

Article

Metaphors in the Wisdom Literature of the Hebrew Bible and Contemporary Art

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Abstract: Biblical wisdom literature is a treasure-trove of powerful metaphors. This article presents a sample of these metaphors and their significant impact on contemporary artwork. The impact is characterized by both appropriation and adaptation, similitude and analogy, respectively. The highlighted metaphors are not merely catalogued but, more or less, analyzed with regard to relevant contemporary artwork. This augments the importance of contemporary biblical literacy analysis and uses it as one of the tools by which it is possible to gauge the impact and interaction, in this case, of the metaphor-world of the wisdom tradition on contemporary art. More importantly, however, this study underscores the relevance of these metaphors for biblical exegesis, hermeneutics, and theology. The analysis of the reception of these metaphors in contemporary artworks undergirds and informs the process of interpretation. The reception of these metaphors in their contemporary art contexts is best understood within the framework of imagery and imagistic language. Metaphor, as a subset of imagery and imagistic language, is foundational for the examined wisdom books, Proverbs, Job, and Qoheleth, and for the relevant contemporary artwork, alike. Moreover, metaphor also constitutes a bridge between the ancient and contemporary context. With this backdrop in mind, this article argues for the necessity of exploring the connections between these wisdom books, metaphor studies, and contemporary artwork.

Keywords: metaphor; wisdom; contemporary; art; image; imagery; literature; theology

1. Introduction

The purpose of the current article is to discover some of the ways in which the metaphors of the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible have been plied in contemporary art. The three building blocks of the treatment are summarily alluded to here.

First, the elaboration of the purpose, per se, is prefaced by a brief presentation of the history of scholarship pertaining to the hermeneutics of the wisdom literature. As it is shown, the history of scholarship, in its hermeneutical aims, tends to emphasize the presence and relevance of metaphors within the wisdom literature. This section stresses the necessity of exploring the metaphor-world of the wisdom literature in convergence with other topics or textual, linguistic, semantic, pragmatic, and theological interests, etc. This necessity also pertains to the impact on contemporary biblical literacy.

Second, the interaction of the metaphor-world of the wisdom literature and contemporary art is investigated in a separate section. In terms of metaphors considered, the investigation focuses chiefly on three wisdom books found in the Hebrew Bible, namely the book of Proverbs, Job, and Qoheleth.

Third, the article concludes with a brief analysis of the consequences of the interaction of metaphors within the wisdom literature and contemporary art.

History of Wisdom Scholarship and Metaphors

Quid est veritas? The question still persists with regard to a whole range of subject matter, some of which include the definition of wisdom in the context of the Hebrew Bible, the definition of metaphors in general, and in biblical scholarship, and, not in the least, the definition of contemporary art. Even if the definitive truth cannot be formulated with regard to the triumvirate of the aforementioned items, verifiable truth claims can certainly be pronounced.

For quite a long period, the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible was overshadowed by an understandably intense preoccupation with the law and the prophetic corpus respectively. Moreover, at one point some scholars even asserted that the wisdom literature is a *Fremdkörper*, that is, a *strange corpus* in the Hebrew Bible [1]. Nevertheless, partly as a result of a two-fold process, a more worthwhile interest in the wisdom literature commenced following the impact of Gerhard Von Rad's book *Weisheit in Israel* [2]. This two-fold process was marked, on one hand, by the publication of a few major and novel interpretations of the wisdom literature and, on the other hand, by a mushrooming of specific studies dedicated to the examination and appreciation of the poetry of the Hebrew Bible. This latter aspect was perhaps partly influenced by the *form criticism and beyond* stage, marked by the emergence of rhetorical criticism. Consequently, scholarship became interested in investigating the abovementioned salient features, one of which is metaphor.

During the time that biblical scholarship focused on employing other beneficial methods in the hermeneutical process of biblical texts, such as historical, literary, transmission historical, redaction historical, form, and traditio-historical criticism, various truth claims and facts about the metaphors were somewhat marginalised. Currently, fresh theories with respect to the definition of metaphors in general, spurred by the scholarship of the past few decades, offer sundry truth claims. These truth claims do not settle all of the issues revolving around the definition and function of metaphors. Nonetheless, they highlight the avenues into areas which have been somewhat unexplored territories before. The various theories of metaphor with their cascading effect had a major impact on biblical studies. It was perhaps the arrival of the *form criticism and beyond* stage that properly heralded the ascendancy of the interest in metaphors and poetics, in biblical narrative and poetry alike [3]. This stage in biblical academics resulted in the creation of the exegetical, respectively hermeneutical, method designated as rhetorical criticism. This method, with a specific focus on the rhetorics of Hebrew Bible texts, impinged on scholarship to discover the literary beauties inherent in these texts. Rhetorics, poetical devices, and literary art in biblical texts have become salient features of the hermeneutical enterprise. Scholars also advanced additional methods and approaches, which were roughly in line with the aims and outworkings of the aforementioned rhetorical criticism. One such method is rhetorical analysis, which is to be differentiated from rhetorical criticism [4]. At present, the study of metaphors and the methodological and exegetical application of various metaphor theories on biblical texts is an ever-growing research area. This process has already generated studies concerned with the narrative and poetry of the Hebrew Bible. Moreover, since a significant part of Hebrew Bible poetry is also classified as wisdom literature, this surge in mutual influence and cooperation constitutes a stimulating period for wisdom literature and metaphor study alike. Nonetheless, the abovementioned application ought to converge with other topics and textual, linguistic, semantic, pragmatic, and theological interests, etc. This step is necessary to avoid the trap of *metaphormania* [5], which would make this application an autotelic enterprise.

Apart from the books of Proverbs, Job, and Qoheleth, wisdom, as a genre element in Hebrew Bible texts, is not restricted to these three books. Moreover, at one stage it was thought to crop up almost everywhere in the Hebrew Bible, resulting in a *sophiamania*. This tendency had to be curbed by the development of a criteria system as an aid in the process of determining the influence of wisdom upon not strictly sapiential texts [6]. Still, it may be possible to make note of the overarching presence of the wisdom genre in the Hebrew Bible, the LXX and apocryphal texts without falling into the trap of *sophiamania*. Therefore, this inquest recognizes the presence of similar metaphors in the wisdom

texts and/or wisdom-like fragments of other books of the Hebrew Bible and the LXX. It also makes references to apocryphal wisdom books, such as Sirach.

Some academics defined the book of Proverbs as containing *early* or *traditional wisdom*. This proverbial wisdom propagates a *cause-and-effect* relationship, *Tun-Ergehen Zusammenhang*, according to which good things befall the good and bad things befall the bad. When such a linkage ceased to operate consistently and harmoniously, it thrust the audience into a conundrum. This conundrum is then explored in the books of Job and Qoheleth. Job and Qoheleth, along with their metaphors, should be read in conjunction with Proverbs. Moreover, Job and Qoheleth partly operate as a canonical corrective to an overreading of Proverbs [7]. Therefore, the metaphors in Proverbs may be viewed as somewhat more confident in their tone. Robert Alter remarked that “in Proverbs, didactic points are frequently made through sharp thrusts of wit in the metaphors” [8].

In places even Proverbs hints at the imperfection of this sin-tainted world. The son might be enticed by sinners, who lie in wait for blood (1:8–19), or by the Strange Woman, who lures him into promiscuity (2:16–19; 5:1–6). The son might desert the wife of his youth and elope with a more arousing woman (5:15–20). There might be no guidance for a nation (11:14), or there might be a cruel man who hurts himself (11:17b). A marriage might suffer, when one has to live with a quarrelsome spouse (21:9, 19). In Job and Qoheleth, these, and even graver, imperfections of human existence become a sourer reality and personal experience. While Proverbs is the handbook preparing partly for success and partly for existential struggle, Job and Qoheleth are immersed in existential struggle.

2. Metaphors in the Wisdom Literature of the Hebrew Bible and Contemporary Art

A correlation between metaphors and artwork may be established through the terms *imagery* and *image*. Moreover, these key terms also provide a framework within which this correlation may be explored. Still, as B. A. Strawn highlights, both key terms are notoriously slippery in the realm of literature. In poetic theory they appear in so many contexts that W. Mitchell thinks that “it may well be impossible to provide any rational systematic account of their usage” [9]. As opposed to being a deterrent, this is rather a confirmation of the relevance and ubiquity of *imagery*. According to a social psychologist: “We live on images” ([9], p. 306). Nonetheless, the complexity in interpreting poetry in general, metaphors and artwork orbit around understanding *imagery*. Therefore, the key term *imagery* may be analysed with regard to texts, but also in connection to artwork ([9], p. 306).

At this point, what is of greater interest here is that *imagery* is a complex phenomenon and can be subdivided into particular categories. There are several theories which explain how *images* function and, correlatively, how best to interpret them. Many scholars, e.g., Louis Alonso-Schökel, purport that *imagery* operates chiefly as a means of comparison. According to W. Watson: “The essence of imagery is the juxtaposition of two different levels of meaning.” ([9], p. 307). Oliver claims that: “Imagery means, generally the representation of one thing by another thing,” and poetic language overall is “the language of one thing compared to another thing.” ([9], p. 307).

Resemblance may be identified between these descriptions of *imagery* and the way metaphor works if only because metaphor is a subset of *imagery*. Metaphor studies can also offer valuable knowledge concerning the interpretation of *imagery*.

“Similarities are also seen, however, between imagery as fundamentally comparison—with reference to metaphor especially, including both the like and the unlike (see Ricoeur)—and how some scholars have characterized the nature of Hebrew parallelism.” ([9], p. 307).

Furthermore, A. Berlin claims that parallelism itself is like metaphor and, thus, *imagery*, and vice versa [10]. Sensitivity to juxtaposition and comparison and interpreting them properly is vital for an acceptable understanding of *imagery*. Since metaphor is a subset of imagistic language, its realm is the perfect place to examine interpretation ([9], p. 307).

Such keywords as *like*, *unlike*, *juxtaposition*, and *comparison* have been circulated here to allude to the understanding of *image*, *imagery*, and metaphor. These, and other terms, are also important

in the process of defining metaphor on its own and, *vis-à-vis*, artwork. Other keywords may be mentioned, which are related to various metaphor definition theories. A Hungarian scholar, Piroska Kocsány, formulated, summarily, perhaps one of the most incisive critiques of these metaphor theories. Apparently,

“the concept of metaphor in the history of rhetorics, through turnings and twistings, seems to be returning to the Aristotelian point of departure. The most important stops of this story, may be schematically presented as follows:

- (a) The metaphor in antiquity: from transference/transposition to brief similitude.
- (b) The metaphor as substitution/replacement: the pitfall of structuralism.
- (c) The metaphor as interaction: the snare of metaphorical revelation.
- (d) The metaphor as concept-transference/transposition: the detour of conceptual metaphor.” [11].

This latter concept reverts to the foundation of *similitude*, *analogy*, to the topic of establishing the common marks/signs. Irma Szikszainé Nagy noted that, through these remarks, Kocsány also formulated the directives of further research:

“The uniqueness and surprisingness of metaphors can be explained only through an approach, which interprets metaphors as a semiotic process, as a dynamic mark/sign and strives in the jointness of the object, respectively image/picture element to deal with the purpose and weight of similitude and analogy” ([11], p. 443).

Hereby, the aim is to underscore the oscillation of metaphor definition, regarding itself and regarding artwork. The purpose is also to show that the trail of metaphor definition seems to be returning to the Aristotelian point of departure, which is *similitude* and *analogy* [12]. In consequence, the examples given in the succeeding chapters operate on the lines of the keywords *similitude* and *analogy*.

The interaction of the metaphor-world of the Bible in general and of its wisdom literature in particular with classical art, has been amply explored [13,14]. The relationship between classical and contemporary art and whether there is or is not a philosophical and ideological continuity between the two, has also been subjected to intense debate¹. While this latter issue is still pending, it is undeniable that the metaphor-world of the Bible, in general, and of the wisdom tradition makes its impact on contemporary art and performs an interaction with it. The tool of biblical literacy is used here to investigate this impact and interaction. The interest of this tool lies not merely in the listing of metaphors found in the wisdom literature and then being mentioned or (re)used in contemporary art. The tool has also vested interest in determining the impact of this reference and usage and in examining possible changes made to these metaphors in their novel, contemporary art contexts. Therefore, the metaphors found in the three major wisdom books, that is Proverbs, Job, and Qoheleth, are presented at the same time as their reference and usage in contemporary art contexts.

Obviously, the understanding of what is contemporary will always be in flux, anchored in the present with a starting date that moves forward. Moreover, the works the Contemporary Art Society, bought in 1910, in the year it was established by the critique Roger Fry, can hardly be labelled as contemporary [17]. Therefore, the dates of the contemporary artworks alluded to here, might slightly extend to the period prior to 1910. The lion's share of the examples, which is not exhaustive by all means, includes mainly fine art and literature illustrations and one sitcom example, generally called contemporary. The method used in the selection of the examples was motivated mainly by two reasons. First, to bring a couple of examples of wisdom metaphors related mainly to fine art and *belles lettres*

¹ See further Francis A. Schaeffer [15] and also his *Art and the Bible* [16].

illustrations. Second, to foreground examples which, in some shape or form, are significant in the writer's historical and cultural context. Obviously, other examples could be mentioned.

2.1. Metaphors in Proverbs and Contemporary Art

The dating of Proverbs is a complex enterprise and nowadays few scholars attempt to deal with this subject. Nonetheless, there is a scholarly consensus regarding the presence of traditional wisdom in Proverbs. This is foundational for understanding the wisdom genre of the Hebrew Bible. Concomitantly, the wisdom and the metaphors employed by it may be adumbrated in several categories, namely, wisdom is grounded in the fear of the Lord, wisdom is preoccupied with discerning the order that the Lord has built into creation, etc. The majority of the metaphors may be spotted, grouped, and/or mapped on the basis of these categories².

2.1.1. Fine Art: Tivadar Csontváry Kosztka's *The Lonely Cedar* and *Pilgrimage to the Cedars of Lebanon* Paintings

One may start with two paintings by the Hungarian avant-garde painter Tivadar Csontváry Kosztka, entitled *The Lonely Cedar* and *Pilgrimage to the Cedars of Lebanon* [19]. Albeit the authenticity of a supposed precursor of these paintings, *The Tree of Life*, is under scrutiny, both aforementioned works (re)use, amongst other metaphors, chiefly the metaphor of the *Tree of Life*, which *Tree of Life* represents the universe [20]. The *tree of life*, as a metaphor, can be also encountered in the wisdom context of Proverbs as reflected by the equivalent expression *tree of life*, עֵץ חַיִּים, in the BHS, δένδρον ζωῆς in the LXX (ξύλον ζωῆς in 3:18) and אֵילֵנָה דְּחַיִּי in the Tg (c.f. 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4) [21]. In a more recent study of this biblical metaphor, Karolien Vermeulen reappraised the earlier scholarly view:

“... , the tree of life introduced in Prov 3:18 as a metaphor explicitly connects itself with the model tree of life as represented in Genesis 2–3 and in general with an ancient, mainly Mesopotamian concept of sacred trees and life giving plants.

The new tree and its predecessors are bound by thematic and verbal parallels. The stories merge wisdom/knowledge and immortality.

The tree of metaphor in Proverbs stands for a blend of things covering longevity, health, immortality and wisdom.

Whereas previous research favoured a unidirectional, demythologized reading of the metaphor, the ... tree of life is a complex and inclusive image. It draws on a strong mythological symbol and incorporates its connotations in the final message. It deals with more than a tree of life; it deals with the tree of life.” [22].

The mythological aspect of the biblical metaphor may be compared with Csontváry's mythological allusions. In *The Lonely Cedar*, Csontváry's ideas about the genesis, *Urreligion* and relationship of Hungarians with cultures from the East are amalgamated with the *Urmythologie* of the *Tree of Life* as a symbol of the universe, respectively with the *ars poetica* of the artist. Csontváry exclaimed that divine Providence would not let him rest and spurred him to paint this five or six-thousand year old cedar from the Mount of Lebanon, during his visit to the Holy Land. The symbolics of the painting are not autotelic, but formulate a message to the society of his time. Csontváry also noted that this cedar brandishes one of its branches as a sword against the world. Apocalyptic visions about the cataclysmic end of humanity were topics which occurred in the works of many of his contemporaries. The magic of reviving in this painting is reified by the colour-dynamics, shades of light and, so far unseen, totality of colours. For expressing the message of the painting, Csontváry created such a perfect system of

² For a more complete taxonomical enumeration of the metaphors in Prov 1–9, see further [18].

colour, form and line, which bids the gazer towards the understanding of the highest creating and creative Power [23].

In the *Pilgrimage to the Cedars of Lebanon* the cedar also occurs as a symbol of the artist. The cedar with the twin tree-trunk is surrounded by humans enacting the rites of an ancient festivity or ceremony [24]. Some animals also feature in the painting, which might recall the *majestic cedar* (in the BHS the equivalent expression is אֲרֵז אֲדִיר, in the LXX is κέδρον μεγάλην and אֲרֵז רָמָא in the Tg) on the mountain height of Israel (Ezek 17:23 in the BHS/LXX and 17:22 in the Tg), which shelters many kinds of birds.

Furthermore, Vermeulen's abovementioned interpretation of the biblical metaphor of the *Tree of Life*, with its emphasis on wisdom, knowledge, and immortality, resonates well with Ferenc Romváry's comments regarding the symbols of the *Pilgrimage to the Cedars of Lebanon* painting:

"[The cedar is a] tree of life. In addition to this it is also an ancient source...An eagle is perched on the tree on the left, [which is] the symbol of wisdom, knowledge and of the spirit" ([25], p. 132).

Next, two additional examples of metaphors are examined in greater detail. These are embedded in their Hebrew Bible and contemporary art contexts respectively. The first one, the *knife to the throat*, is a visual metaphor for appetite curbing or endangering one's life by demonstrating a large appetite. The second example presents two extended, ontological metaphors concerning the paradoxical wise and the paradoxical fool.

2.1.2. The *Knife to the Throat* Metaphor

Proverbs 23:1–11 echoes an ancient wisdom text, the *Teaching of Amenemope*. Admonitions concerning table manners are on display in other ancient wisdom texts, like the *Instruction to Kagemni*, the *Instruction of Ptahhotep* and the abovementioned *Amenemope*. Elaborate directions concerning table manners are also dealt with in the apocryphal Jewish wisdom book *Sirach* (31:12–32:13). This was a well-known topic in wisdom tradition. Apparently, the conclusions to be drawn regarding the social status of the diner are somewhat speculative. In verse 1, it makes little difference whether the caveat is to consider the food or the proprietor. Probably both are envisioned in the injunction. The proprietor may be seen as probing the visitant (see further 23:3). In verse 2, the visual metaphor of the *knife to the throat* (the equivalent expression in the BHS is שִׁפְיוֹ בַלֶּעָד and in the Tg is סְכִינָא בַלְיוּעָד) has been decoded in at least two ways: curb the appetite, or endanger one's life by gluttony. The first interpretation seems more plausible. In verse 3, the *deceptive food* is ambiguous; it may point to the unpleasant effects of gobbling, or signal the fact that the victual is not promotive to good health. Nevertheless, it more likely alludes to the wily character of the proprietor, who is testing the character of the visitant. Hence, the victual can be deemed deceptive because it does not serve the aim of health or taste, but is employed for private intent by the proprietor [26]. This visual metaphor of the *knife to the throat* is recommended as a necessity by the sages to foil the temptations inviting the wise to join in ruthless gluttonies.

A short episode in *The Simpsons* features a dream of Homer's that he is the legendary Solomon, in the royal court with the means to exercise justice. He is asked to settle an argument between Lenny and Carl, who both assert ownership of a pie. In the original story (1 Kings 3:16–28), two female prostitutes assert their ownership over an infant. Solomon demands a blade, pronouncing that the live infant must be sliced in two, with each woman receiving half the child. The maternal instincts of the biological mother become manifest as she intercedes for the infant's survival. The decision is interpreted as buttressing Solomon's wisdom.

In *The Simpson's* version, the baby is replaced by a pie. As opposed to Solomon, Homer's decision is governed by ruthless gluttony:

"The pie shall be cut in two, and each man shall receive . . . death. I'll eat the pie." ([27], p. 158).

The Simpsons parody eradicates the women altogether from the scene and supplants them with male figures. By this the object of Homer's craving, the pie, is made central, thereby stressing the satirical effect of Homer's gluttony hampering his capability to make wise judgments. As opposed to the visual metaphor of the *knife to the throat* in Prov 23:1–3, here one encounters the visual metaphor of the *knife to the pie*, with no child to die, just a pie to be gobbled up in haste. While the first metaphor is designed to foil the temptations of ruthless gluttony from empowering one, the second metaphor is contrived to lure one into wallowing in it. This is no proof to the fact that the author of the sitcom made any deliberate use of this particular wisdom metaphor. Nevertheless, it might be feasible to suggest that the irony in both metaphors and their discourse-contexts allows for a possible analogy between the ancient text and the modern sitcom. In Prov 23:1–3 the metaphor and its discourse-context suggests the possibility of the wise becoming unwise, unless the knife is applied to the throat. In *The Simpsons* the wise has already become unwise by giving way to gluttony. Is the Israelite paragon of wisdom, Solomon, always presented like a wise or sometimes like an unwise? Is it possible for the wise to become unwise? In both contexts metaphor and irony alike may function as a tactic in a general strategy to suggest something more or other than what is expressed [28]. In spite of the ostensible effort to conceal meaning, irony is a means of revelatory language.

"It reveals by asking the reader to make judgments and decisions about the relative value of stated and intended meanings, drawing the reader into its vision of truth, so that when the reader finally understands, he or she becomes a member of the community that shares that vision, constituted by those who also followed the author's lead." ([29], p. xiii).

2.1.3. *Belles Lettres*: Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *Die Physiker*, the Möbius Strip, the Paradoxical Wise, and the Paradoxical Fool

With regard to Solomon, the icon of Israelite wisdom, the interface of *theological intentionality* and *ironic articulation* of the Hebrew Bible narratives related to him and, I would add, what the wisdom tradition attributes to him in Proverbs, is seminal. The intricate complexities of the texts in question propose, first, a paradoxical, then ironical Solomon, whose picture is tainted in places with a proclivity of living on the verge of becoming a fool. As much as wisdom was a reality in Solomon's personality and demeanour, so too was the reality of lapsing into foolishness. It is suggested here that, especially Proverbs, in some instances of metaphor display, impinges on showcasing the paradoxical nature of the wise and of the fools. While the wise in some cases can easily lapse into foolishness, equally fools might resort to dangling and flaunting a luxurious proverb from their mouths. To corroborate this point, Proverbs 25:26–28 – 26:1–12 may be adduced as an example. This section may be viewed as a pericope if the conceptual target domain, the topic of the wise gambling away his wisdom (25:26–28; 26:4), respectively the fool masquerading his alleged wisdom is given priority (26:1, 7–9). The pericope unleashes an avalanche of similes which, in turn, contribute to the edification of two extended metaphors, one concerned with the wise, and the other with the fool. The edification process is linguistically indicated by the Hebrew lexical marker for similes, *like* (Hebrew preposition כִּי; Greek subordinating conjunction ὡς; Aramaic preposition הִיךְ). A deliberately-used metaphor may be indicated by lexical markers, such as *like*, by the extension of the metaphor beyond one phrase or clause and the use of extended comparisons, respectively, analogies [30]. Here, the two extended metaphors are ontological, of the aspect identifying kind [31]. A popular example of such an ontological metaphor is, "The ugly side of his personality emerges under pressure" etc. Paradoxical aspects in the personality of the wise are identified through the ontological metaphors *muddied spring* (BHS מַעְיֵן נִרְפָּשׁ in 25:26a), *polluted fountain* (BHS מְקוֹר מְשֻׁחָת in 25:26a), *city broken into* (25:28; BHS עִיר פְּרוּצָה; LXX πόλις τὰ τεῖχη καταβεβλημένη; Tg קריתא דתריעה), and [city] *without walls* (25:28; BHS אֵין חוֹמָה; LXX ἀτείχευτος [unfortified]; Tg וְלֹא אֵית לָהּ שׁוּרְחָא). Paradoxical aspects in the demeanour of the fool are identified through ontological metaphors by means of metaphoricizing certain items bestowed (26:1, 8), entrusted (26:6, 10), or misused by the fool. The item misused by the fool is a *proverb*. The *proverb* misused in the mouth of the fool is signalled by the metaphor's *uselessly dangling*

legs (26:7; BHS דליו שוקים), respectively *ascending thorn* (26:9a; BHS חות עלה; LXX ἄκανθαι φύονται; Tg כובא סליק). Is Solomon wise or a fool? Or is he a wise fool or a foolish sage? Is the wise person a crystal clean spring or a *muddied spring*, an unpolluted or a *polluted fountain*? Does the fool become wise by simply flaunting some proverbs from his mouth? Is one dealing with a paradoxical, Möbius strip-like wise and/or a paradoxical, Möbius strip-like fool? Is wisdom an illusion in Solomon, the Wise?

Friedrich Dürrenmatt, the son of a Swiss Protestant (Reformed) pastor, in his satirical drama *Die Physiker* (1961) sets the story in the drawing room of *Les Cerisiers* sanatorium. The third physicist, and the protagonist of the play, is Johann Wilhelm Möbius. This physicist seemingly suffers from the delusion that King Solomon appears to him in visions, disclosing secrets of the physical world. Albeit Möbius, unlike the other two patients, Herbert Georg Butler, alias Einstein, and Ernst Heinrich Ernesti, alias Newton, does not believe himself to be a famous scientist. Dürrenmatt evidently named the character after the 19th century German mathematician August Ferdinand Möbius. He discovered what is called the Möbius strip, a looped, ribbon-like shape, whose apparently opposite surfaces form only one side. This becomes the interpretive key for the paradoxical play: the two sides turn out to be an illusion; the lovers are also the killers, the two mentally ill, the spies, the seemingly mentally ill Möbius, the inventor, the *healer* doctor psychiatrist Mathilde von Zahnd, a power maniac, who also claims King Solomon to be speaking to her.

As much as Proverbs is more confident about what it means to be wise and uses bolder metaphors to express that, in places, one is surprised by the lucidity with which the paradox and the ensuing irony gush forth in the metaphors of the target domain.

2.2. Metaphors in Job and Contemporary Art

Many scholars, both Jewish and Christian, have applauded the book for its finest details of craftsmanship, in which metaphor-rainfalls are showered upon the ancient and modern reader alike. In the following some ontological metaphors for suffering/pain are listed from this rich wisdom text-granary. The final example is a metaphor for wholesome food.

2.2.1. Metaphors for Suffering

The ontological metaphors for suffering are the most important ones, which are adopted and adapted from the book of Job in contemporary art. A conversation entitled, *The 'Book of Job' in the Modern Age*, aired in October 2013 on On Point radio between Tom Ashbrook, Mark Larrimore, and Greg Epstein points to the contemporary interest that the storyline and its metaphors still enjoy.

Fine Art: Francis Gruber's Job Painting

The hard and endless Jobian struggle and its accompanying metaphors for suffering were immortalized in Francis Gruber's *Job* painting (1944), in the style of French Miserabilism. The painting exhibited in *Salon d'Automne* is a symbol of downtrodden people and is an allegory of the survival of hope during the occupation. The paper with the inscription at which Gruber's Job is looking is taken from Job 23:2. The paper is on the ground. Job with a head tilted towards the ground gazes at the inscription:

Maintenant encore, ma plainte est une révolte, et pourtant ma main comprime mes soupirs
(Bible d'Ostervald 1881) [32].

The BHS of Job 23:2 qualifies the *hand* of Job as *becoming heavy* (יָדִי כְבֵדָה), whereas the LXX inserts the masculine singular possessive pronoun *his* (αὐτοῦ), in reference to God. Thus, in the LXX version, the *heavy hand* metaphor (ἡ χεὶρ αὐτοῦ βαρεῖα γέγονεν) alludes to God being heavy-handed with Job.

Fine Art: Gyula Kardos' The God Fearing Job Painting

On Gyula Kardos' *The God-fearing Job* (1900) painting, Job longingly gazes upwards with his left hand used to support himself and his right hand touching the ground but not clenched into a fist. The palm of the hand is open, awaiting remission [33].

Fine Art: Sándor Návay's Job Statue

Sándor Návay, in his 2003 bronze statue of Job, portrayed Job as a metaphor of a mere *bundle of pain*. The writhing of the body parts is also evocative of the spiritual convulsion. Nevertheless, Job's gaze is not searching for the humus but for heaven [33].

Fine Art: Further Portrayals of the Jobian Ontological Metaphors for Suffering

Austrian artist Hans Fronius, member of an old Protestant (Lutheran) German-Saxon aristocratic family in Transylvania, produced twelve charcoal sketches, thus perpetuating Job's fate as one of the main ontological metaphors for suffering. The Jobian ontological metaphor for suffering was also enshrined in Willy Jaeckel's thirteen lithographies, Helmuth Uhrig's pen and ink drawings, and also in William Blake's engravings [34].

Belles Lettres: G. K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday* Metaphysical Thriller

G. K. Chesterton, in his novel *The Man Who Was Thursday*, creates a London suburb, Saffron Park. The suburb is intended in many ways to be reminiscent of Job's life in the early chapters of the biblical book. Chesterton writes about the suburb:

"The place was not only pleasant, but perfect." ([35], p. 7).

Towards the end of the novel, the European anarchist council is debunked. The leader Gabriel Syme, alias Sunday, an undercover policeman, is a force of good. Still, he is unable to answer the question as to why he has caused so much trouble and pain to the other undercover detectives, who were also members of the council. Gregory Lucian, alias Thursday, the main protagonist and the only true anarchist, challenges the good council. His reasoning is that the council members as rulers have not really suffered like Gregory or their other subjects. Thus, their power is illegitimate. Syme argues that he also inflicted terror on the other members of the council. The dream comes to a closure when Sunday is asked whether he has ever suffered. His final words quote Jesus' question posed to the Sons of Thunder, James and John:

"Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?" (KJV; Mark 10:38–39).

Who will drink the Jobian cup of suffering or that of Jesus? This metaphysical thriller, based largely on the book of Job, is a useful guide for reading Job for further theological and cultural insights ([36], pp. 133, 138; [37,38]).

2.2.2. The Metaphor for Wholesome Food and András Visky's *Juliet* Monodrama

The freshest prisoner of the Jobian angst and suffering is *Juliet* (2006). András Visky's monodrama, entitled *Juliet—Conversation about Love*, which was on stage at the Sacred Playground Theatre Project, Edinburgh Fringe Festival 2013, directed by Robin Witt, presents the tragic family story of the author. The author's father is a Protestant (Reformed) minister who leaves Hungary after the Second World War in order to serve as a clergyman in Northern Transylvania, which, at the closure of the conflict, was annexed from Hungary by Romania. The 1956 revolution in Hungary had its repercussions in neighbouring Romania as well. As part of the communist reprisals, the father Ferenc Visky, amongst many, is sentenced for twenty-two years. A short while hence, the mother Juliet, the protagonist of the monodrama is taken captive with her seven children to the Gulag at the Danube delta. In inhumane conditions with her children, not knowing whether the husband is alive or dead, Juliet repels the

reality by which God views her as one reacting the role of Job. Three times she repeats the exclamation that “I am not A JOB.” After the exclamation she reiterates twice that: “I do not understand a word from this entire Job, not a single word.” [39]. Umpteen times she draws parallels between her life and that of Job. She has seven children, Job had seven sons. She is tempted by a communist lawyer, who paid her a visit at the Gulag, to denounce her husband and divorce him. Job is also tempted by his wife to curse God and turn his back on Him. She has a deadly illness, *angina pectoris*. Job is struck with *loathsome sores* (2:7; BHS שִׁחִיו רַע; LXX ἑλκεῖ πονηροῦ; Tg בִּישָׁא שִׁחִינָה). She bemoans the day she left the city of her birth Budapest, meets the Woman of Death and wishes to be dead. Job laments the day of his birth. During Juliet’s almost Augustinian soliloquy, she is taken twice to the mortuary. In both instances she is revived by the wholesome food of honey and lukewarm milk:

“I woke to
My firstborn’s shakes and slaps,
My eyelids he pulls upwards.
A twelve year old Jesus gazed at me.
I did not hear what he uttered to me.
He clamped my nose, he gripped it, he gripped it ...
What are you doing, you, you’re throttling me ...
!Air! Air!
My mouth cleft open a rive,
My teeth betwixt he put a blade, a knife,
With his other hand honey and lukewarm milk
Dribbles he into me. Honey and milk...
And I plunged back into the unconscious peace.” ([39], p. 36).

The metaphor of wholesome, reviving food, as in honey and curd, occurs in Zophar’s speech against the wicked in Job 20. The food is still the dominant imagery in verse 17. Nonetheless, there is a new development, for here it is not the poisonous victual that the evildoer eats, as in the preceding verses (20:14, 16) but the wholesome food that he will never eat because he has died of his eating. He will not savour quintessential food, that is oil, honey, and cream, which are the regular symbols of plenitude in the land of Canaan. In biblical times, honey is typically wild honey (Judg 14:8; 1 Sam 14:25–26) or a thick grape or date syrup. Cream or curds is not butter but a fermented milk product, nowadays called *leben*, and similar to yoghurt. This was concocted by churning fresh milk in a goatskin holding the remainder of clots from the previous supply. In Isa 7:14 curds and honey are probably an elementary diet, but more often milk and honey are a symbol of abundance, especially if the land is flowing with them (Exod 3:8, 17; 13:5; 33:3; Lev 20:24). In the Baal myth, a passage has El dreaming that Baal has come back to life and the earth’s fertility is reignited. He sees that “the heavens rained oil, the ravines (*nhl*, like *lx;n*: here) ran with honey” ([34], p. S. 490).

Juliet’s second time in the mortuary is again distinguished by an internal dialogue-brawl with God. The moment of awakening is again caused by her feeling the clamped-nose effect.

“He [the child] clamps my nose, as if he would punish.
Knife-blade.
Honey and milk.
What did He tell you?
That I should not flee from Him—to Him.
Whither from Him?
Well, to death—to Him.
But He does not want to accept me.
Well spoken! Very well spoken!
Heed His Words, and return.” ([39], pp. 58–59).

In both scenes at the mortuary the internal dialogue-brawl with God is connected with a desire to die, with children desperate to revive their mother functioning as the element of *deus ex machina* of the monodrama and finally the metaphor for wholesome food, namely honey and milk.

2.3. Metaphors in Qoheleth and Contemporary Art

The Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the Egyptian *Dispute Over Suicide* alike deliberated about life's conundrums. Qoheleth seems to have surpassed both works in terms of the piteousness and profundity with which he presents these conundrums. Qoheleth, *the one who assembles*, managed to convene a collection of some of the most perplexing issues of humanity regarding life, death, happiness, vanity (or enigma), time, etc.

"It is endlessly quoted, often out of context, and provides a great reservoir of metaphors and images for people to draw on." ([36], p. 188).

In the following, the conceptual metaphor for ephemerality, vanity, enigmatical, that is *hebel*, and ontological metaphors in Qoh 1:4–7 are surveyed with regard to their impact on contemporary art.

2.3.1. The Conceptual Metaphor for the Enigmatical

Belles Lettres: Robert Bridges, T. S. Eliot, A. M. Klein Poems

This conceptual metaphor may be grouped in five hermeneutical reading-stages. The final one applies to contemporary art, which is characterized by a rediscovery of Renaissance readings ([40], p. 140). *Vanitas vanitatum, et omnia vanitas* (2:2b) is the opening and probably the most popular conceptual metaphor for ephemerality. *Vanitas* is also a category of symbolic works of art. In contemporary art, *vanitas* also preponderates in Salvador Dali's illustration of Qoheleth. The portrait of Qoheleth from the artist's 1969 illuminated Bible is facing the overture of the book, as found in Qoh 1:1–3.

This conceptual metaphor is based on the Hebrew word *hebel* (BHS חֶבֶל; LXX ματαιότης; Tg הבלו), which is intentionally positioned in this verse and at the closure of the book, in 12:8, forms an inclusio. The translation of the word may be *vanity, useless, absurd, transience, meaningless*, or probably rather *enigmatic* ([36], p. 194). The complexity of the rendering revolves around deciphering whether one can ascertain a kernel to its employment in Qoheleth. The term has negative connotations but its central meaning is specifically foregrounded by the phrase that regularly escorts it, namely *striving for the wind* (1:14; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6; 6:9; BHS רִיחַ רֵעַנָה; LXX προαίρεσις πνεύματος). This does not mean that the wind is unreal but that one cannot clasp it in one's hands ([36], p. 194). Nevertheless, most artists interpreted the *hebel* conceptual metaphor and its auxiliary themes as witnesses to only the gloomy side of human existence.

The *vanitas* metaphor can be seen (re)emerging in some 20th century poetry. In his applauded *The Testament of Beauty* (1929), Robert Bridges proffers a Qoheleth-like stanza that is as dismal as any *vanitas* adaptation ([40], p. 136). T. S. Eliot also embarked upon involving more comprehensively the *vanitas* metaphor, as exemplified in *Dry Salvages*, II (1941) of the *Four Quartets* (1943) ([40], p. 137). In his *Koheleth* (c.1944), Canadian poet A. M. Klein, representative of the *Montreal group* of poets in the 1920s and 1930s, acknowledged little beyond Qoheleth's most gloomy metaphors and themes ([40], p. 71). Nonetheless, *hebel* was not the only (re)adapted metaphor from Qoheleth.

2.3.2. *Belles Lettres*: Ernest Hemingway's *Fiesta* Novel and the Ontological Metaphors in Qoh 1:4–7

The major themes of Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), or *Fiesta*, as it was published in Britain, appear in its two epigraphs. The first is a reference to the expression *Lost Generation*, broached by Gertrude Stein intimating the post-war generation; the other epigraph is a quotation from the King James Version of Qoh 1:4–7. Apparently, Hemingway explained to his editor Max Perkins that the book was not so much about a generation being lost but that *the earth abideth forever*. Hemingway reckoned that the characters in *Fiesta* may have been *battered* but were not lost [41]. Rightly so,

Qoh 1:4 avows the ephemeral character of humanity, against the background of the perpetual earth. The constant repetition, the *coming* and *going*, is brought out in the metaphors of verses 4–7. The image of generation stands for repetition, ongoing and relentless, always monotonous, and this is reinforced by the succeeding examples. The metaphors in Qoh 1:4–7 are ontological, since the structural term for kin relationships *generation* (1:4a; BHS דֹּר; LXX γενεά; Tg דִּרָא) and the terms relating to the natural phenomena, such as the *sun* (1:5a; BHS שֶׁשׁ; LXX ἡλιος; Tg שֶׁשׁ), *wind* (1:6b; BHS רֵיחַ; LXX πνεῦμα; Tg רוּחַ), *streams* (1:7a; BHS נָחָלִים; LXX χεῖμαρροι; Tg נַחְלִיאַ) and *sea* (1:7a; BHS יָם; LXX θάλασσα; Tg אִיִּקְיָאֲנוֹס) are specified as being a person. In the case of ontological metaphors, the personification is not a solitary unified common procedure. The personifications vary in terms of the aspects of people that are selected. For instance, in verse 5 the description of the sun's journey is in lively contrast with Ps 19, where it is compared to a warrior etc. Michael V. Fox even deems that there is no contrast here between the evanescence of generations and the permanence of the *earth*. To this end he interprets *earth* as meaning humanity [42]. This is a possibility. Still, to reconnect with Hemingway's aforementioned opinion, the *earth abides* and humanity also has many reasons for which to abide, for *apart from Him who can eat or who can have enjoyment* (Qoh 2:25 ESV)? This also coincides with Hemingway's further hints in one of the conversations in the *Fiesta*:

“‘Gentlemen,’ he said, and unwrapped a drumstick from a piece of newspaper. ‘I reverse the order. For Bryan’s sake. As a tribute to the Great Commoner. First the chicken; then the egg.’

‘Wonder what day God created the chicken?’

‘Oh,’ said Bill, sucking the drumstick, ‘how should we know? We should not question. Our stay on earth is not for long. Let us rejoice and believe and give thanks.’

‘Eat an egg.’

Bill gestured with the drumstick in one hand and the bottle of wine in the other.

‘Let us rejoice in our blessings. Let us utilize the fowls of the air. Let us utilize the product of the vine. Will you utilize a little, brother?’

‘After you, brother.’

Bill took a long drink.

‘Utilize a little, brother,’ he handed me the bottle. ‘Let us not doubt, brother. Let us not pry into the holy mysteries of the hencoop with simian fingers. Let us accept on faith...” ([43]).

3. Conclusions

It is suggested that the scrutiny of wisdom literature metaphors should not lapse into either *sophiamania* or *metaphormania* but should be linked with other topics, such as linguistic, semantic, pragmatic, and theological aspects, etc. It is intimated that Proverbs depicts a more nuanced picture concerning the wisdom that it presents. Proverbs is not a scanty do ut des wisdom-book. Similarly to Job and Qoheleth, it also precipitates some of the misfortunes and struggles of life. Here, a somewhat more balanced nexus is advocated between the wisdom categories in Proverbs, Job, and Qoheleth. New metaphor connections are also signalled and expanded. This is the first instance that the relevant visual metaphor from Proverbs is connected to *The Simpsons*. Two new ontological metaphors are discovered in Prov 25:26–28 – 26:1–12 and examined for the first time in relation to Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *Die Physiker*. The *hand becoming heavy* metaphor in Job 23:2 is examined with reference to Francis Gruber's *Job* painting. It is highlighted that the metaphor in the LXX version of the text is applied to God, as opposed to Job. Thus, in this version of the metaphor, God's *hands become heavy* upon Job. The metaphor for *wholesome food, honey, and curd*, in Job 20:17 is scrutinized in convergence with a similar metaphor in András Visky's *Juliet*. In Qoh 1:4–7 ontological metaphors are signalled and related to their usage in Ernest Hemingway's *Fiesta*. In these ontological metaphors the relevant personifications are also accentuated.

As shown, there is an intrinsic relationship between the metaphors and other aspects of the wisdom literature and contemporary art. This relationship underscores the artistic ingenuity, too, with which metaphors are adopted, adapted, further developed and even altered. At times the metaphors are quoted and used out of context. Still, with the help of the tool of biblical literacy it is possible to gauge the continuous germination of usage within contemporary art of various metaphors found in the wisdom literature. This might also mean that the wider society is in contact with the wisdom corpus of the Hebrew Bible and that the metaphors and other aspects found in it are still masterly enough to inspire and influence 21st century audiences. Finally, biblical scholarship in its exegetical, hermeneutical, and theological enterprises, might also benefit from paying close attention to the usage of wisdom metaphors in contemporary art contexts.

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Abbreviations

BHS	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia
Ezek	Ezekiel
LXX	Septuagint
Prov	Proverbs
Qoh	Qoheleth
Sir	Sirach

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