THE RHETORIC OF WORK IN PROVERBS 24:30-34

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ABSTRACT: The book of Proverbs contains several instances where the Israelite sages highlight the value of work for the individual and for society. Proverbs 24:30-34 is a masterful example of such a rhetorical piece. Failure to consider its rhetorical featuares is likely to result in incomplete and even incorrect interpretation. Many recent works on Proverbs recognize the rhetorical character of the book, but do not demonstrate its relevance as far as interpretation of the sayings is concerned. To read Proverbs as a rhetorical act is to treat the book close to the demand of its genre. This paper takes a close look at Proverbs 24:30-34 and argues that an analysis of the rhetoric of the text enables us to gain insight into how proverbs function. As well, a rhetorical approach will unfold the meaning and influence of biblical proverbs for a contemporary audience.

RÉSUMÉ : Le Livre des Proverbes contient plusieurs instances où les sages d'Israël mettent en évidence la valeur du travail pour l'individu et pour la société. Proverbes 24,30-34 est un excellent exemple de ce type de rhétorique. Négliger ces caractéristiques rhétoriques est susceptible d'entraîner une interprétation incomplète et même incorrecte. Plusieurs travaux récents sur le Livre des Proverbes reconnaissent son caractère rhétorique, mais ne démontrent pas sa pertinence en ce qui concerne l'interprétation de maximes. Lire les Proverbes comme un acte rhétorique est de traiter le livre en fonction de son genre. Cet article examine de près Proverbes 24,30-34 et fait valoir qu'une analyse de la rhétorique du texte nous permet de mieux comprendre comment fonctionnent les proverbes. De plus, une approche rhétorique révélera la signification et l'influence des proverbes bibliques pour un auditoire contemporain.

Introduction

Work is an important economic and social activity in the world today. Economically, it is the link between the processes of production and consumption that characterize both the local and global economy. Again, it is the core activity that shapes global commerce. Socially, work is a source of dignity, self-fulfillment, identity and recognition, as well as material well-being. Also, it is one of the main ways humans relate with each other. These vital social and economic roles are the basic reason that all societies have a range of different institutions to govern the many facets of work. The vital place of work holds also for ancient societies, including ancient Israel. The Hebrew Bible gives us clues about the value of work in the lives of ancient Israelites.[1] The wisdom traditions, especially the book of Proverbs, dwell extensively on work and its related issues. Perdue observes of the book of Proverbs that "of all human endeavours, labor especially drew the attention of Israel's sages."[2] If so, the centrality of work in the lives of ancient Israelites needs close attention. This is especially timely when there are few explorations into this theme from the perspective of the Israelite wisdom tradition.

This article examines the place of work in the Israelite society from the perspective of the book of Proverbs. The choice of Proverbs is informed by two main reasons. First, Proverbs deals more extensively with topics of work than any other book in the Hebrew Bible.[3] Second, the book, as wisdom literature, approaches this topic in a direct and pragmatic way. The paper takes a close look at Prov 24:30-34, and argues that an analysis of the rhetoric of the text enables us to gain insight into how proverbs function. Again, a rhetorical approach unfolds the meaning and influence of biblical proverbs before today's audience.

1. *Method*

Rhetorical criticism is the method used in this study. This approach to Proverbs helps in treating the book more closely according to the demand of

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[1]   The creation stories in Genesis, for instance, indicate the central place of work in human life (cf. Gen. 1–3). Claus WESTERMANN, commenting on Gen 2:15, writes, "Work is regarded here as an essential part of human existence. Life without work would not be worthy of human beings." *Genesis 1-11*, trans. John J. SCULLION (London: SPCK, 1984) 220.

[2]   Leo G. PERDUE, *Proverbs* (*Interpretation*; Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2000) 220.

[3]   The book of Proverbs talks about the benefits of work to an individual and the society (cf. Prov 12:11; 14:23, 22:29); it also caricatures the lazy (cf. Prov13:4; 15:9; 18:9; 20:4; 22:13).

its genre.[4] When a proverb is uttered, it establishes a relationship with its audience in order to achieve an effect. This pragmatic nature of proverbs sets it within a rhetorical framework. To utter a proverb, therefore, is to engage in a rhetorical act.

Rhetorical criticism has two foci. First, the critic needs to determine the boundaries of the text in order to pinpoint its start and end, thus avoiding the danger of fusing together separate elements. Second, the critic must describe rhetorical devices that unify particular texts. Such analysis follows the rhetorical method of Kennedy, who presents a lucid and systematic model for rhetorical-critical exegesis underpinned by classical erudition. Some modifications to his method, however, are made to suit the particularity of the genre of proverbs.

2. *Pericope of Proverbs 24:30-34*

In any rhetorical analysis, it is important to determine the rhetorical unit. Ascertaining rhetorical units in Proverbs does not pose much difficulty. Many of the sayings are independent, and they are presented in single verses.[5] There are exceptions, however, evident in the chapters 1–9 and with our chosen text. Our text in particular is one of the few units in the sentence sayings in which the subject matter is expressed in five verses. It falls under the block Proverbs 24:23-34 with the heading, "These also are sayings of the wise." Scholars like Whybray believe Proverbs 24:23-34 is an appendix to the preceding block (Prov. 22:17–24:22).[6]

Different structures have been proposed for this appendix (Prov. 24:23-34). Clifford sees two parallel groups of three ideas each (Prov. 24:23-27 and 24:28-34). The three ideas are "the law court, speaking and thinking, and labor."[7] Perdue, on the other hand, divides the entire block into three: superscription (24:23a), a discourse on judgment (24:23b-26, 28-29), and an autobiographical discourse on household labour (24:27, 30-34).[8] By lumping 24:27 and 24:30-34 under the heading "household labour," Perdue overlooks the minute differences in the two sayings on labour. Clifford rightly avoids the qualifier "household," and sticks with the label "labour" only.

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[4]   PERDUE, *Proverbs*, 27, 32.
[5]   Robert ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1985) 163.
[6]   Roger Norman WHYBRAY, *The Book of Proverbs* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1972) 142.
[7]   Richard J. CLIFFORD, *Proverbs: A Commentary* (*Old Testament Library*; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999) 216.
[8]   PERDUE, *Proverbs*, 217.

Proverbs 24:30-34 belongs to the literary class of the autobiographical or example story. It is the most elaborated unit within the appendix. In its immediate context, it is closely linked to v.27, since they all deal with the issue of labour. However, between v.27 and vv.30-34 are two intervening verses that deal with revenge. Again, the sage separates the two units by the nature of their respective counsels. While v.27 emphasizes the need for preparation before one undertakes an activity, vv.30-34 dwell on the fate of one who refuses to work.[9] In its immediate context, Proverbs 24:30-34 is unique because of its literary type.

3. *Rhetorical Analysis of Proverbs 24:30-34*

Rhetorical analysis involves a careful study of the strategy used by speakers in conveying their message and how the message persuades an audience. According to Kennedy, important to the rhetorical act is the rhetorical situation and problem. Ascertaining the rhetorical situation involves determining the cause of the text, the reason it was written, the mood of the audience and the author and their social values.[10] This is similar to *Sitz im Leben* of form criticism. Closely linked to the rhetorical situation is the rhetorical problem. Here again, Kennedy explains that, in many rhetorical situations, speakers might face some problems in conveying their message. For instance, an audience may not consider the speaker as having authority to speak on the matter, or the expectation of the audience might be different from the speaker's goal.[11] It may be observed that Kennedy's insight on the rhetorical situation and problem is geared towards historical considerations of the text. The critic would have to do some form of reconstruction of the historical and the social world of the text in order to ascertain the situation and problem.

This study avoids Kennedy's use of rhetorical situation and problem, because any attempt to reconstruct the history behind the sayings in Proverbs is a herculean task, if not an impossible one. The sayings themselves provide little assistance in this direction. Furthermore, proverbial sayings are used in multiple contexts, and what we have in the Book of Proverbs are collections divorced from their contexts. For these reasons, the rhetorical situation and rhetorical problem are set aside. Instead, the rhetorical analysis upholds the

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9   CLIFFORD, *Proverbs*, 217-218.

10 George A. KENNEDY, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984) 34.

11 KENNEDY, *New Testament Interpretation*, 36-37.

hermeneutical principle of text and audience.[12] The first three rhetorical elements applicable to written text (invention, disposition, and technique) provide the framework for the analysis of the text.

Rhetorical Invention

Rhetorical analysis is concerned with the way in which a text persuades its audience. The mode and manner a text uses to convince its audience, or the proof it employs, are important in achieving the rhetorical goal. This is known as invention.[13] Inventing an argument is a difficult task, especially if the issue at stake is as delicate as urging a slothful person to work. What is worse, it is more challenging if the goal is not merely to inform but to move the person to respond positively to the message. Such a task (considered as deliberative act)[14] demands artistic composition on the part of the speaker. The discussion on the invention of the text dwells on its logos.[15]

The obvious inventive or artistic feature of the text is its argument; that is, one who fails to work ends up destitute. An argument is the building block for any rhetorical act. It addresses the fundamental issues of fact and values that inform the choices of the audience.[16] According to Rottenberg, an argument is made up of three parts: claim, support, and warrant.[17] A claim answers the question, "What is the speaker trying to prove?" In our text, for instance, the underlying claim is that, because of the sluggard's lifestyle, he/she ends up destitute. This type of claim is considered as a claim of fact.[18]

All claims have to be supported. The text uses two kinds of support: an example and the appeal to authority. An example is a case or an instance,

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[12] Dale PATRICK and Allen SCULT's concept of audience is applied here. They posit that a text like the Hebrew Bible is written with the audience of later generations in mind. The text, therefore, contains clues that make it eternal with its message; *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation* (Decatur, GA: Almond Press, 1990) 12. Therefore, by audience, I mean readers of the text throughout the text's life span.

[13] Invention is the first rhetorical canon. It holds that rhetoricians do not create new arguments, but instead discover arguments in their search; see Yehoshua GITAY, "A Study of Amos' Art of Speech: A Rhetorical Analysis of Amos 3.1-15," in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 42 (1980) 293-301; Phyllis TRIBLE, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method and the Book of Jonah* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1994) 9; KENNEDY, *New Testament Interpretation*, 14.

[14] TRIBLE, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 8-9.

[15] The text gives little to discuss on the ethos and pathos as part of the invention.

[16] Karlyn Kohrs CAMPBELL, *The Rhetorical Act* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1982) 203.

[17] Annette T. ROTTENBERG, *The Structure of Argument* (Boston, MA: Bedford Books, 1997) 10.

[18] Other types of claims are "claims of value" and "claims of policy." See ROTTENBERG, *The Structure,* 47.

"real or hypothetical ... used to illustrate an idea or to prove that a particular kind of event has happened or could happen."[19] The text draws on an example, in a story form, of a sage's observation of a field that belongs to a sluggard. Although brief, this anecdote is detailed enough to provide the necessary proof for the claim. First, we are informed of the sluggard and his possession of farmland (v.30). Next, we are told of the state of this farmland; it is deplorable (v.31). Following this is the reason behind the deplorable state of the farmland; that is, the owner gives a series of excuses to remain idle (v.33). Finally, we are told the consequence of the daily lifestyle of the owner, that is, destitution (v.34). These details are crucial in increasing the degree of willingness an audience commits to accepting the claim.

The strength in the use of an example lies in its psychological effect on the audience. According to Kohrs, "the rhetorical force of the example lies in its capacity to make us imagine a scene, imagine ourselves in it, and identify with the people and events."[20] The example, as a specific case, focuses on a single event, and so closes the audience's mind to all other issues. Another strength of the example lies in its plausibility. How reasonable or credible is the claim in the example? This works at two levels: within the example itself and with the audience. First, the claim that a sluggard ends up destitute is reasonable and has been properly illustrated in the anecdote. The verisimilitude of this example, therefore, increases the degree of conviction to which an audience will be prepared to commit in accepting its claims. Second, the credibility of the claim should also reflect the experiences of the audience. When a similarity is established between what the audience experiences and what the example portrays, the audience level of acceptance increases.

The example is backed by authority. Here, the "I" in the example story coalesces with the persona of the sage, so that what the "I" says is what the sage also declares. Von Rad identifies this literary form as "autobiographical stylization."[21] The distinctive mark of this literary form is the use of the first person singular, which indicates the involvement, at a personal level, of the sage or the speaker. This literary style enables the "I" in the story to attain the respected and authoritative position akin to the "father" persona in the lectures genre in Proverbs 1–9.[22] It is on this basis of an authoritative position that the "I" could use strongly derogatory descriptive language such as

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[19] CAMPBELL, *The Rhetorical Act*, 174.

[20] CAMPBELL, *The Rhetorical Act*, 175.

[21] Gerhard VON RAD, *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. James D. MARTIN (London, UK: SCM Press, 1972) 37.

[22] Cf. Michael V. FOX, "Ideas of Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9," in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116 (1997) 621-622.

"lazy man" (ʾîš ʿāṣēl) and "a man lacking sense" (ʾādām ḥăsar-lēv). Von Rad writes that by using "I," the sages make themselves "personally responsible for the perception which is being presented."[23]

The anecdote provides the support for the claim, but on what basis should an audience accept the support? A warrant is needed to assure the audience of its credibility. According to Rottenberg, a warrant is a justification or a bridge that connects the support to the claim.[24] It flows from the support and helps in validating the claim. For instance, if one argues that John is stupid (claim) because he cannot write his name (support), the warrant is that any person who cannot write his/her name is stupid.[25] Moving to our text, the claim, support and warrant can be outlined as:

> **Claim**:   Any person who fails to engage in work ends up destitute.
> **Support**:   A farmland that belongs to an individual with a sluggish lifestyle has deteriorated.
> **Warrant**:   Individuals with sluggish lifestyles fail to be productive and they end up destitute.

We notice that the warrant is specific in what it says. It establishes a cause-effect relationship between a sluggish lifestyle and destitution. This type of warrant is known as substantive warrant.[26] Its credibility is based on the reliability of factual evidence. In the text, the anecdote provides the evidence. From this evidence, the general conclusion that a sluggard ends up destitute is made. A reservation with this type of argument, however, is that other possible causes could equally account for the effect (destitution). Nonetheless, the strength of the argument lies in the ability to verify the support. In other words, we can test the relationship that has been established between a sluggish lifestyle and the state of destitution.

Rhetorical Disposition

Once arguments are discovered, they must be organized. Thus, judicious arrangement of arguments is as important to persuasion as the arguments themselves are. According to Alter, although many proverbs exist in verse, there are a number of proverbs that contain "narrative vignettes in which some minimally etched plot enacts the consequence of a moral principle."[27]

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[23] VON RAD, *Wisdom in Israel*, 38.

[24] ROTTENBERG, *The Structure,* 179-180.

[25] This warrant is less credible because there could be a number of people who are intelligent but cannot write their names. In such a case one has to review the support for the argument.

[26] ROTTENBERG, *The Structure*, 186.

[27] ALTER, *Biblical Poetry*, 169.

This is the case with Proverbs 24:30-34. Although a narrative, the text presents its argument in discursive manner. The arguments are structured within the framework of a logical and empirical reality. In order to explore the manner in which the various parts of the text relate with each other, the broad structure of the text is outlined below.

A. Narrative Introduction (v.30): *By a field of a lazy man I passed,*
                                    and by a vineyard of a man lacking sense;

B. Observation (v.31): *And see! It had gone up, all of it with thorns;*
                          covered its face with chickpeas,
                          and its stone walls have broken down.

C. Personal Reflection (v.32): *Then I saw, I set my heart to it;*
                                  I looked, I took a lesson;

D. Conclusion (v.33-v.34): *A little sleep, a little slumber,*
                              a little folding of the hands to lie down

                              and your poverty will come upon you like a
                              traveller,
                              and your want like an armed man.[28]

Trible explains that structure in rhetorical criticism is "the *ipsissima verba* of the text. It shows the patterns of relationships residing in the very words, phrases, sentences, and larger units."[29] The text opens with a strolling character who encounters an agrarian property. The maqqef preposition "by" (ʿal) joined to its object, "field" (śĕdēh), introduces this property (v.30). The word "field" is in a construct state and is linked to the noun phrase "a lazy man" (ʾîš ʿāṣēl). This syntax expresses the possessive relationship between the two nouns. The field in question, therefore, is none but "a field of a lazy man." Closing the first part of the line is the first-person verb (ʿāvartî) reporting the action of the stroller: "I passed." The syntactic construction is repeated in the second part of the line with slight variation. Apart from the conjunction "and" (wĕ), which begins the line, and the superficial absence of a verb phrase, the syntax of the first part corresponds to that of the second. At the semantic level, the two parts are parallel, but a difference is observed at the lexical level of the line. Thus, while a "field of a lazy man" is the object in the first, in the second, the object spoken of is "a vineyard of a man lacking sense" (kerem ʾādām ḥăsar-lēv). The verbal phrase "I passed" serves as a double duty word in the line: it implicitly provides the subject and verb needed to complete the grammatical structure of the second part of the line. It needs to be pointed out that, though two things are

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[28] The translation is my own, and I have tried to give as literal a translation as possible.
[29] TRIBLE, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 92.

spoken of (the field of a lazy man and the vineyard of a man lacking sense), the syntax and vocabulary of the verse, when set within Hebrew poetic work-ings, yield a single reality.[30] Accordingly, a farmland belonging to a sluggard is the issue at stake.

The first line (v.30) introduces a farmland belonging to a sluggard. The speaker in the text has had a visual experience of this farmland. In v.31, the speaker accordingly describes what he/she observes of this object. This verse is placed in a close relationship with the preceding one by the conjunction "and" (*wĕ*), which is prefixed to the word "see" (*hinnēh*). A sequential relationship thus is established by this syntactical move: the speaker moves from strolling to observing. The descriptive narration is couched in three clausal units. All three units are set within the exclamatory remark "see" (*hinnēh*), which opens the line. By beginning the line, the particle "see" heightens the speaker's observatory report for the audience. Each of the three clausal units consists of three syntactical elements, i.e., a verb and two nouns. In the first clause, the verb "it had gone up" (*ʿālāh*) begins the clause and the noun "thorns" (*qimmĕśonîm*) ends it. Interposed between the two is the quantitative noun "all of it" (*kullô*). The second clause, in similar fashion, opens with the verb "covered" (*kāssû*), ends with the noun "chickpea" (*ḥărullîm*) and is interposed with the noun "its face" (*pānāyw*). The third clause, unlike the preceding two, begins with two nouns, "wall" (*geder*) and "its stone" (*ʾăvānāyw*), in a construct chain. It ends with the verb "broken down" (*nehĕrāsāh*). A ternary style permeates the line in its entirety to cre-ate an extensive and vivid description of the field in question. The image the speaker creates is, therefore, unambiguous: this field belonging to the slug-gard is highly deteriorated.

Picking up the narration, v.32 details how the speaker processed the data gathered during his/her observation. Verbs that invoke the epistemological and pedagogical activities of the character dominate the verse.[31] A binary structure permeates the verse at the syntactical and semantic level. Syntacti-cally, the verse is divided into two halves, and each half has two parts. The first part begins with a verb of vision, "I saw" (*ʾeḥĕzeh*), and ends with a verb of reflection, "I set my heart" (*ʾānokî ʾāśît libî*). Here, the mere act of seeing leads to the concentrated act of pondering. The second part also begins with a verb of vision, "I looked" (*rāʾîtî*), and builds up to the cognitive

[30] Wilfred G. E. WATSON, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Supplement Series, 26; Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1995 [1984]) 139.

[31] CLIFFORD, *Proverbs*, 218, believes that here we see glimpses of the learning process in ancient Israel..

act of taking instruction (*lāqaḥtî*). The binary structure of the syntax ties into the binary structure at the semantic level of the line. The entire line juxtaposes the two ideas of vision and reflection to accentuate the manner in which the speaker perceived the object of sight.

The reflection of the speaker continues in v.33 as he/she itemizes three traits of the sluggard. Couched in a ternary style, the line describes the rationalization the sluggard gives for remaining inactive. Three reasons are given – "sleep" (*šēnôt*), "slumber" (*tĕnûmôt*), and "folding of the hands to lie down" (*ḥibuq yādayim liškāv*) – and they are all qualified by the attributive adjective "little" (*mĕˁaṭ*). After reflecting on the object of sight, the speaker concludes by detailing the consequence of the sluggard's inactions. The consequence is announced in the concluding verse (v.34) in a chiastic structure:

> like a traveller (*mithallēk*) – your poverty (*rêšekā*)
>   A   B
> your need (*maḥsorêka*) – like an armed man (*kĕˀîš māgēn*)
>   B   A

The verse opens with the conjunction "and" (*û*), which establishes a linkage between the rationalization above (v.33) and the consequence (v.34). This is followed by the verb "come" (*bāˀ*), which plays a double duty role connecting the two parallel lines. The chiastic structure is observed in the subjects and complements that make up the two lines. Apart from its aesthetic effect, the structure emphasizes the state of destitution that will eventually dawn on the sluggard. Again, there is the use of possessive construction, i.e. "your poverty" (*rêšekā*) and "and your need" (*maḥsorêka*), to highlight the act-consequence tenet of wisdom literature.[32]

Rhetorical Techniques (*Elocutio*)

Once ideas are discovered and organized, they must be translated into words for written or oral discourse. Rhetoricians believe that style is not merely ornamental; rather, an appropriate use of language is as important to persuasion as is the quality of the thought that the language expresses.

Central to Hebrew poetry is parallelism, and this technique permeates the text in its entirety. In v.30, for instance, synonymous parallelism is used to focus the central object of discussion. The word pairs, "field of a lazy man"

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[32] Peter HATTON, "A Cautionary Tale: The Acts-Consequence 'Construct'," in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 35 (2011) 375-384. He cautions, however, that the term "act-consequence" reduces the agency of God into a simplistic formulaic.

and "vineyard of a man lacking sense," not only assist the sage in compos-ing the couplet, they also focus the audience's attention on the idea raised.[33] Synonymous parallelism (grammatically or semantically) does not equal rep-etition: there is always a progression of meaning within the parallel lines. Thus, we see that the speaker cleverly varies the *nomen regens* and the *nomen rectum* in the construct relations of the word pairs (field of lazy man/ vineyard of man lacking sense) when he could have at least made one of them a constant, such as "the field of a lazy man" and "the vineyard of the lazy man." By this variation, the sage sharpens the idea of thought through narrowing the general idea of a field (which is in a superordinate position) to the specific idea of a vineyard (in the subordinate position). Also, there is a progression of meaning revealed in the genitives "lazy man" and "man lacking sense." The audience becomes aware that the man in question is not only lazy, but in addition to his laziness, also lacks sense.

Another dynamic use of parallelism is evident in v.31. The verse displays synonymous parallelism at the semantic level. Once again, the ideas invoked, though similar, go through various levels of subtleties to accentuate their meanings. The state of the farmland is given in three descriptive phases, where three clauses are used to focus the deteriorated state of the farmland. Although the idea conveyed in all clauses regards the land's deterioration, we see that each clause presents a unique perspective on the nature of the deterioration. The farmland is itself captured in three phases ("all of it"; "its face"; and "its stone walls"). Three qualities are then pegged to each phase ("gone up with thorns"; "covered with chickpeas"; and "have broken down"). The description of the farmland in the first clause is in a superordi-nate position ("all of it"), while the two subsequent clauses play a subordi-nate role by specifying an aspect of it ("its face" and "its stone walls"). The qualities, on the other hand, are all coordinates. Clearly, the technique of parallelism has been used to give the audience a sufficient portrait of the object of discussion.

Verse 32 displays a similar use of parallelism with the additional tech-nique of hypozeuxis.[34] Four clauses make up the couplet of the verse, with two each constituting a line. The first line, "And I saw; I set my heart to it," introduces the sage's reflection on what has been seen. By the use of hypozeuxis, the sage separates the two actions on one hand, but at the same time links them together, so that the acts of seeing and learning become

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[33]   See WATSON, *Classical Hebrew,* 140; he indicates that one important use of word pairs is the leverage it provides for the poet to complete his/her line.

[34]   This is a rhetorical technique where a construction has series of clauses in which each clause has its own subject and verb (e.g., I came, I saw, I conquered).

spontaneous. The second line, "I looked; I took a lesson," follows the same pattern. The two-stage process, which mediates the act of vision and the act of reflection and which carries through the technique of parallelism and hypozeuxis, signals to the audience how an everyday experience is potentially a platform for the discovery of wisdom. Thus, for Kidner, this points out the essence of time for the sage.[35] This relationship between time and wisdom is made more pronounced in v.33.

The technique of parallelism, garnished with that of anaphora, introduces v.33.[36] The technique of anaphora, according to Alter, produces "an overlap effect where we perceive an action flowing into a related and subsequent action."[37] The repeated word "little" (*měʿaṭ*) is used to qualify three related actions (to sleep, to slumber, and to fold the arms to lie), though each action maintains its unique semantic contribution to the line, giving the line a complex but unified thought. The first phrase, "a little sleep," begins the lesson of the speaker. The phrase introduces the rationalization the lazy man gives to explain the state of his farm. "A little sleep" grows into "a little slumber": the use of assonance evident in the plural endings of the feminine nouns establishes the connection between the actions (to sleep and to slumber). This, in turn, emphasizes the attitude of procrastination of the lazy man. The last phrase of the line, "a little folding of the arms to lie," dramatizes the quest for respite by the sluggard. With this last phrase, the speaker points out to the audience the mockery in the lazy man's excuses. Ironically, the excuses of little respites add up to a bigger loss of time. Thus Kidner writes of the sluggard, "... by inches and minutes, his opportunity slips away."[38]

The speaker breaks away from the anaphora (v.33), and in a climactic tone pronounces the consequences of a slothful lifestyle (v.34). Beside parallelism, the techniques of personification and diction are marshalled to heighten the message. In the first line, poverty is personified in the traveller, while need is given the human attribute of being armed. The personification enlivens the message, making the abstract concepts – poverty and need – clearer and more real to the audience by defining them in terms of everyday human activity. The speaker's aim is to accentuate the damaging effect of the state of destitution. The phrases "like a traveller" and "like an armed

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[35] Derek KIDNER, *Proverbs: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1964), 43.

[36] Anaphora is a technique of repetition where a word or phrase is repeated at the beginning of several successive clauses. An example is: Not time, not money, not laws, but willing diligence will get this done.

[37] ALTER, *Biblical Poetry*, 64.

[38] KIDNER, *Proverbs*, 42.

man" succinctly achieve this goal. Take the Hebrew word *mithallēk*, for instance; its *hithpael* status indicates an intensive act of walking, one which is also iterative. It characterizes poverty as quick and incessant. While *mithallēk* portrays the rapid onset of poverty, the noun phrase *ʾîš māgēn* brings out poverty's brutish nature. Crenshaw believes that the sage's rhetoric "may have been that poverty will overpower its hapless victim, rather than taking him by surprise."[39] These two portraits, nonetheless, highlight the destructive nature of the state of destitution.

The diction of the speaker is also significant in many respects. The Hebrew terms *rêš* "poverty" and *maḥsôr* "need" are two of the several words used to refer to the poor and the state of poverty in the Hebrew Bible. Other words used in the scriptures are *ʿānî* and *ʾebyôn*. *Rêš and maḥsôr*, according to Frick, are used in the wisdom books to refer to one who is in a state of poverty due to laziness. They deviate from other terms like *ʿānî* and *ʾebyôn,* which refer to poverty due to economic exploitation.[40] Significantly, by the use of these terms, the sage emphatically dwells on poverty that is self-imposed: the sluggard brings it upon himself due to laziness. This claim is further supported by the use of the pronominal suffix "your" attached to the nouns "poverty" and "need." This rhetorical tactic stresses the proximity between one's refusal to work and one's state of poverty/need.

4. *Review of Analysis*

The text communicates a "truth": the "truth" that, because a lazy person fails to work, he/she ends up as destitute. This sounds simplistic and obvious, but to the speaker, it is a message that has to be communicated. After all, truths cannot circulate without a vehicle. They have to be communicated by one person to another through the use of language. The tool of language is, therefore, very crucial. As the container in which truth resides, language has to be handled well. Also, proverbs by nature are pragmatic: thus the sage's concern is not merely to reiterate this truth, but to package the truth in such a way that it will move an audience to respond appropriately. Right packaging for right response is what reveals the rhetorical ingenuity of the proverbial sayings.

The text demonstrates this ingenuity in a striking manner. The entire rhetorical act revolves around the two characters in the anecdote: the sluggard

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[39]   James L. CRENSHAW, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1981) 90.

[40]   Frank S. FRICK, "CUI BONO? – History in the Service of Political Nationalism: The Deuteronomistic History as Political Propaganda," in *Semeia* 66 (1995) 85-88.

and the "I" or speaker. The sluggard is the focal point of the message in the anecdote. The moral lesson is invested in his personality. Right from the beginning, this character is portrayed as "a lazy man" and "a man lacking sense." These name-tags focus and define the sluggard's personality. The clarity and vividness of the sluggard's characterization is, again, evident in the description of the farmland which he owns. The entire line of v.31 projects this vividness and holds the attention of the audience by dramatizing the deteriorated state of the farmland. The line also justifies the name-tags in the opening verse. The characterization of the sluggard peaks in v.33. Here we see the consistency and appropriateness of the sage's message. The depiction of the sluggard's personality is consistently sustained by the technique of anaphora, which subtly ridicules his daily lifestyle. By this stage, the audience has been provided with the necessary information about this character. The obvious question is, What lies in wait for such a deviant? The speaker tactfully ends his/her message by dwelling on the natural corollary to the sluggard's personality. By portraying the sluggard as a deviant, the sage prepares the audience to expect nothing but a bad ending for this character. Deprivation and destitution is, therefore, the inevitable fate of the sluggard. The unity in which the personality of the sluggard is presented makes it difficult for the audience to reject the tragic ending of this character.

Second, the character "I" or the speaker is used in a complementary role to support the minimally etched plot. The "I" is the bearer of the message: the truth about the sluggard is put in his/her mouth. The personality of the speaker, therefore, is crucial in getting the audience to respond to the message. At the beginning, the "I" establishes his/her personality through the tone of the opening verse. With a serious tone, the "I" invites the audience to expect an equally serious message. Verse 32 demonstrates the wise personality of the "I" as opposed to the foolish personality of the sluggard. This is achieved by portraying the "I" as a prudent person, one who is able to discern wisdom from everyday life, and is therefore a credible person to speak on this matter. The "I" also effectively utilizes credibility when the speaker shifts from using the third person to refer to the sluggard to addressing the sluggard directly in the conclusion. By this shift, the "I" bridges the gap between the addresser and the addressee, and heightens the act-consequence tenet of wisdom literature.

Conclusion

The beauty of Proverbs 24:30-34 is the permanence of its message and the striking manner in which this message has been packaged. The text promotes work by portraying the damaging effect on one who fails to work.

With the rhetorical aim of achieving a pragmatic response, the sage shapes the text in a way that succeeds in producing wide-ranging rhetorical goals such as the creation of virtual experiences. This enables the audience to perceive the message as real and valid. Again, by dramatizing the sluggish lifestyle, the sage alters the perception of the audience by accentuating the devastating effect of laziness. The audience is predisposed to respond negatively to this sluggish lifestyle as it is adversely portrayed in the text. Finally, the sage implicitly invites the audience to act contrarily to the sluggard's actions. This is the goal of initiating and maintaining action as demanded by any deliberative rhetorical act. In many ways, human behaviour hardly seems to have changed over the centuries. Thus the text is important for our society today. Its message is as simple as it can be: avoid a slothful lifestyle and be as diligent as you can.