

A Rhetorical Perspective on the Sentence Sayings of the Book of Proverbs

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Abstract

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The dominant perspective of biblical scholarship; is that proverbs are valued for what they reveal about the wisdom and culture of an ancient civilization. While they convey insightful information; they are perceived as mild mannered in spirit. But this perspective is anemic. It eclipses the power of the proverb. What I have done is to brush away the deposits from the surface of the proverb and expose the deep structure of its rhetorical shape. I have demonstrated that far from being harmless cliches, biblical proverbs are potent rhetorical works of art. What I have discovered is a sharpness about the proverb that enables it to penetrate the ear and the mind of the listener.

Because of this internal dynamic, the proverb *does not* lie dormant. It must have a context in which to work. Even when consigned to a collection, the proverb seeks out active duty. Contemporary scholarship has of acknowledged this activity within the book of Proverbs. My work is distinctive in that it describes the action of the proverb within the collection. Proverbs do not have to lie around waiting for someone to pluck them from the loneliness of a collection and appropriate them to a social context before they experience self-actualization. They have a working context within the book of Proverbs. Thus, scholarship can no longer be noncritical of the long standing belief that the texts of Proverbs are randomly Collected. Biblical

scholars must now be more sensitive to macro-structures within Proverbs. I have shown that the rhetorical power of the proverb enables it not only to manage individual and social behavior but also to manage texts and ever changing contexts within the canon of Scripture.

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Chapter One

Introduction: The Rhetorical Foundation

Though small and innocent in appearance, the Proverb has demonstrated amazing tenacity in transcending time and influencing cultures. This unique unit of discourse has been the possession of almost all cultures in all times and places, being utilized for multivalent purposes and goals.¹ The power of the proverb is linked to its polysemous quality.² More easily than other rhetorical genres, the proverb shatter contextual constraints and transcends the confines of authorial intent unfolding to referents before it its multiple dimensions. Its perspicuity, brevity, commonness, and structural quality equip it to penetrate the mind, influencing thought and action. On the surface, the form and content of the proverb work together to make its thought something that can be immediately affirmed by the hearer.

¹ Whiting describes a broad spectrum of culture and peoples who use proverbial lore and the variety of ways in which they are employed. He acknowledges that certain primitive peoples do not seem to have a store of proverbs. However, he remarks, "It must be borne in mind that it is impossible to be certain of the complete absence of proverbs, because there is always the possibility that proverbial sayings have escaped the attention of foreign observers." See B. J. Whiting, "The Origin of the Proverb," *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature* 13 (1931): 61.

² Using the semiotic model of Susan Wittig, James William. demonstrates the polyvalence of Biblical proverbs. Williams concludes his essay with these words: "The possibility of multiple meanings may be viewed as unfortunate or as a way of weaseling out of the interpreter's responsibility. I view it as a challenge to the interpreter to allow the proverb to provoke and challenge his mind." James G. Williams, "The Power of Form: A Study of Biblical Proverbs," *Semeia* 17 (1980) : 55.

But its relatively indeterminate nature also empowers it with a surplus of meaning.³

A vast amount of material has been written on proverbs, their use in literature and what they reveal about different peoples. Anthropologists, folklorists, psychologists, and sociologists have engaged in studying this elemental form. However, few rhetoricians have entered into the arena to explore their rhetorical function and influential force.⁴ Neither have rhetoricians put much effort into historically investigating how proverbs have been used.⁵ In this study I propose to investigate the rhetorical work of the proverb as it is used and organized in the book of Proverbs in the Hebrew Scriptures.

³ Max Black speaks of the polyvalent quality of a proverb indirectly in his description of metaphors. Black remarks that "when we speak of a relatively simple metaphor, we are referring to a sentence or another expression in which some words are used metaphorically while the remainder are used nonmetaphorically. An attempt to construct an entire sentence of words that are used metaphorically results in a proverb, an allegory, or a riddle." Max Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1960) 26.

⁴ One of the few are Goodwin and Wenzel who use Ehninger's and Brockriede's classification system to analyze how contemporary proverbs illustrate patterns of reasoning or argument. See Paul D. Goodwin and Joseph W. Wenzel, "Proverbs and Practical Reasoning: A Study in Socio-Logic," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 65 (1979): 289-302.

⁵ One exception is Gerald Phillips' essay on the dominant role of speech in the proverbs of Sirach and the Book of Proverbs. See Gerald M. Phillips, "Rhetorical Gleanings from the Wisdom Literature," *Western Speech Journal*. 26 (1962) : 157-163. Another is an essay by Edd Miller and Jesse J. Villarreal, "The Use of Cliches by Four Contemporary Speakers," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 31 (1945): 151-155.

This collection has been studied by biblical scholars who have revealed much about its nature. But such studies have been constrained because of the way in which the book has been approached. What I propose to do is initially to examine and critique the traditional paradigm used by biblical scholars. This examination will also include a description and critique of their underlying hermeneutic. An alternative rhetorical paradigm and hermeneutic will be offered that does not eclipse the old model but enables the proverbial material to have its richest expression. It is this rhetorical hermeneutic that will serve to inform the direction taken in this dissertation.

The Cognitive Paradigm

The dominant paradigm for studying the collection of proverbs in Scripture is a cognitive one.⁶ The cognitive paradigm tends to be determinate and focuses primarily on the content and message of proverbs. Charles Fritsch's statement that the "way to rescue the valuable teaching of this collection" is to arrange them according to subject matter, is representative of this approach.⁷ After the superficial form of the proverb is boiled away, the residue that remains is its real essence. The most influential scholars in Wisdom Literature build their research around this perspective.

William McKane, in his monumental commentary on the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament Library series, classified the proverbs according

⁶ Arland D. Jacobson has identified this as the paradigm. See Arland D. Jacobson, "Proverbs and Social Control: A New Paradigm for Wisdom Studies," *Gnosticism and the Early Christian World*, eds. J. E. Goehring, C. W. Hedrick, Jack T. Sanders, and Hans Deter Betz, (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge Press, 1991) 75-88.

⁷ Charles T. Fritsch, "The Gospel in the Book of Proverbs," *Theology Today* 7 (1950) : 170.

to content and the three phases in the development of that content.⁸ His entire commentary is organized around these phases. The first includes proverbs that are concerned with the success and harmonious life of the individual. This is "old wisdom" and these proverbs are the earliest part of the biblical collection. In the second phase the center of concern shifts from the individual to the community. And the third phase reinterprets the first by incorporating "God-language." The proverbs in the third phase are the latest editions to the collection and are the most theological. The historical development in this scheme is from the secular to the sacred. And the focus is solely on content.

Other works on Proverbs follow suit. The foundational work on Wisdom Literature in ancient Israel by Gerhard von Rad, discusses proverbs under the heading "The Forms in Which Knowledge is Expressed."⁹ He goes further and identifies in the Proverbs a "tension between a radical secularization on the one hand and the knowledge of God's unlimited powers on the other."¹⁰ Such a division is based on content. The most renowned scholar of Wisdom Literature in America, James L. Crenshaw,

⁸ McKane, *Proverbs, A New Approach* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970) 11, 415.

⁹ Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972) 24.

¹⁰ Von Rad 98. Claudia Camp takes issue with such a division. She rightly argues that even though religion is not synonymous with common sense, common sense is a part of religion. See *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Decatur, GA: Almond Press, 1985) 173-176. Such a connection is significant for rhetorical theory since *endoxa* (common or popular opinion) is crucial for developing any kind of rhetorical argument.

entitles his chapter on the book of Proverbs "The Pursuit of Knowledge."¹¹ John T. Willis, in his little volume, organizes the proverbs in the book of Proverbs around the various topics they address.¹² In one of the most recent books to come out on Wisdom Literature, Roland Murphy subtitles his chapter on Proverbs "The Wisdom of Words" which implies an interest that may reach beyond content.¹³ In fact Murphy states that the book of Proverbs "seeks to persuade, to tease the reader into a way of life . . ."¹⁴ However, after only paying lip service to this element, Murphy devotes the chapter to summarizing the contents of the major blocks of material in the book. These works are representative of the dominant way in which the book of Proverbs is approached.

A number of scholars claim that what has contributed most to perpetuating the cognitive model has been the placing of proverbs in a collection. In a collection a proverb's performative context is lost and all that remains is its content. Whenever a proverb is codified it loses its force and power. Janet E. Heseltine has maintained this: "Looked at in one way, the history of the use and disuse of proverbs is a progression from the concrete to

¹¹ James Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981) 66.

¹² John T. Willis, *The Old Testament Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon* (Abilene, TX: Biblical Research Press, 1982) 84-126.

¹³ Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday) 15.

¹⁴ Murphy 15

the abstract."¹⁵ Later she adds, regarding the increased interest in collecting proverbs in the eighteenth century, "We may take it as a sign that proverbs were on the wane that they now began to be collected so zealously."¹⁶ The paroemiologist Wolfgang Mieder affirms that "the proverb in a collection is dead."¹⁷ Claudia Camp also argues that when a proverb is consigned to a collection it dies.¹⁸

The literary collection of proverbs robs them of the function that is essential to their identity, leaving only what paroemiologists refer to as the *Baukem* or 'kernel,' the proverb's context-free core composed of its topic and comment. The 'Baukem' is 'the ultimate source for all subsequent applications, since this core is the carrier of the message, however, mundane or profound' (Fontaine, 165). Insofar as the form of the proverb is determined by its function . . . and insofar as the proverb is only functioning qua proverb in a performance context, the form and style of the proverb in a collection become expendable features, as they are

¹⁵ Janet E. Heseltine, Introduction, "Proverbs and Pothooks," *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*, comp. William George Smith, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935) : xii.

¹⁶ Heseltine xvii

¹⁷ Wolfgang Mieder, "The Essence of Literary Proverb Study," *Proverbium* 23 (1974) 892.

¹⁸ Claudia Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Decatur, GA: Almond Press, 1985): 166.

not in the context of use (p. 124). In the collection, it is only the kernel, the message, that has any relevance at all.¹⁹

Camp's solution to the loss of a context for the proverbs is to recontextualize them. She proposes that this is accomplished by framing the sentence proverbs (chs. 10:1-22:16 and 24:22-29:33) in a narrative within the wisdom poems (chs. 1-9 and 30-31). Wisdom personified as feminine offers an interpretive framework for the collection of proverbs. The feminine image enables the book of Proverbs to be a unified whole and function as part of a canon of religious literature.²⁰ Camp's approach is creative and illuminating in many ways. But to say that the prologue and the epilogue offer the interpretive key to the text of Proverbs is to continue to confine proverbs to the abstract. Other than transforming the book into narrative, how does the beginning and ending interpret the whole? How does it interpret the sentence proverb? Camp does not say. In the final analysis, Camp's approach as well is primarily interested in the intellectual content.²¹ The interpretive responsibility belongs to the narrative itself. There is little or no dialogue between text and interpreter. The interpretation takes place

¹⁹ Camp 171. Camp enumerates three effects of placing proverbs in a collection: 1) they lose their function as cultural model is (i.e. their capacity to evaluate and affect change); 2) the removal of the performance context creates the appearance of proverbial dogmatism; 3) "in Israel the loss of he performance context also meant the loss of the covenant context. It is this factor that engenders the appearance, and perhaps also the experience, of a sacred-secular dichotomy" (p. 177).

²⁰ Camp 182

²¹ Jacobson reaches this conclusion as well when he remarks that Camp's "model continues to be a primarily cognitive one" (p. 87).

within the text between the feminine image and the sentence proverbs.²² All of this is to say that Camp's interpretive approach is guided by a cognitive model and therefore is constrained.²³

It does seem accurate to claim that collections of proverbs have tended to promote the cognitive paradigm. The collections are perceived by this model to abstract proverbs from their oral context and focus interest solely on intellectual content. But even in collections it is, as Jacobson says, a "mistaken assumption that intellectual content is what proverbs are about."²⁴ Gathering proverbs into collections does not in and of itself bring about their demise.

Constraints of the Cognitive Paradigm

Even though the cognitive model has much to commend itself and even though it has yielded rich insights into the meaning of the contents of the proverbs, there are a number of constraints that must be faced if we are to advance further in our understanding and appropriation of proverbs. First, the cognitive model has no interest in the way in which proverbs influence thought and behavior. The exclusive focus on content has totally eclipsed the

²² According to Camp, the feminine image brings to the fore the focus on the woman and her characteristics throughout the book. The primary characteristic has to do with the responsibility of the woman to educate and advice. She is evaluated not by her role as childbearer but by her responsibility as advisor.

²³ Camp has worked to release her approach from any one method. So she relies on the use of several including literary, anthropological, sociological, historical, and canonical (p. 11). Notably absent from her repertoire is any use of rhetoric.

²⁴ Jacobson 87

vital dimension of how a proverb works rhetorically to accomplish its task. The internal structure and reasoning pattern used by the proverb along with its content and the context in which it is used all work together synergistically to energize it with persuasive power. The traditional approach to proverbs treats them as inert entities. It lumps the various structural patterns of proverbs into fixed categories of parallelism such as synonymous, antithetic, or synthetic, and this does not allow for the subtle but dynamic differences that characterize the individual proverbs. To investigate the rhetorical dimension that resides within the proverb will yield rich insight into the way the proverb works, that is, the way in which it influences thought and action. Proverbs, as such, are a valuable resource for contemporary rhetorical use. Thus, a constraining factor of the cognitive model is that it has little interest in the way in which proverbs act upon their audiences.

Second, the cognitive model is uninterested in and even incapable of discovering possible macro-structural patterns in the book of Proverbs. The cognitive model assumes that the proverbs gathered together in the Hebrew collection are a random collection. In fact, the dominant way of understanding the book has been to see the collection as quite haphazard and the surrounding context in which the proverb is placed as irrelevant for its interpretation. William McKane has made this observation of the sentence proverbs which is representative of much of biblical scholarship: "there is no context, for each sentence is an entity in itself and the collection amounts to no more than the gathering together of a large number of independent sentences, each of which is intended to be a well-considered and definitive

observation on a particular topic."²⁵ Such an observation is constraining in that it disregards the possibility of a macro-structure or, at least, certain clusters of proverbs that are intentionally placed together in a context. In fact the cognitive model has no tools for investigating such structural possibilities.

Third, the cognitive perspective does not take seriously the dialogical dimension of the proverb. The proverb is designed to be used in an unlimited variety of situations and contexts. In those different contexts a traditional proverb is immediately recognizable. But at the same time it may take on a little different meaning or shape. One or both of its parallel lines are changed or adapted to fit the situation. Generally speaking the cognitive perspective views proverbs as determinate in both form and content. The meaning and structure remains constant regardless of the context in which the proverb is used. The difficulty with this view is that when many of the proverbs are found in other parts of Scripture, they are not repeated verbatim. One or the other of their binary lines are changed and various images substituted in order to fit the context or rhetorical argument of the text. In Scripture proverbs are dynamic and ever changing. They enter into a kind of dialogue with the context in which they are placed. The cognitive model does not acknowledge this quality in its scheme. Its focus is on what the proverb

²⁵ McKane 413. Earlier in his work, McKane had set the tone for his view and approach to Proverbs when he said that "there is, for the most part, no context in the sentence literature and that the individual wisdom sentence is a complete entity. The logical outcome of this argument is the allocation of the sentences to different classes, since the necessity for such a system of classification follows from the random way in which wisdom sentences follow one upon another in any chapter" (p. 10).

meant. Therefore it is limited in what it can say about the ongoing function, the living tradition, of the proverb.

Finally, the cognitive paradigm, even with its topical approach, has overlooked the primacy that the book of Proverbs has assigned to the role of discourse and speech. At the heart of sagacity is the ability to use words effectively. The topical approach can catalog various subjects that are addressed in Proverbs. But it has no real interest in discovering which ones are more significant. Central to the texts of Proverbs is a concern for the proper training in and use of speech. The sage's function appears to be more rhetorical than cognitive.

My argument in this dissertation is that these four areas are vital to developing a more holistic understanding of biblical proverbs. These areas will be addressed in the succeeding chapters of this dissertation. However, before I can adequately address them, another and more fundamental problem must be exposed. What lies at the basis of all four of these problem areas are the hermeneutical presuppositions of the cognitive paradigm. An exclusively cognitive hermeneutic leads to a restrictive view of proverbs. So, in addressing this hermeneutical problem, the groundwork for offering a more productive approach to the study of biblical proverbs is made possible.

The Hermeneutic of the Cognitive Paradigm

Underlying the cognitive paradigm is a hermeneutic that continues to dominate biblical studies, including the study of biblical proverbs, which has profoundly influenced the way proverbs are viewed. To briefly explain and understand this hermeneutic will equip one to understand how proverbs have been traditionally perceived and will open the door for an alternative approach.

The cognitive hermeneutic takes a determinate approach to Scripture. Such a hermeneutic came as a reaction against the interpretive practice of the medieval period and the common idea of the four senses of Scripture.²⁶ The criticism of the four senses was that they "could easily breed confusion"²⁷ and Scripture could come to mean anything anyone wanted it to mean. The concern of the Reformation was to make the interpretation of Scripture more "respectable." And the way to do that was to make it more scientific. William Tyndale in explaining the four senses of Scripture, "wrote the first actual discussion of the nature of a proverb which is to be found in English:"²⁸

They divide the scripture into four senses, the literal, tropological, allegorical, and anagogical. The literal sense is become nothing at all: for the pope hath taken it clean away, and hath made it his possession. . . . The tropological sense pertaineth to good manners (say they), and teacheth what we ought to do. The allegory is appropriate to faith; and the anagogical to hope, and things above. . . .

Thou shalt understand, therefore, that the scripture hath but one sense, which is the literal sense. And that literal sense is the

²⁶ The four senses are the literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical. For a nice summary of this hermeneutic see Harry Caplan, "The Four Senses of Scriptural Interpretation and the Mediaeval Theory of Preaching," *Speculum* 4 (1929) : 282-290.

²⁷ Caplan 287

²⁸ B. J. Whiting, "The Nature of the Proverb," *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature* (1932): 292.

root and ground of all, and the anchor that never faileth, whereunto if thou cleave, thou canst never err or go out of the way. And if thou leave the literal sense, thou canst not but go out of the way. Neverthelater, the scripture useth proverbs, similitudes, riddles, or allegories, as all other speeches do; but that which the proverb, similitude, riddle, or allegory signifieth, is ever the literal sense, which thou must eek out diligently: as in the English we borrow words and sentences of one thing, and apply them unto another, and give them new significations. We say . . . "Look er thou leap": whose literal sense is, "Do nothing suddenly, or without advisement." "Cut not the bough that thou standest upon": whose literal sense is, "Oppress not the commons." . . . All fables, prophecies, and riddles, are allegories; as AEsop's fables, and Merlin's prophecies; and the interpretation of them are the literal sense.

So in like manner the scripture borroweth words and sentences of all manner things, and maketh proverbs and similitudes, or allegories.²⁹

For the Reformation leaders, proverbs, along with the rest of Scripture had just one plain determinate meaning, and that was the literal meaning.

Such a view dominated the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The hermeneutical perspective of John Locke heavily influenced the way in

²⁹ William Tyndale, "Obedience of a Christian Man," *Doctrinal Treatises*, ed. H. Walter (Cambridge, Parker Society, 1848) 303-305. Quoted by B. J. Whiting, "The Nature of the Proverb," 292-293.

which Scripture was interpreted. Locke's approach was inductive and the truth of Scripture could be empirically verified:

The scriptures consist of datum exterior to man, and man receives its truth in the same manner in which the scientist learns the truth of nature. Through induction one derives spiritual truth in precisely the same manner as material truth.³⁰

Locke believed that by following the commands of Scripture anyone who really desired to could be able to see plainly what God required. Scottish Common Sense Realism and its method of Baconian scientific induction also had a profound influence on the way in which Scripture was interpreted.

The scientific method of Baconian induction was the means used by the Scottish Common Sense Realist philosophers to construct their philosophy. These philosophers believed that careful generalizations should be built upon an inductive accumulation of "facts."³¹

Such a scientific hermeneutic is still dominant in many religious circles today.³²

³⁰ Thomas H. Olbricht, "The Bible as Revelation," *Restoration Quarterly* 8 (1965) : 213.

³¹ Michael Casey, "The Origins of the Hermeneutics of the Churches of Christ Part Two: The Philosophical Background," *Restoration Quarterly* 31 (1989): 199.

³² The growing ranks of fundamentalism witnesses to the popularity of this approach to Scripture. For a description of the tenants of this hermeneutic see J. I. Packer, *Fundamentalism" and the Word of God*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967). For a critique of the hermeneutic of fundamentalism see Kathleen C. Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So: Discourse*

The central concept related to this scientific hermeneutic is that of determinism and objectivity. Emilio Betti is the philosopher who has championed this hermeneutic today. Richard Palmer observes that Betti's primary concern is with objectivity. Betti, himself states his intention clearly:

This contention which raises a completely new problematic and which would lead to the negation of objectivity, we, as historians, have to oppose with all firmness. Our outline has shown that the subjectivist position rests on a shift of meaning which identifies the hermeneutical process of historical interpretation with a situationally determined meaning-inference . . . and which has the effect of confounding a condition for the possibility with the object of that process; as a result, the fundamental canon of the hermeneutical autonomy of the object is altogether removed from the work of the historian.³³

There are a number of derivative principles in this hermeneutic stemming from the canon of objectivity. First is the canon of the autonomy of the object.³⁴ That is, the object has its own existence. The primary way in which an interpreter respects an object's autonomy is to focus on authorial intention. For E. D. Hirsch, authorial intention is the norm for validity of

of Protestant Fundamentalism (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

³³ Emilio Betti, "Hermeneutics as the General Methodology of the *Geisteswissenschaften*," *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*, eds. Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990) : 177.

³⁴ Betti 164

interpretation.³⁵ According to Gadamer, Spinoza argued that "everything important can be understood if only we understand the mind of the author 'historically'--i.e., overcome our prejudices and think of nothing but what the author could have had in mind."³⁶

The second canon, according to Betti, is the coherence of meaning or "the principle of totality."³⁷ Betti argues that one must understand the text in context. There is "an inner relationship of coherence between individual parts of a speech because of the overarching totality of meaning built up of the individual parts."³⁸

The third canon is the "actuality of understanding."³⁹ With this canon the interpreter reverses the creative process that produced the object in the first place; the process and message is reconstructed. Understanding involves the re-construction of a meaning.⁴⁰ Betti, who adamantly opposes Gadamer's idea that the interpreter *produces* messages, claims that the interpreter's responsibility is to reproduce the message. The concern is with an *accurate*

³⁵ E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967) 27, 38.

³⁶ See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad Publishing Corp., 1991) 181.

³⁷ Betti 165

³⁸ Richard Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in, Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969) 57.

³⁹ Betti 167

⁴⁰ Betti 163

reconstruction of the meaning of the text. In this regard Hirsch makes the following observation:

If a meaning can change its identity and in fact does, then we have no norm for judging whether we are encountering the real meaning in a changed form or some spurious meaning that is pretending to be the one we seek. Once it is admitted that a meaning can change its characteristics, then there is no way of finding the true Cinderella among all the contenders. There is no dependable glass slipper we can use as a test, since the old slipper will no longer fit the new Cinderella.⁴¹

The hermeneutic of Betti, Hirsch, Locke and those traditions stemming from the Reformation movement is concerned primarily with determinacy. A determinate hermeneutic views a symbol as having univocal meaning that does not change when the symbol is applied to new objects or in new situation. Determinacy in texts implies an arbitrary and coercive imposition of meaning. This leads to the interpreter exerting a tyrannical hold over the interpretation of a text. But what is needed is a hermeneutic that will allow the text to be heard. What I want to argue is that a rhetorical perspective does just that. It enables the interpreter to hear the text on its own terms. Such a hermeneutic, then, needs fuller elaboration.

⁴¹ Hirsch 46

A Rhetorical Hermeneutic as the Foundation for Approaching Proverbs

Paul Ricoeur maintains that when discourse moves from speaking to writing it is liberated from its author and original setting.⁴² This phenomenon Ricoeur refers to as *distanciation* is a phenomenon that works as a positive value in the process of interpretation. It enables the interpreter to approach the text and its structural nature as fixed and at the same time to enter into a dialogue with the text and appropriate it to the present situation rather than confining the meaning of the text only to the past and to authorial intent. Such a hermeneutic is rhetorical because it views both the interpreter and his or her audience as active agents in the interpretive process.

However, when it comes to proverbs, Claudia Camp sees this perspective as problematic. To begin with Camp's critique at this point will aid in sharpening the focus for establishing a rhetorical hermeneutic. Of Ricoeur's hermeneutic, she makes the following assessment:

Although Ricoeur construes this liberation resulting from writing in a positive way, it becomes quite problematic with respect to the proverbs as we have already seen. Perhaps more than any other form of discourse the import of a proverb depends on 'what the author (or user) meant.' It is designed to penetrate the world of the listener in a given situation, causing

⁴² Paul Ricoeur, "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Theological Hermeneutics," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 5 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975) : 14-33. Reprinted with excursus as "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Theological Hermeneutics Ideology: Utopia and Faith," *The Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture* (Berkeley: n.p., 1976) 5.

him or her to see that situation in a new way. . . . Stripped of a situation in which to create new meaning, there is little work for it to do, and little demand for a new audience. Thus, the de-contextualization of a proverb does not provide the conditions for its re-contextualization but only for its descent into platitudinalism. The proverb requires a performance context to be fully meaningful.⁴⁵

But why does a proverb, more than any other genre, have to depend on what the original author meant? Why cannot the de-contextualization of a proverb from its original context provide for its re-contextualization? Camp's understanding of proverbs treats them as univocal and having one "literal" meaning, much in the same way as William Tyndale viewed them. When proverbs are placed in a collection, can they not be multivalent in the way in which they are appropriated by the interpreter? In fact, is not the proverb by nature polysemous? In contrast to Camp's position, I would like to argue that a rhetorical hermeneutic is intentional--it enables written proverbs to be dynamic by locating their meaning in the emergent speech situations of life.

In order to understand this hermeneutic, it is necessary first to ask about the relationship between rhetoric and hermeneutics. Second, what does such a rhetorical hermeneutic look like? Finally, is such a hermeneutic a foreign template that intrudes on proverbial texts in an artificial and mechanical way? Or is it endemic to them? Such an investigation, I am convinced, will confirm the heuristic value of a rhetorical perspective.

⁴⁵ Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, pp. 181-182.

Rhetoric and Hermeneutics

First, what is the relationship between rhetoric and hermeneutics?

The close relationship between rhetoric and hermeneutics has been acknowledged by Michael J. Hyde and Craig R. Smith who have forcefully argued that from "the hermeneutical situation originates the primordial function of rhetoric."⁴⁴ That primordial function is to make known meaning.⁴⁵ There is, for these authors, an important dialectic between hermeneutics and rhetoric: "Without the hermeneutical situation there would be a meaningless void; without rhetoric the latent meaning housed in the hermeneutic situation could never be actualized."⁴⁶ Rhetoric appropriates the synchronic and diachronic findings of hermeneutics. And the hermeneutical process is not complete until this is accomplished.⁴⁷

Hans Georg Gadamer has also acknowledged the centrality of rhetoric to hermeneutics. He maintains that rhetoric pervades all hermeneutic activity:

Convincing and persuading, without being able to prove- these are obviously as much the aim and measure of understanding and interpretation as they are the aim and measure of the art of oration and persuasion

⁴⁴ Michael. J. Hyde and Craig. R. Smith, "Hermeneutics and Rhetoric: A Seen but Unobserved Relationship," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 65 (1979): 347.

⁴⁵ Hyde and Smith 348

⁴⁶ Hyde and Smith 354

⁴⁷ Hyde and Smith 357

The ubiquity of rhetoric, indeed, is unlimited.⁴⁸

Dale Patrick and Allen Scult affirm that hermeneutics is a central realm of rhetoric. They define rhetoric "as the means by which a text establishes and manages its relationship to its audience in order to achieve a particular effect."⁴⁹ That is, rhetoric empowers a text to continue to address audiences at different times and in different places.

But while affirming the central role of rhetoric in hermeneutics, Scult moves beyond Hyde and Smith and Gadamer to offer a corrective to their view. While Hyde and Smith and Gadamer ground hermeneutics and rhetoric in the hermeneutical situation, Scult argues that they neglect the rhetorical situation, that at least in the case of sacred texts the rhetorical grounding must take precedent.⁵⁰ For Hyde and Smith the function of rhetoric in the hermeneutical act exists first in the intrapersonal realm, between text and interpreter. But Scult affirms that the interpretive process is interpersonal since the intention is to make a text relevant to a contemporary audience from the start. The interpreter is guided by the rhetorical situation and not the hermeneutical situation to make known his or her interpretation. So the interpreter is not only affected by his or her own interpretations but by the predispositions and values of the audience. Scult articulates this point well:

⁴⁸ Gadamer in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 1976, p. 24.

⁴⁹ See Dale Patrick and Allen Scult, *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation*, (Decatur, GA: Almond Press, 1990), p. 12.

⁵⁰ See Scult, "The Relationship Between Rhetoric and Hermeneutics Reconsidered," *Central States Speech Journal* 34 (1983): 221.

If an audience, distant in time and place from the original text, is somehow "intended" by the text to be included in the purview of its meaning, then that audience's predispositions to understanding indeed would be a legitimate and necessary framework for ascertaining the text's meaning. We shall see that this is precisely the case with Scripture.⁵¹

Scult proposes that what has been left out of the process of hermeneutics in some accounts is that the interpreter's interpretation is shaped by who the audience is and the values they hold. The audience affects the way in which an interpreter constructs the interpretation; it is audience conditioned. Thus the motive for interpreting a text is not simply to bring that which is distant closer because many ancient texts lie dormant. But rather the motive lies in the interpreter understanding that when the text is properly understood it speaks to an exigence.⁵² Therefore, Scult concludes that hermeneutics is an element of rhetorical invention. It is a place, a topic if you will, to which one goes in order to discover a fitting response to a particular exigence.

Scult offers a further corrective to Gadamer's view. It appears that Gadamer understands language as the repository of tradition. Gadamer, however, makes no acknowledgment that language is spoken by someone and the status of that person determines to a large degree how the language will be received. Scult comments, "Texts that have greater status in our eyes move us to delve more deeply into the language, to trust it as a means of

⁵¹ Scult 222

⁵² Scult 223

enlightening our own thought. . . . Once a text achieves sacred status, it assumes the power to speak beyond itself."⁵³ When a text achieves sacred status, its words assume a new dimension and a power that enable them to continue to disclose knowledge. The interpreter looks to it to locate an appropriate response to the audience and in so doing carries on the function that direct revelation once was thought to do.

The hermeneutical act is in its fullest form rhetorical because from the very beginning of the process such an act is related to a contemporary audience. Gadamer, himself, continually maintains throughout his works, that endemic to hermeneutics is application. It is therefore necessary for rhetoric to claim and develop this territory if it is to flourish and expand. Scult's thesis is appropriately succinct: ". . . *interpretation is a species of rhetorical invention chosen by the rhetorician-interpreter when there is warrant to extend in time and space the meaning of a sacred text* ."⁵⁴ What Scult affirms of sacred texts in general, I would also appropriate specifically to the proverb.

Characteristics of a Rhetorical Hermeneutic

The point at which I would like to begin to describe a rhetorical hermeneutic is with Roger Abrahams' succinct remarks in his essay on a rhetorical theory of folklore. I would like to apply his theory specifically to

⁵³ p. 224. Scult refers to the power of a text to speak beyond itself as "textuality" (p. 224).

⁵⁴ Scult 223

written texts.⁵⁵ Abrahams says that there are four ways in which scholars approach a work of art. The first way emphasizes the importance of the shaping hand of the author and the effect of what he or she says upon the audience. The second underlines the work of the text as an object, divorcing the author and the original audience from consideration. This perspective "implies that once a work is created it is capable of speaking for itself and must be analyzed in terms of its internal characteristics and the interrelationships of its parts."⁵⁶ This is a structuralist view. The third approach is interested in how the text influences the audience. And the fourth centers on the way the audience affects the text, the performer or the piece of art. This last approach analyzes the way in which public values and conventions affect what is perceived in the text and how it is shaped by such tastes. Abrahams concludes by maintaining that the last two approaches emphasize the public nature of the text while the first two have more private concerns.

Abrahams' point is that all four perspectives have value and a rhetorical approach is able to incorporate all of them. He proceeds with an example of a rhetorical analysis which, he correctly states, is not like the scientific method that relies on a fixed set of procedures to investigate a test situation.⁵⁷ Rather it is "a point of view which proposes areas in which

⁵⁵ Roger D. Abrahams, "Introductory Remarks to a Rhetorical Theory of Folklore," *Journal of American Folklore* 81 (1968) : 143-158.

⁵⁶ Abrahams 144

⁵⁷ Abrahams 149

insights might be gained by using comparative or relational methodology."⁵⁸ To say that a rhetorical approach is simply concerned with comparing one genre to another is a gross simplification of the rhetorical perspective.⁵⁹ But Abrahams general theory proceeds in the right direction. And, with certain revisions, it is this direction that I would like to develop and refine more precisely in what follows.

A rhetorical hermeneutic is one that takes seriously the interaction between text, interpreter and audience.⁶⁰ A hermeneutic that honors these elements is one that is compatible with a rhetorical perspective. In this regard, Paul Ricoeur's project offers some hopeful possibilities. As Barbara Warnick explains, "Ricoeur's approach . . . leads the critic to ask: What elements of the text allow contemporary readers to encounter it in a meaningful way? How has the rhetor touched upon universal themes and values so that the discourse has lasting significance?"⁶¹ His agenda, on initial reflection, seems to be commensurate with texts that are autonomous and that have an enduring quality to them.

There are two elements in Ricoeur's hermeneutic that are well suited to a rhetorical hermeneutic. These are the elements of distancing and

⁵⁸ Abrahams 149

⁵⁹ In the remainder of his essay, Abrahams compares the proverb with the riddle in order to gain a better understanding of how each one works.

⁶⁰ Kathleen C. Boone says, "Like the famous tree falling in the forest, texts are silent unless and until someone reads them." *The Bible Tells Them So: The Discourse of Protestant Fundamentalism* (Albany: State University of New York Press) 62.

⁶¹ Barbara Warrick, "A Ricoeurian Approach to Rhetorical Criticism," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 51 (1987) : 228.

appropriation. Ricoeur's hermeneutic begins with distancing. Rhetoric respects the fixed nature of the text as it is received. One does not approach a discourse believing that it can mean whatever one wants it to mean. The text, because it has a set form and structure, provides constraints for its interpretation. Ricoeur refers to this as distancing. Distancing is a part of writing because such a text has already distanced itself from its original author and audience. In fact, Ricoeur maintains that speech is inseparable from writing if it really is to be understood: "It therefore appears that writing must precede speech, if speech is not to remain a cry."⁶² Such a quality of distancing is not a detriment but an asset to interpretation. It enables the discourse to be extended to new and different situations and not confined to one time and place.

It is in attributing value to distancing that Ricoeur has a quarrel with the hermeneutic of Hans-Georg Gadamer.⁶³ Ricoeur maintains that the mainspring of Gadamer's work is the fundamental belief that there exists an opposition on the one hand between alienating distancing (objectivity) and participatory belonging (subjectivity).⁶⁴ With Gadamer, either one adopts

⁶² Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics. II*, trans. Kathleen Blarney and John B. Thompson (Evanston, IL: Northwest UP, 1991) 93-94. By speech remaining a cry, Ricoeur seems to be implying that unless it is connected to a prior text it will remain insignificant and confined to a one-time event.

⁶³ It is interesting to note that Gadamer had attributed value to prejudice (i.e. tradition). Ricoeur respects that but goes beyond and attributes value to the distancing element that Gadamer thought was an obstacle.

⁶⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *Paul Ricoeur: Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 131.

distanciation and a methodological approach to texts which results in alienation or one adopts the perspective of belonging and renounces objectivity. Ricoeur rejects this conflict and claims that his project is to bridge the apparent gap between the alternatives.⁶⁵

Ricoeur claims that Gadamer did not allow a place for distanciation. Gadamer's aversion to distanciation was based on its close association with method. And method alienates. Gadamer was concerned with the fusion of horizons. Ricoeur maintains that there is a place for both distanciation and belonging. He believes that distanciation is an inherent part of a text and the task of writing.⁶⁶ Distanciation is not the product of methodology; it is not parasitical. Rather it is a natural quality of a text. The text, Ricoeur says, is more than just "a particular case of intersubjective communication: it is the paradigm of distanciation in communication."⁶⁷ Ricoeur claims that writing is "the consecration of distanciation more than its cause."⁶⁸ Like prejudice in Gadamer's scheme, distanciation in Ricoeur's system serves a positive and productive role. It enables the interpreter to enter into a "participatory belonging." Ricoeur's concept of distanciation "brings an 'objective' approach to textual interpretation together with a 'recreative' or 'evocative' approach to textual significance."⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Ricoeur, *Paul Ricoeur: Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, (1981) p. 131.

⁶⁶ Ricoeur, 1981, p. 140.

⁶⁷ Ricoeur, 1981, p. 131.

⁶⁸ Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," *Semia* 4 (1975) : 67.

⁶⁹ Warnick, "A Ricoeurian Approach to Rhetorical Criticism," p. 228.

What are the components of distancing? First, distancing acknowledges that there is distance between the actual event and the meaning of what is said. The reference is no longer a first order reference to the original event. But the reference is now a second order reference. The text is projected in front of itself rather than behind, rather than toward the past. This is in stark contrast to Biblical scholars who are intent on getting behind the text of a proverb to the original usage. This, for example, is Carole Fontaine's task in her volume on *Traditional Sayings in the Old Testament A Contextual Study*.⁷⁰ In a later essay she makes the following observation:

. . . [S]ince the wisdom sayings collected in Proverbs and Qoheleth were clearly in a secondary phase of usage, the 'prehistory' of the role of wisdom literature had not been adequately addressed. Ethnographic data for the use of sayings and proverbs was most likely to be found in the narrative books, where these 'minimal' bits of wisdom were shown in social interactions.⁷¹

Fontaine is representative of biblical scholarship in Wisdom Literature that is concerned with understanding the original occasion in which the proverb was used.

Second, there is distance between text and its psychological meaning, that is to say, authorial intention. Ricoeur argues, "Hermeneutics no longer is the search for the psychological intentions of another person which are

⁷⁰ Carole Fontaine, *Traditional Sayings in the Old Testament: A Contextual Study*, (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1982).

⁷¹ Carole Fontaine, "Proverb Performance in the Hebrew Bible," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 32 (1985) : 91.

concealed behind, the text"⁷² The autonomous "world of the text," according to Ricoeur, "may explode the world of the author."⁷³ This is in contrast to Dilthey who said, "The ultimate aim of hermeneutics is to understand the author better than he understands himself."⁷⁴ Severing the meaning of the text from authorial intention is also in direct opposition to E. D. Hirsch.⁷⁵ Ricoeur explains that "the thing of the text," that is to say the "world of the text" is placed above all else and thus authorial intent is no longer the criterion for interpretation. The "revelation" of the text is the new world it unfolds before the interpreter and audience.⁷⁶ "In other words,

⁷² Ricoeur, 1981, p. 141. Derrida maintains that written signs break contexts and the further in time a discourse moves from its source or author the less dependent it is on that source and the more power the interpreter has. Jacques Derrida, *Signature Event Context, The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, eds. Patricia Bizell and Bruce Herzberg, (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1990) 1175.

⁷³ Ricoeur, 1981, p. 139.

⁷⁴ Quoted by Ricoeur, 1981, p. 151.

⁷⁵ Hirsch argues that "On purely practical grounds . . . it is preferable to agree that the meaning of a text is the author's meaning" (1967, p. 25).

⁷⁶ Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, p. 96. Ron Highfield, in a paper read at the 1990 Christian Scholars Conference at Pepperdine University also affirms this position: "An author's words mean more than [sic] he or she consciously intends. Great poems and novels arise out of depths of which the author has no conscious control or knowledge, depths which reach out into the common human cultural experience and down into its genetic roots--that vast body of tacit knowledge which provides the silent but powerful context in which we "consciously think". Most of us who write have had the experience of being "given" a story or a thought, or of not even knowing what we think until we write it down or preach on it. Every time I reread something I have written I find out something I think which I did not recall "intending" to say. How much less should we expect authorial intention to be an adequate aim when we are dealing with Holy Scripture in which a

revelation, if the expression is to have a meaning, is a feature of the biblical world.⁷⁷ It is the sense and new world of the text that is revelation and not the author.

In regard to the texts that I am concerned with, one of the major foci of biblical scholars of Wisdom Literature is the authorial origin of proverbs and the wisdom corpus. The issue is, Was there in Israel a professional guild of sages or not? R. N. Whybray argues that the wisdom books were not authored by a professional group of sages.⁷⁸ On the other hand, scholars such as Gerhard von Rad, Walter Brueggemann, and James Crenshaw argue for a professional group of sages being responsible for the writing of the Wisdom Literature.⁷⁹ There may be value to exploring such origins. But more than likely the issue will never be clearly resolved. And such a concern imprisons and relegates the sacred corpus to the past. Ricoeur's focus is on how the text unfolds itself to the present. There is sometimes considerable distance between text and authorial origins.

Third, there is also distance between the text and the original audience. The shared reality and world no longer exist. Sociologically the text is able to decontextualize itself enabling the text to be recontextualized in a new

human mind is not only in touch with the well springs of human being but is open to the being of God" (p. 21)?

⁷⁷ Ricoeur, 1991, p. 96.

⁷⁸ R. N. Whybray, *The Intellectual Tradition in the Old Testament* (de Gruyter: New York, 1974).

⁷⁹ Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972); Walter Brueggemann, *In Man We Trust* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1972); James Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981).

situation. In a sense, Ricoeur is describing something that is opposite Lloyd Bitzer's concept of the "rhetorical situation" when a particular discourse is tied to a specific exigence. Another one of the major debates in Wisdom Literature and the book of Proverbs is, What is the *Sitz im Leben* for the material?⁸⁰ Did the book of Proverbs arise in a clan or family setting, a court setting or a school setting? With the last proposal, the school setting, the debate is extended further, Were there schools in ancient Israel? If so when did they arise?⁸¹ Again such issues are not central for Ricoeur. For him the

⁸⁰ John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue have edited a series of essays addressing the different cultural and social contexts of Israelite wisdom. See *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990).

⁸¹ The amount of material written on this issue is too prolific to cite here. But I cite just a few simply to demonstrate that it continues to dominate the focus of scholarship in Wisdom Literature. James Crenshaw maintains that there was considerable diversity in education in ancient Israel. See James L. Crenshaw, "Education in Ancient Israel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104 (1985) : 601-615. Bernard Lang looks at three wisdom poems in Proverbs (1:20-33; 8:1-36; 9:1,-18) and concludes that there were schools in ancient Israel and uses these texts to describe the educational system. See *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: An Israelite Goddess Redefined* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1986). However his conclusions were attacked by other scholars who questioned whether the highly metaphorical language of these poems can be relied on for an accurate account of Israelite pedagogy. Nili Shupak summarizes the arguments used to conclude that schools did exist in ancient Israel. Then he gives additional support to the argument by looking at the terminology used and the "semantic equivalents" associated with Egyptian schools. His conclusion is that a "comparative study of the terminologies of Hebrew Wisdom literature and the literature associated with the Egyptian Wisdom cycle confirms the existence of a link between Biblical Wisdom compositions and the educational context" (p. 117). See Nili Shupak, "The 'Sitz Im Leben' of the Book of Proverbs in the Light of a Comparison of Biblical and Egyptian Wisdom Literature," *Revue Biblique*. 94 (1987) :98-119. In December of 1992, Michael V. Fox read a paper at the Society of Biblical Literature in San Francisco on "Unity and Diversity in Proverbs." His paper concluded that Proverbs had its origin in the court with the king's men

text has been freed from its situational moorings; it is no longer closely tied to the original audience, reference or authorial intention. Here there is solidarity with Gadamer.

Scult advocates Ricoeur's decontextualization of the text forcefully and clearly when he maintains that the original rhetorical situation must remain dormant so as not to interfere with the text's capacity to speak to the present with equal force.⁸² Scult says, "Interpretation that treats the text as sacred 'forgets' the original rhetorical situation in order to enable the text to continue to fulfill its sacred rhetorical function."⁸³ Literal interpretations bring us back to the original rhetorical situation of the text and thus cut off the life of the text in time. Much scholarship on Proverbs has focused on issues such as whether or not there were schools or whether there was a professional guild of sages or whether wisdom originated with the clan, the court, or the school or whether the wisdom material originated with the upper socio-economic class.⁸⁴ While all of this has value, it primarily treats

because that setting best explains the diversity in a book that has an overall uniform perspective. In other words, the redactors, or king's men, incorporate a diversity of folk sayings that were in circulation at the time.

⁸² Scult, 1983, p. 226.

⁸³ Scult 226

⁸⁴ In regard to this last issue, there has been a debate as to whether wisdom literature is the product of the upper class or another economic strata. Robert Gordis argued powerfully for the former in an essay written in 1944. See Robert Gordis, "The Social Background of Wisdom Literature" *Hebrew Union College Annual* 18 (1944) : 77-118. R. N. Whybray has more recently argued that the book of Proverbs expresses the view of the poor. See R. N. Whybray, "Poverty, Wealth, and Point of View in Proverbs," *Expository Times* 100 (1987) : 332-336. Michael V. Fox has argued for the elite of society as the origin of Proverbs. "Unity and Diversity in Proverbs," unpublished paper, Society of Biblical Literature, 1992.

Proverbs as a resource for the insight it can shed on the past. Robert Alter is one biblical scholar who has rejected this quest for wisdom's life-setting:

. . . because it is, necessarily, a will-o'-the-wisp and, even more, because it is a prime instance of the misplaced concreteness that has plagued biblical research, which naively presumes that the life-setting, if we could recover it, would somehow provide the key to the language, structure, and meaning of the poems.⁸⁵

From the above it is obvious, but important, to observe that Ricoeur's approach is different from a traditional neo-Aristotelian perspective which places the original source, message, and receiver or audience in close proximity. For Ricoeur the authorial intent and the original audience are eclipsed by the fusion of the text and the contemporary interpreter/audience.

How does the rhetorician-interpreter proceed to affirm the distancing of a text? It is through structural analysis that this is accomplished. A structural analysis of the text honors its autonomy, exposes its arrangement, genre, and stylistic features, and uncovers what Ricoeur calls its sense. This stage of the hermeneutic process is mainly descriptive.

Warnick clarifies the function of structural analysis when she remarks, "In performing a structural analysis, the critic distances him- or herself from the text and attempts to expose its underlying structure and implicit

⁸⁵ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1985) 186. Alter makes a similar point earlier in this work when he argues that "it is idle to speculate about what went on in the Wisdom schools, if in fact they really existed as schools, because we simply don't have enough evidence to go on" (p. 176).

meaning."⁸⁶ Structural analysis leads one from a naive understanding of the text to a more mature understanding. Ricoeur uses the example of a musical score to illustrate what he means.⁸⁷ A musical score can be played in a number of ways. But the musician has constraints placed upon him by the text of the music. For example, various cultures and subcultures have sung the hymn "Amazing Grace" in ways that are most fitted to their own style and tradition.⁸⁸ But the song is still immediately recognized by all because of the constraints placed upon the musician-interpreters by the musical score. In the same way, a sacred text may be interpreted by various people differently. But it is still immediately recognized because its fundamental structure remains constant.

In a series of essays in *Semeia* in 1975, Ricoeur detailed the task of structuralism. Suffice it to say here that such a task involves uncovering the patterns, themes, moves, plots, and genres embedded in texts. Ricoeur seems especially sensitive to the importance of literary genres. He maintains that a "structural analysis is truncated if it does not proceed from message to code [genre] and from code to message."⁸⁹ The surface-structure of the plot is not a secondary phenomenon but the message itself. The literary genre secures the survival of the meaning after the disappearance of its *Sitz im Leben* and in

⁸⁶ Warnick, 1987, p. 233

⁸⁷ Ricoeur, 1981, p. 174.

⁸⁸ Bill Moyers's special program on PBS "Amazing Grace," 1989.

During the course of the documentary, Moyers makes comments on a verse of the song that was later added by saying that the "hymn takes on a life of its own."

⁸⁹ Ricoeur, 1975, p. 71.

that way starts the process of decontextualization which opens the message to fresh reinterpretation according to new contexts of discourse and of life. The form preserves the message from distortion. So for Ricoeur genre is not perceived as a means of classification, but as a means of production. A form or a genre makes a text into a complex organism that enables it to speak to a specific situation.

To summarize, distanciation is a descriptive stage in the process of interpretation that honors the autonomy of the text as it is decontextualized from its original setting and that gives the text a quality of "objectivity." A structural analysis enables a text to display its fixed nature, its sense. But Ricoeur takes issue with the radical structuralists who are content to end the process at this stage.⁹⁰ Distanciation is a necessary prerequisite to the next move which Ricoeur calls appropriation.

For Ricoeur appropriation is commensurate with distanciation (explanation). With appropriation the rhetorician-interpreter does not seek something hidden behind the text, but something disclosed in front of it. According to Thompson, it is to "move from that which it [the text] says to

⁹⁰ Warrick offers a timely explanation of the distinction between radical structuralists and phenomenologists in her QJS article in 1979. I am also opposed to structuralists who according to James S. Sanders "disdain the use of biblical criticism and focus on the overall structure of a biblical passage no matter when or how it was first composed, or for what purpose." See James S. Sanders, *God Has a Story Too, in Theories of Preaching*, ed. Richard Lischer (Durham, NC: The Labyrinth Press, 1987) 190-191. A rhetorical approach is sensitive to the findings of higher criticism. For example Allen Scult, Michael McGee, and J. Kenneth Kuntz in their essay use source criticism to aid in understanding the relationship between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2-3. See "Genesis and Power: An Analysis of the Biblical Story of Creation," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 72 (1986): 113-131.

that which it says it about."⁹¹ It is a move from sense to reference. Warrick observes, "In appropriating the text, critics come to account for how texts endure and communicate meaning beyond and apart from the circumstances in which the discourse was originally expressed."⁹² This dimension Ricoeur refers to as the reference (not primary but secondary reference). Warrick observes, "The move of external reference, in which the work discloses a world, is appropriation."⁹³

What is finally to be understood in a text is not authorial intention, nor the structure of the text, but rather the world intended beyond the text as its reference.⁹⁴ In *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* Ricoeur elaborates on this concept: "The issue of the text is the world the text unfolds before itself."⁹⁵ The result of writing is that it removes a discourse from the finite horizons of its author and first audience. Ricoeur explains that such an autonomy opens up the potential of new worlds to those who read the text:

And the intended implicit reference of each text opens onto a world, the biblical world, or rather the multiple worlds unfolded before the book by its narration, prophecy, prescriptions, wisdom, and hymns. The proposed world that in biblical language is called a new creation, a new Covenant, the Kingdom

⁹¹ John Thompson, ed. trans. *Paul Ricoeur: Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1981) 15.

⁹² Warnick, 1987, p. 230.

⁹³ Warnick 234

⁹⁴ Ricoeur, 1980, p. 100.

⁹⁵ Ricoeur, 1980, p. 100.

of God, is the 'issue' of the biblical text unfolded in front of this text."⁹⁶

The text as decontextualized comes to have its own world. The reference of poetic language⁹⁷ projects ahead of itself a world in which the reader is invited to dwell, thus finding a more authentic situation in being. Ricoeur claims that if the interpreter takes only the prophetic genre⁹⁸ in Scripture as the paragon of revelation, then the approach is a psychologizing interpretation of revelation. But if one takes the variety of genres seriously then we are delivered from this authorial constraint to a sensitivity to the sense of the text, to the world-reference it opens up before it.⁹⁹ From this perspective the genre of the text makes sense by projecting a reference as a possibility for the present.¹⁰⁰ For an example, Ricoeur considers the parable: "A parabolic metaphor, in the strangeness of its plot, institutes a shock which

⁹⁶ Ricoeur, 1980, p. 103. Elsewhere Ricoeur has said that the primary task of a hermeneutic is not to bring about a decision in the reader but first to allow the text to unfold the new vision of the world: "In this way, above feelings, dispositions, belief, or unbelief is placed the proposal of a world, which, in the language of the Bible, is called a new world, a new covenant, the kingdom of God, a new birth. These are realities that unfold before the text, unfolding to be sure for us, but based upon the text. This is what can be called the 'objectivity' of the new being projected by the text" (Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, p. 96).

⁹⁷ This is a term Ricoeur uses to include all genres (1980, p. 100).

⁹⁸ Such a genre focuses on the voice behind the prophet's voice, and this then is extended to all other genres.

⁹⁹ Ricoeur, 1980, p. 25

¹⁰⁰ Ricoeur 26

redescribes reality, and opens for us a new way of seeing and being."¹⁰¹ The Kingdom of God is said to be like something that is quite common. This form of metaphorical process opens an otherwise matter-of-fact situation to an open range of interpretations and to the possibility of new commitments.¹⁰² The referential power of the text, in the sense that it opens a "world in front of it" which we may inhabit, is likened to a "model" that might be a heuristic device, an instrument for the redescription of reality, which breaks up an inadequate interpretation of the world and opens the way to a new, more adequate, interpretation. Such a model permits us "to 'decode' the traces of God's presence in history."¹⁰³

The foregoing has been an attempt to summarize Ricoeur's understanding of appropriation. He argues convincingly that it is commensurate with distanciation. The two are inseparable sides of the hermeneutic process. One of the criticisms that could be leveled against his view of appropriation is that the text is placed under the domain of the contemporary reader. Ricoeur anticipated that criticism and responds to it in one of his essays on "Appropriation."¹⁰⁴ He objects by claiming that appropriation is not a kind of possession. It actually is a moment of dispossession. In seeking to clarify Ricoeur's position John Thompson says that ". . . appropriation is not so much an act of possession as an act of

¹⁰¹ Ricoeur 26

¹⁰² Ricoeur 26

¹⁰³ Ricoeur, 1980, p. 26

¹⁰⁴ Ricoeur, 1981, p. 192

dispossession, in which the awareness of the immediate ego is replaced by a self-understanding mediated through the text."¹⁰⁵ With appropriation the reader risks being changed by the world the text envisions. The reader relinquishes self in order to submit to the possibilities of a new world proposed by the text. In *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* Ricoeur says it a little differently:

To understand oneself before the text is not to impose one's own finite capacity of understanding on it, but to expose oneself to receive from it a larger self which would be the proposed way of existing that most appropriately responds to the proposed world of the text. Understanding then is the complete opposite of a constitution for which the subject would have the key. It would be better in this regard to say that the self is constituted by the issue of the text."¹⁰⁶

The text offers a lively threat to "decenter" the self and its aspirations, to strip us of our desire for power, possession, and honor.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Ricoeur, 1981, p. 19

¹⁰⁶ Ricoeur, 1980, p. 108

¹⁰⁷ Regarding the posture of the interpreter, Dale Patrick and Allen Scult maintain that the "ideal interpreter seeks to learn from the text rather than [sic] to use it to confirm and propagate what he or she already knows. If the text renders a world we potentially or actually share, or sets forth an argument we are willing to adopt, our own thinking is deepened and broadened in proportion to how well we listen to and even 'strengthen' the text. If it opposes us, we should state the strongest case against ourselves and thereby strengthen our own thinking." See Patrick and Scult, *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990) 84.

Both these qualities of distancing and appropriation are rhetorical because they necessitate interaction between text, interpreter, tradition and audience as a part of the hermeneutic process. The process of interpretation is not done in isolation nor intrapersonally. The process of interpretation is public, engaging a number of partners in discourse. Keeping the text as the primary focus and allowing such a text to have the priority in the dialogue, the interpreter enters into the tradition of the ongoing interpretation of the text. Thus the hermeneutical process is never ending. Ricoeur acknowledges the qualities of distancing and appropriation to be a part of the hermeneutics of Scripture.¹⁰⁸ Ricoeur also acknowledges the dependence of faith on hermeneutics (a rhetorical hermeneutics). In an eloquently written passage using different descriptive phrases for faith, Ricoeur highlights the centrality of faith and its inseparable connection to hermeneutics:

The 'ultimate care' [faith] would remain mute if it did not receive the power of speech from an endlessly renewed interpretation of the signs and symbols that have, so to speak, educated and formed this care throughout the centuries. The feeling of absolute dependence [faith] would remain a weak and inarticulated feeling if it were not the response to the proposal of a new being that opened for me new possibilities of existing and acting. Unconditional trust [faith] would be empty if it were not

¹⁰⁸ This will be made more obvious in the next section on "The Hermeneutics of Scripture." But Ricoeur explicitly states that distancing was "already constitutive of primitive faith itself." There was distance between the first witness and the event (1987, p. 181). The modern meaning of hermeneutics "is only the discovery . . . of the hermeneutic situation which was present from the beginning of the gospel but hidden" (p. 181).

based upon the continually renewed interpretation of the sign-events reported by Scripture, such as the Exodus in the Old Testament and the Resurrection in the New Testament. These events of deliverance open and uncover the innermost possibility of my own freedom and thus become for me the word of God. Such is the properly hermeneutical constitution of faith itself.¹⁰⁹

Hermeneutics is that which gives voice to faith and appropriates it to new situations enabling faith to be a living dynamic faith. This is a rhetorical hermeneutic in which the interpreter mediates between text and audience enabling the text to speak to the present and giving vitality to biblical faith. Such a hermeneutic is therefore natural to biblical texts. It is not a foreign object or a template that is forced onto Scripture. Ricoeur himself correctly acknowledges that Scripture itself engages in this hermeneutic when he speaks of the relationship between speech and writing. First, speech is related to an earlier writing that it interprets: Jesus interpreted the Torah; Paul interpreted the "Christic event in light of the prophecies and institutions of the old covenant. More generally, a hermeneutics of the Old Testament, considered a given set of writings, is implied by the proclamation that Jesus is the Christ."¹¹⁰ The relationship between writing and the spoken word appears only through a series of interpretations. Ricoeur affirms that "to the degree that Christianity is dependent upon its successive readings of Scripture and on its capacity to reconvert this Scripture into the living word" is the

¹⁰⁹ Ricoeur, 1991, pp. 99-100; brackets are my insertions.

¹¹⁰ Ricoeur, 1991, p. 93

degree it is dependent on hermeneutics.¹¹¹ He uses the New Testament as an example of this process. It is a reinterpretation of the events of the Old Testament.¹¹² In deciphering the spiritual meaning of the Old Testament "faith is not a cry' but an understanding."¹¹³ The kerygma of Christianity is first and foremost not the interpretation of a text; it is the announcement of a person (Christ). But the kerygma is expressed in the stories and texts of Scripture and involves a rereading of those stories.¹¹⁴ "Hermeneutics is the very deciphering of life in the mirror of the text."¹¹⁵ Scripture itself is engaged in a rhetorical hermeneutic, to which Ricoeur is sensitive. Just how commensurate is Scripture with this hermeneutic? The sacred text itself may offer a model for the kind of hermeneutic necessary for understanding and appropriating its message.

The Hermeneutics of Scripture

Scripture is a veritable textbook of the appropriation of ancient texts which continued to give new vision and life.¹¹⁶ Scripture continually

¹¹¹ Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, in *Theories of Preaching*, ed. Richard Lischer (Durham, NC: The Labyrinth Press, 1987) 176.

¹¹² Ricoeur, 1987, p. 178

¹¹³ Ricoeur 178

¹¹⁴ Ricoeur 177, 179-180

¹¹⁵ Ricoeur 179

¹¹⁶ James Sanders views Scripture as a hermeneutic paradigm. "Contextual Hermeneutics," *Theories of Preaching*, ed. Richard Lischer (Durham, NC: The Labyrinth Press, 1987) 190.

reappropriates the tradition. It is a series of critiques of the communities for which it was written. Indeed as Leander Keck has observed:

Had the faith of Israel been on target the prophets would not have denounced it. The prophets are a protest against the prevailing faith and life of Israel. In the same way, the New Testament is a critique of early Christianity. This is especially true in Paul's letters. Had the church in Corinth, for example, been developing properly he would not have written his letter to it. The letters of Paul are nothing less (though considerably more) than a trenchant critique of his own churches.¹¹⁷

Scripture continually decontextualized its own tradition. In line with a rhetorical hermeneutic, it is not concerned with first order referent, historical situation or authorial intent.¹¹⁸ A couple of examples illustrate this decontextualization approach.

One example is found in the New Testament in the letter to the Hebrews. The Hebrews writer fills his work with references, which are fairly lengthy, from the Old Testament text. What is his method of interpretation? He is not concerned with a distinction between what the text meant and what it means. The words spoken long ago in a different setting are quoted as

¹¹⁷ Leander Keck, "The Presence of God Through Scripture," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 10 (1975) : 12.

¹¹⁸ James Sanders points out this fact: "One might rightly point out that the biblical authors themselves did not rehash the original meaning of the traditions or scripture they cited; usually they simply interpreted the tradition quite directly for their own time. There are interesting exceptions, but for the most part the biblical authors sought value in the tradition directly rather than recovering the points it first scored and then applying those points to their time" (Sanders, 1987, p. 191).

words to the author's own community. So he does not make a distinction between exegesis, hermeneutics, and exposition. When the author interprets he never asks "What did the text mean to the original audience?" For him the meaning of a text is not determined by its earliest form.¹¹⁹

The author's "word of exhortation" (Hebrews 13:22) is nothing less than making the ancient words contemporary. The Hebrews writer interprets the ancient text within the context of the community of faith. By interpreting it in this context he does so in a spirit which is fully consistent with the nature of the documents. He approaches the texts, not as the objective scientist who stands outside the claims of these texts, but as one who is absolutely open to the claims which they make about God and his summons to the believing community. The texts open out in front of themselves and

¹¹⁹ John Henry Newman made this appropriate observation: "It is indeed sometimes said that the stream is clearest near the spring. Whatever use may fairly be made of this image, it does not apply to the history of a philosophy or belief, which on the contrary is more equable, and purer, and stronger when its bed has become deep, and broad, and full" (p. 63). Later in his treatise Newman makes specific remarks about the text of Scripture: "It may be objected that its inspired documents at once determine the limits of its mission without further trouble; but ideas are in the writer and reader of the revelation, not in the inspired text itself; and the question is whether those ideas which the letter conveys from writer to reader, reach the reader at once in their completeness and accuracy on his first perception of them, or whether they open out in his intellect and grow to perfection in the course of time" (p. 78). Externally, he says, Scripture is an "earthen vessel" and as such "it grows in wisdom and stature" (p. 79). As a religious leader of the nineteenth century, Newman's statement was especially radical. See *Development of Christian Doctrine* (1878), reprint, (Westminster, Md: Christian Classics, Inc., 1968). James Sanders says that it is the general "trait of the post-Enlightenment era . . . to find authority only in the most primitive meaning of a passage" (Sanders, 1987, p. 191). But Sanders also goes on to offer a warning that neither is the meaning we may discern out of our immediate modern contexts the only authoritative one.

offer the possibility of a new world to those willing to dispossess themselves in order to hear what it has to say.

The way in which the Hebrews writer interprets ancient texts is not atypical of the way in which Scripture is appropriated throughout its pages. One consistently discovers that when the New Testament quotes Old Testament Scripture, especially the prophets, there is little or no regard for how it was used in its original context. One example will serve to demonstrate what is typical. In Hosea 11:1, Hosea, speaking of what God did for his children Israel *in the past*, says "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." The Gospel writer Matthew quotes this passage (2:15) and applies it to Christ fleeing down into Egypt during the time of Herod's persecution. There is no interest in authorial or historical context. In fact it might be argued that Matthew is playing pretty loose with the tradition. However, Matthew is simply calling attention to the similarities. What God did with Israel is a type or a parallel to what God is doing with Jesus. The ancient tradition is viewed from a new perspective as it points forward toward the future.

The ancient traditions of Israel are developed, expanded, and appropriated to the changing circumstances always looking forward. Recently Michael Fishbane has demonstrated this in a profound way. Modern biblical scholarship has long been persuaded that Scripture is founded upon tradition. Tradition history is a salient feature of higher criticism. Tradition criticism moves back from the written sources to the oral traditions which make them

up.¹²⁰ Fishbane inverts the process and focuses on what he calls "inner-biblical exegesis" which starts with the received Scripture and moves forward to the interpretations based on it (p. 7). His goal is to show how the handing down (*traditio*) has modified what was handed down (*traditum*). The *traditum* is the received tradition as codified in Scripture and the *traditio* is the appropriation of that tradition to new situations. Fishbane concludes that there is no one model or mold that characterizes the relationship between *traditum* and *traditio*. ". . . the Hebrew Bible is the repository of a vast store of hermeneutical techniques which long preceded early Jewish exegesis."¹²¹ Fishbane believes that all religions, including the biblical ones, renew and regenerate themselves via a "paradoxically dynamic" process. This process is dynamic because the imagination animating it is enormously creative and flexible. Yet it is paradoxical because all of this creativity, however innovative, is grounded solely in earlier tradition--thus placing it, for him, in the category of exegesis.¹²² Fishbane cites several examples to prove his point. Among legal texts, he sees the process in the way earlier laws are repeatedly updated and expanded.¹²³ Among the historical texts, he notes how Moses'

¹²⁰ Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) 7.

¹²¹ Fishbane 14

¹²² See Michael Fishbane, *The Garments of Torah: Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics* (Bloomington, IL: Indiana UP, 1989). This work is largely an abbreviated and popularized version of his earlier work *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*.

¹²³ E.g. compare the careful definition of what a "field" is in Deut. 22:9-11, updating Lev. 19:19; or the lawyerly reexamination of Exod. 23:10-11a in Lev. 25:3-7.

speech to Joshua in Deuteronomy 31:7-8 is exegetically transformed into a hymn of praise to the law in Joshua 1:7-8. Among the prophetic texts, the prophets often cited earlier tradition.¹²⁴ The Hebrew Bible is described by Fishbane as a multi-layered phenomenon whose outer layers, like outer garments on a person, are most easily seen and analyzed, but whose ever-deepening internal layers "conceal deeper and less-refracted aspects of divine truth," the core of which is "God himself."¹²⁵

The Hebrew Bible, when viewed holistically, vividly and creatively carries forth a rhetorical hermeneutic. It is quite clear that such a hermeneutic is commensurate with the way in which sacred texts engage in the interpretive process and vice versa. My approach to the book of Proverbs will take seriously this rhetorical process as a way of enabling this genre of literature to continue to speak. Thus my specific aim is to offer an understanding of proverbs in the book of Proverbs that unfolds their meaning and influence before contemporary audiences.

The Contribution of a Rhetorical Paradigm

The rhetorical hermeneutic that I have explicated above will serve as the foundation for my investigation of biblical proverbs. Such a hermeneutic does not eclipse the cognitive paradigm but seeks to extend its boundaries in order to be more holistic in its investigation. Such a rhetorical hermeneutic will enable me to investigate four fundamental aspects of the collected

¹²⁴ E.g. the way in which Jer. 23 updates and applies Exod. 19:5-6 to a radically new situation.

¹²⁵ *The Garments of Torah*, p. 35.

proverbs that the cognitive paradigm simply eluded or, more correctly, was unable to address.

First, it will enable me to explore those internal qualities of a proverb that equip it to influence behavior. By design proverbs are intended to manage social behavior, to create order. The hermeneutic paradigm I am using takes seriously this rhetorical function of the proverb. In addition, a rhetorical hermeneutic does not approach the proverb as a static and determinate form. Rather it understands its fundamental nature to be dynamic and relatively indeterminate. A rhetorical hermeneutic identifies those qualities that enable the proverb to persuade, to function effectively and to speak to many different contexts. Such an investigation is the focus of chapter two.

Second, a rhetorical hermeneutic that is based on Ricoeur's scheme is interested in disclosing the power of the text as it stands and not primarily in the historical issues that lie behind it. The hermeneutic that I am engaging underlines the work of the text as an object, divorcing the author and the original audience from consideration. Once again in the words of Roger Abrahams, this hermeneutic "implies that once a work is created it is capable of speaking for itself and must be analyzed in terms of its internal characteristics and the interrelationships of its parts."¹²⁶ I would argue that Proverbs is especially suited to a synchronic investigation because the individual proverbs are already decontextualized by the very fact of being placed in a collection. In addition, the proverbs collected here are anonymous. There is also no reference to their historical situation nor to a

¹²⁶ See above page 24.

primary reference. Proverbs are universalized. Therefore a rhetorical hermeneutic fits naturally with the canonical collection of proverbs. In line with this perspective, I will use a structural analysis to locate possible macrostructures that might organize the collection of biblical proverbs. My analysis does not seek to create a structure where no structure exists. But its goal is to honor the natural organization of the text. Chapter three will explore the texts of Proverbs in this way.

Third, as I explore the texts of proverbs, a rhetorical paradigm will enable me to discover what they have to say about the role of discourse and possibly about the interpretive process itself. A rhetorical hermeneutic will attend to a careful reading of a text giving it an interpretation that enables it to be the "best possible text."¹²⁷ I have selected five texts of Proverbs to engage in interpretive dialogue. They include the following: 10:13-21; 16:21-24; 25:11-28; 26:17-28; and 26:4-10. The reason for selecting these is that they all have an interest in the proper or improper use of discourse. They are actually representative of the central focus of Proverbs on speech. In addition, the last three of the above texts address two central topoi of speech in which Proverbs has special interest: ethics and kairos. These passages will be used in chapter three as I attempt to do a structural analysis of Proverbs.

Fourth, a rhetorical hermeneutic will enable me to engage the dialogical dimension of the proverb and observe the proverb at work in the broader canonical context. It will demonstrate how on the one hand there is an element of constancy to the familiar proverb but on the other hand it also

¹²⁷ Dale Patrick and Allen Scult, *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation*. Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990, p. 25.

is able to change shape and substance to fit the occasion and the audience. Such a focus does not, as in the cognitive tradition, focus on the past and what the proverb meant, but on its ability continually to unfold new meaning to new situations. In the broader canonical context, proverbs are ever expanding and extending their meaning in time and space. Scripture itself witnesses to proverbs being appropriated and reappropriated. In chapter four I want to demonstrate how the dialogic nature of proverbs serves as a rhetorical model of the hermeneutic process.

Underlying all four of these foci is an interest in how biblical proverbs influence individuals, contexts and tradition. First, their influence derives from their internal dynamic, their structure, content, and reasoning pattern. Second, their influence also derives from the immediate context in which they are placed in the Hebrew collection of Proverbs. That is, an individual proverb influences and is influenced by the surrounding proverbs it touches. They take on new meaning, an added dimension if you will, when they are considered in clusters. Third, their influence stems from how, when and by whom they are used. The texts of Proverbs witness to these important factors. Finally, their influence derives from the larger canonical contexts in which they are found as they continue to unfold new meaning when placed in these situations.

Selection Criteria for the Biblical Proverbs Studied

The following is a rationale for the constraints that I will place on the way in which I select the biblical proverbs for this study. The one general criterion that will govern the selection process is that I will focus primarily on sentence proverbs. Sentence proverbs are found in chapters 10:1-22:16 and 25-29 of the book of Proverbs. The sentence proverbs are small two line units of

discourse and stand in contrast to the longer paragraph length instruction proverbs which dominate the first nine chapters, the last two chapters and a middle section of the book (22:17-24:22). Thus the general constraint is based on structure.

Since each of the following chapters in my dissertation has a slightly different focus, the specific criteria will vary with the respective chapters. As I investigate how the proverb works in chapter two, the overall guiding principle of selection will be to include a sufficient number of proverbs to reasonably conclude that certain strategies are part of the makeup of biblical proverbs. That there is a sufficient number is a judgment call on my part.

The criteria for proverb selection in chapter three is dictated by my focus. The criteria are twofold. First, selected texts in Proverbs will be chosen whose macro-structure appears to unite a series of proverbs into a cohesive unit. Second, I will select certain texts of proverbs that appear to be clustered around an interest in discourse and two key themes: ethics and proper timing. I have chosen five that have already been mentioned above: 10:13-21; 16:21-24; 25:11-28; 26:4-10; and 26:17-28.

In chapter four I will investigate how proverbs are used and interpreted in different canonical contexts. An adequate number of examples will be used from three different contexts of Scripture (Proverbs, Hebrew Scripture, New Testament) to demonstrate their hermeneutical function. Again what determines an "adequate" amount will be a judgment call on my part.

These criteria, I believe, will enable me to proceed in a relatively consistent and orderly manner. They will also enable me to maintain the focus I need as I progress.

Conclusion

A rhetorical analysis of the book of Proverbs will be of heuristic value for both biblical and rhetorical scholars. It can offer insight into how proverbs function. In addition, my aim is to offer an understanding of the proverb and the book of Proverbs that unfolds its meaning and influence before contemporary audiences. An ongoing criticism that is leveled against both the discipline of rhetoric and biblical studies is that little research in these respective fields is practically oriented.¹²⁸ My focus is intended to demonstrate the value of proverbs and the text of Proverbs to contemporary culture.

In the past decade an increased interest in studying Scripture from a rhetorical perspective has been manifested by both biblical and rhetorical scholars. The need for and receptivity to quality research in this area continues to increase. But it is still relatively new territory. Though the enthusiasm for such research is great, there is uncertainty regarding how it should be done. The tendency is to approach Scripture mechanistically by simply imposing rhetorical jargon onto biblical texts and genres. In addition, though the value of such a perspective is acknowledged, there is apprehension about where it leads. Rhetorical analysis of biblical texts is still a pioneering field. As such there is a need to continue to explore the territory.

¹²⁸ Stanley Deetz levels this criticism against the field of speech. See Stanley Deetz, "Conceptualized Human Understanding: Gadamer's Hermeneutics and American Communication Studies," *Communication Quarterly* 26 (1978) : 13-14. In biblical scholarship the dominant hermeneutical paradigm tends to confine the book of Proverbs to the past and thus is only secondarily concerned with the contemporary scene.

In 1981 James Crenshaw, one of the most distinguished biblical scholars in America on Wisdom Literature,¹²⁹ wrote an introduction to this corpus simply entitled, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*. In the preface of that volume he discloses his motives for writing it: "I have written this book as preparation for a more ambitious project, a study of the art of persuasion in Israelite wisdom, which I hope to complete in the near future [emphasis mine]."¹³⁰ Later in chapter one he once again refers to this forthcoming volume.¹³¹ However, that volume has not come forth. In a personal letter I received from Crenshaw, dated September 29, 1988, he offered a very brief explanation as to why it had not yet been published. He remarked that other tasks had delayed its completion and "perhaps also, my conviction that it needs further reflection. One of these days I do intend to turn that study loose, but not yet." Even now, this volume still has not been produced. His hesitancy demonstrates the doubts that many biblical scholars have about taking a rhetorical perspective, how to proceed with it, and what it is really supposed to accomplish. But it also affirms that there is a strong interest in pursuing such a focus. It is for this reason that I enthusiastically take on such a task.

¹²⁹ Wisdom Literature in Scripture primarily includes Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and Sirach.

¹³⁰ James Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981) 7.

¹³¹ Crenshaw 34. In footnote 15 in chapter one he has even given the volume a tentative title, *The Art of Persuasion in Israelite Wisdom*, and says that it will be published by Fortress Press (p. 246).

Chapter Two

The Biblical Proverb and Its Micro-Dimensional Influences

By design proverbs function within various cultures to manage social behavior and maintain the order of the community. Clearly this makes them rhetorical. But what internal qualities of the proverb, and specifically the biblical proverb, enable it to carry out its work? How is it that proverbs are able to influence the thoughts, feelings and actions of those who hear them? Such a focus is not easy to address because of the multitude of factors at work simultaneously within the dynamics of proverbs. However, such an undertaking can be fruitful if approached with rhetorical sensitivity and with the understanding that the work that proverbs do is not accomplished mechanistically nor can the way in which they work be completely explained and rationalized. Because of their multidimensional character there is an element of mystery that will always be a part of their makeup.

In order to begin to understand the action of the proverb, one must approach it holistically, taking seriously the polysemous nature that has been denied the proverb by the cognitive paradigm. Roger Abrahams understands the rhetorical quality and the relationship between the component parts when he makes the following statement: "The rhetorical approach deals with all levels of style simultaneously in order to show how they interrelate through the direction of argument."¹ The rhetorical character of the proverb involves a synergistic relationship between a series of components. These components include its structural nature, reasoning patterns, content, and situational character. Each of these four elements will be explicated in this

¹ Roger Abrahams, "Introductory Remarks to a Rhetorical Theory of Folklore," *Journal of American Folklore* 81 (1968) : 146.

chapter. But again it must be kept in mind that no one element is at work without the others. Only for the sake of analysis are they here separated.

The Structural Character of Biblical Proverbs

In order to put the structure of biblical proverbs in perspective, I want to begin with an analysis of the structure of the proverbial genre at large. Then I will return to a more finely tuned analysis of biblical proverbs. So in this section focus will first be given to discovering an archetypal or universal structure to proverbs. Then second and in greater detail, attention will be turned to a comparison of biblical proverbs and a probing into the richness of their rhetorical structure.

Roger Abrahams describes the structure of the proverb succinctly: "The proverb is generally a sentence that is perceptibly broken in the middle."² It has a binary or two part construction that, for the sake of rhetorical effect, is strategically divided. Alan Dundes analyzes this binary structure in more detail. He concludes that there is a close relationship between the structure of the proverb and the structure of a riddle. That which they have in common has to do with what he calls a "topic-comment" format: "A minimum proverb or riddle consists of one descriptive element, that is to say, one unit composed of one topic and one comment."³ Thus a proverb must have at least two words, one being the topic the other the comment. Typically,

² Roger Abrahams, "Proverbs and Proverbial Expressions," *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972) 120.

³ Alan Dundes, "On the Structure of the Proverb," *The Wisdom of Many: Essays on the Proverb*, eds. Wolfgang Mieder and Alan Dundes (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1981) 43-64.

however, proverbs are longer than this. Dundes elaborates further by saying that there are oppositional and non-oppositional proverbs. Oppositional proverbs have the basic formula which says that A does not equal B (Two wrongs don't make a right; One swallow does not make a summer). Proverbs based on the formula that A is greater than or less than B (e.g., the "better/than" proverbs: Hindsight is better than foresight) are also oppositional proverbs. Examples of non-oppositional proverbs would be the following: honesty is the best policy; the customer is always right; haste makes waste; experience is the best teacher. Equational proverbs ($A = B$) are also non-oppositional: time is money; seeing is believing. Proverbs which contain a single descriptive element are usually non-oppositional. Proverbs with two or more descriptive elements may be either oppositional or non-oppositional. For Dundes, the lowest common denominator in the structure is that ". . . all proverbs are potentially propositions which compare and/or contrast. Comparing originally referred to finding similarities or identifying features in common; contrasting referred to delineating differences."⁴

To compare biblical proverbs to this general description of proverbial structure is helpful. There is a general topic/comment pattern that is a part of their structure. But a more refined analysis of biblical proverbs is still necessary. In biblical proverbs, in the collection assembled in the book of Proverbs, the common element is their binary structure. And as folklorists and anthropologists struggle to describe the relationship of the two parts of a proverb (eg. topic/comment), in like manner an important issue with biblical

⁴ Dundes 54

proverbs has to do with the relationship between the couplets. To attend to this relationship can reveal much about their structural strategy.

Since Robert Lowth's work, *On Sacred Hebrew Poetry (De sacra poesi Hebraeorum)* published in 1753, biblical scholars have identified the dominant characteristic of Hebrew poetry in general as that of parallelism. Lowth was the first to use this term to explain the two part structure of all poetic language in Scripture which includes Psalms, the Prophetic books and Proverbs. Hebrew poetry consists basically of two lines standing in a particular kind of relationship to one another. This relationship is referred to as parallelism. To take a proverb that opens the sentence collection in Proverbs chapter ten will illustrate the point. The proverb is structured in this way:

"A wise son makes a glad father/ but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother//"
(10:1)

The saying clearly has a binary structure. Two lines make up the proverb. The second line stands in some kind of relationship to the first. The structure can be diagrammed like this: _____ / _____ //.

Since Lowth's time the principle of parallelism has been refined and standardized. Many works on Hebrew poetry have codified a half-a-dozen different kinds of parallelism.⁵ First, there is parallelism that is *synonymous*.

⁵ As examples see the following: Philip Johannes Nel, *The Structure and Ethos of the Wisdom Admonitions in Proverbs* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1982) 16; Clyde M. Miller, "Interpreting Poetic Literature in the Bible," *Biblical Interpretation: Principles and Practice*, eds. F. Furman Kearley, Edward P. Myers, and Timothy D. Hadley (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986) 164-165; Roland E. Murphy, *Wisdom Literature & Psalm* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983) 37-38; John T. Willis, *Insights from tbs. Psalms* (Abilene, TX: Biblical Research Press, 1974) 8-16.

The second line in synonymous parallelism states the same thought as the first only using different words. An example used to illustrate this might be:

"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof/ the world and those who dwell therein / /" (Psalm 24:1)

A second type is antithetic, parallelism in which the second line forms a contrast with the first:

"Yahweh knows the way of the righteous/ but the way of the wicked will perish / /" (Psalm 1:6)

Third, synthetic parallelism consists of the second line advancing the thought of the first:

"I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God/ than dwell in the tents of wickedness / /" (Psalm 84:10)

Fourth, emblematic, parallelism uses metaphoric language in one of the two parallel lines:

"For as the heavens are high above the earth/ so great is his steadfast love toward those who respect him / /" (Psalm 103:11)

And fifth, *chiastic* parallelism structures the two lines of poetry in an ABBA pattern:

"Because he cleaves to me in love (A), I will deliver him (B) / I will protect him (B), because he knows my name (A) / /" (Psalm 91:14)

These were considered to be the typical kinds of parallelism. A poetic verse or proverb could be plugged into one of these categories. In all of these categories emphasis is stressed on similarities, especially semantic similarities. The second line reiterates the first in some way or another. T. H. Robinson described the function of the second line in the following way: "So

the poet goes back to the beginning again, and says the same thing once more, though he may partly or completely change the actual words to avoid monotony."⁶ The feature of parallelism is simply providing variety.⁷

The problem with this system of classification is twofold. First, this model of parallelism, as well as other current models, completely omits any consideration of how the binary structure serves as a rhetorical strategy. However, this appears to be a primary function of such a structure. Second, this model, based on a cognitive mind set, is too rigid and inflexible. All poetic verse is forced to fit into one of these categories. But not all parallelism fits so neatly. The result is that the dynamic and rhetorical dimension of the proverb is stifled. There is no room for flexibility and creative movement. In addition it can be argued that there is no such thing in Hebrew poetry as one line being exactly synonymous or antithetic with another. Even words that are characterized as synonyms or antonyms are not exactly synonymous or antithetic because they will carry a slightly different shade of meaning than their counterparts. For example, Proverbs 11:12 says "he who despises, his neighbor lacks sense/but a man of understanding *will be silent*." If this were purely antithetic then we would expect praise or encouragement to be the antithesis of despise or belittle. But it is not. We are surprised to find that an

⁶ T. H. Robinson, *The Poetry of the Old Testament* (London: np, 1947) 21.

⁷ In following this scheme, Philip Johannes Nel has identified a twofold element of what he calls the admonition proverb. The twofold structure includes an admonition followed by a motivation, a reason given for the admonition. While his findings are helpful, they are mainly based on the content of the proverb even though he argues that one cannot separate content from form (pp. 72-74). *The Structure and Ethos of the Wisdom Admonitions in Proverbs* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1982).

understanding man is *silent*. Another way of describing the structure and function of Hebrew poetry must be sought, one that sees such a structure as a rhetorical strategy.

In 1981 James Kugel published a volume entitled *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History*. In it he took issue with the long standing way of describing Hebrew poetry. He argued that the term "parallelism" is misleading because it implies that each half must parallel the other in meaning or that each word of the first line must be matched by a word in the second.⁸ This view flattens out the dynamic nature of parallelism. After perusing through the poetic material of Scripture (his examples are primarily from Psalms but they also include a few examples from Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and some of the Prophets), Kugel concludes that "the ways of parallelism are numerous and varied, and the intensity of the semantic parallelism established between clauses might be said to range from 'zero perceivable correspondence' to 'near-zero perceivable differentiation' (i.e., just short of word-for-word repetition)."⁹

Kugel calls the first part of the two part poetic form A and the second part B and proceeds to elaborate on what he perceives to be a more natural description of the relationship between the two. In the standard description of parallelism described above, the medial pause or break that is visible in the Hebrew text between the first (A) and the second (B) line has been taken to be

⁸ James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1981) 2.

⁹ Kugel 7.

a kind of equals sign. But, Kugel maintains, it is a pause and its true character might be more graphically symbolized by a double arrow (<-->):

for it is the dual nature of B both to come after A and thus add to it, often particularizing, defining, or expanding the meaning, and yet also to harken back to A and in an obvious way connect to it. One might say that B has both retrospective (looking back to A) and prospective (looking beyond it) qualities. by its very afterwardness, B will have an emphatic character.¹⁰

In Kugel's structure the focus is on the emphatic or "seconding" quality of B. B does not simply repeat A but in some way, shape or form complements it. The relationship is that there is a statement made in A and a "what's more" statement in B. Note this "going beyond" nature of the second line (B) in the following examples that Kugel cites:

You brought up a vine from Egypt / you banished nations and
planted it // Psalm 80:9

Let your love, Lord, be upon us / since we hope in you //
Psalm 33:22

If a camp encamp about me / my heart shall not fear //
Psalm 27:3

My friends and companions stand aloof from my affliction /
those closest to me stand far off // Psalm 38:12

Of the primacy of this two-part binary form, Kugel argues that

. . . we are asserting, basically, a sequence: first part-pause-next
part-bigger pause. . . . But even this sequence is a bit of a

¹⁰ Kugel 8

shorthand for the real point, for what those pauses actually embody is the *subjoined, hence emphatic*, character of B. The briefness of the brief pause is an expression of B's connectedness to A; the length of the long pause is an expression of the relative disjunction between B and the next line. What this means is simple: B, by being connected to A-carrying it further, echoing it, defining it, restating it, contrasting with it, it does not matter which- has an emphatic, "seconding" character, and it is this, more than any aesthetic of symmetry or paralleling, which is at the heart of biblical parallelism.¹¹

In Kugel's eyes, the lines are parallel not because the second line is symmetrically parallel to A nor the same length as A, but because B completes it or carries it further. Thus this phenomenon is flexible and dynamic, not flat and rigid. This explains why the practice of paralleling is so inconsistent.¹² Such unpredictability, I would argue, is intentional and rhetorical. "Our point," Kugel concludes, "is hardly that parallelism does not exist, but that care must be taken to see it in the proper terms, as part of a larger, overall rhetorical structure."¹³ Kugel maintains that there is a

¹¹ Kugel 51

¹² Many scholars have tried to impose a metrical structure on Hebrew poetry. But there has been no consensus on what this meter is. The reason for no consensus is that the principle of parallelism is inconsistent and a metrical system relies on consistency.

¹³ Kugel 56. Kugel takes a whole chapter in his book to argue that this phenomenon of parallelism is not something confined to poetry. It is also a characteristic of biblical narrative as well. He goes so far to say that there is little distinction between poetic and narrative material in the Hebrew

"sharpness"¹⁴ that is connected with parallelism. "Its sharpness," he explains, "has nothing to do with spurring to action."¹⁵ Rather it has to do, he says, with "the delight in creating a B half which both connects with, and yet cleverly expands, the meaning of A. 'Sharpness' represented the potential subtleties hidden inside juxtaposed clauses."¹⁶ Kugel's description of the "sharpness" of the proverb though appropriate is too constricted. If there is this quality within the structure of the proverb itself, does it not naturally follow that the "sharpness" of its quality extends beyond its internal structure to its external ability to penetrate the ear and the mind of the auditor?

In spite of this constriction in Kugel's model, his assessment of parallelism is revolutionary. It opens the door to understanding much more clearly the structure and nature of Hebrew poetry. However, Kugel's treatment focuses primarily on the poetry of the book of Psalms. How might his structural analysis help illuminate a more detailed investigation of the nature of proverbs in the book of Proverbs? I would maintain that his analysis can be helpful in understanding their rhetorical structure as well.

Scriptures. Such a position, however, is extreme and leads to lumping all genre of Scripture into one conglomerate.

¹⁴ By sharpness, Kugel is referring to the frequent association of the quality of sharpness with the word proverb. שְׁנִינָה is used in Deut. 28:37; I Kings 9:7; Jer. 24:9; II Chron. 7:20. See Brown, Driver, Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2nd printing (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975) 1042. Also the idea of sharpness is connected with the proverb in Proverbs 26:9: "Like a thorn that goes up in the hand of a drunkard/ is a proverb in the mouth of fools //." Also compare Ecclesiastes 12:11 "The sayings of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings which are given by one shepherd."

¹⁵ Kugel 11

¹⁶ Kugel 11-12

From a cognitive perspective, biblical proverbs are often perceived to be quite pedestrian in nature. Part of the reason for this disrespect is the lack of awareness of their rhetorical form. Alter observes that when biblical proverbs are brought into contemporary culture, there is the tendency to use only one line of the proverb rather than both halves thus defusing their force.¹⁷ But when both halves are taken seriously they are not so pedantic. However, I take issue with Alter on this point. Using only one half of the proverb does not necessarily lead to their blandness. In actuality their binary structure equips them to undergo a process of fission that enables them to adapt to ever changing situations.¹⁸ What I would like to do is brush away the deposits from the surface of the proverb and expose the underlying beauty of its rhetorical shape. I want to demonstrate its multidimensional form by identifying some overarching structural patterns that are common to it. And in highlighting these I also want to emphasize its fluidity by showing the rich variety of forms that reside within these general patterns.

There are five different types of parallelism that I want to highlight. These include static, antithetic, extension, formulaic, and riddle-form proverbs.¹⁹ I am not proposing these as a new set of categories to replace the old set. But these are simply dominant structural patterns that have surfaced

¹⁷ Alter. 165

¹⁸ For further development of this quality, see chapter four.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Huwiler maintains that there are basically two general structural patterns: correspondence and distinction. In the former the second line shows a similarity in relationship with the first. In the latter the difference between the two is highlighted. Elizabeth Huwiler, *Control of Reality in Israelite Wisdom*, unpublished dissertation Duke University (1988) 83ff.

in the course of my study and that demonstrate the paralleling principle of "seconding."²⁰ Nor are these categories completely distinct from one another. There is much overlap between them. The one common denominator that ties them all together is the principle that in some way, shape or form the second line builds on the first.²¹

First, there are those proverbs that are more static in nature, with the second line coming close to a verbatim repetition of the first. However, there is no true synonymity because even verbatim repetition has a heightening effect as, for example, is observed in the last two poetic lines of Psalm 90:17:

Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us/
and establish thou the work of our hands upon us/
yes, establish thou the work of our hands / /.

Though the last line repeats verbatim the former, it is not because the poet is simply repeating himself so readers will get the point. The second line is a way of intensifying what is being said. So even though there is no true

²⁰ Kugel 51

²¹ An additional common element has to do with their compactness. As one author comments, proverbs are a "maximum of meaning in a minimum of words." See Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1990) 20. Typically there are four words to the first line and three to the second. This pattern does vary and sometimes there are four in the first and four in the second. And on a few occasions there are more in the second than in the first. But more often than not the second line is shorter than the first. Sometimes there is a punch word as in 15:23 "An apt answer is a joy to a man/ a word in its time- how good!" (*mah-tob*). Such structural qualities are strategic and are simply another way of demonstrating the seconding or heightening function of the second line.

synonymity, there are certain proverbs that do come close. The following is an example of this more static structure.

"A deceiving witness will not go unpunished/ and he who utters lies will not escape / /"²² (Prv. 19:5)²³

In the above, the "deceiving witness" of the first line is matched by "he who utters lies" in the second. And "not go unpunished" is quite similar to "not escape."²⁴ There is little development from the first to the second line, nor does there seem to be much, if any, heightening effect. However, the phrase "not escape" may be an intentional abbreviation of "not escape punishment." If that is the case, the abbreviation allows the audience to complete the thought thus creating a type of heightening effect. In any case, the proverb comes as close to being synonymous as will be found. The following are further examples of static parallelism:

"He who gathers in the summer is a prudent son/ he who sleeps in the harvest is a shameful son / /" (Prv. 10:5)

"A soft answer will turn away anger/ but a harsh word will bring up anger / / (Prv. 15:1)

In both of these proverbs, the second line is antithetical to the first. And in both the words and terms of the second come very close to being antonyms of

²² It is good to note here that this same proverb is repeated in 19:9. But "not escape" in the second line is changed to "perish" which intensifies the second line.

²³ The translations of proverbs in this chapter are my own and are made from Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica* text.

²⁴ To add weight to its static nature the proverb contains an equal amount of words in each line (four).

the first. The syntax and word order are also quite similar.²⁵ In perusing through the sentence sayings in proverbs there are other examples that could be given. But the static proverb is by no means a dominant form. Richness in structure, a proverb that teases and entertains the mind, is much more the norm.

A second general structural pattern is the antithetic proverb. The last two proverbs cited above introduce this type. The antithetic proverb is scattered throughout the collection of biblical proverbs. But they are most concentrated in chapters 10-15, chapters that are a part of what is known as the Solomonic collection. Like the static proverbs they are not as colorful as others, especially those found in chapters 25-27. In fact, it could be argued that most of the static-like proverbs are antithetic in form. The following is one example:

"A man who is kind benefits himself/ but he who is cruel hurts himself /" (Prv. 11:17)

Even though the antithetic proverbs are not as colorful as many others, neither are they as jejune as some would claim. There is a subtle richness to them when they are closely examined. Many display the principle of intensification in the second line. In the following proverb

"The righteous one will seek out his friend/ but the way of the wicked ones will wander /" (Prv. 12:26)

the second line intensifies the first by moving from singular in the first to plural in the second. Furthermore the first line is focused on seeking out a

²⁵ In addition both proverbs contain an equal amount of words in each stich (four).

particular kind of person, a friend. Thus the objective is clear. However, in the second line there is a lack of focus; the wicked ones are those who have no direction. They are those who wander. The antithetic proverb of 14:24 demonstrates another way of intensifying:

"Wise ones are crowned with their wealth/ but the folly of fools
is foolish //"

Here, as in most of the antithetic proverbs, the proverb is marked by succinctness with three words in the first line and three in the second. The second line intensifies the contrast with the first. All three words in the second line are different forms of the term for fool. Such repetition heightens the stupidity of the fool in contrast to the wise. Something similar, as well, is seen in the following:

"In all a prudent man acts with knowledge/ but a fool spreads
out his folly // " (Prv. 13:16)

There are four words in the first line and three in the second. Two of the three words in the second line are words for folly. In addition, notice again how in the first line the prudent one is focused in direction but in the second line the fool has no direction. The fool spreads out his folly like a peddler spreads out his wares. Sometimes intensifying is accomplished by the use of a punch word or phrase that concludes the proverb. This is illustrated in the following proverbs:

"When the just man prospers, a town exults/ when the wicked
perish-shouts of joy! // " (Prv. 11:10)²⁶

²⁶ What is translated into English as "shouts of joy" is one word in Hebrew. One is also surprised to find in this proverb that there is no antithetic to "a town exults." The antithetic would be something like

"A false balance is an abomination to Yahweh/ but a just weight— his delight! / /" (Prv. 11:1)²⁷

Intensification also occurs when the second line contrasts that which is salient with that which is evanescent:

"Truthful lips will endure for ever/ but only for a moment is a lying tongue/ /" (Prv. 12:19)²⁸

The second line of Proverbs 15:8 "seconds" the first in still another way:

"The sacrifice of the wicked ones are an abomination of Yahweh/ but the prayers of the upright ones—his delight//"

This proverb moves from a general form of worship to a specific form, namely from sacrifice to prayers.²⁹ The second line also intensifies by using a punch word: his delight.

Some antithetic proverbs move from singular to plural:

"A rich man's wealth is his strong city / the poverty of the poor is their ruin / /" (Prv. 10:15)

mourning or weeping. Instead there is the word "shouts of joy" which again is a subtle witness to the dynamic nature of these proverbs.

²⁷ Again the phrase "his delight" is one word and is placed in an emphatic position at the end of the proverb. It is worthy of also mentioning here that throughout the Proverbs "abomination" and "delight" are formulaic contrasting pairs: 11:20; 12:22; 15:8.

²⁸ The phrase "only for a moment" is literally "while I would twinkle" and emphasizes the brevity of the deceptive tongue. We would say "In the twinkle of an eye." The proverb is also built on a chiastic structure with an ABBA pattern.

²⁹ There is also a movement from the singular sacrifice to the plural prayers.

"There is a way which seems right to a man/ but its end is the ways of death / /" (14:12)

Some move from plural to singular and from less vivid to more vivid imagery:

"Wise men lay up knowledge/ but the babbling of a fool brings ruin near / /" (Prv. 10:14)

Others move from feminine to masculine:

"A gracious woman will grasp honor/ but violent men get riches / /" (Prv. 11:16)³⁰

Still others from exterior to interior:

"A woman of strength is the crown of her husband/ but like rottenness in his bones is she who brings shame / /" (Prv. 12:4)³¹

The woman of worth gives her husband a crown which can be seen by all.

The shameful woman affects the interior of her spouse, his health.

In all of these examples of antithetic proverbs, intensification is achieved in a variety of creative ways, through chiasmic structure, punch words, movement from feminine to masculine, from singular to plural, from external to internal and vice versa. Intensification is also achieved by compactness, with the first line typically containing four words and the second three. As I have already affirmed, there are those that are more static in nature. But their presence is simply witness to the variety of the proverbial structure. The above examples could be multiplied. These are,

³⁰ This proverb not only moves from feminine to masculine but also from singular to plural.

³¹ this proverb is also chiasmic in structure with an ABBA pattern.

however, sufficient to demonstrate certain patterns that surface and the subtle rhetorical nature of the antithetical proverb, which first appears to lack vitality. But when the residue is brushed aside, a form unfolds before us that is aesthetically pleasing to the mind and rhetorically attractive to the ear.

A third structural form is the proverb that is developed from the principle of extension. Like many of the antithetic proverbs, the second line of the extension proverb elaborates on, heightens, specifies, focuses, concretizes or intensifies the first line but not in a contrasting way. The proverb

"Gracious words are like the honey of a honey comb/ sweet to the soul and healing to the bones/" (Prv. 16:24)³²

is an example of the second line extending or elaborating on the first. The second line expounds on and specifies what is meant by the honey metaphor in the first and reveals how gracious words impact a person.

One of the primary types of extension proverbs are those that contain a narrative impulse.³³ The first line of the proverb expresses a thought or a

³² There is no contrast intended in the second line between soul and bones. Unlike the Greeks, for the Hebrews "soul" was simply another word for the whole of the individual or the self.

³³ Roger Abrahams says, "Many of the most widely known and interesting proverbs tell a condensed story; these items often function metaphorically when used in a conversational context. That is, in the proverb 'People who live in glass houses should not throw stones' we are given an image suggestive of a story, but the comparing effect of the metaphor is not present. Yet when this proverb is used it does imply that the person in the glass house is to be compared to the one to whom the saying is directed" (p. 120). "Proverbs and Proverbial Expressions," *Folklore and FolkLife: An Introduction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972). Thomas Long has also claimed that the element of narrativity lies behind

moral principle followed by the second line which traces through its effects or consequences. Many proverbs display a narrative form by presumably encapsulating a variety of similar experiences into one brief vignette. In fact the New Testament writers use particular proverbs out of which to create a story.³⁴ The following is one such sample of the narrative form:

"The beginning of strife is like letting out water/ so quit before
the quarrel breaks out / /" (Prv. 17:14)

Numerous other examples can also be given. The following are just a few:

"Do not boast about tomorrow/ for you do not know what a day
may bring forth / /" (Prv. 27:1)

"He who rises early in the morning to bless his neighbor with a
loud voice / it will be counted as verbal abuse / /" (27:14)³⁵

"The consequence for humility and fear of the Lord/ riches and
honor and life / /" (Prv. 22:4)³⁶

many of the proverbs. Thomas Long, *Preaching the Literary Forms of the Bible* 1989 Fortress.

³⁴ For example, Proverbs 25:6-7 is used by Jesus in Luke 14:7-11 to create a parable.

³⁵ The first line contains six words the second three. Using humor and compactness in the second line, this narrative vignette moves from the superficial facade of what the person does to how it really affects the neighbor. In commenting on this proverb, William McKane says "The person who goes to such extravagant lengths to create an impression of amiability is to be reckoned as a curse to the one to whom he is excessively civil." McKane p. 619.

³⁶ The narrative flow of this proverb is clear with the second line heightening the results of the first by stacking on top of one another three positive terms. Line one contains four words, line two three.

"Train up a child in the way he should go/ for when he is old he will not depart from it / /" (Prv. 22:6)³⁷

"The lazy person says, 'There is a lion outside/ I shall be murdered in the midst of the plaza / /" (Prv. 22:13)

"A lazy person buries his hand in the dish/ he will not even raise it to his mouth / /" (Prv. 19:24)³⁸

"A man who is reprov'd yet who is stubborn/ will suddenly be broken—and there is no healing / /" (Prv. 29:1)³⁹

"A poor man and one who oppresses the poor/ a beating rain – and there is no bread / /"(Prv. 28:3)⁴⁰

Some narrative proverbs conclude with the element of surprise. Such is the case with Proverbs 21:31:

"The horse is made ready for the day of battle/ victory belongs to Yahweh//"

³⁷ The narrative impulse of this proverb lives on in contemporary versions such as the following: "As the twig is bent/ so grows the tree/ /;" or "The acorn does not fall far from the tree;" or "He is a chip off the old block."

³⁸ Within this encapsulated narrative is a hyperbole that conjures up a humorous image of a person who is so lazy that he cannot even lift his hand to his mouth to feed himself.

³⁹ This narrative vignette is capped by a punch phrase in the second line, a two-word phrase in Hebrew "there is no healing."

⁴⁰ The narrative of this proverb is completed with a vivid metaphor of a torrential rain that destroys crops and fruit. Such a metaphor intensifies the proverbial plot. It is more typical, however, as will be seen later, for the metaphor or image to be placed in the first line with the second line clarifying its reference. In this proverb, the metaphor is placed in the second line.

In this proverb horse serves as a metonymy for battle preparations. The first line conjures up images of the detail, energy, time and strategy that goes into the preparations for an encounter with the enemy. Both horse and rider are trained and outfitted for war in order to insure a successful campaign. But suddenly there is a turn of events. A third party enters the picture, Yahweh. He is the one who really determines the outcome. This surprise ending is intensified even more by the fact that the second line contains only two words in Hebrew.⁴¹

The extension proverbs engage many of the subtle moves that were observed earlier in the antithetic proverbs. It is not uncommon to find the binary structure moving from singular to plural, internal to external and vice versa. They can also move from general to specific as in Proverbs 19:29:

"Justice will be ready for scoffers/ and blows to the back for
fools / /"

Here what is meant by justice in the first line is specified in the second as referring to a whipping. Frequently the move from general to specific is accomplished by the use of vivid metaphors in the second line such as is found in these proverbs:

"He who verbally abuses his father and his mother/ his lamp
will be extinguished in utter darkness/(20:20)

"In the light of the king's face is life/ and his good will is like a
cloud that brings spring rain/ /"⁴² (16:15)

⁴¹ The first line contains four words.

⁴² Line one contains four words, line two three.

With the extension proverbs one begins to delve even further into the depth of the proverbial structure. Their structure is primarily characterized by a development from one line to the next. This development takes place in a variety of ways: in the form of a narrative plot, from abstract to concrete, from cause to effect, and sometimes in terms of a surprise turn of events. As Robert Alter has insightfully observed ". . . Proverbs . . . requires close reading because within the confines of the one-line poem nice effects and sometimes suggestive complications are achieved through the smallest verbal movements."⁴³

A fourth type are those proverbs that use some kind of formulaic phrase or term to structure the saying. In what follows I will isolate two major and two minor forms.⁴⁴ The first and most frequent formulaic type is the "better/than" sequence. These proverbs take some desirable physical situation or circumstance and place it in the context of strife or chaos. Suddenly a reversal takes place and the less desirable physical surrounding becomes the better way because it is accompanied by an atmosphere of peace and tranquility. This formulaic type is based on the reversal motif which pervades Scripture. Experiences are not always what they seem.⁴⁵ There is an

⁴³ Alter 175

⁴⁴ The distinction between major and minor is based on the frequency of appearance in the book of Proverbs and not a judgment statement about their worth. In addition to these four, one could probably add one or two more depending upon how flexible one wants to be with what is considered formulaic.

⁴⁵ Proverbs 14:12 summarizes this concern clearly: "There is a way that seems right to a man/ but its end is the ways of death." A number of

unexpected reversal that takes place. The reversal motif is not only a part of the content of the proverb but of its structure as well. In the "better/than" proverbs the sages make a value statement about what are the more important things in life:

"Better is a dry crust of bread and quietness with it/ than a house full of feasting and strife / /" (Prv. 17:1)⁴⁶

"Better a meal of vegetables where there is love/ than prime beef with hate / /"⁴⁷ (Prv. 15:17)

"Better is a little with the fear of the Lord/ than much treasure and confusion with it / /" (Prv. 15:16)

"Better is a poor one who walks with integrity/ than a wealthy one who is perverted in his ways / /" (Prv. 28:6)

"Better to be a common man who has employment/ than to make a show of grandeur and be short of bread / /" (Prv. 12:9)

In addition to these there are several "better/than" proverbs that increase the structural complexity by employing the formula in both the first and second lines of the proverb.⁴⁸

contemporary proverbs also express this thought: "you can't judge a book by its cover" or "all that glitters is not gold."

⁴⁶ A contemporary French proverb built on the same structure conveys a similar sentiment: "Better an egg in peace than an ox in wartime."

⁴⁷ The phrase I render "prime beef" is literally a "fattened ox."

⁴⁸ Intensification in the second line is achieved by the surprise discovery that that which seems to be the more desirable state is really not.

"Better is one who is slow to anger than the mighty/ the one who has self control than one who captures a city/ /" (16:32)⁴⁹

"How much better to acquire wisdom than gold/ to acquire understanding than choosing silver// " (Prv. 16:16)⁵⁰

"A good name is better than great wealth/ and to be gracious than silver and gold / /" (Prv. 22:1)

Several "better/than" proverbs deal with a particular domestic problem: the "nagging wife:"⁵¹

"Better to dwell upon the corner of a roof/ than in a spacious house⁵² with a contentious spouse/ /⁵³ (Prv. 25:24)

⁴⁹ Besides the double "better/than" form, there is also the intensification from "mighty" in the first line to "capturing a city" in the second. Further, within each line there is a move from the internal to the external, from one who has control over his or her emotions to one who is able to control others.

⁵⁰ Once again there is a movement from the internal qualities of knowledge and wisdom to the external elements of gold and silver.

⁵¹ A rhetorical hermeneutic that is concerned with how the text looks forward to the present can continue to see the power and relevance of these sayings by rendering them gender neutral which is how I interpret the following. In addition Proverbs itself acknowledges that "nagging" was not a trait characteristic only of women. Men as well can be quite contentious ("drippy") as Proverbs 26:21 affirms: "As charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire/ so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife / /."

⁵² Here I accept the emendation that Kittel recommends in his note to this proverb in his *Biblica Hebraica*, text. I render *rhb* (רְהַב) for *hrb* (הַרְב). *hrb* refers to that which is common or to company.

⁵³ In this proverb there is a spatial movement from small to large, from the cramped and seemingly hideous conditions on the corner of a roof to the openness of a roomy house. This proverb has a doublet in 21:9.

"Better to dwell in a desert land/ than with a quarrelsome and angry spouse/ /" (Prv. 21:19)⁵⁴

Numerous other "better/ than" sayings could be added to these examples.⁵⁵ Elizabeth Huwiler classifies these sayings into two general types: simple (better X than Y) and coordinating (better X with A than Y with B).⁵⁶ Within this form, the surprise motif is the central element of the structure. The structure reverses normal expectations in a way that is satisfying to the auditor and gives voice to what the common person would affirm as the more important things in life. These proverbs invite us to reconstruct reality,⁵⁷ to look at life from a different perspective by focusing on the value

⁵⁴ Here the spatial movement might be the opposite as was seen in 25:24. but the real contrast is between deprivation on the one hand and the comforts of a house on the other. Line one contains four words, line two three.

⁵⁵ "Better open rebuke/ than hidden love/ /" (Prv. 27:5). See also 16:8; 16:19; 19:1; 19:22; 25:7; 27:10; 28:6. In the instruction sayings of Proverbs 1-9 there are several "better/than" sayings: 3:14-15; 8:10-11, 19.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Huwiler, *Control of Reality in Israelite Wisdom*, unpublished dissertation Duke University (1988) 86. Glendon Bryce, in addition to a historical survey, also does a structural analysis of the "better" sayings. " "Better"--Proverbs: An Historical and Structural Study," *The Society of Biblical Literature Book of Seminar Papers* (L. C. McGaughey, ed.; Missoula: SBL, 1972) 343-354.

⁵⁷ This is one of Walter Brueggemann's main agendas in his most recent work entitled *Texts Under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) pp. 12-25. His thesis is that biblical texts from a postmodern perspective offer a healthy and radical recreation of our materialistically construed world.

of internal qualities over external appearances, on relationships rather than material prosperity.⁵⁸

A second formulaic type is the "how much more" proverb.⁵⁹

There are a number of examples of these:

"If a righteous one is rewarded on earth/ how much more are the wicked and the sinner / /" (Prv. 11:31)

"Sheol and Abaddon are open before Yahweh/ how much more are the thoughts of men / /" (Prv. 15:11)⁶⁰

"Choice speech is not becoming to a fool/ how much less⁶¹ is lying to a noble/ /" (Prv. 17:7)

"The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination/ how much more when brought with evil intent / /" (Prv. 21:27)

The "how much more" sayings⁶² serve as well as good examples of the principle of intensification. The pattern is if _____ is true, bad, difficult,

⁵⁸ I have focused on the micro-structure of the "better/than" proverbs. G. Ogden looks at the the function of these kinds of proverbs in terms of the macro-structure of the book of Ecclesiastes. His conclusion is that the "better/than" proverbs serve as either an introduction or a summary of a particular unit of text in which they are found. See G. Ogden, "The 'Better'-Proverb (Tob-Spruch), Rhetorical Criticism, and Qoheleth," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977) : 491-492.

⁵⁹ In Hebrew the phrase is 'כִּי אַיִן.

⁶⁰ Sheol and Abaddon are terms for the grave and the place of the dead in Hebrew thought.

⁶¹ The Hebrew phrase is the same

⁶² Other "how much more" sayings include 19:7 and 19:10.

unlikely, or inconsistent then how much more is _____. It is a way of "upping the ante," of increasing the intensity of the movement.

The "better/than" and "how-much-more" sayings are two of the most prominent formulaic types of the sentence proverbs. There are two minor or less frequent types that are also observed in the sentence collection. One of these is the numerical proverb. They are much more prevalent in the wisdom poems⁶³ than in the sentence sayings⁶⁴ Proverbs 20:12; 25:3; 20:10 are reminiscent of numerical sayings:

"The hearing ear and the seeing eye/ the Lord makes both of them / /" (Prv. 20:12)

"The heavens for height and the earth for depth/ and the mind of kings is unsearchable / /" (Prv. 25:3)

"Unequal weights and unequal measures/ both are an abomination to Yahweh / /" (Prv. 20:10)

The structure of these proverbs are built on a climactic movement of a narrative type plot built into the two lines.

A second minor formulaic type is one that is structured around an imagined conversation and patterned after the formula "as X said to Y." Such a formula may be the predecessor to the more well known Wellerism. According to William McNeil, the Wellerism is "always a quotation in which the saying is assigned to a fictitious author. It is always intentionally

⁶³ The wisdom poems are found at the beginning, chapters 1-9, middle chapters 22-24, and the end, chapters 30-31, of the book of Proverbs.

⁶⁴ Proverbs chapter 30 is a collection of numerical proverbs which are built on the formula "three things . . . four" There is also a numerical saying in 6:16-19 which uses the numerical formula "six things . . . seven"

humorous."⁶⁵ While none of the biblical proverbs could be classified as full blown "Wellerisms," the Wellerism seems to be structured after their pattern. The formulaic conversation is observed in some of the following biblical proverbs:

"As a madman shooting missiles and deadly arrows/ so a man deceives his neighbor and says 'Was I not simply joking?' / /"
(26:18-19)

" 'It is no good, no good!' says the buyer/ but as he goes away he congratulates himself / /" (20:14)

"Says the lazy one, 'There's a lion outside!/ I shall be slain in the streets!' / /" (22:13)

"Says the lazy one, 'A lion in the way!/ A lion between the plazas!' / / " (26:13)

"He who robs his father and his mother and says 'There is no transgression!'/ he is united with a man who destroys/ /" (28:24)

Like the Wellerism, these proverbs contain hyperboles, ridiculous excuses or observations by someone who plays the role of a fool.⁶⁶ Traces of other formulaic structures might also be found in the sentence sayings. However, the above mentioned seem to stand out more readily.

⁶⁵ William McNeil "Proverbs in American Folklore" audio cassette, Everett/Edwards Inc. Deland, FL, 1979.

⁶⁶ Examples of typical contemporary Wellerisms may include the following: "'Everyone to their own taste,' said the old lady as she kissed the cow;" or "'All's well that ends well,' said the monkey as the lawn mower ran over his tail."

A fifth structure is what Robert Alter calls the riddle form.⁶⁷ These are proverbs based on the principle of a riddle with the first line making a cryptic like statement and its referent being revealed only in light of the second line.⁶⁸ It is quite common, however, for translations to cover over this structure by reversing the order of the two lines in order for the proverb to sound better in English. The Revised Standard Version often does this as seen in the following example:

"A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls" (25:28)

The proverb actually begins with the image of a conquered city and not until the second line is the image related to one who is without self control. This again is an example of the rhetorical power of the proverb being glazed over.⁶⁹ What is lost is the subtle structural touch of the proverb that enables it to penetrate the mind of the listener.

In the riddle form, a perplexing statement is made or a striking image created in the first line and it is left to the second line to resolve the dilemma. Different nuances of the riddle structure are creatively employed to achieve different effects. For example, frequently there is the use of a shocking or illogical metaphor in the first line to heighten the illogical and ridiculous

⁶⁷ Alter 175

⁶⁸ Proverbs chapters 25 and 26 are especially rich in riddle form.

⁶⁹ The same reversal of structure occurs in a number of other proverbs including 25:18 and 25:19. R. B. Y. Scott frequently reverses the two lines of the proverb making the image come after that to which it refers thus diluting the proverb's structural sharpness. See for example his translation of Proverbs 25:20; 25:25; 26:7; 26:9; 26:10; 26:11; etc.

nature of the phenomenon in the second line. Such is the case in the following proverb:

"A golden ring in a pig's snout/ a lovely woman lacking sense / '" (11:22)

When we hear and imagine the picture given to us in the first line of this proverb we laugh a mocking laugh and are perturbed at such misuse of one's possessions. Such feelings, then, are intended to be transferred and related to the image in the second line. Or take the shocking image of this proverb:

"As a dog returns to its vomit/ a fool repeats his folly/ '" (26:11)

How repulsive and disgusting is the image portrayed in the first line! But such repulsiveness is really intended to be transferred to the person who is a fool.

Sometimes the riddle image is not shocking or perplexing but the first line simply calls for an explanation as in the comic characterization of the lazy man:

"The door turns on its hinge/ and the lazy person on his bed//"
(26:14)⁷⁰

The image of the first line is not surprising by any means. In fact it is a very pedantic observation that needs no explanation even to the most simple. But when this image is placed along side that of an indolent person lying on his or her bed, it conjures up a whole new set of images and creates a whole new cluster of emotions. Just as a door moves easily and naturally on its hinges so a lazy man or woman turns easily and naturally over and over in bed. Other

⁷⁰ There are a series of sarcastic proverbs about the slothful person that have been collected together with this one. See Proverbs 26:13-16.

mental pictures, as well, can be imagined from this vignette. The feelings that are surfaced by this proverb could range all the way from pleasure to indifference to disgust. There are numerous other riddle proverbs that connect everyday experiences with a virtue or vice in order to intensify the image and drive home the moral lesson:

"Iron sharpens iron/ and a man sharpens his friend / /" (27:17)

"He who seizes a passing dog by the ears/ he who meddles in a quarrel not his own / /" (26:17)

"The crucible is for silver and the furnace is for gold/ and a man for his reputation / /"⁷¹ (27:21)

Some riddle forms do not use figurative language but are so odd that they need explanation. Some examples include these:

"Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs/ and not a fool in his folly / /" (17:12)⁷²

"Better to dwell in the corner of a roof/ than with a nagging wife in a spacious house/ /" (21:9)

"He plunders his father, drives out his mother—/ a son who disgraces and shames/ /" (19:26).

⁷¹ McKane comments that "the point of the simile then is that the processes at the disposal of the community for testing a man's reputation are as rigorous and reliable as those employed for testing silver and gold A man will enjoy such public esteem as he deserves" p. 608.

⁷² One meaning of this proverb is that it is better to be waylaid by a bear enraged at the loss of her cubs than to be embroiled in the foolishness of a person who has no common sense.

"Weight and weight and ephah and ephah / the abomination of the Lord are they both" (20:10)⁷³

"The poor and the oppressor have met/ he who lights the eyes of them both—Yahweh/" (29:13)⁷⁴

In each of these proverbs, the first line envisions something rather unusual or strange. And, as in the previous riddle proverbs mentioned, it is left to the second line to explain it. For example, in the last one quoted above, one sees an example of a riddle that is not a metaphor. The question the hearer has is, What possibly could the oppressed and the oppressor have in common? Why do they meet? We are surprised to find that what is common to both is Yahweh himself! This commonality is heightened by the position of the name Yahweh at the end of the line as a punch word.

Sometimes a statement about the physical world is simply placed along side a moral statement without explanation. Then the auditor is required to do the satisfying work of making the connection between the two. Kugel says "Sometimes, especially in proverbs and sayings, finding the precise connection between two apparently unrelated parallel utterances is the whole point."⁷⁵ Such proverbs trust the hearer to make the connection. When such

⁷³ The first line is a reference to the use of unequal weights and measures and speaks of deception and economic abuse.

⁷⁴ Compare Proverbs 22:2:"Rich and poor have met/ Yahweh is the maker of them all / /" and 14:31

⁷⁵ Kugel 10

connections are made the result is that new insight and understanding are created.⁷⁶ The following are further examples of such a rhetorical strategy:

"A broken tooth and one whose foot slips/ one who trusts in deceptive ones in difficult times / /" (25:19)⁷⁷

"A city which has been broken through and there is no wall/ a man who has no self control / /" (25:28)

"The north wind will bring forth rain/ and a whispering tongue angry looks" (25:23)

"Cool water upon a thirsty soul/ and good news from a distant land / /" (25:25)

"Coal to embers and wood to fire/ and a quarrelsome man to kindle strife / /"⁷⁸ (26:21)

"Silver dross covering an earthen pot/ smooth lips and evil intent / /" (26:23)⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Here is the enthymeme at its best. These riddle proverbs are exemplary models of the enthymematic principle at work as they typically bring together two unrelated items and require the hearer to make the connection between them. This enthymematic principle will be addressed more directly at a later point in the essay.

⁷⁷ A decaying or broken tooth and an unsure foot are both impotent. They cannot be relied upon to perform their tasks. Neither can one rely on faithless ones in difficult times.

⁷⁸ This proverb moves in climactic order from coal to wood to quarrelsome man.

⁷⁹ McKane understands "silver dross" to be a glaze or enamel that is "spread over a piece of earthenware. The surface is pleasing, smooth and brilliant and it obliterates the nature of the material over which it is coated" (604). Smooth speech, in like manner, covers over hostile intent.

In all of the above, an external phenomenon is used to heighten the understanding and feeling of an internal experience. Other riddle proverbs are more explicit about the connection between the two lines and employ the particle "like" or "as" (in Hebrew כִּי) as the following proverbs do:

"Like the coolness of snow in the day of harvest/ a faithful envoy to those who send him/ and he restores the spirit of his masters/ /"⁸⁰ (25:13)

"As a bird fluttering, as a swallow flying/ so undeserved verbal abuse will not alight / /" (26:2)

"Like tying a stone in a sling/ so he who gives honor to a fool//"
(26: 8)

"Like snow in summer and like rain in harvest/ so honor is not fitting for a fool / /" (26:1)

Several riddle forms are more elaborate and extended in their comparison, initially leading the hearer to believe that they are simply observations on the physical world. But then they conclude with a pair of lines that apply the observations to the moral realm:

"Remove the dross from the silver/ the smith will produce a work of art / / Remove the wicked from the king/ and his throne will be firm in righteousness / /" (25:4-5)

"When you find honey, eat what is sufficient for yourself/ lest you become sated with it and vomit it// Make your foot rare in

⁸⁰ This proverb is unusual in that it has three lines rather than the standard two.

your neighbor's house/ lest he will be sated with you and hate
you / /" (25:16-17)⁸¹

Because of their structure the riddle form is especially intriguing to resolve. And there may be more than one resolution as is the case with Proverbs 27:19:

"As in water the face to face/ so the heart of man to man//"

This proverb, like many, is intentionally ambiguous though more cryptic than most.⁸² This proverb can legitimately be interpreted in a number of different ways. Some, like S. R. Driver, interpret the second line as presuming to involve another person and conclude that "through the observation of another, a man can know himself."⁸³ McKane has a different interpretation and says that the second line "has to do only with one man whose self is mirrored in his *leb* [heart], and the meaning . . . is that it is through introspection . . . that a man acquires self-knowledge."⁸⁴ Robert Alter's comment and analysis is especially apropos:

The terseness makes you work to decipher the first verset. Once it dawns on you that what is referred to is the reflected image of a face in water, further complications ensue: Does each man discover the otherwise invisible image of his own heart by

⁸¹ This one is structured similar to the previous ones; both move from the physical world to the relational world from natural experience to moral principle.

⁸² Because of the figurative and metaphorical language used, proverbs are by nature relatively indeterminate.

⁸³ See McKane 616

⁸⁴ McKane 616

seeing what others are like, or, on the contrary, is it by introspection (as we say, "reflection"), in scrutinizing the features of his own heart, that a person comes to understand what the heart of others must be? And is the choice of water in the simile merely an indication of the property of reflection, or does water, as against a mirror, suggest a potentially unstable image, or one with shadowy depths below the reflecting surface?⁸⁵

This is truly the polysemous quality of the proverb. Even though Proverbs 25:20 is not as esoteric as the above one mentioned, it too can be translated and interpreted in a number of ways:

"He who removes a garment on a cold day/ vinegar on a wound⁸⁶ and he who sings songs to a sad heart / /"

The vivid and rich imagery of the proverb opens it to a number of different interpretations. McKane believes the last phrase refers to someone who has to sing songs to an audience while very sad, like a clown making his or her audience laugh when he or she is depressed.⁸⁷ It is also very possible to understand the proverb as describing the pseudo attempt of someone to cheer up another who has suffered a great loss. Proverbs based on the form of

⁸⁵ Alter 178

⁸⁶ The Hebrew text says "vinegar on soda." But there is legitimate grounds for emending it to "vinegar on a wound." However, with both the idea and image is similar. The idea of adding vinegar to soda is that of adding one bitter thing to another (cf. Ps. 69:21). The idea of adding vinegar to a sore is that of an unpleasant and painful experience.

⁸⁷ McKane 588-589

a riddle are infused with the power to have multiple meanings. Riddle proverbs also come in all shapes and sizes. Sometimes they begin with a shocking figure, sometimes with a figure that just needs explained, and still at other times without figurative language at all but with an unusual experience that needs further elaboration. In all of its varied shapes, the riddle form is designed to actively engage the hearer in its discourse.

The five general structures explicated above and the variety of shapes that each of those structures take are witnesses to the polysemous nature of the quality of parallelism. When the traditional dress is removed from the surface of the proverb's structure, the criticism of pedanticism so commonly leveled against it no longer holds water. What is revealed is that its external shape is simple. But housed within this simple form is a myriad of structural dimensions that give it its creative power. A rhetorical hermeneutic opens up a whole new dimension of possibilities that a determinate perspective completely ignores. But there is more at work in the action of a proverb than just its structure. Encased within its small frame are a variety of reasoning strategies that are also used to accomplish its rhetorical purpose.

Reasoning Patterns

In regard to what the proverb is designed to accomplish, it is clear that its primary function is to maintain a sense of order within a particular community. In Arland Jacobson's words, the "primary function of proverbs is as tools for a mild form of social control" ⁸⁸ The aim of the proverb is

⁸⁸ Arland Jacobson, "Proverbs and Social Control: A New Paradigm for Wisdom Studies" (pp. 75-88), *Gnosticism and the Early Christian World* eds. J. E. Goehring, C. W. Hedrick, Jack T. Sanders, and Harts D. Betz (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge Press, 1991) 79.

not simply to share information but to manage the attitude and actions of other people. Such social control and management is concerned with preserving the order of the community. In preserving the order of the community, one also preserves the good of the individual. If this is its primary function, then the work of the proverb is rhetorical. Roger Abrahams says that ". . . the rhetorical approach considers techniques of argument" and "assumes that all expression is designed to influence, and that we must simply discover the design."⁸⁹

What reasoning patterns do proverbs use to carry out their function of managing an orderly society? A number of qualities are at work. I want to first set forth three general patterns. Then, by using the scheme suggested by Brockriede and Ehninger, I will describe in more detail their reasoning strategy.

There are three general reasoning patterns inherent within proverbs that enable them to do their work. All of these are related to their overall function of managing social order. First, proverbs manage a situation by appearing to clarify it.⁹⁰ Such a clarifying act is persuasive since it is concerned with determining the way in which a listener will perceive the occasion. In other words, proverbs interpret events and circumstances. Kenneth Burke refers to this process as "naming."⁹¹ Burke says that

⁸⁹ Roger Abrahams, "Introductory Remarks to a Rhetorical Theory of Folklore," *Journal of American Folklore* 81 (1968): 146.

⁹⁰ Abrahams 150

⁹¹ Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973) 293-294.

just as Eskimos have fifteen or so different names for many different kinds of snow, so proverbs are used to classify or name different situations. To have different names for snow implies that one will hunt differently or wear a different kind of foot gear. In fact, some names for snow will imply that one should not hunt at all. In the same way proverbs name situations and in so doing give direction as to our attitude and to how we should act in that particular situation. To put a name or label on something is a strategy for implying what to expect and what to look out for. The act of naming is also rhetorical because it is concerned with how one will influence and be influenced by the situation at hand. Thus Burke claims, "Proverbs are strategies for dealing with situations. In so far as situations are typical and recurrent in a given social structure, people develop names for them and strategies for handling them."⁹²

In the process of clarifying and naming experiences, a proverb becomes a model of what is appropriate conduct. The proverb embodies and epitomizes the ideal of stability and orderliness. This rhetorical stability is then transferred to the exigence that is commented upon by that proverb. Clifford Geertz maintains that there are two functions of a model. A cultural model can serve as a model *of* reality or a model *for* reality.⁹³ Such an understanding can be applied to a proverb. On the one hand, when it functions as a model *of* reality, it attempts to reflect or mirror reality in such a way that participants can more clearly understand what has taken place:

⁹² Burke 296-297. Burke also refers to proverbs as "medicine" because of their attempt to mend problems and restore order to chaos. (293).

⁹³ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) 93.

this is the way things are. As a model of reality, one can better understand what has happened. On the other hand, a proverb that functions as a model for reality is forward looking. In fulfilling this function, it seeks to change the course of events and shape the experience in the way the proverb thinks it should be shaped. Roger Abrahams speaks of these two functions as passive and active.⁹⁴ If a job has been rushed and a mistake made, the proverb "haste makes waste" is used to identify the problem and make it understandable or possibly to provide consolation. This is a passive function. In the passive function the proverb is more evaluative. Actively the proverb "haste makes waste" is used to recommend an immediate course of action to someone who is confronted with a problem of having to decide whether to rush a task or not. Here the proverb is concerned with influencing the future course of events. But not all proverbs are intended to produce an action immediately. Many proverbs attempt to produce an attitude toward a situation that may well call for inaction and resignation.⁹⁵ This could be one of the uses of the proverb "don't cry over spilled milk."

Roger Abrahams' remarks offer a fitting summary to this characteristic of the proverb:

Proverbs are descriptions that propose an attitude or a mode of action in relation to a recurrent social situation. They attempt to persuade by clarifying the situation, by giving it a name, thus

⁹⁴ Roger Abrahams, "A Rhetoric of Everyday Life: Traditional Conversational Genres," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 32 (1968) : 47.

⁹⁵ Roger Abrahams, "Proverbs and Proverbial Expressions," *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972) 121.

indicating that the problem has arisen before and that past practice has come up with a workable solution.⁹⁶

Thus the proverb can be used as a model to direct future activity or it can be used as a model to alter an attitude toward something that has already occurred. In either case the proverb clarifies, names, labels, or reframes the problem situation in a way that enables order to be restored. The disorienting experience is oriented.

A second important rhetorical feature of the proverb is its indirectness. This indirectness is also connected with its use as a tool for social management. Roger Abrahams has developed a diagram for conversational genres enabling them to be placed into four possible classes based on whether they are personal or impersonal on the one hand and whether they confront inter-personal or extra-personal forces on the other. For example, the folk genre of boasts and taunts use the rhetorical strategy of confronting an interpersonal problem with a personal attack. Prayers, spells and charms are concerned with confronting extra-personal forces with a personal front (a first person point of view). In Abraham's scheme the rhetorical strategy of the proverb is to confront inter-personal issues from an impersonal (third person) perspective.⁹⁷ Abrahams explains the reason for this strategy as well as how they give the impression of being impersonal:

⁹⁶ Abrahams "Proverbs and Proverbial Expressions" 121. Earlier Abrahams made a similarly succinct remark: "Each proverb is a full statement of an approach to a recurrent problem. It presents a point of view and a strategy that is self-sufficient, needing nothing more than an event of communication to bring it into play" (p. 119).

⁹⁷ Roger Abrahams, "A Rhetoric of Everyday Life: Traditional Conversational Genres," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 32 (1968): 52.

. . . proverbs can be seen to regulate to a certain extent man's relation to his neighbors; they do this by setting forth solutions to the problems that arise between them repeatedly, phrasing them in such a way that they are at one and the same time concise, witty, memorable, forceful, and illustrative of past usage. But most important for the implementation of their rhetorical strategy, they are phrased impersonally, so that the very personal problem becomes more universalized. The argument of the proverb, in other words, achieves its ability to influence by being couched in objective, third-person terms. The appearance of objectivity is further heightened when they employ analogic or metaphoric techniques of argument.⁹⁸

Not only does Abrahams affirm the central quality of obliqueness, he also identifies two characteristics that enable the proverb to work indirectly. One is through the appearance of objectivity. In another essay he has published, Abrahams says that the appearance of objectivity is able to be conveyed through abstract terms like love and honesty and truth.⁹⁹ The other way is through the use of metaphors. Jacobson confirms this as well when he concludes that "The metaphoric quality helps to give the proverb its well-known out-of-context character . . ."¹⁰⁰ Metaphors give a concrete illustration of the problem or experience in a different setting. They place the problem in a different setting so that it can be dealt with "objectively." Thus

⁹⁸ Abrahams 48

⁹⁹ Abrahams, "Proverbs and Proverbial Expressions," 122.

¹⁰⁰ Jacobson 82

the conflict is addressed indirectly. Indirectness is especially necessary when dealing with one's peers or superiors. According to Jacobson, "Proverbs allow people to say what needs to be said without creating additional social tensions"¹⁰¹ The protagonist recognizes that the assertion of a proverb may not find agreement. To avoid potential disagreement over the assertion, and to give the appearance of not being personally involved in the issue, the counsel is couched in indirect rhetoric. Abrahams describes the process in this way:

The controlling power of folklore, the carrying out of its rhetorical intent, resides in the ability of the item and the performer to establish a sense of identity between a 'real' situation and its artificial embodiment. This sense of identity is engineered through the exercise of control, allowing the audience to relax at the same time it identifies with the projected situation. This is done by creating a "psychic distance," by removing the audience far enough from the situation that it can see that it is not going to actively involve them immediately. Presented with an anxiety situation but relieved from the actual anxiety he [sic] listener gains control, and with this limited control, relief. . . . Such controls make the problem seem more impersonal and universal and less immediate. This is the essence of play: the objectifying and impersonalizing of anxiety situations, allowing the free expending of energies without the threat of social consequence. This removal process serves

¹⁰¹ Jacobson 81

rhetoric by clearing the way for the production of pleasure and the sympathetic response. Rhetoric in its turn serves society by promoting accepted attitudes and modes of action.¹⁰²

One of the rhetorical strategies of the proverb is to "play out" in an indirect way a potential solution to an interpersonal problem or issue. The proverb then applies that solution to a real situation. Jacobson's description of proverbs as a "mild form" of social control is significant.¹⁰³ Proverbs work subtly and indirectly. He maintains that the "hearer is gently but firmly confronted with the incongruity between her or his behavior or situation and what she or he knows to be true."¹⁰⁴ "Proverbs take a personal circumstance and embody it in impersonal and witty form."¹⁰⁵ They utilize the cognitive dissonance inherent between thought and act or between an act and a situation.

Third, and related to the principle of indirectness is that the proverb works like a rhetorical enthymeme. According to Thomas Conley, the "inventor" of the enthymeme is Aristotle.¹⁰⁶ According to Aristotle enthymemes are "the substance of rhetorical persuasion."¹⁰⁷ In his description of the enthymeme he implies that the premises in a rhetorical

¹⁰² Abrahams "Rhetorical Theory" 148-149

¹⁰³ Jacobson 79

¹⁰⁴ Jacobson 79

¹⁰⁵ Abrahams "Proverbs and Proverbial Expressions" 119.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas M. Conley, "The Enthymeme in Perspective," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (1984) : 169.

¹⁰⁷ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1354a 14-15.

argument should not be fully expressed. What he means by this, according to George Kennedy, is that a "tight logical argument is not effective in rhetoric, which is addressed to a popular audience."¹⁰⁸ The enthymeme is like a syllogistic argument but less rigorous because it is used in a popular context. Conley refers to the enthymeme as a "rhetorical syllogism."¹⁰⁹ In an earlier essay Conley claimed that the enthymeme incorporates all three rhetorical proofs: ethos, logos and pathos.¹¹⁰ Because of its nature, the enthymeme is closely related to the *endoxa* of the people. The common opinion of the people becomes the primary resource for the enthymeme's argument. It reflects values, attitudes and probable facts. In Bitzer's words, "*Owing to the skill of the speaker, the audience itself helps construct the proofs by which it is persuaded.*"¹¹¹ Thus the enthymeme uses the popular beliefs of an audience to argue its case and involves the audience in the process of self persuasion.

The proverb functions in a similar fashion. Aristotle speaks of different kinds of maxims¹¹² but says that the best kind "are those in which

¹⁰⁸ George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980) 71.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas M. Conley, *Rhetoric in the European Tradition* (New York & London: Longman, 1990) 317.

¹¹⁰ Thomas M. Conley, "The Enthymeme in Perspective," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (1984) 169.

¹¹¹ Lloyd F. Bitzer, "Aristotle's Enthymeme Revisited," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (1959) : 408.

¹¹² For Aristotle proverbs (paroemia) and maxims (gnoma) are practically synonymous. The first uses figurative language and the second

the reason for the view expressed is simply implied" ¹¹³ The proverb works enthymematically because it embodies those values that are commonly held to be true by a particular culture. Because of this, a rhetor can use it to prompt the audience to help him or her construct an argument. A rhetor does not need to lay out the presuppositions which underlie a proverb, because the audience already affirms them. ¹¹⁴ The audience supplies the presuppositions for the rhetor. Thus, the collaboration between the rhetor and the audience that was the essential feature of the enthymeme is also the essential feature of the proverb.

To take one example to illustrate how a proverb can work enthymematically, one can look at Proverbs 17:16:

uses literal language. As enthymemes they function in a similar fashion. See Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

¹¹³ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1394b 20.

¹¹⁴ The enthymeme does not complete the process of synthesis as the syllogism does. The syllogistic process is too involved and complex for the common person needing to make an immediate decision. In this regard Walter Harrelson's remarks are apropos: "Wisdom operates without the necessity of synthesis. This is perhaps its most characteristic feature. Humans need both disciplines of philosophy/logic and phronesis/wisdom thinking" (p. 10). "They need the carefully articulated picture of the world and its parts which comes from systematic thought that aims at synthesis. They need equally--and this is my point--the mode of thinking that can stop short of synthesis. That is what the ancient world called wisdom" (p. 11). "A society needs to have a large number of observations that can be applied to given situations unthinkingly, immediately, without necessary reference to some coherent scheme of thought within which they fit" (p. 11). "People want an answer to the immediate situation, guidance for today and tomorrow. The right phrase, the apt analogy, the story that offers guidance without being didactic--these often turn the trick" (p. 11). "Wisdom and Pastoral Theology" *Andover Newton Quarterly* 7 (1966); 6-14.

"What is this price in the hand of a fool/ to acquire knowledge¹¹⁵ when there is no mind? /"

As an enthymeme the premise lies behind the statement. The premise is that one cannot buy learning. It is only acquired at the price of strenuous intellectual effort. Therefore, someone who proposes to buy off their education is foolish. Other enthymematic characteristics of this proverb include its indirectness.¹¹⁶ Also underlying the proverb is an appeal to universal values: the value of knowledge, wisdom and education, the value of hard work, and the importance of honesty as opposed to deception. We admire those people who develop the resources of their mind, who put themselves through the rigorous discipline that is involved in the process of learning. In contrast, we despise people who try to get something for nothing.

Not only do such premises lie behind the enthymematic nature of the proverb, but a rich resource of images as well. This proverb conjures up in the mind of its auditors pictures, examples and illustrations of individuals who have violated the premises that are held dear. But it also may call to mind individuals who have exemplified the process of acquiring wisdom.

All of the elements of indirectness, underlying premises, appeals to universal values, and imagery are a part of the enthymematic quality of the

¹¹⁵ The Hebrew word is wisdom (חָכְמָה). Contemporary culture distinguishes between wisdom and knowledge. Knowledge has to do with information and facts and intellectual pursuits. Wisdom is knowledge applied. This division was not so in Hebrew culture. Wisdom included both. It included the head knowledge and the ability to use that knowledge in a practical way. See Bernard Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: An Israelite Goddess Redefined* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1986) 13-14.

¹¹⁶ Note that the proverb is an interrogative.

proverb. Such qualities bring the auditor into the persuasion process and allow the proverb to do its work. These three general elements of clarity, indirectness and enthymematic quality are a part of the repertoire of the proverb's rhetorical strategy.

Having looked at these overarching strategies, I want now to turn to a finer and more detailed investigation of how they influence. What type of rhetorical reasoning do they employ to do their work? As has already been observed, this reasoning is not a formal or logical reasoning. But the pattern is practical; it employs the principles of phronesis. That proverbs are concerned with some type of practical reasoning is evidenced in their emphasis on order. It has long been observed that in the book of Proverbs there is a keen interest in social order. Whenever there is disorientation, wisdom seeks to rectify the situation and bring about orientation. Wherever there is chaos wisdom seeks to restore order. That is its function. Proverbs portray creation itself as the epitome of orderliness. The world was believed to have been made in a way that would reward actions that contributed to order and punish those behaviors that did not. So when an individual's life was in sync with order, success resulted. Neglecting order brought failure.¹¹⁷ The ethical duty of individuals was to prevent the hostile intrusion of disorder into society.

With this heavy emphasis on order it is reasonable to assume that there was a practical reasoning process at work not only in the world at large but also within wisdom discourse itself and specifically within the frame of

¹¹⁷ The following biblical proverbs are just a few that attest to the centrality of order: Proverbs 10:2, 4, 30; 11:21; 13:25; 25:23; 26:27.

the proverb. The very discourse that promotes order is itself an example of order. Thus it should not be surprising to find that proverbs use an informal reasoning process to argue their case. To discover this reasoning process, I want to employ a scheme of classifying practical argument that is used by Douglas Ehninger and Wayne Brockriede.¹¹⁸

Ehninger and Brockriede's scheme offers "a system for classifying artistic proofs which employs argument as a central and unifying construct."¹¹⁹ Inartistic proofs are those in which the datum used in making a claim or coming to a conclusion are conclusive in themselves. The data can stand alone. On the other hand, when the evidence is not conclusive, when one is dealing with probability, the rhetor must rely on artistic proofs to help carry the argument. Proofs for the argument are dependent upon the arguer's ability to create them, thus they are understood as artistic. In artistic proofs

¹¹⁸ Douglas Ehninger and Wayne Brockriede, *Decision by Debate*, (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1963). In chapters 8 through 11 their scheme is most specifically described. Earlier Brockriede and Ehninger employed this scheme in a more condensed form in a journal essay: "Toulmin on Argument: An Interpretation and Application," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 46 (1960) : 44-53. The limitation of their classification system here is that it misappropriates Toulmin. They perceive their classification of arguments as a universal system. That is, Brockriede and Ehninger make the reasoning process field independent. For them, a particular argument is independent of a particular situation; it can be applied across the board to any circumstance. Any one argument will be equally effective in any number of different situations. In contrast to this, I will demonstrate below that proverbs are field dependent; they are occasional in nature (See the last section in this chapter on "The Situational Character of Biblical Proverbs."). The effectiveness of the argument of a proverb is inextricably linked to the exigence at hand. Barring this misappropriation, the classification system of Brockriede and Ehninger can aid in revealing the underlying structure of proverbial argument.

¹¹⁹ Brockriede and Ehninger, (1960), 44.

the warrant becomes critical. Warrants are the stated inferences used to support a claim or a conclusion. A warrant signifies a relationship between evidence and claim.¹²⁰ The warrant is based on three different kinds of artistic proofs or arguments. First, the claim can be supported by demonstrating that a relationship or connection exists between phenomena in the external world (sometimes referred to as *logos*). Second, the warrant can be based on assumptions concerning the quality of the source from which the data are derived (*ethos*). And third, the warrant can argue from assumptions concerning the inner drives, values, or aspirations which impel the behavior of those persons to whom the argument is addressed (*pathos*). Ehninger and Brockriede refer to the logical line of reasoning as substantive, the ethical line as authoritative and the appeal to inner drives as motivational.¹²¹ Substantive arguments are divided into seven different kinds: cause, sign, generalization, parallel case, analogy, classification, and statistics.¹²² There are no subdivisions for the authoritative and motivational lines of argument because there is no relationship between them and phenomena in the external world. Ehninger and Brockriede's scheme is a helpful aid for classifying pragmatic argument and for understanding the way in which common persons reason. Because the essential function of a proverb is rhetorical, applying this scheme to the way in which it reasons can also unveil its underlying strategy and instruct those

¹²⁰ Ehninger and Brockriede (1963) 99.

¹²¹ Ehninger and Brockriede (1963) 125-126.

¹²² Ehninger and Brockriede (1963) 126. The use of statistics will not be used in the scheme that I appropriate to proverbs.

who use it how to better argue. Paul Goodwin and Joseph Wenzel have done this in regard to the practical reasoning of contemporary proverbs.¹²³ They take contemporary proverbs as they are collected in the volume *The Home Book of Proverbs, Maxims and Familiar Phrases* and show how they demonstrate the three different kinds of argument.

Ehninger and Brockriede's classifying system can also be helpful in discovering the argumentative strategy of biblical proverbs. It can reveal how biblical proverbs call on substantive, authoritative, and motivational proofs, to make their case, typically employing all three at the same time. For the sake of clarity, however, each of these three types of warrants will be treated separately.

To begin with, how do biblical proverbs use substantive arguments? To classify proverbs according to Ehninger and Brockriede's six different types of substantive arguments demonstrates the pervasive use of this argument. The argument from cause:¹²⁴ Many proverbs argue from this premise. This argument can move from cause to effect or from effect to cause. Such contemporary proverbs as "he who lies down with dogs, will rise up with fleas" and "spare the rod, spoil the child" are examples of those that reason from cause to effect. This line of argument posits a definite causal link between two or more phenomena. For example, Proverbs 26:27 reasons, "He

¹²³ Paul D. Goodwin and Joseph W. Wenzel, "Proverbs and Practical Reasoning: A Study in Socio-Logic," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 65 (1979): 289-302.

¹²⁴ Ehninger and Brockriede note that the determination of causes is very difficult in most questions (1963, pp. 126-131). However, it is part of the strategy of the proverb that it over simplifies and pinpoints causal effect in order to make its argument more forceful.

who digs a pit will fall into it/ and a stone will come back upon him who starts it rolling //." Proverbs 24:33 argues from the same premise: "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest/ and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man //." In both of these cases the proverb attributes to a particular activity a predicted outcome. Broadly speaking, in biblical proverbs, extension and narrative proverbs argue from this premise as the following examples witness:

"Train up a child in the way he should go/ and when he is old he will not depart from it/" (Prv. 22:6)

"A slack hand causes poverty/ but the hand of the diligent makes rich/ /" (10:4)

"The reward for humility and fear of the Lord/ is riches and honor and life / /" (22:4)

Often proverbs that begin with a Hebrew participle are proverbs that argue from cause to effect. Such verbal nouns are indicative of a move from an action to its consequence:

"He who verbally abuses¹²⁵ his father and his mother/ his lamp will be extinguished in utter darkness // (20:20)

"He who oppresses¹²⁶ the poor to increase his own wealth/ he who gives to the rich will only come to poverty! / /" (22:16)

The argument from sign: In arguments from sign, the data consist of clues which the warrant interprets to be indicative of some other

¹²⁵ In Hebrew "he who verbally abuses" is the participle and is one word.

¹²⁶ "He who oppresses" is the Hebrew participle.

phenomenon. Here the argument begins with some perception of the outward appearance of a phenomenon and views it as a symptom of something else.¹²⁷ Contemporary proverbs such as "a person is known by the company he keeps" or "the best carpenter makes the fewest chips" are examples of sign reasoning.¹²⁸ There is, however, a similarity in strategy between sign reasoning and causal reasoning; both are concerned with making connections between different types of phenomena. The difference is that whereas causal reasoning connects two phenomena in the same order or level of reality, sign reasoning infers the existence of one kind of unobservable phenomenon from another kind that is observable. Ehninger and Brockriede add that generally the corroboration of several signs is required to establish the existence of a certain state of affairs.¹²⁹ Many biblical proverbs embody the sign reasoning mode:

"He who winks the eye causes trouble/ and a prating fool will
come to ruin // (10:10)

¹²⁷ Use of this kind of argument is easily observed in contemporary "weather proverbs" where signs in nature lead one to make conclusions about a particular course of action to take: "Red sky at night, sailors delight/ red sky in the morning sailors take warning/ /;" "When the wind's in the north/ the skillful fisher goes forth / /;" "Rain before seven, fine before eleven/ rain after seven, rain all day / /." There are no "weather proverbs" to speak of in the book of Proverbs. In the NT Jesus refers to looking at the signs in the sky as indications of the type of weather to come: "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather; for the sky is red.' And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times" (Matthew 16:2-3).

¹²⁸ Consider also such a proverb as "cleanliness is next to godliness."

¹²⁹ Ehninger and Brockriede (1963) 133-134.

"He who winks his eyes plans trouble/ he who compresses his lips brings evil to pass / /" (16:30)¹³⁰

"When words are many transgression is not lacking/ he who restrains his lips is prudent / /" (10:19)

In the first and second proverb the wink of an eye is taken as a sign of trouble forthcoming. In the third, many words are indicative of the same thing – trouble.

The most abundant use of this mode of argument in Proverbs is seen in faulty or hasty reasoning that stems from signs. Many proverbs warn about the deceptive nature of sign/appearances.¹³¹

"What your eyes have seen do not hastily broadcast/ for what will you do in the end/ when your neighbor humiliates you//?" (25:7b-8)

"He seems right who states his case first/ until his companion examines him / /" (18:17)

"There are friends who pretend to be friends/ but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother / /" (18:24)

The largest category of proverbs that address fallacious sign reasoning are the "better/than" proverbs. Here what one might normally deduce from the

¹³⁰ The instruction proverb in 6:12-13 says "A worthless person, a wicked man/ goes about with crooked speech/ winks with his eyes, taps with his feet, points with his finger . . . / /."

¹³¹ Many contemporary proverbs warn against this kind of faulty reasoning: "You can't judge a book by its cover;" "Just because there is snow on the roof doesn't mean there is no fire in the fireplace;" "There's not always good cheer where the chimney smokes;" "Beauty is only skin deep;" "You can't judge a horse by its harness;" "You can't tell by the honk of the horn how much gas is in the car;" etc.

outward appearance is not always the case. Things are not always as they seem. This is the warning in many of the "better/than" proverbs:

"Better is a dry crust of bread and quietness with it/ than a house full of feasting and strife / /" (17:1)

"Better a meal of vegetables where there is love/ than prime beef with hate / /" (15:17)

"Better is a little with the fear of the Lord/ than much treasure and confusion with it / /" (15:16)

The argument from parallel case: This is an argument which uses example. One situation is intrinsically similar and compared to another. That is to say, one case has a trait similar to another and therefore what one concludes about the former must also be ascribed to the latter: "like father like son."¹³² In the following biblical proverb, "A false witness will not go unpunished/ and he who utters lies will not escape / /" (19:5), the parallel argument is that if the one who is guilty of perjury in court is punished, the same is true of one who utters lies in a social context. The following are further samples of proverbs that use the parallel mode of reasoning:

"A friend loves at all times/ and a brother is born to help in adversity / /" (17:17)

"A foolish son is a grief to his father/ and bitterness to her who bore him / /" (17:25)¹³³

¹³² Another contemporary proverb that illustrates this argument is "the apple (acorn) doesn't fall far from the tree."

¹³³ The numerical proverbs that are found in chapter thirty seem to argue from parallel reasoning but in a more complex way by bringing in several components: "Three things are too wonderful for me; four I do not

Many proverbs simply describe a natural phenomenon in the first line and place along side it a moral phenomenon in the second:

"Apples of gold in a figure of silver/ a word spoken at the right time / /" (25:11)

"A muddied fountain and a ruined spring/ a righteous one who gives way to the wicked / /" (25:26)

"Cool water on a thirsty soul/ and a pleasant report from a distant land / /" (25:25)

"Coal to embers and wood to fire/ and a quarrelsome man to kindle strife / /" (26:21)

The argument from analogy: This is typically based on a four part resemblance of relationships. As Ehninger and Brockriede explain it: "The warrant assumes that a similar relationship exists between a second pair of items."¹³⁴ So in the argument from analogy, there is a relationship that is assumed to exist between two items and that relationship is imposed onto another pair. One would diagram such a relationship in the following way: "As A is to B so C is to D." Such reasoning seems to be at work in the following proverbs:

"As in water face answers to face/ so the heart of man reflects the man / /" (27:19)

"Iron sharpens iron/ and one man sharpens another / /" (27:17)

"Remove the dross from the silver/ the smith will produce a

understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a maiden" (30:18-19).

¹³⁴ Brockriede and Ehninger (1960) 50.

work of art // . Remove the wicked from the king/ and his throne will be firm in righteousness// " (25:4-5)

"When you find honey, eat what is sufficient for yourself/ lest you become sated with it and vomit it/A Make your foot rare in your neighbor's house/ lest he will be sated with you and hate you / /" (25:16-17)

"How much better to acquire wisdom than gold/ to acquire understanding than choosing silver / /" (Prv. 16:16)

"He who loves transgression loves strife/ he who makes his door high seeks destruction / /" (17:19)

The argument from classification assumes that what is true of a general group of phenomena is also true of an unknown element related to the phenomena. The argument moves from the general to the specific, from more to some. Actually this mode of argument underlies all the biblical proverbs since by nature they are concerned with summarizing experiences. It is the character of a proverb to name or label a series of experiences or a group of phenomena. This quality of naming is a type of classification system. Goodwin and Wenzel claim that the proverbs of classification "could be easily categorized by the label or type with which they deal."¹³⁵ So when it comes to biblical proverbs one can look at the type of individuals it addresses: wise/fool, lazy/diligent, rich/poor. For example, what is true of the class of the lazy is true of the individual. This is the reasoning used in the following proverbs:

¹³⁵ Goodwin and Wenzel 297

"The sluggard buries his hand in the dish/ it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth / /" (26:15)

"The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes/ than seven men who can answer discreetly / /" (26:16)

In other words, when one lazy person is observed, all have been observed and the conclusion is that they are all alike. These proverbs classify lazy persons as all being the same.

In arguments from generalization, one sees the characteristics of a small group of people and events as representative of the larger class of phenomena.¹³⁶ What is true of the smaller sample is true of the larger group. Thus the argument moves from some to more. Often times proverbs are viewed and used as statements of generalization about life experiences: "He who sows injustice will reap calamity/ and the rod of his fury will fail / /" (22:8). The internal structure of this proverb does not move from some to more. But in a particular context, it can be used by a person to move from a specific experience to make a broad statement about every experience: "you will always get what you deserve." The following proverbs could also be used in a particular situation to move from the specific to the general:

"Misfortune pursues sinners/ but prosperity rewards the righteous / /" (13:21)

"The fallow ground of the poor yields much food/ but it is swept away through injustice / /" (13:23)

¹³⁶ Contemporary proverbs that reason from this perspective: "Once a crook, always a crook."

"The glory of young men is their strength/ but the beauty of old men is their gray hair / /" (20:29)

The six divisions above are all different ways in which proverbs can argue substantively.¹³⁷ The divisions demonstrate the different directions proverbs can go when using logos in argument and when relating phenomena from the external world to the situation at hand.

The second major type of argument is the argument based on authority or ethos.¹³⁸ Here the argument focuses on the character, reputation and credibility of the one making the statement or using the discourse. The authoritative status of the proverb is significant because it is based on the wisdom and experience of many and appeals to the common opinion of the people. The very foundation of proverbs is based on authority: the wisdom of many. So proverbs can be used as effective arguments because they appear to embody the wisdom of the past. Roger Abrahams says that this appearance of collective wisdom is the most important of the persuasive characteristics of proverbs.¹³⁹ Aristotle maintained that ethos "may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion . . ." available to a speaker.¹⁴⁰ Proverbs argue

¹³⁷ Ehninger and Brockriede include a seven division, statistics (1963, 148). However, that argument is not pertinent to proverbial lore.

¹³⁸ Ehninger and Brockriede deal with authoritative and motivational arguments in chapter eleven of their work (1963).

¹³⁹ Abrahams "Proverbs and Proverbial Expressions" 122.

¹⁴⁰ Aristotle *Rhetoric* 1365a 13

traditionally and use "arguments and persuasive techniques developed in the past to cope with recurrences of social problem situations."¹⁴¹

In addition, not only do proverbs do their work from an established base of authority, some directly promote the use of authority. Many proverbs advocate the importance of listening to the counsel of others:

"Where there is no guidance, a people falls/ but in an abundance of counselors there is safety / /" (11:14)

"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes/ but a wise man listens to advice / /" (12:15)

"Listen to advice and accept instruction/ that you may gain wisdom for the future / /" (19:20)

The one who is really wise is the one who seeks out and listens to the advice of other trusted individuals. So the appeal to authority that is a part of the proverb is demonstrated in two ways. The most significant is the authority that underlies it. The work of the proverb flows out from an established base of authority, a base that is founded on tradition and endoxa. This is the proverb's indirect appeal to authority. But the proverb also directly appeals to authority through its exhortation to seek the counsel of others.

The third major type of argument is that which uses motivational appeals. These are appeals to values, emotions, desires, and inner drives, or to a combination of any or all of these elements.¹⁴² The motivational appeal

¹⁴¹ Abrahams "Rhetorical Theory" 146

¹⁴² In terms of emotions, Aristotle listed some fourteen different emotional traits and their causes that an audience or listener can experience. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (New York: Random House, Inc., 1984) Book II chapters 1-11.

is concerned with putting the audience in a particular frame of mind. It is also concerned with raising feelings of dissonance in the mind of the listener in order to move the auditor to action or to a change of attitude. As with the appeal to reason and to authority, the motivational appeal does not operate in isolation but in conjunction with other strategies of persuasion.

Biblical proverbs are jaded with appeals to the emotions, the values, and the desires of people. But it must be kept in mind that if one of the persuasive strategies of the proverb is that it is situational, then one and the same proverb can conjure up a plethora of emotions in different contexts.

Take the following proverb for example:

"The heart knows its own bitterness/ and no stranger will share
in its joy /" (14:10)

Depending on the context, one can imagine that the proverb can incite a number of different feelings. In some situations it might create feelings of despair as it conveys the idea that I am all alone in my grief or in my joy: "No one understands me." But in a different context, the proverb could be used to convey just the opposite emotion. One who has suffered a loss similar to another could say to her or him "the heart knows its own bitterness" confirming the loneliness of the experience. This person at least understands that no one understands. And such confirmation could be a word of encouragement. On another occasion the proverb could be said to someone as an expression of *apathy* conveying the idea "you made your bed, now you must lay in it." Numerous scenarios could be given in which other kinds of emotions or frames of mind are triggered or intended to be triggered by this proverb.

Not only does the situational use of the proverb appeal to a variety of emotions, but within the frame of its structure and content it is laden with emotional appeal. Proverbs are satiated with metaphor and those which reason from parallel and analogous arguments. Such language and argument is especially rich in pathos. One can move through the biblical proverbs and list the different kinds of emotions that are conjured up in light of the image or comparison used. For example, many of the proverbs that have to do with the fool and the lazy person raise odious feelings:

"Like a dog that returns to its vomit/ is a fool that repeats his folly / /" (26:11)

"The lazy man buries his hand in the dish/ it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth / /" (26:15)

Some proverbs could be used in contexts in which they would arouse feelings of joy:

"Oil and perfume will make the heart rejoice/ and the sweetness of friendship strengthens the spirit¹⁴³ / /" (27:9)

Some could arouse feelings of confidence and security:

"Better is a neighbor who is near/ than a brother who is distant / /" (27:10c)

Others are capable of arousing uneasiness or dissonance in the mind of the listener:

¹⁴³ The second line of this proverb is obscure in the Hebrew text. I have adopted William McKane's translation. See *Proverbs: A New Approach* p. 612f. R. B. Y. Scott translates the second line "So a friend's cordiality strengthens one's spirit." Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965) 161.

"One who takes a passing dog by the ears/ he who meddles in a quarrel not his own / /" (26:17)

And so one could continue on through the proverbs identifying and classifying those that could create a particular frame of mind in the listener: hurt, pain, pleasure, surprise, shock, consolation, anger, revenge, delight, etc.

In addition many proverbs speak about the necessity to control emotions and thus indirectly witness to the influence and power of emotions. The following proverb epitomizes such concern for restraint:

"One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty/ and he who has self control than he who takes a city//"¹⁴⁴ (16:32)

One of the primary emotions needing to be controlled is pride. Many proverbs speak to this. The following is one of the more familiar:

"Before destruction—pride/ before stumbling— a haughty spirit / /"¹⁴⁵ (16:18)

Other emotions that must be reigned in include anger, jealousy, greed, and anxiety.

Proverbs appeal to emotions from several angles. They acknowledge the power of emotions by the way in which they urge constraint. In many proverbs there is also direct reference to various emotions. And when a proverb is put to work in different situations it excites different feelings and creates different frames of mind.

¹⁴⁴ Compare Proverbs 25:28: "A breached city and without a wall/ a man who has no self control / /."

¹⁴⁵ The contemporary proverb phrases it thus: "Pride goes before a fall."

Potentially the richest area of investigation, however, is to be found in the various motivational appeals that are endemic within the deep structure of the proverb. Typically because the sentence proverbs are primarily descriptive, they have been viewed as appealing to little if any motivational element. However, on closer examination underlying the surface are strong motivational appeals. J. Atkinson describes what he calls "approach motivation" and "avoidance motivation."¹⁴⁶ If his scheme is taken and overlaid on the antithetic proverbs there is a *doubling* of motivational potency by combining both approach motivation and avoidance motivation. Ted Hildebrandt makes the following affirmation in this regard: "Through the use of antithetic parallelism the sages maximize the motivational forces by presenting the negative and positive consequences of both wisdom and folly."¹⁴⁷ Ninety percent of Proverbs chapters 10-15 is in the form of antithetic parallelism. It has generally been argued that because of the lack of a specific motivation clause introduced in Hebrew by a particle (because, for, that, כִּי לְ), there was little or no motivational appeal. But when Atkinson's approach/avoidance scheme is considered, the antithetic proverbs appeal to potent motivational forces. The first proverb in the sentence collection demonstrates the double force: "A wise son makes a father glad" encourages the positive behavior with an approach motivation. "But a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother" discourages the negative behavior with an avoidance motivation. Most of the proverbs in chapters 10-15 are built around this

¹⁴⁶ J. Atkinson and D. Birch, *An Introduction to Motivation* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1978) 239, 288-289.

¹⁴⁷ Ted Hildebrandt, "Motivation and Antithetic Parallelism in Proverbs 10-15," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 35 (1992) : 440.

construction. In addition, some proverbial structures use an approach/approach incentive. The formulaic "better/than" proverbs and "how much more" proverbs are based on this move.

There is also appeal to extrinsic and intrinsic motivations.¹⁴⁸ Initially it might appear that biblical proverbs are extrinsically oriented. It is true they do utilize extrinsic rewards (wealth and poverty). However, there is a strong thrust toward being intrinsically driven. Wisdom itself is understood to be the goal of the sage (11:2; 13:20; 14:6-7, 18, 23; 15:33). Character development is held up as its own reward: ". . . fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It will be healing to yourself and medicine to your inner being" (3:7b-8; cf. also 4:7; 31:10)). Proverbs 11:17 also utilizes this motive: "A man who is kind benefits himself/ but he who is cruel hurts himself //." Motivational appeals are more central to the sentence sayings than has traditionally been assumed. The appeals, in addition, are rich in variety and strength. This is a fertile area for further inquiry and research.

In focusing on logos, ethos, and pathos, what has been discovered is that proverbs illustrate and comment on specific patterns of reasoning. They are demonstrations of the process of informal reasoning used by the common person.

In spite of all the respect for and acknowledgment of the power of informal reasoning in biblical proverbs, one qualification must be made. Though biblical proverbs place a premium on order,¹⁴⁹ reasoning and

¹⁴⁸ Hildebrandt 442

¹⁴⁹ Some scholars have believed that Israel's concern for order was imported from Egyptian culture. Egyptian sages referred to this as *ma'at*. The concept or god of *ma'at* had to do with order, justice and truth. When an

phronesis, they also recognize the constraints of such elements. Their approach is not rigid and mechanical, static or determinate. They do not hold completely to the idea that one who follows the rules of reason will always win out and be successful. No, because the practical reasoning of proverbs is dynamic and not mechanistic.¹⁷⁰ There are experiences and situations beyond one's control. There is also another force at work that moves beyond the realm of reason. The wise recognized these limits and the limits of reasoning to which the following proverbs witness:

"There is no wisdom and no understanding/ and no counsel
that can stand against Yahweh / /"

The horse is made ready for the day of battle/ victory belongs to
Yahweh / /"(21:30-31)

The sages frequently acknowledged the ambiguities of life and the tentativeness of wisdom.¹⁵¹

individual's life was integrated with order, success resulted. Neglecting order brought failure. It was a rigid structure of life. Thus in this scheme of thought, the central polarity was order and chaos, and the ethical duty of individuals was to prevent the hostile intrusion of disorder into society.

¹⁵⁰ The "better/than" proverbs are witness to this. The typical formula coordinates negative qualities along side positive: better X (negative) with A (positive)/ than Y (positive) with B (negative) / /. Under normal circumstances one might be able to make a choice between a positive on the one hand and a negative on the other, with the "better/than" sayings the choice is more difficult because both choices contain elements of positive and negative together.

¹⁵¹ For others see Proverbs 14:12; 16:1-2, 33; 19:21; 20:24; 21:1, 31; 22:12; 27:1.

"A man's mind will plan his way/ but Yahweh will order his steps / /" (16:9)¹⁵²

The sages do have an interest in discovering certain patterns of experiences and reasoning, to which Proverbs 10-15 especially is testimony. There is order underlying the experiences of life but this order is not fate producing. The sages acknowledge the uncertainties of life. The world and life is viewed dynamically. Wisdom, with its concern for practical reasoning, seeks creatively to manage life not to control and dominate it. The former leads one to a sensitivity to a variety of views and experiences. The latter leads to oppression.

The majority of this chapter has, by design and intention, been devoted to the structure and the reasoning patterns of the proverb. These are two important rhetorical strategies the proverbs use to accomplish their work. They are also the more neglected components in proverb studies due to the hermeneutic that has dominated biblical scholarship. However, the structure and reasoning patterns of the proverb are not the only strategies employed in its action. Two others are also essential if the proverb is to make an impact on its hearer. These include its content and the situation in which it is used.

Proverbial Content

An essential strategic quality of the proverb is related to its content. Since the primary focus of biblical scholarship has been on content and the concern has been to classify and catalog them according to themes, it is not necessary to give content as much attention. However, it must not be

¹⁵² The contemporary proverb built on this one is "Man proposes/ but God disposes."

inferred from this that content is not as important an element in the rhetorical influence of the proverb as the other elements. Its content plays a vital role in the way in which it is able to gain a hearing and thus influence thought. But rather than simply discovering and classifying the themes and topics that are central to proverbial lore as other scholars have done, my purpose will be to demonstrate how their content continues to reflect the values of the common folk. There are universal themes and values to which proverbs appeal that enable them to continue to influence thought and action. Thus my purpose is more narrowly focused. It is concerned with demonstrating how proverbial content contributes to its overall rhetorical strategy.

In order to understand the continued relevance of the cognitive dimension of biblical proverbs, it is first necessary to ask what are the universal themes and values to which contemporary Americans espouse. Milton Rokeach and Sandra Ball-Rokeach employing a series of studies over a period of thirteen years (1968-1981) discovered a hierarchy of values to which the general population of Americans hold. Two sets of eighteen values were ranked in the order of importance. One set of terminal values related to the "ultimate end-goals of existence, such as wisdom, equality, peace or family security."¹⁵³ The second set is related to instrumental values

¹⁵³ Milton Rokeach and Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, "Stability and Change in American Value Priorities, 1968-1981," *American Psychologist* 44 (1989): 776. Edward Steele and W. Charles Redding compiled a list of sixteen standard American values in the early 1960s. But their list is dated and not a hierarchical ranking of values. Thus its value is limited. See Edward D. Steele and W. Charles Redding, "The American Value System: Premises for Persuasion," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 26 (1962): 83-91.

or the behavioral means of reaching the end-goals. Such values include being honest, ambitious and forgiving. Listed below are these two sets of values. The results for the instrumental values were taken in 1968 and 1971 and are listed according to the average ranking given them during this time. The results for the terminal values are from 1968, 1971, 1974 and 1981 and are listed according to the average ranking given them over this thirteen year period.

Instrumental

- Honest (sincere, truthful)
- Ambitious (hard-working, aspiring)
- Responsible (dependable, reliable)
- Forgiving (willing to pardon others)
- Broadminded (open-minded)
- Courageous (standing up for your beliefs)
- Helpful (working for the welfare of others)
- Clean (neat, tidy)
- Capable (competent, effective)
- Self-controlled (restrained, self-disciplined)
- Loving (affectionate, tender)
- Cheerful (lighthearted, joyful)
- Independent (self-reliant, self-sufficient)
- Polite (courteous, well-mannered)
- Intellectual (intelligent, reflective)
- Obedient (dutiful, respectful)
- Logical (consistent, rational)
- Imaginative (daring, creative)

Terminal

- A world at peace (free of war and conflict)
- Family security (taking care of loved ones)
- Freedom (independence, free choice)
- Happiness (contentment)
- Self-respect (self-esteem)
- Wisdom (a mature understanding of life)
- Equality (brotherhood, equal opportunity for all)
- Salvation (being saved, eternal life)
- A comfortable life (a prosperous life)
- A sense of accomplishment (lasting contribution)

True friendship (close companionship)
 National security (protection from attack)
 Inner harmony (freedom from inner conflict)
 Mature love (sexual and spiritual intimacy)
 A world of beauty (beauty of nature and the arts)
 Social recognition (respect, admiration)
 Pleasure (an enjoyable, leisurely life)
 An exciting life (a stimulating active life)¹⁵⁴

Rokeach makes some important observations about the study. First, it is amazing that the values remain so stable over a period of thirteen years. This is especially true of the first six and last six values on each list. But second, even though there is stability in the value system as a whole, Americans are undergoing value change. The most noteworthy is a sharp decline in the importance attached to equality. There was also increased value placed on a comfortable life, a sense of accomplishment and an exciting life.¹⁵⁵

What is important, however, for the purposes of this study is how Biblical proverbs make cognitive connections with many of these values. In terms of the instrumental values listed, numerous proverbs could be cited that espouse and promote these values. Honesty, at the top of the list, is a deeply cherished value to which proverbs give voice (eg. 10:9; 19:1; 20:7; 11:3; 28:6). Ambitious (6:6-10; 26:13-16), forgiving (17:9) and responsible (10:5; 19:22; 27:10) are high priorities in Proverbs. Other value laden proverbs follow suit: helpful (21:13), capable (25:19), self-controlled (17:27; 25:28), loving (10:12), (cheerful (12:25; 17:22; 18:14), independent (the capable woman of 31:10-31)),

¹⁵⁴ Rokeach 778

¹⁵⁵ Rokeach, 779. Rokeach describes this change between 1968 and 1981 "as a shift away from a collective morality value orientation to a personal competence value orientation" (783).

obedient (13:1), polite (20:11). The proverbs that voice these values could easily be multiplied.

Proverbs also reflects many of the terminal values that Rokeach ranks. Though Proverbs does not philosophize about world peace and though it has no vision of global unity, it does place heavy priority on the absence of interpersonal conflict and strife. Many proverbs deal with the disruptive nature of domestic strife (17:1; 15:16-17). Both the quarrelsome man (27:17-23) and the quarrelsome woman (25:24; 21:9; 27:15) are not to be tolerated by the community. The value of the individual, which is concerned with the uniqueness and worth of every single person, is emphasized in Proverbs. In other portions of the Hebrew canon, the focus is on the corporate personality of Israel.¹⁵⁶ Unique to wisdom and to the book of Proverbs is an emphasis on the individual. When one reads Proverbs there is no rehearsal of the mighty acts of Yahweh. There is no Exodus, no Sinai, no Conquest, none of the significant events in the life of Israel as a community. The focus is more personal, more on the responsibility of the individual. The book of Proverbs can be read and understood apart from any understanding of ancient Israelite, culture.¹⁵⁷

Proverbs has no tolerance for a man who does not take care of his own family (27:8). It defines happiness as being content and as such places a high

¹⁵⁶ The concept of corporate personality has to do with an individual's identity being intimately connected to the community. See H. Wheeler Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

¹⁵⁷ This is why some New Testament Bibles include the book of Proverbs at the end of the work. It does not need to be connected with Israel's history to be understood.

priority on contentment (14:30). And, of course, wisdom is the primary end-goal of life (24:3-7). Proverbs also espouses the goal of living a comfortable life. The mature person avoids both poverty and riches. He or she lives a comfortable "middle class" existence (30:7-9). Other terminal values are also reflected in the proverbs. A more detailed comparison would also reveal differences between American and proverbial values as well. But, at least, it has been demonstrated that proverbs continue to reflect many of the values deemed important by contemporary American culture.

One element of surprise to me is that not ranked as one of the top eighteen American values in Rokeach's findings is health. In a day and time when fitness, weight loss and health food seems so dominant, it is amazing that such a value is absent. It may simply be that this value is incorporated under other values such as happiness, self-control, clean, self-respect. But for whatever reason it does not rank independently on the hierarchy for Americans, it does rank high on the sage's value chart. Holistic health (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual are all interrelated in Proverbs) is a central part of living a fulfilled life for the sapient:

"A cheerful heart is good medicine/ but a gloomy outlook dries up the bones / /" (17:22)

"Contentment makes a body healthy/ jealousy rots bones / /"
(14:30)¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ For other proverbs addressing this subject see: 15:13; 18:14; 15:30; 16:24; 29:1 etc.

Proverbs speak to the notion that one's emotional and psychological state affects the well-being of the physical. Such a belief has popular appeal among contemporary American culture.

Not only can one go to a list such as Rokeach's to discover contemporary values, but one can look at biblical and contemporary proverbs themselves to discover those values. In fact, this content dimension of the proverbs continues to be used to shed light on the values of American culture.¹⁵⁹ Morris E. Massey and Michael J. O'Connor have developed a test to help individuals determine their own particular value system based on proverbial lore.¹⁶⁰ They list forty common sayings and ask participants to respond to them by answering from a range of strongly agree to strongly disagree. Even though they do not use biblical proverbs, the fact that they use contemporary proverbial type material acknowledges the capacity of this genre in general to express and reflect the values of the common person. The content of the biblical proverb is rooted in experience,¹⁶¹ and its focus is practical. Thus they reflect and invoke widely shared values.

The contents of biblical proverbs enable them continue to influence mind and behavior. The values espoused to by biblical proverbs have universal appeal. The relatively indeterminate nature of the proverb further

¹⁵⁹ The principle is stated in the proverb: "Tell me the proverbs of a people and I will tell you their character."

¹⁶⁰ See Morris E. Massey and Michael J. O'Connor, "Values Profile System," (Minneapolis: Carlson Learning Company, 1989).

¹⁶¹ Again I am reminded here of the popular definition of a proverb:: "A short sentence based on a long experience."

enables its content to be adapted to different cultures and settings. The biblical proverbs continue to reflect the voice of the common folk.

The Situational Character of Biblical Proverbs

The rhetorical structure, reasoning pattern, and content all have to do with the internal action of the proverb. But one final and external dimension is at work in its action. It is the situational factor. This dimension serves as the catalyst for activating the other internal qualities.

It is only when the proverb is activated for a specific occasion that it is able to influence. The proverb needs a context to do its work. Unlike a cognitive hermeneutic that claims that gathering proverbs into a collection leads to their demise, a rhetorical hermeneutic sees collections serving a legitimate function by preparing the proverb for use. First, the collection liberates the proverb from its original context so that it can be used in other contexts. Second, within the collection itself, the proverb may be given a context.¹⁶² Proverbs may not be randomly placed together. That is, the context of the proverb within the collection may suggest one way the proverb can be interpreted.¹⁶³ So rather than placing a limit on the proverb, the collection frees it from its original context to unfold and work anew in a plethora of other contexts. Consigning proverbs to a collection has the potential of enabling them to do their work in different situations.

¹⁶² Another value of collections is that they enable a contemporary culture to cash in on the sagacity of previous generations.

¹⁶³ This particular line of thought will be explored in greater detail in chapter three. For the sake of developing the argument of this chapter, the context outside the collection of Proverbs is the focus.

However, the relationship between the situation and the proverb is not unilateral. Not only do situations actualize proverbs, proverbs shape and control situations.¹⁶⁴ The relationship between the proverb and the situation is dynamic. Neither one is determinate but each works together in a dialectic manner to make sense out of the experience at hand. The situation is a central element in the process of the proverb working to influence and change.

The situational character of the proverb is seen in the way in which the same proverb can have an indeterminate number of meanings based on the context in which it is used. For example, the proverb "A rolling stone gathers no moss" means different things in different cultures. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has identified three meanings. 1) In England "the allusion is to the desirable qualities of the moss found draped over stones in a peaceful brook."¹⁶⁵ Thus, from this angle, the proverb affirms the positive role of

¹⁶⁴ Richard Vatz and Lloyd Bitzer's dialogue in *Philosophy and Rhetoric* is pertinent at this point. Bitzer argued that the controlling factor in the rhetorical act is the situation. It is determinate. One speaks to a situation because of its exigence. There is an imperfect situation that demands an immediate response. Thus the situation gives rise to the discourse. See Lloyd Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1 (1968) : 1-14. However, Richard Vatz took issue with Bitzer's idea of the situation dominating a rhetorical act. He emphasized the creative role of the rhetor. The rhetorical situation rather than determining what is said is created by the rhetor. See Richard Vatz, "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 6 (1973) : 151-161. In applying their dialogue to proverbial discourse, I would maintain that both experiences can occur. On the one hand, a situation can give rise to a proverb. On the other hand, the proverb can shape and "name" a particular situation thus determining how it is to be perceived and acted upon.

¹⁶⁵ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Toward a Theory of Proverb Meaning," *The Wisdom of Marty: Essays on the Proverb*, eds. Wolfgang

stability and the productivity that results. 2) A "rolling stone gathering no moss is like a machine that keeps running and never gets rusty and broken."¹⁶⁶ And 3) "a rolling stone is like a person who keeps moving and is therefore free, not burdened with a family and material possessions and not likely to fall into a rut."¹⁶⁷ Depending on the situation and depending on what the rhetor wants to accomplish will determine what the proverb means and how it is used.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett also expounds on the multi-level meaning of the proverb "A friend in need is a friend indeed (in deed)." When she asked eighty of her University of Texas students the meaning of this proverb, she received four general types of responses.¹⁶⁸ To take another example, the proverbial phrase "silence is golden" can be used in several different contexts.¹⁶⁹ It can be used by a parent to order a child to be quiet. It can be used by a person to console a shy partner when awkward pauses enter their conversation. It can be used to express satisfaction or peace of mind when in the stillness of a forest. Or it can be used to express disgust at the constant

Mieder & Alan Dundes (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1981) 112-113.

¹⁶⁶ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 113

¹⁶⁷ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 113

¹⁶⁸ The four meanings include "(1) Someone who feels close enough to you to be able to ask you for help when he is in need is really your ;Friend; (2) Someone who helps you when you are in need is really your friend; (3) Someone who helps you by means of his actions (deeds) when you need him is a real friend as opposed to someone who just makes promises; (4) Someone who is only your friend when he needs you is not a true friend" (113414).

¹⁶⁹ I heard Jeff Arthurs at Multnomah Bible School in Portland, Oregon use this example.

chatter of a friend or peer. The situations are endless. Taken at face value the proverb has the appearance of making a simple once-and-for-all categorical judgment on a particular experience. Its meaning is self-evident. But its meaning is activated when, as Kenneth Burke says, the rhetor uses it "for promise, admonition, solace, vengeance, foretelling, instruction, charting"¹⁷⁰ or for whatever the situation calls.

There is strong evidence that the Israelite sage understood and took seriously the situational character of the proverb. The two line structure of the proverb ideally equips the proverb for adaptation to different circumstances. For example, it is not infrequent for one of the lines of the

¹⁷⁰ Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action* (3rd ed. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973) 296. Earlier in this work Burke gives an example of the "endless variety of situations, distinct in their particularities," which a proverb may "size up." He says, "To examine one of my favorites: 'Whether the pitcher strikes the stone, or the stone the pitcher, it's bad for the pitcher.' think of some primitive society in which an incipient philosopher, in disfavor with the priests, attempted to criticize their lore. They are powerful, he is by comparison weak. And they control all the channels of power. Hence, whether they attack him or he attacks them, he is the loser. And he could quite adequately size up this situation by saying, 'Whether the pitcher strikes the stone, or the stone the pitcher, it's bad for the pitcher.' Or Aristophanes could well have used it, in describing his motivation when, under the threats of political dictatorship, he gave up the lampooning of political figures and used the harmless Socrates as his goat instead. Socrates was propounding new values— and Aristophanes, by aligning himself with conservative values, against the materially powerless dialectician, could himself take on the role of the stone in the stone-pitcher ratio. Or the proverb could be employed to name the predicament of a man in Hitler's Germany who might come forward with an argument, however well reasoned, against Hitler. Or a local clerk would find the proverb apt, if he would make public sport of his boss. These situations are all distinct in their particularities; each occurs in a totally different texture of history; yet all are classifiable together under the generalizing head of the same proverb" (pp. 2-3).

proverbial couplet to be altered in another part of the collection. Such overlapping is the case with Proverbs 17:3: "The crucible for silver, the furnace for gold/ but he who tries hearts: Yahweh //." In Proverbs 27:21 the second line is changed: "The crucible for silver, the furnace for gold/ and a man for his reputation //." In these two proverbs the first two lines are duplicated. But the overlapping does not stop there. The second line of 17:3 overlaps with another proverb, 21:2: All the ways of a man are right in his eyes/ but he who regulates hearts: Yahweh //. Another example is seen in Proverbs 10:15 and 18:11 where the first line in both proverbs is "A rich man's wealth is his strong city/." But the second line is different. In 10:15 it is "the poverty of the poor is their ruin //." And in 18:11 it is "and like a high wall protecting him //." Many other examples of overlapping could be cited.¹⁷¹

One explanation for this phenomenon is that in Israelite schools, for instructional purposes, the teacher would quote the first line and the student was expected to complete it with a second line.¹⁷² The problem with this explanation is that sometimes it is the first line that is changed with the second being duplicated. A more likely explanation for the overlapping sayings is that it is an indication of the flexibility of the proverbs. One line can be substituted for another depending on what the situation demands. The binary structure of the proverb equips it to be adapted to different

¹⁷¹ Compare 13:14 with 14:27; 16:2 with 21:2, 14:12, and 16:25. Compare 10:6 with 10:11; 11:14 with 15:22; 15:8 with 21:27; 24:23 with 28:21; 28:112 with 28:28; 19:12 with 20:2; 15:11 with 27:20; 19:5 with 19:9. In the Hebrew text, the second line of 10:8 is the same as 10:10.

¹⁷² Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, 163.

situations and enables it to continue to work.¹⁷³ The overlapping sayings suggest that the proverbs are to be memorized yes, but not always to be repeated verbatim. They suggest that the proverb is occasional nature and that the proverb user has the responsibility to be creative and flexible in its appropriation.

William McKane acknowledges the situational nature of the biblical proverb in the following statement:

As a means of breaking the ground for this enquiry, I have developed an exact definition of 'proverb' in which the emphasis is laid on representative potential and openness to interpretation. The 'proverb', in virtue of its concreteness, sometimes in virtue of the organization of imagery, has a representative capacity which can be intuited by future interpreters. The paradox of the 'proverb' is that it acquires immortality because of its particularity; that because of its lack of explicitness, its allusiveness or even opaqueness, it does not become an antique, but awaits continually the situation to illumine which it was coined.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ A contemporary example of this is the proverb "An apple a day keeps the doctor away/ a dozen or more he's right at your door //." Or "An apple a day keeps the doctor away/ an onion a day keeps everyone away //." The familiar one line proverb, "look before you leap," is given a second line, "and listen to the learned." "Birds of a feather flock together" is given an additional line, "and fools fair ill with the wise."

¹⁷⁴ William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970) 414.

To illustrate this situational dimension, McKane chooses a proverb that appears to have limited use: "A son who gathers crops in summer is competent/ but one who sleeps through the harvest is a disgrace//(Proverbs 10:5)." It is possible, says McKane, to take this proverb "literally." As such it deals with the laziness of a son which is regarded as a cardinal sin in an agricultural community:

But v. 5 is much more than such a limited, exact statement concerning the particular duties of a son in a peasant economy. It is also a representative saying about any son who displays acumen and mettle when his father most needs him A further universalizing of the 'proverb' would be its use to say that it is the testing or critical situation which constitutes the sifting process and provides a reliable indication of ability and character.¹⁷⁵

The proverb that McKane uses here is a rather mundane one; it is not as colorful nor as metaphoric as others such as those found in chapters 25-27. If one can imagine a more pedestrian proverb stretching the bounds of its original context, how much more would a proverb that is metaphorically packed! Think for example of the unlimited contexts of the following proverb: "As iron sharpens iron/ so man sharpens his friend / /" (27:17). In a general way the proverb addresses the influence one person has on another. The proverb could be appropriated in either a positive or negative context. Further it could be addressed to the one who is influencing or the one who is being influenced or both. To whomever it is directed the contexts are

¹⁷⁵ McKane 415

multiplied further by the way the proverb is used. It could be used as a rebuke, a praise, an excuse, consolation, warning, counsel, promise, revenge, reminder, and so on. In addition the binary nature of this proverb enables one to drop the second line and substitute any number of relationships: ". . . so a parent influences a child;" ". . . so a teacher influences a student," etc.

What is true of the multiple contexts of this proverb is also true of most of the sentence proverbs, especially those in chapters 25-27 that are more metaphorically loaded. One cannot completely appreciate its nature until the proverb is seen at work in a specific context. The particular situation becomes the essential component for unleashing the power of the proverb.

What are the characteristics of a proverb that enable it to have such multivalent use? The different meanings are derived from different situations as well as the indeterminate nature of the proverb itself. One factor that makes proverbial discourse relatively indeterminate is its metaphorical nature. Metaphors equip proverbs to be utilized in many different situations. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett identifies several characteristics of a contemporary proverb that show how the proverb is able to be relatively indeterminate. The proverb, "A friend in need is a friend indeed (in deed)," can be interpreted a number of different ways because of its indeterminate nature. The sources of multiple meaning stem from

- (1) syntactic ambiguity (is your friend in need or are you in need); (2) lexical ambiguity (indeed or in deed); (3) key (Is proverb [sic] being stated 'straight' or 'sarcastically'? Does 'a friend indeed' mean 'a true friend' or 'not a true friend'?).¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 114

These kinds of qualities along with the rhetor and the interpreter-listener give the proverb the ability to adapt to many different situations and contexts.

Claudia Camp has acknowledged the importance of contextualizing the proverbs:

If performance keeps proverbial truth relative, it is also that same capacity to be adapted to and employed in many different situations that keeps a proverb alive. It is precisely its contextual adaptability, as well as the openness of a single context to more than one proverb, that gives this form of speech its special 'openness to experience.'¹⁷⁷

Jacobson affirms the "openness" of the proverbs by declaring that "wisdom sayings have a tendency to lead as contextless an existence as possible, so as to prove useful in ever new contexts."¹⁷⁸ Jacobson adds, "To preserve multivalency, proverbs are best strung together in such a way that their interpretation does not become fixed but remains open."¹⁷⁹ This does not deny the use of catch words, "proverbial pairs,"¹⁸⁰ and even thematic and

¹⁷⁷ Claudia Camp *Wisdom and the Feminine* 166

¹⁷⁸ Arland Jacobson 85

¹⁷⁹ Jacobson 86

¹⁸⁰ Ted Hildebrandt argues against the atomistic nature of Proverbs 10-29. He says that there are certain collectional features at work. One of these features is the unit of proverbial pairs. A "proverbial pair" is defined as two proverbial sentences that are bonded together into a "higher architectonic unit." He claims to have discovered sixty-two examples of proverbial paring. This accounts for 124 verses out of a total of 595 in Proverbs (21%). The pairs are bonded together by means of phonetics, semantics, syntax, rhetorical device, pragmatic situation, or theme. See Ted Hildebrandt, "Proverbial Pairs:

syntactical clusters that are found throughout the collection.¹⁸¹ Such unified clusters may simply offer suggestions for how the proverb can be used. But they do not fix it to one setting.

To deny the situational quality of the proverb is to open it to abuse. The book of Proverbs itself acknowledges this fact. One proverb laments:

"A lame man's legs are limp/ so a proverb in the mouth of
fools /" (26:7)

So a proverb used in the wrong way is as useless as the limbs of a paraplegic.

Soren Kierkegaard tells the parable of a man who escaped from an insane asylum. He knew he must disguise himself otherwise he would be caught and sent back to the asylum. He thought if he could come up with a phrase that everyone would acknowledge as true, they would not recognize his insanity. The phrase he settled on was "the world is round." So to everyone he met he uttered this phrase. Needless to say he was discovered and returned to his former confinement.¹⁸² Even though the phrase he uttered is not strictly speaking a proverb, the parable is still apropos and illustrates the uselessness of a proverbial type phrase in the mouth of one who does not understand its situational nature. To use proverbs appropriately is a mark of social intelligence. Even though some may be more adept in using them than others, to a certain degree, everyone can develop elementary skills in

Compositional Units in Proverbs 10-29," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107 (1988): 207-224.

¹⁸¹ See the next chapter for development of the idea that there are contexts for the proverbs within the biblical collection.

¹⁸² Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941) 174.

actualizing proverbs in discourse. The rhetor is not wise because he or she knows a lot of proverbs but because he or she knows the appropriate time and context in which to use them.

As the proverb does its work, its structure, reasoning pattern, content, and context are synergistically functioning together. No one strategy is hierarchically more important than another. All of these elements combine forces to empower the proverb to manage social order and influence thoughts and actions. But not only is an internal micro-dimension at work in empowering the proverb, an external macro-level within the proverbial collection is also at work. It is to this dimension that I now turn.

Chapter Three

The Biblical Proverb and Its Macro-Dimensional Influences

By nature the proved is most fulfilled when engaged in active duty. Therefore, it is always seeking a context in order to do its work. In the preceding chapter I established this situational quality. When the proverb is taken out of the collection and is put to occasional use, its influence is activated. Because of the proverb's strong character, it does not wait around to be pressed into service in some context outside the collection. It sees action within. The dynamic activity that occurs outside the book of Proverbs is already occurring within the book. By design the proverb clusters itself with other proverbs of like mind and, to its delight, finds itself engaged in spirited dialogue. But this dialogical and structural dimension within the collection of Proverbs has been ignored. When such a dimension is explored, a whole new understanding of proverbs and of the nature of discourse is revealed.

In order to explore this neglected dimension, I first will search for those occasions where the proverb appears to be in dialogue with its surrounding context. That is, I will seek to discover structural patterns in the proverb collection that go beyond the level of the individual proverb. Second, because these texts of proverbs have such a keen interest in the use of discourse, I want to overhear what they have to say about how speech, words, and proverbs influence. In keeping with this twofold purpose, the chapter is divided into three parts. First, because I am interested in understanding what proverbs have to say about the use of speech, I want to establish the fact that this subject is not a foreign template that is being forced onto the material. Rather discourse as a tool for influencing others is of central importance to the whole Wisdom corpus. Second, I want to apply a rhetorical hermeneutic to two sample texts, Proverb 25:11-28 and 10:13-21, to discover any

overarching structure that might create a textual context for the individual proverbs in each unit. In addition, the primary reason for selecting these two pericopes is that they appear to have a general interest in the use of words and their value as a form of art. Third, I will look at two central topoi of speech addressed in Proverbs by structurally analyzing Proverbs 16:21-24, 26:17-28, and 26:4-10. Pursuing these three areas will enable me to evaluate the fruitfulness of a rhetorical hermeneutic and will lead to a better understanding of the role and power of discourse as it is described in Proverbs.

The Centrality of Speech in the Wisdom Corpus

Even with only an elementary knowledge of what sapience involves, a solid case can be made for saying that wherever a corpus of wisdom material resides or wherever the quality of *phronesis* is vested, the site of that body will offer a rich repository of information regarding the role and function of rhetorical practices even though such practices may not be systematized. For example, Gerald Phillips has perused the five books of wisdom literature and observed the substantive amount of effort devoted to the proper conduct in speech.¹ Among other things, Phillips' essay demonstrates that an interest in proper speech is not an isolated phenomenon but pervades the wisdom corpus.

Central to the concept of wisdom is the proper use of speech. It could even be argued that one of the primary functions of the sage was to train

¹ Gerald M. Phillips, "Rhetorical Gleanings from the Wisdom Literature," *Western Speech* (1962). The five books of wisdom literature are Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Sirach, and Wisdom of Solomon.

young men in its use. The sage's function was more rhetorical than exclusively cognitive.² Dianne Bergant offers a valid description of the sage.

Because intelligence has been characteristically associated with speech, the one who knows what to say and when to say it is often considered wise. This is particularly true in societies where the spoken word assumes tremendous importance. Hence, those whose intelligence is demonstrated in the artful use of words are vouchsafed a prominent place in society. This fact may account for the conventional but inadequate view that the counselor, the teacher and the wisdom author are the official sages.³

In Proverbs the sage repeatedly affirms the power of words:

From the fruit of his mouth a man is satisfied/ he is satisfied by the yield of his lip //

Death and life are in the power of the tongue/ and those who love it will eat its fruits // (Prv. 18:20-21).

The sapient gives his students this advice in Proverbs 22:17-18 at the beginning of a section known as the Thirty Sayings:

² Here I am defining rhetoric in its fullest form which includes the concern for invention and the discovery of ideas as well as for style and form.

³ Dianne Bergant, *What Are They Saying About Wisdom Literature?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984) 8. Robert Alter claims that "the ancient Hebrew literary imagination reverts again and again to a bedrock assumption about the efficacy of speech," *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, 69-70. In Hebrew thought there is little difference between what one does and what one says. When one spoke one was acting. The Hebrew word דְּבַר can be translated "word" or "thing."

Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise one and you will set your heart to my knowledge.

For it is pleasing when you will remember them and when *they are poised for shapely utterance* (emphasis mine).

The one who follows in the steps of the sage is the one who not only remembers his words but who also is able to utter them articulately and at the appropriate time.

The sages themselves were ones who collected ideas, words, and proverbs using them as tools to shape and mold the lives of their students. They are stewards of speech. As a sage, Qoheleth⁴ is described as one who . . . taught the people knowledge, *weighing and studying and arranging proverbs with great care*. Qoheleth aught *to find pleasing words*, and uprightly he wrote words of truth. *The sayings of the wise are like spur*, and like nails driven home with a mallet are those *who master the collected sayings of their mentor* (Ecclesiastes 12: 9-11; emphasis mine).

⁴ The Hebrew name given to the book of Ecclesiastes. Qoheleth, Job and Proverbs form the corpus of the wisdom literature of the Protestant canon. Sirach (also known as Ecclesiasticus) and The Book of Wisdom (also The Wisdom of Solomon) are included in the Catholic Scriptures.

Qoheleth was one who collected proverbs.⁵ As a sage, he studied and memorized traditional sayings. The sages were the ones who knew how to use different forms of speech to influence others.

To further support this emphasis on training in proper speech there is the striking parallel between the Hebrew *Hokmah* (wise one) and the Sophist (wise one) of classical Greece.⁶ Though the Hebrew culture was preoccupied with a religious consciousness and Greek life was predominantly humanistic, there were resemblances between the two professional classes in instructional techniques and goals.⁷ In the Platonic dialogue, Protagoras, the sophist announces that his goal is to teach his pupils prudence in public and private affairs, the orderly management of family and home, the art of rhetoric and

⁵ The root of the Hebrew word *qhl* means "to assemble." Qoheleth is usually understood as one who assembles the people for worship or students for learning in a school. However, based upon Ecclesiastes 1:1 and 12:9-11, Crenshaw argues convincingly that Qoheleth refers to one who assembles or collects proverbs (1987), pp. 32-34.

⁶ Robert Gordis, "The Social Background of Wisdom Literature." *The Jewish Theological Seminary of America* 18 (1943-1944) : 85.

⁷ Though it is doubtful that the Hebrew sage had direct contact with the Greek sophist, it is worthwhile to keep in mind that Hebrew sagacity and Wisdom Literature is international in character. Several sections in Proverbs are adapted from non-Israelite sources. The Thirty Sayings in 22:16-24:22 are adapted from an Egyptian source, Amen-em-opet. See James B. Pritchard *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955) 421-424. The sayings in chapter 30: 1-9 and chapter 31:1-9 are taken from sages who were not Israelites. Job and his three friends in the book of Job are non-Israelites. So the Hebrew sages seemed to have traveled around and learned from other cultures including Greek culture. They were itinerant, much like the Greek sophists.

the ability to understand and direct the affairs of state.⁸ These are the goals of the Hebrew sage as Proverbs attests:

By me [Wisdom] kings reign, and rulers decree what is just;
by me princes rule, and nobles govern the earth (8:15-16).
. . . that prudence may be given to the simple,
knowledge and discretion to the youth
the wise man also may hear and increase in learning,
and the man of understanding acquire skill,
to understand a proverb and a figure,
the words of the wise and their riddles (1:4-6).

Like the Sophist, the *Hokmah*, was "the master of compressed, polished epigrammatic utterance; he gathers his thoughts into memorable forms of expression."⁹ Another wise man in later Israelite tradition, Ben Sira (or Sirach), claims that the ancient sages would assiduously study the rhetorical masterpieces of the past:¹⁰

He will seek out the wisdom of all the ancients and be occupied with prophecies. He will observe closely the discourse of renowned men and will enter into the intricacies of parables (39:1-2; emphasis mine).

⁸ Plato, *Protagoras*, *Loeb Classics* 4 (New York, 1924) 124.

⁹ McKane, 1970, p. 267

¹⁰ Ben Sira is a work that is quite similar to the canonical Proverbs in content and form. However it is primarily made up of instruction type proverbs instead of sentence proverbs. Its date is 180 BCE.

The sages were those who were skilled in the proper use of speech and who taught such skills to young men aspiring to be public leaders.¹¹ This is a side of the sage that I would claim has been marginalized and even ignored.

The sages' interest in speech is not peripheral. Their perspective on oral discourse is understood as something essential for a successful life. Their perspective is revealed in specific texts related to the subject of discourse.

Two Sample Texts: Proverbs 25:11-28 and 10:13-21

Before these texts can be explicated an awareness of the way in which Proverbs has been studied needs to be explained. The dominant way of understanding the book has been to see the collection of proverbs as quite haphazard and the surrounding context in which the proverb is placed as irrelevant for its interpretation. Carole Fontaine, in the forward of her book, makes this observation:

While the most "basic" genre of wisdom, the saying, has always been recognized as serving a social function, whether in the Jerusalem court or the "tribes" of Israel, little progress has been made in assessing the actual ways in which a saying might be

¹¹ In a seminal work by Robert Gordis, "The Social Background of Wisdom Literature," the author persuasively argues that the book of Proverbs is written by and comes from the perspective of the upper class. The collections of proverbs assembled in the book come from the collections of kings like Solomon, Lemuel, Hezekiah's scribes, and the sages. The women described throughout the book also appear to be from the well-to-do class. It was the upper class that was the ruling class and involved in the politics of the day. As such it was a rich environment for the development of speech and oral discourse. Michael V. Fox supports a similar upper class milieu for the book of Proverbs. Michael V. Fox "Unity and Diversity in Proverbs," Unpublished paper presented at Society of Biblical Literature in San Francisco, December 1992.

employed in a social context. The wisdom sayings found collected in the book of Proverbs offer very little scope for such study, since they are simply that— a collection without clear contexts of use.¹²

Gerhard Von Rad, in a chapter in his book on Israelite Wisdom Literature entitled "The Essentials for Coping with Reality," laments the fact that in Proverbs there is no homogeneous view of reality which in part is due to the random collection of the proverbs:

We find particularly aggravating the lack of any order determined by subject-matter, of any arrangements in the collection of sentences and teachings. Only rarely does the reader come upon a group of proverbs in which related material has come together. For the understanding of the sentences as a whole, these small ordered arrangements are of no significance, for they appear too sporadically.¹³

¹² Carole R. Fontaine, *Traditional Sayings in the Old Testament: A Contextual Study* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1982) vii. In a later essay summarizing the current studies of proverbs by biblical scholars and folklorists, she reaffirms the lack of context in collections of proverbs: "Analysis of the intent or strategy of the use of proverbs and sayings as rhetorical devices in traditional arguments shows the need to go beyond simple collection of the item to give full contextual data about the situation in which the saying is used. This, of course, is precisely what collectors of proverbs have usually failed to do, since function in context had not been perceived as a factor which might affect meaning as a whole." See "Proverb Performance in the Hebrew Bible," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 32 (1985) : 97.

¹³ Gerhard Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972) 113.

John Thompson complains that this is one of the reasons for the decline in popularity of the book of Proverbs:

As for our canonical proverbs in particular, they fail to reach us, it would seem, for . . . they are jumbled together willy-nilly into collections the phenomenon of a plethora of distichs, many having little or nothing in common with what precedes or what follows, is peculiar to this book, particularly to chapters 10-29.¹⁴

Kathleen O'Connor describes Proverbs 10-29 in an especially descriptive way:

Proverbs is like a collection of word pictures or verbal snapshots. Unclassified and generally lacking in thematic or chronological order, the collected sayings resemble a family's cache of photos, placed randomly in a drawer year after year till remembrance of relationships among them is lost.¹⁵

The view of a random order to the sentence proverbs continues to dominate the way in which the book of Proverbs has been studied. As a

¹⁴ John Mark Thompson, *The Form and Function of Proverbs in Ancient Israel* (The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1974) 15.

¹⁵ Kathleen M. O'Connor, *The Wisdom Literature* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1988) 36. Many other scholars and studies could be included among those who see chapters 10-29 as a random collection. In the popular and well used Daily Study Bible Series, the commentary on Proverbs approaches chapters 10-29 topically. See Kenneth T. Aitken, *Proverbs* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986). Derek Kidner comments on Proverbs 10-29: "Here at last are the sayings that we recognize as proverbs: short, self-contained, poured out apparently at random." *An Introduction to Wisdom Literature: The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job & Ecclesiastes* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985) 24-25.

result, the most common way of studying the book is by gathering together proverbs in the collection that deal with similar subjects under one heading such as wealth, folly, friendship, speech, etc.¹⁶ There are several limitations to the topical approach. First, it does not take the rhetorical and structural sense of the text seriously. Any possible structure that might exist beyond the level of the individual proverb is ignored. Second, such a topical approach is exclusively cognitive. It focuses only on content. Third, dealing with Proverbs 10-29 exclusively in a topical fashion runs the risk of overlooking a number of proverbs because they do not fall within the specific categories that one has listed. Several proverbs are quickly marginalized and get lost in the topical shuffle. Fourth, many of the proverbs are judged to be quite jejune because there is no referent or context. Thus, for example, the proverb, "He who digs a pit will fall in it/ and he who rolls a stone, it will return to him/ /" (26:28), is understandable enough but it seems rather trite and mundane because it is not in any specific context. But if its textual context is taken seriously, could this not possibly give it a new dimension and supply the needed referent?

¹⁶ William McKane classifies the proverbs according to their cognitive development. He identifies all the proverbs that focus on the individual into one category and says that this was the earliest stage in their development (proverbs in this category he simply labels A). The next stage of development comes when there was demonstrated an interest in community. So proverbs that are concerned about the welfare of the community he labels B. The final stage in the process was when stages A and B received a religious or theological orientation and thus included reference to Yahweh. These he labels C.

I would like to offer an alternative to the topical approach which takes more seriously the context in which they are placed in the collection.¹⁷ It is my view that a rhetorical hermeneutic that approaches the texts of Proverbs synchronically can reveal an order to the proverbs that moves beyond the sentence level.¹⁸ Raymond Van Leeuwen has maintained that "if the micro-structures are aesthetically well-crafted, why not the macro-structures?"¹⁹ In

¹⁷ Most recently two biblical scholars have suggested such an approach. See, for example, Ted Hildebrandt, "Proverbial Strings: Cohesion in Proverbs 10," *Grace Theological Journal* 11.2 (1990): 171-185. Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, *Context and Meaning in Proverbs 25-27*, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

¹⁸ An interesting and modern illustration of how individual proverbs can be intentionally clustered together to form a coherent unit and even a story is seen in the following poem by the American poet Arthur Guiterman, entitled "A Proverbial Tragedy" (See *The Laughing Muse*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1915, p. 16):

The Rolling Stone and the Turning Worm
 And the Cat that Looked at a King
 Set forth on the Road that Leads to Rome-
 For Youth will have its Fling,
 The Goose will lay the Golden Eggs,
 The Dog must have his Day,
 And Nobody locks the Stable Door
 Till the Horse is stol'n away.

But the Rolling Stone, that was never known
 To Look before the Leap
 Plunged down the hill to the Waters Still
 That run so dark, so deep;
 And the leaves were stirred by the Early Bird
 Who sought his breakfast where
 He marked the squirm of the Turning Worm-
 And the Cat was Killed by Care!

¹⁹ Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, *Context and Meaning, in Proverbs 25-27* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) 31.

addition, since wisdom is concerned with discovering order and patterns in the universe, does it not seem possible that to some degree there would be order in the wisdom book of Proverbs?

The hermeneutic of Paul Ricoeur will aid in discovering the macro-structure of texts in Proverbs. As noted in chapter one, his hermeneutic involves two commensurate movements. The first, distancing, is concerned with an explanation of the text via a structural analysis. The second movement is that of appropriation which extends the text out from its internal structure to its external reference. This reference is the audience that is here and now. Since these texts are a part of the Christian canon of Scripture, throughout this chapter I will assume my secondary referent to be the contemporary Christian community. I would like to apply my hermeneutical perspective to two texts of proverbs that appear, on first reading, to be clustered around an interest in the proper use of oral discourse.

Oral Discourse as Art: Proverbs 25:11-28

The first text is Proverbs 25:11-28. Is there an overarching structure that can be discovered in the text? Two scholars have argued for a structure that underlies the whole of chapter 25. It will be helpful to look at their analysis before proceeding to the narrower confines of 25:11-28. In an article in *Journal of Biblical Literature* written in 1972, Glendon Bryce maintained that this chapter (25:2-27) was a small wisdom book.²⁰ Bryce argued this on the basis of a structural analysis of the text. His structural analysis revealed that 25:2-5 served as an introduction because it contained the two principle themes

²⁰ Glendon E. Bryce "Another Wisdom-'Book' in Proverbs" *Journal of Biblical Literature* (1972) : 145-157.

of these verses: the king (vv. 2-3) and the wicked (vv. 4-5). The two main sections of the book deal with the ruler or king (vv. 6-15) and the wicked (vv. 16-27). Verse 27 concludes the unit because its first line echoes the first line of verse 16, which is the first verse of the second section. In addition, the second line of verse 27 reflects back to the first verse of the unit (v. 2).²¹ Thus verse 27 forms an *inclusio* with verses 2 and 16. Even though the boundaries of Bryce's text (25:2-27) are different than the boundaries I will propose (25:11-213), his analysis uncovers a structural plot that shapes these proverbs into a coherent unit and lays the structural groundwork for my interpretation.

Raymond C. Van Leeuwen commends Bryce for his analysis but believes that it is incomplete.²² The weakness of Bryce's structural analysis, according to Van Leeuwen, is that it assumes that a structure of a text must be a narrative structure and must reveal a narrative sequence. According to Bryce, in Proverbs chapter 25 the king is involved in a quest for wisdom. The narrative begins with a situation in which there is a lack of wisdom and moves forward to discover that wisdom.

Van Leeuwen seeks to look at the structure of this passage from a different light. He analyzes the structure of Proverbs 25:2-27 in terms of three

²¹ Bryce translates verse 27b in the following way: "But to search out difficult things is glorious." Verse 2 is translated "It is the glory of God to hide a matter/ and it is the glory of kings to search it out." The catch word in both is "glory."

²² Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, *Context and Meaning in Proverbs 25-27* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) 70. Van Leeuwen devotes chapter two in his book to explicating Bryce's work (pp. 21-28). He calls Bryce's work "rhetorical criticism" because it focuses on the poetic and stylistic features of the text (pp. 23, 70).

components: its structure, its poetics, and its sense. In terms of its structure, Van Leeuwen divides the unit in the following way:

25:2-5 Introduction

25:6-15 Section I

25:16-20 Section IIa

25:21-27 Section IIb²³

The structure of these units is made up of an alternation between Sayings (S) and Admonitions (A).²⁴ The introduction consists of a solid block of positive Sayings and then the body of the text alternates between positive and negative Sayings and Admonitions:

Body I

A:- (vv 6-10)

S:+ (vv 11-15)

Body IIa

A:- (vv 16-17)

S: (vv 18-20)

Body IIB

A:+ (vv 21-22)

S: - (vv 23-27)²⁵

The second component Van Leeuwen considers for his synchronic analysis has to do with the poetics of the unit. By poetics Van Leeuwen has reference to "those rhetorical or stylistic devices which relate the various Sayings and Admonitions to one another."²⁶ Van Leeuwen incorporates

²³ Van Leeuwen 61-62

²⁴ Sayings are proverbs composed in the form of the indicative. They offer descriptions of experiences or teach a moral. Admonitions are in the imperative. They issue a command to the listener or reader. There are positive (+) and negative (-) Sayings and Admonitions.

²⁵ Van Leeuwen 64.

²⁶ Van Leeuwen 53. Van Leeuwen says that Old Testament critics often use the phrase rhetorical criticism "as a name for what is more properly

Bryce's stylistic contribution in demonstrating how verse 27 is an inclusio for the text tying the beginning, the middle and the end together.

The third component relates to the sense or the themes of the text.

Van Leeuwen maintains that

for all the diversity of its individual topics and themes, Prov 25:2-27 is a composition united by two main concerns: 1) social hierarchy, rank, or position; and 2) social conflict and its resolution. The primary address of this chapter is to the young men of the royal court. . . . Yet by their very nature, these sayings have a wide applicability beyond the court.²⁷

Thus focusing on the components of structure, poetics, and sense, Van Leeuwen makes a strong case for understanding this unit as a whole and not as a haphazard self-contained collection of individual proverbs.

Not only does the structure, style, and sense point to the unity of this text, but the type or genre of proverbs that make up this text also points to such a conclusion. Proverbs 25:11-28 are riddle-like proverbs formed on the principle of analogy. Such a type compares some relational or moral phenomenon to a natural phenomenon. The natural phenomenon is typically stated in the first line and the relational in the second. Actually the majority of proverbs in chapters 25-27 are riddle-like proverbs. This clustering together of proverbial genres is a common practice in the book of Proverbs. For example, chapters 10-15 are primarily made up of antithetic

stylistic or poetic criticism. That is, the actual focus is on the literary work itself as art object, rather than on its reader-relatedness, as 'rhetorical criticism' in the strict sense implies" (p. 52).

²⁷ Van Leeuwen 72-73

proverbs and chapters 16-22 of extension proverbs. The grouping of like genres is witness to an imposed structure on the individual sayings.

Building on the insights of both Bryce and Van Leeuwen, I would like to suggest, however, that the boundaries of the text in chapter 25 are verses 11-28. One reason for suggesting the text begin with verse 11 is that the preceding verses are structured more along the lines of a narrative, more like the instruction proverbs found in chapters 1-9. Verses 2-10 contains a trio of narrative vignettes. Verses 2-5 are a narrative dealing with the responsibility of the king. Verses 6-7b are a vignette addressing the relationship a young man is to have in the king's court. And verses 7c-10 are a narrative about one's ethical responsibility to one's neighbor. Chapter 25:11-28 is not structured around any narrative sequence but around the common topos of speech.²⁸ Another reason for believing that the text begins with verse 11 is that this is the beginning of the riddle-like proverbs. Prior to this the form of the verses are extension proverbs.

The following is my translation of the text under examination.

- v 11 Apples of gold in settings of silver/ (4)²⁹
a word well turned // (4)
- v 12 A ring of gold and a trinket of fine gold / (4)
one who gives wise reproof to a listening ear// (5)
- v 13 Like coldness of snow on the day of harvest/ (4)
is a faithful envoy to his senders/ (3)
and his master's soul he restores // (3)

²⁸ Elizabeth Faith Huwiler has argued that "speech and silence" is a common theme that holds the text of 25:11-20 together as a unit. See Elizabeth Faith Huwiler, *Control of Reality in Israelite Wisdom*, unpublished dissertation, Duke University, 1988, pp. 214-230.

²⁹ The number in parenthesis following each line refers to the number of Hebrew words in each line.

- v 14 Clouds and wind but no rain/ (4)
 a man who boasts in false gifts // (4)
- v 15 Through patience a ruler will be persuaded³⁰/ (4)
 and a soft tongue will break a bone // (4)
- v 16 You have found honey - eat only enough for yourself/ (4)
 lest you be sated with it and vomit it // (3)
- v 17 Make your foot rare in your friend's house/ (4)
 lest he be sated with you and hate you // (3)
- v 18 A club³¹ and sword and sharpened arrow/ (4)
 a man who answers against his neighbor, a false witness // (5)
- v 19 A broken tooth and a shaky foot/ (4)
 confidence in a deceiver in the day of distress // (4)
- v 20 Removing a garment on a cold day/ (4)
 vinegar on a wound³²/ (3)
 and singing songs to a sad heart // (5)
- v 21 If the one who hates you is hungry give him bread to eat/ (5)
 if he is thirsty give him water to drink // (4)
- v 22 For you³³ will snatch up coals on his head/ (6)
 and Yahweh will reward you // (3)
- v 23 A north wind will produce³⁴ rain/ (4)
 and a secret tongue,³⁵ angry faces // (4)
- v 24 Better to dwell upon the corner of a roof/ (5)
 than in a spacious³⁶ house with a contentious woman // (4)
- v 25 Cold water on a thirsty soul/ (5)
 and a pleasant report from a distant land // (4)

³⁰ The Hebrew word is פתח and literally means "to be open."

³¹ Both Kittel and Brown, Driver, and Briggs suggest emendation of the pointing from מַפֵּץ to מִפֵּץ. See BDB p. 807.

³² The Hebrew text reads "vinegar on soda." The idea is that the two are incompatible, adding one bitter thing to another. However, the word can also be translated "wound." See McKane p. 588.

³³ "you" is emphatic in the Hebrew text.

³⁴ The Hebrew root is חול. See Brown, Driver, Briggs p. 297

³⁵ The image here is of one who gossips.

³⁶ I follow Kittel's recommendation of emending the text from from חָבֵר (hrb) to חָבֵר (rhb). hrb refers to that which is common or to company.

- v 26 A spring which has been befouled and a polluted well/ (4)
 a righteous one who slips before a wicked person/ / (4)
- v 27 To eat too much honey is not good/ (5)
 so be sparing of complimentary words/ /³⁷ (3)
- v 28 A city broken into and there is no wall/ (4)
 a man who has no self control / / (5)

What patterns, moves and images can be surfaced in this text of proverbs? In the first line of verse 11 a beautiful piece of art work is imagined, the centerpiece of which is "apples of gold." Such a masterpiece of human art is compared to the artistic use of words. McKane suggests that the second line might literally refer to a word upon its two wheels. If so, he claims that the "reference is then to the compact elegance of expression produced by the balancing halves of a wisdom sentence."³⁸ That is, the "two wheels" refer to the two parallel halves of a proverb. In any event, the second line is somewhat cryptic but refers to the artful and creative use of speech. It is a skill that can be taught and learned.

Verses 11 and 12 are a proverbial pair because both use the image of precious metal as an analogy for proper speaking and listening. In both proverbs the gold is crafted into something aesthetically pleasing and artistic. In the context of verse 12, the gold is more than likely fashioned into an earring. Such attractive jewelry is compared to advice that is seasoned with correction given to one (a student or a child) who has a "listening ear." The

³⁷ The second line of this verse is extremely difficult to translate. Literally the Hebrew reads "and searching out their glory is glory" which is a nonsensical phrase. McKane translates the phrase "so be sparing with eulogizing words" (p. 588). Glendon E. Bryce supports a similar idea in his 1972 article. See Glendon E. Bryce "Another Wisdom-'Book' in Proverbs" *Journal of Biblical Literature* (1972) : 148-150.

³⁸ McKane 584

process of offering reproof that in good taste to one who is receptive to it is described as a work of art.

Verses 13 and 14 are also a proverbial pair. Whereas verses 11-12 speak of nature that has been artistically molded and shaped by humans, verses 13-14 speak of another kind of nature that is beyond human control: weather. Some translators question the reality of the image in 13a and the impossibility of snow during harvest season. However, the image does not have to be a reality or an actual event but simply a figure depicting unexpected and pleasurable refreshment.³⁹ Just as harvesters are relieved from the heat of the day by something cold and refreshing, so a master is refreshed by the confidence he places in a messenger who is faithful in relaying the message he has been given to others. A negative counterpart of this is given in verse 14. Huwiler says the saying is "about unkept promises, whether of nature or of humans."⁴⁰ But the focus is on the human who makes empty promises. Such promises are like clouds that appear on the horizon over a parched country that bring no rain.

Verse 15 stands by itself in the structure of this text. It is a pivotal saying. There is no proverb just preceding or following it with which it is paired. The proverb has to do with control of speech. By the proper use of discourse someone of a lesser status can exercise influence over someone of a greater status. Through the controlled use of speech, a person who has

³⁹ Think about contemporary beverage commercials depicting a snow storm during the summer.

⁴⁰ Huwiler 218

political clout can literally be "opened"⁴¹ to considering other ideas and perspectives. The second line uses figurative language to express the power of such language: "a soft tongue will break a bone." As Huwiler remarks this is analogous to the contemporary proverb "the pen is mightier than the sword."⁴² In this proverb the power of speech is put to positive use as it influences people in powerful positions. The proper control of speech is a strong motif in this text which begins (v 11; shaping discourse for the right moment) and ends (v 28; the lack of self control) with this concern.

Verses 16 and 17 are a proverbial pair. Both proverbs refer to something that is good and valuable which becomes harmful because it is not controlled. Throughout Scripture honey is viewed as a health food; it has medicinal qualities. However, too much honey can make one ill. The proverb of verse 17 picks up on this image and becomes the center of gravity for the pair. Friendship, like honey, has medicinal value for the mental health of an individual. However, over staying one's welcome can harm the relationship. If the surrounding context of verse 17 is taken seriously, then the specifics of how one becomes tiring to another is related to the lack of control of discourse. The proverb counsels about using words sparingly in the context of friendship. This is further supported by a parallel proverb in verse 27: "To eat too much honey is not good/ so be sparing of complimentary words/ /." This verse becomes a fitting summary of the thought of verses 16 and 17.

⁴¹ The Hebrew word I translate "persuasion" means "to be simple" or "open." See translation.

⁴² Huwiler 218

Verses 18, 19 and 20 are closely related in thought and image. All the images and analogies used are in some way negative. The analogies have to do with something natural being transformed into something abusive or harmful. The first line of verse 18 lists a series of instruments of war: club, sword, arrow. The common denominator underlying them is that they are all like an individual who speaks out falsely against a friend or neighbor. Here is an image of the destructive force of speech. This destructive nature is pressed even further in verse 19. Teeth and feet are two parts of the body that are necessary for survival. But here these natural allies have betrayed the body and are now, because of impotence, used to defeat the individual. This betrayal is compared to one who places confidence in a deceiver or an unreliable person at a critical moment in time. Verse 20 is the climax to the trio and highlights the use of outside forces to defeat the internal character.⁴³ One of the issues pertaining to this verse has to do with whether the sad heart belongs to the one who is doing the singing or to the one to whom the songs are being sung. If the former, it would be analogous to the image of a clown entertaining an audience when the clown himself or herself is sad. But more than likely the force of the verse resides with the latter interpretation. The images in the previous lines support this reading. The first two lines describe an external force being used to shock a person:⁴⁴ cold air hitting one's body, applying vinegar to an open wound. The reference of these images appears in third line and describes the shock of someone singing a lighthearted song to

⁴³ Like verse 13, verse 20 is unusual in construction because it is composed of three rather than two lines.

⁴⁴ Huwiler 220-221

another who is in a state of sadness or grief. Huwiler concludes: "The verse encourages its audience to avoid such shocking use of speech. The concern is for the effect of speech on the hearer."⁴⁵

Verses 21 and 22 are paired proverbs. The difficulty in these proverbs is with what is meant by the phrase "snatch up coals on his head." Van Leeuwen follows the interpretation that understands the imagery to be that of dehydration and fever due to heat. When a person gives the thirsty enemy water to drink the dehydration is cured: "then you will be snatching coals (from) upon his head."⁴⁶ Another interpretation is to understand the phrase as a form of torture. When one returns good for evil one is bringing a self-inflicted punishment on the enemy.⁴⁷ R. B. Y. Scott offers a third possibility and says that "the figure was derived from an Egyptian repentance ritual i.e., 'you will make your enemy repent.'"⁴⁸

But how does this proverb relate to the thematic issue of speech in this text? The language is figurative since seldom does one come across a literal enemy who is starving and thirsty. Whereas the previous trio of proverbs imaged the enemy as an external force in the form of words destroying an individual, this proverb offers a little twist to the scenario. When one comes upon an enemy (a conflict) one can use what is in his ,or her power to do good. In this context, the power most readily available to the individual is

⁴⁵ Huwiler 221

⁴⁶ Van Leeuwen 60

⁴⁷ This appears to be McKane's position (p. 592).

⁴⁸ Scott 156

words. Instead of using discourse in a destructive way as it was in the previous trio, the implication here is to use it on one's enemies (conflict situations) in a constructive way.

Verses 23 and 24 form a proverbial pair. Both address the effects that are produced by negative speech. The difficulty in verse 23 is that in Palestine the north wind does not normally produce rain. But this may be the reason for referring to it. Van Leeuwen proposes the following connection between the two lines of verse 23: "The thought seems to be that as the North wind is an unanticipated (hidden) source of rain contrary to the observer's expectation, so talk in secret suddenly produces outrage from an unexpected — perhaps trusted (cf. v 19b!) — corner."⁴⁹ The focus of attention in this proverb is on the unexpectedness of what the wind and the tongue produce. In the case of the former it produces positive results. But in the case of the latter the results are destructive.⁵⁰ The hidden tongue of gossip is destructive. This leads to the next proverb. Just as, gossip is destructive, so is a contentious and quarrelsome spouse. It is better to live in cramped quarters than in a comfortable spacious environment that is filled with caustic and critical speech.

Both verses 25 and 26 are paired because they use the image of water to illustrate their message. In verse 25 cold water revives a parched throat; it brings refreshing relief to the while being. So pleasant and unexpected words from a distant land are a source of refreshment for another. In verse 26 the

⁴⁹ Van Leeuwen 60

⁵⁰ If the two lines were exactly parallel one would expect a positive counterpart to rain in the second line. Instead what is produced is angry looks.

image is of refreshing water that has become polluted by animals or humans. Something that is good has been abused and wasted. According to the second line a righteous person can be polluted by the work of the wicked. How this is done is not specified. The proverb itself is quite general and open. Once again, I would propose that the context gives the proverb a specific reference. The effect the wicked have on the righteous comes through the negative influence of speech.

Even though the second line of verse 27 is difficult to translate and interpret, there is good evidence for understanding it to refer to the over use of complimentary words.⁵¹ The concern is with proper control of speech. Even something that is good if it is misappropriated can do harm.

The proverb that concludes this text (v 28) has no direct reference to speech. However, it is closely connected to the preceding ones because of its emphasis on control. The first proverb in this text has to do with control: shaping words into a "well turned phrase." Verse 15 has to do with controlling one's speech in order to influence those in political positions. This last proverb by itself is generic. But again in light of the context in which it is found, it can be interpreted as referring to the artful control and management of speech.

The above analysis reveals that there is an overarching unity to this text of proverbs. These proverbs are not thrown together haphazardly. They have a common structure. The text begins (v 11) with an image of the constructive results of controlled speech: the shaping of a word to fit the moment. It concludes with the destructive results of a lack of control: a city

⁵¹ See footnote 37.

whose walls have been demolished. This text of proverbs is also structured around a common theme: the appropriate and inappropriate use of speech. Finally the proverbs in this text are also clustered around a common genre!. They are riddle-like in form with the first line containing a figurative "comment" on the "topic" of the second line.

I do not end, however, with a structural analysis. Once the text has been explained and its underlying structure discovered, then the interpreter is equipped to appropriate it. The text that has remained distant is now brought near and unfolded before the interpreter and the contemporary audience.

The themes focused on in Proverbs 25:11-28 have to do with conflict on the one hand and control on the other. The conflict that arises in these proverbs stems from the relationship between individuals and the inartistic use of speech. There is conflict between husband and wife (v 24) that is destructive because of the caustic use of speech. Conflict also arises between friends. Sometimes these friends over stay their welcome (v 17) or use complimentary words too liberally and become flatterers (v 27). Sometimes conflict stems from gossip (v 23), sometimes it occurs because of promises that are made but not kept (v 14), sometimes it results from inappropriate timing of speech (v 20).

Over against this image the text appeals to control and restraint. But this is not just a generic appeal for restraint. It is an admonition for restraint in the specific realm of speech. As I have pointed out above, the text begins and ends with this focus. The way to resolve the conflicts that arise in relationships is through wise management and control of one's words. Such control is envisioned to be a work of art. It is like a classic painting (v. 11), a piece of jewelry (v. 12). It is like a satisfying refreshment (vv 13, 25). Words

are compared to honey, a food that is not only refreshing but also healthy (v 27). When such words are under control they can influence even the most politically powerful individual (v 15). With the proper control even the reproving words of a sage to his student can be productive (v 12). However, when such words are not under control they can be a destructive force. They can drive a friend to even deeper despair (v 20). They can be turned into weapons that can destroy a relationship (vv 18, 23, 24). They can negatively shape the character of another (26).

These themes of conflict, control and speech, therefore, enable this text to connect with a contemporary community. Conflict arises because of the way in which words are used. The resolution to such interpersonal conflicts is to learn to control one's speech. Such control is portrayed as a work of art, a fine piece of jewelry, a beautiful painting (vv 11-12).⁵² Speech as a work of art implies that to use it takes skill and training and thought. When one learns to manage and control speech it becomes an important defense against negative external influences (v 28). At the same time, such control enables one to take the offense and have an influence on even the most powerful of political leaders (v 15). These are the themes and ideas in the text that enable it to be appropriated.

⁵² Elsewhere Proverbs describe speech as a piece of art work: "There is gold, and abundance of costly stones/ but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel/" (20:15); "Choice silver: the tongue of the righteous/ the mind of the wicked is of little worth / /" (10:20).

The Role of Mentor in Developing the Art of Speaking: Proverbs 10:13-21

The second text to be explicated is Proverbs 10:13-21. The following is my translation:

- v 13 On the lips of the understanding one, will be found wisdom/(4)
but a rod is for the back of one who lacks sense⁵³ / /(4)
- v 14 Wise men store up knowledge/(3)
but the mouth of a fool brings imminent destruction / /(4)
- v 15 A rich man's wealth is his strong city/(4)
the poverty of the poor ones is their destruction / /(3)
- v 16 The work of the righteous one leads to life/(3)
the revenue of the wicked one leads to sin / /(3)
- v 17 He who keeps instruction is on the path to life/(4)
but he who forsakes reproof causes others to stray⁵⁴ / /(3)
- v 18 He who covers over hatred has lying lips/(4)
and he who utters slander, he is a fool / /(4)
- v 19 When there are many words transgression will not lack/(5)
but he who restrains his lips is prudent / /(3)
- v 20 Choice silver: the tongue of the righteous one,/ (4)
the mind⁵⁵ of the wicked ones has little worth / /(3)
- v 21 The lips of the righteous one will feed many/(4)
but fools die for lack of sense / /(4)

The structure of this text forms the individual proverbs into a single unit. That this text is a unified whole is not out of place since Elizabeth Huwiler has identified a series of proverbs clustered around the theme of wealth (10:2-5) and around the theme of speech (10:6-11) earlier in the

⁵³ For "lacks sense" the Hebrew text uses the phrase "needy of heart," a phrase used frequently in Proverbs to refer to the fool.

⁵⁴ The term I translate "causes others to stray" is a hiphil participle and thus is literally translated "one who causes to stray."

⁵⁵ Literally "heart." For the Hebrews the heart was the seat of the intellect.

chapter.⁵⁶ In regard to 10:6-11 she made the observation that the text begins (6b) and ends (11b) with the same phrase: "but the mouth of the wicked ones covers violence." She argued that this phrase formed an inclusio that held the text together. In a similar fashion, I would like to argue that 10:13-21 is structured around the inclusio of verses 13 and 21. Both verses begin with one of the organs of speech, the lips. They both conclude with the Hebrew phrase, "lacks sense" (In Hebrew, חָסֵר לֵב). Both verses 13 and 21 express similar thought about the value of speech when used with wisdom and its destructiveness when used by fools. In addition, it could also be said that verse 21 intensifies the thought of v 13. In verse 13a it is simply stated that speech flowing from a prudent person makes sense. In its counterpart in verse 21a, a more specific and intense statement is made: the wise use of speech will feed many. In verse 13b a whipping is to be doled out to the foolish one. In verse 21b death is said to be the punishment. Thus verses 13 and 21 form a nice inclusio for this cluster of proverbs.

This series of proverbs is also clustered around the common theme of speech. Throughout 10:6-32 there is frequent use of and reference to the organs of speech. In all there are nineteen references. These include the mouth (פֶּה), lips (שִׁפָּה), tongue (לְשׁוֹן) and heart or mind (לֵב). But especially in 10:13-21 there is a heavy concentration of the organs of speech: lips (used four times), heart/mind (three times), mouth (once), and tongue (once). Nine references to the organs of speech are used in this text. All of this serves to reinforce the unity of 10:13-21.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Faith Huwiler, *Control of Reality In Israelite Wisdom*, Unpublished dissertation., Duke University (1988) 186-201.

A closer reading of this text is now in order. In verse 13 there is a contrast between the perceptive person and the one who lacks discernment. On the one hand, when the perceptive person speaks it is evident that his words have been carefully thought out and chosen. He knows what the listener needs to hear. On the other hand, the person who lacks discernment or who has no common sense gets into trouble. The undiscerning person is bankrupt in mind (literally poverty of mind/heart).

The next verse contains a contrast of a similar kind (v 14). Regarding this verse, McKane comments:

Again, wise men are those who have served their apprenticeship with a master and have wrought into the fabric of their own being the store of his wisdom. It is because they were once teachable and receptive that they now possess a maturity of wisdom in their own right and are impeccable counsellors (v.14a)."⁵⁷

The wise are those who learn from the past, from experience, and store up or treasure that knowledge for the right occasion and person. In contrast, the fool has no such control. He simply blurts out to anyone who listens whatever happens to be on his mind at the time. The result is imminent destruction.

Verses 15 and 16 are a pair. They are the only two proverbs in this unit that make no direct reference to speech. So are they out of place? Not necessarily. If we take 10:13-21 as a context for interpreting the individual proverbs, then perhaps these two can be interpreted in light of the others in

⁵⁷ McKane 416

this cluster. This pair has to do with a contrast between the righteous and the wicked, wealth and poverty. The first line of each sets forth the value of wealth and hard work in the hand of the righteous. However, throughout Proverbs wealth frequently has reference to things other than material prosperity.⁵⁸ It can refer to an abundant life, a life filled with satisfaction and peace of mind. If the context of this proverbial pair is taken seriously, is it not possible to understand wealth to mean all the resources of a rich person (v 15) or a righteous person (v 16) including those of knowledge and speech? The previous proverbs have alluded to economic terms to describe how one uses speech. In verse 10 the one who has no discretion is said to be mentally poverty stricken (the phrase is "needy of heart"). In verse 11 the wise man treasures knowledge. What kind of work does a righteous person do that leads to life (16)? In this context it could be understood to be the proper stewardship of speech.

Verse 17 appears to be an educational maxim. The student who listens to instruction is one who will experience quality life. The one who rejects reproof and correction will not only hurt himself but others as well which makes the matter of heeding wise reproof urgent.

Verse 18 is the only proverb that does not have an antithetic structure in this cluster. In fact in the whole of chapter 10, verses 22 and 26 are the only other ones that are not built on antithetic parallelism. Though the syntax of the first line of verse 18 is a little difficult, the thought is that the one who lies

⁵⁸ As one example Proverbs 22:4: "The reward for humility and fear of the Lord/ riches and honor and life //." Note the context of riches in this proverb aligns it with honor and life, things that are more internal and intangible in nature.

(possibly in the form of flattery) is doing so to cover over a malevolent attitude. Such a person spends his time looking for gossip that will hurt another person. He is judged to be a fool.

The thought of verse 19 is tied closely to verses 13 and 14. Here one important sign of wisdom is the ability to control speech.⁵⁹ The one who incessantly talks is the one who will inevitably get into trouble. Because he is so busy talking, he is not sensitive to the situation or the individuals involved. It may even be that the form of the proverb itself is a visual demonstration of the idea it is communicating. The first line of this proverb contains an unusual number of words (five). The only other proverb in chapter 10 to contain five words is the first line of verse 3. The second line of verse 19 contains only three brief words. Thus the form visualizes the contrast between many and few words.

Verse 20 uses the image of precious metal to describe the speech of the righteous person. As in the passage in 25:11-28 the use of speech is understood to be a work of art. "Choice silver" is silver that has been purified by the furnace. Thus it is not just raw material but it has been handled and tested and is readied for use as some kind of ornament or jewelry. The organs of speech of the righteous (in this case, tongue) are of the highest quality. But the organs of speech of the wicked (in this case the mind) are of "little worth."

Verse 21 closes out this text. It brings one back to the beginning in verse 13 as well as connecting with the thought of verse 17. Verse 17 is the center proverb in this text and is educational in focus: those who do not heed

⁵⁹ I am reminded of the contemporary proverb that expresses this thought: "least said sooner mended."

instruction will lead others astray. Verse 21 also has an educational perspective. The first line affirms that the speech of the righteous will nourish many people. That is, they bring health and life. In contrast, the words of the fool brings death.

Examination of the formal structure of this text suggests themes that might enable it to be appropriated. To learn how to become skillful in speech, one must align himself or herself with those who model its appropriate use. If students follow the wrong model, as verse 17 implies, their error will affect their ability to function and succeed. They in turn will perpetuate this dysfunctional model to others. But if students find the appropriate mentor they will be nurtured in a healthy and constructive way (v 21). Throughout this text there is repeated contrast between the wise and the fool. The key to a proper perspective on how to effectively use speech is to find the right mentor.

In addition to the mentor theme, there is the idea of speech as an art or a skill. As in 25:11-28 the use of speech is imaged as a work of art and as such its proper use involves control and restraint. Control involves the ability to remain silent when necessary and to speak only when one understands the situation and is sensitive to the individuals involved. Control also involves the ability to hear and accept wise criticism. The term in verse 17 for "instruction" is also the word for "discipline." Discipline is a central part of listening and is what is necessary in order to appropriate constructive criticism. In addition, the sage is one who has the organs of speech under control. The fool does not. The results of disciplined speech include nurture, wisdom and life. The absence of such discipline lead to destruction, sin, hatred, lying, leading others astray, and death.

What I have attempted to do in this section of the chapter is twofold. First, I have selected two texts of proverbs, 25:11-28 and 10:13-21, to demonstrate how the rhetorical hermeneutic of Ricoeur illuminates an overall structure. The study of Proverbs has been dominated by the belief that the individual proverbs are self-contained units that have no connection with what precedes or follows. However, using a rhetorical hermeneutic one can uncover an underlying and intentional structure that moves beyond the micro-level to a macro-level. What I have shown is that at least in certain sections of Proverbs the proverbs are not randomly collected but have a context in which they have been intentionally placed. Such a context gives certain proverbs that seem to be quite generic and mundane a more specific focus. As a result these proverbs are given new meaning and a dynamic quality. Working to discover macro-structures in Proverbs, however, still needs further investigation.

Second, I have attempted to take a group of proverbs that are clustered around the common theme of speech. I would argue that these are not the only texts clustered around this subject.⁶⁰ In choosing these texts, I have intended to get closer to the sage's understanding of and perspective on speech. The analysis has put us close to the ground of the sage's way of thinking about words and how they influence and affect others. From these texts one gains a sense of the appreciation of and the power invested in oral discourse. The use and control of speech is indeed a work of art designed to shape and influence the lives of others.

⁶⁰ Elizabeth Huwiler has also identified three clusters relating to speech: 10:6-11; 17:27-18:8; 25:11-20. See her unpublished dissertation, *Control of Reality in Israelite Wisdom*.

Topoi Related To Oral Discourse

The two texts of proverbs explicated above centered around the general theme of oral discourse. In the following section I want to look at two topoi of speech that are central to the book of Proverbs. These include the topoi of the ethics of speech and of the quality of timing. These topoi will give further insight into Proverbs' perspectives on oral discourse and how it influences. Once again special attention will be given to centering on clusters of proverbs that are related to these two topoi and to using a rhetorical hermeneutic for explanation and appropriation.

Topos: The Ethics of Discourse

The Virtues of Speech

Inherent in the use of words is an ethical dimension because such use involves the issue of power. The sage acknowledges the power of words by referring repeatedly to their persuasive force. When words are used in an ethically responsible way to persuade, the results are constructive. When used irresponsibly, the results are destructive. Proverbs 16:21-24 is a cluster of proverbs that describes and illuminates the persuasive power of words in a constructive way:

- v 21 The thoughtful sage will be called "the understanding one" / (4)
and sweetness of lips will increase persuasiveness⁶¹ / (4)
- v 22 Prudence is a well of life to its owner/(4)
but folly is the instruction of fools/ (3)
- v 23 The mind of the wise will make his speech⁶² prudent/(4)

⁶¹ This word נִקְלָו also carries the meaning of learning or teaching.

⁶² The Hebrew term is mouth (פֶּה).

and he will add persuasiveness⁶³ to his lips // (4)
 v 24 Pleasant words are like the honey of a honey comb/(4)
 sweet to the taste⁶⁴ and healing for the body⁶⁵ // (4)

As a unit, these proverbs address the power discourse exerts on the self and on others. Verse 22 is the most generic. But even here folly is said to "instruct" fools. And when interpreted in light of the surrounding proverbs it takes on even more specificity. The prudence and folly of verse 22 has to do with the stewardship of words.⁶⁶

The Revised Standard Version, New American Standard Version and the Jerusalem Bible all appropriately translate the Hebrew word הִקְלִי in verses 21 and 23 as persuasiveness.⁶⁷ Brown, Driver, and Briggs translate the second line of verse 21 as "sweetness of lips increaseth persuasiveness."⁶⁸ They comment that there is a close relationship between teaching power and persuasiveness.

Verse 21 begins by describing persuasive words as sweet, while verse 24 concludes the cluster with the same description thus forming an inclusio. Two images are used in the text to highlight the positive power of words: honey and a well (or spring) of life. Both honey and water are vital sources of

⁶³ The Hebrew word is the same as that used in verse 21.

⁶⁴ The Hebrew word is soul (נַפְשׁוֹ).

⁶⁵ The Hebrew word is bones (עֲצָמוֹ).

⁶⁶ All of the lines in this text are positive in force except for 22b.

⁶⁷ The New International Version has a footnote to these two verses and suggests "persuasiveness" as an alternative to the word "instruction" they use to translate the Hebrew term.

⁶⁸ See Brown, Driver, Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975) 544.

health for the body. In like manner, prudent words are a source of health for the community. Because of its context in 16:21-24, the image of "well of life" in verse 22 becomes a reference to the persuasive power of words: prudent speech is a well of life.

The appropriation of the text is discovered in its holistic perspective on how words and sayings influence the self and others. First, truly effective words flow from a mind that is prudent and thoughtful (vv 21, 23). These words have substance and are able to offer guidance and instruction. Second, speech that is effective is pleasant. There is an aesthetic quality to it. This quality arises from the way in which it is formulated. The style and structure of a proverb witnesses to how words can be artfully constructed into a form that is attractive. But their aesthetic quality also stems from their appropriateness to the particular situation and individual. Finally speech that is effective persuades. It is capable of bringing about change in others. This text affirms that when words have substance to them and are aesthetically shaped to create pleasure, their persuasive power increases.

The way in which the sage describes the power of speech in these proverbs has striking affinity with Augustine's three components of an effective sermon which he adopted from Cicero.⁶⁹ First, he maintained that the sermon is to teach. That is, it is to have content and substance from which the audience can learn. Second, it is to delight. It is to have an element of pathos that touches the emotional side of the listener and moves the spirit. Finally, Augustine says that the sermon is to persuade. It is to do

⁶⁹ Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. II (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), Book IV Chapter 12, p. 583ff.

something in the mind and life of the auditor. It must bring about change. Augustine concludes that the first purpose, to teach, is concerned with what is said. To delight and persuade are concerned with how it is said. These three components underlie the description of discourse given in these proverbs.

This text describes an ethical basis of speech for two reasons. First, the method or means by which the discourse is constructed is holistic. There is not an appeal simply and only to use words aesthetically. Such an exclusive focus would result in what wisdom calls flattery. But neither is the focus only on education or on persuasion. Speech as it is described here is ethical because it incorporates all three purposes: to instruct, to please, to persuade. It is holistic. Second, this is an ethical description of speech because of its results. Such holistic speech brings health to the community. It is for the good of others. Both images of honey and well of life highlight this dimension. Both the means and the ends of speaking are shaped by the ethical dimension.⁷⁰

Vices of Speech

Wisdom counsels against using certain kinds of speech, not because it is ineffective but because of its harmful impact on others. A cluster of proverbs in 26:17-28 centers around such a negative influence:

- v 17 He who seizes the ears of a passing⁷¹ dog/(4)
 one who infuriates himself in a quarrel not his own/ /(5)
- v 18 Like a madman shooting/(2)

⁷⁰ It is neither that the means justifies the ends nor the ends justifies the means. There is a dialectic between the two.

⁷¹ My translation of this proverbs moves the *athnah*, from under "passing" to the next word in the proverb thus keeping the term for "passing" with the first line.

- missiles, arrows, and death/(3)
 v 19 So is a man who deceives his neighbor/(5)
 and says, "was I⁷² not joking?" / /(4)
 v 20 By lack of wood a fire will be quenched/(4)
 and where there is no slanderer quarreling will cease / /(4)
 v 21 Coal to embers and wood to fire/(4)
 and a quarrelsome man to kindle⁷³ strife / /(4)
 v 22 The words of a slanderer are tidbits/(3)
 and they will go down into the chambers of the belly / /(4)
 v 23 Impure silver over laid on clay pots/(5)
 burning lips and an evil heart / /(4)
 v 24 He who hates will disguise with his lips/(3)
 and within he is set on deception / /(3)
 v 25 for he will show favor in his voice: do not believe him/(6)
 for seven abominations are in his heart / /(4)
 v 26 Hatred is concealed by deceit/(3)
 his evil will be exposed in the assembly / /(3)
 v 27 He who digs a pit will fall into it/⁷⁴ (4)
 and he who rolls a stone, it will return to him / /(4)
 v 28 A deceptive tongue will hate those it crushes/(4)
 and a smooth mouth will lead to downfall / /(4)

Several commentators have recognized the coherence of this unit even though they do not exploit the context. McKane groups verses 20-28 together and entitles the section "Malice in Action."⁷⁵ Earlier in his discussion of chapter 26 he made the following remark: "It is a question whether vv. 17-19 should also be attached to vv. 20-28"⁷⁶ In addition McKane says that

⁷² The first person pronoun is emphatic in the Hebrew text.

⁷³ The Hebrew word **הָרָר** means "to be hot" and is in keeping with the image of fire portrayed in this verse.

⁷⁴ R. B. Y. Scott understands the sense of this line when he inserts the references in brackets in his translation: "He who digs a pit [for another] will fall into it [himself]" (158).

⁷⁵ McKane 602

⁷⁶ McKane 595

these proverbs are all concerned with negative or harmful actions that affect the solidarity of the community. R. N. Whybray in the Cambridge Bible Commentary refers to verses 20-28 as "A group of sayings about malicious speech."⁷⁷ So even without a formal structural analysis, commentators have recognized a unified quality surrounding these proverbs.

Structurally this text is held together by common theme, imagery, and vocabulary. First, the theme that holds the cluster together is the malicious use of discourse. The second structural element holding the text together is related to imagery. Before I identify the specific imagery used, attention should be called to the general type of proverb in this section since this is related to the imagery. The dominant proverb type in chapters 25-27 is the riddle like proverb.⁷⁸ Thus the imagery in this section and specifically in 26:17-28 is rich. Because of his approach to Proverbs, McKane comments that the proverbs in chapter 26 are "of a more pedestrian kind."⁷⁹ But when these proverbs are examined in the larger context of verses 17-28 they take on a dynamic quality. One imagery used in 26:17-28 to describe malicious speech is that it is a lethal weapon. Such speech is like a madman shooting arrows; it is like an angry dog, like coal or wood fueling a fire, like a pit into which one

⁷⁷ See *The Book of Proverbs* (Cambridge: University Press, 1972) 153.

⁷⁸ In the riddle like proverbs a figure has been selected in order to make a particular point. The second line of each proverb interprets the figure in the first line. However, there are a couple of variations of this in 26:17-28. In 21a there are two images instead of the normal single image. Verse 22a interprets the image in the first line. Verse 27 contains two images one in the first and one in the second. But the referent is not specified. Thus it is dependent on the context of 26:17-28 for its interpretation.

⁷⁹ Specifically he names 26:24, 26, 28 (594).

can fall. Another image involves a psychological dimension: malevolent discourse is portrayed as externally attractive but bent on internal destruction. So the slanderer's words are like tidbits of tasty finger foods, like a time release capsule, that goes down easily but later has an adverse effect. His words are like a smooth mouth (flattery), impure silver over laid on clay pots, and like a disguise or a trap. Such speech gives the appearance of being amusing. But its destructiveness is far reaching. The third structural factor that holds this text together is a common vocabulary that describes the verbal abuser. The verbal abuser is a man of strife, a slanderer, a deceiver and a madman.⁸⁰ This person is depicted as one who verbally wounds.

In addition to the above elements, it should be noted that the text begins and ends with a reference to the consequences facing the verbal wounder. Thus an *inclusio* envelops the text. Verse 17 implicitly states the consequences the verbal wounder faces. Anyone knows that the person who grabs a passing dog by the ears is going to get hurt. Verses 26-28 are more explicit, and thus more emphatic, bringing the poem to a climax.⁸¹ The verbal abuser will be exposed by the community (v 26) and his deceptiveness will lead to his own ruin (vv 27-28). Such an *inclusio* knits these proverbs into a structural unit.

⁸⁰ The word for strife used throughout the text is רִיב (rib; vv 17, 21), its synonym in this passage is מְדוֹן (m'dhon; vv 20, 21). The word food slanderer is נִרְגֵן (n'ghn; vv 20, 21). The word for deception מְרַמֶּה מְרַמֶּה (ramah or mirmah; vv 19, 24).

⁸¹ Might this movement from implicit to explicit, or this movement from a general assumption to an emphatic statement be parallelism at work on a macro-level?

Using a structural analysis, Van Leeuwen has offered convincing arguments for understanding 26:17-28 as a poetic unit.⁸² What follows is a summary of his analysis. Van Leeuwen maintains that the text is concerned with ". . . negative speech which harms the other and causes social conflict"⁸³ In Van Leeuwen's structural analysis, verses 17-19 provide a three line introduction to the poem. This introduction speaks of strife (v 17) and the "verbal wounder" (vv 18-19) which are the two related themes in this cluster.⁸⁴ Verses 20-22 develop the two themes introduced in verses 17-19. Van Leeuwen explains that "the verbal wounder (*nrgn*, [slanderer] *ʿys mdwnyn* [man of strife]) can start (v 26:21; cf. 25:18) or maintain (26:20; cf. 25:18) conflict."⁸⁵ In verse 22, the poem describes the wicked power of the *nrgn* (slanderer): "his words penetrate to the inner being of a person, that hidden core of the self which determines external action."⁸⁶ Then verses 23-25 pick up on the catch-theme of "inner and outer" and uses it to warn the reader concerning the two-faced character of the verbal wounder. Verses 26-28 conclude by providing a warning to the verbal abuser. His ways will be exposed, his speech will be self-destructive, and his smooth talk will lead to his own demise.

⁸² Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, *Context and Meaning in Proverbs 25-27* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) 111-122.

⁸³ Van Leeuwen 120

⁸⁴ Van Leeuwen 119

⁸⁵ Van Leeuwen 119

⁸⁶ Van Leeuwen 119

Since the general structure of this text has been exposed, a more specific analysis is now in order. According to verse 17, whoever gets himself involved in a quarrel which is none of his business, provokes retaliation and will suffer damage and injury. Here the subject of strife and quarreling is introduced. Verses 18 and 19 are one proverb. The proverb introduces the verbal abuser. He is one who is deceptive, a characteristic that is developed throughout the text. He is deceptive because he puts on the appearance of simply wanting to have fun, to amuse. However, there is a hidden agenda which is to undermine the order of the community for the sake of accomplishing his own selfish desires.

Verses 18 and 19 contain a hypothetical quote from the lips of the deceiver who lightheartedly defends his actions by saying, "was I not joking?" Elizabeth Huwiler refers to this as "reported speech" and concludes, after surveying the use of all such speech throughout the sentence proverbs that such "[r]eported speech is overwhelmingly negative."⁸⁷ Positive reported speech is found only in chapters 1-9 and is closely associated with wisdom and with parents. The conclusion is that speech that is not connected with sapiential figures should be viewed with suspicion. Ethos plays a central role in the vices and virtues of speech. The character of the person speaking determines the quality of the discourse.

⁸⁷ Huwiler 236. She includes the following examples of reported speech: 1:11-14; 3:28; 5:12-14; 7:14-20; 9:16-17; 20:14, 22; 22:13; 23:7, 29, 35-36 [sic]; 24:12, 24, 29; 26:13, 19; 28:24; 30:9, 15, 16, 20 (p. 237). She says that examples of positive reported speech includes the speech of wisdom (1:22-33) and of parents (4:4). She concludes that outside of chapters 1-9, there is little positive reported speech.

Having been introduced to the verbal seducer and to the lethal word games he plays in verses 17-19, verses 20-25 detail his effect on the community. In verse 20 the slanderer's role in society is described as destructive; he destroys the trust which produces solidarity.⁸⁸ Such a slanderer, according to verse 21, feeds and fans the flames of dissension. He piles on more verbal fuel in order to keep the fires of contention burning. The quarreler has developed a long established habit of disregarding the best interest of the community.

The techniques the slanderer uses are alluring but camouflaged which make them quite effective. Verse 22 makes this clear.⁸⁹ The following remarks by McKane are apropos:

The slanderer's wares are tit-bits ... which go down into the inner compartments of the stomach. Slander is hospitably received and welcomed for a long stay. This is an observation on a human flaw—the appetite for evil gossip and the relish with which it is savoured and devoured. People like to hear evil of their fellows and whatever they may forget they will recollect slander without any effort of memory; it is remembered, and in all probability it will be transmitted by a damaging whisper.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ R. B. Y. Scott maintains that the "rhyme and structure of the second line suggests that it is a popular proverb of the type: No-this, No-that" (160). He tries to capture the rhyme and structure by translating it: "No calumny, no quarrel" (158).

⁸⁹ This proverb is duplicated in Proverbs 18:8.

⁹⁰ McKane 519

The slanderer is skilled in making the enthymematic connection between what he wants and the desire people have for listening to gossip. This proverb also speaks of the long lasting impression such discourse has on the psychic. Like tasty finger food that goes to the inner chambers of the body, so the words of the verbal wounder remain indelibly etched on the mind of the listener.⁹¹ The verbal wounder is artistically skilled in using discourse for destructive ends. His speech by no means is impotent. It has the power to shape one's perception of others and thus the way in which one behaves in community.

Verse 22 is a transitional verse because not only does it remind the reader of the deceptive nature of appearance already alluded to in verses 18 and 19 but it anticipates this motif in verses 23-25. The proverbs of verses 23-25 are all concerned with the thought that an attitude of deep, settled malice may be cloaked by a cultivated civility of speech and charming manner. The polished exterior is not what it appears to be (v 23). The image used in verse 23 is of silver being lacquered over a clay pot to give the earthen vessel an appearance of something it is not. Verses 24-26 are a narrative vignette specifying the image of verse 23 and elaborating on it in a more detailed fashion. Here the macro--level of parallelism seems to be at work with verse

⁹¹ The impact of such negative discourse is reminiscent of a proverb used in Yoruba culture to advise parents about their responsibility regarding conversation about others carried on in the presence of their children: "If you talk of cutting off somebody's head in the presence of a child, he will always be staring at the man's neck." The proverb in essence says that if parents express their bias about a person in the presence of their children, the children will always remember that bias or alleged fault whenever they see the one in question. See E. Ojo Arewa and Alan Dundes, "Proverbs and the Ethnography of Speaking Folklore," *American Anthropologist* 66 (1964): 76.

23 stating the general image and principle and verses 24-26 applying them to a specific individual: the verbal wounder.⁹²

With verse 25 comes the first imperative and the first offer of advice on how to deal with the verbal wounder. The counsel is straightforward: "do not believe him." Such a person, according to McKane, "has no respect for words, and language as used by him is always prostituted to evil ends and made the servant of deceit . . ."⁹³ McKane correctly explains that the phrase "seven abominations" in the second line of verse 25 "has no precise numerical significance and means something like 'any number of' . . ."⁹⁴ The number "seven" is used in the verse just preceding this text (26:17-28) in 26:16. Aitken comments that "behind a veneer of friendly words 'seven abominations' lurk; while he smiles to your face he will stab you in the back."⁹⁵ Seven abominations may reflect back on the numerical proverb of 6:16-19 which begins with the formulaic phrase, "There are six things which the Lord hates/ seven which are an abomination to him" The idea is that hatred spawns a number of wicked thoughts and actions. In 26:25 the verbal manipulator breeds ongoing disorder in the community.

Verse 26 concludes the narrative vignette and also serves as a transition into the final subsection. This subsection (vv 26-28) specifies the

⁹² McKane says that "Verse 24 is a pedestrian repetition of the sentiments of v. 23" (604). Once again his assumption that the proverbs are a haphazard collection is at work.

⁹³ McKane 604

⁹⁴ McKane 601

⁹⁵ Aitken 175

consequences the verbal abuser will face. Those who use their organs of speech to harm the community will themselves suffer the evil they intended for others. The one who schemes against another will himself suffer the repercussions. The reference in verse 26 to the assembly (*qhl*) is not a reference to a formal judicial body. R. N. Whybray affirms this in his remark on the proverb: "It can have the meaning of a religious meeting, but here it probably means an informal gathering of citizens, in which reputations could be made or destroyed."⁹⁶ Verse 27 further illustrates the consequences: "He who digs a pit will fall into it." When placed in the context of the cluster of proverbs in 26:17-28, this verse no longer remains aloof and pedantic. It has specific application to the verbal wounder. The proverb contained in the first line of this verse, is alluded to in various parts of Scripture.⁹⁷ Here it refers to the consequences faced by one who uses his discourse to disrupt community life and solidarity. In light of this, the final verse is also to be interpreted with the same referent in mind: the self-destructive tendencies of the verbal seducer. McKane understands the verse this way, "The false tongue is its owner's worst enemy."⁹⁸ Similarly Van Leeuwen affirms, "A false tongue hates those it crushes, yet a slick mouth works (its own) calamity."⁹⁹ And

⁹⁶ Whybray 154

⁹⁷ Cf. Ps. 7:15f; 9:15f; Eccles 10:8f; Prov 28:10. See chapter four for how this proverb is appropriated in different contexts.

⁹⁸ McKane 606

⁹⁹ Van Leeuwen 112-113

finally R. B. Y. Scott translates this verse as follows: "A lying tongue is a man's own worst enemy, And smooth talk leads to downfall."¹⁰⁰

Before moving to the appropriation of this text, it is striking to note how the above text, 26:17-28, is similar to a cluster of proverbs in 16:27-29. Comparing the two poems can lead to further illumination of 26:17-28. The text of 16:27-29 is translated as follows:

- v 27 A worthless man digs evil/(4)
 his lips are like a scorching fire // (4)
 v 28 A perverse man will spread strife/(4)
 and a slanderer will cause division among friends // (3)
 v 29 A violent man will persuade¹⁰¹ his friend/(4)
 and he makes him walk in a way that is not good // (4)

The text is a structural unit. Each line begins with the Hebrew word אִישׁ (man). In the first line of each verse the second word is a negative modifier used to describe the man: worthless, perverse, violent. Further each verse is held together by a common theme: the malicious use of speech. The vocabulary has strong affinities with that of 26:17-28. There is reference to the "slanderer" נִרְגֵּן (v 28; cf. 26:20, 22), to "burning" צָרַב lips (v 27; cf. 26:23), to "strife" מִדּוֹן (v 28; cf. 26:17, 21) and to "digging" כָּרַח evil (v 27; cf. to "digging" כָּרַח as pit 26:27). Both clusters have a similar vocabulary and theme.¹⁰² Chapter 16:27-29 is a fitting summary to the text of 26:17-28. The theme and images in 26:17-28 enable it to be appropriated to a contemporary audience. The central focus is on the ethos of the verbal abuser

¹⁰⁰ R. B. Y. Scott 158

¹⁰¹ The term that I translate persuade פָּתַח in verse 29 is the same word used in Proverbs 25:15. See above page 18.

¹⁰² One might further compare 16:27-30 with the poem in 6:12-15.

and the havoc he wreaks on society. Speech that is placed in the hands of the wrong person destroys the solidarity of the community. Of the three modes of persuasion, logos, pathos and ethos, ethos was and continues to be the most potent.¹⁰³ In this text, the verbal abuser brings disorder, creates division, and spreads chaos among friends and community. His character is the epitome of all that one should not be.

This verbal abuser also stands as the male counterpart to the quarrelsome woman¹⁰⁴ and to the seductress, the character that looms the largest in Proverbs 1-9. The seductress or temptress used words to entice her unwary prey: "With much seductive speech¹⁰⁵ she persuades him¹⁰⁶; with her smooth talk she compels him" (7:21). Like the temptress, this male counterpart seduces with words. The male seductor "will show favor in his

¹⁰³ Of the three modes of persuasion Aristotle said regarding ethos that the speaker's "character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses." See *Rhetoric*, Book I 2.13.

¹⁰⁴ See Proverbs 19:13; 27:15-16; 21:9; 25:24; 21:19. In all of these passages, the Hebrew term used to describe the quarrelsome wife is **מְדַבֵּר**, the same term that is used twice in 26:17-28 (vv. 20 and 21) and once in 16:27-29 (v. 28).

¹⁰⁵ The Hebrew word **לְקַח** is the same one used and translated persuasion in 16:21 and 16:23.

¹⁰⁶ Brown, Driver and Briggs say that the hiphil of **נָטַח** carries the idea of influence or persuasion (p. 640, 3c). Elsewhere in Proverbs there are descriptions of the temptress's persuasive powers: "For the lips of a temptress drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil" (5:3). The instruction of the sage is "to preserve you . . . from the smooth tongue of the adventuress" (6:24). The young man who is wise ". . . will be saved from the temptress, from the adventuress with her smooth words . . ." (2:16).

voice" (26:25) he will allure the innocent person as one is allured by tasty food (26:22). He is the one with the "smooth mouth" (26:28).

Van Leeuwen summarizes the character of the abuser and the advice given in the text:

. . . this proverb poem presents the Negative Actants (NA) who cause strife and hurt by verbal violence and deception. It warns the reader not to be one such, gives advice in relating to them (RA [Relating Actant, one who acts in relation to the abuser]), and concludes with the act-consequence declaration that the harm they do returns upon themselves.¹⁰⁷

This is the verbal seducer. He entices, manipulates and destroys. But the community is not without defense. They can unmask his true character (v 26). Then once exposed, the community can refuse to listen to him or believe what he says (v 25). The focus on ethos and the advice given to deal with such ethos equips the text for the task of appropriation.

In summarizing the topos of ethical speech the focus centers around the character of the interlocutor. The one who uses discourse to heal and to bring a semblance of order to the community is the one who is wise and ethically responsible. The one who uses discourse to spread disease and chaos is the verbal abuser, the one who is irresponsible. Thus ethos plays a primary role in the ethics of speech. All forms of speech, including proverbs, have the power to shape the character of individuals and of communities. The character of the person using such speech determines its constructive or destructive power.

¹⁰⁷ Van Leeuwen 122

Topos: The Kairos of Discourse

In Proverbs another central topic of concern regarding the use of speech is proper timing. In fact one of the important ways to distinguish between the wise and the foolish is that the sage knows when to speak and when to keep silent. The sage knows the proper timing of words. The fool has no sense of timing and as a result wounds everyone with his words even when he has the best of intentions in mind. In keeping with the rhetorical hermeneutic that I have established I want to look at one text of proverbs that seems to be clustered around a concern for kairos. The text is Proverbs 26:4-10. I translate it in the following way:

- v 4 Do not answer a fool according to his folly/ (4)
lest also you¹⁰⁸ will be like him // (5)
- v 5 Answer a fool according to his folly/ (3)
lest he will be wise in his own eyes // (4)
- v 6 He who cuts off his feet, he who drinks violence/ (4)
he who sends messages¹⁰⁹ in the hand of a fool // (4)
- v 7 Legs hanging down from a lame man/ (3)
and a proverb in the mouth of fools // (3)
- v 8 Like tying a stone in a sling/ (3)
so is one who gives honor to a fool // (4)
- v 9 A thorn going into the hand of a drunkard/ (4)
and a proverb in the mouth of fools // (3)
- v 10 An archer who wounds all passers-by¹¹⁰/ (3)
one who hires a fool and who hires passers-by // (4)

¹⁰⁸ The second person pronoun is emphatic.

¹⁰⁹ literally "words" (Hebrew **דְּבָרַיִם**).

¹¹⁰ The text literally reads "an archer who pierces all." I have furnished the specific object: "passers-by."

A structural analysis of these proverbs is first in order. Chapter 26:4-10 is part of a larger coherent unit of text: 26:1-12.¹¹¹ There is a catchword that ties these proverbs together and that is the word כֶּסֶל (fool). The term is used eleven times in 26:1-12. A number of commentators acknowledge the unity of these proverbs based on this key word. But they do not acknowledge the possibility of allowing this text to be the context in which the individual proverbs are interpreted. In addition to the catchword "fool," all the proverbs in this cluster are riddle like in form with the first line making a figurative type of comment on the topic that is stated in the second line.¹¹² A final element that ties this text together is its concern with the proper timing of discourse: the use of malicious words that are not fitting (v 2), knowing how to give the appropriate "answer" (vv 4-5), the proper care in sending "messages" (literally "words"; v 6), the proper use of "proverbs" (vv 7, 9), and the giving of respect that is fitting to the person (v 8). Here is a description of the verbal actant who must understand the occasional quality of words.

Before looking specifically at 26:4-10, it is important to see how this text is set up or introduced in verses 1-3. Chapter 26:1-3 speak of "fittingness" in nature and in community. Verse 1 introduces an important word that ties the message of the whole text together. It is the word "fitting" (נָאֵן): "Like snow in summer and rain in harvest/ so honor is not fitting for a fool / /." Certain things in nature do not fit at certain times of the year. Snow does not fit the season of summer, nor rain the season of harvest. Neither in the

¹¹¹ It is for the sake of time and focus that I choose not to address the larger unit in detail.

¹¹² Dundes observes that a proverb is made up of a Topic and a Comment. See chapter two.

realm of community does honor or respect or status fit the fool. The same Hebrew word is used in Proverbs 17:7: "Fine speech is not fitting to a fool/ how much less is false speech to a prince //." The proverb in 26:1 compares disorder in nature with disorder that occurs in society. Those elements that are in and of themselves good can be harmful because they are not suited to the occasion. Verse 2 describes just the opposite phenomenon: "Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying/ so a causeless curse that does not alight //." Malicious words can be given to a person who does not deserve it! But because it is inappropriate it is ineffective. Finally verse 3 describes what is really fitting to the fool or stupid person: punishment. "A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass/ and a rod for the back of fools //."

The sages had a keen interest in the timing that is built into the order of the universe. All things have their appointed time.¹¹³ Even things that are good (snow, rain, honor) can be harmful because they do not fit the occasion. Verses 1-3 serve as an introduction to verses 4-10 which describe the occasional nature of discourse. According to Van Leeuwen such a concern is a hermeneutical one: "Wisdom, to a very large extent, is a matter of interpreting people, events, situations, actions in relation to norms for existence."¹¹⁴ Such an observation is most significant!

Verses 4-5 are two admonition proverbs that specifically apply the problem of fittingness to discourse. Here are two contradictory proverbs placed side by side. Such contradiction is not uncommon in the collection of

¹¹³ Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 contains the well-known poem which begins, "For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven." See below for the complete text.

¹¹⁴ Van Leeuwen 100

Proverbs.¹¹⁵ But here the problem is highlighted and developed in a context devoted to the subject of timing. The first line of verses 4 and 5 are the same except for the addition of the prohibition in verse 4. The admonition of verse four is to not answer the fool so that one will not stoop to his level. The admonition in verse 5 is to answer the fool so that he will see his faults and be able to make corrections. So which is it? Kenneth Aitken says that the Rabbis solved the problem by making verse 4 refer to worldly matters and verse 5 to spiritual matters.¹¹⁶ However, the problem is not one of contradiction but of fittingness and timing. These two admonitions raise the dilemma that is a daily experience: when to speak and when not to speak.¹¹⁷ Strikingly and intentionally they contain no criteria for deciding the matter. It is the responsibility of the sage to evaluate the situation, event, and person

¹¹⁵ See below, footnote 128.

¹¹⁶ Aitken 104

¹¹⁷ Kenneth Høglund addresses 26:4-5 in the context of 26:1-2 and basically understands it to be a tightly constructed unit. He concludes that verses 4-5 are the crux of the sage's dilemma in the cluster and the surrounding proverbs struggle to work out the conflict between the two. When taken in the context of verse 12 ("Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him."), Høglund maintains that the sage has "little choice but to take the risks and answer the fool, thus engaging in a dialogue as perilous as it is unrewarding." He concludes his essay with these words: "For the wise, the dialogue with the fool may require the ultimate loss of all that marks one as a member of the wise. This tension expresses a strong sense of self-identity on the part of Israel's wise, and a deep appreciation for the ambiguity of life experiences." See Kenneth G. Høglund, "The Fool and the Wise in Dialogue," in *The Listening Heart: Essays in Wisdom and the Psalms in honor of Roland E. Murphy. O. Carm.* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987) 175-176.

involved in order to determine the best response. This is the hermeneutical task the sage daily confronts.

Flowing out of the hermeneutical dilemma set forth in verses 4-5, verses 6 through 10 extend the problem to several other situations where judgment must be made based on what is appropriate: the sending of a messenger (v 6), the use of a proverb (vv 7, 9), the giving of honor and respect (v 8), and the hiring of a worker (v 10). All of these are related directly or indirectly to proper timing in the use of discourse. In addition it is through the use of discourse that one is able to interpret surrounding events.

Verse 6 makes the claim that there is discretion involved in entrusting certain discourse to the care of another. If one trusts a fool to do this, instead of putting another pair of legs to work, the person is cutting off his own legs. The verbal actant has not properly evaluated the situation and the circumstances.

Verses 7 and 9 are overlapping sayings in which the second line of both is a duplication. Even though the message of the first two lines is the same the image and emphasis is different. In verse 7 the image depicts the uselessness of the proverb. In verse 9 the image depicts the proverb as dangerous. Van Leeuwen insightfully remarks that these two verses, "give an explicitly hermeneutic coloring to the whole. In the close proximity of the contradictory *mslym* [proverbs] of vv 4-5, the reader of vv 7, 9 is forced to see that knowledge of a stock of proverbs does not ensure their wise application."¹¹⁸ The image in verse 7 is that an aphorism spoken by a fool is handicapped, impotent, like dangling emaciated legs. Structurally speaking,

¹¹⁸ Van Leeuwen 104

this proverb moves from the two legs of one person who cannot walk to the use of a single proverb by a plural of fools. In verse 9 the image is of a drunken man who having no control over his body falls down and runs a thorn into his hand. In like manner, a proverb that is used by one who has no sensitivity to the situation becomes harmful.¹¹⁹ An alternate reading of the text translates "thorn" as "thorn bush."¹²⁰ If this is the reading, then the image is of a drunken man who has picked up a thornbush in his hand and is thrashing it about uncontrollably. The result is harm to anyone that arbitrarily comes in his way. So the proverb that is used by one who does not know how to appropriate it becomes destructive. In either case the idea is related to the proper and improper use of a proverb.

Verse 8 addresses the absurdity of tying a stone in a sling that is about to be thrown. In like manner when one bestows "honor" on another who does not deserve it it is absurd. The term for "honor" is related to one's position, status, or reputation in a community. When a fool is put in a position *for which he is not suited*, both he and the community are hurt. The same kind of indiscretion is spoken of in verse 10. One who takes a fool or someone unknown and presses him or her into a service for which he or she is not competent, is like an archer who has gone berserk and randomly shoots passers-by. The one who has not evaluated the situation well and placed such an incompetent person into a service role for the community will hurt even innocent bystanders. The results of his poor judgment and lack of

¹¹⁹ The *Today's English Version* gives the action of the fool in this proverb a benign meaning in its translation: "A fool quoting a wise saying reminds you of a drunk man trying to pick a thorn out of his hand."

¹²⁰ See McKane 599

understanding are far reaching. Throughout verses 4-10 the interpretation of different situations and people is central. These verses are concerned with how one interprets events in various life settings by entering into dialogue with others. This is wisdom (and rhetoric) at work.

Now that I have set forth a structural explication of this passage, the implications for its appropriation become quite significant. This cluster of proverbs speaks to the all important idea of timing. Van Leeuwen comments that

the *sine qua non*, of wise judgment is a sense of fittingness, of how the realia of life are good only when properly applied. That is, the wise person perceives the larger, tacit context of norms and circumstances in terms of which persons, a saying (vv 7, 9), a word (v 2b), a rod (v 3), a message (v 6), status (vv 1, 8), or a job (v 10b) are fitting.¹²¹

Wisdom can be defined as the ability to discern what is fitting. There are no rules, no pat answers, given in this text for knowing what is the right time. That is because life and experiences are dynamic, ever changing and fluctuating. The sage is one who is sensitive to such flow. The opposite paradigm of such sensitivity is painfully illustrated in the dialogue Job has with his three friends. The three friends use proverbs as tools for trying to force Job to submit to Yahweh. Over and over they repeat the aphorism: righteous people prosper, wicked people suffer. Job finally cries out in response: "Your maxims are proverbs of ashes, your defenses are defenses of

¹²¹ Van Leeuwen 105. This idea also expresses one of the central foci of rhetorical concern.

clay!" (Job 13:12). But the three friends are guilty not so much of speaking what is false as speaking what is inappropriate for Job's situation.

The true sage is in close touch with the order of creation and with the order of community. In so doing he or she learns how to judge what is fitting and what is suited to the occasion. The poem from Qoheleth in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 demonstrates the keen sensitivity of sapience to *kairos*:

For everything there is a season and a time for every matter
under heaven:

a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones

together;

a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
a time to rend, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence and a time to speak;
a time to love and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.¹²²

The sages were concerned with right timing. But to be more specific, 26:4-10 focuses on their concern for the appropriate timing of speech. The sage is the one who knows when to speak and when not to (vv 4-5), who knows who can be entrusted with a message (v 6), and when and how to use a proverb (vv 7-9). As Dianne Bergant has aptly remarked the sage is the "one who knows what to say and when to say it."¹²³ Other proverbs throughout

¹²² Quoted from the Revised Standard Version. The text was made popular in the '60s when the singing group, The Byrds, made it into a hit song.

¹²³ Bergant 8

the book of Proverbs reflect this concern. On the one hand, Proverbs 17:7 claims that in the possession of those who have no sense of timing the use of speech is irritating at the least and destructive at the worst: "Fine speech is not fitting to a fool/ how much less is false speech to a prince/ /." On the other hand, when one has developed the skill of timing, the use of words is truly a work of art: "To make an apt answer¹²⁴ is a joy to a man/ and a word at the right time-how good!¹²⁵ / /" (Prv. 15:23). Sirach, a sage of a later generation¹²⁶ continues and develops this important tradition of the sages. In one of his collected proverbs he eloquently proclaims: "A proverb from a fool's lips will be rejected, for he does not tell it at its proper time" (Sirach 20:20). Sirach further elaborates on the importance of right timing in 20:1-8:

There is the rebuke that is untimely, and there is the man who
keeps quiet, and he is the shrewd one.
But how much better to rebuke than to fume! The man who
acknowledges a fault wards off punishment.
Like a eunuch longing to take a girl's virginity so is he who uses
force to argue cases.
There is the man who keeps quiet and is considered wise,
another incurs hatred for talking too much.
There is the man who keeps quiet, not knowing how to answer,
another keeps quiet, because he knows when to speak.
A wise man will keep quiet till the right moment, but a
garrulous fool will always misjudge it.
The man who talks too much will get himself disliked, and the
self-appointed oracle will make himself hated.

¹²⁴ The phrase **בְּמַעֲנֵה פִּי** (lit. "the answer of his mouth") is an infinitive construct and carries the idea of the ability to give the appropriate answer. See also Brown, Driver, Briggs p. 775.

¹²⁵ "how good" **מַה טוֹב** is in the emphatic position at the end of the proverb.

¹²⁶ Probably around 180 BCE

Both Sirach and the text of Proverbs 26:4-10 affirm the central element of fittingness and timing. In an ethnographic study on the way in which certain African communities use proverbs, Arewa and Dundes quote a Nigerian student his understanding of proverbs: "I know the proverbs, but I don't know how to apply them."¹²⁷ This theme that pervades wisdom thought becomes a point of contact with contemporary culture. The wise are wise not because they have memorized many proverbs but because they know how and when to use them with effect. Wisdom is not so much in the proverb, or any other genre for that matter, as it is in the person who uses them and in his or her sensitivity to timing.

There is another way in which 26:4-10 is appropriated which is closely related to the concept of timing. The text speaks to the contradictory nature of proverbs (most directly observed in vv 4-5). Throughout the book of Proverbs there are contradictory sayings.¹²⁸ Such contradictions appear to be endemic to the genre. In fact, many contemporary proverbs are blatant contradictions of one another.¹²⁹ The cognitive paradigm has spawned the

¹²⁷ Arewa and Dundes 70. They comment: "In European courtrooms, of course, lawyers cite previous cases to support the validity of their arguments. In African legal ritual, an advocate of a cause uses proverbs for the same purpose. Here clearly it is not enough to know the proverbs; it is also necessary to be expert in applying them to new situations. The case usually will be won, not by the man who knows the most proverbs, but by the man who knows best how to apply the proverbs he knows to the problem at hand" (p. 70).

¹²⁸ Compare 18:10 and 18:11; 15:22 and 19:21; 13:23 and 13:25; 22:6 and 13:1; 26:17 and 27:5-6; 10:4 and 12:9.

¹²⁹ The following are just a few examples:

"Out of sight out of mind" // "Absence makes the heart grow fonder"

"Look before you leap" // "He who hesitates is lost"

popular notion that proverbs are general truths and observations about life.¹³⁰ As such, the conflicting nature of many is perplexing.¹³¹ Archer Taylor has tried to explain the dilemma. His explanation is that the abundance of contradictions indicates that proverbs take a middle of the road view of life.¹³² Their overall vision of life, from Taylor's perspective, seems to be expressed in the platitude "moderation in all things." But such a view makes proverbs anemic and robs them of their power. It considers them only cognitively and eclipses the rhetorical dimension.

In order to address the contradictory aspect, one must begin with the archetypal contradiction in Proverbs which appears between the sages' search for order on the one hand and divine freedom on the other. The sages observed order in creation and thus concluded there must also be order in the

"Many hands make light work" // "Too many cooks spoil the broth"
 "Haste makes waste" // "Strike while the iron is hot"
 "Nothing ventured nothing gained" // "Better safe than sorry"
 "Never too old to learn, never to late to turn" // "You can't teach an old dog
 new tricks"
 "Marry in haste repent at leisure" // "Happy the wooing that is not
 long in doing"

¹³⁰ Derek Kidner reaches this conclusion: "Naturally they generalize, as a proverb must, and may therefore be charged with making life too tidy to be true. But nobody objects to this in secular sayings, for the very form demands a sweeping statement and looks for a hearer with his wits about him." *An Introduction to Wisdom Literature: The Wisdom of Proverbs. Job & Ecclesiastes* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985) 26. Later Kidner maintains that the book of Proverbs deals not only with generalities but with ultimates (p. 119).

¹³¹ Of the contradictory proverbs mentioned in footnote 129 above, how can it be said that each proverb and its opposite is generally true? If one is generally true, the other must be generally not true.

¹³² Archer Taylor, "The Study of Proverbs," *Proverbium* 1 (1965) 7.

social realm. Biblical scholars have long affirmed that the dominant characteristic of the sage is his search for and interest in the order to be found in community. The sage is concerned with discovering an overarching pattern to the affairs of life and thus being able to predict the consequences of human actions. So if someone lives an irresponsible life that person will soon reap the consequences in the form of poverty and anguish. If someone works hard and is industrious, such a one will be rewarded with wealth and security.¹³³ However, contrary to the dominant view held by biblical scholars, the sages of the book of Proverbs did not believe in a fixed and rigid world order. Such a belief does not fit the polysemous nature of biblical proverbs. The sages believed in a force at work in the universe that was bigger than any "order" that humans could discover. Such a perspective is stated in Proverbs 16:9: "A man's mind plans his way/ but Yahweh directs his steps / /."¹³⁴ Thus not all the things that happen in a person's life can be controlled and ordered. There is another stronger power at work and that is the power of the Divine. Even though there is order in creation and in society, it is not something that can always be predicted. The intimate involvement of Deity in human affairs renders the order of the universe dynamic.

Roland Murphy is one biblical scholar who has raised questions about the dominant view of a static order in Proverbs. He has proposed the axiom

¹³³ See Proverbs 10:2; 10:4; 10:30; 11:21; 13:25; 25:23; 26:27 as representative of this perspective.

¹³⁴ Or as the contemporary proverbs says, "Man proposes, but God disposes." For other proverbs representing this perspective see Proverbs 14:12; 16:1, 2; 16:33; 19:21; 20:24; 21:1; 21:30-31; 22:12; 27:1.

"every gnomic saying needs a balancing corrective"¹³⁵ as a way of balancing the sages' search for order on the one hand and divine freedom on the other. But Murphy's approach is exclusively cognitive and seems to be more of a compromise between the two poles of human order on the one hand and Yahweh's reign on the other. The proverbs are thus not heard for their sharpness and precision.

Because proverbs function primarily rhetorically, they are not absolutes nor are they even general truths. They are occasional, functioning appropriately only when used at the right time for the right situation.¹³⁶ It is the nature of the proverb to be close to life and life experiences. A proverb takes the uniqueness of each situation seriously and is shaped by the user to fit that circumstance. So when two contradictory proverbs are placed side by side, a statement is being made. The sage does not respond to situations mechanistically, grasping for some standardized or typical response. He is able to live with the tension that is inherent among proverbs and life experiences. The sage maintains a philanthropic attitude towards humans

¹³⁵ See James L. Crenshaw, "Murphy's Axiom: Every Gnomic Saying Needs a Balancing Corrective," *The Listening Heart: Essays in Wisdom and the Psalms in Honor of Roland E. Murphy. O. Carm.*, eds. Kenneth G. Hoglund, et al. (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987) 1-17.

¹³⁶ The "better/than" proverbs discussed in chapter two are also witness to a more dynamic view of reality. Glendon Bryce makes the following conclusion in his survey of this proverbial structure: "Thus, the 'better'-proverb straddles the division between the moral absolute and the relative preferential value"(p. 353). See " 'Better'–Proverbs: An Historical and Structural Study," *The Society of Biblical Literature Book of Seminar Papers* (L. C. McGaughey, ed.; Missoula: SBL, 1972) 343-354.

and towards discourse and uses intentional resources, such as proverbs, to discover the fitting and needed response.

This chapter has addressed proverbs in their textual context in Proverbs 10-29. But proverbs are such that they easily transcend the boundaries of any one setting. Proverbs delight in moving from context to context. The following chapter demonstrates the ability of biblical proverbs to continually expand their horizons.

Chapter Four

The Ongoing Influence of Biblical Proverbs in the Tradition of Scripture

The use of the proverbs in Scripture demonstrate an ongoing hermeneutic process which at its core is rhetorical. Scripture itself continually reappropriates its traditions in new settings. I would like to argue in this chapter that the proverbs serve as a paradigm for the ongoing process of reappropriation and interpretation. The proverbs continue to change, to take on new form and be appropriated to new contexts. As a result they continue to influence thought and action.

As a hermeneutical paradigm, the proverb takes on different forms and functions in a variety of contexts in Scripture. Yet the proverb is not subjective in nature because regardless of its fluidity, it still has dimensions that remain constant. There remains an element of "objectivity" about it. That is why the proverb has sometimes been mistaken as an absolute truth and even more often as expressing a generalization. There is something about it that gives it the appearance of certainty. But as it moves into different contexts, it has the ability to adapt. So in terms of its hermeneutical work, I characterize the proverb in the following way: it is a rhetorical form that demonstrates both constancy and change. It is able to dress old thought and tradition in new clothing. Such a quality is a strong hermeneutical paradigm for approaching sacred texts. It is also a paradigm for a philosophic hermeneutic: interpretation as an ongoing process of life.

The argument I am claiming for the proverb has either been overlooked or not been taken seriously. Wolfgang Mieder has written a work

entitled *Tradition and Innovation in Folk Literature*.¹ His claim is that folklorists have vacillated between focusing on tradition or on innovation. An earlier generation of scholars focused on the static and traditional aspects of folklore genres. Little attention was paid to the innovative processes. These survivalists were concerned with preserving the tradition. More recent folklorists are stressing the innovative aspect of folklore genres. They emphasize the constant change that is taking place in the use of folklore in contemporary culture. What Mieder proposes is an interplay between tradition and innovation.

Studying innovation and its processes leads to the investigation of human communication, which ought to be at the heart of folklore scholarship. But we must be careful not to let the scholarly pendulum swing to a new extreme by concentrating only on innovative uses of folklore in our modern age. The mere study of folklore as rigid survivals was one extreme. Folklore studies should now not swing to the other extreme and merely deal with the innovative survival of texts in the world of popular culture and mass media.²

Mieder's call for a balance is one that looks at the interplay between constancy and change over a period of centuries. In a chapter entitled "The Proverb in the Modern Age: Old Wisdom in New Clothing," Mieder

¹ Wolfgang Mieder, *Tradition and Innovation in Folk Literature*, (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1987).

² Mieder xii

demonstrates how this is at work in the proverb.³ Looking at tradition and innovation over such a vast time frame is valuable. But it leaves the impression that such a hermeneutic phenomenon is a slow evolutionary process barely visible to the naked eye.

My contention is that it is not necessary to look through the centuries to discover the hermeneutic process. I maintain that with biblical proverbs the tension between constancy and change can be observed within the texts of Scripture themselves. As such they serve as a paradigm for the way in which the hermeneutic process is responsibly carried out. The type of hermeneutic that is advocated by individuals like Paul Ricoeur and Allen Scult is not new. It is a hermeneutic that is endemic to Scripture and specifically demonstrated in proverbs themselves. It is a natural and rhetorical hermeneutic.

The purpose of this chapter is twofold: first, it is to demonstrate how biblical proverbs serve as a rhetorical model of the hermeneutic process and thus are able to influence thoughts and actions; second, to show how proverbs demonstrate both constancy and change. The proverb condenses a series of experiences into a short statement. It is tightly packed. But it is not intended to remain in that state. It is made for the purpose of being unpacked in different contexts. This chapter demonstrates how proverbs unfold in new contexts in Scripture. It demonstrates how they are able to express traditional

³ See *Tradition and Innovation in Folk Literature*, pp. 118-156. Mieder says: "Throughout the pages of this chapter examples will be cited from literary sources, art, and the mass media, indicating that proverbs belong to all types of communication and that they distinguish themselves through an unlimited adaptability to ever new contexts. Proverbs in collections might appear to be trite remnants of the wisdom of times past, but when contextualized in their original wording or in telling variations they become a most effective verbalization of human and societal concerns" (p. 119).

values and mores for new and contemporary settings. Proverbs exemplify a living tradition.⁴

In order to accomplish the above goals, this chapter addresses four issues. First, how do proverbs unfold in various contexts in the book of Proverbs? Second, how do proverbs work in other contexts of the Hebrew Scriptures? Third, how do they work in passing on Israel's earlier tradition to a later generation? Fourth, how are proverbs used in the New Testament? This chapter limits itself only to sayings that are collected in the book of Proverbs.⁵

Proverbs in Various Contexts in the Book of Proverbs

What are the different shapes and forms that proverbs take in the book of Proverbs? There are two types of examples that I want to use to demonstrate the constancy and the fluidity of the proverb. The first is the overlapping saying which has already been mentioned in the previous

⁴ Mieder makes the following comment that is apropos to proverbs: "Oral traditions especially have clearly been prone to changes in form and wording. Fairy tales after all were not blindly learned by heart in former times. They "lived" because they were told by individuals who added or deleted words or sentences as they saw fit" (p. xi). A little later he continues in this same vein: "We might be able to reconstruct the archetype for some fairy tales, nursery rhymes, and so on by painstaking research, but at the same time it becomes extremely clear that the 'original' version never remained constant and that variation is intrinsically related to tradition" (p. xii).

⁵ This focus is different from Carole Fontaine's work. Because Fontaine believes that proverbs lack a context in the book of Proverbs, she looks for a context in the Hebrew narratives. The question she addresses is, How are proverbs used in the discourses of these narratives? None of the proverbs that she investigates in the narratives are found in the collection of Proverbs. See *Traditional Sayings in the Old Testament: A Contextual Study*, (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1982).

chapters. The second is the sentence saying used in the poems of chapters 1-9 and 22-24.

The Phenomenon of the Overlapping Sayings

The abundance of overlapping sayings found in Proverbs is a witness to the creative production that is at work in the collection. The purpose of investigating these overlaps is not to demonstrate the historical development of the proverbs. This has dominated the interest of biblical scholars. Many scholars assume a development of thought from secular sayings to religious sayings.⁶ Others assume a development of form from the short sentence sayings to the longer instruction poems.⁷ Such foci are concerned with a diachronic perspective and do have a place in the interpretation of proverbs. But my concern is not with the historical development of proverbs. My concern is with a synchronic view of the text noting how the proverb changes in shape and function within the text of Proverbs.

There are a number of different types of overlapping sayings in Proverbs. First, with several of the overlaps, the first line remains the same or at least relatively constant while the second line is changed. The following are a few examples:

- a) A rich man's wealth is his strong city/
the poverty of the poor is their ruin // (10:15)

⁶ William McKane represents this view. See chapter two.

⁷ Brevard S. Childs is one representative of this perspective. *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979) 554-555. Roland Murphy also represents this view. See "The Faces of Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs," *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 212 (1981): 338-339.

A rich man's wealth is his strong city/
and like a high wall protecting him // (18:11)

b) The sacrifice of wicked ones: an abomination to Yahweh/
but the prayer of the upright one pleases // 15:8)

The sacrifice of wicked ones: an abomination/
how much more when it is offered deviously // (21:27)

c) Better is a poor one who walks in his integrity/
than one who is perverse in his speech and he is a fool // (19:1)

Better is a poor one who walks in his integrity/
than one who has perverse ways and he is rich // (28:6)

d) As a lion growls so is a king's wrath/
but as the night mist upon the herb so is his goodwill // (19:12)

As a lion growls so is the terror of a king/
he who infuriates him endangers his life // (20:2)

In each of the above the first line remains relatively constant with the second line being changed. The way in which it changes is quite varied. Sometimes the second line is stated in antithetic form, sometimes it is an extension of the first, and sometimes a formulaic phrase such as a "better/than" or "how much more" saying is used. There is no predictable pattern of change on which the second line is based. A great deal of room is allowed for flexibility.

Second, in another type of overlap, the second line remains constant while the first is changed:

a) The wealth of a wicked one does not profit/
but righteousness saves from death // (10:2)⁸

⁸ It is worthy of note that many of the overlaps occur in the first chapter of the sentence proverbs in the book of Proverbs: 10:1 and 15:20; 10:2 and 11:4; 10:6 and 10:11; 10:8 and 10:10; 10:10 and 10:8; 10:11 and 10:6; 10:12 and 16:6; 10:13 and 19:29, 23:6; 10:15 and 18:11.

Wealth does not profit on a day of tumult/
but righteousness saves from death // (11:4)

b) The instruction of a sage is a fountain of life/
that one may avoid snares of death // (13:14)

Fear of Yahweh is a fountain of life/
that one may avoid snares of death // (14:27)

c) Before destruction a man's heart is haughty/
but before honor is humility // (18:12)

The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom/
and before honor is humility // (15:33)

d) You have seen a man wise in his own eyes/
more hope for a fool than for him // (26:12)

You have seen a man who hastens in his words/
more hope for a fool than for him // (29:20)

In this set of examples,, the same overlapping phenomenon occurs. Only here while the second line remains relatively constant the first line is varied.

Third, there are proverbs in which both lines are slightly varied:

a) Better to dwell upon the corner of a roof/
than in a spacious house with a contentious woman // (21:9)

Better to dwell in a desert land/
than with a contentious woman and anger // (21:19)

b) Rich and poor meet together/
the maker of them all: Yahweh // (22:2)

The poor and the oppressed meet together/
he who gives light to the eyes of them both: Yahweh // (29:13)

Fourth, sometimes there are sayings with three variations:

A crucible for silver and a furnace for gold/
but a tester for hearts: Yahweh // (17:3)

A crucible for silver and a furnace for gold/
and people by the mouth of their praise // (27:21)

All of one's ways are right in one's own eyes/
but a tester for hearts: Yahweh // (21:2)

With the first two proverbs the second line is changed. In the third proverb the second line is the same as the second line in 17:3. Thus 17:3 has a double overlap. Its first line overlaps with 27:21 while its second line overlaps with 21:2. One other example of a triple variation is the following:

On the lips of the understanding is found wisdom/
but a rod for the back of a senseless one // (10:13)

That which is waiting for scorers: justice/
and blows for the back of fools // (19:29)

A whip for a horse, a bridle for a donkey/
and a rod for the back of fools // (26:3)

That which holds these proverbs together is the second line of each: "a blow/rod for the back of fools." The first line of each varies. The first proverb exhibits antithetic parallelism, the second extension and the third takes the form of a riddle. Again innovation is allowed for in the creation of the proverb.

A fifth kind of overlapping is the duplication of proverbs. There are several proverbs that are repeated almost verbatim.⁹

a) He who tills his land will be satisfied with bread /
but he who pursues vain things lacks sense // (12:11)

⁹ With the following translation of proverbs, I have tried to demonstrate the similarities and shades of differences. If the Hebrew text of the pair is identical, then I translate the pair of proverbs accordingly. If there are differences in syntax, word choice, gender and number, I also try to indicate such differences in English.

He who tills his land will be satisfied with bread/
but he who pursues vain things will be satisfied with poverty // (28:19)

b) There is a way which seems right to a man/
but its ends are the ways of death // (14:12)

There is a way which seems right to a man/
but its ends, are the ways of death // (16:25)

c) The words of a slanderer are tidbits/
and they will go down into the chambers of the belly // (18:8)

The words of a slanderer are tidbits/
and they will go down into the chambers of the belly // (26:22)

d) A sluggard will hide his hand in a dish/
even to his mouth he will not return it // (19:24)

A sluggard will hide his hand in a dish/
he will be weary to return it to his mouth// (26:15)

e) Strike a scoffer and the simpleminded will learn prudence/
reprove a man of understanding and he will understand
knowledge // (19:25)

When a scoffer is punished the simpleminded will be wise/
but when the prudent is given wisdom, he will take
knowledge // (21:11)

f) Take his garment, he is a pledge for a stranger/
and hold him in pledge as surety for foreigners // (20:16)

Take his garment, he is a pledge for a stranger/
and hold him in pledge as surety for the foreign woman // (27:13)

g) Better to dwell upon the corner of a roof/
than in a spacious house with a contentious woman // (21:9)

Better to dwell upon the corner of a roof/
than in a spacious house with a contentious woman // (25:24)

h) The prudent one sees danger and will hide/
but the simpleminded ones will keep on and pay the price // (22:3)

The prudent one sees danger and will hide/
but the simpleminded ones will keep on and pay the price // (27:12)

i) All the ways of a man are pure in his eyes/
but the Lord weighs the spirit // (16:2)

All the ways of a man are right in his eyes/
but the Lord weighs the heart // (21:2)

j) A deceiving witness will not go unpunished/
and he who utters lies will not escape // (19:5)

A deceiving witness will not go unpunished/
and he who utters lies will perish // (19:9)

k) A wise son will make a father glad/
but a foolish son is a grief to his mother // (10:1)

A wise son will make a father glad/
but a foolish man shames his mother // (15:20)

Before making some general remarks about the whole phenomenon of overlapping, I want to make some specific observations about the duplicate proverbs. What do the duplicates say about the interpretation process? Are they simply signs that the book of Proverbs is made up of smaller collections? In compiling collections and clusters from different sources, did the editors inadvertently duplicate several proverbs? I would maintain that there is more to them than just that.

First, it is possible that the duplicates are structural markers. This seems to be the case in 16:25 which falls between two marked clusters of proverbs: 16:21-24 and 16:27-29. The duplicate in 18:8 concludes a cluster of proverbs on speech. Proverbs 18:8 is repeated in another cluster in 26:17-28 (v. 22). What might be its function here? Why is it that the 19:5 and 19:9 duplicates are placed so close together? A number of questions still remain regarding their structural function. But preliminary indications are that they

may have some structural purpose. They were not simply thrown together from different collections without the collector's awareness.

Second, if there is a context for proverbs in the book of Proverbs, if they are not simply randomly collected, then these duplicates would demonstrate how the same proverb can be used in different textual settings. The same proverb might have a different meaning and function in different clusters.

Third, the duplications illustrate that the proverbs were memorized and sometimes repeated verbatim. But the duplicates also emphasize that the partial overlaps that are expanded and changed are done so intentionally. It is not that there is a lapse of memory in repeating a proverb. The phenomenon of overlapping is a sign of composition more than of simple collection. The duplicates heighten the intentionality of the creativity in the partial overlaps.

Having made these specific observations about the duplicates, what kind of conclusions can be made from the various types of overlaps observed? First, the overlaps argue against understanding proverbs as absolutes. The proverb is open to change and adaptability. To be creative and flexible with the proverb is an assumed responsibility.

Second, they do not support the idea of any theological development occurring in the book. As was noted in both chapters two and three, several scholars propose that earlier proverbs were more secular while later proverbs were baptized with religious language. The overlap sayings do not support any such movement.

Third, the overlaps indicate a dialogue or interaction occurring within the book. Proverbs are not to be read in isolation but in interaction with other proverbs and in interaction with other contexts in the book of Proverbs. Thus they are reshaped and reformed. Such a reading is diametrically

opposed to the dominant view that isolates and studies each proverb in the book on its own. The incorporation of these overlapping variants creates a dialectic within the book. But the implication extends even further than this. The implication is that to be true to the book of Proverbs this dialectic is to continue beyond the text. Using my own resources of creativity and invention, I carry on the dialogue initiated by the proverbs. The interplay observed between the proverbs in the book of Proverbs causes me to reconsider, modify and adjust. It places responsibility on me to understand and rethink the situation. It is not simply that I am handed a proverb to memorize and then asked to repeat it verbatim on another occasion. I am asked to enter into the dialogue with the proverb.

Fourth and closely connected with the previous point, the overlaps demonstrate that proverbs are not static but dynamic and flexible. The overlapping sayings suggest that the proverbs are to be memorized yes, but not necessarily to be repeated verbatim. Elizabeth Huwiler makes the following astute observation:

If the purpose of the sayings in Proverbs were simply to repeat and remember them, it would be difficult to understand the reason for including such pairs. The existence of these variants could even indicate the failure of the system: someone failed the test of memorization and remembered incorrectly. It is likely that the purpose of such groups of sayings as we find in Proverbs 10-29 was not simply to preserve but also to *propose and discuss*. While it is impossible to prove such intention, the existence of partially overlapping sayings at least indicates that we should

not be hasty to assume a context in which the goals were simple repetition and memorization (emphasis mine).¹⁰

An individual is not wise simply because he or she has memorized many proverbs. One is wise because he or she knows how to adapt a proverb to different contexts. An existing proverb can be taken and responsibly adjusted to fit the occasion. In fact Sirach suggests that this is the responsibility of the one who uses proverbs: "If an instructed man hears a wise saying, he applauds it and improves on it. If a rake hears it, he is annoyed and throws it behind his back" (Sirach 21:15).¹¹

Fifth, these overlaps suggest a rhetorical process, a rhetorical hermeneutic. The overlaps suggest that the process of understanding and interpretation does not involve simple reproduction. Interpretation involves more than concern with accuracy. There is a responsibility on the part of the interpreter to be creative and productive, to move forward in a dialectic with other discourse. Because of the close proximity¹² and the frequency with which they occur, the overlaps are not just signs of collection but of composition. They are indications that those involved in the collection process also produced. The way in which they composed was possibly dependent upon the context in which the proverbs were placed. The overlaps are witness to the rhetorical process. They witness to the

¹⁰ Elizabeth Huwiler, *Control of Reality in Israelite Wisdom*, unpublished dissertation, Department of Religion Duke University, 1988, 108.

¹¹ Quoted from the New English Bible version.

¹² Compare 26:4 and 5; 26:7 and 9; 21:9 and 19; 22:28 and 23:10; 10:6 and 11; 10:8 and 10; 10:2 and 11:4.

observation of Proverbs 27:17 (substituting the word "proverb" for "friend"):
 "As iron sharpens iron/ so one proverb sharpens another //."

A rhetorical tension is at work in the overlaps. Midst the change and innovation of one line or another, however, there is still constancy. *There still is overlap*. A part of the proverb remains fixed. This is not a subjective enterprise. There is a strong element of "objectivity" in the interpretive task that must be honored.

Finally, as I have already suggested above with the duplicates, the use of overlaps may create connections among various parts of the book of Proverbs. It is possible that the overlaps serve as refrains or as inclusions or as headings for various clusters of proverbs. Or the overlaps may serve some kind of seconding function, heightening or intensifying the thought of a small cluster. Such a possibility is worthy of further investigation.

Proverbs in the Context of the Proverbial Poem

The foregoing has demonstrated how the same proverbs manifest themselves differently in different parts of chapters 10-29. However beyond this, sentence proverbs are also employed in the proverb poems of chapters 1-9 and 22-24. How do they unfold in this context and what is their function? I would like to look at several examples of the use of the sentence proverb in the poems.¹³

The first proverb poem in the book is Proverbs 1:2-7. The concluding verse contains the most theologically central proverb in the book:

¹³ James Crenshaw has identified four proverb poems that use a sentence proverb to help make their argument. James Crenshaw, "Wisdom and Authority: Sapiential Rhetoric and its Warrants," *Vetus Testamentum Supplement* 32 (Vienna: Congress Volume).

That men may know wisdom and instruction/
 understanding words of insight/
 receive instruction in wise dealing/
 righteousness, justice, and equity/
 that prudence may be given to the simple/
 knowledge and discretion to the youth—/
 the wise man also may hear and increase in learning/
 and the man of understanding acquire skill/
 to understand, a proverb and a figure/
 the words of the wise and their riddles // .
 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge/
 fools despise wisdom and instruction // .¹⁴

This poem serves as an introduction not only to the first nine chapters but also to the whole book of Proverbs. The poem states the goal of the sage. The goal is instruction and understanding. It is to give prudence to the youth and enable the wise to continue to increase in knowledge. But the goal is not simply a cognitive one. Wisdom is also concerned with form. Form and content are not separated. So the sage says that the goal of his instruction is to help the student shape his thoughts into memorable forms of expression: "to understand a proverb and a figure/ the words of the wise and their riddles" (v. 6). The sage then concludes the introduction with a proverb that expresses the heart of what wisdom is all about: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge/ wisdom and instruction fools despise // "(v. 7).

How does the proverb in verse 7 function in this context? Using Brockriede and Ehninger's scheme, the proverb argues from classification.¹⁵ This proverb names or labels two different groups: those who fear the Lord and the foolish. To label a group is to engage in classification. Fools are those

¹⁴ Quoted from the Revised Standard Version.

¹⁵ See chapter two for an explanation of their system.

who despise wisdom. Those who fear the Lord are ones who possess knowledge.

The function of the saying is also to serve as a crescendo to the poem. The poem itself is strategically placed at the beginning of the whole book in order to establish the goal of the sage and of what follows in the collection. This introductory poem then concludes with a proverb. The proverb expresses the heart and core of wisdom thought. The ultimate goal of wisdom is "the fear of the Lord."

It is also significant that this same proverb concludes other poems in the Hebrew Scriptures as well. One line of the proverb concludes the wisdom poem in Job 28: "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom/ and to depart from evil is understanding/ /" (v. 28). When compared with Proverbs 1:7, the first line of Job 28:28 remains constant, while the second line amplifies the thought. The conclusion of one of the wisdom psalms, Psalm 111:10, is also an overlapping proverb: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom/ a good understanding have all those who practice it / /." The first line remains constant while the second line extends the thought and describes the consequences of fearing the Lord. Finally, this proverb concludes the poem in Proverbs 9:1-12. After describing the futility of trying to teach the scoffer and the fool, Lady Wisdom quotes this saying: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom/ and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight/ /" (v. 10).¹⁶ Again the first line remains constant while the second is changed to fit the context.

¹⁶ One of the sentence proverbs uses a varied form: "The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom/ and humility goes before honor / /" (15:33). Proverbs 15:33 concludes the chapter. Does this proverb come in the context

The second example is the instruction proverb in 1:10-19. The thrust of its argument is to warn the student against becoming involved in the lifestyle of those who rob and abuse others. The poem begins with the teacher advising the student to avoid association with such people. The teacher in fact, goes so far as to quote the discourse of these corrupt youths describing their plans to ambush and rob. The teacher urges the student not to get caught up in their schemes. As the exhortation is concluded, the teacher caps it off with a proverb: "For in vain is a net spread in the sight of any bird" (1:17).¹⁷ So how does this proverb relate to the immediate context which maintains that the violence of the highwaymen will come back on them (vv. 18-19)? The connecting link appears to be this: a bird watching someone lay a trap for it will go for the grain just as it would have done if it had not seen it being put down. The bird is a slave of its appetite so it follows a compulsive desire to eat the grain. The same is true of the highwaymen. No amount of warning will deter their crime because they are slaves to wealth.

In analyzing the rhetorical function of the proverb here, the teacher does not simply rely on his authoritative position to deter the student from a harmful lifestyle. Neither does he simply issue a command. He employs a number of reasoning strategies and persuasive arguments to make his case. One of those is the use of a proverb. The proverb is an appeal to experience, to observation and to common sense in order to persuade the youth to refrain

of a cluster of proverbs and possibly "wraps up" the argument of such a group?

¹⁷ The proverb may be similar in meaning to the following contemporary proverb: "It's too late to lock the barn door after the horse is out."

from being involved with the wrong kind of people. In Brockriede and Ehninger's scheme, the proverb argues from parallel case. The example of the bird and the trap is intrinsically parallel to the behavior of the highwaymen: through callousness they both become addicted to their destructive habits. In addition the proverb falls near the conclusion of the poem. In such a position, the proverb appears to be used to clinch the argument. It is not responsible for carrying the full weight of the argument. But it is appealed to to verify and affirm what the teacher has already claimed. It is an appeal to the authority of *endoxa*.

A third poem in 6:6-11 advises sluggards to learn a lesson from the ant and warns against the dreadful consequences of laziness.

Go to the ant, O sluggard/
 consider her ways, and be wise//
 Without having any chief/
 officer or ruler/
 She prepares her food in summer/
 and gathers her sustenance in harvest //
 How long will you lie there, O sluggard //?
 When will you arise from your sleep //?
 A little sleep, a little slumber/
 a little folding of the hands to rest/
 and poverty will come upon you like a vagabond/
 and want like an armed man //.¹⁸

Here the ant is held up as the epitome of discipline and hard work. The lazy person is exhorted to observe the industrious ways of this insect as a way of changing his or her behavior. The poem begins with this analogy then moves to asking two rhetorical questions. "How long will you lie there, oh sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep" (v. 9)? Finally the sage

¹⁸ Quoted from the Revised Standard Version.

clinches the argument by quoting the following proverb: "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest/ and poverty will come upon you like a vagabond/ and want like an armed man / /" (vv. 10-11).

Returning to Brockriede and Ehninger's classifying system, the proverb in this poem argues from cause. The proverb moves from the premise of cause to that of effect: laziness results in poverty. In addition, the position of the proverb comes at the conclusion of the poem. In such a position its function is not to carry the weight of the argument but to confirm it.

Fourth, in Proverbs 24:30-34 there is another proverb poem about the lazy person. A similar movement in argument is made but with a different illustration from nature.

I passed by the field of a sluggard/
by the vineyard of a man without sense/
and lo, it was all overgrown with thorns/
the ground was covered with nettles/
and its stone wall was broken down / /.
Then I saw and considered it/
I looked and received instruction / /.
A little sleep, a little slumber/
a little folding of the hands to rest/
and poverty will come upon you like a robber/
and want like an armed man / /.¹⁹

The poem begins with the description of the vineyard of a lazy person. It is overgrown with thorns and the protective outside wall is in shambles. Whereas the poem in 6:6-11 offered a positive model of what the lazy person should be like, this poem gives a description of the deteriorating conditions of such a lifestyle. Finally the sage tops off his argument with a proverb: "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty

¹⁹ Quoted from the Revised Standard Version.

will come upon you like a robber and want like an armed man" (vv. 33-34). Here the same proverb as before is used. It too comes at the conclusion of the exhortation.

A fifth poem using a saying is found in 6:20-35. The poem counsels against being taken in by the seductive power of the temptress. The teacher begins by appealing to parental authority. He appeals to the student to listen to the words of his parents and to make their teachings a part of the very fabric of his life. From here the sage moves to describe the seductive power of the temptress as a way of inoculating the student against the kind of strategy she uses. Her speech is smooth (v. 24). She is beautiful capturing him with her eyelashes (v. 25). In fact, the temptress is quite aggressive. She "stalks a man's very life" (v. 26). It is after this descriptive vignette that the teacher quotes a proverb to drive home the argument. The proverb is in the form of a rhetorical question: "Can a man carry fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched?" (vv. 27-28). The teacher continues his argument, using another analogy, by appealing to the negative pathos we feel toward a thief (vv. 30-31). He finally concludes by referring to the destructive consequences of yielding to such temptation (32-35).

The sentence proverb in this poem is used to give rhetorical weight to the argument against being enticed by the temptress: "Can a man carry fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned?" In the Brockriede and Ehninger system, the proverb argues from two premises. First, it argues from cause to effect. If I carry a hot coal in my pocket, I can be assured of being burned. The thought and argument is very similar to the contemporary proverb which concludes that "those who play with fire, get burned." Second, the proverb

argues from parallel case. The experience of playing with fire has intrinsic similarities to playing around with another man's wife.

This is an argument based on practical experience which no one would dare to challenge. Crenshaw observes that ". . . when he wants to make his point decisively, this sage quotes a proverb; that is, he relies upon consensus, appealing to what all know to be true."²⁰ What comes through in this proverb is the power of its enthymematic nature. The proverb connects closely to the *endoxa* and the common experience of the people.

Even though the proverb used here does not come at the conclusion of the poem, it does come at the conclusion of the main argument. What follows after the proverb is quoted are the consequences of not yielding to the advice. Thus as in the previous poems, the proverb does not carry the weight of the argument but instead drives home the point already made.

Sixth, the poem of 9:13-18 is concerned about the same matter as Proverbs 6:20-35: the seductive power of the temptress. In the course of the argument, a proverb is quoted.

A foolish woman is noisy/
 she is wanton and knows no shame//.
 She sits at the door of her house/
 she takes a seat on the high places of the town/
 calling to those who pass by/
 who are going straight on their way/
 "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!"/
 And to him who is without sense she says/
 "Stolen water is sweet/
 and bread eaten in secret is pleasant"/
 But he does not know that the dead are there/

²⁰ James Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 21.

that her guests are in the depths of Sheol // .²¹

The whole of the poem is taken up with describing tactics and strategies used to persuade the youth to engage in illicit sex. The poem demonstrates just how persuasive she really is! She is pictured as aggressively seeking a man as a playmate (v. 13). She calls for those who pass by and invites them into her house. The young simpleton is easily caught in her trap. The temptress concludes her call to the youth by quoting a proverb: "stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant" (v. 17). The final verse states the inevitable consequence of such activity: death.

The rhetorical strategy of the proverb in verse 17 is rich. First, the proverb uses indirectness²² as an appeal to engage the youth. The language of the proverb is highly metaphoric comparing the most staple elements needed for survival, water and bread, to the act of adultery. The proverb makes no reference to sexual intercourse but the context requires it. Second, the proverb engages in what Kenneth Burke calls naming.²³ It labels and reframes the illicit sexual experience in a positive light! In using the proverb, the temptress downplays the wrongness of the action and highlights the pathos of the experience: its sweetness and pleasantness. In Hebrew Scripture sweetness is generally associated with honey, a food valued for its medicinal quality. In describing the immoral behavior this way, the proverb assigns a positive value to a negative action. In "naming" the action, *the proverb does*

²¹ Quoted from the Revised Standard Version.

²² See chapter two for a more detailed analysis of this strategy and the strategies to follow in this paragraph.

²³ See the explanation of this in chapter two.

the work of interpreting the experience for the simpleton. Third, as an enthymeme the proverb connects with an experience that is common to all. It is the primeval idea that forbidden fruit tastes best²⁴ The proverb is quite similar to Proverbs 20:17a: "bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man."²⁵

In Brockriede and Ehninger's classification, the saying combines an argument from cause to effect (action: when water and bread are stolen; result: they are especially sweet) with one from parallel case (the pleasantness ascribed to stolen water and bread should also be ascribed to illicit sex). Once again the proverb appears to come at the climax of the temptress's persuasive appeals: after she takes her seat in a conspicuous place, after her aggressive behavior, after she has repeatedly called to the youth.

According to Crenshaw, this poem "demonstrates Madam Folly's skill at citing appropriate proverbs which reinforce her smooth words of invitation to forbidden pleasures."²⁶ The temptress relies on commonly accepted knowledge to persuade her victim. She uses the proverb with great skill and artistic finesse.

²⁴ A number of contemporary sayings express this idea: "Everything I like is either illegal, immoral, or fattening." An Arabic proverb says: "Everything forbidden is sweet." A quote attributed to Mark Twain: "The only way to keep your health is to eat what you don't want, drink what you don't like, and do what you'd druther not."

²⁵ Here is another example of an overlap. Proverbs 20:17 takes the second line of 9:17, "bread eaten in secret is pleasant," and composes another proverb with a different focus: "Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man/ but afterward his mouth will be full of gravel."

²⁶ Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, 73.

Seventh and finally, the instruction poem of 24:3-7 contains the use of two proverbs in the course of the argument it makes:

By wisdom a house is built/
and by understanding it is established/
by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant
riches //.

A wise man is mightier than a strong man/
and a man of knowledge than he who has strength/
for by wise guidance you can wage your war/
and in abundance of counselors there is victory //.
Wisdom is too high for a fool/
in the gate he does not open his mouth //.

This instruction poem is divided into three different parts by some scholars in order to fit the "thirty sayings" that are supposed to make up chapters 22-24. However, there is good reason to understand this to be one poem. First the Hebrew text marks it as one. Second, the thought structure of the poem is a unit which is built around the skill and power of wisdom. Third, it has the same kind of unity and flow many of the extended poems have in Sirach.

There are two sentence proverbs in this poem, one coming at the beginning and the other at the conclusion. The first one is in verse 3a: "by wisdom a house is built." This overlaps with Proverbs 14:1: "The wisdom of women builds her house." And it overlaps with 9:1: "Wisdom builds her house." The second saying is found in verse 6b: "in an abundance of counselors there is victory." This proverb overlaps with 11:14: "Where there is no guidance, a people falls/ but in an abundance of counselors there is safety //." In 15:22 it appears in a little different version: "Plans are frustrated when there is no counsel/ but in much counsel, it will stand." These sayings seem to frame the poem, emphasizing the strength and success of wisdom.

Wisdom is skilled in building a house, in filling its rooms with the riches of life. Wisdom is stronger than physical strength and gives victory even in war. Because of its strength and superiority, the final verse affirms that wisdom is beyond the reach of the fool. The two proverbs in this poem serve first to set up the argument and then in the end clinch it.

What does the use of the sentence proverbs in these seven poems reveal? Biblical scholars have generally assumed that the grounds for obedience in the proverb poem was the appeal to an authoritative figure, a teacher, sage, or parent.²⁷ Throughout the proverb poems there is repeated the line, "Listen, my son, to your father's instruction" (1:8; 6:20; 10:1; 15:20; 23:22). With the teacher/student relationship there is automatic authority/submission response. Because of this, any need for rhetorical or persuasive strategies was deemed futile. However, the poems do not simply issue commands expecting them to be followed. The use of the sentence proverb is witness to this. The sentence saying sheds a different light on what is taking place in the poems. The poems may contain imperatives but not by themselves. It is backed with arguments of various kinds to persuade the student to follow the commands. One of these is the use of the saying. Typically the proverb is used not to carry the main load of the argument. But after the argument has been developed, it is employed to clinch the case. On first appearance because the poem is based on the authority of the father or teacher, their ethos may seem to be doing all the persuasive work. But in

²⁷ See James Crenshaw for a brief explication: "Wisdom and Authority: Sapiential Rhetoric and its Warrants," *Vetus Testamentum Supplement* 32 (Vienna: Congress Volume).

reality the poem must rely on the saying to wrap up its case. Sometimes the indirect appeal is more potent than the direct.

Proverbs in the Broader Context of Hebrew Scriptures

In the Hebrew canon proverbs are being appropriated in new and ever expanding contexts. Numerous examples of this expansion could be given. I offer only a few to demonstrate their ongoing and dialogic work in Scripture. The proverbs included here are from the book of Proverbs which are employed in other contexts of the Hebrew Scripture.²⁸

One example of the reapplication of a proverb is Proverbs 26:27: "He who digs a pit will fall into it/ and he who rolls a stone, it will return to him //." The context of the proverb is in a cluster of proverbs about the impact of the verbal wounder.²⁹ His speech is a lethal weapon. But the verbal abuser faces adverse consequences in the end. His abusive ways will come back on him. The one who schemes against another will himself suffer the repercussions.

The first line of this proverb is used in two other texts outside Proverbs. One is in Ecclesiastes 10:8 and the other is Psalm 7:15. In Ecclesiastes 10:8-9 the proverb is as follows: "He who digs a pit will fall into it/ and whoever tears down a wall— a snake may bite // . He who dislodges stones may be hurt by them/ and he must take care who would chop down trees // ." Most commentators say that Ecclesiastes chapter 10 is made up of a series of

²⁸ Again I am not concerned with the diachronic issue of whether the proverb in the collection of Proverbs is the more original one or the proverb outside the collection. Such a focus is unnecessary for what I am attempting to accomplish.

²⁹ See chapter three.

unrelated proverbs. However, they at least seem to be clustered in smaller units made up of two or three verses. Verses 8-11 may be one such cluster. Using a series of analogies the proverbs speak to the idea of retribution. Misconduct will bear its own fruit.

Here again one sees the way in which a proverb is shaped and expanded in a different context. Like the overlapping sayings within the book of Proverbs, this proverb takes the first line of a traditional saying and adds to it another and different line and analogy. The second line uses the analogy of a snake nesting within a wall. Because the most common type of mortar was mud, it was easy for snakes to find hiding places in the cracks in walls. The image is possibly of a robber breaking into a house to steal and in the process encountering a poisonous snake. It was the responsibility of the proverb user to not simply repeat a proverb verbatim. But the user was to employ his or her creative powers to reshape and expand the proverb to fit the occasion and make it fresh.

The image of the pit is used in several psalms.³⁰ However, Psalm 7:15 comes closest to the phrasing of Proverbs 26:27. It reads as follows: "He makes a pit, digging it out/ and falls into the hole which he has made //." Psalm 7 is an individual lament in which the psalmist prays to God to deliver him from his enemies. The psalm concludes with a description of the enemy as a creator of evil. Such evil will eventually return to the one with whom it originated. This is the context for the above proverb.

This verse takes the image of the pit which makes up the first line of the proverb and expands it into two lines. In fact the next verse (v. 16) serves

³⁰ Psalms 9:15; 35:7f; 57:6

as a commentary on its meaning: "His mischief returns upon his own head/
and on his own pate his violence descends //."

The proverb is used outside the Hebrew canon as well in the wisdom book of Sirach. Sirach 27:26 reads: "The man who digs a pit falls into it/ he who sets a snare will be caught by it //." This proverb comes in a cluster of proverbs dealing with the destructive behavior of the wicked one:

The man with a sly wink is plotting mischief/
no one can dissuade him from it //
Honey-tongued to your face/
he is lost in admiration at your words //
But behind your back he has other things to say/
and makes your own words sound offensive //
I have found many things to hate, but nothing to equal this man/
and the Lord hates him too //
The man who throws a stone in the air, throws it on to his own
head/
a treacherous blow cuts both ways //
The man who digs a pit falls into it/
he who sets a snare will be caught by it //
On the man who does evil, evil will recoil/
though where it came from he will not know //
Sarcasm and abuse are the mark of an arrogant man/
but vengeance lies in wait like a lion for him //
The trap will close on all who rejoice in the downfall of the
devout/
and pain will eat them up before they die // (Sirach 27:22-29).

This series of proverbs like many in Sirach are closely tied together and actually form a narrative. What is striking about this unit is that it is quite similar in thought and movement to the cluster of proverbs found in Proverbs 26:17-28. The text begins with the deceptive nature of the wicked. The primary tool at his disposal are his words. His words are honey-coated. But when you are out of sight he speaks offensive words. He is a verbal abuser. The poem concludes similarly to the way in which Proverbs 26

concludes. It speaks of the consequences that will come to this destructive person. Midst a series of vignettes about evil recoiling back on the evil one, the poem includes the proverb of the wicked one falling into his own pit. This poem has remarkable similarities to the poem of Proverbs 26:17-28.³¹

Comparing Proverbs 26:27 with three other contexts outside the book of Proverbs reveals the richness and the flexibility with which a relatively mundane proverb is put to work. The similarity of all three is that the proverb is used in a context that speaks of the destructiveness of those who work to do harm to another. In all three the harm returns to the one who initiated it. In comparing these three contexts, the proverb is never quoted verbatim. In Ecclesiastes 10:8 the second line is changed to include an analogy of a snake. In Psalms 7:15 the proverb is expanded to include both lines. Finally in Sirach 27:26 both the lines preceding and following it contain different analogies. What one witnesses in this little proverbial phrase is constancy in change.

Psalm 37 is a collection of proverbs some of which overlap proverbs found in the book of Proverbs. It is interesting to compare and contrast the sayings in Psalm 37 with those in Proverbs. For example, Psalm 37:22 overlaps with Proverbs 3:33 in the following way:

For those blessed by Yahweh will possess the land/
but those cursed by him will be cut off // (Psalm 37:22)

The curse of Yahweh is on the house of the wicked/
but the abode of the righteous he blesses // (Prv. 3:33)

³¹ If the proverbs of Sirach 27:22-29 are clearly a unit and if it is similar to Proverbs 26:17-28, might this be further evidence for the unity of the proverb poem of 26:17-28?

With these two proverbs the lines of each are simply reversed; they are overlapping saying in which the first and second lines are switched.

Psalm 37:30 overlaps with Proverbs 10:31. Notice how this occurs:

The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom!
and his tongue will speak justice // (Ps. 37:30)

The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom/
but the perverse tongue will be cut off // (Prv. 10:31)

The relationship between these two is that, except for one word (in the Hebrew), the first line in both is the same. The second line is different. In Psalm 37 the parallelism is an extension or elaboration of the first line. In Proverbs 10:31 the parallelism is antithetic. However, in the Hebrew text the second line of each begins with the word "tongue" (לְשׁוֹן).

Psalm 37:23 overlaps with Proverbs 20:24:

The steps of a man are from Yahweh/
and he establishes him in whose way he delights // (Ps. 37:23)

The steps of a man are from Yahweh/
how can man understand his way? // (Prv. 20:24)

The first line of both of these proverbs is identical including the not so common use of the term גִּבּוֹר for man. The second line of both is an extension of the first and both use the term דֶּרֶךְ (way). But that is the end of the similarities. The second line of Ps 37:23 is in the indicative and affirms the positive consequences of Yahweh's work. The second line of Proverbs 20:24 is an interrogative and is antithetic to the first stating the negative consequences of the absence of Yahweh's work. Psalm 37:23 gives the positive results of Yahweh's work in human life: the individual is given security and direction. Proverbs 20:24 gives the negative results of the absence of his work: the individual gropes through life with no direction.

Psalm 37:16-17 overlaps with Proverbs 16:8 in the following way:

Better is a little that the righteous has/
 than the abundance of many wicked //
 For the arms of the wicked shall be broken/
 but the Lord upholds the righteous // (Ps. 37:16-17)
 Better is a little with righteousness/
 than much revenue with no justice // (Prv. 16:8)

The two lines of Psalm 37:16 and Proverbs 16:8 are basically the same. Both are couched in the form of a "better/than" formula. Both associate a little with what is good and a lot with what is bad. The main difference is that Psalm 37 expands on the proverb with a second verse that describes the consequences that will come to the righteous who has little and the wicked who has much. It appears to be a natural practice to expand upon a traditional proverb found in the biblical collection. Such expansion may be a way of using the proverb responsibly.

The above are examples of proverbs being used in other contexts outside the book of Proverbs. What is seen is their flexibility. The proverb in its new context is still immediately recognized. But it is reshaped and remolded to address the new situation.

Proverbs in the Context of Israelite Tradition

The texts of Proverbs are rhetorical. By that I mean that they are fluid, dynamic and adaptable. They are activated by a specific audience and situation. As such they provide a bridge, a conduit if you will, from the past to the present and from the present to the future. Proverbs provide such a bridge by connecting past traditions with contemporary culture. Thus they are a living and dynamic tradition. But not only do proverbs look to the past they also work from the present to the future. All of this takes place in the

context of changing times, relationships and circumstances. Proverbs work close to the ground of the human condition. They are always unfolding into new situations ahead. They are rhetorical in the way they function.

The proverb carries on the traditions of the past by reinterpreting them. When reading the texts of Hebrew Scripture, such texts are filled with references to the major historical events in the life of a specific culture, Israel. Such events include the Exodus from Egypt, the Wilderness Wanderings, Conquest of the land of Canaan, the Covenant with Yahweh at Sinai. In order to understand the majority of the texts of Old Testament Scripture, one must be familiar with and know these historical events. They are alluded to in practically every corner of its pages. In addition to the major historical events there are the major institutions and traditions that dot the landscape of the texts. These include the temple and the cult³², the sacrificial system, the monarchy, and the torah (law).

However, when moving to the texts of wisdom and specifically Proverbs, surprisingly absent are references to these events and institutions. There is little or no concern with the history of Israel as a people. There is no, Salvation History, no Exodus, no Covenant, no Wilderness Wanderings, no Conquest. There is also little mention of the torah, little mention of the cult, and little of the monarchy. The proverbs dehistoricize other texts of Scripture. It is not that they are opposed to these events or traditions. Rather they move beyond them to reframe them. The traditions are reminded for a

³² The term "cult" refers to Israel's worship practices and institutions including the sacrificial system, priesthood, and temple worship. It has nothing to do with the contemporary use and meaning which refer to small fanatical religious groups.

different time and context. The proverbs de-ethnicize Hebrew texts and enable them to speak more universally rather than to the exclusive community of Israel.³³ Without knowing or understanding the major traditions of ancient Israel, almost anyone can understand the proverbs.³⁴

But yet the proverbs do not reject the past. They are not antipathetic to tradition. They are grounded in the events and traditions that have gone before. Such events and beliefs are still central. They simply appear in new form and clothing. Proverbs form a bridge between religious nationalism on the one hand and responsible living on the other. Wisdom renders its rhetorical service by eliminating the nationalistic tone of the tradition. Wisdom enables all individuals to be a part of the world community rather than the community being limited to one particular ethnic group. It is inclusive rather than exclusive.

I want to give three examples of how proverbs work in this regard. One example is in regard to the concept of "holy" in the Hebrew Scriptures. This concept pervades the texts of Genesis through Deuteronomy. Such texts speak of the Lord being a holy God (Exodus 3) and his people being holy

³³ A good example of this occurred one day when I was walking across the University of Oregon campus in Eugene. I happened to walk by the art building. Over the archway entrance was inscribed this proverb from Proverbs 24:3-4: "By wisdom a house is built and by understanding it is established, by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches." The individuals who read that can understand its meaning. Yet most do not have any awareness of or even care for ancient Israelite tradition.

³⁴ This explains why in some modern versions of the Bible that contain only the New Testament the book of Proverbs is sometimes included as an appendix. The book can be understood separated and apart from the original context.

people (Exodus 19:6; Deuteronomy 7:6). Leviticus chapters 17 through 26 is known as the "Holiness Code." Here is a description of Yahweh as a God who is holy and the kind of response he expects from his people because of who he is:

So you shall keep my commandments and do them: I am the Lord. And you shall not profane my holy name, but I will be hallowed among the people of Israel; I am the Lord who sanctify you, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I am the Lord (Lev. 22:31-33).

Now when one moves to Wisdom Literature the use of the term "holy" is absent. What proverbs do is to reframe the concept by using a different term. In Proverbs the new term is "the fear of the Lord."³⁵ That the two terms are related is seen when one compares the usage of both. The benefits and values assigned to both are quite similar.³⁶ However, the "fear of the Lord" is a broader more universal term which is not as closely tied to Israel's tradition and cultic worship as was the concept of "holy."³⁷ Here is an example of wisdom carrying on the tradition and concept of holiness but in a different and more universal frame.

³⁵ This phrase is repeated on numerous occasions in Proverbs 1:7; 1:29; 9:10; 14:27; 15:16; 15:33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4.

³⁶ See Ronald Clements, *Wisdom For a Changing World: Wisdom in Old Testament Theology* (Berkeley: BIBAL Press, 1990) 29-31. An expanded version of this work is seen in his more recent volume entitled *Wisdom in Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

³⁷ See Clements, *Wisdom For a Changing World*, p. 31.

A second example is that of the concept of health and illness in the Hebrew Scriptures. The old way of thinking believed that health was a reward for living obediently to Yahweh and illness was a form of punishment for disobedience (See Exodus 15:25-26; Leviticus 15:31; Psalm 38:3-8). Sickness resulted because of sin. But wisdom reminds these thoughts and beliefs without completely rejecting them. Though the idea of sin is not completely exorcized from its connection to health, it no longer is given center stage in the relationship. Health is demystified. Now health involves a strong element of psychological well-being. The roots of good health are traced to a healthy frame of mind.³⁸

A cheerful heart is good medicine/
a downcast spirit dries up the bones // (Prv. 17:22)

Contentment can bring health and healing:

Contentment makes a body healthy/
jealousy rots bones// (Prv. 14:30)

In contrast, a negative and pessimistic outlook can bring on illness:

A person's spirit will endure sickness/
but a broken spirit who can bear? // (Prv. 18:14)

Responsible use of speech contributes to good health:

There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts/
but the tongue of the wise brings healing // (Prv. 12:18)

³⁸ Individuals like Norman Cousins and Bill Moyers have revived and popularized the idea that mental health effects physical well-being. In the introduction to Cousins' book *The Healing Heart*, Proverbs 17:22 is quoted. Norman Cousins, *The Healing Heart*, (New York: Avon Books, 1983). See also Bill Moyers, *Healing and the Mind* (New York: Doubleday, 1993). We seem to be instinctively aware of the connection between physical and mental/emotional health when we use such phrases as "She died of a broken heart" or "he is worrying himself sick."

In an earlier generation in Israel, health and sickness belonged in the general categories of sin and guilt and to the realm of the priest and the cult. With the activation of wisdom in a later generation, such categories are exorcized. Again this is not to be taken as a rejection of the cult but as reaching beyond this boundary to be more inclusive. Health and medicine now come to be viewed as a part of the science of life available to those who live responsibly.

A final but important example is related to how wisdom reframes discourse enabling it to be more inclusive. Wisdom speaks of and understands discourse differently than the other two major units of the Hebrew canon (the Law and the Prophets). With the law and the profession of the priests, discourse was viewed in the context of the cult. Priests used discourse as a means of fulfilling the ritual requirements and of absolving guilt. It was used in the context of carrying out sacrificial duties and of forgiving sins. Discourse was very much theocentric.

Prophetic discourse came primarily in the form of oracles. The most frequent genre was the messenger speech which began with the formulaic phrase "thus says the Lord." The prophets stood as spokesmen for God speaking a word on his behalf to the people. They were gifted orators using a variety of creative genres to communicate their message. Even though they were skilled in the use of oratory, they were primarily preachers and not homileticians or speech teachers. That is, they did not talk about discourse.

When it comes to the use of discourse in Proverbs, there is a change. The sages were skilled in its use as teachers. They were not only practitioners but also instructors, teaching students the proper use of discourse. Here for

the first time in the Hebrew Scriptures is an interest in metadiscourse. Advice is offered about how to speak.

In Proverbs discourse is not simply unidirectional, Yahweh communicating to humans. Now more emphasis is placed on the social dimension, on proper timing, on how speech affects others, and how it reflects the character of the one who uses it. Discourse in the institutions of the priests and prophets was clearly theocentric. The sages do not in any way eclipse the theocentricity. However, it is now more subtle and serves as the background to a perspective that appears more humanistic. The spotlight is on human interaction and responsibility. Yahweh is still at work but through the ways in which individuals responsibly use speech. This is another example of the hermeneutical process of proverbs.

The proverbial form was one of the important media by which ancient tradition could be preserved and could continue to be living and dynamic. Such a function of proverbs is not limited to the Biblical collection. This was partly the motive for Erasmus (c. 1466-1536) carrying out a thirty-six year project of collecting proverbs in his *Adagia*.³⁹ According to Margaret Mann Philips, the "primary intention" of the *Adagia* was to "familiarize the reader, particularly the Greekless reader, with the great authors of antiquity."⁴⁰ The

³⁹ The first collection was published in 1500 and contained 818 adages. The final collection was published in the year of Erasmus's death, 1536, and contained 4,151. Margaret Mann Philips, *The 'Adages' of Erasmus: A Study with Translations* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1964) x-xi.

⁴⁰ Margaret Mann Philips trans., *Collected Works of Erasmus: Adages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982) xiii.

use of the proverb functions as a kind of time capsule to transport tradition into a new setting.⁴¹

What is observed in proverbs is one type of hermeneutical model for enabling a community's beliefs and traditions to continue to speak. Proverbs serve as a bridge in passing on the beliefs of a former generation. They demystify past tradition. But as a bridge to the future not only do proverbs reframe past beliefs but they themselves can be reminted to fit a specific community and ethnic group. They exemplify both constancy and change.

Proverbs in the Context of the New Testament

The ongoing work of the proverb is not just limited to texts of the Hebrew Scriptures. It extends beyond them to texts of the New Testament as well. Once again what is observed are the qualities of constancy and change. The proverb carries on the tradition but at the same time has an innovative quality to it. I have selected several proverbs quoted by writers in the New Testament.⁴² How do these New Testament texts use them? How do the proverbs function in these contexts?

I Peter 4:8 quotes Proverbs 10:12 in the hortatory context of the letter. In its form in Proverbs 10:12 the proverb reads as follows: "Hatred stirs up strife/ but love covers all transgressions/ /." One possible meaning of the proverb is

⁴¹ In the forward to a volume by B. J. Marketos who has compiled a collection of ancient Greek proverbs, John Vassos makes this observation: "The Greeks have used their proverbs to pass along their experience and their philosophy. Proverbs have even been used as a means of underground communication" (p. 13). See B. J. Marketos, ed., Ann Arpajoglou, trans., *A Proverb For It: 1510 Greek Sayings* (New York: New World Publishers, 1945).

⁴² My selection is not exhaustive. An example worthy of analyzing which is not included in this section is Proverbs 3:34 which is quoted both in James 4:6 and I Pet 5:5.

that one who loves is able to overlook the imperfections in another which could lead to conflict. I Peter 4:8 quotes the second line of the proverb: "love covers a multitude of sins." The context in which the proverb is used is in the hortatory section of I Peter 2:11-4:11. This whole context follows on the heels of 1:1-2:10 which is simply a description of what God has done for the church and the Christian community. The hortatory section that follows (2:11-4:11) is dominated by the imperative mood. So the letter moves from describing what God has done for Christians to what Christians must do to live responsibly. It is at the conclusion of this exhortation passage that the text quotes the second line of Proverb 10:12. The following is the immediate context:

The end of all things is at hand; therefore keep sane and sober for your prayers. Above all hold unfailing to your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another. As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies; in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen (I Peter 4:7-11).

As the author reaches the climax of his exhortation, he issues a barrage of imperatives to the reader and exhorts the Christian above all else to "hold unfailing to your love." This prepares the way for using what more than likely was a familiar saying: "love covers a multitude of sins."⁴³ The author

⁴³ That this was a familiar saying is supported by the fact that it is quoted in the book of James. The quote is the final statement the writer makes in that book: "My brethren, if any one among you wanders from the truth and some one brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back

uses the proverb to drive home his argument to Christians to live responsibly and with an attitude of love toward others in the Christian community.

A second example of the use of a proverb in the New Testament is found in II Peter 2. In this text the author is making a strong and passionate appeal against associating with false teachers. These false teachers were once faithful Christians. But now they have apostatized. The text begins by warning the reader about their destructive nature (2:1-3). The author continues by reflecting back on how history demonstrates that false teachers are always punished (2:4-8). This was true in the days of Noah, with the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and with the fallen angels. The conclusion that is drawn from past history is that God knows how to deliver the faithful and punish the unfaithful (2:9-10). From here the author tightens his case even more by describing the lifestyle of these false teachers (2:11-17). They are full of lust and despise authority. Their eyes are full of adultery and greed. With a strong element of pathos, he pictures them as irrational animals born to be caught and killed. He concludes his argument by describing their dangerous condition. They are backsliders. They had tasted of the knowledge of Christ but returned to their former way of life. And this last state is worse than the first. The author caps off his argument by appealing to a repulsively charged proverb: "The dog turns back to his own vomit, and the sow is washed only to wallow in the mire" (2:22). The saying comes from Proverbs 26:11: "Like a dog that returns to its vomit/ is a fool that repeats his folly //."

The saying in Proverbs comes in the context of a cluster of sayings dealing with the folly of fools:

a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will *cover a multitude of sins*" (James 5:19-20; emphasis mine).

Like an archer who wounds everybody/
 is he who hires a passing fool or drunkard //
 Like a dog that returns to its vomit/
 is a fool that repeats his folly //
 Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes?/
 There is more hope for a fool than for him // (Prv. 26:10-12)

The fool is the one who does not learn from past mistakes. He is incapable of appropriating the most elementary lessons from the experiences of life. Thus he is doomed to chronic repetition of folly. Foolishness becomes a tragic way of life.

The text in II Peter does not use the saying to talk about fools but about a different character of people: false teachers. The argument is packed with pathos which is capped off by this proverb. The text in II Peter uses only the first line of the proverb and adds a second image that is almost as despicable as the first: a pig wallowing in the slush and stench of its own mud hole.

There are two observations worthy of note in the use of proverbs in the above two texts. First, the two proverbs cited above, like those in the instruction poems, are used not to carry the burden of the argument but to clinch it. Both the proverbs used in I and II Peter are quoted at or near the conclusion of a long series of arguments. They both, especially II Peter 2:22, carry a strong element of pathos. The placement of the proverb in the course of the argument and its appeal to pathos and experience enable the proverb to drive home the point at issue. Second, only half of the "original" proverb is quoted. Once again the phenomenon of overlapping is at work. The binary structure of the proverb is equipped to split in half enabling it to undergo a kind of fission. Its structural makeup gives it the capacity to reproduce proverbial offspring that take on other shapes and forms in different contexts.

But "fission" is not the only way a proverb is expanded into future contexts. Sometimes a proverb is taken and amplified into a story form or a parable. It is the nature of a proverb to compress a series of experiences into one brief statement. What happens when these tightly packaged sayings are unpacked? Such is the case with several parables in the New Testament. It is another way in which the proverb unfolds.

Luke 14:7-11 tells the parable of how guests are to act at the invitation to a marriage feast:

Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he marked how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, "When you are invited by any one to a marriage feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest a more eminent man than you be invited by him; and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher'; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Lk. 14:7-11).

This parable is clearly an amplification of the saying in Proverbs 25:6-7: "Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence/ or stand in the place of the great/ / for it is better to be told, 'Come up here,'/ than to be put lower in the presence of the prince/ /." In its context in Proverbs, the saying is concerned with giving advice to the aspiring young student about the way he should conduct himself in the presence of the king. It is concerned with proper etiquette. The parable in Luke unpacks the proverb and expands it into story form. It gives advice about how to conduct oneself in a social setting. It is concerned with individuals developing the quality of humility.

The parable of Luke 18:1-18 is built on another saying from Proverbs:

And he told them a parable, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor regarded man; and there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Vindicate me against my adversary.' For a while he refused; but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will vindicate her, or she will wear me out by her continual coming.' And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

The saying appears to be based on Proverbs 25:15: "With patience a ruler may be persuaded/ and a soft tongue will break a bone //." This proverb comes in the context of a cluster of sayings dealing with the impact discourse has on others. When used appropriately, discourse has an effect for good. When used carelessly it destroys. Proverbs 25:15 speaks of its appropriate use. And so does the parable in Luke that builds on it. But the context in Luke is not just about any kind of discourse. It is about prayer and how persistent and faithful prayer from a widow who has no status and no power can influence the decisions of a most powerful and ruthless judge, one who fears neither God nor humans.

Other parables are also based on sayings from Proverbs. Included in this is Luke 6:47-49, the parable of the wise and foolish builders, which seems to expand the saying of Proverb 10:25: "When the tempest passes, the wicked is no more/ but the righteous is established for ever//." Another example is the parable in Luke 11:5-8. Here, Jesus tells the story of the person who at midnight asks a friend for food because special guests have unexpectedly

arrived at his house and he has nothing to offer them. Though it is an inconvenience for the friend who is being asked, his responsibility is to respond immediately and not put off the request. The parable is an elaboration of the saying in Proverbs 3:28: "Do not say to your friend, 'Go, and come again, tomorrow I will give it'— when you have it with you."

This section is not intended to exhaust the ways in which New Testament writers use and appropriate Biblical proverbs. But it does suggest that Hebrew proverbs continue to unfold in New Testament contexts. At least two ways have been identified here. First, one line of a proverb is quoted and pressed into service for the sake of driving home the point of an argument. Second, New Testament writers amplify proverbs into parable form. In these ways the proverb carries forth its ongoing function.

The interpretive process does not occur in a vacuum. It is a dialogue that takes place between text, interpreter and contemporary audience. The proverb is built to engage in such a dialogue. It expands in order to meet the ever changing hermeneutical demands of the situation. As a hermeneutical paradigm, the proverb manifests both constancy and change.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

The dominant perspective of biblical scholarship is that proverbs are valued for what they reveal about the wisdom and culture of an ancient civilization. While they convey insightful information, they are perceived as mild mannered in spirit. But this perspective is anemic. It eclipses the power of the proverb. What I have done is to brush away the deposits from the surface of the proverb and expose the underlying beauty of its rhetorical shape. I have demonstrated that far from being harmless cliches, biblical proverbs are potent rhetorical works of art. What I have discovered is a sharpness about the proverb that enables it to penetrate the ear and the mind of the listener.

Because of this internal dynamic, the proverb does not lie dormant. It must have a context in which to work. Even when consigned to a collection, the proverb seeks out active duty. Contemporary scholarship has not acknowledged this activity within the book of Proverbs. My work is distinctive in that it describes the action of the proverb within the collection. Proverbs do not have to lie around waiting for someone to pluck them from the loneliness of a collection and appropriate them to a social context before they experience self-actualization. They have a working context within the book of Proverbs. Thus, scholarship can no longer be noncritical of the long standing belief that the texts of Proverbs are randomly collected. Biblical scholars must now be more sensitive to macro-structures within Proverbs. I have shown that the rhetorical power of the proverb enables it not only to manage individual and social behavior but also to manage texts and ever changing contexts within the canon of Scripture.

Methodologically, I have sought to test the productivity of the rhetorical hermeneutic of Paul Ricoeur. I have applied his theoretical work to specific texts. What I have discovered is that the Ricoeurian perspective is especially productive when used to illuminate the text of Proverbs. Its productivity goes beyond that of the historical critical method which has for so long dominated biblical scholarship. The historical critical method is concerned with how the text has come into its present form. It is interested in the source, form and redaction processes that lie behind the received text. My method is more philanthropic with the text as text. Rather than trying to get behind the text, I begin with the text and discover how it unfolds before itself. I respond to the following question: What claim does the text, as it stands, make on the present reader? I demonstrate how the text is encountered in a meaningful way by contemporary Christian readers.

Further, my study demonstrates that the method of rhetorical criticism fits naturally with texts of Proverbs. Biblical scholars would have to agree that the process of placing proverbs in a collection removes them one step from their historical moorings. Therefore, as compared to other textual settings, scholars should have the least difficulty with accepting the value of a synchronic method of inquiry in the book of Proverbs. In addition, what I have been able to produce by using this method witnesses to its value.

Finally in regard to methodology, my work has suggested a way for appropriating a rhetorical perspective to sacred texts. Biblical scholarship is interested in rhetorical methodology but has been hesitant to use it because scholars either were uncertain in how to proceed, or had poor models to follow, or simply did not understand what a rhetorical method was supposed to accomplish. What I have done is to offer one valid way of employing a

rhetorical method for interpreting sacred texts. Flowing out of these substantive and methodological conclusions are a number of implications that make a valuable contribution to both biblical and rhetorical scholarship.

My investigation into the micro-dimensional level of the proverb has value for contemporary biblical scholarship. First, it demonstrates that the proverb is polysemous in its form and content. Proverbs have frequently been treated like clichés or slogans whose meanings are obvious to even the simple minded and therefore unworthy of serious scholarly investigation. My approach has clearly demonstrated that there is more to them than meets the eye. Therefore, further investigation into their structural nature and reasoning patterns would be fruitful. For example, I have used Brockreide and Ehninger's paradigm to uncover certain reasoning strategies used by the proverbs. However, is there another more Hebraic "system" that governs how they persuade? What might this Hebraic system contribute to rhetorical scholarship?

Second, in revealing the complex nature of the individual proverb, my work can make a contribution to the ongoing task of translating Scripture. Currently, English versions of Proverbs contribute to the view of proverbs as trite and mundane since the primary concern of the translators is to focus on content. Even though translating poetry from one language to another is difficult, more effort can be given to the rhetorical dimension of proverbs. Translation committees can be more sensitive to brevity, word order, analogic form, gender and number changes, and rhyme while still honoring content. For example, translations can at least maintain the order of the two lines of the riddle like proverb with the analogic image typically being stated in the first and the reference or topic in the second. In terms of brevity, if nothing

else translators might indicate in parentheses the number of words in each line so that the English reader would at least note any significant variance from the four/three word pattern. Even though the rhetorical dimension can never be completely captured in translation, clearly there is much more that can be done to reveal the proverb's dynamic power. A holistic approach to the individual proverb will create a deeper appreciation for the, work that it does.

A study at the micro-level of the proverb can also make a contribution to rhetorical scholarship. In regard to the way in which proverbs reason, Goodwin and Wenzel's comment is worthy of note:

. . . proverbs serve the common run of humanity in the same way that a textbook on logic or argumentation serves the formally educated. Proverbs offer a general set of rational strategies for deliberating about life's problems¹

Goodwin and Wenzel come to the conclusion that scholars should be encouraged by the degree of rational competence that is suggested in the reasoning displayed in proverbs which represent "the logic of the common folk."² But I take issue with them at this point. It is not that scholars should give the general populace a pat on the back for the way in which it reasons. Rather it is in observing how common folk reason that rhetoricians can better learn how to effectively argue. Rhetorical scholars can refine their understanding and skills in how to reason and influence others by studying biblical proverbs.

¹ Goodwin and Wenzel 302

² Goodwin and Wenzel 302

A rhetorical approach to the proverbs from the macro-dimension also yields rich dividends. Biblical scholarship can benefit from such an approach. I have applied a hermeneutic to the book of Proverbs that takes seriously the possibility of a structure that lies beyond the level of the individual proverb. Even though further refinement is necessary, I believe what I have established is that throughout Proverbs chapters 10-29 there are at least sections of proverbs that have a macro-structural unity. Such a finding has great significance for the book of Proverbs. The common and legitimate assumption of folklorists, as well as biblical scholars, has been that in order for a proverb to do its work it must have a context. The common criticism of proverbs is that when they are assigned to a collection they die because they have been taken out of a living and dynamic context. What I have demonstrated in regard to the collection in Proverbs is that there is a context within the collection. That context is the text itself. Proverbs become living and dynamic when they are interpreted in light of the structural unit: in which they are found. However, an important heuristic question remains. What is the extent of the structural units in the book of Proverbs?

In choosing clusters of proverbs that address the role of discourse, both biblical and rhetorical scholarship can be informed by what these clusters have to say about the process of hermeneutics. Using discourse as the primary tool at its disposal, wisdom takes on the hermeneutical task, of judging and evaluating different situations in order to determine what the occasion demands. Wisdom cannot dictate how to respond in every situation (recall Proverbs 26:4-5). But because the sage's life has been permeated with an interest in the order of the universe and sensitized to what is "fitting," he

is equipped to enter into life situations and relationships and make the best judgments he can about what is called for on particular occasions.

For example, I argued in chapter three that Proverbs 26:4-10 is concerned with how one interprets events in various life situations by entering into dialogue with others. I agree wholeheartedly with Van Leeuwen who eloquently argues that Proverbs 26:4-10 is a "'treatise' on the 'hermeneutics' of wisdom."³ Van Leeuwen concludes that a careful listening to this text shows

it to be carefully constructed to force the reader to confront perennial problems which are properly labeled hermeneutic. That is, how are the proverbs to be used and applied in various, even contradictory life settings? The passage evinces a profound awareness of the interaction of the proverbs, which must be interpreted, and life, which must be interpreted in terms of the proverbs. This text forces the reader to reflect on the problem of fittingness, and on the limits of human understanding, especially of the other (the *ksyl*), of proverbs (*mslym*, vv 7, 9), and of self (vv 4-5, 12).⁴

As insightful as they are, Van Leeuwen's remarks omit one central component in his descriptive analysis. That is the role of discourse. All of

³ Van Leeuwen 99. Van Leeuwen defines hermeneutics in the Gadamerian sense of a philosophic hermeneutic. That is to say, it is a hermeneutic which has to do not only with interpreting texts but with understanding in general. How do people understand and interpret the world around them?

⁴ Van Leeuwen 99

the verses in Proverbs 26:4-10 are concerned directly or indirectly with interacting and relating to another. Interaction takes place via proverbs, messages, answers, replies. There is described here a *rhetorical* hermeneutic,⁵ one that is able to interpret life situations through interaction with others. In this regard then, implicit in the world view of these wisdom texts is the claim that the world in which the reader lives is interpreted through discourse with others. Reality is not fixed or static. R. N. Whybray makes the following comment on 26:4-5:

These two apparently contradictory sayings have been placed together to show that human problems are often complicated and cannot always be solved by an appeal to a simple universal rule. This observation marks a significant step in the development of human thought.⁶

The world view of Proverbs allows a place for learning to live with and appreciate the ambiguities of life.

In the texts that were engaged in chapter three of my dissertation, none of the interpersonal conflicts described were resolved by appeal to a universal rule. The texts maintain that resolutions come through engaging in discourse. The sage struggles to understand his world through entering into dialogue with others to whom he relates in community. Such a task is a hermeneutical one. Hermeneutics becomes an inventional resource for the verbal actant. It not only equips participants to respond to the world around

⁵ Even though the term "rhetorical hermeneutic" is foreign to the text, I feel it is a fitting description of what is taking place.

⁶ Whybray 152

but, in part, empowers them to create a new world. Verbal actants are deemed wise based on their ability adequately to interpret life experiences, respond appropriately to them and in the process create a better world in which to live.⁷ Both biblical and rhetorical scholarship can be enriched by such a dynamic perspective.

In addition, in reflecting on the five clusters of proverbs I selected in chapter three, they reinforce as well as enhance fundamental theories in the discipline of speech. First, for a person to be successful he or she must be skilled in the proper use of oral discourse. Such skill involves the management and control of speech. To manage one's own speech is a work of art. And as in any genuine art, one's intention is designed to shape and influence the lives of others. Second, the primary way in which one learns about the art of discourse is through selecting the right model. When a person aligns with one who has demonstrated mastery of the art, he or she will have the best opportunity for developing the skill. Third, the ethical dimension of speech is central to the texts of Proverbs. Ethics in Proverbs is closely related to the ethos of the person speaking. Flowing from ethos that is wise is discourse that brings health and solidarity to the community. Flowing from ethos that displays poor judgment is discourse that spreads disease and discord. Fourth, these texts in Proverbs emphasize the centrality of *kairos* in speech. The one who is wise in the use of discourse is the one who knows what to say and when to say it. These texts strongly imply that, even though

⁷ This strikes against the common religious notion that reality is "out there" and fixed. Humans simply respond. In the texts explicated in chapter three, there is a belief that humans are actants and do not just respond to reality but in part create reality for themselves.

there are certain things beyond human control, there are clearly many things that are under human control. Through the proper management of discourse individuals can create a reality and a world that is better suited for the good of all in the community.

In addition to the micro and macro-levels I have mentioned, my investigation into the larger canonical use of proverbs makes several potentially fruitful contributions as well. These contributions will stimulate biblical studies. First, the flexibility of the proverb in different biblical contexts witnesses to its willingness to enter into dialogue with interpreter and audience. The proverb does not operate unilaterally handing down a statement of belief with no regard for the hearer. It is bilateral. It takes the experiences of the listener seriously and seeks to find a common ground between the sacred and the secular. As William Beardslee says, its task is "that of building a bridge between the perspective of faith and the experience of men outside the circle of faith."⁸ The proverb, according to Beardslee, presupposes "that the hearer's own perspective already gives him a basis from which to respond to the challenge being given. . . . [T]he proverb assumes that there is a common human body of experience on which to comment"⁹ That common body of human experience (endoxa) is the hermeneutic upon which the proverb is grounded. The proverb is at work between the intersecting points of the sacred and the secular. It is not that religion equals common sense. Rather it overlaps with it. As Claudia Camp maintains, "A

⁸ William Beardslee, "Uses of the Proverb in the Synoptic Gospels," *Interpretation* 24 (1970) : 62.

⁹ Beardslee 71

culture's system of common sense morality and its religion can be understood to exist in something of a symbiotic relationship."¹⁰ In working at the intersection of religious and secular culture, the proverb does not water down or flatten the message of faith by any means. Rather it works rhetorically, taking the listener seriously and enabling the message to receive a hearing. The enthymematic nature of the proverb then begins by seeking to discover the overlap between faith and culture and then moves to communicate its unique message. It may do this by reversing normal thought and jolting the listener into another way of perceiving (eg. "better/than" proverbs) or by clarifying thought, or by showing the continuity between the two cultures. Whatever its goal, at its heart the proverb is dialogic.

Second, there is no one form of religious vocabulary in which the Christian message is couched. Certain aspects of the Christian faith can be communicated without use of explicit or traditional forms of religious language. Again William Beardslee's comment is apropos: "There is no one standard form of Christian speech."¹¹ Its message can be stated in a variety of ways in various circumstances. The proverbs witness to this truth. Their tendency is to shed the clothing of traditional vocabulary while still holding firm to the traditional beliefs.

Third, proverbs are inventional resources. They are a means of amplification. The proverb is not simply an ornament of discourse. It is a means by which new material and ideas can be discovered. Its compactness is

¹⁰ Claudia Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, (Decatur, GA: Almond Press, 1985) 174-175.

¹¹ Beardslee 72

made for unpacking, its binary structure for amplifying and its indeterminacy for ever changing situations. The phenomenon of overlapping is one witness to its ability to expand itself. The proverbs are constantly undergoing fission, dividing and reproducing themselves in different shapes and sizes and contexts. A novel by Gail Godwin contains an insightful conversation between two people about the experience of "congealing:"

"There are two kinds of people," she once decreed to me emphatically. "One kind you can tell just by looking at them at what point they congealed into their final selves. It might be a very nice self, but you know you can expect no more surprises from it. Whereas the other kind keeps moving, changing. With these people, you can never say, 'X stops here,' or 'Now I know all there is to know about Y.' That doesn't mean they're unstable. Ah, no, far from it. They are fluid. They keep moving forward and making new trysts with life, and the motion of it keeps them young. In my opinion, they are the only people who are still alive. You must be constantly on your guard, Justin, against congealing."¹²

In like manner, the live proverb resists congealing, in life and in interpretation. By its very nature it requires the interlocutor to engage not simply in the task of memorization but in composition and production.

Having made these more theoretical claims, I would like to make a pragmatic recommendation about the contemporary use of proverbs. I

¹² Gail Godwin, *The Finishing School* (New York: Viking Press, 1988), p. 4.

believe in our "neo-oral" culture there is an important place for reviving the responsible use of proverbs in common every day discourse. The oral culture of the medieval period relied heavily on proverbial material in letterwriting, in preaching and in poetry. Contemporary advertising uses proverbial lore in quite effective ways, capitalizing on their commonality and familiarity. For example, when McDonald's came out with the quarter pound hamburger some years ago, their advertising material pictured a giant hamburger with the caption: "Man does not live by bread alone." Coca-Cola has relied on a variety of slogans over the years to promote its product. At one time the slogan was, "Thirst Come--Thirst Served." Political campaigns frequently rely on proverbial phrases to communicate their message and express their ideology in an attractive compact way. The following are just a few examples: "Don't Change Horses in the Middle of the Stream;" "Bring Us Together;" "Leadership—For a Change;" "Together a New Beginning." Also those who are effective political speakers seem to have a reservoir of familiar sayings which as Edd Miller and Jesse J Villarreal remarked some years ago "are useful in talking to a heterogeneous group to prevent arousing opposition."¹³ These representative situations speak to the vitality of proverbial use in the daily affairs of life. Proverbs serve as vital resource topoi for both public and private discourse.

A responsible use of this resource involves developing a mental repertoire of proverbs by expanding on those that are already a natural part of our daily use. Such a repertoire could involve committing to memory both

¹³ Edd Miller, and Jesse J Villarreal, "The Use of Cliches by Four Contemporary Speakers," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 31 (1945) : 152.

biblical and contemporary proverbs. With sensitivity to how and when to employ them, interlocutors would be equipped with a valuable resource for influencing others and interpreting the world in which they live.

Proverbs can be rich resources for dialogue in a number of different everyday settings. They can be instructional resources for parents and children, a way of handing on family values. Proverbs seemed to provide this function in ancient Israel.¹⁴ One of the motives for Erasmus compiling his *Adagia* was to pass on Greek tradition.¹⁵ The proverbial form is one of the important media by which family values can continue to be living and dynamic.

Proverbs can also be pedagogical resources for the classroom. Teachers basically have two general approaches to educating. On the one hand, they can teach students in the Cartesian mode and arm them with an abstract method for interpreting and controlling all experiences. On the other hand, they can begin by immersing students in the lore of the culture enabling them to interpret and make judgments for themselves from within. If one opts for the latter, proverbs can be an important starting place. In such an environment, they can serve as models of reality, dialogue and critique. In addition, the polysemousness of proverbs can provide opportunities for students to use convention in new and surprising ways. Students can refine their rhetorical skills for discovering connections between the accepted beliefs of a community and the new and changing situations being faced by invoking proverbs into the dialogue. Proverbs are ideally suited for such an occasion.

¹⁴ See chapter 4.

¹⁵ See chapter 4.

What must be kept in mind, if the proverb is to be used responsibly in these different settings, is that it requires the interlocutor to carry on the proverb's work of expanding and producing. Much of the reason for the lack of interest in proverbial use today is that this important dialectic dimension has not even been recognized let alone practiced. An interlocutor who is responsible will be creative in using proverbs while at the same time honoring their thought and form. In engaging this dynamic dimension, a person may alter a line or add an idea to a familiar proverb that would be more fitting or contribute fresh insight to a particular exigence. In activating this dimension, proverbs would never be reduced simply to clichés or slogans. They would go on doing their work, engaging both those who would use them and those who would listen. After all "A proverb in the hand/ is worth a thousand words."

There still remains much to be done in the study of proverbs, collections of proverbs, and proverbs in discourse. In seeking to make a contribution to rhetorical studies, scholars have tended to perceive certain kinds of discourse more valuable than others. Scholars tend to gravitate toward those types of discourse that are viewed as making a great impact on society. Such discourse may be in the form of a speech or a piece of art. Currently rhetorical scholars are attracted to the discourse of marginal groups. Scholars have also and almost always been attracted to exotic and unusual discourse because it peaks curiosity and broadens one's understanding of other peoples. In the past, rhetoricians have expressed little interest in the proverb partially because of its commonness. But commonness is its very strength. Proverbs provide a vital link that unites common ordinary life with literature, religion and rhetoric. In order for these disciplines to do their

work, they must be close to the ground of human activity. Thus all of them depend on proverbial lore to enable them to make that connection. To study discourse that is designed to connect academic disciplines to daily life and reframe phenomenological experiences to create new realities is discourse worthy of our attention. A serious investigation of a proverb's inner resources as well as its textual, contextual, and dialogical makeup will make a useful contribution to contemporary rhetorical scholarship.

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- Western Baptist Seminary
 Degree: Doctor of Ministry (1985). Special area of study: homiletics.
 Dissertation "Preaching from I and II Samuel"
- Abilene Christian University
 Degree: Master of Divinity (1980)
- Harding University
 Degree: Bachelor of Arts in Speech (1976). Bachelor of Arts in Bible (1975)

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

- 1993-present Associate Professor of Homiletics, Harding University
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- 1982-1992 Associate Professor of Bible and Religion, Columbia Christian College, Portland, Oregon
- 1990-1.991 Graduate Teaching Assistant at University of Oregon.
- 1980-1990 Pulpit Minister, Eastside Church of Christ, Portland, Oregon
- 1979-1980 Preacher for Ira Church of Christ, Ira, Texas
- 1976-1980 Instructor of Fundamentals of Speech, Abilene Christian University, Abilene, Texas

SCHOLARLY PUBLICATIONS:

- "Review of *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation*," by Dale Patrick and Allen Scult, in *Critical Review of Books in Religion*
- "Review of *The Bible as Rhetoric: Studies in Biblical Persuasion and Credibility*," edited by Martin Warner, in *Critical Review of Books in Religion*
- "The Biblical Quest for Wisdom," Major Book Review in *Interpretation*, 46 (April 1992)

"Review of Wisdom for a Changing World: Wisdom in Old Testament Theology," by Ronald E. Clements, in *Restoration Quarterly* 33 (1991)

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"God's Activity as Reflected in the Books of Ruth and Esther," in *Restoration Quarterly* 24 (1981)

"Exegesis of Psalm 62," in *Restoration Quarterly* 23 (1980)

Numerous book reviews on homiletic resources including: "*Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in an Age of Show Business*," by Neil Postman, *Mission Journal* 21 (1987); "*Preaching Christian Doctrine*," by William Carl, *Restoration Quarterly* 31 (1989); "Fundamentals of Preaching," by John Killinger, *Restoration Quarterly* 30 (1988); "Reclaiming the Old Testament for the Christian Pulpit," by Donald Gowan, *Restoration Quarterly* 29 (1987); "Finally Comes the Poets," by Walter Brueggemann forthcoming in *Restoration Quarterly*.