WISDOM, STRANGE OR SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN: IN SEARCH OF A REAL WOMAN IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

By

JEANETTE MAY HARTWELL

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this study is the portrayal of the Strange Woman and the unnamed mothers and wives of Proverbs arguing for a realistic portrayal of these women within the book. Informed by a feminist approach it considers the impact of male-oriented reading strategies upon existing interpretation and attends to the way in which poetic parallelism and variant repetition create proverbial clusters which offer an alternative context for the interpretation of proverbs. The findings show, firstly, that current interpretations of women in Proverbs are unduly influenced by the portrayal of Wisdom, the Strange Woman and the Woman of Worth in the framework of chapters 1-9 and 31, rather than by the text itself. Secondly, women's voices provide a possible source for material in the lectures of Proverbs 1-9 (along with the father), the poems of Proverbs 31, and as the narrator of the encounter with the Strange Woman in Proverbs 7. Thirdly, where mothers and wives are in focus, alternative interpretations can be offered which do not assess the character or behaviour of the woman, but rather focus on the son's character and behaviour and its subsequent impact upon relationships with his parents, his wife and his own offspring.

DEDICATION

In loving memory of my father

Thomas Ian Williamson (1944-2015)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BDB   Brown, Francis, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*

BHQ   *Biblia Hebraica Quinta*. Edited by Adrian Schenker et al. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2004 –

BHS   *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Edited by Karle Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983

BKAT   Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament

HALOT   *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. 3rd ed. Leiden: Brill, 1995, 2004

HAT   Handbuch zum Alten Testament

JSOT   *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*

LXX   Septuagint

MT   Masoretic Text

NRSV   New Revised Standard Version

OBO   Orbus Biblicus et Orientalis

TDOT   *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Translated by John T. Willis et al. 8 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1974–2006

TOTC   Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This research into the portrayal of women within the biblical book of Proverbs began with the seemingly naïve question 'Is she as bad as everybody makes out?' The 'she' in question was the Strange Woman[1] of Proverbs 7, the female character designated as *ʾiššâ zārâ* and *nokriyyâ*, against whom the young man is warned, her paths allegedly leading to death and destruction (7:1-27).[2] If the question was naïve, then the quest to discover an answer has involved not only an exploration of the portrayal of her identity and character, but also that of some of the identities and characters of women portrayed throughout the book, of which there are several in the forms of mother, wife, personified Wisdom, the Strange Woman, Folly and the Woman of Worth of 31:10-31.

As an Anglican ordinand at the time I was first introduced to the scholarly study of Proverbs, and with a burgeoning interest in Feminist Theology I was intrigued by the way in which the character of this woman seemed to be so casually treated by the vast majority of (male) scholars who commented on Proverbs 7. Despite the Hebrew adjectives *zārâ* and *nokriyyâ* which are used to identify her, and the ongoing debate about the precise meanings of those terms, she is most commonly referred to as an adulteress, the overriding interpretation being that she is a woman of dubious sexual morality. Contrasted with this seemingly negative portrayal, the other female images

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[1] Throughout the thesis I shall use the capitalized version of Wisdom, the Strange Woman and Folly, to 'name' the female personification of the concepts, and the lower case versions for discussions of the concepts in general.

[2] She also makes an appearance in Proverbs 2:16-19; 5:1-23; 6:20-29.

appear to be the idealised versions of womanhood presented in the figures of Wisdom in chapters 1-9 and the Woman of Worth (31:10-31). At the same time as this initial encounter with the women portrayed in Proverbs, discussions around women's admission to the episcopacy in the Church of England dominated the agenda of its General Synod, to bemusement amongst the wider public unacquainted with the theological arguments but accustomed more generally to women in positions of leadership in secular society. Two things then came together: if Proverbs is generally accepted as a book about the cultivation of wise leaders within a society and, if it appears to portray women in either highly idealised or conversely highly negative images, what might Proverbs have to say to women who continue to make in-roads into leadership in the public sphere (both secular and within the church) in the twenty-first century?

1.2   Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to re-examine existing interpretations of certain female characters within the biblical book of Proverbs, most notably the Strange Woman and the unnamed 'mothers' and 'wives'. Is it possible to provide alternative interpretations which defy stereotypical representation of women and their roles? Furthermore, might alternative interpretations reflect more accurately the complexities of women's characters, both as individuals and in their roles as wives and mothers? In order to achieve this, the following questions will be explored: What impact, if any, does the structure of Proverbs have on the interpretation of female characterisations within it? Is it possible to identify women as the source of material contained within Proverbs, and if so, what impact might that have on existing interpretations and the potential to provide

alternative ones? Can an exploration of poetic devices evident in the text itself, and editorial intention, give rise to the possibility of alternative interpretations?

1.3   Outline of thesis

Following on from this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 presents a survey of scholarly contributions on women in Proverbs in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Chapter 3 describes the methodological approach and the methods used in the study. In Chapter 4, I consider whether the final composition of Proverbs demonstrates an editorial intent to provide a key reading strategy for the book as a whole, and what impact, if any, this might have on the interpretation of female characters. This takes the form of a literature review focusing on the question of the function of Proverbs 1-9 and 31 as a possible framework for the Proverbs collections as a whole. Chapter 5 explores whether women might be identified as a potential source for the poems in Proverbs 31 by identifying the literary genres of the poems and taking into consideration female participation in public life.

Having considered the broader questions of the structure of Proverbs and the potential sources of material contained therein, Chapters 6 to 9 focus more specifically on female characters and characterisations. In Chapter 6 the portrayal of The Strange Woman is considered, particularly her encounter with the 'man without sense' in Proverbs 7. I re-evaluate both her identity and the threat she is perceived to represent, to ascertain whether she is as dangerous as is traditionally understood. Chapter 7 focuses on the role of the 'mother' in the 'education' and nurture of her (male) offspring, taking as a starting point the instruction not to abandon her teaching (1:8, 6:20). I explore whether the 'mother' appears solely as a literary device to meet the needs of poetic parallelism or whether there is a possibility of 'real' women undertaking such a role.

The focus of Chapter 8 is the portrayal of mothers and fathers in Proverbs 10-29, exploring the use of poetic parallelism and variant repetition to identify if there are any 'missing' mothers within the text. In addition, each reference to the mother is not only considered in light of its parallel, but also without recourse to it, divorcing it from, in most instances, the first half-line in order to reassess if the statement is as 'detrimental' as it might have first appeared. Chapter 9 employs the same method in looking at the portrayal of 'contentious wives' (19:13, 21:9, 19; 25:24; 27:15) within the same collection. Finally, the conclusion in Chapter 10 explores the implications of the research undertaken and suggests areas where further work may prove fruitful.

1.4   Translations

My translations are based on the NRSV with attention to Fox (2000; 2009), Waltke (2004; 2005) and Heim (2001; 2013). Despite a preference for an inclusive translation of gendered terms in general, I have chosen to use gendered language in the translations. This is to highlight, rather than mask, the gender specific nature of the text. A good discussion of the difficulties in translating biblical text from a feminist perspective is outlined by Sherry Simon in 'Corrective Measures: The Bible in Feminist Frame' in *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission* (1996 pp. 111-133).

One of the difficulties in translation is the naming of the *ʾiššah zārâ/nokriyyâ*. As will become evident in Chapter 6 there is neither clear consensus as to the definitive translations of the Hebrew, or the identity of the woman or the threat she is perceived to represent. It is for this reason I have chosen to identify and name her the Strange Woman, highlighting both the difficulties in translation and interpretation, and the ambiguity of the perceived threat.

CHAPTER 2

WOMEN IN PROVERBS

2.1   Introduction

Despite its reputation as a male-authored text for a male audience there are a surprising number of references to women and female characters in Proverbs, a total of 219 verses, 23.5% of the total material, arranged across all of its collections (Heim, 2008 p. 20). Within Proverbs, women are presented in three stereotypical groups of images: namely mother, wife, and foreign or 'other'. Contrary to their representation elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, women are not portrayed as chattels and subject to the authority of males, but more generally as the makers and breakers of men (Bird, 1974 pp. 57-60). The objective for the original, intended recipient of Proverbs, in terms of his relationship with women, is to cultivate wisdom in order that he might distinguish between the two. The goal is to obtain a 'good woman' who will bring him honour, rather than fall prey to the wiles of the seductress. Prime examples of a 'good woman' are presented in the figures of Wisdom (Proverbs 1-9) and the Woman of Worth (31:10-31). Here are female images of good character, seemingly at home in both the public and private spheres, and free to engage where they will. In contrast, the type of woman to be avoided is expressed in the characterisation of the Strange Woman and Folly. The portrayal of women in Proverbs has traditionally been understood within this binary context.

2.2   Scholarly contributions on women in Proverbs: a survey

What follows is a summary of recent scholarly work focused on the portrayal of women in Proverbs, aided by the contribution of *The Book of Proverbs: A Survey of*

Modern Study (1995), in which R.N. Whybray gives an account of the study of Proverbs in the twentieth century. Since Whybray's work includes contributions up to 1995, I shall use his findings before turning to scholarly contributions post 1995.

Whybray deals with major aspects of Proverbs study dividing his material into chapters entitled: "Origins and Background"; "Literary and Structural Matters (Prov. 10-29)"; "Proverbs 1-9 and 22:17-24:34"; "Proverbs 30-31"; "Ideas and Theology"; "Dating the Book of Proverbs"; and "Texts and Versions". In the chapter dealing with ideas and theology, he devotes six pages to "Proverbs and women" (pp. 142-147). He surveys scholarship which has engaged with the topic and acknowledges that prior to the contribution of W.O.E. Oesterley (1929) who wrote an excursus on the subject, little was made of the presence of women in the book, commentators limiting themselves to slight observations on particular verses.

Turning aside for a moment to Oesterley (1929 pp. lxxx-lxxxiv), he contends that in the Hebrew Bible as a whole, woman is thought of entirely in terms of her relationship to man but that the theory was worse than the practice and can be discarded when we peer into the realm of family life, women's real domain. Whether Oesterley believes women's real domain to be family life or whether he is expressing the view of the sages is unclear, although I suspect it may be both, demonstrating an acceptance of the perceived world-view of the text. Such 'givens' in male-oriented readings require no clarification in the view of the commentator.

According to Oesterley women in the Hebrew Bible are generally thought of and spoken of wholly from the point of view of man. In his view women are portrayed more positively within Proverbs than elsewhere within the Hebrew Bible because the setting in Proverbs is the domestic sphere as opposed to the national life of Israel. However,

herein is the basis of traditional interpretations of the text: women are indeed portrayed in good and bad lights but both portrayals, I would suggest, are measured against male expectation of female character and male-defined female roles within society. Accordingly the 'positive' portrayal of wife and homemaker is contrasted with the 'negative' one of contentious wife and the adulteress and harlot, which in Oesterley's words is the "less pleasing side of the subject [which] bears out, however, the anything but submissive and inferior position generally implied in the Old Testament books. In fact it is the man rather than the woman who is the victim according to some passages" (1929 p. lxxxiii).[3] Oesterley might appear sympathetic to an understanding that a woman is 'victimised' by only being viewed through a man's eyes; however his words highlight that it is the man who remains the focus of attention, and a woman's character and behaviour are measured according to the impact they have upon him, for good or ill. Conversely the reverse does not usually occur.

As welcome, and as radical, as Oesterley's contribution might be in terms of an introduction to the subject in its day, understandably for its time it measures the worth of the woman in terms of the honour accorded to her husband or the threat which she poses to the well-being of other men (cf. Proverbs 6:26, 12:4). One might question whether Oesterley himself views the "less pleasing side of the subject" purely as such because the man is portrayed as the victim. Much of the scholarship which has followed still measures the portrayal of woman within the book in similar terms.

Moving on from Oesterley and returning again to Whybray, he notes that subsequent works concentrate more explicitly on Proverbs 1-9 and 31:10-31,

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[3] In the introduction to Chapter 5, I refute Oesterley's claim that Proverbs is exceptional amongst other biblical material in affording love and respect to the mother, contending that the sage's focus is in preventing unwanted behaviour by the son and that care and consideration to either parent is a by-product of this primary concern.

particularly the portrayal of the Woman of Worth of the final chapter, the debate primarily focused on whether she is a symbolic figure of the wisdom portrayed throughout the book or a representation of 'real' women. Whybray makes brief mention of H. Ringgren (1967), E. Jacob (1971) and A. Barucq (1972), all of whom advocate a connection between the woman in Proverbs 31:10-31 and wisdom but disagree in terms of the presentation of the woman herself as real or symbolic, and S. Amsler (1979) who sees the main emphasis on women throughout the book, not as mothers or teachers, but as wise counsellors offering advice to men. Amsler's argument is that women in Proverbs claim the right to speech, and in exercising this right, they use it effectively either for good or ill. This notion of women as counsellors is developed by presenting wisdom in a female guise as the supreme counsellor (Whybray, 1995 pp. 143-144).

One of the most notable contributions comes with the publication of Claudia Camp's *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (1985) which presents a study of the portrayal of wisdom as based on real women in Israel and advocates that the negative portrayals are merely stereotypical. Camp puts forth the proposition that, in spite of the differing literary styles of the poems in chapters 1-9 and 31 and the intervening proverb collections, the poems themselves form a hermeneutical framework which provide a performance context through which the intervening proverb collections can be reinterpreted (1985 p. 14). She contends that when an individual proverb is placed in a literary collection it is incoherent in both form and content, by virtue of its brevity and the lack of a performance context which renders meaning to it. This is remedied, however, by the literary work itself: stylistically, the female imagery present in the poems at the beginning and end of the book create a literary framework for the

work as a whole; thematically, the sections of the book are held together by female imagery and wisdom which appear in all three sections of the book (1985 p. 207).

I shall discuss Camp's proposal more fully in Chapter 4 but for now it is worth noting that whilst there has been much subsequent discussion concerning the portrayal of Wisdom, the Strange Woman and the Woman of Worth there has been little discussion of the impact of the framework on the interpretation of the Proverbs collections, and in particular on the portrayal of women throughout the book, a point which has not gone unnoticed by Knut Heim (2008 p. 21). Wisdom is presented in feminine form by the sages as something to be sought after, cleverly connecting the ethereal with the no doubt practical concern of the young men of the day, that of finding a good wife. One might conclude that, rather than seeing women as complicated characters integrating both wisdom and folly, the binary oppositions that women present in the mind of the sages gave rise to them feminizing wisdom and her antithesis the Strange Woman.[4]

Whybray also draws attention to the contributions of T.L. McCreesh (1985) and E.L. Lyons (1986), both of whom focus on the portrayal of the woman in 31:10-31, and finally on A. Brenner's (1993) work on women in general in wisdom literature in the Hebrew Bible and her arguments for the discovery of female ('F') voices therein. Whybray acknowledges the growth of interest in the topic of women and Proverbs following Camp's publication as a result of the growing wave of feminist interest in women in the Hebrew Bible in general, and in wisdom literature in particular. There

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[4] A modern rebuttal of this binary difference is to be found in the film Maleficent, a reworking of the traditional fairy tale Sleeping Beauty, in which the principal character is the supposed wicked fairy Maleficent, who not only casts the original spell but also reawakens Sleeping Beauty from her sleep. The narrator's final words: 'So you see, the story is not quite as you were told, and I should know, for I was the one they called "Sleeping Beauty". In the end, my kingdom was united not by a hero or a villain, as legend had predicted, but by *one who was both hero and villain*. And her name was Maleficent' (Stromberg, 2014 my emphasis).

have been steady contributions in the latter part of the twentieth and early part of the twenty-first centuries, although much of this continues to focus, perhaps understandably, on the portrayals of Wisdom, the Strange Woman and the Woman of Worth. There has been less scholarly interest in the portrayals of women in the intervening collections (Proverbs 10-29), perhaps partly because at first sight there do not appear to be many, and because the short sentences are not thought to lend themselves easily to literary-critical methods, a methodological approach more often favoured by feminist writers.

In terms of scholarly contributions since 1995, three important types of work on Proverbs appear, the first of which is a number of significant commentaries notably all by male scholars: R.E. Murphy (1998), R.J. Clifford (1999), L. Perdue (2000), M.V. Fox (2000; 2009), B.K. Waltke (2004; 2005) and E.C. Lucas (2015).[5] These scholars no longer ignore the portrayal of women within Proverbs although, as they engage with the text, they continue to advocate interpretations based upon binary representation. In terms of their contribution to this research, they provide a starting point for my own investigations in providing invaluable detailed exegesis. However, I will exercise a degree of caution when engaging with their interpretations where women are in focus because they appear to advocate, in their interpretations of the text, the same thinking about women which Oesterley demonstrated: that it is the man who remains the focus of attention and concern, and a woman's character and behaviour is judged solely according to the impact it has upon him.

The second category, specific to the portrayal of women in Proverbs and predominantly by feminist scholars, has generally continued to focus on the question of

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[5] Lucas' *Proverbs* was published too late for me to engage with at a significant level, although he is referred to in later chapters.

the hermeneutical framework first advocated by Camp and/or the portrayals of the female characters within Proverbs 1-9 and 31. The intervening chapters appear to attract little interest since, as I have previously stated, there appears to be less upon which to focus.

Thirdly, there has been a growing interest in the structure of Proverbs and the poetic devices used, and a strengthening of the arguments for the advocacy of a careful crafting of units within the proverbial statements of Proverbs 10-29. What follows is a brief overview of the latter two types of contribution since 1995, acknowledging that it is unlikely to represent a complete catalogue of works since Whybray's review. Furthermore, since most are dealt with in greater depth in the remaining chapters of this thesis, I shall restrict myself to providing the briefest outline of their scholarly interest and refrain from commenting on the authors' conclusions at this stage.

In the same year as Whybray's publication, *A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature* (Brenner, 1995) was published. Whilst Part I concentrates on social roles and literary figurations of women and wisdom, Part II focuses on wisdom and 'otherness' with articles exploring the identity of the female characters in Proverbs 1-9 and in particular the Strange Woman. Contributions are made by Meike Heijerman (1995), Gale Yee (1995a; 1995b), Claudia Camp (1995) and Harold Washington (1995).[6] A few years later A. Wolters (1988) presented a rare form-critical analysis of chapter 31:10-31

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[6] Meike Heijerman's *Who Would Blame Her? The 'Strange' Woman of Proverbs 7* was delivered as a lecture in Utrecht in 1993. Of the rest of the articles in this section all but one, *The Socio-Literary Production of the 'Foreign Woman' in Proverbs* (Yee, 1995b), were published elsewhere prior to inclusion in Brenner's Companion, but not included by Whybray in his review: Gale Yee (1989) *'I Have Perfumed My Bed with Myrrh': The Foreign Woman (ʾiššā zārâ) in Proverbs 1-9* JSOT 43 pp. 53-68; Claudia Camp (1988) *Wise and Strange: An Interpretation of the Female Imagery in Proverbs in Light of Trickster Mythology* in J. Bos and J.C Exum (eds.), Reasoning with the Foxes: Female Wit in a World of Male Power, Semeia 42 pp. 14-36; Harold C. Washington (1994) *The Strange Woman (אשה זרה/נכריה) of Proverbs 1-9 and Post-Exilic Judaean Society* in T.C Eskanazi and K.H. Richards (eds.), Second Temple Studies 2: Temple and Community in the Persian Period, Sheffield, JSOT Press pp. 217-242.

arguing that the poem could be seen as a heroic hymn and that, contrary to an erotic portrayal more usually encountered in ancient Near Eastern literature praising women, it is the activity of the woman which is extolled as opposed to her beauty (1988 pp. 456-457). Carol Meyers (1988; 1991) explores the possibility of a female voice in the opening nine chapters of Proverbs, building her case upon the use of the phrase *bêt 'em* (mother's house) which, although not present in Proverbs, can be deduced from the portrayal of both Wisdom and women who 'build' (Proverbs 9:1, 14:1, 24:3, 31:10-31). In an exploration of a possible correlation between the portrayal of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9 and a portrayal of women in society by Israelite sages, Judith McKinlay (1996 pp. 100-132) considers the portrayal of women as wives and mothers within the book as a whole. Her conclusion focuses predominately on the correlation between the opening nine chapters and the final chapter of Proverbs. The female figure of 31:10-31 is, she contends, wisdom domesticated although she does not represent the 'real' women of Israelite society but rather, the expectations of the sages (1996 pp. 131-132).

Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes (1996) focuses on women as the creators of Hebrew Bible texts by exploring literary genres, and Athalya Brenner (1996) advocates a female voice for Proverbs 1-9, her starting point a rejection of the traditional interpretation that it 'must' be a male speaking. A conclusion of Heim's work on proverbial clusters (the deliberate editorial placing of proverbs in thematic units) is that the perceived attitude of Proverbs towards women needs to be reassessed since statements about women can function as rhetorical devices to influence male behaviour, rather than characterising female stereotypes (2001 p. 316). Later, in an article on Proverbs 11:22, he challenges the traditional interpretation of the usually negative connotation between the pig and the

'woman without sense'. His reading conversely equates the young man with the pig, led by the nose by his beautiful but indiscrete wife (2008 p. 27).

Camp explores the concept of 'strangeness' building upon her 1995 article and arguing that the portrayal of the Strange Woman masks an ideology concerned with the problems of identity, theodicy, political struggle, purity and authority in a developing canon. The figure of the Strange Woman provides an entry into an understanding of some of those concerns (2000 pp. 70-71). Christine Roy Yoder's (2001) interest lies in the socio-economic context in which Proverbs 1-9 and 31:10-31 were crafted, and the impact that has on the origins of Wisdom. Based on lexical and thematic parallels between Wisdom and the figure in 31:10-31 she concludes that the two come together: in the 'father to son' instructions the father presents in Wisdom a portrayal of the Woman of Worth, whom the son is encouraged to seek as a wife. Carole Fontaine (2004) explores the depiction of women's social roles in Proverbs using intertextual comparisons with other ancient Near Eastern literature and concluding that women were the traditioners of wisdom both in the public and private spheres.

Nancy Tan's PhD (2004) attempts to uncover the historical background to the appearance of the Strange Woman in the text and to trace the development of a 'foreign woman' motif in subsequent literature, by careful study of semantics and an exploration of how sexual impropriety has become imputed into the Hebrew terms by which she is identified. In the same year Madipoane Masenya (2004) focused on interpreting Proverbs 31:10-31 from an African South-African perspective since it is a text traditionally used within her culture to outline the qualities of a good woman and cited to those who are to be married. Her approach is to endeavour to present a reading of the text that will empower the women to whom it is quoted. As the title of her book

suggests, Katherine Dell's (2006) interest lies in the social and theological aspect of Proverbs, and how its theology determines the relationship with other parts of the Hebrew Bible.

Stuart Weeks (2007) contributes to the field with a study of Proverbs 1-9 essentially examining its genre and its use of imagery and Peter Hatton (2008) argues for a more cohesive structure to Proverbs, that it is more than a collection of random sayings and passages. Amongst other things Hatton advocates a deliberate editorial strategy of antithetical repetition, comparing and contrasting the 'smooth words' of the Strange Woman in Proverbs 6:20-7:27 with the harsh reprimand of Lemuel's mother in 31:1-9, thus promoting an understanding that flattering words may be deceptive and harsh words are to be trusted, a recurrent theme in the book. Heim (2013) explores the use of variant repetition and further developed his advocacy of a careful crafting of the units within Proverbs 10-29.

2.3   Summary of findings

It is perhaps unsurprising that the majority of the writings focused on women in Proverbs are by women. This is not uncommon. Roland Boer's introduction in *No Road: On the Absence of Feminist Criticism of Ezra-Nehemiah* observes that the tendency in feminist biblical studies is to focus on texts that include women, using methods which seek to recover female characters and voices in the biblical materials, or deploying reconstructions which restore women to the historiography of ancient Israel or early Christianity (2005 p. 233). However, based on the cursory division of male and female authors, this review highlights three things.

Firstly, biblical commentaries on Proverbs in recent years have been written by men who continue to advocate the 'father to son' instruction genre as the context in which Proverbs is to be read and understood. In the main, despite their engagement with, and in some cases their sympathy for, feminist concerns they remain bound by the male-orientated reading strategies in which they themselves have been raised and, perhaps inadvertently, continue to perpetuate.

Secondly, the majority of female writers focus less specifically on the text itself, with the exception of Tan, for whom a large part of her thesis is devoted to an analysis of the Hebrew *zārâ* and *nokriyyâ*. Rather, they attend more specifically to the historical and social contexts and the way in which the reader receives the text, focussing predominantly on the portrayals of Wisdom and the Strange Woman in the opening nine chapters, and the Woman of Worth of chapter 31. The underlying assumption however, in all but Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes' *On Gendering Texts* (1996), concurs with their male counterparts' assumption: Proverbs is a male-authored text and the 'father to son' instruction genre remains the hermeneutic context. Furthermore, in light of the fact that the female scholars have chosen not to abandon the biblical text as irredeemably patriarchal, the portrayal of women is 'rescued' by interpretations that present the literary representation of women as an inaccurate reflection of the lives of women at the time. Instead, the text is understood as upholding the androcentric agenda of the male writers. This is a reversal of where we began with Oesterley. In his interpretation, an appreciation of the woman's domain (as defined by the sage and/or Oesterley himself) gives credence to the portrayal of women within the text; in modern interpretation, it is the reclamation of the lived experience which raises questions as to validity of the textual representation of women.

Finally, a third observation. Heim, Hatton and Waltke challenge the notion that Proverbs is a random collection of poems and sayings haphazardly thrown together. They employ a literary critical approach in looking at how the text, the genre, and the structures of Proverbs work and what that means for interpreting the poems and sayings for today. Their focus is on a careful analysis of the ways in which the verses of both the poems and aphorisms are set alongside one another, either adjacent or more importantly further apart, creating 'clusters' or 'units' of individual proverbial statements based on a thematic unity. Their readings lead us into an exploration of poetic function, of the way in which poetic parallelism and variant repetition function in Proverbs, and what that might offer in terms of new interpretations.

2.4   Conclusion

What has become evident in this review of scholarship is that to date, both male and female scholars have been inadvertently influenced by traditional male-orientated reading strategies. All respond to the text in gendered ways, either by perpetuating traditional interpretations which interpret the character or behaviour of women according to the impact it has upon the male, or by responding to the perceived 'maleness' of the text in assuming that the text itself has nothing positive, or at least very little, to say about women, and instead using approaches to provide interpretations more in keeping with a feminist agenda.

What also appears evident is that, despite the discussions concerning Camp's hermeneutical framework, there is little discussion on the impact of the framework on the portrayal of women in the book. If the hermeneutical framework can be said to exist, its concern is to portray wisdom and its antithesis through the use of female imagery as defined by the male sage. These binary portrayals as male-imagined feminine provide

the context for the rest of the material and therefore the question is whether the presence of female imagery in the framework does anything to aid the interpretation of the portrayal of women in the Proverbs collections. If this binary representation is compared to the portrayal of men within Proverbs, it is noteworthy that for men, as the focus of the 'instruction' contained within Proverbs, there is the scope for varying degrees of foolishness in their pursuit of wisdom. In contrast, women's representation, as either idealised or vilified, does not afford to them an equivalent scope which acknowledges, and does justice to, the complexity of female character; neither does it question what might cause the women to behave in the way they are described. It is these concerns that I hope to address in the course of this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

3.1   Introduction

As I commented in the opening introduction, interest in this research was piqued by the portrayal of the Strange Woman and my approach throughout has been to continue to ask questions of both the text and the interpretations that currently exist. I began with a broad view of the questions I wished to explore but the course of the research and the subsequent chapters have appeared as the response to each question raised pointed to the next step to be taken. This introduction, outlining the way in which the research took shape, provides a rationale for its final shape and the methods employed.

I began by exploring the question of the supposed hermeneutical framework of chapters 1-9 and 31, given that it provides an introduction to the portrayal of the female in Proverbs, replete as it is with female imagery. In exploring whether a deliberate editorial strategy exists in framing Proverbs with such imagery, the questions of whether that might impact on the relationship between the poems of chapter 31 and the potential for discovering a female contribution to the poem of 31:10-31 arose. These questions are the focus of Chapter 4. Following on from this, I endeavoured to identify evidence of literary genres associated with female participation in public life within the poems of Proverbs 31, which subsequently became the subject of Chapter 5, exploring also the reasons why women might choose to speak of other women in seemingly derogatory terms. Having suggested the possibility that women may have contributed to the material found in Proverbs, I then returned to my initial question – the portrayal of the Strange Woman. Here, in what became Chapter 6, I explored the semantic study of

the occurrences of the Hebrew words used to describe her, and considered the use of literary devices e.g. type-scenes and smoke screens, and the way in which they might influence an interpretation of her character. I then turned my attention to the less popular (in terms of scholarly research) characters of unnamed mothers and wives which became the contents of Chapters 7-9. Firstly, I focused on the unnamed mother of Proverbs 1-9 who appears alongside the father in poetic parallelism, seeking to determine whether her inclusion in the text represents a physical reality in terms of a contribution to the instruction, or is the product of a literary device. I explored the social setting for the material and what bearing it might have on a mother's role (or otherwise) in the instruction and education of future generations. The structure of Proverbs 1-9 was then explored, along with a semantic study of the word group 'teaching/instruction' and its relationship to the 'mother' through use of variant repetition. In Chapters 8 and 9 I employed the same approach in exploring the way in which the text itself forms our understanding, this time in connection with the 'mothers' and 'contentious wives' of Proverbs 10-29.

What might appear evident is that this research is not the product of a single hermeneutical method. It incorporates an integrated approach, using a variety of methods that seek to answer the questions that are raised, as the research takes shape. It is however, shaped by three areas of specific interest: it pays deliberate attention to the impact of male-oriented reading strategies upon current interpretation; it is informed by a feminist approach; and it explores the use of poetics in the text. I shall explore each of these in due course, following a brief discussion of the rationale for an integrated approach.

3.2   An integrated approach

Towards the latter end of the twentieth century there was an increasing rejection of the 'certainties' of historical-critical methods and their focus on the world of the author, and a growing interest in the text in its present form and its reception in the present day. A major criticism of the historical-critical approach, at least from a feminist perspective, was that in its attempts to reconstruct the text, context and meaning of scripture it did so, not from an unbiased perspective but rather expressed the world-view and 'norms' of the exegetes themselves who are most typically white males in academic institutions:

> As for biblical studies, if not all biblical students are male, it is the case that many of us sat, or currently sit, at the feet of male teachers, where we are taught the norms and practices of what Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has termed 'malestream' biblical scholarship. Unlike feminist criticism, this form of scholarship does not describe its agenda in terms of gendered interests and perspectives. Rather, its explicit goal is to reconstruct the original text, context and meaning of Scripture by applying objective, value-free, scientific methodology enshrined in historical and related criticisms. Yet it is clear, at least to feminist critics, that the interpretive activities directed towards this goal, far from being value-free, express the norms and world-view of the exegetes themselves (Reinhartz, 1997 p. 31).

Hence new methods of interpretation arose concerned with the text and its reception, and texts were reinterpreted with a view to what they might have to say to the reader and the concerns and ideologies which they brought to the reading of the text. New literary critical methods evolved, taking their lead from methods applied in the study of literature and in time moving away from the concern of obtaining an interpretation of the text to subjecting it to ideological interrogation (Exum and Clines, 1993 p. 14). With the introduction of methods from secular literary studies into biblical scholarship, literary criticism has itself become an umbrella term for methods concerned with biblical text as an end-product. Literary critical methods were themselves subject

to criticism from 'traditional' interpreters who continued to advocate a 'value-free' methodological approach and who viewed this new approach as being too subjective, effectively interpreting a text in a way that suited the interpreter's agenda.

There is, however, an inherent danger in insisting that there is a 'correct' method which, if discovered, would produce an infallible interpretation of the text. One of the consequences of this search for the holy grail of methods is that each 'new' method declares its predecessor as obsolete and tends to assume that the non-academic reader is incapable of engaging critically with the text (Barton, 1996 p. 5). In recent years there has been a growing interest in the way varying methods should be used in connection with one another, and previous 'certainties' concerning specific methodological approaches have come under scrutiny. This has led to a call for a culture of combining methods and a growing recognition of the fallibility of the 'value-free' approach.

Two prominent proponents of an integrated approach are Susan E. Gillingham and W. Randolph Tate. In her book *One Bible, Many Voices: Different Approaches to Biblical Studies* (1998), Gillingham argues for plurality in the reading of the Bible combining theological, historical and literary approaches to biblical interpretation. She provides a good summary of the theological, historical-critical and literary critical approaches to hermeneutics.

The theological approach understandably seeks to interpret a text from and for a faith perspective. The historical-critical approach focuses on the purported author's historical context, the date of the work, sources used by the author, oral and written forms chosen by the author, traditions which influenced the author and editors of the text and finally, the redactors of the text (Gillingham, 1998 p. 157). Its focus is very much on the world of the author. In contrast, the literary critical approach is concerned,

not with the purported author of the text but with the text in its present form, with its structure and with the role of the reader in receipt of the text. Where historical criticism (the diachronic approach) endeavours to look through the different layers of interpretation and editing that have shaped the text into its current form, literary criticism (the synchronic approach) endeavours to work alongside the present form of the text: unconcerned with the shaping of the text through the historical process, it asks questions about the shape of the text in its current form (Gillingham, 1998 p. 173).

All three approaches have their drawbacks. A purely theological approach exposes the interpreter to making the text fit the theological argument that is being espoused. In terms of historical criticism, whilst an understanding of where a text came from can assist in interpreting the text, the approach can lack an appreciation of the subtleties of the literary form. Finally, the literary critical approach, focusing as it usually does on a larger section of text, can (according to Gillingham) miss the significance of its smaller constituents, and is particularly problematic in terms of the poems and didactic material (Gillingham, 1998 p. 25).

In his book *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach* (2008), Tate speaks of "a journey into three worlds". These three worlds are identified as *author-centred, text-centred* and *reader-centred.* The first, the author-centred approach, echoes the historical-critical approach with its emphasis on the author and the author's world, what Tate terms the world *behind the text*. The text-centred approach cuts the text free from its historical ties (and to an extent, from its reader) and considers its meaning and value to derive from the text itself. Tate labels this as the world *within the text*. Finally he considers the world *in front of the text* i.e. the reader-centred approach; it is the reader who brings meaning to the text, the author's intention is negated and the text is re-

contextualised by the world-view and experience of the reader. At its most simple, a text is meaningless until something is read into it. An integration of all three approaches is required according to Tate: in written communication an author intends to convey meaning through the text to a reader and that meaning is derived through the conversation between the text and reader with the world behind the text informing the conversation (Tate, 2008 pp. 1-6).

As I noted at the beginning of this thesis, this enquiry into the portrayal of women in the Proverbs began with a question which I raised because I was a woman who was (at that time) training for ordained ministry in a church grappling theologically with the role that women might play within it. There are three key features which inform the way in which I shall endeavour to provide a response to the question raised. The first is the predominantly male standpoint: that the compilers and original intended recipients of Proverbs were male, with male interests at heart, and the almost universal assumption that the father-to-son genre is the hermeneutical context through which Proverbs is to be interpreted. This takes me, in Tate's parlance, to an exploration of the world *behind the text*. The second is that, *in front of the text*, how might this female, originally an unintended recipient of the text, not only negotiate the perceived 'maleness' of the text as it is imagined, but also re-contextualise Proverbs from a feminist world-view? Finally, what meaning can be derived from *within the text* by exploring the nature of the text itself, specifically by paying attention to its poetics?

3.3   Male-orientated reading strategies

Male-orientated reading strategies, by both male and female readers, have focused on the understanding that the compilers of Proverbs were male, had only male interests at heart, and that the recipients of the material were male. Individual proverbs which

speak of female characters or characteristics have traditionally been understood and interpreted in this context. This one-dimensional reading prevalent both *behind* and *in front of the text* has generally meant that however derogatory a proverb may appear in its treatment of the female character, it is usually explained or justified on the basis that the material is written by men, for men, with male interests as their focus and therefore in some way ought to be either excused, simply recognised for what it is, or ignored. Fox serves well as an illustration:

> Murphy is troubled that sayings about shrewish wives are never balanced by complaints about quarrelsome *husbands.* This imbalance is due to the fact that the compilers were men who saw things from the male standpoint alone. But proverbs are everywhere and everyone's, and women may have had equally sharp sayings of their own about nasty husbands (2009 p. 683).

Fox's comment about women having sayings about men is undoubtedly correct, but his statement demonstrates the prevalent one-dimensional reading of the text, employed by both male and female readers, critically and uncritically: reading *behind* and *in front of the text* in this way fails to allow for the possibility of greater complexity in the authorship and compilation of Proverbs. An integrated approach suspends the male-oriented line of thinking and offers the opportunity to explore whether the authors of the text are more subtle than we have hitherto allowed them to be.

Another way in which the proverbs are justified is to allude to the Woman of Worth of 31:10-31 and the many positive actions and qualities attributed to her. Here I shall quote Waltke who, when referring to Proverbs 21:9, states that the proverb "expresses contempt for a brawling wife, not for generic woman *(cf. 31:10-31)*" (2005 p. 175 my emphasis). Here the Woman of Worth is held up as the very model of wise behaviour, a 'prize' for the son "who finds the LORD's favor in a wife who in mutual love submits to him and builds up the household" (Waltke, 2005 p. 175). These are

Waltke's interpretations, clumsily arguing that the description of contentiousness is not applicable to all women because Proverbs makes reference elsewhere to 'good' female qualities. The impact of his statements however, in referring to the Woman of Worth, reinforces the male perception of female wise behaviour, and advocates it as a reward for the man who seeks after wisdom.

An alternative interpretation is to consider that the Woman of Worth has a heavy workload while her husband takes credit for her endeavours whilst sitting at the gate (31:23). A woman's usual focus is understood to be the running of her home, protecting the honour of her husband by remaining with the confines of the private sphere and granted honour by her husband's trust in her (31:11). However in the Woman of Worth's case she breaks this taboo; she enters the public domain but is again accorded praise because she enters the public arena in order to serve her husband's interests (Fontaine, 2004 p. 29). Her value appears to be derived from the honour that she brings to her husband, appearing to have no value in and of her own right. Whilst it may indeed be rare for a woman to be praised, and for domestic chores to be so publicly lauded, the main focus could be said to be her service to others. There is also another troubling aspect to the praise that she receives: she is favourably compared to other women and is judged to exceed them in her accomplishments (31:29), resulting potentially in other women being chided for not reaching such lofty expectations. Hence, this male-defined commendation of her value, at the expense of other women, cannot justifiably be used as a tool to offset negative portrayals of women elsewhere.

There are then two essential difficulties, which I, as a female reader of Proverbs, have with much of the scholarship to date: firstly, the explanations and/or justifications of seemingly problematic verses provide little or no explanation as to *why the woman*

behaves in the manner she does. My reaction on reading such material is not to smile wryly at the implication that that is the way women are, but to be, if not enraged, then saddened that the portrayal of women in this way can so easily be glossed over. Neither am I inclined to make apology for what appears to be the seemingly misogynistic nature of the literature. This appears most evident in the interpretations of the portrayals of the Strange Woman in the opening chapters and the contentious wife (19:13; 21:9, 19: 25:24; 27:15).

The portrayal of the Strange Woman focuses on both her character and the threat she is perceived to represent in being somehow 'other' in respect of male expectation of female behaviour. This 'otherness', most commonly interpreted as the danger of sexual attraction, is a theme which runs through Proverbs 1-9, in her portrayal as the antithesis to Wisdom and 'the wife of one's youth' (5:18). In contrast, other than a reference to the danger of her mouth (22:14), no other reference is made to women's 'otherness' in Proverbs 10-29. Here, in contrast to the plethora of female imagery in Proverbs 1-9 and 31, reference to women is sporadic: a gracious woman takes hold of honour (11:16); her beauty and good sense are contrasted in 11:22; a good wife is the crown of her husband, while a shameful one causes decay in his bones (12:4); finding a wife is good, although no mention is made of her character (18:22); a prudent wife is from the Lord (19:14); and the five references to the contentious wife, as noted above. W*hy* then, given the scarcity of references to a wife, should the sages choose to include references to women which are not specific to her 'otherness', and why the specific focus on the alleged character flaw of contentiousness?

In the main, scholarly focus has been on the female characters in Proverbs 1-9 and 31. To my knowledge very little work has been carried out by women on the statements

contained in Proverbs 10-29, or indeed by men who are both sympathetic to the interpretation of female characterisation and incorporate it into their interpretative strategies. Whilst there has been a growing sense of discomfort about some of the proverbs which make reference to women, in the main there has been little attempt to reinterpret the proverbs, such is the predominance of traditional interpretative strategies.[7] The generally accepted hermeneutic framework (Proverbs 1-9 and 31) is purported to provide a performance context for the individual proverbs but, as Heim points out, in terms of statements about women the impact of it is hardly noticeable (2008 p. 21). Heim also suggests that a detailed study of the material by and about women in the collections is needed from the perspective of gender relations, and healthy and legitimate relationships with women by men who are being trained as leaders of society. This study is an attempt to meet that objective. Interest is piqued therefore not only by what is said about the woman, alerting us to her presence, but by the very scarcity of the material. Why *is a woman in focus* and what might that mean in terms of possible (re)interpretations of the proverbs themselves?

Hence, the problematic verses in chapters 10-29 need to be analysed on their own terms without having recourse to the images portrayed in the opening nine chapters or in the poem at the end of Proverbs. What therefore constitutes an appropriate reading strategy? The first component is to recognise that the text and traditional male-focused interpretations are both part of the dominant group's manifesto in which the ruling class ideology is presented as 'normal' and all else is considered to be deviant and/or irrational (Rowland, 2006 p. 659). Until relatively recently, interpretation of the text has sought, either deliberately or unconsciously, to maintain the status quo with alternative

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[7] For examples of scholarly discomfort with some of the traditional interpretations, in this case Proverbs 11:22 and the comparison of a woman to a pig, see Heim's article on Proverbs 11:22 (2008)

viewpoints discarded because they do not fit the agenda of those who have made the rules. Even when aware of it, it can be difficult to read through a different lens, conditioned as we might have been, regardless of our personal context, to view the world from the white male ruler perspective. Writing from an African-South African perspective, Masenya (2004 p. 2) points out that past and present biblical scholarship, not only in South Africa but throughout the world, has been predominantly white and male, the domain of the privileged few. Only within the last fifty years has this dominant approach been significantly challenged by alternative readings, wherein the texts are interpreted not solely in terms of their ideas but rather, politically and economically. In terms of the material in Proverbs 10-29, there are two approaches to be taken: a re-evaluation of the use of the hermeneutical framework (Proverbs 1-9 & 31) as a means of interpreting the proverbial statements, and a rereading of the individual proverbial statements.

3.4   Feminist approaches

Let me begin with self-identification. In engaging with the text, I am not a neutral. I self-identify as a white, heterosexual Christian woman, living in the First World. It is this self-identification that I bring to my engagement with the text and with those who have preceded me in their own scholarly endeavours. To disclose my self-identification signals something of my methodology, in that I abandon any pretence at approaching the text from a neutral perspective and am concerned primarily with what the text has to say in terms of its representation of women and how that may be understood in today's society.

Feminist theology is concerned, in the main, with the issue of gender oppression. It offers both a critique of the patriarchal ideology of biblical writers but also seeks to

respond to current-day issues of gender inequality. Hence, it engages both with the biblical text and the world in which we live (Gillingham, 1998 pp. 141-143). However, one of the difficulties for feminists who self-identify as Christian is the tension in engaging with a text which is defined as canon within the faith whilst at the same time recognising that both the biblical text and the faith system in which one operates are androcentric.

Claudia Camp explores this tension in *Feminist Theological Hermeneutics: Canon and Christian Identity* (1994 pp. 154-169). In a discussion on defining canon she cites Carolyn Osiek's five part typology as helpful in providing an understanding of feminist theological hermeneutics. Osiek suggests that there are five ways in which women in Christian communities respond and adjust when they become aware that they are part of a patriarchal religious system and that the Bible is an instrument used to reinforce the existing structures (1985 pp. 97-105). The first of Osiek's suggested responses is a *rejectionist* approach in which the Bible and Judaism and Christianity, in its most radical expressions, are rejected as irredeemably patriarchal. This most extreme position, in which maleness is defined as evil and femaleness good, is described by Osiek as 'radical separatism'. Here the redemptive nature of the Judeo-Christian tradition is denied and the structure and its supporters are a lost cause. At the opposite end of the scale is the *loyalist* approach, proponents of which accept the Bible as divine revelation, not requiring vindication by human authority, rather human submission. However, within this understanding it is also understood that God's intention for women and men is mutual respect, and it is therefore the interpretation rather than the text which is at fault. In her appraisal of this approach Osiek commends it for its use of exegetical method. At the same time she notes as its weaknesses its temptation to appeal

to history and the literal meaning of the texts, and its failure to recognise the political implications of the gender-defined roles that it advocates as part of divine revelation.

The third hermeneutical approach is a *revisionist* approach which seeks to reclaim the text, recognising that it is historically determined but open to theologically reinterpretation, portraying women more positively within the tradition through exegetical methods and recourse to cultural context. Its starting point is not to abandon the tradition, rather to place women more securely within it, seeking to present positive role models for women. Its major flaw, in Osiek's opinion, is that in carefully reconstructing evidence of women in the text it fails to challenge the system which has kept them in their male-defined places. A *sublimationist* approach distinguishes between male and female but rather than exalting male over female equates, or even determines as superior, feminine traits over masculine. Hence the focus is on the search for female imagery, exalting feminine qualities which, according to Osiek, can lead to exclusivism and a lack of engagement with the social-political dimensions of the text. Finally, a *liberationist* approach defines salvation as liberation in the world and views the Bible through the lens of women's struggle against all forms of oppression. Osiek understands the choice of any of the five positions to be a true alternative borne out of an individual's experience and human conditioning. However, this is not a universally held view and Camp cites Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza as one who would challenge whether all positions are capable of dealing with the sources of oppression and have the ability to combat them.

Schüssler Fiorenza argues for a more critical approach to feminist interpretation which does not seek to make apologies for scripture. She advocates a move from an androcentric to a feminist interpretive framework. In doing so, she contends that

feminist theologians' central commitment and accountability are not to the male institution of church, tradition, or the Bible as a whole, but rather to women in the church, to a feminist transformation of Christian traditions, and to the liberating Word of God found in the Bible (1984 pp. 2-3). This is not to argue for a separation of genders but "to underline the visibility of women in biblical religion and to safeguard our freedom from spiritual control" (1984 p. 7). Schüssler Fiorenza's advocacy for liberation in this way questions the role of the Bible. Is it possible that the Bible, as a product of a patriarchal culture, can be used in the struggle against oppression by the women against whom it has been used as a tool of subjugation?

The problem, as Schüssler Fiorenza sees it, is that the Bible is seen as a "mythical archetype rather than as a historical prototype open to feminist theological transformation" (1984 p. 10). The "mythical archetype" ascribes to the historical texts and situations of the Bible an eternal 'norm' for the faith community which the Bible itself serves. Since the 'norm' of the Bible is inherently patriarchal, patterns of behaviours and understandings within the faith community are therefore patriarchal. Based on this understanding, a feminist approach essentially has the choice either to accept it unchallenged or to reject it outright.

Schüssler Fiorenza's response to this dilemma is to view the Bible as a historical prototype which is capable of transformation and able to be subject to critical scrutiny which has at its heart women's liberation and wholeness. Feminist critical hermeneutics "follows Augustine, Thomas, and the Second Vatican Council in formulating a criterion or canon that limits inspired truth and revelation to matters pertaining to the salvation, freedom and liberation of all, especially women" (1984 p. 14). However, when Schüssler Fiorenza speaks of canon, its source is not the biblical text but rather the

community of women struggling against oppression: biblical texts are placed under the authority of feminist experience and held as canon only in so far as they speak to the salvation of women (1984 p. 14). It is this claim to women's authority over the Bible which separates Schüssler Fiorenza from other feminist theologians and which, according to Camp, is important, not only for the advance of the cause of women but also:

> in terms of a critical theory that refuses to validate its claim by appeal to a 'transcendent other'. If there are biblical texts that support women's struggles against oppression, they do so because women claim them in this struggle, not because God (or any other transcendent, de-historicized ideal) says so (1994 pp. 158-159).

This is an attractive proposition although it undoubtedly raises the question about the authority of the Bible and how that might be understood. In terms of a critical hermeneutic, Camp acknowledges the tension, identifying that for most the Bible, as the perceived Word of God, is authoritative and that a complete denial of such is a step too far too soon. In addition, she also notes that whilst the Bible might be claimed in the struggle for freedom from oppression, it is also used, by the same people, as the inspiration to strive for justice. Camp's compromise is therefore to call for a reconceptualization of biblical authority, which embraces Schüssler Fiorenza's claim to the authority of biblical people but also takes more account of the role of the Bible in defining those people. She proposes three complementary models of biblical authority in feminist hermeneutics: the Dialogue Authority Model; the Metaphor Model; and the Trickster Model (1994 pp. 161-169).

In the first of these Camp acknowledges that for many Christian women the Bible is unquestioningly accepted as the authoritative word on individual and communal identity, but that this authority needs to be distinguished from coercion or influence, the

Bible perceived as little more than another piece of information in a decision making process. In contrast, authority is defined as "a free surrendering to the jurisdiction of scripture" (1994 p. 162), and although this may vary amongst individuals the important factor is that this surrendering is free from coercion. Thus authority is a two way process: as individuals grant the text the permission to allow it to shape their life, so those same people need the authority to grant permission. This comes from the text which needs people with which to engage in order that it may continue to reveal itself as life-giving. Thus, in this dialogue between text and reader each grants authority to the other.

The second of Camp's models draws upon the work of Sally McFague (1982) and her understanding of the Bible as a "poetic classic" and "classic model" for Christianity, and metaphorical theology. Whilst use of the term 'classic' acknowledges the Bible's conservative character, 'poetry' and 'model' suggest its ability to be radical and to transform and its ability, as poetry, to be continually reimagined. The concept of metaphor therefore, according to Camp, "can provide both a theological perspective on the nature of scriptural authority itself and also a methodological tool for allowing liberating seeds of the tradition, heretofore scattered and fallow, to blossom forth with possibilities for new structures of reality" (1994 p. 165). Authority of the metaphor, in this sense, derives from the source itself and from its capacity to empower and liberate.

The third model is the Trickster model in which Camp describes "the biblical image of the "strange woman" provid[ing] a hermeneutical key for the difficult attraction of Christian women and androcentric text" (1994 p. 166). Camp defines the trickster as one who stands on the edge of authority and who, above all, continually reminds those in authority that chaos and disorder are an ever-present threat to their

structures of power and themselves as holders of power. In terms of my own enquiries, reading as a trickster adopts this liminal position recognising the binary representation of woman within the text as either good or evil and seeking to subvert the polarised position which endeavours to keep women in their (male defined) places. It also embraces, rather than seeking to negate, the tensions that women experience in engaging with both the text and the systems within which they work.

I find both Schüssler Fiorenza's argument and Camp's nuanced interpretation thereof compelling. It provides an answer to the conundrum of biblical authority, a means by which I can engage critically with the text of Proverbs as a text which is inherently androcentric. Camp's Dialogue Authority model has much resonance and rather than a rejection of what has been written it does not demand unquestioning allegiance. If the text has authority it does so because something in it has caused the reader to take it seriously whilst at the same time it can only have the authority that the reader grants it. Combined with this, her Metaphor model enables the text to be seen as more than words on paper: what idea or imagery is being portrayed which concurs with and upholds the overriding narrative of Scripture that God wills for all people life and wholeness. As I shall demonstrate in the following discussion on poetics, imagination is a tool to be used in interpreting Scripture. Finally her Trickster model is a reminder that things are generally never as neatly contained as those who hold power would like them to be. A challenge of using Camp's approach is to recognise that I, as an ordained leader in the Church of England which continues to struggle with the role of women within it and is renegotiating its own sense of importance and influence as the established church in an increasingly multi-faith and secular society, am also a holder of power within that organisation. Therefore I am held to account by the approach Camp advocates. This is

particularly pertinent in attempting to unmask male-oriented reading strategies. I need to be attentive to my own bias and the ways in which I continue to perpetuate those strategies which I have both consciously and unconsciously inherited: to recognise that any possible reinterpretations which might arise from my work, are themselves likely to be held as the product of this particular white heterosexual female's imagination. This, in a sense, is to live with paradox and an example of the lack of a neat and all-encompassing approach to feminist hermeneutics. To recognise it as such is to be attentive to the challenges and the discomfort that it presents.

3.5 Poetics

The origin of Hebrew wisdom literature is open to debate with no commonly held consensus as to the origins of the proverbial statements in Proverbs. Discussions on the subject tend to focus on whether the source of individual proverbs are popular sayings within the domestic context or 'literary proverbs' created within a more formal context, i.e. a court setting, whether the superscriptions denote the actual author and whether some of the material is 'borrowed' from other ancient Near Eastern literature (Fox, 2000 pp. 6-12; Waltke, 2004 pp. 31-37; Whybray, 1995 pp. 35-42). Despite this apparent lack of consensus as to its origins, in terms of its literary genre there is a general acceptance that Proverbs should be classified as poetry. However the acute terseness of the poetry within Proverbs and the way in which individual proverbs might appear not to be connected to their surrounding material raises the question of whether Proverbs is a random collection of independent sayings or whether there is a deliberate editorial strategy in the arrangement of proverbial statements to form coherent groupings. Arguments for the former are based on the independent nature of the individual proverb and its integrity as such, and the un-predictableness of proverb repetition, both in terms

of the variations and where repetitions are located (Heim, 2001 p. 18). Advocates for the existence of coherent groupings so do on the basis of paronomasia and catch words, structuralism, poetics, semantics and thematic links (Waltke, 2004 pp. 17-21).[8]

An individual proverb is understood to make sense because the reader or hearer has some comprehension of the context out of which it has arisen, i.e. its performance context. Claudia Camp's (1985) proposal for a hermeneutical framework which provides a performance context for the whole of Proverbs will be discussed in the next chapter but it seems reasonable to suggest here that even if there is a framework which provides a performance context for Proverbs as a whole, then there is also the possibility that a literary performance context is provided by the material located around an individual proverb. An accusation against this viewpoint is that the proverb can be interpreted in a way that meets the need of the person interpreting it. However no proverb is ever interpreted in a vacuum. Whilst we can endeavour to ascertain the context from which an individual proverb arose it cannot be verified. Therefore any interpretations which currently exist for a given proverb arise from the interpreter's understanding of the original context (such as it is) and the interpreter's own understanding of the way in which the world works.

Heim comments that "a contextual interpretation of the individual sayings against their literary background is suggested by the material itself" (2001 p. 313). He observes that whilst there appears to be a growing consensus concerning the existence of editorial groupings, there is still disagreement concerning their quantity, extent and significance; there appears to be no over-arching rationale which might explain the structure of the collections; and there exist unanswered questions concerning the relationship between

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[8] Chapters 1 and 3 of Heim's *Like Grapes of Gold set in Silver* (2001) discuss denial and affirmation of coherent groupings detailing individual contributions on both sides of the discussion.

individual sayings and the collections, the relationship between the main sets of appellations and similar vocabulary, and what criteria might be used for delimiting editorial groupings. I hope, through this study, to contribute to the latter, to ascertain whether potential coherent groupings can be identified through exploring the placing of individual proverbs which refer to mothers and wives.

3.5.1 Poetic line terminology

I shall begin with a clarification of the terminology, since even a brief excursion into the discussion of poetic parallelism reveals an array of designations for the constituent parts of a poetic verse, which in the main consists of two halves, although on occasions may have more. In modern Hebrew editions of ancient Hebrew biblical text e.g. BHS, BHQ, a poetic verse of typical length is written as one line of text, with clear markers to identify both the end of the first half and the end of the verse itself. In English, the need for more words in translation means that a verse generally appears as two lines of text. These partial lines are most commonly called *colon* (singular) and *cola* (plural) and the verse consisting of two halves a *couplet* or *bicolon.* This brief explanation demonstrates the difficulty in referring to part or all of the verse as a *line* since without continual reference to the translation it is not immediately apparent to what is being referred. For this reason, and for others which derive from the practical problem of fitting text onto the page which need not detain us, Heim determines to use the term *poetic line* for that which I have been referring to as the verse, and *half-line* or *partial line* for its component parts. Heim (2013 pp. 12-14) provides a detailed explanation of the reasoning behind the terminology he prefers which on inspection is not without justification and, since I intend to use Heim's work as a basis for my own, it would appear sensible to remain consistent with his terminology.

In terms of the various levels of parallelism, Heim again provides an explanation of what he calls 'four levels' of parallelism which he identifies as: *intralinear* - the 'normal' parallelism between partial lines: *semilinear*, after Watson (1994), *interlinear* after Alter (1985) and finally the fourth, *translinear*. Heim is not the only scholar to have identified a fourth level, as he himself acknowledges: Dennis Pardee (1988), using different terminology, identifies a fourth level of parallelism entailing non-adjacent poetic lines. This point does not go unnoticed by Van Leeuwen (1988 p. 54) who quotes an earlier unpublished work of Pardee's suggesting that 'distant' parallelism functions to bind larger structures together and that the greater the distance between the parallel lines the more likely the link is to be through repetition. Pardee's (1988 p. xv) stated intent is an analysis of two trial texts (Ugaritic and Hebrew Bible) on the basis of methods employed in the study of Hebrew poetry. His perspective is the techniques of analysis available to the modern critic as opposed to the techniques available to the ancient poet. His investigations lead him to conclude that repetitive parallelism is a significant feature in near and distant distributions in Proverbs 2, that "semantic parallelism … must be strengthened by repetition of roots and words when used at greater distances" (Pardee, 1988 p. 152). Hence investigation into potential parallelism needs to be extended beyond the poetic line.

Pardee's proposals have not received scholarly support, primarily because of his focus on non-biblical materials and his concentration on the recurrence of single words or short phrases rather than the wider scope that variant repetition permits across partial lines (Heim, 2013 p. 30). Heim chooses not to adopt Pardee's terminology preferring to use his own (pp. 29-32). For ease of clarification a summary of their respective terminology is set out below:

Parallelism	Heim	Pardee	Example
Within a partial line	Semilinear	Half-line	Prov. 6:10
Between the partial lines	Intralinear	Regular	Prov. 6:10
Adjacent poetic lines	Interlinear	Near	Prov. 26:4-5
Partial lines separated by one or more poetic lines	Translinear	Distant	Prov. 10:6b & 10:11b

Heim's terminology is quasi-new. Whilst Pardee's has the advantage of being 'simple', Heim's is consistent with the terminology used by Alter (as demonstrated below) and is perhaps more in keeping with the Hebrew if a 'line' is recognised as a line of Hebrew text and not the English translation. I shall, therefore, once again remain consistent with Heim's terminology.

Both Pardee and Heim advocate an expansion of understanding of poetic parallelism, and I will be paying particular attention to translinear parallelism. As will become evident in my discussion of Adele Berlin below, I agree with her insistence that by focusing too much on the individual line, the bigger picture is in danger of being lost and thereby the potential for intentional ambiguity in poetic text can be lost. By identifying parallelism across one or more poetic lines connections may be made which have hitherto been unidentified. In addition, the sporadic reference to women in the collections alerts us to an exploration of the possibility of an intentional reason for their appearance; furthermore variant repetition (particularly about the contentious woman) features within those poetic lines.

Having established the terminology that I shall use, and the reasons for so doing I shall now turn my attention to a discussion of poetic parallelism, "if … [not] *the* hallmark of biblical poetry … nevertheless a very formative component" (Kuntz, 1999 p. 50 his emphasis). What becomes evident from the following discussion is that there is

no general consensus as to how parallelism functions within the text. Overall, scholarly discussion concentrates on the function of parallelism in the identification and classification of biblical Hebrew text as poetry as opposed to prose. I do not intend to engage with this debate since I am less interested in the literary characteristic per se, but rather the way in which parallelism functions to produce meaning.

3.5.2 **Poetic parallelism**

As part of his study Heim (2013) provides a review of literature on both poetic parallelism and variant repetition. He acknowledges the contribution of J. Kenneth Kuntz's (1998; 1999) reviews and evaluation of scholarly literature on parallelism and Hebrew poetry up to 1997. Hence he limits his own review to the significant contributions that impact on the study of variant repetition in Proverbs and the understanding of Hebrew poetry and parallelism, notably M. O'Connor, James Kugel, W.G.E Watson, Adele Berlin, Robert Alter, David Clines, Luis Alonso Schökel, Sue Gillingham, R. Meynet and J. P. Fokkelman (2013 pp. 19-29).[9] Both Kuntz and Heim cover the ground comprehensively, hence there is little to be gained in repeating the endeavour. What follows therefore is a summary of Kuntz's contribution and Heim's literature review, acknowledging the foundation that they provide for my own investigations.

Since the late 1700's the study of parallelism within Hebrew poetry has been dominated by the theory of *parallellismus membrorum,* the work of Bishop Robert Lowth, who proposed three categories of parallelism: *synonymous, antithetic* and *synthetic*. In synonymous parallelism the second half of the poetic line provides the

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[9] The most recent contribution to the conversation is F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp who considers the characteristics of Hebrew poetry beyond parallelism in *On Biblical Poetry* (Dobbs-Allsopp, 2015). Unfortunately Dobbs-Allsopp's script was published too late for me to engage with it critically.

same meaning (usually reinforcing the point) as the first half using different words. Antithetic parallelism does the opposite, in that the second half of the line provides a contrasting statement or set of emotions. Lowth's third category, synthetic parallelism, is less clearly defined and works in terms of the construction of the partial lines rather than their content and, as Heim points out, is deliberately vague in that it was "designed to cover very different kinds of 'parallel' lines, where the supposed 'answer' in the second halves of poetic lines is not always obvious" (2013 p. 21). The attraction of Lowth's paradigm was that it enabled scholars and students of biblical poetry to 'make sense' of what was in front of them. It provided a 'one-size-fits-all' approach, enabling the interpreter to be led "into the meaning of obscure words and phrases: sometimes it will suggest the true reading, where the text in our present Copies is faulty; and will verify and confirm a correction offered on the authority of MSS, or of the ancient Versions" (Robert Lowth cited by Heim (2013 p. 21)). In many ways this provides an entry level into textual criticism of Hebrew poetry. However, what it does not allow for is subtlety and ambiguity with Lowth's relatively simplistic approach questioned and re-imagined in more recent years.

O'Connor's *Hebrew Verse Structure* (1980) favours a linguistic approach, concentrating not on larger poetic compositions but narrowing his work to the individual partial line rather than the poetic line, and not on metrics but on its syntactic structure. He then examines 'matching', where partial lines have identical syntax, 'gapping', where a syntactical element is missing, and 'syntactic dependency', where following partial lines are dependent upon the first. O'Connor's concern is not necessarily in editorial strategy, but focuses on the design and construction of each individual line. His close attention to the specific detail of each line is not something I

intend to emulate but the identification of 'gapping' may prove helpful on the occasions when the mother and father are in focus.

Kugel's contribution to the topic is that basic poetic parallelism is essentially about repetition. In *The Idea of Biblical Poetry* (1981) he argues that the relationship between two parallel lines can be remarkably varied and advocates that the second half of a poetic line is not a simple repetition but adds something more substantial to the original half. He thus dismisses Lowth's paradigm, rejecting the notion that repetition is simply restatement and recognising that parallelism cannot be confined to three categories. Furthermore he questions the labelling of biblical literature as either prose or poetry arguing that what is described as poetry is an intensification of effects used with varying degree (1981 p. 94). Alter (1985 p. 6) highlights the doubts raised by Kugel as to whether it is justifiable to speak of poetry in the Hebrew Bible, although as previously noted, this question is not one which I wish to explore. What it highlights is the breadth of discussion concerning parallelism within the Hebrew Bible. For my purposes sufficient evidence exists to acknowledge parallelism at work and the focus is to explore whether *the way in which it works* adds credence to any of my lines of enquiry.

Watson, on the other hand, tries to reclaim the ground for Lowth. In *Classical Hebrew Poetry* (1984) and *Traditional Techniques in Classical Hebrew Verse* (1994) he attempts to refine the paradigm by adding new categories of parallelism, notably gender-matched, word pairs, number, staircase, noun-verb, vertical and Janus (the use of a word with two meanings) (1984 pp. 114-159). This still involves endeavouring to 'fit' lines within a prescribed structure and I would question how far sub-categorisation can be taken before it is effectively rendered meaningless. Given the variety and complexity

of any language to what extent can parallelism be said to be a deliberate ploy by the author, rather than a coincidence caused by the proliferation of words within a language? On a more positive note Watson is credited with discovering parallelism within partial lines (semilinear parallelism), each of which is parallel with the second partial line cf. Proverbs 6:10.

Adele Berlin contributes to the field with *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (1985).[10] Like O'Connor, Berlin favours a linguistic approach, offering an investigation of the grammatical, lexical, semantic and phonological aspects of parallelism, arguing against a simple linguistic formula and demonstrating the linguistic complexity of parallelism. Given this complexity, she argues, there can be no hierarchy of parallelism and the emending of text to produce 'better' parallelism cannot be justified. Not only this, but deducing meaning of an unknown word from a word pair is dangerous; parallelism activates word-pairs through word association, rather than the other way round (2008 p. 130). Berlin's approach suggests an infinite number of possibilities unconfined by the need to categorise within strictly defined limits.

Robert Alter's *Art of Biblical Poetry* (1985) builds on Kugel's theory of repetition and argues that in the repetition it is not just the same thing that is being said, but that the idea is progressed or intensified. Alter is interested in how this intensification works in terms of the longer poems and he is the first to speak of 'interlinear parallelism' when referring to parallelism within adjacent poetic lines. Schökel's *Manual of Hebrew Poetry* (1988) and Gillingham's *Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible* (1994) advocate the need for a less formulaic approach and the need for creativity in interpreting Hebrew Poetry. Schökel speaks of the need not to be confined by analytical

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[10] A revised edition appeared in 2008.

theories, but to let theory be shaped by the imagination in the text: to allow its patterns and nuances lead the reader into new discoveries. If the text can be credited with nuance and subtlety, it can also be taken a stage further by acknowledging that a text can never fully represent everything in the author's life situation. Rather than being confined by analytical theories, might it be possible that by being less prescriptive in our reading of the text, the inherent imagination therein might reveal new insights to the reader, in this case to revaluate the portrayal of women? Gillingham's contribution is to offer a classification which suggests that parallels can not only equate to one another, but also that a dominant thought in the first half can be qualified by the second, or an introductory thought in the first can be completed by the second half.

The critique of Lowth's paradigm and the expansion of the understanding of biblical parallelism and the way in which it functions, or is made to function, have meant that the text itself is open to a greater deal of interpretation. There is the potential to discover more complex and expansive meanings than have hitherto been identified. At one level, the more parallelism is identified, the less 'imaginative' the material becomes, since repetition would appear, on face value, to offer nothing new, a mere rehashing of what was already in existence. However, this fails to take account of the fact that the repetitions are not straightforward word-for-word repetitions but do indeed include variations, as the survey of literature has shown. O'Connor's attention to the individual partial line, concentrating on its design and content, Kugel's contribution of the subtleties of variant repetition and Berlin's insistence that word pairs are not necessarily required to create parallelism mean that connections can be made where previously none may have been thought to have existed.

Particularly pertinent for my line of enquiry are Alter, Gillingham and Berlin. The focus on Kugel's apparent dismissal of poetry in the Hebrew Bible (or for that matter, his questioning of whether the Hebrew Bible can be termed literature) in the ongoing debate about the nature of biblical poetry has, in my opinion, detracted from the importance of Kugel in at least widening the scope of the perception of parallelism. Whilst some have sought to remain faithful to Lowth's original classifications, identifying within them new 'categories' of parallelism, I am inclined to agree with Berlin's opinion that in collecting and classifying we can no longer see the wood for the trees: that there has been such interest in the minutiae of the individual components of parallelism that the overall complexity and effectiveness of the literary device has been lost (2008 p. 2). I intend primarily to focus on this broader picture, not providing detailed analysis of the syntactical structure of a poetic line, but searching for connections between poetic lines based on word repetition and thematic links.

As I have already noted Alter advocates a progression or intensification, rather than equivalence, in the second half of the poetic line. This is not only in terms of numerical sayings (e.g. Proverbs 30:18, 21, 29) but "also the motor force in thousands of lines of biblical poetry where no numbers are present" (1985 p. 11). He qualifies this in terms of each semantic element of the half-line: it is not obligatory that each element in the line is intensified but rather, in the majority of cases, it is one set of matched terms which is intensified. Alter's rule of thumb is that general terms occur in the first half-line and a more specific instance of the general in the second. This is particularly pertinent to the question of the mother's appearance in the second half-line (1:8, 6:20); whether she appears to satisfy the requirements of a literary device or is included in her own right to specifically speak to the mother's role in the upbringing of her children.

Gillingham's proposal has much to commend it in that she too moves away from Lowth and Watson's categorisations. She proposes that there is only one type of parallelism, the seconding of two lines A and B. Within this overarching structure she advocates at least three variations of thought: lines A and B are interchangeable and include both synonymous and antithetic parallelism, hence A=B. Contra Alter, she does not identify any intensification in this variation. Her second variation appears to be the same as Alter's general proposition, where A is expressed as the important idea and B an intensification of it, noting also its use in numerical sayings (A>B). Thirdly, she introduces the opposite scenario, where B expands an idea introduced in A, and becomes more important (A<B) (1994 pp. 78-82). In terms of exploring the portrayal of the unnamed mothers and wives Gillingham's proposals of intensification and importance in the second half-line are of interest given that the women appear in the second half line. However, in terms of the mother, it does not necessarily mean that she is physically present, since we are still focusing on the demands of parallelism as a literary device. Nor does it take account of why the sayings are found in their specific locations within the text. Hence, we address the question of variant repetition.

3.5.3 **Variant repetition**

For students of variant repetition i.e. exact or similar repetitions of verses within Proverbs, Daniel Snell provides an invaluable catalogue of variant repetitions in *Twice-Told Proverbs and the Composition of the Book of Proverbs* (1993). He categorises the repetitions he identifies according to 12 categories as follows (1993 pp. 34-59):[11]

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[11] With regards to terminology, 'whole verse' equates to what I have termed 'poetic line' and 'half verses' to 'partial lines'.

1.0   Whole verses repeated with spelling variations (6 sets)
1.1   Whole verses repeated with one dissimilar word (6 sets)
1.2   Whole verses repeated with two dissimilar words (11 sets)
1.3   Whole verses repeated with three dissimilar words (9 sets)
1.4   Whole verses repeated with four or more dissimilar words (10 sets)
2.0   Half-verses repeated with spelling variations (16 sets)
2.1   Half-verses repeated with one dissimilar word (20 sets)
2.2   Half-verses repeated with two dissimilar words (22 sets)
3.0   Half-verses repeated in whole verse with each word in the half-verse appearing in the whole (4 sets)
3.1   Half-verses repeated in whole verses with one dissimilar word (6 sets)
3.2   Half-verses repeated in whole verses with two dissimilar words (1 set)
4.1-4.9   Syntactically related verses (49 verses)[12]

Snell's aim in studying Proverbs' "propensity toward repetition" is to further understand its composition, although he acknowledges that he fails to explain repetition itself (1993 p. 9). Fox, on the other hand, sets out the hypotheses put forward to explain variant repetition, namely: *literary cleavage*, repetition arising from the collating together of previously independent collections; *numerology,* the requirement to have a particular number within a collection; for *emphasis*; *oral formulaic composition*; as a *structuring device* framing material; and a *combination of existing sayings with new lines.* He raises objections to the first five on the grounds that they do not adequately explain (in turn) the volume, the repetition, the variation, and the dispersal of the sayings, and in terms of the *structuring device,* that it is too sporadic to be used of the larger collection. Of the explanations, he considers only the last one to warrant further exploration which leads him to conclude that:

> The overall process is best described as *proverb permutation*, the constant transformation of proverbs based on templates implicit in other proverbs. A template is a recurrent pattern of syntax or wording that serves as a mold for constructing new couplets. What makes a feature a template is its reuse (Fox, 2009 p.488).

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[12] These are not my primary concern; hence I have grouped them together. Snell himself acknowledges that this category is only a small sampling and that there are in all likelihood countless others that he has not recorded.

In *Poetic Imagination in Proverbs* (2013), Heim focuses on variant repetition building on his earlier work (2001) which did not seek to provide an explanation for the purpose of variant repetitions, even though he considered them to be a prominent feature and an important part of the final editorial process. His focus on variant repetition at both the micro and macro level, combines a detailed analysis of parallelism as variant repetition within a line (cf. Kugel, 1981), and abandons systems of rigid classification, looking beyond the individual line for evidence of parallelism in non-adjacent poetic lines. Heim's appreciation of parallelism, alongside the identification of similarities and antitheses is where

> poetic materials display a daring *lack* of correspondence[s]. Interesting kinds of parallelism … are those that are close enough for parallelism to remain discernible, yet sufficiently different to say something distinctive in each part of the parallel, so that it widens the perspective of what is said in the other parts of the poetic line – each part thus illuminating and enhancing the other (Heim, 2013 p. 636).

Hence it appears that the way in which the text functions, in terms of both parallelism and variant repetition, produces meaning which can be drawn out by the reader. By making connections between verses and creating clusters or units which speak to a particular theme advocates contend that the proverbial material is far more complex and nuanced than might appear at first sight. This is not to say that individual proverbs lose their meaning. They can still be understood on their own merit, but when connections are made across the collection alternative meanings can be derived.

Like Snell, whose contribution Heim acknowledges as a foundation for his own endeavours, Heim's interest lies in the composition of Proverbs:

> My primary aim is to explain what may have prompted the editor or editors in the final stages of the formation of the book of Proverbs to give these repeated proverbs their present shapes and what caused them to place

various versions of these repeated proverbs or verses in their present contexts (2013 pp. 8-9).

Whether or not Heim achieves all that he set out to do is open to discussion. Through careful comparison of verses he strengthens the argument for the existence of variant repetition within Proverbs and advocates a greater care in interpreting biblical poetry, though his advocacy of the existence of clusters is not universally accepted. Commenting on *Like Grapes of Gold Set in Silver* (2001) Fox questions Heim's suggestion that 10:1-22:16 in its entirety is made up of clusters. He asks whether it is entirely necessary that the collection should be arranged in this way; whether the compiler may have put lines together deliberately or based on unconscious association, and the themes of proverbs limited to the extent that repetition is unavoidable (2009 p. 479), something which Heim himself recognises as a possibility.

There may be some foundation to Fox's critique but Heim's careful attention to variant repetition in *Poetic Imagination in Proverbs* challenges the preoccupation with resolving the perceived problem of ambiguity in biblical interpretation. Heim advocates an acceptance of this "valuable, indispensable feature of poetry" (2013 p. 640), a recognition of a deliberate strategy which can bring greater depth and understanding to the interpretation. However, he fails to provide an answer as to why repeated verses are found in their final locations although he acknowledges in conversation that further exploration may still be required in this area, something to which I hope to contribute when considering the placing of the statements about the contentious wife. Heim's demonstration of the importance of intentional ambiguity gives licence to reread the text looking for the potential of alternative interpretations to those traditionally espoused.

This borrowing from pre-existing material to create new material in variant repetition does not appear to be in doubt. However, the theory only explains how proverbs may have been created. It fails to explain the large number of repetitions, the placing of repetitions in close proximity and the placing of variant repetitions in comparable contexts (Heim, 2013 p. 611). An answer to the question of editorial intent therefore still remains unanswered. Nonetheless, within this section I have described the nature of poetic parallelism and variant repetition in ways that enable me to analyse references to women within the text by paying attention to the way in which language and poetic form operate to produce meaning. By looking to poetic parallelism particularly across distance, it may be possible to identify clusters which hitherto may have been unidentified, or to provide alternative interpretations than those already in existence. It might be possible to suggest both the implicit presence of the mother in poetic lines where she does not appear in a literary word-pair and a re-evaluation of the interpretation of the 'contentious wife'; to endeavour to provide interpretations derived from the way in which the text functions, unencumbered (as far as is possible) by the bias of male-oriented reading strategy.

3.6 Conclusion

In the discussion above I have outlined the rationale for the methods which will be used in this study. I have discussed the difficulties that I as a woman have with much of the traditional interpretation of Proverbs to date, interpretations which continue to perpetuate a male-centred approach. I have explored the concept of the Bible's authority in feminist hermeneutics and determined that there is an ongoing dialogue between biblical text and the reader which affords authority conferred and received by both parties. The final consideration was a discussion of the nature of the Proverbs material.

My intention then is to search for the ways in which women may have contributed to the text which we now have, to endeavour to discover female voices behind the text. My focus is not primarily on the social reality which may have given rise to the text but to investigate whether some of the portrayals of women in Proverbs, namely the Strange Woman and the un-named mothers and wives, might be re-examined and (re)claimed. This is three-fold: firstly, in acknowledging the lack of consensus over the origin of Proverbs, whether there is potential for reclaiming the text from the hands of supposed male sages, exploring the possibility that women were the original source of some of the Proverbs material; secondly, claiming an alternative portrayal of the women other than that promoted by those who are the long-perceived 'norm' in society – the white, heterosexual male of the ruling elite; and thirdly, seeking a feminist reading from the poetic structure of the text, rather than by appeal to the lived experience of the women of the time.

CHAPTER 4

PROVERBS 1-9 AND 31: A HERMENEUTICAL FRAMEWORK?

4.1 Introduction

Proverbs, generally considered to be a book about the cultivation of wise men, has throughout its pages the general maxim that wisdom is to be sought. From the outset the 'father' regularly instructs the 'son' to strive for wisdom with all his might. However the task is not simple:

> Even while absorbing the father's precepts, the son must pursue wisdom tenaciously. And even then, wisdom is reached only with God's help…the reason that the wisdom the author is seeking to impart is at once difficult and obvious is that it is not reducible to the book's precepts. The author is aiming at a higher and harder goal: wisdom as a power. The knowledge of wisdom, once achieved, resides in the learner as a potential and must be activated by God in order to become the power of wisdom, an inner light that guides its possessor through life (Fox, 2000 p. 347).

Wisdom is to be found, not only in the father's exhortations, but also in the voice of personified Wisdom and by avoiding at all costs, wicked men and the temptress (in the form of the Strange Woman and Folly) whose path ultimately leads to destruction. There is little throughout the book specifically addressed to women. Praise for a good wife, with the notable exception of Proverbs 31:10-31, only appears in antithesis to the potential harm of an imprudent choice (e.g. 11:16, 11:22, 12:4) or, for some, as a sign of favour from the Lord (e.g. 18:22, 19:14).

The book concludes with a poem in praise of the Woman of Worth, extolling the merits of an industrious woman. It is remarkable that a book whose target audience is young men should end with a poem in praise of a woman. It exalts the qualities to be found in a woman who dedicates herself to the welfare of not only her family and

household but also to the welfare of the wider community. She is praised and her husband appears to bask in her reflected glory (v.23). Why then conclude the book with what might best be described as an encomium?[13]

In the remainder of this chapter I propose to undertake a literature review focusing on the following three areas of consideration: whether chapters 1-9 and 31 provide a framework for the collections of proverbs in chapters 10-30; the relationship, or otherwise, between the poems of 31:1-9 and 31:10-31; and the exploration of a female voice within 31:10-31.

The literature review is broadly chronological, since most of the scholars have interacted with those who preceded them.

4.2   Literature review

The question of any specific editorial intent in Proverbs, particularly in respect of Chapter 31, is relatively recent thinking: F. Delitzsch (1874) and C.H. Toy (1899) paid scant attention to the purpose of Chapter 31 in relation to the rest of the book. During the twentieth century, a general lack of scholarly interest in wisdom literature as a whole pervaded until the 1970s, when Gerhard von Rad's *Wisdom in Israel* (1972) signalled a renewed interest in the field. In his major survey of the scholarly study of the book, Whybray (1995) reviewed contributions from the 1890's onwards, noting that the connection between the poem of Proverbs 31:10-31 and the rest of the book had been a major preoccupation in the previous three decades. Interest began with E. Jacob's

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[13] Fox (2000 pp. 902-905), in considering the genre and purpose of the poem concludes that it is best classified as an encomium, a declaration of high praise for a person or type of person. He notes that it is difficult to determine the poem's precise genre as there is nothing quite like it anywhere else. He is not content, contra Wolters (1985), to classify it as a hymn and concludes that it bears a resemblance to psalms that praise the righteous man e.g. Psalms 112 and 128.

Sagesse et Alphabet. A propos de Prov. 31:10-31 published in 1971. Jacob argued that Proverbs was a compendium of wisdom with the poem setting the seal on the work as a whole. No further developments were made until 1985, when Camp and McCreesh quite independently considered again the function of Proverbs 31:10-31. Subsequent scholars have referred to these two major contributions in some considerable detail.

4.2.1 **Murray Lichtenstein**

Lichtenstein published his paper *Chiasm and Symmetry in Proverbs 31* in 1982. His approach differs from those yet to be reviewed in that he is not concerned with the relationship of chapter 31 to the rest of the Proverbs collections but with the relationship between the two poems within the chapter i.e. 31:1-9 and 31:10-31. Lichtenstein notes several features common to each poem which might account for their juxtaposition: both poems begin with a specific reference to women (vv.3, 10); in the first poem it is the *hayil* (v.3) of the king which is to be protected from women, whilst in vv.20 and 29 it is the woman who embodies *hayil*; Lemuel is charged to 'speak up' on behalf of the needy (vv.8,9) just as the woman 'speaks up' (v.26) with wisdom and kindness (1982 p. 202).

In addition to these thematic and verbal links Lichtenstein also argues for stylistic and structural analogies between the two poems (1982 p. 203). He notes that both poems have examples of lines with a chiastic structure and each poem contains one example of the pattern A:B :: B:A. Within the structure the initial order of key terms is reversed in their repetition, creating a symmetrical balance of equal but opposite words and phrases.[14] Lichtenstein's work pays careful attention to the structure of both poems

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[14] I will revisit this in a later chapter as part of my exploration of any potential connection between the two poems of chapter 31.

and his conclusion is that there is more than a sharing of key words, themes and subjects which may have originally led to an editorial decision to place the two poems together. His conclusion provides further evidence, if not for the two to be viewed as a single entity, then for their purposeful juxtaposition within the Hebrew text. Lichtenstein, writing before Camp and McCreesh, does not say whether the juxtaposition has a hermeneutical purpose for the understanding of the chapter within the context of the rest of the book. However, his findings may provide initial arguments for such a possibility.

4.2.2 Claudia Camp

In 1985, Camp published *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*. She addresses the question of the female imagery used of wisdom as well as how the poems of chapters 1-9 and 31 relate to the proverb collections in chapters 10-30. In considering the relationship between the chapters she identifies two problems: theological and literary.

Theologically, she raises the question as to how the seemingly 'secular' material of the Proverbs collections came to find itself as part of the Hebrew Bible, concluding that 'common sense' and religious faith are not mutually exclusive. In terms of the literary problem, she considers what happens to a proverb when it is no longer handed down the generations in oral form but in a de-contextualised written form, arguing that as a result it loses its performance context:

> 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 him or her to see that situation in a new way. The proverb in a collection, however, is not being transmitted in the same manner that it would be orally. 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. It is not in itself an act of discourse: out of context, it does not say something *about something*; hence the apparent 'shallowness' of many of the collected proverbs (Camp, 1985 pp. 181-182).

It is this loss of performance context, not its 'secularity', which renders the Proverbs collections without a meaningful framework. Camp's answer is therefore to reinstate a performance context by identifying the poems of chapters 1-9 and 31 as a framework for the collections as a whole. The expressions of wisdom personified contained within chapters 1-9 and 31 provide a performance context, a lens through which to view and interpret the collections of individual proverbs. The female imagery serves as a bracketing device which indicates some form of intentional editorial strategy (1985 p. 191).

This conclusion is formed on the basis that, besides the obvious presence of female imagery, the poems connect to one another and to other material within Proverbs stylistically and thematically. More specifically Camp lists the mother's teaching (1:8) reappearing thematically in the teaching of Lemuel's mother (31:1-9); the identification of both the Woman of Worth and Wisdom as 'more precious than jewels' (31:10, 3:15 & 8:11); the reward for finding such a treasure as no lack of material gain (31:11, 3:14, 8:21); the Woman of Worth exceeds all others (31:29) as Wisdom surpasses all other desires (3:15); the embracing of and commitment to the female figures within the text (3:18, 4:8, 4:6, 8:7,21, 5:18, 31:11); Wisdom calls youngsters to her house (8:34, 9:1-6) whilst the Woman of Worth is firmly established (31:21) and offers provision to the needy (31:20); Wisdom cries out at the gates (1:21, 8:3) and the works of the Woman of Worth praise her there (31:31); and the discernment of true attraction in chapters 1-9 is echoed in the proverb concerning true beauty in 31:30 (1985 pp. 188-189). Camp appears to present a strong argument to support her case, although in providing a

possible explanation for the editorial intention behind the compilation of the book, the origin and intentions of the creators of the material, and the reason for their fascination with female imagery remains unanswered.

Camp chooses to work with chapter 31 as a coherent whole, rather than as two distinct poems. This in itself is relatively unusual. Most commentators appear to consider the two poems in isolation and, as will become evident, care needs to be taken when considering those scholars who advocate a framing device, as to whether they are referring to Proverbs 31 in its entirety or to 31:10-31. In considering the connections of Proverbs 1-9 and 31 with the chapters that they surround, Camp considers the repetition of imagery. One of her conclusions is that Proverbs 31, along with chapters 1-9 and 23:22-24:4, close "with an allusion to a view of wisdom that extends beyond the limits of an individual instruction by means of the metaphor of wisdom's house" (1985 p. 200). In the case of chapter 31 the poem of the Woman of Worth concludes the chapter and "virtually embodies the 'wisdom of the house' in that poem" (1985 p. 201). By way of a footnote she then advocates a connection between the two poems of chapter 31 and concurs with Lichtenstein that there is evidence to suggest that the placing of the two poems together is not merely coincidental (1985 p. 317).

4.2.3   Thomas McCreesh

Thomas McCreesh, again in 1985, wrote *Wisdom as Wife: Proverbs 31:10-31*. He concisely sets out his stall in his introduction:

> The poem functions as a summary, a coda, for the whole of the book… [it] draws together the major themes, motifs, and ideas of the book in a final, summarizing statement about wisdom under the image of an industrious, resourceful and selfless wife. It is the final piece in a symbolic framework that unifies the whole book, including the individual sayings (1995 pp. 25-26).

Unlike Camp, McCreesh is not concerned with how the opening and closing chapters may or may not relate to one another. He is content to rely upon J.N. Aletti's (1977) description of a symbolic framework for chapters 1-9 and hence considers no further work to be necessary in respect of the opening chapters. He begins with the then traditional interpretation of the poem i.e. as a model of exemplary behaviour for the Israelite housewife and mother, a woman engaged in numerous tasks so greatly accomplished that her husband is effectively rendered useless. It is this franticness and high level of achievement, McCreesh argues, that discredits the interpretation of the Woman of Worth as a role model to which to aspire. Instead she is a symbol.

McCreesh then draws a comparison between this 'symbolic' woman and personified wisdom found in the opening chapters of Proverbs. Whilst the woman is settled and her attention directed to the ways of her household, personified wisdom combs the streets looking for those who will take heed of her words (1:33). She further implores those who hear her to pay attention (8:4-5) and finally, having built a house and prepared a feast, invites those who heed her call to enter (9:4-6). Hence, according to McCreesh, the image of wisdom in chapter 9 is a woman in search of companions, whilst the image in chapter 31 portrays her as finally settled with home and family. This presents a framework for understanding the author/editor's understanding of wisdom (1995 p. 30).

McCreesh is not the only scholar who has picked up on this potential of wisdom personified to play a significant role in the interpretation and understanding of the wise woman of Proverbs 31, however perceived. However, scholars respond to that interpretation and understanding in different ways: the point is not to say who is right, but to recognise the capacity of the text to evoke such responses. To date no consensus

exists as to the correct understanding, leading us to conclude that whilst the text is evocative it must remain open to varied interpretations.

McCreesh then turns his attention to chapter 31:10-31 to "illustrate more fully the wisdom dimension of that portrait" (1995 p. 30). He notes the alphabetic acrostic structure of the poem and argues that rather than a haphazard and illogical arrangement of the verses, in terms of their content, there is indeed an order to the poem.[15] The structure is such, that through the repetition of words, an order can be discerned. He cites the use of the words *kap* (palm/hand) and *yād* (hand) as an example: using these words a chiasmus occurs between verses 19 and 20, a shift in emphasis from the woman's role in her own household to her care and concern for the poor. A subsequent repetition of *yād* in the last verse of the poem creates a further transformation: the woman is no longer using her hands to give but is to be the recipient of the fruit of her hands. McCreesh concludes that through this repetition the woman is first portrayed involved in practical affairs, then in terms of her concern for others, and finally in terms of the praise that is accorded to her (1995 p. 32).

McCreesh argues for the symbolic portrayal of the woman through the use of the poem's words and phrases. The rhetorical 'who can find?' at the beginning of the poem, whilst eliciting the response 'no one', is followed by a list of qualities deemed worth looking for in a potential wife and mother. This suggests to McCreesh that the statement alludes to an ideal rather than a real woman. Alongside this he also considers the possibility of the poem being a riddle, the solving of the riddle leading to the discovery of wisdom. To further support his hypothesis, McCreesh argues for the use of wisdom

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[15] Those who argue that the structure of the poem is governed by the acrostic device include Toy (1899) and McKane who comments that "the author had enough on his hands with the acrostic principle to work out, and as he tackled the verses one by one he took no thought for what had gone before or what was to come after" (1970 p. 665).

allusions within the poem. He begins with the Hebrew phrase ʾēšet ḥayīl (Woman of Worth), a phrase occurring only once elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible in Ruth 3:11, and notes several similarities between Ruth and the Woman of Worth of Proverbs: both are paradigms of loyalty and fidelity; both act with resourcefulness; both are portrayed in terms of their marriages, home and families; and both are praised for what they do. He then refers to other wisdom allusions in the poem: the comparison to precious jewels (31:1, 3:15, 8:1, 21:15, 18:19 and 16:16); the promised benefits to the husband (31:11) and the student of wisdom (4:6,8,9); the ability of both Wisdom and the woman to laugh at the future (1:26, 31:25) (1995 pp. 38-44).

Finally, McCreesh takes a brief look at the introductory discourse of Wisdom in chapters 1, 8 and 9. The call of Wisdom in the first nine chapters becomes an invitation in Proverbs 9 to become a faithful, lifelong companion. What follows are the individual sayings "where Wisdom is to be found and understood" (1995 p. 45). Hence he concludes:

> The poem in chapter 31 is the book's final masterful portrait of Wisdom. She was presented in chapter 9 as the young marriageable woman seeking lovers who would accept the gifts and life she could offer. Now that time of courtship, of learning is over. In chapter 31 Wisdom is a faithful wife and a skilled mistress of her household, finally settled down with her own. This ingenious symbolic framework of the book of Proverbs presents a consistent picture of Wisdom. She is not some lofty, remote ideal for those initiated into her mysteries, but a practical, ever-present, faithful guide and lifelong companion for all who choose her way (1995 p. 46).

As we shall see later (cf. Waltke), McCreesh makes various points that are open to question. The question of personified wisdom's portrayal within the opening chapters of the book is dealt with elsewhere but for now what McCreesh provides is strong evidence of editorial intent.

4.2.4 **R.N. Whybray**

R.N. Whybray makes a significant contribution to this literature review. In *The Composition of the Book of Proverbs*, published in 1994, he begins his discussion of 31:10-31 by noting the acrostic structure of the poem and that it can be seen to be, at first sight, a poem designed to list the attributes of a good wife that a man should look for, or as an ideal to which young marriageable girls should aspire.[16] He acknowledges the growth of interest in the perceived significance of the poem and turns his attention to the redaction of the book in his final chapter. Whilst Whybray argues that there is no evidence of systematic editing for dogmatic or theological reasons he recognises a correspondence between Proverbs 1-9 and 31, and supports the argument that they provide a framework through which the intervening material can be interpreted (1994 p. 159).

In considering the connection between the opening and closing chapters of Proverbs, Whybray first notes that the poem in 31:10-31 is unique in that it has no heading. This, he suggests, may support a theory that the poem was appended to the collections in Proverbs 10:1-31.9 by a different editor, who was also familiar with Proverbs 1-9 in a form not dissimilar to their present form.[17] Whybray's grouping of the collections is interesting. With regards to the redaction of the book, he separates the collections into chapters 1-9, 10:1-31:9 and 31:10-31, thus seeing the framework consisting of the final poem and not chapter 31 in its entirety. This follows McCreesh, whereas Camp advocates that the whole of Chapter 31 forms the framework. As we

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[16] The latter, that the poem is an aide-memoire that a young girl would take home from school after receiving instruction on the subject, is a thesis proposed by M.B. Crook (1954). Although referred to by subsequent scholars her proposal has failed to gain general acceptance.

[17] Waltke (2005) also identifies the uniqueness of the poem but draws an altogether different conclusion. He concludes that the poem has no heading because the superscription at 31:1 is for the entire chapter, not solely for the first nine verses.

shall see later, there are differing views amongst those scholars who advocate a framing device, as to what precisely is included.

Whybray poses the question about the portrayal of the woman in 31:10-31, as to whether she is primarily symbolic, or a real, if somewhat idealized, wife. It is a question he does not answer directly, although as discussed below, in 1995 he acknowledges that the prevailing thought is that the poem is about Wisdom, although the precise nature of the portrayal is uncertain. He notes those (e.g. Barucq) who suggest that it is at least written to draw the reader to find echoes of personified wisdom in the text; refers to Wolters (1985) work on the word *sopiyya* (v.27 – *she watches over*) as a pun on the Greek word *Sophia*; and highlights others' (e.g Jacob) observation of whether *yirʾat* (v.30) is 'a woman who fears Yahweh' or 'a woman (who is) the fear of Yahweh'.

His final observation is about the similarities between Proverbs 1-9 and 31:10-31. Firstly he notes the prevalence of female figures, a proportion unequalled elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, with the exception of Ruth and the Song of Songs. It is not only their prevalence but also their nature: they are active and dominant compared to their partners. Secondly, the setting in both cases is domestic: Whybray sees, following McCreesh, the fulfilment of the promises in chapters 1-9 in an established house. Thirdly, personified wisdom is presented as a teacher (8:14) in the opening chapters and the woman 'opens her mouth with wisdom' (31:26). Fourthly, the overriding instruction is to find wisdom. Those who find personified wisdom and her teaching (1:28, 3:13, 4:22, 8:17,35) are promised happiness and life, the man who finds a Woman of Worth gains riches beyond price (31:10) and does not lack gain (31:11) (1994 pp. 160-162).

Whybray considers the possibility of the two poems being connected but dismisses it on the grounds that 31:10-31 is a complete acrostic and that the LXX

identifies them as separate entities, by separating them with chapters 25-29 in the Hebrew text. For those reasons, he states (rather boldly, in my opinion) that "the instruction does not extend beyond v.9" (1994 p. 153).

In 1995 Whybray sought to assist modern scholarship by publishing *The Book of Proverbs: A Survey of Modern Study*. Here he assessed the contribution of Camp, McCreesh and Wolters and in his summing up concluded:

> Most recent contributors to the debate [re the portrayal in 31:10-31], however, hold the view that 31:10-31 is really about Wisdom, although whether the poem is an allegory, and whether the wife portrayed should be seen as a personification or as an embodiment of wisdom - as a model of what it means to be wise - remains uncertain. The answers to these questions affect other aspects of the interpretation of the poem; but there is now a wide agreement about its function in the book as a whole: that it has been placed at the end of the book at a late editorial stage, that it in some sense sums up the teaching of the book, and that it is part of a deliberately created framework for it (1995 p. 110).

4.2.5 Madipoane Masenya

Masenya's *How Worthy is the Woman of Worth? Rereading Proverbs 31:10-31 in African-South Africa* appeared in 2004.[18] Her work focuses on interpreting Proverbs 31:10-31, a text traditionally used within African-South African culture to outline the qualities of a good woman and cited to those who are to be married. Her aim is to present a reading of the text that will empower the women to whom it is quoted.

In considering the redaction of Proverbs 31:10-31, Masenya concurs with Camp (1985) regarding the connection between Proverbs 1-9 and 31, believing Camp to have "shown the interrelationships between the various collections of the book of Proverbs" (2004 p. 81). Contra Camp and McCreesh however, she understands the woman of

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[18] Masenya defines the term 'African-South African women' as referring to the women who belong to the indigenous peoples of South Africa.

Proverbs 31:10-31 to be a real, if idealised, picture of a woman. Masenya is systematic in her approach, considering first the relationship between chapters 1-9 and 31; secondly the relationship between chapters 1-9, 10-31:9 and 31:10-31; and finally 31:10-31 within Proverbs 31. This approach enables her to work through the chapter, her final consideration being the issue of the relationship between the two poems of Proverbs 31 (2004 pp. 85-88). However, she appears to be imprecise in her terminology. When she speaks of chapter 31 (or part thereof i.e. 31:10-31) providing a framework she appears inconsistent as to what precisely forms the framework: "it became clear that Proverbs 31:10-31 forms part of the envelope (coda) of the whole book" (2004 p. 84) and then later "it has been noted previously that Proverbs 1-9 and 31 form an envelope for the whole book" (2004 p. 87).

This distinction is important given that I intend to consider the possibility of a relationship existing between the two poems of Proverbs 31. However, despite this inconsistency, Masenya is one of the few scholars to date who has given more than a cursory glance at this question. Most are content either to rely on the acrostic structure of 31:10-31 to support the hypothesis that the poem has no connection to 31:1-9, or to see the latter merely as the conclusion of the major collection beginning at chapter 10 of Proverbs. Masenya, however tackles the issue in some depth. She notes that in the LXX the two poems do not appear consecutively and cites Kidner (1985) who advocates that their separation in the LXX suggests that the two poems were independent of one another and that the acrostic poem is anonymous and therefore not a continuation of the Mother's advice to King Lemuel.[19]

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[19] Kidner's significant contribution to the question of the location of the poems in chapter 31 is comprehensively dealt with by Masenya and hence I do not include him independently within this review.

An alternative view that Masenya refers to is that of Lichtenstein (1982). She notes, however that Lichtenstein does not propose that the two form a whole, only that he accounts for them having been juxtaposed with each other in the final text. She is of the opinion, therefore, that the acrostic nature of the poem in 31:10-31 does indicate that it is the start of a new section and that 31:1-9 is in the form of an instruction, a reminder of the instructions contained in chapters 1-9.

As to consideration of the voice *behind the text* Masenya ascertains, quite rightly, that male authorship and redaction of the poem have always been taken for granted, but with the advent of feminist theology such assumptions (i.e. of male authorship) can no longer be taken for granted. She raises the point that a hermeneutics of suspicion needs to be applied in the reading: whose interests is the author serving? However, she concludes that primarily the poem is scribed by males of an elite society for the benefit of males of an elite society. She considers Brenner's (1996) suggestion of a female voice within the text, but dismisses it on the grounds that she understands the instructor and recipients of the opening chapters of the book to be male, headings to the collections within Proverbs to denote male authorship, and that the male voice is heard through the text of 31:10-31 (2004 pp. 76-77).

4.2.6 **Bruce Waltke**

Waltke's contribution to scholarly endeavour in this field is considerable. His initial commentary *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15* (2004) was swiftly followed by *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31* in 2005. It is to the latter that we now turn. Waltke is seemingly alone amongst scholars in including the poem in 31:10-31 with 31:1-9 (hereafter referred to, in his words, as the poem of "The Noble King") under the heading of the "Sayings of Lemuel". He has no comment to make on the poem's

location within the book, noting only its acrostic structure and that "like the acrostic poem in Sir. 51:13-20, [it] draws the book to its conclusion. By describing the capable wife within such a rigorous structure, the poet and his audience experience in a most memorable way the catharsis of having fully expressed themselves" (2005 p. 514).

Hence, according to Waltke, the poet uses the literary device to express the finalisation of the collection. However, the use of the literary device for such a purpose suggests that the poem in 31:10-31 is inherently linked to what has come before and as yet we have still to consider whether or not any such connections do exist.

Waltke's primary focus is twofold: first he considers the poem's genre; secondly whether the woman in the poem personifies wisdom. As to the first concern he concludes (cf. Wolters (1985)) that the poem belongs to Israel's heroic poetry. As to the second, Waltke goes against the prevailing tide and proposes a return to the traditional understanding that the wife represents a real woman rather than being allegorical (2005 p. 518).

Leaving aside the question of the poem's genre, against McCreesh (1995), Waltke argues that whilst the qualities the Woman of worth displays may show that she embodies wisdom, they do not establish that she is unreal. He also finds McCreesh's argument, that the image portrayed is that of Wisdom 'settled down', unconvincing: McCreesh, he claims, first needs to establish 31:10-31 as a figurative personification of wisdom as in 1:20-33, 8:1-36 and 9:1-6 (2005 pp. 517-518).

Camp, McCreesh and Whybray conclude that the prominence of the female figure in the opening and closing chapters of Proverbs gives weight to a symbolic interpretation of the woman in Proverbs 31:10-31. Waltke is unconvinced, arguing that

a symbolic portrayal in the opening chapters does not exclude the possibility of the Woman of Worth being a portrayal of a real woman (2005 p. 519). He further argues his case concluding that every other reference to *ʾiššah* in Proverbs denotes a real woman; that McCreesh's reference to Ruth also denotes a real woman; that Wisdom is never portrayed as a wife and mother but has many roles, as opposed to the woman who is portrayed solely as a homemaker.

Waltke's arguments are compelling at first sight, although further exploration of his interpretation of individual proverbs in subsequent chapters perhaps suggests a traditional understanding of the role of women. What is of interest is that with his publication he reverses the trend of the previous two decades and throws wide open again the discussion around the purpose of the poem and the identity of the wise woman in chapter 31.

4.2.7 Michael V. Fox

The most recent major contribution is that of Michael Fox. His commentary in 2000, *Proverbs 1-9* was followed by *Proverbs 10-31* in 2009. In his discussions on the context and content of the poem in 31:10-31, and particularly in his consideration of the wise woman of the poem, Fox mainly interacts with Camp (2009 pp. 914-916). However, he does not come to the same conclusion. He suggests that Camp pushes the correlation between the opening and closing chapters of Proverbs too far, although he acknowledges that her approach helps move attention away from the author to the intention of the editor. He also points out that even if the poem were not written initially as the conclusion for the book, the editor has chosen to use it as such. However, Fox is not considering the entire picture: both he and Camp are concerned with editorial intent

and ignore the voice behind the Woman of Worth. I shall consider the question of 'authorship' of Proverbs 31 in due course.

In Fox's view, it is the first nine chapters of Proverbs, without the inclusion of Proverbs 31, which provide the contextualisation of which Camp speaks. In Fox's view the voice of Wisdom urges the listeners to seek wisdom and insight, not purely in the first nine chapters where her voice is heard, but in the subsequent material throughout Proverbs and in other literature. Despite the lack of voice within this other material, wisdom is still to be found, not solely in these pages but in the teachings of the home (2000 pp. 358-359). The worthiness of a random collection of sayings is to be reclaimed by the very fact that they provide guidance in the pursuit of the very thing that youngsters are being encouraged to follow i.e. God's wisdom and instruction. If Proverbs 1-9 provide the contextualisation that the Proverbs collections require, Fox ventures that an editor chooses to close Proverbs with the poem because it says

> something about wise women in a book that usually neglects them. The scribe … might reasonably have concluded the book with a grand encomium on the wise *man* ... Instead, he chose to have the culmination be an encomium on the wise woman, in which there resonates all that is said about wise women and Lady Wisdom elsewhere. But she does not personify wisdom; she *instantiates* it." (2000 p. 915)

I have already noted above Fox's support of Camp for diverting attention away from the author to editorial intent and my intention to deal with the issue of 'authorship' in due course. In terms of the search for a female voice *behind the text*, Fox and Whybray (1994) point out that the poem of 31:1-9 is a royal instruction, not unlike the Egyptian books Djedefhar, Amenemhet, and Merikare or even the Babylonian "Advice to a Prince", and both assert that this is a rare occurrence of female 'authorship'. Fox states that although Proverbs credits both the mother and father with a role in the

instruction of their sons 31:1-9 is the only Near Eastern Wisdom text specifically attributed to a woman, (2009 p. 883). He goes on to say, in his textual notes, that the words of Lemuel in 31:1 are Lemuel's in the sense that they were given to him by his mother and then spoken by Lemuel in his teaching. What we then have is a female voice *behind the text*: what remains unclear however, and what Fox makes no comment on, is whether the voice of Lemuel's mother is her own or given to her by a redactor.[20] Fox therefore moves in some way to establish the source of the words spoken in this particular instance although nowhere else does it appear that he considers the possibility of any voice other than that of a male. Whilst Fox's comments are insightful, the search for female voices *behind the text* pushes us to ask further questions beyond those which have been raised by Fox.

With regards to the question of any connection between the two poems of chapter 31, Fox dismisses attempts to establish the unity of the entire chapter and proposes their juxtaposition on the grounds that both poems deal with the teaching of a woman, the first spoken by a wise woman whilst the second is in praise of one.

4.2.8 **Fokkelien Van Dijk-Hemmes and Athalya Brenner**

I conclude my literature review by returning to 1996 with Athalya Brenner and Fokkelien Van Dijk-Hemmes' *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible*. Although not in chronological order I review their work independently of those already mentioned because they deal more specifically with the search for female voices within the Hebrew Bible, rather than the redaction of Proverbs itself. The general consensus amongst scholars is that Proverbs 31:10-31 is both authored and received by

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[20] This observation draws on van Dijk-Hemmes' (1996) concern re male-authored scripts being put into the mouths of female persona. See below.

males. Seen as a given, little is made of the question of authorship and to my knowledge only Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes have seriously sought to redress what they perceive to be an imbalance by endeavouring to find female voices within the texts of Hebrew scripture. My aim is more modest, seeking not to redress the balance but to look for female voices previously unrecognised in Proverbs.

Van Dijk-Hemmes' contribution is entitled *Traces of Women's Texts in the Hebrew Bible.* Within it, she ascertains that recent scholarship which has focused on feminist or gender-nuanced interpretations of the Hebrew Bible has largely ignored the question of female authorship. However, despite a large amount of evidence which might suggest that the search for 'female' texts may prove fruitless, she advocates two basic arguments for undertaking such an endeavour: firstly, that if the editors of the text did their best to obscure the identity of the authors of the Bible, then there must be room to identify women as potential authors; secondly, most biblical writings began and took shape in an oral process, only subsequently being recorded in written form. This then allows for the possibility that texts were 'authored', if not transcribed, by women although, as she then notes, the dilemma is to ascertain whether the texts are literal quotations of female voices or are male-authored transcripts put into the mouths of the females within the text (van Dijk-Hemmes, 1996 pp. 18-20).

As part of her quest to discover if there are undiscovered female authors in the Hebrew Bible, van Dijk-Hemmes uses as a guideline a study produced by S.D. Goitein, originally written in Hebrew as early as 1957 and translated into English in 1988, appearing as an article entitled 'Women as Creators of Biblical Genres' (Goitein, 1988). Van Dijk-Hemmes provides a comprehensive review of Goitein's study, juxtaposing his view of the biblical texts with other interpretations and referring to more recently

published material, particularly that written from scholars researching in the field of women's studies (1996 pp. 29-109). Recognising that songs and poetry played an important part in the lives of Yemenite immigrants to Israel in 1949-50, Goitein sought to use their poetry (male and female) as a basis for his research into poetry found within the Hebrew Bible and was clear in the scope of his research:

> we must explore the length and breadth of the Bible and uncover in it those places in which women are explicitly mentioned as being active in this or that field of literature – oral literature, of course … Afterwards we must ask whether any remnants of that genre have been preserved in the Bible. But there is no need to suppose that such remnants, as they have come down to us, must necessarily have been written by a woman. Such remnants will often be found preserved in the books of a male scribe or prophet, who wrote about subjects and in a style which were traditional among Hebrew women. This investigation will not discuss women as *authors* but as creators of biblical literary *genres*. It is in the nature of popular oral literature that it does not retain its original nature, but is poured from one vessel to another. Yet the original imprint is not erased. And thus it leaves a recognizable impression in literature which has reached us after many metamorphoses. (1988 pp. 4-5)

Goitein's research considers the possibility of women creating genres of poetry within the whole of the Hebrew Bible, and categorises it into specific genres as follows: songs of victory, mocking, rebuke, prophecy, soothsaying, love songs, prayers and lament. Van Dijk-Hemmes, following Goitein, extends these further to include vows, birth songs and naming speeches. Their research seems to suggest that a poem in its entirety falls into a particular category of genre. My question, in endeavouring to uncover previously unheard voices behind the text, is whether different categories are to be found in a single poem, and more specifically within the two poems of Proverbs 31.

Brenner does not tackle the text of the poem in Proverbs 31:10-31 per se. In *Proverbs 1-9: an F Voice,* she specifically concentrates on the search for an 'F' voice within the text of Proverbs 1-9, although she considers the possibility of an 'F' Voice

within chapter 31. In the introduction to their book, Brenner discusses the issues around 'Author, Authority, Text, Voice'. She recognises the difficulty in attempting to identify authors of largely anonymous collections which inevitably leads to speculation, but that we continue to search for them, even if unconsciously. Hence, in recognising the temptation the search becomes, not one of finding female authors, but "the gender positions entrenched in a text to the extent that its *authority* rather than its *authorship* can be gendered" (1996 p. 6). 'Voice' is the speech assigned to an individual within the text, although, in terms of recorded speech Brenner argues that women's voices are divorced from their origins by virtue of having been contextualised into a male script and can no longer be seen as a woman's (or indeed a man's voice): ultimately the voice loses its owner and becomes a "textual voice". It is for this reason that she and van Dijk-Hemmes label the textualized women's tradition for which they search as 'F' voices (1996 p. 7).

Brenner's *starting point* is to deny the 'father's instruction to the son' genre in Proverbs 1-9 and 31. This is not because of some whimsical gesture, but as a reflection of

> the dissatisfaction with the multiplicity of explanations advanced to date for Proverbs 1-9, explanations whose common denominator is the assignment of some space to presumably "quoted", fictive F discourse within a frame of an M discourse and an M text. (1996 pp. 115-116)

She proceeds to explain her dissatisfaction: she acknowledges Camp's efforts to explain the positioning of F literary voices as the frame for Proverbs, the existence of which she agrees with, but questions why male editors should have made such a decision; she dismisses theories about Goddess imagery, exogamy and cult as explanations; she questions why Proverbs 31, two poems both concerning women, are

placed at the end of the Proverbs collections when so much of what has preceded it has been less than favourable to woman and their portrayal; and she enquires as to the identity of the imagination that conjured up Wisdom and her attendant literary figures. Finally, drawing upon the work of Goitein, she advocates a 'mother's instruction to son' genre and, on the strength of the wife and mother's educational position as depicted in Proverbs 31, Brenner considers the possibility of a mother's discourse for the whole of Proverbs 1-9 (1996 pp. 116-117).

Brenner, having suggested the possibility of a mother's discourse, then endeavours to find supporting evidence for such a proposition. Her first is to consider the father and mother instructions of Proverbs 1-9. She argues that the only specific reference to the Father's instruction is Proverbs 4:1-4 and separates these verses into three distinct speakers: the first who exhorts the 'sons' to listen to the 'father' (vv.1-2); the second, the father who speaks of his learning (vv.3-4a) and: thirdly, the paternal grandfather's instruction. The traditional interpretation has been that the first speaker is male, and usually the father.[21] By splitting the passage into three speakers Brenner claims that, whilst there is no overriding evidence for the claim to a Female voice as the first speaker, neither is it any less correct than the traditional understanding.

Secondly, in her claim for a maternal voice *behind the text*, Brenner refers to the 'Female Onlooker' figure of Proverbs 7. She subscribes to van Dijk-Hemmes proposal of a female rebuker figure (see above) and adds further observations of her own: that archaeological evidence adds weight to a *woman at the window* scenario, and that the

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[21] Waltke concludes that the speaker is the father, not the mother because the "I" of v.2 identifies himself as a son in v.4 (2004 p.276). This is conjecture and if we follow Brenner's hypothesis of three distinct speakers, his assertion does not hold. Fox dismisses Brenner's alternative reading as a "convoluted supposition", and like Waltke connects verses 2 and 4. He also notes the absence of any quoting phrases at the beginning of v.3 (2000 p.173).

woman stays indoors like the Woman of Worth of Proverbs 31 thus remaining within her domain, unlike a male observer who would be more likely to go out and have a look at what was going on. I will assess Brenner's suggestion when I consider the identity of the narrator of Proverbs 7 in Chapter 6.

Brenner's conclusion for Proverbs 1-9 is that there is insufficient evidence for gender specific use to support a claim that the voice behind the text *must* be male. At the end of Proverbs therefore she claims Proverbs 31 as a reminder of the 'mother's instruction to son' genre operative in the first nine chapters. There appears to be little doubt that the words of Proverbs 31:1-9 have been ascribed to Lemuel's mother, presumably a woman of great standing and power. What however still seems to be unsure, recalling van Dijk-Hemmes' note of caution recorded earlier, is whether this is indeed the speech of a female literary character or evidence of a female voice *behind the text*. Brenner appears to have no such hesitation. If sons have been dealt with through the text then what about daughters? She proffers the observation that Proverbs 31:10-31 is "the single biblical instance of a 'mother's instruction to daughter' genre, the opposite and complementary number of the 'mother's instruction to son' convention of chapters 1-9 and the first part of chapter 31" (1996 pp. 127-128).

I am not entirely clear as to what Brenner means by the term "the opposite and complementary number": whether she is placing the emphasis on the opposite and complementary, or highlighting the number of instances that the 'mother to daughter' genre is employed. However, irrespective of this she adopts "the *readerly privilege* of denying the 'father's instruction to the son' genre in Proverbs 1-9 and 31" (1996 p. 115 my italics), rejects Camp's and others' positing that the framing of Proverbs is a 'male' discourse and concludes that if chapter 31 is the instruction of the wife and mother, we

ought to consider the possibility of the whole of Proverbs 1-9 being a woman's discourse.

I find Brenner's argument exciting and worthy of consideration although as yet I remain unconvinced. It is encouraging that someone has dared to suggest that 31:10-31 is an F Voice although her argument appears somewhat circular: she uses Camp's suggestion of an informal educational position for the wife and mother depicted in Proverbs 31, upon which she bases a woman's discourse for the whole of Proverbs 1-9, and then concludes that because 1-9 is Female, so therefore is chapter 31, with the added bonus of the unique 'mother's instruction to daughter' genre of 31:10-31. Perhaps not unsurprisingly given the weight of traditional 'father-to-son' interpretation, Brenner's proposition has received little in the way of scholarly support. However, she and van Dijk-Hemmes have opened a dialogue concerning the possibility of finding female voices within the text of Proverbs: Brenner, through her reading of Proverbs 1-9 "from the perspective of an F reader listening for F textual voices and the cultural model(s) underlying them" (1996 p. 113); Van Dijk-Hemmes, through her categorisation of biblical genres. It is a dialogue to which I hope to contribute.

4.3 Summary of findings

This literature review has shown that a major scholarly preoccupation in the last forty years is the role of Proverbs 1-9 and 31 as an editorial device to provide a performance context for the collections as a whole raising a key question for this study: what impact might a supposed hermeneutical framework have on reading strategies where the portrayal of women is in focus?

Camp is a key proponent of the editorial strategy and receives support from McCreesh, Whybray and Masenya. Amongst those reviewed, Fox is alone in proactively arguing that Proverbs 31 is not required in the formation of an editorial framework with chapters 1-9, but instead, is used to close the book with an image of wise womanhood evident elsewhere in the Proverbs collections. Waltke, whilst he concurs with Fox about the use of the chapter as the finalisation of the collections, has little to say on the subject of the framework as a whole.

Camp's proposal has much to commend it. Fox's critique, recognising that there are similarities between the parts but arguing that the author would surely have made them more obvious, and that the parts are hardly equal, would carry more weight if he himself had not suggested that the value of Camp's approach is that it shifts focus away from authorship to editorship (2009 p. 915). If it is assumed that the positioning of an independent poem at the end of the collections is the work of an editor, then the similarity or not between the sets of poems becomes less important. An editor may choose to bracket collections with unequal parts which bear a similarity to each other rather than an author writing complementary pieces intended in the first instance to provide a framework for a set of collections from the outset.

It would appear that those who advocate a framing device generally conceive the Woman of Worth as an allegory for personified wisdom. It may be useful therefore at this point to provide a summary of the findings on the purpose of Chapter 31 and the portrayal of the Woman of Worth in Proverbs 31:10-31:

| | Framework consisting of Proverbs 1-9 and: | | Finalisation of the Collections | Portrayal of the Woman of Worth |
	chapter 31:1-31	chapter 31:10-31		
Camp (1985)	✓			Symbolic
McCreesh (1985)		✓		Symbolic
Whybray (1994)		✓		Symbolic
Masenya (1995)[22]	✓			Real
Waltke (2005)			✓	Real
Fox (2009)			✓	Real

Two points are worthy of note here. Firstly, amongst those who advocate the existence of a framework there is no consensus as to whether the framework consists of chapter 31 or 31:10-31 only. Lichtenstein argues for the existence of both thematic and structural similarities between the poems of chapter 31. This suggests that even if the two poems are thought to be independent of one another, their juxtaposition indicates an editorial intent that the poems be seen as a whole in some form or other. If one accepts Lichtenstein's findings then chapter 31 should be seen as a whole in terms of an editorial framework.

My second observation is that, with the exception of Masenya, there appears to be a connection between the editorial strategy and the portrayal of the Woman of Worth: those who advocate a framework device advocate a symbolic portrayal of the woman; those who view the poem as the finalisation of the collections see a real (albeit

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[22] As outlined in my review of Masenya, it is unclear as to whether she understands the framework to consist of 31:10-31 or chapter 31 in its entirety. For the purposes of this summary I have concluded that she follows Camp on the basis that "it is no wonder that the editor of the book of Proverbs, with his interest in female imagery, could have put side by side two poems, one by a woman (31:1-9) another lauding a woman (31:10-31)" (2004:87).

idealised) portrayal of the woman. My review indicates that there is no overriding consensus in respect of the purpose of chapter 31: who therefore is right? However, a more fundamental question, even if Proverbs 31 is understood as part of the framework, would be to ask what impact any framework has on the interpretation of individual proverbs within the intervening collections. More specifically, what impact does female imagery have on the interpretation of individual proverbs which include women?

Consideration of editorial intention is important and may well contribute to our understanding as a whole. However Hatton (2008) argues that within the field of wisdom literature, Proverbs has, in the past, been marginalized by critical scholarship and only recently has there been a shift in sentiment concerning the value of the text. The danger then is that however well-intentioned research may be, those of us working in this particular field need to guard against the feeling that we work with the 'poor relation' in biblical genres. Such sentiment may make us more inclined to read into the text strategies that contradict the accusations of banality and randomness that the text receives in some quarters. Fox also sounds a note of caution: that in looking at the structuring of the work, contemporary scholars are expecting to find an order that simply may not exist. Contra this expectation he cites Yoder's comparison of the poem to an impressionistic painting i.e. close up it seems haphazard and yet from a distance the brushstrokes produce a comprehensive whole. (Fox, 2009 p. 890).

This is only a note of caution. It is not to say that a framework cannot, or indeed, does not exist. What it highlights is the need to consider the evidence and what implications it may or may not have in the search for the voice of the creator of the Woman of Worth. It may well be that the preoccupation with editorial strategy has obscured other lines of enquiry. For this reason I propose to 'decouple' the portrayal of

the Woman of Worth from the editorial device. The questions concerning the relationship between 31:1-9 and 31:10-31 can then be considered on other bases and the search for the Woman of Worth's creator may prove more fruitful. In due course, dependent upon our findings, the two may be 'recoupled'.[23]

Finally, we consider Waltke and Fox's suggestion of the poem of 31:10-31 as a final conclusion for the collections as a whole. If one is inclined to think that the poem is an independent piece of writing then the question of why it sits where it does remains unanswered. To suggest that it is used to conclude the book precisely because there is no other writing in the collections which extols women's virtues (Fox, 2009) is to intimate that the editor felt compelled to redress an imbalance. In the context of the rest of Proverbs, this seems highly unlikely and it would surely have made more sense to conclude with a poem in praise of a worthy man who through the pursuit of wisdom (the ultimate endeavour) achieves 'worthiness'. Yet no such eulogy is found. Instead there is a poem in praise of the Woman of Worth.. The reason might be the same – the editor offers to the reader the final prize, the end result if you take heed of the advice offered in the book, i.e. the fundamental and most basic choice to be made is finding a good wife who will, through her endeavours bring prosperity (v.11), stability (v.21) and prestige (v.23) to her husband.

An important conclusion to be drawn is that the redaction of Proverbs cannot be considered without considering the 'implied' authorship of the poem. A key question is whether or not the poem may be 'authored' by King Lemuel's mother, a continuation of her admonition and advice to her son: v.10 is the question asked by Lemuel, in response to his mother's admonition not to expend his strength on women; vv.11-31 are the

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[23] Masenya may already have inadvertently begun this process. She alone amongst those reviewed, does not follow either of the usual couplings.

mother's response, and v.23 is the heart of the poem because ultimately the poem, in keeping with the rest of the book, is primarily concerned with the welfare of men, rather than women.

Having 'disconnected' the woman in Proverbs 31:10-31 from the editorial strategy my aim is to search for a female voice within the text of Proverbs 31, exploring whether the two poems of the chapter are connected. However, methodologically I am developing the argument from a heuristic assumption that the poems are independent. Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes, through their work have begun a conversation concerning the possibility of finding female voices within the text of Proverbs. In the next chapter I will continue the conversation by addressing the issue of the phraseology used in the discussion of the authorship of the poem found in 31:10-31; look more specifically at the *text* of chapter 31, drawing upon Goitein and van Dijk-Hemmes' categorisation of biblical genres; and narrow the search for a female voice to the text itself. I will then return to the wider question of any connection between the two poems of chapter 31.

CHAPTER 5

'AUTHORSHIP' OF PROVERBS 31

5.1   Introduction

In the previous chapter I undertook a literature review focusing on the question of Proverbs 31's function (with chapters 1-9) as a possible framework for the Proverbs collections as a whole, the relationship of the two poems within Proverbs 31, and the quest for a female voice within the chapter. With regard to the latter what has been apparent, through absence of any real argument to the contrary, is the overriding assumption that the Proverbs collections were the work of males for males; or to put it more precisely, that the collections were 'authored' and edited by males. With the exception of Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes (1996), little has been done to date to explore the possibility of female voices within the text of the Hebrew Bible. Furthermore, authorship of the proverbial statements is open to debate, in that there is a lack of consensus as to their source being popular sayings or literary proverbs. Whybray (1995 p. 41) suggests that even if popular sayings might be included in the collections, there is no criteria by which they might be identified.

The scope of this chapter is to continue the conversation begun by Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes, if not for the Hebrew Bible as a whole, then for a small but significant part in that Proverbs 31:2-9 are widely accepted to be attributable to a female, a rare feature in the Hebrew Bible. What this may mean in relation to 31:10-31, I shall explore in due course. I begin by focusing on the question of 'authorship'. Since much of the scholarship to date has spoken in terms of 'authorship', I will consider precisely what is meant by the term 'author', a term which has been used generically when, in fact, it may refer to three quite distinct characteristics: the voice of the text, the

scribe who put pen to paper, or the final editor. Secondly, by considering the literary genres of the two poems, and by exploring genres of biblical poetry traditionally associated with women I hope to challenge Whybray's assertion that no criteria exists by which popular sayings can be identified and suggest that it might be possible that women were the original source for material contained within Proverbs. Consequently I will consider whether there is evidence to support a claim that the two poems of the chapter are connected. The implications of suggesting that women may be the source of some of the material raises the question of why it may appear to be detrimental to other women. A discussion of the reasons why this might pertain concludes the chapter.

5.2   The concept of authorship

In *Glossary of Literary Terms*, M.H. Abrams defines authors as "individuals who, by their intellectual and imaginative powers, purposefully create from the materials of their experience and reading a literary work which is distinctively their own" (1999 p.14). However, he notes that the term author is a relatively modern invention arising from historical developments: the shift from an oral to a literate culture; the move from manuscripts to printing; the difficulty in establishing the originators of certain kinds of text; and the proliferation of readers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Whilst the move from manuscripts to printing and the proliferation of readers will not necessarily be of concern, the difficulty in establishing the originators of original text and the shift from an oral to a literate culture are of primary concern. If 'authorship' as a concept has arisen as a result of the written word, and 'authors' are defined as those who create original works from their own intellect or imagination then, in my case, any search for the 'author' (in its modern sense) is likely to prove fruitless. In all probability the current text of Proverbs 31 was recorded and collated by one or more male scribes.

However, setting aside the presumption that Proverbs 31 is the work of male intellect or imagination facilitates an exploration of the possibility of it being a female text.[24]

Before I proceed any further, care needs to be taken in clearly identifying what, or more precisely to whom, I am referring. For this reason I shall outline the definition of the main terms pertinent to the discussion in the remainder of this chapter. In order to avoid confusion I shall use the following terms: (a) *author* in its modern definition, to denote the person(s) whose 'intellect and imagination' has created a written work; (b) *scribe* to denote a person who has recorded in literate form a piece of work and; (c) *editor*, the one who collates a collection of works into its present form.

Clarification is also required in speaking of *persona* and *voice*. Again, to use Abrams' definitions, *persona* "is often applied to the first-person speaker who tells the story in a narrative poem or novel, or whose voice we hear in a lyric poem" (1999 p. 217). I shall use it in reference to a first-person speaker. By contrast Abrams defines *voice* as that which lies *behind the text* in that it

> points to the fact that we are aware of a voice beyond the fictitious voices that speak in a work, and a persona behind all the dramatic personae, and behind even the first-person narrator. We have the sense, that is, of a pervasive *authorial* presence, a determinate intelligence and moral sensibility, who has invented, ordered and rendered all these literary characters and materials in just this way (1999 pp. 218-219).

As will become evident, such precision in terminology has not necessarily been of primary concern in the past. The presumption that the collections are the work of males for males has led to the generic use of the term *author* when it may perhaps have been more correct to consider instead the two related concepts of *persona*, on the one hand,

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[24] I will explore the possible presence of female voices in other parts of Proverbs but at this stage chapter 31 alone is the focus of my attention.

and *voice*, on the other. To illustrate the point it is worth looking at Waltke who, although not alone in his generic use of the term 'author', is representative of this use of less than precise terminology.

In considering Proverbs 31, Waltke entitles the entire chapter *The Sayings of Lemuel (31:1-31)*. By my definition this makes Lemuel the *persona*, contradicting the widely held view that it is Lemuel's mother who speaks in 31:1-9. Waltke then proceeds to argue that whilst many scholars credit only vv.2-9 to Lemuel's mother, the content of the first verse mark it as a superscription and that "if Lemuel is not the *author* of 'The Valiant Wife' [31:10-31], it is a unique orphan in Proverbs – that is, it lacks a superscription describing its *authorship*" (2005 pp. 501-502, my emphasis).[25] It would appear that Waltke, in spite of his title for Proverbs 31, is content to credit what he entitles "The Noble King" (31:2-9) to Lemuel's mother but reverts to Lemuel's 'authorship' of Proverbs 31:10-31. This is inconsistent on two levels: he neither identifies what he means by 'crediting' in terms of voice, authorship or redaction, nor does he continue to support the mother's role in the text. Having argued for a connection between the two poems the mother's input, whatever it may have been, is lost at the end of verse 9. To be fair to Waltke the question of *voice* is not necessarily his primary concern. However, I refer to him as an example of how easily the generic term 'authorship' is used and how, for my purposes, a more precise use of terminology is required.

This distinction between *persona, voice, authorship* and *redaction* lies at the heart of what I am endeavouring to ascertain i.e. the *voice behind the text* which gives birth to the poems contained in Proverbs 31. The traditional interpretation is that the chapter,

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[25] As noted during the literature review, Whybray draws the opposite conclusion, deducing that the lack of a heading denotes that it is an independent text appended by an editor.

either in its entirety or as two distinct poems, is *authored* by males creating both a female *persona* who speaks (Lemuel's mother) and a male *persona* who is silent (Lemuel), along with a female character who is silent (the Woman of Worth).[26] The question of a *voice behind the text* is rarely considered. However, there exists interplay between the categories: a *voice* informs the work an author produces; the *author* creates a *persona* who speaks in the text.

The clarification of terms in engaging with the text as it is now received is important: *authors, scribes, editors* and *voices* are persons who make a contribution *behind the text*; *personae* such as Lemuel and his mother, and the Woman of Worth (whether they are based on real people or not) are characters that speak or remain silent *within the text.* My enquiries are less focused on discovering the *author* of the poems, rather the 'persuasive authorial presence', i.e. the *voice,* to which Abrams refers above. Setting aside the assumption that the poems are entirely the work of males, consideration can be given as to whether any evidence exists to support a claim that the work in its current form may originally have been voiced by women before being recorded in written form. This contribution could be in the form of women's direct speech in the text (e.g Lemuel's mother in Proverbs 31), or material which has traditionally been understood as the instruction of the 'father'. My strategy is to adopt an integrated approach, first looking at the literary genre(s) of the poems and then taking into consideration female participation in public life, which may have given rise to women's words and songs being recorded in written form, thus enabling women's voices to be (re)claimed in the Hebrew text.

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[26] Discussion re the identity of the Woman of Worth, as previously noted, has largely focused on the question of whether she is real or symbolic. That is not my primary concern at this stage.

5.3   The literary genres of the two poems of Proverbs 31

Proverbs 31:1-9 is a text which presents no major difficulties in terms of its nature and character. Widely held to be a form of royal instruction, its most striking feature is that the speaker is a woman, a rarity amongst ancient Near Eastern Wisdom texts (Fox, 2009 p. 883), although a female speaker is not in itself a rarity in Proverbs. Wisdom and the Strange Woman both speak in chapters 1-9. It is to its rarity as a female instruction that I shall return when we consider whether any connection exists between the two poems.

Proverbs 31:10-31 has received more scholarly attention although to date comparatively little work has been carried out in terms of form-critical discussion by either female or male scholars: it is primarily supposed to be a wisdom poem and most notably an alphabetic acrostic. Amongst recent scholars, Wolters is the exception advocating that the poem "displays most of the formal characteristics of the hymnic genre" (1988 p. 447). He further clarifies this by suggesting that it sits within the tradition of heroic poetry, a type of literature commonplace in many cultures and "characterized by the recounting of the mighty deeds of heroes, usually the military exploits of noble warriors" (1988 p. 452).

Wolters identifies seven arguments in support of his assertion (1988 pp. 452-455). He begins the defence of his thesis by referring to the use of military terms, observing the use of the term ʾēšet ḥayīl in the opening verse of the poem (v.10). Acknowledging that the term has many translations he advocates that "in this context [it] should probably be understood as the female counterpart of the *gibbôr ḥayīl*, the title given to the 'mighty men [sic] of valour' which are often named in David's age" (1988 p. 453). Wolters relies on the use of the repetition of *ḥayīl* in verse 29, hence the theme of valour

forming a bracket around the intervening material. Within this intervening material he refers to the allusion of strength (ʿoz) 'she girds her loins with strength' (v.17) and 'strength and honour are her garment' (v.25); the use of šālaḥ, (stretches out) usually having an aggressive connotation and ʿālâ (exceed) with a military connation in verse 29; and the use of prey-like words šālāl (plunder) in verse 11 and ṭerep (food) in verse 15.

Wolters' observations are not without merit and in addition I would add the theme of mockery. The term śāḥaq (v.25) usually denotes laughter in mockery or derision, and the Woman of Worth's lack of fear (v.21) may denote mockery at those who are less adequately provisioned. At first sight this does not seem to sit with the image of the woman being portrayed with her care and devotion to the management of her household and to the less fortunate (v.20). Her mockery and jeering in verses 21 and 25 might be understood as 'laughing in the face of danger' but it may well be in mockery and decision as suggested. Suspension of perceived 'feminine' characteristics – caring, compassion amongst them, allows for such an interpretation and we shall see in due course that historically women are understood to have played a significant part in national life by welcoming home in song warriors from war.

Wolters then turns his attention to the use of the masculine plural imperative form of tānah (extol), in preference to nātan (give) in the concluding verse, citing that it occurs only on two other occasions and both in the context of heroic poetry i.e. Judges 11:40 and Judges 5:11. Lastly he argues that a characteristic of heroic poetry is that it describes action, rather than the beauty of the subject matter: the Woman of Worth is indeed a busy woman, and it is her actions, not her beauty that are extolled. Whybray (1995) declares that the woman, although wealthy, is not of the highest class of society

otherwise she would not be actively engaged in the work detailed in the poem. In contrast, Wolters concludes that the woman portrayed in chapter 31 is, like males within heroic poetry, indeed from the higher class and is "clearly the kind of aristocrat of pronounced individuality which is characteristic of the protagonists of heroic poetry" (1988 p. 455).

The assertion of the woman's social standing is further supported by Yoder, who contends that because of her activities, the protagonist of 31:10-31 is a composite figure of Persian-period women, and in particular, women of affluence or position (2001 p. 90). In terms of any reference to the classification of the poem as heroic poetry, Yoder makes reference to the use of the term *ḥayīl*. She notes that it is used throughout the Hebrew Bible, in reference to the qualities of strength, for men engaged in military endeavours and generally of men of power, capacity and substance. Although she does not answer the question of classification directly she does raise the question of why, when the term is used with a woman (real or imaginary), the language used for men in translation is not perceived as fitting and we find the term generally being translated as 'good', 'capable', and 'ideal'. Yoder highlights a few notable exceptions, amongst others, 'woman of worth' (Camp, Fontaine) and 'valiant woman' (Wolters) (Yoder, 2001 pp. 76-77). Subsequent publications appear to have taken note of Yoder's critique e.g. 'woman of worth' (Masenya, 2004), 'valiant wife' (Waltke, 2005), 'valiant woman' (Hatton, 2008), 'woman of strength' (Fox, 2009).

Whether Wolters is convincing in his interpretation is open to debate. Of the scholars who make any substantial comment on Wolters' analysis, Fox (2009) and Waltke (2005) differ in their responses. Fox believes that the poem fails as a hymn on two counts: firstly, because it is in praise of a human rather than, more properly, God;

and secondly, that whilst acknowledging that some of the imagery has heroic or martial overtones, it remains too distant from heroic poetry, which praises the exploits of a warrior. Wolters himself notes this criticism concerning the object of praise, but believes it to be based on habitual association and the fact that the subject matter is not only human but a woman, rather than on any substantial evidence to the contrary (1988 p. 451).

Waltke also believes Wolters' claims for a hymn fall short but concedes that he is on more solid ground in classifying the poem as heroic poetry. Again, whether the poem falls within the genre of heroic poetry is a question which in this context does not need to be answered: it is sufficient to take note of Wolters, Fox and Waltke in their agreement that elements of military and heroic imagery are present within the poem. How then does this support a claim to women's involvement in the creation of the text? At first sight, the use of such military and heroic terms within the text might suggest that the poem was male-authored, the author relying on images and ideas that were familiar to him as a male. However, heroic/victory poetry was not only the preserve of males but also of females: hence the use of heroic and military terms may support a claim for a female voice behind the text of Proverbs 31:10-31 as I will now explore.

5.4   Women and genres of biblical poetry

H. Gunkel argues that ancient literary genres within the Hebrew Bible belong to a definite side of the national life of Israel: the Torah announced by the priest in the sanctuary, the prophet uttering Oracles in the outer courts of the temple, the elders at the gate giving forth wisdom, the Lament chanted by female mourners at the bier, and the Victory Songs sung by women to greet the returning war heroes (1928 pp. 61-62). However, even if they were used in a particular context it is not to say that they

necessarily arose from those situations. As I have already alluded, the origin of much of the material is unknown and questions of oral or literary proverbs divides opinion. What is of importance is whether we might be able to determine whether women were the primary source for any of these literary genres.

As was noted in the literature review a considerable amount of work has been undertaken on female poetry within the Hebrew Bible by van Dijk-Hemmes using Goitein's (1988) research as the foundation for her work. Goitein identified women as *creators,* or what I have defined as *voices* behind the text, of specific genres of poetry. Van Dijk-Hemmes' and Goitein's research suggests that women's poems are classified into particular genres: songs of victory, mocking, rebuke, prophecy, soothsaying, love songs, prayers and lament, vows, birth songs and naming speeches. However, the categorisation of some texts in their entirety into a specific category or genre can prove problematic.[27] Is it therefore possible, that the specific genres identified by Goitein and van Dijk-Hemmes might be found co-existing within one and the same poem and, more specifically, within the two poems of Proverbs 31? It would be stretching the point too far to intimate that the two poems of chapter 31 cover all the aforementioned genres. However, my initial foray into identifying each verse with a particular genre, based on vocabulary and content, reveals the following categorisations:[28]

Victory and mockery	vv. 10, 11, 12, 14, 17, 21, 22, 25, 30
Wise behaviour	vv. 13, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 23, 24, 26, 27
Rebuke	vv. 3-9, 28-29, 31
Lament	v.2

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[27] Wolters (1988 p.448) notes that form-critical distinctions are not rigid and that the features of one genre do not necessarily preclude the existence of another's.

[28] 31:1, as the superscription, is not classified within a particular genre.

Each verse would appear to fit within a category, most notably the victory and mockery genres. 'Wise behaviour' is not a specific genre identified by van Dijk-Hemmes or Goitein. However, it is a public activity which includes verbal transactions which lead to leadership qualities and public expressions which may fall into the more specific categories. While such 'transactions' involve communication and verbal negotiation, the significance in this type of verse is not the oral genres employed by the woman but her actions, which speak louder than words. I shall now consider each classification in more detail, beginning with the genre referred to most commonly as 'victory songs'.

5.4.1 **Victory and mockery**

The two most cited examples of 'victory songs' are Exodus 15 and Judges 5. Whilst women as a collective group took no active part in war itself, conquest and defence were an important part of the public life of Israel. To this end a woman's role was to welcome home warriors on their return from battle. This involved singing victory songs and songs of mockery, mocking either the enemy or those on their own side who had failed to act in the common interest.[29] The identification of victory songs as a genre within Hebrew literature is not in question although the classification of an individual text as a victory song is often more problematic. Trent C. Butler notes the difficulty in considering the genre of Judges 5 to be an example of, or to contain elements of, a victory song:

> Epic narrative, battle calls, cultic blessings and curses, tribal evaluations, and poetic satire blend together into one complex work that defies categorisation into one simple form. If author intentionality carries the

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[29] Jacob L. Wright tackles the issue of the apparent disparity of the criticism levelled at the tribes and territories (Judges 15:15b-17, 23) who traditionally are thought not to have come to the aid of Yahweh (2011 pp. 505-521).

greatest weight in assigning form or genre to a piece of literature, then hymnic praise becomes the dominant form here. If quantity of formal elements prevails, then epic narrative ballad comes to the fore. If function in literature has the last say, then a call to tribal unity may be the appropriate category (2009 p. 123).

Butler provides a good summary of the scholarly views concerning the literary genre of Judges 5 (2009 pp. 122-123). It is sufficient for this research to note only that the chapter contains elements of the genre, even if the entire piece is not classified as such. Evidence of women's victory songs thus exists within the Hebrew Bible. What remains unanswered is the question of the original source for the text as it has been received: whether women themselves were the voices behind the text or whether they are the product of male intellect and imagination. Eunice Poethig poses a similar question in her PhD thesis *The Victory Song Tradition of the Women of Israel* (1985). She asks not only if women are remembered as the singers of victory songs in Early Israel, but also whether there existed a particular group of women whose responsibility it was to maintain the tradition of victory songs and ensure their preservation. Through an exploration of the transmission of traditional (folk) music and a survey of the terms used for women and choruses of women in the tradition, Poethig demonstrates that women were indeed the composers, traditioners and preservers of Israel's victory songs, and that the role was a traditional one for women within the community, with no evidence to suggest that they were performed by professional guilds (1985 p. 220).

Poethig's research lends further credibility to the work of Goitein (1988) in identifying women as the originators of literary genres within the Bible, including songs and poems of victory and mockery. How might this impact on an understanding of Proverbs 31? I have identified verses which fall within the genre of victory and mockery, and I noted earlier that Wolters, Fox and Waltke concur that elements of

military and heroic imagery are to be found within the poem in 31:10-31, despite their disagreement concerning the classification of the poem as a heroic hymn. Fox, whilst acknowledging elements of military and heroic imagery, believes the poem to be too distant from heroic poetry because, in its usual form, heroic poetry praises the exploits of a warrior. However, just as he appears to habitually associate hymns with the praise of God, so he habitually associates warriors with male fighters: is it not possible that the 'battle' to provide for a household, such as is alluded to in Proverbs 31:10-31, requires strategic planning and well-ordered execution, even if not to quite the same extent as in war? The woman's household is indeed a busy and seemingly well-ordered one and in fulfilling those tasks the woman could, in a less male-oriented reading, be acknowledged as a hero. Wolters himself concludes that the heroism of the battlefield is transposed to the woman's activity in the home and community. This can be taken a stage further: it is not the heroism of the battlefield that is transposed to the woman's activity, but the (re)claiming of the literary genre by women, for the activities of women. It is possible therefore, that the elements of heroic poetry found in 31:10-31, far from being male-authored, have the victory songs of women as their source.

5.4.2 Wise behaviour

The next 'genre' to consider is that of wise behaviour. Women were to be found not only in groups in Jewish public life through their victory songs, but as individual women, present in the form of the 'wise woman'. This is a woman who, through natural talent, traits and training comes to acquire leadership amongst women, and sometimes among the public at large. It is the wise woman who keeps watch over her community and whose advice "is sought not just by her family but by the whole village. It is she who is most proficient at whatever craft is practised in the district, and she, too, who is

the poet who 'declaims' before the women at weddings and other festive occasions and in mourning as well" (Goitein, 1988 p. 10). This statement makes strong claims which Goitein supports using scriptural reference and his experience of the immigrant Yemenite villagers, who provided the foundation of his research: wise women are to be found negotiating with an army commander and 'all the people' (2 Samuel 20:14-22), mollifying a king (2 Samuel 14), and instructing an entire nation as a 'mother in Israel' (Judges 5:7).[30]

Goitein's evidence suggests that individual women did have a part to play in the public life of their communities and of the nation. As to the precise nature of the role as *wise women*, the scriptural evidence would not appear to support his claims and we can only surmise that the evidence for that is provided by his study of the Yemenite community. However, Carole Fontaine adds further weight to the claim by identifying the roles that women would have been involved in, both within the private realm of the home and in the wider public domain (2004 pp. 12-149). Her preliminary consideration is to look beyond the stereotypical representations of women within wisdom material and to ascertain whether the lived experience of real women has found its way into wisdom literature as it has been received in its written form. She begins by defining what she means by 'sage': in addition to those who recorded wisdom in its written form it also extends to "any practitioners or tradents (carriers) of the wisdom tradition" (2004 pp. 14-15).

I have already demonstrated the difficulty which lies in attributing specific texts to female voices but, by extending the definition of sage, Fontaine ascertains that women

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[30] Interestingly, the wise woman who mollifies King David is instructed to speak the words that Joab puts into her mouth (2 Samuel 14:3). However, despite not speaking her own words of wisdom she is identified and known outside her own community as a wise woman (2 Samuel 14:2).

may be included in the definition by virtue of their practice rather than their literary skill. Hence, Fontaine categorises the sage woman: firstly in the private domain, in both perceived positive (wife and mother, teacher, household manager, counsellor, maid) and negative (scolding wife and mother, widow, adulteress, prostitute, rebellious slave) portrayals; secondly, in the public domain as authors and official sages, counsellors, healers, mourners and public economic managers and business women. Her conclusion, drawn upon the evidence presented, is a picture of women involved in all aspects of life, both at home and in public. She also extends the interpretation of the wise woman to include not only the perceived leaders of a community, but also slaves (e.g. the 'wisdom' of the female Israelite slave in 2 Kings 5 (2004 p. 75)). Fontaine's work adds further weight to a claim that women's experience in a variety of roles in the public domain informs wisdom literature.

What then of chapter 31? As I shall demonstrate in the next section, the first poem (31:2-9) can be categorised as falling within the rebuke genre of poetry but it is important to note that the poem records, through her words, the wise behaviour of a royal mother. Yet this is not simply a domestic matter, rather it concerns the ethical obligations of the royal son in ruling over his kingdom. The second poem (31:10-31) describes a wise woman, a sage. An argument against such a claim is that the woman of 31:10-31 is predominantly concerned with her own household and business and not with the wider society. However, the majority of her activities relate to those in the wider community. Only verses 11, 12, 15, 21, 22 and 27 relate specifically to the woman, her husband or her household. The remainder concern her activities in her business endeavours (vv. 13, 16, 18, 19, 20 & 24) which presumably enable her to extend her hands to the needy; her wise and kind counsel (v.26); and her perceived

standing both at home (vv.11, 12, 28 & 12) and in the wider community (vv.23 & 31).
Within the chapter, therefore, two elements of the *wise behaviour* genre can be
identified – the action of a wise woman (31:2-9) and an example of a model of wise
behaviour (31:10-31). In due course I shall take this into account in considering whether
any connection exists between the two poems.

5.4.3   **Rebuke**

It is well documented that the poem of the noble king is a royal instruction as
noted earlier. Given the intensity of verse 2 - *No, my son! No son of my womb! No, son
of my vows!* – it is safe to state that vv. 3-9 fall within the rebuke genre of poetry.
Goitein draws this conclusion, remarking that Deuteronomy 21:18-21 advocates that a
wayward son should be rebuked by both his father *and his mother* and that during the
entire period of the monarchy it is the king's mother, not his wife, who has a special
relationship in the state (1988 p. 12). Royal women in Israel were not considered as
ruling sovereigns in their own right, but derived authority and influence from their own
initiative and/or from the kings with whom they were associated (Heim, 2005 p. 610).
Queen Jezebel appears to be the exception to Goitein's suggestion that it is the mother
who enjoys a special relationship (1 Kings 16:31-22:20; 2 Kings 9:30-37). Her husband
King Ahab appears, in the minds of the writers of the Hebrew Bible at least, to have
been led astray by his wife, not by his mother. Whilst she need not necessarily detain us
here, Jezebel is the archetypical wicked foreign queen and perceived as a genuine threat
to the order and stability of the nation. I shall consider the perceived threat of foreign
women more fully in Chapter 6.

Counselling queen mothers are not absent in the Hebrew Bible, although not
always seen in such a positive light as Lemuel's mother: Maacah, mother of Asa, is

removed from office by her son for making an abominable image (1 Kings 15:9-14); Athaliah, mother of Ahaziah is 'his counsellor in doing wickedly' (2 Chronicles 22:2-4). The fact that the deeds of women within the royal court are recorded suggests that some women did indeed hold influence within the court, although a note of caution might be sounded as to the motives of the writers in recording their misdemeanours. Evidence of queen mothers in the royal court is not solely confined to Israel. Fontaine provides compelling evidence of queens using the language of wisdom to achieve their goals in the Late Bronze Age Hittite Empire, both in terms of dealing with their gods and in the political intricacies of treaties and treasures (2004 pp. 62-63).

In terms of the poem praising the Woman of Worth (31:10-31), verses 28, 29 and 31 are not immediately obvious as being identified with the rebuke genre of poetry, since they appear to be advocating precisely the opposite, praise for the woman and her deeds. Yet part of the role of the mother is to rebuke her offspring and the 'son' is expected to adhere to both the mother's teachings as well as the father's discipline. Not only does her wise behaviour bring her praise, but her rebukes command respect.

5.4.4 Lament

Lament is expressed within the community, not necessarily over a particular individual, although that was indeed part of it, but over the destruction of the people. The Queen Mother of 31:2-9 begins her admonition with a heartfelt cry: not only is she fearful of what her son is in danger of becoming, but she also fears for the subsequent destruction of his kingdom. This latter fear is often overlooked, in preference for the preconceived notion that her priority is maternal concern for the welfare of her son. This is not necessarily the case for a wise woman who has the ethical obligations of her son to consider. Neither would the concern for maintenance of his position be the only

consideration for a woman using her wisdom to maintain and promote her own dynasty, avoiding being overthrown from either those within the court or foreign powers. There are personal considerations, given the implications of being a woman of a conquered nation.

Whilst there is no general consensus on the precise translation of *mah* (31:2), the repetition of the phrase *mah-bərî* three times serves to heighten the tension and the intensity of the admonition (Fox, 2009 p. 885). The usual translation of *mah* is '*what*', '*why*' or '*how*'. Fox translates it '*no*', Waltke (2005) '*listen*'. Neither likes the usual translation since '*what, my son?*' appears to make little sense. I would favour '*no*', on the basis that the intensity of the admonition used implies that the text may well be an extract of a longer conversation or that Lemuel is already guilty of the misdemeanours described. Further intensity is derived from the reference not simply to him as 'son' but to the son of her womb and her vows. If it were simply a matter of maternal regret over a son's behaviour the second admonition may well have been sufficient in the sense that it would be an appeal to the fact that she endured the pregnancy and given birth to him. His behaviour then would be an affront to her personally and to her alone. Reference to vows leads to a different realm altogether: why were vows necessary and to whom were they made? The identity of Lemuel and his mother are unknown but vow-making in order to conceive a child is not without precedent (1 Samuel 1:11). Whilst the vows may not have been made to Yahweh in this particular instance, the reference to them in his mother's admonition would suggest that she is not simply asking for his attention but is intimating in the strongest terms possible that there is more at stake than simply a mother-son relationship. Lemuel's behaviour is reproachable and has consequences on three counts: to himself and his reputation (as a son and king); to his mother as the

person who carried and gave birth to him and to her place and reputation at court; and to the god(s) who enabled his conception, and the potential of divine retribution. His mother's lament is therefore for the possible consequences of a broken covenant with the nation as a whole.

5.4.5 **Summary**

It has become evident that both poems within Proverbs 31 contain elements that have been identified as being characteristic of genres of poetry attributed to females, not solely as the maintainers of the traditions but as their creators. What is also evident is that the genres are not confined to one or other of the two poems under consideration but can be seen in both, particularly in the case of wise behaviour. We have also seen that the poem of Proverbs 31:10-31 contains elements attributable to the heroic genre of poetry. These three things add weight to the proposal that there is a female voice behind the text of Proverbs 31. The question that now needs to be addressed, in connection with such a proposal, is the way in which the authors/redactors have made us of the voice and whether any alternative interpretation of the two poems might be suggested. I have already noted the traditional interpretation of the poems: attributed to the male Lemuel (who may or may not be a real person), they are *authored* by males creating within the text a female *persona* who speaks (Lemuel's mother) and a male *persona* who is silent (Lemuel), along with a female character who is silent (the Woman of Worth). Might it be possible that the poems are both voiced and attributable to females? To investigate this further I shall explore whether any connections exist between the two poems of chapter 31.

5.5   The relationship between the two poems of Proverbs 31

As stated earlier most commentators conclude that whilst the poem of the Noble King in 31:1-9 is an example of a royal instruction attributable to a female, the poem of the Woman of Worth is considered to have been *authored* by a male. However, in light of the previous discussion, I have identified that there is evidence to support a claim that the Woman of Worth is female-*voiced* in that there is a female pervasive authorial presence *behind the text*. I therefore intend to explore whether a case can be made for interpreting Proverbs 31:10-31 as the voice of Lemuel's mother, a continuation of the rebuke given to Lemuel in 31:1-9.

Can it be said that a connection exists between the two poems? To suggest so is to swim against a formidable tide of scholarly opinion which deems the poems to be independent of one another: the focus of enquiry tends to fall on why a redactor should have chosen to place a poem in praise of a woman at the end of the collections and the two poems side by side in the final chapter.[31] However, the support for the claim that they are independent is not without justification: their separation in the LXX; the acrostic nature of Proverbs 31:10-31; and the lack of a heading for the second poem.[32] Most notable amongst those who have given any real consideration to the question of a connection is Lichtenstein who, despite going to some length to establish thematic and structural links between the two poems, ultimately concluded that the 'similarity' between the poems prompted an editorial decision to juxtapose the two originally independent pieces (1982 p. 211). However, work to date has assumed that the poems are male-authored and has focused on what has been referred to in the introductory

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[31] The arguments for seeing the two poems as independent of one another were considered in the literature review in Chapter 4.

[32] As already mentioned, the lack of heading has also been put forward as an argument for a connection between the two poems (cf. Waltke).

chapter as the text-centred approach, dealing *within the text* as it has been received. Our exploration to this point has involved looking at the world *behind the text*, not at the world of the *author*, but rather, at the world of the *voice*. It has been established that literary genres associated with women are to be found in both poems within Chapter 31. It is for this reason that, even if it cannot be argued that the poems are connected by the same *voice*, the apparent absolute certainty that no connection exists can at least be undermined, and an exploration into the voices behind the text be continued.

It is generally acknowledged that the words spoken in Proverbs 31:2-9 are attributed to a woman. While there are no parallels in Ancient Near Eastern literature of a mother's wise sayings to her son, elsewhere in Proverbs (1:8, 6:20, 31:26) there is reference to a mother's teaching. Goitein notes that, because of her lofty position in Israel, the queen mother became "*the literary representative of the mother rebuking her child*" (1988 p. 12 his emphasis). This might be understood as implying that the mother in Proverbs 31:2-9 is a literary device. However, despite the uncertainty as to the identity of Lemuel and his mother (if indeed they are real persons rather than literary characters), there appears no real evidence to contradict the notion that the words recorded were originally spoken by a woman of the time. The uniqueness of the instruction in terms of the speaker adds weight to a claim that even if the admonition is understood to be delivered by a male-authored female *persona*, behind it lies the *voice* of a female within a royal court.

The quest to ascertain whether Proverbs 31:10-31 is attributable to the same female *persona* is more complex. The poem begins with a question - *A woman of worth, who can find?* - deemed by most to be rhetorical. Commentators generally affirm the rhetorical nature of the statement whilst relatively few discuss the nuances: interest in

the opening statement rarely extends beyond this interesting and perplexing riddle. Sadly this means that several alternative scenarios have never been fully explored. If the assumptions, that the opening question is rhetorical and the two poems are independent of one another, are suspended then it is permissible to make the following enquiries about the world of the text: firstly, whether the question asked in verse 10 is posed by the same person who speaks the second and subsequent lines of the poem; secondly, whether the poem, in its entirety, is the wise words of Lemuel's mother; and thirdly, whether verse 10 (a and b) is the response of a petulant king who has just been scolded by his mother and the remainder of the poem (vv.11-31) her response to his apparent disconsolation?

These questions are never likely to be resolved with any degree of certainty but the suspension of the assumptions that the poem is male-authored, the question in verse 10 is rhetorical, and the poems are independent at least permit us to ask the questions. I find myself coming to a similar conclusion to Lichtenstein: that whilst there are similarities between the texts of the two poems in terms of the literary genres employed, the juxtaposition of the texts is a deliberate editorial strategy. Whereas Lichtenstein makes a case based on stylistic and structural grounds, my enquiries validate making a case on the grounds that both poems display literary genres known to have been deployed by women. Hence two separate hypotheses can be made concerning Proverbs 31: firstly, women's voices are present *behind the text* of both poems within the chapter, not as *authors* but as *voices*, and it is female voices that have created the female *persona* that is the Woman of Worth; secondly, the poem in Proverbs 31:10-31 can be read as a continuation of the mother's rebuke in 31:2-9.

5.6   An exploration of biblical women's speech

What might this then mean in terms of interpretation? The claim to female voices *behind the text* does not imply that women wrote the text as it is now received. Rather, male authors have collated the material, creating the *persona* of Lemuel's mother who cautions her son against certain women, and a character in the Woman of Worth that is so idealised that it has been used as a benchmark for all women, one which is centred on the needs of her husband and family rather than herself. Moreover, one which, according to the traditional interpretation of 31:10 as a rhetorical question, none can achieve. The discussion over whether she represents a real woman or is symbolic, as discussed in Chapter 4, does not address the question of why a woman would say such things.

In this chapter I have used what McKay (1997 p. 77) denotes as an *inclusivist approach*, following Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes, reading between the lines of the Hebrew text to find material that deals with women and their concerns in a positive way. McKay's critique of this approach is that whilst it has the advantage of treating all the texts as open to equal scrutiny and of identifying women's involvement in the production of texts, it also leaves the texts as it stands. It does not ask the questions that scholars such as Cheryl Exum and Esther Fuchs ask; how far does the text still promote an androcentric agenda and why would women speak in that way against themselves and against other women? Whose interests are being served? An example of Exum's development of her own thinking in this area is the second of her articles dealing with women in Exodus 1:8-2:10 (1994b; 1994a). In *Second Thoughts about Secondary Characters: Women in Exodus 1.8-2.10*, Exum expresses her dissatisfaction with the first article. She argues that, in spite of the positive presentation of women in the text, in

using a literary analysis the interpreter is limited to "describing, and thus to reinscribing, the text's gender ideology… [the method is] representative of the phallocentric drive to control and organize reading (and reality) into clearly defined categories…we need to interrogate the ideology that motivates it" (1994b p. 78)

In *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Woman* Esther Fuchs argues that the Hebrew Bible does not simply present women as marginal but advocates their marginality and, as a literary text, supports the political subordination of women (2000 p. 11-13). Hence all narrative within the Hebrew Bible is to be read within this context and its ideology unmasked. Her critique is that "the narrative is not merely a historical interpretation of past events, but a prescriptive interpretation of culture. It is neither neutral nor objective, though its narrator is usually omniscient and authorative" (Fuchs, 2000 p. 29).

The question of why women say what they do will dog all of my enquiries throughout this thesis as I attempt to uncover female voices. What is there to be gained in identifying female voices, of highlighting the contribution that women have made to the texts as we now receive them, if we understand them to still promote an androcentric agenda? Or is it simply enough to recognise and name the role that women have been placed in by those who hold the power and accept that they posit the worldview of the males who 'permitted' such texts to be included in the canon? Exum and Fuchs are right to question the ideology of the text and to look beyond merely claiming the presence of women *within* or *behind the text*. Women's dealings with one another are part of a complex weaving of gender relations as women negotiate and claim their place in society. Exum and Fuchs offer a position from which to start to explore this complex weaving and it is within this framework that I intend to analyse the 'speech' of women.

This speech takes place at two levels. In identifying women's speech *within the text* the ideology which makes female voices say what they say *behind the text* needs to be identified. It is insufficient simply to claim a female voice and move on. Subsequently, the next stage is to identify why her speech has been included in the male-oriented text. Victory songs are a classic example of this bi-fold espousal of an androcentric agenda. Women's conditioning leads them to sing of androcentric values and their inclusion in the final narration reinforces the ideology.

An example of this is the Song of Deborah (Judges 5). Setting aside discussions about Jael's involvement in the murder of Sisera, I wish to focus on the account of Sisera's mother awaiting her son's return and appearing to delight in the perceived rape, and undoubtedly imprisonment or murder, of female Israelite captives (Judges 5:28-30).[33] Proceeding on the understanding that as a victory song the originators of the song are women, it seems reasonable to assume that a female originated text finds its way into the mouth of a male created female character (Deborah) who speaks ill of a another woman and her cohort (albeit an enemy). This is a triple strike: the male narrator uses women's speech in the mouth of a female to criticise a woman for being vindictive against other women. Cheryl Exum concurs up to a point, since she does not explicitly identify the song's origins as a female voice, stating that "the narrator who puts words in the Canaanite women's mouths puts their words in Deborah's mouth" (Exum, 2007 p. 73). She is right to say that this strategy is not about the portrayal of the 'bad' Canaanite mother against the 'good' Israelite mother, but that the voices of Sisera's mother and Deborah are used to advocate "the male ideology of war in which rape is taken for granted as a weapon of terror and revenge" (Exum, 2007 p. 73). Whilst I agree

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[33] In Chapter 6, I shall consider the same text as part of a discussion of the function of the 'woman at a window' type scene.

with Exum that the narrator should be held to account for using women's speech to further his ideology in this way, we need also to explore why women provide him with the material in the first place.

There is a complex weaving of women's dealings with one another in Deborah's Song. Deborah mocks Sisera's mother for waiting in vain for her murdered son, whilst Sisera's mother delights in the joy of believing her son to be raping Israelite women. Ivone Gebara speaks of "women weaving the cloth of evil" (2002 p. 96), arguing that if we speak of women as victims then we must also speak of them as perpetrators of evil and note that the place in which they are able to operate with most power over other women is within the home. Women, she argues, are capable of the actions that produce systematic violence in society, particularly in the domestic setting when the mother's role in raising children is more powerful than the father's. However, because women have historically not been permitted to operate in the economic and political spheres they are viewed as untainted by the evils within society. They therefore need to be protected from such ills by remaining within the private sphere of the domestic setting. Within this domain, the role of the mother is to protect those in her charge from societal evils. The ideal mother is one who helps keep a certain social order in place; the hierarchy and ethical setting of which is determined by the structures in power. Evil towards others is then portrayed and understood as good or concern for them (2002 pp. 96-100). Both Sisera's mother and Deborah are prime examples of this behaviour: Deborah, as the 'mother in Israel' (Judges 5:7), uncommonly operates in the public sphere, seemingly unconstrained by the usual societal norms. Her role however is to protect, not a biological son from the evils of his own society, but the 'sons of Israel' (Judges 4:5) from being overthrown by enemy forces. Sisera's mother is confined

behind a window, a not uncommon portrayal for women in the Hebrew Bible (Joshua 2:15,18,21; 1 Samuel 19:12; 2 Samuel 6:16//1 Chronicles 15:29; 2 Kings 9:30,32). Both women operate as mothers protecting their sons' interests, one in a public setting and the other in a domestic one, although one might suggest that Sisera's mother's influence extends beyond her son. This 'weaving the cloth of evil' is therefore predominant in both settings and the narrator uses it to good effect.

Turning now to the situation of Lemuel's mother it is evident that this is in force. As the king's mother she is responsible for maintaining societal order on two counts: both for her biological son and, in 31:10-31, for the nation as a whole. Her words to Lemuel in 31:2-9 expose the perceived dangers of cavorting with the 'wrong' women and her words in 31:11-31 reinforce the androcentric opinion of what makes a 'good' wife. The rewards for women acquiescing to, and promoting, their own subjugation within a patriarchal society is honour and status, usually conferred by society in the form of motherhood (Exum, 1994b p. 81). Lemuel's mother demonstrates this ideology in the poem of Proverbs 31, where the Woman of Worth gains honour and status via the prominence of her husband (31:23), by being praised by her husband and sons (31:28), and remarkably, by outdoing other women (31:29). The content of a woman's speech, or more accurately, content which speaks negatively to or about other women, cannot be used to support a claim that it can only be males who are speaking. Rather, when we take into account the system within which women are accorded a position within society, and the means by which they achieve their place, further support is added to a claim to the possibility that it is women's voices that are heard.

5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I continued the conversation begun by van Dijk-Hemmes and Brenner in respect of the search for female voices within the poems of Chapter 31. The discussion of *author, persona* and *voice* identified that scholarship to date has generally used 'author' as a generic term to speak of all three aforementioned terms, although in terms of a historical-critical approach the likelihood of establishing the identity of an author(s) for the material is extremely remote, if not impossible. Setting aside the presumption that Proverbs 31 was the work of males I searched for evidence to support a claim that the poems could have been voiced by women, whilst acknowledging that this brought various scenarios in respect of the possibility of male authors creating female personae who speak within the text. Adopting an integrated approach (Tate, 2008) I identified evidence of literary genres associated with female participation in public life within both poems of Proverbs 31. This common feature of both poems links the two and interest was further enhanced in terms of an alternative interpretation for the poems by reference to the opening verse of Proverbs 31 and its reference to Lemuel's mother, despite an overwhelming scholarly consensus that the two poems are independent. Reading against the grain, I have set aside the presumptions which have dominated 'malestream' interpretation, and as a result have concluded that it is possible that female voices are to be heard behind the text of Proverbs 31. Finally, having argued that women contribute to the text, I explored the reasons why women speak against other women concluding that they do so in order to obtain for themselves a place within androcentric society. In the next chapter I shall explore more fully the case of the Strange Woman and her encounter with the young man detailed in Proverbs 7. My

contention is that here is an example of a female narrator finding her place in society through the vilification of another woman.

CHAPTER 6

THE CASE OF THE STRANGE WOMAN

6.1 Introduction

In the opening nine chapters of Proverbs, Wisdom and the Strange Woman are portrayed as competing for the attention of the inexperienced men to whom Proverbs is addressed. The two are seen in complete antithesis to one another: both offer intimacy (cf. 7:4, 7:18) and yet Wisdom is to be sought out and the Strange Woman to be avoided at all costs, or at least if not avoided, then to be seen for what she really is – a path to destruction and death. Both characters speak within the text alongside the male speech of the 'father' who offers 'advice' to his son in order that he may grow in wisdom and become an upstanding citizen of the community. To that end the son is exhorted to hear (and keep) his father's instruction and to not reject his mother's teaching (1:8, 6:20). Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes have argued for a female voice to be heard but have failed to sway the tide of scholarly (male and female) opinion to date. I shall return to them in due course and consider their arguments.

However, I begin by considering the portrayal of the character designated as *ʾiššâ zārâ* and *nokriyyâ*, in order that I might form an opinion as to her identity and the nature of the threat that she is perceived to represent. Having then drawn my conclusions as to those concerns I will consider both the claims made by Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes, and extend my enquiry to consider whether Peter Hatton's work on antithetical repetition in *Contradiction in the Book of Proverbs: the Deep Waters of Counsel* (2008) adds further weight to a claim for F voices.

6.2   The Identity of the Strange Woman

I shall begin by sounding a note of caution. I have already noted that the personification of wisdom and 'strangeness' (whatever that might mean) causes us to name the characters as if they were indeed real persons. These personae speak within Proverbs 1-9. The other voice to be heard is assumed to be that of the 'father', the one who instructs his 'son' to take heed of his instruction.[34] It is within these instructions that the Strange Woman makes her appearances, most notably 2:16-19; 5:1-23; 6:20-29[35]; 7:5-27. In addition is the appearance of *ʾešēt kəsîlût*, described as both 'the foolish Woman' and personified as 'Folly' (9:13-18), who like Wisdom calls to passers-by, inviting them to feast, but whose guests are described as being dead (9:18). The allusion to their destination cannot help but draw comparison with the Strange Woman. Why the scribe should have chosen to describe her as foolish as opposed to 'other' at this juncture is unclear but for the remainder of this thesis I shall take them to be one and the same.

Whybray, in his comprehensive work of 1995, *The Book of Proverbs: A Survey of Modern Study* comments that despite progress having been made in the understanding of the character of the material in the opening chapters, there still remain major differences of opinion concerning the coherence of the collections of instructions. These

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[34] A case might be made for an additional voice- that of the paternal grandfather in 4:4b-9, although his voice is quoted by the father.

[35] Proverbs 6:24 is unique in that there is no reference to *zārâ* in MT, rather *raʿ*, 'evil'. The LXX translates the Hebrew as "from a married woman", which many have chosen as the basis of their translation, presumably because it makes for a 'tidier' parallelism. In the discussion of his Variant Set 9 (consisting of 2:16, 5:2b (restored), 6:24 and 7:5) Heim provides a comprehensive semantic study of the use of *raʿ* and concludes that MT should prevail. Heim thus translates 6:24 'To keep you from the evil woman//from the smoothness of a foreign tongue'. He points out that a traditional understanding of synonymous parallelism would render the woman evil by virtue of her foreign accent. His interpretation of the sayings within the set suggest that the focus is not on what makes the woman 'evil' or 'strange' but rather on what makes her dangerous. In the case of 6:24 it is her foreign accent that makes her particularly alluring and that, according to Heim, is what makes her dangerous (2013 pp. 94-104).

differences are namely: whether additions that may have been made were for theological reasons; the extent to which Israelite religious traditions, as opposed to Egyptian Instructions, determined the received text; the dating of the material (pre or post exilic); and the setting (family or school) (1995 p. 70-71). Despite an increase in scholarly interest in Proverbs in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, subsequent scholars have not resolved any of these issues with conclusive proof, rather the price to be paid for the increase is "a resounding lack of consensus on almost all key points" (Weeks, 2007 p. 2). However, such discussions are not of primary concern in this study although I may invariably touch upon some of them in the course of our work.

The identity of the Strange Woman, or perhaps more accurately, the precise nature of the threat that she represents, has been much discussed.[36] The discussion has taken two routes: firstly about the translation and meaning of the two words that afford her name and her character *zārâ* and *nokriyyâ*; and subsequently the socio-historical context in and to which the Strange Woman speaks (Camp, 2000 p. 40-41). As a result several interpretations have arisen, which I shall explore in due course. However, I begin the exploration into the identity of the Strange Woman, and the threat that she is perceived to represent, by referring to Nancy Tan's PhD thesis of 2004, *The 'Foreignness' of the Foreign Woman in Proverbs 1-9: A Study of the Origin and Development of a Biblical Motif*.[37] A review of Tan's thesis is useful in that she provides a survey of the scholarly literature and a semantic study of the occurrences of *nkr* and *zr* (2004 pp. 3-40).

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[36] For a discussion regarding the deceptive women motif and its role in perpetuating women's subjugation within a patriarchal framework see *Who is Hiding the Truth? Deceptive Women and Biblical Androcentrism* (Fuchs, 1985).

[37] Subsequently published as a book of the same title by de Gruyter (Berlin and New York) in 2008.

6.2.1 **The Strange Woman as 'Foreign'?**

Tan uses, as her subject matter, the woman who is described in Proverbs 1-9 and to whom we refer as the Strange Woman. She attempts to uncover the historical background to her appearance in the text and to trace the development of a 'foreign woman' motif in subsequent literature. Her basic premise is the tendency by twentieth century scholars to categorise the Strange Woman as an outsider who is sexually promiscuous, noting that scholars in the main translate *zārâ* and *nokriyyâ* not as 'foreign' but as 'adulteress', and that sexual promiscuity has somehow become imputed to the term *zārâ* and *nokriyyâ*. She claims this is contrary to lexical evidence and argues for a renewed emphasis on the woman's 'foreignness': that it should be understood as a significant part of her character, and that the woman herself is used symbolically to represent not simply sexual misconduct, but the temptation to apostasy. Tan's argument is based upon an understanding of Proverbs 1-9 as a product of the post-exilic period and its connection to the marriage reforms depicted in Ezra and Nehemiah. Hence she argues that the distinction of 'foreignness' attributable to the woman is lost when her portrayal is set in the context of men being warned against being lured into worshipping foreign gods by marrying foreign women.

Claudia Camp's (2010) review of Tan's subsequent book questions Tan's lack of consideration of the impact of genre and literary context on the meaning of the two words under consideration thereby determining that their meanings are the same in all occurrences. She also questions her dependence upon the dating of Proverbs 1-9 in the early post-exilic period and its connection to the marriage reforms depicted in Ezra and Nehemiah. Camp sees Tan's argument as circular: placing Proverbs alongside Ezra and Nehemiah in terms of historical dating provides the rationale for interpreting the woman

in terms of intermarriage. Camp herself advocates a later dating for Proverbs, its concern not necessarily intermarriage with 'foreigners', but a need to establish and maintain class divisions and the underlying orders of lineage, inheritance and generational control. Thus, in the creation of Woman as a Sexual Stranger, all perceived evils which threaten a well ordered society are embodied in a persona (Camp, 2000 pp. 40-71). At present, I shall suspend any observations concerning Tan's underlying assumptions or methodology and simply consider her summary of the scholarly literature and lexical studies to date.

Tan begins by providing a summary of scholarly literature to date (2004 pp. 3-12). She refers firstly to those who propose that the woman is a foreigner, although they do not agree on the precise nature of the woman's characterisation: Gustav Boström (1935) proposed that the woman belonged to a foreign, non-Yahwistic cult; Richard Clifford's commentary (1999) understood the woman to be a representation of the foreign female deities of the ancient Near East; Ralph Marcus (1950-51) interpreted her as an allegory of foreign religion; Norman Habel (1972) identified her origin in foreign cults, especially those of mythical goddesses; and R.B.Y. Scott (1965) identified her as symbolic of the foreign cult of Astarte. Tan concludes that in these studies, even though there is an acknowledgement of the woman's 'foreignness', this becomes almost secondary and she becomes more a representation of a foreign cult, or associated with foreign religious and mythical motifs.

Tan's attention is then turned to those who argue against the woman's 'foreignness', most notably Paul Humbert (1939), L.A. Snijders (1954) and Bernhard Lang (*TDOT* vol. IX), whose lexical work on *zārâ* and *nokriyyâ* have influenced more recent thinking on the character of the woman in Proverbs 1-9. Each argued that the

woman is not a foreigner in terms of her ethnicity, but is labelled as an adulteress and viewed as an outsider as a consequence of her immoral behaviour. This idea was found as early as C.H. Toy's commentary in 1899, in which he suggested that the portrayal of the woman reflected that of an adulteress rather than a foreigner, with *zārâ* referring to 'strange behaviour' and *nokriyyâ* 'wife of another'. Subsequent scholarship has followed much the same line although discrepancies arise as to which of the two terms imputes the impropriety: Gemser (1963) and Whybray (1994) argue that it is *nokriyyâ* which confers the promiscuity, because foreign women were believed to engage in prostitution and be inclined towards promiscuity. Others, notably Arndt Meinhold (1991) and Michael Fox (2000), stress the concept that she is another man's wife and that the warnings are against consorting with the adulteress. Joseph Blenkinsopp (1991) views her as a social outsider and as a symbol of goddess worshippers; Karel van der Toorn (1994) has the woman resorting to prostitution to pay her vows; whilst Harold Washington (1995) sees her as a representative of the 'People of the Land' – scorned by the returning exiles. Tan concludes that "on the whole the warnings are against adultery, concurring with Humbert's proposition that the meaning of *zārâ* and *nokriyyâ* refer to another man's wife" (Tan, 2004 p. 7).

This is a confusing array of conflicting viewpoints. While all play down the 'foreignness' of the woman there is no consensus as to which of the terms, *zārâ* or *nokriyyâ*, denotes the impropriety. The difficulty is that in terms of reference to the Strange Woman, and more importantly to the sense of impropriety, her character is identified only by reference to the two terms. The understanding of her character is imputed to her rather than described prescriptively in the text.

Tan goes on to consider a third group: those who argue that the woman represents the danger of the female per se. Claudia Camp (1985) argues that both Wisdom and the Strange Woman are analogies of the lives of women in the experiences of Israel's history: that essentially all woman are like the Strange Woman of Proverbs 1-9 because they are 'outsiders' in the patriarchal order. Christl Maier (1995), based on Snijders' work, proposes three representations: an adulteress, an opponent to Wisdom and a parallel to the evil men – the 'foreignness' of the woman is not dependent upon the words that are used to describe her, but the context of their appearance. Finally, Tan then refers to four others who interpret the woman as representing women who pose some kind of threat within the community. William McKane (1970) believes that *nokriyyâ* should be read as 'foreign', in that the woman is outside her community and that all foreign women are perceived as promiscuous. However, when it comes to the woman in Proverbs 7 he identifies her as a married woman who is a prostitute. Ronald Murphy (1998) believes her to be the wife of another, but a metaphor, more dangerous than evil men, because she leads to death. Finally, Otto Plöger (1984) and Leo Perdue (2000) both interpret the woman differently dependent upon the particular passage in which she appears: as metaphor, prostitute, adulteress, foreign goddess, devotee of foreign cult, and another man's wife.

Tan's review demonstrates that there is little scholarly consensus as to the Strange Woman's identity, not even amongst those who argue either for or against the 'foreignness' of the woman, but that

> the general portrayal of the Foreign Woman is one of an adulteress, whether she is an ethnic 'foreigner' or Israelite. This also probably explains why notions of sexual promiscuity are somehow imputed to זרה and נכריה …The trait of sexual unfaithfulness in the motif of the Foreign Woman is,

therefore, singing to the same tune of apostasy as in the imagery of the adulteress (Tan, 2004 p. 12).

Plöger and Perdue's approach is to move away from the tendency to want to identify the woman with a specific category of threat. However, is that acceptable? Is the intention behind the text to present as many 'pitfalls' to the reader as possible or is the continual repetition of a theme intended to reinforce the danger of a specific threat? I shall explore this area, taking in turn each of the references to *zārâ* and *nokriyyâ*, but for the moment I turn my attention to the semantic study of the words themselves.

Tan's intention is to reclaim the 'foreignness' of the woman in in Proverbs 1-9 and she considers the occurrences of the terms *nkr* and *zr* in the Hebrew scriptures and the lexical studies undertaken by Boström, Humbert, Snijders and Lang (2004 pp. 13-40). First she tackles *nkr*. The term is used, either as a noun or adjective, predominantly in reference to people, and refers to the concept of 'foreignness'. The *TDOT* describes three contexts in which the word is used: (a) *Other* meaning someone distinct from the subject (Proverbs 27:2); (b) *Outside the family* referring to somebody outside one's own family, both emotionally, socially and legally (Exodus 21:8) and; (c) *Foreigner* with specific definitions – someone not of the people Israel and from a distant land (1Kings 8:41), who is not your brother (Deuteronomy 17:15) (*TDOT* pp. 425-431). Tan argues for a broad definition of 'foreignness' which appears to encompass the dictionary definitions and is understood more in terms of ethnicity rather than in nationalistic terms:

> In this way, to put it simply, 'foreignness' is expressed in terms of self-consciousness concerning one's sense of belonging, that is, the exercise of defining who is the 'foreigner' is dependent on what one understands oneself to be part of. This definition allows the flexibility we find in the OT, where there are 'shifting boundaries' of 'foreignness'. Throughout the

books of the OT, the idea of who the 'foreigner' to Israel is and is not (whoever they claim themselves to be) is not a constant entity (2004 p. 16).

In terms of *zr*, dictionaries identify three roots: I *to press out*; II *to turn aside, go away*; and III *to be loathsome*, with the most common usage being II and the participle *zr* translated as *one who distances or removes [him]self*. In the context of the prophetic and political it refers to the enemy, oppressor or occupying force, or to foreign gods; in the language of the cult, to improper offerings and to those 'unauthorised' to perform sacred tasks; and in the language of wisdom, to the 'unchaste woman' and 'another' in terms of providing surety or pledges. Finally there are other passages where the definition is fluid but is, in general terms *outsider* (pp. 52-58).

Tan's argument is that the usage of *zr* is far more fluid than *nkr* and that whereas the latter is consistent in its depiction of some sense of 'foreignness' without any ethical or moral implications, the definition of *zr*, in many of its incidences is derived from its immediate context.[38] On occasions it specifically refers to non-Israelites (e.g. Joel 4:17, Ezekiel 7:21) - those with whom Israel frequently came into contact - but is also used to refer to one who does not belong to the family (Deuteronomy 25:5); illegitimate children (Hosea 5:7); wicked people (Psalm 109:11); people other than oneself (Proverbs 14:10, 27:2, 1 Kings 3:18); and as one ostracised even from his own family (Job 19:15). Because of its fluidity and its meaning being derived from its immediate context Tan argues that, on the occasions where the two appear together, then the meaning of *zr* is derived from *nkr* and therefore denotes a concept of 'foreignness' (2004 p. 18).

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[38] Tan notes that on occasions the context is not clear and that it is best to leave the meaning undetermined. She cites Job 15:19.

Tan's argument is not without logic, although it is also not without some areas worthy of further consideration. Firstly, we have seen that the dictionary definition of *nkr* implies not only a sense of foreignness, but also a sense of otherness – not every incidence is regarded as 'foreign', and Tan herself concludes that the idea of who is determined a 'foreigner' is not a constant entity. Tan implies that every occurrence of *nkr* denotes 'ethnically foreign' and that when it is found alongside *zr* then it also must mean the same. This, however, is not the case in Isaiah 28:21, Job 19:15 and Proverbs 27:2:

Isaiah 28:21	For the LORD will rise up as on Mount Perazim, he will rage as in the valley of Gibeon; to do his deed - *zār* is his deed! and to work his work - *nokriyyâ* is his work!
Job 19:15	The guests in my house have forgotten me; my serving girls count me as *zār*; I have become *nokrî* in their eyes.
Proverbs 27:2	Let *zār* praise you, and not your own mouth a *nokrî,* and not your own lips.

Tan takes issue with Snijders' apparent inability to perceive foreign as anything other than that defined by geographical boundaries, contending that such a term cannot be used for a time when Israel was not a geographical nation, rather a people. According to Tan, that leads Snijders to define *nkr* in terms, not of foreignness, but of not belonging to the family and the tribe (2004 p. 23). I am unsure as to whether this is, in a sense, any different to Tan's own definition of foreignness. If 'foreignness' is not confined to geographical boundaries as Tan states, then her definition of a foreigner is simply someone who is outside of the clan, however the clan may choose to define itself. This does not appear so far removed from Snijder's reasoning, and in that sense the focus should move, not to discussions over the definition of 'foreign' but as to how sexual impropriety became imputed into the terms.

6.2.2 The Strange Woman as 'Other'?

In an attempt to explore this question further I will consider the occasions in Proverbs 1-9 where the two terms occur, as identified below: [39]

2:16	לְהַצִּילְךָ מֵאִשָּׁה זָרָה מִנָּכְרִיָּה אֲמָרֶיהָ הֶחֱלִיקָה	You will be saved from the *zārâ* from the *nokriyyâ* with her smooth words.
5:3	זָרָה כִּי נֹפֶת תִּטֹּפְנָה שִׂפְתֵי וְחָלָק מִשֶּׁמֶן חִכָּהּ	For the lips of a *zārâ* drip honey and her speech is smoother than oil.
5:10	פֶּן־יִשְׂבְּעוּ זָרִים כֹּחֶךָ וַעֲצָבֶיךָ בְּבֵית נָכְרִי	And *zārîm* will take their fill of your wealth and your labours will go to the house of the *nokrî*
5:20	וְלָמָּה תִשְׁגֶּה בְנִי בְזָרָה וּתְחַבֵּק חֵק נָכְרִיָּה	Why should you be led astray, my son, by *zārâ* and embrace the bosom of a *nokriyyâ*.
6:24	לִשְׁמָרְךָ מֵאֵשֶׁת רָע מֵחֶלְקַת לָשׁוֹן נָכְרִיָּה	To keep you from the evil woman from the smooth tongue of the *nokriyyâ*.
7:5	לִשְׁמָרְךָ מֵאִשָּׁה זָרָה מִנָּכְרִיָּה אֲמָרֶיהָ הֶחֱלִיקָה	That they may keep you from the *zārâ* from the *nokriyyâ* with her smooth words.
22:14	שׁוּחָה עֲמֻקָּה פִּי זָרוֹת זְעוּם יְהוָה יִפָּול־שָׁם	The mouth of a *zārâ* is a deep pit he with whom the Lord is angry falls into it.
23:27	כִּי־שׁוּחָה עֲמֻקָּה זוֹנָה[40] וּבְאֵר צָרָה נָכְרִיָּה	For a prostitute is a deep pit a *nokriyyâ* is a narrow well.
27:2	יְהַלֶּלְךָ זָר וְלֹא־פִיךָ נָכְרִי וְאַל־שְׂפָתֶיךָ	Let *zār* praise you, and not your own mouth a *nokrî* and not your own lips

Tan argues that Snijder's interpretation of the Foreign Woman is dependent upon his interpretation of Prov. 23:27, where *nokriyyâ* is used in parallel with *zōnâ* and that his conclusions are flawed, basing them, as he does, on an understanding of the social location of the prostitute Rahab in the book of Joshua, which he argues was outside the

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[39] Proverbs 20:16 and 27:13 include both terms, although unusually the genders do not match and their subject matter is the wisdom of providing surety for strangers. Hence they are not included in this review.
[40] Fox (2009 p. 738) reads *zārâ* rather than *zōnâ*, on the basis that *nokrî* and *zār* are always used in parallel in Proverbs with the exception of 6:24, and that LXX has *allotrios* "stranger". Waltke (2005 p.247) concurs with Fox..

camp. Tan's criticism is that Snijder uses a few examples where ethnic connotations of *nokrî* are rhetorical or metaphorical, suggesting that the term can be used to describe something other than the purely ethnic. This enables him to then suggest that the *nokriyyâ* belongs, not to a particular defined category, but is simply labelled as 'other' and that in this way a moral dimension, based on his reading of 23:27 is introduced:

> Suddenly, the נכריה is not simply someone outside the Israelite ethnic or religious group, as the overwhelming majority of uses for נכריה suggest, nor is she even just someone outside a household or family group, but she has become someone excluded from society for her behaviour (Tan, 2004 p. 31).

Given the propensity in more recent years to label the Strange Woman as an adulteress, and with the connotations of sexual impropriety it is worthwhile considering the descriptions that are not used of her: namely a prostitute (*zōnâ*) or adulteress (*nōʾepet*). Within Proverbs a prostitute is referred to on only three occasions: in parallel with another man's wife (6:26), and a 'foreign' woman (23:27);[41] and as a description, not of a woman but of her attire (7:10). To the sages of Proverbs there is clearly a distinction between the consequences of consorting with a prostitute and another man's wife, the latter leading to far more serious consequences (6:26). If the Strange Woman is meant to represent the dangers of consorting with another man's wife, then it seems surprising that she is not referred to directly as an adulteress. If the danger is so real then one would have thought that the warnings against the precise nature of the threat would have been more forthright. The feminine form of adulterer appears on a total of eight occasions in the Hebrew Bible and, with the exception of Leviticus 20:10 and Proverbs 30:20, the other six occasions are contained within the prophetic literature; more precisely within Ezekiel (16:32, 16:38, 23:45) and Hosea (3:1, 4:13, 4:14). Within these contexts it is not the relationship between two individuals which is in focus, rather it is

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[41] See Tan's criticism of Snijder above.

symbolic of the breakdown of the relationship between Israel and YHWH. In that sense 'adulteress' is not a word that figures large in the consciousness of the writers of the Hebrew Scriptures in terms of marital affairs, although neither does the masculine (Leviticus 20:10; Proverbs 6:32; Jeremiah 5:7, 7:9, 9:2, 23:10, 23:14, 29:23; Hosea 4:2, 7:4; Malachi 3:3; Psalms 50:18; Job 24:15; Ezekiel 23:27).

Rather intriguingly, Waltke has no reservations that the woman is not only an adulteress but also a

> lustful apostate to the godly community and an unrestrained wife who betrayed the husband of her youth (2:16-17; 5:20; 6:24; 7:5), as Gomer did Hosea (Hos 1:2-11), and, having remarried an ungodly and unforgiving husband outside the covenant community (6:29; 7:19), also has no commitment to him … she remains at heart a prostitute [one who engages in sex with no intention of a binding relationship] (6:26) who lustfully stalks the streets and attempts to seduce young men (7:10-21) (2004 p. 124).

Waltke, to my mind, has allowed his imagination to run away with him. His advocacy of the Strange Woman's immoral character can at best be described as enthusiastic, if not bordering on the fanciful. He further describes her as a "whore among men and a harlot against God" (p. 124) and a "lustful strumpet [who] wilfully violated her commitment to her godly husband (2:17a) and in doing so broke God's covenant with her" (p. 122). I see no reason to deduce from the text that the woman is remarried to an ungodly husband. One assumes that Waltke infers from 6:29 that the man is 'ungodly' by virtue of the fact that he 'approaches' (a euphemism for sexual intercourse) his neighbour's wife. However, the concern in advising against such a course of action is the penalty incurred if the wife's husband finds out about the infidelity (6:30-35). Nowhere is it implied that the lover becomes her husband. Another possibility for this interpretation could be inferred from 2:17, the woman abandoning the mate of her youth. Whilst the understanding that this denotes a former husband,

derived from Israel recalling the intimacy of her bond with Yahweh her former husband (Jeremiah 3:4) (Fox, 2000 p. 120), there is nothing to suggest in 7:19 that the husband is not the mate of her youth, nor that she has 'abandoned' him on a permanent basis. Conversely, he is simply away from home and expected to return (7:20). Waltke's understanding of the Strange Woman's character is derived from conjoining the various glimpses of her that appear in the instructions. I wonder though, if he has made rather more of the sum of the parts than is warranted by the text. As I shall demonstrate later in this chapter Waltke has been deceived by a smoke screen which renders the woman more dangerous than the text itself suggests.

The most detailed 'description' of the Strange Woman is provided in 7:10-27, although interestingly she is not named within this section. Here is the presentation of the woman against whom the youngster is so vehemently warned. As Tan's review comprehensively demonstrated, there is no consensus as to the identity of the Strange Woman and the nature of the threat that she represents. It is clear from the discussion above that Waltke identifies her as not only an adulteress but as an apostate, whilst Fox provides a good summary of six potential interpretations of her identity: a foreign woman; a foreign devotee of a foreign God; a foreign goddess; a social outsider; a native prostitute; and an adulterous wife. For him none of these carry any real weight although he concludes that, whilst much has been written on the subject, all these forms of *otherness* are beside the point since there is no stigma in being *zār* or *nokrî* of itself, but the taint is in the illicit assignations between the woman and the men who are *zarim* to her (2000 pp. 134-141). His proposition is less than convincing, as will become clear in the discussion of both Fuchs (1985) and Camp (2000) which follows below. The portrayal of women as devious (Fuchs) and the association of woman with 'Otherness'

(Camp), both recurrent images throughout the Hebrew Bible, impute a level of taint into the terms which cannot be underestimated. It is the woman who is portrayed as dangerous to know, the issue being more than the dangers of illicit sex.[42]

As yet I have refrained from commenting on any of the possibilities put forward with the exception of Waltke and Fox above. What follows is a discussion of some of those possibilities which endeavour to identify the nature of the threat associated with the Strange Woman. Firstly, she is not a prostitute but is only dressed like one (v.10). Heijerman, after Karel van Toorn, explores whether she is a 'needy woman' in terms of finances on the basis of the framing of vv.14-20 concerning money (1995 p. 107). One would assume, however, that given the quality and elaborateness of her home furnishings (vv.16-17) she is not necessarily in need of supplementing her housekeeping. The alternative is the need to produce children, which might be plausible if we consider the fact that she is not menstruating (by virtue of the fact that she is able to offer sacrifices) and the reference to the moon (v.20) alluding to her fertility. Perhaps her husband is unable to meet this particular need, although this might be purely speculative, given that it seems highly improbable that such an aspersion would be cast on the husband by a male narrator. However, if the narrator of the encounter is female – a proposition I shall explore in due course – then this might seem less improbable, and might provide some support for the notion that the woman appears to feel deserted and neglected (cf. Fox, 2000 p. 248).

Washington interprets the Strange Woman as the threat of exogamous marriage, exiles returning from Babylonian captivity labelling their Judean rivals as 'peoples of the land', and together with neighbouring countries, as alien to Judah (Washington,

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[42] I am grateful to Peter Hatton for his observations on a previous draft which challenged my original interpretation of Fox's comments.

1995 p. 172). Fox argues that this does not fit since the Strange Woman appears to be married and therefore is not looking for marriage but for casual sex. His understanding of the Strange Woman's marital status is deduced from the suggestion that an unmarried woman would not be termed *ʾiššâ zārâ* in a sexual context, for to use such a term implies belonging to another person in a sexual context, and an unmarried woman would be out of bounds to everybody (2000 p. 141). This, however, misses the point. The destruction of the community may be brought about by more subtle ways than the land being alienated by marriage to outsiders. It can be brought about by the watering down of religious observance through those who do not practice their religion 'properly', through the unwitting raising of children who are not their own and the practice of deceit and cunning in the peoples' everyday life. It may well be that, in the mind of the narrator, the greatest threat lies with those who think that they belong, but who have been ruled, by the elite for whatever the reason, as outside of the community.[43]

We turn then to the proposal that the Strange Woman is an Israelite adulteress. Within the description of her (7:10-27), the reference to religious observance (v.14) may well refer to the observance of offerings given according to Leviticus 7:11-21 and therefore points to her not being a danger because she is a foreigner but because, as an Israelite, she violates Levitical laws by engaging in sex with the youth during the period of feasting (Camp, 2000 pp. 43-48). Fox is not necessarily in agreement, arguing that the couple would only be in a state of ritual impurity if they engaged in intercourse before eating and that an invitation to ritual desecration would not be, in any way, tempting (2000 p. 246). Whether the Strange Woman defiles the law or not, such an

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[43] Again, we may consider the implication of this if the narrator is supposed to be a woman rather than a man, particularly if we consider the warnings given to Lemuel by his mother (31:1-9).

argument is not necessary to support a proposal that she is an Israelite. If verse 14 is understood as an observance of Israelite offerings, it ironically adds another layer to the portrayal of deception in light of verses 2:16-17, since beneath the veneer of religious observance lurks a deviant:

> 2:16   you will be saved from the loose woman
>   from the adulteress with her smooth words
>
> 2:17   who forsakes the partner of her youth
>   and forgets her sacred covenant.

She is bound in covenantal relationship as an Israelite with Yahweh and as a married woman with her husband. Up until v.19 the young man may claim innocence, because of ignorance, of her marital status in the drama that unfolds in the narration. [44] However, vv.19 and 20 clearly dispel such ignorance and through her tantalising speech the young man is ensnared. This picture of the adulteress provides two warnings: a warning of the dangers of engaging, not in extra-marital sex, but in sex with another man's wife and a pointer to beware the infidelity of the covenant with Yahweh. [45]

The proposition has much to commend it. Time and again the sage warns of what the foolhardy stands to lose (2:18-19, 5:5, 9-11, 22-23, 6:29-35, 7:22-23) and even Wisdom herself will "laugh at [his] calamity" (1:26). Interestingly, no consideration is given to the young man's wife (if there is one): the instruction to delight in the wife of his youth (5:15-20) is not out of consideration for her but as a potential safeguard from

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[44] It can be assumed that he is a youngster, one of the *petî*, the inexperienced and gullible. A fuller explanation of the types of fools found in Proverbs can be found in Fox (2000 pp. 38-43) and are discussed in Chapter 8 following.

[45] We are not told whether the young man is married and is himself committing adultery or whether the narrator is concerned only with the fact that the woman is married and therefore 'belongs' to another (cf. Proverbs 6:26).

the temptations of the adulteress.[46] Finally, let us consider the idea that the Strange Woman represents the infidelity of Judah to its covenantal relationship with YHWH. Sexual seduction is used metaphorically in the Hebrew Scriptures to illustrate in graphic terms religious apostasy and cultural assimilation (Fox, 2000 p.133). And yet, we have already noted above that in terms of the covenantal relationship with YHWH, the term used to denote infidelity is *n'ap* and it is not used here to describe the Strange Woman.

As I have demonstrated there is no clear consensus as to the Strange Woman's identity and the threat she represents and it might well be that her portrayal is deliberately ambiguous. What appears not to be in doubt is that deceptiveness is imputed into her character, and the manner by which she achieves this deception is through her speech. All of the verses in which *zārâ* and *nokriyyâ* appear contain references to words which are in the semantic field of speech. At first sight 23:27 appears to be the exception with its reference to pits and wells. It is, however, connected by variant repetition to 22:17 which refers to the mouth of the *zārâ* being a deep pit (Heim, 2013 pp. 523-527). It is the woman's speech against which the 'son' is warned, her speech which is considered deceptive and dangerous. But why this concern with what she has to say?

Attention to speech is a major focus of Proverbs with more than twenty percent of all the proverbs in chapters 10:1 to 22:16 and 25-29 concerned in some way with the spoken word and its power (U. Skladny (1962) cited in Whybray, 1995 p. 140). To the sages of Proverbs the tongue is a powerful instrument with the power of life and death (18:21; cf. 10:19; 17:27-28), the power to heal or destroy (6:12-15, 16-19; 10:14; 11:9;

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[46] A possible tenuous consideration for the wife is the notion that the earth trembles, the natural order is confounded when a married woman is unloved (30:23). This may well apply to the Strange Woman herself, but again could be perceived as safeguarding the stability, by ensuring that married women do not lead other men astray.

12:18; 16:24), and the power to reward or damage oneself (10:10; 12:14; 18:6-7) (Waltke, 2004 p. 102). In a preoccupation with identifying a specific threat, scholarship has failed to observe the threat at its simplest: that the young man is being warned against the power of speech and the need to discriminate between the myriad voices that he will encounter as he navigates his way through the world. To some degree, the precise nature of the threat that she is purported to represent becomes less relevant, the woman is simply a tool that speaks, a female guise because she is attractive to a male audience. Two further considerations add weight to this proposal: the deceptive woman motif and the use of metaphor and metonym.

The presentation of a woman as someone who hides the truth is a common ploy in the Hebrew Bible. Esther Fuchs argues that the portrayal of women as deceptive reveals "not only the extent of the Bible's androcentric bias but also the manner in which the biblical narrative suppresses the truth about women's subjugation within the patriarchal framework" (1985 p. 137). She makes reference to female biblical characters, Rebekah, Potiphar's wife, Rachel, and Lot's daughters among them, in support of her claim, the detail of which follows (1985 pp. 137-144).

Fuchs suggestion is that in a patriarchal society Rebekah cannot bestow a blessing upon Jacob and therefore needs to resort to deception, whilst Jacob remains blameless and Isaac and Esau are duped (Genesis 27:5-10). Rebekah is not condemned for her actions, rather she is portrayed as a powerful woman in contrast to Isaac as a man past his prime, and her action is viewed as ensuring that Yahweh's plan is adhered to.

Another woman who is portrayed as powerful is Potiphar's wife against her husband's defenceless servant Joseph (Genesis 39:17-18). On this occasion Potiphar's wife is condemned for her deceit (probably because she is a foreign woman casting

aspersions on the Israelite hero) but she herself is a victim of patriarchal monogamy which applies only to women. Rachel deceives her father, stealing his idols (Genesis 31:19) and ensuring that he fails to find them (Genesis 31:35), but as a daughter she is not entitled to an inheritance. Lot's daughters ply their father with drink in order to have illicit intercourse with the intent of securing the continuation of the human race. Their actions are condemned by virtue of the fact that their sons become Israel's archenemies (Genesis 19:31-38), despite them fulfilling their primary duty within a patriarchal framework, that of producing heirs.

In the narratives of the Hebrew Bible men's deceptiveness is exonerated. When women use deception against a man to further a subordinate man in their lives (Rachel and Jacob against Laban, Michal and David against Saul); or against the enemies of Israel (Rahab and Jael); or in order to ensure the continuation of their late husband's name (Ruth), their actions are condoned and even lauded. When a woman uses it to gain something for herself (Delilah is a prime example (Judges 16:5)) her deceptiveness is dramatized as her most lethal weapon against man, particularly if she happens to be foreign. Women therefore cannot win.

Fuchs' conclusion is that even when the text lauds a woman's actions she is still marked as deceptive. Hence the portraits found in the Hebrew Bible reinforce the suspicion that, despite their apparent impotence, women are inherently cunning and deceitful. Whilst men's cunning and deceit is glossed over and set against a larger catalogue of positive portrayals, pictures of women's positive attributes are harder to locate and the potential for deceit remains at the forefront of female characterisation.

Working alongside the concept of 'woman as deceitful' as described by Fuchs, are what Camp describes as "the rhetorical logic of metaphor and metonym" and "the

rhetorical logic of social functionality" (2000 pp. 48-51). According to Camp, the language that is found in Proverbs about the Strange Woman centres on sexual activity and language elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible equates illicit sex with worship of foreign gods, caused usually by association with foreign women. Therefore within the Hebrew Bible sex, religion and strangeness intertwine and culminate in a rhetoric which equates woman with strangeness. Metaphor and metonym are present in the pre-exilic texts of Hosea and Jeremiah, in which idolatry and foreign political alliances are represented as illicit sex, in the forms of adultery and prostitution. Hence illicit sex becomes a metonym for idolatry and reinforces the metaphor of idolatry as adultery against Yahweh. Ezekiel reinforces the 'illicit sex equals idolatry' metaphor but extends it by introducing impurity into the equation and the men who go a-whoring (Hosea 4:14) now become a female Israel tainted by menstruation and her mixed heritage (cf. Ezekiel 16:3; 16:45; 23:45).

Alongside "the rhetorical logic of metaphor and metonym" is "the rhetorical logic of social functionality" in which it is understood that marriage to foreigners will lead to worship of foreign deities, without any association with sexual activity (Deut. 7:1-5), the ideology of the post exilic returning *golah* against those who had remained in the land. In Exodus 34:11-15 this concern for the danger of intermarriage is narrowed down to Israelite men taking foreign wives and the metaphor 'playing the harlot' is introduced: foreign wives will not only play the harlot themselves but will encourage Israelite males to do the same. The insinuation is that foreign wives are engaged in ritual sex, and idolatry is construed as (female) adulterous behaviour by (male) Israelites. This gender specific prohibition is further enacted in Ezra-Nehemiah, where marriage to a foreign woman is not the first step, but the whole reason why Israelite men abandon

their deity (Ezra 10:2) and Ezra introduces 'impurity' into the mix, combining the rhetoric of both exogamy and uncleanness. Woman therefore becomes the outsider, the Non-Israel. Finally, in Numbers 25:1-3, various strands are brought together in a thought process which equates sex with foreign women with promiscuity, with ritual sex, with idolatry:

> While Israel was staying at Shittim, the people began to have sexual relations with the women of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. Thus Israel yoked itself to the Baal of Peor, and the LORD'S anger was kindled against Israel. (Numbers 25:1-3)

This interweaving of rhetoric, Camp argues, negates against an understanding that the Strange Woman represents solely a fear of foreign idol worship being introduced by foreign wives. She advocates a line of symbolic development which incorporates female pollution of the temple (Ezekiel) and the equating of foreign marriage with covenantal infidelity resulting in pollution of the land (Ezra). This results in woman being perceived as strange and the metaphor of Strangeness as a Woman (Camp, 2000 pp. 48-59).

Fuchs and Camp both demonstrate convincingly that the figure of the Strange Woman cannot be associated with a specific threat; rather she embodies all that is contrary to the male understanding of an ordered society. She represents above all, a danger to order and stability. She is an outsider because she does not conform, which in Fuchs' analysis would render her as not having to be deceitful to achieve her goals, and indeed, as I shall demonstrate later, she is not deceptive in her speech. She is however considered to be deceitful not because of what she says or does but because she is a woman. This implies that all women are considered to be 'strange' which in effect they are, but not to all men. To my mind, the skill of the narrator in Proverbs 7 is bringing to

bear the chaotic expression of disorder in the character of the Strange Woman, through the mastery of story-telling; of leading the youngster into the virtual reality of the very encounter he should endeavour to avoid. I thus shift the focus of my attention away from the identity of the Strange Woman and onto the identity of the narrator.

6.3 The Identity of the Narrator

As we noted in Chapter 4, van Dijk-Hemmes and Brenner have opened a dialogue concerning the possibility of finding Female voices within the text of Proverbs. To date they are, to my knowledge, the only scholars (male or female) to have offered an alternative F reading of texts which have traditionally been viewed as M discourses. Other scholars have considered the question, most notably Camp. They have however, concluded that the texts remain, despite their best endeavours to discover an alternative reading, M discourses. Since van Dijk-Hemmes and Brenner are the only ones to have offered alternative interpretations, I will now consider their contributions at some length. My earlier concern was the possibility of an F voice within Proverbs 31 and whilst a brief discussion was made concerning Proverbs 1-9, those chapters were not the focus of my investigation at that point. However, it is to those chapters that I now turn for fuller consideration. Both van Dijk-Hemmes and Brenner argue for the possibility of F voices and I shall consider van Dijk-Hemmes' arguments before turning to Brenner.

6.3.1 Type Scenes and Smoke Screens

Van Dijk-Hemmes puts forward the case for a female speaker in Proverbs 1-9 (1996 pp. 57-62). She argues that the instructor who speaks in chapters 1-9, whom she identifies as the *I persona*, is that of a wisdom teacher instructing the son(s). Since the son is implored not only to hear his father's instruction, but also not to reject his

mother's teaching (1:8; 6:20) then it is probable that the speaker in certain parts of Proverbs 1-9 could be female. She ties this in with the rebuke genre of poetry and argues that a female rebuker, exhorting her son, would thus be exercising her prerogative as a mother, to be involved in the nurture and discipline of her offspring. This, she argues, is particularly the case with Proverbs 7. Here, the *I persona* introduces herself with a motif that would be familiar to readers, the *woman at the window* type scene: 'For at the window of my house I looked out through my lattice' (7:6). The *I persona* proceeds to address the hearer with a tale, not unlike the beginning of a rape scene, although after the initial seizing and kiss (7:13), the femme fatale of the narrative uses the power of 'seductive speech' and 'smooth talk' (7:21) rather than physical strength, in contrast to the behaviour of the male seducers or rapists of Genesis 34 and 2 Samuel 13. Here the perpetrators say nothing, or very little, which leads van Dijk-Hemmes to conclude that in the arena of sexuality the less mighty require other means than brute force.

She then draws her reader's attention to Camp's interpretation of the passage i.e. the misleading character of the language, which according to Camp, carries the real danger since it "throws up a smoke screen, blinding its listeners to the effect of their actions upon themselves and society" (1987 pp. 51-52, cited by van Dijk-Hemmes). Readers, are brought back to reality by the shocking conclusion to the tale, and the *I persona* portrays, not unlike Lemuel's mother (Proverbs 31:2-9), the "destructive power of women" (van Dijk-Hemmes, 1996 p. 60).

Van Dijk-Hemmes questions Camp's findings on two scores: firstly, whether her analysis is applicable to Proverbs 7 as a whole (a question which she does not appear to go on to address); and secondly, whether her analysis of the Strange Woman's language

is convincing. She tackles the latter question arguing that contrary to general understanding the Strange Woman does not set out to deceive but is quite blatant in her intentions. It is the words of the *I persona* that 'throw up the smoke screen', sketching the male as defenceless against a sexually active female, a "one-sided figuration of social reality, where the reverse usually obtains" (1996 p. 61). She goes on to accuse Camp of not going far enough in her analysis of the Strange Woman's language: that it is the reader, not the young man who is led astray and deceived.

It seems that there are two points to consider in van Dijk-Hemmes proposals for an F voice: firstly her reliance on the *woman at the window* type scene; and secondly, her development of Camp's smoke scene scenario. However, before I consider these two points, I would highlight another way in which the narrator achieves this deception: the instruction to call wisdom his sister that he might be saved from the *ʾiššâ zārâ* (7:4, 5):

7:4	אֱמֹר לַחָכְמָה אֲחֹתִי אָתְּ	Say to wisdom 'you are my sister'
	וּמֹדָע לַבִּינָה תִקְרָא	and call understanding your kinswoman.
7:5	לִשְׁמָרְךָ מֵאִשָּׁה זָרָה	To save you from the *zārâ*
	מִנָּכְרִיָּה אֲמָרֶיהָ הֶחֱלִיקָה	the *nokriyyâ* with her smooth speech.

Among scholars the injunction to address wisdom as a sister is commonly understood as implying a degree of intimacy, 'sister' being a term of endearment for a beloved in the Song of Songs and elsewhere in Egyptian love songs. Mention is also made of the contrast between the image of intimacy expressed in 7:4 and the threat of danger implied in 7:5 (Fox, 2000 p. 240; Murphy, 1998 p. 43; Waltke, 2004 p. 370; Whybray, 1994b p. 114). This does not appear to be in doubt. However, the injunction

calls to mind not only the intimacy evoked in poetic form, but deception invoked in the narratives.

The instruction 'Say to wisdom "you are my sister"' (7:4a) calls to mind Abraham's request to Sarah to pass herself off as his sister (Genesis 12:13) and their subsequent deception (Genesis 20), repeated by Isaac and Sarah (Genesis 26). The basic plot in the Genesis accounts is that the Hebrew protagonist enters foreign territory with his wife and is at the mercy of his foreign host. In response to a perceived threat from the foreign host, the woman is 'made available' for the host by denying the true nature of their relationship. Divine intervention rescues both the woman and the man from the situation, and the man receives unexpected reward despite his duplicity. The plot line is also played out with role reversal in the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39) and the book of Esther (Keshet, 2013 p. 1).

With regards to Proverbs 7:4 and 5, in the same way that Abraham and Sarah, and Isaac and Rebekah are married the implication of intimacy is present in 7:4 by the use of the term 'sister'. Fox (2000 p. 240) advocates that 7:4 speaks of wisdom 'as if' she were a person rather than portraying her as one as is the case in Proverbs 8 and 9, and stresses the importance of the nature of the relationship, one of intimacy and closeness. His observation does not detract from my argument that the use of the *say you are my sister* motif works as a literary device to foster anticipation of danger. However, in this instance there is an additional layer of interpretation. The son is not instructed to call wisdom his sister but rather to claim her as such: to say to her that she is his sister in the same way that Abraham and Isaac claim their respective spouses as their sisters, in order that their lives may be spared. The son is entering into the 'foreign' world of adult

responsibility where distractions and dangers lurk everywhere and the choice to be made is between life and death.

The instruction to call wisdom his sister works on two levels: firstly, it denotes an intimacy which contrasts sharply with the image portrayed of the fleeting sexual relationship with the Strange Woman; secondly it acts as a 'danger ahead' signal alerting the reader to the potential of not just danger, but a life-threatening encounter. Interestingly, in the Genesis' accounts the protagonists' fears turn out to be unfounded and remarkably Abraham is given gifts for his duplicity. In Proverbs, in contrast to the receipt of gifts from the host, the son receives divine reward through his loyalty to, rather than abandonment of, his beloved (8:34-35). This variation on a theme is not untypical in literary type scenes as I shall demonstrate in the ensuing discussion of another type scene at play in the narrative of the encounter with the Strange Woman, that of the *woman at the window*.

The ancient image of a woman looking through a window is found, not only in biblical narratives but in the arts, architecture and literature of ancient Near Eastern civilization. In ancient art the image is connected with the cult of fertility and the practice of temple prostituition. The woman at the window expresses her femininity, her sexual attractiveness and her biological reproductive ability with the framework of the window (based on Freudian interpretation) reinforcing the sexual symbolism. However, more modern representations focus not only on the powerful portrayal of fertility and sexual attractiveness, but also on the confinement imposed by the framework of the window. Rather than seeing a goddess image holding power over men, the image gives rise to a potentially frustrated woman, denied access to the public domain more commonly associated with men and confined within the private domain of the home

(Aschkenasy, 1998 pp. 13-15). Within biblical narratives there are seven accounts of window scenes: Genesis 26:8; Joshua 2:15,18,21; Judges 5:28; 1 Samuel 19:12, 2 Samuel 6:16 (repeated verbatim in 1 Chronicles 15:29); 2 Kings 9:30,32 and Proverbs 7:6. Of the seven, only one portrays a man at the window (Genesis 26:8) whilst the identity of the onlooker in Proverbs 7 is undefined. The remainder portray women who are all foreign, with the exception of Michal, Saul's daughter and David's wife (1 Samuel 19:12; 2 Samuel 6:16// 1 Chronicles 15:29).

In each of the accounts an individual is positioned at a window. Abimelech looks out to see Isaac and Rebekah caressing, unmasking the lie that they are brother and sister, the result of which is that Abimelech commands Isaac's presence. Jezebel (2 Kings 9:30,32) and the mother of Sisera (Judges 5:28) look out in the hope of an outcome which fails to materialise. Rahab (Joshua 2:15,18 and 21) and Michal (1 Samuel 19:12) are both active in that they let men - the spies and David respectively - down through the window as a means of escape. They themselves remain confined to the room and Rahab is silenced by the instruction not to tell of the men's plans. After being proactive in David's escape, Michal is again reduced to looking out of the window, this time to see David singing and dancing, enjoying his freedom while she harbours resentment (2 Samuel 6:16//1 Chronicles 15:29). Contrary to these portrayals the narrator of the encounter with the Strange Woman is unnamed and an 'insider' as opposed to being foreign. All the accounts deal with danger, real or perceived.

Discussion of the *woman at the window* type scene provides an answer for why, if a claim is being made that the narrator could be female, she could be so dismissive of another female. As was discussed in Chapter 5, the behaviour of Sisera's mother, and the inclusion of such vitriol against women in Deborah's song, is a result of confining

women to the private sphere and them becoming desensitised. By taking her place at the window the woman acquiesces to the male viewpoint of the world and upholds it, engaging in the world only by virtue of her participation in the lives of the men with whom she engages. Sisera's mother (note she is not accorded a name) lives her life in the public domain through the activities of Sisera. This adulation of men means that the woman colludes with male interest against her own gender and loses sensitivity to the suffering of other women. The account of Sisera's mother awaiting his return (Judges 5:28-30) is part of the Victory Song of Deborah recording his death at the hands of Jael (Judges 4), and should be interpreted through that lens.

Deborah is not considered the archetypal biblical female (if one can be said to exist). She accords Sisera's mother maternal concern for the late return of her son, which the mother herself suppresses by taking cruel delight in the belief that he and his men are delayed by taking advantage of their enemies' captive women. The use of *rehem* 'womb', rather than girl or woman, reduces the captive women to sexual objects rather than whole human beings. This is in spite of the fact that the same fate could just as easily befall the mother and her household, should their own fortress be invaded by enemy forces. Deborah's account (fictional or otherwise) makes Sisera's mother and her female household complicit in their own subjugation. By virtue of their confinement behind the window, they betray their own womanhood and collude in the male sexual objectification of women. Deborah, as a woman who has not experienced such confinement, is able to pass judgement on the dehumanising impact of women's confinement (Aschkenasy, 1998 pp. 23-26).

This seems plausible, although Aschkenasy makes no comment on the voice behind the text of Deborah's song. As a literary character Deborah may or may not be

based on a real woman. However, it seems reasonable to assume that a female originated text finds its way into the mouth of a male-created female character who subsequently speaks ill of another woman and her cohort (albeit an enemy). This is a double blow. A man (the creator of Deborah) uses a woman (Deborah) to criticise another woman (Sisera's mother) for being vindictive against other women (the supposed bounty of war). The same might be said of the narration of the encounter with the Strange Woman: the male sage creates a female narrator to criticise another woman, this time, not for being vindictive against women, but for leading men astray. Effectively, from a male viewpoint, women are not even to be trusted with their own kind.

How dangerous is the Strange Woman perceived to be? This question lies at the heart of the discussion about her character. As I noted earlier, van Dijk-Hemmes developed Camp's smoke-screen scenario to argue that it is the reader, rather than the man with whom the encounter takes place, who is deceived. I would concur with van Dijk-Hemmes on this point: 'seductive speech' and 'smooth talk' might 'persuade' and 'compel' but are not necessarily deceptive. The way to Sheol is the *I persona*'s understanding of the outcome of events not the Strange Woman's and, although the object of her attention is portrayed as being oblivious through his naivety, that should not and does not make the Strange Woman a mistress of deception. There is nothing in the Strange Woman's speech (7:14-20) which implies deception: on the contrary, she is honest both in her reasons for seeking out the youngster and in her intentions.[47] The reader reads into the Strange Woman's words the perceived deception through the reference to the outcome of the encounter which comes later, when the *I persona* once

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[47] Glenn Pemberton also questions whether the woman's rhetoric is "smooth", noting that the woman is not deceptive about her status or her desires, and asks whether it is the content of her appeal rather than her rhetoric that is deemed so dangerous by the 'father' (1999 p. 268).

again takes up the narrative, with its allusions to slaughter, entrapment and the chambers of death (7:22-27). Earlier references signpost the required reading of the plot (2:16, 5:3, 6:24). Van Dijk-Hemmes noted that the reader should at least have been alerted to the possibility of a negatively presented biblical figure i.e. women who are brought into action against women, by the use of the *woman at the window* type scene (1996 p.62). I would also include the allusion of danger signalled by the use of the *say you are my sister* motif, as discussed above.

Robert O'Connell produces an interesting short note on *Proverbs VII 16-17: A Case of Fatal Deception in a "Woman and the Window" Type-scene.* (1991 pp. 235-241). In doing so he provides, perhaps unwittingly, an example of the way in which the smoke screen is so effectively rendered and the reader deceived. He notes that three themes – sexual attraction (requited or frustrated), deception, and the threat of death – are familiar companions in the *woman and the window* type-scenes, all of which he declares, combine in Proverbs 7:16-17:

> 7:16 I have decked my couch with coverings,
>   coloured spreads of Egyptian linen;
>
> 7:17 I have perfumed my bed with myrrh,
>   aloes and cinnamon.

Linen, myrrh, lign-aloes and cinnamon all figure as symbols of luxury and sensual enjoyment although, as far as O'Connor is aware, "no-one has yet commented on either the deceptive or ominous nuances of these adornments of the temptress's bed" (1991 p. 238). He makes a case for his assertion, re the "deceptive and ominous nuances", but in truth whether he has a case is not of concern here. What O'Connell does is fall into the trap, the smoke screen so effectively rendered by the *I persona*: the Strange Woman may well have simply adorned her bed in preparation for a sexual encounter, but as the

reader, O'Connor has read into the description of her bed-coverings, the deception and threat that has been put into his mind by the *I persona.*

Van Dijk-Hemmes (1996 p. 62) concludes that the speech of admonishing and rebuking women in Proverbs conform to androcentric discourse. Her conclusion is that the *I persona* in Proverbs 7 could be a female speaker, but that unfortunately it is as unreliable in instruction as an M voice, because it plays according to the rules of the androcentric discourse: the female *I persona* uses the tools of the trade − she permits another female in the text to speak (the Strange Woman) and then silences her. The *I persona* is a female rebuker figure, and her portrayal of another woman, in a less than favourable light, is not without precedent (cf. Lemuel's mother).

6.3.2 The 'F' voice

I shall now turn my attention to Brenner, whose intention is to reassess the notion of the Female Rebuker genre and apply it to Proverbs 1-9 (1996 p. 113-130). She notes that virtually all commentators, feminist as well as non-feminist, concur that the voices in the perceived framework of Proverbs, i.e. Proverbs 1-9 and 31, are 'M' discourses. As already stated in the literature review (Chapter 4) her *starting point* is to deny the 'father's instruction to the son' genre in Proverbs 1-9 and 31.

I would go a stage further and argue that if she is considering all possibilities then we might note that the word used in 4:2b is *tôrâ*. On the two occasions when both the mother and father are referred to (1:8 and 6:20) *tôrâ* is used in the context of the mother, whereas in 3:1 and 4:2 no mention is made specifically to the mother. However, if we dare to suggest that there is nothing to exclude the mother's voice from Proverbs 3 (possibly in its entirety) then we might also argue that it is the mother's voice which

speaks in part of chapter 4.[48] Why should the use of *tôrâ* appear here, if not because it is

the mother's voice? We might not go so far as to suggest her voice in verses 3 & 4 but

as Brenner suggests, it seems arguable that her voice is at least heard in the first verse,

encouraging her son(s) to pay attention to what their father is about to say.

I, like Brenner, am persuaded by van Dijk-Hemmes' argument that the *I persona*

of Proverbs 7 is female. However, wary of "conform[ing] to the interpretative norm of

the gender authority inherent in Proverbs 1-9" (1996 p. 114), an accusation which

Brenner lays at Camp and other feminist critics, to my mind Brenner's observations add

nothing further in support of the assertion to an 'F' voice. Granted the figure stays at the

window to observe the scene that unfolds, but that cannot be used in itself to suggest

that only women are confined behind windows. Abimelech looks out of the window and

summons Isaac to appear before him; he does not venture out (Genesis 26:8, 9). Fox

(2000 p. 258) concurs although his assertion that men are as likely as women to look out

of windows appears to take no account of the use of a 'woman at a window' type-scene

as a literary device. Within Proverbs Wisdom, her maids, Folly and the Strange Woman

appear in public competing for the attention of the 'youngsters'. In addition, I see no

evidence for keeping the Woman of Worth of Proverbs 31 at home. On the contrary, the

activities with which she is involved would suggest that she is active both within and

outside the home. Likewise, Brenner's assertion that a male observer would be more

likely to go out and look carries no real weight.

Brenner, however, presses on. Once a female figure is established as the observer

at the window, and perhaps importantly a maternal figure, further insight can be added

to discussions concerning the *zārâ*, the personification of wisdom and women's

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[48] No consideration is given by either Fox or Waltke as to the gender of the speaker in Proverbs 3, the assumption being that it is the 'father'.

teaching. In terms of the *zārâ*, Brenner rejects the translation of "foreign" or "strange" preferring instead the concept of "other", that is women who are positioned outside the accepted social order (1996 p. 121). She recognises that this could be an 'M' voice in a female persona but argues that the vehemence of the attack on the woman is evidence of the F persona having conformed to androcentric values and overzealousness in protecting those values. According to Brenner, 'F' self-interest is silenced through identification with 'M' interest: in other words, the 'F' voice contributes to its own suppression (1996 p. 126).

It is 'F' voices which create personae within the text according to Brenner. Therefore the depiction of personified wisdom is one of lover and bride corresponding to the predominance of 'F' voices in love poetry. This is, she claims, not a male voice discussing M concerns through an image of female sexual attractiveness but a carefully crafted persona which will appeal to its intended audience and a female voice is as plausible as another. Curiously when Wisdom speaks she is maternal and commercial rather than erotic, no doubt reinforcing the binary representation of woman. Finally, Brenner considers chapter 31 as already discussed, determining it as the only instance of a mother-to daughter instruction (1996 pp. 126-127). I noted my concerns earlier, and there is little in the foregoing to have changed that opinion.

Overall, Brenner flies with a theory beginning with, and basing her argument on, a 'what if' scenario. Her advocating of a female voice for the whole of Proverbs 1-9 is, I think, a step too far. Too much evidence weighs against an 'F' voice for the whole of the text but there is sufficient evidence to support a claim for an 'F' voice as the narrator of the events of Proverbs 7: a female rebuker figure, the *say you are my sister* and *woman at the window* type scenes, and the use of the smoke-screen scenario.

Furthermore, I will now consider the work of Peter Hatton which, in contrasting 6:20-7:27 with 31:1-9, in my mind adds further support to a claim for an 'F' voice.

6.4   Comparisons and contrasts with King Lemuel's mother

In *Contradiction in the Book of Proverbs: The Deep Waters of Counsel* (2008), Peter Hatton notes that although a few scholars argue for some element of organisation within the sections of Proverbs most scholars believe that Proverbs is a lightly edited, random collection of sayings. Hatton develops an argument that Proverbs is skilfully organised to enliven the individual sayings within the collections (chapters 10-29) through the use of deliberate repetition, in order that the reader is brought into renewed contact with earlier themes. Whilst the scope of Hatton's concern does not necessarily match mine, I refer to him because one of the areas he considers is that of antithetical repetition within Proverbs, and he uses, as his evidence, the passages of Proverbs 6:20-7:27 and 31:1-9 (2008 pp. 72-77). Hatton notes that many sayings within the book intimate that smooth, flattering words deceive, whilst harsh words are to be trusted, citing Proverbs 1:22-33; 2:16-19; 5:1-14; 12:6, 17; 17:4; 18:7, 8; 19:25; 21:6; 22:14; 26:18-28; 27:5-6; 28:23; and 29:5.

In Proverbs 6 and 31 this concept is reinforced: the harsh, reprimanding speech of Lemuel's mother (31:2-9) recalls, and is contrasted with, the smooth, flattering words of the *nokriyyâ* of Proverbs 6:20-7:27, particularly "that sinister [sic] figure's" speech in 7:14-27 (2008 p. 73). Hatton endeavours to display that there are similarities between the two passages and, importantly, for my purposes, both these passages involve female personifications. However, more than that, Hatton endeavours to prove that similarities exist between a passage that is widely held to have been spoken by a female (31:2-9) with a passage that includes a female character speaking, but which has generally been

thought to be the words of a male. For my purposes then, I shall endeavour to build upon Hatton's argument, with the particular view of adding weight to the claim for an 'F' voice within Proverbs 7.

I have already said, based upon the discussion of van Dijk-Hemmes and Brenner above, that there is evidence to support a claim that the *I persona* in Proverbs 7 is a Female Rebuker figure and that the voice behind the text is an 'F' voice. This female figure watches from her window, and recounts the tale of a woman's encounter with a supposedly naïve, younger male. Hatton declares the woman engaged in the encounter to be sinister from the outset. And yet, I have already demonstrated that it is the female *I persona* who establishes a smoke screen and renders it so efficient that the reader/listener is lured into presupposing that the woman is intent on more than engaging in a casual sexual encounter. Disabling the smoke screen and setting aside the presupposition of a male narrator, I will now consider the claims that Hatton makes.

The first comparison that Hatton makes between the passages is that both warn against certain sorts of encounters with women. The danger is perceived to be from sexual encounters although it would appear that, particularly in the case of Proverbs 6:20-7:27, it is not the sexual encounter per se that is warned against, rather sex with another man's wife. It might appear that it is the fact that he is engaging with someone who belongs to another man that poses the threat, rather than the sexual encounter itself.[49] Hatton might therefore have been more accurate in commenting that the warning is against certain sorts of encounters with *a certain type of women*. Fox, as we have already noted, concludes that, in considering the identity of the Strange Woman, all forms of *otherness* are beside the point since there is no stigma in being *zār* or *nokrî*

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[49] cf. Proverbs 6:26

of itself, but the taint is in the illicit assignations between the woman and the men who are *zarim* to her (2000 pp. 134-141). In Proverbs 31 Lemuel's mother warns against women who destroy kings, and although adultery is not mentioned, one assumes that what is in focus is the sexual attraction that they pose, whether they are married, single and/or foreign. Hence, Lemuel's mother appears more concerned with the threat that women pose to the king carrying out his reign properly than the threat from an enraged husband. This may indeed be a subtle difference but ultimately the young man is being warned against women of some description, and it does not detract from Hatton's theory.

Hatton's second comparison is that the addressee is a son and that at least one of the speakers is commonly believed to be a mother, to whose maternal authority the son is expected to submit. Both passages, he suggests, are examples of maternal instruction. Of course, this comparison does not necessarily imply that the voice behind the text in Proverbs 6:20-7:27 is an 'F' voice, since an 'M' voice could give rise to a female personification. However, the linking of the passage to Lemuel's mother's speech adds further weight to a claim for an 'F' voice in the former.

Hatton's third comparison is that both sections permit *foreign* women to speak with their own voice, in that he is making the comparison between Lemuel's mother and the speaker of 7:14-20. These are the supposed smooth words of deceit that are contrasted with the harsh words of the mother's rebuke, although as I have said earlier, smooth words might persuade and compel but may not necessarily be deceptive. Hatton's evidence in support of the Queen's claim to a foreign status is comprehensive and there is no reason to disagree with his conclusion. However, he is also clear in his

own mind that the Strange Woman is a foreigner.[50] This enables him to claim a comparison, but which appears circular in its argument, since he does not make a case for the Strange Woman's *foreignness* but asserts that: "If an antithetical correspondence between 6:20-7:27 and 31:1-9 is recognized, then a rationale behind the foreignness of the speakers becomes clear" (2008 p. 74).

The difficulty for me, in terms of this comparison, is that I am less concerned with the *smooth* words of the Strange Woman, and more with the speaker of the narrative. Hatton concludes that the Strange Woman is "the negative voice in a dialogical examination of relationships with foreign women; Lemuel's mother is the positive voice" (2008 p. 77). However, if the comparison is extended to the *I persona*, then both she and the Queen are issuing a warning to the son to guard against a dangerous liaison. Both passages present a mother admonishing a son, but in terms of antithesis the one has a non-foreign mother warning against a foreign/strange woman; the other, a foreign woman warning against women, or at least an excess thereof. If anything then this may add further weight to a claim that the *nokriyyâ* is not foreign but, as others have claimed, 'other', since both foreign and non-foreign mothers are united in their warnings against them.

The final parallel that Hatton offers is the males' silence. Neither son speaks during their encounters. Again, whilst Hatton only comments on the comparison between 31:1-9 and the encounter with the Strange Woman (7:14-20), there is also a comparison to be drawn with the entirety of 6:20-7:27: both the son who is receiving the advice and the young man who encounters the *nokriyyâ* are silent.

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[50] An observation made in 2010 on an earlier piece of unpublished work of mine that Hatton was generous enough to comment on.

Hatton's intention is to argue for a more cohesive structure to Proverbs, that it is more than a collection of random sayings and passages. Through the use of antithetical repetition, he advocates an editorial strategy in promoting an understanding that flattering words may be deceptive and harsh words are to be trusted, a recurrent theme in the book. He is concerned with the differences that exist between the two passages. By comparing the passages, antithetical repetition does indeed appear to be in existence. However, Hatton, although referring to 6:20-7:27 in its entirety chooses to make a comparison with 7:14-20 alone when he considers the smooth words of the *nokriyyâ* in comparison to the harsh words of the Queen, and the silence of the male characters. Within the framework of 6:20-7:27 the antithesis extends beyond verses 14-20, and is duplicated in the entire section. Both the *I Persona* and the Strange Woman speak, the non-foreign and 'other' in contrast to the foreign Queen, and both the 'son' and the 'young man' are silent before the women. Finally the smooth words of the *nokriyyâ* can be contrasted with the reproof of the *I persona*. These parallels and the antithetical repetition highlighted by Hatton add further weight to a claim that the *I persona* of Proverbs 7 is female, her speech informed by an 'F' voice.

6.5   Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the identity of the character that appears throughout Proverbs as the antithesis to Wisdom. I have noted that there is no consensus within scholarship as to her identity or to the threat that she poses. Late twentieth century scholarship, influenced largely by the work of Humbert and Snijders, rejected the earlier identification of the woman as a foreigner and largely identified the character as representing sexual impropriety and 'otherness'. Tan's thesis attempted to reclaim the notion of the character's 'foreignness', however her conclusions were not entirely

compelling and her definition of 'foreignness' i.e. not being confined to geographical borders but simply outside the clan, appear not to be sufficiently distant from the sense of 'otherness'. If Tan did not provide a sufficiently compelling argument to establish a foreign identity for the woman, in my mind she raised the question as to why sexual impropriety came to be imputed into the words used to name her.

I am not convinced that I have found a conclusive answer, although I have sympathy with the notion that simply to be woman is to be perceived as a threat. In the absence of physical strength, power and status, a woman's feminine wiles and charms may be perceived as part of her armoury, deployed to obtain a desired outcome, whether that is for sexual gratification (e.g. 7:14-20) or more political ends (31:1-9). I also remain unconvinced that the Strange Woman represents a specific threat, rather it is her speech which is considered dangerous and to be guarded against.

The lack of a specific identity is not, however, detrimental to a search for female voices in Proverbs. If it is not possible to label precisely the character of the Strange Woman that does not prevent an exploration of the suggestion that the character is given voice by a woman. To this end I considered the work of Brenner & van Dijk-Hemmes with respect to their claims for 'F' voices within the text, and Hatton's proposal that antithetical repetition particularly, for my purpose, in light of 6:20 – 7:27, provided a connection with the female speech within the text of Lemuel's mother in 31:1-9. In terms of the material within Proverbs, whilst it cannot be argued that chapters 1-9 in their entirety are an 'F' voice, there is sufficient evidence to support a claim that the speech of the *I persona* in 6:20-7:27 is that of a woman. The woman uses *a woman at the window-type* scenario to speak of an encounter that she so skilfully narrates.

Two questions arise from this assertion of a female narrator: why might a woman speak of, or portray such a negative image of another woman, and why might a male scribe re-employ such a ploy? At its simplest it may be because the woman, as a mother, wishes to protect her child from being led astray by a woman in the same way that a man may warn his daughter against the danger of rape by another man – being of the same gender does not prevent an acknowledgement of what others may be capable of. On a more complex level we noted in Chapter 5, in the discussion of Deborah's Song, the complex weaving of women's dealings with one another. The narrator's attack on the Strange Woman can be viewed in this light: I demonstrated earlier that a domestic setting for the instructions cannot be ruled out and therefore it is feasible that the narrator is the mother. As a mother, bearing much of the responsibility for the upbringing of the children within the home, it is not unreasonable to deduce that her 'lesson' carries more weight, in that she has an emotional hold on the 'son'. Confined behind the window she protects the 'status quo' and enhances her own reputation as a 'good' mother by warning against a woman whom she may resent for enjoying the freedom that she is denied (cf. Michal's resentment at the freedom David was enjoying).

The answer to the second concern as to why a male might include this scene if it is a woman speaking follows a similar thought process. In employing a woman to criticise another woman the male scribe reinforces the notion that women are inherently deceitful but a good wife is to be trusted (31:11). The narrator of the encounter speaks against those who are not like her and whom she perceives to threaten the stability of society. Finally, it is the employment of the smoke screen that renders the Strange Woman so potentially fatal – not the Strange Woman herself.

Many have failed to see beyond this screen. Fox argues that "the narrative …
displays the Strange Woman in her particularity and human frailty. She is indeed
dangerous, but at the same time rather *pathetic*" (2000 p. 252 my emphasis). In a sense,
Fox is right: without the screen the Strange Woman may indeed be perceived as frail
and pathetic − a woman in search of a brief sexual encounter whilst her husband is
away. However, I am unconvinced that the narrator views her as pathetic. Fox himself
cites vividness as one of the ploys that the 'father' uses to teach wisdom, creating
salacious scenes that the intended audience will find tantalizing but which will also
generate a sense of repulsion, only to subsequently remove the façade and reveal the
unpalatable truth (2000 p. 350). In the Strange Woman's case, most commentators
appear to forget this ploy, attributing the negative characteristics to the Strange Woman
herself, as opposed to seeing her as the creation of the narrator. The vehement attack on
her character, emphasised by the fact that the narrator uses the smoke screen to entice
the reader into viewing her speech as sinister is to be understood as the antithesis to the
Woman of Worth of chapter 31:

> Like the strong woman… the adulteress also leaves the realm of the
> household, but this time to do evil rather than good. *Her* textiles are all for
> entrapment and adornment; *her* surplus is a primal sexual energy that her
> husband, in his absence can neither absorb nor control (Fontaine, 2004
> p.45).

Camp concludes that "the forces of 'chaos' are embodied in a woman who takes
control of her own sexuality" and that "the purpose of the poem in Proverbs 7 is to
project into a single figure the greatest evil imaginable" (2000 p. 61). And yet, Proverbs
appears to be completely uninterested in the control of women's sexual behaviour and is
concerned only with that of its young men. The Strange Woman, whilst unacceptable to
the narrator, is not in my opinion condemned by her; her sole interest is to warn the

youngster of the dangers that lie in encountering her, and she achieves that by skilfully enticing him, and subsequent readers, to read more into the encounter than physically exists.

CHAPTER 7

DO NOT FORSAKE YOUR MOTHER'S TEACHING

7.1 Introduction

If, as I have claimed, there is sufficient evidence to present a claim for the voice of the *I Persona* in 6:20-7:24 to be female, where does that leave us in terms of the rest of chapters 1-9? Originally I was not persuaded by Athalya Brenner's (1996) argument that the whole of Proverbs 1-9 was an 'F' voice. However, having made a plausible claim in the case of Proverbs 6:20-7:24, and more tenuously for 4:1, my initial response to Brenner's proposal ought to be reconsidered. At this juncture it is important to note that I am swimming against a very strong tide and that previous attempts to claim an 'F' voice have not been well received. However, my aim is not to declare categorically that the voice that speaks in Proverbs 1-9 is female, but rather to bring into question the almost universal assumption that the voice is male.

With the exception of the female personifications of Wisdom and the Strange Woman, women are not named within Proverbs. The same could be argued in terms of fathers and sons within the book although, though not named, the voices heard are assumed to be male and the sayings are attributed to named males i.e. Solomon, Agur, and through his mother, Lemuel. In the single exception when a female voice is almost universally accepted (31:1-9) the woman is referred to not by name but only as Lemuel's mother. Named women appear in other books of the Hebrew Bible, where family histories are recorded and the purity of the cult and the people are treated (Ljung, 1989 p. 34), but not within Proverbs.[51] Instead, rather than being named, women are

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[51] Inger Ljung provides a comprehensive study of named and anonymous women in the first two chapters of *Silence and Suppression: Attitudes to Women in the Old Testament* (1989).

referred to as wife, mother, harlot, but never as daughter[52] or sister, although the young man is encouraged to refer to Wisdom as his sister (7:4).[53] Women within Proverbs are viewed entirely in terms of their relationships with men, whether the man is their father, husband or son: they are the recipient, for good or ill, of their "son's" behaviour (10:1, 15:20, 17:25, 19:26, 23:22, 23:25); viewed in terms of the honour that they might bring to their men-folk (31:23); and warned against in terms of their sexuality.[54] On this basis it would appear that no concern is expressed for women in any of these relationships; they are viewed simply in terms of their relationship to men either as wife, mother, or a perceived threat.

In his 1929 commentary *The Book of Proverbs*, Oesterley suggests the opposite. Although he acknowledges that the mother's position was inferior to the father's in terms of legal and ritual matters, he comments that "the book of Proverbs has more to say about the love and respect due to the mother than any other book in the Bible… the mother's claim to consideration is equal with the father's" (1929 p. 7). His claim is not without foundation, since several statements within Proverbs appear to suggest that consideration is to be accorded to the mother: either by not ignoring her teaching (1:8, 6:20); by not causing her grief or bitterness as a consequence of a lack of wisdom (10:1, 17:25 and antithetically 23:25); or by not treating her with contempt or rejection (15:20, 19:26, 23:22, 30:11, 30:17). Three instances (1:8, 6:20 and 23:22) are injunctions and denote specific action on the son's part – no reference is made to his wisdom or otherwise. The remainder would suggest that the pain or distress that is caused is an

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[52] The instruction of daughters does not appear uppermost in the scribe's mind, although it has been argued that Proverbs 31 is a teaching tool for daughters in Crook M. (1954) 'The Marriageable Maiden of Prov.31:10-31', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies,* 13**,** pp. 137-140 and Brenner's (1996) advocating of a mother to daughter instruction for Chapter 31.

[53] See the earlier discussion concerning the use of this 'device' in Chapter 6: The Case of the Strange Woman, where I argue that this is part of the smoke-screen device employed by the narrator.

[54] Even Wisdom is not free to be truly independent, but is generally viewed as a divine consort of the Israelite (male) deity.

undesired *outcome* of foolish behaviour or attitudes, and therefore the appeal to wise behaviour is not *prima facie* out of concern for the mother, or indeed the father.

In his work on proverbial clusters in *Like Grapes of Gold Set in Silver*, one of Heim's conclusions is that the perceived attitude of Proverbs towards women needs to be reassessed in that "most statements do not characterise female stereotypes per se, but function as rhetorical devices to *influence* male behaviour in social aspects of life" (2001 p. 316). I agree with Heim that we may have been too quick, both male and female, to set Proverbs' portrayal of the female in a less than positive light (a product of male-oriented reading strategies), and that it does need to be viewed through a different lens. However, despite the references to 'mother' appearing to suggest a concern for her wellbeing, I remain sceptical of Oesterley's claim that concern for either parent, let alone the mother, was at the forefront of the scribe or editor's mind.

If there are no specific named references to women within Proverbs, then I need to be more subtle in endeavouring to ascertain whether I can, in fact, lay claim to women's voices being heard in the opening nine chapters. What is known is that within Proverbs youngsters are instructed not to disregard a mother's teaching (1:8, 6:20), which might imply that mothers were involved in the education and social upbringing of their children. However, there are two difficulties with this argument: firstly, whether the use of the term 'mother' reflects the actual reality of a mother's input to the content of the text or is merely a literary device; secondly, whether the mother can be found in the context within which instruction was given i.e. within the home or within a more formal educational setting. No clear scholarly consensus exists as to the most likely scenario.

To answer these difficulties I shall turn my attention to the structure of the opening nine chapters, within which reference to the mother's teaching is found. I shall

consider the alternative proposals for the context of the material i.e. whether it took place in a formal educational/school setting or within a domestic setting. I shall then turn my attention to the role of mothers as teachers and what bearing it may have on a woman's role in the instruction and education of subsequent generations. There are other references to 'mother' beyond Proverbs 1-9 which I shall explore in the next chapter, but it is the instruction to not disregard her teaching that forms the basis of my enquiry into whether her words can be heard in the text. Having drawn conclusions concerning the role of women in this sphere, I shall then turn my attention to the text itself. The verses which allude to the mother and to the word group 'teaching/instruction' belong to a group of sayings which are thought to be related to one another through the use of variant repetition: the seemingly random use of repeated phrases (with slight variation) throughout the collection. An exploration of these repeated sayings may establish the potential for female voices to be discovered where hitherto they have remained unclaimed.

7.2   The Ten Lectures of Proverbs 1-9

I shall begin by considering the nature of the material with which I am engaging. Unlike the rest of Proverbs, which in the main consists of short maxims within chapters 10-29 and shorter poems in 30-31, the opening nine chapters are made up of longer literary units consisting of 'father-to-son' discourses or 'lectures', interspersed with 'interludes' which, for the most part, are reflections on wisdom (Fox, 2000 p. 45).   Fox designates the major units of the first nine chapters 'lectures', reflecting their nature i.e. a 'father' lecturing his 'son'. I prefer Fox's term 'lecture' rather than Whybray's 'instructions' or McKane's 'discourses' primarily because it appears less dogmatic and gives the impression of choice in whether the recipient accepts the advice proffered.

This, to my mind, fits more with the advisory nature of Proverbs rather than as a didactic teaching tool.

The structure of the opening nine chapters, consisting of the ten 'lectures' and interspersed with 5 'interludes', was first identified by R.N. Whybray in his work *Wisdom in Proverbs* (1965 pp. 33-52), and has been widely accepted ever since. In a later work Whybray (1994a) identifies that most of the lectures, with the exception of 1:8-19 and 4:20-27 are not in their original form, but have been added to for theological and non-theological reasons and can be identified as a distinct literary type, in that they all begin with the same literary characteristics: they address 'my son' (or 'sons') as the first or second word; they command the listener to pay heed, in some form, to the 'teaching' that is to follow; they assert the personal authority of the one speaking; they all assert, in some form, the value of the 'wisdom' being dispensed; there is no reference to any authority other than that of the speaker; and 'wisdom' (which occurs only twice in 4:11 and 5:1) refers to human wisdom and not as a term of any special significance (1994a pp. 11-61). He also notes that whilst it may be relatively easy to note the beginning of the instructions, the conclusions are more difficult to determine since the expansions often tend to be placed in final positions.

As already noted, Whybray's proposition has generally received widespread acceptance although Murphy questions whether the phrase *my son* "can … bear all the weight of indicating fundamental divisions" within the opening nine chapters and whether, in terms of identifying the original from expansions, such conclusions can be drawn without introducing arbitrary criteria (1998 pp. 8-9). Both Fox (2000 pp. 44-45) and Waltke (2004 pp. 10-12) provide a clear outline of the structure of Proverbs 1-9, identifying the core elements of introduction, lecture and conclusion within each

lecture. They are not in complete agreement as to the delimitation of the material although their differences are not in terms of the overall structure. Heim provides a helpful comparison of Fox and Waltke's delimitation of the ten lectures in table form and an exploration of some of their differences (2013 pp. 37-41). An exploration of those differences need not detain us: there is sufficient consensus as to the overall structure of the opening nine chapters of Proverbs that I can proceed on the basis that, however they have arrived at their final form, different parts of the introductions are related to one another (Heim, 2013 p. 36). It is this relationship between parts of the introductions that I shall now explore, most notably Proverbs 1:8 and 6:20.

At the heart of all this is whether there is socio-historical evidence to suppose that the text represents a reality in terms of both parents being involved in the kind of instruction that the lectures imply, or whether the terms 'mother' and 'father' are simply used as a literary device. I have already stated that the overriding assumption is that it is the father (or male figure) speaking in the addresses and it is therefore pertinent to ask why there is reference to the mother at all. Whether this question is answered differently by male and female, the difference lying in the default line of gender, is open to interpretation, but almost all scholars simply consider the reference to father and mother in parallel as denoting instruction to listen to the parental voice and nothing more. I shall demonstrate in due course that whilst most refer to the parental voice, the voice of the mother is routinely dismissed and hence a more accurate comment would be that it refers to the paternal voice. The general understanding to date is that it is the requirements of synonymous literary parallelism, as traditionally perceived, which demand the inclusion of the mother.

It is important therefore that the requirements of poetic parallelism are considered in order to ascertain whether they rule out any claim to the physical presence of the mother in the instruction of her offspring. Thus, there is a route to answering the first concern: the question of whether the mother might be a physical reality. I now turn my attention to the second, the educational context.

7.3 The Educational Context

It is generally assumed that within the home mothers played a role in the education of their offspring in terms of their moral, religious and civil responsibilities. This much does not appear to be in doubt, although the Hebrew Scriptures say very little about the mother's role in this realm (Fox, 2000 p. 82). What is also generally assumed is that, in terms of instruction, it is the father's voice that is heard in the text, thus 'relegating' the woman's input to the private domains of the home. Whilst she is supposedly held as equally accountable for producing responsible members of society, the mother is to remain silent in the public domain.[55] The question of whether a female voice is present in the first nine chapters of the book, or indeed any of the chapters, is not necessarily at the forefront of most scholars' minds. Most comment on the speech of the 'father' to the 'son' as a given, and restrict their observations to the setting and nature of the relationship i.e. whether it is indeed a parental relationship or that of a tutor and tutee in a more formal educational setting. Only Waltke, as far as I am able to determine, is relatively circumspect with regard to the source of the material, noting that the chapters consist of ten lectures "put into the mouth of the father" (2004 p. 10).

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[55] Females heard crying out in the public domain are the Strange Woman and Wisdom competing for the attention of the 'simple'.

Whether or not the context for Proverbs is within the family home, as opposed to a more formal educational setting, is open to debate and to date no conclusive response has been found. In support of a more formal educational setting, the idea of an educational purpose for Proverbs 1-9 suggests some form of official school setting. Some evidence can be found to support such a claim: Proverbs 5:13 alludes to teachers and instructors as opposed to the father and mother elsewhere, and much is made of the similarities between some of the Proverb material and Egyptian Instructions which are known to have been used for the education of large numbers of officials over a considerable period. One of the strongest proponents for the existence of schools in Israel is A. Lemaire. In *Les écoles et la formation de la Bible dans l'ancien Israël* (1981) Lemaire argues, based on eleven categories of epigraphic evidence, that the school is the *Sitz im Leben* for most of the biblical writings, although not necessarily all of the oral compositions which lie behind the written text (Davies, 1995 pp. 199-205).

The claim to the existence of schools in ancient Israel is no longer as assured as it once might have been. Katharine Dell (2006 p. 26) asks whether evidence of literacy translates into evidence for schools. Another question, concerning the possible existence of a formal educational setting is 'how formal is formal'? Previous scholarly discussion on education in Israel has focussed in the main on proving or disproving the existence of schools, i.e. separately identifiable physical entities with a professional class of tutors. However, education in larger contemporary cultures such as Mesopotamia and Egypt took place not in schools as defined in modern terms, but in the home and in the workshops of scribal masters. This could equally have been true of smaller kingdoms like Judah which maintained a scribal-education apparatus, albeit on a smaller scale than their neighbours. How widespread such literacy might have been is another

unknown although, given the high mortality rate with many scribes not living long enough to exercise their trade, it would have been necessary to educate more than just the children of the official scribe (Carr, 2005 pp. 113-115).

Overall the evidence on either side of the debate remains inconclusive, but it is the "use of literacy to *help* enculturate, shape the behavior, and otherwise mentally separate an educated upper class from their noneducated peers" (Carr, 2005 p. 119) which is of importance. Does it therefore need to be an either/or scenario? It is universally acknowledged that Proverbs, if not an educational tool per se, was an instrument to be used in the instruction of wise behaviour. If it is a school setting, then why is there reference to the mother and father as teachers? Conversely, if it is a domestic setting then why, as I have already remarked, is there reference to teacher and instructor? It seems possible that even a formal setting might have been less formal than an educational establishment and 'teaching' might have taken place within the context of the family unit. Heim contends that since the 'mother' and 'father' are the ones who 'teach' and 'instruct', the words find their antecedents in the only other reference to 'teaching' in the preamble – that of the 'wise' in Proverbs 1:6. In this case, the reference to mother may more accurately refer to women in general and indicate that their role within the home and more formal teaching contexts was less clearly defined than has previously been thought (2013 p. 64).[56] It cannot be said with complete confidence that the setting was within the home and that the mother would have been explicitly involved; neither can it be said that she was excluded by the provision of education and instruction solely within a school setting. Hence, it is impossible to say categorically

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[56] Waltke advocates that reference to 'your mother' points to a home setting and that the "references to the mother in the prologue (1:8, 4:3, 6:20) function as exemplars for the other lectures – that is, one should assume that the mother is gapped in the terse poetry and epigrammatic proverbs but in fact is an authoritative voice along with the father" (2004 p. 117).

that she was not present and therefore, by definition, it is *possible* that she was present, however unlikely that may have thought to have been in most scholarship to date. On that basis I shall proceed on the assumption that it is *possible* that the mother had a role to play.

7.4 The Mother's Teaching

References to a mother's teaching are rare in ancient texts. In his essay *Foreign Semitic Influence on the Wisdom of Israel* (1995) John Day points out that, to his knowledge, there are no references to the mother's teaching in any of the Egyptian Instructions, and that isolated Mesopotamian references to a mother's teaching are Sumerian rather than Semitic. He quotes the Instructions of Shuruppak, lines 259-60, urging that the mother's words not be ignored, and notes that it is striking that Proverbs 31 designates itself as part of the ancient Near Eastern wisdom appropriated by Israel (1995 p. 66). If, therefore, reference to the mother's teaching is unusual and is not 'borrowed' from other instruction material, then why it is found in Proverbs? The most common answer to this question is that it is a product of poetic parallelism: rather than being a specific reference to the mother it simply denotes, along with the mention of the father, 'parental' instruction in which the mother is accorded an equal role in that instruction (Whybray (1995), Fox (2000), and Camp (1985)). However, an alternative viewpoint, that parallelism renders the mother an inferior role, is proffered by Judith McKinlay in her discussion of the portrayal of women in Proverbs in *Gendering Wisdom the Host* (1996 pp. 100-132).

McKinlay observes that whilst Israel's use of the literary genre of 'instruction' is in common with surrounding cultures, the reference to the role of the mother in the instruction is rare. As the starting point in considering the question of the woman's

teaching role she notes, as I have done, the difficulties presented by the text: whether mention of the mother is purely to meet the demands of parallelism or significant of itself; and the inability to establish with any degree of certainty the setting for the material, noting that most commentators settle for a domestic background to the instructions. Taking into consideration the significance of the second half-line in parallelism and its role in respect of the first half-line in terms of equivalence or intensification, McKinlay's concern is that even if there is some reason for the mother to be mentioned beyond the needs of poetic parallelism, this may not necessarily mean that the mother and father are to be seen in equal terms: rather, it may be that the mother is 'relegated' to an inferior position. Contrary to Whybray, Fox and Camp, who argue that equality is emphasized by the parallelism, McKinlay expresses doubt that the two are to be considered as equal given that the mother, when she does make an appearance, appears in the second half-line in all cases and never in the first.

Rather unusually, in Proverbs 29:15, no mention is made of the father but the mother still appears in the second half-line, an observation that McKinlay does not make explicitly. She subsequently draws attention to the verse linking it with reference to the father in the first half-line of 29:17, although again there is no explicit reference to the father, only the second person masculine singular suffix denoting 'your son'. I shall deal with this placing of the mother and the 'missing' father in due course, since consideration of Alter and Gillingham's definitions of poetical parallelism, along with O'Connor's understanding of word-play fundamentally undermine McKinlay's argument, but for now let us consider the foundations upon which she builds her case.

McKinlay's contention is that, because the father was almost always thought of as the authority figure in Israelite society and that certain word pairs always occur in a

fixed order where the first refers to the prototypical speaker, the inclusion of the mother is not about gender equality, but "highlights an almost subconscious perception of the woman's secondary place" (1996 p. 106). She bases her proposition upon the work of O'Connor's *Hebrew Verse Structure* (1980), who for his part drew upon the work of Cooper and Ross (1975) and their study of word pairs in American English. I shall now turn my attention to the work of O'Connor, unpacking it slightly in order that it might shed more light on McKinlay's claim.

One of O'Connor's quests is to consider whether, given the seemingly general nature of word-pairs and their use, there is any means of getting to grips with the practice in order to make it useful in the study of parallelism (1980 pp. 96-109). He turns his attention to the work of the ancient Sanskrit grammarian Panini, and to Cooper and Ross who had studied a large class of fixed and semi-fixed phrases in English. He derives from their work two sets of principles, semantic and phonological, which govern the use of word pairs in English. Although Cooper and Ross's work is in English, O'Connor is satisfied that it has a bearing in the study of Hebrew because their basic premise is that the language a person speaks contributes to how they view the world (the Whorfian postulate) and many of the principles at work apply similarly in Semitic languages, and in Hebrew in particular. In terms of semantic principles Cooper and Ross identify that in word pairs, a word is given order preference over another based on the following principles: *Here, now, present generation, adult, male, positive, singular, patriotic, animate, solid, front, agentive, power source, living, at home, general.* Behind this ordering also comes the 'me first' principle, in which the first of the word pair describes the 'prototypical speaker' of the language, although this is overridden when

God is in the equation, or, in English although not in Hebrew, by rules of politeness ('you and I' rather than the other way round).

Secondly, Cooper and Ross identify that there are word freezes which have no apparent semantic explanation and for which they identify seven phonological rules, the simplest of which is the most important: according to Panini, all other things being equal, the shorter of the two words comes first in a pairing. This is particularly pertinent, I would argue, in languages where the feminine form is created by the addition of a prefix or suffix. The remaining rules need not detain us, but note should be taken of O'Connor's assertion that the semantic principles are less important than the phonological ones, amongst which Panini's Law is the most important, recognition of which "serves to push our attention back where it belongs in reading poetry: onto the language itself. Most parallelistic usages result from ordinary facts of language, not special poetic features" (1980 p. 101).

It is this that McKinlay appears to have failed to take into account. The language of itself works according to the rules of word pairing and we cannot deny that in terms of the Hebrew Bible, the "me first" principle will apply in that the male will be seen as the dominant word in the pairing. That does not necessarily mean that it is the man that is actually speaking, nor does it mean that the second word of the pair, in this case 'mother', is necessarily to be seen as less important. As O'Connor has pointed out, it is simply the way the language works. McKinlay's assertion that the ordering of the word pair 'father/mother' places the actual mother in a subsidiary role is an assumption. Against this assumption the issue is not about who is more or less important but rather, whether the explicit inclusion (or indeed non-inclusion as I shall explore later) renders the woman, and the role she fulfils, important at all. My concern at this stage is with the

presence of the mother rather than equality, a subsidiary but no less important consideration.

I shall now consider McKinlay's claim with reference to Alter and Gillingham and their classifications of poetical parallelism. Of primary focus are Proverbs 1:8 and 6:20. Within these poetic lines, which half-line might be construed as the most important, A or B? A traditional understanding would render them interchangeable (A=B), neat examples of synonymous parallelism, although 'mother' is not synonymous with 'father' in terms of gender, and therefore raises the question as to why the term 'mother' is used. The two poetic lines have been viewed as so "standard and predictable and thus perhaps less interesting" (Heim, 2013 p. 62) that they have failed to generate detailed interest. [57] However, Alter and Gillingham's understandings of 'seconding' help in terms of attempting to explain the presence of the mother in the second half-line. The rules of word-order place the father in the first half-line, which in one of Alter and Gillingham's understandings would mean that the father and his 'instruction' is the important element which is intensified in the second half line (A>B). However, in accordance with Gillingham's alternative proposal, B both complements and completes the saying so that the second half-line is given more importance than the first (A<B). In the first line the 'son' is implored to simply 'hear' the father's instruction, the second 'to not disregard' the mother's teaching. Does this constitute intensification or is it complementary? Which is the line that dominates, A or B?

As much as it may further an exploration of the significance of the mother in line B, I am unconvinced by Gillingham's alternative proposition. It is difficult to clearly differentiate between her second and third variations and the examples she gives in

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[57] Heim's view of 1:8 and 6:20 is expressed in relation to his concern with the variant repetition rather than the individual poetic lines.

support of them are not sufficiently extensive to make the distinction more apparent. If 'mother' is not synonymous with 'father' then the line is not an A=B scenario. Furthermore, 'do not disregard' denotes a progression from simply 'hearing' but it is questionable as to whether the second half-line gives the impression of "greater precision" or "not only complement[s] but also complete[s]" (Gillingham, 1994 p. 80) so that B is given more importance than A. The jury is out in terms of 1:8 and 6:20, but the fact that it is not A=B renders some significance to the use of 'mother' and brings into question the almost universal assumption that the statement refers simply to 'parental' instruction.

McKinlay's exploration of the topic is founded on the common presupposition that it is the father's voice in the instructions. Following her observation that the 'mother's teaching' comes after the 'father's instruction' she notes: "This is more significant when viewed together with the observation that it is not her voice but the father's that is heard in the opening lines of the chapters in this instruction collection" (1996 p. 102) and later adding:

> "the many more instances of 'father' as teacher would perhaps argue against any automatic sense of 'anticipation' of 'mother'… If this is indeed a statement of inclusion and equivalence, then one still needs to remember… not necessarily to equate poetic literary form with social reality" (1996 p. 106).

If one presupposes that the voice to be heard in the instructions is the father's and his alone, then the conclusion to be drawn in terms of reference to the mother's teaching will be that her voice is not to be heard. However, despite having been unable to establish with any degree of certainty the social reality in terms of the educational context, social reality per se is not of concern at this stage. I am concerned with the text as it stands: both the poetic form and the way in which language functions. Word-

pairing owes its ordering to the way language works and arises simply out of normal word associations made by competent speakers of a given language (Berlin, 2008 p. 67). In addition to this, if poetic form does not necessarily equate to social reality then in terms of the material in Proverbs it cannot be presumed, simply because the social situation is known to favour men, that the voice in these chapters is male. Unfortunately, McKinlay has failed to pay attention to the text, perhaps understandably given that women are so used to male-oriented reading traditions that it can be difficult to see through a different lens.

Within the opening nine chapters the term 'father' is used on only two occasions, likewise 'mother'. All other references to instruction and its genre are preceded by the first person possessive pronoun 'my'.[58] McKinlay's assertion that there are many more references to the father as teacher is a presumption rather than a fact borne out by the text itself, although she is not alone in her thinking. In the almost universal presumption that the speaker is the 'father' the text has been ignored and criticisms have been levelled at those who have suggested an alternative reading e.g. Brenner. McKinlay herself, when considering Proverbs 4:3, dismisses Brenner's alternative reading of a mother encouraging their sons to listen to their father, commenting that it "is clearly surrounded by generational teaching from father to son that excludes the mother" although she provides no evidence to support her assertion (1996 p. 108). These criticisms have been made not on any firm foundation that it is the father speaking but on the basis that where the speaker *is* identifiable in wisdom literature he is male (Fox, 2000 p. 258), and on the basis of the presupposition that the speaker *must* be the father or a male tutor because of the social setting.

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[58] See below for references to parental speech in Proverbs 1-9.

Contrary to this presupposition that the speaker must be male because of the social setting, Carol Meyers' considers the phrase *bêt 'em* (mother's house), as opposed to the more frequent use of *bêt 'āb* (father's house).[59] It is worth clarifying at the outset that the phrase *bêt 'em* does not appear in Proverbs: it is a rare expression within the Hebrew Bible and is found only in Song of Songs 3:4 and 8:2, Genesis 24:28 and Ruth 1:8. Its more common counterpart, *bêt 'āb,* is generally accepted as a technical term referring to a family unit within Israelite society. Whilst there may be some manoeuvring in the precise definition in terms of the subdivision of Israelite society, the term 'extended family' is generally thought to be the best definition, although Meyers defines this, not merely as family members, but also to include buildings, property and animals as well as people. Its importance is that it refers to the smallest self-sufficient unit within Israelite society in terms of its size and its role as the basic economic unit producing virtually everything needed for the members of the household (1991 pp. 39-42).

It is this last point that connects the *bêt 'em* with Proverbs, despite the absence of the phrase within the book, since what is seen in Proverbs is the connection between women and the household: Wisdom 'builds her house' in 9:1; women build their house in 14:1; wisdom builds a house in 24:3; and 31:10-31 is a demonstration of the *bêt 'em*, the woman providing for the welfare of the family unit. Within this poem the mother's teaching is again found (31:26). All in all, Meyers associates a teaching role with the mother on four occasions in Proverbs (1:8; 6:20, 23; 31:26) as opposed to three times for the equivalent father's role, although it should be noted that no reference is specifically made to the mother in 6:23. Here Meyers is associating the mother with the 'teaching' through the use of *tôrâ*, a not unreasonable assumption which I shall explore

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[59] Brief consideration is given in Meyer's *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (1988 pp. 179-180). The discussion is developed further in *"To Her Mother's House": Considering a Counterpart to the Israelite Bêt 'āb* (1991 pp. 39-51)

more fully in due course. Meyer does not state the instances where the father is specifically referred to, but I assume that she is referring to 1:8, 4:1 and 6:20. Outside of the opening nine chapters there are other occasions where the mother and father appear alongside one another, although no reference is made to teaching or instruction (10:1, 13:1, 15:20, 17:25, 19:13, 19:26, 23:22, 23:24, 23:25, 30:11, 30:17). I shall turn my attention to these statements in the next chapter, to explore the possibility that they add further weight to a claim for the mother's part in the instruction of her offspring, and more importantly that they substantiate the claim to her voice being heard by a wider audience than her 'son'.

I shall now set aside presumption and explore what the text has to say in terms of the mother's role. All in all I have laid the foundation upon which I shall build the case for the mother's voice to be heard. I have demonstrated that within the structure of chapters 1-9 the literary device does not rule out the mother's physical presence; nor does our knowledge of the educational context, or lack thereof, rule out the possibility of the mother fulfilling a teaching role. Furthermore, an understanding of the way in which language operates in word-pairs undermines the presumption that it is the father alone who speaks in the opening nine chapters. In addition, the connection of the woman and the household provides a link to the teaching of the mother in 31:26.

As I begin to engage with the text itself one more building block needs to be in place: identification of variant repetition within the opening nine chapters of Proverbs which refer to either parent and to the word-group 'instruction/teaching'. Detailed below are the variant repetitions, eight in total, as identified by Heim and Snell :[60]

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[60] Heim provides a complete listing of all the sets he has identified in Proverbs (2013 pp. 4-5).

	Heim's Set	Snell's Category
Proverbs 1:8 and 6:20	Set 2	Cat. 1.2
Proverbs 1:8a and 4:1a	Set 3	Cat. 2.2
Proverbs 2:1 and 7:1	Set 6	Cat. 1.1
Proverbs 2:2, 4:20 and 5:1	Set 7	Cat. 1.2
Proverbs 3:2, 4:10 and 9:11	Set 10	Cat. 1.2 (not 4:10)
Proverbs 3:21a and 4:21a	Set 14	Cat. 2.1
Proverbs 4:4c and 7:2a	Set 16	Cat. 2.0
Proverbs 5:7, 7:24 and 8:32a	Set 17	Cat. 2.0

Finally I turn to the text of Proverbs 1-9. Identified below are the poetic lines within the opening nine chapters where reference is made to the parental imperatives and to the word-grouping 'instruction/teaching', noting whether the verse forms part of the appeal at the beginning of a 'lecture' (*App*) and identifying its variant repetition(s) (in parantheses). Transliteration of the Hebrew for terms in the word-group (e.g. *mûsar* etc.) is for convenience in noting repetition since English translations may not always be consistent. I also transliterate in the singular or plural noun form (indicating gender and number) without the accompanying preposition, in order to highlight the preposition 'my' in English.

1:8	*App*	(4:1a) (6:20)	שְׁמַע בְּנִי מוּסַר אָבִיךָ אַל־תִּטֹּשׁ תּוֹרַה אִמֶּךָ	Hear, my son, your father's *mûsar (ms)* and do not reject your mother's *tôrâ (fs)*
2:1	*App*	(7:1)	בְּנִי אִם־תִּקַּח אֲמָרָי וּמִצְוֹתַי תִּצְפֹּן אִתָּךְ	My son, if you accept my *ʾōmerîm (mp)* and treasure up my *miṣwôt (fp)* within you
2:2		(4:20) (5:1)	לְהַקְשִׁיב לַחָכְמָה אָזְנֶךָ תַּטֶּה לִבְּךָ לַתְּבוּנָה	Making your ear attentive to *ḥokmâ (fs)* and inclining your heart to *təvûnâ (fs)*
3:1	*App*		בְּנִי תּוֹרָתִי אַל־תִּשְׁכָּח וּמִצְוֹתַי יִצֹּר לִבֶּךָ	My son, do not forget my *tôrâ (fs)* but let your heart keep my *miṣwôt (fp)*
3:21a	*App*	(4:21a)	בְּנִי אַל־יָלֻזוּ מֵעֵינֶיךָ נְצֹר תֻּשִׁיָּה וּמְזִמָּה	My son, do not let these escape from your sight, keep sound wisdom and prudence
4:1	*App*	(1:8a)	שִׁמְעוּ בָנִים מוּסַר אָב וְהַקְשִׁיבוּ לָדַעַת בִּינָה	Listen, sons, to a father's *mûsar (ms)* and be attentive, that you may gain insight.
4:2			כִּי לֶקַח טוֹב נָתַתִּי לָכֶם תּוֹרָתִי אַל־תַּעֲזֹבוּ	For I give you good *leqaḥ (ms)* do not abandon my *tôrâ (fs)*
4:4		(7:2a)	וַיֹּרֵנִי וַיֹּאמֶר לִי יִתְמָךְ־דְּבָרַי לִבֶּךָ שְׁמֹר מִצְוֹתַי וֶחְיֵה	He taught me and said to me let your heart hold fast my *dəvarîm (mp)* keep my *miṣwôt(fp)* and live.
4:10	*App*	(3:2) (9:11)	שְׁמַע בְּנִי וְקַח אֲמָרָי וְיִרְבּוּ לְךָ שְׁנוֹת חַיִּים	Hear, my son, and accept my *ʾōmerîm (mp)* that the years of your life may be many
4:20	*App*	(2:2) (5:1)	בְּנִי לִדְבָרַי הַקְשִׁיבָה לַאֲמָרַי הַט־אָזְנֶךָ	My son, be attentive to my *dəvarîm (mp)* incline your ear to my *ʾōmerîm (mp)*
5:1	*App*	(2:2) (4:20)	בְּנִי לְחָכְמָתִי הַקְשִׁיבָה לִתְבוּנָתִי הַט־אָזְנֶךָ	My son, be attentive to my *ḥokmâ (fs)* incline your ear to my *təvûnâ (fs)*
5:7		(7:24) (8:32a)[61]	וְעַתָּה בָנִים שִׁמְעוּ־לִי וְאַל־תָּסוּרוּ מֵאִמְרֵי־פִי	And now, sons, listen to me and do not depart from the *ʾōmerîm (mp)* of my mouth
6:20	*App*	(1:8)	נְצֹר בְּנִי מִצְוַת אָבִיךָ וְאַל־תִּטֹּשׁ תּוֹרַת אִמֶּךָ	My son, keep your father's *miṣwâ (fs)* and do not reject your mother's *tôrâ (fs)*
7:1a	*App*	(2:1)	בְּנִי שְׁמֹר אֲמָרָי וּמִצְוֹתַי תִּצְפֹּן אִתָּךְ	My son, keep my *ʾōmerîm (mp)* and store up my *miṣwôt (fp)* within you

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[61] 8:32 is spoken by Wisdom as opposed to one of the 'parents' and is therefore excluded from the current enquiry.

7:2	(4:4c)	שְׁמֹר מִצְוֹתַי וֶחְיֵה	Keep my *miṣwôt (fp)* and live
		וְתוֹרָתִי כְּאִישׁוֹן עֵינֶיךָ	keep my *tôrâ (fs)* as the apple of your eye.
7:24	(5:7)	וְעַתָּה בָנִים שִׁמְעוּ־לִי	And now, sons, listen to me
	(8:32a)	וְהַקְשִׁיבוּ לְאִמְרֵי־פִי	and be attentive to the *ʾōmerîm (mp)* of my mouth

The following preliminary observations are made from my identification of the poetic lines in the above table:

a. 1:8 and 6:20 are fundamental to my enquiry. They refer to the mother's teaching and, as Heim notes, they both, according to the Lowthian paradigm, count as neat examples of synonymous parallelism. However, the pairing of 'father' and 'mother which are clearly not synonymous, might be for rhetorical effect and to meet the requirements of poetic parallelism. Given the lack of variation in the two verses they may well simply form a standard appeal to the pupil to take heed at the beginning of a lecture (Heim, 2013 pp. 62-63). They are a clear case of variant repetition, being classified by Snell as whole verses repeated with two dissimilar words: 'hear/keep' and 'instruction/command' in the first half line.

b. With the exception of 3:1 and 4:2, all the statements are, according to Heim, part of a variant set. However, the inclusion of 3:1 and 4:2 in the table above may have led to an assumption that they would have formed part of a set.

c. Despite the overriding assumption that the speaker in the ten lectures is the 'father', seven of the ten appeals do not refer to either father or mother but rather use the first person possessive pronoun (2:1, 3:1, 3:21, 4:10, 4:20, 5:1, 7:1). Of the other three (1:8, 6:20 and 4:1), only 4:1 has no reference to the mother.

d. *Tôrâ* is used on 5 occasions (1:8, 3:1, 4:2, 6:20, 7:2), two of which are with 'mother', but never in the same half-line as 'father' and unusually appearing in the first half-line of 3:1.

What might these facts contribute to my enquiry? On the basis that seven of the appeals do not refer to either 'father' or 'mother' the text itself gives licence not to presume that it is necessarily or exclusively the 'father' who speaks. I shall begin by looking at the three verses (1:8, 4:1 & 6:20) which specifically refer to the father's 'instruction'. In terms of variant repetition it is interesting to note the use of the word *tôrâ* in 3:1 and 4:2 despite there being no reference to the mother, raising the question as to whether gender-matching in parallelism has a part to play in the pursuit for the mother.

In addition to 1:8 and 6:20, 'father' is only elsewhere referred to in 4:1 and unlike all of the other appeals there is no possessive pronoun on the word son/sons. Heim contends that "the possessive pronominal suffixes in 1:8a simply explicate the relationship between child and 'parents' clearly implied by the syntagmatic juxtapositions in 1:8a and 4:1a" (2013 p. 67). In other words, the use of the possessive pronoun has no bearing other than establishing some form of relationship between the speaker and the recipient. If that is the case, the lack of a possessive pronoun in 4:1a strengthens the argument that it is not the father speaking but rather someone else who is referring to a 'father's' instruction'.

Fox notes the anomaly but only in the sense that *mûsar 'ab* is, in his opinion, a generic term and simply denotes paternal instruction (not *parental*, I might add) (2000 p. 172). Waltke concurs, noting that it "points to the kind or class of instruction as that

of a father to a son, not as typically the identity of the father as the one addressing his son (cf. 1:8, 6:20, 13:1)" (2004 p. 276). If the hope was that Waltke was claiming another speaker here then there is disappointment since he goes on to say "The speaker is the father, not the mother, because the I of 4:2 identifies himself as a son in v.4". Murphy (1998) and Heim (2013) understand the term to denote parental instruction although I am unconvinced that in reality there is any distinction between 'paternal' and 'parental', given that even when the term 'parental' is used, the mother's influence and voice is denied, or if not categorically denied, then ignored. With the exception of Brenner (1996), there is nothing in more recent scholarship that would support a claim to a speaker other than the father. All four aforementioned scholars read nothing into the unusual lack of a possessive pronoun simply inferring that it implies paternal or parental teaching, rather than actual father-to-son teaching. Both Fox and Waltke focus on the form of authority being exercised, rather than on the person holding it and they cannot see beyond the possibility of a 'father figure'. Heim acknowledges that, in the context of 'teaching', the mother's role may have been more fluid than previously imagined (2013 p. 64). However, he still falls prey to referring to the father's teaching, although in conversation acknowledges my claim that even when the term 'parental' is used, most would assume it to mean paternal, given the strength of the male-oriented reading strategy and the inability to countenance the possibility of a female voice. Fox's comment on Brenner's claim to a female voice for 4:1 is a clear example of this outlook. Rejecting outright her claim, he comments that she "offers no reasons for such a convoluted supposition other than its bare possibility" (2000 p. 173).

Fox may be right in his critique of Brenner's lack of concrete evidence to support a claim, but given the sheer weight of presumption through which we must wade, is

there not at least licence to *consider* the possibility that there may be an alternative? In attempting to add credence to a theory that began with "bare possibility" I have offered evidence to suggest that it might be more than that. The explanations proffered for the missing pronoun are a case of failing to see the situation through a different lens, explaining away a discrepancy in the light of presumed knowledge about the teacher/tutee relationship rather than, as I am doing, looking at it in the context of endeavouring to 'find' the mother. If the presence of a possessive pronoun is meant to simply imply parental (or more accurately paternal) authority then its absence in 4:1 suggests a stronger case for the voice therein being that of the mother as Brenner suggests and which I, as previously stated in Chapter 6, think has some merit.

Let me extend this scenario a little further. Not only is 4:1a unusual in that it lacks the possessive pronoun suffix, it is also unusual in respect of the fact that it directs itself to 'sons' plural rather than the singular. That in itself links it to other verses where the addressee is plural, namely 5:7, 7:24 and 8:32. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that 8:32 is a speech given by Wisdom, a female.[62]

4:1	שִׁמְעוּ בָנִים מוּסַר אָב	Listen, sons, to a father's *mûsar*
	וְהַקְשִׁיבוּ לָדַעַת בִּינָה	and be attentive, that you may gain insight
5:7	וְעַתָּה בָנִים שִׁמְעוּ־לִי	And now, sons, listen to me
	וְאַל־תָּסוּרוּ מֵאִמְרֵי־פִי	and do not depart from the ʾōmerîm of my mouth
7:24	וְעַתָּה בָנִים שִׁמְעוּ־לִי	Now, sons, listen to me
	וְהַקְשִׁיבוּ לְאִמְרֵי־פִי	and be attentive to the ʾōmerîm of my mouth
8:32	וְעַתָּה בָנִים שִׁמְעוּ־לִי	Now then, my sons, listen to me
	וְאַשְׁרֵי דְּרָכַי יִשְׁמֹרוּ	blessed are those who keep my ways

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[62] An observation also made by Heim in a footnote (2013 p.68).

Snell and Heim categorise verses 5:7, 7:24 and 8:32 as variant repetitions, 5:7 and 7:24 being *whole verses repeated with one dissimilar word* (Snell's category 1.1) and 5:7a, 7:24a and 8:32a being an example of *half-verses repeated with spelling variations* (Snell's category 2.0). Heim includes the three verses in his *Set17.* Again, just as was the case in terms of the lack of a personal pronoun in 4:1a, in these verses little is made of the use of the plural other than to indicate that the teaching is for all rather than just an individual (Fox, Waltke, Murphy). With the exception of 4:1 none of these verses form part of the opening appeals and we shall consider what Heim has to say concerning his Set 17 before endeavouring to discover if there are any links with 4:1.

With regards to the contexts of 5:7, 7:24 and 8:32a, Heim states that the use of the plural might appear incongruous given that the opening appeal of 5:1 is in the singular. His response is to argue that with variant repetition at play the incongruity is explained by the fact that 5:7 and 7:24 are later additions, 'borrowing' from 8:32a where the plural is more in keeping with material around it. The use of the plural in 8:32a, introducing the conclusion of Wisdom's speech, is entirely in keeping with the beginning of her address in 8:4 where she calls out to all people (2013 pp. 145-148). The three verses are 'resumed exhortations' and Heim's argument that 5:7 and 7:24 are 'borrowed' from 8:32a, and that the use of the plural is entirely in keeping with the exordia is convincing. Might it be possible that the same could be argued for 4:1, providing a connection between the female voice of wisdom and the speaker in 4:1? It would appear not. It is the beginning of an exordium rather than a resumption, and there is little in terms of the context to suggest that the use of the plural would have been more appropriate, other than Fox's assertion that it simply implies that the teaching is generic (2000 p. 172). As Heim rightly points out this does not explain the use of the plural in specific instances,

and although I concur with him in terms of its use in 5:7 and 7:24, an explanation for 4:1 still proves elusive.

I highlighted earlier that it appeared an anomaly that 4:1 is not included in a variant set and I have endeavoured to look for a variant repetition based on the use of the plural 'sons'. One might want to argue that if there is a connection between the four poetic lines, the case for arguing that it is the 'father' who speaks when the son/s are implored to 'listen to me' is strengthened. However, in the case of 8:32 it is Wisdom who speaks, not a male, and therefore any claim to the 'father' is weakened. The imperative 'listen to me' in 8:32, 7:24 and 5:7 implies that listening to Wisdom and to the sage is to be seen as one and the same thing (Waltke, 2004 p. 424), but that does not necessarily imply that the sage is male. Only in verse 4:1 are the 'sons' instructed to listen to 'a father's instruction'. This lack of 'listen to me' may signal a departure from the norm and makes the reader, if it is viewed through a different lens, sit up and take notice: the mother is speaking, and her teaching in 4:2 is, in this case, the instruction to listen to the father. Granted, this is tenuous. However, by considering the use of variant repetition in light of perceived 'anomalies' in the Hebrew text (or indeed the lack thereof), I have demonstrated that although it is not possible to state categorically that it is the mother who speaks in 4:1, further weight can be added to the 'bare possibility' that it might be her.

My final consideration in this section is the use of parallelism in the poetic lines arising from the use of gender-matched nouns (gender-matching parallelism). Unlike English, Hebrew nouns are designated a gender and I have noted the inclusion of the feminine noun *tôrâ* along with the mother in 1:8 and 6:20. In four of the five references to *tôrâ* the imperative is not to disregard, forget or abandon with the fifth instance

advocating 'keeping'. Hence, where no reference is made to the mother it might be possible that her presence is alluded to by the accompanying feminine noun and the repeated imperative 'not to disregard'. Of the verses identified in table 7.2 above, and in terms of the word used for some form of instruction or teaching, six verses have parallel nouns of opposite gender which are both either singular or plural (1:8, 2:1, 4:1, 4:2, 4:4, 7:1), four have matching gender and are again both either singular or plural (2:2, 4:20, 5:1, 6:20), two the same gender but contrasting singular and plural (3:1, 7:2), and the remaining 3 have a noun only in one half-line (3:21, 4:10, 5:7, 7:24). The incidence of gender–matching does not therefore appear to be sufficiently consistent to support an argument that a feminine noun alerts the reader to the mother's presence, although as I have noted above the omission of both the mother and the father in many of the half-lines calls into question the assumption that it is the father that is present. Conversely therefore one might want to suggest that the predominance of female nouns adds further weight to an appeal for the mother's presence. Again this is all speculative and it is worth noting in this respect Berlin's insistence that parallel pairings are not usually created for grammatical reasons but rather through word association (2008 p. 44). This appears to be true in this case.

7.5   Conclusion

My quest in this chapter was to search for the presence of the mother in Proverbs 1-9. In some ways my explorations have proved inconclusive particularly in terms of the setting for the material, although the inconclusiveness brings into question the overriding assumption of a 'father-to son' setting. The discussion of McKinlay's assertion that the mother is in a subsidiary role highlighted the way in which the male-oriented interpretation strategy dominates thinking, rather than paying attention to the

way in which the text functions. Discussion of Alter and Gillingham's 'intensification' in the second line again proved inconclusive in supporting a claim to the mother's presence but challenges the use of the term 'parental' rather than paternal instruction. A further challenge to the predominance of the father is the lack of reference to him; instead the predominant use of the possessive pronoun 'my' questions the long held assumption of a 'father-to-son' setting. Finally, the consideration of gender-matching parallelism again proved inconclusive. Overall, whilst it cannot be categorically stated that the mother's voice is predominant in the lectures, my findings challenge the long held conviction that it is the father who speaks.

CHAPTER 8

MOTHERS AND FATHERS IN PROVERBS 10-29

8.1 Introduction

In Chapter 7 I focused on the role of the mother in the education and nurture of her offspring in Proverbs 1-9 and whether her voice can be heard in the text, rather than as a literary device to meet the demands of poetic parallelism. However, within Proverbs reference to mother and father is not confined to the opening nine chapters. Rather there appear, at first glance, seemingly sporadic references throughout the entire collections. Table 8.1 below details verses where reference is made to either or both of the parents in chapters 10-29. A traditional understanding of parallelism would expect to find both the father and mother present within a poetic line. However there are exceptions, notably the absence of the mother in the second half-line; those verses are included in order to investigate whether she might be read into those verses. It was also noted in the previous chapter that there appears to be universal acknowledgement and acceptance that where reference is made to the mother and father in parallel what happens to one happens to both. Whilst I agree that this may work as a literary device the acceptance of transference of statements in any given line featuring the mother and father lets the creators of individual proverbs 'off the hook' in terms of their portrayal of women. My concern is that where the mother is mentioned it is in reference usually to the behaviour of her son and she appears to bear the burden of 'wayward' sons whilst the father, in the main, delights in wise ones.

The focus of this chapter is to interpret those verses within Proverbs 10-29 where both the mother and father are mentioned, looking first to parallelism to identify if there are any 'missing' mothers within the text. Secondly, I shall look at each statement, not

only in light of its parallel, but also without recourse to it. Divorcing it from, in most instances, the first half-line I shall endeavour to discover if the statement is as detrimental to women as might first appear. My work is again dependent upon Heim's identification of variant repetition and proverbial clusters, and incorporates William P. Brown (2002) and Christopher Ansberry's (2010) advocacy of a development of themes within the Proverbs collections. It also adheres to Raymond C. van Leeuwen's assertion that biblical Hebrew poetic devices have significance for large units of proverbial material and the focus is therefore not on individual sayings but on the rhetorical and stylistic devices which relate individual sayings to one another (1988 p. 53).

8.2   The structure of Chapters 10 - 29

It is generally held that Proverbs consists of five collections: The ten 'lectures' and 'interludes' (1:1-9:18); 'The proverbs of Solomon' (10:1-22:16); 'The sayings of the wise' (22:17-24:34); 'Other Proverbs of Solomon that the officials of King Hezekiah of Judah copied' (25:1-29:27); a miscellaneous collection consisting of 'The words of Agur' (30:1-14), the numerical sayings (30:15-33), 'The words of Lemuel' (31:1-9) and the acrostic poem 'the Woman of Worth' (31:10-31). Moving on from the lectures and interludes of the first nine chapters at 10:1

> the literary landscape changes dramatically. No longer is the father in evident control of the discourse, nor is personified wisdom on center stage…the arrangement invit[es] readers who have been instructed by the father in chaps 1-9 to participate now in "wisdom-making" themselves. They are now required to test each one for themselves (Yoder, 2005 pp. 171-172).

Setting aside for the moment Yoder's reference to the father, I shall begin to look at this changed landscape. The superscription 'The Proverbs of Solomon' suggests that it is the beginning of a new collection and some take it to indicate that this was an original

piece of work with chapters 1-9 added at a later date. The initial nine chapters suggest a setting where, in the ten lectures, everything is neatly explained to the son. What then follows appears to be a random collection of unrelated sayings, collected together and presented to older (?) and perceived wiser men to interpret. Wisdom is not something to be simply learnt but to be continually explored and negotiated in the myriad of life's lessons and experiences. A simple formulaic solution will not suffice. Might this explain the variations that exist?

I noted in Chapter 7 that it is not possible to conclude with certainty whether the setting for the proverbial material was the home or a more formal educational setting. I endeavoured to determine the possibility of the mother having been involved in the 'education' of her sons, and whilst there was no conclusive proof, neither was there sufficient evidence to exclude her. In *Be Wise, My Son, and Make My Heart Glad: An Exploration of the Courtly Nature of the Book of Proverbs,* Christopher Ansberry's interest lies in exploring the courtly nature of Proverbs. His work is of interest to me, not because of his conclusions concerning the setting for the material, but because in exploring the development of the material he concludes that "Proverbs 10-24… exhibits a thematic movement that develops particular themes that correspond with the interests of the addressee" (2010 p. 125).

Ansberry alludes to the contribution that William P. Brown makes to the notion of thematic development in *The Pedagogy of Proverbs 10:1-31:9* (2002 pp. 150-182) noting that Brown himself advocates a development of thought in areas such as human relations, communication, ethics, money, governance and theology (2010 p. 100). Is it possible then that the relationship between parent and son might be included as an area

of curricular development? Within the general collections identified earlier Ansberry subdivides the proverbial collections:

Rudimentary wisdom:	Solomon 1A	10:1-15:33	Elementary wisdom
	Solomon 1B	16:1-22:16	Intermediate wisdom
	Sayings of the Wise 1 & 2	22:17-24:34	Vocational wisdom
Advanced wisdom:	Solomon 2A	25:1-27:27	
	Solomon 2B	29:1-29:27	

Ansberry rightly asserts that it is difficult to ascertain the origin of a proverb in a collection and that a proverb can only be understood within a performance context. However in the case of Proverbs, the individual sayings have been removed from their original performance context and assembled into a collection. It is this collection that then affords the sayings their performance context. In essence what is relevant is no longer the *Sitz im Leben* but the literary context, the *Sitz im Buch.* Regardless of their origin the arrangement of the material creates both immediate and distant literary contexts for the reader (2010 p. 72). The immediate literary context is concerned with the arrangement and juxtaposition of the individual sayings. Literary units are identified by either *sound* – the identification of paronomasia, word-play, verbal repetition; or *sense* – common themes, images or topics. The distant context considers the similarities and differences between the content of individual proverbs which do not appear alongside one another in the collection, recognizing the development of significant topics throughout the individual proverbs e.g. wealth and poverty, the king, matters of justice. Alongside this, distant context also considers the role of Proverbs 1-9 as the hermeneutical framework, the lens through which the rest of the collection is read. Ansberry therefore sees 10:1 not as the beginning of an independent new section but as

a transitory link between the lectures of Proverbs 1-9 and the sentences which follow which pick up the themes first introduced in the opening chapters (2010 p. 76).

In terms of my own enquiries there is much to commend Brown, Ansberry and van Leeuwen's approach. It is my intention to demonstrate in the following survey of the sentence literature that there is a progression where women are concerned from mothers who are in despair of their sons through to contentious wives. Throughout the collection there is a thematic development of the impact of the son's behaviour upon his parents and subsequently his own wife and children.

8.3   Wise and foolish sons and the impact on their parents

The focus of my current exploration are verses 10:1, 13:1, 15:5, 15:20, 17:21, 17:25 and 19:13. My proposal is that Proverbs 10:1 is a simple introduction to a theme pertaining to sons and their behaviour towards their parents and the impact thereof upon the parents. What follows through the course of the collection is a progression of worsening foolishness and its impact culminating in a role reversal in 19:13 when the son becomes the recipient of his own foolishness by having to contend with a contentious wife. References to mother and father are made in subsequent verses: those which include the reference in the first half-line (19:26, 20:20, 28:24) and describe some form of anti-social behaviour rather than a degree of foolishness: and those (23:22, 24 and 25) which collectively form one of the thirty maxims of 'The sayings of the wise' (22:17-24:34) which appear to be more in keeping with the earlier references to the parents. Detailed below are the verses under consideration and for completeness I include vv. 19:26, 20:20, 23:22, 24, 25, and 28:24 although they do not form part of my investigations in this instance:

10:1	בֵּן חָכָם יְשַׂמַּח־אָב וּבֵן כְּסִיל תּוּגַת אִמּוֹ	A wise son makes a glad father But a foolish son (*kəsîl*) is his mother's grief.
13:1	בֵּן חָכָם מוּסַר אָב וְלֵץ לֹא־שָׁמַע גְּעָרָה	A wise son – a father's discipline (*mûsar*) while a scoffer (*lēṣ*) does not heed a rebuke
15:5	אֱוִיל יִנְאַץ מוּסַר אָבִיו וְשֹׁמֵר תּוֹכַחַת יַעְרִם	A fool (*ʾĕwîl*) scorns his father's discipline (*mûsar*) but he who accepts reproof becomes shrewd
15:20	בֵּן חָכָם יְשַׂמַּח־אָב וּכְסִיל אָדָם בּוֹזֶה אִמּוֹ	A wise son makes a glad father but a foolish (*kəsîl*) man (*ʾādām*) despises his mother.
17:21	יֹלֵד כְּסִיל לְתוּגָה לוֹ וְלֹא־יִשְׂמַח אֲבִי נָבָל	The one who begets a fool (*kəsîl*) gets grief, and the father of a scoundrel (*nābāl*) knows no joy
17:25	כַּעַס לְאָבִיו בֵּן כְּסִיל וּמֶמֶר לְיוֹלַדְתּוֹ	A foolish (*kəsîl*) son is a grief to his father and bitterness to her who bore him
19:13	הַוֹּת לְאָבִיו בֵּן כְּסִיל וְדֶלֶף טֹרֵד מִדְיְנֵי אִשָּׁה	A foolish (*kəsîl*) son is his father's ruin and a woman's bickering is an irksome dripping
19:26	מְשַׁדֶּד־אָב יַבְרִיחַ אֵם בֵּן מֵבִישׁ וּמַחְפִּיר	He who ruins his father and drives away his mother is a shameful and disgraceful son
20:20	מְקַלֵּל אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ יִדְעַךְ נֵרוֹ בֶּאֱשׁוּן חֹשֶׁךְ	He who curses his father or mother his lamp will go out in utter darkness
23:22	שְׁמַע לְאָבִיךָ זֶה יְלָדֶךָ וְאַל־תָּבוּז כִּי־זָקְנָה אִמֶּךָ	Listen to your father who begot you and do not despise your mother when she is old.
23:24	גּוֹל יָגוּל אֲבִי צַדִּיק יוֹלֵד חָכָם וְיִשְׂמַח־בּוֹ	The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice he who begets a wise [son] will be glad in him
23:25	יִשְׂמַח־אָבִיךָ וְאִמֶּךָ וְתָגֵל יוֹלַדְתֶּךָ	Let your father and mother be glad; Let her who bore you rejoice
28:24	גּוֹזֵל אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ אֵין־פָּשַׁע וְאֹמֵר חָבֵר הוּא לְאִישׁ מַשְׁחִית	He who robs father and mother and says 'that is no crime', is partner to a thug

8.4   What kind of fool am I? A review of foolish sons within Proverbs

Proverbs views humankind as belonging to two classes: the wise and righteous, and the fools and wicked (Waltke, 2004 p. 93). At its most simple, Proverbs deals in binary opposites presenting its audience with statements which demonstrate the consequence of choosing one way of behaving over another or the consequences of particular character traits. The evil suffer as a consequence of their own evildoing whilst the righteous receive rewards as a consequence of their own goodness, a principle commonly referred to as the 'deed-consequence nexus' (*Tat-Ergehen Zusammenhang*) after K. Koch's essay of 1955, in which he advocates this particular form of recompense evident in the Bible.[63] Subsequent studies by P. D. Miller and L. Boström challenge Koch's claim to the uniqueness of this form of recompense and, rather than a deeds-consequence nexus, they prefer to speak of a 'character-consequence relationship' (Fox, 2000 p. 91). Udo Skladny (as cited by Waltke (2004 pp. 15-17)) categorised chapters 10-29 by analysing their form, content and style and by employing statistics to quantify his findings.

What is of interest is that Skladny identified that in the antithetic parallels of 10-15 (Category A), the benefits of the righteous are often contrasted with the misfortunes of the wicked *without clearly defining those terms.* Rather than a deeds-consequence connection there is a 'character-fate connection'. By way of contrast, in 16:1-22:16 (Category B) the contrast between the righteous and the wicked is less evident, and the wise/foolish and righteous/wicked are spoken of in more concrete terms, their specific actions listed. This is defined by Skladny as 'deed-outcome unity'. Skladny's intention was to trace the historical development of wisdom in Israel through the categorisation of

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[63] Koch, K. (1955) Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament? *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 52 pp. 1-42

Proverbs 10-29 and, although there is general consensus about his categorisations, his historical sequencing has been received less favourably. Skladny's proposition is that there is a progression from 'character-fate' (A) to 'deed-outcome' (B) by virtue of growing scepticism. This, according to Waltke, is unlikely and he understands the development as pedagogic, citing van Leeuwen's (1997) assertion that collection A provides a basic introduction to the ways of wisdom and collection B draws attention to a myriad of instances where the basic rules are not adhered to. Since the dating of the collections is not of concern here and Waltke's proposal seems reasonable I shall proceed on the understanding that collection B gives a practical application of the general character-fate nexus. I shall particularly look at collection B to see what it has to say about individual traits. Categories C and D in Skladny's scheme are 25:2-27:7 and 28:1-29:27 which deal with comparative Proverbs and antithetic concepts respectively (Waltke, 2004).

According to Proverbs there are varying degrees of 'foolishness' (Donald, 1963 p. 287; Fox, 2000 pp. 38-43; Waltke, 2004 pp. 109-115) all of which are due, not to a lack of intelligence, but rather ignorance or moral culpability. Of the varying degrees of 'foolishness' only two appear to have any hope of being redeemable, that of the *petî* whose overriding fault is to be gullible and the *baʿar*; the 'ignoramus' who is both foolish and ignorant. The *petî,* the youngster 'without sense', is in essence the target audience for the sages' material since his character and behaviour can still be shaped to conform to societal norms. He is the focus of both Wisdom and Folly's competing attention (Proverbs 9).

In contrast to the gullible are those who are, to all intents and purpose, a lost cause. Whilst both the gullible and the ignoramus can claim a degree of ignorance, the

ʾĕwîl, kəsîl, ḥăsar lēb, lēṣ, and the nābāl have no such excuse. Both the ʾĕwîl and kəsîl are morally degenerate. Both are deaf to wisdom and whereas the ʾĕwîl is morally obtuse, the kəsîl will become morally perverse by virtue of his obtuseness. There is stupidity associated with kəsîl born out of a misplaced trust in his own worldview and judgement: he considers himself not in need of education or moral guidance. The lēṣ, the mocker, takes folly one stage further in that not only does he ignore instruction but actively sets himself against it. The nābāl appears only once in Proverbs 17:21, with the kəsîl. Although Donald notes that it only just falls within the semantic field (2003 p. 287), and Fox and Waltke make no reference to it in their discussions of fools, its appearance in the second half-line suggests to me an intensification of 'foolishness'. Donald suggests that the nābāl is opposed to the noble and lacks eloquence (1963 p. 287). In general then, Proverbs appears less concerned with specific misdemeanours and concentrates on degrees of foolishness which it wishes its recipients to either grow out of or avoid becoming.

8.5 Interpretation of Proverbs

In light of how foolishness is understood in Proverbs what becomes clear in these verses is that as we move through the proverb material there is a progression (setting aside for a moment 13:1) of the effect of the son's behaviour on the parent. The appeal to the son to listen and to take heed of parental instruction and teaching is reinforced by the demonstration of the impact on the parents when the advice is either acted upon or ignored. What I will demonstrate through consideration of these verses is that there is a comparison between sons who are wise and please their fathers and foolish sons who cause grief to both their mothers and fathers. Moreover, in terms of the foolish son there is a progression through various stages from ignorance and naivety through to wanton

disregard. The focus shifts from the negative effect of his foolishness on his parents to a portrayal of what the future might hold for the son if he fails, through his own foolishness, to be a good father.

In my discussion of Oesterley in Chapter 7 I was unconvinced of the prima facie concern for the welfare of the parents. Despite these escalating consequences the effect on either parent might still be seen as a by-product of the son's behaviour. Ultimately the 'teachers' are endeavouring to cultivate wisdom in the youngsters in their charge, and both mother and father will be rightly pleased and proud if the son becomes a responsible adult. Throughout these verses there is a development of the effect on the parents of wise or foolish behaviour. Setting aside for a moment the traditional understanding of the terms mother and father in parallel and discounting the perceived understanding that what happens to one happens to both there is a progression in terms of both parents: in terms of the mother it moves from one who is upset about her child's foolishness, to becoming one who is despised by the son and then seemingly lost from sight; in terms of the father, he moves from being one who is initially perceived responsible for the wise son but who in turn becomes aggrieved, and even ruined in 19:13.

8.5.1   Proverbs 10:1, 15:5 and 15:20

10:1	בֵּן חָכָם יְשַׂמַּח־אָב	A wise son makes a glad father
	וּבֵן כְּסִיל תּוּגַת אִמּוֹ	but a foolish son (*kəsîl*) is his mother's grief (*tûgâ*)
15:5	אֱוִיל יִנְאַץ מוּסַר אָבִיו	A fool (*ʾĕwîl*) scorns his father's *mûsar*,
	וְשֹׁמֵר תּוֹכַחַת יַעְרִם	but he who accepts reproof becomes shrewd
15:20	בֵּן חָכָם יְשַׂמַּח־אָב	A wise son makes a glad father
	וּכְסִיל אָדָם בּוֹזֶה אִמּוֹ	but a foolish (*kəsîl*) man (*ʾādām*) despises (*bāzâ*) his mother.

Verses 10:1 and 15:20 are identified by Snell and Heim as a variant repetition.[64] I include 15:5 because it speaks of one of the parents being scorned. The first half-lines of 10:1 and 15:20 are identical, whilst two of the four words in the second half lines are different: *bēn* replaced by *ʾādām*; and *tûgâ* by *bāzâ*. Heim's justification for the variation is compelling, stressing a development from the adolescent son who remains under parental authority to a grown man who takes an independent stance from his parents. In 10:1 the foolish, adolescent son causes his mother grief. The relationship between mother and son is viewed from the mother's perspective, the grief hers to bear, the son possibly unaware of the effect of his behaviour upon her. In 15:20, however, the foolish *man* despises the mother, feeling no moral obligation to those who have raised him to adulthood (Heim, 2013 pp. 208-213). Heim, like others, understands the mother to represent both parents and that it is for impact that the combination of mother and 'despise' are found together in this half-line. The suggestion that it is worse for a mother to be despised rather than the father suggests an interpretation deriving from the traditional male-oriented reading strategy. Likewise, the 'interchangeability' of the parents as understood by this tradition discounts any exploration of the subtlety of the poetry with regards to the fool's worsening behaviour and its implications. By focussing on the effect of the behaviour on the mother and father individually, rather than collectively as parents, the gendered subtleties of the poetic text can be highlighted.

Ignoring the father for a moment, the progression from 10:1 to 15:20 is that the mother is no longer sorrowful but has become despised. There are two implications: both parents' emotions are affected by the son's folly, but it is the mother alone who is the recipient of the son's attitude. Heim notes this but he concludes that both parents are

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[64] Snell's category 1.2 and Heim's Set 26

equally affected in terms of their emotions and the son's attitude. As to my previous comment about its shock value it may be more shocking that the father is excluded from being despised; in contrast to 15:5 it is the mother herself who is the object of the son's contempt rather than the father's instruction. Secondly, not only are the mother's emotions affected by the son's folly, but it is she alone (not both parents) who is no longer responsible for the way in which she is being treated. This is a conscious act on the adult son's part, but there is no suggestion of why he should despise his mother. It may be that he despises her because of her wisdom and instruction, something which he wishes to rebel against since *fools despise wisdom and instruction* (1:7). Here is a reminder that the mother herself offers wisdom and instruction.

8.5.2 **Proverbs 13:1**

13:1	בֵּן חָכָם מוּסַר אָב	A wise son – a father's discipline (*mûsar*)
	וְלֵץ לֹא־שָׁמַע גְּעָרָה	while a scoffer (*lēṣ*) does not listen to a rebuke

Proverbs 13:1 has no apparent mention of the mother and much of the discussion in recent commentaries focuses not on whether the half-lines are parallel but on the first half-line, in terms of it being either an example of juxtaposition or where ellipsis (gapping) might be evident. Watson defines ellipsis as "the omission of a particle, word or group of words within a poetic or grammatical unit, where its presence is expected. In other words, ellipsis is the suppression of an element demanded by the context" (1984 p. 303). The difficulty with this statement is that reading tradition determines what might be expected and, in terms of my enquiry, the expectation that the mother need not be present has led to the question of her potential omission from the text never having been considered. Hence there are three separate but related questions concerning

13:1. Firstly, the missing verb in the first half-line; secondly, the missing son in the second half-line and thirdly, the missing parent in the latter part of the second half- line.

The lack of a verb in 13:1a makes translation difficult. Fox and Murphy both offer an example of blunt juxtaposition by way of explanation. Murphy notes that no changes are necessary if the juxtaposition is recognised (1998 p. 94). Fox points out that the usual syntax of XY meaning 'X is Y' does not hold true in this case because the son is not able to *be* discipline (2009 p. 561). Instead the interpretation is left to the reader, although the connection is through implication i.e. a wise son implies a father's discipline or a father's discipline is the cause of a wise son. Heim also follows this logic in his translation in *Like Grapes of Gold* translating the half line as "A father's instruction makes a wise son" (2001 p. 159). He subsequently adapts the gapping technique "a wise son [listens to] the father's instruction" (2013 p. 329) in line with Waltke (2004 p. 545).

In terms of the parallelism in 13:1 whilst the two half-lines are clearly antithetical, the contrast between them is not straightforward (Heim, 2013 p. 330). A wise son is contrasted with a mocker and a father's instruction with "does not listen to rebuke". It therefore appears more sensible to adapt gapping which suggests a contrast as follows:

A wise son / [listens to] / a father's discipline
A scoffer / does not listen to / a rebuke

What is unusual about the gapping technique in this instance is that by inserting a verb in the first half-line the half-lines are balanced in terms of syntactic elements, whereas in most cases of gapping, a half-line is balanced prior to the insertion of its 'missing' component. It is also unusual for the verb to be missing from the first-half

line, the more common occurrence being two half-lines of three and two components respectively (1980 pp. 120, 123)

In terms of the missing son Waltke notes that the son could be thought of as gapped, "a scoffing son", as in the LXX but that this is unnecessary (2004, p. 545). However, the omission of the son and the parent (mother or father in the second line) might suggest a moving away from the parental home and discipline. It may imply that the *lēṣ* is no longer under parental control. I shall focus on this suggestion more fully when I consider the transition of the son from naïve adolescent to full grown *nābāl*.

The first half-line has echoes of 1:8 and 6:20 in terms of listening to a father's instruction (*mûsar*) and offers a consequence of having taken heed of the instruction offered in those lines. Waltke (2004 p. 550) notes that every word of 13:1, with the exception of *gəʿārâ*, resonates with the vocabulary of the prologue, which encourages the son to listen to the parent's instruction. What he fails to take account of is the omission of the mother in comparison to 1:8 and 6:20. Despite his comment concerning the resonance of the line with the vocabulary of the prologue, Waltke reads into the text a father's rebuke in the line: "The antithesis implies that the wise son listens to *his father's* rebuke and the mocker does not (30:17)" (2004 p. 551, my emphasis). A wise son not only hears, but listens to and keeps his father's instructions, and the result is that the father is glad (10:1). But what of the mother? Nobody, as far as I am aware, has asked the question concerning the potential for the mother to be missing in this verse. The instruction in 1:8 and 6:20 is not to disregard her *tôrâ* and yet there is no mention of her in 13:1. Instead, the second half-line speaks of the scoffer ignoring a rebuke although whether the rebuke is the mother's is uncertain. While a traditional understanding of antithetic parallelism would expect the inclusion of the mother in

13:1b, its absence does not mean that she is not there and as we are working with imprecise parallelism we ought not to discount her presence.

The assumption that it is the father's rebuke in 13:1b is questionable on two counts. Firstly, there is no reference to him in the second line; neither is *rebuke* in the construct but rather the absolute; and, in terms of antithesis and our sample of verses we have seen that the mother, or reference to her, appears in the second half-line (1:8, 6:20, 10:1, 15:20, 17:25). It therefore could be argued that the rebuke is that of the mother, if we are to discount the absolute. Secondly, the other question which is raised is the absence of a pronoun in the first line establishing a relationship between the father and son. This in itself is not particularly significant. However, where a pronoun is missing in the second half-line the usual interpretative strategy is to refer to an antecedent in the first. Hence a traditional understanding assumes that the rebuke of the second half-line is the father's but this is not substantiated by any antecedent in the first half-line. Furthermore Waltke refers to 30:17 and yet what we see in 30:17 is the eye that derides a father and despises obedience to a mother (likewise the mother is despised when she grows old in 23:22). To despise obedience to a mother is to not listen to her rebuke and therefore it may be more logical to argue that it is the mother's rebuke that the scoffer disregards.

One further thing that can be considered is gender matching parallelism, although Watson himself notes that, since the norm in Hebrew poetry is synonymous parallelism it would be more descriptive to label it 'Gender-matched synonymous parallelism'.[65] Effectively it consists of the use of matching gender nouns within a line but a review of the verses with which we are engaged highlights that this is not at work. There appears

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[65] For further details see W.G.E Watson, *Traditional Techniques in Classical Hebrew Verse,* Chapter 4 Gender-matched parallelism (1994 pp. 192-239).

no deliberate editorial strategy in terms of the distribution of the word group denoting instruction/teaching in the opening nine chapters, neither does there appear any specific editorial strategy in terms of the verses being considered in this chapter – there are insufficient nouns within the lines for gender-matching parallelism to exist. That said it is worth noting that in 10:1 *tûgâ* (*grief*), a feminine noun, is attributed to the mother. This is insufficient evidence to support a claim that since 'rebuke' is feminine in the Hebrew, the rebuke is the mother's. More substantial to my mind is the comparison with 30:17. The two half-lines might then appear as follows:

> A wise son / [listens to] / a father's discipline
> A scoffer / does not listen to / [a mother's] rebuke

13:1b is a variant repetition of 13:8b, although the half lines in 13:8 are not parallel in the traditional sense. The only variation in 13:8b is that it is not the scoffer who ignores a rebuke but the poor. As Heim points out, the implication is that in contrast to the wise son who listens to his father, the scoffer ends up in poverty (2013 p. 331). Unfortunately for my purposes, there is still no mention of the mother although 13:8a does not suggest any expectation of her presence in the text. In looking elsewhere to support a possible claim for the mother's presence in 13:1b an alternative avenue of exploration is the use of *gǝʿārâ (rebuke)* although here again a blank is drawn: of the six instances when it is used of a person's rebuke – Proverbs 13:1, 8 and 17:10; Ecclesiastes 7:5; and Isaiah 30:17 (twice) – there is no use of the word with *tôrâ* or anything to imply such a connection. A direct correlation is therefore not possible and any connection through gender matching parallelism is ruled out. Another option is to consider *lēṣ* whose character is defined in Proverbs 21:24: *The presumptuous and the proud: mocker is his name.* The overriding characteristic is that he either resists

chastisement (9:7, 8; 13:1; 15:12) or is incapable of finding wisdom (15:12). Again however, none of these verses have any reference or allude to the inclusion of the mother.

While it is not possible to make a compelling case for the mother's inclusion in 13:1b, it is possible to make a plausible one, given that no incontrovertible reasons have been found for her absence. The traditional reading strategy assumes that the rebuke is the father's, rather than any definitive evidence in the text. None of the above enquiries compel us to read the proverb in the way that I have suggested, but neither does any other evidence compel us to read it in the way it has traditionally been understood. By considering the verse amongst this collection weight is added to a claim that the mother can be included by implication. The lack of an explicit reference to her might be said to be a deliberate ploy by the scribe to lead the readers of the day to make the connections, to fill in the gaps from their context. The modern preoccupation with the word-pair of mother and father as denoting parent, and the inclusivity of gender appropriate language in some of the more recent English translations has blinded the modern reader to the potential subtleties within the text. It may be possible that the lack of any reference to the mother is a deliberate ploy by the scribe to lead the listener or reader into exploring the avenues which we have explored, to recall to mind the other verses and hence to reinforce the message that the mother's role in the nurture of her children was not to be underestimated or ignored. This might explain her absence both in 13:1 and 17:21.[66]

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[66] Fox notes the anomaly with 19:13 where, in line with traditionally parallelism one would expect the mother as opposed to a nagging wife (2009 p. 654). This is discussed in the following chapter.

8.5.3 **Proverbs 17:21 and 17:25**

17:21   יֹלֵד כְּסִיל לְתוּגָה לוֹ   He who begets a fool brings grief upon himself,

         וְלֹא־יִשְׂמַח אֲבִי נָבָל   and the father of a scoundrel (*nâbâl*) knows no joy

17:25   כַּעַס לְאָבִיו בֵּן כְּסִיל   A foolish son is grief to his father

         וּמֶמֶר לְיוֹלַדְתּוֹ   and bitterness to her who bore him

In verses 17:21 and 17:25 we move from the antithetical parallelism of the earlier verses (with the exception of 13:1) to progressive parallelism, the second half-line reinforcing and developing the sentiment expressed in the first half-line (cf. Billingham and Alter). In the two verses in question the focus shifts to the father in three of the four half-lines, although I will later suggest his presence in the second half-line of 17:25. Also worthy of mention is that within these two verses there are no positive attributes or statements attributed to either the son or his parents.

Heim and Waltke consider verses 21 and 25 to form an inclusio around a section, the frame being formed by the words *kəsîl*, *yālad* and *ʾâb,* and the theme being the failure of rearing a fool. The fool not only brings about his own ruin but has a negative impact on his parent (Heim, 2001 p. 237; Waltke, 2005 p. 59). Fox, on the other hand, sees no reason to assume, contra Delitzsch, that verse 21 heads up a new section despite the similarity of 17:21 to verses 10:1, 13:1 and 15:20 (Fox, 2009 p. 634).

The initial query is the difficulty of the first half-line. At first sight the question is to whom is the statement addressed? Unusually it is not the fool who is the subject but the father himself and the use of the preposition *lô* denotes that 'he who begets' brings grief upon *himself* i.e. the father. Is the addressee then the father? Most commentators believe the address to be to the son, and there is no real reason to assume otherwise: on even a simplistic level it might appear odd that the focus shifts from the son to the father

in this isolated proverb. Fox advocates that it is not directed to the father since he would have no control over whether he sires a fool (2009 p. 634). This is indeed true, since one cannot determine the character of one's offspring at the moment of conception. However, in terms of raising a child, then indeed the father (and mother) bears some responsibility for his or her character. Hence, whilst we may agree with Fox's dismissal of a claim that the address is to the father, it does appear to be based on a particular interpretation of *yâlad*, which implies purely conception rather than upbringing (I shall explore this in due course). My contention is that although the address is not to the father, but continues to be to the son, there is a subtle shift in emphasis. As I have already said, unlike the earlier variations of wise and foolish sons and the impact on their parents in vv. 10:1 and 15:20, the son is no longer the subject in verse 17:21. Instead he is the object, and the focus shifts to the one who begets a fool i.e. the father. The earlier references allude to the parent's grief in having a son who is a fool: they seek to persuade an adolescent son that wise behaviour will result in not upsetting his mother and bring his father gladness and pride. The section 17:21-25 is still addressed to the son, but the focus now is not on his relationship with his own parents, but rather on the son's future relationships as a husband and father. Here the tutelage is not an appeal to the son to consider the welfare of his parents, but a warning of what he himself may have to bear in the future when he becomes a husband and father. The proverb, although not addressed to the father alludes to a father's role, not just in siring offspring, but in playing a part in the upbringing of children.

This explains the progression from *kəsîl* to *nābāl* in 17:21. Fox's explanation of the translation of *nābāl* has much to commend it: a person tainted by personal baseness, with whom social disgust and rejection are always implicit, effectively a pariah (2009 p.

628). This is obviously on a different scale to being merely foolish. Therefore the suggestion is that bad parenting leads to contending, not only with somebody who ought to know better, but with someone who is morally repugnant to society at large. No wonder it causes the father grief!

More substantial, in terms of my enquiry, is the lack of any reference to the mother in 17:21b, contrary to what might have been expected in light of the previous verses. The addressee is the son being given a portrait of a future which he himself has not only brought about, but where he is also the victim of a foolish son, or indeed a scoundrel. The scribe is here stressing the future consequences of inadequate parenting. The focus is that what begins with a fool (and possibly remains within the confines of the home) becomes a public matter when the son is scorned by society. For that reason, the intended audience is not women, or perhaps more precisely future mothers, and therefore there is no need to draw attention to what might be in store for the mother. This explains her absence in verse 17:21b. Interestingly, in his translation of 17:21 in *Like Grapes of Gold* (2001 p. 237) Heim translates the first half-line of 17:21: *the fool brings sorrow to the one who gave him birth*. This perhaps does not render the precise meaning of the verse on two levels: firstly, it does not highlight the shift of focus from the son as a son, to the son as a father as discussed above; and secondly it might be construed, in the English, as meaning that reference here is also to the mother. However, the masculine singular participle *yôlēd* denotes that it is the one who begets, not the one who delivers in childbirth who bears the grief of a foolish son. This might be considered a scribal error since in a traditional understanding of parallelism we might have expected to find reference to the mother in the first half-line by virtue of the fact that there is reference to the father in the second. This however seems unlikely: nowhere

else does the mother appear by herself in the first half-line and there is little else to support such a theory. Her omission though is unusual. Discounting the usual interpretation that both father and mother are in view in the half-lines of the verses, pride or gladness are more often associated with the father (cf. 10:1) and grief with the mother. The change in 17:21 reinforces, in my mind, the focus on the son to consider the implications of being a father. No longer is the focus on pleasing his parents but the emphasis on what he himself will bear in the future.

Having noted that there is no reference to the mother in 17:21, how might this connect with 17:25, where there is reference to the mother by virtue of the feminine participle of *yālad*?

17:21a	יֹלֵד כְּסִיל לְתוּגָה לוֹ	he who begets / a fool / gets grief
17:25b	וּמֶמֶר לְיוֹלַדְתּוֹ	and bitterness / to her who bore / him [a fool]

I have already noted the use of 17:21 and 17:25 to form an inclusio around the section. My focus now is on the term 'beget' (*yālad*) and I begin by considering what the father's role might be. The many references to *yālad* in the Hebrew Bible either refer to the act of begetting, bearing or giving birth and it is used of both male and female. Of its use in terms of human procreation, it never appears to be used in terms of the raising of children. Indeed, the concept of raising children appears unusual in the Hebrew Bible, the use of *gādal* appearing only seven times in the context of bringing up and raising children (BDB p. 152): the raising of the king's sons (2 Kings 10:6); in the context of Israel's relationship with Yahweh (Isaiah 1:2; 23:4; 49:21; 51:18; Hosea 9:12); and Daniel's education in the Babylonian court (Daniel 1:5). Thus to return to Fox's earlier assertion that 17:21 is not addressed to the father since he cannot be responsible for begetting a fool, he would appear to have a point. If we take this line

though in terms of the literal translation of the Hebrew that would denote that parents have no influence over their children and that the onus is solely on the son to become wise. This is contradictory to the fundamental teaching of the Proverbs material which implores the son to take heed of his parents' instruction and teaching. Not to do so brings the parents pain and disgrace. In this case therefore the use of *yālad* must denote some implicit meaning of upbringing.

The separation of the act of fathering or giving birth to a child from the act of raising it does not appear to exist in the Hebrew Bible and it may be simply a modern preoccupation, one which the scribes of Proverbs would not have countenanced. In their minds to father a child or give birth to one, is to be responsible for its upbringing. Yet the implications are far greater. Any lack of the sense of rearing denoted in the word *yālad* raises the question of who was responsible for the child's upbringing. Traditional interpretation speaks of both parents being involved whilst at the same time discounting suggestions that the mother can be identified in the sayings. The use of both the male and female participles of *yālad* in the text and the suggestion above that the term denotes the raising of children imply that the mother cannot be excluded in this way. Both bear the responsibility for disciplining the children.

How might this discipline be administered? The understanding to date has been through verbal instruction and the willingness of the recipient to pay heed to what is being said reinforced by Proverbs 17:10: *A rebuke comes down harder on a perceptive person than a hundred blows on a fool.* The emphasis here is on the recipient of the punishment, suggesting that physical punishment is wasted on a fool, whereas a sharp word will be more effective with somebody who is willing to acknowledge that they have more to learn. Waltke notes that in terms of pedagogic texts *nākâ* in the *hiphil*

refers to flogging and appears in Proverbs 17:26; 19:25; 23:13, 14 (Waltke, 2005 p. 51). With the exception of 17:26 which speaks of striking princes, Proverbs 17:10 appears to stand in contradiction to the other references which condone physical punishment. Proverbs 23:13, 14 suggest not sparing the rod whereas 19:25 appears more subtle: the *kəsîl* has progressed to a *lēṣ* and the beating is not for his benefit, but for the simple (*petî)*, who learns, according to Fox, either by the warning, or if he does not learn wisdom, becomes sufficiently cunning to avoid a beating himself (2009 p. 660). Both 17:10 and 19:25 appear to be dealing with lost causes: verbal chastisement is effective with those who are willing to learn, physical beatings are wasted on those who have deliberately chosen to ignore sound advice.

It would seem to suggest that it is a case of encouraging the son to take seriously his responsibility to nurture wise children as opposed to fools or even scoundrels. Parenting cannot simply be about subjecting children to beatings, discipline can and must be offered by other means and the primary responsibility must be to prevent the simple fool from becoming a scoffer or scoundrel. Once the son reaches that stage he is a lost cause. The one who brings about a fool, who in the first instance sows his seed and then fails to provide adequate parenting, not only brings grief upon himself but will cause bitterness (distress) to the mother of his children. The implication therefore if 17:21a and 17:25b are co-joined is that the father has a responsibility both to his children and to the mother of those children, assuming that to be his wife. Furthermore is there a deliberate ambiguity in the lack of a specific object in 17:25b? She who gave birth is embittered, but by whom - the father or the fool himself? There is another possibility here: both the mother and grandmother are embittered since both have a fool for a son. I have already noted the lack of a mother in 17:21 and the shift of focus to the son as a prospective father. What 17:25 emphasises is that the mother is doubly

aggrieved – not only is her son a fool but also the father of her son, since he has failed to prevent the son from becoming a fool.

8.5.4 Proverbs 19:13

19:13	הַוֺּת לְאָבִיו בֵּן כְּסִיל	A foolish (*kəsîl*) son is his father's ruin
	וְדֶלֶף טֹרֵד מִדְיְנֵי אִשָּׁה	and a woman's bickering is an irksome dripping

Proverbs 19:13 is unusual in that despite the similarity of 19:13a to the first half-lines of the other verses noted, the subject of the second half-line is not what might have been expected, in terms of there being no reference to the mother. At first sight the two lines appear incongruous given that what would normally be expected would be a statement commenting on the effect on the mother rather than an apparent complaint about an irritating wife; the theme a dysfunctional home with two things that cause a man misery, a foolish son and a nagging wife (Fox, 2009 p. 654).[67] Fox notes that the proverb "evaluates relationships from the perspective of a husband and father, which is basically the perspective of the whole book" and therefore it does not "disparage all women any more than it condemns all sons" (2009 p. 654). However, my question is what causes the wife to nag? I do not disagree with Fox's comment about the book as a whole, however in this instance the proverb should be evaluated from the perspective of the son who is to become a husband and father (along with 17:21 and 25). This is a subtle shift, as I have already noted. Rather than considering it through the lens of the son and the impact of his character and behaviour upon his parents, (and hence the assumption that there will be reference to the mother in 19:13b) the verse is to be interpreted through the lens of the son as a prospective father. He is reminded yet again that a foolish son brings not only grief but also ruin. However this time there is, as we

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[67] Contentious wives also make an appearance in 21:9, 19; 25:24 and 27:15. I shall consider these verses in Chapter 9.

might expect, a progression in the consequences. He has already been told, if he is wise enough to comprehend, that he will cause bitterness to the mother of his children (17:25) and the consequence of her bitterness is that she nags, although it is worth noting that it is her nagging that is the cause of irritation rather than the wife herself. A prudent wife, perceived as a gift from the Lord (18:22) has cause for complaint. Her displeasure and bickering is a result of the failure of the son, who started out as a mere *kəsîl*, to learn wisdom and become a father capable of begetting and bringing up a wise son himself. The imagery in 19:13 is simply a picture of what he may have to contend with in the future, through no fault but his own. It is not simply a warning to the son that he will cause distress to his parents by becoming a fool but actually places an onus on him to be a diligent father. The statement in 19:13 is not a criticism of wives but of the fool.

8.6   Conclusion

In this chapter I set out to discover if there were any 'missing' mothers within the text and to ascertain whether, by divorcing the second half-line from its antecedent, the statements concerning mothers might be reinterpreted in a more positive light for women. It is uncertain whether I achieved what I originally set out to do. As I have already pointed out, whilst it is not possible to make a compelling case for the mother's presence in 13:1b, it is possible to make a plausible one and the modern preoccupation with the word-pair of mother and father as denoting parent, and the inclusivity of gender appropriate language in some of the more recent English translations has blinded the modern reader to the potential subtleties within the text. The lack of any reference to the mother may be considered a deliberate ploy by the scribe to encourage the 'tutee' to

recall to mind similar verses and hence to reinforce the message that the mother's role in the nurture of her children was not to be underestimated or ignored.

It is also questionable as to whether I have found a more positive portrayal for women. I suspended the general understanding that, in the statements which refer both to the mother and father, what is said in one half-line refers equally to the parent in the other. I also considered the nature of the collections in Proverbs 10-29, the categories of foolishness within Proverbs, and argued for the development of themes across the material, identifiable through the use of variant repetition. By disconnecting the two half-lines from one another, and by considering proverbial statements which although not adjacent to one another were semantically linked by reference to the parents and to varying degrees of 'fools', I have demonstrated that it is the mother who, in the main, bears the burden of wayward sons, whilst the father alone benefits from 'wise' ones, and that there is a progression of the son's worsening behaviour and the impact on his parents throughout the collection. This has not resulted in a more positive portrayal of women, rather an unmasking of the weight of the traditional interpretative strategy.

What my investigations have revealed is that there is an escalation of the son's behaviour and its impact on his parents. This culminates in 19:13 when the father is ruined and, surprisingly, the mother is no longer in focus. Instead she is replaced by the contentious wife. The son is no longer in the parental home. He has come full circle and is now the recipient of his own foolish behaviour; no longer is he the perpetrator of grief, but the recipient of his wife's constant nagging.

CHAPTER 9

CONTENTIOUS WIVES

9.1   Introduction

The previous chapter focused on proverbs which included reference to the mother. One of the conclusions drawn was that by considering, as a unique set, the verses which referred to the mother, a coherent case could be made for a progression throughout the collection, the focus moving from the son and his relationship with the parents to the son as a husband and father. Attention is now turned to the portrayal of the wife, the ᾿iššâ.[68] Since Proverbs is understood to have been written from a male perspective it may seem strange that there appear to be no *explicit* references to how the son is to behave as a husband and father, although many of the proverbs advocate behaviour that will ultimately mean that he behaves well in those roles, in addition to his role as neighbour, friend, and business associate. In this chapter I will provide analysis and evidence to suggest that this perceived lack of specific reference to his behaviour as husband and father is not necessarily the case. Although not explicit, some of the proverbs which have hitherto been read as ambivalent or even detrimental to the characterisation of women, most notably those which describe her as 'contentious' (19:13; 21:9, 19; 25:24; 27:15), can instead be understood in terms of advice to the man concerning the treatment of his wife and children.

What I develop in this chapter is the notion that it is not necessarily the woman who is negatively portrayed in the proverbs. Rather the proverbs can be interpreted as an exhortation to men to treat women properly in order that the women do not have

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[68] It is worth pointing out that ᾿iššâ is translated as woman or wife. In the context of Proverbs as a whole, and the nature and interpretation of the individual proverbs I have chosen to view each occurrence in this section as referring to a wife.

cause for complaint. In doing so, it is important to acknowledge that male concern still lies at the heart of the text. In the sages' view, if the woman does not have cause for complaint the man has a quieter life, a concept antithetically portrayed in the form of Proverbs 21:9 with its image of the harassed husband taking refuge in the corner of the rooftop. Consider Fox's interpretation of this verse:

> We can picture a harried husband hounded from his house…and taking refuge on the roof … [not] the whole roof, but just a corner. Yet even this is better than being cooped up with a shrew … [The proverb's] practical use would be to offer the comfort of cynicism and anonymous camaraderie, to let a man who feels harried, see his experience as a common one - *that's just the way women are* (2009 pp. 683-684, my emphasis).[69]

My proposal is that the purpose of the proverbs which describe the wife as contentious are not, contra Fox, in order to 'offer the comfort of cynicism and anonymous camaraderie'. Rather, they highlight to the intended audience the need to treat women properly in order to avoid giving them cause for grumbling, thereby ensuring a quiet life for themselves. I shall therefore look at each individual proverb where reference is made to the wife locating it within a proverbial cluster (if applicable) and ascertaining whether there is a development of theme. I shall consider whether there is a strategic placing of the verses within the collection and pay particular attention to variant repetition and the traditional interpretation of the proverbs. Following a discussion of female imagery within Proverbs I will evaluate the extent of the impact of Camp's hermeneutical framework upon the proverbial statements of Proverbs 10-29,

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[69] It is unclear whether Fox is reporting the views of the scribe or whether he himself is of the same opinion, the uncertainty caused by the fact that he fails to disassociate himself from the statement. This question arose in conversation with Knut Heim who, although sensitive to the nuances of male-oriented interpretative strategies, understands Fox to be referring to the scribe's viewpoint. I on the other hand, sensitive to comments about women by men, initially concluded that it was Fox's. I mention this as an illustration of the impact of reading strategies not only on the biblical text itself but on our engagement with other scholars.

before proceeding to provide interpretations of those proverbs which provide a description of the wife.

9.2 Female imagery in Proverbs

The plethora of female imagery in Proverbs 1-9 and 31 can give rise to the impression that Proverbs is replete with references to women and the feminine. However, by my reckoning, of the total 595 verses in 10:1-29:27 only 25 references are made to women.[70] They are referred to as mothers (10:1; 15:20; 17:25; 19:26; 20:20; 29:15); wives (11:16, 22; 12:4 (x2); 18:22; 19:13, 14; 21:9, 19; 25:24; 27:15, 16); 'strange' (22:14; 23:33; 23:27); prostitutes (23:27; 29:3); female servants (27:27); and widow (15:25). Reference to the mother, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, is in the light of the impact of the son's (and on occasion her husband's) behaviour towards her and there is no mention of any attributable characteristics to the mother herself. Likewise other sporadic references throughout these collections make no specific character reference: references to the servant girls and widow are in terms of provision for them; references to the Strange Woman and the prostitute pick up the allusions of deep pits and narrow wells from the opening chapters, and the squandering of wealth. By contrast, references to woman as wife, with the exception of 18:22 which implies that a wife is a gift from God, attribute to the wife some form of character trait: she is gracious (11:16); beautiful without sense (11:22); virtuous or by contrast shameful (12:4); contentious (19:13; 21:9, 19; 25:24; 27:15, 16); and prudent (19:14).

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[70] Heim (Heim, 2008 p. 20) suggests a total of 220 verses within Proverbs containing statements by or about women, of which 190 are to be found in Proverbs 1-9, 30 and 31, leaving only 30 verses in the intervening twenty chapters. As he does not list them it has proved difficult to locate the additional five. Whybray (1990 p. 28) lists 20 verses, categorising them as mothers, wives, 'strange', prostitutes, female servants and widows.

Scholarly comment on these verses, such as it is, follows a traditional line, focusing predominantly on the impact of the wife's character or behaviour upon the man. On occasions where there is extended discussion the focus is on the difficulties of translation as opposed to interpretative strategies as will become evident in the ensuing discussion on individual proverbs. In those discussions I shall draw attention to such comments but, in the main, scholarly engagement within this chapter will be predominantly with Fox, Heim and Waltke: Fox because of his detailed exegetical commentary, and Heim and Waltke because they offer discussion of potential proverbial clusters within the collections. My proposed line of enquiry is open to criticism on two counts: firstly, the selective concentration on female characterisation; secondly, by providing an alternative interpretation whether I allow the original creators and collectors of the Proverbs off the hook in terms of their portrayal of women.

To consider the first of these, the negative traits in character and behaviour, it is obvious that such traits are not confined solely to women and therefore to concentrate purely on the negative portrayals of women is selective. However, in terms of the statements in Proverbs, 'negative' women are commonly identified by their strangeness, otherness or foreignness. The exception is wives who presumably cannot be 'other' or 'strange' to their husbands by virtue of their marriage, and ought not to be foreign (Deuteronomy 7:3). The use of the term *zārâ* within Proverbs suggests a deep suspicion of foreign women although Ruth is an obvious and unusual exception of a 'good' foreign wife in the Hebrew Bible. Instead, within Proverbs, wives are described as

contentious, the male equivalent appearing only once as a description of a man (26:21).[71]

The premise of Proverbs is to 'train' young men in the pursuit of wisdom, to avoid the temptation to follow their basest desires, whether in terms of material want or sexual desire. As the default audience for the material, men's behaviour or character in Proverbs has generally been evaluated, not qua men, but rather as the behaviour and character of humankind in general. This understanding is best exemplified by those who advocate a simple reversal of imagery e.g. Tremper Longman III (2002 p. 132) and Lucas who in his discussion of 5:1-23 advocates that "women can transpose the teaching into their situation by replacing the honey-lipped woman by a sweet talking man on the prowl for a one night stand" (2015 p. 71). Men, qua humankind, are not identified then by specific 'faults', rather they are identified in terms of varying degrees of foolishness, as discussed in the previous chapter. Hence negative character traits of men in Proverbs are glossed over, not because they are unimportant but because they are not necessarily viewed as individual character flaws, but as the antithesis of how people in general should behave. In contrast, when women's faults are identified, they are identified as the faults of women qua women, and particularly in terms of the impact they have on men. Fox's comment (2009 p. 654) that within the context of Proverbs criticism of a contentious wife is not disparaging of all women just as all sons are not condemned, whilst not untrue misses the mark. It is the specific nature of the character

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[71] Ora Brison, a PhD student at Tel Aviv presented a paper at the SBL International Conference (Vienna, July 2014) entitled *Who's Afraid of 'eshet Medanim (Prov 21:9): Is She a "Contentious Woman" or 'eshet Midianim Practicing Magic and Divination?* Her suggestion is that the Masoretic reading (Qere) of the proverbs referring to *'eshet medanim* as a Midianite woman might be an echo of, or an allusion to, a specific biblical type of a 'foreign' woman. Regrettably, I have been unable to procure a copy of the paper and cannot therefore comment on what appears to be an interesting and welcome contribution to the subject of the woman's identity and the threat she is perceived to pose. On the face of it, a claim that the woman is a foreigner would contribute to the ongoing conversations regarding the identity of the *'iššâ zārâ* in Proverbs 1-9.

trait and its uniqueness in being highlighted in respect of wives which suggests that it is a specific fault of women qua women. According to Proverbs, mothers bear the impact of their son's behaviour rather than having their own specific character traits, whereas wives have the potential to make or break their husbands by being virtuous, shameful or argumentative.

The second criticism I identified is that by proposing an alternative interpretation for the proverbs which appear to deal negatively with women the creators and collectors are allowed off the hook in terms of their representation of women. It is my intention to demonstrate that it is adherence to male-oriented reading strategies which has clouded our ability to interpret the proverbs in a new light which speak more effectively to female and male readers today. Even in their original intention some of the proverbs may not have been as negative or detrimental to female characterisation as traditionally has been understood.

9.3   The hermeneutical framework revisited

Despite widespread scholarly acceptance of Camp's (1985) proposal for a hermeneutical framework, as discussed in Chapter 4, little has been done in the subsequent years to re-evaluate individual proverbs in chapters 10-29 in this context. Camp claims that proverbs need a performance context within which they can make sense rather than being considered banal statements. Within Proverbs the context, according to Camp, is provided by the "interweaving of the beginning, middle and end of the book by virtue of a web of subsidiary images connected both with female imagery and wisdom" (1985 p. 207). Wisdom therefore is conceived as a female literary figure and her nemesis is also portrayed as female, with both competing for the attentions of the young men. In the sages' opinion the acquisition of wisdom manifests

itself in the ability to procure for oneself a 'good' wife who will neither let you down nor bring you shame (12:4). The poem in the final chapter is an idealised picture of wisdom in its fullness – whether it is real or symbolic is irrelevant since, either way, it is part of a literary device used by the sage to create a lens through which to view the rest of the material.

Within that setting the maxims found in Proverbs 10-29 are a means of enabling a young man to choose wisely and Wisdom, the Strange Woman, and the Woman of Worth are literary tools for presenting competing demands upon a young man's attention. This of course assumes that within the social context of the time all men are expected to seek and procure a wife. However, what scholarship has generally failed to do is to view the maxims in this context. As I demonstrated in the literature review in Chapter 4, scholarly discussion has focussed by and large on substantiating Camp's claim about the validity of the hermeneutical framework. In spite of the proportionally high volume of female imagery, seemingly misogynistic material has traditionally been interpreted, not in terms of gender relations, but in the light of a wider concern for the pursuit of wisdom. Hence, consideration of the framework appears to have had little impact on the interpretation of individual proverbs. Therefore if it is taken into account what difference might it make to the interpretation of individual proverbs which make reference to women?

Heim, in his article on Proverbs 11:22 (2008 p. 21), draws attention to the inclusion of a high volume of female characters and metaphors in a male-centred text and posits three reasons for its inclusion: the scribes render Hebrew feminine nouns as females; the target audience is male whose attention is held by females; and education in relationships with women as wives, mothers and 'other', is important to the well-

ordering of society. None of this appears to be in contention and Brenner suggests a

similar, if slightly less positive (from a female perspective) understanding when she

advocates that the framework of Proverbs contains

> materials that elaborate the roles of a legitimate wife/lover and mother as
> against illicit sexual ties of a man with Other women, in keeping with
> Proverbs' general interest in safeguarding the family as an ongoing,
> [re]productive social institution. This impulse makes sense for social
> continuation and self-perpetration. At the same time, it betrays anxiety
> about the very social project it appears to promote (2004 p. 11).

If that is the case, then it seems surprising that there is little actual material in the

proverbial section which appears to relate to gender relations. These appear to be dealt

with in the framework itself, and would imply that the foundation of society is in stable

family environment, from which men make responsible decisions about the moral and

ethical concerns to which the proverbs allude. As Brenner suggests, it is both admiration

for the role of motherhood and fear of women's sexuality which hold the scribes' and

their recipients' attention. In this context the greatest catastrophe to befall a man is that

he has a foolish son and a contentious wife (19:13) which, as suggested in Chapter 8, is

an observation on his inability to obtain wisdom rather than, as traditionally has been

understood, an observation on the character of his spouse and offspring.

Heim (2008 p. 21) suggests the need for more detailed study of material

concerning women in Proverbs in light of its appeal to a male audience and the

supposed concern for gender relationships. However, these raise the questions as to

whether these concerns and the hermeneutical framework are connected; and whether

Camp's framework should shape how we interpret the portrayal of women in the

Proverbs collections. Heim's comments might suggest that they are, and would appear

initially to make sense: if the proverbs are framed by female imagery which provides a

performance context, then that must have something to say about how the statements themselves are to be interpreted. This forms part of what I originally set out to do. The framework presents female characters vying for the attention of young males, the one leading to life, the other to death and at first sight interpretations of the proverbial statements about women appear to reinforce this. However, while the young men are to be encouraged to find a wife the overriding issue is the pursuit of wisdom (and in my exploration of 18:22 and 19:14 below I shall explore which of these two things come first – good wife or favour of the Lord). It is therefore pertinent to question why wisdom and its antithesis are presented as feminine within the framework.

Camp speaks in terms of legitimising wisdom as feminine since she recognises that by reading Proverbs in isolation from any social context, wisdom itself rather than female authority is legitimised:

> Although legitimation of female authority is not the only, nor even the primary purpose of the wisdom poems, they cannot effect their primary purpose – viz., the establishment of Wisdom's capacity to mediate God's blessings to humans – without the assumption of that authority which they in turn, if only secondarily, support (1985 p. 264).

She further responds to the question of why the imagery is female by suggesting that in the post-exilic context the narrative of a large scale God is not entirely abandoned but diminished, and theological emphasis is refocused on the domestic realm of everyday life, a domain in which the female is predominantly centre-stage. This emphasis on the female is not without its challenges: images of marriage and prostitution are used by the prophets to describe Israel's relationship to God; and the tension between sinfulness and the call to purity manifest themselves in the prohibition of intermarriage in Ezra-Nehemiah. On the one hand, Camp suggests, Israel's sin and impurity is embodied in a female figure by Ezekiel, whilst on the other, in Malachi and

Ezra, the woman becomes the sign of the purity of the Israelite household. Even this 'positive' implication is ambiguous though since having the wrong kind of woman as wife means impurity (1985 pp. 265-268).

The connection between finding a 'good' wife and the LORD's favour explains why it is that within the Proverbs collections only wives are accorded a character, and why the image is predominantly a disharmonious one. The difficulty is that, set within the context of the framework, traditional interpretations have unwittingly laid the blame firmly at the woman's door and have failed to view the proverbs in the wider concern of gender relations since that is not at the heart of Proverbial wisdom's concerns.

I agree with Heim as to the reasons why female imagery is prevalent but I am unconvinced that the female imagery in the framework provides a specific lens through which to interpret individual statements. Indeed I would go so far as to state that where the portrayal of women is concerned the imagery in the framework of idealised Wisdom and vilified Strange Woman reinforces the binary representation of women. This fascination with the character portrayal of certain types of women has hindered rather than aided the interpretation of individual proverbs where women are in focus. Suitable male guises for wisdom and its antithesis were not to be found. Hence, the performance context is not provided by the female characterisations, but rather the overriding imperative to pursue and find wisdom. The framework has no more or less bearing on proverbs which include women than they do on proverbs that do not. Each individual proverb needs to be understood in terms of the pursuit of wisdom, and its potential meaning derived from its setting within the collection and within proverbial clusters where appropriate.

9.4   Interpretation of proverbs

Set out below are the verses which will form the basis of my investigation in this chapter. All the verses refer to the woman in the context of her suitability as a marriage partner or as a wife. In the discussions that follow I do not intend to provide a full exegetical analysis of each individual verse, since my focus is interpreting the statement in terms of what it might have to say in terms of gender relations. The grouping of the individual proverbs into subsections is based on identifiable clusters or sets (as per Heim and Waltke), or where I suggest that joining proverbs together aids an alternative interpretation. In each sub-section I intend to present a selective level of depth of analysis of individual verse, primarily drawing upon existing scholarly comment and my own interpretations.

11:16	אֵשֶׁת־חֵן תִּתְמֹךְ כָּבוֹד וְעָרִיצִים יִתְמְכוּ־עֹשֶׁר	A gracious woman takes hold of honour and violent men take hold of wealth[72]
11:22	נֶזֶם זָהָב בְּאַף חֲזִיר אִשָּׁה יָפָה וְסָרַת טָעַם	A gold ring in a pig's snout a beautiful woman who lacks discretion
12:4	אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל עֲטֶרֶת בַּעְלָהּ וּכְרָקָב בְּעַצְמוֹתָיו מְבִישָׁה	A woman of worth is the crown of her husband but she who brings shame is like rottenness in his bones
18:22	מָצָא אִשָּׁה מָצָא טוֹב וַיָּפֶק רָצוֹן מֵיהוָה	He who finds a wife finds something good and obtains favour from the Lord
19:13	הַוֹּת לְאָבִיו בֵּן כְּסִיל וְדֶלֶף טֹרֵד מִדְיְנֵי אִשָּׁה	A foolish son is his father's ruin and a constant dripping the contentions of a wife
19:14	בַּיִת וָהוֹן נַחֲלַת אָבוֹת וּמֵיְהוָה אִשָּׁה מַשְׂכָּלֶת	A household and wealth are an inheritance from fathers but a prudent wife is from the Lord.
21:9	טוֹב לָשֶׁבֶת עַל־פִּנַּת־גָּג מֵאֵשֶׁת מִדְיָנִים וּבֵית חָבֶר	Better to live in the corner of a roof than a contentious wife and noisy household
21:19	טוֹב שֶׁבֶת בְּאֶרֶץ־מִדְבָּר מֵאֵשֶׁת מִדְיָנִים וָכָעַס	Better to live in a desert land than a contentious wife and grief
25:24	טוֹב שֶׁבֶת עַל־פִּנַּת־גָּג מֵאֵשֶׁת מִדְיָנִים וּבֵית חָבֶר	Better to live in the corner of a roof than a contentious wife and noisy household
27:15	דֶּלֶף טוֹרֵד בְּיוֹם סַגְרִיר וְאֵשֶׁת מִדְיָנִים נִשְׁתָּוָה	A continual dripping on a rainy day and a contentious woman are alike
27:16	צֹפְנֶיהָ צָפַן־רוּחַ וְשֶׁמֶן יְמִינוֹ יִקְרָא	To restrain her is to restrain the wind or to grasp oil in the right hand

9.4.1 **Proverbs 11:16 and 11:22**

Leaving aside Proverbs 10:1, and its reference to the mother, which was dealt with in the previous chapter, 11:16 is the first instance of a reference to a woman in chapters 10-29. Exegetical interpretations of the individual proverb largely focus on the apparent

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[72] Lucas (2015 p. 99) comments on the difficulty of identifying the essential antithesis in 11:16. As will become apparent in the ensuing discussion on this verse, the difficulty is in the translation itself and I argue that the proverb is not antithetical, as traditionally understood, but rather subverts the usual narrative in that both half-lines suggest action on the part of the subject that would not be condoned by the sage.

mismatch of comparison between men and a woman (Oesterley 1929 p. 85; Murphy, 1998 p. 82), or the apparent confusion over the antithesis (Whybray 1994 p. 182; Lucas 2015 p. 99). Fox (2009) grapples more comprehensively with possible interpretations, as will be discussed in the next section. What is not addressed however is *why* there should be reference to a woman at this juncture? It is Waltke to whom I will turn to endeavour to address this question since he advocates the inclusion of women at seams (2004 p. 499), suggesting that 11:16 and 11:22 (the next reference to a woman in this collection) frame a section, the theme of which is grace over brute strength. I concur with Waltke that the two verses form an inclusio, although disagree as to the theme he suggests. I intend to demonstrate that 11:16 and 11:22 form the frame of a proverbial cluster, the theme of which is marital disharmony as a consequence of the inappropriate pursuit of wealth. I shall begin with a discussion of Fox's alternatives for the interpretation of 11:16.

9.4.1.1 **Proverbs 11:16**

11.16	אֵֽשֶׁת־חֵן תִּתְמֹךְ כָּבוֹד	A gracious woman takes hold of honour
	וְעָרִיצִים יִתְמְכוּ־עֹֽשֶׁר	and violent men take hold of wealth

While 11:16 can initially be interpreted as having something positive to say about women, the second half-line makes no immediate sense. Although wealth and honour are not unusual in being coupled together it is highly unlikely that the sage would wish to advocate the gaining of wealth through violence (Fox, 2009 p. 537). There is little detailed comment on the verse by scholars in the main, other than noting a weak antithesis (Murphy, Lucas), or highlighting the contrast between a single woman and multiple men (Waltke). Fox, in contrast, provides three interpretations of v.16b, commenting that none are entirely satisfactory (2009 pp. 537-538).

The first of Fox's interpretations is reading the statement as an observation of fact (rather than as a tool of persuasion), contrasting the behaviour of holding fast to honour and holding on to wealth, rather than equating the woman to the men. According to Fox, this means that there is no reason for the first statement to be limited to women. However, this seems highly improbable given that nowhere else in Proverbs is the inclusion of a woman used as a generic term for both women and men, rather the statements appear specifically gender focused. The question is not about its inclusivity but rather, whether the specific inclusion of a woman signals something to which the intended recipient is required to pay heed. Moreover, as an observation of fact, 11:16 apparently contradicts the deed-consequence nexus that is evident in Proverbs which implicitly advocates, amongst other things, that violent men are not rewarded for their action, and gracious women do not take hold of (grasp) honour. The meaning of *tāmak* is to take hold of, to hold, or to grasp (*HALOT* p. 1751). All usages imply that the subjects are active in holding an object rather than having something accorded to them which contradicts the traditional understanding that the woman 'gains' honour, although it makes sense in the second half-line where and violent men take hold of wealth.

The translation 'take hold of' appears to me to be perfectly adequate, a possible interpretation being that both the woman and the men seize their respective 'prizes'. The only other use of *tāmak* in Proverbs in relation to a woman is the Woman of Worth who seizes the spindle (31:19). Fox rejects this on the basis that the comparison would not be favourable to the woman, being portrayed rather gracelessly as greedy for honour (2009 p. 537). This assumes that the sage would want to say something positive about gracious women. Instead both half-lines of the proverb can be interpreted as subverting the usual narrative. Just as the statement about violent men is contrary to the usual

expectation, so gracious women are not expected to seize honour, but rather have it accorded to them. In this light, the statement can be interpreted as less favourable than it might appear at first sight.

The second interpretation offered by Fox is understanding *hēn* not as inner grace but rather, physical beauty, and *kābôd* as wealth rather than honour. The implication is that a woman can use her physical beauty to gain wealth and men can use violence. This is not without some merit but again it would seem unlikely that the sage would wish to promote such a strategy or, if he were to promote it, whether it would be phrased in such a way. Proverbs appears not to be overly concerned with the attraction of physical beauty, *yāpî,* appearing only in 6:25 and 31:30, rather it is usually a woman's speech which is deemed potentially dangerous. The most predominant use of *hēn* (*HALOT* p. 332) is in terms of finding favour with God and humans. Where it is used in relation to women, in Proverbs 11:16 and 31:30, men are warned in 31:30 that *hēn* is deceitful and *yāpî* is vain. Interpreting *hēn* as inner grace, rather than as beauty is therefore in keeping with the sentiment expressed in 31:30. On that basis there appears no reason to translate *kābôd* as wealth.

Fox's third interpretation is to emend ʿārîṣîm (violent men) to ḥārûṣîm (diligent men) thus providing rewards in keeping with the behaviour of the subjects. The verse promises what might be expected: honour for gracious women and wealth for diligent men. This is his preferred interpretation, presumably because he expects the proverb to speak according to a perceived understanding of what it will say. However, it is my contention that emendation is unnecessary since the signal for understanding is in 11:16b. Whilst traditional interpretation has readily accepted the perceived truth of 11:16a, the difficulty has been in interpreting 11:16b, even to the extent of inserting

additional lines in the LXX. However, as already mentioned above in response to Fox's first proposal, I suggest that 11:16 subverts the usual narrative. It presents the unpalatable reality that wealth can be obtained through violence and that an apparently gracious woman can be grasping. The scope of this study does not permit an investigation into the possibility of other verses which subvert the usual narrative but it could be a fruitful exercise to be undertaken in the future.

In contrast to Fox's first interpretation, Waltke interprets the single woman standing against the plural men who achieve their end through violence, signalling the superiority of grace to brute force (2004 p. 499). This again perceives 11:16a as the usual narrative and seeks an explanation for the perceived difficulty of the second half of the saying. What these interpretations fail to explain is the sudden introduction of a woman into the text. In terms of any attempt to link the appearance of the woman with the use of the word 'wealth', *kābôd* appears elsewhere in Proverbs (3:35, 15:33, 18:12, 20:3, 25:27, 26:1, 26:8, 29:23) but there is no indication that it is a female who is the focus in any of these verses. If, as I have suggested above, 11:16 subverts the usual narrative, why might there be mention of a woman?

A satisfactory answer to the conundrum is not immediately apparent. However, it seems probable that there is an editorial reason for the placing of this proverb at this juncture. Waltke notes the "striking mention of a woman" in 11:16, and links it with the inclusion of a woman elsewhere at seams (cf. 11:22, 12:4, 14:1, 18:22, 21:9) (2004 p. 499). He does not include reference to 19:13, 19:14, and 21:19. Elsewhere he categorises 19:13 as the beginning of a unit dealing with 'wisdom in the home', 19:13 presenting a functional home and 19:14 a dysfunctional one (2005 pp. 106-109). In contrast, 21:19 is a stand-alone verse upon which Waltke makes no comment on its

potential as an introductory or framing device, only stating that it is an escalation of 21:9 in that the man is driven not just to the corner of the rooftop but to the desert (2005 p. 182). Despite this apparent inconsistency, Waltke's approach is worthy of note as one of a number of contributions over the last fifty years or so to have been made in ascertaining deliberate editorial strategies through careful attention to poetics. I therefore intend to continue to explore the potential explanation for the inclusion of a woman at this point.

One of Waltke's intentions is to identify the beginning of units by using, as a heuristic guide, single-line educative proverbs, seeing those lines as refrains which organize the material (2004 p. 21). It is therefore unsurprising that he identifies 'striking mentions of women' at the beginning and, in the case of 11:22, at the end, of thematic units. As far as I am able to determine no particular exploration of the editorial placing has been developed other than Waltke's explanation that they signify shifts in subject matter. However, as attractive as this might appear at first, one might reasonably conclude that shifts in subject matter elsewhere in the collection are signalled by proverbs which do not make reference to a woman. This is an interesting question in and of itself and, although not within the remit of this thesis, a further potential area of study could be to identify the possible variances in the way thematic sections are introduced by single-line educative proverbs.

Waltke's observations are therefore a good starting point but they still leave unanswered the question of *why* women are included. In addition there is a lack of consensus among those who search for thematic groupings within the collection which will become evident in the following discussion. Since Waltke's explanation concerning the location of the woman is deemed an insufficient response to the question of *why* she

appears, I shall turn to the next reference to a woman in the collection. She appears six verses later in 11.22, in the equally perplexing reference to a beautiful woman and a gold ring in a pig's snout. By considering the interpretation of 11:22 I suggest that light can be shed on the interpretation of 11:16.

9.4.1.2 **Proverbs 11:22**

11:22	נֶזֶם זָהָב בְּאַף חֲזִיר	A gold ring in a pig's snout
	אִשָּׁה יָפָה וְסָרַת טָעַם	a beautiful woman who lacks discretion

It is reasonable to say that the overwhelming interpretation of 11:22 equates the woman with the pig. Delitzsch established the modern interpretive tradition through his use of the proverb as an illustration of what he described as *emblematic* proverbs, the close placing of a contrast and emblem without the use of a connecting similitude (1874 pp. 8-9). Heim, an exception to the rule in terms of the interpretation of 11:22, provides a useful review of the interpretations afforded this particular proverb in his article 'A Closer Look at the Pig in Proverbs XI 22' which demonstrates that despite slight interpretative variances, the tradition established both by Delitzsch and Toy (1899) in the late nineteenth century continues to hold sway (2008 pp. 14-18).

My immediate question is whether 11:16 and 11:22 form a frame around the intervening material. This is a theory put forward by Waltke advocating that vv.16-22 frame a subunit contrasting a gracious woman with true honour with the indiscreet beauty who has no honour (2004 p. 499). Heim (2001) and Whybray (1994) also suggest a cluster but the three scholars disagree as to both the delimitations of the unit and consequently its theme. In terms of the delimitations I am inclined to agree with Waltke but before I engage with his hypothesis I shall discuss Heim and Whybray's contributions.

Rather than a cluster consisting of 11:16-22, Heim proposes 11:15-21 advocating the inclusion of v.15 as the first verse in the cluster, its purpose being the introduction of a new theme, the danger inherent in acquiring wealth dishonestly (Heim, 2001 pp. 139-141). Lucas (2015 p. 99) concurs with Heim as to the delimitation of the section proposing its theme 'reaping what you sow'. However, acknowledging as he does insufficient room in his commentary to give a detailed argument for the clusters he identifies (2015 p. 16), Lucas' contribution to this discussion, other than as an advocate for proverbial clusters, is sadly limited.

Returning then to Heim, he notes the introduction of a female figure in both 11:16 and 11:22 and makes reference to the possibility that they might have a structural function. However, he declines to develop this further rejecting the notion and concluding that v.16 is integral to the group, linking it with v.17 and seeing the comparison between the gracious woman (16a) and merciful man (17a), and violent men (16b) and the cruel man (17b). No further explanation is given for the inclusion of a woman in 11:16. Heim's justification for the cluster is that, aside from 11: 20-21, all the half-lines contain at least two kinds of the following information: characterisation, business terminology or the consequence of the person's action or character, and that through interpretation all the lines can be placed in the semantic field of business.

Whybray (1994a p. 97) observes a thematic unity, the righteous and the wicked, in vv.17-21 but sees no reason to suppose that vv.16 and 22 mark the beginning and end of a specific subunit given that there is no mention of women or related topics in the intervening material, a viewpoint I hope to challenge. Of the chapter as a whole, Whybray is of the opinion that it is neither a unified whole, nor made up of distinct unified components.

In contrast, Waltke advocates a sub unit consisting of 11:16-22 with a theme of grace over brute strength set within the larger thematic unit of 11:16-27 (benevolence brings rewards whilst selfishness harms oneself). According to Waltke, vv.16 and 17 deal with honour and wealth versus troublesome wealth, vv.18 and 19 with life and death, and vv.20 and 21 with the Lord's validation. The progression through the unit sees the violent men grasp hold of wealth and in doing so they are cruel and ultimately injure themselves (2004 pp. 499-504).

In terms of advocates for the presence of a structural unit two thematic unities are proposed: Heim's focus on the acquisition of wealth contained within 11:15-21; and Waltke's focus on grace over brute strength. Each has merit and I intend to combine the two to provide an interpretation which explains the inclusion of the woman and questions Whybray's assertion that nothing within the core of the unit is connected to the verses providing the frame. My proposition is that the cluster, as defined as 11:16-22, is not read simply in terms of business terminology (as per Heim) but as a contrast between business and home life, expanding it from Waltke's narrow confines of the domestic setting. It is a pointer to the young man that he is to look to the needs and concerns of his wife (and presumably his children). The introduction of the woman in 11:16 is a marker for the shift from business to domestic concerns. The cluster is set out below:

11:16	אֵשֶׁת־חֵן תִּתְמֹךְ כָּבוֹד	A gracious woman takes hold of honour
	וְעָרִיצִים יִתְמְכוּ־עֹשֶׁר	and violent men take hold of wealth
11:17	גֹּמֵל נַפְשׁוֹ אִישׁ חָסֶד	A man of goodness rewards himself
	וְעֹכֵר שְׁאֵרוֹ אַכְזָרִי	but a cruel one does himself harm
11:18	רָשָׁע עֹשֶׂה פְעֻלַּת־שָׁקֶר	The wicked man produces a deceitful wage
	וְזֹרֵעַ צְדָקָה שֶׂכֶר אֱמֶת	but he who sows righteousness gets a true reward

11:19	כֵּן־צְדָקָה לְחַיִּים וּמְרַדֵּף רָעָה לְמוֹתוֹ	Righteousness leads to life he who pursues evil will die
11:20	תּוֹעֲבַת יְהוָה עִקְּשֵׁי־לֵב וּרְצוֹנוֹ תְּמִימֵי דָרֶךְ	The LORD loathes the crooked of heart he favours the ways of the innocent
11:21	יָד לְיָד לֹא־יִנָּקֶה רָּע וְזֶרַע צַדִּיקִים נִמְלָט	[Hand to hand] the evil man will not go unpunished but the descendants of the righteous will escape
11:22	נֶזֶם זָהָב בְּאַף חֲזִיר אִשָּׁה יָפָה וְסָרַת טָעַם	A gold ring in a pig's snout a beautiful woman who lacks discretion

My interpretation suggests an alternative reading of the cluster than has been held in traditional circles. Beginning with 11:16 and 11:17 the gracious woman who holds honour enables the merciful man (i.e. the one who has treated his wife properly and not given her cause to be contentious) to be rewarded, he brings good upon himself by treating her properly. In contrast the violent men (v.16b) who seek after wealth at all costs, and in doing so ignore the needs of their wives, give them cause to be contentious, thus bringing harm upon themselves. Verses 18 and 19 might also be interpreted in this vein, whilst vv.20 and 21 draw attention to a theological underpinning of wise behaviour. The result is that the wives of the violent men become shrewish and like a gold ring in the snout of a pig (11:22), their inner beauty masked and their husbands exposed for the shallow creatures that they are. The violent men of wealth (v.16) who flaunt their beautiful wives without taste (v.22), bringing trouble upon themselves (v.17) are in receipt of deceptive wages (v.18) and their destiny is death (v.19).

The proverbial cluster has less to do with men's wealth and more to do with men's priorities. One man with a gracious wife is better off than violent men (plural) who seek after wealth to the exclusion of everything else. That is the subtext of the cluster and the lesson which the sage wishes the young man to learn.

The sting in the tale from this perspective is that when gracious women (v.16a) are compared with beautiful women (v.22b), the violent men (v.16b) are compared with a pig's snout (v.22a): as the men acquire wealth, so the snout acquires a gold ring. This is a significant departure from the traditional interpretation of 11:22 which, with the exception of Heim, focuses on the equating of a certain type of woman with a pig. However, neither of the half-lines at first sight makes sense. As I have already noted it would be unusual for the sage to advocate the gaining of wealth through violent means and yet it is known that evil people prosper (or would appear to do so, even if only in the short term). Likewise, whilst it would not be uncommon for a beast to have a ring through its nose, what is unusual is that the ring is made of precious metal. Rather than the ring being placed in the snout to lead or constrain the pig, as is done for a bull, it is placed in the snout to prevent the pig from rooting and thus destroying the ground. It therefore prevents the pig from doing what is a natural activity and can be considered stressful to the animal. By equating the wealth of the violent men to the gold ring in the pig's snout the wealth can be said to be unclean and detrimental to the men's well-being, preventing them from fulfilling their natural instincts (in the minds of the sages), care of their wives and families. Both the wealth of violent men and a gold ring in a pig's snout are an affront, tainted and damaging to well-being. Rather than the woman being compared with the pig, as has been the traditional interpretation, it is the men who are associated with the pig. Wealth gained through violent means is unclean, and those who practice such tactics are equated to animals that live in insalubrious conditions, in stark contrast perhaps to the image they wish to portray.

This interpretation of the cluster gives justification for the introduction of a woman into the text beyond simply signalling a change in subject matter as Waltke

suggests. It advocates that marital disharmony is a consequence of the inappropriate pursuit of wealth. It also provides an interpretation that may be more acceptable to readers of the text sensitive to issues of gender equality. In terms of the portrayal of women, it cannot be denied that Proverbs is for a male audience, but the interpretive tradition initiated by Delitzsch can be challenged, by reference to the editorial skill of the compilers in bringing together individual proverbs to form clusters. I began with 11:16 which of itself appears uncontroversial; unless exception is taken to the implication that the wife must be gracious only in order to bring honour to her husband and that the woman's worth is measured only in terms of what she brings to her husband (a criticism seemingly of 31:10-31). However, as an isolated proverb 11:16 can be interpreted, as I suggest, as subverting the usual narrative drawing attention to the way in which a youngster might be misled. Similarly 11:22 subverts the usual narrative, in my interpretation, by equating the gold ring in the pig's nose with the wealth of violent men. My alternative interpretation provides a platform on which to build alternative interpretations for other statements - those which portray women in a seemingly negative way, or which male orientated reading strategies have interpreted in a negative way, more than is necessary or intended.

9.4.2 Proverbs 12:4

12:4	אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל עֲטֶרֶת בַּעְלָהּ וּכְרָקָב בְּעַצְמוֹתָיו מְבִישָׁה	A woman of worth is the crown of her husband but she who brings shame is like rottenness in his bones

Unlike verses 11:16 and 22, 12:4 presents no difficulties by way of translation. Traditional interpretation understands the proverb to present a comparison between two types of wife – the virtuous and the shameful. Waltke's interpretation of 12:4 focuses on the woman as the maker or breaker of marriage and he advocates that the mention of the

wife separates the main body (2:4-12) from the introductory three verses. 12:4-7 form a

sub unit concerned with speech and the household, and 12:7 highlights the permanence

or otherwise of the righteous and unrighteous household (2005 pp. 521-522). Likewise,

Heim interprets 12:4 as a link between two similar proverbial clusters (vv.1-3, 5-7)

(2001 p. 148).

In contrast, Garrett (1993 pp. 128-30) suggests that 12:4 is the final verse in an

inclusio consisting of 11:28, 29 and 12:3, 4 around an intervening section on behaviour

and its reward or punishment. Accordingly, the focus of the four verses which frame the

unit is the failure of the wicked to flourish through wealth and deceit, and the role both

the son and the wife have in the family:

11:28	בּוֹטֵחַ בְּעָשְׁרוֹ הוּא יִפֹּל וְכֶעָלֶה צַדִּיקִים יִפְרָחוּ	He who trusts in his riches will wither, but the righteous will flourish like green leaves
11:29	עוֹכֵר בֵּיתוֹ יִנְחַל־רוּחַ וְעֶבֶד אֱוִיל לַחֲכַם־לֵב	He who troubles his household will inherit wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise
12:3	לֹא־יִכּוֹן אָדָם בְּרֶשַׁע וְשֹׁרֶשׁ צַדִּיקִים בַּל־יִמּוֹט	No one finds security by wickedness but the righteous cannot be moved
12:4	אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל עֲטֶרֶת בַּעְלָהּ וּכְרָקָב בְּעַצְמוֹתָיו מְבִישָׁה	A woman of worth is the crown of her husband but she who brings shame is like rottenness in his bones

While I am not necessarily concerned with the intervening material, Garrett's

appraisal of the aforementioned verses is of interest in that his proposal adds weight to

the discussion on 11:16 and 22 above. He contends that 11:28 and 12:3 advocate

righteousness over wealth and cunning, whilst 11:29 and 12:4 focus on the behaviour of

the son (cf. 17:2) and the wife, thus connecting the pursuit of wealth with a focus on

family relationships. Garrett's conclusion is that the verses suggest that "rather than

focus his attention on making as much money as possible, a man should give thought to

the choice of a good wife and then to the spiritual nurture of his children. Above all else, he must conduct his own life with integrity if he expects the same from his family" (1993 p. 129).

As far as I am aware Garrett is alone in interpreting these verses in this manner. His interpretation is not without merit: all three verses considered to this point can be interpreted as being concerned with gender relations, rather than being a comment on a woman's character. Furthermore, Garrett's focus is on the man's choice of wife. In the discussion of 'contentious' wives below I will extend the focus from not only acquiring a wife but also maintaining a healthy marital relationship. Garrett also suggests that the emphasis of the unit is on the favour and disfavour of God (1993 p. 130). This provides a link with the next proverb which makes reference to the wife, 18:22, but before considering that verse there are some other observations I wish to make concerning 12:4 which relate predominantly to imprecise parallelism.

The use of *ʾēšet ḥayīl* calls to mind the image of the good wife portrayed in 31:10-31, although therein she is predominantly praised for her actions as opposed to her speech (31:26). More noteworthy, however, are the use of *ʾēšet ḥayīl* as opposed to *ʾiššâ maśkālet*, found only in 19:14, and the lack of *ʾēšet* or *ʾiššâ* in the second half-line.

The one who brings shame, the *məbišâ*, is the antithesis to the *ʾēšet ḥayīl* and is found only in 12:4. Her male counterpart appears in 10:5, 14:35, 17:2, in contrast to the *maśkîl* (astute, prudent), and in 19:26 and 29:15 in relation to both or one of his parents respectively. Its root, *bwš*, refers to shame and disgrace, denotes a person who is disgraceful or disappointing, and is used of a person in a subordinate relationship to another whether that is a son to his parents, a wife to her husband, or a slave to his master (Fox, 2009 p. 513). It seems unusual that when *məbišâ* is used in 12:4 the

opposing ʾiššâ maśkālet is not used, although she appears in 19:14, seemingly as a gift from God, in contrast to a household and wealth which are gifted from ancestors. Instead the term ʾēšet ḥayīl is used, with its obvious connection to the imagery in 31:10-31.

Also intriguing is the lack of ʾēšet or ʾiššâ in the second half-line, It might, as Heim suggests, be an ellipsis (2001 p. 148), and has been understood as such in traditional interpretation. However nowhere else in Proverbs is reference to wife and death connected; rather the husband is told that it is better to live in isolation than with a contentious wife, and images of death are more commonly associated with the Strange Woman. Hence, the omission of the wife might be deliberate: in the second half-line it is not the wife who is shameful but the Strange Woman who will cause rottenness to his bones, an allusion to his eventual death. Whilst this might be considered tenuous, of all the usages of *bwš* in the form of a participle in Proverbs, only in 12:4 and 14:35 does the participle not qualify an explicit noun. In all other cases (10:5, 17:2, 19:26, 29:15) it is the son who acts shamefully and in 14:35 it is a masculine participle. The feminine participle in 12:4 is the single occurrence in Proverbs. Further research into other occasions where the subject of the second half-line is not explicit is required to determine whether it should be interpreted as referring to an antecedent in the first half-line, or whether an alternative interpretation can be provided, as I am suggesting.

9.4.3 Proverbs 18:22 and 19:14

18:22	מָצָא אִשָּׁה מָצָא טוֹב וַיָּפֶק רָצוֹן מֵיְהוָה	He who finds a wife finds something good and obtains favour from the Lord
19:14	בַּיִת וָהוֹן נַחֲלַת אָבוֹת וּמֵיְהוָֹה אִשָּׁה מַשְׂכָּלֶת	A household and wealth are an inheritance from fathers but a prudent wife is from the Lord.

Proverbs 18:22 and 19:14 are not usually paired together, although Murphy suggests that 19:14b is confirmed by 18:22 (1998 p. 144). More usually 19:14 is understood as the counterbalance to 19:13 contrasting the prudent and contentious wives (Clifford, Fox, Heim, Kidner, and Waltke). Both 18:22 and 19:14 appear to suggest that the acquisition of a wife and receiving favour from the Lord are related although it is unclear as to which might come first: whether finding a wife invokes the Lord's favour as appears to be implied by 18:22, or a wife is a prize for having found favour (19:14).

In the context of Proverbs, obtaining a wife is to be perceived by the husband as a blessing from God, although human effort is required before it will be bestowed (Fox, 2009 p. 646). Hence God's favour is bestowed in correlation to an individual's pursuit of wisdom. The understanding of what makes a 'prudent' wife (19:14) is measured by male expectation and again I would suggest that a man's pursuit of wisdom will ensure that he treats a woman properly enabling her to be a 'good' wife in that she is neither contentious or brings him shame (if 12:4b is understood as referring to the wife). Although it might appear at first sight that the woman constitutes a prize for right behaviour, she is rather an outworking of the individual's pursuit of wisdom and right behaviour. In contrast, an inheritance is bestowed upon the recipient rather than earned, and 19:14 might suggest that the young man is not to be overly concerned with the individual pursuit of wealth. Reference to inheritance rules and the arranging of marriages is pertinent here: in the main the son is guaranteed his inheritance, particularly if he has not been foolish and ruined his father (19:13a) and the question arises as to whether 19:14 questions the son's loyalty to his parents or to God (Murphy, 1998 p. 144). Alternatively 19:14 may be interpreted as a question of the prudent wife's

ability to manage the inherited wealth in order to enable it to be passed to the next generation. Inheritance is guaranteed whereas a good wife is not. (Waltke, 2005 p. 108)

Unusually, in 18:22 no reference is made to the character or behaviour of either of the couple, and one assumes that both are deemed to be good, the man by virtue of the fact that he has received the blessing and the woman by implication. The LXX unnecessarily glosses wife with 'good', highlighting the perceived tension of the proverb.

According to Waltke, 18:22 signals the beginning of a new unit (18:22-19:23), which is broken down into three subunits: 18:22-19:7, 19:8-15, and 19:16:23. The introduction of the woman in 18:22 signals the beginning of the first subunit which deals with the 'moral ambiguities of wealth', the rich attracting companions and the poor losing them. Words for the poor person *rāš* (18:23, 19:1 and 19:7) and *dāl* (19:4) occur at the seams of the unit (18:23 and 19:7) and within the unit. Alongside the poor person is the companion, *rēaʿ* (18:24, 19:4, 7). Consequently, 18:23-19:7 can be further divided into three minor subunits: the first concerning failed companions (18:23, 24); the second, ethics and wealth (19:1-3); and the third, companions at court (19:4-7). The subunit's message is that companions are not to be trusted (they are unwise and capable of being bought), but it is introduced with the most intimate of companions, the wife, who presumably is to be trusted (Waltke, 2005 p. 93-94). This seems tenuous and I express again my reservations about the validity of the proposal that the inclusion of proverbs making reference to a woman signal shifts in subject matter. Heim (2013 p. 190) reasonably questions Waltke's assertion suggesting that in larger units there is a greater chance that mere coincidence will play its part rather than editorial strategy, although I am of course endeavouring to ascertain a more logical explanation for the

presence of women in these verses. Since I am unpersuaded by Waltke's proposal what other explanations might be offered for 18:22?

I have already noted a connection with 19:13 but another avenue of exploration is whether 18:22 can be linked back to 11:16, as the first verse in the collection to speak of a woman. There is a common link in terms of honour and favour but there is no evidence of variant repetition and the distance between the verses might suggest that any repetition may be coincidental rather than a deliberate editorial strategy. It seems highly improbable that a single unit might stretch over 220 verses, 37% of the total collection.

A more productive enquiry is to focus on speech. 18:20-21 form a proverbial pair, an inclusio formed by 'fruit' with reference to mouth, lips and tongue. The essence of the pair is that a man reaps not what he sows, but what he *says*, to the extent that it is a matter of life and death.

18:20	מִפְּרִי פִי־אִישׁ תִּשְׂבַּע	By the fruit of his mouth is a man's stomach sated
	בִּטְנוֹ תְּבוּאַת שְׂפָתָיו יִשְׂבָּע	the produce of his lips satisfies him.
18:21	מָוֶת וְחַיִּים בְּיַד־לָשׁוֹן	Death and life are in the hand of the tongue
	וְאֹהֲבֶיהָ יֹאכַל פִּרְיָהּ	those who love it will eat its fruit.
18:22	מָצָא אִשָּׁה מָצָא טוֹב	He who finds a wife finds good
	וַיָּפֶק רָצוֹן מֵיְהוָה	and so obtains favour from the Lord

The images of lips, mouths, fruit, of being sated, all conjure up a sensual perspective and call to mind the competing attractions of both Wisdom and the Strange Woman, one of whom leads to life, the other to death. This point does not go unnoticed by Van Leeuwen who, in a brief discussion on the nature of human speech, comments that v.21 plays on the feminine 'tongue', giving an erotic flavour and v.22, with its love

of the wife, parallels the love of Wisdom although he refers only to Wisdom and makes no reference to being sated (1993 p. 265). Heim initially considers van Leeuwen's proposal speculative but subsequently considers both 8:35 and 18:22, along with 12:2, part of a variant set (2013 pp. 186-192). In a development of van Leeuwen's proposal he offers three convincing proposals which support the inclusion of the woman for reasons other than the beginning of a new unit. In 8:35 personified wisdom is found and the reward for finding her is 'life' (18:21). Both wisdom and the female tongue of 18:21 are personified. Furthermore, 18:21 and 8:36 are the only occasions in Proverbs where the words 'love' and 'death' occur together, which suggests a deliberate editorial strategy, given that they are adjacent to 18:22 and 8:35. Hence Heim's conclusion is that van Leeuwen is correct to highlight intentional intertextual play and that 18:22 only makes sense when read in the light of 8:35.

I agree, although I would suggest that the allusion to lips, tongue and mouth also call to mind the dangers associated with the Strange Woman (5:3, 6:24, 7:5 and 21) and the common understanding of the dangers of her speech. This is further reinforced by the reference to being sated (*sbʿ*). However, contrary to the use of *sbʿ*, the image in 7:18 is of 'drinking one's fill' (*rwh*) which also appears with sexual connotations in 5:19, wherein the hope is that the man be satisfied by his wife's breasts. Proverbs 18:22, I would suggest, is deliberately placed after references to speech which have a sexual overtone. In the same way that the son is enticed into fantasising about a harmful relationship and then brought to his senses in the narration of the encounter with the Strange Woman (Proverbs 7),[73] 18:20-22 leads the son on a similar journey. Distracted by the sexual overtones of the first two verses he conjures up images of an illicit affair,

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[73] See the earlier discussion in Chapter 6..

only to be reminded sharply that he is to concentrate on finding a wife, who is both a blessing from the Lord and from whom he should take his delights. The inclusion of a woman at this point is not, contra Waltke, to provide an introduction to a shift in subject matter but rather is part of a cluster of Proverbs dealing with gender relations.

9.4.4   Proverbs 19:13 and 27:15

19.13	הַוֺּת לְאָבִיו בֵּן כְּסִיל	A foolish son is his father's ruin
	וְדֶלֶף טֹרֵד מִדְיְנֵי אִשָּׁה	and a constant dripping the contentions of a wife
27.15	דֶּלֶף טוֹרֵד בְּיוֹם סַגְרִיר	A continual dripping on a rainy day
	וְאֵשֶׁת מִדְיָנִים נִשְׁתָּוָה׃	and a contentious woman are alike

I evaluated 19:13 in the previous chapter and concluded that it marked a shift in focus from viewing the 'son' in terms of his relation with his parents, to his behaviour as husband and father. It introduces the 'contentious' wife, although as I noted in the previous chapter it is the nagging which is the cause of irritation in 19:13 rather than the wife herself. The contentious wife is a recurrent theme in the context of marital disharmony for whom, in terms of traditional interpretation, the woman is at fault (19:13; 21:9, 19; 25:24; 27:15). Heim includes 19:13b with 27:15-16 as a set (2013 p. 460), each word of 19:13b appearing in 27:15 and 27:16 included to aid interpretation of 27:15.

Waltke (2005, p. 107) and Heim (2013, p. 464) equate *dlp* (19:13b, 27:15a) with a leaky roof rather than 'dripping'. Fox notes the connection with roofs but chooses to translate as 'irksome dripping' (Fox, 2009 p. 654). Waltke perceives the nagging as taking place within the home, the very place the husband might expect refuge, and hence the roof leaking is a sign that all is not well at home. Heim equates the roof and wife suggesting that the writer wishes to draw attention to what they have in common,

essentially the provision of a place of comfort, but in this case the roof is dripping and the wife is nagging. Reference to the roof does indeed draw attention to the domestic setting of the home. However, it is sufficient to translate *dlp* as 'constant dripping', promoting imagery which suggests that the constant niggles of the wife, as opposed to the wife herself, are a cause for complaint. Like persistent rain the constant nagging is not confined solely to within the home. It is not the location of the nagging that the proverb wishes to focus on but on the persistency and the shame that it generates. The deficiencies of a roof only come to attention when it is raining whereas persistent rain erodes, both materially and emotionally. Waltke's comment (2005, p. 108), that the man can only escape the nagging by abandoning the home may be true of 21:9 and 25:24 but not necessarily in this case. Just as there is no let up on a rainy day, so there is no escape for the man. He who raises a foolish son cannot find reprieve, neither can he who causes his wife to nag. The progression from 19:13 to 27:15 is that the woman has become embittered, her character changed by the inconsideration afforded her (17:25). There is something permanent and persistent about the fate.

9.4.5   **Proverbs 21:9, 21:19 and 25:24**

Proverbs 21:9, 21:19 and 25:24 are identified by Heim as a variant set (2013 pp. 504-508). They continue to deal with the contentious wife in the domestic setting.

21.9	טוֹב לָשֶׁבֶת עַל־פִּנַּת־גָּג	Better to live on the corner of a roof
	מֵאֵשֶׁת מִדְיָנִים וּבֵית חָבֶר	than a contentious wife and a noisy household
21.19	טוֹב שֶׁבֶת בְּאֶרֶץ־מִדְבָּר	Better to live in a desert land
	מֵאֵשֶׁת מִדְיָנִים וָכָעַס[74]	than a contentious wife and grief
25.24	טוֹב שֶׁבֶת עַל־פִּנַּת־גָּג	Better to live on the corner of a roof
	מֵאֵשֶׁת מִדְיָנִים וּבֵית חָבֶר	than a contentious wife and a noisy household

9.4.5.1 Proverbs 21:9 and 25:24

The meaning of the term *bêt ḥāber* (21:9, 25:24) is disputed. It is commonly rendered either 'shared house' (Fox, Waltke, McKane), 'wide house' (Toy), or 'noisy household' (Heim) after J. Finkelstein's suggestion that *ḥāber* is connected with the Akkadian *ḫabārum* and its meaning 'to be noisy' (Finkelstein, 1956). Heim (2001 p. 292) originally translates it as 'sharing a house' but changes to 'noisy household' after Finkelstein, the reason being that 21:9, 25:24 and 21:19 then share the same syntactical structure (2013 p. 505). My own preference for the latter is that it fits better with 21:19 and its reference to *kaʿas* (grief). Fox's proposition, contra 'noisy household', is that the 'better than' formula calls for a desirable attribute, which 'noise' evidently is not (2009 p. 683). It does, though, suggest that 'shared house' is viewed as a positive attribute and is contrasted with the supposed isolation of living in the rooftop. If that were the case the same claim might be made for the emendation to *bayit rāḥāb* 'wide house' as suggested by Toy and Ehrlich (cited in Fox, 2009 p. 683), a reference to space as opposed to the confines of the rooftop.

Fox provides an excursus on 'better than' proverbs advocating that the basic structure in a 'complex better than' proverb takes the form of A + B > A´ + B´, wherein

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[74] Here, and in 25:24 I follow the universal acceptance of the Qere reading, in line with 21:9 but see my earlier footnote on Ora Brison's exploration of whether it refers to a Midianite.

A is less desirable than A´ and B is more desirable than B´ (2009 p. 597). Hence in the case of 21:9, 19 and 25:24 the structure is:

> better to live [alone] (A) in the corner of the rooftop/desert land (B)
> than [with] a contentious wife (A´) in a shared/spacious house (B´).[75]

Here, whilst the first half line is still more favourable than its counterpart, A is more desirable than A´ and B´ more so than B, although it is the alleged character of the wife which makes it so. This suggests that the proverb is *not* about spacious living arrangements, but the character of the wife which determines the comfort of the dwelling place. The alternative translation reads:

> better to live [alone] (A) in the corner of the rooftop/desert land (B)
> than [with] a contentious wife (A´) in a noisy household/and strife (B´)

In this case both A and B might be considered preferable to A´ and B´: solitude preferable to living with somebody who is contentious and the 'quiet' corner of the rooftop is preferable to a noisy household. The proverbs do not fit precisely Fox's pattern in that B is not considered a positive at the outset but, as Heim rightly points out, the proverbs share the same syntactical structure. All three proverbs promote solitude and lack of material comfort (either in terms of space (21:9, 25:24) or provision (21:19)) over and above living with a contentious wife and noisy household.

Heim's Set 81 includes 21:9, 21:19 and 25:24 and he concludes that 25:24 is the original from which the other two were adapted (albeit very slightly in the case of 21:9), given that there is no other material in the surrounding proverbs which provides a sufficient thematic link to constitute a contextual function (2013 pp. 504-508).

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[75] Fox designates 21:9 a 'simple template with two parts': "Better (A) to dwell in a desert land than (B´) with a contentious and angry woman", although its simplicity belies its complex paradigm (2009 p.597).

According to Heim, Proverbs 21:9 and 19 form the frame of a proverbial cluster, its theme being that solitude and humble circumstances are preferable to communal life in strife (2001 p. 294). Waltke advocates a section concerned with 'doing righteousness and justice' (20:29-21:31), the main body being 21:3-29 with an introduction (v.3) and three subunits: vv.4-8 (the wicked person's pursuit of wealth), vv.10-18 (the righteous triumph over the wicked), and vv.20-29 (the endurance of the righteous versus the death of the wicked). The three subunits are separated by statements about the 'contentious' wife (vv.9 and 19). Waltke asserts that "by the dramatic switch from wicked types of men to the wicked (i.e., quarrelsome) wife a sharp division is formed between the body's subunits … v.9 emerges as a janus linking the preceding and following sub-units about the wicked" (2005 pp. 159).

All interpretations, with the exception of Heim, view the wife's contentiousness as a character flaw inherent in the woman. Comparing the desert land with the corner of a rooftop implies, according to Heim, that the husband is being squeezed out and that the focus is not on the nagging wife but on strife in general, and the woman's presence is solely to maintain interest (2001 p.294). Whether this is the case is questionable on the basis of the scarcity of the material, given that the collections are not littered with references to women, as Heim's own calculations bear witness: of the total 595 verses in 10:1-29:27 only 30 (5%) include reference to a woman (Heim, 2008 p. 20). Each of the seven collections does indeed include at least one reference to a woman but the majority are found in chapters 1-9 and 31. One might question how the sage retains the son's interest elsewhere when there is no reference to a female.

Again, a potential avenue to explore is whether the appearance of the wife signals a discussion about gender relations. Looking at the material surrounding 21:9 it is not

immediately obvious that this is the case. The sub unit 21:4-8 is a comment on the wicked person's pursuit of wealth (Waltke, 2005 p. 170). However, drawing on the discussion of 11:16 and 22 above, where I argued that marital discord is seen as a result of a man's violent appropriation of wealth, 21:9 can be interpreted as a reminder again of the need to pay attention to the wife and family. It is better to live in humbler conditions with a content family, than to acquire great riches violently (15:17, 17:1).

9.4.5.2 Proverbs 21:19

I shall now turn to 21:19. Both Whybray (1994a p. 118) and Garrett contend that vv.20, 21, and 22 are connected, the rewards for doing right and, according to Garrett, with a close correspondence to vv.16-18. The contentious woman of v.19 forms a connection between the two: "The implication is that the poverty and trouble of vv.16-18 follow whoever has a quarrelsome wife, whereas the wealth and benefits of vv.20-22 attend the man who has a prudent wife" (Garrett, 1993 p. 182).

21:16	אָדָם תּוֹעֶה מִדֶּרֶךְ הַשְׂכֵּל בִּקְהַל רְפָאִים יָנוּחַ	The man that wanders from the path of prudence shall rest in the assembly of the dead
21:17	אִישׁ מַחְסוֹר אֹהֵב שִׂמְחָה אֹהֵב יַיִן־וָשֶׁמֶן לֹא יַעֲשִׁיר	He who loves pleasure will become poor he who loves wine and oil will not become rich
21:18	כֹּפֶר לַצַּדִּיק רָשָׁע וְתַחַת יְשָׁרִים בּוֹגֵד	The wicked becomes a ransom for the righteous and the treacherous for the upright
21.19	טוֹב שֶׁבֶת בְּאֶרֶץ־מִדְבָּר וָכַעַס מֵאֵשֶׁת מִדְיָנִים	Better to live in a desert land than a contentious wife and grief
21.20	אוֹצָר נֶחְמָד וָשֶׁמֶן בִּנְוֵה חָכָם וּכְסִיל אָדָם יְבַלְּעֶנּוּ	Desirable treasure and oil in the house of the wise but a foolish (*kəsîl*) man squanders it.
21:21	רֹדֵף צְדָקָה וָחָסֶד יִמְצָא חַיִּים צְדָקָה וְכָבוֹד	He who pursues righteousness and kindness finds life, righteousness and honour
21:22	עִיר גִּבֹּרִים עָלָה חָכָם וַיֹּרֶד עֹז מִבְטֶחָה	A wise man goes up against the city of the mighty and brings down the stronghold in which they trust

I agree that the verses form a unit but for a different reason than Garrett, primarily because he blames the woman for the man's misfortune, an unsurprising interpretation given traditional reading strategies. Rather, vv.16 and 21, with their reference to death and life, form a frame around a unit. Contrary to the wife being the cause of the man's ill fortune or otherwise, the unit's theme might be interpreted as the pursuit of righteousness and kindness, including how to treat a wife, over and above the pursuit of wealth. The image of wandering from the path of prudence (v16) conjures up the warning against the Strange Woman and the allusions of death (2:19; 5:5; 7:25-27), and serves as a reminder of the prudent wife of 19:14 and the 'beautiful and prudent' Abigail, wife of the 'harsh and evil' Nabal (1Sam 25:3). Pleasure seekers and lovers of wine (v.17) will not prosper and comparison can be drawn with Lemuel's mother's words in 31:3-4. In the corresponding 'good' statement (v.20) wine is replaced with ʾôṣār (treasure) which is to be desired. This is no longer material wealth but the 'prize' that comes from the Lord (19:14). The kəsîl does not appreciate what he has at home and is in danger of squandering it if he does not pay attention. He who chases after fleeting pleasures, leaving the path he should follow, rather than appreciating what he has at home, would have been better off had he chosen a life of isolation in the desert. The fault lies squarely with the fool, not the wife. The man is wise because he recognises that what he has at home are choice treasures (cf. 12:4; 17:6). Verse 22 echoes the maxim 'behind every great man is a great woman'. With the woman behind him he is able to overcome all obstacles (21:22). As we might expect, concern for the husband is still in focus, but whatever fault there may be is not wholly attributable to the wife.

Both 21:9 and 21:19 might be reinterpreted in light of their placing in sections concerned with the acquisition of wealth. There is undoubtedly an escalation from 21:9 to 21:19. A desert land is more isolated than the corner of the rooftop and, although the wife has not become any more extreme (in the sage's opinion, can the wife be anything worse than contentious?), a noisy household has become grief, implying an escalation from the noise of wayward young sons to the grief inflicted by foolish ones who should know better. A foolish son is grief to his father and bitterness (*memer*) to her who bore him (17:25). Hence the wife becomes contentious because she is dealing with both a foolish son and husband (see Chapter 8).

Interestingly, 25:24 is not located within the context of a discussion about the acquisition of wealth. Heim's assertion that it is the original statement from which 21:9 and 21:19 were copied, because the surrounding material does not provide a contextual function, appears justified. Waltke offers no reason for its location other than as part of a proverb pair (25:23-24, 25-46) using weather and water imagery, its theme being unexpected conflicts (Waltke, 2005 p. 332). It would seem then that there is a measure of consistency in terms of persistent rain and conflict.

9.5   Qumran 4QInstruction

My final consideration in this chapter is Qumran's 4QInstruction. The *Instruction* text, consisting of 1Q26, 4Q415-418 and 423, contains 'instructional' material similar to material found in Proverbs (Kampen, 2011 p. 36). What is particularly worthy of note is that within the text, a section is addressed to females: 4Q415 2ii is written in the second person feminine, a rare occurrence in wisdom literature. According to Kampen this suggests that, as addressees, women, although subordinate members of society, are considered to be responsible for their own actions and are to be treated as morally

responsible (2011 p. 58). The fragment of text which has not survived intact instructs the woman on marriage suggesting that she honour someone in the same way that she honour her own father, moving from obeying the authority of her father to that of her husband and his family (Goff, 2013 p. 32).

4QInstruction is interested in the ordinary life of its addressee and gives copious advice concerning wealth and poverty (Goff, 2013 p. 13). As already noted wealth and poverty are not a focus of this thesis, neither is 4QInstruction. However there would appear to be a connection in 4QInstruction between wealth and poverty and the relationship that the addressee is to have with the women in his life. Firstly, the addressee of 4QInstruction is not considered to be a person of wealth, rather somebody of modest means (Goff, 2013 p. 23) and this may explain the emphasis on borrowing and the repayment of debt within the instructions. Alongside this concern for wealth (or lack thereof) there is also an appeal to poverty in the metaphorical sense, with loyalty to parents expected (Goff, 2013 p. 25) and respect to the women in his life (Goff, 2013 p. 33), having taken a wife in poverty. Is it possible that such connection is to be made in Proverbs? Might the discussion of gender relations within Proverbs be set in the context of men who are endeavouring to establish themselves in society who may be tempted to pursue wealth and power and forget their obligation to their parents and their wives?

9.6   Conclusion

Camp's hermeneutical framework has no significant bearing on the interpretation of the portrayal of women in the intervening Proverbs collections and the binary representation of women in Proverbs 1-9 and 31:10-31 is reinforced in the traditional interpretations afforded to proverbs which include women. Consequently I have sought

to offer alternative interpretations than those provided by traditional interpretation for the proverbs relating to wives.

I began by considering why mention was made of the women given that in these collections it is relatively scarce. Initially rejecting Waltke's suggestion that the introduction of women signals a change in subject matter I proposed that 11:16 and 11:22 frame a proverbial cluster, the theme of which is that marital discord is a consequence of the inappropriate pursuit of, or obsession with, wealth. What the wife's concern is in terms of her husband's behaviour can only be surmised. It may be that her husband's attentions are focused elsewhere leaving little time and emotional energy to devote to his family, although this may be a preoccupation of modern western society. Alternatively a husband's business activities may place the family in fear of business associates and rivals, particularly if the husband risks property and well-being, gambling with his inheritance (19:44); or the violence which he exhibits to gain wealth (11:16) is not confined to his business dealings but spills over into the domestic setting. Finally her concern might have a more spiritual focus: her husband's pursuit of wealth will lead the family away from God. These concerns are not articulated in Proverbs, neither does it suggest that the wife has any control or influence over an unwise husband; rather she is reliant upon him acting wisely. A discussion of wealth and poverty within Proverbs is not within the remit of this study, and I am therefore unable to comment on whether those studies which have tackled the subject do so from a domestic perspective and particularly with a view to the impact on relationships. If not, then it would be an area for potential investigation.

Building on this foundation I questioned whether the woman in 12:4b is a wife or 'other', drawing upon the contrast with the Woman of Worth of 31:10-31 and, in so

doing, identified echoes of the narrative in Proverbs 7 in 18:22 with its sexual overtones. The theme of 19:13, 19:14 and 27:15 appeared to me to be the persistence of the complaint against the unwise husband, and 21:9 and 21:19 returned again to the subject of the inappropriate acquisition of wealth and its impact on the relationship.

My suggested interpretations challenge the almost universal assumption that the wife is inherently at fault. They suggest that the compilers of Proverbs were concerned with encouraging healthy gender relations, although these are from the male perspective as might be expected. My enquiries were also driven by the question of why the woman appears, given that there are comparatively few mentions of women within the sayings as opposed to the framework. To date few appear to have asked the question, an exception being Waltke who explains the inclusion of women as signalling a change in subject matter. Although it was not my original intention to challenge Waltke on this particular assertion, I would suggest that my interpretations offer a coherent argument against his general assertion that they represent divisions. Rather, the specific inclusions of women at particular junctures work with other proverbs to say something about the relationship between a husband and his wife and the priorities that the husband should have. Women are included in proverbs that have something specific to say in terms of gender relations. Whilst male concern continues to lie at the heart of the Proverbs collections, my interpretations challenge the assumption that the compilers and editors have little positive to say about certain categories of women.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the portrayal of certain women in the biblical book of Proverbs, namely the Strange Woman of Proverbs 1-9 and the unnamed 'mothers' and 'wives'. In doing so its aim was to ascertain the impact of traditional male-oriented reading strategies upon the portrayals of the characters and the interpretation of proverbial statements in which they appear, and to provide alternative interpretations which reflect more accurately the complexities of women's character, both as individuals and in their roles as wives and mothers. The following questions were explored: What impact, if any, does the structure of Proverbs have on the interpretation of female characterisations within it? Is it possible to identify women as the source of material contained within Proverbs, and if so, what impact might that have on existing interpretations and the potential to provide alternative ones? Can an exploration of poetic devices evident in the text itself, and editorial intention, give rise to the possibility of alternative interpretations?

In this concluding chapter I will summarise my findings, offer my conclusions and their implications and suggest avenues of exploration for future research.

10.1 Summary of findings

The first three chapters were the preliminary chapters with Chapter 1 offering an introduction to the thesis, Chapter 2 a review of scholarly contributions on women in Proverbs in the twentieth and twenty-first century, and Chapter 3 outlining the methodology and methods to be employed in the study.

In Chapter 4, by way of a literature review, I considered whether Proverbs 1-9 and 31 provide a hermeneutical framework for the Proverbs collections as a whole, and whether editorial intent might have an impact on the interpretation of female character and characterisation. My review showed that a major preoccupation in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries was the role of Proverbs 1-9 and 31 as a hermeneutical framework. Unsurprisingly perhaps, there is no overriding consensus for the existence of a hermeneutical framework; most scholars appear to favour the proposal, although debate exists as to whether both poems of chapter 31 are included. Of those who advocate a framework, the general sense is that the Woman of Worth is a symbolic portrayal; on the other hand, those who consider Proverbs 31:10-31 to be the finalisation of the collections, consider the woman's portrayal as real, albeit idealised. This coupling of the existence of the framework with the portrayal of the Woman of Worth in 31:10-31 obscures two lines of enquiry: firstly, the impact of a framework on the interpretation of proverbs within the intervening collections, particularly in respect of the predominance of binary female portrayals and the way in which they impact on the interpretation of women in the intervening collections; secondly, the identity of the creator of the portrayal of the Woman of Worth and any potential connection with the poem of 31:2-9, considered to be the single incidence of explicitly 'female' instruction in Proverbs.

Having 'decoupled' the portrayal of the Woman of Worth from the supposed editorial intent of a hermeneutical framework, Chapter 5 explored the potential for women to be identified as the source of material contained in Proverbs 31 by identifying literary genres associated with women and the involvement of women in public life. Setting aside the overwhelming presumption that Proverbs 31 was the work of males I

identified evidence of literary genres associated with female participation in public life within both poems of Proverbs 31, most notably the heroic genre associated with women welcoming home from their battles returning warriors. This suggests that women may have been the original source of the material contained within the poems and that the poems of Proverbs 31:2-10 and 31:10-31 may not be independent of one another, but the conversation between the mother and her son King Lemuel.

Two considerations arising out of this suggestion are the way in which women caution their sons against certain female characters and the way in which female-voiced material which is detrimental to some women is used by male authors and editors to create in the Woman of Worth an exceptional female character against which all other women could be compared. The answer to this conundrum takes us into the realm of how women achieve power and status within androcentric society, recognising that they may do so by speaking ill of other women. It is within this context that all women's speech in Proverbs should be analysed. It is insufficient to claim a female voice and simply move on; rather when it is identified the inclusion of women's voices and speech in such a male-dominated text should alert the reader to the espousal of an androcentric agenda which should be treated with suspicion.

If Chapter 5 alerted us to the presence of women speaking evil against women, my contention in Chapter 6 was that, in the case of the Strange Woman in Proverbs 7, the narrator of the encounter is a female voice who finds her place in society through the vilification of another woman. Exploring the identity of the Strange Woman in terms of the words used to describe her, I remain uncertain as to her precise identity and the threat she is perceived to represent, although I have sympathy with the notion that being a woman is perceived as a threat in itself. My investigations, however, highlight that the

literary devices used in the telling of the encounter, notably the *woman at the window* and the *say you are my sister* type scenes, and the employment of a smoke screen are what render the Strange Woman's speech, not the woman herself, as dangerous. Moreover, her speech is delivered by the narrator of the encounter, the *I persona*, whose identity I also explored. I concluded that it was possible that the *I persona* of Proverbs 7 is a woman's voice: confined behind a window the woman gains a place in society by protecting the 'status quo' and enhances her own reputation as a 'good' mother by warning against another woman whom she may secretly both admire and resent for enjoying freedoms which she is denied. Her inclusion in the text by a male scribe suggests a deliberate editorial policy designed to reinforce the notion that women can be dangerous and deceitful characters: while she believes herself to be acting as a 'good' mother she demonstrates that she is not to be trusted by speaking ill of her own kind.

In Chapter 7 I returned again to the question of female voices in Proverbs 1-9. Originally unpersuaded of the argument for a female voice for the whole of the ten lectures, I reconsidered the question following my claim for a female voice for the *I persona*. My quest became the search for the presence of the mother, given that the son is instructed not to forsake her teaching (1:8, 6:20). My investigations proved inconclusive in terms of categorically stating that the mother speaks in all ten lectures, although I highlighted the way in which the male-oriented interpretation strategy dominates interpretation, rather than paying attention to the way in which the text functions to produce meaning. My findings, rather than asserting categorically the mother's presence and voice, challenge the almost universal assumption that the father's voice alone is heard. Firstly, the setting for the material, as uncertain as it is, cannot categorically rule out the mother's presence. Secondly, my work highlighted that, in

terms of synonymous parallelism, the understanding that what happens to one parent happens to both is predominant thinking in Proverbs. However, whilst most scholars understand this to mean that the teaching is 'parental', the voice of the mother is then categorically rejected implying that the correct term should be 'paternal'. However, within the appeals there is little actual reference to the father in the text; rather there is frequent reference to the possessive pronoun 'my' which raises, in my mind, questions as to the long held assumption that it *must* be the father who speaks – an assertion borne out by the reading tradition as opposed to the text itself.

The focus of Chapter 8 was the portrayal of the mother in Proverbs 10-29 and whether any 'missing' mothers might be identified where the father was referred to in the first half-line but the mother missing from the second. It was possible to make a plausible, if not compelling, case for the mother's presence in 13:1b and I would want to suggest that the modern preoccupation with the word-pairing of mother and father as denoting parent, and the inclusivity of gender appropriate language in some of the more recent English translations obscures any potential subtleties within the text. Rather than being thought of as absent I want to suggest that the lack of any reference to the mother may be considered a deliberate ploy by the scribe to encourage the 'tutee' to recall to mind similar verses and hence to reinforce the message that the mother's role in the nurture of her children was not to be underestimated or ignored.

I am unconvinced that I found a more positive portrayal for the mother, although the focus of the statements was the impact of the son's behaviour upon her and therefore the quest may have been thwarted from the start. If I failed to provide a more positive portrayal of mothers in this context, I demonstrated that it is the mother who, in the main, bears the burden of wayward sons, whilst the father alone benefits from 'wise'

ones, and that there is a progression of the son's worsening behaviour and the impact on his parents throughout the collections. This culminates in 19:13 when the father is ruined and, surprisingly, the mother is no longer in focus. Instead she is replaced by the contentious wife. The son is no longer in the parental home. He has come full circle and is now the recipient of his own foolish behaviour; no longer is he the perpetrator of grief, but the recipient of his wife's constant nagging.

My interpretations, I would suggest, have been previously masked by the weight of the traditional interpretative strategy, which generally rejected the consideration of the impact of the son's behaviour on the mother alone.

Following on from her introduction in Chapter 8, the contentious wife was the focus of Chapter 9. The characterisation is traditionally understood as the wife who harangues her defenceless husband. I already provide an initial re-interpretation in my suggestion that she is the product of her husband's foolishness and my findings build on that suggestion. I contend that female imagery in Proverbs 1-9 and 31 with its polarised view of idealised women, Wisdom and the Woman of Worth, and the Strange Woman who is best avoided, does little to aid the interpretation of women in the intervening collections. Interpreters have generally viewed the portrayals in the same polarised light. However, setting aside the traditional interpretations and explaining away of references to women, the relative scarcity of their appearances in the proverbial statements alerts us to their presence and raises the question of why they are placed where they are.

In considering the location of proverbial statements referring to the contentious wife I have demonstrated that the verses are located in clusters which have as their theme the acquisition of wealth. Rather than being derogative to the wife, the statements

have more to do with the way in which the son treats her. The clusters suggest that the compilers of Proverbs were concerned with encouraging healthy gender relations, although these are from the male perspective as might be expected.

Although not an original intention, my findings in respect of the contentious wife challenge Waltke's assertion that the inclusion of women signals a change in subject matter. Contentious women are included in proverbs that have something specific to say in terms of gender relations.

In conclusion, male concern continues to lie at the heart of Proverbs and I recognise that in endeavouring to lay claim to women's contribution to the text and alternative interpretations I have been swimming against a strong tide of traditional interpretation. I cannot claim to have reversed the tide, although my findings challenge the weight and assumed certainty of the interpretative tradition, both in terms of the portrayal of women and the function of poetic device in producing meaning within a text. As a resource for the development of wise behaviour Proverbs offers rich pickings which are less popular than they might have once been. The difficulty for those sensitive to gender issues is its assumed binary portrayal of women. In response to this, where seemingly negative portrayals were identified, I have offered alternative interpretations, laid claim to the possibility of female voices therein and suggested proverbial clusters hitherto unidentified. Furthermore I have demonstrated the ways in which the editorial strategy can facilitate the reinforcement of an androcentric agenda, something to which all interpretation should be attentive.

10.2 Areas for future research

Throughout the course of this study I have endeavoured to find women's voices, working from the hermeneutical perspective that women are not the recipient of the material. Interestingly, a fragment of 4QInstruction, 4Q415 2 ii, is generally understood to be addressed to a woman encouraging her to be faithful to her husband, and therefore suggests gender relations as its subject. The implication of a woman being addressed by wisdom material is an interesting development and further work in this area might prove fruitful.

In respect of the relationship between the Qumran scripts and Proverbs, specifically in terms of female characterisation, I am aware of Matthew Goff's *Hellish Females: The Strange Woman of Septuagint Proverbs and 4QWiles of the Wicked Woman (4Q184)* (2008) and Sidney White Crawford's *Lady Wisdom and Dame Folly at Qumran* (1998). Comparison with other ancient Near Eastern literature has not been a feature of this study. I would suggest that further exploration of the similarities, from the same perspective that I have taken, may prove a fruitful exercise.

All other suggestions for further work derive from my investigations in Chapter 9. Firstly, the subject of Chapter 9 was the contentious wife. I did not consider women described as strange or prostitutes within Proverbs 10-29 (e.g. 22:14, 23:33 23:27). This could potentially be an area for further development, particularly in respect of the impact of the portrayals of the feminine in Proverbs 1-9 upon the descriptions.

Secondly, in my discussion of the difficulty in translation of 11:16a I noted Fox's preference for emendation of the text, on the basis that the emended text offered what might be expected. I, in contrast, proposed an alternative interpretation which subverted

the usual narrative. The scope of this study does not allow for an investigation into the possibility of other verses which subvert the usual narrative but it could prove a fruitful exercise to be undertaken in the future.

Thirdly, I discussed the 'missing' wife of 12:4. I suggested that, although tenuous, it might be possible that it is not the wife who causes rottenness in the husband's bones, but rather the Strange Woman. Further research into other occasions where the subject of the second half-line is not explicit may prove beneficial in determining whether the subject of the second-half-line should always be interpreted as referring to an antecedent in the first half-line.

Fourthly, as far as I am able to determine, no other exploration of the editorial placing of individual proverbs relating to the contentious woman has been developed, other than Waltke's explanation that they signify shifts in subject matter. One might reasonably conclude that shifts in subject matter elsewhere in the collections are signalled by proverbs which do not make reference to a woman. Although not within the remit of this thesis, a further potential area of study could be to identify the possible variances in the way thematic sections are introduced by single-line educative proverbs.

Finally, I touched briefly on 4QInstruction in my discussion of the contentious wife and her appearance in the context of discussions about the acquisition of wealth. A discussion of wealth and poverty within Proverbs is not within the remit of this study, and I am therefore unable to comment on whether those studies which have tackled the subject do so from a domestic perspective and particularly with a view to the impact on relationships. If not, then it could be an area for potential investigation, as would an exploration of the Qumran material in the same vein.

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