf. William P. Brown, "The Pedagogy of Proverbs 10:1-31:9," in *Character and Scripture: Moral Formation, Community, and Biblical Interpretation,* ed. William P. Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 171-72, 178; Christine Roy Yoder, "On the Threshold of Kingship: A Study of Agur (Proverbs 30)," *Interpretation* 63, no. 3 (July 2009): 256-263. Also, on 31:1, cf. Apple, 176.

[9] "What has been written with imagination must be read with imagination. Imaginative interpretation values the normal features of poetic expression and celebrates the *truly* unusual." Knut Heim, *Poetic Imagination in Proverbs: Variant Repetitions and the Nature of Poetry,* Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement 4 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 634-645; quotes on 645 and 644, respectively. Emphasis original. "[T]he book's goads are not meant to simply intrigue or entertain but also to prompt readers to come to their own critical appropriation of wisdom and help them to live and act in a complex world … By attending to the complex dialogues in the book; by refusing to jump to premature conclusions; by reading

R. Millar, Anne W. Stewart, and others suggests Proverbs' pedagogy is better understood when we recognize the complex, dynamic process Proverbs' literary texts guide readers through.[10] Such work suggests readers' interpretive process is an intentional component of *how* Proverbs *teaches.*

The present study attempts to leverage this recent work for 31:1-9, examining how the readerly interpretive process functions in teaching canonical readers*,* e.g., transforming worldview, strengthening intellect, and shaping character.[11] In seeking a fresh way to read Proverbs 31:1-9 with respect to its literary pedagogy, I analyze not only the *finished* hermeneutic product (after difficulties are smoothed out), but also the cooperative readerly experience of navigating the unit, its poetry, and attempting to make sense of its implied communicative act. This readerly experience not only yields a cognitive product (i.e., the content being taught), but involves a journey of development I presume Proverbs' final composer intended his readers to take. Thus, I seek to understand the pedagogy of Proverbs 31:1-9, accounting for both its locution and the intended illocutionary effect on the implied canonical audience.[12]

---

sensitively and holding contradictions together rather than seeking to harmonize them away the reader can become one of those who are able to act wisely, responsibly, in a complex world." Peter T. H. Hatton, *Contradiction in the Book of Proverbs: The Deep Waters of Counsel,* Society for Old Testament Study Monographs (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2008), 149-70, quote on 170.

[10] Cf. Suzanna R. Millar, *Genre and Openness in Proverbs 10:1-22:16,* Ancient Israel and Its Literature 39 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2020); Anne W. Stewart, "Poetry as Pedagogy in Proverbs 5," in *Biblical Poetry and the Art of Close Reading,* ed. J. Blake Couey and Elaine T. James (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 80-92; Anne W. Stewart, "Wisdom's Imagination: Moral Reasoning and the Book of Proverbs," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 40, no. 3 (March 2016): 351-72; Anne W. Stewart, *Poetic Ethics in Proverbs: Wisdom Literature and the Shaping of the Moral Self* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Michael V. Fox, "The Pedagogy of Proverbs 2," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113, no. 2 (1994): 233-43.

[11] Cf. Millar, *Genre and Openness*, 221-222.

[12] On pragmatic linguistics for biblical hermeneutics, see C. John Collins, *Reading Genesis Well: Navigating History, Poetry, Science, and Truth in Genesis 1-11* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 51.

To understand the pedagogy of 31:1-9 by way of this readerly hermeneutic experience, I adapt the methodology of Suzanna R. Millar, who models a reading strategy attentive to Proverbs' poetic character, communicative context, and readerly process.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore the poetical pedagogy of Proverbs 31:1-9 by considering a canonical audience's cooperative engagement with the text. I hypothesize that the readerly interpretive process contributes meaningfully to the text's pedagogy for such an audience—and thus informs the text's overall teaching. The study tests this hypothesis using standard exegetical and literary methods within the adapted methodology of Suzanna Millar.

Outline of Sections

This study has five chapters. Chapter One, here, is introductory, providing an outline and study framework. Chapter Two is a two-part literature review: (1) explaining the recent Proverbs scholarship paving the way for this study and, in contrast, (2) surveying three selected scholars' understanding of the pedagogy of Proverbs 31:1-9. Chapter Three explains the study's methodology. Chapter Four analyzes the readerly hermeneutic process of 31:1-9 in seven exegetical sections: where the first six sections read the text's sequential structural units—(1) 31:1; (2) 31:2; (3) 31:3; (4) 31:4-5; (5) 31:6-7; and (6) 31:8-9— and the seventh section simulates rereading the whole unit (31:1-9). In conclusion, Chapter Five analyzes the exegetical findings to discern the pedagogy of 31:1-9, summarizes the study's findings, and suggests future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to understand the literary pedagogy of Proverbs 31:1-9 by considering the role of the readerly interpretive process in reader development. This chapter aims to provide necessary background through literature review in two parts. The first part surveys how recent Proverbs' scholarship has paved the way for this study: by adding a new dimension of interpretation in Proverbs' teaching as integral with its poetry and by recognizing the readerly hermeneutic journey as an intentional (not accidental nor incidental) aspect of this pedagogical curriculum. In contrast, the literature review's second part highlights select scholarship on Proverbs 31:1-9, offering evidence that pedagogy of 31:1-9 is often considered apart from readerly engagement with its poetry. This juxtaposition invites Stewart's and Millar's insights to be applied to 31:1-9 to better understand its poetic pedagogy.

Fresh Methods for Proverbs' Poetical Pedagogy

Recent scholarship has offered increasing evidence to support Gerhard von Rad's recognition that Proverbs' poetic form is inextricably connected with its pedagogic function.[13] The first part of this literature review highlights work of two key scholars who

---

[13] Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel,* trans. James D. Martin (New York: Abingdon Press, 1972), 24. For von Rad, Proverb's poetry is neither "insignificant" nor a "peculiarity" to be "separated from the intellectual process as if it were something added later; rather, perception [of Proverbs' material] takes place precisely in and with the poetic conception." Others who have made helpful efforts connecting Proverbs pedagogy with its poetry include the following: Richard J. Clifford, "Proverbs 1-9 as Instruction for a Young Man and for 'Everyman,'" in *"When the Morning Stars Sang": Essays in Honor of Choon Leong Seow on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday,* ed. Scott C. Jones and Christine Roy Yoder, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 500 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018), 129-142; William P. Brown, "The Didactic Power of Metaphor in the Aphoristic Sayings of Proverbs," *Journal for*

demonstrate that Proverbs' poetry and readerly engagement of this poetry is intertwined with its pedagogy: Anne Stewart and Suzanna Millar.

Proverbs' Pedagogy as Poetry: Anne W. Stewart

Corroborating Jacqueline Vayntrub's argument that Proverbs is fundamentally a *literary* artifact, inviting some interpretive postures more than others, Anne W. Stewart sees a direct connection between Proverbs' poetry and its pedagogy.[14] Per Stewart, one cannot understand *what* Proverbs says (its instructional content) without recognizing *how* it says it (its poetic literary form): Proverbs "does not make its argument by narrative progression or propositional argumentation. Instead, it saturates the thinking process with vivid imagery, complex metaphors, and a cacophony of speaking voices."[15] It is precisely in and through this kaleidoscope of Proverbs' poetic devices, Stewart argues, that Proverbs' poetry *teaches:* training reader-learners how to think, developing imagination,

---

the Study of the Old Testament 29, no. 2 (December 2004): 154; Dave Bland, "Conversation as a Resource for Character Formation in Proverbs," in *And the Word Became Flesh: Studies in History, Communication, and Scripture in Memory of Michael W. Casey,* ed. Thomas H. Olbricht and David Fleer (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Papers, 2009), 143-59; Christine Roy Yoder, "Forming Fearers of Yahweh: Repetition and Contradiction as Pedagogy in Proverbs," in *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday,* ed. Ronald L. Troxel, Kelvin G. Friebel, and Dennis Robert Magary (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 167-83; Christine Roy Yoder, "The Shaping of Erotic Desire in Proverbs 1-9," in *Saving Desire: The Seduction of Christian Theology,* ed. F. LeRon Shults and Jan-Olav Henriksen (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2011), 148-63.

[14] Cf. Jacqueline Vayntrub, "The Book of Proverbs and the Idea of Ancient Israelite Education," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 128, no. 1 (2016): 98n6. Vayntrub argues that Proverbs does not affirm itself as a source book, textbook, or educational representation nor invite readers to seek some "reality"—historic or otherwise—*behind* the text. "[B]eyond form-critical (and evolutionary literary) assumptions of the social context …, there exists no available data on the social or educational function of the biblical book of Proverbs (or any of its parts) during its composition or collection to make such a claim." Anne Stewart's work most pertinent to the present study includes the following: Stewart, "Poetry as Pedagogy," 80-92; Stewart, "Wisdom's Imagination," 351-72; Stewart, *Poetic Ethics.* Cf. also Anne W. Stewart, "Teaching Complex Ethical Thinking with Proverbs," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible and Ethics,* ed. C. L. Crouch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 241-56.

[15] Stewart, "Poetry as Pedagogy," 80.

and transforming worldview.[16] Stewart's work illumines the *complexity* of Proverbs' pedagogy as a multifaceted project geared toward complex holistic development.[17]

Recognizing Proverbs' intertwined poetry and pedagogy must, Stewart argues, inform our interpretive methods.[18] If Proverbs' poetry is the engine of its pedagogy, readers must expect not straightforward presentation of cognitive ideas targeting the intellect, but poetic engagement of the whole person.[19] That is, "the import of poems cannot be appreciated by paraphrasing their main point."[20] Rather, as Stewart argues, to understand Proverbs' pedagogy, we must *participate* in its poetry.[21] Exegesis must cooperate with and draw upon this participatory experience when discerning meaning. The present study accepts Stewart's argument and looks not only to her, but to Suzanna Millar for methods of examining pedagogy by way of participation in Proverbs' poetry.

---

[16] Stewart, "Wisdom's Imagination," 359-372; Stewart, *Poetic Ethics,* 29-69.

[17] Stewart, *Poetic Ethics,* 170-200. Stewart leverages the concept of prototypes from cognitive linguistics to examine how Proverbs' poetic pedagogy invokes imagination and moral development. Others arguing for such holistic pedagogy in Proverbs include William P. Brown, *Wisdom's Wonder: Character, Creation, and Crisis in the Bible's Wisdom Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2014), 1-66; Dave Bland, *Proverbs and the Formation of Character* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015).

[18] "Attending to the poetry illumines how the book marshals the resources of language to underscore and develop its assumptions about the role of rebuke in shaping the student, as well as its value and purpose." Stewart, *Poetic Ethics*, 88.

[19] Similarly, Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* Anchor Yale Bible 18A (2000; repr. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010)*,* 348-349. Fox points out, desire is too fierce a foe for just "erudition, sapience, or unusual intellect." "Imparting information is not enough, for static cognition may not engender moral character." Also, see the excellent argumentation in Yoder, "The Shaping of Erotic Desire," 162.

[20] Stewart, "Poetry as Pedagogy," 92.

[21] Ibid., 80-83, 91-92. Stewart draws on insights from literary scholars, e.g., Helen Vendler, "W. B. Yeats Thinking: Thinking in Images, Thinking in Assertions," in *Poets Thinking: Pope, Whitman, Dickinson, Yeats* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 119. "The evolving discoveries of the poem—psychological, linguistic, historical, philosophical—are not revealed by a thematic paraphrase of their import. They can be grasped only by our participating in the process they unfold." On why the consideration of lyric poetry is not out of place in the Hebrew Bible, see F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 231-32.

Proverbs' Pedagogy Includes Process: Suzanna R. Millar

In ways complementary to Stewart, Suzanna Millar examines readers' interpretive experience of Proverbs' pedagogic poetry. Like Stewart, Millar recognizes the tight connection of Proverbs' form and content and the importance of engaging with Proverbs' poetry *qua* poetry. However, Millar goes beyond Stewart in her focus on the pedagogic import of readers' interpretive process.[22] To Millar, pedagogical impact of Proverbs' texts more overtly involves both the readerly experience and its interpretive product.[23]

Applying high-level cognitive linguistic theory, Millar navigates the tricky question of where meaning lies by inhabiting the tension among authorial intent, the text itself, and the readerly experience.[24] She views literary texts as communication: a social contract between speaker (author) and hearers (readers).[25] Pedagogical texts further clarify these communicative relationships: author-speaker as teacher-discipler and reader-hearers as students-disciples. Author-speakers are intentional agents facilitating educatively experiential communication. Reader-hearers are complex, multifaceted

---

[22] For other recent Proverbs scholarship corroborating Millar's attention to the readerly hermeneutic, cf. Bland, "Conversation," 143-59; Brown, "Didactic Power," 133-54; Edward M. Curtis, "Learning Truth from the Sages," *Christian Education Journal,* ser. 3, 2, no. 1 (2005): 113-128; Scott C. Jones, "Wisdom's Pedagogy: A Comparison of Proverbs VII and 4Q174," *Vetus Testamentum* 53, no. 1 (2003): 65-80; James L. Kugel, "Ancient Israelite Pedagogy and Its Survival in Second Temple Interpretations of Scripture," in *Pedagogy in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity,* ed. Karina Martin Hogan, Matthew Goff, and Emma Wasserman (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017): 15-58; John L. McLaughlin, "Wisdom from the Wise: Pedagogical Principles from Proverbs," in *Religions and Education in Antiquity: Studies in Honour of Michel Desjardins,* ed. Alex Damm (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2019), 29-54; Kojo Okyere, "The Pedagogy of Sexual Morality in Proverbs Five," *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 32, no. 2 (2013): 107-19.

[23] Suzanna R. Millar, "When a Straight Road Becomes a Garden Path: The 'False Lead' as a Pedagogical Strategy in the Book of Proverbs," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 43, no. 1 (2018): 69. "The process in Proverbs is as important as the product."

[24] See Millar*, Genre and Openness,* 5-9.

[25] Collins, *Reading Genesis,* 89-106.

persons whose dynamic textual engagement has been pedagogically designed by its author-speaker to shape them. Thus, a text's pedagogy should not be understood primarily as its content, but also as the formative readerly engagement with this content.

For Millar, reading then is not so much a destination as a formative journey of interpretation and application. To understand this interpretive process, Millar heuristically applies high-level cognitive linguistic concepts, most notably, blend theory which suggests that "no text, or event, or datum, has a pre-packaged meaning, but that meaning is generated 'online'."[26] Readers engage a text, seeking to make sense of it, through a temporal, dynamic mental process "with imaginative and creative aspects."[27]

> [I]n the initial stages of conceptualisation, we construct small conceptual packets in the mind, which then become 'inputs'. … Selected information from the inputs is transferred into a mental 'blend space', and meaning is generated as they interact. This meaning goes beyond the sum of the parts, for the interpreter necessarily employs creativity and imagination when blending. She brings in her wider encyclopaedic knowledge, and may combine elements in creative ways, transforming her raw materials. The blend has an emergent structure not simply predictable from its inputs.[28]

Per Millar, Proverbs' texts often juxtapose discrete images/concepts in quick "stroboscopic" succession, so readers make imaginative connections they otherwise would not have made.[29]

---

[26] Millar*, Genre and Openness,* 62-64, quote on 63n72. Millar uses Fauconnier and Turner's blend theory: readers mentally blend "small packets of conceptual structure dependent on larger domains of encyclopedic knowledge. Source and target are two 'input spaces,' what is common between them constitutes the 'generic space,' and they are imaginatively combined in the 'blend space.'" Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, "Conceptual Integration Networks," *Cognitive Science* 22, no. 2 (June 1998): 133-87.

[27] Millar*, Genre and Openness,* 62-64, quote on 63n72. "We construct interpretations as we read, not after the whole has been read." Millar, "Garden Path: The 'False Lead'," 70.

[28] Suzanna R. Millar, "Openness, Closure, and Transformation in Proverb Translation," *The Bible Translator* 71, no. 1 (Apr 2020): 84-85.

[29] Ibid., 85-87.

Millar recognizes two stages in the readerly interpretive process. In the first stage, characterized by openness, readers navigate Proverbs' poetic polysemy, parallelism, and imagery to construct meaning dynamically through imaginative blending of textual inputs.[30] Initial interpretations spring to readers' minds.[31] New textual inputs add complexity, and readers must evaluate initial interpretations and reassess when they discern errors.[32] Not infrequently, mistakes are made and realized. In the search for coherent sense, revision efforts draw readers deeper into the text.[33]

In Millar's second stage, readers move toward closure as "ambiguity is clarified and vagueness specified."[34] Seeking to eliminate discordant possibilities, readers often find themselves at interpretive crossroads. They may "'waver' between readings."[35] Readers' divergent decisions at these crossroads explain their arrival at different interpretations.[36] Per Millar, this dynamic, iterative, and formative interpretive journey is

---

[30] Millar*, Genre and Openness,* 46-66. "There develops a dynamic interaction of parts, as the interpreter blends them together in her mind. As she does, fresh avenues of interpretation open out, not predictable from either input alone." This first stage "has involved the imaginative, creative processes of conceptual blending. Because of the rich imagery and concise phraseology of proverbs, different interpretive avenues open out." Millar, "Openness, Closure, and Transformation," 85, 87.

[31] Millar, "Garden Path: The 'False Lead'," 71.

[32] Ibid., 70.

[33] "Fundamentally, poetic techniques force the reader to engage deeply with the text." Millar, "Garden Path: The 'False Lead'," 69.

[34] Millar, "Openness, Closure, and Transformation," 87-89.

[35] Suzanna R. Millar, "Interpretive Crossroads in Parallel Lines: Charting the Complexity of Antithetical Parallelism in Proverbs 10-22," *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* (forthcoming)*,* 5; Millar, "Openness, Closure, and Transformation," 87. "[R]econceptualization … may lead us to reassess our initial interpretation." Millar cites Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism,* rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 96-98.

[36] Millar, "Interpretive Crossroads," 13.

"central to the poetics" of Proverbs.[37] To make sense of its texts, readers must "enter into … complexity, and themselves be shaped by it."[38] Readers learn to recognize connotations, see what lies below the surface, and evaluate choices.[39] The greater the difficulty processing the text, the deeper the formative impact of this processing. As readers are trained how to think, they cultivate imaginative skills, adjust their worldview, and develop their ability to identify and correct interpretive mistakes.[40]

Millar primarily studies this pedagogic readerly process in the micro-texts of Proverbs 10:1-22:16.[41] As few interpreters have considered readers' interpretive journey as a pedagogical component of these texts, Millar's analysis often uncovers data previously not considered.[42] While her heuristic methods to predict readerly tendencies could be refined, her work presents Proverbs as having a nuanced, holistic pedagogy. In some cases, Millar's analysis offers evidence against MT emendation.[43]

---

[37] Millar, "Interpretive Crossroads," 13; Millar, "Garden Path: The 'False Lead'," 81-82. See also Millar, *Genre and Openness.*

[38] Millar, "Interpretive Crossroads," 14.

[39] "More than one interpretation may arise, and the reader learns to adjudicate between competing opinions, in proverbs as he must in life." Millar*, Genre and Openness,* 225.

[40] Ibid., 224-25. The hermeneutic process teaches readers intellectual and imaginative skills and humble perseverance: "to see things anew and to forge connections between what had seemed incommensurable." Thus, Proverbs' openness prompts readers grow in "modes of thought essential to life."

[41] Ibid., 9-13. "Pedagogic" here relates to authorial intent to instruct original readers.

[42] Ibid., 120. E.g., in Prov 13:5, per Millar, readers fill gaps to balance the parallelism: "the reader practices a type of reasoning essential for a wise life: deducing connections between character, act, and consequence. In this world order, the *Tun-Ergehen Zusammenhang* is logical, and basically predictable. However, the leveling process also brings a certain openness: the order is not absolutely established. … By reversing the terms, the reader deduces that the righteous deserve honor. Through the interpretation process, then, he ascribes honor to the worthy and is thus made to practice the very principle the proverb preaches."

[43] For an example of strengthened argument against emendation, consider Millar's analysis of Proverbs 14:34. Millar, "Garden Path: The 'False Lead'," 72-73. Cf. Robert Alter, *The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), 257. Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon,* trans. M.G. Easton (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm.

Summary of First Part: Proverbs' Pedagogy through Recent Work

In this first section of literature review, I surveyed recent work in Proverbs' scholarship which offers foundational support for the present study. I recognized how Anne Stewart has demonstrated Proverbs' poetic literary form as inextricable from its pedagogy and that understanding its pedagogy requires participation in its poetry. I surveyed how Suzanna Millar presents readerly interpretation of Proverbs' poetry as an 'online' temporal process: incremental, iterative, imaginative, and formative. Per Millar, examining a passage's pedagogy should include consideration of this readerly process.

Select Scholarship on Proverbs 31:1-9 as Pedagogy

Stewart's and Millar's work reflects an innovative way of reading Proverbs: to understand Proverbs' pedagogy, exegetes must participate in its poetry and consider how this participatory interpretive experience contributes to its pedagogy. This second section of literature review aims to demonstrate that such a reading strategy has not yet been applied to Proverbs 31:1-9. I survey three representative scholars' treatment of 31:1-9—James L. Crenshaw, Michael V. Fox, and Wilma Mancuello González—to suggest that readers' interpretive process has not been adequately considered in its pedagogy.

James L. Crenshaw

James L. Crenshaw's oft cited "A Mother's Instruction to Her Son (Proverbs 31:1-9)" examines the teaching of 31:1-9 through recognition of its genre (ANE (Royal)

B. Eerdmans, 1950), 1:313-15; Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* Anchor Yale Bible 18B (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 587; McKane, 475.

Instruction) and comparison with other similarly identified texts.[44] Crenshaw sees 31:1-9 as "a small sample of maternal teaching": "Lemuel's mother opens her teaching with rhetorical flourish, then proceeds to warn her son about women, wine, and dereliction of duty."[45] Crenshaw identifies the unit's structural components and offers historical-critical analysis of each: superscription (v. 1), direct appeal (v. 2), and four admonitions (vv. 3, 4-5, 6-7, and 8-9). To him, the text reflects words directed *to* Lemuel, (historic?) king of Massa (v.1), which, after an opening appeal to the "bond between mother and son" (v. 2), instruct him on dangers to his kingly "promoting of justice" for the disadvantaged.[46] At times, Crenshaw reveals his own hermeneutic reasoning, but his analysis seems characterized by what Millar would see as "closure," or hermeneutic solutions.

Crenshaw's consideration of 31:1-9 as *literature* seems limited to comparative genre analysis, and he views the poem's pedagogy in terms of Lemuel's mother's teaching her historical son.[47] He briefly alludes to a literary audience ("a wider body of potential scholars" who would read the text, despite it being "the teachings of a foreign woman"), yet does not address the text's pedagogy for such an audience.[48] Similarly,

---

[44] Crenshaw, "A Mother's Instruction," 1-22. On Crenshaw's analysis, see Mancuello González, 79.

[45] Crenshaw, "A Mother's Instruction," 11, 14.

[46] Dangers being "the threat posed by women" and "excessive drinking." Ibid., 15, 16, 17.

[47] "The tone of the advice to Lemuel suggests that his mother wished to instill in him a noble concept of kingship so that responsibility rather than privilege would control his daily conduct." Ibid., 19. Crenshaw's historical-critical approach finds ANE Instruction texts as representative of historical ANE education. While noting the poem's deviation from the Instruction genre (e.g., a "remarkable" "absence of motivation clauses," a standard "feature of the genre"), he does not consider how an audience might receive such genre differences. On the impact of genre deviation, see Millar*, Genre and Openness,* 5; Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009)*,* 12.

[48] Crenshaw, "A Mother's Instruction," 22. Although referencing other Hebrew Scriptures, Crenshaw does not examine the unit's pedagogy for a canonical audience.

Crenshaw's analysis considers what its "rhetorical" components *mean* cognitively, not how they persuade.[49] Crenshaw does note poetic features—ambiguity, repetition, parallelism, surprise, reversal—yet does not consider readerly engagement with these features in the text's pedagogy.[50] Overall, Crenshaw's pedagogical consideration of 31:1-9 seeks to discern historical realities behind the text (e.g., how ANE mothers instructed sons) more than the poem's a pedagogical speech-act for an implied canonical readership.

Michael V. Fox

Michael V. Fox's analysis of 31:1-9 in his full-length Proverbs' commentary is noteworthy in length, detail, and quality of argumentation.[51] Fox places the unit in Proverbs' whole, offers introductory treatment, then exegetes each verse per grammatical, lexical, and literary issues.[52] Fox concludes by paraphrasing the unit's teaching "message."[53] Fox's treatment of 31:1-9 mainly seeks to establish sense and logical flow. Thus, his consideration of the unit's poetry primarily clarifies its cognitive content.[54] While poetic tone is briefly observed (repetition conveys "intensity" and "tone

---

[49] For example, on vv. 6-7, cf. ibid., 17-18.

[50] "Surprisingly, the main verb is missing, but the resulting emphasis on the two infinitive constructs achieves stunning rhetorical effect." Repetition is understood as "rhetorical flourish" with parallels are "added for good measure." Reversal of order "subtly underscores the harsh realities confronting those who are perishing." Ibid., 16, 15, 17.

[51] Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 882-88.

[52] Fox, *Proverbs 10-31,* 882-83; Fox, *Proverbs 1-9,* 5-18; Fox, *Proverbs 10-31,* 849, 884-88. Fox's introductory treatment consists of annotated translation and commentary on genre, theme, structure, and language. On "mothers as teachers", cf. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9,* 82-83.

[53] Fox, *Proverbs 10-31,* 888.

[54] Ibid., 886. E.g., Fox considers parallelism as in v. 3 for disambiguation of referents: they offer "excellent sense in a warning against improper involvement with women."

of urgency"), Fox omits mention of most poetic elements (wordplay, polysemy, metaphor).[55]

Even more than Crenshaw's, Fox's treatment of 31:1-9 is characterized by interpretive closure, or hermeneutic answers. His annotated translation lacks indication of ambiguity or hermeneutic difficulty.[56] He presents exegetical comments on even highly debated issues confidently in the indicative.[57] At times, Fox's language offers hints of lingering ambiguity or interpretive difficulty, yet this linguistic difference is subtle.[58] Overall, Fox presents his readership a tidy interpretation with remarkably few loose ends. But for a passing reference regarding a process of elimination used with מה in v. 2, Fox conceals his own interpretive process.

---

[55] Ibid., 885.

[56] Ibid., 883. The only two annotations succinctly note text critical matters.

[57] Ibid., 884, 886, 887. E.g., per Fox, the unit is royal instruction; Lemuel is from Massa, a "North Arabian people," "a region not distant from Moab"; *mah* in 31:1 is a non-interrogative negative particle ('No!'); *destroyers of kings* "restricts the parallel 'women,' to a certain type of woman"; and alcohol in vv. 6-7 "is here commended as an anodyne to dull the pain of him who is embittered and declining to death." See Fox's comments on placement of 31:1-9 in Proverbs. Ibid., 849, 883. Fox presents the addition of this poem to Proverbs as a largely solved problem: "No editorial principle governs the arrangement of these units, except that VIc [31:1-9] and VId share the theme of women. The appendices were most likely added to the end of the book sequentially … [out of] a natural and common process. The exegetical significance of the placement of an appendix varies. Sometimes an appendix may be intended to comment on the earlier material; this is the case with VIa [30:1-9] and, to a degree, VId [31:10-31]. Sometimes material is added at the end just because that is where space was left on the papyrus or parchment. This seems to be the case with VIb [30:10-33] and VIc [31:1-9]."

[58] For example, to discuss areas of the unit's hermeneutic difficulty, Fox occasionally employs subjunctive auxiliary verbs ("These forms *may*, however, be only ostensibly Aramaic."), qualitative adverbs ("'Your ways' here can be a euphemism for coitus (Ehrlich) or, *more likely*, sexual virility, parallel to 'your strength.'"), hinting verbs ("The intensity of the repeated proleptic negatives … *suggests* that Lemuel's mother is doing more than offering advice in the abstract"; "Unlike the other imperatives, this one is in the plural, *suggesting* that v 6 is a traditional saying that Lemuel's mother quotes."), a reasoning ("… but translating, 'What, my son?' would make it sound as if Lemuel had just said something that his mother didn't quite catch"), or, rarely, first-person references ("*In my view*, the pattern is too intricate to be absorbed by the reader and to be rhetorically effective."). Ibid., 883, 886, 885, 887, 884, 883. Emphasis added.

Fox recognizes 31:1-9 as pedagogic and offers a paraphrased summary of the (historic?) mother's teaching for her son.[59]

> Lemuel's mother presses him to avoid (or stop) dissipating his strength on wine and women (vv 3-5). Instead, he should give wine to the poor to ease their pain (vv 6-7). As king, he must ensure justice for the poor (vv 8-9). More precisely, she urges him to avoid dissipation *so that* he can rule justly. … Justice was the duty of the king throughout the ancient Near East.[60]

Although Fox's verse-level argumentation implies the text's hermeneutic difficulties create a complex readerly process, Fox's pedagogic synthesis does not show these difficulties (or the reading process) as contributing to its pedagogy in any meaningful way.[61] Such analysis implies interpretive difficulty and the reading process generally are neither pedagogically formative nor intentionally planned by the text's speaker-teacher.

While Fox shows more awareness of the unit's literary character than Crenshaw, Fox's consideration of the text's pedagogy is similarly limited to Lemuel's mother's "message" to her son. Although alluding to canonical context (Prov 1:3; Ps 72:1-4), Fox does not consider the text's pedagogy for Proverbs' canonical audience, its implied readership.[62] By implication, Fox holds both readers and the interpretive process apart from textual meaning, which can be accessed after hermeneutic difficulties are overcome.

---

[59] It is "disciplinary instruction" Lemuel received from his mother "and then spoke … in his own teaching." Whom Lemuel aimed to teach, how, or why, Fox does not address. Ibid., 884.

[60] Ibid., 888.

[61] That is, Fox first navigated the text's hermeneutic difficulties himself and then, once he had *arrived* at the "right" answers, he could examine the text's pedagogy through his construction of "right" answers.

[62] Ibid., 849, 883. For Fox, 31:1-9 seems a more coincidental than purposeful inclusion—"appended" as one of other "short texts that seemed appropriate" to be positioned next to 31:10-31.

Wilma Mancuello González

Provocative but well-supported, Wilma Mancuello González's recent monograph challenges prevailing scholarly views on Proverbs 31:1-9, most notably by arguing for its exilic Hebrew provenance and its function as conclusion for Proverbs 10-30.[63] Mancuello González presumes a canonical audience and, unlike Fox and Crenshaw, analyzes the text as set before this readership. The teaching's main thrust, per Mancuello González, is right stewardship of justice in favor of the poor unto the liberation of their suffering.[64] Recognizing the unit's lexical focus on justice and poverty, Mancuello González follows Cornelius a Lapide (1567-1637) in reading 31:3 as condemning not sexual immorality, but arbitrary, abusive use of force.[65]

Mancuello González argues for the poem's tight literary structure and attends to the unit's poetic aesthetics far more than Crenshaw and Fox. While, like Fox, her exegesis often reflects hermeneutic answers, Mancuello González also regards parallelistic imbalance, semantic breadth, and ambiguity as intentional features of the text.[66] Her concerns do not focus her examination onto canonical readerly engagement, but her exegesis discerns the text's difficulties and ambiguity as intentionally formative, leaving room for the readerly process to contribute to its pedagogy.[67]

---

[63] On *status quaestionis* of textual origin, Mancuello González, 19-46. On Proverbs 31:1-9 as a conclusion for Proverbs 10-30, Mancuello González, 199-253, especially 246-253.

[64] Ibid., 81.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid., 257-58.

[67] "¿Por qué el recopilador conservó el carácter enigmático de los personajes principales y el lenguaje ambiguo de la colección? Tres ideas podrían ayudar a entender este recurso literario: 1) El subtítulo de la colección es encabezado por la palabra משא. Los profetas recurren, a veces, a un lenguaje enigmático para transmitir sus mensajes bajo el apelativo משא (cf. Jr 23,30-40; Is 14,28-32). 2) Quien habla en la colección

Mancuello González argues that, since Hitzig's identification of the syntactic problem of 31:1, scholarship's unsubstantiated assumption of the unit's foreign origin has influenced its exegesis.[68] Mancuello González's recognition of exilic Hebrew provenance leads her to discern the poem's connections with other biblical material. She sees the poem's portrayal of the king-son and mother aligning with the royal figures of Israel's exile.[69] Mancuello González also recognizes intentional allusion to, e.g., prophet-judge and monarchial founder Samuel, the ideal king in Isaiah 11:1-9 and Psalm 72, and the idealized Josiah of Jeremiah 22:13-17.[70] Mancuello González further demonstrates how navigating the text's hermeneutic challenges leads to consideration of inner-biblical connections.[71] Her work offers many insights not heretofore developed in scholarship.[72]

---

es la reina madre, hablar de modo enigmático es una prerrogativa de los reyes (cf. 1 Re 10,1; 2 Re 14,9; Dn 8,23.25) y de las sabios (Pr 1,6). 3) *La intención formativa de la obra es manifiesta, así puede suponerse que al final del libro, el sabio eleva el lenguagje a los discípulos. Pretendería favorecer la autonomía de los lectores y los obligaría a desarrollar su propia opinión crítica* como parece hacer el texto Qo 4,13-16." Ibid., 253. Emphasis added.

[68] "El problema fundamental que se observa entre los exegetas que postulan el origen no hebreo de la colección es la tendencia a introducir en el texto las modificaciones necesarias para encajar con la hipótesis." Ibid., 23-45, quote on 45. "El problem esencial de los estudios que postulan la procedencia extranjera de Pr 31,1-9 es su tendencia a la falacia de *petition principii*: generalmente, la demostración de su hipótesis exige una enmienda en el texto." Ibid., 46.

[69] Ibid., 192-93. Jehoiachin and mother Nehushta (2 Kings 24:8-15; 25:27-30; Jer 22:26).

[70] "En nuestro texto emerge una concepción de la realeza marcada por una sensibilidad política diferente, que se funda en la Ley, pero va más allá de la misma." Ibid., 148-54, 197, quote on 154.

[71] Ibid., 259, also 155f. E.g., she sees the imperatives in vv. 6-7 as evoking both the imagery of Wisdom's wine (Prov 9:1-6) and abundance at the Lord's reign (Is 25:6-8).

[72] Ibid., 259-260. E.g., drinking in vv. 6-7 with Proverbs 9:1-6. Cf. brief note in Murray H. Lichtenstein, "Chiasm and Symmetry in Proverbs 31," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (April 1982): 204-205.

Summary of Second Part of Literature Review

In this section, I surveyed three scholars' treatment of 31:1-9: Crenshaw, Fox, and Mancuello González. While all three scholars offer helpful exegesis, their analysis of the text's pedagogy does not take readerly hermeneutic engagement with its poetry into much account. Crenshaw observes the text's rhetorical and poetic features, but his understanding of its pedagogy reflects mostly historical-critical concerns. By implication, for Crenshaw, its teaching seems only from historical mother to son-king, not from an editor/author to a canonical audience. Similarly, Fox assesses the unit's pedagogy primarily in terms of the mother's cognitive message for the son, apart from poetic character, readerly engagement, or canonical audience. Mancuello González offers the most sophisticated treatment of the text as poetical literature for a canonical audience, particularly in recognizing inner-biblical allusion. She does not highlight the readerly interpretive process in its pedagogy, but she demonstrates awareness complementary to this consideration: (1) the poetic text's intentional ambiguity and allusions engage readers, (2) this readerly engagement is formative, and (3) its lexical and thematic connections with Proverbs and canonical material invite readers' imaginative appropriation of the teaching.

While Crenshaw, Fox, and Mancuello González are a small sample of scholars who have examined the pedagogy of 31:1-9, their work suggests that Stewart's and Millar's recent insights—considering readerly interpretive engagement with the text's poetry—has not yet been attempted for this unit. Mancuello González's work comes nearest, particularly with recognition of canonical audience and biblical allusion, and offers the present study considerable support.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This study seeks to understand how the readerly interpretive process of the poetical Proverbs 31:1-9 contributes to its pedagogy. As presented in Chapter Two, I assume that Proverbs' pedagogy is intertwined with its poetry and must inform our hermeneutic. My hypothesis is that the readerly interpretive process of incrementally consuming the text, engaging with its poetry, and seeking to make interpretive sense of it contributes meaningfully to the pedagogy of 31:1-9. This chapter aims to explain the study's methodology and address relevant introductory matters.

Millar's Methodology

Model for the Study: Suzanna Millar's Methodology

As mentioned above, Suzanna Millar has contributed to the fresh conversations about Proverbs (particularly, the didactic proverbs of 10:1-22:16), especially on the contribution of the readerly interpretive process to Proverbs' pedagogy and how Proverbs' poetic devices contour this engagement.[73] In contrast to mainstream hermeneutical theories in biblical studies which primarily focus on a text's cognitive content as its pedagogy, Millar's research suggests we can understand Proverbs'

[73] Millar's other research interests include hermeneutics (particularly ecological/animal hermeneutics) of Hebrew Biblical wisdom literature. Suzanna R. Millar "The Ecology of Death in the Book of Job," *Biblical Interpretation* (published ahead of print April 7, 2021: https://doi.org/10.1163/15685152-20211629); Suzanna R. Millar, "History and Wisdom Literature," in *The Oxford Handbook of Wisdom and the* Bible, ed. Will Kynes (New York, Oxford University Press, 2021), 441-58; Suzanna R. Millar, "Dehumanisation as Derision or Delight?: Countering Class-Prejudice and Species-Prejudice in Job," *Biblical Interpretation* (published ahead of print October 9, 2020: https://doi.org/10.1163/15685152-00284P21).

pedagogy better when we understand the dynamic process Proverbs' literary texts guide readers through and how this transforms readers' worldview, strengthens intellectual skills, and shapes character.[74] Our study adapts Millar's methodology to study 31:1-9.[75]

Leveraging heuristic models from cognitive linguistics, Millar's exegetical methodology follows two broad analytic steps: (1) recreating readers' hermeneutic process and (2) inferring a text's pedagogy from this process and other exegetical evidence. For the former, Millar traces a text's readerly engagement in temporal slow motion: from initial construction of meaning, to navigating interpretive crossroads, then to revised meaning and contextualization. She considers the text's pedagogical implications: that is, what can be inferred about the authorial educative intent from a given text and its readerly process. Millar suggests that understanding of a text's pedagogy is enriched when this process is seen as an integral aspect of its message.

When examining a particular text, Millar begins by setting it in front of her audience. She notes initial readerly impressions and poetic features of the proverb which may puzzle or engage its readers. She attends to its imagery, sound play, and metaphor and helps her audience see the interpretive decisions readers may make and the developmental impact of these evaluations. For example, on Proverbs 10:16 ("The wage of the righteous—to life; the produce of the wicked—to sin."), Millar notes the initial impressions: its terseness yields a final surprise. What initially seemed a "precise

---

[74] Millar*, Genre and Openness,* 221-22.

[75] Presented here is my synthesis of Millar's composite methodology based on the following work: Millar*, Genre and Openness*; Millar, "Garden Path"; Millar "Openness, Closure, and Transformation"; Millar, "Interpretive Crossroads"; Suzanna R. Millar, "The Multiple Genres of Wisdom," in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Wisdom Literature,* ed. Katharine J. Dell, Suzanna R. Millar, and Arthur Keefer (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

antithetical parallelism" is jarred when readers receive "sin," not the expected antithesis to "life." Millar notes, "This riddle-like rupture brings a psychological disorientation appealing for resolution."[76] Millar then considers how readers may face this interpretive challenge—in this case, to level the parallelism by mentally supplying the reversals:

CHARACTER	ACT	CONSEQUENCE
The wage of the righteous	[—*to virtue and*]	to life
The produce of the wicked	—to sin	[—*and to death*]

Millar then considers ways readers may imaginatively explore the relationships suggested by the expanded parallelism. She notes lessons student-readers may learn along the way: for 10:16, Millar states, "Through the parallelism, the reader connects this sinful behavior with death; a deduction set up to motivate righteous living. … The disruption to the precise parallelism through the term חטאת suggests that the world order does not always click along mechanically. The student must be prepared to face ambiguity in proverbs and in the world."[77] Millar also often considers her conclusions in light of scholarship.[78]

Millar's Heuristic Approach

Some may criticize the seeming subjectivity of Millar's work: given the murky waters of Proverbs' composition and reception history, how, indeed, can we predict its early readers' interpretive process? To overcome our limited insight into ancient readerly tendencies, Millar gets her research underway with three heuristic moves. First, Millar

---

[76] Millar, *Genre and Openness,* 123.

[77] Ibid., 124.

[78] On 10:16, Millar challenges Waltke's and NIV's rendering "sin and death", as outside semantic range, but acknowledges that the proverb subtly "closely bind[s] the concepts together." Ibid., 125.

focuses on singular Proverbs' micro-texts (mostly in 10:1-22:16) in MT, which allows her to bypass matters of compositional history, dating, and macro-literary structure.[79] Second, while acknowledging Proverbs' "*actual, original readers …* are difficult to reconstruct", Millar leverages a high-level concept of saliency from cognitive linguistics to understand how human readers generally engage texts.[80] She supplements this predictive patterning through understanding of genre "conventions and contexts."[81] Third, while viewing the readerly interpretive process as inherently organic, Millar establishes heuristic structure to examine it. Millar tracks the process linearly: while readerly interpretation is fluid and iterative, time regulates interpretive events *relative* to each other. Also, Millar examines the larger process through three opposing readerly tensions which function as consistent data markers to assess readerly engagement: (1) openness and closure, (2) resonance and dissonance, and (3) trust and scrutiny.[82] The next paragraphs unpack these tension pairs.

Millarian Methodological Tensions: Openness and Closure

Millar's methodology attends most closely to the tension between openness and closure. For Millar, openness—"a text's ability to offer multiple possibilities of interpretation and use"—is one of Proverbs' characterizing features, due to its poetic

---

[79] Ibid., 2-5, 10-12. This allows Millar to sidestep many issues and, e.g., make analogous arguments, leveraging modern paremiographical and linguistic research.

[80] Cf. ibid., 71, 72. This allows Millar to incorporate historical literary evidence with analogous insights from cognitive linguistics and pragmatics.

[81] Ibid., 8. "This can offer some constraints in interpretation. What was the original readers' framework of expectations, and what meanings were possible within this framework? What social conventions and hermeneutical principles may have guided them?"

[82] The second pair identified here, resonance and dissonance, is less overt in Millar's methodology; she describes this tension variously, but the concepts remain uniform throughout her research.

ambiguity, brevity, and sparse literary context.[83] Millar examines a proverb's openness by considering its "stroboscopic" textual inputs, context, and connotations and what gaps must be filled to construct meaning.[84] When relationships between these are unclear (or even contradictory), per Millar, readers feel compelled to explore. In readers' mental processes, textual inputs begin to "blend," or interact together, forming imaginative worlds.[85] Yet, while openness engages readers, as Millar notes, readers instinctively move toward closure, which is how Millar sees texts able to have meaning.[86]

Millarian Methodological Tensions: Resonance and Dissonance

Millar notes readers' initial interpretations of Proverbs' micro-texts frequently jar readerly expectations of, e.g., Proverbs' moral worldview, genre cues, or how parallelism *should* work.[87] For readers, who inherently seek coherence, such jarring produces

---

[83] 'Openness' is how Millar refers to what others have called "ambiguity, vagueness, or indeterminacy." "An open text may be used and applied in many ways. This seems to be a generic hallmark of proverbs, which are 'inherently capacious,' offering general principles to be fleshed out by the circumstances of the hearers' own lives. An open text also provides vistas for mental examination. The readers may climb in and explore, further opening up the proverb for themselves. Limits will be encountered somewhere, however. Meaning may be expansive, but it is not inexhaustible." Ibid., 5-6.

[84] The "ambiguous imagery and concise phraseology" offers readers "not … one fixed meaning, but … many nuances and connotations." The sparse literary form thrusts discrete images upon the reader in quick succession and without sense of their relatedness. Millar, "Openness, Closure, and Transformation," 85. "In the density of Proverbs; poetry, the interconnections between parts are often not explicit but must be inferred." Millar, "Interpretive Crossroads," 3.

[85] Millar*, Genre and Openness,* 62.

[86] Per Millar, closure comes via entrenched interpretations/salient expectations and context. Ibid., 66-67, 68-70, 70-72. Millar uses "entrenchment" language in *Genre and Openness* but "saliency" in "Garden Path: The 'False Lead'."

[87] That is, previous interpretation "proves incongruous either with new information revealed in the text, or with a realization from extra-linguistic knowledge." Millar recognizes "the initial interpretation, though linguistically possible, jars with the worldview espoused by the book. Again, what is found jarring depends on context, here, the wider moral system proposed by Proverbs." Millar recognizes genre functioning in the communicative frame of a text as a social contract between author and reader: "an implicit agreement about what to expect and how to interpret." Millar, "Garden Path: The 'False Lead'," 71. "In effect, genre

dissonance. When interpretive dissonance is discerned, readers pause and reassess, looking for their mistakes and possible solutions.[88] In their search for coherence, readers learn valuable lessons which may corroborate the pedagogical textual content.[89]

The resonance-dissonance tension reveals the greatest challenge of Millar's reading strategy, as mentioned above: how to predict ancient readerly tendencies. Millar meets this challenge by heuristically applying high-level consideration of cognitive linguistic saliency, or entrenchment.[90] Yet even this heuristic has challenges: as Millar notes, she faces "the problem of how to know what was salient to the original proverb readers, in a context so different from our own."[91] As a further heuristic, Millar employs a "rough-and-ready" 'bag of words' metric: "the criteria of frequency and context" in the Hebrew Bible.[92] That is, Millar begins analysis by presuming "the salient interpretation of the word, phrase or construction" for ancient readers would be the most frequently

---

configures the relationship between reader and text. It projects an ideal reader, who will respond in a particular way, and asks the actual reader to adopt this persona." Millar, "Multiple Genres," 2.

[88] "A reader with no knowledge of the system may not be struck by any incongruity. But those with some such knowledge (like the intended reader of the book) must reject the false lead. They have been led up the garden path, are forced to retrace their streps. They must go back over the proverb, reanalysing its component parts, searching for rare word meanings or possible syntactic constructions not noticed before. Through this process they arrive at a 'corrected interpretation.'" Millar, "Garden Path: The 'False Lead'," 71.

[89] "The process in Proverbs is as important as the product. Proverbs do not just tell students to become wise and discerning. Through their poetic techniques, they force them to practice wisdom and discernment. They train them how to think." Millar, "Garden Path: The 'False Lead'," 69. Also, Millar, "Interpretive Crossroads," 2, 5. Millar*, Genre and Openness,* 58.

[90] "[T]he initial interpretation … is the one most salient to a speech community … [with] the salience of a word or phrase depend[ing] on its frequency, familiarity, conventionality, and prototypicality to speakers. A salient interpretation is immediately accessible, and springs readily to mind, even if later discovered to be incorrect. For example, the English word 'air' will usually be interpreted as what we breathe, not what we sing. Salient interpretations depend very much on the wider experiences and knowledge of the speech community, as well as the immediate literary, social, and physical context." Millar, "Garden Path: The 'False Lead'," 70-71. Also, Millar*, Genre and Openness,* 66.

[91] Millar, "Garden Path: The 'False Lead'," 71.

[92] Millar*, Genre and Openness,* 67.

occurring sense of the word in the HB appropriate in that literary context.[93] Millar acknowledges this method of assessing salience as not infallible, and researchers' common sense is warranted.[94]

Millarian Methodological Tensions: Trust and Scrutiny

The third tension of Millar's methodology assesses readerly trust and scrutiny.[95] Navigating this tension, per Millar, cooperates with Proverbs' overarching call to acquire wisdom.[96] Readerly trust of Proverbs' authoritative poet-narrator undergirds Proverbs' pedagogy. In canonical context, this trust is aligned with trust of the LORD.[97] However, cooperatively identifying and interpreting Proverbs' puzzles and enigmas (cf. 1:6) also requires readers' careful listening. Like biblical narrative's "ambiguity" and "gaps," Proverbs' sparse poetry calls for responsible readerly scrutiny.[98] Per Millar, Proverbs'

---

[93] Millar, "Garden Path: The 'False Lead'," 71.

[94] Millar*, Genre and Openness,* 67. "If a potential ambiguity rests upon an uncommon meaning, we ought to be careful, for it may not be empirically perceived."

[95] Ibid., 196, 198, 201-204, 219. "Proverbs' general didactic principles are safe and ordered, worthy of trust. However, specific situations may display contradiction and ambiguity. … In [proverbs'] status as sagacious wisdom, they are to be trusted; by encapsulating the debate within themselves, they goad their readers to scrutinize." "A text's meaning emerges from three interacting forces: the speaker/author, the text itself, and the reader/hearer. Each of these … are basically trustworthy but can deceive and should be scrutinized. Scrutiny is possible because of the textual openness."

[96] "To acquire this wisdom, students should trust and scrutinize—a hermeneutical principle for interpreting text and world." Ibid., 219.

[97] "Proverbs' didactic intention … [is] to shape characters who would interpret Yahwisticly and trust in God." Proverbs' interpretive process trains readers to adopt "[a] stance of trusting subordination" to God, the "utterly inscrutable" One, "the enabler and limiter of human wisdom." Ibid., 219.

[98] Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 186-229.

sentence literature intentionally forces readers to navigate trust and scrutiny, training readers in reasoning and even their own limitations and interpretive ability.

Millarian Methodology Adapted for Proverbs 31:1-9

The present study approaches Proverbs 31:1-9 using a similar process as Millar's: (1) tracing readers' hermeneutic process and then (2) examining the pedagogy of the text.

Heuristic and Methodological Steps

As I consider readers' interpretive process of Proverbs 31:1-9, like Millar, time is the primary organizing factor to establish relative hermeneutic events. Like Millar, I use Millar's three readerly tension pairs to illumine the interpretive process: openness and closure; resonance and dissonance; and trust and scrutiny. Like Millar, while acknowledging the approach as not infallible, I heuristically employ high-level cognitive linguistic concepts to get my analysis underway. I view the human linguistic interpretive process as analogously 'online': ancient readers constructed meaning temporally as modern readers do, word by word, phrase by phrase, line by line. In this process, I see ancient readers, like modern ones, making initial interpretations which are iteratively reassessed, confirmed, or revised, based on subsequent textual inputs.

Like Millar, I acknowledge that ignorance of ancient readers and of Proverbs' compositional history poses obstacles to this kind of research. Similar to Millar, I envision an early canonical audience for whom both Proverbs' final form and the canonical material is in place (a synchronic reading). I heuristically leverage Millar's "rough-and-ready" consideration of HB frequency and context to understand what word meanings, constructions, and phonology might saliently have sprung to ancient minds.

However, Millar's 'bag of words' model is less fitted to examining longer mixed-genre poems like Proverbs 31:1-9 and discerning allusion to other biblical material. I supplement Millar's method with three other heuristic concepts. First, I incorporate high-level insights from cognitive linguistics' relevance theory to clarify the communicative act and predict ancient readers' textual engagement (what Millar does intuitively). Second, as discussed below, I attend to shared language to discern when ancient readers may have recognized inner-biblical allusion. Third, beyond shared language, I investigate allusion, nuancing Millar's 'bag of words' model, by heuristically applying bibliometrics' concept of term frequency and inverse document frequency (tf-idf).[99] Though not calculating tf-idf values, I use the general principle of higher root frequency relative to frequency in other units in Proverbs and HB to corroborate possible allusion "hotspots."

To trace the readerly interpretive process, I qualitatively assess the three Millarian tension dynamics according to this question: "Based on where the text has most recently directed readers' attention (or required hermeneutic effort), what is the current readerly sense of _____?" For the first reading of the text, readerly assessments are considered twice per verse segment: both early and late in the segments.[100] In addition to qualitative

---

[99] Cf. Miriam Azar, Aliza Pahmer, and Joshua Waxman, "A Thesaurus for Biblical Hebrew," in *Proceedings of 1st Workshop on Language Technologies for Historical and Ancient Languages,* ed. Rachele Sprugnoli and Marco Passarotti (Marseille, France: European Language Resources Association, 2020), 68-73. Racheli Moskowitz, Moriyah Schick, and Joshua Waxman, "*Leitwort* Detection, Quantification and Discernment," in *Atti del IX Convegno Annuale AIUCD. La svolta inevitabile: sfide e prospettive per l'Informatica Umanistica,* ed. Cristina Marras, Marco Passarotti, Greta Franzini, and Eleonora Litta (Milan, Italy: Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 2020), 171-177. Howard D. White, "Combining Bibliometrics, Information Retrieval, and Relevance Theory, Part 1: First Examples of a Synthesis," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 58, no. 4 (2007): 536-59. Howard D. White, "Combining Bibliometrics, Information Retrieval, and Relevance Theory, Part 2: Some Implications for Information Science," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 58, no. 4 (2007): 583-605.

[100] The final verse includes an additional assessment at what I see as the climax of the poem.

exegesis, these assessments are quantified on a scale of 1 (very low) to 7 (very high) and graphed. On the rereading, similar assessments are taken at the start and then after each verse (10 times). Graphs are presented in summary of findings.

After tracing the readerly interpretive process through each verse in 31:1-9, I attempt to understand readers' development through a second reading. In this rereading, I seek to understand how the interpretive process has enriched readerly textual engagement and what readers have learned in the interpretive struggle. I suggest my second reading is what can be compared to scholarly exegesis of hermeneutic answers (e.g., Fox's).

I acknowledge that this project is, to use Lyons' phrasing, "suggestive."[101] Like literary analysis generally, it can neither be proved nor disproved that Proverbs' poet-narrator intended canonical readers to engage with 31:1-9 in a particular way. Nor can I prove nor disprove that canonical readers did so. Yet empirical research suggests readers behave predictably when faced with incoherence, ambiguity, and poetic device.[102] On such grounds, it is feasible to perceive how ancient writers like Proverbs' final composer might intuitively have constructed material to engage such cognitive processes.

---

[101] Michael A. Lyons, "Local Incoherence, Global Coherence? Allusion and the Readability of Ancient Israelite Literature," *Old Testament Essays* 34, no. 1 (May 2021): 156.

[102] See Lyons, 157; Millar*, Genre and Openness,* 66n78; Jason E. Albrecht and Edward J. O'Brien, "Updating a Mental Model: Maintaining Both Local and Global Coherence," *Journal of Experimental Psychology. Learning, Memory & Cognition* 19, no. 5 (September 1993): 1061-70; Jason Braasch et al., "Readers' Use of Source Information in Text Comprehension," *Memory and Cognition* 40, no. 3 (2012): 450-65; Paul Hoffman and Andres Tamm, "Barking up the Right Tree: Univariate and Multivariate fMRI Analyses of Homonym Comprehension," *NeuroImage* 219 (October 1, 2020): DOI:10.1016/j.neuroimage.2020.117050; Stephen Lehman and Gregory Schraw, "Effects of Coherence and Relevance on Shallow and Deep Text Processing," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 94, no. 4 (December 2002): 738-51; N. Mashal and Miriam Faust, "The Effects of Metaphoricity and Presentation Style on Brain Activation during Text Comprehension," *Metaphor & Symbol* 25, no. 1 (2010): 19-33; Helge I. Strømsø, "Multiple Models of Multiple-Text Comprehension: A Commentary," *Educational Psychologist* 52, no. 3 (June-September 2017): 216-224; Matthew J. Traxler, *Introduction to Psycholinguistics: Understanding Language Science* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 117-18.

While this project attempts to reading 31:1-9 attentive to the readerly *process*, it is not my goal to explain historic reading strategies, e.g., how canonical readers throughout the centuries have read 31:1-9 yielding various interpretations. At times, I offer historic interpretations as support that readers *may* have read such a way. However, the historic interpretive diversity of 31:1-9 is complex, and itself attests that poetic communication is inherently risky. It is interesting that biblical authors regularly choose to communicate in poetry that gave readers so much agency and did not guarantee particular interpretations. While right interpretation seems important in Proverbs (cf. Prov 1:2-6) as elsewhere in HB, I do not see historic interpretive diversity of 31:1-9 as evidence that its poetry somehow failed. Nor do I view majority positions as cooperative with Proverbs' poet-narrator's communicative purposes merely by the strength of numbers.

Insights from Relevance Theory

Cognitive linguistics' Relevance Theory (RT) has recently replaced the 'code model' of communication and offers my study a supplementary heuristic framework to understand how an early canonical audience might have engaged with Proverbs 31:1-9.[103] Despite its newness, RT has been helpfully applied to biblical texts by Gene Green, Karen Jobes, and others.[104] As far as I can discern, RT has yet to be applied to Proverbs.

---

[103] Kevin G. Smith, "Relevance Theory," in *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Languages and Linguistics,* ed. Geoffrey Khan (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2013), 3:364-67.

[104] Gene L. Green, "Lexical Pragmatics and Biblical Interpretation," *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 4 (December 2007): 799-812; Gene L. Green, "Relevance Theory and Theological Interpretation: Thoughts on Metarepresentation," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 4, no. 1 (2010): 75-90; Karen Jobes, "Relevance Theory and the Translation of Scripture," *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 4 (December 2007): 773-97; Tim Meadowcroft, "Relevance as a Mediating Category in the Reading of Biblical Texts: Venturing beyond the Hermeneutical Circle," *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 4 (December 2002): 611-27.

Developed by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, RT envisions communication as ostensive (speakers desire to be understood), inferential (hearers must infer speakerly intent and assumptions from available evidence), and highly context dependent.[105] A speaker's meaning goes beyond what is conveyed in an utterance, and hearers must use context to fill gaps and disambiguate referents. Two principles undergird RT. First, communication works because speakers and hearers can mutually predict what is understood as relevant to a given meaning. Because a speaker can predict hearers will "pay attention to the potentially most relevant stimulus," she selects certain stimuli (and not others) so that her hearers will grasp her meaning.[106] For example, when Brenda says to James, "Please hand me the *blue* book," Brenda and James likely both understand that her specifying the book's color was important to her communicative purpose—e.g., for James to distinguish the desired book from books of alternate colors.

Per RT's second underlying principle, human processing of communication seeks efficiency.[107] Hearers understand that an "utterance should be relevant enough to be worth the effort needed for comprehension" in a particular context.[108] James can presume that Brenda's specification of the book as 'blue' is optimally efficient for their shared context. Brenda omitted other extraneous details about the book from her request—author, publisher, subtitle, its condition—because both she and James could predictably

---

[105] Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition,* 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1995).

[106] "The human cognitive system tends towards processing the most relevant inputs available." Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber, "Truthfulness and Relevance," *Mind* 111, no. 443 (July 2002): 603. RT convention for using pronouns 'she/her/hers' for speakers and 'he/him/his' for hearers is followed here.

[107] Wilson and Sperber, 604. "Every utterance conveys a presumption of its own optimal relevance."

[108] Wilson and Sperber, 604.

agree that such details would be irrelevant to his grasping her meaning in their shared context. Per RT, in successful (single-order) communication, a given utterance has only a single interpretation relevant to the speaker's and hearer's shared context, and the linguistic content has been constructed for optimal efficiency.[109] However, if James and Brenda were sitting among stacks of books in a library, her less precise request "Please hand me the book" would likely confuse James. James would expend additional effort to disambiguate which book Brenda desired. He may wonder why she had him do so.

Thus, as RT posits, a speaker like Brenda assumes she can convey her meaning through the union of explicatures (what James can infer from linguistic content) and implicatures (what James must infer from external context).[110] Hearers like James seek to make sense of these assumptions through efficient cognitive engagement of the conceptual information available to them: lexical entries (words like "hand" or "book" used to portray concepts), logical entries (minimal, fixed, and context-independent "irreducible properties of the concept"), and encyclopedic entries (open-ended yet organized storehouses of information about the concept—i.e., the whole of all James understands about books).[111] This information is accessed selectively and efficiently per the discerned context of an utterance.[112] James need not access his mentally stored

---

[109] Smith, 365. Single-order communication is where the speaker does not intend ambiguity. In fact, RT's model is conducive to research like the present study's because it generally "yields a single interpretation for a given quadruple of speaker, hearer, utterance, situation." Wilson and Sperber, 606.

[110] Jobes, 782-92; Smith, 365.

[111] Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance,* 86-89; Green, "Lexical Pragmatics," 801-2; Smith, 365-66.

[112] Green, "Lexical Pragmatics," 802.

information on how books are made, where they are sold, and which are his favorite books in order to rightly interpret Brenda's statement "Please hand me the blue book."

While largely complementary to Millar's heuristic use of saliency and blend theory, RT provides greater awareness of what interpretive options may (or may not) occur to readers and what credence they may give to these in a given literary context. RT offers our study a helpful guide for when interpretive effort starts, continues, and stops.[113]

However, I recognize RT's limitations regarding Proverbs' poetry. First, RT is geared toward single-order communication: where speakers produce utterances for hearers to consume cognitively and efficiently.[114] As Millar, Heim, and others have argued, Proverbs' literature seems often intentionally ambiguous, which means RT's ideal single-order communication model does not readily fit Proverbs' communicative context. Moreover, as Millar and Stewart argue, Proverbs' poetry is not weakened by inefficient processing (as some might hear RT suggest), but *enriched* by the greater processing demanded by weak implicature and ambiguity.[115] Lexical economy ("fewer words used," as is particularly characteristic of Hebrew poetry) is, in fact, inversely

---

[113] "The hearer should consider interpretive hypotheses (disambiguations, reference assignments, implicatures, etc.) in order of accessibility—that is, follow the path of least effort—and stop when he arrives at an interpretation which satisfies the expectations of relevance raised by the utterance itself." "[W]hen a hearer following the path of least effort finds an interpretation which satisfies his expectations of relevance, in the absence of contrary evidence, this is the best possible interpretive hypothesis." Wilson and Sperber, 605.

[114] "What makes it reasonable for the hearer to stop at the first interpretation which satisfies his expectations of relevance is that either this interpretation is close enough to what the speaker meant, or *she has failed to communicate her meaning*. A speaker who produced an utterance with two or more significantly different interpretations, each yielding the expected level of cognitive effect, would put the hearer to the *gratuitous* and *unexpected extra effort* of choosing among them, and the resulting interpretation (*if any*) would not satisfy … the presumption of optimal relevance." Wilson and Sperber, 605. Emphasis mine.

[115] "[P]oetic effects create common impressions rather than common knowledge. Utterances with poetic effects can be used precisely to create this sense of apparently affective rather than cognitive mutuality." Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance,* 224.

proportional to "cognitive economy (less processing effort required)."[116] Also, RT can be seen to reduce poetic effects to cognitive (vs. affective or aesthetic) relevance.[117] Further, RT's emphasis on context highlights our ignorance of Proverbs' communicative context.

Despite these limitations, I see RT provide three helpful tools for the present study. First, RT suggests that Proverbs 31:1-9—in its sparseness, complexity, and ambiguity—has been optimally constructed for the intended readerly interpretive experience. That is, greater interpretive processing is not incidental, but *necessary* to grasp its intended meaning.[118] Second, RT supports deep readerly engagement with the textual data's explicatures.[119] As Adrian Pilkington observes, "in poetry, reference assignment and disambiguation are often deliberately made problematic," ensuring readers expend greater effort in examining textual features and poetic devices.[120] This greater effort yields richer combination of memories, emotions, and cognitive effects.[121] RT encourages us to understand readers' deep engagement with the poetic text of 31:1-9

---

[116] Anna Christina Ribeiro, "Relevance Theory and Poetic Effects," *Philosophy and Literature* 37, no. 1 (April 2013): 110.

[117] Ribeiro, 102-117, particularly 111. Poetic effects, per Sperber and Wilson, are the "peculiar effect of an utterance which achieves most of its relevance through a wide array of weak implicatures" "in the otherwise ordinary pursuit of relevance". Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance,* 222, 224.

[118] "Clearly the extra linguistic processing effort incurred by the repetition must be outweighed by some increase in contextual effects triggered by the repetition itself." Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance,* 220.

[119] "In relevance-theoretic terms, we can say that [poetic] techniques such as [lexical economy and other poetic devices] are invitations to readers or listeners to explore the encyclopedic entries of the concepts involved." Ribeiro, 109.

[120] Adrian Pilkington, *Poetic Effects: A Relevance Theory Perspective* (Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing, 2000), 77.

[121] As Pilkington argues, poetic devices are "ways of encouraging readers to explore memory more thoroughly, to combine memories stored at different conceptual addresses in order to increase the range of cognitive effects." Pilkington, 77.

does change the way they think and how they see the world.[122] Third, when carefully applied, RT aids our recognition that deliberately ambiguous communication (as I suggest 31:1-9 reflects) is actually communicating something non-ambiguous.[123]

> In the case of deliberate equivocation, where an utterance is intentionally constructed so that two apparently satisfactory competing interpretations occur to the hearer and he is unable to choose between them, neither interpretation is directly accepted. Rather it is the fact that the speaker has produced such an utterance that is seen as a communicative act.[124]

RT suggests such second-order communication, which also includes artificial contexts like that established in 31:1-9, works on the level of *showing* versus *telling*.[125] RT further suggests that relevance in poetic texts or texts with artificial contexts can be achieved "through a vast array of weak effects, rather than through a 'meaning' or a 'message.'"[126] To be tuned to these, this study applies accepted methods for poetical literary analysis.

Literary Methodology

While widely acknowledged as Hebrew poetry, Proverbs 31:1-9 has long been seen as a foreign import and thus interpreted largely apart from other canonical

---

[122] Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, "Précis of *Relevance: Communication and Cognition,*" *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 10 (1987): 751. "Relevance can be achieved not only by informing someone of new facts, but also by altering saliences and strengths in the cognitive environment. … They force the listener or reader to develop or otherwise modify mental models, scenarios, scripts, or schemas."

[123] Sperber and Wilson, "Précis," 751. "[D]eliberate ambiguity at one level can be used as a nonambiguous ostensive stimulus at another level."

[124] Wilson and Sperber, 605n6.

[125] Sperber and Wilson, "Précis," 751. "So communicating, at one level, information about Hamlet or Ishmael which is relevant only in its own artificial context communicates at a second level by showing what is possible or conceivable, rather than what is. … These works are perfectly good cases of ostensive communication because they are, at the higher level, cases of showing rather than 'saying that.'"

[126] Sperber and Wilson, "Précis," 751.

materials.[127] Mancuello González's compelling argument for its Hebraic origin invites fresh reading of the unit, sensitive to possible allusion and echo of other canonical material.[128] Recognizing allusion can be contentious, yet Mancuello González's exemplary work in Proverbs 31:1-9 and recent work in biblical intertextuality broadly encourage further exploration of this possibility with 31:1-9.[129]

Cooperative reading of poetry (both so-called secular and biblical) recognizes weak implicature and allusion as integral to right interpretation.[130] By 'allusion,' I refer to an author's intentional but unstated reference to another text through shared language or "patterned characterization and plot sequences."[131] Allusion, by its nature "indirect," demands readers' intelligent collaboration.[132] As Leland Ryken notes, allusion is "a means of achieving a tremendous compression of meaning, and often multiplicity of meaning."[133] Allusion also leverages emotion and shared knowledge the poet anticipates

---

[127] Mancuello González, 19-46. Cf. Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 2011), 548, 552.

[128] Contra, e.g., Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs*, 3-9.

[129] Cf. Katharine Dell and Will Kynes, eds., *Reading Proverbs Intertextually,* Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 629 (2019; repr. New York: T&T Clark, 2020).

[130] Cf. William Harmon, *A Handbook to Literature,* 12th ed. (Boston: Longman, 2012), 14. "[D]iscovering the meaning and value of the allusions is frequently essential to understanding the work." Leland Ryken, *Sweeter Than Honey, Richer Than Gold: A Guided Study of Biblical Poetry* (Wooster, OH: Weaver Book, 2015), 63. "If we are not familiar with the work of literature or historical event to which a poet or author alludes, we miss the meaning of a passage completely."

[131] Lyons, 143.

[132] Luis Alonso Schöckel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics,* trans. Adrian Graffy, Subsidia biblica 11 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2000), 143.

[133] Ryken, *Sweeter Than Honey,* 63.

his readers to have.[134] Allusion, thus, is tricky: the poem's meaning is incomplete without it, yet it operates by weak implicature. Although perhaps well-intentioned against abuse, positivist methodologies seeking objective certainty of inner-biblical allusion have, as Ryan O'Dowd notes, "the unfortunate tendency of distorting or flattening literary artifacts".[135] My study attempts to wade these murky waters; however, my goal is less to present solid defense of inner-biblical allusion in 31:1-9 than to offer reasons why canonical readers might have themselves considered the possibility of allusion as they participated in the unit's poetry and what this evaluative process might have involved.

To do the close reading this consideration will require, I seek to be attentive to, in Peter Leihart's phrasing, "a hermeneutics of the letter … attending to the specific contours of the text—the author's word choices, structural organization, tropes and allusions, and intertextual quotations."[136] To this careful attention to the text, I attempt to bring the shared body of knowledge which I presume Proverbs' canonical author could be confident a canonical audience would be aware: namely, the canon.[137] Common linguistic forms, particularly rare and/or covenantally weighty words and images, as I see it, encourage recognition of connections between canonical texts. The more overlapping lexemes and images in a given text, the greater likelihood of intentional allusion, echo, or

---

[134] Harmon, 14. "By tapping the knowledge and memory of the reader, it seeks to secure a resonant emotional effect from the associations already existing in the reader's mind. … The effectiveness of allusion depends on a body of knowledge shared by writer and reader."

[135] Ryan O'Dowd, "A Prophet in the Sage's House?: Origins of the Feminine Metaphors in Proverbs," in *Riddles and Revelations: Explorations into the Relationship between Wisdom and Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible,* ed. Mark J. Boda, Russell L. Meek, and William R. Osborne (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 171.

[136] Peter J. Leithart, *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), vii, 132-39.

[137] On a cautionary approach on Israelite access to other ANE texts, cf. Millar*, Genre and Openness,* 21-23.

evocation.[138] I heuristically leverage Jeffrey Leonard's principles to identify inner-biblical allusion, where "shared language is the single most important factor in establishing a textual connection."[139]

This study aims to trace not form-critical concerns or directionality of intertextual influence, but rather the implied poet's intention for readerly engagement. As some have noted, shared worldview may account for lexical commonalities between biblical texts.[140] As I attempt to discern poetic intention, I do not attempt to differentiate between poet's references to shared canonical worldview and allusions to specific texts. As synchronic, not diachronic, this study aims to read Proverbs 31:1-9 in the canonical context and consider how readers might be meant to explore other biblical texts and 31:1-9 as

---

[138] As my focus is on readerly engagement, I do not seek to distinguish allusion, evocation, and echo. On echo as integral to the artistry and meaning of a biblical work, see Leland Ryken, *A Complete Handbook of Literary Forms in the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 70-71.

[139] Jeffrey M. Leonard, "Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions: Psalm 78 as a Test Case," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127, no. 2 (2008): 246-51. Leonard offers eight principles as follows:

(1) Shared language is the single most important factor in establishing a textual connection.
(2) Shared language is more important than nonshared language.
(3) Shared language that is rare or distinctive suggests a stronger connection than does language that is widely used.
(4) Shared phrases suggest a stronger connection than do individual shared terms.
(5) The accumulation of shared language suggests a stronger connection than does a single shared term or phrase.
(6) Shared language in similar contexts suggests a stronger connection than does shared language alone.
(7) Shared language need not be accompanied by shared ideology to establish a connection.
(8) Shared language need not be accompanied by shared form to establish a connection.

On intertextuality between biblical prophecy and biblical wisdom, Russell L. Meek, "Prophet and Sage in Dialogue: History and Methodology," in *Riddles and Revelations: Explorations into the Relationship between Wisdom and Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible,* ed. Mark J. Boda, Russell L. Meek, and William R. Osborne, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 634 (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 14-15.

[140] Cf. Russell L. Meek, "Intertextuality, Inner-Biblical Exegesis, and Inner-Biblical Allusion: The Ethics of a Methodology," *Biblica* 95, no. 2 (2014): 280-91.

"mutually enlightening."[141] To clarify, I presume Proverbs' canonical audience would be open to hear evocations across biblical genres. As Mark Sneed noted, "confluences" of biblical literary so-called traditions "should not be viewed as anomalies but as perfectly natural and to be expected."[142] Apparent incoherence of an immediate literary context and a suspected inner-biblical allusion does not invalidate it.[143] As RT suggests, second-order communication in 31:1-9 allows us to consider whether, to use Lyon's words, the author "employed allusion in such a way as to create incongruity and incoherence at local text-segment levels while creating a coherent argument at larger text-segment levels."[144]

Introductory Matters

Text, Audience, and Authorship

Our source text will be the Masoretic Text (MT), which I take to be the best evidence as to Proverbs' final form. I see 31:1-9 as Hebrew poetry composed and purposely included in Proverbs' literary whole, which implies its intentional inclusion in

---

[141] Suzanna R. Millar, "Reading Esther with Proverbs: Complexifying Character, Theme, and Ideology [or Esther in Dialogue with the Proverbs]," in *Reading Esther Intertextually,* ed. David G. Firth and Brittany N. Melton, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, forthcoming [2022]), 1.

[142] Mark R. Sneed, "Inspired Sages: Massa' and the Confluence of Wisdom and Prophecy," in *Scribes as Sages and Prophets: Scribal Traditions in Biblical Wisdom Literature and in the Book of the Twelve,* ed. Jutta Krispenz, BZAW 496 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2021), 17.

[143] "[I]n some cases, there is reason to believe ancient Israelite writers employed allusion in such a way as to create incongruity and incoherence at local text-segment levels while creating a coherent argument at larger text-segment levels." Lyons, 141. On Proverbs' connections with other canonical texts, see Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 165-81; C. John Collins, "Proverbs and the Levitical System," *Presbyterion* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 9-34.

[144] Lyons, 141.

the broader Hebrew Scriptures.[145] I follow Mancuello González's thorough text critical assessment of Proverbs 31:1-9 and receive MT without emendation.[146] Unlike Mancuello González, I receive the *qere* in 31:4.[147]

Although Proverbs' compositional history and dating are complex, the audience of 31:1-9 envisioned for the present study is Proverbs' early canonical audience: those who approach 31:1-9 within the whole of Proverbs' final form with the canon in place. I presume readers' familiarity with the literary context in Proverbs, broader canonical context, and larger biblical meta-narrative in which the Scriptures orient themselves. I presume HB encourages this canonical audience to read cooperatively in this context and see themselves as "heirs," "caretakers," and "participants" of this literary heritage.[148]

Proverbs' intended setting and consumption is debated. For the purposes of this study, I presume canonical readerly consumption of Proverbs 31:1-9 would be primarily corporately public (vs. private) and aurally received (vs. visually). I envision Proverbs 31:1-9 read aloud to the gathered company of God's covenant people—men, women,

---

[145] 'Composed' allows for the possibility of many editors within a complex compositional history. We have no other extant witnesses of 31:1-9 in alternate form or context of HB. Mancuello González, 45. I eschew questions of earlier authorship. My concern is not with historic personages (e.g., Lemuel or his mother), but rather with literary personas in the pedagogical poetry of 31:1-9 for the canonical audience. On Proverbs' historic final composer, my literary concerns regard this persona's literary form, and thus I refer to him as Proverbs' poet-narrator. Cf. Vayntrub, "Proverbs and Ancient Israelite Education."

[146] Cf. Mancuello González, 47-67, 82.

[147] I justify this decision on the grounds of the overall reliability of the Masoretic tradition, my specific concern with a canonical audience, and my seeing this audience's primary aural engagement with the text. Others like Franz Delitzsch and David Toshio Tsumura receive *qere* in v. 4 as sensible and therefore preferable over any emendation. Delitzsch, *Proverbs,* 2:320-22; David Toshio Tsumura, "The Vetitive Particle אַל and the Poetic Structure of Proverb 31:4," *Annual of the Japanese Biblical Institute* 4 (1978): 23-31.

[148] Collins, *Reading Genesis Well,* 293.

children—when such a reading would be appropriate.[149] While MT vocalization and para-textual elements are not authoritative, Masoretic "meticulous" transmission suggests accentuation reflects ancient exegesis and is the best guide we have to its ancient aural presentation.[150] If reasonable solutions respecting MT vocalization are available, the burden of proof lies with those ignoring the para-textual elements. In all cases of proposed vocalization emendation in 31:1-9, I argue (below) that a reasonable solution which respects Masoretic vocalization exists and therefore should be favored. Masoretic paratextual elements are incorporated into my exegesis as aural textual inputs.

Dating with Respect to Audience

The uncertain dating of Proverbs' final composition means that, here, I envision, not necessarily the *first* readers of Proverbs' final form, but a post-exilic canonical audience soon after establishment of the canon's final form.[151] As this audience would have been subject to foreign kings, it is reasonable to see them invited to discern the discrepancy between their post-exilic reality and God's covenant promises, a context which, by its kingly subject matter is brought to bear implicitly in Proverbs 31:1-9.[152]

---

[149] Cf. Michael Graves, "The Public Reading of Scripture in Early Judaism," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 3 (September 2007): 467-87.

[150] Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible,* 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 68. See also William Wickes, "A Treatise on the Accentuation of the Three So-called Poetical Books of the Old Testament, Psalms, Proverbs and Job," in *Two Treatises on the Accentuation of the Old Testament,* The Library of Biblical Studies, ed. Harry M. Orlinsky (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1970), 1-9.

[151] Childs*,* 75-79.

[152] Deut 30:3-10; 2 Sam 7:10-16; 1 Kings 6:13; 8:46-53; Is 64-66; Jer 32:36-44; Ezek 34, etc.

Relationship of 31:1-9 with 31:10-31.

Proverbs 31:1-9 exhibits numerous features which confirm it to be a coherent paragraph: subtitle, coherent characters, linguistic and literary cohesion, repetition. Whether the superscript of 31:1 is intended to govern all of chapter 31 is a difficult question.[153] The present study heuristically regards 31:1-9 as a complete unit.[154]

Literary Structure

In considering the "online" readerly interpretive process of 31:1-9, my study anticipates readers' perception of its literary structure not as understanding held prior to reading, but as that generated "online" as readers move linearly through the text, attentive to internal stylistic/formal shifts as key structural cues. On the one hand, while 31:1-9 is hermeneutically complex in other ways, its internal literary structure appears fairly straightforward.[155] This is reflected in scholarly discussion—differences on literary structure are more in nuance than substantive disagreement.[156] Verse 1 is universally acknowledged as a superscript/title, and scholars widely recognize the imperatival force

---

[153] The majority position sees 31:10-31 as a discrete unit independent of the 31:1 subtitle. However, I am sympathetic to Kitchen's and Waltke's arguments for 31:1 sitting over all of chap. 31. I remain undecided. Kitchen, 70, 100-102. Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31,* The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 501-503.

[154] Although some have argued for character (or scenario) continuity between 31:1-9 and 31:10-31, the איש חיל introduced in 31:10 appears to be a new persona within Proverbs or perhaps Wisdom personified (cf. chaps. 1-9). Cf. Lichtenstein, 202-11; Victor Hurowitz, "The Seventh Pillar—Reconsidering the Literary Structure and Unity of Proverbs 31," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 113, no. 2 (2001): 209-18. Alternatively, cf. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31,* 883-84. Or Irmtraud Fischer, *Gotteslehrerinnen: Weise Frauen und Frau Weisheit im Alten Testament* (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 2006), 142-72.

[155] Cf. McKane, 407. "Apart from v. 2, which is a puzzle, the structure is simple …"

[156] To compare subtle thematic difference, cf. McKane, 409-10 with Leo G. Perdue, *Proverbs,* Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (2000; repr. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 271.

in vv. 3-9 to address three overt topics: women (v. 3), strong drink (negatively in vv. 4-5 and positively in vv. 6-7), and legal advocacy of the marginalized (vv. 8-9). Verse 2 is variously characterized as introductory appeal, call to attention, warning, or admonition. My methodology incorporates these accepted broad textual subdivisions.

On the other hand, while the unit's broad literary structure is readily discerned, its inner logic is less accessible, even enigmatic. How readers make sense of the unit's reasoning carries subtle structural significance, as scholarship reflects.[157] Scholars typically augment the broad structural sweeps noted above by discerning internal reasoning through application of one and/or two different literary hypotheses.[158] The majority hypothesis nuances literary structure of 31:1-9 by approaching it as an instance of ANE (Royal) Instruction genre.[159] While this hypothesis helpfully pays close attention

---

[157] As Mancuello González notes, readers must differentiate not only the relation of the admonitions to each other, but their relative importance. Mancuello González, 79. E.g., Richard J. Clifford and Mancuello González are among those who emphasize justice as the overarching priority. Mancuello González, 79-82. Richard J. Clifford, *Proverbs: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 270.

[158] Cf. Mancuello González, 78-82.

[159] As seen with McKane, Crenshaw, and others, the majority position typically attends to the unit's structural features and thematic foci relative to the understanding of the ANE (Royal) Instruction genre and an implied kingly audience. An exemplary case, Waltke's structure of vv. 2-9 reflects consistent understanding of this genre and its thematic implications:

I. Introductory admonition to hear	2
II. Admonitions to show restraint	
A. With regard to women: not to waste national strength	3
B. With regard to intoxicants: to protect the poor	4-7
1. Not to become drunk and forget edicts that protect the poor	4-5
2. To give intoxicants to the poor to forget their misery!	6-7
C. Admonition to give new edicts for the poor	8-9

Waltke, 506. (Waltke regards 31:1 as a superscript governing all of chap. 31.) Cf. Crenshaw on discussion of its structural features. Crenshaw, "A Mother's Instruction," 14. Similarly, McKane, 407, 409-10; Fox, *Proverbs 10-31,* 888; Jean-Jacques Lavoie, "Vin et bière en Proverbes 31,4-7," *Studies in Religion* 44, no. 1 (2015): 34; Arndt Meinhold, *Sprüche Kapitel 16-31,* vol. 2 of *Die Sprüche,* Zürcher Bibelkommentare AT 16.2 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1991), 2:516; Petrany, 157; Van Leeuwen, 258-59; R. N. Whybray, *Proverbs,* New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 422. Some scholars employ this hypothesis implicitly. Cf. Clifford, *Proverbs,* 270; Derek Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary,* Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 17 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 176-77.

to the unit's features, it presumes authorial reasoning may be conveyed to its audience by way of the audience's familiarity with the intricate nuances of the ANE Instruction genre, a presumption which has limited supporting data.[160] While the early canonical audience situated in the ANE was certainly influenced by ANE culture, we have little certainty of the common Israelite's exposure to *ANE Royal Instruction* as a literary device.[161] In contrast, far more defensible is the canonical audience's familiarity with the Instruction genre as instantiated in Proverbs: namely, parental instruction (Prov 1:8-9:18) and admonition (Prov 22:17-24:22).[162] I assume these Proverbs instantiations, not more general ANE Instruction, are ready comparables available for readers' construction of literary structure in 31:1-9. Thus, I follow Mancuello González in her nuanced view of the poem's structure, which keys on such textual features likely apparent to Proverbs' readers: a title/subtitle (v. 1), speech opening appeal (v. 2), and a body of instruction (vv. 3-9): what the king should avoid (negative admonition in vv. 3 and 4-5) and what the king should do (positive admonition in vv. 6-7 and 8-9).[163]

---

[160] "There is certainly enough evidence for instructions in Israel to suggest that the author [of Proverbs 1-9] would have known about the genre, and that his work is, therefore, self-consciously and not coincidentally an instruction. It is far from being the case, however, that we can assume him to have had a wide knowledge of foreign compositions in the genre, let alone to have been immersed in Egyptian ideas or motifs." Stuart Weeks, *Instruction and Imagery in Proverbs 1-9* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 33-38, quote on 36. On Proverbs 1-9, cf. Keefer, 10-11. While this may seem to run contrary to scholarship's acceptance of foreign influence on Proverbs (e.g., Adolf Erman's recognition of a connection between Prov 22:17-23:11 and the Egyptian *Instruction of Amenemope* (cf. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9,* 17-19)), the present study has in view not an elite readership of the few who might have exposure to international Instruction literature, but the common canonical audience presumed by the Hebrew Scriptures generally.

[161] Perdue notes the other possible biblical example of Royal Instruction as 1 Kings 2:1-12. Perdue, 271.

[162] Distancing from ANE Instruction and situating closer to canonical material suggests subtle but real interpretive difference on the unit's structure. E.g., with greater familiarity to Proverbs' instruction and admonition, a canonical audience may not perceive what Crenshaw does in his comparative analysis with ANE Royal Instruction: "The absence of motivation clauses in the mother's instruction is remarkable, for this feature is typical of the genre." Crenshaw, "A Mother's Instruction," 19. Similarly, McKane, 407-408.

[163] Mancuello González, 79-82. Cf. Crenshaw, "A Mother's Instruction," 14.

Less applicable to my study but worthy of note, the second, minority scholarly hypothesis (championed by Murray Lichtenstein and Victor Hurowitz) structures 31:1-9 by presuming a unity of Proverbs 31 as a whole. Unlike the majority position's focus on Instruction genre features, this posture discerns the unit's inner logic by attending to repeated roots, chiasms, and macro-thematic parallels.[164] While some recognize its validity, this position has not won scholarly consensus.[165] In my view, this approach attends to select textual elements while neglecting others and is less attuned to the unit's literary sweep.[166] While the present study does consider literary connections with surrounding material, manageability of scope demands these be a secondary focus. The primary goal is a close reading of 31:1-9. However, I recognize that the unit's speaker structures her teaching in 31:2-9 with intra- and interline parallelism, using verbs (primarily) and repeated roots (secondarily). This seems to contrast significantly with the alphabetic acrostic structure of 31:10-31 and sets 31:1-9 apart for its own consideration.

---

[164] Recognizing "equal and opposite" "symmetry" in both 31:1-9 and 31:10-31, Lichtenstein finds chiastic arrangement of יין–שכר in vv. 4 and 6 as structurally significant. Lichtenstein, 203-205, 211. Within 31:1-9, he identifies a "rubric" (v. 1), an "introductory exhortation" intended personally for Lemuel (vv. 2-3), and a "main structural unit" (vv. 4-9) addressing kings' behavior broadly through "two juxtaposed symmetrical components (vv. 4-7) … [and] a two-verse coda (vv. 8-9)." Extending Lichtenstein's argument, Hurowitz sees "overlapping … chiastically ordered word chains" and "a thematic chiasm embracing the entire chapter" (Hurowitz, 216):

A 1-2 Mother rebukes son
B 3a + 3b Women (warning against women + danger of woman)
C 4 + 5 Wine (warning against wine + danger of wine)
C′ 6-9 Wine (ideal aspects of wine)
B′ 10-19 + 20-31 Women (the desired woman)
A′ 28-29 Sons praise mother

[165] Cf. Mancuello González, 78-79. Also, Fox's critique: "In my [Fox's] view, the pattern is too intricate to be absorbed by the reader and to be rhetorically effective." Fox, *Proverbs 10-31,* 883.

[166] E.g., Lichtenstein's regard of 31:8-9 as a "coda" hardly attends to the dramatic poetic pacing of the poem, which I see climaxing in these two verses. Lichtenstein, 205.

Literary Context and Participants

As Fox and Crenshaw demonstrate, Proverbs 31:1-9 is often interpreted with a near lens: as maternal admonishment of a kingly son, Lemuel. However, in Proverbs' literary canonical whole, a wider lens illumines the layered voices and complexity: Proverbs' canonically authorized poet-narrator voices 31:1; and the ambiguous genitive דברי למואל allows for either vv. 2-9 as "his mother's" voice or Lemuel reiterating "his mother's" voice.[167] Canonical readers must determine how to position themselves relative to the text and discern why Proverbs' poet-narrator set this poem here for their overhearing. In terms of RT, the text's relevance to Proverbs, the canon, and the canonical audience is not readily apparent, and canonical readers have their inferential work cut out for them. Much of the passage's interpretive burden involves discerning these intended inferences.[168]

I differentiate the historical person of Proverbs' final composer from the literary persona of Proverbs' speaking poet-narrator, who supervises the literary work and voices Proverbs' superscripts.[169] My focus is on the latter. This poet-narrator delegates speaking privilege to Proverbs' other voices, including the maternal persona of 31:2-9.[170] In canonical context, Proverbs' poet-teacher speaks not on his own authority, but as a

---

[167] The latter possibly allows for repetition of either *ipsissima vox* or *ipsissima verba.*

[168] For brief discussion of these literary matters commonly overlooked for 31:1-9, see Jeanette May Hartwell, "Wisdom, Strange or Somewhere in Between: In Search of a Real Woman in the Book of Proverbs" (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2017), 83-85, 98-100, https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/7593/. Hartwell leverages this literary awareness toward a feministic hermeneutic and her quest for a female voice within Proverbs 31.

[169] Minimally, 1:1; 10:1; 24:23a; 25:1; 30:1; and 31:1. 22:17-20 and 24:23 use a different structure. Thus, I am not certain the poet-narrator voices these. On a narrator's persona as distinct from historical author/editor, see Harmon, 361.

[170] E.g., the parent of Proverbs 1:8-9:18 and the speaker of 31:2-9.

delegate of the Person understood to authorize the meta-narrative of the Scriptures, the LORD, the God of Israel.

Chapter 4

Exegetical Reading of Proverbs 31:1-9

This study seeks to understand the pedagogy of 31:1-9 by way of readerly hermeneutic participation in its poetry. This chapter applies the first stage of Millar's reading strategy to exegete the unit: tracing readers' temporal, online interpretive engagement with the text. This chapter's seven parts reflect this readerly interpretive journey through two sequential readings of 31:1-9. The first six sections correspond to the text's six subsections. The seventh section encompasses the entire second reading. The first engagement with the text aims to construct basic sense: disambiguation, semantics, grammar, syntax, and gapping. The second reading more deeply explores poetic evocations and imagery. These simulated interpretive journeys through the text are, admittedly, more detailed than what readers may process in real time. I hope to show, however, the interpretive journey as undulating and complex. The journey becomes a narrative of sorts, a pedagogical plot to analyze in the next chapter.

Reading 31:1

Readers enter Proverbs 31:1 saturated in the imagistic multi-line poems of 30:1-33.[171] In 31:1, readers navigate a voice shift, recognize a subgenre marker, and encounter a destabilizing attribution. In real time, the interpretive process seems highly oscillating: waves of efficiency, then complexity. Readers face seemingly imbalanced syntax,

[171] In 30:2-33, meaning is more enriched by imaginative engagement with sensory details than semantic relationships of abstract qualities or types.

difficult semantics, and ambiguous characters.[172] Genre expectations seem challenged. Readers likely exit the verse with open questions of basic sense, speaker identity, and proper interpretive posture. Understanding of 31:1 appears gained more by imaginatively overlapping images and concepts than grasping clausal semantic sense.

Proverbs 31:1 text —

דִּבְרֵי לְמוּאֵל מֶלֶךְ מַשָּׂא אֲשֶׁר־יִסְּרַתּוּ אִמּוֹ׃

The readerly hermeneutic process of 31:1 is simulated in three sequential segments: (1) דברי למואל, (2) מלך משא, and (3) אשר יסרתו אמו.[173]

Reading 31:1a - דברי למואל

Table 1: Encountering v. 1a

Initial interpretation:	The words of Lemuel …
Possible corrected interpretation:	The words of One-who-belongs-to-God …

The first segment offers readers initial stability (דברי) yet quickly disorients with a new, unknown character (למואל). Recognition of דברי in Proverbs' context signals that Proverbs poet-narrator may have resumed speaking, which demands interpretive postures be adjusted.[174] Though succinct and mysterious, the poet-narrator's voice seems trustworthy, and readers likely ready more straightforward interpretive tools than those

---

[172] Cf. Ferdinand Deist, "Prov. 31:1. A Case of Constant Mistranslation," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 6 (1978): 1-3.

[173] The second segment, as proposed, jars with Masoretic division, yet it aligns with salient expectations of Hebrew syntax of an appositional indefinite מלך in this subtitular context. The primary interpretive tension of 31:1b hinges on this conflict. The choice to segment in this way leans into this interpretive struggle.

[174] Though often overlooked, canonical literary headings are part of the literary experience. "A text's frame, whether narrative or not, contextualizes a work for a reader, bridges the world of the reader and the inner world of the text, and may narrow its generic and interpretive possibilities." Jacqueline Vayntrub, *Beyond Orality: Biblical Poetry on its Own Terms,* The Ancient Word 2 (New York: Routledge, 2019), 185-87. Here in 31:1, readers may consider implications of a voice shift.

needed for the poetry of 30:1-33.[175] As Crenshaw notes on 30:1, "The opening word, *dibrê*, offers an ambiguous clue with regard to the realm of discourse into which readers are drawn."[176] Crenshaw recognizes the frequency of דברי with prophetic material, but readers await nominal clues on "whether the word is prophetic or sapiential."[177]

למואל confirms 31:1 as a subtitular attribution. However, like Agur in 30:1, this otherwise unknown name contrasts sharply with Solomon (1:1; 10:1; 25:1) and Hezekiah (25:1), whose roles in biblical narrative as authorized *speakers*, *writers,* and *preservers* of texts invite readers' literary imagination to hear Proverbs' material voiced by those literary characters.[178] Attribution to unknown figures gives readers little context to make sense of what they will hear those figures voice.[179] In RT, this lower relevance demands greater processing, e.g., scanning encyclopedic knowledge of canonical characters or canonical attribution patterns.

Openness-Closure

Early in 31:1a, openness seems moderately high and closure moderate. In Proverbs' context, subtitular דברי invites readers to adopt a general interpretive posture

[175] The persona voicing 30:2-33 has stopped speaking, and Proverbs' poet-narrator has resumed direct speech to his implied audience.

[176] James L. Crenshaw, "Clanging Symbols," in *Justice and the Holy: Essays in Honor of Walter Harrelson,* ed. Douglas A. Knight and Peter J. Paris, Scholars Press Homage Series (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 52.

[177] Crenshaw, "Clanging Symbols," 53.

[178] See Eva Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 13, 42-42. In Jewish literary imagination, Solomon (Prov 1:1; 10:1; 25:1) was a divinely sanctioned wordsmith (1 Kings 4:32-33; 5:2; 6; 2 Chr 35:4). Similarly, Hezekiah (cf. 2 Chr 29:5-11, 31; 30:6, 19, 26).

[179] "Ancient attribution is not precritical religious dogma about literal authorship, but a poetic and honorific association of a body of texts which a character who becomes more and more powerfully linked with[, e.g., as in David's case,] efficacious prayer, beautiful song, and divine favor." Mroczek, 84.

yet hints of multivalency.[180] Late in 31:1a, as Mancuello González notes, the genitive is ambiguous.[181] Saliency and relevance suggest, however, these words as *spoken by* Lemuel, not addressed to him.[182] The openness of Lemuel's identity—and relationship to the canonical audience—heightens readerly interest, as demonstrated in longstanding scholarly dialogue. Who is this person? Readers uncomfortable with attributional openness in canonical material may seek prompt closure.[183] Readers briefly may consider למואל as a known character's paronomasia/theophoric diminutive.[184] Yet, as Mancuello González notes, morphology here is ambiguous; only in v. 4 does context offer clarity.[185]

Resonance-Dissonance

Early in 31:1a, with דברי, canonical readers may discern very high resonance and very low dissonance to Proverbs' context, given expectations set in 1:6; 22:17; 24:23; and 30:1. Yet late in 31:1a, resonance likely decreases, and dissonance increases with למואל. Agur's example in 30:1 makes such an attribution to a seemingly unknown person possible in Proverbs' whole but still uncomfortable.

---

[180] Cf. 1:6; 22:17 See Fox on משלי versus דברי חכמים. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9,* 54, 64. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31,* 707.

[181] Mancuello González, 84.

[182] Cf. Prov 1:1; 10:1; 25:1; 30:1; also, e.g., Amos 1:1; Mic 1:1; Zeph 1:1; Hag 1:1; Zech 1:1; Mal 1:1.

[183] As perhaps displayed in traditional rabbinic attribution of Lemuel to Solomon (as in Jedidiah (2 Sam 12:25) and Qohelet (Eccl 1:1)). See Vayntrub, *Beyond Orality,* 24-27. On Lemuel as not Solomon, cf. Ferdinand Hitzig, "Das Königreich Massa. Zur Methode der Auslegung des Alten Testaments," *Theologische Jahrbücher in Verbindung mit mehrenen Gelehrten* 3 (Tübingen 1844): 269-305. Also, Mancuello González, 23-26.

[184] See Delitzsch, *Proverbs,* 2:314-317. Also, Apple, 177-78. For an alternate proposal few scholars receive (but evidence of the readerly tendency to explore paronomasia), cf. Anton Jirku, "Das n. pr. Lemu'el (Prov 31:1) und der Gott Lim," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 66, no. 1-2 (1954): 151.

[185] Mancuello González, 85.

Trust-Scrutiny

Early in 31:1a, readers likely adopt high trust and an attentive listening posture after recognizing Proverbs' poet-narrator's voice, anticipating a more straightforward interpretive task than that of chapter 30.[186] Readers taking Proverbs 1:2-6 as interpretive promises or an approximate outline may anticipate 31:1 as complex material near the end of Proverbs' whole.[187] Late in 31:1a, Proverbs' poet-narrator's enigmatic brevity and Lemuel's identity likely demand moderately high scrutiny.[188]

Reading 31:1b – מלך משא

Table 2: Encountering v. 1b

Initial interpretation:	…king of … . An oracle/weighty speech…
Possible corrected interpretations:	…a king. An oracle/weighty speech …
	… (a) king of burden/Massa/weighty speech …

Somewhat disoriented but optimistic, readers likely find initial interpretive ease in 31:1b (מלך) overtaken by complexity (משא). The lexeme מלך offers greater relevance: 31:1 is indeed likely a subtitle but perhaps more like 1:1 or 25:1 than 30:1, and the unknown Lemuel, a king, perhaps speaks (per salient genitive) in a kingly capacity.[189]

---

[186] Context suggests such דברי are commendable and relevant to canonical wisdom. Cf. 1:6; 22:17; 30:1; 24:23. Yehudah Kil, "Chapters 17-31," in *The Bible: משלי Proverbs with the Jerusalem Commentary,* trans. Albert Milton Kanter and Yocheved Engelberg Cohen (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Book, 2014), 399.

[187] דברי in 31:1 as דברי חכמים וחידתם ('words of wise ones *and their riddles*,' 1:6). On Proverbs 1:2-6 as interpretive promises, see Keefer, 2, 4-7, 116-126. For Proverbs 1:2-6 as an outline, see Kyle C. Dunham, "Structure and Theology in Proverbs: Its Function as an Educational Program for Novice Leaders in Ancient Israel," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 29, no. 3 (2019): 361-88.

[188] While Proverbs' final composer may have anticipated familiarity with a historic or literary character 'Lemuel', diversity in ancient versions suggests the question of Lemuel's identity was longstanding. LXX references an indeterminate βασιλέως. Syriac Peshitta offers 'Muel'. Delitzsch, *Proverbs,* 2:317; John F. Healey, trans., "The Targum of Proverbs," in *Targums of Job, Proverbs, and Qohelet*, The Aramaic Bible 15 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 63n1.

[189] Mancuello González suggests מלך signals to readers that the following text is ANE Royal Instruction. Mancuello González, 86. Cf. also E. J. Revell, *The Designation of the Individual: Expressive Usage in Biblical Narrative,* Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 14 (Kampen, Netherlands: Kok

However, if מלך and non-Davidic, Lemuel may lean uncomfortably "other" to the covenant community. Agur (30:1) may be Israel's proselyte or resident sojourner, but few non-Davidic kings function thus in the biblical meta-narrative.[190] However, מלך also seems to offer confusion on the segment's logical phrasing.[191] On the one hand, per Masoretic *atnach*, aural cues signal a significant logical pause after מלך.[192] On the other, salient syntactical patterns anticipate phrase continuation of an honorific attribution.[193] Proverbs' articular omission may be relevant to context, but here readers likely must suspend judgment.[194]

Based on saliency and subtitular contextual relevance, readers' initial interpretation of משא is likely 'utterance, oracle'.[195] Auditory readers seeking a place

---

Pharos, 1996), 361. "The basis for the use of an epithet is its lexical content. The title 'king' is typically used where the person designated is being treated as a king, or is acting in a notably kingly manner."

[190] On Agur, see Crenshaw, "Clanging Symbols," 53. On kingship, see Deut 7:2; 23:6. Alternatively, the מלכים of 1 Kings 4:34 are positively depicted but unnamed. Maybe Hiram, king of Tyre, Solomon's ally in temple building is an exception, but Kings' narrator does not evaluate (1 Kings 5; 7:13, 40, 45; 9:11; etc.).

[191] See discussion in Delitzsch, *Proverbs,* 2:314-316.

[192] As stated above, I presume the Masoretic accentuation and para-textual elements to be the best guide to Proverbs' final composer's intended reading. With this paradigm, the Masoretic *atnach* communicates phrase completion. On Hitzig's and Delitzsch's influential interpretations, see Mancuello González, 85-87.

[193] An indefinite מלך in this syntax would be a statement of class, not specificity, which readers may find less relevant in a subtitle. See Mancuello González on the syntactical argument articulated by Hitzig and followed by Delitzsch. Mancuello González, 85-87. As JM §131k observes, a given name preceding indeterminate office is most likely followed by a proper name of realm or people. Hebrew biblical authors show a strong preference to append the definite article to מלך when used with a named figure without such construct form: e.g., lit. 'Josiah the king' (Jer 3:6) or 'the King Jehoiachin' (Ezek 1:2). On this basis, Delitzsch argues indeterminate apposition is "an impossibility," not "proper" to the subtitular context. Delitzsch, *Proverbs,* 2:315. Similarly, some (e.g., BHS) ignore the *atnach*: 'Lemuel, king of Massa'.

[194] On Proverbs' poetic syntactical freedom, see Mancuello González, 86. Also, JM §3d.

[195] For משא as 'load, burden, etc.' (BDB, 672.II); as 'utterance, oracle' (BDB, 672-673.III); vs. the vastly rarer '"son' of Ishmael" or "realm of king Lemuel" (BDB, 601.I.1-2). On the historical debate on משא, cf. Mancuello González, 16, 23-46, 85-87. RT and graded saliency theory suggest the rarer sense would likely be inaccessible to readers. Rachel Giora, *On Our Mind: Salience, Context, and Figurative Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 14. Also, Katharine J. Dell, "Response on Methodological Matters Regarding Wisdom Influence and on the Relationship between Wisdom and Prophecy," in *Riddles and*

name, given possible syntactical expectations, may hear homonym מסה, 'place of testing'.[196] While all senses of משא likely appear dissonant to context, the structurally significant term משא demands readers' "gratuitous and unexpected extra effort."[197] This hints that, in RT, second-order communication may be in view: by being deliberately ambiguous, the poet-narrator may be *showing* his communication, not just *telling.*[198]

Openness-Closure

31:1b presents readers with more openness than closure. Readers may struggle to connect מלך and משא conceptually, leading them, however briefly in real time, to experiment with alternate semantic senses to find one fitting to a Proverbs' subtitle. The ambiguous משא in 31:1b may suggest little about the interpretive posture intended by Proverbs' poet-narrator (cf. the interpretive task following המשא in 30:1). As Mancuello González observes, Proverbs' poet-narrator is surely aware of the ambivalent character of משא in 31:1b with its canonically unique syntax, broad semantic range, and interpretive significance.[199] Readers may suspect intentional ambiguity and explore multivalency.[200]

Revelations: Explorations into the Relationship between Wisdom and Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, ed. Mark J. Boda, Russell L. Meek, and William R. Osborne, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 634 (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 238.

[196] מסה, a *place,* appears in the biblical narrative at Exod 17:7; Deut 6:16; 9:22; 33:8. In the unlikely event, readers discern משא carrying its personal sense (Gen 25:14; 1 Chr 1:30), it would imply a clan or tribe. See discussion in Delitzsch, *Proverbs,* 2:315-17.

[197] Mancuello González, 86. Contextually "preñada de sentido". Wilson and Sperber, 605, 605n6.

[198] Wilson and Sperber, 605, 605n6.

[199] Mancuello González, 88, 252-53.

[200] E.g., might משא be intended in its most frequent HB sense ('load, burden, lifting, bearing, tribute')? Cf. discussion in Waltke, 503.

Some may find משא as 'utterance, oracle' incongruous with Proverbs and wisdom literature, yet the pairing seems to invite readers to nuance genre expectations.[201] Thirty-three verses earlier, subtitular משא found relevancy as 'oracle' through the contextually near נאם.[202] Repetition of משא here seems more ambiguous, suggesting Proverbs' poet-narrator intends readers to explore what Mark Sneed terms a "confluence of wisdom and prophecy," "places where the sapiential and prophetic traditions merge."[203]

Resonance-Dissonance

While early in 31:1b readers may discern high resonance and low dissonance with מלך, late in 31:1b, the situation inverts. No matter how readers receive 31:1b, dissonance seems high. Some readers may make creative sense of the textual data through poetic playfulness, but likely such processing awaits a later reading.[204] Readers may begin, however, imaginatively exploring and blending משא and מלך, treating the dissonance as a riddle (cf. 1:6) and making connections they otherwise may not have made.[205]

---

[201] Wendy L. Widder, *"To Teach" in Ancient Israel: A Cognitive Linguistic Study of a Biblical Hebrew Lexical Set,* Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 456 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 19; Stewart, "Moral Imagination," 358-365.

[202] See Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 852. Sneed also recognizes דברי as carrying prophetic connotations. Sneed, "Inspired Sages," 19-20. Also, cf. Waltke on משא in 301:1. Waltke, 465-66.

[203] Sneed, "Inspired Sages," 15, 17.

[204] For example, Yehudah Kil suggests משא may "serve … a dual function, both ending the first half of the verse and beginning the second half." Kil, 399. Similarly, García Bachmann, "A Foolish King, Women, and Wine," 317n9; Apple, 177-78.

[205] Juxtaposition of kingship with a heavy load (cf. Exod 23:5) may evoke imagery of Deut 1:12. Cf. Tova Forti, "Animal Images in the Didactic Rhetoric of the Book of Proverbs," *Biblica* 77 (1996): 63.

Trust-Scrutiny

While, early in 31:1b, מלך initially suggests interpretive ease, the disorienting textual inputs late in 31:1b may heighten scrutiny and decrease trust in both readers' own interpretive skill and in Proverbs' poet-narrator. Readers may scrutinize the morally ambiguous framing of Lemuel's kingship with respect to speech.[206] To hear Lemuel's words with the kind of ears Proverbs' poet-narrator invites, readers must understand *what kind* of king Lemuel is, his character, and relational affiliations.[207] Lemuel's ambiguous kingly identity seems to prompt moral scrutiny.[208] Moreover, as Mancuello González notes, intentional ambiguity here alerts readers to possible surprises ahead.[209]

Indeed, the complex hermeneutic challenges in 31:1a-b appear intentionally crafted.[210] Interpretive skill seems stretched through creative syntax, semantics, and aural clues. The indeterminate מלך suggests the speaker's presentation is as *a* king: his class presented but his purview withheld. Is he with "us" (the canonical audience, God's covenant people), or with "them" (outsiders)? Can canonical readers trust his words?

---

[206] Prov 28:3, 16; 29:4, 12; 30:31. Cf. Brown, "Pedagogy of Proverbs 10:1-31:9," 171-72, 178; Yoder, "On the Threshold," 256-263.

[207] RT suggests these words are relevant to the canonical audience within Proverbs' communicative context—but in what capacity? As Agur's enigmatic words demonstrate, readers must apply proper interpretive filters even to broadly commended speech.

[208] In Proverbs, what seems good can actually be bad, and vice versa. Readers must learn to discern beyond superficiality. Keefer argues Proverbs 1-9 offers interpretive clarity for moral ambiguity. Keefer, 132-40.

[209] Mancuello González, 88. Mancuello González also observes the phrasing in LXX-Proverbs suggests its translator discerned the ambiguity in משא and attempted to convey it to his Greek readership.

[210] The poet-narrator may intend to disturb interpretive confidence. Cf. Yoder, "On the Threshold," 259-61.

Reading 31:1c – אשר יסרתו אמו

Table 3: Encountering v. 1c

Initial interpretation:	…(with) which his mother admonished him.
Possible corrected interpretation:	Whom his mother admonished.

Readers navigate 31:1c on a now familiar path: initial simplicity followed by complexity. The dependent clause establishes a "minimal narrative frame" for, presumably, the forthcoming דברי למואל: "his mother" admonished him, her son, Lemuel.[211] Yet while providing welcome interpretive context, this frame introduces both stabilizing and destabilizing interpretive elements. On the one hand, 31:1c signals interpretively familiar terrain within Proverbs: *musar* מוסר, 'discipline'.[212] With יסר in 31:1c, the rarer verbal form of nominal מוסר, readers likely ready interpretive strategies used throughout Proverbs, specifically for that of triangulated parental speech (1:8-9:18; 22:17-24:22). Readers are invited both to overhear parental instruction of a son and to receive this instruction as if they were the son.[213]

However, the dependent clause simultaneously destabilizes. אשר in a Proverbs' subtitle is unprecedented, its referent here is ambiguous, and it alerts readers to expect

---

[211] On "minimal narrative frames," see Vayntrub, *Beyond Orality,* 186-91. On their usage elsewhere in canonical texts, e.g., Helmut Utzschneider, "Tabernacle," in *The Book of Exodus: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation,* ed. Thomas Dozeman, Craig A. Evans, and Joel N. Lahr, Vetus Testamentum Supplements 164 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2014), 267-301.

[212] Stewart, *Poetic Ethics,* 78-79, 83. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 59. "In all cases, the content of *musar* is an ethical (rather than, say, practical) teaching." Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 34. Its objective is "always … a moral insight or a quality of moral character" within the "morally obligated" relational sphere of "a superior to an inferior".

[213] Stewart, "Poetry as Pedagogy," 83. As Stewart explains, Proverbs' triangulated discourse "subtly shap[es] the reader in the those of the malleable (male) student." Cf. Clifford, "Proverbs 1-9 as Instruction," 129-42; Carol A Newsom, "Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchial Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1-9," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel,* ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 143-44. On maternal מוסר, cf. 1:8; 6:20; 29:15; Deut 21:18. Mancuello González, 89-90.

specifically maternal admonishment.[214] Previously, readers were thrust into Proverbs' triangulated parental speech without such preparation (1:8f; 22:17f).[215] Per RT, Proverbs' poet-narrator would offer this information because it was *relevant*, possibly providing advance consideration unneeded elsewhere. Readers navigate new interpretive territory.

Openness-Closure

31:1c introduces both openness and closure. A new character is introduced, and readers seem invited to be curious about her. Forewarning of maternal *public* admonishment of a king seems to prompt readers to consider overlapping authority structures. Readers may begin to blend affective and cognitive aspects of mother-child hierarchy with other sociopolitical/cultic hierarchies within the covenantal frame.

Late in 31:1c, the salient genitive of דברי למואל seems surprisingly disambiguated and defamiliarized through the dependent clause, suggesting these words were spoken to Lemuel.[216] With initial hypotheses of relevance challenged, readers seem invited to construct a broader narrative frame between 31:1c and 31:1a: did Lemuel both receive the words and then repeat them? Readers may reprocess the dynamics of wisdom transmission sketched by Proverbs (Proverbs 1:2-6): words spoken by the wise were likely words spoken to/for them.[217] Readers may reflect on previous Proverbs' genitive

---

[214] On referent of אשר, Mancuello González, 93-94. Widder, however, offers a stronger case for the highly transitive יסר taking the recipient of the admonishment as direct object. Widder, 179-73. Also, Deist, 2-3.

[215] Meinhold, 2:515-16.

[216] ANE wisdom literature typically sets words in the attributed person's mouth. Cf. Vayntrub, *Beyond Orality,* 12, 203-205. Miriam Lichtheim, *The Old and Middle Kingdoms,* vol. 1 of *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 1:5-9.

[217] Cf. Prov 4:3-4. Bernd U. Schipper, *Proverbs 1-15: A Commentary on the Book of Proverbs 1:1-15:33,* trans. Stephen Germany, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2019), 9.

subtitular relationships (1:1; 10:1; 25:1) and parental transmission as a conduit of wisdom.[218]

Resonance-Dissonance

Early in 31:1c, the אשר clause seems dissonant with Proverbs' subtitular context,[219] yet late in 31:1c, readers likely sense high resonance between the finite verb יסרתו and Proverb's whole.[220] Readers may still wrestle with משא in 31:1 (in any of its semantic senses), but יסר confirms relevance to Proverbs' context, its literary patterns, and its pedagogic thrust.[221] This fits coherently in the covenantal frame: parental correction images the LORD'S loving מוסר to Israel.[222]

Yet explicitly *maternal* מוסר may jar readerly genre expectations. Proverbs' positive depictions of mothers' *torah* have heretofore been *abstract* and *generalized*.[223] As in Proverbs 1-9, ANE Instruction seems broadly to employ a formulaic father-son device.[224] While the paternal literary convention does not demand devaluation nor denial of maternal instruction, we can minimally observe that direct maternal מוסר was

---

[218] Biblical narrative sets the LORD as source of Solomon's wisdom, but is silent on its process. Perhaps Proverbs' poet-narrator intends 31:1 to invite reconsideration of the genitive in 1:1 (as בן; cf. 2 Sam 7:14).

[219] Vayntrub, *Beyond Orality,* 183-206, especially 203. As Vayntrub points out, this type of narrative frame is indeed canonically 'minimal,' yet relative to Proverbs' other subtitles, it is expansive.

[220] Stewart, *Poetic Ethics*, 78. מוסר—nominal form of verb יסר—is "at the heart of the book's purpose."

[221] On ambiguity and 1 Chr 15:22, the only other HB case where יסר and משא both occur, see Mancuello González, 91-94. On triangulated speech in Proverbs, see Stewart, "Poetry as Pedagogy," 83.

[222] Proverbs 3:11-12; cf. Deut 4:36; 8:5; 11:2; 2 Sam 7:14-15.

[223] E.g., 1:8; 6:20; cf. 10:1. See Fox on Prov 23:22. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 83, 258.

[224] Fox, Proverbs 1-9, 80-81. Per Fox, outside of Proverbs 31:1-9, only paternal ANE wisdom instruction is extant. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 883. As Fox notes, it is reasonable to anticipate readers' processing of vocalized parental speech in Proverbs within that convention—i.e., as explicitly *paternal.*

apparently not an expected literary device for canonical readers—or for ANE readers generally.[225] Through this defamiliarization, readers may awaken to מוסר in new ways.[226]

Finally, readers trained to hear poetical parallelism likely discern the subtitle's imbalance.[227] The dependent clause of 31:1c does not easily parallel the earlier abstract nominal constructions of 31:1a-b. Such relationships "stimulate the mental substitution of implicit (or elliptical) information …. [and] enhances the amount of information that the poetic line can convey because the imprecise contrasts imply their respective contrasts in the opposing half-line."[228] While fleshing out connections between elements, greater processing effort yields perhaps more questions than cognitive effects, as depicted in Figure 1. Such reflection seems to redirect attention to the ambiguous משא.

---

[225] Fox, *Proverbs 1-9,* 82; Camp, 81-82. Mothers were recognized as active in raising children. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 83. Fox notes of ANE Wisdom literature generally, "The specific words of wisdom are the father's, but their substance comes from the mother too." On ancient Israelite perception of women's roles, cf. Daniel I. Block, "Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel," in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World,* ed. Ken M. Campbell (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 33-102.

[226] Cf. Viktor Shklovsky, "Art, as Device," trans. Alexandra Berlina, *Poetics Today* 36, no. 3 (September 2015): 151-74.

[227] Even in a subtitle, imperfect parallelism leaves a gap for readers to navigate. Michael V. Fox, "The Rhetoric of Disjointed Proverbs," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 29, no. 2 (Dec 2004): 166-67. Also, Heim, *Poetic Imagination,* 638; Millar*, Genre and Openness,* 58-60; William E. Mouser, "Filling in the Blank: Asymmetrical Antithetical Parallelism," in *Learning from the Sages: Selected Studies of the Book of Proverbs,* ed. Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 137-50.

[228] Heim, *Poetic Imagination,* 630.

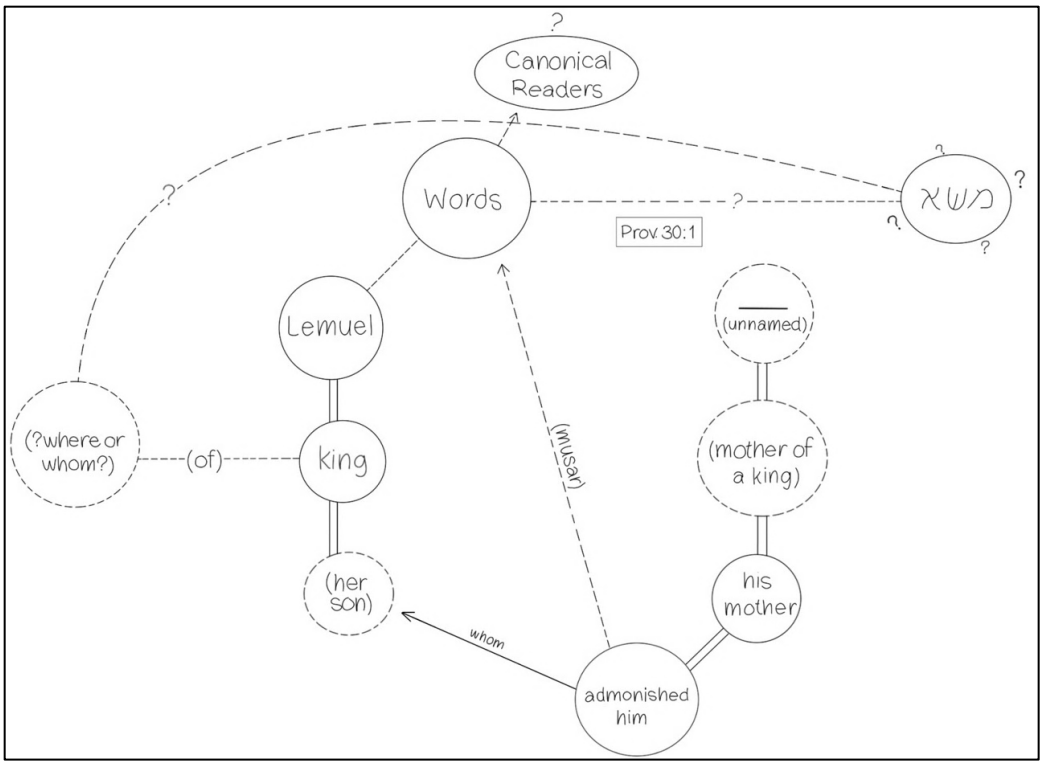

Figure 1: Word Map of 31:1

Trust-Scrutiny

Early in 31:1c, trust seems to reset to high. Readers likely experience restored confidence in their interpretive abilities. However, late in 31:1c, readers may reassess 31:1 as a whole, but loose ends persist, yielding wavering trust and heightened scrutiny.

Reading 31:1 Summary

The issue of Lemuel's identity and the intended meaning of משא notwithstanding, commentators often see 31:1 as a relatively straightforward superscript announcing the words of admonishment that a non-Israelite king Lemuel received from his mother—and thus signaling the text's foreign origin. Commentators remain most divided on משא in 31:1b. Some, like Fox and Crenshaw, interpret it as Lemuel's realm: Massa, a northern

Arabian region or Ishmaelite tribe.[229] Others, like Lindsay Wilson and NIV, see משא as signaling an 'oracle'—"words of warning, correction and encouragement for him in his duties as king"—or, like JPS, NASB or NLT, weighty words.[230] Despite scholarly debate on both Lemuel's identity and sense of משא, these matters are often implicitly regarded as, to use Wilson's phrasing, "not otherwise significant" to the unit's interpretation.[231]

However, like Mancuello González, who recognizes intentional ambiguity in משא and argues for the text's Hebraic provenance, I have argued that, on first reading, 31:1 may presents an attribution far from straightforward yet carrying weighty interpretive significance. Using RT, I have shown it unlikely that canonical readers would see 31:1 establishing Lemuel's identity as an *Ishmaelite* king (a common modern understanding for משא), yet by casting him as a non-Davidic king, 31:1 likely raises interpretive questions of his *ethos* and how readers are to hear his words.[232] Indeed, while offering readers' interpretive framework, 31:1 seems to challenge big interpretive categories relative to genre expectations and speaker identity.[233] While context suggests these דברי come commended by the poet-narrator, Proverbs has trained readers that unknown

---

[229] Cf. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31,* 884. Crenshaw, "A Mother's Instruction," 14-15. Those leaning this way include Clifford, 269; Perdue, 269; Whybray, *Proverbs,* 422.

[230] Lindsay Wilson, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary,* Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 17 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 314-15. Similarly, LXX and modern translations NIV, ESV.

[231] Wilson, 314n4.

[232] Cf. Mancuello González, 88.

[233] Ehud Ben Zvi's assessment of the superscription of Micah 1:1 seems apt here: superscriptions "are an integral—and most significant—part of their respective [texts]. Indeed, they provide the rereaders with authoritative, interpretive keys that, to a large extent, govern the set of potential interpretations that the texts are allowed to carry." Ehud Ben Zvi, *Micah,* The Forms of the Old Testament Literature XXIB (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 21. The consideration of a foreign king—indeed, a foreign woman's kingly son—being given the space to speak to the canonical audience certainly has affective dynamics, when set upon the backdrop of the larger metanarrative in which HB situates itself.

speakers' speech must be scrutinized before acceptance.[234] Given the open interpretive questions of 31:1, readers likely do not yet know how to approach Lemuel's speech or position themselves in the text.[235] For now, readerly reception appears provisional, awaiting clarifying information.

Readers may maintain uncomfortably high openness, dissonance, and scrutiny and exit 31:1 with open questions. At first reading, understanding of 31:1 likely comes less through straightforward clausal sense and more through imaginatively sketched blending of textual inputs, made complex by persistent ambiguity and imbalanced parallelism with wide gapping. As suggested by RT, such intentional ambiguity opens second-order communication: forcing readers to modify mental schemas and suggesting that *showing* will be a part of the communication of 31:1-9.[236] Readerly interpretive process of 31:1 appears to reinforce one of Proverbs' main themes: speech is powerful.[237]

---

[234] Unauthorized speech is a recurrent plot conflict in HB (e.g., Gen 3). Obscure identity does not always mean with dangerous speech but does demand scrutiny. Cf. Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative,* 90.

[235] Rather than a generalized "son(s)" in whom readers could see themselves, the implied son-king audience seems personalized to the extent that such positioning would seem uncomfortable. Cf. Brown, "Pedagogy of Proverbs 10:1-31:9," 178-79. On moral ambiguity in Proverbs as hermeneutic difficulty—where "what is wrong can sound right"—see Keefer, 22, 128-42. Similarly, perhaps, what is right can also seem wrong.

[236] Cf. Sperber and Wilson, "Précis," 751.

[237] Kidner, 43-45. In particular, Proverbs 1-9 has been seen to train readers to discern wrong speech and embrace right speech. E.g., Jones, 74-75. The threat of Proverbs 7 is cast in terms of speech (7:21). Its antidote is receiving right speech (1:8-9; 2:1-11; 8:1-11, 32-33). Thus, correctly discerning speakerly character seems critical to proper interpretive posture.

Reading 31:2

Likely humbled yet curious, readers may enter 31:2 expecting triangulated maternal discourse. Yet 31:2 offers more questions—literal and metaphorical—than answers: ambiguous semantic, syntax, and linguistic elements and a grammatical enigma.

Proverbs 31:2 text —

מַה־בְּרִי וּמַה־בַּר־בִּטְנִי וּמָה בַּר־נְדָרָי׃

Readers' interpretive journey of 31:2 is considered in three segments: (1) מה ברי, (2) ומה בר בטני, and (3) ומה בר נדרי.

Reading 31:2a – מה ברי

Table 4: Encountering v. 2a

Initial interpretation:	What, my pure one, … ?
Likely corrected interpretation:	What, my *Sohn,*[238] … ?

Salient interrogative sense of מה likely has high relevance for a speech-opening parental question in Proverbs.[239] Proverbs' parallels also offer relevance for ברי as a vocative of direct address. Yet with ברי, like מלך משא in 31:1b, salient semantic and syntax clash and require readers' greater processing. In Proverbs' Hebraic context, the salient sense of lexeme בר seems moral: 'pure, clean'.[240] However, although בני would be expected (e.g., 1:8), a vocative sense of בר 'son' (Aramaic) appears more syntactically

---

[238] German cognate *Sohn* conveys to English readers both general sensibility of 'son' but also foreignness.

[239] Cf. Prov 1:22; 8:1; 22:20; and 30:4. מה as most frequently an interrogative pronoun (BDB, 552.1a-e; 553.2a; 553.4a-f); less frequently as an indef./rel. pronoun (553.3) or adverb in exclamation (BDB, 553.2b).

[240] Prov 14:4. Cf. Jerome rendering of 31:2a: *quid dilecte mi*. Gordon discerns Jerome's influence as Leviticus Rabbah, 19a, and Sanhedrin, 70b. Cyrus H. Gordon, "Rabbinic Exegesis in the Vulgate of Proverbs," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 49, no. 4 (1930): 411. Also, cf. בר (HALOT, 1:153.II.1) as in Ps 19:9; 24:4; 73:1; Job 11:4; Song 6:9, 10 (cf. Ps 18:21, 25). Salient sense would yield ברי as a substantive: 'my pure one', a moral category. In Song 6:9, 10, feminine ברה refers to a mother's offspring. בר describes the heart of a righteous person in Ps 24:4 and Ps 73:1 and the state of a man before God in Job 11:4.

relevant in parental מוסר. This issue's resolution likely strengthens suspected foreign/"otherly" speaker identity.[241] As a vocative in triangulated speech, ברי seems to bear "emotional intensity" and focused attention often conveyed by poetic apostrophe.[242]

Openness-Closure

Early in 31:2a, openness seems high. Like Proverbs' other parental discourse begun *in medias res*, readers likely anticipate sparse expositive details will be offered gradually. Yet with the hyper-particularized frame sketched in 31:1, imaginative scenarios may flourish.[243] Late in 31:2a, openness seems high to very high, and closure low to moderately low. Processing of ברי toward an Aramaic/dialectical maternal speaker leaves ambiguous the interpretive posture for such blended Hebraic-dialectical speech. Moreover, ברי as vocative has paused the speaker's thought, heightening suspense.[244].

Readers' extra processing of ברי invites connection of ברי here with the only other (Hebrew) MT occurrence of בר taken as 'son,' Psalm 2:12.[245] As rare shared language in

---

[241] Literary incorporation of foreign/dialectical material in 31:1-9 does not demand non-Hebraic origin. Mancuello González, 196-97. On style switching as a literary device in HB, cf. Brian Bompiani, "Style Switching in the Jacob and Laban Narratives," *Hebrew Studies* 55 (2014): 43-57. Brian Bompiani, "Style Switching in the Speech of the Transjordanians," *Hebrew Studies* 57 (2016): 51-71. Benjamin J. Noonan, *Advances in the Study of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic: New Insights for Reading the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 219-20.

[242] Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 98. Ryken, *Complete Handbook of Literary Form*, 27.

[243] E.g., Rashi sees the context (via 1 Kings 1; 3:1; and 8:65), as Solomon still abed with his bride, Pharaoh's daughter, rebuked by Bathsheba his role in the day's lapsed cultic duties. Leonard S. Kravitz and Kerry M. Olitzky, *Mishlei: A Modern Commentary on Proverbs* (New York: UAHC Press, 2002), 307-308.

[244] Readers likely lack context to discern the intended sense of the semantically flexible מה. JM §37. Particularly needed are its clausal participants: verbs, nouns, adjectives, appended prepositions, etc.

[245] Cf. Kidner, 176. "*Son:* the word (*bar*) is commoner in Aramaic than in Heb.; but cf. Psalm 2:12."

HB, the two בר forms suggests inner-biblical allusion.[246] Readers may also recognize shared context between 31:1-2 and Psalm 2, i.e., a kingly "us vs. them" dynamic.[247] Although the connection could provide helpful interpretive context for 31:1-9, readers likely have to bookmark for later processing.

Resonance-Dissonance

Early in 31:2a, resonance seems moderately high to high with the relevance of authoritative interrogatives of Proverbs' parental discourse. Late in 31:2a, dissonance appears high when the relevance of ברי syntax and semantics clash. Though 'son' is likely more relevant, speakerly identity leans into foreign female speech, which has potentially ominous moral relevance in Proverbs but also normalizes non-standard forms/syntax.[248]

Trust-Scrutiny

Early in 31:2a, trust seems moderately high. מה as an interrogative likely seems highly relevant per the context set by 31:1. Scrutiny may remain high, however, as the precise sense of an interrogative מה requires careful listening for disambiguation. Late in 31:2a, trust may wane. Readerly interpretive abilities seem stretched, and readers lack contextual details for this seeming foreign woman's speech. Readers may trust the poet-narrator's choice to let her speak to Proverbs' readership, but warily and with scrutiny.

---

[246] I see the two cases meeting Leonard's first three principles of allusion. Cf. Leonard, 246-51.

[247] Psalm 2 portrays an international community of kings postured against the LORD and His anointed. Cf. Leonard's sixth principle for inner-biblical allusion.

[248] נכריה, 2:16-17; 6:24; 7:5; זרה, 5:3, 20; 7:5.

High scrutiny also seems demanded by the relational landscape implied by ברי. Heightened intimacy between mother and kingly son (as suggested by ברי) may highlight the ambiguous distance between the pair and the canonical audience (cf. Psalm 2:12). While the close parallel between ברי and the familiar בני vocative for Proverbs' paternal instruction establishes high relevance for this literary device, the "other-ness" of ברי in a maternal voice seems to draw fresh attention to the phrasing (defamiliarization, or 'enstrangement') and the relational intimacy it signifies.[249] With perceptions awakened, readers may find the intersections of maternal voice, kingship, and ברי if not polarizing, then uncomfortably ambiguous on the backdrop of canonical context.[250] On the one hand, some readers may consider parallels between the maternal speaker in 31:2 and Deborah's poetic characterization of Sisera's mother (Judges 5:28-31).[251] This potential connection allows readers to recognize the potential antagonism of a foreign mother-son pair to the LORD and His covenant people. On the other, readers may consider canonical foreign mothers with covenant faithfulness to LORD: Ruth the Moabitess, whence arose Davidic kingship.[252] The matter seems open, demanding high scrutiny.

---

[249] Cf. Shklovsky, 162. "The goal of art is to create the sensation of seeing, and not merely recognizing, things; the device of art is the 'enstrangement' of things and the complication of the form, which increases the duration and complexity of perception, as the process of perception is, in art, an end in itself and must be prolonged."

[250] Cf. Proverbs' thematic portrayal of kingship in near context. Brown, "Pedagogy of Proverbs 10:1-31:9," 163, 171-72, 178-79.

[251] Points of connection with Proverbs 31:1-2a and Judges 5:28-31 include poetic framing; shared language (אם) of a speaker-mother of a foreign leader; use of anaphora; sound similarities (יסרתו אמו and אם סיסרא); multiple speech-opening posed questions with repetition by each (מה ומה ומה in 31:2 and מדוע ... מדוע in Judg 5:28, 30); and a type of wisdom context (cf. חכמות שרותיה Judg 5:29).

[252] At this place in 31:1-9, points of connection with Ruth the Moabitess whose blessing led to the Davidic kingship (Ruth 4:11-17) are more imagistic than grounded in shared language (Ruth 1:16-17; 2:12; 3:9)—also cf. the question posed to Ruth in 3:9 and her bearing a son (Ruth 4:13). Shared language will emerge later in the interpretive process. Cf. also Rahab (Josh 6:25) and possibly Tamar (Gen 38; Ruth 4:12).

Reading 31:2b – ומה בר בטני

Table 5: Encountering v. 2b

Initial interpretation:	… and what, *Sohn* of my womb, …
Possible corrected interpretation:	*None*

The interpretive discoveries of 31:2a likely allow readers to process 31:2b efficiently. Grammatically, the *vav* conjunction with repeated מה and בר forms may be recognized as a rare Proverbs' case of anaphora (staircase, or climatic, parallelism).[253] Slowing down the pace may allow readers time for absorption.[254] The verse's distinctive accentuation may alert readers that this is a rare case of triple-line anaphora, reinforcing the sense of direct, even colloquial speech.[255] The canonical rarity of triple-line anaphora may evoke comparison with its other instances in Proverbs or the canon.[256]

Openness-Closure

Early in 31:2b, ומה seems to keep openness and closure static. The speaker's posed question remains interrupted (heightening anticipation), and direct speech seems confirmed.[257] Closure may move to moderate. Late in 31:2b, readers likely experience increased closure and high openness. בר בטני confirms the sense of בר as 'son', and the

---

[253] I.e., a clausal pattern of interruption, backtracking repetition, then resumption of thought. Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to* the *Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987), 181. Adele Berlin, "Parallelism," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary,* ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:156-57.

[254] See Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (Sheffield, UK: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Press, 1986), 34. With *metheg* and *maqqef*, Masoretic notation seems to indicate a concern that readers not lose the open question. However, cf. Delitzsch, *Proverbs,* 2:318.

[255] Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 150-155. Here, the major disjunctive falls on the second vocative. Watson notes its frequency in direct speech.

[256] Cf. Judg 5:12. Wilfred G. E. Watson, "A Note on Staircase Parallelism," *JSTOR* 33, no. 4 (Oct 1983): 512.

[257] Watson, "A Note on Staircase Parallelism," 510. Interestingly, Watson notes evidence of international use of anaphora (Ugaritic, Akkadian), which allows 31:2 to seem resonant with foreign/dialectical speech.

contextually more relevant sense of בטן 'womb' (אמו) seems to concretize the physical, intimate mother-son connection.[258] For canonical readers, such a manifestation of maternal fruitfulness likely invokes reciprocal relational responsibility—although a foreign woman's offspring may carry more ominous connotations.[259] Yet such connections may yield contextual openness, in view of RT: how will such an intimate vocative prove relevant for this overheard מוסר?

Resonance-Dissonance

Early in 31:2b, the repeated מה seems moderately highly resonant with context of direct, poetic parental discourse, despite anaphoric rarity in Proverbs. Dissonance, thus, appears moderately low. Late in 31:2b, resonance seems moderate, and dissonance moderately high. Parallel בר vocatives fit parental speech, though the intimate בר phrasing may call readers to attend to the difference—just as much as sameness—between this speech and Proverbs' other parental discourse. Indeed, that the anaphora fails to progress the clause likely deviates from readerly expectations of staircase parallelism.[260]

---

[258] Cf. Meinhold, 2:517. Admittedly, the ambiguous genitive of דברי למואל and referent of אשר in 31:1 leave space for readers like Deist to hear this direct speech as that of Lemuel to, presumably, his own son. Deist, 3. Yet RT suggests the strong relevance of אמו and בטני ('womb' (BDB, 105.3)) would lead readers to hear confirming evidence of a *mother's* voice. It seems unlikely in this first reading for readers to hear בטני in the more common senses of 'belly, abdomen' (BDB, 105.1) or 'body' (BDB, 105.2). See Job 19:17, Mic 6:7; Deut 7:13; cf. Gen 15:4. Later reading may evoke comparison with בר 'grain, corn'. BDB, III.141. Ps 72:16; Prov 11:26; Jer 23:28.

[259] Deut 28:4, 11. For other covenantal connections with this phrase in 31:2, see Mancuello González, 97.

[260] Cf. Judg 4:18. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry,* 150.

Trust-Scrutiny

Early in 31:2b, the repeated מה form seems to encourage moderate to moderately high trust in readerly interpretive skills. Yet scrutiny seems to remain high, relative to anticipated clausal completion.[261] Late in 31:2b, despite a likely sense of high relevance, readers may feel the absence of forward progress in the main clause. Trust in interpretive abilities may wane somewhat. The foreign mother-speaker's close intimacy with her son may, by contrast, highlight the ambiguous distance between these two personas and the canonical audience, decreasing trust slightly. After all, Sisera's mother had great endearment for her foreign son, Israel's enemy. Scrutiny seems high.

31:2c – ומה בר נדרי

Table 6: Encountering v. 2c

Initial interpretation:	… and what, *Sohn* of my vows, _____ ?
Possible corrected interpretations:	… and what, pure one of my vows, _____?
	… and what [kind of one] is the *Sohn* of my vows?[262]

31:2c initially offers readers high relevance: a thrice-repeated interrogative and rare case of three-line anaphora.[263] Yet if Masoretic vocalization reflects ancient reading, this מה is subtly distinct—not only alternately vocalized but bearing *disjunctive* stress—

[261] Edward Greenstein, "How Does Parallelism Mean?", in *A Sense of Text: The Art of Language in the Study of Biblical Literature,* Jewish Quarterly Review Supplement (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1982), 54-55. The syntactic demands of staircase parallelism require significant "audience involvement." "Since we process incoming speech clause by clause, we must suspend processing until the completion of the clause is presented in the second line. Our perception is kept on edge, so to speak, during such a staircase."

[262] While מה typically references things, when it refers to a person, it asks "*what* that person is". JM §144c.

[263] Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry,* 152. The determination of, e.g., Waltke that an interrogative sense is not appropriate here is not, I suggest, the position he first anticipated upon reading, but rather the place he landed after a complex interpretive process of elimination and contextual exploration. Waltke, 503-504.

and may alert of hermeneutic difference.[264] Exiting 31:1c, readers are likely startled by the segment's abrupt end.[265] With the בר forms taken as vocative, the line's grammatical clausal construction of מה ומה ומה is unprecedented in HB and, apart from implicature, seems a nonsensical, incomplete thought.[266] Suspecting a false lead, readers may try to reassess. בר נדרי also seems to invite imaginative contextual blending with 1 Samuel 1-4.

Openness-Closure

Early in 31:2c, openness appears heightened, and closure low. The third מה form's aural distinctions may engage readers' imaginations (e.g., recalling other canonical cases or exploring intended ellipsis), but judgment must remain withheld. Late in 31:2c, the

---

[264] On this vocalized form, cf. JM §37c-f and GKC §37e, who both seem to understand this case as an exception. This vocalization is rare before a nonguttural. The Masorah notes twenty-four such forms, hence Delitzsch, *Proverbs,* 2:318. Cases include Exod 32:1, 23; 1 Sam 4:6, 14, 16; 15:14; 2 Sam 1:4; 1 Kings 14:14; 2 Kings 1:7; 4:13, 14; Job 7:21; Ps 4:2[3]; 10:13; Eccl 2:12, 22; 7:10; Is 1:5; Jer 8:9; 11:15; 16:10; Lam 5:1; Hag 1:9. Gérard E. Weil, ed., *Massorah Gedolah: Iuxta codicem Leningradensem B19a* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1971), 1:71-72. On repetition's development of meaning, see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1985), 64. Within RT (as epizeuxis), cf. Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance,* 219-224, quote on 220. "Within our framework, the task of the hearer faced with these utterances [containing repetition] is to reconcile the face that a certain expression has been repeated with the assumption that optimal relevance has been aimed at."

[265] The final, pausal form בר נדרי draws attention to the line's unanticipated end. E. J. Revell, *The Pausal System: Divisions in the Hebrew Biblical Text as Marked by Voweling and Stress Position,* ed. Raymond de Hoop and Paul Sanders, Pericope: Scripture as Written and Read in Antiquity 10 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2015), 18, 123. As "the majority of pausal forms stand at the end of a clause," Revell's work seems to suggest canonical readers likely have learned to associate these with breaks in thought.

[266] Cf. Revell, *Designation of the Individual,* 335-36. "[C]lause structure is not affected by the presence or absence of a vocative, nor, where one is used, by its position in the clause." Also, GKC §126f. I performed extensive research on grammatical uses of מה in HB. In the other approximately 750 מה forms in biblical Hebrew, there is **no** other occurrence of מה in such syntactic grammatical isolation. It seems the semantic flexibility of מה requires other clausal grammatical forms for intelligibility. Even the briefest clauses elsewhere have at least one other clausal element: a finite verb, prepositional phrase, particle, or nominal form. Cf. Gen 25:22; 29:15, 25; 31:36; 32:27; Ex 3:13; 16:7, 8; Josh 15:18; Judg 1:14; 18:8; 1 Sam 20:1; Job 6:11; 7:17; 15:14; 21:15; Prov 30:4; Eccl 8:4; Jer 8:6; 16:10; 23:33; 48:19; Lam 2:13; Ezek 19:2; Hos 9:14; Jon 1:8; Hag 1:9; Zech 1:19; 4:4; 5:6; 6:4; 9:17; Mal 1:7, 13; 2:14, 15, 17; 3:7, 8, 14. Thus, מה in 31:2 seems to offer two contrary situations: (1) a three-fold repetition indicating some sense of communicative importance (Cf. Revell, *Designation of the Individual,* 365, 367-68.) and (2) a grammatical construction where מה is clausally isolated, which has no HB comparable, hence my view that it yields nonsensical biblical Hebrew.

text presents a disorienting clausal construction, which invites greater processing.[267] As reflected in centuries of translational diversity, the resultant cognitive effects likely do not yield a clear-cut clausal sense.[268] Closure seems very low.

In this grammatical openness, readers likely turn to the interpretively rich בר נדרי, which evokes an imagined backstory and affective relational context. While the same pausal form נדרי was spoken by the immoral woman of Proverbs 7:14, as illustrated in scholarly exegesis, the maternal framing of 31:2 likely leads canonical readers to preference comparing the speaker and her son with personas of the Hannah-Samuel narrative (1 Sam 1-2), the iconic canonical mother-son pair characterized by a mother's vow.[269] While readers undoubtedly note difference between the two texts, בר נדרי offers a strong hinge whereby readers can focus on the sameness of the two texts, experimentally gap-fill both texts, and evaluate resonance.[270] Recognizing numerous shared language, thematic, and contextual parallels between 31:1-9 and 1 Samuel 1-2 (even 1 Sam 3-4) likely encourages readers to discern the intentional allusion.[271] While a real-time first

---

[267] Cf. Millar, "Garden Path." Crenshaw, "Clanging Symbols," 51.

[268] Cf. Millar, "Garden Path." Four primary grammatical interpretations are reflected in scholarly literature and modern translations: (1) an intelligible interrogative clause (ESV; cf. LXX), (2) a nonclausal emotive expression/interjection (NLT), (3) a rhetorical negative (JPS, ISV), or (4) a foreign imperative (NIV). However, few interpreters give account of their interpretive journey, which I suggest is likely complex.

[269] See Mancuello González, 160-62. Numerous commentators make this connection with 31:2. E.g., Fox, *Proverbs 10-31,* 885. Hubbard, 474-75. R. N. Whybray, *Book of Proverbs,* 180. Kidner, 176. Van Leeuwen, 258.

[270] The sons' early years are imaginatively shaped by Hannah's narrative and later years by 31:1-2.

[271] While readers would not be able to process the comparison fully in real time, at least five of Leonard's principles seem to be present between Prov 31:1-9 and 1 Samuel 1-4, reinforcing the perception of intentional allusion. Shared language includes the following: מרת נפש, נדר, עני, זכר, שכח, נתן, פי, דבר, לב, שכר, מה, יין, אשה, אל תתן, דרך, בן, חיל, ידין, יתן עז למלכו, שפט, פתח, נאם / משא. On the pericope's similar abundance of suffering vocabulary, see Mancuello Gonzalez, 161n521. E.g., shared phrasings (remember and forget) and themes (son, שפט, alcohol/sobriety, concern for the poor and needy, an anointed one/king).

reading allows limited reflection, connections and exploration here offers interpretive context for the hermeneutic challenges of 31:1-9.[272]

Overlaying the two texts (Prov 31:1-9 and 1 Sam 1-4) through בר נדרי obliquely introduces a new character in 31:1-9: a deity to whom mother-speaker and son-audience are obligated. While the mother-speaker's foreignness (and likely foreign deity) remains ambiguous, blending the Hannah-Samuel narrative with 31:1-2 invites more positive understanding, where, e.g., 'vows' suggest a devotion unto God which exceeds standard expectations of covenant reciprocal faithfulness.[273] Just as Hannah's vow, which bound her son's whole life to costly service unto the LORD, is held up for canonical readers' approval, readers may consider cautious approval of the mother-speaker's vows.[274] If the mother-speaker's vow was more like Hannah's than not (e.g., the vows of Prov 7:14), readerly comparison could connect the son-king as similarly bound to God like Samuel under costly terms offered in sincere sobriety and piety. Indeed, readers may intuitively recall that the plot of the Hannah-Samuel (and Eli-sons) micronarrative turns on the human tendency to forsake costly obligations to God—and bring this value implicitly into the interpretive context of Proverbs 31:1-9.[275]

---

[272] Early consideration of 1 Samuel 1-4 increases its relevance with later textual inputs of 31:3-9.

[273] Cf. Lev 7:16; 22:18, 21; 23:38; 27:2f; Jacob's attitude in Gen 28:20; cf. 31:13. On purity, see Lev 22:23.

[274] Canonical readers likely carry implicit understanding of Mosaic vows into 31:1-9. Num 30:2; e.g., Num 21:2-3. For near context, see Prov 20:25. For example, as a woman's vow, canonical readers presume, as with Hannah's vow, the husband's needed approval. (1 Sam 1:23) See also Mancuello González, 97-98.

[275] Hannah's joyful keeping of her vows forms the climax of her micro-narrative (1 Sam 1:24-28, leading into Hannah's intercessory prayer, 1 Sam 2:1-10). In contrast, Eli's and his sons' forsaking of bonds to the LORD function as **the** narrative foil (1 Sam 2:22-25). Indeed, the picot point is whether or not a character would honor the LORD (1 Sam 2:30, as voiced by the anonymous man of God). In this, Hannah's response to her vows starkly contrasts with Eli's sons (who do not fulfill their obligations but rather exploit their position). The LORD's favor of Hannah (evidenced by both her exultant song of praise to the LORD (1 Sam 2:1-10) and God's provision of future children (1 Sam 2:20-21)) contrasts His severe judgment on Eli's

Thus, the Hannah-Samuel narrative, intertwined with the narrative of Eli and his sons, does far more than depict admirable vows and parenting and sonship. It offers discerning readers of 31:1-9 a different "us vs. them" contrast than they were perhaps expecting—where danger arises not from *foreign* adversaries, but from *internal* corruption.[276] With the contrast between Hannah and Eli, consecrated parenting, perhaps more than sonship, is in focus in 1 Samuel 1-4.[277] Readers of Proverbs 31:1-9 may be reminded of parents' covenantal responsibilities, particularly regarding such children set apart for the LORD's service.[278] Although only the beginning of readerly processing may occur in real time, this emerging theme of consecration may prompt readerly reexamination of בר as intentionally multivalent: a son consecrated unto ritual purity.[279] Readers may imagine how the mother might intervene should the implied son-king

house (1 Sam 2:27-36; 4:12-22).As voiced in her exultant prayer/son (1 Sam 2:3, 5, 8-10), the insignificant but faithful Hannah prevailed over corrupt Eli—not by her own power but by the LORD's intervention.

[276] Eli's ineffective parenting of his wicked priest-sons did not restrain their appetites or irreverence to treat the LORD's offerings with contempt and defiled women (הנשים) at the entrance of the Tabernacle (פתח אהל מועד) (1 Sam 1:12-17, 22; 2:28; cf. 8:1-5). In fact, as the narrator skillfully makes manifest at the end of Eli's life, his blind corpulence suggests not just the milder problem of parental inefficacy but his shocking complicity in his sons' dishonoring the LORD by treating His offering contemptuously (1 Sam 4:15, 18; cf. 2:25, 29).

[277] Cf. Hannah's ongoing commitment in 1 Sam 2:19. Eli's duty (1 Sam 2:22-25) was evaluated not by its external appearance, but by its efficacy: particularly that Eli failed to restrain his sons (כהה, 1 Sam 3:13). Indeed, the Samuel narrative records three direct prophetic warnings to *Eli,* not his wicked sons, that went unheeded: first, Hannah's intercessory prayer of reversals (פלל, 1 Sam 2:1-10; cf. 2:25); second, the נאם from the man of God (1 Sam 2:27-36); and third, the דבר the LORD spoke to Samuel (1 Sam 3:11-18).

[278] Cf. Deut 6:7; 8:5; 21:18; 22:18. Such parenting comes with implied accountability. Indeed, readers attuned to the uniquely vocalized מה in 31:1c may recall that *three* of the "twenty-four" so vocalized מה occur in 1 Samuel 4, the execution of divine judgment on Eli, his sons, and Israel. Eli's penultimate speech (1 Sam 4:14) is juxtaposed against the Philistines' (1 Sam 4:6), foreigners who demonstrate more fear of the LORD than Eli or Israel did. The shared language/sense of Eli's final direct speech (1 Sam 4:16)— מה היה הדבר בני—with 31:1-2 and may invite considerations of sameness and difference (cf. 1 Sam 2:23).

[279] I.e., possible multivalency with בר also denoting the purity demanded by the mother's vows: 'my pure son.' Readers recalling Hannah's vow's terms (1 Sam 1:11) likely understand such vows within the Mosaic law (Lev 22:17-25; Num 6). Aaron's line (Eli's house) has similar consecrated elements: eating (Lev 7:22-36; 8:31-32; 10:12-15), drinking (Lev 10:9), spaces (Lev 8:33-35; 10:7), and duties (Lev 10:1-10).

forsake the vow's unstated terms. Is this happening here? In this imaginative space, readers may reflect on their own obligations to God and self-evaluate their responses.

Blending the Hannah-Samuel/Eli-sons narrative with Proverbs 31:1-9 also invites readers to intuit 31:1-9 in a broader context. The tender Hannah-Samuel micro-narrative not only contrasts with Eli's house, but functions as *the* entry point for a larger macro-narrative, the LORD'S deliverance of Israel through the Davidic kingship.[280] Hannah's barrenness is paralleled with Israel's plight, albeit being the consequence of their own unfaithfulness. God's remembering of Hannah corresponds with His remembering His covenant with Israel, which peaks in the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7.[281] Readers' positioning themselves in Proverbs 31:1-9 remains open, but connection with 1 Samuel 1-4 suggests sympathy toward a pious mother and wariness toward *internal* dangers.[282]

Resonance-Dissonance

Early in 31:2c, resonance with the immediate context seems high with the repeated מה—despite slight aural and formal dissonance. Late in 31:2c, readers seem stopped short by the seeming incomplete thought: likely, very high dissonance and

---

[280] See God's promises in 2 Samuel 7:8-10 with respect to His people and language echoing His covenant with Abraham (Gen 12:1-3; 15; 17; 22). Cf. also this similar tone regarding the priesthood in 1 Sam 2:35.

[281] As Israel's last judge, Samuel authorized (anointed (1 Sam 2:10)) David's kingship on the LORD'S behalf (1 Sam 16:12-13). Samuel's spiritual leadership is established in the Hannah-Samuel micro-narrative through contrasting Hannah/Samuel with Eli (1 Sam 2:12-25), which is encapsulated in prophetic speech against Eli: "…those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Sam 2:30) and in Hannah's own words: "I delight in your deliverance" (1 Sam 2:1). Hannah's plight and deliverance parallels and prefigures Israel's plight and deliverance by His anointed (1 Sam 2:1, 5, 8-10).

[282] Such hopefulness and wariness are present in both the Hannah-Samuel/Eli-sons and Samson narratives.

resonance low to very low.[283] This very high dissonance may disrupt forward progress and force readerly grammatical reassessment of 31:2.[284] The dissonant syntax may encourage readerly connections with similar feminine voice patterns in Judges 4-5.[285]

Trust-Scrutiny

Early in 31:2c, trust appears static and scrutiny heightened with anticipation of clausal completion. The sameness and difference of מה may invite scrutiny. Late in 31:2c, trust falls to very low. Readers likely doubt their interpretive skills and suspect the speaker's false lead. Scrutiny seems very high as readers seek to make sense of the data.

31:2 Summary

Wide variation in modern and ancient translations of 31:2 corroborates commentators' common recognition of the verse's grammatical challenges and interpretive difficulty. Per Crawford Toy, its "form of expression is strange and doubtful."[286] To others, it is "a bit difficult", an "enigma", "a puzzle", "difficult to translate", and its meaning "uncertain" or "unclear".[287] The compounding issue seems an

---

[283] Readers likely expect thought completion in such parallelism. Cf. David Toshio Tsumura, "Vertical Grammar of Parallelism in Hebrew Poetry, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 1 (2009): 169.

[284] Cf. Greenstein's psycholinguistic theory of staircase parallelism's reanalysis or possibly suspended analysis. Greenstein, 54-55. See also Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry,* 151n109-152n109.

[285] Judges 4:18; 5:7, 12. Cf. also Judg 5:19, 21, 27, 28, 30.

[286] Crawford H. Toy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), 539.

[287] Respectively, quotations are from the following: Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs,* Baker Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 538; Hubbard, 475; McKane, 407; John J. Pilch, *The Cultural Life Setting of the Proverbs* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 167; Waltke, 503; Whybray, *Proverbs,* 422. As William Reyburn and Euan Fry query, "… [W]hat does it mean? And how

absent predicate—to which some scholars find creative solutions; others trend toward literal rendering with or without an elided verb.[288] Commentators often navigate the verse intuitively, seeing it as a call to attention, rhetorical rebuke, emotive heart cry, or some combination of the three.[289] The missing predicate seems to focus scholars on the more understandable בר phrases, and many note a parallel with Hannah in 1 Samuel 1:11.[290]

Not dissimilar from these scholarly trends, I have argued that the fast-paced hermeneutic difficulties of 31:2 likely disorient readers more than 31:1. The missing predicate seems acutely felt, and the line's abrupt end likely primes readers to experience a false lead. Thus, at first reading, basic clausal sense of the mother's direct speech may feel elusive, and readers likely make sense of 31:2 through blending and fitting illocutionary clues to a relevant imaginative context. As modeled by commentators and shown in Figure 2, strong evocations of the Hannah-Samuel (and Eli-sons) narrative may offer readers context to fill the interpretive gaps of 31:1-2. Shared key words, themes, and imagery may also evoke Judges 4-5 and Psalm 2. Readers must persevere through persistently dissonant material and may hope 31:3 will clarify the openness.

---

should it be translated?" William D. Reyburn and Euan McG. Fry, *A Handbook on Proverbs*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 2000), 646.

[288] Creative solutions include discerning in מה an Arabic imperative 'listen' or a Hebraic rhetorical negative "No!" Literal translation, e.g., NASB: "What, my son? And what, son of my womb? And what, son of my vows?" Or with recognition of an elided verb, e.g., ESV: "What are you doing, my son? What are you doing, son of my womb? What are you doing, son of my vows?" Similarly, LXX.

[289] Commentators taking a composite view include the following: Clifford, 269nB; Delitzsch, *Proverbs,* 2:317-18; Fox, *Proverbs 10-31,* 885; Kidner, 176; Wilson, 315.

[290] Cf. Clifford, 270; Fox, *Proverbs 10-31,* 885; García Bachmann, "A Foolish King, Women, and Wine," 323; McKane, 408; Perdue, 272; Whybray, *Proverbs,* 423.

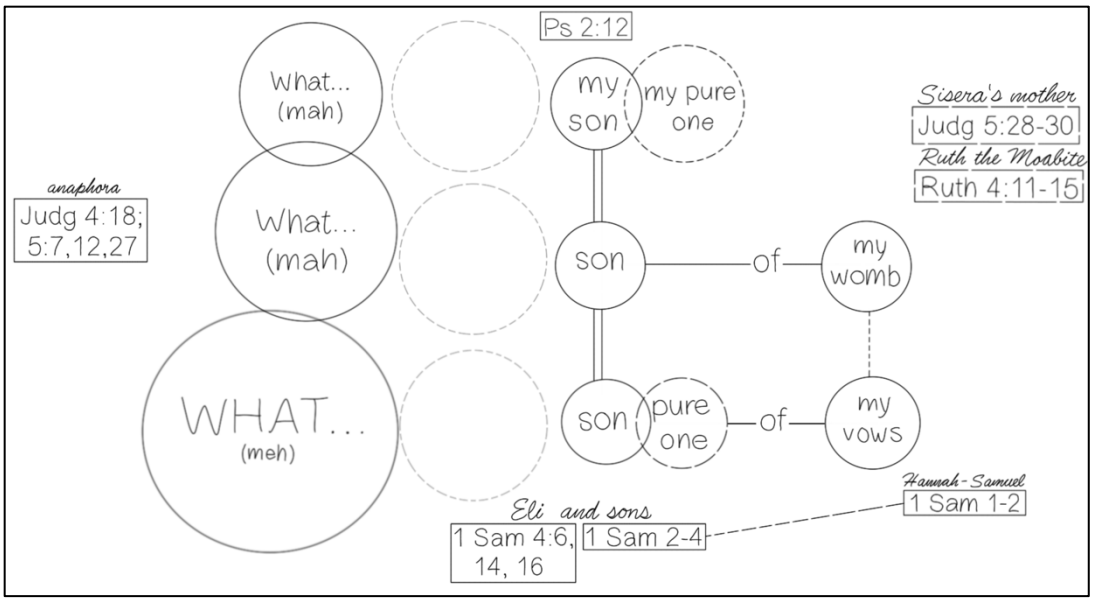

Figure 2: Word Map of 31:2

The issue of speaker identity seems to remain in the foreground. Who is this speaker? Are her words trustworthy? Why would Proverbs' poet-narrator authorize her speech? The poem's sparse details have juxtaposed apparent conflicts: a son-king with an unknown name and a mother whose intimate speech appears dialectical/foreign (cf. 7:14)—yet alongside the mother's seemingly positive piety and מוסר of her son. As canonical context informs this tension, the Jews are "us", aligned with the LORD; those outside are "other".[291] Readers recognizing the בר connection in 31:2 and Psalm 2:12 may try setting 31:1-9 in that context: a foreign king would likely stand in hostility with other gathered kings against the LORD and His anointed (cf. Judges 5:31). Although it seems unlikely this person would be given subtitular attribution in Proverbs, such a king's

[291] Cf. Millar, "Reading Esther," 4-5. "Proverbs is, ostensibly, unconcerned with ethnicity. And yet, unease about foreignness manifests itself at pivotal moments, in warnings about the 'Foreign Woman' (נכריה: 2:16; 6:24; 7:5; 23:27) … [T]his metaphor depends on an ideological assumption about ethnic foreignness: it is dangerous and unwanted. In Proverbs, ethnicity and morality coalesce: the Foreign Woman is outside ethnic norms, so must be outside ethical norms too." While some like Fox argue the strangeness means the woman is off-limits ("another man's wife"), Millar correctly discerns the underlying reasoning powering the metaphor, which is literarily present even if not meant to be literally taken. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9,* 134-141.

words appear to carry an ominous tone. However, the בר נדרי connection with Hannah seems to provoke sympathy, even admiration for this mother-speaker and son-audience—far more than wariness toward a foreign woman which Proverbs' context may suggest. Besides open questions of sense, readers may be navigating complex feelings: disapproving those opposed to the LORD, longing for the LORD to deliver His people, admiration for those keeping costly obligations to the LORD, and reverent fear of the LORD's judgment.

Reading 31:3

Presenting yet another stylistic shift, 31:3 confirms the enigmatic 31:2 as a complete thought and thrusts the reader into more familiar interpretive territory: negative admonition. However, readers appear to face continued challenges: semantic ambiguity, imbalanced parallelism, absent motivation clause, and difficult forms. Readers' appropriation of interpretive context likely determines how they navigate the verse. The mother-speaker's suspected foreign identity seems to resurface at the close.

Proverbs 31:3 text —

אַל־תִּתֵּן לַנָּשִׁים חֵילֶךָ וְדַרְכֶּיךָ לְמַחֹות מְלָכִין׃

31:3 offers two parallel sections, divided by the Masoretic *atnach*: (1) אל תתן לנשים חילך and (2) ודרכיך למחות מלכין. I analyze the verse in these two segments.

Reading 31:3a – אל תתן לנשים חילך

Table 7: Encountering v. 3a

Initial interpretation:	Do not give to (the) women your strength/army/valor …
Possible corrected interpretation:	*None (although variations in semantic range)*

The shift to negative admonition early in 31:3a seems to make readers set aside open interpretive questions and receive new inputs through adjusted hermeneutic tools. As in 31:1-2, initial interpretive relevance appears quickly complicated. Readers may waver in discerning relevance due contextual gaps and overlapping spheres.[292] Yet RT suggests the intersectional order of מלך, בר, and נדרי as optimally relevant and, thus, intuit the context primarily as *kingly,* secondarily as מוסר appropriate to general *sonship*, and tertiary as unto *consecration*.[293] Subtle clues in the discourse offer further hinted relational context, but disambiguating sense and referents likely remains challenging.[294] Even the lexemes may seem slippery. Despite high frequencies in HB and wide semantic ranges, lexemes נתן, נשים, and חיל appear to play awkwardly together.[295] In a consecrated kingly sonship, what חילך can יתן מלך to נשים? Readers may withhold judgment, awaiting clarification in 31:3b, or imaginatively blend new and previously evoked passages.[296]

---

[292] Is the mother-speaker speaking to her son *as a son* (ברי, cf. 1:8-9:18; 22:17-24:22), *a king* (e.g., 16:10-15)*,* or *both* (cf. Bathsheba to Solomon, 2 Kings 2:19-21)?

[293] Readers recognizing 31:1-9 as דברי חכמים (1:6) may find the most relevant parallels in 22:17-24:22.

[294] Revell, *Designation of the Individual,* 279. Subtle clues in this speech offer relational context. Use of the second person modal form in this case where "a request can be expected to cause displeasure" reflects "the speaker is not treating the addressee as a superior." On referents of נשים, see JM §35e; §137i; cf. Ezek 23:10. Vocalization may suggest definiteness (a subset of women) or a collective class (all women). Indefinite vocalization is used later in vv. 4, 8.

[295] Nowhere else in HB do the three lexemes meet directly, and different phrasings are used to express the sense which many translations of 31:3 communicate (see discussion below). E.g., 'women' is never the indirect object of נתן חיל. Although חיל (salient sense of חילך as 'your power' or 'your wealth' (HALOT, 1:311.1-2)) is a common object in HB, נתן is rarely its transitive verb. In those rare cases, the verbal subject of נתן with direct object חיל is almost always the LORD, not a human (2 Chr 24:24; Jer 15:13; 17:3; Joel 2:22; cf. also Deut 8:18; Ps 18:32; Ruth 4:11). In many such pairings, the sense of חיל is 'force, army,' (2 Chr 16:8; 17:2; 24:24 (BDB, 290.4)), which offers relevance in 31:1-3 with a kingly implied audience yet perhaps has lower relevance in (maternal) מוסר. נתן with women in HB often have the woman as direct object and man as indirect object (1 Sam 18:27; 2 Sam 12:11). Cf. Gen 34:21 where both are lamed prepositional forms. A "fuzzy" search of the three roots on Stepbible.org yields five additional cases: Josh 1:13; Ruth 4:11; 1 Sam 18:17; Esth 8:11; Dan 11:6. Cf. Mancuello González, 104-106.

[296] Most likely are 1 Sam 1:16; 2:16, 23; and Ruth 4:11-15. Similar phrasing used in Hannah's plea to Eli in 1 Sam 1:16 and the contrast of Eli wicked sons' demand of a worshiper in 1 Sam 2:16. "Do not regard [אל

Openness-Closure

Early in 31:3a, moderate closure comes as readers likely recognize triangulated parental discourse.[297] However, readers enter this discourse with advance warning of its unique particularization.[298] Readers, thus facing *excessive* closure, may feel acutely that they do not know how to position themselves in the text.[299] Late in 31:3a, imbalanced parallelism may increase openness and decrease closure. However, as RT suggests, optimal relevance appears to yield a contextual intersection of kingship/leadership, sonship, and consecration. While the lexeme arrangement of 31:3a remains somewhat unwieldy, readers likely seek disambiguation within such an imaginatively constructed context of relevance: e.g., canonical kings' and leaders' negative associations with women; abuse of consecrated power; and parental admonishment.[300] This context seems to give more relevance via biblical narrative examples than of Proverbs' literary whole.[301]

Readers recognizing connections to 1 Samuel 1-4 may find interpretive help for 31:3a, particularly in the verb נתן as reflecting covenant relationship between characters

---

נתן] your servant as a worthless woman…" 1 Sam 1:16. "And if the man said to him, 'Let them burn the fat first, and then take as much as you wish,' he would say, 'No, you must give [נתן] it now, and if not, I will take it by force.'" 1 Sam 2:16. Cf. phrasing in Gen 30:4; Esth 3:11; Ezek 27:16. HALOT, 1:733.4.

[297] Cf. similar verb form in Prov 6:4; 30:8; cf. 5:9; negative 2ms juss forms are common in 22:17-24:34.

[298] Brown, "Pedagogy of Proverbs 10:1-31:9," 178. I.e., an engendered, "otherly" parent of a named-yet-unknown king-son.

[299] Some may find the son's particularization dissonant with their listening role of 'son' and, like Fox, position themselves outside of the text. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31,* 888. As noted above, Fox's reading of 31:1-9 appears so particularized that he does not approach the text as triangulated speech and engage with it through various perspectives. However, Clifford argues that particularization actually can make, at least in Proverbs 1-9, the 'son' perspective available for 'everyman.' Clifford, "Proverbs 1-9 as Instruction."

[300] E.g., instructions for kings (Deut 17:17); Samson's relations with Philistine women (Judg 14-16); Saul's plot (1 Sam 18:17, 21); David's dalliance (1 Sam 11); Solomon's love of idolatrous women (1 Kgs 11:1-6).

[301] E.g., Proverbs reflects only 34 of 2011 occurrences of נתן as a verb form, the same form is used in Prov 6:4 (with tenor of self-restraint); also, Prov 23:26 and 31:31. See the structurally significant inf con in 1:4.

and the LORD.[302] נתן in Hannah-Samuel narrative establishes "a climate of gratitude" unto God, which, Mancuello González argues, is carried by the verb into 31:1-9[303] God, the ultimate Giver, gives first, even as Hannah rejoices, strength (עז) to his king (1 Sam 2:10).[304] Human נתן responds to divine giving, either in reciprocal loyalty (as Hannah and Samuel) or in disregard (as Eli and his sons).[305] The 1 Samuel 1-4 narrative further suggests the right response to crisis includes bold request for more divine נתן.[306] There as perhaps in 31:1-9, character (e.g., in terms of consecration) is discerned through one's נתן. Admiration for the mother-speaker may increase (as with Hannah) sympathy for her admonition (Eli's sexual immoral sons emerging as imaginative foils (1 Sam 2:22).).

Resonance-Dissonance

Early in 31:3a, resonance seems high, and dissonance moderately low, based on the fittedness of admonition with Proverbs' parental מוסר (31:1).[307] Late in 31:3a, readers

---

[302] For נתן depicting balanced reciprocal faithfulness of the LORD and Hannah, see 1 Sam 1:11, 17, 27. In contrast, the LORD proved faithful to Eli's Aaronic house (1 Sam 2:28). Yet Eli and his sons responded by נתן with unfaithfulness and lack of discernment: 1 Sam 1:16; 2:15-16. In the book of Samuel, Hannah's exultant climax (1 Sam 2:10) sets נתן as the measure of reciprocal action between the LORD, Israel, and the king He would set over them: 1 Sam 8:6, 14-15; 12:13, 17-18; 15:28.

[303] Mancuello González, 161. My translation.

[304] God's giving: 1 Sam 1:11, 17, 27 (Hannah); 2:10 (His king—and therefore His people); 2:28 (to Aaronic priesthood). Although נתן חיל in 31:3a is often rendered along the lines of 'give strength', the far more common expression in HB is נתן עז. Both this phrase (Sam 2:10) and חיל occur in Hannah's exaltation (1 Sam 2:4). See also Ps 29:11; 68:35; 86:16.

[305] Other possible evoked texts suggest human giving to (or taking from) others is considered as an aspect one's response to the LORD's giving. See, e.g., 1 Sam 1:4-5 (Elkanah); 1:16 (Eli); 2:15-17 (Eli's sons). In Judges 5:25, Jael give Sisera milk. In Judges 14:9, Samson gave his parents (defiled) honey.

[306] 1 Sam 1:16-17, 20, 27; cf. Ps 2:8. Other potential texts reinforce the LORD's giving of inheritance or enemies (Ps 2:8; Judg 4:7, 14) or giving Israel over to enemies (Judge 13:1).

[307] Cf. 1:8-9:18; 22:17-24:22. Readers familiar with ANE (Royal) Instruction may recognize connections with this wider pool of texts. Yet the particularity set by 31:1 seems to play with such genre expectations. Cf. Hennie J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel: Their Social and Religious Position in the Context of*

may not see how the lexemes work together in discerned context, but sense of resonance is likely moderately high: the speech fits the admonition subgenre. Semantic senses of the lexemes and their interaction seem less clear, yielding moderate dissonance.

Trust-Scrutiny

Early in 31:3a, trust appears moderate, and scrutiny moderately high. Even foreign mothers are right to admonish their sons. Readers may be interpretively optimistic—though seeing themselves in the text likely remains difficult. Late in 31:3a, trust appears moderate and scrutiny heightened. Readers may try to make sense of the small structural, grammatical and phonologic details, which, per RT, have been selected for optimal relevance, yet seem to highlight contextual gaps.[308]

Reading 31:3b – ודרכיך למחות מלכין

Table 8: Encountering v. 3b

Initial interpretation:	… [do not give] your ways to those who wipe out kings.
Possible corrected interpretation:	… [do not give] your ways to wipe out kings.

The chiastic structure of 31:3b offers recognizable parallel elements and confirms verb governance of אל נתן. Interpretive ease seems to end there. As reflected in some modern commentaries, readers likely struggle to discern relationships between parallel items and navigate the difficult למחות and, to a lesser extent, מלכין.[309] Parallelism likely

the Ancient Near East, Oudtestamentische Studiën/Old Testament Studies 49 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2003), 325-89.

[308] The indirect object has ambiguous particularity and fronting. The direct object receives mid-line pausal emphasis. How do these details communicate optimum relevant? Readers likely struggle to comprehend.

[309] Cf. Mancuello González, 106. "Pr 31,3b es una de las frases más controvertidas y oscuras de la colección." Some scholars emend the text to smooth out difficulties. E.g., Hubbard's example and reasoning. Hubbard, 475. However, I recognize the poem's regular hermeneutic challenges and seeming

serves as readers' interpretive foothold. Those constructing a cause-and-effect narrative frame may, finding coherence, stop processing. Others may more deeply explore weak implicatures with canonical imagery: the 'ways' metaphor, the "strange and dubious" למחות, and nonstandard מלכין.[310] Shared language may invite connection with Ps 18:32.[311]

Openness-Closure

Early in 31:3b, openness appears moderately high, and closure moderately low. Readers recognizing חילך || דרכיך as chiastic parallels may feel interpretively optimistic. Late in 31:3b, openness and closure likely vary, as readers engage the line's difficulties.

Semantic imbalance in the line's parallelism likely puzzles.[312] Per Alter, semantic parallelistic imbalance often is causal, inviting readers to construct a "narrative sequence" to account for cause and effect.[313] If modern scholars reflect ancient readerly tendency, לנשים may trigger readers to envision Lemuel's context as a royal harem in which sexual dalliance threatens kingly resources.[314] דרכיך and למחות מלכין are likely fitted to this

irregularities as intentional. Readers seem encouraged to face the challenges in other ways. Scribal error may warrant this consideration, but emendation is not a readerly posture the poet-narrator seems to invite.

[310] On למחות, cf. BDB, 562.3. The unusual vocalization is likely longstanding, based on ancient versions. Clifford, *Proverbs*, 269. I accept the MT vocalization as the best guide to Proverbs' composer's intent. On מלכין, JM §90c and BDB, 1100 recognize the pl ending as an "Aramaizing" element. As Fox notes, however, vocalization is Hebrew, not Aramaic. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31,* 883.

[311] Cf. Mancuello González, 101-103, 110-111.

[312] As often discernible in ancient versions and modern scholarship. Cf. Delitzsch, *Proverbs,* 2:318-21. Van Leeuwen, 258. Cf. Heim, 637. "Often the imprecise nature of the parallelism allows a range of complex and highly productive implications and inferences that immensely enrich meaning and significance."

[313] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry,* 35.

[314] For scholarly examples, cf. Crenshaw, "A Mother's Instruction," 16; Meinhold, 2:517; Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 886; Mancuello González, 99.

imaginative narrative, e.g., receiving למחות as synonymous with לנשים.[315] If Lemuel pursues sexual pleasure inside/outside his harem (31:3a, cause), these habits (and the women involved) will bring his downfall (31:3b, consequence). Once constructed, such a narrative may function as the standard of relevance for vv. 4-9, yielding high closure and moderately low openness.[316] Such closure may lead readers to further disambiguate לנשים || למחות with canonical cases of kings/leaders threatened by female entanglement.[317]

While some visual readers may level 31:3 causally, aural readers likely feel less free to emend למחות to fit a neat parallel.[318] Although the precise form is unusual, the root מחה seems recognizable.[319] Despite perceived imbalance with לנשים, a rare syncopated

---

[315] E.g., Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs,* Word Biblical Commentary 22 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 240n3. Murphy turns to the Ugaritic *drk* so the parallelism resembles more what might be predicted—sexual virility || power. See also McKane 409: "the send of v. 3b is unsatisfactory and some emendation … is necessary." Hubbard, 475. Cf. Delitzsch, *Proverbs,* 2:319; Mancuello González, 107.

[316] Cf. discussion in Delitzsch, *Proverbs,* 2:318-20.

[317] Leaders may include (David (1 Sam 11), Solomon (1 Kings 11), Samson (Judg 14-16), or Eli's sons' (1 Sam 2:22). Female figures include, thus, Delilah, Jezebel, Athaliah, Proverbs' "strange" women, etc. Cf. Mancuello González, 104. Jezebel (1 Kings 16:31; 18-17; 212 Kings 9:30-37); Athaliah (2 Kings 8:26; 11:16-20). Proverbs' dangerous women: 2:16-17 ;7; 9:13-18; 30:20.

[318] Alviero Niccacci, "The Biblical Hebrew Verbal System in Poetry," in *Biblical Hebrew in Its Northwest Semitic Setting: Typological and Historical Perspectives,* ed. Steven E. Fassberg and Avi Hurvitz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 263. Emending vocalization does not solve "the problem … of why … the Masoretes vocalize[d] that way and what they intended." "Given the fact that our knowledge of BH is basically dependent on the Masoretic redaction of the Hebrew Bible … [e]ven if we may prefer a different vocalization, the task remains of trying to understand of what the Masoretes meant by their reading." Also, readers with high trust in the text may be uncomfortable with emendation, seeing verb gapping as evidence the mother-speaker intended 31:3a and b set together. Cf. Fox, "Disjointed Proverbs," 168.

[319] Scholarship's three major proposals for למחות are all forms of verb root מחה. Cf. Delitzsch, *Proverbs,* 2:318-20; Mancuello González, 108-111. (1) As a *hiph* inf const with appended lamed preposition, if the *hey* is syncopated though such cases are abnormal (JM §54b). (2) With revocalization, a *qal* infinitive construct with *lamed* preposition. (3) Alternatively, with revocalization, a *qal* definite fem pl ptc with prefixed *lamed* preposition. (Lipiński's argument for an Akkadian form rendered as an Aramaic plural: 'aux voyantes des rois' seems less likely than one of the above. Edward Lipiński, "Les voyantes des rois en Prov 31:3," *Vetus Testamentum* 23, no. 2 (April 1973): 246.) Many commentators, ESV, and NIV opt for #3: a fem pl ptc in parallel with לנשים. E.g., Clifford, *Proverbs*, 269; Delitzsch, *Proverbs,* 2:319; Murphy, 240n3a; Whybray, *Proverbs*, 423; cf. BDB, 562.I.3.

hiph inf con may be discerned: 'to (cause to) wipe out, blot out'.[320] Such a parallel seems to move toward expansion, inviting consideration of wider causality than sexuality alone.[321] Readers may recognize further connection with Eli's impious sons, whose sexual immorality was only a symptom of their larger problem (1 Sam 2:22-25, 29, 34).

Through the intersection of three lexemes (נתן, היל, and דרך), readers may also recall Psalm 18:32[33], a shared-language connection with 31:3 suggesting inner-biblical allusion.[322] The narrative frame, if blended with 31:3, likely expands למחות beyond sexual temptation and female wiles, e.g., recognizing political enemies like Saul of David. Simultaneously, it may invite seeing such danger(s) within a frame where the LORD, as Giver of חיל, is worthy of praise. He alone is the One who delivers the humble and oppressed (who can also be kings like David) who keep His *ways* and walk in *purity* (Ps 18:22, 27; 2 Sam 22:22, 27). Saul's plots to use *his daughters* to destroy David may

---

[320] JM §54b. CDCH, 213.I; BDB, 562.I; HALOT, 1:568.I. The two other *hiph* cases: Neh 13:14; Jer 18:23. Uncommon senses of מחה are 'to strike' (BDB, 562.II; Num 34:11) and 'to fatten' (BDB, 562.III; Is 25:6). Cf. Kidner who allows either 'so as to destroy' or 'to those (fem.) who destroy'. Kidner, 176. The text does not demand leveling—in fact, the speaker will continue to use imprecise parallelism with oddly vocalized infinitive forms. Cf. Delitzsch, *Proverbs,* 2:318. The verse's polysemy and imbalance suggest the speaker does not want to let her audience off so easily.

[321] Cf. Mancuello González, 105-108, 110. Mancuello González discerns multivalent admonishment: e.g., women usurping kingly power, which opens exploration of canonical parallels of the Jezebel and Athaliah narratives. Mancuello González explores engagement of Proverbs 31:3 with Is 3:12-15, concluding in concern of royal men relinquishing power to women and how such reversals negatively impact citizenry. However, the intersection of לנשים, למחות, and Proverbs' Solomonic anchor in the biblical meta-narrative (1:1; 10:1; 25:1; 1 Kings 11) likely encourages readers to include sexual temptation into the intent.

[322] Mancuello González, 102. The narrative frame (Ps 18:1) presents the poem in David's voice, recounting God's deliverance from his enemies, including Saul. If, as some argue, psalms were used in corporate worship, 18:32 as lyrics may be retained in memory as "formative speech". John D. Witvliet, "Words to Grow into: The Psalms as Formative Speech," in *Forgotten Songs: Reclaiming the Psalms for Christian Worship,* ed. C. Richard Wells and Ray Van Neste (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2012), 7-16. Also, C. John Collins, "Always Alleluia: Reclaiming the True Purpose of the Psalms in the Old Testament Context," in *Forgotten Songs: Reclaiming the Psalms for Christian Worship,* ed. C. Richard Wells and Ray Van Neste (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2012), 17-34. Leonard's principles here of 31:3 and Ps 18:32[33]: #1 & 2 shared language; #4 shared phrasing; #5 accumulation of shared language; #6 shared kingly context; #7 questionable ideology does not negate shared language for a connection.

enrich the imagined context by framing the parallelism as moving from concrete to a broader, figurative reality.[323] The "Aramaic" suffix on מלכין (but Hebrew morphology) however, may invite readers to set 31:1-2 within a frame of God's deliverance (Ps 18) within the international landscape of Ps 2, reopening the question of speaker affiliation.[324]

Resonance-Dissonance

Early in 31:3b, resonance likely seems moderately high and dissonance moderately low, as the chiastic parallelism emerges.[325] Late in 31:3b, readers face dissonant material (moderate to moderately high) in the parallelism's imbalance and difficult/nonstandard forms. Resonance appears moderately high for readers able to construct a causal narrative and/or fill interpretive gaps with canonical imagery.[326]

Trust-Scrutiny

Early in 31:3b, the easily recognized parallel may yield moderate trust in self and speaker. Scrutiny likely decreases slightly with anticipation of clean chiastic structure.

---

[323] Saul's first scheme to offer daughter Merab to David so the Philistines would kill him fizzled due to David's humility (1 Sam 18:17). Saul's second scheme to offer Michal failed—David brought back twice the number of Philistine foreskins, not 100, but 200—and solidified Saul as "David's enemy continually." (1 Sam 18:20-29: "Saul saw and knew that the LORD was with David, and that Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him.") Cf. the narrative presents the songs of הנשים in 1 Sam 18:6 as triggering Saul's jealousy.

[324] Whether or not the Davidic kingship is in view for the speaker of 31:2-9 or her son does not seem discernible by internal textual evidence alone; however, the covenant community as audience for the Scriptures certainly had Davidic kingship, the rights and responsibilities thereof, in relevant frame (e.g., 2 Sam 7) as they read this unit with kingship evoked from 31:1, and perhaps more broadly by 1:1; 10:1; 25:1; and other references in Proverbs' later material.

[325] The oddly plural דרכיך may feel slightly dissonant with Proverb's broader, typically singular, דרך metaphor and its parallel here, חילך. But the sense of danger seems resonant with Proverbs' broader context.

[326] E.g., To נתן one's דרך is an odd match, yet readerly reflection on this relationship in HB likely reveals that the verbal pair as highly relevant when the LORD is in frame. The combination of the two within the biblical canon portrays in various ways the LORD as Ultimate and generous Giver. See discussion above.

Late in 31:3b, however, scrutiny may rise to high with the parallelism's imbalance, unusual forms, high stakes, and dialectical speaker. Despite the resurfaced question of speaker identity, readers' construction of a causal frame may have reminded them of the LORD's trustworthiness. Trust may increase proportionate to this readerly consideration.

Reading 31:3 Summary

Although its nonstandard forms and parallelistic imbalance prompt debate, commentators often understand 31:3 as a prohibition against the king's "improper involvement with women", specifically women of the sort who would destroy kings.[327] For many, the line carries specifically sexual overtones, and some propose emendation along these lines to balance the parallelism.[328] Some evoke Proverbs 7 or scenarios from biblical narrative as context to make sense of the parallelism; others discern from the מלכין suffix an Aramaic/northern Semitic setting.[329] A minority view argued by Mancuello González recognizes 31:3 as not reducible to a warning against sexual threat, but rather functions to prohibit the king from giving political power to women.[330]

Similar to Mancuello González, I have shown that the sense of 31:3 is not as simple as it may seem. As RT suggests, the verse's imbalanced parallelism, multivalency, and nonstandard forms seem intentionally included for optimal relevance; thus, readers' wrestling to make sense of the text appears a cooperative posture. Lack of interpretive

---

[327] Quote from Fox, *Proverbs 10-31,* 886. On the women, see Clifford, 270; Perdue, 272-73; Wilson, 315.

[328] Cf. McKane, 409.

[329] Cf. Clifford, 270-71; Perdue, 272-73. See also Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry,* 35.

[330] Mancuello González, 110-111. Crenshaw also recognizes "room for ambiguity". Crenshaw, "A Mother's Instruction," 16.

context heightens interpretive difficulty.[331] As scholarship models, readers likely construct a narrative frame to explain the parallelism causally. In addition to continued resonance with 1 Samuel 1-4, phrasing in 31:3 may evoke Psalm 18:32, as suggested in Figure 3.

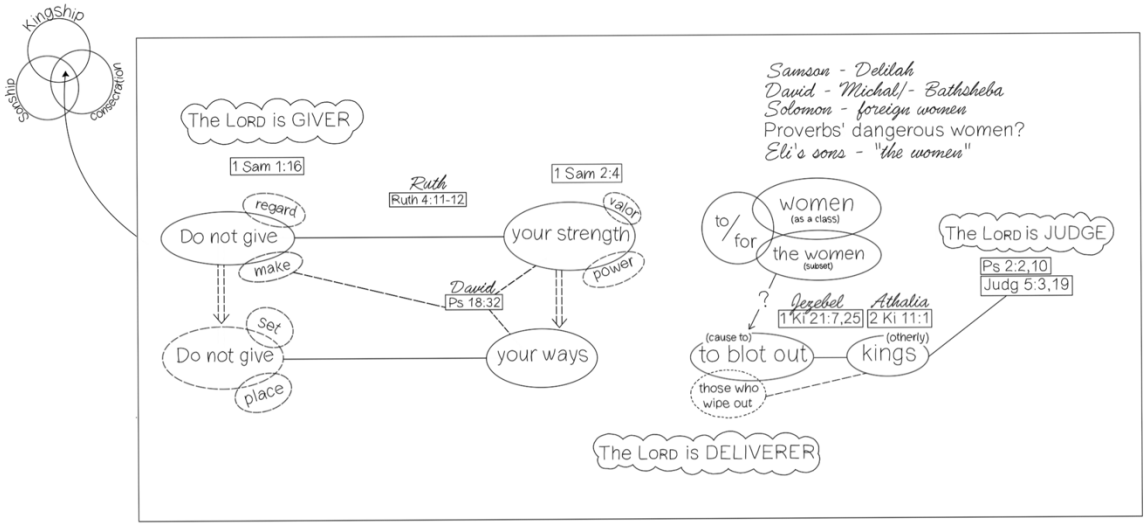

Figure 3: Word Map of 31:3

Like Mancuello González, I suggest this interpretive context may reinforce a widening focus—broadening the danger beyond sexual temptation and bringing the LORD into frame as Deliverer and Judge. This interpretive journey likely prompts readerly connection with other canonical figures, which in real-time, may only be strobic images to be explored later. The closing "Aramaic" suffix on מלכין seems to redirect readers back to the international landscape of Psalm 2 and the open question of "us vs. them."

[331] Keefer rightly notes 31:1-9 "provides, rather than assumes, much of its own interpretive context", i.e., the "familial and royal contexts." Keefer, 116-17. However, as scholarly debate reveals, this given context leaves readers with many hermeneutic challenges—in fact, I suggest the proffered context heightens these.

Reading 31:4-5

Readers attentive to speakerly patterns may expect stylistic change and hermeneutic challenge in vv. 4-5. This is indeed what readers appear to face: stylistic variation, difficult clausal sense, and seeming topical pivot. Readers finally reach a motivation clause, which offers a foundation for stronger interpretive judgments. Readers may glimpse the heart behind the מוסר, yet still struggle to see themselves in the text.

Proverbs 31:4-5 text —

אַל לַמְלָכִים֮ לְמוֹאֵ֗ל אַ֣ל לַמְלָכִ֣ים שְׁתוֹ־יָ֑יִן וְלִרוֹזְנִ֥ים אֹו שֵׁכָֽר׃

פֶּן־יִשְׁתֶּ֥ה וְיִשְׁכַּ֗ח מְחֻקֵּ֫ק וְיַשַּׁ֥נֶּה דִּ֣ין כָּל־בְּנֵי־עֹֽנִי׃

The poem's central 31:4-5 present two stylistically different lines connected by a פן conjunction: anaphoric negative admonition (without finite verb) with a bi-colon motivation clause. I trace the readerly journey in five segments: (1) אל למלכים למואל, (2) אל למלכימ שתו יין, (3) ולרוזנים או שכר, (4) פן ישתה וישכח מחקק, and (5) וישנה דין כל בני עני.

Reading 31:4a – אל למלכים למואל

Table 9: Encountering v. 4a

Initial interpretation:	Do/let not … for kings, Lemoel, …
Possible corrected interpretations:	Let it not be for kings, O One-who-belongs-to-God, …
	Do not [give] to (the) kings, O One-who-belongs-to-God, …

With אל, readers likely prepare for negative admonition vertically parallel to 31:3.[332] However, אל followed by a nonverbal form is highly rare in BH.[333] The unexpected predicate למלכים likely disrupts readers' ability to discern both basic clausal sense and interlinear relationships.[334] Rather, in absence of new volitive, readers seem invited to scrutinize the parallel למלכים || מלכין alongside Lemuel's own kingly identity, a scrutiny seemingly intensified by vocative placement.[335] The revocalized vocative with its unusual syntactic position suggests the speaker is drawing focus to the paronomasia of her son's personal name, One-belonging-to-God, in both "intimacy" and "reprimand."[336]

While in 31:1, Lemuel's identity likely puzzled readers, now, in the central line of the poem, the speaker uses morphology to crystalize his name's paronomasia, thus calling attention to who, as בר נדרי, he is *vowed* to be: a vice-regent of God on earth, with whom,

---

[332] In Proverbs' context, negative parental admonitions with אל on adjacent lines are rare but when they do occur, they appear interrelated. Cf. Prov 3:27-32; 4:5-6; 24:28-29. Cf. 23:1-9.

[333] As Jean-Sébastien Rey notes, "Cases where it [אל] is followed by a non-verbal element are relatively rare: 25 appearances out of 729 in the biblical corpus, without taking into account those where the enclitic נא is directly attached to the negation אל." Jean-Sébastien Rey, "'Dislocated Negations': Negative אל Followed by a Non-verbal Constituent in Biblical, Ben Sira and Qumran Hebrew," in *Hebrew of the Late Second Temple Period: Proceedings of a Sixth International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira,* ed. Elbert J. C. Tigchelaar and Pierre van Hecke, Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 114 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2015), 162. The rarity highlighted by Rey's work makes it less likely that, as suggested by JM, readers may hear אל plus lack of volitive as "more energetic nuance or … stylistic embellishment." JM §160f.

[334] On אל preceding a volitive verb, see JM §160f.

[335] Cf. Revell, *Designation of the Individual,* 336.

[336] I am grateful to Dr. Aaron Goldstein for this insightful suggestion. Cf. Mancuello González, 114-15. The name appears a form of the noun אל and the poetic preposition למו. On vocative position and significance, cf. Revell, *Designation of the Individual,* 332-32, 335-36. In Revell's study of narrative discourse, such placement accounted for only 5 of 148 cases. Revell suggests, "It seems likely that the purpose of the placing of the vocative in position (4) [after the subject and the head of the predicate, but followed by one or more constituents] is to isolate what follows in a form of 'end focus', giving greater impact to its combination with what precedes the vocative." Cf. Wickes, 26, 32. On the name's meaning, per Fleischer, it means *Deo consecrates*, based on למו as poetic form of the *lamed* preposition. Cited by Delitzsch, *Proverbs,* 2:316-17. On למו, see BDB, 518 (Job 27:14; 29:21; 38:40; 40:4).

and in whom he is, God commands and governs.[337] Thus, in a brief space, the speaker has compressed vast meaning: not only clarifying Lemuel's identity, but offering unexpected relevance to the overlapping kingship, sonship, and consecration spheres.[338]

Openness-Closure

Early in 31:4a, openness and closure both appear moderate, as readers may anticipate interlinear connections.[339] Late in 31:4a, openness seems high and closure moderately low with the segment's syntactic irregularities, missing volitive, revocalized vocative, and clausal pause. Interpretive questions may abound: Who are the referents of מלכים? Are they distinct from מלכין? What do the speaker's linguistic patterns suggest about her and her message? Readers may seek new canonical parallels for context.[340] As one of the rare 29 אל cases followed by a nonverbal form, Eli's rebuke of his sons may offer a relevant parallel (1 Sam 2:24) with the nuanced context reinforced by 31:4a:

---

[337] Cornelio Cornelii a Lapide, *Commentarius in Salomonis proverbial* (Venice, Italy: Apud Hieronymum Albriccium, 1702), 660. "Tacitè hìc Bethsabee aliam dat causam, cur Salomon ceterique reges abstinere debeant à potatione, quòd scilicet sint *Lamueles*, id est vicarii Dei in terris, cum quibus, & in quibus est, imperatque & gubernat Deus." The speaker seems to have deliberately limited readers' understanding of Lemuel's identity to his roles of son and king until 31:4a, where readers may now see him freshly through his name's meaning and his being בר נדרי. Cf. Mancuello González, 115. However, Lavoie receives the differing morphology as shift from Hebrew to Aramaic. Lavoie, 40.

[338] As readers should have begun to discern, this speaker is a gifted stylist, master of surprise, and careful teacher. The revocalized name may also offer multivalency of the *lamed* prepositions in vv. 3-4. BDB, 510.1 "very often, with various classes of verbs, *to, towards, for*" yet, BDB, 512.4 "of a transition into a new state or condition, or into a new character or office" with נתן Is 42:6; also BDB, 512.5a "defining those in reference to whom a predicate is affirmed, hence oft. = *belonging to, of"* 1 Sam 2:33; 1 Kings 2:4.

[339] Cf. Hélène M. Dallaire, *The Syntax of Biblical Hebrew and Amarna Canaanite Prose,* Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic 9 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 102-105.

[340] Possible texts evoked include (feminine direct speech with kings), e.g., Bathsheba with David (1 Kings 1) and Solomon (1 Kings 3); Abigail with David (1 Sam 25); Queen of Sheba with Solomon (1 Kings 10); wise woman of Tekoa with David (2 Sam 14); Jezebel to Ahab (1 Kings 21); Esther with Xerxes, etc.

consecrated leaders have a high calling before God.[341] The two types of sons in 1 Samuel 2 (and kings (Psalm 2)) may further enrich readers' imaginative landscape for 31:1-4a.

Resonance-Dissonance

Early in 31:4a, the repeated אל likely offers high resonance and low dissonance. However, late in 31:4a, dissonance may rise to moderately high and resonance decrease to moderate. Readers may face multiple dissonances: lack of verbal form, standard Hebrew plural in מלכים, and hyper-particularized vocative.[342] Yet glimmers of resonance remain: an emerging pattern of *lamed* prepositional predicates, a high frequency of /l/ and /m/ phonemes, the implied audience's particularity, and speakerly patterns.[343]

Trust-Scrutiny

Early in 31:4a, the recognizable pattern may increase trust and decrease scrutiny. Late in 31:4a, the lack of finite verb (and therefore verbal subject) may lower trust in readerly interpretive ability. The speaker's syntactical and morphological irregularities suggest unpredictability, likely increasing scrutiny to high.[344]

---

[341] "Now Eli was very old, and he kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting. And he said to them, 'Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all these people. No, my sons; it is no good report that I hear the people of the Lord spreading abroad. If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him?' But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the Lord to put them to death." 1 Sam 2:22-25.

[342] Mancuello González, 113. The *personalized* vocative is dissonant with Proverbs broader literary context, the alternate vocalization in 31:1, and perhaps even the overlapping hierarchies implied by a mother's volitional statement to an adult kingly son. See Revell, *The Designation of the Individual,* 329-38.

[343] On labial phonemes in 31:2, cf. Mancuello González, 94.

[344] Cf. Mancuello González, 112.

Reading 31:4b – אל למלכים שתו יין

Table 10: Encountering v. 4b

Initial interpretation:	… do/let not … for kings to drink wine…
Possible corrected interpretations:	… let it not be for kings to drink wine…
	… do not give to kings wine to drink…

Unexpected syntax, morphology, and content seem to continue in 31:4b. While the anaphora may allow readerly absorption, the structure simultaneously appears to underscore the missing volitive verb. The segment's *hapax* form שתו may jar further. Readers may recognize the speaker's pattern of weaving difficult forms with clarifying words. Here simplicity follows complexity: יין (pausal form) is likely easily understood, disambiguating שתו and enriching the constructed narrative context with new imagery.[345]

Openness-Closure

Early in 31:4b, openness seems high and closure moderately low. Repetition of אל למלכים confirms its anaphora, suggesting some development in meaning and perhaps drawing consideration of the ambiguous referents of מלכים.[346] Late in 31:4b, openness may remain high, but יין likely allows moderate closure. While basic clausal sense of 31:4 seems elusive, יין invites readers to backfill interpretive gaps. Readers may employ imaginative blending in lieu of clausal sense: blending recognized lexemes with the imagined context gleaned from 31:1-3 and evoked canonical texts.[347] Images may spring to mind: royal banquets in grand, luxurious spaces with indulgence in pleasures of wine,

---

[345] שתו as having the root שתה ('drink' (BDB, 1059.I)). The precise form may remain obscure (like למחות in 31:3). E.g., Whybray, *Proverbs,* 423. Murphy, 240. Though recognizing inf const, Murphy feels the inf abs should be here. As an inf const (BDB, 1059), שְׁתוֹת would be expected (JM §79b) as in Jer 35:8.

[346] Cf., JM §35e; §137i. See note on לנשים above on 31:3a. On anaphoric development, cf. Alter*, The Art of Biblical Poetry,* 64-65.

[347] Blending אל, root שתה, and יין suggests, with למלכים, a general prohibition against kings drinking wine.

food, and women.[348] Of the many available possibilities, perhaps readers may intuitively find most relevant those where kingship, consecration, and sonship overlap: e.g., the irreverent feast of Belshazzar, son of Nebuchadnezzar, in Daniel 5.[349] Others, like Berend Gemser, may intuit parallels with texts having lexical connections with 31:4a-b, e.g., similar forms of שתה, like Jeremiah 35.[350] The likely impact of readerly participation in such evocations is a narrative framing of the poem which extends the surface concern of 31:3 beyond alcohol (even informed by Proverbs' context) unto *consecrated* duty.[351]

Resonance-Dissonance

Early in 31:4b, resonance seems moderately high with repetition and anaphora. Dissonance also appears moderately high in the continued absence of volitive finite verb. Late in 31:4b, resonance seems static. The pausal form יין likely captures readerly focus, encouraging moderately high resonance with imagined narrative context. The *hapax* שתו

---

[348] For an example of such a readerly approach, see McKane, 409. "Wine is a natural ally of women and a complementary threat to a king's integrity." Of course, the large majority of the original canonical audience would not have had much lived experience in this direction, particularly if the dating is post-exilic. So, canonical narrative likely supplies the majority of external inputs for this blending process. Banquets like Belshazzar's (Dan 5), Ahasuerus' (Esth 1:7, 10); Esther's (Esth 5:6), and even Nabal's "kingly" feast (1 Sam 25:36). Those who eat at the king's table: Mephibosheth and all David's sons (2 Sam 9:11-13).

[349] Other parallels available to readers include Absalom's murder of Amnon (2 Sam 13:23-33); David's scheme with Uriah (2 Sam 11:11-13; 12:3); Ben-hadad's drinking with his kings (1 Kings 20:12-21); Adonijah's feast (1 Kings 1:25); Solomon's coronation (1 Chr 29:19, 22); Nabal's feast (1 Sam 25:36).

[350] Reading *qal* inf con. Berend Gemser, *Sprüche Salomos,* Handbuch zum alten Testament 16 (Tübingen, Germany: J. C. B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1963), 107. Cf. GKC §75n; Delitzsch, *Proverbs,* 2:320.

[351] For example, in Jeremiah 35, the LORD used the matter of wine (as ostensibly addressed to Recabites) to deliver a second-order prophetic communication for the larger audience of Judah and Jerusalem. Jeremiah was to serve the Recabites wine in the temple—to demonstrate their faithfulness to their forefather's words and to reveal the ludicrousness of Israel's disregard for the LORD's commands. Linguistic parallels of Jer 35 with Prov 31:1-9 include דבר, מלך, בנינו, נתן, שתה, חיל, and נשים. Thematic resonance can be seen in parental commands, "us vs. them" tensions, and the LORD's prophetic word (נאם || משא) given ostensibly to one audience but actually for the benefit of the larger Israelite audience.

may also seem resonant with the speaker's patterns. Dissonance may decrease to moderate. The clausal enigma remains, but imaginative blending provides a rich interpretive context and averts focus from jarring elements. While a latent prohibition against kingly excess coheres with Proverbs' ethical landscape, the more readers engage in exploring other canonical parallels, the more likely the focus turns to consecrated duty.

Trust-Scrutiny

Early in 31:4b, as with the middle anaphoric 31:2b, scrutiny is likely high. Trust may decrease to moderately low. The speaker, though emerging as a master of stylistic subtlety, seems doggedly tricksy. Readers might see the speaker as trustworthy, but still doubt their interpretive ability. Late in 31:4b, scrutiny likely remains high.

Reading 31:4c – ולרוזנים או שכר

Table 11: Encountering v. 4c

Initial interpretation:	*Qere:* … and for rulers [saying], "Where is strong drink?"
Possible corrected interpretations:	*Ketiv:* … and for rulers [neither wine] nor strong drink.
	… and for rulers to crave[352] strong drink.

In 31:4c, readers are likely relieved to recognize semantic synonymous parallelism. The rare poetic substantive participle 'potentate, ruler' might pose minor difficulties, but שכר is aligned easily with יין from 31:4b, making a synonymous parallel of לרוזנים with למלכים.[353] I presume aural readers receive the Masoretic *qere* אי, a poetic interrogative contraction ('O where?'), as parallel to שתו, whose root שתה is likely held

[352] As NIV, NASB, etc., discerning an inf of אוה.

[353] As Mancuello González notes, the ptc puzzled translators of ancient versions. Mancuello González, 116. BDB, 931. Root רזן 'be weighty, judicious, commanding'; 6 occurrences in MT. CDCH, 418.

confidently even if readers are unclear about the precise sense.[354] Readers likely feel the imbalance of this parallel. Some may level the parallelism by emendation.[355] Others may recognize the speaker's tendency toward imbalanced parallelism with infinitive forms (31:3) and seek a sensical interpretation as vocalized.[356] With the basic clausal sense still elusive, on this first reading, readers may understand the line primarily by blending the textual inputs and filling gaps. As missing volitives are rare in such constructions, readers may intuit a gapped or elided verb with high relevance to the imaginative context.[357] The two rare/difficult forms may invite consideration of inner-biblical allusion.[358]

Openness-Closure

Early in 31:4c, the synonymous parallel of מלכים and רוזנים likely brings moderately high closure although the rare רוזנים may invite disambiguation from מלכים.[359] Late in 31:4c, openness seems moderate, and closure high with the highly relevantly

---

[354] BDB, 32.1a. Often in direct speech. Cf. Delitzsch's translation of 31:4: *zu fragen.* Franz Delitzsch, *Das Salomonische Spruchbuch.* vol. 3 of *Biblischer Commentar über die poetischen Bücher des Alten Testaments* (Leipzig: Dörffling und Franke, 1873), 523. So, the Vulgate. Other canonical cases of this form without suffix or זה include Gen 4:9; Deut 32:37; 1 Sam 26:16. Cf. Aramaic TgJ 1 Sam 25:11; Judg 13:6.

[355] E.g., Hubbard receives the *ketiv*: 'nor'. Hubbard, 475; cf. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31,* 881-82, but see 886. Ancient versions vary widely. Cf. discussion in Lavoie, 35-36, who discerns the majority of scholars recognizing an infinitive verbal form: 'to desire, crave' אוה. E.g., Longman, 534ne; Whybray, *Proverbs,* 423; Clifford, *Proverbs*, 270. NASB and NIV reflect this form.

[356] Another method receives *qere* consonants, but revocalizes with *chireq*. Cf. discussion in Lavoie, 36.

[357] This context likely has been blended within the intersection of יין and שכר with imagery of kingship, sonship, and consecration as gathered from encyclopedic data (which for canonical readers includes biblical material). Contra Mancuello González, Rey's work predicts canonical readers would likely find such syntax highly dissonant—and the few canonical similar cases (Pr 12,28b; Is 62:6; Jr 10:24; 15:15; 2 Chr 26:18) become interpretively significant. Rey, 160-74. Cf. Mancuello González, 113.

[358] Particularly, Psalm 2 and Judges 5 may resurface along with the Samson narrative and prophetic texts.

[359] On disambiguating רוזנים with kings, see Lavoie, 34. On other majority positions—'princes,' 'governors,' and 'dignitaries'—see discussion in Mancuello González, 116.

synonymous parallels for רוזנים and שכר. The seemingly imbalanced שתו || *qere* אי may invite consideration of causality and imaginative blending. Some readers, like Jerome's Vulgate, may find אי relevant as the groups' indirect speech: 'where is strong drink?'[360] While clausal openness likely remains, such readers may then fill interpretive gaps with an imaginatively constructed narrative: e.g., leaders (מלכים || רוזנים) are admonished against not just drinking (שתה), but pursuing (אי) alcohol (יין || שכר). With this imaginative framework, readers may intuit clausal sense by supplying a gapped נתן or elided היה.[361]

While 'king' is one of the most common images in HB, its pairing here with rare form רוזנים likely draws a crystalized focus to the pairing's few other HB cases.[362] Readers may be surprised to discern two of these occurrences are situated in passages

---

[360] BDB, 32.1a. Other indirect speech in Proverbs' parental discourse are Prov 3:28; 5:12; 23:35; 24:12. That few modern interpreters alight on this interpretation perhaps can be attributed to the strength of an individual's constructed narrative, confidence in speakerly intent for synonymous parallelism, and—as Mancuello González observes—presumption of the unit's foreign provenance. Mancuello González, 45.

[361] An elided היה seems the common modern readerly interpretation, per translations. However, a gapped נתן, I suggest, better fits BH. Cf. Cynthia L. Miller, "Ellipsis Involving Negation in Biblical Poetry," in *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday,* ed. Ronald L. Troxel, Kelvin G. Friebel, and Dennis Robert Magary (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 38. Cynthia L. Miller, "A Linguistic Approach to Ellipsis in Biblical Poetry (Or, What to Do When Exegesis of What Is There Depends on What Isn't)," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 13, no. 2 (2003): 251-70. Cynthia L. Miller, "The Relation of Coordination to Verb Gapping in Biblical Poetry," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 32, no. 1 (2007): 41-60. The vertical and syntactic parallelism here allows for gapping of נתן as fitting Miller's criteria for forward ellipsis in biblical Hebrew: (1) both sentences (vv. 3 and 4) are coordinate, (2) both sentences have syntactic correspondence at the highest level (see Miller's note in "Linguistic Approach to Ellipsis," 261n30), and (3) the verb is present and lexically identical. For further support, see Tsumura, 171-74. Niccacci, 258-59. "In poetry, this phenomenon [ellipsis] is particularly frequent, especially in the form of a technique called 'double-duty modifier.' This designates a grammatical element that serves two or more lines although it does not appear in every case but only in the first line or, more difficult to recognize, only in subsequent parallel lines of a poetic unit." Also, Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry,* 304-306.

[362] "There is scarcely a grander or more widespread image used in the Bible than king." Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998), 476.

already evoked by 31:1-9: Judges 5:3 and Psalm 2:2.[363] These may reinforce a landscape of hostile international kings and rulers over which the LORD sits enthroned as Judge and ultimate King. On such a background, the speaker's unconfirmed affiliation seems reemphasized as dangerous. However, another relevant case of רוזנים || מלכים in Proverbs 8:15 may offer balance through a more positive framing: even non-Israelite kings and rulers need wisdom to rule.[364] By revocalizing the son-king's name, the speaker seems to have finally made clear her own identity and her son's—they stand with the LORD.

Applying this blended interpretive context, readers may discern two opposing "us vs. them" groups in 31:1-9: first, God Himself with the speaker and her implied son-king whose name marks him as One-belonging-to-God. The opposing group's members appear fuzzier: likely, נשים and the verbal subjects of מחה מלכין. But where do מלכין, מלכים (if distinct), and רוזנים fall?[365] If applying this landscape to this question, the speaker's admonishing seems less about ethical behavior and more about core identity. In this light, the amplifying parallel of 31:4 seems to hold up for disapproval a kind of ruler who uses his (consecrated) mouth for self-gratification: to be one who not only drinks but has his

---

[363] Some readers may already have recalled Judges 5:28-30 (Sisera's foreign mother). Deeper consideration with 31:1-4 may yield many points of linguistic and thematic relevance. In Judg 5:3, Deborah's song similarly invites מלכים and רזנים (in vocatives) to overhear a song to the LORD: Deborah, a "mother in Israel" (אם בישראל) Judg 5:7 parallels Sisera's mother who desires exploitation of Israel (Judg 5:28-30). Deborah's song calls kings and rulers to witness the LORD's faithfulness to rescue Israel from oppression (Judg 5:19-23). This deliverance is portrayed as working through both Israelite military (5:13-18) and a non-Israelite woman, Jael (5:24-27). Deborah's narrative reveals it was the LORD who appointed her to speak and judge, which is suggestive of the implied speaker's identity and role in Proverbs 31:1-9. Judges 5 and Proverbs 31:1-9 meet five of Leonard's principles. Similarly, Psalm 2 juxtaposes the victorious kingly בר and the opposing מלכי ארץ ורוכנים unwisely conspiring against the LORD but invited to repent (2:10-12).

[364] The other cases of רוזנים, Isaiah 40:23 and Habakkuk 1:10, have thematic and linguistic overlaps with 31:1-9, which may invite further imaginative blending, but likely not on first reading.

[365] Readers may have categorized the implied son-king audience in the same general class as the מלכין of 31:3 and the מלכים and רוזנים of 31:4. Blending of 31:1-4 with Psalm 2 may invite reexamination.

speech reflect this character-defining desire. Such a ruler is incompatible with the ideal upheld in Proverbs 8:15-17, where rulers seek not pleasure but wisdom and thereby can speak justly. The speaker seems to draw readers past moralism to the heart of identity.

In interpreting 31:4 with the intersection of יין and שכר on leaderly character, readers may discern further parallels with the Hannah-Samuel/Eli-sons narrative, in the intersection of drunkenness, consecration, leadership, and parental rebuke. Reflection on 31:1-4 may sharpen he dichotomy between the sons in 1 Sam 1-4. The admonition against alcohol may find strong relevance in the consecration frames of Samson and the Nazirite vows. Readers may be provoked to wonder what the terms of נדרי of the son-king's consecration might be and be moved to admire such service if consecrated to God.

Resonance-Dissonance

Early in 31:4c, resonance appears high and dissonance low through recognizable synonymous parallelism. The phrasing רוזנים || מלכים may offer relevant inner-biblical parallels. Late in 31:4c, resonance appears moderately high by evidence of continued semantic parallelism. Dissonance seems moderately low despite the imbalanced אי.

Trust-Scrutiny

Early in 31:4c, scrutiny may be high with the rarity of רוזנים and possible recognition of other biblical parallels. Trust seems moderately high: both in one's abilities but also for those finding relevant evocations, which may recognize Proverbs' poet-narrator orchestrated this, reflecting high theological and literary understanding. Late in 31:4c, scrutiny seems high as readers must make sense of difficult form *qere* אי

and the imbalanced parallelism. Trust likely decreases while navigating this textual difficulty—perhaps this difficulty brings forward readerly consideration of scribal error.

Reading 31:5a – פן ישתה וישכח מחקק

Table 12: Encountering v. 5a

Initial interpretation:	Lest he drink and forget what has been decreed…
Possible corrected interpretations:	*None*

Contrastive in style but highly relevant in both form and content, 31:5a offers a concrete motivation פן clause with few hermeneutic challenges. Likely a relief, the line helps readers understand the reasoning behind the contextually enigmatic admonition of 31:4, but also encourages backward reassessment of the entire unit, e.g., confirming root שתה in 31:4b. While the perspective of 31:4 seems broad, the chain of impf verbs draws the lens close to a negative hypothetical scenario of a single מלך or רוזן. By the second verb שכח phrase, readers likely discern the line's progression as causal. By concrete imagery and stroboscopic scene changes, the speaker allows her implied audience (and its overhearers) to experience the negative situation she describes. Other details (e.g., *pual* ptc מחקק) seem to encourage continued development of an imaginative narrative frame.

Openness-Closure

Early in 31:5a, with the recognition of פן clause and שתה repetition, closure appears very high, and openness moderately low. Interpretive posture seems confirmed, and readers likely receive closure on שתו (31:4b) through the repeated form here. RT would suggest readers' implicit understanding of the sg subject as a רוזנים || מלכים.[366] Late

[366] Subject ambiguity likely reinforces a synonymous understanding of the pair.

in 31:5a, readers may successfully move toward high closure by filling gaps; מחקק suggests the motivations behind 31:3-4 are, at least in part, judicial/political. Yet the extreme jump from ישתה to ישכח מחקק likely startles—its weak implicature offers relatively low relevance. Readers must exert greater processing to discern the speaker's meaning. What kind of drinking does she have in view? And what kind of forgetting?[367]

The פן phrasing in 31:5 may subtly strengthen by shared language and theme connections of already possibly evoked passages (i.e., Psalm 2:12 and 1 Samuel 4:9) and spark connections to other texts. E.g., the concentration of פן phrasing in Proverbs 5:6-10 may encourage readers to nuance the "us vs. them" dichotomy and inform resource stewardship. Similarly, the proportional high פן cases in Deuteronomy may invite readers to overlay affective elements of covenant longing and faithfulness onto 31:1-9.[368] In Deuteronomy, פן is repeatedly leveraged to warn against forgetting the LORD and His covenant commands, both regarding eating/drinking and care of the poor, which may find added relevance in 31:5 with מחקק.[369] If heard echoed in 31:5a, these warnings, set within Deuteronomy's blessings-curses economy (Deut 28), may invite the post-exilic/diaspora readership into a complex emotive landscape of lament and hope. Solomon's image of satiated forgetfulness, a forgetfulness not merely cognitive, but affective toward God (1

---

[367] Lived experience and canonical context suggest readers consider the level of drinking, not the action in absence of degree. Readers' encyclopedic knowledge would attest that alcohol in moderation is unlikely to align with cognitive impairment unto forgetfulness. Yet does the speaker have solely cognition in view?

[368] Deuteronomy and Proverbs account for 28 (21%) and 18 (13.5%), respectively, of the 133 פן instances in HB. Genesis has 17 (13%), and Exodus 13 (10%). The Pentateuch accounts for nearly half (62).

[369] Cf. Deut 4:9, 23; 6:10-12; 8:10-12; 15:9. Also, see Deut 29:6. The echo of 'drink and forget' pairing evokes conceptual imagery of 'eat and forget' in Deut 6:10-12 and Deut 8:10-12—that is, Israel consuming LORD's good gifts but consequently, in fullness and satisfaction forgetting the LORD. Similar phrasing and theme occur in other covenantally significant places, which readers may hear echoed. Cf. Lev 10:7; Ps 50:22; 59:11; Is 5:11; 6:10; Jer 21:12; 35:8, 14.

Kings 11:9; Deut 17:17-20) may offer relevance to the kingly Proverbs text. This frame evokes the LORD's supreme kingship, whose covenantal terms and preeminent decrees make not just Israel's kings, but all kings His subjects and vassals (Ps 2:3-7, 11-12).[370]

Resonance-Dissonance

Early in 31:5a, resonance seems very high, and dissonance very low. The פן progression fits Proverbs' admonition while aligning with the canonical worldview.[371] The interline cohesion may compound such perceptions. Late in 31:5a, resonance likely remains high, and dissonance low. The new lexemes seem resonant with 31:1-4, and the political sphere increases in relevance and sharpens the moral reasoning.

Trust-Scrutiny

Early in 31:4c, trust seems high and scrutiny moderately low with the relative interpretive clarity—though readers may recognize the coming need to reassess 31:1-4. Late in 31:4c, trust likely remains high with straightforward interpretation, and scrutiny moderately high, as readers may examine the causality and its motivational implications.

Reading 31:5b – וישנה דין כל בני עני

Table 13: Encountering v. 5b

Initial interpretation:	… and [he] alter the cause of all sons of affliction.
Possible corrected interpretations:	*None (variations in semantic range of שנה)*

[370] Cf. Shalom M. Paul, "Unrecognized Biblical Legal Idioms in the Light of Comparative Akkadian Expressions," *Revue biblique* 86, no. 2 (April 1979): 231-35. Paul argues ANE kings were seen as divinely accountable to enact justice and steward a legal corpus in evidence of their divine appointment.

[371] פן occurrences increase significantly later in Proverbs (especially in chaps. 25-29 and 30:6, 9, 10).Interestingly, only a third of Proverbs' 18 cases are found in its other parental Instruction: 5:6, 9, 10; 9:8; 22:25; 24:18.

Culminating the causal progression with new lexemes and a new character group, 31:5b offers readers a different kind of parallelistic imbalance. The progression from שכח to שנה seems less semantically distant than from שתה to שכח, but the syntax seems to let readers *feel* the intensifying progression, both in direction and effect, which lifts readers' eyes beyond internal royal settings of 31:1-5a.[372] The courtroom setting and characters likely disambiguate the semantically wide שנה as *hapax* ANE legal jargon.[373] These technical terms may offer readers canonical links with imagistic and emotive effects.

Openness-Closure

Early in 31:5b, openness and closure both seem moderately high. Along with its relatively rare object, the uniquely vocalized *piel* שנה may lead readers to recall imagery from its few other *piel* HB occurrences.[374] Late in 31:5b, openness appears very high and closure moderately low. The lens from 31:5a, so tightly tracking the 3ms verbal subject, has now widened to include this new group כל בני עני. As readers attempt to place בני עני and their plight relative to other characters, readers seem invited to explore the speaker's reasoning in the motivation clause so they can know how to integrate the new characters and setting into the textual landscape. With בני, the sonship sphere seems subtlety

---

[372] The line's expansive clausal sequence emphasizes effects: no object for the first verb, a singular object of the second, and a long construct chain with pausal form for the third. Cf. Mancuello González, 120.

[373] Paul, 233. ישנה דין "though unique to the Bible, is amply documented in Mesopotamian legal documents by its interdialectal counterpart *dinam enu|sunnu* 'to revoke, alter, change a verdict.'" E.g., Law of Hammurapi §5. Per Paul, it involved altering written documents and invoked harsh punishment. Fox also notes an Akkadian verbal parallel. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31,* 887. 'Pervert', per BDB, 1040.

[374] Per BDB, Jer 52:33; 2 Kings 25:29; 1 Sam 21:14; Ps 34:1; Esth 2:9; Ps 89:35; Jer 2:36; Job 14:20. Thematic overlaps with the relatively rare דין (20 nominal forms; 24 verbal forms) may foster connections.

reevoked through term changes (cf. בר, 31:2).[375] The purposefulness of these lexical choices and lens shift is, in view of RT, not mere flourish, but *optimally relevant* for the communicative purpose. The cooperative interpretive posture likely reassesses 31:1-4, its meaning and latent questions, in light of this new textual landscape and priorities.

The stark causal progression may provoke readers to examine its reasoning and implications.[376] The motivational causal chain may invite interlinear comparison with 31:3: does 31:5 portray wrong giving of חילך and דרכיך? To see the linkage may yield a physical as well as causal progression: wrong ways in navigating kingly private pleasure (drinking in the banquet hall—with perhaps revelry extending to the bedroom) impacts kingly public duty (presiding in legal spaces). Readers seem still invited to construct an imaginative narrative frame to account for the optimal relevance of the hypothetical disaster in 31:5 for the implied son-king audience.

For readers who recall other HB *piel* occurrences of שנה, startling shared linguistic and thematic elements may be discernible, further stimulating readers' affections and thinking as provoked by 31:1-5. The *piel* form of שנה seems to carry a technical sense appropriate to kingly-subject relationships; its HB usage seems to correlate with highly emotive images of the LORD's reign, of the span of Davidic kingship (from David through Jehoiachin), and foreign overlordship.[377] As Mancuello

---

[375] Why the contrast? In the landscape, readers may note this kingly (likely foreign) בר sits in authority over (Hebraic?) בנים such that their plight is in his hands. It may also inform the מלכין vs. מלכים groups as more than possible code-switching. Are the latter two different groups? Or the same group seen from two different perspectives? Readers seem invited to continued contemplation of the poem's character identities.

[376] E.g., how are drinking and forgetting decrees linked, and likewise forgetting and perverting such rights? Are these figurative or metaphorical actions? What must be true for this to proceed? What could arrest it?

[377] Readers likely do not have time to explore connections with *piel* שנה in real-time on the first reading, but if discerned, echoes may contribute to particularly affective aspects of readers' imaginative narrative frame.

González notes, the phrasing בני עני is also canonically significant and may even carry messianic evocations.[378] Would the speaker have intended such evocations? Perhaps not, yet it seems likely that Proverbs' final composer would anticipate his canonical readership's covenantal sensitivities evoked through the paired legal jargon of *piel* שנה and those bearing the burden of its action: בני עני. Given the lens shift in 31:5b, this consideration is perhaps poignant for post-exilic readers still struggling to see themselves in the text. Less likely to identify with the speaker or her son-king, these readers may have in כל בני עני found a group whose vantage aligns more closely to their own. Even those few like Daniel, Esther, or Nehemiah invited into such internal elite spaces are called to use such privilege in line with loyalty to God's heart and purposes—and not forget בני עני. Others may be reminded of their own plight under the LORD's discipline (sensing the gap between their lived reality and God's covenant promises of restoration) and be encouraged to turn wholeheartedly to God, Supreme King.

Resonance-Dissonance

Early in 31:5b, resonance seems very high and dissonance very low as the causal pattern unfolds. Late in 31:5b, resonance may decrease to moderate as readers navigate more new lexemes, new characters, and shifting focus. Dissonance seems moderately low: the moral concerns in 31:5 seem consistent with Proverbs' and canonical context.

[378] Mancuello González, 120-24.

Trust-Scrutiny

Early in 31:5b, trust and scrutiny seem both high. While the causality still requires processing, the imagistic scenario encourages readerly interpretive confidence. Late in 31:5b, trust in interpretive ability may decrease to moderate. The segment's shifts and any discerned inner-biblical echoes likely supports high scrutiny.

Reading 31:4-5 Summary

Despite various positions taken on the difficult forms and revocalized name in v. 4, commentators often understand 31:4-5 in broad consensus: as prohibiting rulers' immoderate consumption of alcohol, a prohibition in harmony with Proverbs' other teaching on strong drink and ANE standards for kings generally. Almost universally, scholars recognize an elided היה in v. 5: "It is not for kings…" or "Let it not be for kings…". Most understand implicit conditionality of the prohibition.[379] Some recognize, per the force of the motivation clause in v. 5, the underlying concern is not abstinence itself, but preserving justice for the poor.[380]

While not in contradiction with common scholarly consensus on vv. 4-5, I have shown the pedagogical impact of readers' engagement with 31:4-5 as *poetry* via provocative syntax, morphology, parallelism, and imagery. Even the missing finite volitive likely propels readers deeper into the text, and its sustained absence suggests the

---

[379] I.e., the speaker is not absolutely forbidding alcohol consumption. Cf. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31,* 886; Lavoie, 42; McKane, 410. In contrast, Gemser perceives an unconditional restriction. Gemser, 84.

[380] E.g., Tom Shepherd, "'Give the Poor Wretch a Drink,' Alcohol, Poverty, and Justice in Proverbs 31:1-9," in *Creation, Life and Hope: Essays in Honor of Jacques B. Doukhan,* ed. Jiří Moskala (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 2000), 145.

speaker's precise admonition in 31:4 may still seem hazy—like her question(s) of 31:2.[381] This sense takes shape as readers engage with imagistic, dramatic progression of 31:5 to discern the speaker's reasoning (cf. Figure 4). While scholarship may note Lemuel's name as theophoric, I have shown that the hermeneutic challenges of v. 4 particularly invite readers' consideration of his name's meaning as central to the text's main teaching.

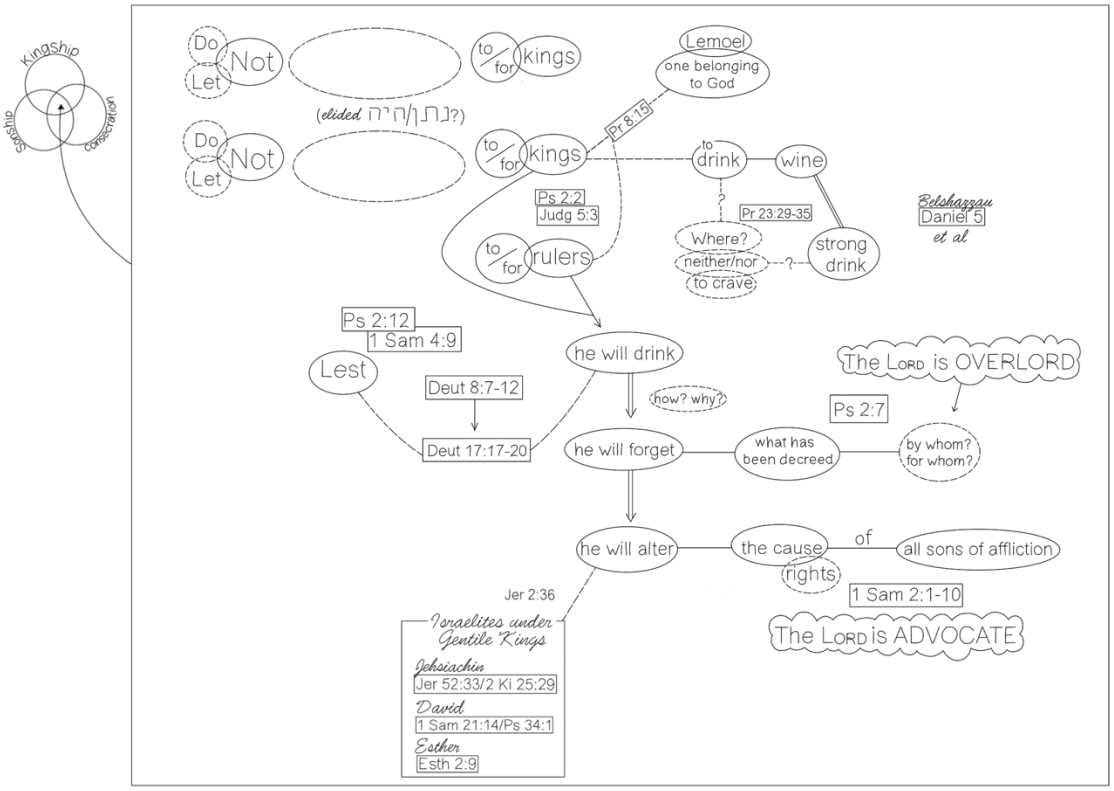

Figure 4: Word Map of 31:4-5

With the urgency conveyed in v. 5, the text—with its diverse spaces and dichotomous characters—depicts an emerging dramatic tension: though consecrated unto God, the son has access to powers, pleasures, and people of privilege. The intersection of kingship, sonship, and consecration calls for a certain kind of stewardship of these

[381] Crenshaw notes the surprising nature of the missing verb. Crenshaw, "A Mother's Instruction," 16-17.

resources. Yet external enemies and internal desires threaten to corrupt his agency to disastrous effect. The recurring questions of speaker/audience identity and readerly identification suggest relational loyalties participate significantly in determining how one governs desires. Rhetorically, the poem seems to use inner-biblical evocations (Ps 2; 18:32; Judg 5; 13; 1 Sam 1-4; Deut 8:10-12) to spur the canonical readership's loyalty to the LORD and His priorities, and disapproval of disloyalty to Him as short-sighted.

Reading 31:6-7

The imagistic motivation clause of 31:5 may allow readers to navigate the seemingly odd admonition of vv. 6-7 with a growing awareness of the speaker's primary concern. Vv. 6-7 present relatively fewer semantic and grammatical interpretive challenges, but readers likely face bigger hermeneutic questions as they seek to make sense of the material seemingly dissonant with canonical worldview.[382]

Proverbs 31:6-7 text —

תְּנוּ־שֵׁכָר לְאֹובֵד וְיַיִן לְמָרֵי נָפֶשׁ׃

יִשְׁתֶּה וְיִשְׁכַּח רִישׁוֹ וַעֲמָלֹו לֹא יִזְכָּר־עֹוד׃

31:6 and 31:7 are bi-cola lines of admonition and motivation. Language and syntax evoke vv. 3, 5, suggesting their relationship. I trace 31:6-7 in four segments: (1)תנו שכר לאובד, (2) ויין למרי נפש, (3) ישתה וישכח רישו, and (4) ועמלו לא יזכר עוד.

Reading 31:6a – תנו שכר לאובד

Table 14: Encountering v. 6a

Initial interpretation:	Give strong drink to one perishing …

[382] Cf. discussion of the problem in Shepherd, 143-45.

Possible corrected interpretations:	Give strong drink to one wandering …

After so much interpretive enigma and stylistic shift, readers likely feel relieved to recognize previously patterned elements in 31:6a. The textual pace quickens, both linguistically but also likely experientially, as readers leverage previous interpretive work unto higher relevance and lower processing. The returning imperative verb נתן may encourage readers to consider v. 6 as the opposite of v. 3 (and perhaps vv. 4-5) and contrast the sg vs. pl subject referents in vv. 3 and 6, respectively. Indirect object אובד is likely synonymously relevant to כל בני עני, yet disambiguation may require processing.[383] The surprising object שכר may prompt deeper examination of the moral argument.

Openness-Closure

Early in 31:6a, readers may face high openness and moderately low closure. Pattern recognition may reinforce interpretive posture, but multiple shifts encourages interlinear processing. Late in 31:6a, openness likely seems high and closure moderate. While the indirect object is relevantly synonymous to בני עני and offers general closure to the syntax through interline parallelism, disambiguation of both אובד and the new pl subject and navigating the moral reasoning may require greater processing effort.

Although the text has positioned multiple plural character groups, disambiguating the pl imperative subject may challenge readers.[384] Even if, as Mancuello-González

---

[383] Cf. Mancuello González, 130-32. While BH frequency suggests sense "to perish" is salient (as majority of modern scholars and translators (also, 10th c. Karaite Yefet Ben 'Eli) favor), some like Mancuello-González (also Aramiac Targum and Abraham Ibn Ezra) favor 'to wander, be lost.' (LXX and Syriac choose perhaps a middle ground?) Michael G. Wechsler, "The Arabic Translation and Commentary of Yefet Ben 'Eli on Proverbs 31:1-9," *Revue des Études juives* 161, no. 3-4 (July-December 2002): 406.

[384] As I consider the readerly interpretive process, I reject Whybray's proposal of the pl impv in v. 6 as a likely "later addition" due to it being "inappropriate" in such an Instruction with a single addressee. R. N. Whybray, *Wealth and Poverty in the Book of Proverbs,* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 99 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1990), 108. In my view, canonical readers receiving the text

argues, the plural is "a plural of majesty or of excellence", readers seem invited to hear its difference as interpretively significant.[385] In view of RT, this subtle shift in subject is optimally relevant to right understanding. Not only may readers face openness in one of the few interpretive decisions held confidently (that the implied audience is the singular son-king Lemuel), but the change in imperative subject affect the imaginative narrative frame readers have constructed for the poem's interpretive context.

However, while widening and ambiguating her addressees, the speaker simultaneously has narrowed focus to an indefinite אובד person, and readers may explore the relevancy of these shifts, nuanced relationships between characters, and how אובד fits into the textual landscape with בני עני. The substantive אובד is at home in the canon, particularly in literature dealing with suffering, the rise of evil, or judgment (e.g., Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Job, Esther, and Psalms) or depicting two bifurcating paths (e.g., Proverbs and Deuteronomy).[386] However, aural readers may also hear (with high

aurally (as I have presumed) would be unlikely to keep interpretively suspicious redactional concerns in the fore as they processed the text 'online'. Whether or not the pl form indicates something about the redactional history of the text is largely irrelevant to the readerly interpretive process I am investigating. I see canonical readers receiving the text as it stands in a more cooperative posture, while trying to make interpretive sense of its irregularities. On this form from such an interpretive posture, see discussion in Lavoie, 46. Readers may consider multiple options. Perhaps the plural subject is the collective body of international kings alluded to in vv. 3-5? Or is the speaker "breaking the wall" to speak directly to the canonical audience? Is the initial son-audience still in frame? Mancuello González understands the plural subject to be appropriate to the son-king's royal persona. Mancuello González, 75.

[385] Mancuello González, 75-76. My translation. Cf. JM §136d.

[386] Benedikt Otzen, "אבד," in *TDOT*, 1:23. The *qal* usage "exhibits a variety of nuances … Of greater theological interest is the use of this word in prophetic texts where the verb describes how in critical times, when evil increases, good attributes and positive ideas vanish," such as knowledge, hope, wisdom, righteousness. While the ptc form can often have 'the poor' in view, the *qal* can carry the more general sense of 'dying', though this could be literal or figurative. Cf. BDB, 1.1-2.

relevance) the homonym עבד ptc, 'slave,' with perhaps the resonant sense of 'vassal'.[387] Thus אובד may convey doubly heightened urgency (e.g. Ps 2:11-12).

Resonance-Dissonance

Early in 31:6a, resonance seems moderately high with recognized repetitions and patterning. Dissonance appears moderately low although the plural imperative may jar readers' interpretive frame. Late in 31:6a, resonance appears moderately high and dissonance low: the new lexeme comes with a familiar syntax, context, and parallelism.

Trust-Scrutiny

Early in 31:6a, trust likely is moderately high and scrutiny moderately low with pattern recognition, despite the shift to plural imperative. Late in 31:6a, trust and scrutiny both seem moderately high as more patterns and repetition suggest the speaker's communication is purposeful but requiring interpretive investment.

Reading 31:6b – ויין למרי נפש

Table 15: Encountering v. 6b

Initial interpretation:	… and [give] wine to those bitter of soul.
Possible corrected interpretation:	*None (though variation in semantic range)*

In one sense, readers likely navigate 31:6b efficiently due to high semantic relevance. The recognizable impv verb gapping of נתן (31:3) and vocabulary repetitions

[387] 'work for another, serve him by labor.' BDB, 713.2. Cf. roots עבד and אבד in Ps 2:11-12, which suggests the only two paths for kings are (1) to serve the LORD and His anointed בר or (2) to perish by His wrath.

may facilitate recognition of further interlinear connections.[388] By continued parallels, the speaker seems to have be directing her audience's attention away from privilege and toward those suffering and various forms of suffering. Yet in another sense, 31:6b seems to offer a parallelism that is *too* balanced—or at least fails to explain the moral reasoning for the admonition, which has seemed scandalous to some, if taken literally.[389]

Openness-Closure

Early in 31:6b, readers may face high closure and moderate openness through יין repetition, balanced linear and interlinear parallelism, and consideration of moral reasoning. Late in 31:6b, openness and closure seem both moderately high. The tight parallelism and interline connections invite closure with some exploration of nuance.[390] The intersection of stock canonical phrases may prompt recall of aspects of other biblical texts. However, these connections are somewhat surprising and lean into other passages evoked. Echoes of the Hannah-Samuel narrative invite blending of Hannah's מרי נפש onto 31:1-6—and anticipate the LORD's hearing the cries of מרי נפש, as He heard Hannah. This subtly may (re)position Him in the interpretive frame and suggest divine accountability for the son-king audience.[391] Openness may also emerge with readers' curiosity about

---

[388] The parallelism in 31:6b follows the same syntactical pattern as that of 31:3b, which may invite grammatical comparison between מרי and the difficult form מחות. יין and שכר are, again, set in a resonant parallel. The *lamed* prepositional pattern as indirect object seems further confirmed.

[389] On the discordance of 31:6-7, cf. Shepherd, 143-45; Lavoie, 44-50.

[390] As the substantive adjective 'bitter' aligns evocatively with the near parallel of 'perishing', נפש contrasts with the imminent death of those perishing, which invites readers to think closer about the contrast in light of textual inputs. Is this bitterness of life metaphorical? E.g., the "seat of emotions and passions" for "sorrow and distress" (BDB, 660.6c).

[391] Hannah's song of exultation with its "crossing fates" is presented in Samuel as prophetic, foreshadowing God's deliverance of Israel in David's prevailing over Saul. J. P. Fokkelman, *Vow and Desire (1 Sam. 1-*

this new clustering of characters and the speaker's purpose in bringing them forward. One can perish for lack of food and water to which provision of sustenance is a fitting remedy. Yet bitterness of soul in its parallel here suggests the underlying problems in view extend beyond physical nourishment.[392]

Resonance-Dissonance

Early in 31:6b, resonance seems high and dissonance moderately low by the tight interlinear connections. Late in 31:6b, resonance and dissonance are likely unchanged. The new lexemes find high relevance in close synonymous parallelism. Although the moral reasoning behind the command may feel dissonant, concern for the poor may seem coherent with passages previously evoked as well as Proverbs' moral landscape.

Trust-Scrutiny

Early in 31:6b, scrutiny and trust both appear moderate: recognizable patterns likely increase trust in interpretive ability, and scrutiny seems required to discern unstated connections. Late in 31:6b, scrutiny and trust seem both moderately high, increasing on the strength of patterning and opportunities for imaginative blending.

---

12), vol. 4 of *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analyses,* Studia Semitica Neerlandica (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1993), 4:110. 1 Sam 1:10, when Hannah cried out to the LORD for deliverance. מרי, though not an exclusively feminine group in 31:6b, may evoke two other canonical mothers: (1) Naomi's renaming of herself as 'bitter' (Ruth 1:13, 20-21). (2) The woman accused of unfaithfulness (Num 5:11-31) was to drink bitter water. An innocent woman would be vindicated and maintain the ability to bear children (Num 5:28).

[392] Cf. Hagar and Ishmael's plight in the desert (Gen 21:19); famine under Joseph (Gen 41:36); God's provision for the Exodus community (Exod 16:1-17:7); Sampson's request for water (Judg 15:18). Though consider Jael's provision for Sisera in Judg 4:19; 5:25.

Reading 31:7a – ישתה וישכח רישו

Table 16: Encountering v. 7a

Initial interpretation:	He will drink and forget his poverty …
Possible corrected interpretation:	*None (variation in verbal aspect, semantics)*

After the patterned admonition of 31:6, readers encounter another familiar pattern in 31:7: a motivation clause with high relevance of form repetition—and logically opposite—v. 5. Readers likely can interpret the semantic content with high efficiency, receiving its only new lexeme רישו in synonymous relationship to the growing cluster of suffering descriptors. The scenario presented here is similarly imaginative as that of v. 5.

Openness-Closure

Early in 31:7a, openness and closure both seem moderately high. The modified phrasing from 31:5 signals an antonymous imaginative scenario by which readers may explore the speaker's meaning. Late in 31:7a, openness may remain moderately high while closure moves to high. רישו offers high relevance to context: the unstated subject as a particularized member of the growing multifaceted group of sufferers. As in 31:5, openness comes through imaginatively examining the causal progression—yet the antonymous juxtaposition with 31:5 likely moves readers forward into the speaker's inner logic. When might drinking yield such a result? Readers' lived experience and encyclopedic knowledge likely seek to fill in gaps. The multiplication of terms for suffering in vv. 5-7 suggest complex problems, from which relief would indeed be desirable. Yet readers likely sense dissonance: the behavior advised is imbalanced for

lasting relief from such difficulties, as Proverbs' context and evoked texts corroborate.[393] To what extent does the speaker intend the scenario to be understood literally?

Resonance-Dissonance

Early in 31:7a, resonance seems high, and dissonance moderately low with the direct echo of 31:5. Late in 31:7a, resonance and dissonance both seem moderately high. While the interlinear patterns attest to an underlying logic, the portrayed method to relieve multi-faceted suffering seems imbalanced and out of step with canonical context.

Trust-Scrutiny

Early in 31:7a, trust in interpretive ability seems high, and scrutiny moderate, based on recognized patterns and the speaker's purposefulness. Late in 31:7a, trust in interpretive skills may be moderate, and scrutiny high considering the causal progression.

Reading 31:7b – ועמלו לא יזכר עוד

Table 17: Encountering v. 7b

Initial interpretation:	… and his trouble he will remember no more.
Possible corrected interpretation:	*None (though variations in semantic range)*

31:7b deviates from the pattern of v. 5 by fronting the direct object עמלו (in recognizable synonymous parallel with רישו) and delaying the third verbal form. These syntactical differences emphasize both, but particularly draw readers' focus to the final act: יזכר, the semantic opposite of ישכח.[394] However, the punch of v. 7b seems delayed until the last form עוד, which highlights dissonance with a literal inebriation's "cure."

---

[393] E.g., Prov 20:1; 23:31-35; 1 Sam 1:12-16. Cf. Is 5:11, 22; 28:7; 56:12; Mic 2:11.

[394] BDB, 1013.

Openness-Closure

Early in 31:7b, closure appears high and openness moderate. Upon the synonymous structure, readers may integrate רישו || עמלו into the text's stroboscopic, imagistic landscape of suffering.[395] Late in 31:7b, closure and openness are likely both high. Pattern completion and parallels invite closure. The weakly relevant עוד, however, when coupled with לא, suggests a durative 'continuance' and may prompt exploration of intersections: what kind of suffering(s) and what kind of forgetting(s) are in view, and how drinking alcohol, which impairs faculties only temporarily, could overlap both.[396] A durative continuance of forgetting suggests a similar continuance of excessive drinking, dissonant with Proverbs' and canonical moral landscape.[397] Some readers likely recognize this dissonance as an interpretive problem and seek a resonant way through.[398]

Searching for context in Proverbs, readers may consider two metaphorical central depictions of drinking in Proverbs 1-9, often understood as Proverbs' introduction. In Proverbs 5:15, the speaker-father exhorts his son(s)-audience with drinking as a metaphor of marital fidelity. Set in the broader context of Proverbs 1-9, the poetic language aligns literal marital faithfulness with metaphorical faithfulness to Wisdom (cf. 7:4). The conclusion of Proverbs 1-9 similarly casts commitment to learning wisdom with receiving Lady Wisdom's invitation to eat and drink of her prepared banquet (9:5-6).

---

[395] עמל can refer to 'one's own suffering' (BDB, 765.1). Canonically, it may include the sense of thwarting and despair: fruitless toil (Deut 26:7) or lamenting one's birth (Job 3:10, בטן; Jer 20:18). 22x in Eccl.

[396] BDB, 728.1.a.α. 'continuance, persistence, usu. of past or present, still, yet'; HALOT, 2:313.I.5.a: "with negation … expressing continuance". Cf. Ruth 1:14.

[397] Literally, such forgetting would require ongoing king-sponsored drinking and correlate with a lack of productivity/work ability to maintain familial, community, and cultic covenant responsibilities.

[398] Cf. Lavoie's thorough discussion of the modern interpretation of this exegetical problem. Lavoie, 44-50.

Other readers may discern positive canonical imagery.[399] Readers may blend such metaphorical uses with 31:3-7 to account for the dissonance.

Resonance-Dissonance

Early in 31:7b, resonance is likely high, and dissonance low with the semantic parallelism. Late in 31:7b, however, resonance seems moderate and dissonance moderately high. While the parallel structure coheres, עוד + לא offers a dissonant sense with v. 7 as literally depicting an intersection of alcohol and suffering.

Trust-Scrutiny

Early in 31:7b, trust is likely high, and scrutiny moderate with navigable and predictable structure. Late in 31:7b, trust seems moderate and scrutiny very high. Along with syntactic difference, עוד may prompt readers to reassess a literalistic interpretation.

Reading 31:6-7 Summary

Recognizing the contrastive parallels between vv. 4-5 and vv. 6-7, commentators widely understand vv. 6-7 to advocate for the needy. Almost universally, scholars understand the admonition literally to command the kingly audience to give alcohol to marginalized persons "*so that* they forget their misery".[400] However, what exactly does the command mean? Commentators are widely divided on the intended rhetorical force of the admonition for the implied kingly audience. While some seem to take the command

---

[399] Cf. Mancuello González sees 31:7 evoking Amos 5:10-12 and Is 25:6-8. Mancuello González, 136-37.

[400] Fox, *Proverbs 10-31,* 887.

at face value (either strictly or generally, that the son-king should give alcohol to the poor), others, like Fox, see in it a cynical realism; like Wilson, complexity; or, like Shepherd or Waltke, a surprising irony or sarcasm.[401] Others discern a broader commentary within Proverbs' literary whole: e.g., Lavoie views vv. 6-7 as validating the ethics of a foreign woman in contrast to their depiction(s) in Proverbs 1-9.[402]

Not dissimilar to scholarly consensus but with heightened awareness of affective impact, I have shown the rhetorical force in 31:6-7 diverts focus from persons of privilege to the multi-faceted suffering of the marginalized (cf. Figure 5). At this point, readers may remain undecided as to how literally the son-king audience is intended to take the admonitions, but may begin to identify with the needy characters more than either the speaker or her kingly son. The more this identification is solidified, the greater the incongruity of לא יזכר עוד with the cognitive "forgetting" of inebriation may seem, encouraging readerly connections with this canonically significant phrase. Overall, through interlinear connections discovered and engagement with the poetry of vv. 6-7, readers likely have adjusted their imaginative construction of the poem's narrative frame and enriched their perception of the speaker's communicative priorities.

---

[401] See Lavoie's detailed review of scholarly interpretation of vv. 6-7. Lavoie, 44-50. Wilson, 316.

[402] Lavoie, 44.

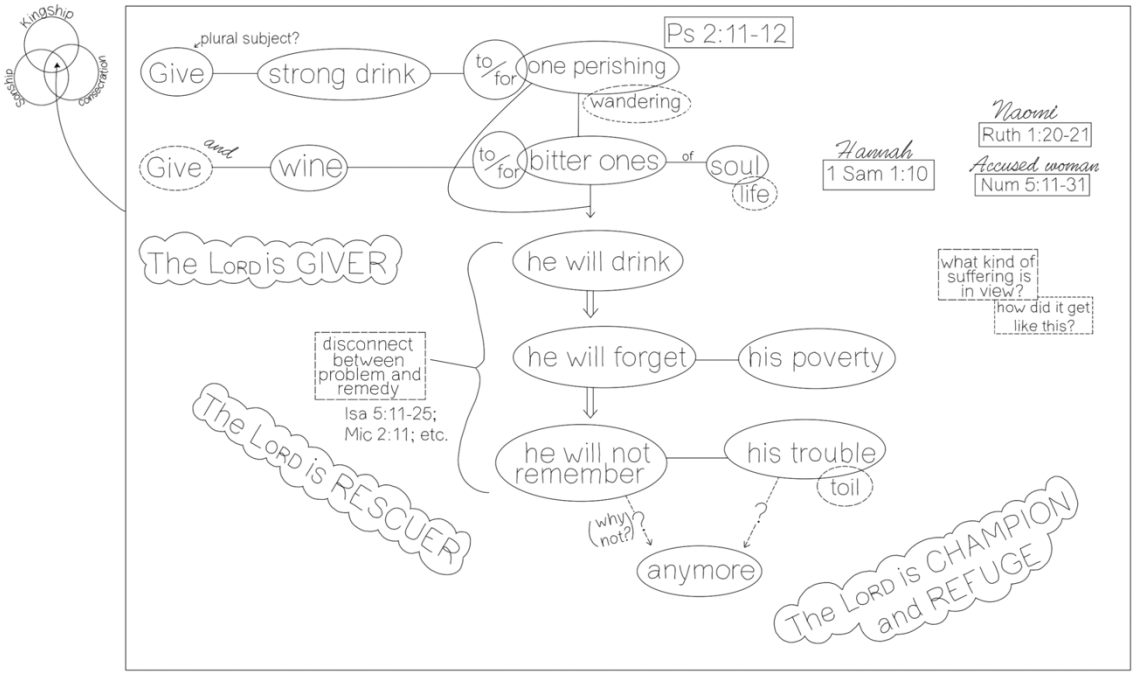

Figure 5: Word Map of 31:6-7

Reading 31:8-9

The new imperative pair for vv. 8-9, on the one hand, structurally distances the lines from what precedes. On the other, repeated key words and thematic synonyms for both suffering and justice likely invite readers to extend their understanding of the poem toward these bigger concepts. Evocative key words and a possible false lead encourage readers to participate in making pedagogic connections.

Proverbs 31:8-9 text —

פְּתַח־פִּיךָ לְאִלֵּם אֶל־דִּין כָּל־בְּנֵי חֲלוֹף׃

פְּתַח־פִּיךָ שְׁפָט־צֶדֶק וְדִין עָנִי וְאֶבְיוֹן׃ פ

31:8 and 31:9 are bi-cola lines. I trace 31:8-9 in four segments: (1) פתח פיך לאלם, (2) אל דין כל בני חלוף, (3) פתח פיך שפט צדק, and (4) ודין עני ואביון.

Reading 31:8a – פתח פיך לאלם

Table 18: Encountering v. 8a

Initial interpretation:	Open your mouth for a mute one …
Possible corrected interpretation:	*None (though variations with literal/figurative)*

The new 2ms imperative likely signals the beginning of another subunit. Continued patterning encourages interlinear connections: e.g., 2ms sg impv, direct object with 2ms pronominal suffix, and lamed prepositional indirect object. Movement between definite/indefinite and singularity/plural seems to further the interplays patterned above. This sameness and difference may prompt comparison and disambiguation.[403]

Openness-Closure

Early in 31:8a, openness seems high, and closure moderately low. The changes in imperative lexeme, number, and type of action may open new interpretive questions. Discerning the intended addressee requires greater processing, following the shift in imperative number between vv. 3 and 6 and the content of v. 7. The nearest context makes the imperative perhaps most viable for a member of the afflicted poor (to receive drink) yet heightens the dissonance of a literalistic view of vv. 6-7 with the poem's tone. Late in 31:8a, closure seems moderate and openness moderately high as the 2ms impv subject, the son-king, is clarified through recognition of לאלם as another group of sufferers, one who literally or metaphorically has no voice. The form's rarity in HB (six cases) may evoke this plight from various angles (e.g., Ex 4:11, Ps 38:13; and Is 35:6).

The poetic imagery persistent throughout vv. 1-7 appears more overt: the open (consecrated) mouth, in parallel to the open (consecrated) womb (31:2; cf. 1 Sam 1:5, 6,

[403] Mancuello González, 138-39.

20), calls for its agency unto divine accountability (cf. Eli's sons behavior at פתח אהל, 1 Sam 2:22). Readers may anticipate a literary climax of the son's stewardship of such a consecrated mouth: e.g., what will "your" open mouth do, and how will "you" care for the needs and desires of others in "your" influence, particularly those without voice?[404]

Resonance-Dissonance

Early in 31:8a, resonance seems moderately high, and dissonance moderate with the recognizable admonition patterning and lexical difference. Late in 31:8a, resonance appears high, and dissonance low as the indirect object clarifies the segment's characters.

Trust-Scrutiny

Early in 31:8a, scrutiny seems high, and trust moderately high. New lexemes and pattern keep readers attentive, yet differences seem they will prove interpretively relevant. Late in 31:8a, scrutiny and trust both appear moderately high, after the indirect object clarifies relationships, yet may make the overarching poetic imagery more overt.

Reading 31:8b – אל דין כל בני חלוף

Table 19: Encountering v. 8b

Initial interpretation:	… for the rights of all the sons of those passing away.
Possible corrected interpretation:	*None (though semantic variation with חלוף)*

While common, the אל preposition opening this segment bears structural and lexical significance.[405] Rather than parallelism of *vav* conjunctions as throughout vv. 2-7,

[404] Cf. Kil, 404n19a-b.

[405] Cf. Delitzsch, *Proverbs,* 2:323.

this second half-line offers moral reasoning. דין כל בני here echoes 31:5b, and, as patterned in vv. 3-4 and v. 5, the keyword דין shifts the scene from banquet table (vv. 6-7) back to courtroom (vv. 8-9). The phrase completion with חליף seems to bracket with עני (v. 5) and offer a summary perspective on the compounding descriptions of suffering.[406] The speaker's structure seems to draw her son-king's eyes, not just to his responsibilities or behavior, but to *sufferers* in the breadth of *suffering.* Readers likewise seem invited to look at such people and self-evaluate their own postures, behaviors, and identity.

Openness-Closure

Early in 31:8b, openness and closure both appear moderate. While structurally significant, אל דין likely carries high relevance and suggests moral reasoning. Late in 31:8b, openness and closure both likely move to moderately high. The clausal sweep seems resonant, yet the closing form חלוף invites bracketing with דין כל בני עני. While depiction of suffering is dire and varied, blending with larger canonical context may evoke a significant shift in perspective and hope: affliction is not a permanent state for those who cry out to the LORD, but something they are passing through.[407] Because the LORD Himself as Righteous King will hear the cries of the oppressed, affliction is only a temporary state for those in right covenant relationship with the LORD. Readers attentive to Judges 5 may recall God's deliverance through Jael's "passing through" Sisera's temple (5:26). The imagery of the Jael-Sisera narrative juxtaposed against 31:1-8

---

[406] חלף 'pass on or away, pass through'. BDB, 322. 28 (or 32) HB occurrences. CDCH, 120. Cf. discussion in Mancuello González, 139.

[407] Cf. 1 Sam 2:1-10. On possibly a literal sense: ones wandering, begging, sojourning, cf. Mancuello González, 140-41.

emotively reminds readers of the bifurcation of paths and people under God's sovereignty. Though clever and humanly powerful, Sisera could not escape God's judgment. God raised up a *non-Israelite woman* to deliver the fatal blow (cf. Judg 4:9, 17; 5:24-27). Readers may be reminded that God's suffering people should wait faithfully: God's deliverance will come to those who seek Him—even from unlikely sources.

Resonance-Dissonance

Early in 31:8b, resonance seems moderately high, and dissonance moderately low. Syntactical patterns reflect both sameness and difference. Late in 31:8b, resonance likely is high, and dissonance moderately low by emerging coherence of moral reasoning.

Trust-Scrutiny

Early in 31:8b, trust and scrutiny both seem moderately high. The phrase אל דין may clue an interpretive posture for moral reasoning. Late in 31:8b, trust and scrutiny both are likely high: readers seem on navigable ground to discern the speaker's purposes.

Reading 31:9a – פתח פיך שפט צדק

Table 20: Encountering v. 9a

Initial interpretation:	Open your mouth to judge righteousness …
Possible corrected interpretation:	Open your mouth. Judge with righteousness…

31:9a begins with direct echo of 31:8a, inviting interpretive confidence, reasserting mouth imagery, and suggesting anaphora.[408] The final two lexemes' roots have high relevance to the legal setting, and while the uniquely vocalized שפט may

[408] Cf. Mancuello González, 141.

require disambiguation, the imperative force seems readily discernible. Readers may note changes in syntactic pattern, phonemes, and pacing.

Openness-Closure

Early in 31:9a, openness and closure both seem moderate. The repeated imperative may invite readers to scrutinize the imagery and its connections. Late in 31:9a, closure may remain moderate, but openness is likely high. Readers may be surprised by a shift in syntactic patterning: no *lamed* indirect object (as in v. 3a, 4a-b, 6a, 8a) but a verbal form. Commentators and translators often take the שפט as an impv, yet the principle of saliency suggests pattern recognition within the unit (including the preceding conjunctive accent (cf. v. 8a)) favors readers' *initial* understanding of the form as an inf con (as in v. 4b), not impv (in *first,* not *second,* place in vv. 3a, 6a).[409]

This likely supports readerly recognition of interlinear antonymous parallelism with opening one's mouth for שתה יין versus שפט צדק. Thus, צדק would likely be received as the direct accusative: 'to judge righteousness.'[410] But on whose behalf? After such earlier prevalence, an indirect object seems elided for readers to infer and disambiguate, which may represent a sum or part of such sufferers portrayed in vv. 5b-8b.[411] Verbally, שפט suggests "action that restores שלום to a community after it has been disturbed", and a

---

[409] Further, per Wickes, if the line were divided into three roughly parallel (impv) members, readers would likely anticipate the main dichotomy at the first member's close. Wickes, 28. For one modern interpreter who may see שפט here as infinitive, cf. Saebo's phrasing "gerecht zu richten." Magne Saebø, *Sprüche,* Das Alte Testament Deutsch 16,1 (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 378. Cf. also Ruth 1:1. Among those who take שפט as imperative, see Mancuello González, 142; Kil, 404; Fox, *Proverbs 10-31,* 888; etc. Also, ESV, KJV, NASB, NIV, NRSV. However, either understanding (inf con or impv) carries imperatival force, and the difference is one of nuance.

[410] Delitzsch, *Proverbs,* 2:325. Possibly evoking, e.g., Prov 1:3; 8:15; Deut 1:16; 16-18-20; Ps 9:4.

[411] Cf. Mancuello González, 142-44.

sufferer in this "disturbed situation receives שפט as an announcement of salvation, of aid to obtain justice."[412] The pairing שפט צדק may evoke the ideal Davidic kingship.[413]

Resonance-Dissonance

Early in 31:9a, resonance seems very high, and dissonance very low with direct repetition. Late in 31:9a, resonance appears moderate, and dissonance moderately low—despite structural difference, the new lexemes largely fit the legal and moral context.

Trust-Scrutiny

Early in 31:9a, trust appears high, and scrutiny wanes to moderately high—repetition may bolster interpretive confidence and require less attention. Late in 31:9a, trust seems moderately high, and scrutiny high with the pattern shift and new lexemes.

Reading 31:9b – ודין עני ואביון

Table 21: Encountering v. 9b

Initial interpretation:	… and the cause of the afflicted and needy.
Possible corrected interpretation:	… and plead the case of the afflicted and needy.

With one *aurally repetitious* form (דין) and the two new easily recognized synonymous forms, 31:9b is likely efficiently processed. However, if saliently interpreted by the unit's previous patterning, the segment seems to provide readers a false lead (cf.

[412] HALOT, 2:1623.

[413] Cf. Kil, 404-405, citing 2 Sam 8:15. Cf. also Ps 72, noted by Fox, though not in overt connection with Davidic kingship. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 888.

31:2), inviting readers to reprocess the whole line to make grammatical sense of it.[414] The extra time spent in the final line likely reinforces the unit's main pedagogic thrust.

Just as readers' pattern recognition may initially regard שפט in 31:9a as an inf con, it is unlikely for readers initially to receive ודין, the first form of v. 9b, as the imperative recognized by most commentators and translators in finished interpretation.[415] דין in v. 9b seems aurally indistinguishable from the structurally significant nominal forms in vv. 5b, 8b.[416] RT would suggest hearers' tendency toward efficiency leads them to process ודין in v. 9b to seek the relevance of a *repeated* form (in the mouth of a speaker who frequently employs repetition), not as a homonym with a discrete lexical entry.[417] Thus, readers likely *hear* the form, recognize relevant previous patterning, and interpret nominally as 'cause, rights.' One the one hand, the final two forms עני ואביון appear to confirm דין as nominal (cf. similar accentuation in v. 8b): "… [the] rights of [the] afflicted and needy."

However, on the other, at the end of the line, as is evidenced in interpretive history, readers must inherently recognize such an initial interpretation as not quite right.[418] Perhaps readers sense that linguistically the nominal דין cannot be a direct

---

[414] On patterning in vv. 8-9, cf. McKane, 412.

[415] This is understandable because, like noted about Fox's interpretation of 31:1-9, commentators and translators tend to present the unit's hermeneutic *product,* not its *process.* Cf. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31,* 883, 888; Mancuello González, 143; Wechsler, 407.

[416] דין in 31:5b appears at the speaker's shift in focus away from privileged persons to sufferers. The second דין likewise in 31:8b where positive moral reasoning clarifies the admonition in v. 8a.

[417] Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance,* 219-20. Pilkington, 59, 125.

[418] The initial interpretation, as understood here, would be a single impv phrase: Open your mouth to judge righteousness // and the cause of the afflicted and needy. I have not found any translator or interpreter to have this understanding. Thus, I infer, if readers would have received such an initial interpretation (which I argue is plausible), something—though I am not certain as to what this might be—prompts reevaluation.

accusative of שפט.[419] Perhaps the initial interpretation yields a parallelistic imbalance with which readers are intuitively dissatisfied.[420] As reflected in most translations, reevaluation likely yields three staccato imperative phrases, a fitting conclusion to a poem ripe with triplets. The introduction of an impv form at the start of the second half-line *is* surprising: דין as a unique imperative form of the rare HB verb דין 'to judge, plead the case'.[421] The single impv פתח broadens into a fast-paced, final call to action: שפט || דין.

Openness-Closure

Early in 31:9b, closure is likely high, and openness moderately low with the seemingly repeated דין. When readers likely recognize the need to reassess, openness may seem very high, and closure moderately low. Late in 31:9b, openness and closure both appear moderate. Readers' additional time in the text may explore lexical intersections.

The initial interpretation discerned here emphasized for the third time that, apart from any verbal action, the poor and needy *have* דין, rights. This reality invites readerly reflection within the canonical worldview: the poor having rights is central to the LORD's character and covenant with His people.[422] These concerns, however, cannot be understood without, as the readerly process through 31:9b has revealed, without corresponding action. It is not enough to recognize the reality of such rights; one must

---

[419] Nowhere in HB is the nominal דין an object of its verbal synonym שפט. Cf. Deut 17:8 which uses prepositional בין. Perhaps the preposition אל (cf. v. 8b) would be more fitting?

[420] Previous patterning indicates a verbal form in each second or third cola of vv. 3-8. Perhaps the lack of verbal element in v. 9b intuitively feels odd and prompts reevaluation.

[421] The verb form has 24 occurrences in MT—and no others in Proverbs.

[422] Who gives them these rights? Why should readers bother with them? What about those poor and needy who are suffering because of their own folly or sin? Readers seem invited to consider questions like these in light of the LORD's concerns, e.g., Psalm 140:12; Is 10:2; Jer 5:28-29; 22:15-16.

take appropriate action. Here the overlapping spheres of kingship, sonship, and consecration demand the son-king's advocacy for the marginalized. These concerns are central to many canonical texts, which readers may hear evoked—particularly prophetic ones. Indeed, readers may recognize the ideal response invited by Proverbs' poet-narrator—to be aligned with the LORD's concerns for the poor (as the unnamed maternal speaker in 31:1-9) and even to expect the LORD's ultimate advocacy on their behalf.[423]

Resonance-Dissonance

Early in 31:9b, resonance seems moderately high, and dissonance low to moderately low through repetition and mild change in patterning. When readers recognize the need to reassess, dissonance is likely very high, and resonance moderately high: concepts seem fitting, but the speech is enigmatic. Late in 31:9b, resonance seems high, and dissonance low. Some challenges await resolution, but the text seems coherent.

Trust-Scrutiny

Early in 31:9b, interpretive trust seems high, and scrutiny moderate with familiar repetition offsetting minor shift in patterning. When readers recognize the need to reassess, scrutiny is likely very high, and trust moderately low with possible recognition of a false lead. Late in 31:9b, both trust in the speaker and scrutiny are likely high—

---

[423] Hannah's triumphant climax with its key shared language with 31:2-9 seems a key text that readers seem invited to hear evoked (1 Sam 2:10). Indeed, such imperative forms of דין are rare—yet each canonical case seems resonant with 31:1-9. Psalm 72, the Solomonic kingly psalm, has four occurrences. The most similar *sounding* imperative is Jer 21:12 where the LORD is warning the Davidic house to deliver the poor from the oppressor. Deut 32:36 and others promise the LORD will judge his people. Cf. also Ps 110:6; Jer 5:28; Zech 3:7. The number and breadth of canonical texts resonant with 31:1-9 by keyword and/or theme may startle readers—and readers' own discovery undoubtedly enriches the learning process.

cooperative readers may realize the false lead served a worthy interpretive purpose. Also, readers may anticipate the text has more for readers to discover upon rereading.

Reading 31:8-9 Summary

Commentators widely understand vv. 8-9 as admonition for the king son to use his privilege to speak on behalf of those who have no voice. I have shown, among other summary aspects of vv. 8-9, that poetic tension portrays mouth imagery to crystallize and clarify this focus. The speaker does not address questions which her son may have liked answered (e.g., can kings consume alcohol in moderation? does she hold up inebriation as an admirable good for all suffering people?), but shifts the focus to offer alternate imagery. She depicts her son-king's mouth in the intersection of kingship, sonship, and consecration as not given for his own enjoyment, but for the sake of those in his care, i.e., the marginalized. Canonically significant language in vv. 8-9 seems to align the speaker's exhortation with the LORD's concerns for Israel and the world (cf. Figure 6).

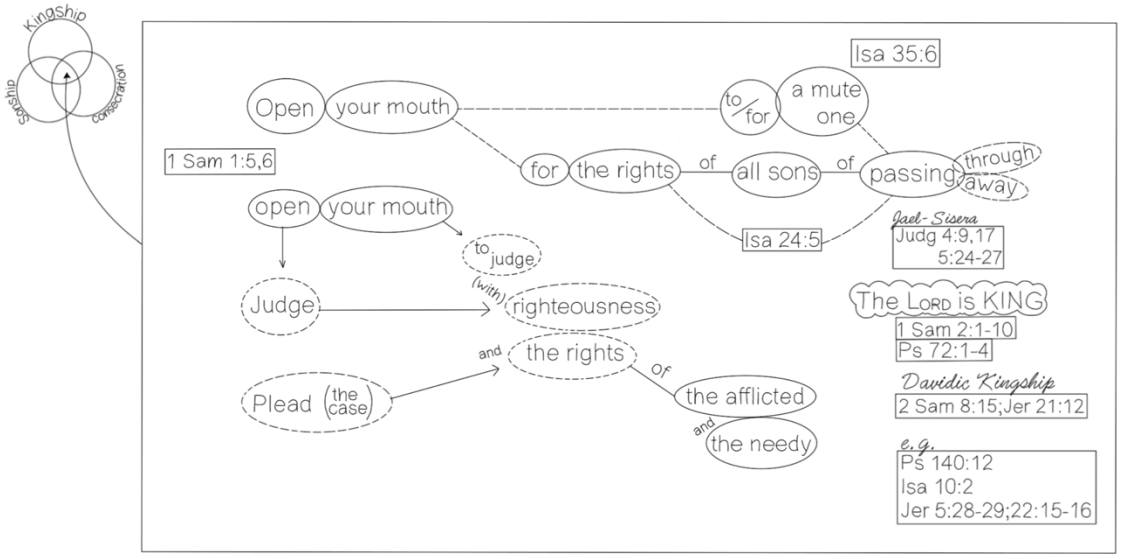

Figure 6: Word Map of 31:8-9

Rereading 31:1-9 as a Whole

Readers so actively involved in interpreting a text like 31:1-9 are likely motivated to reread the poem and apply insights they gained. This section simulates this second reading.[424] Having wrestled with the text's tricky grammar and forms, readers may now attend to interlinear connections and other literary elements. Questions of basic sense may remain, but readers likely have a clearer sense of the mother-speaker's purposes for this poetic מוסר, which may allow them not only to integrate loosen ends but also to grasp why they as canonical readers have been invited to overhear. That is, readers may now discern and nuance the earlier disjointed textual inputs to discern relevance.

Rather than logical reasoning, the juxtaposed imagery—private and public, banquet hall and courtroom—may offer *scenic* order to the poem's disparate pieces. 31:2 begins with an ambiguous setting—perhaps the adult son-king has granted a private audience to his mother-speaker by her implied son-king (cf. 1 Kings 2:13-25). The mother-speaker's voice in 31:3a images perhaps a private chamber where the king receives visitors, suggesting various spaces (harems?) where the king may interact directly with women (Esth 2:8-18; 5:1-8; cf. 1:10-12). The setting of 31:3b is difficult, due to the challenging form, but perhaps depicted is a king's council or war room (Esth 1:13-14)—or even backrooms where assassination plots are hatched (cf. 2 Ki 14:5, 27). Setting details become clearer with the next scene changes: without warning, the speaker moves her implied audience into the banquet hall (31:4-5a), then abruptly shifts to the courtroom (31:5b). The speaker returns her audience to the banquet hall's abundance (31:6-7) before once more thrusting him back into the courtroom (31:8-9).

---

[424] In this (re)reading, assessments will be made at the beginning, after each verse, and after the end.

In eight short verses, the speaker with great stylistic skill has moved her son-king audience through the physical spaces that likely make up the bulk of his life. Yet she does so in a way that let her audience *feel* drunk. The settings of vv. 31:2-5 are hazy—and the stroboscopic scene shifts allow the audience to move like a drunken king: who started probably in his private chambers, then to banqueting, but—suddenly—finds himself holding court. This drunken perspective cannot remember the progression of events which led him to the courtroom, let alone the decrees and business he is supposed to do there. Masterfully, the speaker has allowed her audience to experience how such behavior would be inappropriate. Indeed, by quick scenic shifts she has demonstrated that, in short, kings have business everywhere. Kings must listen to wise counsel both in private (31:2) and in public (cf. 31:1). They have no space, in fact, outside of the intersection of kingship, sonship, and consecration. They have responsibility in private chambers, in banquet halls, and in courtrooms. Rather than setting her son's eyes on things easy to see, the speaker also trains his eyes to see those absent from the luxurious spaces he normally occupies. Conscious effort and training are needed to see, remember the lowliest of His citizenry, and hear their cries.

Thus, the poem's scenic organization masterfully underscores the speaker's overt concern for the marginalized. This is what the causal motivation clauses (vv. 5, 7) imaged, but—corresponding to the move unto sobriety—the speaker has allowed her audience to discern most clearly in vv. 8-9: e.g., thrice-repeated root דין and the multiplicative lenses by which she trains the son-king's eyes to view those suffering. Concern for the marginalized merges with her concern for her son-king audience. The consecrated identity he has had from birth as God's vice-regent (as emphasized in his

revocalized name, לְמוּאֵל) carries both great responsibility and privilege. Such a position (e.g., the right to consume fruits of other people's labor (1 Sam 8:11-17)), comes with inherent dangers. In light of these threats, the speaker cares deeply about the kind of king her son will be. That this מוסר exists attests, per RT, that the mother-speaker judged such not only that such admonishment was *necessary* to address the threats, but that this complex poetic form was *optimally relevant* to do so. To be the right kind of vice-regent, he must be motivated by right values and concerns—i.e., aligning with *God's* values and concerns. But he also must have the wisdom and strength to act accordingly (Prov 8:15). Perhaps the residual ambiguity in 31:1-9 was intended as poetic second-order communication: to show her son-king that he needed to learn such discernment.

For canonical readers, while the repeated question of implied speaker-audience identity ("us vs. them") may be unresolved, poetic participation of 31:1-9 within canonical context may have brought forward possible clarifying interpretive parallels and echoes.[425] In the shadowy imagistic landscape of the text seems to emerge a polarization of personalities and of loyalties: there are those indulging and those suffering; those aligned with God and those opposed to Him. Set on Proverbs' and canonical context, this polarization, however, does not fall cleanly or comfortably between Israelites and foreigners. Indeed, God's people went into exile precisely because they persisted, like Eli, in dishonoring Him. But God will keep His covenant promises to Israel in David.

---

[425] The most shared language can be found in the Hannah-Samuel || Eli-sons narrative (1 Samuel 1-4), crystallized in Hannah's song (1 Sam 2:1-10), the Davidic בר as the LORD's anointed (Psalm 2), and strength/valor language of Psalm 18:32 [which as 2 Sam 22 serves as Hannah's song's parallel at the close of the book of Samuel]. Other psalmic, prophetic, and narrative textual connections may have infused the contextual gaps in 31:1-9 through the span of Israel's history: from the era of the Judges (Judges 4-5; 13-16; Ruth1, 4), through David's and Solomon's reigns (1 Kings 11; Ps 72), the split of the kingdom, decline (1 Kings 21; 2 Kings 11) and into the exile (Jer 52; Dan 5) and beyond, whispering both hope and warning.

God sees Israel in her captivity, bondage, and suffering and will certainly deliver her. God calls His people to repent: to turn back to Him wholeheartedly, observe His ways, be shaped by His values, and wait well for His restoration. Albeit conveyed through stroboscopic imagery and suggestive whispers, such is a call akin to that of canonical prophetic texts (משא). Like such texts, this poem seems to demand a holistic response from its readers: to (re)align hearts, minds, and bodies with the LORD and His covenant.

Before readers reenter 31:1-9, openness likely appears high, and closure moderately high. Questions remain, but readers may feel more equipped to navigate textual challenges. Resonance may seem high, and dissonance moderately low: the speaker's larger concern and imaginative narrative frame seem to align with both Proverbs' and canonical context.[426] Interpretive trust and scrutiny may both be high with the interpretive progress made in the first reading and of the text's skillful construction.[427]

Rereading 31:1

The first genitive phrase דברי למואל can now likely be received as canonically worthy words within an imagined narrative frame of reception and transmission (cf.

---

[426] Readers' perceptions of Proverbs' theological and communicative context may, of course, influence their receptivity of such poetic evocation of canonical material. There is enough evidence of a "confluence of wisdom and prophesy" to explore poetic resonance of 31:1-9 with so-called non-wisdom canonical material. Sneed, "Inspired Sages," 17. On Proverbs' theological context as largely unified, see Keefer, 143-83. For a summary of scholarly debate about the "wisdom tradition" and static "wisdom genres" within biblical literary material, cf. O'Dowd, 169-81; Mark R. Sneed, "'Grasping after the Wind': The Elusive Attempt to Define and Delimit Wisdom," in *Was There a Wisdom Tradition?:" New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies,* ed. Mark R. Sneed, Ancient Israel and Its Literature 23 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015), 39-68; Mark W. Hamilton, "Riddles and Parables, Traditions and Texts: Ezekielian Perspective on Israelite Wisdom Traditions," in *Was There a Wisdom Tradition?": New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies,* ed. Mark R. Sneed, Ancient Israel and Its Literature 23 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015), 241-62, the following quote on 257-58. "[T]he distinction between a wisdom text and a prophetic text lies less at the level of ideas in them than at the level for constructing and interpreting them, but even this difference is one on a continuum, not a radical distinction in kind."

[427] Cf. Clifford, *Proverbs,* 270.

generational dynamic in Prov 4). If Lemuel, a possibly non-Israelite king was called to righteousness (31:9; cf. Melchizedek (Gen 14:18; Ps 110:4)) and was seemingly faithful to receive and transmit the limited godly wisdom he may have received (as implied by context), how much more are God's canonical audience (privy to a vast store of godly wisdom) called to be steadfast to both *receive* and *transmit* what has been entrusted to them? This undoubtedly is the covenant obligation of all who, like Lemuel and Israel, are consecrated to God. This makes Lemuel more like the canonical audience than not, and his particular provenance largely irrelevant.[428] Because the LORD's supreme Kingship, He sets apart even foreign kings like Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 21:7), Evil-merodach (lit., 'man of Marduk') (Jer 52:31), and Cyrus (2 Chr 36:22) to accomplish His purposes. If this is so, readers seem invited to ponder, how much more should God's covenant people gladly be about God's business in the places where He has set (נתן) them (Exod 19:4-6)?

31:2-9 then seem the words of a king consecrated by God and used by Him—thus, words to be heard with scrutiny but received as restorative, good words for His covenant people's overhearing (cf. Jer 52:32). The question of speaker identity thus leans strongly toward trust, and readers seem invited to accept the Masoretic phrasing's break in thought after מלך.[429]

The meaning of משא, then, earlier the center of interpretive uncertainty (cf. Figure 1), may now be informed by the poetic sweep of 3:2-9. Informed by the imaginative context constructed in the first reading, these דברי are indeed *weighty speech* to be heard

---

[428] It seems the clarifying term in the salient construct phrase begun with מלך … is purposefully elided.

[429] Even if Lemuel was intended to be received as an Ishmaelite king (מלך משא), the "how much more" reasoning ought to hold true. If an *Ishmaelite* descendant's *words* (who rarely speaks in HB (Gen 16:10-13; 17:20; 21:9; 25; Judg 8:25)) could be thus consecrated to God, how much more ought Israelite words to be?

and heeded.[430] Yet I argue, further, the literary echoes of hope and warning discerned in the first reading suggest the kind of hope and warning common in HB prophecy: calling God's people to repent of covenant faithlessness, to warn of severe discipline if they did not while offering hope of a repentant remnant's restoration (e.g., Is 1-5; Hos 2).[431] In this, its concerns with mistreatment of the poor have been observed to resonate with canonical prophetic literature.[432] To integrate such elements in Proverbs and to set divinely oracular משא in the mouth of an ambiguous king, the poet-narrator seems to play with genre expectations.[433] This may indicate, here near Proverbs' end, the poet-narrator's desire that readers integrate Proverbs' material with the broader canonical worldview. Consequently, readers may overtly respond to משא in 31:1 by applying to 31:2-9 a hermeneutic appropriate to HB prophetic oracle.[434] Readers may also be invited

---

[430] Cf. Jer 52:31. On משא in 31:1 as "oracular advice"/"sapiential oracle," Sneed, "Inspired Sages," 21-22.

[431] Repentance must always be twofold: (1) renewed trust that the LORD sees their plight and will deliver them and (2) reshaped lives to image God's values and concerns.

[432] Cf. J. David Pleins, "Poverty in the Social World of the Wise," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 37 (1987): 61-78. Though broadly arguing "the values and interests of the wisdom writers are the same as those of the urban elite whom they serve," Pleins recognizes Proverbs 30-31 as aligning more with prophetic material in its denunciation of oppression of the needy rather than championing the outlook of the ruling elite. Plein specifically compares Proverbs 31:1-9 to "Jeremiah's exhortations to king Jehoiakim, who was reminded that Jehoiakim's father, King Josiah, 'judged the case of the poor [*'ani*] and needy [*'ebyon*]; then it was well' (Jer. 22.16)." Quotations from Pleins, 61, 64. Similarly, Mercedes García Bachmann discerns a parallel concern with Isaiah. Mercedes García Bachmann, "La sed de vino y de poder: 'No sea que beban… y perviertan el derecho de todos/as los/as afligidos/as' (Prov 31:5)," *Revista Caminhos – Revista de Ciências da Religião* 14, no. 1 (January/June 2016): 90.

[433] On the overlap of prophetic and monarchic function in, e.g., biblical narrative, particularly when the monarchy is weak, see W. Brian Aucker, "A Prophet in King's Clothes: Kingly and Divine Re-Presentation in 2 Kings 4 and 5," in *Reflection and Refraction: Studies in Biblical Historiography in Honour of A. Graeme Auld,* ed. Robert Rezetko, Timothy H. Lim, and W. Brian Aucker, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 113 (Boston: Brill, 2007), 1-26.

[434] On this hermeneutic, see Patrick Fairbairn, *The Interpretation of Prophecy* (1865, 1964; repr. Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1993), 83-181.

to consider fuzzy boundaries of their own consecrated speech (cf. Deut 6:7-9, 20-25).[435] Despite moderate openness with משא, readers following this type of reading may have moderately high closure, scrutiny, trust, and resonance, and moderately low dissonance.

In this reading, 31:1c likely offers moderately high closure and high scrutiny. The referent of the אשר clause, based on the highly transitive יסר, may be cleverly two-fold. Most resonantly with salient syntax, it is Lemuel, One-belonging-to-God, *whom* his mother admonished. Yet this personal referent invites readers to position themselves as the dual object of this triangulated מוסר—also ones consecrated to God and lovingly admonished by Him. Given previous evocations (e.g., Judg 5, Ruth 1-4, 1 Sam 2:1-10, Jer 52:31), it seems fitting that consecrated speech can originate from unexpected speakers in times of spiritual trouble, which should encourage attentive listening.

Table 22: Interpretive Process of v. 1

Initial interpretation (1st reading):	The words of Lemuel, king of [???]. // A weighty speech (with) which his mother admonished him.
Corrected interpretation (1st reading):	The words of One-who-belongs-to-God, (a) king of burden/Massa/weighty speech. Whom his mother admonished.
Revised interpretation (2nd reading):	The words of Lemuel, i.e., One-belonging-to-God, a king …. // An oracle. One whom his mother admonished.

[435] Similarly, cf. Bernd U. Schipper, "'Teach Them Diligently to Your Son!'": The Book of Proverbs and Deuteronomy," in *Reading Proverbs Intertextually,* ed. Katharine J. Dell and Will Kynes, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 629 (New York: T&T Clark: 2019), 29. For an opposing view, cf. John J. Collins, "Wisdom and Torah," in *Pedagogy in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity,* ed. Karina Martin Hogan, Matthew Goff, and Emma Wasserman, Early Judaism and Its Literature 41 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2017), 64.

Rereading 31:2

In 31:2, readers may expect to overhear a skillful stylist-teacher who both does not waste words and is mindful of the interpretive task she sets before her audience.[436] Thus, readers may recognize 31:2 as a *purposeful* grammatical enigma with two related problems: its missing verbal sense and abrupt end. Upon second reading, readers seem more equipped to apply patterning from the similar situations of 31:4 and 31:9. Four patterns seem relevant. (1) In 31:9b, a presumed nominal form was discerned to be a verbal form. That is, data needed to make sense of the text could be found in the text—after adjusting salient contextual expectations. (2) The speaker also employed verb gapping in vv. 3, 6, and possibly v. 4.[437] (3) In 31:4, the speaker used a vocative with a multivalent function: both as vocative and verbal volitive. (4) The enigma in 31:9b seems use readers' discovery to reinforce the speaker's larger concerns. If the poem's *last* line did so, readers may be invited to expect similar stylism in the *first* line. Synthesizing these points, it seems readers are encouraged to look more closely at what has been provided to discern what seems missing—the process which may yield interpretive focus.

A first strategy, then, seeks an existing form in the poem (verb or a nominative's verbal core) which would fit the context. The three choices of forward gapping from 31:1 are דבר, יסר and היה (within לְמוּאֵל).[438] Investigating the possibility of backward gapping

---

[436] Undoubtedly, some readers discern that the imaginative narrative frame constructed on the first reading sufficiently accounts for the perceived relevance of 31:2 and therefore will not exert further processing. I, however, am concerned with seeking to make best sense of the textual evidence.

[437] The speaker shows a propensity for using only a few select verbs/roots with repetition. Likely, this verb would have already been set before readers, although backward ellipsis, though rare, is not outside of consideration, given the speaker's patterns. Cf. Miller, "Verb Gapping in Biblical Poetry," 41-60.

[438] Respectively, (1) "What, my בר, will you/I **speak**?" [cf. 31:1, 8-9]; (2) How, my בר, will I **admonish** [you]?; (3) What [kind of person], my בר, **are/is** you/the one who belongs to God?

yields nine more verbs to pose a relevant question.[439] The problem this strategy poses is irreconcilable openness: it provides *too many* good options. How can one discern the speaker's intent?

A second strategy would likely, learning from 31:9b, look for verbal sense where it may have been overlooked or hidden. Per 31:4, this speaker may compress verbal sense into a vocative. Thus, a simple clausal solution for 31:2 leverages the staircase parallelism and makes sense of the aural distinction of the third מה: "What, my בר, O what, בר of my womb, O what [kind of king] is the בר of my vows?"[440] While looking for gapped/elided verbs yielded too many viable clauses, this second strategy yields the simplest yet fruitful relevant solution also flexible to various imaginative narrative frames.[441] Readers who put in the interpretive effort may find in 31:2 the overarching interpretive question and, moreover, discover that finite verbs hold the interpretive key to this poem.[442] Readers' interpretive journey undoubtedly reinforces the poem's teaching in their hearts and minds.

---

[439] נתן, מחה, שתה, שכח, שנה, לא זכר, פתח, שפט, and דין. Respectively, (1) What, my בר, will you **give**?; (2) What, my בר, will you **blot out**?; (3) What, my בר, will you **drink**? [cf. Proverbs 5, 7, 9]; (4) What, my בר, will you (not) **forget**?; (5) What, my בר, will you (not) **alter**?; (6) What, my בר, will you **remember**?; (7) How, my בר, will you **open** [your mouth]?; (8 & 9) How, my בר, will you **judge**? (שפט and דין). A tenth possibility is "What, my בר, will you **desire**?" (אוה)

[440] JM §144c: מה "when reference is made to a person, …[can] ask *what* that person is." 1 Sam 29:3; Ps 8:4.

[441] A third (possibly overlapping, but more complex) strategy might be to blend into 31:2 a predicate from one of the other twenty-four מה (*meh*) cases which has other linguistic and thematic parallels with 31:1-9. Though this solution may seem overly inferential, shared language and theme may be found in, e.g., 1 Sam 4:6, 14, 16; 15:14; 1 Kings 14:14; Is 1:5; Jer 8:9; and Hag 1:9. See discussion on 31:2c above.

[442] Thus, it is highly resonant that the speaker will make readers work so hard to find the verbs in 31:2, 4, and 9. Connections with verbal elements in Psalm 2:12 and Hannah-Samuel narrative, e.g., may prompt readers to recall to similar questions set to David's house or to Israel by the LORD. Israel as God's Son: Exod 4:22; 19:5-6. Davidic king as God's son: 1 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:12; Ps 110.

As with the grammatical enigma of 31:2, the sense of בר seems clearer, yet still somewhat ambiguous. The speaker's tone and concern sense coherent with בר as 'son', reinforcing her as likely foreign.[443] However, simultaneously, the speaker subtly reinforces her son-king's identity as consecrated to God. This identity requires his cooperative response to *remain* pure according to the costly vows established presumably before his birth.[444] Thus, while these vow terms are undisclosed, blending with the Nazarite imagery in the Hannah-Samuel narrative, canonical readers may hear the coming tension between vows and alcohol with that context: although human nature to regret such vows, how heinous is their violation.[445] Yet as Hannah-Samuel model and Eli-his sons prove the foil, even vows of great cost *can* and *should* be kept with great gladness: the LORD will honor those who honor Him. What kind of purity will the son-king keep, and what kind of consecrated one will he prove to be? The poem's dramatic tension, as re-readers know, leaves this question largely unanswered—though that 31:1-9 are cast as the words of *Lemuel* hints, contra Crenshaw, of his positive response.[446]

Readers may exit the verse with openness and closure both moderately high (בר and question fluidity). Resonance, trust, and scrutiny all seem high, and dissonance low.

Table 23: Interpretive Process of v. 2

Initial interpretation:	What, my pure one, and what, *Sohn* of my womb, and what, *Sohn* of my vows, _____ ?

[443] Perhaps in blending with the Esther narrative, readers may envision a Hebrew mother of a foreign king.

[444] The Hannah-Samuel and Sampson narratives blend with Num 6 to suggest a purity *signified* by no razors or alcohol—but not *limited* to these markers. Consecration unto God involves far more (cf. Is 1-5).

[445] Though the mother-speaker may not have been calling her implied son audience to complete abstinence from alcohol in 31:3-7, the evoked figures of both Samson and Samuel put such a reality on the table.

[446] Crenshaw, "A Mother's Instruction," 14. "The biblical Instruction for Lemuel lacks any response on his part…"

Possible corrected interpretations:	What, my *Sohn,* O what, *Sohn* of my womb, O what, *Sohn* of my vows, _____ ?
	[Many clausal variations of elided/gapped verbs or rare senses of מה*]*
Possible revised interpretation:	What, my *Sohn*, O what, *Sohn* of my womb, O what [kind of pure-one] is the *Sohn* of my vows?"

Rereading 31:3

Readers likely struggled with 31:3 on the first pass, due to the seeming semantically imbalanced parallelism, lack of framing context, and ambiguity of newly introduced characters. Upon rereading, readers may enter more confident of the speaker's concerns and patterning. Also, the context gaps may invite readers' effort to construct a relevant narrative frame within the intersection of kingship, sonship, and consecration. Thus, the larger concern is for the son-king to become the kind of king who *sees* suffering people, *remembers* what has been decreed (e.g., evoking Deut 8:10-12; 17:17-20), *stewards* his divinely given resources wisely, and *judges* righteously.[447] The opposite is imaged in the motivation clause of 31:5: a licentious kingly person drinking, forgetting, and changing what has been decreed regarding the sons of affliction.[448] These two opposite paths appear to align with the דרכיך metaphor (31:3b). In that context, חילך may maintain its ambiguity: not just sexual immorality but, more broadly, all of life's resources divinely endowed to the implied son-king.[449] God's gifts come with

[447] Such a one may have been imaged or evoked briefly for readers in idealized depictions of David/Solomon/Josiah (Pss 2; 72; 110; Is 11; Jer 22:13-19). Mancuello González, 148-54. Ironically, however, the benevolent Evil-merodach (Jer 52:31-34) and others (Cyrus or Darius) also may be imaged.

[448] Belshazzar may spring quickly to readers' minds (Dan 5, especially Dan 5:17-28).

[449] Canonical readers hopefully would recognize that, whether the implied audience knows it or not, חיל is something seen less as what one gives, but what one is given by the LORD.

responsibility to use them per *His* values and priorities—to which even foreign kings will be held accountable (cf. Dan 5:18-21; חילך in Ezek 28:4-5).

For 31:3, however, the question still remains: who are these women, and who are those at risk of blotting out kings? Difficulty disambiguating these characters may reflect intention second-order communication. That is, in Proverbs' context (e.g., chaps. 5, 7, 9), as O'Dowd argues, the poetic language "very naturally" allows for simultaneous "concrete" referents (e.g., "temptations in daily life") "*and* poetic/cosmic expressions of human desire."[450] Thus, this poetic multivalency may blend imaginatively with the kingly-womanly pairs which may have sprung to mind—as well as other instantiations of wrong desires, such as למחות מלכין (Ps 2) or running after wine (Prov 23:29-35).[451]

While some find the content of 31:3 "entirely unrelated" to kingly responsibility to marginalized citizenry, I have argued that readers may expand the logical reasoning as focused on right *stewardship* of consecrated kingship/sonship which has holistic implications.[452] While interpretive work remains in 31:3 (as perhaps the most remote of the concerns imaged in 31:1-9), readers may perceive they are moving toward the intended sense: openness may be very high, closure and resonance moderate, dissonance moderately low, trust moderately high, and scrutiny high.

Table 24: Interpretive Process of v. 3

Initial interpretation:	Do not give to (the) women your strength, // your ways to those who wipe out kings.
Possible corrected interpretation:	… your ways to blot out kings.

[450] O'Dowd, 175.

[451] See discussion and word maps above. These evocations invite recognition that there is a *choice* of women. Perhaps this is the interpretive point the speaker wants her implied audience to consider. Thus, it appears the speaker does not mean to group *all* women in this negative admonition. Nor does she intend to make it easy for her implied son-king audience: he must learn to discern the difference.

[452] Cf. Whybray, *Wealth and Poverty in the Book of Proverbs*, 108.

Revised interpretation:	Do not give to (the) women your strength, // your ways to (cause to) blot out kings.

Rereading 31:4-5

While most interpreters easily intuit an elided היה verb in the unusual grammar of v. 4, as noted above, reader' interpretive work seems to draw attention to its verbal sense. Thus, upon rereading 31:4, attentive readers may cooperative by seeking the missing volitive. This effort is likely aided by keeping the speaker's concern for the marginalized in the foreground. While the chief responsibility stressed is to provide justice for the poor and needy (v. 9), vv. 3-5 suggest this requires internal and external stewardship: to cultivate consecrated דרכים of heart, mind, and body unto the LORD (Deut 17:17-20).

Readers may look in 31:4 for a gapped/elided verb as in 31:2.[453] The simplest, most relevant *gapped* verb possibility is תתן (31:3a, 6a).[454] The sense would yield: "Do not give to the kings, O One-belonging-to-God, do not give to the kings wine to drink, to rulers [opening their mouths] 'Where is strong drink?'" Scenically, this may appear relevant to ANE imagery of a foreign overload king presiding over a banquet hall of dignitaries, kinglets, and even *dethroned* kings (like Jehoiachin).[455] Servants attend guests, filling cups and bringing food—the bounty of which arises through others' toil (1

[453] The alternate strategy would be to identity verbal sense already in the text. However, seeing volitive force in Lemuel's revocalized name would yield, however, is a positive volitive premise is gapped in the middle of a negative volitive. Likely, readers may find this too dissonant and abandon this line of thought.

[454] נתן meets formal and syntactic gapping constraints here. Cf. Miller, "Verb Gapping," 51-60; Miller, "A Linguistic Approach," 251-70. I suggest the syntax is no odder than other aspects of 31:1-9. If the speaker desired close attention paid to this verse, use of verb gapping may accomplish this.

[455] Such imagery may have already evoked Jer 52:31-34, Dan 5, and also Ps 23:5. Cf. Ronald E. Clements, "A Royal Privilege: Dining in the Presence of the Great King (2 Kings 25.27-30)," in *Reflection and Refraction: Studies in Biblical Historiography in Honour of A. Graeme Auld,* ed. Robert Rezetko, Timothy H. Lim, and W. Brian Aucker, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 113 (Boston: Brill, 2007), 49-66.

Sam 8:6-18). It is a place of contrasts: of honor and dishonor, of hospitality and selfishness, of ruling and servitude. Does such an overlord have consecrated duty as shepherd/host in that banquet hall? Vv. 4-5 would suggest yes. In fact, Clements suggests Jehoiachin's reversal unto Evil-merodach's banquet hall prophetically images the persistence of the divine promise to Israel through the Davidic house.[456] It shows Evil-merodach's at least partial submission to the Supreme Overlordship of the LORD and His Anointed (cf. 1 Sam 2:10; Ps 2:12; etc.). The imagery seems fitting to a "confluence" of wisdom and prophecy. Moreover, such a reading offers continuity between vv. 4 and 6-7: THE KING IS A HOST metaphor thus would cohere the admonition sections through antonymous imaging—what he should not do vs. what he should do.[457]

While I see such an interpretation of 31:4 as cohesive to 31:1-9 as a whole, as reflected in most translations, the majority reading discerns an elided verb היה in v. 4: "Let it not be for the kings, O One-belonging-to-God, not for the kings to drink wine or for potentates to crave strong drink."[458] Taken literally, this would be as a general prohibition of type, i.e., that kings as a class should not drink alcohol. V. 5 then serves as a justification for the command (i.e., kings as a class misuse wine, and this jeopardizes fulfillment of their duties). Vv. 6-7 then suggests the converse: suffering people as a class

---

[456] Clements, 65-66.

[457] The imagery of king being host (31:6-7) and then moving to courtroom seems clear (31:8-9). To see the same pattern of king as host in v. 4 and king in courtroom in v. 5 is resonant with structure and reasoning.

[458] If there is a way to respect the volitive sense of אל, this should be preferred over a non-volitive form.

should drink wine because it will give them some kind of relief (and they will not misuse it?). Despite the popularity of this interpretation, it is not without difficulty.[459]

Regardless of 31:4 verbal sense, in 31:5b the stroboscopic progression leads to provocative imagery: a kingly person drinks, forgets existing decrees, and executes pervasive misjustice for *all* the sons of affliction. The descent into forgetful injustice, fringed with imagery of wine, kings, women, forgetting, and affliction, may prompt biblical narrative, e.g., the Ahab-Naboth-Jezebel narrative, to spring to readers' minds (1 Kings 21). In this pericope, Ahab as vassal king selfishly abuses his power (lust for Naboth's vineyard) violates the LORD's inheritance for Naboth and his heirs. The pettiness of Ahab's greed and Jezebel's shameless scheming to frame Naboth flesh out the plight of such sufferers—who will advocate for them? Ahab's and Jezebel's judgment adds a sober but hopeful frame to 31:5—the LORD will advocate even when human leaders fail (1 Kings 21:11, 25-26).

After rereading 31:4, openness, resonance, and trust seem moderately high, closure moderate, dissonance moderately low, and scrutiny high. After 31:5, openness and scrutiny appear moderate; closure, resonance, and trust high, and dissonance low.

Table 25: Interpretive Process of vv. 4-5

Initial interpretation:	Do/let not … for kings, Lemoel, // do/let not … for kings to drink wine, // and for rulers [who say], "Where is strong drink?" Lest he drink and forget what has been decreed, // and alter the rights of all sons of affliction.
Possible corrected interpretations	Let it not be for kings, O One-who-belongs-to-God, // let it not be for kings to drink wine, //

[459] Readers should also weigh the syntax's scant precedent (discussed above) as well as interpretive difficulty. This interpretation yields vv. 6-7, per Shepherd, as a "discordant" "conundrum". Shepherd, 143, 145. Lavoie's thorough discussion of modern interpretation identifies some interpreters as scandalized over vv. 6-7, and others avoiding it because it is, per Lavoie, "si choquant." Lavoie, 44-50, quote on 44.

	and for rulers [who say], “Where is strong drink?” Lest he drink and forget what has been decreed, // and alter the rights of all sons of affliction.
Revised interpretation:	Do not [give] to (the) kings, O One-who-belongs-to-God, // do not give to kings wine to drink, // or to rulers [who open their mouths, saying,] “Where is strong drink?” Lest he drink and forget what has been decreed, // and alter the rights of all sons of affliction.

Rereading 31:6-7

Interpretive focus on rereading vv. 6-7 likely pertains to the apparent disconnect (in terms of RT, low relevance) between the literal admonition of vv. 6-7 and the speaker’s underlying concern with needy persons and their advocacy (as in vv. 3-5 and 8-9), and the severity of suffering depicted.[460] In short, readers seem invited to evaluate the proffered solution of vv. 6-7 as mismatched to the problem. Would kingly distribution of alcohol cause sufferers to forget their problems *indefinitely* (לא עוד)? What is the right sort of posture for a (consecrated) king toward the needy? As noted above, scholarship is divided on how vv. 6-7 fit into the text’s overall illocution.[461]

As illustrated by Whybray’s and Nzimande’s critiques, if vv. 6-7 represents a rigid totality or literal prescription of kingly responsibility to the poor, the text’s problem-

[460] The speaker’s use of patterns and repetition may be considered to illumine the text’s inner reasoning. Cf. on chiastic arrangement of יין || שכר, see Shepherd, 143.

[461] Notably, Lavoie, 33-54; Shepherd, 139-45. See also García Bachmann, “A Foolish King, Women, and Wine,” 316-27. Other hermeneutic stances have been applied to this problem: e.g., Peter Lechion Kimilike, “Poverty Context in Proverbs 31:1-9: A Ben Tanzanian Analysis for Transformational Leadership Training,” *Old Testament Essays* 31, no. 1 (2018): 135-63; Makhosazana Keith Nzimande, “Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation in Post-Apartheid South Africa: the גבירה in the Hebrew Bible in the Light of Queen Jezebel and the Queen Mother of Lemuel” (PhD diss., Texas Christian University, 2005), 163, 194, 229-30.

solution pairing remains hopelessly mismatched.[462] Readers should re-enter vv. 6-7, however, understanding that the kingly responsibility in view extends beyond superficial generosity with alcohol to self-sacrificial advocacy on behalf of the marginalized (vv. 4-5, 8-9). Moreover, this responsibility contextually carries the quiet but real element of his consecration unto the deity to whom he is avowed (v. 2): the kingly call of divine representation implicitly anticipates divine accountability. Such a frame coheres with the overarching canonical view of kingly responsibility, and it is reasonable to expect canonical readers to seek interpretive context for vv. 6-7 in Proverbs and the canon.

As Keefer has demonstrated, Proverbs 1-9 serves an introductory function for Proverbs 10-31 by providing interpretive context. Thus, the metaphor WISDOM IS A BANQUET OF FOOD AND DRINK which dramatizes the climax of Proverbs 1-9 may help readers reconcile the problem-solution tension of vv. 6-7 in 31:1-9, here near the end of Proverbs' whole.[463] As Maurice Gilbert notes, the meat and drink of Wisdom's metaphorical banquet is, in fact, Proverbs 10:1-31:9 itself, a feast of instruction and teaching unto wisdom set before its readers.[464] While Wisdom ultimately functions as

---

[462] "This is rather strange advice: the persons addressed are clearly possessed of resources which would enable them to give material assistance to the unfortunate, but *are not encouraged to do so*. Their poverty is taken for granted, and *only* an opiate is considered an appropriate gift." Whybray, *Wealth and Poverty,* 108. Emphasis mine. "If she is genuinely committed to justice toward the socially disadvantaged, how can she possibly utter a message of justice in the same breath as encouraging the intoxication of the poverty stricken?" "[I]n a manner reminiscent of the colonizers of our time, the Queen Mother of Lemuel is a very cagey figure, who chooses to acknowledge injustice in her context but *not provide any concrete measure on how the hegemonic structures that cause the suffering of the poverty-stricken could be dismantled*." Nzimande, 194, 228. Emphasis mine.

[463] Cf. Keefer, 182-83. Conclusion to the introductory parental discourse, Proverbs 9 depicts two competing banquet invitations. Accepting Wisdom's lavish banquet of food and mixed wine (9:1-12) leads to life (9:11); choosing Lady Folly's alternate offer of "stolen water" and "food eaten in secret" leads to death (9:13-18).

[464] Maurice Gilbert, "La pedagogia dei saggi nell'antico Israele," *La Civiltà Cattolica* 155, no. 3701 (September 4, 2004): 348.

host of this banquet, Proverbs' context presents kings (in addition to parents) as mediators of (divine) wisdom (1:1; 10:1; 25:1)—kings who are called to learn wisdom themselves (8:14-16) and then to be generous in sharing this wisdom with others. Given the metaphorical imagery in Proverbs 9:1-6, this generous portion of wisdom might be poetically depicted even in Proverbs 31 as יין and שכר.[465] In Proverbs, all people need wisdom for flourishing; true relief of suffering cannot be reduced to a king's wise ruling (even a generous one), but must include his citizenry growing in wisdom. To this end, a consecrated king must פתח פיו to distribute Wisdom's fare (cf. vv. 8-9) so that all in his sphere of influence may hear, particularly the impoverished.[466] With a king's mouth opened wide, even these could "drink" so deeply of wisdom's draught to be established, in Proverbs' economy, on the path to life and flourishing (9:13). On that path, if wisdom is heeded, suffering may seem a faint memory (cf. 9:6 with 1:22-27). If the son-king audience of 31:2-9 were this kind of wise king (as 31:1 contextually suggests; cf. 1:1, 6; 10:1, etc.), he would have true wisdom to share. It would be unjust and forgetful of his consecrated status to keep such a resource to himself (as may be imaged in vv. 4-5).

To this metaphor suggested by Proverbs' introduction, canonical context further informs the tension of vv. 6-7. On the backdrop of ideal kingship as depicted broadly in Scripture, what appears advised in vv. 6-7 is not a limit or a single behavior (i.e., ply the needy with alcohol) but a call to cultivate kingly character which would wholeheartedly steward (as the LORD's vice-regent) divinely given resources for the marginalized's

---

[465] Mancuello González argues similarly, citing also Deut 8:3; Amos 8:11; Is 55:1-36. "We think that the advice to give to drink in 31,1-6, analogous to 9,1-6, should be understood as a symbol of something good, beautiful, whose referent it is necessary to search out." Mancuello González, 130. My translation.

[466] Cf. 16:10-15. Indeed, Proverbs does not offer any lasting way through any suffering or problem, apart from acquiring true wisdom and spurning folly.

benefit. Canonically, wise stewardship of divinely given resources in the royal courtroom and banquet hall implies the sweep of the king's character and of his rule would Isaiah 25:4-9 (cf. Luke 14:12-24). On such a backdrop, the literal conditions of vv. 6-7 demands many more unstated concerns: that hospitality in the royal banquet hall would be a true symbol of the compassionate generosity of the Shepherd Overlord king to even the least of his citizenry.[467] Thus. the tension in vv. 6-7 can be resolved by envisioning a call to righteous, efficacious governance, where sufferers can no longer remember their problems not due to temporary cognitive impairment, but because their problems have been rightly addressed at their core. This suggests an ideal king whose eyes, like the LORD's, are trained on those often unseen. His ears are so tuned toward compassion that he hears the silent cries of even the אלם.[468] Shared language and concept resonance with such canonical scenes suggest such enduring advocacy (not a strict literal interpretation) is what Proverb's poet-narrator desires his readership to understand from vv. 6-7.

The distinct plural imperative of v. 6 may suggest Proverbs' poet-narrator intends to include the canonical audience directly. While early canonical readers lack kingly authority, but they each can be impacted by and aligned with the LORD's heart for the poor and needy. They can steward their own resources to alleviate suffering and its causes. Moreover, readers may also be intended to hear לא זכר עוד with covenantal

---

[467] Canonical texts hold many examples of such kingship up for readers' admiration. (cf. the king in Ps 23, Evil-merodach's generosity to Jehoiachin (Jer 52:34) or David's to Mephibosheth (2 Sam 9:13))Evil-merodach raised Jehoiachin's head, released him from prison, spoke kindly to him, and gave him a seat of honor above other kings in Babylon. In his new clothes, Jehoiachin ate before the king all his days.

[468] Cf. Petrany, 157-59. That the mute would receive voice as a result of the Lord's hearing advocacy is imaged in the progression of Hannah from silent in her grief (1 Sam 1:13) to joyfully exultant of the King's intervention on her behalf (1 Sam 1:26-2:10). Cf. Is 35:6.

significance.[469] *Remembering* the right things (i.e., the LORD, His law) is a type of stewardship reflecting reciprocal covenant faithfulness.[470] The biblical meta-narrative upholds that the LORD lovingly disciplines his people when they persist in covenantal forgetfulness (cf. Prov 3:11-12). Such disciplinary suffering is meant to cause the people to remember, leading them back to covenant faithfulness. The most dangerous forgetfulness to God's people is luxurious satiation (cf. Deut 8:10-20): that the mouth would open to consume the fruit of the land without regard for the One who gave the fruitfulness for specific purposes. To be full of one's own privilege and luxury seems dangerously inclined toward forgetfulness—and held up for audience disapproval.[471]

Canonical imagery of vineyards and wine as representative of the relationship between the LORD and His people may provide another interpretive aid for the tension of vv. 6-7. God's graciousness to Israel included giving them vineyards they did not plant (Deut 6:11; Josh 24:13) so they would enjoy fruitfulness within the boundaries of His law (Exod 22:5; Lev 25:3-4; Deut 20:6; 22:9). These boundaries included using such resources in generosity and compassionate care for suffering people (Lev 19:10; Deut 23:24; 24:21). But should His people reject the LORD and ignore His warnings, their vineyards—over which they had toiled—would be ravished and infested (Deut 28:30,

---

[469] See Is 43:18; 46:8; 54:4; Jer 3:16.

[470] 'Remember' as a covenantally significant word: Gen 8:1; 9:15-16 (look at the covenant signs). God remembered Abraham (Gen 19:29), Rachel (Gen 30:22), the Israelites enslaved in Egypt (Exod 2:24; 6:5), Samson (Judg 16:28), Hannah (1 Sam 1:11, 19). When Israel had sinned and was under judgment but repented, the LORD remembered His covenant with the patriarchs (Exod 32:13; Lev 26:42, 45; Deut 9:27). God's people were also called to remember the LORD and their covenant with Him (Deut 8:2, 18).

[471] Vertical parallelism with נתן in vv. 3, 6 seem to pair agency with responsibility: stewardship of resources requiring discernment, self-restraint, and intentional remembrance. This agency requires one who *is* as the centrally placed vocative למואל means: a steward-king who does not belong to himself, but to the greater King (Deut 17:17-20).

39). Israel imaged as the LORD's vine was laid to waste (Is 5:1-7). Yet biblical texts anticipate a time of the LORD's renewing favor where the people return to the LORD. At this time, their affliction would be *so far removed to not even be remembered* (Is 61; 65). In such prophetic language, restoration is often portrayed in terms of vineyards. In this time of flourishing and restored blessing, the land's *vineyards* would abound, and foreigners would serve in *their* vineyards (Is 61:5-6). The LORD Himself would tread the nations in winepress of judgment (Is 63:3-6). Thus, the closing לֹא זכר עוד in 31:7 may posture readers emotively to long for the LORD's deliverance. Even in exile, these who long for the LORD's favor have work to do, for His vineyards are everywhere.

Table 26: Interpretive Process of vv. 6-7

Initial interpretation:	Give strong drink to one perishing // and wine to those bitter of soul. He will drink and forget his poverty // and his trouble he will remember no more.
Possible corrected interpretation:	Give strong drink to one wandering … (*other semantic variations possible)*
Revised interpretation:	Give strong drink to one perishing // and wine to those bitter of soul. He will drink and forget his poverty // and his trouble he will remember no more.

Rereading 31:8-9

Vv. 8-9 features the poem's climax. Previous scenic movement to the courtroom was abrupt (v. 5); readers likely experienced disorientation, some simulated cognitive impairment, and surprise at wide-ranging consequences. In vv. 8-9, the speaker seems to help her audience feel the weight of responsibility in the fullness of sobriety, knowing why the king is there and what he is supposed to be doing.[472] He has likely left his

[472] He is One-belonging-to-God, a steward of חילך and דרכיך and מחקק, a leader of leaders in a community of kings and rulers, a host and advocate for the דין of all the downtrodden in the fullness of their suffering.

banquet hall in the care of under-stewards. Now in the courtroom, as elsewhere, his mouth does not belong to himself, but לאל, to God. Thus, the imperative pair of vv. 8-9 allow readers imaginatively to draw close: the lens is near, even as time slows down. When the king opens his mouth, what will come out will depend on what has gone in. Following right stewardship of his resources, his mouth will open for words of justice for the voiceless (Is 11:4; cf. 1 Sam 2:10; Is 25:4-8).[473] His mouth ought to proffer a sword of justice—for in this courtroom, by implication, are the pressing in of real adversaries who would take advantage of his silence and/or stupor. All is not (yet) well in his realm, and the speaker has helped to highlight not just the great need for justice but other threats: external (מחות מלכין) and internal (מחקק שכח and שנה דין).

In v. 8 the subtle shift in language offers an inclusio and perspective shift from all the sons of *affliction* to all the sons of those *passing through*…. Covenant readers may be invited to hear in this phrasing hints of God's certain promises to come to the aid of His people. Their afflictions are real, and even suffering readers have responsibilities related to stewarding even their afflictions well and being mindful of those less fortunate. But ultimately, those who trust in the LORD and return to Him are passing through affliction (Is 43:1-3). Even when the kings and authorities over them are unfaithful stewards of their roles, God's people should *remember* that the LORD will judge on behalf of his faithful ones (1 Sam 2:9). Thus come the last three words of 31:9, the false lead which points to the right interpretive path. This is the core of the poem and the answer of the enigmatic question the speaker posed in 31:2. Within the broader canonical framework, this is the LORD's heart and His expectation for all kings and leaders—Israelite or

[473] Mancuello González, 148-54, 169, 221.

otherwise: the cause of the afflicted and needy. The wise will chose to heed this wisdom in the fear of the LORD, which will lead to life and honor, not death and dishonor.

Table 27: Interpretive Process of vv. 8-9

Initial interpretation:	Open your mouth for a mute one // for the rights of all the sons of those passing away. Open your mouth to judge righteousness // and the cause of the afflicted and needy [?]
Possible corrected / Revised interpretation:	Open your mouth for a mute one // for the rights of all the sons of those passing through. Open your mouth. Judge with righteousness // and plead (the case) of the afflicted and needy.

Rereading 31:1-9 Summary

After the interpretive effort and weak implicature of the first reading, rereading 31:1-9 seems far less undulating and more evocatively fruitful. Readers may have been encouraged to see interpretive challenges largely overcome through the insights and context provided through the previous imaginative blending and evocations. It seems confirmed that the proper interpretive posture for 31:1-9 participates in the poetry and receives rich depth of meaning and even prophetic echoes of hope and warning.

Chapter 5

Summary of Findings and Conclusion

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to understand the poetic pedagogy of Proverbs 31:1-9 by way of its readerly interpretive process of an early canonical audience. Using a methodology adapted from the work of Suzanna Millar (as outlined in chapter 3), I exegeted Proverbs 31:1-9, attending to the readerly temporal interpretive process, word-by-word, phrase-by-phrase, line-by-line. I sought to engage deeply with its poetry as the journey of highly cooperative readers' navigating the text's many hermeneutic difficulties. In this process, I measured each of the six factors in the Millarian methodology (openness-closure, resonance-dissonance, and trust-scrutiny) at multiple points per verse. I traced the process in six consecutive sections of the text on a first reading and then, in a seventh section, reread the whole poem.

This qualitative process and its below graphical form should not be considered as a mechanism to understand the interpretive process between subjects (i.e., comparing Reader 1 to Reader 2). Instead, this qualitative process would allow contrasting the changes that occur in the interpretive process in a single reader as result of successive readings.

In general, the graphical data presented in the subsequent tables for my first reading are highly volatile. Qualitative data from the second reading are generally smoother. Determining the exact reasons for the observed graphical changes from reading 1 to reading 2 are beyond the scope of this project. However, further evaluation of potential interpretive changes using a repeated measures approach may yield interesting

results. This section will present and summarize findings with respect to each of the three tension pairs.

Openness and Closure

The interpretive journey through Proverbs 31:1-9 appeared highly evocative and imagistic. The sparseness of a narratival contextual details seemed to invite readers to seek context in Proverbs and the HB. Use of canonically rare words and canonical stock elements may have opened many opportunities for exploring and imaginatively blending canonical texts with 31:1-9. Sensory details were rare in the text itself, but imagined encyclopedic knowledge of ANE culture likely helped fill gaps. It was surprising to find multiple shared language connections in several evoked texts (e.g., 1 Sam 1-4; Ps 2), and the overlap and blending may have provided some closure but also opened up new avenues for exploration. At a grammatical and semantic level, the text also provided openness: brevity, ambiguity, metaphor, rare forms or morphology, etc. Much of the interpretive openness on the first pass was at the level of trying to discern meaning on a semantic or grammatical level. Much more closure was obtained in this respect on the rereading.

Assessments of openness and closure tabulated by time (tracked by verse progression) in the first reading are in Figure 7. Similar assessments for the rereading are presented in Figure 8. The journey through the factors of openness and closure seemed highly variable. There seemed to be grammatical, semantic, morphological, genre, and logical surprises and puzzles in nearly every segment. While the speaker eventually showed propensity for tight patterning and repetition, which may have allowed readers to feel closure, this did not begin to emerge until v. 5—and still then, the surprises kept

coming. Openness likely trended high throughout. Even after readers may have discerned patterns, the highly evocative and imaginative interpretive process which invited closure to open questions also opened new, more particularized questions. The rereading seemed to have a different kind of openness (moral and logical—even covenantal) but was much less tumultuous. Eventually, closure seemed high and openness moderately low.

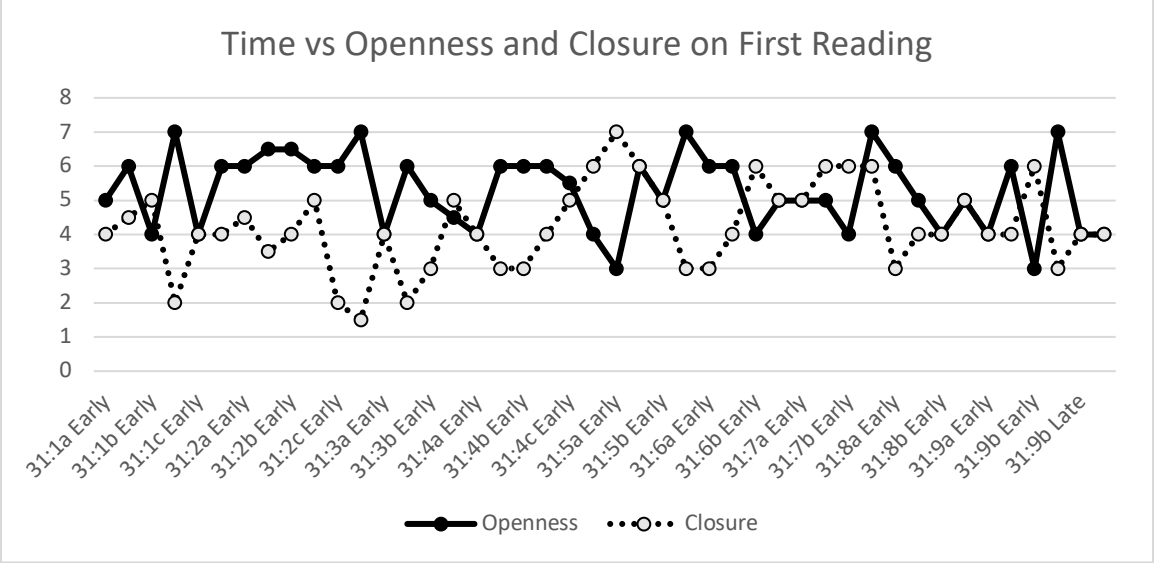

Figure 7: Time vs Openness and Closure on First Reading

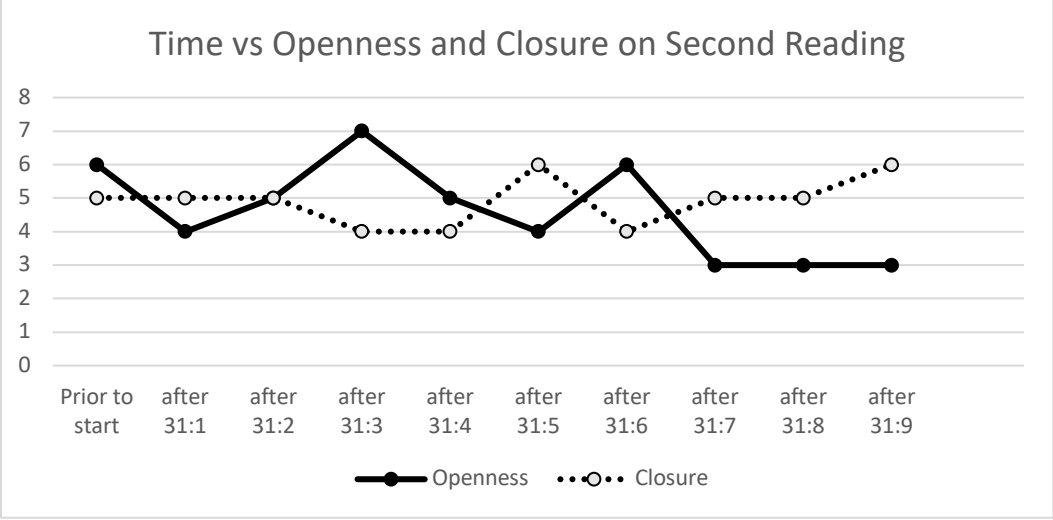

Figure 8: Time vs Openness and Closure on Second Reading

Resonance and Dissonance

Resonance and dissonance sought to measure the readers' sense of what was fitting and what was jarring, respectively, to the text's concerns, the literary presentation of characters and reality, and the immediate and broader literary context. Figure 9 reflects resonance and dissonance assessments in the first reading of the text. Figure 10 presents the second reading's assessments for these factors. The first pass through the text seemed a roller-coaster, particularly through 31:1-4. After v. 5, readerly expectations of speaker's concerns and patterns may have given help in the interpretive process. These factors were used particularly to gauge where the speaker was directing her implied audience's attention and hermeneutic efforts. The second reading showed markedly much more stable patterns: with high/moderately high resonance and moderately low/low dissonance.

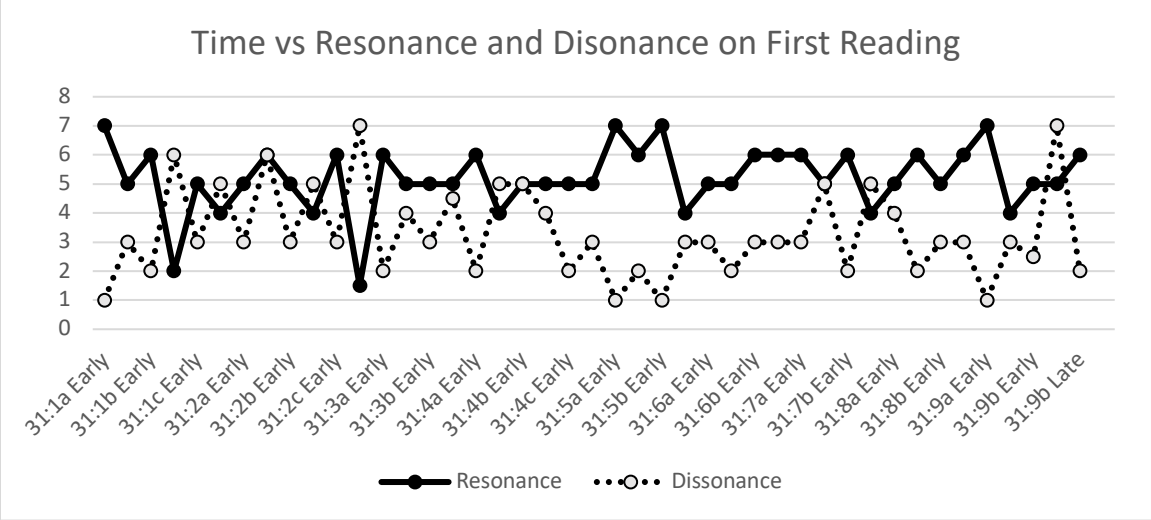

Figure 9: Resonance and Dissonance on First Reading

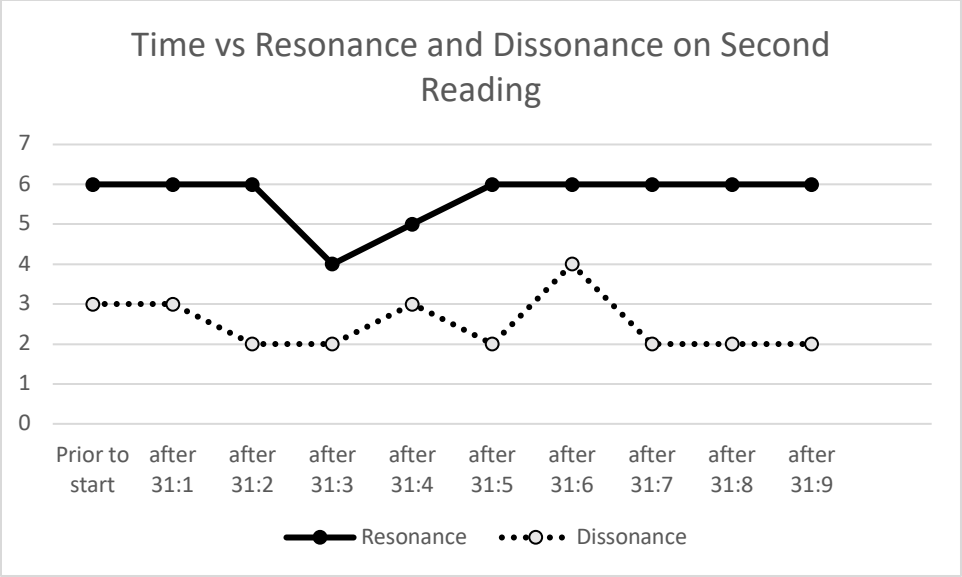

Figure 10: Resonance and Dissonance on Second Reading

Trust and Scrutiny.

Readerly trust was measured as a composite assessment of two aspects: trust in the reader's own interpretive abilities and trust in the speaker/poet-narrator. Occasionally, when the text brought God in frame, the assessment also included trust in God. Scrutiny measured readerly attentiveness to the hermeneutic task. Figure 11 presents trust and scrutiny assessments in the first reading of the text. Figure 12 presents the second reading's assessments of these factors.

The interpretive journey with respect to trust and scrutiny seemed also highly volitive. Interpretation likely required a high level of reader engagement with its many puzzles and surprises. On the first reading, trust and scrutiny appeared to be often mirrored. On the second reading, trust seemed fairly stable at high or moderately high. Scrutiny started high, rose, had a few variations, but ended moderate.

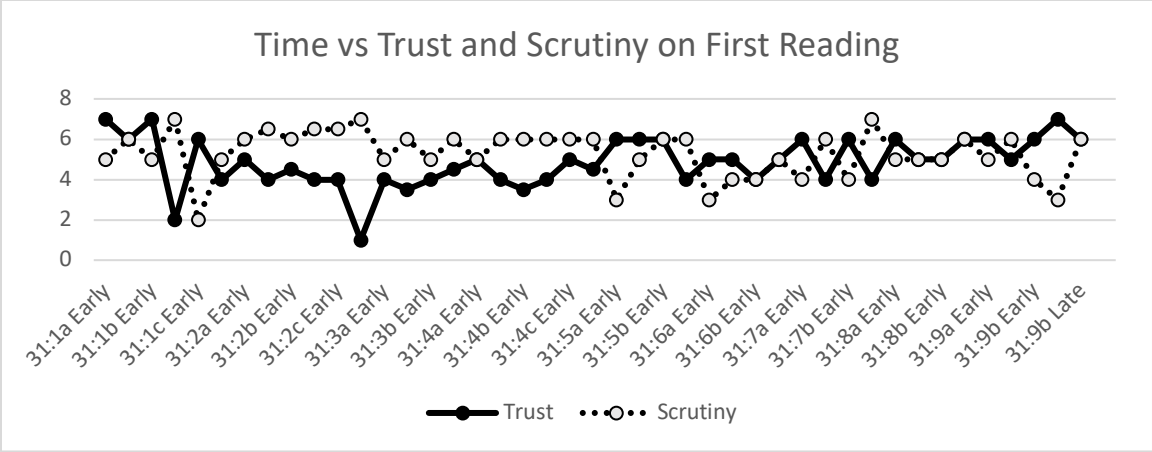

Figure 11: Time vs Trust and Scrutiny on First Reading

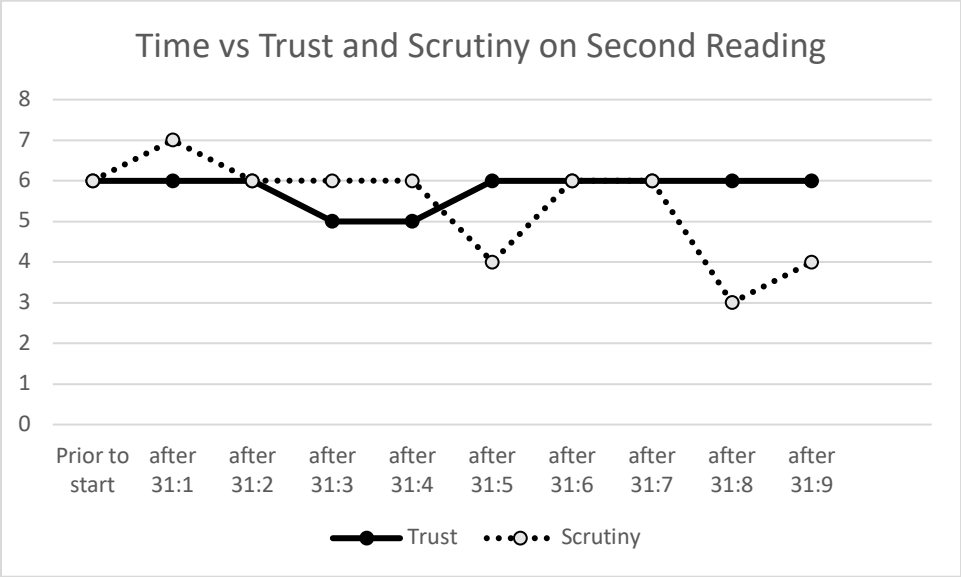

Figure 12: Time vs Trust and Scrutiny on Second Reading

Discussion of Findings

In this section, the selected literature and my research will interact in order to identify the study's findings. In Chapter 2, Michael V. Fox's assessment of the pedagogy of 31:1-9 was seen as expressive of the text apart from its many interpretive challenges:

> Lemuel's mother presses him to avoid (or stop) dissipating his strength on wine and women (vv 3-5). Instead, he should give wine to the poor to ease their pain (vv 6-7). As king, he must ensure justice for the poor (vv 8-9).

> More precisely, she urges him to avoid dissipation *so that* he can rule justly. This recalls the way that Prov 1:3 does not demand the virtues of righteousness, justice, and rectitude, but instead *promises* them as a reward for wisdom. … Justice was the duty of the king throughout the ancient Near East.[474]

As with mainstream interpretive methods, Fox's assessment of the text's educative impact reflects the assumption that interpretive difficulties are *not* formative or intentionally posed by the text's implied composer. That is, despite detailed exegetical discussion, Fox's analysis presumes that the readerly interpretive process does not contribute meaningfully to the text's pedagogy.

As noted above, James Crenshaw's rhetorical analysis attends more closely to the literary rhetorical methods, but assesses its pedagogy similar to Fox: as targeting the son-king Lemuel and on which the readerly interpretive process has little impact. "The tone of the advice to Lemuel suggests that his mother wished to instill in him a noble concept of kingship so that responsibility rather than privilege would control his daily conduct."[475] Crenshaw briefly hints of the text's wider audience and set the text within the larger context of ANE Instruction genre, yet he does not consider the teaching from the perspective of the canonical audience.[476] Crenshaw considers the text's rhetoric through its genre features, not the communicative impact of those features on its readership.

As noted above, Wilma Mancuello González's evaluation of 31:1-9 attends most closely to its poetry and, in many ways, laid the foundation for this study by arguing for

---

[474] Fox, *Proverbs 10-31,* 888.

[475] Crenshaw, "A Mother's Instruction," 19.

[476] Ibid.

the text's Hebraic provenance and, by implication, a canonical audience. Mancuello González discerns the main teaching of 31:1-9 within Proverbs' context as right stewardship of justice for the needy and holding up for the exilic community the ideal of liberating these persons from their suffering.[477] She recognizes the intentional ambiguity of the text as prophetic משא with possible messianic evocations.[478] While more attentive to reader engagement and development ("La intención formative"), Mancuello González only tangentially considers the pedagogical force of the readerly interpretive process.

In contrast to Fox's, Crenshaw's, and Mancuello González's treatment, my assessment of the pedagogy of 31:1-9 aimed to test the hypothesis that the interpretive journey of 31:1-9 contributes in a meaningful way to its instruction for an imagined original canonical audience. The findings of my study support this hypothesis. In fact, the findings suggest a pedagogy more complex and holistic that goes beyond the text's locution to reinforce themes of hope and warning resonant with prophetic משא in the HB.

Conclusion

Overall, the study reveals the readerly interpretive journey to play a significant role in the poetic pedagogy of Proverbs 31:1-9. The interpretive journey seemed marked by high activity and oscillations on the openness-closure, resonance-dissonance, and trust-scrutiny tensions. The interpretive challenges these oscillations represent propelled readers deep into the textual data and its poetic features. Through imaginative blending

---

[477] Mancuello González, 252-53. "De hecho, posteriormente, Pr 31,1-9 al formar parte del libro que contiene el marco 1-9 y 31,10-31 puede decirse que este fragment de sadiduría real had sido democratizado; lo que vale para el rey, vale para tods. En otras palabras, la práctica de la justiciar enseñada por la madre se espera todos, especialmento miembros de la aristocracia."

[478] Mancuello González, 253.

and seeking of context with which to make sense of the textual data, canonical readers seem to have been brought repeated to highly imagistic and covenantally important evocations of Proverbs literary whole and the biblical meta-narrative. The high resonance of these evocations likely allows readers not only to make good sense of the locution of 31:1-9 but also of its illocution as a communicative act by Proverbs' final composer to them, the canonical audience of God's covenant people.

This covenantal illocutionary meaning was found to be complex and imagistic, showing high resonance with canonical prophetic and sapiential literature and suggesting a pedagogy of desired change for the holistic person within the framework of God's covenant and mission. The seemingly deliberate ambiguity of, e.g., משא and בר, and of the two seeming grammatical false leads in vv. 2 and 9 reinforce the sense that, in view of RT, Proverbs' poet-narrator is going beyond *telling* to *showing.* This may include *showing* the canonical audience God's often quiet but certain presence in the private and public spaces God has sovereignly set His people to inhabit. Readers' ears and eyes need to learn to be attentive to God's presence—Proverbs' context may suggest that this is part of acquiring wisdom (1:2-7).

Analyzing the readerly interpretive process illumined the illocutionary pedagogical thrust of 31:1-9, certainly, to include that which Fox and Crenshaw identify: a warning for kings against loose living and an admonishment toward judicial concern for the poor. As Fox also noted, the text's warning and the admonition are tightly linked: kingly avoidance of the bad is "*so that*" he can be faithful in the good.[479] However, the study's findings demonstrate the text's pedagogy desires far more change in the canonical

[479] Fox, *Proverbs 10-31,* 887-88.

audience than these straightforward assessments of morality and social justice, as Mancuello González' analysis hinted. The teaching, when considered from the vantage of the readerly interpretive process, seems to lift readerly eyes to the LORD's character and His covenant. Its many hermeneutic difficulties seem to propel reader-learners deep into Proverbs and into canonical texts in search of interpretive context. In the midst of complexity and such searching, 31:1-9 reminds readerly hearts and minds of their consecration and then images what faithful (and unfaithful) consecrated living looks like—as perhaps best illustrated in the Hannah-Samuel narrative. As Hannah and Samuel's foils, Eli-Hophni-Phineas illustrate, 31:1-9 simultaneously seems to issue severe warning to those persisting in dishonoring the LORD. It thus seems a holistic call to repentance and to trust, the kind of trust that would wait well for God's deliverance by stewarding their resources to that reflects God's character.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study focused on pedagogy of the poetry of Proverbs 31:1-9. As with any study, there are limitations as to how extensive the focus can be. Therefore, pursuit of the following areas of study could be highly valuable for the better understanding of Proverbs 31:1-9: (1) intertextuality of 31:1-9 and texts found to have multiple points of shared language and thematic elements (Hannah-Samuel, Samson, Evil-Merodach-Jehoiachin, Deborah-Jael-Sisera, etc.); (2) further studies of the pedagogical impact of deviations and defamiliarization from genre expectations in Proverbs and/or ANE literature; and (3) application of educational theory and developmental psychology (e.g., developmental domains) to further illumine the readerly process and the desired change implied by the text.

Bibliography

Albrecht, Jason E., and Edward J. O'Brien. "Updating a Mental Model: Maintaining Both Local and Global Coherence." *Journal of Experimental Psychology. Learning, Memory & Cognition* 19, no. 5 (September 1993): 1061-70.

Alonso Schöckel, Luis. *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics.* Translated by Adrian Graffy. Subsidia biblica 11. Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2000.

Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Poetry.* New York: Basic Books, 1985.

———. *The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes: A Translation with Commentary.* New York: W. W. Norton, 2010.

Apple, Raymond. "The Two Wise Women of Proverbs 31." *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (2011): 175-180.

Aucker, W. Brian. "A Prophet in King's Clothes: Kingly and Divine Re-Presentation in 2 Kings 4 and 5." in *Reflection and Refraction: Studies in Biblical Historiography in Honour of A. Graeme Auld,* edited by Robert Rezetko, Timothy H. Lim, and W. Brian Aucker, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 113, 1-26. Boston: Brill, 2007.

Azar, Miriam, Aliza Pahmer, and Joshua Waxman. "A Thesaurus for Biblical Hebrew." In *Proceedings of 1st Workshop on Language Technologies for Historical and Ancient Languages,* edited by Rachele Sprugnoli and Marco Passarotti, 68-73. Marseille, France: European Language Resources Association, 2020.

Ben Zvi, Ehud. *Micah.* The Forms of the Old Testament Literature XXIB. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000.

Berlin, Adele. *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism.* Rev. ed. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008.

———. "Parallelism." In *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary,* vol. 5, edited by D. N. Freedman, 154–162. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Bland, Dave. "Conversation as a Resource for Character Formation in Proverbs." In *And the Word Became Flesh: Studies in History, Communication, and Scripture in Memory of Michael W. Casey,* edited by Thomas H. Olbricht and David Fleer, 143-59. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Papers, 2009.

———. *Proverbs and the Formation of Character.* Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015.

Block, Daniel I. "Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel." In *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World,* edited by Ken M. Campbell, 33-102. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003.

Bompiani, Brian. “Style Switching in the Jacob and Laban Narratives.” *Hebrew Studies* 55 (2014): 43-57.

———. “Style Switching in the Speech of the Transjordanians.” *Hebrew Studies* 57 (2016): 51-71.

Braasch, Jason, Jean-François Rouet, Nicholas Vibert, and M. Britt. “Readers’ Use of Source Information in Text Comprehension.” *Memory and Cognition* 40, no. 3 (2012): 450-65.

Brown, William P. “The Didactic Power of Metaphor in the Aphoristic Sayings of Proverbs.” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 29, no. 2 (December 2004): 133-54.

———. “The Pedagogy of Proverbs 10:1-31:9.” In *Character and Scripture: Moral Formation, Community, and Biblical Interpretation,* edited by William P. Brown, 150-82. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002.

———. *Wisdom’s Wonder: Character, Creation, and Crisis in the Bible’s Wisdom Literature.* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2014.

Camp, Claudia V. *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs.* Sheffield, UK: Almond/Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Press, 1985.

Childs, Brevard S. *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture.* Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 2011.

Clements, Ronald E. “A Royal Privilege: Dining in the Presence of the Great King (2 Kings 25.27-30).” In *Reflection and Refraction: Studies in Biblical Historiography in Honour of A. Graeme Auld,* edited by Robert Rezetko, Timothy H. Lim, and W. Brian Aucker, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 113, 49-66. Boston: Brill, 2007.

Clifford, Richard J. “Proverbs 1-9 as Instruction for a Young Man and for ‘Everyman.’” In *“When the Morning Stars Sang”: Essays in Honor of Choon Leong Seow on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday,* edited by Scott C. Jones and Christine Roy Yoder, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 500, 129-42. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018.

———. *Proverbs: A Commentary.* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999.

Collins, C. John. “Always Alleluia: Reclaiming the True Purpose of the Psalms in the Old Testament Context.” In *Forgotten Songs: Reclaiming the Psalms for Christian Worship,* edited by C. Richard Wells and Ray Van Neste, 17-34. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2012.

———. “Proverbs and the Levitical System.” *Presbyterion* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 9-34.

———. *Reading Genesis Well: Navigating History, Poetry, Science, and Truth in Genesis 1-11.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018.

Collins, John J. “Wisdom and Torah.” In *Pedagogy in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity,* edited by Karina Martin Hogan, Matthew Goff, and Emma Wasserman, Early Judaism and Its Literature 41, 59-80. Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2017.

Cornelii a Lapide, Cornelio. *Commentarius in Salomonis proverbia.* Venice, Italy: Apud Hieronymum Albriccium, 1702.

Crenshaw, James L. “Clanging Symbols.” In *Justice and the Holy: Essays in Honor of Walter Harrelson,* edited by Douglas A. Knight and Peter J. Paris, Scholars Press Homage Series, 51-64. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989.

———. “A Mother’s Instruction to Her Son (Proverbs 31:1-9).” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 15, no. 4 (Winter 1988): 9-22.

Curtis, Edward M. “Learning Truth from the Sages.” *Christian Education Journal,* ser. 3, 2, no. 1 (2005): 113-128.

Dallaire, Hélène M. *The Syntax of Biblical Hebrew and Amarna Canaanite Prose.* Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic 9. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014.

Deist, Ferdinand. “Prov. 31:1. A Case of Constant Mistranslation.” *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 6 (1978): 1-3.

Delitzsch, Franz. *Das Salomonische Spruchbuch.* Vol. 3 of *Biblischer Commentar über die poetischen Bücher des Alten Testaments*. Leipzig: Dörffling und Franke, 1873.

———. *Biblical Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon.* 2 vols. Translated by M.G. Easton. Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1950.

Dell, Katharine J. “Response on Methodological Matters Regarding Wisdom Influence and on the Relationship between Wisdom and Prophecy.” In *Riddles and Revelations: Explorations into the Relationship between Wisdom and Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible,* edited by Mark J. Boda, Russell L. Meek, and William R. Osborne, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 634, 233-245. London: T&T Clark, 2018.

Dell, Katharine, and Will Kynes, eds. *Reading Proverbs Intertextually.* Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 629. 2019. Reprint, New York: T&T Clark, 2020.

Dobbs-Allsopp, F. W. *On Biblical Poetry.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Dunham, Kyle C. "Structure and Theology in Proverbs: Its Function as an Educational Program for Novice Leaders in Ancient Israel." *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 29, no. 3 (2019): 361-88.

Fairbairn, Patrick. *The Interpretation of Prophecy.* 1865, 1964. Reprint, Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1993.

Fauconnier, Gilles, and Mark Turner. "Conceptual Integration Networks." *Cognitive Science* 22, no. 2 (June 1998): 133-87.

Fischer, Irmtraud. *Gotteslehrerinnen: Weise Frauen und Frau Weisheit im Alten Testament*. Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 2006.

Fokkelman, J. P. *Vow and Desire (1 Sam. 1-12).* Vol. 4 of *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analyses.* Studia Semitica Neerlandica. Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1993.

Forti, Tova. "Animal Images in the Didactic Rhetoric of the Book of Proverbs." *Biblica* 77 (1996): 48-63.

Fox, Michael V. "The Pedagogy of Proverbs 2." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113, no. 2 (1994): 233-43.

————. *Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary.* Anchor Yale Bible 18A. 2000. Reprint, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010.

————. *Proverbs 10-31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary.* Anchor Yale Bible 18B. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009.

————. "The Rhetoric of Disjointed Proverbs." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 29, no. 2 (December 2004): 165-77.

García Bachmann, Mercedes L. "A Foolish King, Women, and Wine: A Dangerous Cocktail from Lemuel's Mother." In *The Bible and Feminism: Remapping the Field,* edited by Yvonne Sherwood and Anna Fisk, 315-27. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017.

————. "La sed de vino y de poder: 'No sea que beban… y perviertan el derecho de todos/as los/as afligidos/as' (Prov 31:5)." *Revista Caminhos – Revista de Ciências da Religião* 14, no. 1 (January/June 2016): 82-96.

Gemser, Berend. *Sprüche Salomos.* Handbuch zum alten Testament 16. Tübingen, Germany: J. C. B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1963.

Gilbert, Maurice. "La pedagogia dei saggi nell'antico Israele." *La Civiltà Cattolica* 155, no. 3701 (September 4, 2004): 345-58.

Giora, Rachel. *On Our Mind: Salience, Context, and Figurative Language.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Gordon, Cyrus H. "Rabbinic Exegesis in the Vulgate of Proverbs." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 49, no. 4 (1930): 384-416.

Graves, Michael. "The Public Reading of Scripture in Early Judaism." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 3 (September 2007): 467-87.

Green, Gene L. "Lexical Pragmatics and Biblical Interpretation." *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 4 (December 2007): 799-812.

———. "Relevance Theory and Theological Interpretation: Thoughts on Metarepresentation," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 4, no. 1 (2010): 75-90.

Greenstein, Edward. "How Does Parallelism Mean?" In *A Sense of Text: The Art of Language in the Study of Biblical Literature,* Jewish Quarterly Review Supplement, 41-70. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1982.

Hamilton, Mark W. "Riddles and Parables, Traditions and Texts: Ezekielian Perspective on Israelite Wisdom Traditions." In *Was There a Wisdom Tradition?": New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies,* edited by Mark R. Sneed, Ancient Israel and Its Literature 23, 241-62. Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015.

Harmon, William. *A Handbook to Literature.* 12th ed. Boston: Longman, 2012.

Hartwell, Jeanette May. "Wisdom, Strange or Somewhere in Between: In Search of a Real Woman in the Book of Proverbs." PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2017. University of Birmingham Institutional Research Archive. https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/7593/.

Hatton, Peter T. H. *Contradiction in the Book of Proverbs: The Deep Waters of Counsel.* Society for Old Testament Study Monographs. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2008.

Healey, John F., trans. "The Targum of Proverbs." In *Targums of Job, Proverbs, and Qohelet*, The Aramaic Bible 15, 1-63. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991.

Heim, Knut. *Poetic Imagination in Proverbs: Variant Repetitions and the Nature of Poetry.* Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement 4. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013.

Hitzig, Ferdinand. "Das Königreich Massa. Zur Methode der Auslegung des Alten Testaments." *Theologische Jahrbücher in Verbindung mit mehrenen Gelehrten* 3 (Tübingen 1844): 269-305.

Hoffman, Paul, and Andres Tamm. "Barking up the Right Tree: Univariate and Multivariate fMRI Analyses of Homonym Comprehension." *NeuroImage* 219 (October 1, 2020). DOI:10.1016/j.neuroimage.2020.117050.

Hubbard, David. *Proverbs.* Mastering the Old Testament 15A. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989.

Hurowitz, Victor. "The Seventh Pillar—Reconsidering the Literary Structure and Unity of Proverbs 31." *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 113, no. 2 (2001): 209-18.

Jirku, Anton. "Das n. pr. Lemu'el (Prov 31:1) und der Gott Lim." *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 66, no. 1-2 (1954): 151.

Jobes, Karen. "Relevance Theory and the Translation of Scripture." *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 4 (December 2007): 773-97.

Jones, Scott C. "Wisdom's Pedagogy: A Comparison of Proverbs VII and 4Q174." *Vetus Testamentum* 53, no. 1 (2003): 65-80.

Kaiser, Walter C., Jr. *Toward an Old Testament Theology.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991.

Keefer, Arthur Jan. *Proverbs 1-9 as an Introduction to the Book of Proverbs.* Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 701. London: T&T Clark, 2020.

Kidner, Derek. *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary.* Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 17. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008.

Kil, Yehudah. "Chapters 17-31." In *The Bible: משלי Proverbs with the Jerusalem Commentary,* translated by Albert Milton Kanter and Yocheved Engelberg Cohen, 162-422. Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Book, 2014.

Kimilike, Peter Lechion. "Poverty Context in Proverbs 31:1-9: A Ben Tanzanian Analysis for Transformational Leadership Training." *Old Testament Essays* 31, no. 1 (2018): 135-63.

Kitchen, Kenneth A. "Proverbs and Wisdom Books of the Ancient Near East: The Factual History of a Literary Form." *Tyndale Bulletin* 28, no. 1 (1977): 69-114.

Kravitz, Leonard S., and Kerry M. Olitzky. *Mishlei: A Modern Commentary on Proverbs.* New York: UAHC Press, 2002.

Kugel, James L. "Ancient Israelite Pedagogy and Its Survival in Second Temple Interpretations of Scripture." In *Pedagogy in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity,* edited by Karina Martin Hogan, Matthew Goff, and Emma Wasserman, 15-58. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017.

Lavoie, Jean-Jacques. “Vin et bière en Proverbes 31,4-7.” *Studies in Religion* 44, no. 1 (2015): 33-54.

Lehman, Stephen, and Gregory Schraw. “Effects of Coherence and Relevance on Shallow and Deep Text Processing.” *Journal of Educational Psychology* 94, no. 4 (December 2002): 738-51.

Leithart, Peter J. *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture.* Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009.

Leonard, Jeffrey M. “Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions: Psalm 78 as a Test Case.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127, no. 2 (2008): 241-65.

Lichtheim, Miriam. *The Old and Middle Kingdoms.* Vol. 1 of *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006.

Lichtenstein, Murray H. “Chiasm and Symmetry in Proverbs 31.” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (April 1982): 202-11.

Lipiński, Edward. “Les voyantes des rois en Prov 31:3.” *Vetus Testamentum* 23, no. 2 (April 1973): 246.

Longman, Tremper, III. *Proverbs.* Baker Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006.

Lyons, Michael A. “Local Incoherence, Global Coherence? Allusion and the Readability of Ancient Israelite Literature.” *Old Testament Essays* 34, no. 1 (May 2021): 141-64.

Mancuello González, Wilma. *La lección de una madre hebrea: Exégesis de Pr 31,1-9.* Suplementos Revista Bíblica 4. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Asociación Bíblica Argentina, 2018.

Marsman, Hennie J. *Women in Ugarit and Israel: Their Social and Religious Position in the Context of the Ancient Near East.* Oudtestamentische Studiën / Old Testament Studies 49. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2003.

Mashal, N., and Miriam Faust. “The Effects of Metaphoricity and Presentation Style on Brain Activation during Text Comprehension.” *Metaphor & Symbol* 25, no. 1 (2010): 19-33.

McKane, William. *Proverbs: A New Approach.* Old Testament Library. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1970.

McLaughlin, John L. “Wisdom from the Wise: Pedagogical Principles from Proverbs.” In *Religions and Education in Antiquity: Studies in Honour of Michel Desjardins,* edited by Alex Damm, 29-54. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2019.

Meadowcroft, Tim. “Relevance as a Mediating Category in the Reading of Biblical Texts: Venturing beyond the Hermeneutical Circle.” *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 4 (December 2002): 611-27.

Meek, Russell L. “Intertextuality, Inner-Biblical Exegesis, and Inner-Biblical Allusion: The Ethics of a Methodology.” *Biblica* 95, no. 2 (2014): 280-91.

————. “Prophet and Sage in Dialogue: History and Methodology.” In *Riddles and Revelations: Explorations into the Relationship between Wisdom and Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible,* edited by Mark J. Boda, Russell L. Meek, and William R. Osborne, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 634, 3-18. London: T&T Clark, 2018.

Meinhold, Arndt. *Sprüche Kapitel 16-31.* Vol. 2 of *Die Sprüche.* Zürcher Bibelkommentare AT 16.2. Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1991.

Miller, Cynthia L. “Ellipsis Involving Negation in Biblical Poetry.” In *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday,* edited by Ronald L. Troxel, Kelvin G. Friebel, and Dennis Robert Magary, 37-52. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005.

————. “A Linguistic Approach to Ellipsis in Biblical Poetry (Or, What to Do When Exegesis of What Is There Depends on What Isn’t).” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 13, no. 2 (2003): 251-70.

————. “The Relation of Coordination to Verb Gapping in Biblical Poetry.” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 32, no. 1 (2007): 41-60.

Millar, Suzanna R. “Dehumanisation as Derision or Delight?: Countering Class-Prejudice and Species-Prejudice in Job.” *Biblical Interpretation*. Published ahead of print October 9, 2020. https://doi.org/10.1163/15685152-00284P21.

————. “The Ecology of Death in the Book of Job.” *Biblical Interpretation.* Published ahead of print April 7, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1163/15685152-20211629.

————. *Genre and Openness in Proverbs 10:1-22:16.* Ancient Israel and Its Literature 39. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2020.

————. “History and Wisdom Literature.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Wisdom and the* Bible, edited by Will Kynes, 441-58. New York, Oxford University Press, 2021.

————. “Interpretive Crossroads in Parallel Lines: Charting the Complexity of Antithetical Parallelism in Proverbs 10-22.” *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel,* forthcoming.

———. “The Multiple Genres of Wisdom.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Wisdom Literature,* edited by Katharine J. Dell, Suzanna R. Millar, and Arthur Keefer. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming.

———. “Openness, Closure, and Transformation in Proverb Translation.” *The Bible Translator* 71, no. 1 (Apr 2020): 79-100.

———. “Reading Esther with Proverbs: Complexifying Character, Theme, and Ideology.” [Or “Esther in Dialogue with the Proverbs.”] In *Reading Esther Intertextually,* edited by David G. Firth and Brittany N. Melton, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies. New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, forthcoming [2022].

———. “When a Straight Road Becomes a Garden Path: The ‘False Lead’ as a Pedagogical Strategy in the Book of Proverbs.” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 43, no. 1 (2018): 67-82.

Moskowitz, Racheli, Moriyah Schick, and Joshua Waxman. “*Leitwort* Detection, Quantification and Discernment.” In *Atti del IX Convegno Annuale AIUCD. La svolta inevitabile: sfide e prospettive per l’Informatica Umanistica,* edited by Cristina Marras, Marco Passarotti, Greta Franzini, and Eleonora Litta, 171-177. Milan, Italy: Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 2020.

Mouser, William E. “Filling in the Blank: Asymmetrical Antithetical Parallelism.” In *Learning from the Sages: Selected Studies of the Book of Proverbs,* edited by Roy B. Zuck, 137-50. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995.

Mroczek, Eva. *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Murphy, Roland E. *Proverbs.* Word Biblical Commentary 22. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998.

Newsom, Carol A. *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

———. “Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1-9.” In *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel,* edited by Peggy L. Day, 142-60. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989.

Niccacci, Alviero. “The Biblical Hebrew Verbal System in Poetry.” In *Biblical Hebrew in Its Northwest Semitic Setting: Typological and Historical Perspectives,* edited by Steven E. Fassberg and Avi Hurvitz, 247-68. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006.

Noonan, Benjamin J. *Advances in the Study of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic: New Insights for Reading the Old Testament.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020.

Nzimande, Makhosazana Keith. "Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation in Post-Apartheid South Africa: the גבירה in the Hebrew Bible in the Light of Queen Jezebel and the Queen Mother of Lemuel." PhD diss., Texas Christian University, 2005.

O'Dowd, Ryan. "A Prophet in the Sage's House?: Origins of the Feminine Metaphors in Proverbs." In *Riddles and Revelations: Explorations into the Relationship between Wisdom and Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible,* edited by Mark J. Boda, Russell L. Meek, and William R. Osborne, 169-81. London: T&T Clark, 2018.

Okyere, Kojo. "The Pedagogy of Sexual Morality in Proverbs Five." *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 32, no. 2 (2013): 107-19.

Otzen, Benedikt. "אבד." In *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, translated by John T. Willis, 12-23. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans' Publishing, 1974.

Paul, Shalom M. "Unrecognized Biblical Legal Idioms in the Light of Comparative Akkadian Expressions." *Revue biblique* 86, no. 2 (April 1979): 231-39.

Perdue, Leo G. *Proverbs.* Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. 2000. Reprint, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012.

Petrany, Catherine. "Fathers, Mothers, Sons, and Silence: Rhetorical Reconfiguration in Proverbs." *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 50, no. 3 (2020): 154-160.

Pilch, John J. *The Cultural Life Setting of the Proverbs.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016.

Pilkington, Adrian. *Poetic Effects: A Relevance Theory Perspective.* Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing, 2000.

Pleins, J. David. "Poverty in the Social World of the Wise." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 37 (1987): 61-78.

Revell, E. J. *The Designation of the Individual: Expressive Usage in Biblical Narrative.* Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 14. Kampen, Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1996.

————. *The Pausal System: Divisions in the Hebrew Biblical Text as Marked by Voweling and Stress Position.* Edited by Raymond de Hoop and Paul Sanders. Pericope: Scripture as Written and Read in Antiquity 10. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2015.

Rey, Jean-Sébastien. "'Dislocated Negations': Negative אל Followed by a Non-verbal Constituent in Biblical, Ben Sira and Qumran Hebrew." In *Hebrew of the Late Second Temple Period: Proceedings of a Sixth International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira,* edited by Elbert J. C. Tigchelaar and Pierre van Hecke, Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 114, 160-74. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2015.

Reyburn, William D., and Euan McG. Fry. *A Handbook on Proverbs.* UBS Handbook Series. New York: United Bible Societies, 2000.

Ribeiro, Anna Christina. "Relevance Theory and Poetic Effects." *Philosophy and Literature* 37, no. 1 (April 2013): 102-117.

Ryken, Leland. *A Complete Handbook of Literary Forms in the Bible.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014.

———. *How to Read the Bible as Literature.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984.

———. *Sweeter Than Honey, Richer Than Gold: A Guided Study of Biblical Poetry.* Wooster, OH: Weaver Book, 2015.

———. *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987.

Ryken, Leland, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery.* Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998.

Saebø, Magne. *Sprüche.* Das Alte Testament Deutsch 16,1. Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012.

Schipper, Bernd U. *Proverbs 1-15: A Commentary on the Book of Proverbs 1:1-15:33.* Translated by Stephen Germany. Hermeneia Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2019.

———. "'Teach Them Diligently to Your Son!'": The Book of Proverbs and Deuteronomy." In *Reading Proverbs Intertextually,* edited by Katharine J. Dell and Will Kynes, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 629, 21-34. New York: T&T Clark: 2019.

Shepherd, Tom. "'Give the Poor Wretch a Drink,' Alcohol, Poverty, and Justice in Proverbs 31:1-9." In *Creation, Life and Hope: Essays in Honor of Jacques B. Doukhan,* edited by Jiří Moskala, 139-46. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 2000.

Shklovsky, Viktor. "Art, as Device." Translated by Alexandra Berlina. *Poetics Today* 36, no. 3 (September 2015): 151-74.

Smith, Kevin G. “Relevance Theory.” In *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Languages and Linguistics,* vol. 3, edited by Geoffrey Khan, 364-67. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2013.

Sneed, Mark R. “‘Grasping after the Wind’: The Elusive Attempt to Define and Delimit Wisdom.” In *Was There a Wisdom Tradition?:” New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies,* edited by Mark R. Sneed, Ancient Israel and Its Literature 23, 39-68. Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015.

————. “Inspired Sages: Massa’ and the Confluence of Wisdom and Prophecy.” In *Scribes as Sages and Prophets: Scribal Traditions in Biblical Wisdom Literature and in the Book of the Twelve,* edited by Jutta Krispenz, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 496, 15-32. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2021.

Sperber, Dan, and Deirdre Wilson. “Précis of *Relevance: Communication and Cognition.*” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 10 (1987): 697-754.

————. *Relevance: Communication and Cognition.* 2nd ed. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1995.

Sternberg, Meir. *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985.

Stewart, Anne W. *Poetic Ethics in Proverbs: Wisdom Literature and the Shaping of the Moral Self.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

————. “Poetry as Pedagogy in Proverbs 5.” In *Biblical Poetry and the Art of Close Reading,* edited by J. Blake Couey and Elaine T. James, 80-92. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

————. “Teaching Complex Ethical Thinking with Proverbs.” In *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible and Ethics,* edited by C. L. Crouch, 241-56. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

————. “Wisdom’s Imagination: Moral Reasoning and the Book of Proverbs.” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 40, no. 3 (March 2016): 351-72.

Strømsø, Helge I. “Multiple Models of Multiple-Text Comprehension: A Commentary.” *Educational Psychologist* 52, no. 3 (June-September 2017): 216-224.

Tov, Emanuel. *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible.* 2nd ed. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001.

Toy, Crawford H. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs.* New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1908.

Traxler, Matthew J. *Introduction to Psycholinguistics: Understanding Language Science.* Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

Tsumura, David Toshio. “Vertical Grammar of Parallelism in Hebrew Poetry. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 1 (2009): 167-81.

———. “The Vetitive Particle אי and the Poetic Structure of Proverb 31:4.” *Annual of the Japanese Biblical Institute* 4 (1978): 23-31.

Utzschneider, Helmut. “Tabernacle.” In *The Book of Exodus: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation,* edited by Thomas Dozeman, Craig A. Evans, and Joel N. Lahr, Vetus Testamentum Supplements 164, 267-301. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2014.

Van Leeuwen, Raymond C. “The Book of Proverbs: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections.” In *Introduction to Wisdom Literature; Proverbs; Ecclesiastes; Song of Songs; Book of Wisdom; Sirach,* edited by Leander E. Keck, 17-264. Vol. 5 of *The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997.

Vayntrub, Jacqueline. *Beyond Orality: Biblical Poetry on its Own Terms.* The Ancient Word 2. New York: Routledge, 2019.

———. “The Book of Proverbs and the Idea of Ancient Israelite Education.” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 128, no. 1 (2016): 96-114.

Vendler, Helen. “W. B. Yeats Thinking: Thinking in Images, Thinking in Assertions.” In *Poets Thinking: Pope, Whitman, Dickinson, Yeats,* 92-120. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.

von Rad, Gerhard. *Wisdom in Israel.* Translated by James D. Martin. New York: Abingdon Press, 1972.

Waltke, Bruce K. *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31.* The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005.

Watson, Wilfred G. E. *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques.* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 26. Sheffield, UK: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Press, 1986.

———. “A Note on Staircase Parallelism.” *Vetus Testamentum* 33, no. 4 (Oct 1983): 510-512.

Wechsler, Michael G. “The Arabic Translation and Commentary of Yefet Ben ‘Eli on Proverbs 31:1-9.” *Revue des Études juives* 161, no. 3-4 (July-December 2002): 393-409.

Weeks, Stuart. *Instruction and Imagery in Proverbs 1-9.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Weil, Gérard E., ed. *Massorah Gedolah: Iuxta codicem Leningradensem B19a.* Vol. 1, *Catalogi*. Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1971.

White, Howard D. "Combining Bibliometrics, Information Retrieval, and Relevance Theory, Part 1: First Examples of a Synthesis." *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 58, no. 4 (2007): 536-59.

———. "Combining Bibliometrics, Information Retrieval, and Relevance Theory, Part 2: Some Implications for Information Science." *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 58, no. 4 (2007): 583-605.

Whybray, R. N. *The Book of Proverbs.* The Cambridge Bible Commentary. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1972.

———. *Proverbs.* New Century Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994.

———. *Wealth and Poverty in the Book of Proverbs.* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 99. Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1990.

Wickes, William. "A Treatise on the Accentuation of the Three So-called Poetical Books of the Old Testament, Psalms, Proverbs, and Job." In *Two Treatises on the Accentuation of the Old Testament,* The Library of Biblical Studies, edited by Harry M. Orlinsky, 1-119. New York: Ktav Publishing, 1970.

Widder, Wendy L. *"To Teach" in Ancient Israel: A Cognitive Linguistic Study of a Biblical Hebrew Lexical Set*. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 456. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014.

Wilson, Deirdre, and Dan Sperber. "Truthfulness and Relevance," *Mind* 111, no. 443 (July 2002): 583-632.

Wilson, Lindsay. *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary.* Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 17. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018.

Witvliet, John D. "Words to Grow into: The Psalms as Formative Speech." In *Forgotten Songs: Reclaiming the Psalms for Christian Worship,* edited by C. Richard Wells and Ray Van Neste, 7-16. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2012.

Yoder, Christine Roy. "Forming Fearers of Yahweh: Repetition and Contradiction as Pedagogy in Proverbs." In *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday,* edited by Ronald L. Troxel, Kelvin G. Friebel, and Dennis Robert Magary, 167-83. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005.

———. "On the Threshold of Kingship: A Study of Agur (Proverbs 30)." *Interpretation* 63, no. 3 (July 2009): 254-263.

———. “The Shaping of Erotic Desire in Proverbs 1-9.” In *Saving Desire: The Seduction of Christian Theology,* edited by F. LeRon Shults and Jan-Olav Henriksen, 148-63. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011.