

JOSIAH D. PEELER

Punning in Odd
or Elegant Constructions
in Jeremiah

Forschungen
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174

Mohr Siebeck

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Josiah D. Peeler

Punning in Odd or Elegant Constructions in Jeremiah

The Convergence of Linguistics, Rhetoric, and
Textuality in the Hebrew Text of Jeremiah

Mohr Siebeck

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וכדה על־שקמה... ויהייהוא טרם פלה לדבר והנה רבקה יצאת

With appreciation for Danielle's steadfast strength and unswerving kindness in weathering this eight-year voyage. *Je t'aime.*

Preface

This is a revision of my doctoral dissertation completed at the University of Edinburgh. I appreciate the assistance, kindness, and direction provided by my *Doktorvater*, Timothy Lim, during my time in Edinburgh. His focus, concern, and tenacity allowed me to finish in a timely fashion. It was during my second conversation with Timothy that he suggested my exploring the intentionally of odd or well-formed texts in the Hebrew Bible. Anja Klein, my secondary supervisor, clarified my route by her precise feedback and comments at my boards. I appreciate the willingness of Suzanna Millar and Noam Mizrahi to be my examiners. Their criticisms during the *viva voce* were illuminating. I thank Connor Boyd, Paul Foster, Phil Foster, Alex Muir, and John Screnock for challenging my thinking and articulation in numerous ways. John Screnock has especially been a constant source of guidance and assistance over the last years. I appreciate the editors of the *FAT II* series accepting my manuscript in this esteemed series. I especially appreciate the guidance provided by Elena Müller, Betina Burkhart, Markus Kirchner, and Tobias Weiss at Mohr Siebeck as I prepared the manuscript for publication.

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לֹא לָנוּ יְהוָה לֹא לָנוּ כִּי־לְשִׁמָּה הִן כְּבוֹד עַל־מִצְדָּה עַל־צְמִתָּהּ

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Abbreviations

α'	Aquila
σ'	Symmachus
θ'	Theodotion
A	Aleppo Codex
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
ArBib	The Aramaic Bible
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
AcBib	Academia Biblica
AIL	Ancient Israel and Its Literature
<i>AJSL</i>	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature</i>
<i>AnSt</i>	<i>Anatolian Studies</i>
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
<i>ASJ</i>	<i>Acta Sumerologica</i>
AUM	Andrews University Monographs
<i>AuOr</i>	<i>Aula Orientalis</i>
<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BBRSup	Bulletin for Biblical Research, Supplements
BCOTWP	Baker Commentary on Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms
<i>BDB</i>	F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980)
BeO	Bibbia e oriente
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BHHB	Baylor Handbook on the Hebrew Bible
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BibOr	Biblica et Orientalia
<i>BIOSCS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the International Organisation of Septuagint and Cognate Studies</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BJSUCSD	Biblical and Judaic Studies from the University of California, San Diego
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BHLXX	Baylor Handbook on the Septuagint
BHS	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia
BHQ	Biblia Hebraica Quinta
<i>BZAW</i>	<i>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
C	Cairo Codex of the Prophets
CAD	Chicago Assyrian Dictionary

CAT	Manfried Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín, <i>The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places</i> , 2nd ed. (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995)
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CD	Cairo Genizah copy of the Damascus Document
<i>CDCH</i>	David J. A. Clines, ed., <i>The Concise Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009)
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
CIS	Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum
CPNIVC	College Press NIV Commentary
DNWSIJ	Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling., <i>Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions</i> (Leiden: Brill, 1995)
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
EHL	Encyclopaedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics
<i>ErIsr</i>	<i>Eretz Israel</i>
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
<i>FO</i>	<i>Folia Orientalia</i>
G	Greek Translation of the Hebrew Bible
<i>HA</i>	<i>Hebrew Abstracts</i>
<i>HALOT</i>	E. J. Richardson, ed., <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> , Study Edition, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2001)
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HBCE	Hebrew Bible: A Critical Edition
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
HdO	Handbuch der Orientalistik
<i>HeBAI</i>	<i>Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel</i>
<i>Hen</i>	<i>Henoch</i>
Hermeneia	Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HSM	Harvard Semitic Museum Monographs
HTKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
HUCM	Monographs of Hebrew Union College
<i>HvTSt</i>	<i>Hervormde Teologiese Studies</i>
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
Int	Interpretation
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology</i>
<i>IOS</i>	<i>Israel Oriental Society</i>
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JANES	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>
JANESSup	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society Special Supplement</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBQ</i>	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JHebS	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>

<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
<i>JSem</i>	<i>Journal of Semitics</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>J.W.</i>	<i>Jewish Wars</i> (Josephus)
<i>KAI</i>	Herbert Donner and Wolfgang Röllig, <i>Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften I</i> (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002).
KJV	King James Version
<i>KUSATU</i>	<i>Kleine Untersuchungen zur Sprache des Alten Testaments und seiner Umwelt</i>
L	Leningrad Codex
LBH	Learning Biblical Hebrew
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LMS	Lexham Methods Series
LSWS	Linguistic Studies in West Semitic
Maarov	Maarov
MCAAS	Memoirs of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences
MT	Masoretic Text
NAC	New American Commentary
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OCDSS	The Oxford Commentary on the Dead Sea Scrolls
OL	Old Latin
OrLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
<i>OTE</i>	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
OTG	Old Testament Guides
<i>OLP</i>	<i>Orientalia lovaniensia periodica</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>Presb</i>	<i>Presbyterion</i>
<i>Proof</i>	<i>Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
<i>ResQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
RevQ	Revue de Qumrân
TMSJ	The Master's Seminary Journal
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentary
S	Syriac Peshitta
SAIS	Studies in the Aramaic Interpretation of Scripture
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
<i>Scrip</i>	<i>Scriptura</i>
SHBC	Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary

STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
SSN	Studia Semitica Neerlandica
SLL	Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics
StANER	Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records
StPh	Studia Phoenicia
StPohl	Studia Pohl
SubBi	Subsidia Biblica
SuppTHB	Supplements to the Textual History of the Bible
T	Aramaic Targumim to the Hebrew Bible
TCT	Textual Criticism and the Translator
TS	Texts and Studies
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>Text</i>	<i>Textus</i>
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
V	Latin Vulgate
VCSupp	Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WAWSup	Writings from the Ancient World Supplement Series
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WW</i>	<i>Word and World</i>
YJS	Yale Judaica Series
<i>ZAH</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Althebräistik</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZB	Zürcher Bibelkommentare
ZECOT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament

Chapter 1

Meta-Textual Semantics: Present or Absent in the Hebrew Bible?

1.1 Introducing Meta-Textual Semantics

The reader of the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible encounters several oddities within the text usually explained as scribal corruptions (e.g., the scribe has accidentally interchanged the consonants of a lexeme) or scribal variation (e.g., a scribe prefers spelling a lexeme a certain way though other ways simultaneously exist). If scribal variation is the chosen explanation, then no significance is given to the intentional change. If a textual corruption, then the text is emended. Some readers, however, understand certain textual oddities neither as scribal corruptions nor variations but as elements elucidating the context.

In this study, I use the term meta-textual semantics to refer to the form and presentation of the Hebrew text of the Hebrew Bible providing meaning beyond what is inherent in the form of lexemes and phrases.¹ I highlight cases involving a peculiar or obtrusive element within the Hebrew text of Jeremiah which illustrates the contextual message though the element under discussion does not actually possess any semantic value (e.g., an extra \aleph in the orthography of a word).² It can be an ill-formed or well-formed element in the text. The form adds meaning beyond the contextual sense of the words. As Yairah Amit says regarding narrative criticism, “Observing the form of a narrative

¹ The terminology of “meta-textual semantics” was suggested to me by Timothy Lim in December 2020. Also, see Lewis Glinert, *The Story of Hebrew* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 1–2. Glinert describes this aspect as “para-language.” He says, “We will look beyond the words and grammatical structures to communication styles and to the ‘para-language’ of scripts, fonts, spellings, formats...No account of language can ignore the pull of para-language.”

² For ancient and medieval Jewish and Christian exegetes using the contextual message in their exegesis of the Hebrew Bible, see Timothy H. Lim, “Contextual Readings of the Song of Songs in the Pre-Modern Period,” in *Congress Volume Aberdeen 2019*, ed. Grant MacAskill, Christl M. Maier, and Joachim Schaper (VTSup 192; Leiden: Brill, 2022), 186–203. Lim argues that the contextual meaning corresponds to פֶּשֶׁט and the allegorical reading corresponds to פְּשָׁר while a middle ground is found in Anonymous Prague and Anonymous Oxford manuscripts of Songs which lists different interpretations.

necessarily deepens one's understanding of its content."³ I include elements of orthography, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics as representatives of meta-textual semantics in the Hebrew text.

The secondary literature of the Hebrew Bible often mentions the phenomenon of meta-textual semantics, though this literature does not use uniform terminology to describe it.⁴ In addition to this lack of consistent terminology, there does not exist a critical methodology of meta-textual semantics which can test the validity of its purported presence in a text, nor has a work appeared detailing its complexity across various texts within a section or book in the Hebrew Bible.⁵ This lack of a full and critical engagement with meta-textual semantics has resulted in a flat description of the phenomenon within the Hebrew Bible. Also, previous studies upon meta-textual semantics provide brief examples across a plethora of texts producing the assumption that this particular device is not widespread across the texts of the Hebrew Bible, which does not appear to be an entirely accurate assessment. This study will seek to correct some of these misconceptions and misrepresentations by suggesting a methodology and describing a selection of meta-textual semantics in the Hebrew text of Jeremiah.

1.2 Call for a Fuller Investigation of Meta-Textual Semantics in the Hebrew Bible

To briefly illustrate the need for further investigation of meta-textual semantics, I examine the description of the phenomenon in a few sources discussing Isa 61:3.

Isa 61:3 reads –

[He (YHWH) sent me]...to give to them a turban instead of ashes...⁶

³ Yairah Amit, "Narrative Analysis: Meaning, Context, and Origins of Genesis 38," in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Peterson*, ed. Joel M. LeMon and Kent Harold Richards (Atlanta: SBL, 2009), 271.

⁴ A lack of consistent terminology is also discussed regarding puns and metathesis in the Hebrew Bible. For puns, see Scott B. Noegel, "Wordplay" in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (ANEM 26; Atlanta: SBL, 2021), 1. For metathesis, see Isaac Kalimi, *Metathesis in the Hebrew Bible: Wordplay as a Literary and Exegetical Device* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2018), 1–8.

⁵ Similarly, Nathan LeMaster states that Janus parallelism lacks a clear methodology. See Nathan LeMaster, "A Methodology for Janus Parallelism," *TMSJ* 31 (2020): 173–188. A methodology is lacking in spite of a monograph on the subject. See Scott B. Noegel, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job* (JSOTSS 223; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996).

⁶ The *Qal qatal* of $\sqrt{\text{חלש}}$ in Isa 61:1 governs the following infinitives in Isa 61:1–3.

In Isa 61:3, metathesis illustrates the reversal of the Babylonian exiles' situation.⁷ The exiles, who have smeared their heads with ashes in mourning, now will have “a turban instead of ashes” (פָּאֵר תַּחַת אָפֶר) placed upon their head. Commenting on this verse, John Goldingay says, “The first exchange involves a paronomasia: *'ēper* will be replaced by *p^e'ēr*. The exchange of letters suggests the exchange of that to which they refer.”⁸ Also, Joseph Blenkinsopp says, “The point is also made by the reversal of consonants and sounds in the first of the three images: *pē'ēr taḥat 'ēper*, ‘a turban instead of ashes.’”⁹

While both Goldingay and Blenkinsopp provide the essential details (i.e., the form of this phrase encapsulates the reversal the Judahite exiles will experience), they do not fully explore the construction of this particular phrase. First, the pun does not simply involve metathesis (or consonance) between the consonants א and פ as Goldingay suggests but equally includes vocalic metathesis (or assonance) as Blenkinsopp notes.¹⁰ Second, the fact that the pun includes the preposition תַּחַת is not mentioned by either commentator. Goldingay does not even transliterate the preposition when discussing the pun in this phrase.¹¹ Blenkinsopp transliterates the preposition but ignores its significance by suggesting the importance centres on the connection between the first and third words within the phrase. The contribution of the preposition תַּחַת to this phrase denoting reversal resides in the fact that this preposition is a palindrome.¹² The appearance of a palindrome between two anagrammatic lexemes marks the organic connection inherent throughout this phrase.¹³ By using a palindrome between two metathesising lexemes of the first two consonants, the author or scribe illustrates the ease with which YHWH will reverse the exiles' circumstances. Additionally, this three word phrase pivots on the preposition תַּחַת. The consonant ה is the middle letter of the phrase פָּאֵר תַּחַת אָפֶר. This consonant only appears once but every other consonantal phoneme within this phrase appears twice – once on either side of ה. The author or scribe constructs this phrase to illustrate a thorough and systematic reversal.

Third, neither commentator mentions the contextual association of the lexeme אָפֶר “dust” and פָּאֵר “turban” with the verb פָּאֵר “to glorify” which appears in Isa 61:3 (i.e., as a *Hitpael* infinitive) at the conclusion of Isa 61:1–3.

⁷ Kalimi, *Metathesis in the Hebrew Bible*, 72, 132, and 160.

⁸ John Goldingay, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 56–66* (ICC; London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 304.

⁹ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 19B; New York: Doubleday, 2003), 226.

¹⁰ For a fuller description of the nature of the vocalic metathesis, see Josiah D. Peeler, “Quenching Tears: A Note on 2 Kings 22:17 and 19,” *VT* 72 (2022): 821–826.

¹¹ Kalimi does not transliterate the preposition תַּחַת in his discussion. See Kalimi, *Metathesis in the Hebrew Bible*, 72, 132, and 160.

¹² For the significance of the palindrome in Isa 61:3, see Peeler, “Quenching Tears: A Note on 2 Kings 22:17 and 19.”

¹³ For anagrammatic paronomasia, see Scott B. Noegel, “Paronomasia,” *EHL* 3:26.

The verb $\sqrt{\text{פאר}}$ is a *Leitmotiv* in this section (Isa 60:7, 9, 13, 21; and 61:3; cf. the lexeme תִּפְאַרֶךְ in Isa 60:7, 19; 62:3; 63:12, 14; and 64:10). The *Hipael* infinitive of $\sqrt{\text{פאר}}$ in Isa 60:21 and 61:3 envelopes the proclamation of Isa 61:1–3. Additionally, the verb $\sqrt{\text{פאר}}$ is a denominative verb deriving from the lexeme פְּאָר .¹⁴ A key component of the coherence of this section is that Israel's reversal (i.e., אָפֵר to פְּאָר) results in Israel having a פְּאָר and being $\sqrt{\text{פאר}}$ and YHWH being $\sqrt{\text{פאר}}$. In this way, the author or scribe extends the pun between אָפֵר and פְּאָר and centres the reader or hearer's attention to the multifaceted nature of the root $\sqrt{\text{פאר}}$ as a noun in Israel's case and as a verb in YHWH's case.

Fourth, neither commentator seeks to connect the actual textual elements in Isa 61:3 with the possible lexical or conceptual associations that the ancient reader or hearer of this text might envision. Though this is admittedly subjective, there is evidence that other lexemes would be evoked by the language of אָפֵר and פְּאָר in this verse. The fact that the pun extends to include the verb $\sqrt{\text{פאר}}$, especially from Isa 60:21 and 61:3, suggests that the author or scribe is open to additional, implicit connections between the puns explicitly within the metathesising phrase in Isa 61:3. For example, the pun between אָפֵר and פְּאָר may include the lexeme אָפֵר “bandage” (1 Kgs 20:38 and 41). The various witnesses of 1 Kgs 20:38 confuse the lexeme appearing in the text (i.e., אָפֵר “bandage” in the MT; פְּאָר “turban” in G and T; and אָפֵר “dust” in S, α' , σ' , and V).¹⁵ This suggests that the close graphematic and phonetic connections between these three lexemes might cause the reader or hearer to confuse them. In each case, the lexeme describes something that can be placed upon or wrapped around the head. Also, the lexemes פְּאָרֶה “branch” (Ezek 17:6; 31:5, 6, 8, 12, and 13)¹⁶ and פְּאָרֶה “branch, bough” (Isa 10:33; cf. the denominative verb $\sqrt{\text{פאר}}$ “to go over the branches” in Deut 24:20)¹⁷ might be in view because of the tree imagery in this section (i.e., נֶצֶר “branch” in Isa 60:21 and אֵיל “oak” in

¹⁴ The lexeme פְּאָר is an Egyptian loanword. See Benjamin J. Noonan, *Non-Semitic Loan-words in the Hebrew Bible: A Lexicon of Language Contact* (LSAWS 14; University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2019), 169–170. It has been proposed that the noun פְּאָר derives from the verbal root $\sqrt{\text{פאר}}$ “to glorify.” Noonan, however, notes that there is no Semitic cognate for the Hebrew lexeme פְּאָר , and there is no Semitic cognate for the Hebrew root $\sqrt{\text{פאר}}$. It seems that Hebrew borrowed the lexeme פְּאָר from the Egyptian prj , which denotes a cloth wrapping including, but not limited to, one wrapped around the head. The same conclusion appears in HALOT, 908.

¹⁵ For the textual evidence, see C. F. Burney, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Kings* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1903), 241–242 and Marvin A. Sweeney, *1 and 2 Kings* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 237.

¹⁶ See HALOT, 909 and BDB, 802. The form פְּאָרוֹת in L of Ezek 17:6 appears as פְּאָרוֹת in A. See D. S. Loewinger, “The Aleppo Codex and the Ben Asher Tradition,” *Text* 1 (1960): 85.

¹⁷ The masorah of Isa 10:33 states that the א is written but not read in the form פְּאָרֶה thus producing פְּאָרֶה . See HALOT, 909 and BDB, 802. John Watts understands the lexeme פְּאָרֶה in Isa 10:33 as related to the root $\sqrt{\text{פאר}}$ I “to glorify,” instead of $\sqrt{\text{פאר}}$ II “to go over the branches.” This is because he understands only one root for $\sqrt{\text{פאר}}$ which has both glory and tree semantics. He believes the noun פְּאָר derives from the verb $\sqrt{\text{פאר}}$ “to glorify” and under-

Isa 61:3), as well as the consonantal connection with the lexeme פָּאָר, as well as אָפָּר. The noun מָטֵע “planting” appearing in Isa 60:21 and 61:3 also appears in Ezek 17:7 and 31:4, further linking at least the lexeme פָּאָר to this Isaianic context. Within the context of the reversal of the Babylonian deportation of Judah, a pun operable between lexemes with the consonantal phonemes פ and ר (i.e., פָּאָר and אָפָּר explicitly in Isa 61:3 as well as other lexemes possibly implicitly evoked אָפָּר, פָּאָרָה, and פָּאָרָה) in Isa 61:3 might additionally suggest that Judah’s fully reversed situation will culminate with a re-crossing of the Euphrates River (פָּרָת) to return to Canaan. If so, then this Isaianic text probably envisions this crossing of the Euphrates as a reenactment of the crossing of the Red Sea (Exod 14–15) and Jordan River (Josh 3–4) which were part of the first Exodus. This crossing signals both a reversal of the Babylonian deportation and institutes a second Exodus. Additionally, YHWH came from פָּאָרָן “Paran” (Deut 33:2 and Hab 3:3) to rescue and claim Israel. Now, he comes to give Israel a פָּאָר perhaps from פָּאָרָן.¹⁸

This brief examination of the authorial or scribal design within one phrase of Isa 61:3, illustrates that previous comments on meta-textual semantics are often too brief. A fuller, more detailed engagement with this phenomenon in the Hebrew Bible needs to be conducted. Additionally, it should be acknowledged that all of the implicit lexical and conceptual links I suggest above with the three word phrase in Isa 61:3 could be a fabrication of mine and are not necessarily intended by the authors and scribes of this text. This illustrates that there is a need for a methodology to determine what connections and associations the authors and scribes of Isa 61:1–3, for example, intended when they inscribed their text. What elements of the form of a text are constructed by the author or scribe in contradistinction to which elements are constructed by the modern scholar?

1.3 Is Meta-Textual Semantics an Ancient or Modern Conceptualisation?

An issue related to the study of meta-textual semantics is determining whether it is an ancient device placed in the texts of the Hebrew Bible by its authors and scribes or whether it is an invention of the modern scholarly mind.¹⁹ Did

stands the form in Isa 10:33 as referring to glory and not to the branches of a tree. See John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33* (WBC 24; Waco, TX: Word, 1985), 164–165.

¹⁸ For the potential confusion of פָּאָרָן with פָּאָרָה or פָּאָרָה in the G of Hab 3:3, see Joshua L. Harper, *Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Haggai: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (BHLXX; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2023), 53. This textual issue further demonstrates that the kind of lexical connections, associations, and accidental interchanges suggested above are understood by ancient scribes and translators working with the texts of the Hebrew Bible.

¹⁹ Cf. Scott B. Noegel, “Atbash (אֲתַבַּשׁ) in Jeremiah and Its Literary Significance: Part 1,” *JBO* 24 (1996): 86. Noegel notes that the few occurrences of atbash in Jeremiah and

the author or scribe place it in the text or did the reader? For example, Gary Rendsburg cautions regarding Kalimi's recent monograph on metathesis that while metathesis is certainly an intentional device in some texts, Kalimi might be too keen to find metathesis across the Hebrew Bible. The limited Hebrew *abjad* with only 22 consonantal phonemes means that the same consonants will likely appear in various juxtaposed lexemes and probably create unintentional metathesis at various points.²⁰ In a similar way, Michael Fox warns that modern commentators may create enigmas in Proverbs because of the phraseology of Prov 1:6 instead of discovering ones the author placed in the text.²¹ If meta-textual semantics is a modern construction which scholars have superimposed upon ancient texts, then its value is limited to a discussion of modern approaches to the text.²² If, however, the ancient authors and scribes and their original audience were familiar with and utilised meta-textual semantics both when forming and creating their texts as well as when listening to and reading texts, then providing a framework from which to properly understand its appearance and function in the texts of the Hebrew Bible will aid in exegeting these texts.

I suggest that Prov 1, especially verses 2–6, 10, and 15, provide evidence that ancient Israelite authors and scribes were aware of the concept of meta-textual semantics and employed it when constructing their texts. Additionally, the authors and scribes of ancient texts in the Hebrew Bible and in the ancient Near East expected their readers and hearers to be familiar with meta-textual semantics to properly perceive and grasp the significance of its appearance within a discourse.

the difficulty in describing them means that “some consider the device to be pure scholarly fiction, or not original to Jeremiah’s prophecy.”

²⁰ Gary A. Rendsburg, review of *Metathesis in the Hebrew Bible: Wordplay as a Literary and Exegetical Device*, by Isaac Kalimi, *JT* 71 (2021): 153–156 especially 154–155.

²¹ See Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9* (AB 18A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 65–67. Fox (67) says, “The Prologue’s assumption that the book holds a significant number of enigmas encourages the reader to seek them out, and this effort may itself produce enigmas – as it did for Tur-Sinai and Zer-Kavod. The messages of such ‘found’ enigmas always accord with the basic message of the book and thus reinforce it. When that happens, the enigma then belongs to the act of interpretation, not the moment of composition.”

Contra Scott B. Noegel and Corinna E. Nichols, “Lurking Lions and Hidden Herds: Concealed Wisdom in the Hebrew Bible,” *Religions* 12 (2021): 493. Noegel and Nichols suggest that the hidden “lion” (אֲרִי) among the form אֲרִי־הַאֲרִי “he prolongs” in Prov 19:11 “puts into practice the directions given in Prov 1:6 that to obtain wisdom one must listen closely.”

²² This is a difference between historical-critical approaches to the Hebrew Bible and post-modernist approaches. Post-modern approaches focus on the reader’s interpretation of the text, while historical-critical approaches are more focused on the original context and conceptualisation of a text.

1.4 Proverbs 1:1–7: A Paradigm for Increasing Wisdom through Reading

The introduction to the book of Proverbs and the immediately following textual unit illustrate how meta-textual semantics is part of the shared rhetorical and literary framework of both author/scribe and hearer/reader when interacting in a text. Several odd elements appear within the text of Proverbs 1 that are difficult to interpret. Is the title in Prov 1:1 (מִשְׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה בְּנֵי-דָוִד מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל) only composed of the overt object of a null copula phrase with both the subject (i.e., אֵלֶּה “these” as in Exod 1:1 and Deut 1:1) and the verb being covert?²³ Or is this phrase a “syntactic fragment functioning as a title,” a possibility which Robert Holmstedt, John Cook, and Phillip Marshall note regarding the similar construction in Qoh 1:1?²⁴ Is the title governing the following infinitives? If Prov 1:1 represents a null copula phrase, then is the null finite verb in Prov 1:1 governing the infinitives which follow it in verses 2–4 and 6? Has a verb elided between Prov 1:1 and 1:2?²⁵ The titles within Proverbs (10:1; 24:23; 25:1; 30:1; and 31:1) are not connected to what follows them according to Arthur Keefer.²⁶ Is the title in Prov 1:1 an exception to this pattern? If Prov 1:1–6 is syntactically connected, then the resulting understanding that מִשְׁלֵי in 1:1 help to understand a מִשְׁלֵי in 1:6 seems tautological.²⁷ Is the jussive beginning verse 5 (שִׁמְעוּ “to hear, listen”) evidence of an editorial insertion or a parenthesis

²³ The titles in Prov 24:23 (גַּם-אֵלֶּה לְחֻכְמִים) and 25:1 (גַּם-אֵלֶּה מִשְׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה) begin with אֵלֶּה. This suggests that אֵלֶּה is the null subject in Prov 1:1.

²⁴ Robert D. Holmstedt, John A. Cook, and Phillip S. Marshall, *Qoheleth: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text* (BHHB; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), 48. Holmstedt, Cook, and Marshall understand Qoh 1:1 as having a null subject (i.e., אֵלֶּה).

²⁵ Most understand the title as governing the infinitives. For example, R. N. Whybray, *Proverbs* (NCBC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 31; Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs* (WBC 22; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 3–4; Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 58 and 72; and Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1–15* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 173–174. Fox (*Proverbs 1–9*, 58) says, “The syntax of this passage – a noun defined by a long series of infinitives of purpose – is without parallel in the Bible. It is later employed in the Rule of the Community from Qumran (1QS I 2–11), probably in dependence on Proverbs.” Waltke (*The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1–15*, 174) says, “This unique series of infinitival phrases binds the preamble to the title. A verb such as ‘were collected’ is elided – i.e., the full thought is, ‘The proverbs of Solomon... were collected to know wisdom...’”

²⁶ For a discussion of the titles in Proverbs, see Arthur Keefer, “A Shift in Perspective: The Intended Audience and a Coherent Reading of Proverbs 1:1–7,” *JBL* 136 (2017): 105–106. A paragraph opens immediately after the title in Prov 10:1 (i.e., מִשְׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה) strengthening Keefer’s point, though it is not noted by him.

²⁷ This is suggested in Whybray, *Proverbs*, 34. Whybray believes that the tautological nature of verse 6 means that it was not originally part of the preface.

that is separated from the rest of verses 2–6?²⁸ If this verse is not a parenthetical statement, then how does the jussive relate to the infinitives preceding it in verses 2–4 and the following one in verse 6? Should $\sqrt{\text{שמע}}$ be gapped both backward and forward so that it governs the infinitives in verses 2–4 and 6 as Keefer suggests?²⁹ Does verse 7 refer to the fear of YHWH being the starting point of knowledge or the foremost aspect of knowledge?³⁰

The subject of the null copula phrase in Prov 1:1 is covert (i.e., הָאֱלֹהִים is the covert subject) and separate from the following verses.³¹ The jussive of $\sqrt{\text{שמע}}$ in verse 5 governs the infinitives in verses 2–4 and 6 though it is phonologically null.³² This overview highlights the complex grammatical structure of Prov 1:1–7.

The intricate nature of Prov 1:1–7 requires the hearer/reader to closely scrutinise this text within its context while the phraseology and structure also continually forces them to reevaluate and reformulate their previous understandings.³³ Close, contextual reading is not a modern enterprise. I suggest

²⁸ This is argued in Crawford H. Toy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1904), 4–5. But, see Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 62. Fox understands the jussive as logically following the infinitives.

²⁹ See Keefer, “A Shift in Perspective: The Intended Audience and a Coherent Reading of Proverbs 1:1–7,” 106–108.

³⁰ Fox (*Proverbs 1–9*, 67–68) understands the fear of YHWH as the first thing to know so that everything else can be learned (cf. Ibn Ezra and Kaspi). The use of הַתְּחִלָּה “beginning” in Prov 9:10 suggests that רֵאשִׁית refers to the starting point in Prov 1:7.

³¹ See Holmstedt, Cook, and Marshall, *Qoheleth: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text*, 48 and Keefer, “A Shift in Perspective: The Intended Audience and a Coherent Reading of Proverbs 1:1–7,” 105–106.

³² For phonologically null constituents in ancient Hebrew, see John A. Cook and Robert D. Holmstedt, *Intermediate Biblical Hebrew: An Illustrated Grammar* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 18–19. Cook and Holmstedt say, “...The null constituent is a type of constituent that is rarely recognized in Hebrew grammar, though it is both syntactically critical and nearly omnipresent. Null constituents lack a phonological shape and yet have a syntactic reality...Null constituents are allowed within a discourse because their reference is easily recoverable” (19).

³³ The fact that various proverbs in the book of Proverbs force the hearer/reader to re-examine their previous exegetical decisions appears in Suzanna R. Millar, “When a Straight Road Becomes a Garden Path: The ‘False Lead’ as a Pedagogical Strategy in the Book of Proverbs,” *JSOT* 43 (2018): 67–82. Millar argues that certain lexemes provide a false lead for the reader who must reevaluate and then reread the proverb. This device is pedagogical. It forces the reader to think more about an individual proverb. Millar says, “The process fosters alertness, and trains the reader to think, coaching them in moral reasoning. The initial interpretation is rejected because it is morally abominable. The proverbs teach the reader how to navigate Proverbs’ ethical system and thus contribute to their moral development, a main pedagogical aim of the book. The reader learns to consider instruction, rejecting bad advice and accepting wise counsel...This technique makes the reader aware of the limits of their wisdom. In fact, it exemplifies the limits by forcing the reader to come up against them in their own mistaken interpretation (81).”

that the text formulates the grammatical difficulties mentioned above in Prov 1:1–7 to force the reader to grapple with the message. In this way, the text encourages the hearer/reader to a close, contextual reading of every element within the text. The reader is constantly reevaluating previous understandings (i.e., retrospective patterning) and wrestling with how each new understanding should be incorporated into the coherence of the text.³⁴ In this way, the comments by Blake Couey on Hebrew poetry in general are helpful. Couey says, “...This account of poetic structure emphasizes the audience’s experience of a poem as an event that unfolds in real time. Even so, poetic movement is hardly a straightforward progression from beginning to end. The audience is continually processing new lines of a poem, and the devices that move the poem forward may also send the audience back to preceding lines with new insights. Smith dubs this process ‘retrospective patterning.’”³⁵

Retrospective patterning provides a lens to describe the infinitives’ relationship to their governing finite in Prov 1:1–6. The jussive of $\sqrt{\text{שמע}}$ is phonologically null but present through ellipsis (backward and forward) in these surrounding verses. The placement of the finite in Prov 1:5 illustrates a reading strategy of the book. The hearer/reader must connect what they read both with what proceeds it and what follows.³⁶ Similarly, the subject (i.e., אֱלֹהִים)

Paul Overland suggests that grammatical ambiguities or difficulties in sayings in Proverbs is the result of the conscious efforts and sophistication of the sages’ presentation, not of scribal error. The ambiguous element forces the reader to stop and contemplate the saying more closely. See Paul Overland, “Hard Sayings of Solomon: Due to Deterioration, or Design?” (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Denver, CO, 15 November 2022).

³⁴ For the concept of coherence in a text, see Elizabeth Robar, *The Verb and the Paragraph in Biblical Hebrew: A Cognitive-Linguistic Approach* (SSLL 78; Leiden: Brill, 2015), 2–3 and Elizabeth Robar, “Coherence and Cohesion,” *EHL 1*:473–476. Robar argues based on the Gestalt Effect and the Zeigarnik Effect that the mind remains stressed until it places new information into cohesive units. This stress can only be alleviated by fixing and forming cohesive units in the mind which allows the brain to feel that the situation has been sufficiently resolved. The troubling element, which does not fit cohesively and cogently into the present categories of the mind, will prey upon the mind until there is some closure which comes in the form of cohesion. This process forces the mind to fixate on a divergent element and to explore different avenues which might provide cohesion.

³⁵ J. Blake Couey, *Reading the Poetry of First Isaiah: The Most Perfect Model of Prophetic Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 68–69. Couey is dependent on the terminology in Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 10.

Also, compare the process of intentionally delaying information in a narrative, which is called “delayed exposition,” see Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Routledge, 2005), 124.

³⁶ Compare Seth D. Postell, “Reading Genesis, Seeing Moses: Narrative Analogies with Moses in the Book of Genesis,” *JETS* 65 (2022): 437–455. Postell argues that several textual elements in Genesis (e.g., רִיחַ אֲלֵהֶם in Gen 1:2) are only understood when the reader comes to later texts (רִיחַ אֲלֵהֶם in Exod 35:31) in the Pentateuch. He describes this process of need-

and verb of the null copula is phonologically null but present in Prov 1:1 highlighting that the hearer/reader must be aware of what is covert in the text as well as what is overt. The syntax of Prov 1:1–7 establishes the blueprint for reading Proverbs.

Proverbs encourages its hearers/readers to continually contemplate its teachings (cf. Deut 6:4–9; Josh 1:8–9; and Ps 1:2). Proverbs suggests that the sayings are carefully arranged by the teacher to cultivate further investigation and discovery by the student (cf. Qoh 12:9–11).³⁷ The student’s goal should be an infatuation with acquiring and reexamining wisdom (Prov 4:5–7) using every aspect of their physical constitution (e.g., eyes, ears, lips, neck, heart, fingers, feet, etc. in Prov 1–9). Studying wisdom is an all-encompassing enterprise. Wisdom is equally profitable for the naïve (מִתְאָמֵר in Prov 1:4; 8:4–5; and 9:4) and the wise (Prov 1:5 and 9:9) to expand their mental and cognitive abilities.

The introduction to Proverbs purports that the entire book is a handbook to help its hearers/readers understand various complexities.³⁸ The nouns לָקַח and תְּהַבִּילוּת in Prov 1:5 illustrate that the wise person will increase their ability to acquire and take in more understanding. The noun לָקַח derives from the root לָקַח “to take, receive.”³⁹ In this context, it refers to the increasing capacity of the wise to receive and acquire more wisdom than was previously accessible.

The noun תְּהַבִּילוּת always appears in the plural in Proverbs (1:5; 11:14; 12:5; 20:18; and 24:6). It appears with nouns from יַעֲזֵב “to plan, advise” (Prov 11:14 and 24:6) and הִשָּׁב “to think, devise” (Prov 12:5 and 20:8) in its other occurrences in Proverbs. It describes the ability to receive advice from diverse sources and to synthesise them to produce a coherent plan of action. The lexeme תְּהַבִּילוּת connects to the lexeme הֶבֶל “rope” as it is probably derived from the same root.⁴⁰ תְּהַבִּילוּת could have the nuance of creating mental connections (i.e., tying together information; cf. Arabic *‘aql* refers both to a rope used to tie up a camel and intelligence).⁴¹

ing to continue reading to ascertain the proper meaning as “textual clumsiness.” It should be noted that Postell assumes that a connection can be made at either a close or distant proximity to the original textual element.

³⁷ See Toy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs*, 9. Toy says, “The aphorisms, and particularly the discourses, in Pr. and Ben-Sira are for the most part not popular in form, but bear the impress of cultivated thought.”

³⁸ Proverbs 1:1–7 seems to consist of two later additions to the book (i.e., a title in Prov 1:1 and an introduction in Prov 1:2–7. The connection between the phrasology of לְדַעַת הַכְמָה in Prov 1:2 and דַּעַת הַכְמָה וּמוֹסֵר in Prov 1:7 draws these verses together.

³⁹ See *HALOT*, 535; *BDB*, 544; and *CDCH*, 197.

⁴⁰ For הִבַּל “to bind, pledge,” see *BDB*, 286–287 and *HALOT*, 1716.

⁴¹ Saqib Hussain brought this to my attention in a personal communication (26 March 2021).

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