Proverbs 31-01:

Why is the Woman of Valour of Proverbs 31:10-31 so hard to find?

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September 2018
Dissertation submitted as partial requirement for the degree of MA by Research in Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Nottingham

Table of Contents

Contents

Acknowledgments....2
Abstract....3
Introduction....4
Chapter One: Reception Theory and the Contemporary Reception of Proverbs....7
Introduction....7
Reception Theory: Origins....7
Horizons of Expectation and Mediation between Horizons....10
Pre-understanding, Tradition and Paradigm Shifts....12
Applications to Biblical Interpretation....14
Theoretical Considerations and Dependence on Parris....16
Literature Review: Proverbs, Court or Popular Origin....19
Proverbs 1-9 and 31: A Hermeneutical Framework for the Book....29
Proverbs 31: Persian and Greek Socioeconomic Comparisons....34
Conclusion....41
Chapter Two: Translation and Word Study of Proverbs 31:10-31....42
Introduction....42
Methodology: Allusion or Intertextuality?....42
Word Study: חיל and Other Military Related Terms....46
Word Study: Colour, Fabric and Clothing....60
Conclusion....68
Chapter 3: Mediating Between Horizons with the Book of Ruth....69
Introduction....69
Allusions in the Book of Ruth....71
Unnecessary Rivalries and Grounding the Woman of Valour: Specific Studies on the Intertextuality between Ruth and Proverbs 31:10-31....79
Conclusion....84
Conclusion....86
Bibliography....88

Acknowledgments

I would firstly like to give thanks to my supervisors, Dr. Tarah Van De Wiele and Dr. Carly L. Crouch who have both supported me at both, the undergraduate level and during my current studies. I would also like to thank Dr. Sara Parks who supported and encouraged me throughout the year. Their help throughout my time in academia has been most appreciated and without their support and encouragement this project would likely not have come to fruition.

Secondly I would like to thank my fellow students and friends Cat Quine, Ellie Lyell, and Michael Bullock, who have endured my ramblings for the past few months about Proverbs scholarship and the frustrations this has caused. Without them I would have undoubtedly ended up a mad hermit amongst a pile of books, steeped in uncertainty.

Finally, I would like to thank the Midlands 3 Cities training partnership which provided the funding for my studies this year. Without said funding I would have been unable to dedicate myself to a year of study as I have done.

Abstract

This dissertation focuses on Proverbs 31:10-31, the poem about the *eset hayil,* the co-called 'woman of valour'. Chapter one will use Reception Theory to show how scholarship on Proverbs, especially discussions about the school/royal court or folk/clan origin of Israelite wisdom, has influenced the interpretation of Proverbs, creating a pre-understanding or research paradigm within which researchers think. I will show how specific interpretations of Proverbs 31:10-31 as part of a hermeneutical framework or inspired by a particular social setting have been influenced by this research paradigm.

Chapter two will begin with a literary analysis, discussing the structure and content of Proverbs 31:10-31 and translation difficulties. A more focused word study will pick out key words and ideas in the poem, including military, industry, and action language, in an attempt to reconstruct the horizons of expectations (as understood in Reception Theory) of the original author. From this, I will identify specific motifs and images used by the poem, considering how they are used here and whether they are used similarly here as elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible—that is, whether they reaffirm an established literary motif or image, or go against other uses, challenging the horizons of expectation.

Chapter three, perhaps the most speculative part of the project, will undertake an intertextual analysis of the poem, in conversation with the book of Ruth. These texts share a number of similarities, including their focus on women who work for the benefit of home and family, who are both identified as an *eset hayil* and praised in the gates of the city for their documented deeds. This will build up to an analysis of the term *eset hayil* itself, to determine whether we should change our understanding of the term from a person to something more akin to a title or accolade someone earns. This would transform the overall function of 31:10-31 from advice literature for the male elite to a song of praise.

Introduction

Within the Hebrew canon the book of Proverbs is the last book to appear in the trilogy of wisdom books. While Job and Qohelet take the form of a dialogue, often from a sceptical point of view about life and God, Proverbs stands in a positive frame, proposing that life is inherently good, should one follow the path of wisdom and righteousness. However, this message does not resonate at the same level within each section of the book, most notably the final chapters 30-31. This section of appendices is subdivided even further into four distinct and separate pieces: 30:1-9, 30:10-33, 31:1-9 and 31:10-31. This final section, the poem of the אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל, or Woman of Valour, will be the focus of project. This poem stands out within the book due to its acrostic nature, but also within the Hebrew canon due to the fact that it addresses the Woman of Valour's achievements in a fashion typically reserved for men. This has led to it being seen as somewhat of an enigma within both the book and the canon, with discussions focused on whether she is a real woman or a symbol of something larger and greater than herself. The aims of this study are to look at how contemporary commentators have perceived the text, as well as to explain some of the specific motifs and language used in the poem and how the original author may have understood them. In doing so I hope to shed new light on the poem, pointing out some of its unique features as well as deepening the understanding of who and for what reason someone might be deemed an אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל.

This study will be split into three chapters. The first chapter will be a literature review, albeit not in the usual sense of discussing what various commentators have thought about the Woman of Valour; rather, I will focus on where commentators believe Proverbs originated and how this has influenced interpretations of the Woman of Valour. There are two schools of thought surrounding the origin of Proverbs: that it is a product of an elite school system linked to a male scribal wisdom class, or that it is a product of a grassroots folk wisdom tradition owned by the general

population. Although the two schools rarely interpret Proverbs 31:10-31 to fit in with their theory, more specialised studies on Proverbs 31:10-31 make use of these two theories to identify the poem as advice literature aimed at young men, typically of an elite social standing. This is but a brief snippet of a larger debate, which will be explained in greater depth throughout this chapter. In order to do so I will use Reception Theory, originated by Hans Robert Jauss but facilitated through David Parris. This theory considers how the reader of a text brings their own prejudices or horizons of expectations to a text naturally colouring their interpretation.[1] By incorporating Reception Theory into this discussion I will be able to account for how this wider debate of school or popular origin affects the specific interpretation of 31:10-31 specifically, by highlighting preconceptions we as modern scholars bring to the text.

From here I will begin the analysis of the poem itself. Methodologically, I will be using Reception Theory once more, undertaking a word study, the aim of which is to show how the author of the poem made use of specific words and how the author would have understood these words and their meaning within the poem. This is referred to as a reconstruction the original horizon of expectation of a text, which allows us to see how this text could have also challenged or affirmed the horizons of expectation of the original audience. Doing so also allows us to recognise the temporal distance between ourselves and the text, without reducing it to a product of the past, but rather considering it as a product which had an impact on its audience, both then and now. I will also discuss the use of allusion between texts, and how the author of Proverbs 31:10-31 could have been playing off well established motifs or ideas, and how these motifs are transformed in the poem.

[1] David Paul Parris, *Reception Theory and Biblical Hermeneutics*, (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2009). Parris will be my main source for Reception Theory due to the simplicity with which he explains Jauss' theory and how it can be applied to biblical studies and interpretations specifically.

In the final and third chapter, I will approach the poem from an intertextual perspective, using the concepts of Reception Theory and allusion as detailed in chapter two, by looking at the book of Ruth and how it alludes to and makes use of the poem and the title אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל. In isolation we cannot glean anything about the wider use and understanding of this title from Proverbs 31:10-31, but by looking at the use of similar phrases outside of Proverbs, such as in the book of Ruth, we can begin to build a larger semantic field for the title within the Hebrew Bible. Just as we would not expect a single literary classic to teach the full extents of the English language, we cannot make similar demands of the book of Proverbs. By looking at multiple occurrences of this title, we can deepen our understanding of the title and begin to appreciate its real significance despite the limited information we have. This will also allow us to mediate between the original and new horizons, exposing the different meanings we have ascribed to words within the Hebrew language through translation, and how those meanings are either affirmed or challenged.

Chapter One: Reception Theory and the Contemporary Reception of Proverbs

Introduction

In this first chapter I begin by explaining the origins of Reception Theory and its main concepts, especially focusing on horizons of expectation, how we are to mediate between horizons of expectation, and how a pre-understanding of a text affects interpretation. I will then discuss how the debate between a school or royal court origin of Proverbs, versus a popular or folk origin, has taken the main stage of Proverbs scholarship and how this creates a preunderstanding for scholarly interpretations. Finally, I will consider more specific interpretations of Proverbs 31:10-31, such as Camp's and McCreesh's hermeneutical framework theory and various sociological readings, such as Lang and Yoder. In these last two sections, my aim will not be to refute these interpretations as inherently wrong, but rather to expose how they do not necessarily reflect the original function or meaning of the poem.

Reception Theory: Origins

Reception Theory developed in Germany under Hans Robert Jauss, who built upon the work of his supervisor Hans-Georg Gadamer.[2] Jauss' concerns related to a crisis of literary history as adopted from the nineteenth century.[3] The field's use of positivist historical methodologies usually took the form of two different studies, either: overarching general studies based on texts with the same genre, or by studies considering an author's "life and works."[4] Jauss argued that it was inherently problematic to approach texts in this way, because as "the text is detached from the creative act and you are only left with the traces or relics of a creative

[2] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 113.
[3] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 119.
[4] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 120.

mind."[5] The first method does not give due credit to the author and their reasons for partaking in the genre, while the second method allows for lesser known authors and works to slip through the cracks, when such things can anticipate larger works or movements.

In order to rectify this problem Jauss turned to Marxist and Formalist literary theory, each theory resolving certain deficiencies of the other and blending to provide a solution to the problem Jauss had identified. Marxism's strength lay "in its emphasis on the idea that art and literature were not independent activities but are part of the life process, and only when this is considered does history cease to be a collection of lifeless facts."[6] Unlike a positivist approach, which objectified the text and denied it any formative function, Marxist theory argued that society and culture is reflected through the art and literature it produces. Yet, while art and literature could reflect a society, Marxist theory argued that they "could only reflect what was already known within that social or historical horizon."[7] Art and literature were thus given a more formative function than they had previously been allowed, but their formative ability was limited with the theory denying that any revolutionary aspects could be found in a text. Juass argued that such restrictions were the ultimate weakness of Marxism because it again reduced the creative mind to something which can only affirm one's expectations rather than challenge or dismantle them. In order to overcome this, "one must recognize the double character of literature; it not only expresses reality but it also creates reality."[8] As such, Jauss argued that "literature is not only a product of social influences and serves as repository of culture, it also performs a socially formative function."[9]

[5] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 120.
[6] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 121.
[7] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 121.
[8] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 122.
[9] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 122.

Jauss incorporated Formalism in order to overcome this deficiency in Marxist literary theory. Formalism's main aim was to raise literary theory to the same level of more 'scientific' methods, but most importantly to stress "the idea that a text was an aesthetic entity which reflected reality through its own internal structures."[10] Such internal structures could be the poetical language or the plot devices which challenge the expected horizons of the audience. This lines up with Formalism's key thesis, namely, that "literature is to present something in an unexpected or novel manner and thus disrupt our habitual patterns of recognition."[11] These breaks in convention or of recognition are novel only at the point of their conception, after which they become part of literary history. Parris sums this up neatly by stating that "the elements of defamiliarization that were new and unexpected for the original audience have been 'levelled down' and become part of the horizons of expectations for successive generations of readers."[12] However, in a reversal of the Marxist approach, Formalism was only willing to accept this historical aspect of a text, and paid little to no attention to the surrounding social context outside of the text. Jauss thus argued that "if Marxism failed because it did not consider the aesthetic dimension of reception, Formalism suffered from a lack of historical perspective."[13] By mediating between these two ideas he reached a thesis which is both conscious of the historical and cultural context that a text was formed in, but also of the fact that a text has the potential to disrupt the expectations of its context and present new ideas. Finally, Jauss emphasised the importance of the reader or audience to recognise their own reception of the text, both as a singular piece and as part of a larger chain of reception. This self-awareness was critical as "the reception of a text may take a wide spectrum of reactions in different horizons of

[10] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 124.
[11] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 124
[12] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 126.
[13] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 127.

readers, including the manner in which a text may affirm the accepted norms and conventions of the readers."[14]

Horizons of Expectation and Mediation between Horizons

In order to understand the aim of Reception Theory, we must understand horizons of expectation, and the significance of these horizons in the reception of a text. Jauss appropriated the concept from Gadamer, but adapted it with the help of E. H. Gombrich, who related it to "primarily and not exclusively, to the expectations a reader brings to a text." These expectations are built upon our experiences of art and literature, which cause us to approach new texts - new in the sense of not having experienced them yet - with a predetermined expectation of how a book or other examples of a particular genre will play out. Parris especially emphasises how our horizons of expectation are intrinsically different from the original audience's expectations. For example, "even the title we apply to this parable (the 'Good' Samaritan) betrays this fact" - the original audience did not expect the Samaritan to be good, whereas we already know that he is.[15] For Jauss, recognising this is critical to Reception Theory: we experience the text in a wholly different way compared to the original audience, for whom this parable challenged and disrupted their normal expectations. Jauss argued that it is imperative that interpreters recognise that they are bound to their particular historical horizon, but that interpreters cannot approach these studies objectively by bracketing their own horizon of expectation.[16] According to Jauus, the attempt to look at a text objectively by bracketing one's own expectations and historical background, presupposed an understanding of the text from its original perspective, regardless of temporal distance. Jauss proposed instead that we cannot guarantee that we will understand

[14] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 137.
[15] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 135.
[16] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 148.

a text, because "historical distance alienates the reader from the text and creates a need for reflective mediation between the horizons of the text and the reader."[17] In order to recognise how our expectations of a text are different from the original expectations of the author, we must attempt to reconstruct the original horizon of expectation. Even so, this reconstruction is not a guarantee of understanding; rather it is an attempt to recognise the temporal distance between the original horizon of expectations and our own. Thus:

> It allows the critic to determine the literary merit of the work as it appeared in its first horizon based on how the text affirmed or negated the norms of that horizon and how a reception of a text shifted over time… it also allows the reader to experience the 'alterity' of the text.[18]

This differed from Gadamer's thesis, which stressed the importance of both the original and current horizon of readers but argued that, through interpretation, these horizons of expectations fuse together to create a new set of expectations.[19] However, Jauss criticised this due to the fact that this fusion of horizons would seemingly equated to a form of guaranteed understanding, by reducing the historical alienation between the original horizon of the text and the current reader.[20] Instead, Jauss proposes a mediation of horizons of expectations, where "the mediation between the horizons of expectations takes place in two different movements which are interrelated. It must mediate between the original inception and present experiences."[21] Because of this mediation between horizons rather than fusion of horizons, each reconstruction of the original

[17] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 150.
[18] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 152.
[19] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 152.
[20] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 152.
[21] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 153.

horizon shifts depending on the horizon from which the reconstruction takes place. After all, "all understanding, even historical reconstruction, takes place within a horizon of expectations."[22] This means that while we are able to account for how interpretations of a text shift and change throughout time, each attempt at a historical reconstruction leads to a different set of questions and answers. When we attempt our own reconstruction of the historical horizon "the questions we ask should be directed to discovering the questions the author sought to answer, but we must keep in mind that the questions we ask are conditioned by our contemporary interests."[23] Thus we must always be in a state of mediation, attempting to reconstruct the original horizon of expectations of the author and the text, while conscious of how our own horizon of expectations impacts our reconstruction.

Pre-understanding, Tradition and Paradigm Shifts

Another theory that Jauss developed and expanded from Gadamer concerned the importance of "classic" texts within long-standing traditions of interpretation, as examples of Reception Theory at work. "Classic" refers not to a specific time period but rather "to how a text exists or is preserved through history… the manner in which an enduring element of the classic continues to address successive historical horizons."[24] Gadamer proposeds that classic texts, such as the *Iliad*, possess a timeless aspect. This means that no matter how far the temporal distance between its original audience and each successive generation, new interpretations continue to come to light.[25] Because of this timelessness, a tradition begins to build around this constant reinterpretation of a text, with each successive interpretation, building off older interpretations, while creating new meaning to satisfy current expectations. Thus "as a

[22] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 155.
[23] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 163.
[24] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 277.
[25] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 279.

tradition progresses, previous interpretations and other works on a classic shape the pre-understanding of successive generations of readers." [26] The danger of this is that one interpretation becomes dominant and interpretation thus becomes repetition: "if a classic is not presented in manner that protects its 'otherness,' then it is in danger of being assimilated into the present horizon of expectation."[27] This repetition is something Jauss and Reception Theory wished to overcome. Jauss does not give as much power to the endurance of classic texts as Gadamer. "As times passes and the horizon of expectations shift, such a work will quickly become irrelevant and forgotten as the reader's prejudices change."[28] Jauss thus stresses the reader's power to make a text into a classic or to remove that status from it, should a text no longer challenge or stimulate dialogue within successive horizons.

What then happens when a text has fallen from the status of a classic? Jauss argues that "one of the goals of Reception Theory is to provide a means by which classic texts, which have fallen from their classical status, may be rescued from the dust of history."[29] Building on Thomas Kuhn's ideas of paradigm shifts in science, Jauss argued that when a text has reached this point our thoughts about the text in questions requires a paradigm shift.[30] Kuhn's theory of paradigm shifts considers how science responds when an anomaly it cannot resolve within the current bounds of research comes to light. In Kuhn's thesis, "paradigms" refer to "more than theories; they also include the constellation of a group's commitments and beliefs… this involves symbolic generalisations that are employed by the group… models that provide metaphors and analogies for explanations." Not only does a paradigm "provide the context in which researchers learn the rules of their discipline and how to apply them. At the same time, a paradigm

[26] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 286.
[27] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 290.
[28] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 285.
[29] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 287.
[30] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 173.

restricts the questions that can be asked and the range of answers that the community will accept."[31] Thus paradigms provide frames for research, as well as what questions research should ask and what answers it should respond with - but these paradigms are not concrete and can be disrupted when data which the paradigm cannot process is revealed. In the sciences Kuhn identified three ways of rectifying such a disruption of a current paradigm: "in some instances, the paradigm may eventually provide a solution. The anomaly may be labelled unsolvable and set aside… or in the final instance, a new paradigm may emerge from the crisis."[32] Jauss suggested that paradigm shifts in literary history occur when the dominant paradigm "is no longer capable of explicating the text in a relevant manner."[33] However, new research paradigms do not simply appear out of thin air or via mere speculation. Rather, "the criteria by which a new paradigm is judged to be successful, and the degree to which it replaces the old paradigm, is based on its ability to answer questions that the old paradigm could not."[34] A new paradigm also has the potential to lift a fallen text back "from the dust" for further interpretation, asking new questions that previous paradigms did not think of or could not answer in the previous horizon of expectation. Because the new paradigm must address the deficiencies of the old paradigm, the old paradigm acts as the basis for the preunderstanding of the new.

Applications to Biblical Interpretation

Thus far I have given a general overview of Jauss' Reception Theory, as explained by Parris who further fine tunes the theory to make it more applicable for biblical interpretation. One of the first changes Parris proposes is that while Jauss stresses the importance of mediating between the original and contemporary horizons of expectations, there is

[31] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 178.
[32] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 181-182.
[33] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 184.
[34] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 187.

sometimes an implied audience within the text for a biblical text. For instance, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, there are clearly two horizons of expectations at work: the one behind the author, but also an audience within the text. The parable challenges both of these horizons of expectations.[35] This is something that I will consider myself when looking at the reception of Proverbs, because it has often been argued that the book contains an implied audience of an upper class son being taught the ways of wisdom.[36]

Moreover, the Hebrew canon itself also has an implied audience and thus requires a conscious mediation of contemporary horizons of expectations, the horizon of expectation of the collectors and editors of the canon, and the horizon of expectations of the original author. Treating the Bible as a classic text also requires us to recognise that commentaries on the Bible can themselves become classic texts, influencing the pre-understandings, research paradigms, and horizons of expectations that contemporary scholars bring to their interpretations. Thus, Parris labels the Bible as a foundational classic which allows other classics, typically in the form of commentaries, to emerge from the interpretation of the foundational classic. Parris concludes that "classical commentaries" - though also arguably any commentary which has gained significance within a field - "and theological works partially constitute our pre-understanding of the Bible and determine to a certain degree what we recognise in the text."[37]

[35] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 154.

[36] Jeanette May Hartwell, "Wisdom, Strange or Somewhere in Between: In Search of a Real Woman in the Book of Proverbs, (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2017), 10, Hartwell notes that that while scholars no longer ignore the portrayal of women within Proverbs as they engage with the text they continue to advocate interpretations based upon binary representations assuming that the author or voice of the text is male, without out justification.

[37] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 290.

Theoretical Considerations and Dependence on Parris

Before moving to the literature review, there are some theoretical considerations to note concerning the limitations of and current problems facing Reception Theory and its theorists, which have in turn led me to depend on Parris' version of Reception Theory. In Luz's commentary on Matthew he uses the term *Wirkungsgeschichte*, which Linss summaries as the text's "history of influence."[38] Luz largely follows the Gadamerian/ Jaussian scheme as explained by Parris, but offers little in the way of actual methodical structure about how to use Reception Theory. He defends his choice to use the method, despite the limitations of his own study, on the basis that "the history of the influence of biblical texts is infinite; the knowledge of every commentator is finite."[39] This is by far the most common critique that reception theorists have to defend themselves against, though Susan Gillingham, who has done extensive work on the reception history of the Psalms, claims that such accusations are true for all methodologies. Gillingham argues that "reception history, because of its breadth and scope, sometimes highlights this limitation particularly clearly,"[40] insofar as detailing the history of interpretation for anything, let alone the Bible (which has been commented on for centuries), requires some form of limitation, either in content or detail. This is linked to the other problem that Reception Theory faces: Reception Theory recognises that it cannot approach a topic from a value-free perspective and rather acknowledges that our values will affect the reception of a text and its previous receptions. For instance, Gillingham's work with Psalms 1 and 2 and their reception considers both psalms from a Christian and Jewish perspective, but this perspective is "'frozen' in a particular time and place and culture… that of a western, English, white,

[38] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Continental Commentary*, translated by Wilhelm C. Linss, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 95.
[39] Luz, *Matthew*, 98.
[40] Susan Gillingham, "Biblical Studies on Holiday?" in *Reception History and Biblical Studies: Theory and Practice*, edited by Emma England & William John Lyons, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 17-30, 26.

middle-aged woman."[41] Others, such as Evans and Vasuqez, have also argued that we need to be aware that efforts to reconstruct horizons of expectations within the reception of a text have "a *hypothetical* character"[42] due both to the fact we are "frozen", as well as due to the fact that we are limited in how much we can survey. Evans thus describes the outcome of such reconstructions as a "thick description," using terminology borrowed from Clifford Greetz; it is an attempt to "relate to an experience which is not our own, without (merely) identifying it with our own."[43] Any attempt to establish a reception history of a text must be recognised as *a* reception of the text, rather than *the* reception of a text. Yet, as stated by Parris, one of the key aims of reception history is to offer new interpretations and explanations of a text that provide a relevance to the contemporary horizon of expectation, while preserving the original.[44] No reception of a text will ever reach the same conclusions, but will reveal new ways in which people and communities interact with texts and their history.[45]

With regard to my dependence on Parris' interpretation of Reception Theory over other scholars and their methods, the main reason for this is that Proverbs has received little attention in the way of reception through other media such as art, liturgy, music, and literature. Analysis of these types of reception have been executed by scholars such as Gillingham in

[41] Gillingham, "Biblical Studies," 25.
[42] Victor Manuel Morales Vasquez, *Contours of a Biblical Reception Theory: Studies in the Rezeptionsgeschichte of Romans 13.1-7*, (Goettingen: V&R Unipress, 2012), 77.
[43] Robert Evans, *Reception History, Tradition and Biblical Interpretation: Gadamer and Jauss in Current Practice*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 40.
[44] Cf. Note 29.
[45] For instance, one of the few examples of a non-white, non-western, and female receptions of Proverbs 31:10-31 is Madipoane Joyce Masenya's 1996 doctoral dissertation *Proverbs 31:10-31 in a South African Context: A Bosadi (Womanhood) Perspective,* which specifically interprets the poem of 31:10-31 from a perspective which is fundamentally different from my own and many other proverbs commentators, due to reception of the text in South Africa, where previously "the Bible was often used to legitimate the oppression of black people in South Africa" (2). She is also challenged by the fact that when Black Theology reclaimed the Bible "they also failed to challenge the all-male biblical scholarship" (4). Masenya's reception of the text will be a very specific version, but one that brings a text from the past back to the foreground with new questions and answers for a contemporary audience.

A Journey of Two Psalms[46] and O'Hear.[47] Proverbs, in comparison to texts such as the Psalms, Matthew, and Revelation, has not received much attention from artists, poets, or writers. Proverbs' contents does not lend itself to be received and transformed into a different form of media in which it can inform and inspire its audience. Rather, the reception of Proverbs has been limited to scholarly study and exegesis. This means that the methods deployed by Gillingham and others are of little use, because there is no corpus of secondary material to analyse. Parris, because of his close reading and appropriation of Jauss, has created a theory that favours looking at a text's interpretation in scholarly traditions, and research paradigms as, rather than its interpretation in artistic media. The theory as articulated by Parris and Jauss thus more naturally lends itself to the study of commentaries and monographs, determining their contribution to the research paradigm that exists around the book and their significance as contributors to our pre-understanding of the book of Proverbs. This approach could be categorised as 'reception through exposition,' one of the five categories of reception history that Gillingham outlines (though she does not discuss a concrete methodology by which to conduct such studies.)[48]

Alongside my use of Jauss and Parris, in attempting to recreate the original horizon of expectation for Proverbs 31:10-31 I will analyse the use of allusion and intertextuality between it and other texts in the Hebrew Bible. By looking at examples of intertextuality in the poem, I will be able to highlight both unique motifs and themes used in the poem as well as instances of the author using well-established motifs. This will allow me to assess if the use of these motifs by the author of Proverbs

[46] Susan Gillingham, *A Journey of Two Psalms: The Reception of Psalms 1 and 2 in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), chap. 7 for art, 157-191, chap. 8 for music, 192-233, and chap. 9 for poetry, 234-260.

[47] Natasha F. H. O'Hear, *Contrasting Images of the Book of Revelation in Late Medieval and Early Modern Art: A Case Study in Visual Exegesis*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). O'Hear mainly engages with literature such as the *Lambeth Apocalypse* and art such as the *Angers Apocalypse Tapestry,* 2-3.

[48] Susan Gillingham, "An Introduction to Reception History with Particular Reference to Psalm 1," in *Revue des Sciences Religieuses*, Vol. 85, No.4, (Oct., 2011), 571-599, 573.

31:10-31 reaffirms or subverts the horizon of expectation around these motifs, as found in other texts. This particular part of my methodology will be explained in more detail at the beginning of chapter two.

Literature Review: Proverbs, Court or Popular Origin

In this section I will be providing a brief literature review of mainly Proverbs commentaries, as well as some of the more prominent works that influenced the understanding of wisdom and wisdom literature in the Hebrew Bible. This review will mainly be focused on how scholars have understood the origins of the book of Proverbs and the wisdom literature; Whether it originated within a school or royal court system, or from a popular or folk origin.

First we will begin with the scholars who argue for a school or royal court origin. One of the earliest modern commenters on the book of Proverbs is Toy, who did not link the book to a pre-exilic school or royal court, instead dating it to a post-exilic Greek form of wisdom.[49] Yet, Toy concluded that these proverbs "relate to a definite class of sages whose function is the pursuit of universal moral and religion wisdom – men who, unlike the prophets, lay no claim to supernatural inspiration."[50] This becomes a common conclusion of future commentators. The real shift towards a theory of royal court origin appeared after 1923, when E. W. Budge published an English translation of *The Instructions of Amenemope*, and a discussion of influence on Prov. 22:17-24:22.[51] This connection between Proverbs and a non-Israelite text opened up the debate about how much of Proverbs was unique and how much was simply a common feature of ancient Near Eastern wisdom texts. This dominated later scholarship on wisdom literature's origins.[52] In response,

[49] Crawford H. Toy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1899), xxii.
[50] Toy, *Proverbs*, xxiii.
[51] R. N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs: A Survey of Modern Study*, (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 6.
[52] Whybray, *Modern Study*, 8.

Oesterley suggested that the scribes or 'wise men' who composed the book could be identified in Isaiah and Jeremiah, dating the book to the 8th century or earlier, within the royal court system.[53] Oesterley understood Proverbs' function as the "instruction of young men in all that appertained to right living, and this in the religious as in the secular domain."[54] He deepened the comparisons between Israelite, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian wisdom literature by comparing Proverbs to *Ahiqar*, a wisdom text of Mesopotamian origin, suggesting that external influence did not come from Egypt alone.[55] In the 1960s Whybray offered an analysis of the first nine chapters of Proverbs, working with the overall assumption that the book originated within a court system, with particular reference to Jer. 18:18.[56] These scribes belonged "to the privileged, relatively leisured and cultured class,"[57] and were linked to education/ school system found within the courts, analogous to Egyptian and Mesopotamian educational configurations.[58] Whybray is willing to suggest that some of the book may have started as folk wisdom, but argues that this was eventually collected by scribes and adapted for use within a school setting.[59] In the same year, Scott releases his commentary with many similar ideas, but proposed that "the content of a book like Proverbs is closer to life in the secular world," due to its androcentric nature.[60] Like previous scholars, Scott links Israelite wisdom literature to neighbouring countries, though with the inclusion of other cultures such as the Edomites, Phoenicians, and Sumerians.[61] Scott, like Whybray, argues that Israelite wisdom was a product of an elite scribal class used in

[53] W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Book of Proverbs*, (London: Methuen & Co., 1929), lxx-lxxi.
[54] Oesterley, *Proverbs*, lxxii.
[55] Oesterley, *Proverbs*, liv-lv. Suggests that Israelite scribes could have worked with a Syriac translation in the 6th century, but that a Babylonian version predated this version and Proverbs.
[56] R. N. Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs: The Concept of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9*, (London: SCM Press, 1965), 18, 19. Whybray does state that the wise men and scribes cannot be proved to be the same but that they are "at least very closely related."
[57] Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs*, 16.
[58] Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs*, 19, 20.
[59] Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs*, 15.
[60] R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs · Ecclesiastes*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1965), xvi.
[61] Scott, *Proverbs*, xviii.

schools and the royal courts to train officials.[62] McKane echoes Whybray's thesis of and initial popular/ folk origin,[63] later appropriated by an elite scribal class to be used in schools to train civil servants of the royal court, much like Egypt.[64] Like Scott, McKane concludes that Proverbs was a largely secular rather than a Yahwistic text, at least until the very late pre-exilic era when wisdom literature "begun to make its bow to distinctively Israelite biblical traditions."[65] In his later commentary, Whybray argues for a potential folk origin of at least parts of the book, but concludes "that most of the sayings in Proverbs are literary creations whose authors had a high degree of education."[66] Whybray suggests that, due to the nation of Israel being a fairly 'young' kingdom in comparison to the other kingdoms of the ancient Near East it "became heir to their culture which has already flourished for centuries."[67] Whybray continued to perpetuate arguments of previous scholars who identified the wisdom tradition as a product of an elite scribal class,[68] that developed and was inspired the Egyptian courts.[69] Like McKane, Whybray suggests that the wisdom literature was not widely accepted and "came under fire from the prophets," who criticised the 'wise men' for their confidence in human action rather than God's.[70]

The next major contributor is von Rad. While not providing a commentary, von Rad is a turning point in the interpretation of wisdom literature, arguing that wisdom was more like a world order present within Yahweh's acts of creation, particularly in Job and Proverbs.[71] This thesis seemingly corrected the difficulties presented by the appropriation

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[62] Scott, *proverbs*, 3, xxxiii.
[63] William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach*, (London: SCM Press, 1970), 3.
[64] McKane, *Proverbs*, 8-9, suggest that Solomon may have adopted an Egyptian style of administration, and thus would require similar training and training services as available in Egypt.
[65] McKane, *Proverbs*, 19.
[66] R. N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 2-3.
[67] Whybray, *Proverbs*, 3.
[68] Whybray, *Proverbs*, 4.
[69] Whybray, *Proverbs*, 3.
[70] Whybray, *Proverbs*, 9.
[71] Calaudia V. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, (Decatur: The Almond Press, 1985), 55, 57. I defer to Camp here for this explanation as she provides the most succinct explanation of von Rad's thesis.

of foreign wisdom in place of Yahweh by aligning wisdom with the creative power of Yahweh and as the mediator of dialogue between Yahweh and Israel.[72] Von Rad nevertheless continued to follow previous conclusions about wisdom literature's origin, arguing that in its final form it functions as school wisdom for the royal courts.[73] However, Von Rad argues that the *Sitz im Leben* of Proverbs cannot be confined totally to school and court origins, and that the it is only the literary nature of the work and affinities with foreign wisdom that allowed it to flourish within the courts.[74] By comparing the Egyptian and Israelite administration and working back from the time of Ben Sirach, von Rad argues that schools in Israel existed - without providing any evidence other than the assumption itself.[75]

After Von Rad the majority of commentaries and monographs on Proverbs and wisdom literature begin to shift to a folk origin, as we will see in the next section, although the theory of a court and school origins did persist in other scholarship.[76] Examples include the essays of Day and Davies, collected in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel*.[77] Day begins by arguing that, in regard to the royal courts and wisdom literature, "there can be little doubt that this was *one* of the contexts in which it was cultivated." Following the likes of von Rad and Whybray, Day argues that the courts was not the only point of origin, but favours them as the place where wisdom literature flourished and developed into the form we have today.[78] Davies' essay focuses on the issue of schools in Israel and the

[72] Camp, *Feminine in Porverbs*, 55.
[73] Gerhad von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, translated by James D. Martin, (London: SCM Press, 1972), 12.
[74] von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel,* 26.
[75] von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 17.
[76] Whybray, *Modern Survey*, 24, 25. Whybray notes that Lemaire and Lang in the 80s began to offer archaeological evidence for schools in Israel such as wall inspirations and abecedaries but was never considered to be fool proof evidence of schools in Israel due to their rather simplistic nature suggesting at best "the teaching of the alphabet and ability to write simple words," though this will be discussed further in the analysis of scholars who argue for a popular origin.
[77] *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J. A. Emerton*, edited by John Day, Robert P. Gordon, and H. G. M. Williamson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
[78] John Day, "Foreign Semitic Influence on the Wisdom of Israel and its Appropriation in the Book of Proverbs," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J. A. Emerton*, edited by John Day, Robert P. Gordon, and H. G. M. Williamson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 55-70, 61.

lack of textual evidence for their existence. The main argument focuses on references to musical education in 1 Chron. 25:8 as evidence for the existence of schools in Israel, arguing that the silence in the text over education is because the Bible was not concerned with educational literature or school systems.[79] Again, this is based on arguments of analogy with other kingdoms of the ancient Near East and due to the highly stylistic nature of the Hebrew Bible, as "persuasive indirect arguments," for the existence of schools and their use in training state officials.[80]

On the other side of this debate we have those who have argued against the assumption of a courtly and school based origin for Proverbs, in favour of a folk or popular origin. One of the more notable scholars on this side of the debate is Whybray, who in the previous section was a strong advocate for the school/ court origin thesis. However, this changed when Whybray started to actively question whether a social group such as the 'wise men,' for example in Jer. 18:18, really did exist. Instead of a social group, Whybray suggests that wisdom literature was part of an "intellectual movement," linking it to an understanding of *hokma* as skill or superior ability, rather than abstract wisdom, a term which is more of an attribute than a title.[81] Whybray's study focuses heavily on how *hokma* is used within the Hebrew Bible and whether the term is ever used as a specific title for the specific social group that those who argue for a court/ school origin believe existed. The study's findings suggest that 'wise men' are never specified as a distinct class in the Israelite courts,[82] and that the only references to wise men as distinct class (*ha-hakamim)* is in

[79] G. I. Davies, "Were there Schools in Israel?" in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J. A. Emerton*, edited by John Day, Robert P. Gordon, and H. G. M. Williamson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 199-211, 201.
[80] Davies, "Schools in Israel?" 204.
[81] R. N. Whybray, *The Intellectual Tradition in the Old Testament*, (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1974), 13.
[82] Whybray, *Intellectual Tradition,* 15, those mentioned are *abadim* (servants), *sarim* (princes), *soperim* (scribes), and *yo'es* (counsellors).

reference to non-Israelite courts.[83] Further criticisms are drawn against the schools/ court origin theory's use of passages such as 1 Chron. 25:8. Whybray argues that while this is one of the few examples of the use of *mebin* (master) and *talmid* (pupil), it refers to musical instruction, which would naturally have required teaching. Thus this example cannot be used as an analogy for the teaching of something like wisdom or can it be used to argue for a formal education system.[84] In a similar analysis of *hokma*, Whybray shows how *hokma* is used in social contexts other than the court system; he again fails to find a specific reference of *ha-hakamim* as a specific class - with the three mentions he does find are linked to craftsmen and righteous men.[85] Whybray's thesis was a turning point for the debate on the origins of wisdom and whether the 'wise men' and scribes assumed to have written the book existed. However, later scholars while agreeing with his conclusions, have suggested that "the case he makes… is stronger than the way he makes it."[86] Westermann's analysis notes that even by the 1990s, the debate of origins continued to divide scholars, with von Rad and H. J. Hermission arguing for the school origin while Wolff, Gerstenberger, and Thompson argued for a folk origin.[87] Westermann's contribution attempts to show how Proverbs, especially chapters 10-29, could originate from a folk context based on societal norms and observations. For instance, proverbs such as those about idleness and diligence "emerge from a specific situation to which they speak. They presuppose an audience that has experienced in its surrounding world the contrast of the idle and diligent just as we find described here."[88] Such concerns are, according to Westermann, what betray a folk origin; capital crimes are rarely mentioned, while treatment

[83] Whybray, *Intellectual Tradition*, 15, such as Gen. 41:8 and Ex. 7:11 which refers to Pharaoh calling upon magicians/ sorcerers and the wise men.
[84] Whybray, *Intellectual Tradition*, 37.
[85] Whybray*, Intellectual Tradition*, 49, these references are Ex. 36:4, 2 Chron, 2:6, and Ecc. 9:1.
[86] Stuart Weeks, *An Introduction to the Study of Wisdom Literature*, (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 137.
[87] Claus Westermann, *Roots of Wisdom: The Oldest Proverbs of Israel and Other People*, (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 3-4.
[88] Westermann, *Roots of Wisdom*, 19,

of the poor and needy take up a substantial part of the book, suggesting a concern for community action and behaviour.[89] Westermann went on to inspire scholars such as Golka by proposing the existence of proverbs among preliterate African tribes as a potential analogy of for Israelite folk wisdom.[90] Golka's project was much more expansive than Westermann's, though in pursuit of the same results: showing via analogy that such sayings as those found in Proverbs can occur in a pre-literate folk setting. Fiercely critical of the schools/ court origin theory, Golka argues that scholars like Lemaire who use archaeological evidence[91] cannot build a theory on this basis, especially when scriptural evidence is unable to support it.[92] Golka also takes issue with the fact that many scholars compare Israel, a relatively small emerging nation state, to the Egyptian and Mesopotamian kingdoms, which had taken centuries to develop and advance to their current stage.[93] Thus he proposes a more contemporary sociological study of Israel, comparing it to a society that is similar in size and cultural development. This is partially the reason for interacting with African proverbs, due to the pre-literate and chiefdom/ kingdom type culture in which the folk proverbs of Africa developed. His analysis shows that Proverbs related to the court and king do not necessarily indicate an origin within an elite setting and that spatial distance can "hint at the social distance the speakers feel between themselves and their subject."[94] Golka is also extremely critical of the idea that the theory of school origins is value free interpretation based on evidence. In particular, he suggests that the theory of school/ court origin has assumed its status in Western studies due to schools being familiar to this culture, while Latin American

[89] Westermann, *Roots of Wisdom*, 44.
[90] Westermann, *Roots of Wisdom,* 140-164.
[91] Friedemann W. Golka, *The Leopard's Spots: Biblical and African Wisdom in Proverbs*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 9.
[92] Golka, *Leopard's Spots*, 9, here Golka refers to A. Lemaire, *Les Écoles et la Formation de la Bible dans L'Ancient Israel,* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981).
Golka also notes that some of the most important scribes mentioned in the Hebrew bible tended to make note of the family rather than the individual such as the Shaphan clan in 2 Kgs 22, Jer. 26:24, and 36:9-13.
[93] Golka, *Leopard's Spots*, 10.
[94] Golka, *Leopard's Spots*, 24.

scholars are more inclined to assume a folk or grassroots origin, as that is their familiar point of origin.[95] Weeks' contribution takes the form of a critical assessment of debates about and current research on wisdom literature. Part of his study is based on Fox's understanding of scribes in Egypt and Mesopotamia and their link to wisdom literature as not being a special attribute of their class, but rather a product of the fact that they were scribes.[96] Weeks is also critical of scholars like McKane whose "classification is imposed upon the material, not drawn from it, and rests on presumptions about the development of wisdom."[97] While Weeks does recognise that wisdom literature's existences must suggest at least a basic education of how to write, he warns that scholars must be careful when they suggest Israelite scribes would have been able to read foreign wisdom literature.[98] Thus Weeks, while not agreeing completely with the folk origin, remains critical of the schools/ court thesis and stresses that such a thesis should not be presumed without sufficient evidence.[99]

In one of Whybray's final contributions to the debate, he states that the assumption that Proverbs was created by a scribal elite influenced by external sources has caused it to be considered a *corpus alienum*.[100] He also argues that the arguments about the secular or religious nature of Proverbs are outdated and that questions such as "whether the religion of Proverbs was dependant on a foreign religious system… or whether it was fundamentally of Israelite origin," should be the focus.[101] Martin, influenced by Whybray, further critiqued the school origins thesis by using the socio-archaeological arguments of Jamison Drake, who argued that Israel did not have the human resources to run a state like Egypt until the

[95] Golka, *Leopard's Spots*, 35, this point in particular is a good example of how pre-understanding and horizons of expectations in the reader can affect interpretation and research of a topic.
[96] Stuart Weeks, *Early Israelite Wisdom,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 7.
[97] Weeks, *Early Israelite Wisdom*, 59.
[98] Weeks, *Early Israelite Wisdom*, 151, 155, Weeks notes for instance that Hebrew is very simple alphabet compared to scripts of Egypt and Mesopotamia, and that to learn such languages would be unnecessary even for foreign interactions due to the wide use of Aramaic (154-155).
[99] Weeks, *Early Israelite Wisdom*, 153.
[100] R.N. Whybray, *Proverbs*, (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 3.
[101] Whybray, *Proverbs*, 9.

8th century BCE.[102] These findings showed that while there is evidence of literacy in 8th/7th century Judah, this evidence is focused around Jerusalem, suggesting that Jerusalem functioned as a scribal centre for the surrounding area; there would therefore not be the need for special training schools for the few scribes in Jerusalem.[103] Like Golka, Martin criticises scholars for assuming that institutions like scribal schools and the courts of Egypt, which took a substantial time to develop, would naturally flourish in the relatively young kingdom of Israel without any problems.[104] Murphy's critiques are more brazen, stating that "there is no hard-nosed evidence for what might be called 'schools,'"[105] and that "most of Proverbs lacks a royal flavour;" it should not be considered a product of either.[106] Murphy uses Fox for the same point as Weeks, arguing that Egyptian and Mesopotamian schools were for scribes, not wisdom literature, but goes further and suggests that the whole concept of a school system in Israel has not been sufficiently defined in scholarship.[107] Moreover, Murphy also raises the point that the definition of wisdom literature is not universal among biblical scholars, Egyptologists and Assyriologists.[108] Clifford also uses Fox's thesis to explain the origins of wisdom among scribes but not among the elite. Rather, Proverbs is an anthology of folk wisdom and more literary creations such as Instructions, collected by scribes attached to the courts, but as workers under employment rather than courtiers or the elite of society.[109] Much like Whybray, Clifford stresses that Proverbs did not start as a secular text which was later edited to be more "Israelite;" this does not give due credit to the complex nature of the Israelite religion and of the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible.[110] As suggested by other scholars' frequent

[102] James D. Martin, *Proverbs,* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 23.
[103] Martin, *Proverbs*, 25.
[104] Martin, *Proverbs*, 24.
[105] Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), xx.
[106] Murphy, *Proverbs*, xxi.
[107] Murphy, *Proverbs*, xxi.
[108] Murphy, *Proverbs*, 287.
[109] Richard J. Clifford, *Proverbs: A Commentary*, (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 8.
[110] Clifford, *Proverbs*, 9.

use of his work, Fox has been critical of the school/ court origin theory from a methodological standpoint. However, he favours a court setting not for Proverbs' origins but for its collection and literary formation.[111] The reason for this is that, while the contents of the Proverbs may have originated among craftsmen and farmers, as simple examples, it is unlikely they were written down by these groups - hence the royal courts intervention.[112] Finally, we have Weeks again, whose position on the matter remains mostly the same, though more refined. His study does not favour either theory but remains critical of school/ court origin scholars, particularly in relation to their reliance on a theory of the influence of foreign wisdom literature, circulated on Israel during the monarchal period, which they cannot prove.[113] Weeks also notes, like Fox, that scribes in Egypt and Mesopotamia were the composers and collectors of all genres, like wisdom, hymn, and prayer, rather than one "wisdom" style, as is assumed in the wisdom school theory.[114] Like his previous study, Weeks also cautions against the assumptions of scholars and researchers regarding Israel's ability to use and be influenced by the oldest wisdom texts of the ancient Near East. The language barrier, especially for texts written in Sumerian or Middle Egyptian, would have made it difficult, if not impossible, for the Israelites to read and interpret as scholars have suggested.[115]

As we can see from this review, there is no clear answer to the question of Proverbs' origin, either as a whole, or with regards to its individual components. Nevertheless, this question has taken up the largest chunk of scholarship about Proverbs for the last 100 years. In particular, it has focused research specifically on chapters 1-9 and 10-29.

[111] Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31.* (London: Yale University Press, 2009), 501.
[112] Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 505.
[113] Weeks, *An Introduction*, 17.
[114] Weeks, *An Introduction*, 130.
[115] Weeks, *An Introduction*, 131. He states that such languages were "archaic long before there were any Israelite administrators," and likely of little use due to the 'international' nature of Aramaic.

For the most part,[116] scholars care little for chapters 30-31, offering very limited commentary on the origin of these chapters, other than suggesting it is near impossible to determine.[117] As such, when scholars do conduct a more focused study on chapter 31:10-31, they are faced with a research paradigm which is not suitable for their research, as the existing paradigms do not directly refer to the poem in any of their arguments about Proverbs' origins. Nevertheless, because these are the only paradigms available, scholars' work on chapter 31:10-31 are affected by these debates and conclusions; they provide a pre-understanding of the texts supposed horizon of expectation: of the text as product of a scribal elite male upper class, to educate an elite male upper class.[118] But since this debate all but excludes 31:10-31 we cannot simply apply this theory of origin to the text, assuming that their origins are the same. To conduct research on Proverbs 31:10-31 around or within this research paradigm is methodogically flawed.

Proverbs 1-9 and 31: A Hermeneutical Framework for the Book

In this section I will be discussing the impact of Thomas McCreesh's and Claudia Camp's interpretations of Proverbs 1-9 and 31 as part of a literary envelope that presents a composite image of Lady Wisdom. In Camp's case, this serves also to recontextualise Proverbs 10-29 in a Yahwistic fashion. This view has subsequently been supported by Whybray, on the

[116] Fox is perhaps an exception; he actually provides quite an extensive study of 31:10-31 but still argues that "the book of Proverbs is devoted to cultivating wise *men*… now it concludes by describing a wise woman, but this too is a man's concern," 889-890.

[117] Whybray, *Modern Study*, 157.

[118] Cf. note 38. I would also argue that while scholars like Weeks and Fox continue to dismantle the assumptions of the school/ court origin theory, this theory still persists as the default or most likely of the two schools as it is easier to argue rather than a folk origin which cannot be proved nor argued without a lot of analogy and comparison,. This is reflected by even the most recent scholarship such as Will Kynes, "The 'Wisdom Literature' Category: An Obituary," in *Journal of Theological Studies*, 69, (2018), 1-27. Kynes argues that the category of 'Wisdom Literature' is no longer useful or necessary for scholarship (1), and that scholars rely on old theories or evidence such as Jer. 18:18 (6) or the link between *Amenemope* and Prov. 22:17-24:22 (12), to argue for a scribal origin for this distinct genre; yet the fact that Kynes has to argue that the category is redundant shows that the assumptions clearly still prevail for the most part.

basis of the house building motif noted by McCreesh and Camp,[119] and by Yoder, who argues that lexically and thematically these two sections are linked.[120] I will present McCreesh and Camp's analyses and arguments for this framework, and then discuss the critiques they have faced, as well as discussing how their arguments are based on the preunderstanding of Proverbs as an elite, male, scribal text.

McCreesh's analysis of the poem is not very clear about whether it establishes a link between the poems of 1-9 and 31:10-31 on authorship grounds or on editorial grounds.[121] McCreesh concludes that the Woman of Valour "inclines heavily towards the symbolic," due to the one sided nature of the poem and due to similar images and themes used in 1-9.[122] The Woman of Valour's symbolic nature is also made clear, according to McCreesh, due to the fact that she is a rare find;[123] but that she is not an impossible ideal that can never be reached acts as a paradoxical statement to stress the extraordinary nature of her existence. McCreesh notes that it is much like Pharaoh commenting that no one could find a man like Joseph, yet has found Joseph in Gen. 41:38.[124] McCreesh is clear that only 31:10-31 forms a framework with 1-9, but he also argues that 31:10-31 is juxtaposed with 31:1-9 thematically. Both collections deal with two different types of women, who lead men either to a life of

[119] R. N. Whybray, *The Composition of the Book of Proverbs*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press. 1994), 161.
[120] Hartwell, *Wisdom*, 13. Yoder's conclusion is more similar to McCreesh's arguing that "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." I defer to Hartwell here as well, due to Yoder being considered in the next section for her social setting of the book, and for that fact that many of her assumptions about the framework is based on the work of McCreesh and Camp, though understood primary through a socioeconomic context rather than literary.
[121] Thomas P. McCreesh, "Wisdom as Wife: Proverbs 31:10-31," in *Revue Biblique*, Vol. 92, NO. 1, (Jan. 1985), 25-46, 30, McCreesh notes that the poem could have been a framework used by the author or editor, I would argue that the specific the way he links the poems, through the motif the Woman of Valour being a "settled down" version of Lady Wisdom, suggests he would favour a shared author for both pieces, in order to link the two in such a specific way.
[122] McCreesh, "Wisdom as Wife," 44, for instance the use of city gates: 1:21b, 8:3, 31:31; and Lady Wisdom building her house in 9:1-6 and WoV in 31:15, 21, 27.
[123] McCreesh, "Wisdom as Wife," 36.
[124] McCreesh, "Wisdom as Wife," 37.

success or to an early death.[125] The study also proposes to link the Lady Wisdom and the Woman of Valour together, as the same woman. This is because Wisdom:

> Is presented in chapter 9 as the young marriageable woman seeking lovers who would accept her gifts and life she could offer. Now that time of courtship, of learning, is over. In chapter 31 Wisdom is a faithful wife and skilled mistress of her household.[126]

Camp's thoughts about the origins and use of this framework are more explicit than McCreesh's. Camp argues, through the use of Ricoeur's theory of discourse and decontextualisation and Caroline Fontaine's ideas of performance context and the Hebrew Bible,[127] that chapters 10-30 originally functioned as a stand-alone collection but later required a new framework. This was necessary in order "to re-orient the proverb collection from its original function as a schoolboy lesson-book to later function as part of a canon of religious literature."[128] Thus the school boy's text book can be reinvented and transformed into scripture. But, because proverbs arise in relation to a particular situation or event, not in a literary form, their ability to provide meaning is thereby diminished.[129] The use of chapters 1-9 and 31[130] as a frame to chapters 10-30 provides a new context in which to understand Wisdom as expressed in the book, while also acting as a literary boundary for the collection.[131] But, because this is an artificial framework imposed on the work by editors we cannot

[125] McCreesh, "Wisdom as Wife," 40, 1-9 this is Lady Wisdom vs. Lady Folly/ The Strange Woman, and in 31 the women of 31:3 who Lemuel's mother warns him against, and of course the Woman of Valour herself.
[126] McCreesh, "Wisdom as Wife," 46.
[127] Camp, *Feminine in Proverbs*, 179.
[128] Camp, *Feminine in Proverbs*, 182.
[129] Camp, *Feminine in Proverbs*, 182.
[130] It should be noted here that Camp argues that the entirety of chapter 31 is part of the framework, which Hartwell stating that "this in itself is relatively unusual," and that Camp is one of the few, if not only, scholar to do so. Hartwell, *Wisdom*, 57.
[131] Camp, *Feminine in Proverbs*, 184, 207.

assume that the original author of these poems would have used the poems in such a way, or that they intended to link the two poems together based on shared female imagery, which Camp argues is the crux of the framework.[132] Camp's comparison between the two poems picks up much of the same things as McCreesh, such as the use of gates (1:21, 8:3, 31:21), house imagery (8:34, 9:1-6, 31:21), comparison to jewels (3:15, 8:11, 31:10), while also noting some he did not, such as Wisdom leading to gains of treasure (3:14, 8:21, 21:11).[133] However, Camp argues that chapter 31 grounds the depiction of personified or Lady Wisdom in the framework, by showing that lady wisdom is a human and not a goddess or some divine aspect separate from Yahweh.[134]

While I previously stated that neither of these theories are inherently flawed, it is clear that they contain some baseline assumptions about the poem's origins, audience, and function. In McCreesh's, there is no direct reference to a point of origin for either the author or editor of the text. However, he appears to assume that the text serves to educate young men; the framework allows a man "who has apprenticed himself to Wisdom and studied her proverbs" to "finally recognize the distinctive features of Wisdom in the valuable, industrious wife, busy in her home."[135] Because McCreesh does not offer an explicit statement about the poem's point of origin or how the poems are linked, we cannot determine for certain the grounds of these assumptions. Fox picks up on this issue, noting that McCreesh pushes this idea of 'young marriage Wisdom' and then 'Settled Wisdom,' in chapters 1-9 and 31 respectively in order to link the poems together, but Fox retorts that "Wisdom *never* 'settles down' but is ever going about searching for adherents."[136] Even

[132] Camp, *Feminine in Proverbs*, 187, though, while Camp is clear about this placement and use of the poems is down to the editors, the fact that refers to an author, makes it unclear if she assumes a singular author for 1-9 and 31, or two separate authors, which seems to be the more common consensus, cf. note 107.
[133] Camp, *Feminine in Proverbs*, 188-189, this is just a selection of the comparisons and not a complete list.
[134] Camp, *Feminine in Proverbs*, 190, Camp argues that the depiction of Lady Wisdom roaming the streets and teaching young men the ways of wisdom in her house is clarified by thee
[135] McCreesh, "Wisdom as Wife," 45.
[136] Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 908.

more so, Fox states that if one pushes the marriage analogy, "Lady Wisdom would be polyandrous"[137] - given that it is stated numerous times that she is actively seeking new partners.[138] Hartwell's own critique of McCreesh is that in 1-9 "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."[139]

Camp's assumptions are clear in the fact that her theory depends on a school origin for at least Proverbs 10-30,[140] though no point of origin for chapters 1-9 or chapters31 is explicitly identified. Nevertheless, she examines the poems from the perspective of the editor, who is assumed to be male and elite.[141] This is something that Hartwell notes: in both Camp's own work, and in Fox's later critique of Camp, the focus on the editor means that they fail to consider the original voice or origin of Proverbs 31.[142] This approach can only examine the secondary function of the poem, rather than its primary function. Furthermore, I would argue that Camp's argument for a connection between the two poems based on shared language is underdeveloped and lacking evidence to support some of her proposed connections. For instance, Camp notes a comparison between Lady Wisdom bringing gains to those who listen to her in 3:14 and 8:21, and the Woman of Valour bringing gains to her family in 31:11. Yet, in the original Hebrew each of these verses uses a different word to denote the gain brought, each with its own meaning and semantic field. Verse 3:14 uses the noun form of the verb סָחַר, which is used to refer to profit gained via trade,[143] while 8:21 uses יֵשׁ, a term which is much more ambiguous and refers to a general substance or being.[144] These

[137] Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 908.
[138] Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 909, Fox points in particular to 1:20-21, 24, 8:1-6, 9:3-5.
[139] Hartwell, *Wisdom*, 67.
[140] Cf. note 118.
[141] Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 905, Fox argues there is no audience in the text, but that the poem is directed at young men in order to help them seek a desirable wife.
[142] Hartwell, *Wisdom,* 67-68.
[143] Cf. Gen37:28, 1 Kgs 10:28, Prov 31:14, for the specific form used in 3:14 cf. Prov. 31:18, Is. 23:18.
[144] 8:21 is the only use of the word to denote a substance as specific as treasure out of the 138 occurrences of the word.

connotations differ greatly from שָׁלָל in 31:11, which typically refers to acquisition of items via violence or physical means and is usually translated as plunder or spoil.[145] It is even used in 1:13 to describe the way sinners gain fortune by ambushing "the innocent without reason." This is only one example, but it shows the shallowness of such comparisons once a linguistic examination has been conducted and suggests that, although a framework around the book can be argued for, it is an artificial framework created by the editor of Proverbs or ourselves. After all, as Hartwell and Fox suggest, by "looking at the structuring of the work, contemporary scholars are expecting to find an order that simply may not exist."[146]

Proverbs 31: Persian and Greek Socioeconomic Comparisons

For the final section of this chapter I will consider Christine Yoder's theory about the Woman of Valour being a composite image of an elite Persian Period Woman and Bernard Lang's theory about the poem being analogous with Xenophon's *Oeconomicus.* For Yoder I will primarily be using the book *Wisdom as a Woman of Substance: A Socioeconomic Reading of Proverbs 1-9 and 31:10-31*, rather than the essay "The Woman of Substance אשת חיל: a Socioeconomic Reading of Proverbs 31:10-31," as the former offers a more detailed analysis.[147] It should be noted that, especially in regards to Lang, wider commentary on these works is somewhat lacking, in part due to general consensus that dating or applying a specific socioeconomic background to the text is largely impossible.[148] Nonetheless, it is still necessary to analyse them, because

[145] DCH VIII 400-402.
[146] Hartwell, *Wisdom*, 78.
[147] Christine Roy Yoder*, Wisdom as a Woman of Substance: A Socioeconomic Reading of Proverbs 1-9 and 31:10-31*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001).
Christine Roy Yoder, "The Woman of Substance (אשת־חיל): A Socioeconomic Reading of Proverbs 31:10-31," in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 112, No. 3 (Autumn, 2003) 426-447. While the article is of a later date than the book, borrows heavily from the book's final two sections and offers little in regards to new information or evidence to consider, hence I will defer to her longer study.
[148] Cf. note 105.

they are among the few to try. Much like my analyses of Camp and McCreesh, I will not be aiming to refute or disprove these theories, but rather to show how they are built on assumptions that the text originates from a learned figure, potentially linked to the school or court, and used to educate elite young men.

Yoder's theory begins by noting that in Proverbs scholarship there is an "implicit assumption… that negative activities of female figures are derived from real women whereas positive, powerful female figures are not," with reference to the Strange Woman and Lady Wisdom, respectively.[149] Her study aims to show how the Woman of Valour (or Substance in Yoder's case) is a real woman, inspired by women of the Persian period, and how this influenced the depiction of Lady Wisdom in chapters 1-9, reversing the typical chain of influence.[150] Yoder argues that the sage who composed the two pieces[151] must have been teaching during the Persian period due to the references to international trade, which Yoder argues flourished during this period,[152] and from more specific linguistic references. For instance, Yoder argues that the reference to the Woman of Valour's value or price in 31:10b refers to a bridal price that was offered by the groom or his family in order to marry a bride of high standing, typically via a contract.[153] Another example is the use of plunder in 31:11b, which Yoder argues refers to the husband's right to use the wife's dowry; while he would need to repay anything he used, men were legally allowed to do as they pleased with the dowry.[154] Furthermore, the many references to textile-based work, such as 31:19,

[149] Yoder, *Wisdom as Woman*, 11.
[150] Yoder, *Wisdom as Woman*, 93.
[151] Yoder, *Wisdom as Woman*, 104, while not specifying if she argues for a singular or two authors, Yoder' language is certainly indicative of arguing for a singular author, referring to "the sage of proverbs 1-9 and 31:10-31" always in the singular. Whether she means a sage using these works or including these works or adding them to the book, or the sage as the author, she does not clarify, but referring to a sage is also indicative of those who argue for a school origin to wisdom, as they often refer to the group as sages, cf. note 39.
[152] Yoder, *Wisdom as Woman*, 46.
[153] Yoder, *Wisdom as Woman*, 49.
[154] Yoder, *Wisdom as Woman*, 52.

21, 22 and 24, are indicative of 'women's work' during Persian period, as backed up with archaeological evidence. For instance, Yoder notes that at a number of exaction sites in Dor, groups of spindle whorls and weights dated to the Persian period have been found, particularly in residential buildings, suggesting that "women there engaged in a thriving textile industry."[155] Because of all this, Yoder argues that the sage uses this poem to show young men the value of marrying a woman of high standing (or of substance), as "to marry the Woman of Substance is to live a life of luxury. Her household enjoys the trappings of privilege and wealth."[156] This is also reflected in chapters 1-9, as where "money is the primary reason by which the young men choose Wisdom (4:5-7)."[157] This collection of chapters also argues that Wisdom will lead to riches and "a wealth of quality, perpetuity, and abundance that secures for her husband a position of honour and well-being in the community."[158] This "attention to the economic dimension of the sage's rhetoric highlights its class bias. The language and worldview of Proverbs 1-9 and 31:10-31 suggest that this was instruction by and for affluent and moderately wealthy members of an urban commercial class," specifically men.[159] Yoder also suggests that this rhetoric, especially in chapters 1-9 about the strange woman, is similar to that found in Ezra-Nehemiah and their anti-foreign marriage beliefs. As such, it must have been influenced by these texts or written around that time. This also points to a Persian period setting.[160]

Bernhard Lang dates Prov. 31:10-31 to roughly the 5-4th century, contemporary with Xenophon's *Oeconomicus.* The *Oeconomicus* is presented as a dialogue between Socrates and Ischomachus, with the latter explaining how one should educate a new wife to manage a

[155] Yoder, *Wisdom as Woman*, 59.
[156] Yoder, *Wisdom as Woman*, 83.
[157] Yoder, *Wisdom as Woman*, 103
[158] Yoder, *Wisdom as Woman*, 99-100.
[159] Yoder, *Wisdom as Woman*, 103.
[160] Yoder, *Wisdom as Woman*, 73.

household, and was meant to be taught to the upper classes of Greece.[161] Lang's main focus is the similarities between the women described in both texts. Specifically, he examines what was considered "women's work," the separate work spheres of husband and wife, and access to property.[162] In regards to "women's works," Lang notes that their tasks are largely the same in both texts, focusing on food and textile work, but that the Woman of Valour plays a more active role in the collection and production of these goods. While the Athenian wife has the food delivered to her and then later has it sent to proper storage with the help of her slaves, the Woman of Valour is said to go far and wide, likely to the market place, to collect the goods herself.[163] Lang also notes similarities between the two works about the production of textiles. Lang notes that the Woman of Valour produces for business and livelihood,[164] whereas the Athenian wife weaves for pleasure or to teach her maids a skill, because textile production for money was seen as "socially degrading and not appropriate for the wife of a respectable free citizen."[165] However, this is an idealisation of the household; in reality it was generally quite common for women of all statuses to produce and sell textiles.[166] The similarities continue into the analysis of the separate spheres of husband and wife, which is further divided into public and private interactions. The conclusion of this comparison is that the Athenian wife is much more restricted than the Woman of Valour. For the Athenian wife, it was deemed improper for her to even leave the household, while the Woman of Valour leaves her house to sell her products and work the land of her vineyard in 31:16.[167] Even so, while the Woman of Valour is allowed outside the confines of her house, she is still restricted to the private

[161] Bernhard Lang, "Women's Work, Household and Property in two Mediterranean Societies: A Comparative Essay on Proverbs XXXI 10-31," in Vestus Testamentum, Vol. 54, No.2 (Apr., 2004), 188-207, 189-190.
[162] Lang, "Women's Work," 190.
[163] Lang, "Women's Work," 191.
[164] Lang, "Women's Work," 194, it should be noted that Lang considers this Hebrew family among the elite for being able to produce the textiles described in the poem, such as reds and purples, along with flax and linen.
[165] Lang, "Women's Work," 193.
[166] Lang, "Women's Work," 193.
[167] Lang, "Women's Work," 197.

sphere to a degree, because while she profits from her wares, her husband is still the public face of the house hold "devoting his leisure time to friends and urban politics."[168] In the final comparison, of access to property, we see a major difference emerge between the women. The Athenian wife, again, is totally restricted and is unable to legally own property or land herself. Rather, the measure of an Athenian wife's wealth is made up of things like "slaves, furniture, and household utensils," like looms brought into the household, but never land or property.[169] In Proverbs 31:16, this seems to be the complete opposite; this verse suggests that the Woman of Valour buys a plot of land, and plants a vineyard, without reference to her husband, suggesting that it is *her* land that she purchased with *her* own funds. This is only one example and with few other references in the Hebrew Bible to female land ownership, we cannot use this to determine whether this is an exceptional circumstance or a privilege readily available to Hebrew women. Lang favour's the more conservative interpretation proposed by Westbrook, who argues that the Woman of Valour is simply an agent of purchase for the land in place of her husband, who is the real owner of the land.[170] Nonetheless, Lang does allow for the potential that the land is the woman's own, as her husband may have let the wife own the land in practice, instead of name, "such that one conjugal household existed, comprising two independent estates."[171] To summarise Lang's argument, the comparison supposedly enrichens our understanding of the poem and why the editor of Proverbs included this poem, "to show that all the wisdom taught to men is of little value" if they do not they marry a woman such as the one portrayed here.[172]

Of these two proposals, Yoder's is the one scholars more readily give credit to, whereas Lang is not even mentioned by Hartwell, and Fox

[168] Lang, "Women's Work," 198.
[169] Lang, "Women's Work," 202-203.
[170] Lang, "Women's Work," 203-204.
[171] Lang, "Women's Work," 206.
[172] Lang, "Women's Work," 207.

simply reiterates Lang's key points without offering any real critique or comment.[173] Lang's comparison with Xenophon offers no real analysis that can enlighten about the significance of this title. Rather, it falls back onto the typical interpretation of it as a poem written by, men for men, about the importance of finding a woman who can allows him to devote "his leisure time to friends and urban politics."[174] Furthermore, I would argue that a socioeconomic focus is a limiting way to interpret the poem and skews our understanding of the poem's function. This is because the poem was not intended to be understood as depiction of a specific socioeconomic situation, but rather to depict a woman of superior skill and wisdom. While it is true that *hayil* can be translated as riches or wealth,[175] the Woman of Valour is not given this title because she is rich but because *she is* a Woman of Valour, she is rich because of her hard work and skill. By stressing the socioeconomic aspect of the woman's life, Yoder warps the praise the Woman of Valour receives into something linked to her economic success, rather than linked to the skills which allows her to be an economic success. Yoder is open about the fact that her study does not attempt to challenge the poem's function as a purely male and elite audience,[176] I would argue that Yoder's theory is a case of theory then evidence, rather than the other way around, and it is this which led to Yoder proposing a Persian period date for two poems (chapters 1-9 and 31:10-31) that do not betray any specific time period or geographical location. Fox notes that, while Yoder's analysis of the evidence is extremely thorough, it "does not show, however, that this situation pertains *only* in the Achaemenid period." Because of this, the argument can only work within the fixed parameters that Yoder has set; as soon as they are expanded, the evidence can no longer support such a narrow period. For instance, because the poem mentions the Woman of Valour working with flax, linen, and wool, Yoder uses this as evidence

[173] Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 902.
[174] Lang, "Women's Work," 198.
[175] Whybray, *Modern Survery*, 108.
[176] Hartwell, *Wisdom*, 88, cf. note 149.

that she is a Persian Period woman using these materials.[177] Yoder does not note that these materials were not readily available *before* this period and thus that the study cannot not eliminate the possibility of an earlier dating. Moreover, some of the analysis of the poem itself is also questionable, as some of the analysis seemingly twists the evidence to fit the theory. For instance, Yoder interprets the Woman of Valour's charity (extending her hand) to the poor and needy in 31:20 being as her offering a small loan, something there is evidence of Persian period women doing.[178] The poem, however, very clearly suggests that this is a form of charity; it is one of the reasons why she is praised in the first place. Why would she be praised for loaning money to someone in need, when the gain is ultimately all hers? This is something that Fox also critiques Yoder for, arguing that such a conclusion goes against the ethics of the book itself, and all good sense - why lend to the poor, who might not be able to pay it back, when the rich will always be able to pay their debts?[179] Another point of contention is based on the attempt to link the portrayal of the strange woman in chapters 1-9 to Ezra and Nehemiah's anti-foreign rhetoric. Fox contends that "if the authors[180] of Parts I and VId were really disturbed by intermarriage, as Ezra and Nehemiah were, they could have said so."[181] Although Fox's critiques against Yoder utimately ring hollow, given that Fox's own commentary borrows so heavily from Yoder, it is clear that both Lang and Yoder remain firmly within the established research paradigm of the poem as an educational piece for the male elite.

[177] Cf. note 145.
[178] Yoder, *Wisdom as Woman*, 89.
[179] Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 895.
[180] Here Fox states authors, but Yoder is unclear about if she believes 1-9 and 31:10-31 to be the product of multiple authors or a singular author, but I would argue from her working it is the latter, cf. note 141.
[181] Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 902. For clarification Part I and VId refers to chapters 1-9 and 31:10-31 respectively.

Conclusion

As we can see from the discussion above, scholarship on Proverbs mostly focuses on whether its origins are from a local folk tradition, or has been influenced by the wisdom of other ancient Near Eastern kingdoms and their educational and scribal systems. Although this debate only considers a section of the book, chapters 10-29, scholars who have conducted close readings of Prov. 31:10-31 typically base their readings on assumptions of the theory of a court or school origin in particular, suggesting that the poem was composed by a sage for educational purposes for a small elite, male group. Because of this the poem is often labelled advice literature, even though there is little advice offered in the poem. There is no way to assure that you will marry a Woman of Valour based on this poem alone. Furthermore, there is little evidence to suggest that this poem or the rest of Proverbs was ever intended to be used for the purpose of education. Nor is there evidence of a single author for the separate parts; thus we cannot apply the arguments for the origin or function of one section to another. Rather, it is necessary to analyse Prov. 31:10-31 as a poem in and of itself, which has its own separate function, alongside the one it has within Proverbs and the Hebrew Bible. In doing so we can, through the reconstruction of a potential original horizon of expectation, to better understand the significance of this poem and its unusual choices of imagery and vocabulary, and determine the significance of the Woman of Valour.

Chapter Two: Translation and Word Study of Proverbs 31:10-31

Introduction

This chapter will be split into two parts; first a brief discussion about methodology, in which I discuss allusion within Prov. 31:10-31 and then being the word study proper, in which I will highlight specific words, phrases, and motifs used in Proverbs 31:10-31 that are also used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. By doing this, I construct a (potential) original horizon of expectation for the author of the poem and, in doing so, assess whether the author of the poem used the language we find in it to reinforce existing horizons of expectation or to challenge expectations and provide a new meaning. The study will largely focus especially on חיל and related military terms, as well as the use of specific colours, fabrics, and clothing motifs.

Methodology: Allusion or Intertextuality?

In order to assist in the reconstruction of the horizon of expectation of the author of the poem, I will consider the possibility of inner-biblical allusions within Proverbs 31:10-31 and between other texts. In doing so, I will be able to determine where the author of this poem has made use of well-established motifs and how they are used in the poem, determining if they are used in a similar manner or in a new and unique way. While there is evidence throughout the Hebrew Bible of authors and traditions interacting with each other, scholars have debated the correct methods and terminology one should apply to such studies. Typically, the debate falls into two rubrics: monodirectional allusions within a single text derived from an older text and discussions of bidirectional allusion or intertextuality between texts. Michael Fishbane is most often credited with developing the methodologies these two rubrics revolve around.[182] Sommer and Leonard have subsequently developed Fishbane's ideas and

[182] Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

presented more explicit and robust methodological discussions. We will firstly consider Sommer, who presented his methodology in a 1996 article[183] and a 1998 monograph.[184] The article takes the form of a critical response to Eslinger who had critiqued Fishbane's approach of allusion on the grounds that it was conceived always diachronically.[185] While Sommer agrees with Eslinger that we can never be certain about the direction of influence,[186] he argues that there is evidence to suggest that authors did borrow from earlier sources. For instance, when *specific* or *rare* words and phrases are shared between texts, such as the "Deuteronomic legal traditions" this likely suggests borrowing.[187] Moreover, the identification of allusions is a cumulative process, with the argument becoming "stronger as patterns emerge from those allusions."[188] This requires a diachronic approach, in order to posit one text as the borrower and one as the borrowed.[189] Intertextuality, on the other hand, is a purely synchronic approach, concerned only with the reader and not the author.[190] Because of this, Sommer argues that intertextuality cannot be used as a historical tool; it aims to highlight common features between texts, rather than focus on how an author uses older texts and adapts them for their own writings.[191] This argument is developed in his book *A Prophet Read Scripture*. Although his article he makes use of Hays' methodology[192] the

[183] Benjamin D. Sommer, "Allusion and Intertextuality in the Hebrew Bible: A Response to Lyle Eslinger," in *Vestus Testamentum,* Vol. 46, (1996), 479-489.
[184] Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).
[185] Sommer, "Allusions," 479.
[186] Sommer, "Allusions," 480.
[187] Sommer, "Allusions," 483-485.
[188] Sommer, "Allusions," 485.
[189] Sommer, "Allusions," 486.
[190] Sommer, "Allusions," 487.
[191] Sommer, "Allusions," 488.
[192] Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, (London: Yale University Press, 1989), 29-32. In Sommer, "Allusions," 484, fn. 9. Sommer refers to the seven criteria for determining the possibility of allusion in texts 1. Availability of the text, 2. The volume of the allusion, how explicit is the citation and how large, 3. Recurrence of the source, how often it is used, 4. Thematic Coherence, asking if the allusion adds and fits into the rhetoric of the borrower, 5. Was such an allusion Historically Plausible for the borrower to make, and to an extent the audience to understand, 6. History of Interpretation, asking if it is an allusion that many commentators throughout time have noticed, and 7. Satisfaction, asking if such a reading would make sense within the text, though Hayes notes that not every criteria may be met for every instance of allusion encountered.

book focuses on Ben-Porat's four-stage *Marker* system.[193] In this system, the first stage requires the reader to recognise that an allusion is being made to an older text. Stage two is the recall of the alluded text. Stage three is the transformative stage, when the older text influences the interpretation of the new.[194] The fourth stage is not always necessary; it requires the reader to activate "the evoked text as a whole to form connections between it and the alluding text."[195] Throughout both of these works Sommer continues to argue that *specific* language in common is the best form of evidence for allusion. He splits such allusions into three groups: explicit citation, implicit reference, and inclusion.[196] The first category requires no explanation, but for the second he means the use of specific vocabulary or images without simply parroting the original source.[197] Inclusion means adapting large sections of text, like the Chronicles narratives.[198]

More recently, Leonard has put forward his own system of identifying biblical allusions. He proposes that:

> (1) Shared language is the single most important factor in establishing a textual connection. (2) Shared language is more important than nonshared language. (3) Shared language that is rare or distinctive suggests a stronger connection than does language that is widely used. (4) Shared phrases suggest a stronger connection than do individual shared terms. (5) The accumulation of shared language suggests a stronger connection than does a single shared term or phrase. (6) Shared language in similar contexts suggests a stronger connection than does shared language alone.

[193] This is taken from Z. Ben-Porat, "The Poetics of Literary Allusion," in *PTL: A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature*, Vol. 1, (1976): 105–128.
[194] Sommer, *A Prophet Reads*, 11-12.
[195] Sommer, *A Prophet Reads*, 12.
[196] Sommer, *A Prophet Reads*, 20.
[197] Sommer, *A Prophet Reads*, 21
[198] Sommer, *A Prophet Reads*, 22.

> (7) Shared language need not be accompanied by shared ideology to establish a connection. (8) Shared language need not be accompanied by shared form to establish a connection.[199]

Much like Sommer, Leonard strives to approach the study of allusion from a diachronic standpoint. He argues that inner-biblical allusions are diachronic to some degree even if we cannot be completely certain as to which text is the original and which is borrowing.[200] This is particularly important to consider in a synchronic study which ideally should be able to convincingly argue that the allusion extends equally over the texts at hand. However this cannot always be done, and instead the evidence can point to one direction more than the other, suggesting that one text is either more likely the point of origin or the borrower, thus betraying a diachronic element.[201] It is important to be careful with both synchronic and diachronic analyses as the former can lead to an unbalanced assessment of textual interactions, while the latter has to assert a vector of allusion that may be based on hypothetical assertions.

In my word study of Proverbs 31:10-31 I will favour Leonard's methodology, focusing particularly on the principles no. 1-5. This is because much of the language in the poem is either rare or linked to specific motifs (principle no. 3) or, as we will see in the analysis of חיל, part of an accumulation of related terms adds to the argument of alluding to specific tradition, (principle no. 5). As to whether I will be looking for examples of "allusions" or "intertextuality," intertextuality's synchronic approach may be more suitable due to the difficulties around the dating of Proverbs; this will allow me to avoid the question of which direction the

[199] Jeffery M. Leonard, "Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions: Psalm 78 as a Test Case," in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 127, (2008), 241-265, 246.
[200] Leonhard, "Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions, 257.
[201] Leonhard specifically refers to Dozeman's reading of Jonah as an inner-biblical interpretation of Joel and vice versa, but notes that "While Dozeman's reading of Jonah as a satire of Joel's oracle is quite strong, the evidence he adduces for reading in the opposite direction is meagre by contrast and ultimately unconvincing," 262.

vector of allusion points. However, I intend to consider the original horizon of expectation of the *author*, which intertextuality does not but while allusion does. Unfortunately, due to the problematic nature of dating Proverbs, it is not possible to rule out texts as potential influencers of the poem. I will therefore focus on an intertextual approach, with a synchronic analysis of textual interactions, albeit also considering how the author of Proverbs 31:10-31 *may have been* influenced by the specific motifs and images found in other texts. Moreover, while the search for shared language and themes is the first stage in my analysis, this will feed into a broader consideration of how the author has potentially alluded to or used specific traditions and tropes attested elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. By doing this, I will be able to fully analyse and consider the allusions that are present in the text without having to discuss the vectors of influence that a diachronic study would entail. Ultimately, such a study would lead to pointless hypotheticals about the direction of influence, which could go either way due to the hiddenness and atemporality of Proverbs 31:10-31.

Word Study: חיל and Other Military Related Terms

To begin the word study, I will begin with the word חיל. This term has a wide semantic field, which can make interpreting a specific meaning for חיל difficult in certain situations. In the most basic sense, חיל is related in some form or another to strength and power, but can also be a noun for armies or wealth.[202] For instance, it is used as a noun for an army 71 times[203] in passages like Ex. 14:9 in which וְחֵילוֹ is used in the list of all the people following the Pharaoh in the pursuit of Israel. This is also seen in

[202] Eising, "חַיִל *chayil*," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament Vol. IV*, edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, translated by David E. Green, (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1980, 348-355, 349.
All future references to the collection *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament Vol. I-XV,* edited by G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, translated by John T. Willis, David E. Green, and Douglas W. Stott, (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1974-2006), shall hence forth be referred to as *TDOT*.
[203] Eising, "*chayil*," 351.

Num. 31:14 with the definite article, הֶחָיִל, as part of a construct chain with פְּקוּדֵי, *officers*, and thus refers to officers of the army. In reference to wealth, it is typically linked to another word related to trade or acquisition, such as Job 20:18 with the phrase כְּחֵיל תְּמוּרָתוֹ, *profit (*חיל*) of his tradings,* though this is translated more literally as wealth of his reward or substitutes.[204] Ezek. 28:5 is also an example of חיל as wealth and trade, in the phrase בְּרָכְלָתְךָ הִרְבִּיתָ חֵילֶךָ, *by your trade/ merchandise you have increased your wealth* (חיל). These translations do not match the meaning of חיל as expressed in Prov. 31:10. Nonetheless it is important to be aware of them because these more specific interpretations and definitions affect the general meaning of חיל and the way it is understood.

Suffice to say, these are but a few examples חיל translated as army or wealth, but the way that חיל is used in these verses,[205] is not the same way it is used in Prov. 31:10. Rather, in 31:10, it is part of a construct chain that is linked to a specific person or noun, specifically the אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל, the Woman of Valour. This specific phrase is made up of a construct and absolute noun, אֵשֶׁת and חַיִל respectively, and because חיל is the absolute noun, it is the focus of the phrase. Thus it must be translated as the Woman *of* Valour, rather than as a Valiant Woman, Good Wife, Virtuous Wife, or any other number of translations which have put the stress on אשׁת. My reasoning behind this is that, firstly the phrase אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל, also occurs in Prov. 12:4 and Ruth 3:11, but are both structured in the form of construct-absolute. Secondly, while these may be the only references to the specific phrase אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל, there are a number of other phrases in the Hebrew Bible that appear in the same structure, and are used for similar purposes, acting as a title or signifier of people worthy of praise or accolade. There are 12 other phrases, used primarily in the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, to describe men who are 'Men of Valour,' 'Mighty Men of Valour,' and/ or 'Sons of Valour,' who are typically, though

[204] תְּמוּרָה the root is better understood as reward or substitute but the translation of profit is not unjustified.
[205] Eising, "*chayil*," 352, Eising also notes other passages such as Isa. 8:4, 10:14, 30:6; Jer. 15:13; Mic. 4:13; Gen 34:29; also refer to חַיִל as wealth.

not always, praised or celebrated by holding this title. These specific phrases and their occurrences are:

אִישׁ חָיִל – A Man of Valour - Jdg. 3:29; 1 Sam. 31:12; 2 Sam. 24:9, 1 Kgs. 1:42; 1 Chron. 10:12, 26:8.

אַנְשֵׁי־חַיִל – Men of Valour– Gen. 47:6; Ex 18:21, 25; Jdg. 20:44, 46; 2 Sam. 11:16; Isa 5:22; Jer 48:14; Nah. 2:4; Ps. 76:6; Neh. 11:6.

אַנְשֵׁי הַחַיִל – The Men of Valour – 2 Kgs. 24:16.

אַנְשֵׁי הֶחָיִל – The Men of Valour – Ecc. 12:3.

גִּבּוֹר חַיִל –Mighty Man of Valour – Jdg. 11:1; 1 Sam. 9:1; 2 Kgs. 5:1; Ruth 2:1; 1 Chron. 12:29; 28:1; 2 Chron. 13:3; 17:16, 17; 25:6; 32:21.

גִּבּוֹרֵי חַיִל – Mighty Men of Valour – Neh. 11:14; 1 Chron. 5:24; 7:2; 9:13; 12:22, 26; 26:6, 31; 2 Chron. 14:7; 17:13, 14.

גִּבּוֹרֵי הַחַיִל - The Mighty Men of Valour – Josh. 1:14; 8:3; 2 Kgs. 15:20; 24:14.

גִּבּוֹר הֶחָיִל – The Mighty Man of Valour – Josh. 6:2; 10:7; Jdg. 6:12.

גִּבּוֹרֵי חַיִלִים – Might Men of Valours/ Valorous Deeds[206] - 1 Chron. 7:5

בֶּן־חַיִל – Son of Valour – 1 Sam. 14:52; 2 Sam. 17:10.

בְּנֵי־חַיִל – Sons of Valour – Deut. 3:18; Jdg. 18:2; 2 Sam. 17:10; 2 Kgs. 2:16; 1 Chron. 5:18; 26:7, 30, 32; 2 Chron. 26:17; 28:6.

בֶּן־אִישׁ־חַיִל – Son of a Man of Valour – 2 Sam. 23:20;[207] 1 Chron. 11:22.

In all these occurrences חיל is *always* the absolute noun with the word or words preceding always in the construct form, much like in Prov. 31:10,

[206] This is translated as simply as Mighty Warriors in most translations and there is no natural translation for a plural of חַיִל.
[207] The qere reads חַיִל.

thus placing the focus on חיל. While the references to men or sons of valour are self-explanatory, in their meaning, the various phrases that include the word or some form of גבר are interesting. This because the word גבר when used alone is "synonymous with the powerful or cunning execution of battle, with triumphal power or victory in war."[208] This is clear in references to the mighty men of valour that are singled out as part of David's entourage or men that he specifically seeks out. For instance, in 1 Chron. 26:31 it states that in David's fortieth year he searched for גִּבּוֹרֵי חַיִל and found them in Jazer, and in 1 Chron. 28:1 David calls to all the גִּבּוֹר חַיִל in Jerusalem along with other warriors and officials.[209] This phrase can also be used to refer to enemy forces, most likely to suggest their fearsome power, as seen in 2 Sam. 11:16 when Joab commands Uriah to fight in the part of the city where the אַנְשֵׁי־חַיִל are found, in hopes they kill him. In 2 Kgs. 5:1, Naaman is said to be a גִּבּוֹר חַיִל in the army and for his master, and in 2 Chron. 32:21 the angel cuts down all the גִּבּוֹר חַיִל of the Assyrian army. As such, to be given a title including חיל suggestive of a particular type of power available to these men, both physically and socially. Moreover, Kosmala's analysis of גבר states that it "is an intensive form, and thus means a particularly strong or mighty person who carries out, can carry out, or has carried out great deeds, and surpasses others in doing so."[210] Niditch notes in the Chronicles that "the phrase… is associated with heads of 'ancestral houses' or lineages; this tradition may be assuming the existence of a warrior's caste," or that "this late biblical tradition refer to men of social, political and economic power."[211] While Niditch is simply speculating about the existence of a warrior's caste, there are some references which could support this idea. For instance, 1 Chron. 7:5 the clans of Issachar had a

[208] Kosmala, "גֶּבֶר *gabhar*; גְּבוּרָה *gebhurah*; גְּבִיר *gebhir*; גִּבּוֹר *gibbor*; גֶּבֶר *gebher*," Kosmala, *TDOT Vol. II,* 367-382, 369.
[209] While not referring to גִּבּוֹר, 1 Sam. 14:52 which refers to Saul 'attaching' himself to all the בֶּן־חַיִל he saw, which further highlights the motif of men of valour as part of the royal entourage.
[210] Kosmala, "*gibbor*," 373.
[211] Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 91.

total of 87,000 mighty men of valour, in v.7 the sons of Bela are named as mighty men of valour and as רָאשֵׁי בֵּית אָבוֹת, "heads of the house of the father," a motif also found in v.40. Further evidence of this could be the reference to the גִּבּוֹרֵי הַחַיִל and אַנְשֵׁי הַחַיִל in 2 Kgs. 24:14 and 24:16, respectively, who are distinguished as a separate group of Babylonian exiles.[212] Simple warriors would not have been singled out as being held captive and taken away, thus for them to be mentioned specifically, suggests these captives were more significant or socially/ physically powerful than a typical warrior. The phrases can also refer to wealthy men, like Boaz who is called a גִּבּוֹר חַיִל in Ruth 2:1, and in 2 Kgs. 15:20 Menahem is stated as taking 50 shekels from all the גִּבּוֹרֵי הַחַיִל to give to the Assyrian king. John C. Yoder suggests, similar to Niditch's assessment of the phrase גבר חיל, that in the book of Judges the phrase acts as a title or signpost for a specific class of men. In particular, Yoder notes that "with these words, the messenger identified Gideon as a member of an elite class wielding extensive military, political, and economical power."[213] Yoder also notes that wealth is the main reason one acquires the title. Gideon, in particular, is noted as being from a wealthy family, owning two bulls which he is order to sacrifice in v.25.[214]

For the most part though, these phrases refer to a particular type of person who has accomplished a particularly important deed, regardless of wealth, and are often referred to in multiple narratives. For example, the men who recovered Saul and his son's bodies, are referred to as אִישׁ חַיִל in both 1 Sam. 31:12 and 1 Chron. 10:12. Perhaps the most interesting reference though is Beniah in 2 Sam. 23:20[215] and 1 Chron. 11:22 who is named as a בֶּן־אִישׁ־חַיִל, of Jehoiada, and then followed by a description of his accomplishments. Of this list, Niditch claims there is a bardic style to the tale as Beniah is praised for defeating two ariels (lions) and הארי, the

[212] In 2 Kings 24:14 they are referred to as גִּבּוֹרֵי הַחַיִל and 2 Kings 24:16 are referred to as אַנְשֵׁי הַחַיִל.
[213] John C. Yoder, *Power and Politics in the Book of Judges: Men and Women of Valour,* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 1.
[214] Yoder, *Power and Politics*, 136.
[215] Masora Parvah: ב חַי ק חַיִל.

lion (2 Sam. 23:20), a handsome man and an Egyptian warrior wielding a spear (v.21).[216] The bardic element is further emphasised by the fact that his accomplishments have the definite article, "implying that the authors refers to a well-known tale," the story about the lion, the snow, and the pit.[217] Beniah himself is not directly referred to as a man of valour, only his father, but could it be that he is given this title by extension? Given that his accomplishments are remembered both in 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles, both his deeds and his lineage, it suggests that he is a well-known figure who fits into the typical motif of a גבר/ אשה/ בן חיל. Nonetheless, from all of this we can see that while חיל by itself can refer to armies or wealth, when used as an absolute noun with a construct like אשה or גבר it instead refers to a particular type of person. This person is usually a warrior or hero, typically in relation to either an ancestral family of Israel's past or great heroes in the entourage of others such as David. Because of this, when we see the phrase אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל, which is syntactically identical to the phrases which refer to men, it naturally carries the same expectations of prestige and accolade regardless of sex of the person receiving the title. While the context is different, shift from the battlefield to the household, the title אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל is related to the same phrases used for men, and thus carry the same expectations of praise towards the women claiming this title.[218]

Furthermore, there are a number of other words in the poem, much like חיל, that are linked to physical strength, violence, martial power, and war, further stressing the need to understand the phrase אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל in comparison to the male equivalents. One such word is טֶרֶף *terep* in v.15, often translated as food, but in its most basic meaning refers to torn flesh

[216] Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible*, 91.
[217] Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible*, 92.
[218] Al Wolters, "Proverbs XXXI 10-31 as Heroic Hymn: A Form-Critical Analysis," in *Vestus Testamentum*, Vol. 38, (Oct., 1988), 446-457, 453, part of Wolters thesis also argues along this line as well, concluding that poem is a heroic hymn rather than advice literature (447), but this has been debated by Fox in Fox, *Proverbs*, 902, who argues that while the poem certainly does celebrate great deeds, hymns are typically reserved for God, and that this poem lacks the typical features of the hymnic style, concluding that "there is nothing to be gained from stretching the concept of hymn beyond its usual use.

or the prey of savage animals like the lion.[219] Out of the 58 occurrences of טרף, not all of refer to predators. Some refer to the action similar to that of plucking or tearing, with Wagner noting Gen. 8:11 when the dove brings back the branch to Noah.[220] While טרף is used here positively, it still refers to a necessary physical power behind the action of plucking. In reference to טרף as a food source, we see it used positively Ps. 111:5 where טרף refers to food provided to those who fear YHWH and Mal. 3:10 calls for טרף to be put into the storehouse, and thus makes it reasonable to translate טרף in v.15 a similar fashion.[221] On the other hand, it is interesting that other uses of טרף as food are depicted negatively, such as in Lev. 17:15, where eating meat which has been torn or savaged by an animal renders the eater unclean. In Ezek. 4:14 Ezekiel protests to YHWH that he has not eaten that which has been טְרֵפָה, "been torn apart;" later in the book, טְרֵפָה is listed as one of the foods priests are forbidden to eat.[222] As such, while טרף as food can be both positive and negative, this is probably not the most important meaning that the author of Proverbs 31:10-31 intended to refer to when using the word. Rather, the provision of טרף for her household is a potential allusion to the fact that she either hunts for her food, maybe in a market place, or that it is a meat produce that is substantial in size, much like the lion's prey.

Another set of words to consider are צוֹפִיָּה, "watching over" in v.27, and עָלְיִת, "to surpass" or "go over" in v.29, terms which are also closely linked to violence and war. Firstly, we will consider צוֹפִיָּה, which has been debated by some to be a pun on the Greek concept of wisdom,[223] though this has been disputed. Instead, Steins argues that צפה in the active participle form typically refers to a specific military function of acting as a watchman, in particular as a sentinel for city gates, a vulnerable part of

[219] Wagner, "טָרַף *tarap*; טֶרֶף *terep*; טְרֵפָה *terepa*; טָרָף *tarap*," *TDOT Vol. V*, 350-357, 351.
[220] Wagner, "*terep*," 351.
[221] Wagner, "*terep*," 353.
[222] Wagner, "*terep*," 352.
[223] Wolters, "Proverbs XXXI 10-31 as Heroic Hymn," 448, 451. However, this part of the thesis has largely been discredited, particularly by Fox in Fox, *Proverbs*, 897.

the city, and thus an important defensive job.[224] This is clear in 2 Sam. 18:24-27 which refers to the הַצֹּפֶה, "the watcher," who stands atop the wall of the gates, acting as a look-out. This role distinct from the הַשֹּׁעֵר, "the guard or gatekeeper," as seen by the phrase וַיִּקְרָא הַצֹּפֶה אֶל־הַשֹּׁעֵר, "and the watcher called out to the gatekeeper," reinforcing the idea that these two duties were separate.[225] This specific rank is also noted in 2 Kgs. 9:17-20, and states that this הַצֹּפֶה is atop a tower in order to do his job. In both cases, these men would report incoming messengers and function as lookouts for enemies as well, such as in 1 Sam. 14:16 in which the הַצֹּפִים, report to Saul the state of the Philistine Camp after Jonathan goes there. It is also worth mentioning that while the watchers and the gatekeepers were separate people, their functions were undoubtedly linked and there are a number of references in Chronicles to men of valour who are celebrated for being gatekeepers, or worthy of such as duty. We can see this in 1 Chron. 26:6-8, where the בן חיל and גִּבּוֹר חַיִל are deemed worthy to be considered for gatekeeper duty, which is allotted from v.12 onwards. As such, while the Woman of Valour is overlooking the activities of her household, by using the verb in this form, it alludes to the same vigilance of the watchmen and gatekeepers who would have watched over the city in order to protect it. This also alters the meaning of v.27b "she does not eat the bread of idleness," by suggesting that her lack of idleness is to ensure she keeps a vigilant watch over her household to ensure they are doing and acting well.

Secondly, we have עָלְיוֹת, the word used to describe how the Woman of Valour surpasses all the other women who have עָשׂוּ חָיִל, "done valour," and has both a physical meaning, but also a metaphorical meaning related to war. When used literally to refer to a physical movement, it can be a movement into the air or a building, but also up towards another

[224] Steins, "צָפָה *sapa*; מִצְפֶּה *mispeh*; צִפִּיָּה *sippiya*," *TDOT Vol. XII*, 429-435, 431.
[225] TDOT Vol. 12, "*sippiya*," 432.

land or place.[226] It can also refer to a physical and figurative movement towards a person of higher social rank, such as Joseph going towards the Pharaoh in Gen. 46:31, or a place where high ranking people congregate, like Ruth 4:1, describing Boaz's journey to the city gates.[227] For the specific military context behind עלה, it is typically used with the preposition עַל, forming the phrase, "to go over against or surpass over," with the suggestion being that the one going over has defeated the other party. We can see this in Jdg. 18:9 when the Danite spies tell the men that they will go up against the people of Ephraim to take the land, 2 Kgs 17:3 when Shalmaneser goes up over Hoshea and makes Israel a vassal state, and Jer. 50:9 when YHWH will bring a great nation from the north to go up over against Babylon.[228] Once again, much like the previous terms we have looked at, while the context of the specific phrases has been altered, by using such a specific phrase עֲלִית עַל the author of the poem alludes to the Woman of Valour superiority to be similar to that of one army defeating another. Thus the Woman of Valour surpasses and 'defeats' the other women who have also done חיל themselves, but she reigns supreme as the best of them all, not unlike an army conquering another, proving that they are the strongest and better nation or tribe, in comparison to their victims.

The examples stated above are certainly not the only words used in the poem that are linked to military and war imagery, with others being body parts like her זְרֹעוֹתֶיהָ, "arms,"[229] her יָדֶיהָ, "hands,"[230] and her

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[226] Fuhs, "עָלָה *'ala*; מַעַל *ma'al*; מֹעַל *mo'al*; מַעֲלֶה *ma'aleh*; מַעֲלָה *ma'ala*; תְּעָלָה *te'ala*; עֲלֵי *'eli*; עִלִּי *'illi*; עֲלִיָּה *'aliya*," *TDOT Vol. XI*, 76-95, 81.

[227] Fuhs, "*'ala*," 83.

[228] Fuhs, "*'ala*," 84, these are but a few examples and more include 2Kgs 18:13; Ezek. 16:40; 23:46; 2 Chron. 36:17, as but a few extra examples.

[229] Helfmeyer, "זְרוֹעַ *zeroa*," *TDOT Vol. IV*, 131-140, 133, for instance Helymeyer points to metaphorical use of *zeroa* in Ezek. 30:21-22 in the oracle against Egypt the arms of the Pharaoh are broken while in 31:24 Babylon who will rise against Egypt has their arms strengthened. The arm of YHWH is often depicted as a symbol of war and destruction as well, notably in Ex. 15:16 and Isa. 30:30.

[230] Ackroyd, Bergaman, and Von Soden, "יָד *yad*; זְרוֹעַ *zeroa*; יָמִין *yamin*; כַּף *kap*; אֶצְבַּע *'esba'*," *TDOT Vol. V*, 393-426, 412, the combination of words יָד שָׁלַח, send the hand, is usually linked to an aggressive action of both humans, such as Gen 19:10; Jdg. 3:21, 5:26; in which Ehud and Jael send the hand towards a weapon to kill someone, and YHWH in Ex. 3:20.

husband not lacking שָׁלָל, "spoils" or "booty."[231] From all this we can see that the author of 31:10-31 selected words and phrases typically linked to war and violence, but recontextualises them to fit a domestic context, but retaining the aspects of praise and excellence familiar to these motifs. Yet it is interesting that the Woman of Valour, who is completely divorced from a martial and violent context, is praised with the such a title, given that women such as Deborah and Jael, in Judges 4 and 5 are not praised with such an accolade. Yoder has argued that these accounts are focused on female honour and strength given that Jael's trickery, typically a masculine tactic, "is here successfully exercised by a woman,"[232] and that the accounts aim at humbling men who pursue superficial glory.[233] Yoder even goes so far as to retrospectively bestow the title of אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל onto Deborah and Jael, along with other women in Judges, declaring that their actions merit such a title.[234] Deborah and Jael actions are contrary to their gender, with Deborah acting as a commander and war counsellor for Barak, and Jael's murder of Sisera has been interpreted as an inverse of the rape that the women of Jdg. 5:30 were destined.[235] Yoder notes that the Song of Deborah (Jdg. 5), one of the oldest parts of the Hebrew Bible, praises a women, but the retrospective attribution of the title אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל onto Deborah and Jael does not change the fact that the text itself fails to praise the women itself.[236] Instead, Gale Yee has argued, contrary to Yoder, that the female honour 'celebrated' in the story of Deborah and Jael is rather an unintended by-product of male shame, and that the

[231] This usually suggests a violence in the acquisition of these goods, eg Deut. 2:35; Jdg. 5:30 the spoils here include both luxury items like fine clothing and tapestries, but also women as שָׁלָל, Isa. 10:6; Ezek. 29:19; Prov. 1:13;
[232] Yoder, *Power and Politics*, 158.
[233] Yoder, *Power and Politics*, 156-7.
[234] Yoder, *Power and Politics*, 38, including in his list Delilah, Achsah, and the woman who slays Abimelech. 158, refers to Jael directly as "a woman of valour."
[235] Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible*, 114, given the use of a tent peg, a long hard object, is thrust into Sisera's temple, this has often been interpreted as a phallic symbol of retaliation against the rape of women in war (cf. with Gen. 34:31), to which Niditch states Robert Alter popularised in:
Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985), 43-49, specifically, 49 "the driving of the tent peg into the ground on which the narrator dwells seems to be what our own age would call a phallic aggressive act."
[236] It could be argued that in Jdg. 5:24 when Jael is stated as the 'most blessed of women' that this is a form of praise, but even so her actual actions receive no praise in and of themselves.

women only gain honour by subverting the power of Barak and Sisera.[237] Yee suggests that women like Deborah and Jael are already symbols of male shame, as they can only exist in a time of crisis, when there is a lack of control and turmoil within the established male world.[238] Both women actively shame two great military commanders:

Barak is shamed by Deborah in his refusal to go into battle without her. Sisera is shamed by Jael in the desertion of his battalion and his cowardly retreat to a woman's tent. Barak is shamed by Jael, when he confronts his impotence in the form of Sisera's body, killed by the hands of a woman, and not by his own. *This shaming by a woman is only effective if war is defined solely as a male activity.*[239]

Because of this 'female honour=male shame paradigm,' Jgd. 4-5 does not function as an ode to female strength and honour, but rather as a critique of male deficiency and improper behaviour. Yoder even notes that by falling into the hands of a woman, Sisera is forever disgraced, a blemish on his house for dying in such an embarrassing way, making his shame the focus, rather than Jael honour for defeating Israel's enemy.[240] This is further reinforced by Jdg. 9:54 when Abimelech, after being struck by the millstone a woman dropped on him, asks his armour-bearer to strike him down פֶּן יֹאמְרוּ לִי אִשָּׁה הֲרָגָתְהוּ, "lest they say of me a woman has killed him." Here the shame could be a combination of his attacker being a woman and without the use of a proper weapon, but his protests stress that it is his attacker's gender which brings the most shame. By extension, Jael and Deborah become "castrators" of male pride and honour,[241] subversive

[237] Gale A. Yee, "By the Hand of a Woman: The Metaphor of the Woman Warrior in Judges 4," in *Semeia* Vol. 61, (1993), 99-132, 116-117.
[238] Yee, "Hand of a Woman," 112.
[239] Yee, "Hand of a Woman," 115.
[240] Yoder, *Power and Politics*, 157.
[241] Yee, "Hand of a Woman," 112.

characters whose aim is to show how one should *not* act as a man, rather than how to act as an honourable woman as Yoder would suggest. I have chosen to highlight Deborah and Jael in comparison with 31:10-31 as while Deborah and Jael subvert male honour and power, the Woman of Valour, whose author alludes frequently to male-specific war and military motifs, is instead depicted as an essential and complimentary character to men. Rather than subverting her husband's power, the Woman of Valour actively enhances his life and enables him to perform his own duties without worry, as seen in v.11 and v.23.

Moreover, unlike Deborah and Jael, the Woman of Valour is actively praised by her husband in v.28 and then by her works in the city gates in v.31, specifically with the verb הָלַל, "to be praised." The specific use of הָלַל is an interesting choice, as while the Woman of Valour is not the only human to be given הָלַל, for instance Sarah in Gen 12:15 and Absalom in 2 Sam 14:25,[242] it is most commonly used in reference to YHWH. The most frequent use of הָלַל is in Psalms and the Chronicles collections, where either YHWH is praised,[243] or YHWH's name or words are הָלַל.[244] For instance in 1 Chron. 16:10 and 29:13 YHWH's name is praised, while in Ps. 56:11 the Psalter praises YHWH words. Another common motif that is exclusive to YHWH in regards to הָלַל is doing so via music or song, attested to in multiple Psalms and Chronicles narratives.[245] As such, the call to הָלַל the Woman of Valour is significant in and of itself, but when combined with the fact that she is praised in the city gates, it becomes all the more significant as a public expression of said praise. Walsh notes that gates as a literary contrast usually focus on their function as a place of security, gossip, trade, and also a legal boundary for both insiders and outsiders.[246] City gates can act as a transformative space for women,

[242] Other examples also include: in Prov. 12:8 the man praised for his insight, Prov. 27:3 law breakers praising the wicked, and in Cant. 6:9 the beloved is praised by young women, queens, and concubines.
[243] A few examples, but not limited to: Isa 62:9-10; Jer. 31:7; Ps. 104:35; 105:45; 107:32; 111:1; 115:18; 135:1.
[244] Ringgren, "הלל *hll* I and II; הִלּוּלִים *hillulim*; תְּהִלָּה *tehillah*," *TDOT Vol. V*, 404-410, 405.
[245] For instance: Ps. 69:30; 150: 3-5; Ezra 3:10; 1 Chron. 23:5; 2 Chron. 5:13; 7:6; 29:30; 30:21.
[246] Carey Walsh, "Testing Entry: The Social Functions of City-Gates in Biblical Memory," in *Memory and the city in Ancient Israel*, edited by Diana V. Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi, (Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 43-60, 43, 49.

usually in the form of elevated status, moving from the fringes or outside society to inclusion within it, such as Ruth 4:11, or bestowed with significance in the social memory of Israel, both negative, like Ezek. 8:14 and 2 Kgs. 9:33, and positive like Jdg. 9:53.[247] While it may not be unique for a woman to gain a new elevated status at the city gates, to be הָלַל is. The Woman of Valour's specific form of praise in the gates is unique to this poem. This is further backed by May in her analysis of city gates, who notes 9 specific functions, which are as follows:

1. Gates as a sacral space. Temples, chapels, cult ceremonies and sacrifices at the gate.

2. Gates as a place for the installation of the royal monuments.

3. Processional gates: a place for public performances: military and ritual.

4. Gates as a place for the public appearance of the king.

5. Gates as a place for public assemblies.

6. Gates as a place for judicial activities: judgement, litigation, legal agreements, publication of court decisions and legal documents.

7. Gates as a place for public executions (not only of legal character).

8. Gates as a market place.

9. Gates as a place of control.[248]

Of these functions none of them are related to the form praise as depicted in Prov. 31:31, as even the military function is typically restricted to processions before and after battle, in which the army as a whole is

[247] Walsh, "Testing Entry," 54.

[248] Natalie N. May, "Gates and Their Function in Mesopotamia and Ancient Israel," in *The Fabric of Cities: Aspects of Urbanism, Urban Topography and Society in Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome,* edited by Natalie N. May and Ulrike Steinert, (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 77-122, 78.

praised.[249] Even as a place of social gathering or appearances of the king, these instances do not directly refer to the praise of an individual, regardless of it then referring specially to הֻלַּל as the Woman of Valour is.[250] In fact Prov. 31:31 is the only occurrence in the Hebrew Bible of someone being הֻלַּל within the city gates, thus this is a motif unique to this character and the author.

Considering all that has been discussed above, it is clear that the original horizon of expectation that informed the author was a complex one, and that the author both reaffirmed certain expectations while also subverting and creating new expectations. For instance, using אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל as a title for the Woman of Valour defies expectations due the fact that women, even in war settings, are rarely given such a title. Yet, because her actions parallel איש חיל and warriors in general, such as her vigilance in v.27 and the gatekeepers in 1 Chron. 26:6-8, and that she עָלִית עַל all other women who have עשׂה חיל (v.29), she fulfils expectations that anyone declared a person of חיל is exceptional, strong, and among the best of the best. Yet in the same instance, because she given the title אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל, and described with the language and motifs most often associated with the גִּבּוֹר חַיִל /בֵּן /אִישׁ and other warriors, the author has defied the original expectations of these motifs. Here her gender compounds both the expectation of those who should bear a title include חיל, but also the expectations of warrior-like attributes and war language being used for both a woman and a domestic context. Add to this that she is praised for typically masculine actions, in comparison to other women who defy gender expectations like Deborah and Jael who are not praised as publically or in the same way as the Woman of Valour. The expectation shifts from subversive castrator to complimentary life partner. Whereas Deborah and Jael's power and praise requires them to usurp men via shame, the Woman of Valour's husband actively trusts (v.11) and

[249] May, "Gates and their Function," 89-90.
[250] May, "Gates and their Function," public gatherings in Gen. 34:20-21; Prov. 1:20-21 (93-94), appearances of the King in 2 Sam 18:1-5; 1 Kgs 22:10 (91).

endorses her actions by praising her. Furthermore, the fact the Woman of Valour's praise takes the form הָלַל, a verb most often used in relation to YHWH, show that the author is further defying normal expectations. While the expectation that someone credited with the title of חיל is of an exceptional nature, these expectations are further defied by having a woman and a human at the receiving of הָלַל. Thus, while the original horizon of expectation of a person who is credited with חיל is reaffirmed in some ways, by taking these expectations and placing them in an atypical context, a familiar image is distorted and made new, in this case the אישׁ־חיל becomes the אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל.

Word Study: Colour, Fabric and Clothing

In this second section I will analyse how the poem uses specific colour/ fabric, and clothing motifs, in particular clothing as part of a metaphor. The main focus will be on שָׁנִי, often understood as a hue that falls within the red or crimson spectrum, though the specific nature of the hue is of little concern here. I will instead focus on how שָׁנִי is used in the Hebrew Bible and the poem.

שָׁנִי is one of the 8 colour terms that Noegel has identified within the red colour spectrum.[251] שָׁנִי can be used to refer to a colour, a dye, or a fabric.[252] The most common occurrence of שָׁנִי is in Exodus as part of the chain תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ, "tikelet, and argamon, and the worm of sany and linen,"[253] the materials and colours used for the dressings of the tabernacle and the high-priest's vestments. שָׁנִי refers to the colour or

[251] Scott B. Noegel, "Scarlet and Harlots: Seeing Red in the Hebrew Bible," in *Hebrew Union College Annual,* Vol. 87, (2016), 1-47, 4.

[252] Athalya Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament*, (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982), 138.
John E. Hartley, *The Semantics of Ancient Hebrew Colour Lexemes*, (Paris: Peeters, 2010), 192.

[253] This string occurs in: Ex 25:4; 26:31, 36; 27:16; 28:5, 6, 8, 15, 33; 35:6, 25, 35; 38:18; 23; 39:1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 24, 29; some of these include the article on all terms or a ב preposition, but always occur in this exact same order. Usually שֵׁשׁ is also followed by the verb מָשְׁזָר which means to twist, which means that the linen is of a high quality or crafted by one of a skilled hand. I have also chosen not to translate the colour terms as any attempt to translate is an issue of hue or pigment, which I am not concerned with, but for clarity, *tikelet* = blue-purple, *argamon* = red-purple, *sany* = red/ crimson/ scarlet, *sesh* = linen/ white.

fabric, while תוֹלַעַת, *worm or strand,* refers either to the Kermes worm and the eggs crushed to make the dye,[254] or the shape and length of the fabric. These colours are clearly held in high esteem in a cultic context, undoubtedly being culturally significant colours/ materials because of their rare and luxurious nature. Out of four colours/ materials mentioned, שָׁנִי is less valuable than תכלת and ארגמן,[255] but was still definitely considered a luxurious item as seen in 2 Sam. 1:24 when David calls for the women to weep over the death of Saul, who הַמַּלְבִּשְׁכֶם שָׁנִי, "who clothed you (in/ with) sany." שָׁנִי as a signal of luxury is paralleled also in Jer. 4:30 when Judah is chastised for "beautifying" herself with make-up, adornments of gold and clothing of שָׁנִי in the face of peril, attempting to seduce and placate her tormenters. However, beside these verses, שָׁנִי is not typically linked to luxury or wealth. Carol Meyers has suggested that שָׁנִי (the colour) is used as an apotropaic substance, a phenomenon that still exists today.[256] In particular she highlights Tamar's labour in Gen38:28[257] where the midwife puts עַל־יָדוֹ שָׁנִי, "upon his hand sany." It is often translated as a thread of שָׁנִי due to the use of the verb קָשַׁר, "to bind." Contextually this does make sense, as a baby's hand would require only a small piece of שָׁנִי. Noegel notes the midwives' actions are not typical practice, and that the use of שָׁנִי is either linked to the bloodiness of birth,[258] or that "the author has integrated into a single literary context the cluster: red, stigmatized sexual behaviour (here prostitution), and blood."[259] The story of Rehab also makes use of this cluster, as she also uses חוּט הַשָּׁנִי, "the

[254] Hartley, *Ancient Hebrew Colour*, 192.

[255] Brenner, *Colour Terms*, 144, Brenner states that שָׁנִי in Hebrew "has been narrowed to denote a 'dyed textile' *par excellence*, second only in value to תכלת וארגמן," and that תכלת always appear before וארגמן when they are paired together, suggesting the former is more valuable than the later (146).

[256] Carol Meyers, *Households and Holiness: The Religious Culture of Israelite Women*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 52-53, 54-55, Meyers points to modern examples such as the use of red neckerchiefs to wrap children in after birth to protect from evil spirts, or the red thread which is wrapped around the tomb of Rachel in order to pass on blessings of fertility, she notes that such practices have been used and attested for centuries, and thus could have originated even before then.

[257] Meyers, *Households and Holiness*, 52.

[258] Noegel, "Scarlet and Harlots," 7. He notes that Gen. 25:24-26 does not mention שָׁנִי during the birth of Esau and Jacob, and thus most likely refers to the bloodiness of Tamar's birth. However, I disagree with Noegel's suggestion of שָׁנִי relating to blood as it is never used to refer to or describe blood.

[259] Noegel, "Scarlet and Harlots," 7.

thread of sany," with which וַתִּקְשֹׁר אֶת־תִּקְוַת הַשָּׁנִי, "she bound the chord of sany" to her window in Josh. 2:21. Noegel notes a common link of stigmatized sexual behaviour, once again prostitution, and the use of a שָׁנִי cord. He also argues that תִּקְוַת is a double entendre, meaning both a cord and hope, the former becoming the latter for Rehab.[260] In particular Noegel argues that the actual thread mentioned in Josh. 2:18 may have already been in Rehab's possession rather than given to her and is linked to her status as a prostitute, much like the sexual image of a woman at a window.[261] Further examples include Jer. 4:30, which shares this link of שָׁנִי and stigmatized sexual behaviour,[262] as well as Cant. 4:3 when the beloved is described as having lips כְּחוּט הַשָּׁנִי, "like the thread of sany," though as a sexual motif rather than a stigmatized behaviour.[263]

Like Meyers, Noegel notes that red colours in the ancient Near East, and blood included in this grouping, were more often used in protection rituals and generally possessed apotropaic properties.[264] For instance, in Mesopotamia red salt was used to help those suffering with dreams of the dead.[265] The use of binding and knots is also an attested feature of protection rituals in the ancient Near East and antiquity. This element is present in both Tamar and Rahab's use of שָׁנִי,[266] suggesting that perhaps their use was for protective means rather than as signifiers of their sexual misbehaviour. For Rahab the שָׁנִי thread is literally a sign of protection, but this could also be applied to Tamar given that the שָׁנִי is tied to the hand of the first child who then returns back into the womb while the second is born. Primarily, the שָׁנִי could act as an identifier of the first born but also potentially serve as a protective charm used during a difficult birth. This argument can be further strengthened by Brenner's observation that שָׁנִי is also used in cleansing rituals for leprous people and their houses, notably

[260] Noegel, "Scarlet and Harlots," 9.
[261] Noegel, "Scarlet and Harlots," 7.
[262] Noegel, "Scarlet and Harlots," 10.
[263] Noegel, "Scarlet and Harlots," 22.
[264] Noegel, "Scarlet and Harlots," 25.
[265] Noegel, "Scarlet and Harlots," 25.
[266] Noegel, "Scarlet and Harlots," 27.

in Lev. 14:4, 6, 51, 52; and Num. 19:6.[267] In these passages, the priest takes a live bird, cedar wood, hyssop, and שְׁנִי הַתּוֹלַעַת, *the sany of the worm,* which is likely referring to the colour extracted from the Kermes worm. Hartley proposes that these materials are tied together with the שְׁנִי and dipped into the blood of a bird to then sprinkled on affected peoples and areas in order to cleanse them.[268] Furthermore, it could be suggested that these apotropaic elements extended to the use of שְׁנִי in the construction of the tabernacle, especially given that the tabernacle is a place of constant cultic purity, later influenced the use of שְׁנִי as a material linked to cultic purity. This last point is something that has not yet been suggested by scholars, as far as I am aware, but is worth considering to determine if there is a connection, and whether שְׁנִי was deemed apotropaic after its use for the tabernacle or was used for its construction for this reason. In Ex. 35:25 it is stated that there was a group of women involved in the spinning of the שְׁנִי and the other materials used in the construction of the tabernacle. The Woman of Valour also working with שְׁנִי could be an allusion to this passage in Exodus, showing the significance of her working with such a culturally significant material. Some scholars have argued that שְׁנִי in Proverbs 31:21 refers to double layered clothing due to the root שני being the same for both the number two and the colour. Hartley argues that in this instance שני refers to the colour, as "the evidence is very strong for the MT, given that שְׁנִים is a proper plural of שְׁנִי."[269] Double wrapped clothing may make more sense given that this would provide little warmth than compared to regular clothing. But, by considering Meyers and Noegel observations this verse could be referencing the apotropaic qualities of שְׁנִי. I argue this because, by giving her household clothing of שְׁנִי, the Woman of Valour and her house will not need to תִּירָא… מִשָּׁלֶג, "fear… from snow," thus referencing שְׁנִי's protective qualities to protect her family from snowfall. While snow is

[267] Brenner, Colour Terms, 142.
[268] Hartley, *Ancient Hebrew Colour*, 196.
[269] Hartley, *Ancient Hebrew Colour*, 191.

never used in a negative way except in v. 21, naturally it is does damage to crops and produce, and potentially even buildings if the melted snow leaked through a roof, or even as the cold itself. Ernst notes that while snow in Israel was generally not a long lasting phenomenon it was entirely possible for larger amounts of snow to build up, estimating a maximum of roughly 20 inches.[270] Moreover, Fuhs comments that "only in comparatively few passages is the object of a fear a threatening situation in everyday life: other people or animals, enemies, sickness, death. The object is usually introduced by the prep. *min*,"[271] much like in v. 21, suggesting it a real fear that one would seek protection from. While v. 21 could be alluding to Isa. 1:18 which describes sins being like שָׁנִי and becoming white like snow, I would argue that these passages are likely not related. This is because in Isaiah snow is a positive symbol of purity, while in Prov. 31:21 it a literal phenomenon from which the Woman of Valour must protect her house and family. Rather than שָׁנִי suggesting luxurious or double wrapped clothing, I believe that the author is rather referring to the apotropaic qualities of שָׁנִי. This in turn can indirectly allude to חיל motifs of defenders, such as the gatekeepers. While the protection provided by apotropaic substances is more commonly linked to cultic protection rather than military protection, the Woman of Valour as a defender is more symbolic than real, as shown in v.27 when she protects her family from idleness and wrongdoing.

Alongside this in Prov. 31:22 refers to ארגמן and שׁשׁ together as part of the clothing the Woman of Valour wears. While the text makes it clear that she makes bedcoverings for herself, it can be suggested that the phrase עָשְׂתָה־לָּהּ, makes for herself refers to her clothes as well. This is because there is no other verb in the verse to explain where the Woman of Valour gets her clothing from, and it is reasonable to suggest that she did make her own clothing. ארגמן as clothing can be linked to royalty like

[270] Ernst, "שָׂלָג *seleg*; שלג *slg*," *TDOT Vol XV*, 6-9, 7.
[271] Fuhs, "יָרֵא *yare'*; יָרֵא *yare'*; יִרְאָה *yir'a*; מוֹרָא *mora*," *TDOT Vol. VI*, 290-315, 295-296.

the Median king who wore robes of ארגמן in Jdg. 8:26 and the King's palanquin covered with ארגמן in Cant. 3:10,[272] and is further supported by the Hittie root *arkamaas* which has a dual meaning of both the colour/ fabric and a term for vassal tributes.[273] Yet, Elliot and Reinhold have shown that it was only in the Persian period that ארגמן and related colours became official symbols of royal power and wealth.[274] There is also evidence of women using ארגמן dyes for their hair and make-up,[275] like in Cant. 7:6, but the use of כארגמן means it is more likely a simile Nonetheless we cannot label ארגמן strictly as a 'royal colour.' Thus it is possible for the Woman of Valour to own ארגמן and not be linked to the royal court, but she is still well off in order to acquire this material in the first place.

Within these two verses (v.21, 22) שני, ארגמן, and שש appear as materials that the Woman of Valour had available and the necessary skill to work with. Notably, these are three of the four colours/ materials used for the tabernacle's adornments and dressings. While there are instances of these specific colours/ materials appearing outside the formula established in Ex.25:4,[276] the most common occurrences of all these words is in the phrase תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ. There is a common motif that is attributed to those who are called to work on the construction of the tabernacle, who are identified as כָּל־חַכְמֵי־לֵב, "all wise/skilled of heart" in Ex. 28:3, כָּל־חֲכַם־לֵב, *all wise of heart* in Ex. 31:6, 35:10, 36:8. It is has been suggested that this wisdom is supernatural or gifted to the workers; in Ex. 31:6 where it states נָתַתִּי חָכְמָה, "I [YHWH] have given wisdom," and in 35:35 the workers are מִלֵּא אֹתָם חָכְמַת־לֵב, "filled them (with) wisdom of

[272] Hartley, *Ancient Hebrew Colour*, 203.
[273] Hartley, *Ancient Hebrew Colour*, 203.
[274] Charlene Elliott, "Purple Pasts: Color Codification in the Ancient World," in *Law and Social Inquiry*, Vol. 33, No. 1, (2008), 173-194, 180.
Meyer Reinhold, *History of Purple as a Status Symbol in Antiquity*, (Brussels: Latomus, 1970), 17-18.
[275] Hartley, *Ancient Hebrew Colour*, 203.
[276] For *Argamon* cf. Num. 4:13; Jdg. 8:26; Cant. 3:10; 7:6;
For *tikelet* cf. Ex. 28:28, 31, 37; 39:21; Num. 4:6; Ezek. 23:6; 27:24;
For *Sesh* cf. Ex. 27:9, 18; 38:9; Ezek 16:10.

heart.” Exodus 35:25, 35, 36:8 all link the חכם of the workers directly with the ability to work with תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ. The author of Prov. 31:10-31 may be indirectly alluding to this motif, suggesting that the Woman of Valour is an artisan or a skilled worker, who is able to with rare materials. This could be backed in particular by Ex. 35:25, which refers to the כָּל־אִשָּׁה חַכְמַת־לֵב, “all the women wise of heart,” who work with the תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ by טָווּ בְיָדֶיהָ (lit. with their hands they spun). This is paralleled in Prov. 31:13, where the Woman of Valour seeks צֶמֶר וּפִשְׁתִּים, “wool and flax,” and then works with these materials with the כַּפֶּיהָ, “palms of the hand”. While the materials are different and Prov. 31:13 uses כַּפֶּיהָ instead of בְיָדֶיהָ, meaning it is not a direct parallel but the author’s use of this motif of willing hands working with materials in v.13 echoes the women of Ex. 35:25. Combine this with the later mentions of שני, ארגמן, and שש and we the motif of skilled women working with rare and important materials, is all but complete. It is also worth noting, as Meyers points out, that skills such as fabric production, much like food preparation, were physically demanding tasks, that required precise skills and knowledge as well as plenty of time.[277] The skill and time needed to convert raw materials like wool and flax (Prov. 31:13) and the materials for the tabernacle (Ex. 35:25) would have required a skill set that is most often labelled as ‘women’s work.’[278] The Hebrew חָכְמָה, *wisdom*, has a much wider sematic field than its English translation, referring to intelligences and good ethics, as well as technical expertise and craft. this transforms the concept “women’s work” into a specialisation that was just as necessary as men’s work.[279] Thus while תכלת is not mentioned as one of the fabrics the Woman of Valour works with, I would argue that the reference to the specific materials שני, ארגמן, and שש echo Exodus, in particular the women in Ex. 35:25. This would further reinforce the horizon of expectation that the Woman of Valour, much like those who

[277] Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 145.
[278] Meyers, *Discovering Eve,* 147.
[279] Meyers, *Discovering Eve,* 150.

worked on the tabernacle, is a skilled craftswoman who is trusted and skilled enough to work with rare and historically significant materials and worthy of the title אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל.

Finally, we come to the metaphor of clothing in Prov. 31:25, which states that עֹז־וְהָדָר לְבוּשָׁהּ, "strength and honour are her clothing." While the Woman of Valour is noted for her עז in v.17, there it describes literal physical power; Wagner notes that this is the typical meaning, which dominates its use in wisdom texts.[280] In v.25, however, it is not being used in this sense. Rather, like the poem's use of הָלַל, the author is here using a motif otherwise exclusively associated with YHWH. Others in the Hebrew Bible are said to possess עז, such as the people of the land in Num. 13:28, the tower in Thebez in Jdg. 9:51, and David in 2 Sam. 6:14, who twirled with all his עז. Yet only YHWH is described as being לָבֵשׁ יְהוָה עֹז הִתְאַזָּר, "he clothed himself with strength, he girded himself," in Ps. 93:1. This is similar for the use of הָדַר, "honour" or "splendour." This can also be used to refer to honour or splendour of persons other than YHWH, as in Ps. 21:6 where הָדַר is bestowed upon the king. The motif of being clothed with הָדַר, is also exclusive to YHWH. In Job 40:10 YHWH asks Job if he can הָדָר תִּלְבָּשׁ "with honour clothe yourself" – the expected answers being "no". Ps. 104:1 says of YHWH הָדָר לָבָשְׁתָּ, "you are clothed with honour." To choose עֹז־וְהָדָר for the Woman of Valour to be clothed in is remarkable. The author is obviously challenging the established horizon of expectation surrounding these motifs, by invoking an exclusively YHWH based motif and using it for a human woman. This is no doubt done to further heighten the exceptional nature of the Woman of Valour, proving her worthy of the title of אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל, and justifying her place as the best among all the women in v.29.

[280] Wagner, "עזז *ʿzz*; עֶזּוּז *ʿezuz*; עִזּוּז *ʿizzuz*; עַז *ʿaz*; עֹז/עוֹז *ʿoz/ʾoz*; מָעוֹז *maʿoz*," *TDOT XI*, 1-11, 7.

Conclusion

The original horizon of expectation that the author of Prov. 31:10-31 was informed by is complex. The author use of this horizon cannot be labelled simply as affirmative of expectations or as purely disruptive and contradictory of the expected norms. The use of חַיִל to describe the woman, for example disrupts an established horizon of expectation in which this term was typically reserved for warriors or men who have accomplished notable deeds that require courage and strength. The author uses many motifs linked to such men. This stresses the Woman of Valour's strength, describing her as performing similar actions as men of valour are noted of doing, such as watching over gates and cities, and thus proving the Woman of Valour's worthiness of the same title. By alluding to these motifs, the author both disrupts the horizon of expectation by appropriating established warrior/ חיל motifs for a domestic context and woman, but also reaffirms these expectations by presenting the Woman of Valour acting like a warrior, in a sense, herself. Furthermore, by echoing Exodus and the materials used to make the tabernacle, the author references a horizon of expectation which carries with it the expectations of skilled workers creating one of the most important sanctuaries in the Israelite history. Finally, by describing the Woman of Valour as being clothed in strength and honour, the author uses a very specific motif which elsewhere is only used in reference to YHWH.. As such, while the original horizon of expectation is initially disrupted by having an אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל exist, the author validates her existence by reconceptualising the standard motifs of a man of valour, skilled artisans, and even YHWH to show that she is exceptional and thus worthy of the title.

Chapter 3: Mediating Between Horizons with the Book of Ruth

Introduction

In the final chapter of this project we will now turn our attention to the book of Ruth. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Ruth is one of only three women to be recognised as an אֵשֶׁת חַיִל in the Hebrew Bible, and the only *named* woman to receive such a title. Much like my analysis of Proverbs 31:10-31, Ruth does not find herself in a military context, yet is still bestowed with this title. As such, I will argue that Ruth can act as a mediator between the original horizon of expectation found in Proverbs 3:10-31, and our own contemporary horizon, and potentially shift the research paradigm of Proverbs scholarship. It should be reemphasised here, that this is not an attempt to correct or suggest that the current research paradigm is wrong. Instead, the aim of this exercise to is highlight new ways to think about a topic which has seemingly exhausted itself with the current research at hand. While it is rare for a woman to receive the title of אֵשֶׁת חַיִל being celebrated for ones חיל is not unique, and we should consider this title of Ruth and the anonymous Woman of Valour as part of a wider motif of 'איש/ גבר/ אשת חיל.'

This chapter will be relatively brief in comparison to the previous two chapters. The links between Ruth and Proverbs 31:10-31 are few, albeit significant, and thus this chapter is best understood as a thought experiment. Thus through the analysis and comparison of Ruth and the Woman of Valour, I seek to inspire new research. As Jauss suggests, "one of the goals of Reception Theory is to provide a means by which classic texts, which have fallen from their classical status, may be rescued from the dust of history."[281]

I will not be aiming to suggest that the two women are the same person or should be considered the same person. Rather I will be highlighting the allusions to Proverbs 31:10-31 found in Ruth and how

[281] Parris, *Reception Theory*, 287.

these can influence our understanding of what it means to be an אֵשֶׁת חַיִל. However here I believe it is reasonable to suggest that Ruth was composed after Proverbs. This is because Ruth's author alludes to numerous texts and narratives, meaning that the author must have had access to or knowledge of these older texts, one of which is likely to have been Proverbs 31:10-31. At this point in time there are there are two sides to the debate surrounding Ruth's date, with some scholars arguing for a composition date in around the 10th-8th century while others argue for a post-exilic date.[282] However, because Ruth's author makes particular allusions to Tamar, Rachel, and Leah, which therefore predated Ruth's composition, we can argue that other sources of allusion that Ruth refers to also predate its composition, including Proverbs. While there is no definitive proof, it is likely that the direction of the vector of allusion begins with Proverbs 31:10-31 and leads to Ruth.

This chapter will be composed of two parts, the first part discussing the allusions present within the book of Ruth as a whole, including the ones pertaining directly and indirectly to Proverbs 31:10-31. The aim of this will be to show how scholars have noted the numerous allusions present within the book of Ruth and the effect this has on the understanding of the story and its place in the Hebrew Bible. The second section will focus on two specific studies of Ruth and Proverbs 31:10-31. The first of these two studies will be Samuel T. S. Goh's essay, in which he argues that Ruth is the superior אֵשֶׁת חַיִל. This argument offers little to deepen our understanding of what it means to be an אֵשֶׁת חַיִל, but not without merit. Then I will turn to Elaine W. F. Goh's essay on the

[282] For instance, in the latest commentary on Ruth which was a collaborative project between Alice L. Laffey and Mahri Leonhard-Fleckman, each of them stand on either side of the debate. Fleckman argues for an early dating arguing that the book does not preoccupy itself with argument of inclusion or exclusion of foreigners as seen in Ezra-Nehemiah, or inclusive worship as seen 3rd Isaiah (lviii). Furthermore, she argues that "just because a book is relevant in the postexilic period does not mean it was authored then," and instead could have gained new significance in later periods (lix). Laffey on the hand favours a post-exilic period, arguing that the book naturally acts as a polemic against the xenophobic rhetoric of Ezra-Nehemiah and for having universal tendencies as expressed in 2nd and 3rd Isaiah (lx). Alice L. Laffey, Mahri Leonhard-Fleckman, *Ruth,* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2017).

intertextuality between Ruth and Proverbs 31:10-31, which focuses on both the similarities but also some of the stark differences between these women, and how this furthers our understanding of the title אֵשֶׁת חַיִל. I will build upon some key points from E. Goh's essay to argue that Ruth allows us to gain a much deeper and dynamic understanding of not only who can be an אֵשֶׁת חַיִל but also why Ruth and the Woman of Valour are given this title.

Allusions in the Book of Ruth

In this section I will focus on the numerous allusions that scholars have noted throughout the book of Ruth. Not all of these allusions relate to Proverbs. Yet I wish to draw attention to them in order to highlight the sheer number of allusions that can potentially be found in book of Ruth. Moreover, it is interesting to note that some of the other major allusions within the book alongside Proverbs 31:10-31 focus on matriarchal figures like Rachel, Leah, and Tamar. After considering these specific allusions, the focus will shift to those found between Proverbs 31:10-31 and Ruth. In particular, I will focus on the references of אֵשֶׁת חַיִל in Proverbs 31:10 and Ruth 3:11, and then Proverbs 31:29 and Ruth 4:11, the latter of which few commentators have picked up on.

While this chapter will continue to use the same methodology as explained in the previous chapter, Yitzak Berger's essay on Ruth adds some further comments on methodology of allusions which are worth considering. Berger makes use of Leonhard's methodology[283] but adds that a text like Ruth, which alludes not to a single specific text but to multiple texts, indicates an author who favoured this literary techinique.[284] Berger builds on Leonhard's suggestion that when an author alludes to multiple sources it can help determine the direction of

[283] Cf. page (will fill in once finalised)

[284] Yitzhak Berger, "Ruth and Inner-Biblical Allusion: The Case of 1 Samuel 25," in *Journal of Biblical Literature,* Vol. 128, (2009), 253-272.

the vector of allusion, as well as suggesting that "if an author can be shown to allude to multiple texts, it becomes substantially more plausible that he or she alludes to still another text."[285]

The most common allusions that scholars have drawn attention to in the book of Ruth include allusions to Rachel, Leah, Tamar, and the Woman of Valour. Chertok, Jackson and Nielsen have suggested allusions to Tamar based on thematic allusions, especially in regards to Ruth's origins and actions. Chertok's states that "there are obvious parallels: in both stories widows, in order to continue the lines of their late husbands, plot to present the urgent need to male relations who should perform the surrogate function (levirate marriage)."[286] More thematic links present themselves in the general characterisation of Naomi, Boaz, and Ruth. Naomi and Boaz parallel Judah, the former having lost two sons in a foreign land and the latter being a senior to Ruth, as Judah is to Tamar, while Ruth is compared to Tamar in her childlessness.[287] Jackson, who approaches Ruth as a comedic narrative, argues that the allusions to Tamar, Rachel, and Leah "brings Ruth into the company, of the esteemed matriarchs and into their community of comic tricksters."[288] While Jackson notes that Ruth's methods of survival parallel that of Tamar, their goals differ greatly. Tamar, who has been denied the chance to have a child after Judah does not fulfil his promise of giving her his youngest son to marry, tricks Judah into fulfilling this role himself. Ruth, on the other hand, does not have children in mind according to Jackson but rather long term security via marriage.[289] Laffey and Fleckman have argued that while it is likely these allusions are intentional, the link is more likely

[285] Berger, "Ruth and Inner-Biblical Allusions," 255, footnote 7.
[286] Haim Chertok, "The Book of Ruth – Complexities Within Simplicity," in *Judaism*, Vol. 35, (1986), 290-297, 293.
[287] Chertok, "The Book of Ruth," 294, specifically the fact that both Tamar and Ruth are childless and told to return home to their parent's home as their current guardians (Judah and Naomi respectively) cannot provide new husbands for either woman.
[288] Melissa Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible: A Subversive Collaboration*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 180.
[289] Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation*, 181.

based on the shared motif of female tricksters rather than the need to have a child as is the case for Tamar.[290] Jackson also points out that both Judah and Boaz praise their female counterparts, Judah deeming Tamar's actions[291] "righteous" and Boaz praising Ruth by acknowledging her status as an אֵשֶׁת חַיִל (Ruth 3:11).[292] Nielsen, like Chertok notes the similar thematic structures that exists between the story of Ruth and Tamar, as well as links to famine, loss, and trickery.[293] Like Jackson, Nielsen recognises that Tamar's trickery is orientated towards the gain of a child and while Ruth's trickery aims to lead her to marry Boaz.[294] Because of this, Nielsen specifically identifies Ruth as a text which "belongs within an intertextuality of women's stories that deal with infertility and the triumph over it."[295] The perception of allusions to Tamar within the book of Ruth are based on the identity and actions of the women. Finally, Boaz's praise of Ruth parallels Judah's praise of Tamar, making the reference to Tamar in Ruth 4:12 perhaps more intentional than just being linked to the line of David.

The allusions to Tamar are part of allusions to Rachel and Leah. All three women are noted as tricksters, specifically in their use of the 'bed trick' motif. This is a connection which many scholars have picked up, mainly because the two women are named in the blessing in Ruth 4:11. Nielsen has suggested that Ruth 4:11 was an attempt "to link the marriage of Boaz and Ruth to the establishment of the twelve tribes of Israel."[296] Pardes' analysis notes that, "in evoking Leah and Rachel as the two *cobuilders* of the house of Israel, the Book of Ruth highlights the brief

[290] Laffey & Fleckman, *Ruth*, lxiii, they argue that while Ruth is never labelled as an infertile woman, she was married for 10 years prior to the events of the book and did not have any children during that period.
[291] In Gen. 38:14 Tamar disguises herself with a veil and then tempting Judah into having sex with her, unknowingly on his behalf, finally providing the child that she was first promised in the marriage to his son Er in Gen.38:6-11.
[292] Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation*, 182.
[293] Kirsten Nielsen, *Ruth: A Commentary*, translated by Edward Boardbridge, (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 12-13, 17.
[294] Nielsen, *Ruth: A Commentary*, 17.
[295] Nielsen, *Ruth: A Commentary*, 13.
[296] Nielsen, *Ruth: A Commentary*, 91.

moments on which the two matriarchs manage to cooperate."[297] Pardes further suggests that this a key part of Ruth's subversive nature, highlighting moments of co-operation between two women who are often portrayed as rivals, but also "the scarce representations of relationships between women elsewhere."[298] Jackson links the allusion to Rachel and Leah to the use of the 'bed trick' in the threshing floor scene (specially Ruth 3:6-15), which acts a transformative scene in Ruth. This motif is a key part of both Ruth and Boaz's history. For Ruth, as a Moabite, her line originates from the 'bed trick' Lot's eldest daughter played on their father, while Boaz descends from the line of Perez, via Tamar and Judah, whose story has been briefly detailed above.[299] The 'bed trick' scene is typically a transformative scenes for the characters involved; Tamar gains the children she was promised, while Rachel is switched out for Leah, with the latter becoming Jacob's first wife instead. Because of these encounters Tamar and Leah are transformed into matriarchs, and Jackson argues that Ruth also undergoes this transformation, emerging from the threshing floor as a matriarch herself.[300] It is possible as well that by evoking an allusion to both Rachel and Leah, the book highlights Ruth's trickster nature (via Leah) and Ruth's suggested infertility (via Rachel). This is cured with fertility and the continuation of the house of Israel.

Berger then suggests a number of minor allusions based on thematic parallels, such as Ruth 1:19 to Gen 22:6, 8[301] and from Naomi's speech in Ruth 2:20 to Gen 24:27.[302] Berger then goes on to argue that

[297] Pardes, *Countertextuality*, 101.
[298] Pardes, *Countertextuality*, 101.
[299] Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation*, 182.
[300] Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation*, 183.
[301] Here Berger suggests that the phrase "the two walked on," is an allusion in Ruth to Gen 22:6, 8 both thematically in the fact that two younger people follow after an older companion with no idea what lies ahead. Of this Berger states that "if the formulation in Ruth in fact alludes to this episode, then Ruth's personal sacrifice might be seen to rival that of Isaac, and to provide an early signal of her emergence as a mother in Israel equivalent to the nations ancestral founders," 255-256.
[302] While Berger, "Ruth and Inner-Biblical Allusions," 256, notes that Ruth is at times compared to the matriarch Rebekah, who are both noted for their selflessness, they note that Naomi's speech in 2:20 quotes Gen. 24:27 near verbatim in bless that one receives for not forgetting their kindness.

various parts of Ruth allude to sections of 1 Sam. 25.[303] Berger argues for this connection based on the fact that with the genealogy at the end of Ruth (4:16-20) stresses her connection to David.[304] Coxon in their analysis of Ruth suggests that the scene in Ruth 3 where Naomi prepares Ruth to meet Boaz alludes to Ezekiel 16, as the sequence in which the women are washed, dressed and perfumed is the same.[305] Further, Coxon notes that both the girl of Ezek. 16 and Ruth have 'questionable' origins in that they are both foreign, with the former being born in Canaan from an Amorite father and Hittite mother, while Ruth is from Moab.[306] While the author of Ruth seemingly alludes to this motif in Ezekiel, Coxon argues that the author "intends the reader to see the heroine arrayed as a young bride, not a sorrowing widow;"[307] "the break with convention is seen in the initiative shown by Ruth."[308] Pardes has also suggested that in Ruth 1:14 when Ruth cleaves to Naomi, could be an allusion to Gen. 2:24, when man and woman cleave to each other and become one flesh.[309] These are a few examples of the more uncommon allusions that are ascribed to Ruth, showing that even the smallest of sections have the potential to act as allusions to other texts.

It is clear that Ruth's author favoured the literary technique of allusion, particularly to the matriarchs and to gynocentric motifs and concerns. Thus, it is of little surprise that when Boaz states Ruth has been deemed an אֵשֶׁת חַיִל that this alludes to another gynocentric text – Proverbs 31:10-31. This cannot be reduced to a mere justification of

[303] For instance, Berger, "Ruth and Inner-Biblical Allusions," the opening of Ruth and 1 Sam. 25:1-2 (257), Ruth 2:10 and 1 Sam. 25:23 (258), and Ruth 3:10 and 1 Sam. 25:33 (259).
[304] Berger, "Ruth and Inner-Biblical Allusions," 264.
[305] Peter W. Coxon, "Was Naomi a Scold? A Response to Fewell and Gunn," in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Vol. 45, (1989), 25-37, 33.
[306] Coxon, "Was Naomi a Scold?" 34.
[307] Coxon, "Was Naomi a Scold?" 34.
[308] Coxon, "Was Naomi a Scold?" 34, here Coxon that in Ezekiel 16 the girl is passive throughout the exchange whereas Ruth is active and "prime mover" in the exchange with Boaz on the threshing floor.
[309] Ilana Pardes, *Countertextuality in the Bible: A Feminist Approach*, (London: Harvard University Press, 1992), 102. Pardes, *Countertextuality*, 102, argues that while Genesis uses the motif of cleaving to symbolise marriage, in the Book of Ruth "it depicts female bonding, a hitherto unrecognised tie," and shows that women need not be rivals as is most famously the case between Rachel and Leah.

Ruth's worthiness for Boaz's hand; rather, it is an intentional allusion to the Woman of Valour.[310] Many commentators have drawn this parallel between Ruth 3:11 and Proverbs 31:10,[311] but there are remarkably few similarities between these women beyond the title. In fact, some such as Laffey, Fleckman, and Koosed have suggested that Ruth is more like the 'strange woman' of Proverbs 1-9 than the Woman of Valour.[312] Koosed suggests that Ruth is parodying Proverbs: "the foreign woman is the *'eset hayil*; the seductress is the virtuous wife."[313] In particular, Koosed argues that "Proverbs presents a bifurcated picture of women – Woman Wisdom is countered by Dame Folly; the strange woman is countered by the virtuous wife."[314] It would be an understatement to say that women are portrayed in a dichotomous way in Proverbs, but Ruth seemingly falls into a grey space between the binary. When Ruth alludes to Proverbs "the compliment is more complex" and dynamic because Ruth is both an אֵשֶׁת חַיִל and a strange woman. This suggests that Ruth is quite three-dimensional as a character, unlike her Proverbs counterparts.[315] Giving Ruth the title of אֵשֶׁת חַיִל is a deliberate and provocative move, referring to her strength and character.[316] Ruth is given this title because of her

[310] Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal, *Ruth and Esther*, (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 58, interestingly does not suggest that this is an allusion to Proverbs 31:10-31 and acts only as signifier of Boaz and Ruth compatibility.

[311] Nielsen, *Ruth: A Commentary*, 77 draws parallels between Boaz's title as an איש גבר חיל in 2:1, but suggest that "Boaz is not satisfied with giving his own appraisal but says that everybody at the town gate thinks likewise. That his first response should be what others think of Ruth suggests that his regard for the opinion of other plays a decisive role."
Edward F. Campbell, *Ruth*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1975), 124-125, suggests that the allusion to 31:10-31 here is an attempt by the author to show that Ruth and Boaz should marry without question.
Frederic W. Bush, *Ruth, Esther*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 173-174, much the same as Campbell, Bush suggests that the main function of this allusion is to present Ruth as worthy to be Boaz's bride, acting as a parallel and complimentary title.
Laffey and Fleckman, *Ruth*, 2017, 118-119, largely makes use of Elaine W. F. Goh's essay, which I will discuss in detail later in this chapter, but argue that Ruth being given this title reflects her courage and exceptional attitude towards Naomi, rather than just as a signifier of Ruth's worthiness as Boaz's future wife.

[312] Laffey and Fleckman, *Ruth*, 2017, 119, have noted the irony of the comparison given Ruth's seduction of Boaz in chapter 3.

[313] Jennifer L. Koosed, *Studies on Personalities of the Old Testament: Gleaning Ruth: A Biblical Heroine and Her Afterlives*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2011), 92.

[314] Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 92.

[315] Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth 92.*

[316] This is something that is particularly highlighted by Elaine W. F. Goh, whose essay I will be assessing in the next section.

courage and power and for supporting her mother-in-law in an alien land even though her status as an outsider is highlighted on numerous occasions.[317] Thus while Ruth and the Woman of Valour may have little in common in terms of actions they perform, the allusion in Ruth is more complex than a simple comparison. Rather, the title represents something about the character of these women, irrespective of their perceived 'virtue,' wealth, or status - something for which the חיל /גבר/ איש are not noted when they receive this title.[318]

I would also suggest that there is a second allusion to the Woman of Valour in Ruth 4:11. In this verse the people and elders gather around the city gates to bless the union of Ruth and Boaz, first expressing a hope that Ruth will be comparable to Rachel and Leah, and that they will עשׂה־חיל, *do valour*, in Ephrathah. Linafelt argues that עשׂה־חיל in Ruth refers to the creation of wealth, pointing to Deut. 8:17-18 which is a warning for Israel to remember that they did not create wealth (עשׂה־חיל) themselves, but only through God's power.[319] This argument does have some merit, but is ultimately unlikely given that, of the eleven references to עשׂה־חיל in the Hebrew Bible, only two of them refer to the creation of wealth.[320] Other commentators have suggested that the phrase refers to Boaz's or the couple's sexual power and fertility, referring to Proverbs 31:3,[321] Job 21:7-8,[322] or Joel 2:22.[323] While these passages do mention חיל, none of

[317] Ruth is referred as 'Ruth the Moabite' or being from Moab 7 times in the narrative, even in the final chapter, after we have learned that all the town has deemed her an אֵשֶׁת חַיִל.

[318] While there are some instances of these men being referred to as wealthy, cf., status is something which is gained from this title, rather than which is a prerequisite for the title, and none of these men are ever described as 'good,' 'ideal,' or 'virtuous' in the sense of morality, typically translations prefer terms of power or of able ability, or valour in a military context cf. pages 46-60.

[319] Linafelt & Beal, *Ruth and Esther*, 74.

[320] The other reference is in Ezek. 28:4, which is part of the oracle against Tyre in which the king believe it is through his power and wisdom alone that he has עשׂה־חיל.

[321] Nielsen, *Ruth: A Commentary*, 91.
Andre LaCocque, *Ruth: A Continental Commentary,* translated by K. C. Hanson, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 139.

[322] Campbell, *Ruth*, 153.
LaCocque, *Ruth*, 153.

[323] Nielsen, *Ruth: A Commentary*, 91.
Campbell, *Ruth*, 153.
Linafelt & Beal, *Ruth and Esther*, 74.

them specifically refer to עשׂה־חיל. This makes the allusion unlikely, especially given that the phrase עשׂה־חיל while not unique, is certainly rare.

There are 11 occurrences of the phrase עשׂה־חיל. Only eight of them are of further interest. These eight references to עשׂה־חיל refer to person, Yahweh, or Israel עשׂה־חיל, "doing valour."[324] Campbell notes this in his analysis of the use of this phrase,[325] but only Bush actually links together Proverbs 31:29 and Ruth 4:11 as a potential allusion.[326] This is worth noting as out of all these references, Ruth and the Woman of Valour are the only women to be linked to this phrase, as well as being two out the three women to be referred to as an אֵשֶׁת חַיִל.[327] For this same phrase to be used for both women is not likely to be a coincidence. Rather I would argue that by alluding to Proverbs 31:29, Ruth's image as an אֵשֶׁת חַיִל is strengthened by further linking the two women together. Because Ruth is like the Woman of Valour, Ruth is able to עשׂה־חיל like the Woman of Valour, whether it be by herself or alongside Boaz.

As we can see from the analysis above, Ruth's author made wide use of allusions, both big and small, throughout the narrative, in order to link Ruth to the matriarchs and other celebrated women in the Hebrew Bible. By making these allusions, the author of Ruth can provide an explanation for her exceptional behaviour and why she was so readily accepted into the community. By depicting Ruth as an Israelite matriarch, - many themselves foreigners and outsiders - Ruth is placed within an established context of the exceptional woman. Her actions are not typical, and because of this she receives a title and historical signifier as a matriarch herself.

LaCocque, *Ruth*, 153.

[324] References to this can be found in: Num. 24:18, 1 Sam. 14:48; Ps. 60:12; 108:14; 118:15, 16; Prov. 31:29; Ruth 4:11.

[325] Campbell, *Ruth*, 153.

[326] Bush, *Ruth,* 242, though Bush argues that a translation of 'to flourish' is the most suitable as this has connotations of growing honour and wealth, though I would argue that this is rather an attempt to establish some distance between the typical war/ praise motif that this phrase and חַיִל pertains to and put it in a more domestic context.

[327] The third woman is also anonymous, she is mentioned in Proverbs 12:4.

Unnecessary Rivalries and Grounding the Woman of Valour: Specific Studies on the Intertextuality between Ruth and Proverbs 31:10-31

While the previous section highlighted the numerous allusions in Ruth to other texts including Proverbs 31:10-31, I have yet to show how Ruth can mediate between contemporary and original horizons of expectations for Proverbs 31:10-31. This will be the aim of the particular section, particular in reference to Elaine W. F. Goh. While still building on the trend of the Woman of Valour as a reflection of Lady Wisdom in 1-9, E. Goh highlights similarities and differences between Ruth and the Woman of Valour that I believe are key to the mediation of the horizons. Before I analyse this specific essay, I wish firstly to spend some time assessing Samuel T. S. Goh's essay on the comparability of the two women. S. Goh's essay drew my attention due to the attitude with which he approaches the topic, unnecessarily making rivals out of the two women, as though they were vying for the title of "superior Woman of חיל."[328]

S. Goh's assessment of the comparisons between Ruth and the Woman of Valour should be credited for stressing the fact that the two women are separate entities. [329] In the beginning of the essay, S. Goh notes that there are overarching thematic comparisons, such as the fact that both women work to provide food for the family.[330] There are also a number of linguistic comparisons, with a large amount of qal active verbs present in both pieces, presenting the image of women in action.[331] S. Goh also proposes that Boaz himself emulates aspects of the Woman of Valour, given that he is God-fearing (something Ruth is also praised for), owns land and servants, and shows חסד to the poor and needy.[332] It is notable that S. Goh does argue for an allusion between Prov. 31:29 and

[328] Samuel T.S. Goh, "Ruth as a Superior Woman of חיל? A Comparison between Ruth and the 'Capable' Woman in Proverbs 31.10-31," in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* Vol. 38, No.4 (2014), 487-500.
[329] For the sake of clarity, due to both authors having the same surname, I will refer to each of them by the initials of the forename, with S. Goh and E. Goh referring to Samuel T. S. Goh and Elaine W. F. Goh, respectively
[330] S. Goh, "Ruth as a Superior," 490., they also alongside side this note that both women are publicly praised and noted for their חסד.
[331] S. Goh, "Ruth as a Superior," 489.
[332] S. Goh, "Ruth as a Superior," 492, 493.

Ruth 4:11, but with the difference in the book of Ruth being that עשׂה־חיל is done between two people, something few scholars have picked up on.[333] Rightly, S. Goh suggests that עשׂה־חיל is not related to the gain of wealth, given that it is noted throughout the book that Boaz possess substantial wealth and land, as well as obtaining Elimelech and Naomi's land. In fact, it is arguable that Boaz on these grounds is more like the Woman of Valour than Ruth, at least at face value. As such, S. Goh questions what makes Ruth worthy of the same title. Proverbs makes it very clear that such a woman is hard to find and unrealistic as a role-model, so can both woman really be deemed אשת חיל with so few similarities? S. Goh's concludes that Ruth is given this title in part because of Boaz and his contribution to the story. Unlike the husband of the Woman of Valour, who is mentioned in only three verses, Ruth's author "mentions Boaz's involvement frequently, but also underscores his importance."[334] In particular, S. Goh suggests that, while Ruth 4:11 may be an allusion to Prov. 31:29 and עשׂה־חיל. Because it is two people עשׂה־חיל, who are both people of חיל themselves, the allusion heightened in comparison to its use in Prov. 31:29.[335] S. Goh argues that עשׂה־חיל refers to sexual power, or greatness via procreation, based on verses such as Prov. 31:3, Job 21:7-8, and Joel 2:22.[336] S. Goh also suggests that the phrase עשׂה־חיל is paralleled with קרא־שׁם, a literary motif that is typically linked to the naming of royal dynasties, which makes sense given that Ruth and Boaz contribute to the Davidic line.[337] It should be noted that this is not the typical formula of the motif, as no name is given.[338] Nonetheless, the essence of the blessing in Ruth 4:11 to עשׂה־חיל signifies that "the man of חיל marry the woman of חיל and do חיל," thus bringing

[333] S. Goh, "Ruth as a Superior," 495.
[334] S. Goh, "Ruth as a Superior," 495.
[335] S. Goh, "Ruth as a Superior," 495.
[336] S. Goh, "Ruth as a Superior," 496, as mentioned above, none of these specific passages actually refer to עשׂה־חיל or link this phrase to sexual power/ procreation in anyway.
[337] S. Goh, "Ruth as a Superior," 497.
[338] S. Goh, "Ruth as a Superior," 497.

forth the line of David.[339] Because of this, Ruth "is elevated from a domestic context to a royal context,"[340] and thus made the superior אֵשֶׁת חַיִל after her marriage to Boaz.[341] While S. Goh does note that the title is given to Ruth before she is married to Boaz, his main line of argument is that Ruth reigns supreme as the superior אֵשֶׁת חַיִל because of her links to the Davidic line, rather than anything to do with herself. I would argue that this argument is flawed because it places Ruth and the Woman of Valour into an unnecessary rivalry with each other. This is a comparison which Boaz is not subject to in order to prove his superiority as the most suitable איש גבר חיל. More importantly, the study fails to provide any new insight into either the significance of the title or why these two different women are both credited with the same title. By focusing on how Ruth is superior to the Woman of Valour because of and after her marriage of Boaz, her status as an אֵשֶׁת חַיִל beforehand is all but ignored. Ruth's title is essentially reduced to an attempt to validate Boaz's choice of her as a bride by suggesting that her title is valid only when it is paired alongside Boaz's and leads to their production of offspring. Notably this is something which is not required of other holders of חיל titles, regardless of their gender. While S. Goh does highlight key differences between these women and their contexts, it comes at the expense of failing to actually provide new insight about what it means to be named an אֵשֶׁת חַיִל. Rather, S. Goh reduces and celebrates Ruth as an אֵשֶׁת חַיִל based on her sexual function and fertility.

In response to this, I will now turn to E. Goh's essay.[342] This essay is not flawless but unlike S. Goh, it considers how Ruth can further develop our understanding of the use of the title אֵשֶׁת חַיִל. E. Goh begins by stating that while Ruth's title does act as an equaliser of sorts between

[339] S. Goh, "Ruth as a Superior," 498.
[340] S. Goh, "Ruth as a Superior," 498.
[341] S. Goh, "Ruth as a Superior," 499.
[342] Elaine W. F. Goh, "An Intertextual Reading of Ruth and Proverbs 31:10-31, with a Chinese Woman's Perspective," in *Reading Ruth in Asia,* edited by Jione Havea and Peter H. W. Lau, (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 73-87.

her and Boaz, because he is called an אישׁ גבר חיל, but the titles highlight different features. While Boaz's title refers to his wealth and status, Ruth's refers to her strength, "both physical and cerebral."[343] With this also comes the suggestion that this title in some way reflects Ruth's bravery in journeying to an unknown land and going through with Naomi's scheme of seduction which, if it had back fired, would have put Ruth in danger. In the threshing floor scene, "the possibility of her being rejected and, hence humiliated, is real;" [344] as E. Goh notes, Ruth could have become an outcast for using the same tactics of Lot's daughters, the eldest birthing the nation of Moab in Gen. 19:30-37. Moreover, neither Ruth or Naomi had any reassurance that Boaz would keep his word the morning after.[345] E. Goh's key argument is that because Ruth and the Woman of Valour are both אֵשֶׁת חַיִל the title is not only given to people like the latter, who is arguably an impossible ideal for anyone to aspire to be. It is this that I propose will set the stage for Ruth to act as a mediator of expectations, allowing each woman to be exceptional without compromise, while also shifting the contemporary paradigm away from the perception that Proverbs 31:10-31 is the only way to be an אֵשֶׁת חַיִל or advice on how to be one. The two key points that E. Goh raises are the fact that Ruth is an unmarried, foreign woman yet still claims this title, and also that we cannot link the title to social status or wealth, because both women exist within widely different social contexts and status. E. Goh notes that the "*eset hayil* in Ruth's narrative is found in the field, but in Proverbs she is mainly described in her household. Thus marriage and family are presupposed in Prov 31:10-31, but not in Ruth."[346] This is a significant point as it shifts the expectation of who can be an אֵשֶׁת חַיִל. Ruth opens up the group of those who can claim a title to include unmarried women, and arguably foreign women as well. While the title is still rare with regard to women, this brings it to be more in-line with male equivalents, which

[343] E. Goh, "An Intertextual Reading," 74.
[344] E. Goh, "An Intertextual Reading," 75.
[345] E. Goh, "An Intertextual Reading," 75.
[346] E. Goh, "An Intertextual Reading," 75.

were given based on deeds rather than status. Moreover, because the title can be granted to a woman regardless of her marital status, the contemporary horizon of expectation shifts with it. As mentioned in chapter one, the typical category assigned to Proverbs 31:10-31 is literary advice for men seeking a wife, or advice for women aspiring to be a good wife. When we consider Ruth's impact on the understanding of אֵשֶׁת חַיִל, Proverbs 31:10-31 cannot be restricted to simply an advice piece of what to look for in or aim to be as a wife. Ruth allows us to transform this poem into a song of praise that celebrates a *Woman* of Valour, who is praised for her deeds and actions, like Ruth, rather than being praised for providing and caring for home and hearth. Linked to this is that we no longer claim that these women receive the title אֵשֶׁת חַיִל based on social status. This is already made clear in the book of Ruth through the comparison between Boaz and Ruth, who are from different social classes but both described as a איש גבר חיל \ אשת. When we apply this insight to Woman of Valour, which some scholars argue that she is called such because of her wealth and status, we can see our perspective shift away from praise because of wealth and toward praise because of deeds. E. Goh sums this up nicely, stating that "Ruth's story can serve as a balance and a corrective to the assumption in Proverbs that a woman's worth is defined by marriage, offspring, and wealth."[347]

While it is notable that Ruth was given the title by the author before she was married, the author of Ruth takes the form of an omniscient narrator who knows that chapter 4 is coming and that Ruth will marry Boaz. As such, it is possible to question whether Ruth being given this title before she is married is of any real significance: would Ruth, a foreign woman, be remembered as an אֵשֶׁת חַיִל if she had not ended up a married mother? After all, it is rather miraculous that Ruth would fall pregnant so quickly and easily after her marriage to Boaz given that her previous marriage of ten years resulted in nothing. That they are married

[347] E. Goh, "An Intertextual Reading," 87.

and mothers is one of the few similarities that both the Woman of Valour and Ruth share. Because of this, we could suggest that the patriarchal expectations make up part of the original horizon of expectation, allowing only women who fulfil certain roles, such as wife and mother to gain this title. Reading Ruth from a modern perspective where a woman's worth is no longer based on her fertility, aims to remove these patriarchal expectations of women that permeate the Hebrew Bible. With Ruth mediating between the contemporary and original horizons of expectation, the modern perspective is able to shift the interpretation away from focusing on the Ruth and the Woman of Valour marital status, and instead focusing on their deeds. Furthermore, Ruth grounds the horizon of expectation of אֵשֶׁת חַיִל. Ruth shows us that not every woman who is given this title gains it by imitating an unrealistic model, but because of their own deeds and merits.

Conclusion

Through allusions Ruth's character is linked to women who were respected and praised for their determination, courage, and clever. Regardless of whether one views their trickery as good or bad, by alluding to various other women, Ruth's author places Ruth into same group of women that do what must be done in order to survive. By praising Ruth, the author recognises the strength and courage it takes for a woman to work within the limited system that is presented before her.

I have also suggested that the blessing in Ruth 4:11 to עשׂה־חיל is a direct allusion to Prov. 31:29. This allusion does not to suggest Ruth and Boaz's contributions to the Davidic line is not worthy of being deemed עשׂה־חיל in and of themselves, but that the meaning of this phrase is not limited to only describing their sexual and offspring related greatness.

Finally, I argued that S. Goh's study on the interaction between Proverbs 31:10-31 and Ruth comes at the cost of placing the women into a rivalry, with S. Goh declaring Ruth the winner because she is able to

contribute to the line of David. By focusing on Ruth's ability to provide children for Boaz and the line of David, her worth as an אֵשֶׁת חַיִל is determined through a male lens of women as sexual beings that have the potential to provide male heirs. This is an assessment that the contemporary horizon of expectation places on the poem of Prov. 31:10-31 as advice for men finding a wife to serve his needs, even though this is not reflected in the poem itself as I argued in the previous chapter. If we consider the insights of E. Goh, we see a much deeper and dynamic understanding of אֵשֶׁת חַיִל emerge. Ruth brings the original horizon of expectation of Proverbs 31:10-31 to the fore, emphasising how exceptional the Woman of Valour is, she also shows us that this is not the only way to be named an אֵשֶׁת חַיִל. This expands the contemporary horizon of expectations in relation to who can gain this title, and the reasons why they are given it. The significance of this is paramount. Because of its rarity, any opportunity to glean more information about the title אֵשֶׁת חַיִל must be seriously considered. With Ruth mediating between these horizons the misconception that one must emulate the complete list of tasks that the Woman of Valour does in order to gain this title can no longer be supported. Instead, praise for both women for their physical and mental fortitude shines through, while also presenting two different but equally valid ways in which a woman is named an אֵשֶׁת חַיִל.

Conclusion

It is clear that the contemporary reception of Proverbs has influenced the reception of specific parts of Proverbs, including as the debate about the dating and function of Proverbs 10-29 influencing the debate on Proverbs 31:10-31. Because of this, the poem has long been interpreted as a form of advice literature aimed at elite young men who are hoping to find a wife, but few if any scholars have actually questioned what advice this poem actually gives to the reader. The poem itself offers no advice about how one actually finds an אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל among other women. Furthermore, what good is the poem as advice literature to men who are already married, but not to an אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל? The simple answer, I believe, is that the poem offers little to no advice to the supposedly 'key audience' because the poem is a list of deeds that this woman has already accomplished, with the audience being called to celebrate because of that fact. Instead of determining Proverbs -31:10-31's function as part of a collection, which it did not necessarily originate as part of, we must study it as a piece of literature that had its own primary function before being appropriated for the book of Proverbs.

In order to do this, I attempted to recreate a potential original horizon of expectation, via the methodology as detailed by Parris alongside the methodology of allusion detailed by Leonhard. This involved conducting a close reading of the poem and noting the use of atypical language and motifs. This close reading revealed that the author alludes to and uses a lot of military language and motifs; the typical horizon of expectation of these motifs, when applied to Woman of Valour, is disrupted and challenged because the author places these motifs in a new, domestic context. Yet, at the same time, the horizon of expectation about what a male person of חיל is typically celebrated for is reaffirmed; the author depicts the Woman of Valour performing these typical deeds or displaying these typical attributes within her domestic context. Furthermore, by alluding to other more specific motifs that portray the

woman of valour as a skilled artisan from the days of the Tabernacle, or being clothed in a way similar only to YHWH, the woman's exceptional nature is further solidified and her worthiness of such an unusual title is made clear.

While the original and contemporary horizon of expectation vary greatly, Reception Theory allows for them to be reconciled, to a degree, by mediating between the two in order to highlight new avenues of study. Ruth deepens our understanding of who can be an אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל and why someone may be celebrated as one; while both women share some similarities, they are also very different. Ruth presents a more dynamic understanding of who can be an אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל; while Ruth is praised for her generosity and kindness towards Boaz and Naomi, she is not the exceptional force of nature that Woman of Valour is presented as. Because of this, Ruth grounds the title and the Woman of Valour - not by reducing her significance or exceptional nature, but by showing that there is not a single paradigm that one must adhere to in order to become an אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל.

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