

Wise King – Royal Fool

Semiotics, Satire and Proverbs 1–9

Johnny E. Miles



JOURNAL FOR THE STUDY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT
SUPPLEMENT SERIES

399

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To Rhonda

Woman Wise

Wife of My Youth

Wise King – Royal Fool

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Johnny E. Miles

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A Continuum imprint

Published by T&T Clark International

The Tower Building, 11 York Road, London SE1 7NX

15 East 26th Street, Suite 1703, New York, NY 10010

www.tandtclark.com

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

Typeset by ISB Typesetting, Sheffield

Printed on acid-free paper in Great Britain by The Bath Press, Bath

ISBN 0-567-08093-5

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Every project, however appraised, that comes to completion does so with the aid and support of many. But I would be remiss if I did not convey my warmest appreciation to three individuals in particular, who deserve much recognition. First, I want to express my deepest gratitude to James Kennedy whose shared vision for and cooperative guidance of this project from its inception has proved invaluable in its completion. Throughout my doctoral studies, he proved to be the ideal mentor and a true friend, qualities that I hope I can emulate, and for that I shall always be greatly indebted. I shall forever cherish our discussions, much of which we had during my four years as his graduate assistant. As a mentor, he inspired the necessity of a spirit of creativity in scholarship, which he himself expertly modeled, to explore texts anew from alternative perspectives. As a friend, he encouraged critical engagement while never withdrawing his support even in the midst of disagreement.

Second, I have the profoundest admiration for William Bellinger who, undoubtedly, must be the scholar's scholar. His impeccable knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures, Old Testament scholarship and his amiable demeanor has garnered his high esteem among colleagues and students. But above all else, his caring encouragement and sensitivity to my needs during his stint as the Graduate Studies Director at Baylor University, Texas, fueled my persistence throughout the doctoral studies program. Words alone inadequately express the great respect I have for him.

Third, I want to extend a heartfelt thanks to Andy Moore. His acuity in English grammar and style made his keen eye for details a welcome and necessary contribution to a formal writing project that would have certainly lacked its professionalism otherwise.

I also want to offer a special thanks to friends who, like iron sharpening iron, have sharpened and unknowingly prepared me for this project. How I miss the frequent banter about things sacred and profane with friends who have long since gone on their respective life-journeys!

Finally, but certainly not least of all, I owe a debt of gratitude and love to my family, who have constantly been supportive throughout my educational journey. My parents, James and Paulette Miles, and my sister Teresa have always believed in me more than words by them may have ever expressed. My heart goes to the love of my life, my wife Rhonda. Her undying love saw in me that which I could not, and her unwavering support kept me going when I felt I could no longer go on. My children, Caleb, Hannah and Leah, have demonstrated remarkable patience in the face of time often stolen, and undeservedly so, from them for this study, a fact not lost on me as I have tried to make up for it.

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
<i>ANET</i>	James B. Pritchard (ed.), <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950)
AS	Advances in Semiotics
BerO	Berit Olam
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BibLit	Bible and Literature Series
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur ZAW
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i> , Monograph Series
<i>CJF</i>	<i>The Chicago Jewish Forum</i>
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
GCT	Gender, Culture, Theory
HBInt	History of Biblical Interpretation Series
<i>HeyJ</i>	<i>Heythrop Journal</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JANESCU</i>	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i> , Supplement Series
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
LBS	Library of Biblical Studies
LCBI	Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation
MT	Masoretic Text
NCB	New Century Bible
OTG	Old Testament Guides
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTM	Oxford Theological Monographs
<i>Presb</i>	<i>Presbyterion</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
<i>SEÅ</i>	<i>Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok</i>
<i>Sem</i>	<i>Semítica</i>
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies

SJ	<i>Studia Judaica</i>
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
<i>StudHier</i>	<i>Studia Hierosolymitana</i>
<i>TJOJT</i>	<i>Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought</i>
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>VTSup</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum, Supplements</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZBK	Zürcher Bibelkommentare

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INTRODUCTION

Modern, Western culture has long labored under the (de)(il)lusion that a perfect, unambiguous and universal language once existed. But that language, as the Tower of Babel narrative insinuates, disappeared with the curse of differentiated languages. Numerous dreams to 'restore' the language of Adam have propelled the search for the perfect language, which intends to heal from the wound of a multiplicity of tongues.

Concurrent with this search, a 'modernist' approach to semiotics, the study of signs, has dominated the view of language, what it is and what it does, in the modern Western world by emphasizing that the fundamental goal of language is to convey meaning. From this perspective, the consequence of such a goal for biblical studies is to uncover the message contained in the Bible. Signs, an indispensable element in the sending and receiving of messages, comprise every message. In fact, no sign ever appears that is not all or part of some message. Modernist semiotics assumes that 'there is a message and it is "in" the biblical text(s)...and the purpose of semiotics is to assist in the exegetical extraction of that message'.¹ But some texts, such as poetry, because of their derivative linguistic forms of metaphor and connotation, modify the correct linguistic form so that meaning becomes distorted and ambiguous at best. In a modernist semiotics, poetry, regarded as a linguistic aberration, becomes marginalized as secondary (and inferior) to the primary non-fiction.

By contrast, a 'postmodernist' approach to semiotics assumes that language inherently conceals and privatizes. There is no universal, much less perfect, language, only the modernist (de)(il)lusion of universality. And while the message may be a coded secret, meaning is not 'in' the biblical text. The Bible does not contain a message, or many messages, that are in the text waiting to be excavated by correct exegesis. All exegesis, deeply ideological contra its feigned disinterest or objectivity, is eisegesis. Meaning depends on the reader who 'plays' the text just as playing a game depends on the player.² Derivative linguistic forms, such as metaphor and

1. For a more thorough comparison between 'modernist' and 'postmodernist' semiotics, their ideologies and their different assumptions about language, see George Aichele, *Sign, Text, Scripture: Semiotics and the Bible* (Interventions, 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 9–49.

2. By the use of 'play' is certainly not meant anything trivial. Both sender and receiver play with the message as one might play a musical instrument. No two performers play a musical score in the same way. 'Play' is for postmodernism a (metaphorical) play of metaphors, an endless shifting and fragmentation of multiple and possible meanings. The play of signifiers and the play of intertextuality contribute to the creation of meaning. Meaning is the play between the moving parts (e.g. reader and signs) of the semiotic machine. Aichele, *Sign, Text, Scripture*, pp. 39–40.

connotation, become primary in a postmodern semiotics, which focuses on these elements of language that distort or obscure meaning as crucial in the collaborative production of meaning.

Given the inferior status relegated to poetry by the modernist view of language dominant in biblical scholarship, I deliberately chose the rather unorthodox perspective of postmodern semiotics in this book to demarginalize (the) poetry (of Proverbs 1–9) in biblical studies. By reveling in the play of language, the postmodernist semiotic approach of this book proposes the poetic function of Proverbs 1–9 as a satire on Solomon. Chapter 1 sets the stage by surveying the landscape of biblical scholarship on Proverbs 1–9 with the intention of carving out space in the landscape for a reading strategy that assumes the poetic qualities of this text as its focal concern. Chapter 2 erects the framework for a postmodern semiotic theory, including the foundation of poetics, whereby to navigate the strange, new world of Proverbs 1–9. Chapter 3 briefly introduces the subject of satire prior to engaging the prologue, a poetic cue to what follows, to intuit *what is not said* at the surface level of expression. Chapter 4 picks up on the first point of critique against Solomon in the prologue's subagency with the aim of determining the true nature of the 'wisdom' of Solomon. Chapter 5 takes up the second point of critique against Solomon in the prologue's subagency to analyze an erotic conte(x)(s)t in which the father advises the 'son' (understood semiotically as Solomon) against sexual relations with the Other Woman (אִשָּׁה זָרָה). Chapter 6 examines the contrastive banquet-scenes of Woman Wisdom and Woman Folly to reveal several metaphorical dimensions, all of which underscore a decision of life or death for the 'son', in this allegory. Finally, Chapter 7 summarizes the observations of previous chapters as the ending returns us to the beginning of Proverbs 1–9.

We may liken the poetry of Proverbs 1–9 to a net, a type of labyrinth, in which every point connects with every other point. As this study maneuvers through the various significations establishing each connection, the journey through such a labyrinth attends to the minutia of its every detail. Although tedious, if not tortu(r)ous at times, the close 'play' (of)(with) this poetry with all its complexities, ambiguities, metaphors and connotations will not likely appeal to some, especially those whose logical positivist penchant for fixed denotation(s) will surely only meet with frustration. But for others who have acclimated to a postmodern culture, the experience of such a journey in this well-known corner of the world of Wisdom literature refreshes and becomes its own 'play'ful enjoyment.

Chapter 1

PROLEGOMENON

James Crenshaw once described Wisdom literature as an ‘orphan’ because of its virtual neglect by scholars at the turn of the twentieth century.¹ During the twentieth century, scholars have sought to rectify this problem with extensive investigations into Wisdom literature especially within the last forty to fifty years. Yet, the book of Proverbs particularly remains an ‘orphan’, in essence, because the attention given it has been peripheral at best. Concerns other than the poetic character of this ‘orphan’ have overshadowed its identity. By engaging these concerns via a survey of various historical- and literary-critical approaches to Proverbs 1–9, I intend to carve out a space for a reading strategy that values the poetic character of this ‘orphan’ as its focal concern.

A Survey of Modern Scholarship of Proverbs 1–9

By the second half of the nineteenth century, mainline biblical scholarship had dispensed with the traditional view that King Solomon composed the book of Proverbs.² Historical criticism rendered such blind adherence to this traditional position as naiveté. The work of Franz Delitzsch and Crawford Toy during this

1. Two principal factors for this neglect were: (1) the difficulty of integrating wisdom tradition (which lacked the concept of salvation history) with traditional attempts at Old Testament theology and (2) the absence within the Hebrew canon of two wisdom texts (Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon) that were relegated in the Jewish and Protestant traditions to the lesser deuterocanonical status. ‘Prolegomenon’, in Crenshaw (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom* (LBS; New York: Ktav, 1976), pp. 1–60 (1–3); also see R.B.Y. Scott, ‘The Study of the Wisdom Literature’, *Int* 24 (1970), pp. 20–45 (20–23).

2. Scholars appealed to the superscriptions within Proverbs and to Jewish tradition, which held Solomon as the ideal of wisdom and ‘a writer of idealizing non-liturgical poetry’, in support of Solomonic authorship (Crawford H. Toy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs* [ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1899], pp. xix–xx). Yet even prior to 1850, dissenting voices such as Nicholas of Lyra (fourteenth century), Philip Melancthon (sixteenth century), Thomas Hobbes and Baruch Spinoza (seventeenth century), and Johannes Clericus (eighteenth century) questioned Solomonic authorship on the basis of the various collections within Proverbs. But it was the position of J. Eichhorn (1783) (i.e. that Proverbs comprises various collections and bears the name of Solomon solely because he was a famous man) that eventually gained consensus among critics of the second epoch (1850–1900). As a result, scholars soon divided into two camps over the question of dating – pre-exilic or postexilic. See the brief summary of these two epochs by Bernhard Lang in *Die Weisheitliche Lehrrede. Eine Untersuchung von Sprüche 1-7* (SBS, 54; Stuttgart: KBW Verlag, 1972), pp. 11–26.

time period helped to pave the way for historical-critical interests in sources, genre, social background and redactional stages.

Historical-Critical Approaches

Although acknowledging the traditional view, Delitzsch argued that Proverbs presents itself as a composition of various parts, each differing from the other in character and in the period to which they belong.³ Toy observed that by their differences of tone and content the divisions in Proverbs suggest that it had been formed by the combination of collections of various dates and origins. He parted company with Delitzsch, however, by positing a postexilic date for Proverbs sometime between Job (c. 400 BCE) and Ben Sira (c. 190 BCE) with 1.1–9.18 dating to the middle of the third century BCE.⁴

Sources. Following the lead of Hermann Gunkel's comparative analyses between Egyptian and Israelite wisdom literature, later scholars pursued source-critical interests in an effort to determine literary dependence. Sir E.A. Wallis Budge's publication of *The Teaching of Amenomope* (1923) brought the vague supposition of Egyptian influence upon Israelite wisdom literature into sharper focus.⁵ But R. Norman Whybray was the first to scrutinize the relationship between Proverbs

3. Prov. 1.7–9.18 assume the form of the Mashal song (though Delitzsch later qualified this claim, remarking that this material contains little of the technical form of the Mashal) and comprises fifteen Mashal strains: (1) 1.7–19, (2) 1.20–33, (3) 2.1–22, (4) 3.1–18, (5) 3.19–26, (6) 3.27–35, (7) 4.1–5.6, (8) 5.7–23, (9) 6.1–5, (10) 6.6–11, (11) 6.12–19, (12) 6.20–35, (13) 7.1–27, (14) 8.1–36 and (15) 9.1–18. Prov. 1.1–6 forms the title to the book while 1.7–9.18 most likely functions as an introduction to the larger Solomonic Book of Proverbs (10.1–22.16), to which it was prefixed sometime between Solomon and Hezekiah, probably during the reign of Jehoshaphat (*Biblical Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950], I, pp. 12, 22–23, 30).

4. The departure by Toy from a preexilic to a postexilic date for Proverbs, which became the consensual position, reflects the compelling pressure within scholarship in his day (Cullen I.K. Story, 'The Book of Proverbs and Northwest Semitic Literature', *JBL* 64 [1945], pp. 319–37 [319]). Toy bases his postexilic date on the following arguments: (1) the tacit assumption of monotheism can hardly belong to an earlier time; (2) the absence of characteristic national traits; (3) the social milieu depicted does not bear the marks of old Israel; (4) the philosophical conceptions belong to a time when the Jews came into close intellectual contact with the non-Semitic world (Toy admits the lack of Greek words in Proverbs though hinting at the influence of Greek philosophy); and (5) the use of the terms 'wisdom' and 'wise' bear no philosophical sense in the non-Wisdom books of the Old Testament. *Proverbs*, pp. xx–xxvi.

5. Scholars immediately hailed a direct relationship between Amenomope and Proverbs 22.17–24.22. The question of priority naturally arose in the debate over Semitic and Egyptian dependence. For further discussion, see R. Norman Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs: A Survey of Modern Study* (HBIInt, 1; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), pp. 6–14, and Glendon Bryce, *A Legacy of Wisdom: The Egyptian Contribution to the Wisdom of Israel* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1979), pp. 16–58. John Ruffle characterized this scholarly obsession with literary dependence as 'a kind of academic parlor game of "Spot the Parallel"', which, ironically, Ruffle could not avoid playing. 'The Teaching of Amenomope and Its Connection with the Book of Proverbs', *TynBul* 28 (1977), pp. 29–68 (30).

1–9 and the Egyptian Instructions.⁶ He identified ten lessons or instructions within the collection of Proverbs 1–9,⁷ which, he concluded, were deeply influenced by the Egyptian Instructions.⁸ The quest for Egyptian sources behind Proverbs 1–9, however, neither sufficiently explained the presence of particular themes or features in Proverbs nor conclusively proved Semitic literary dependence.

As ancient Near Eastern sources such as the Aramaic *Ahiqar*, Assyro-Mesopotamian wisdom texts and Ugaritic material became accessible to scholars, they cautiously referred to an ‘international’ backdrop to Israelite wisdom.⁹ But the lack of significantly documented affinities between Proverbs 1–9 and these sources suggests little, if any, Semitic dependence.¹⁰ Even though William F. Albright argued for Canaanite-Phoenician influence by claiming that ‘Proverbs teems with isolated Canaanitisms’,¹¹ non-extant Canaanite wisdom literature renders his hypothesis as purely speculative.

Source analysis neglects the possibility of coincidence of similar thoughts and sayings, which may have originated quite independently in different times and places, as well as the possibility of authorial and/or editorial creativity.¹² Therefore,

6. For example, *The Instruction of Ptahhotep*, *The Instruction of King Merikare*, *The Instruction of King Amenemhet*, *The Instruction of Cheti the son of Duaf*, *The Wisdom of Anii*, *The Instruction of Amen-em-opet*, *Papyrus Insinger*, and *The Instruction of ‘Onchsheshongy*.

7. I: 1.8–19; II: 2.1, 9, 16–19; III: 3.1–10; IV: 3.21–24, 27–31; V: 4.1–5; VI: 4.10–12, 14–19; VII: 4.20–26; VIII: 5.1–8, 21; IX: 6.20–25, 32; X: 7.1–3, 5, 25–27. R. Norman Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs: The Concept of Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9* (SBT; Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1965), pp. 37–51. See also R.B.Y. Scott’s designations (I: 1.8–19; II: 2.1–22; III: 3.1–12; IV: 3.21–26, 31–35; V: 4.1–9; VI: 4.10–19; VII: 4.20–27, 5.21–23; VIII: 5.1–14; IX: 6.20–21, 23–35; X: 7.1–27) in *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes* (AB, 18; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), pp. 14–17, and Lang’s *Lehrrede* (I: 1.8–19; II: 2.1–22; III: 3.1–12; IV: 3.21–35; V: 4.1–9; VI: 4.10–19; VII: 4.20–27; VIII: 5.1–23; IX: 6.20–35; X: 7.1–27) in *Die Weisheitliche Lehrrede*, p. 29.

8. Crenshaw (‘Prolegomenon’, p. 7) observes the following concepts as indicators of such deep influence: the metaphor of the righteous man as a flourishing tree, God as a reliable guide who judges human conduct, and order in life. Whybray also notes significant parallels between Proverbs 1–9 and *The Instruction of Amen-em-opet* – e.g. the injunctions (3.1; 4.1–2; 5.1; 7.1–3), the pupil as ‘my son’ and the prologues – which bespeak Egyptian influence. Aside from the rare address of ‘my son’ in Egyptian texts (only once, but common in Mesopotamian literature), considerable differences between the prologues (e.g. no social or professional background in Proverbs) mitigate against Israelite dependence upon Egyptian sources, thus persuading Whybray later to conclude a direct connection between the two as improbable. See R. Norman Whybray, *The Composition of the Book of Proverbs* (JSOTSup, 168; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), pp. 51–52 n. 40.

9. William McKane assumes as much by prefacing his commentary with an International Wisdom section spanning more than 150 pages. *Proverbs* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970).

10. Chiefly stylistic differences between *Ahiqar* and Proverbs 1–9 far outweigh their comparisons (e.g. the form of paternal address). And the only documented affinities between Proverbs 1–9 and the Mesopotamian wisdom literature are the paternal address ‘my son’ and the Instruction genre. See Story, ‘Book of Proverbs’, pp. 329–32.

11. Albright claimed that Canaanite influence went much deeper than matters of metre, style and language to include the figure of Wisdom, derived from Canaanite mythology. William F. Albright, ‘Some Canaanite-Phoenician Sources of Hebrew Wisdom’, in Martin Noth and D. Winton Thomas (eds.), *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (VTSup, 3; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1955), p. 9.

12. Stuart Weeks comments that this wholesale approach decontextualizes Egyptian and

any conclusions about the extent and direction of literary dependence remain problematic.

Genre. The basic constitutive form of the book of Proverbs is the *m^oshalim* expressed primarily in the ‘sentence sayings’ (10.1–22.16; 25–29) or *Aussagespruch*. Nevertheless, the book does contain material (1–9; 22.17–24.22; 31.1–9) that belongs to the instruction and admonition genre or *Mahnspruch*.¹³ Both the Sentence and Instruction genres differ considerably from one another with regard to their form, length and tone.¹⁴

Convinced that Proverbs 1–9 mirrors the Instruction genre, Whybray proffered the original ten instructions as a distinct literary type because their introductory verses (1.8–9; 2.1, 9; 3.1–4; 3.21–22; 4.1–2; 4.10–12; 4.20–22; 5.1–2; 6.20–22; 7.1–3) bear the following common characteristics:

1. They are all addressed to ‘my son’ (‘sons’ in 4.1) as the first or second word.
2. They all command the pupil to ‘hear’, ‘receive’, ‘not forget’, and so on, the instruction which follows (a conditional form is used in 2.1).
3. They all assert the personal authority of the speaker: the ‘father’ or teacher.
4. They all assert or imply the great value and utility of the father’s words.
5. There is no reference to any authority beyond that of the father himself (‘God and man’ in 3.4 is merely a set phrase indicating universality).
6. The word ‘wisdom’, which occurs only twice (5.1; 4.11), here means ordinary human wisdom and is not treated – in contrast to its use elsewhere in these chapters – as a word of special significance.¹⁵

The ‘ten’ discourses, of similar form and length, spoken by the teacher had their own introduction, an invitation to the pupil to hear and obey the teaching, a main body of precise instructions and often a clear conclusion. While they were both in

Mesopotamian texts, which arose within their own cultures to respond to its own particular needs and conditions. *Early Israelite Wisdom* (OTM; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 8–18.

13. Regarding the Sentence and Instruction genres as the only two genres in the book, McKane (*Proverbs*, pp. 1–22) rejects the Instruction genre as a classification of the *m^oshalim* contra Crenshaw (‘Prolegomenon’, p. 15) who deems both as expressions of the basic form of the proverb.

14. The former tends to be short, occurs in the indicative mood, and is given to alliteration and assonance whereas the latter tends to be long, occurs in the imperative mood, and is given to didacticism. Instructions typically employ subordinate motive (׃) clauses to enhance their persuasive power via direct address. McKane, *Proverbs*, p. 3.

The assumption of developmental stages of Israelite wisdom established the dating criterion of a form’s simplicity as early and complexity as late. Thus scholars posited a postexilic date for Prov. 1–9 due to its long, complex units. But the discovery of *The Instruction of Onchsheshonqy*, which contains the simplest literary form, proves such an assumption as tenuous. Crenshaw, ‘Prolegomenon’, p. 13.

15. But Whybray’s ability to discern any single basic form hinges on considerable textual emendation (*Composition*, p. 13), for which Weeks (*Early Israelite Wisdom*, pp. 11–12) strongly criticizes him. Also, McKane (*Proverbs*, p. 280) questions the possibility of discerning the ‘original text’ of Prov. 1–9 to the degree of exactness Whybray claims given the formal impreciseness of the Instruction genre in Egypt.

form, and to a large extent in content, based on the Instruction genre, they did, nonetheless, possess a specific Israelite character.¹⁶

Independently of Whybray, Christa Kayatz undertook a thorough form-critical analysis of the Egyptian Instructions. Kayatz identified two large groups of Egyptian teachings (i.e. casuistic and imperative introductions)¹⁷ found within Proverbs 1–9 while also noting both differences and similarities between Proverbs 1–9 and the Egyptian Instructions. The strongest of similarities between these two collections occurs in their prologues.¹⁸ Despite the major differences between the two collections,¹⁹ however, Kayatz reinforced Whybray's earlier thesis.

Bernhard Lang understood Proverbs 1–9 to comprise ten *Lehrreden*, wisdom poems (*Lehrgedichte*) and individual sayings. Though lacking uniformity, the commonality of the *Lehrrede* rests in a teacher's speech directed toward the wisdom student.²⁰ Moreover, Lang assumed the Instruction genre for Proverbs 1–9 while strongly maintaining its specifically Israelite character.

Social Background. The aforementioned theories of foreign influence naturally precipitated interest in the social background of Proverbs. Scholars proposed a variety of historical settings, all of which essentially nuance three fundamental theories.

The first theory posits a royal court setting, especially during the time of Solomon, primarily on the bases of biblical evidence (1 Kgs 5.9–14; 10.1–10, 13, 23–24; Prov. 1.1; 10.1; 25.1) and Egyptian parallels. But such a theory is not

16. According to Whybray (*Wisdom in Proverbs*, p. 70), the Israelite author 'neither modified nor was modified by his religious beliefs as an Israelite'. In a later monograph, Whybray revised this thesis no longer arguing for *direct* Egyptian influence on these instructions. Instead, he preferred to speak of parallel developments within an international wisdom tradition (*Composition*, p. 13 n. 4).

17. Those teachings with casuistic introductions focus on the development of officials and predominate in the older Egyptian Instructions whereas those with imperative introductions begin directly with an imperative and predominate in the later Egyptian Instructions, especially *The Instruction of Amen-em-opet. Studien zu Proverbien 1-9. Eine Form- und Motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung unter Einbeziehung ägyptischen Vergleichsmaterials* (WMANT, 22; Neukirchener-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966), pp. 15–16.

18. Both prologues contain statements about its author, its occasion of teaching and its purpose statement expressed in an extensive succession of infinitives. But the special ending of Prov. 1–9 (1.7) has no corresponding Egyptian parallel. Kayatz, *Studien zu Proverbien 1–9*, pp. 24–26, 74–75.

19. For example, note the absence in the Egyptian Instructions of the concept of personified Wisdom, the address 'my son' and the speech of Wisdom in the 'I'-form. Nevertheless, Kayatz finds the similarities strong enough to date the *Lehrrede* to the preexilic period of the Solomonic monarchy. She esteems as questionable the general assumption by scholars of a linear development to form (i.e. from short, individual sayings to long units) and content (i.e. from mundane, secular wisdom to 'theological wisdom') as criteria for the postexilic dating of Prov. 1–9. *Studien zu Proverbien 1–9*, pp. 4–5, 12–14. See also Lang, *Die Weisheitliche Lehrrede*, pp. 35–36.

20. Lang also cited the following typical features of commonality in the *Lehrrede*: (1) they begin with addresses to the son, the invitation to hear, the instruction in the imperative and the admonition in the vetitive (the imperfect with 𐤁); (2) the main section (generally in the imperative and vetitive); and (3) the conclusion. *Die Weisheitliche Lehrrede*, pp. 31–33.

without its problems. First, most scholars dismiss the biblical evidence as legendary in nature, as late additions and as indeterminate in meaning.²¹ Second, the evidence of Egyptian parallels hinges on assumed analogies between the social realities of Egypt, Mesopotamia and Israel. Gerhard von Rad hypothesized that Solomon imitated the Egyptian court school with scribes,²² assumed as the סופרים, who produced the Israelite wisdom literature and taught pupils with collections of proverbs as ‘a method of generalized mundane instruction and thereafter a way of inculcating Yahwistic piety’.²³ The improbability of extensive relations between Solomon and Egypt as well as the lack of attestation for the סופרים as a professional class of scribes repudiate such suppositions and demonstrate this theory as untenable.²⁴

A second theory proposes a scribal school unassociated with the royal court primarily on the bases of biblical evidence (Isa. 28.8-13; 50.4-9; Prov. 22.17-21), schools in Egypt, Mesopotamia and Ugarit, and Palestinian inscriptions. First, a closer examination of the biblical evidence does not substantiate such a theory. At best, the Hebrew Bible points to the existence of literate persons, not schools.²⁵ Second, the argument for Israelite schools assumes analogies with Egypt, Mesopotamia and Ugarit. But the analogy with Egypt fails in that it was a far more advanced culture than Israel. Moreover, Egyptian wisdom literature showed no signs of having been composed within and for the scribal school. Rather, education was made widely available beyond the confines of the court or temple.²⁶ Third, André Lemaire and Bernhard Lang adduced archaeological evidence for schools.²⁷

21. Ironically, Scott rejects the Solomonic superscriptions in Proverbs as historical only to appeal to the superscription ‘Men of Hezekiah’ (Prov. 25.1) as historical to buttress his theory of a Hezekian court setting for the compilation of Proverbs. ‘Solomon and the Beginnings of Wisdom in Israel’, in Martin Noth and D. Winton Thomas (eds.), *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (VTSup, 3; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1955), pp. 264–66, 272. Against Scott, see Ruffie, ‘The Teaching of Amenomope’, pp. 34–35. Cf. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, rev. edn, 1998), pp. 41–44.

22. Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1972), p. 15. William McKane viewed the wise men as statesmen, the royal counsellors of the court. *Prophets and Wise Men* (SBT, 44; Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1965), p. 44.

23. McKane, *Proverbs*, pp. 9–10.

24. Concerning the first supposition, only one of Solomon’s wives was Egyptian, the gods to whom Solomon turned his heart in his old age were Sidonian not Egyptian and Solomon’s relations with King Hiram of Tyre dominate the narrative account of Kings. Scott, ‘Solomon and the Beginnings’, pp. 265–66. Whybray challenged the second supposition by demonstrating a lack of attestation for the terms סופרים and סופרים as designations for a particular professional class. While there were Israelites who had likely acquired a reputation for wisdom in the sense of superior intelligence, there was no evidence for a professional class of royal scribes. Thus Whybray preferred the designation intellectual tradition to that of wisdom tradition. See his *The Intellectual Tradition in the Old Testament* (BZAW, 135; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1974), pp. 55–61.

25. James L. Crenshaw, ‘Education in Ancient Israel’, *JBL* 104 (1985), pp. 601–15 (602–604).

26. Michael V. Fox, ‘The Social Location of the Book of Proverbs’, in Michael V. Fox et al. (eds.), *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), pp. 227–39 (229–30).

27. Lang provides an imaginative picture of an ancient Israelite school with reconstructed syllabi derived from epigraphic evidence such as abecedaries, fragments of alphabets and symbols

Lang unequivocally claimed that Proverbs, specifically the *Lehrrede*, didactic in form, originated in the school and functioned as a textbook for school students.²⁸ Although impressive, the archaeological evidence admits of alternative explanations and certainly does not support an integrated school system. But if one cannot prove the existence of schools in ancient Israel, then one cannot disprove them either.²⁹ This theory remains, at best, purely conjectural.

A third theory proffers a family/clan setting primarily on the bases of various maxims in the Egyptian Instructions (which speak of passing down wisdom to one's children, not one's pupils) and the family education alluded to in Proverbs 4.3.³⁰ Tribal heads and patriarchal fathers promulgated oral instruction comprising both wisdom and law.³¹ In such a popular ethos, careful observation of the immediate world resulted in the form of proverbs. Such folk sayings reflected a concern over life by the peasants and landowners.³² No one contests the fact that parents instructed children in their homes and most likely did so using maxims. Some of the maxims of Proverbs 1–9 may have indeed had the family/clan as their setting.³³ But our ignorance about education in ancient Israel renders the extension of such a prospect to Proverbs 1–9 as speculative.

As convincing as these theories sound, queries into the social background of Proverbs 1–9 have only yielded incertitude. That some material in Proverbs 1–9 may have originated from either of these settings seems possible, but the compilation and redaction of Proverbs 1–9 would certainly exclude the probability of the family/clan setting.

Redactional Stages. The redaction of Proverbs 1–9 assumes developmental stages of composition wherein one can also detect a linear development to Israelite religion.³⁴ Both Fox and Whybray trace these developments in their reconstruction of three redactional stages of Proverbs 1–9.

and drawings on walls, all of which he interpreted as writing exercises for students. *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: A Hebrew Goddess Redefined* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1986), pp. 29ff.

28. Lang regards the *Lehrrede* as Israelite school literature and sets its *terminus a quo* and *terminus ante quem* as the tenth and third centuries BCE, respectively. Nonetheless, he prefers a preexilic date at the time of Solomon for the *Lehrrede* (*Die Weisheitliche Lehrrede*, pp. 48–60, 100–102, and *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs*, p. 10).

29. Weeks offers a word of caution against presuming schools as a setting for Proverbs 1–9 given our profound ignorance of educational methods in Israel. *Early Israelite Wisdom*, pp. 153–56.

30. The Egyptian Instructions never use 'father' as an epithet for 'teacher' whereas in the Sumerian schools members of the *edubba* ('tablet house') designated themselves as 'sons' to outsiders and the master teacher as 'father' (Fox, 'Social Location', pp. 230–31, and Crenshaw, 'Education', p. 608).

31. Erhard Gerstenberger claimed the ancient clan- and family-ethos as the origin of efforts to uphold justice since both wisdom and law were concerned with maintaining social order ('The Woe-Oracles of the Prophets', *JBL* 81 [1962], pp. 249–63 [256–58]).

32. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, p. 17.

33. Scott identifies the following maxims in Prov. 1–9: 3.27–30; 5.15–19; 5.20; 6.1–19; 6.22; 9.7–9 (*Proverbs. Ecclesiastes*, p. 14).

34. Rather than assuming a movement from pure secularism to theological reflection, Crenshaw distinguishes between three fundamental manifestations of Israelite wisdom: family/clan, court and