

The Illusory Way of the Wicked and the Right Way of the Good

A Rhetorical Analysis of Prov 14:12–22

This group of proverbs (14:12–22) constitutes the third and last subsequence of the second sequence (13:1–14:22) in the First Solomonic Collection (10:1–22:16).¹ Twenty years had already elapsed since my original research on this group of proverbs; therefore, it is a right time to retake it giving a fresh glance especially at the coherence of its composition.²

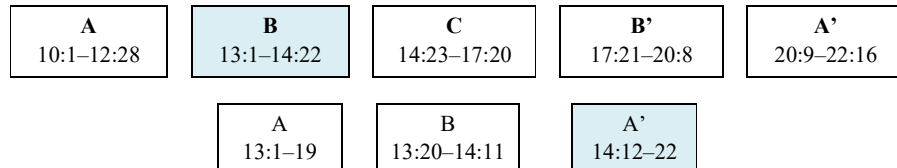
This subsequence is formed of three passages (vv. 12–14, 15–19 & 20–22) arranged concentrically. Each of the extreme passages (vv. 12–14 & 20–22) contains only three proverbs, while the central passage (vv. 15–19) has five proverbs.

The way of the deviant of heart and the way of a good man	12–14
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FOOLISHNESS OF THE SIMPLE AND PRUDENCE OF THE WISE	15–19
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Those who plan evil and those who plan good	20–22
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¹ WITEK, *Dio e i suoi figli*, 136–149. The chart below illustrates the composition of the entire First Solomonic Collection showing all five sequences and the subdivision of the second sequence:



² The *Treatise* was not yet available twenty years ago, when I was working on my dissertation (WITEK, *Dio e i suoi figli*). Its first edition in French (MEYNET, *Traité de rhétorique biblique*) was published in 2007. In 2012 was published the first abridged English edition (MEYNET, *Treatise on Biblical Rhetoric*). The second complete English edition based on the 3rd French edition will be published soon. In this period of time, there was methodological progress of the method itself. This fact will inevitably impact our rereading of this text.

I. THE WAY OF THE DEVIANT OF HEART AND OF A GOOD MAN (14:12–14)

1. THE TEXT

¹² There is a right way before a man,
and the end of it (are) the ways of death.³

¹³ Even in laughter the heart is in pain,
and the end of it,⁴ of joy, (is) sorrow.⁵

¹⁴ From his ways will be satisfied the deviant of heart,⁶
and from his,⁷ a good man.

2. COMPOSITION

This very short passage, the size of a piece, contains three proverbs (12, 13 & 14) arranged concentrically;⁸ its extreme proverbs (12 & 14) have more elements in common. The repetition of the noun *derek* “way” (12ab & 14a) and *’iš* “man” (12a & 14b). The two adjectives *yāsār* “a right one” (12a) and *tōb* “a good one” are found in the same position in extreme members. The first one qualifies the “way” set before the “man” (12a), while the second qualifies the “man” himself (14b). Consequently, the complement *māwet* “death” (12b) in the syntagma “the ways of death” can be related to *sūg lēb* “the deviant of heart” (14a) because he “will be satisfied from his ways.”

The central proverb (13) is linked to the other proverbs through the repetition of the following words: *’ahārītāh* “and its end” (12b & 13b in the same position,

³ The identical proverb is found in 16:25.

⁴ The literal translation of *we’ahārītāh* (“the end of it”) shows that exactly the same syntagma occurs in the preceding verse (12b). Some think it was copied by mistake from the preceding proverb (Müller – Kautzsch, 47; Reyburn – Fry, 313). Other scholars consider the division of words in the MT as erroneous and that it should be as read as follows: *’ahārīt* and *haššimhā* (for example: Hitzig, 137; Frankenberg, 87; Gemser, 67; McKane, 471; GKC, 131n¹; HAUSMANN, *Studien*, 217). However, it could be a case of a construction in which the suffix precedes the noun to which it refers (cf. Bertheau, 57; Delitzsch, 216; Steveson, 189, note 10; Scherer, 142). A similar construction is found in 13:4 where the suffix is used to emphasize the construct state.

⁵ The proverb could also be translated as follows: “Even in joy the heart can be sad and the end of joy can be sadness” (cf. Cohen, 89; Whybray 2, 216).

⁶ Many translate the syntagma *sūg lēb* as “the backslider in heart” that could imply a kind of recidivist. In Ps 78:57 the verb *sūg* means “to deviate” and is synonymous with “to betray” and “to turn aside”: “and they deviated and betrayed like their fathers, they turned aside like a deceitful bow” (cf. MEYNET, *Psalter: Book Three*, 82–83).

⁷ Many, in order to improve the parallelism between members, amend *mē’ālāw* “from his” to *mimma’ālālāw* “from his deeds” (for example: Müller – Kautzsch, 47; Renard, 103; Hamp, 41; BHK³; BHS; Barucq, 126; Alonso Schökel, 317; Clifford, 142; Greenstone, 152; Scott, 97) or to *mimma’āgālāw* “from his tracks” (KUHN, *Beiträge zur Erklärung*, 33; McKane, 474; Garrett, 143, note 287). However, there no need to amend it, since the suffix in the syntagma *mē’ālāw* refers to the way: “from his (way) a good man” (see Hitzig, 138).

⁸ Whybray notes the lexical links in vv. 12–14 but does not recognize them as a unit (“The Composition”, 101–102). Other delimitations proposed: 10–14 (HERMISSON, *Studien*, 177; Plöger, 171; Meinhold, 234; Heim, 177–178; Scherer, 147); 8–15 (SCORALICK, *Einzelspruch*, 223; Garrett, 142; Fuhs 1, 228–229; Fuhs 2, 99).

at the beginning of the second members) and *lēb* “heart” (13a & 14a, in the same position at the end of the first members). The repetition of these two terms forms a crossing at the centre.⁹ The “heart” in 13a links with what follows, whereas “and its end” in 13b links with what precedes.

+ ¹² <i>yēš</i>	<i>derek</i>	<i>yāšār</i>	<i>lipnê</i>	<i>’iš</i>
– <i>wē’ahārītāh</i>	<i>darkê</i>	<i>māwet</i>		
– ¹³ <i>gam</i>	<i>bišhōq</i>	<i>yik’ab</i>	<i>lēb</i>	
– <i>wē’ahārītāh</i>	<i>šimhâ</i>	<i>tûgâ</i>		
– ¹⁴ <i>midrākâw</i>	<i>yišba’</i>	<i>sûg</i>	<i>lēb</i>	
+ <i>ûmē’ālâw</i>	<i>’iš</i>	<i>tôb</i>		

+ ¹² There is	a way ,	a right one,	before	a man,
– <i>and the end of it</i> (are)	the ways	of death.		
– ¹³ Even	in laughter	is in pain	the <i>heart</i> ,	
– <i>and the end of it</i> ,	of joy (is)	sorrow.		
– ¹⁴ From his ways	will be satisfied	the deviant	of <i>heart</i> ,	
+ and from his,	a man,	a good one.		

The last member of the passage (14b) contains a positive message. The first member (12a) could also be qualified as positive because it speaks about “a way” that is “right,” despite its negative interpretation, visible for example in the LXX translation which adds the verb “seems” (“There is a way which *seems* right with men”). Thus, the extreme members would be the only ones qualified as positive, while all others would be negative.

The central proverb (13) stands out from others since it speaks in both its members only about the negative consequences, while the extreme proverbs (12 & 14) speak about the conduct and consequences. A thematic link between the first two proverbs (12 & 13) would be an illusory appearance.¹⁰

3. BIBLICAL CONTEXT

An illusory road

The interpretation of the “right way” in 12a as illusory can recall some admonitions from the Book of Proverbs. Starting with a general one: “Keep

⁹ For a systematic presentation of the crossing at the centre, see MEYNET, *Treatise*, 2nd ed., 414–416.

¹⁰ Cf. Whybray 2, 215.

straight the path of your feet, and all your ways will be sure. Do not turn to the right or to the left; Turn your foot from evil.” (4:26–27) There are specific warnings against an adulterous and seductive woman (5:3–5 & 7:25–27): “For the lips of a loose woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword” (5:3–4). And it states that “Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol” (cf. 7:27). In Sirach 21:10 we read: “The way of sinners is smoothly paved with stones, but at its end is the pit of Hades.” This statement of an illusory and easy way may recall the saying of Jesus about the narrow gate: Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Matt 7:13–14). Ps 37 advises not to get heated over the evildoers when they prosper and not to envy them (vv. 1 & 7) for “the wicked will perish and the enemies of the Lord” (v. 20a) are “like the grass they quickly wither and like green of regrowth they fade” (v. 2) “like the ornament of the meadows they are finished, in smoke they are finished” (v. 20b). On the contrary, “the righteous will inherit the earth and they will dwell upon it forever” (v. 29).¹¹

Joy that ends in sadness

The statement in the central proverb (13) can evoke the discourse of Qoheleth (Eccl 7:1–7), who prefers sadness over laughter or the house in mourning over the house in celebration, since laughter is what fools do (v. 6), whereas the house of the wise is in mourning (v. 4). It could then be an allusion to the belief that when feasting, it is easy to transgress the divine law and its precepts. For this reason, Job was offering sacrifices of purification for his children who feasted, saying: “Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts” (Job 1:5). Joy could then be related to injustice and sadness could express divine punishment as we read in one of the woes in Luke: “Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep” (6:25; cf. also Isa 5:22–23).

4. INTERPRETATION

The ways of the deviant of heart

Since the Bible links *lēb* “heart” to both “moral” and “intellectual” judgment and uses the verb *sûg* in the sense of “deviating, departing from” what is proper and right, the expression *sûg lēb* “the deviant of heart” (14a) could imply either a wicked person (one who is deviating from right moral judgment) or a foolish one (one who is deviating from right intellectual judgment). In this way “the deviant of heart” could refer to those who believe that their own conduct is right

¹¹ MEYNET, *Psalter: Book One*, 517.

and just (12a), but it leads them to death in a moral sense (12b). They can fool themselves by being successful, becoming rich and enjoying a comfortable life (13a), for they walk like blind people who do not see the danger around them until it is too late (12b). They must eat the fruits they collected on their evil way (14a). The joy of their feasts will turn into the sadness of divine punishment (13).

The good are satiated from their own conduct

The positive character, “a good man,” is mentioned only in the final member (14b). However, by reading what is said about the negative characters, we may decipher an implied presence of the good ones. They do not laugh at others or entertain themselves by doing evil (13a). In contrast to “the deviant of heart” (14a) they are wise people who act prudently and who do not fall into a trap by following easy and illusionary ways knowing that an appearance might be misleading (12). The good people therefore eat the fruit of their own right and good conduct (14b).

II. FOOLISHNESS OF THE SIMPLE AND PRUDENCE OF THE WISE (14:15–19)

1. THE TEXT

¹⁵ The simple believes every word,
but the prudent discerns his steps.
¹⁶ The wise fears¹² and turns away from evil,
and the fool transgresses¹³ and is confident.
¹⁷ A quick to anger¹⁴ commits folly,
and a man of wicked devices¹⁵ is hated.¹⁶

¹² It would be an ellipsis to imply the one who “fears the Lord” (Van Leeuwen, 141).

¹³ The word *mit'abbēr* can derive either from 'br I “to pass over, by, through” or from 'br II “to be enraged.” Alonso Schökel, 318, prefers the first root and it could mean here “to transgress” a law or a norm. Lelièvre – Maillot, I, 143, retain the double meaning of the homonymous words. Some read it in the sense of “being arrogant” (Oesterley, 110; Ross, 987; Stuart, 273; Toy, 291). The same verb in hitpael occurs again in 20:2 where it could mean “to ignore.” The root 'br I is used also in 10:25; 19:11 and 22:3. The root 'br I “to pass over” is suggested when the internal structure of the proverb is considered asymmetrical (abc // a'c'b'), thus the expression “turn away from evil” would be opposed to “pass over” (cf. MOUSER, Jr., “Filling in the Blank”, 146–147).

¹⁴ The syntagma *qēšar 'appayim*, “a quick to anger,” literally means “short of nostril” and stands for someone who quickly becomes angry. It is also rendered as “a quick-tempered person” (cf. NJB).

¹⁵ In 12:2 the same expression *'iš mēzimmôt* is used in a negative sense. In the Bible, the noun *mēzimmôt* generally has a negative connotation when referring to people (cf. WILSON, “Sacred and Profane?”, 320–321).

¹⁶ Some prefer to read the syntagma *'iš mēzimmôt* “a man of wicked devices” in a positive sense and therefore they propose various amendments of the verb *yiššānē* “is hated”: *yišne* “is exalted” (THOMAS, “Textual and Philological Notes”, 286; McKane, 468; Lelièvre – Maillot, I, 143), *yiš'ānan* “remains calm” (KUHN, *Beiträge zur Erklärung*, 33; Gemser, 67) and *yišša* “endures” (Toy, 294; Garrett, 143, notes 289 & 290). The MT is preferred by Delitzsch, 218–219; HOTTP, III, 493–494;

¹⁸ The simple inherit¹⁷ folly,
 but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.
¹⁹ The evil will bow down before the good
 and the wicked at the gates of the righteous.

2. COMPOSITION

This passage, the size of a part, is formed of three pieces (15–16, 17 & 18–19) arranged concentrically.¹⁸ The initial piece (15–16) talks about the doings of positive and negative characters. Its internal structure is of mirrored composition: the extreme members feature the synonymous terms, “the simple” (15a) and “the fool” (16b), while the median members feature “the prudent” (15b) and “the wise” (16a). Similarly, negative (15a & 16b) and positive (15b & 16a) doings correspond to each other; the concepts of “discerning one’s steps” (15b) and “turning away from evil” (16a) especially opposed the “transgressing” of the fool (16b). Note also that each member has the same structure with the subject followed by the verb.¹⁹

The final piece (18–19) speaks of the consequences for “the prudent” (18b) and his counterparts: “the simple” (18a), “the evil” (19a) and “the wicked” (19b). The first proverb (18) features opposing terms of the semantic fields of “wisdom” and “folly”, while in the second (19) the characters are qualified from a moral perspective. Thus “prudent” (18a) becomes synonymous with “the good” (19a) and “the righteous” (19b).

The central piece (17) contains only one proverb, and it is a synthetic proverb with a progression: one who acts out of anger acts foolishly (17a); the other one is called “a man of wicked devices” (17b). An explicit lexical link of the central proverb with the last piece is the repetition of the noun *iwwelet* “folly” (17a & 18a). ‘A man of evil devices’ (17b) corresponds with “the evil” (19a) and “the wicked” (19b). ‘A quick to anger’ (17a) can be considered as a synonym of the fool who “transgresses” (16b) if we consider the participle *mit’abbēr* as deriving from *’br* II “to become furious.”

Whybray 2, 218; Plöger, 167; Ross, 987; Steveson, 191, note 12; Scherer, 149; Clifford, 145–146; Heim, 179.

¹⁷ DRIVER, “Problems in the Hebrew”, 181, suggests reading *nehēlū* which derives from *halā* “to be adorned.” His proposal is sustained by McKane, 467; Alonso Schökel, 319; BROCKINGTON, *The Hebrew Text*, 161; Clifford, 142, Garrett, 144.

¹⁸ Other delimitations proposed: 15–18 (Renard, 103; Plöger, 173; Meinhold, 236; Murphy, 105; Whybray 2, 216–217; WHYBRAY, “The Composition”, 102; Scherer, 149; Heim, 179–180); 15–22 (HERMISSON, *Studien*, 178); 16–27 (SCORALICK, *Einzelnspruch*, 223).

¹⁹ It is not a usual structure in the proverbs. Another example of the same structure in this passage is in 18b, while all other members have different grammatical structure.

In the initial proverbs of the extreme pieces (15 & 18), there is a contrast between “the simple” (15a & 18a) and “the prudent” (15b & 18b).²⁰ Both pieces are complementary. While the initial piece (18–19) mentions what the respective characters are doing, the final piece (18–19) talks about the consequences. In the initial piece (15–16) the subjects and verbs are in the singular, whereas in the final piece (18–19) they are in the plural.

– ¹⁵ <i>petî</i>	ya’āmîn	l’kol	dābār
+ w ^e ‘ārūm	yābîn	la’āšurô.	
+ ¹⁶ ḥākām	yārē’	w ^e sār	mērā’
– ūk ^e sil	mit’abbēr	ûbôṭēaḥ.	
.....			
– ¹⁷ q ^e šar	’appayim	ya’āšeh	’iwwelet
– w ^e ’iš	m ^e zimmôt	yiššānē’.	
.....			
– ¹⁸ nāḥālû	p ^e tā’yim	’iwwelet	
+ wa’ārūmîm	yaktirû	dā’at.	
+ ¹⁹ šaḥû	rā’im	lipnê	tôbîm
+ ūr ^e šā’im	’al ša’ārê	šaddîq.	
.....			
– ¹⁵ THE SIMPLE	believes	every	word,
+ but THE PRUDENT	discerns	his steps.	
+ ¹⁶ THE WISE	fears	and turns away	from evil,
– and THE FOOL	transgresses	and is confident.	
.....			
– ¹⁷ A QUICK	TO ANGER	commits	folly,
– and A MAN	OF WICKED DEVICES	is hated.	
.....			
– ¹⁸ Inherit	THE SIMPLE	folly,	
+ but THE PRUDENT	are crowned with	knowledge.	
+ ¹⁹ Will bow down	THE EVIL	before	THE GOOD
+ and THE WICKED	at the gates	of THE RIGHTEOUS.	

²⁰ In the Book of Proverbs, the opposition between ‘ārūm “prudent” and petî “simple” is found exclusively in both Solomonic Collections (10:1–22:16 & 25:1–29:27). These two terms are also used in 22:3 and 27:12.

The thematic arrangement within the passage is as follows:

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ACTING	15–16
<i>Negative acting and negative consequence</i>	17
POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES	18–19

3. BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Being prudent in believing the word

The opening proverb of the passage (15) echoes the warning not to listen to the deceitful word of the wicked that we find at the opening of the Book of the Proverbs (1:10). We also find a similar statement in the Second Solomonic Collection: “When his voice is gracious do not trust him, for seven abominations are in his heart” (26:25). In fact, the Proverbs advise acting with prudence for “the words of the slanderer are delicious morsels that go down into the innermost parts of the body” (18:8; 26:22).

They will bow down

The abasement of the wicked in the final proverb (19) echoes above all two canticles: Hannah proclaims that “the Lord makes poor and makes rich, he brings low and also exalts” (1 Sam 2:7) and in the Magnificat Mary says: “He has brought down the mighty from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty” (Luke 1:52–53). We could also refer to the Lucan parable of the rich man and Lazarus (16:24–31).

4. INTERPRETATION

Ignorance and wickedness

Progression between the members of the central proverb (17) displays that there is a gradation in doing wrong: one is acting out of anger and therefore from the moral point of view his actions would be not so grave (17a) as of the other one who with premeditation is devising evil actions (17b). The first one (17a) is matching with “the simple” (15a & 18a) who believe too easily to what is said by others (15a) and they accept as an inheritance “folly” (18a). The second character (17b) is called a “fool” who “transgresses” God’s commandments because of his confidence (16b) to be able to accomplish his evil plans (17b). He has the intellectual capacity to devise evil plans and to execute them, but his foolishness consists in not taking into consideration that one day the divine punishment will come upon him (19).

Being mindful of one's steps

“The prudent” (15b & 18b), which is synonymous with “the wise” (16a), reflects on his own conduct (15b). He does not believe easily in what is reported or suggested to him (15a). A principle of his actions and thanks to which he can avoid evil is the obedience to God and keeping his commandments (16a). The reward for “the prudent” as being “crowned with knowledge” (18b), in conjunction with the final segment, implies that the divine reward for “the good” and “the righteous” is to see “the evil” and “the wicked” humiliated in front of them (19).

III. TRUE AND FALSE FRIENDSHIP (14:20–22)

I. THE TEXT

²⁰ Even by his friend is hated the poor,
 but those who love the rich (are) many.
²¹ He who despises his friend²¹ sins,
 but he who shows pity for the poor²² (is) happy.
²² Surely²³ those who plan evil go astray,
 but faithfulness and loyalty²⁴ (to)²⁵ those who plan good.

²¹ Because the LXX has *penētas* “poor” in place of *rē’ēhū* “friend” in the MT, some consider *rē’ēhū* as a diplography, because the same word is used in the preceding verse, and in place of it they prefer to read *rā’ēb* “hungry” (see Gemser, 67; Clifford, 142; Scott, 97).

²² The *ketib* is preferred by BHS; BROCKINGTON, *The Hebrew Text*, 161; HAUSMANN, *Studien*, 85; Heim, 181; Hitzig, 140; Scherer, 142; Steveson, 192, note 14; Whybray 2, 219. The *qere* *’ānāwīm* “humble” is suggested by Greenstone, 154; Meinhold, 239; Plaut 162.

²³ We can read the interrogative particle *hālô’* as an assertive “surely” (see Frankenberg, 88; Steveson, 193, note 15; cf. GKC, 150e).

²⁴ The couple *ḥesed w’ēmet* rendered here as “faithfulness and loyalty” is translated in many different ways, for example: “mercy and truth” (KJV), “faithful covenant love” (NET), “faithful love and constancy” (NJB), “loyalty and faithfulness” (RSV & NRSV), “steadfast love” (TNK). It can act as a covenant formula to pledge loyalty, as when Jacob used with Joseph his son to respect his last wish: “If I have found favor in your eyes, put your hand under my thigh and show me *faithfulness and loyalty*. Do not bury me in Egypt” (Gen 47:29). “In the Psalms, the expression applies mostly to God (Ps 40:11–12; 86:15; 98:3; 138:2); in Proverbs, on the other hand, it refers to a human attitude, which the teacher tries to inculcate in his disciple (Prov 3:3; 14:22; 16:6; 20:28)” (MEYNET, *Psalter. Book Five*, 123).

²⁵ The preposition is missing in the MT. Some add *l’* “to” (Plöger, 167; Toy, 302; cf. Oesterley, 112).

2. COMPOSITION

This piece-sized passage contains three segments (20–22).²⁶ Noticing the repetition of the term *lʿrē‘ēhû*, “his friend” in 20–21, and additionally that it occurs in exactly the same position (the second term of initial members), one might think of a parallel structure of the A A’B type. However, their functions are different. In the first instance “his friend” is the subject of an evil action (20a), while in the second instance he is an object of such action (21a). Moreover, in the extreme members, there are two terms with the same meaning: *rāš* “poor” (20a) and *‘āniyyîm* “poor” (21b). The common link would be the behavior towards the poor (20a & 21ab).

– ²⁰ gam	lʿrē‘ēhû	<i>yîššānē’</i>	<i>rāš</i>
– we <i>‘ōhābē</i>	<i>‘āšîr</i>	rabbîm	
– ²¹ <i>bāz</i>	lʿrē‘ēhû	<i>hôtē’</i>	
+ <i>ûm‘hônēn</i>	<i>‘ānāyyîm</i>	<i>‘ašrâw</i>	
– ²² hălô’	<i>yit ‘û</i>	<i>hōršê</i>	<i>rā’</i>
+ we <i>hēsed</i>	we <i>‘ēmet</i>	<i>hōršê</i>	<i>ṭōb</i>

– ²⁰ Even	by his friend	<i>is hated</i>	the poor,
– but <i>those who love</i>	<i>the rich</i>	(are) many.	
– ²¹ <i>He who despises</i>	his friend	<i>sins,</i>	
+ but <i>he who shows pity</i>	to the poor	(is) <i>happy.</i>	
– ²² Surely	<i>go astray</i>	<i>those who plan</i>	evil,
+ but <i>faithfulness</i>	and <i>loyalty</i>	(to) <i>those who plan</i>	good.

On the other hand, there are links between the central proverb (21) and the final proverb (22). From the formal point of view, the arrangement of their members is the same: a negative followed by a positive one. There is also a lexical relation. In the first members “he who despises” (21a) corresponds with “those who plan evil” (22a) and the verb to “sin” (21a) is synonymous with “go astray” (22a). In the second members “he who shows pity” (21b) corresponds with “those who plan good” (22b), while “happy” (21b) corresponds to “faithfulness and loyalty” taken

²⁶ As a thematic unit it is recognized by Delitzsch, 220. Whybray considers v. 22 as a general statement related to vv. 20–21 (“The Composition”, 102). Other proposed delimitations: 18–24 (Garrett, 144–145); 19–21 (Whybray 2, 218); 19–22 (SCHERER, “Is the Selfish Man Wise”, 68; Scherer, 150–151; Heim, 181–182); 19–24 (Meinhold, 238; Van Leeuwen, 142); 20–24 (Plöger, 173).

in the sense of divine reward (22b). Therefore, one might think of the parallel structure of the A B B' type.

Since the two aforementioned opposing parallel structures have equivalently strong lexical support, we could also think of a concentric structure, in which the center (21) is linked both lexically and, more importantly, conceptually. In doing so, we can notice that the first member of the central proverb (21a) links to the first member of the subsequent proverb (22a). Both mention evil actions: “he who despises his friend” (21a) and “those who plan evil” (22a). Both are further qualified as “sin” (21a) and “going astray” (22a). Additionally, there is linking between the second member of the central proverb (21b) and in the first member of the initial proverb (20a) through contrasting behaviors towards “the poor”: hating them (20a) and showing pity to them (21b). This overlapping of the corresponding members would be another case of a crossing at the center.²⁷

3. BIBLICAL CONTEXT

True and false friendship

A similar statement to that of the initial proverb (20) is expressed by another saying in the same collection, “Wealth adds many friends, but the poor is forsaken by his friend” (19:4). Sirach suggests prudence by stating that “a friend cannot be known in prosperity” (12:8). And he elaborates further: “There is the companion friend who is at your table but will not stand by you in day of trouble. When you are doing well, he will be your second self and be bold with your servants. But if you are humbled, he will turn against you and will hide himself from your presence” (6:10–12). A distinction is also made based on economic status: “When a rich totters, he is supported by friends, but when a poor falls, he is pushed away even by friends” (13:21).

Loving one’s neighbor

To despise one’s neighbor is sinful (21) for it is a breaching of the commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18; cf. Matt 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31). Concerning those who are merciful and compassionate to the poor and weak, a beatitude is pronounced (“happy” in Prov 14:21b) and is echoed by “Happy the one who cares for the weak; in the day of trouble the Lord delivers him” (Ps 41:2). The same idea is also expressed in one of the gospel beatitudes, “Happy are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Matt 5:7).

²⁷ In my original research I did not notice the crossing at the center at this point.

4. INTERPRETATION

False friends

“Those who plan evil” (22a) are identified in this passage with those who pretend to be friends when convenient or profitable (20b). but when things change, and the friendship demands sacrifices because a friend is now in trouble, they abandon the needy friend (20a & 21a). True friendship manifests itself in compassion and support (20b). Hatred of the poor (20a) and their rejection as useless objects prove otherwise (21a). Putting one’s self-interest over love for others, especially those in need, surely leads one astray (22a), for it is sinful against the commandment to love one’s neighbor (21a; cf. Lev 19:18).

True friends

Hard times reveal true friendship. True friends are those who, at a time of need, do not run away but stand next to and support the person in need, sacrificing their time, money and all that might be necessary (21b & 22b). For true friends, keeping the commandment to love one’s neighbor is not an extraordinary action, for it comes naturally from their compassionate heart (21b; cf. Lev 19:18). Those “who show pity to the poor” (Prov 14:21b) resemble God our merciful Father: “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36). “The good” shown to others as an expression of “faithfulness and loyalty” to God’s commandments will come back in the form of God’s “faithfulness and loyalty” to the promises attached to the covenant with his people (22b), for “All the paths of the Lord are *faithfulness and loyalty* to those who keep his covenant and his precepts” (Ps 25:10). Therefore, “faithfulness and loyalty” imply here first the human attitude towards God’s commandments and then consequently the divine reward.

IV. THE WHOLE SUBSEQUENCE

I. COMPOSITION

There are just a few lexical links between the passages. The term *tôb* “good” is found in the final segments of each passage in the following expressions: “a good man” (14b), “the good” (19a) and “those who plan good” (22b), thus having the function of final terms. “The righteous” (19b) belonging to the same semantic field also plays the same function of a final term.²⁸ Additionally, in the final segments there are terms of the opposite semantic field: “the deviant of heart” (14a), “the evil” (19a), “the wicked” (19b) and “those who plan evil” (22a), while “a man of wicked devices” is found at the very center of the passage (17b). The

²⁸ In the Hebrew text the word *tôb* “good” occupies the last position in the respective members (14b, 19a & 22b) and similarly *šaddiq* “the righteous” (19b).

same verbal form *yīśśānē* ‘is hated’ is repeated in the central segment of the central passage (17) and in the initial segment of the final passage (20).

¹² There is a right way before a man,	and its end are the ways of death.
¹³ Even in LAUGHTER the heart is in PAIN	and the end of JOY is SORROW.
¹⁴ The deviant of heart will be satisfied from his ways,	and from his, a good man .

¹⁵ The simple believes every word,	but the prudent discerns his steps.
¹⁶ The wise fears and turns away from evil,	and the fool transgresses and is confident.
¹⁷ A quick to anger commits folly,	and a man of wicked devices IS HATED.
¹⁸ The simple inherit folly,	but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.
¹⁹ The evil will bow down before the good	and the wicked at the gates of the righteous .

²⁰ Even by his friend IS HATED the poor,	but those who love the rich are many.
²¹ He who despises his friend sins,	but he who shows pity for the poor is HAPPY.
²² Surely those who plan evil go astray,	but faithfulness and loyalty to those who plan good .

We can also notice some conceptual correspondences. The illusory way of the initial proverb (12) can be linked in the central passage with the behavior of “the simple” who “believes every word” (15a) and the confident “fool” “transgresses” the law (16b), and in the final passage with hating the poor (20a & 21a) and loving the rich (20b).

In addition to the lexical links mentioned above, the final segments also talk about the consequences: positive and negative in the extreme passages (14 & 22) and exclusively negative ones in the central passage (19).

Seeing the presence of terms of the semantic fields of “sorrow” and “happiness” in the central proverbs of the extreme passages (13 & 21), we can also notice conceptual links: “laughter” and “joy” that end “in pain” and “sorrow” (13) can be illustrated by the situations when a friend is despised and ridiculed (21a), while true “happiness” is for the one “who shows pity” (21b). We can also extend this link to the central proverb of the entire passage (17), where “committing folly” because of “anger” could be one of the reasons for changing “laughter” and “joy” into “pain” and “sorrow” (13) and for “despising” others (21a).

The peculiarity of the central passage (15–19) is the presence of the terms of “wisdom” (15a, 16b, 17a, 18a) and “foolishness” (15b, 16a, 18b).

2. INTERPRETATION

The illusory way of the wicked

All people, including those who do evil need justification and motivation for their actions. Many, being convinced of applying whatever is right (12), will do it out of ignorance (15a) or pride and self-confidence (16b). Often a driving force behind the actions can be a monetary profit (20). It can silence the conscience, especially of those who are consciously aware of their malice, for they plan evil action systematically in their hearts (17b & 22a).

Contrary to their expectations everything reverses (19). The illusory path turns out to be the one that leads to eternal death which is the divine punishment for evildoers (12b) because God abhors all evil doing (17b), and especially the “sin” against the commandment to love one’s neighbor (20ab & 21a). Laughter at the misfortune of others and joy in doing evil find an end in the eternal pain and sorrow(13).

The right way of the good

The good person is watchful “of his steps” (15b), reverent to God and obedient to the commandments (16a). Thanks to his prudence (15b) whenever he finds himself in a situation where he must make a choice, he makes a proper decision by avoiding wrong and dangerous paths (16a & 12b). All of this is visible in his behavior: he plans good (22b), he restrains avoids doing evil even when he is joyfully celebrating (13a) and he is compassionate towards the poor (21b). The good will be satisfied with the fruits of their own conduct (14b), implying both earthly (18b) and heavenly rewards (19 & 22b).

CONCLUSION

This new analysis further demonstrates that this text is a coherent proverbial unit. The crossing at the center in vv. 12–14 was listed in the conclusion of my original research,²⁹ but the pattern itself was not yet defined as one of the elements of Semitic Biblical Rhetoric. A new crossing at the center was identified in vv. 20–22. The links between the respective passages highlight more conceptual relations instead of just lexical relations (which are in fact few). The whole now appears now as a more interwoven composition.

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ABSTRACT

This group of proverbs (14:12–22) constitutes the third and last subsequence of the second sequence (13:1–14:22) in the First Solomonic Collection (10:1–22:16). It contains three different size passages constructed concentrically around the longest one (vv. 12–14, 15–19 & 20–22). The coherence of the units is proved by lexical and conceptual links. Among the rhetorical features used are initial and final terms. There are also two instances of the crossing at the center in vv. 12–14 and 20–22.

Keywords: Proverbs, righteousness, wickedness, wisdom, foolishness, good, evil.

²⁹ WITEK, *Dio e i suoi figli*, 370.

ABBREVIATIONS

BHK ³	R. Kittel, ed., <i>Biblia Hebraica</i> , Stuttgart 1957 ³ .
BHS	K. ELLIGER – W. RUDOLPH, ed., <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> , Stuttgart 1968.
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BK	Biblischer Kommentar
BWANT	Beihefte zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
cf.	confer (compare)
EB	Echter Bible
ed.	editor, edited
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
Fs.	Festschrift
FzB	Forschung zur Bibel
GKC	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> , ed. E. Kautzsch; tr. A.E. Cowley, Oxford 1910 ² .
HK	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
HOTTP	<i>Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project, III, Poetical Books = Compte rendu préliminaire et provisoire sur le travail d'analyse textuelle de l'Ancien Testament hébreu, III, Livres poétiques</i> , New York 1979.
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOT.S	Journal for the study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series
KEH	Kurzgefaßtes exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament
KJV	King James Version
LeDiv	Lectio Divina
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NAC	The New American Commentary
NCBC	The New Century Bible Commentary
NeuEB	Die neue Echter Bible
NET	New English Translation
NJB	The New Jerusalem Bible
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OTL	The Old Testament Library
RBSem	Rhetorica Biblica et Semitica
RhSem	Rhétorique sémitique
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBi	Sources bibliques
TG	Tesi Gregoriana
TNK	JPS Tanakh
UBS.HS	United Bible Societies Handbook Series

v.	verse
VT.S	Vetus Testamentum Supplement Series
vv.	verses
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WC	Westminster Commentaries
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
ZBK.AT	Zürcher Bibelkommentare. Altes Testament

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