

Jennifer L. Andruska, *Wise and Foolish Love in the Song of Songs* (Oud-testamentische Studiën 75; Leiden – Boston, MA: Brill 2018). Pp. 219. €104. ISBN 978-90-04-33101-3 (e-Book)

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Among numerous monographs devoted to the Song of Songs published in the last few years, the book *Wise and Foolish Love in the Song of Songs* by Jennifer L. Andruska seems to bring now and fresh insights and merits special attention. It was written as doctoral thesis at the University of Cambridge under the supervision of Dr Katharine J. Dell.

The book consists on seven chapters. The first one (“Dipping into the Discussion: a New Position among a Plethora of Interpretive Options,” pp. 1–14) discusses introductory aspects and specifies some preliminary statements such as the priority of the literal meaning of the poem, the fact that the main characters of the poem are not married and some characteristics of their relation as well as the position of the Poem versus Wisdom.

The second chapter (“Methodological Frameworks for Approaching the Song and Its Relationship to Wisdom,” pp. 15–42) touches the question of literary genre, shaping of the characters, relation to ancient Near East literature and introductory questions concerning date, Sitz im Leben, author, unity and inner-biblical allusions.

The third chapter (“Instruction Concerning Love in the Song of Songs,” pp. 43–93) begins with the discussion on the role of the so called “Do Not Awaken” refrains (Song 2:7; 3:5; 8:4), then the role of the *mashal* Song 8:6-7 (“Place me as a seal upon your heart” etc.) and finally the intertextual relation with Proverbs 7.

The chapters four to six place the Song of Songs in the context of wisdom literature and present the hermeneutical and reader’s response consequences drawn from the analyses undertaken in chapter three. Chapter four defines wisdom and wisdom influence (pp. 94–111), chapter five presents the wisdom features in the Song of Songs (pp. 112–144) and chapter six specifies the didactic nature of wisdom texts and the Song of Songs (pp. 145–176).

The last chapter (“Reflections and Avenues for Further Study,” pp. 177–183) serves as a conclusion of the whole book.

Besides all the literary and exegetical skill of the author, at least three interesting ideas seem to be an original contribution that attracts our attention.

First, Jennifer L. Andruska proposes an interesting inner structure of the Poem. It is based on the three “Do Not Awaken” refrains that lead the reader to the main statement of the Poem, expressed in Song 8:6-7. The author concludes explicitly: “I have offered a new and original exegetical argument for understanding the refrains, which expands upon a few important and overlooked exegetical features” (p. 177). The specificity of the refrains has been summarized in the following way: “The poet didactically shows, through the lover’s speeches and actions, what love looks like when it is present, when it has desired to awaken: it is mutual, peaceful, equal, proactive, devoted, desirous, erotic, exclusive, committed and timeless. It is ‘that love’s’ presence or absence that shows whether a love like the Song *is* present. This is the type of love that the instructions encourage readers to pursue, yet they simultaneously warn against awakening love before this type of love is present because of what the *marshal* teaches in 8:6-7” (p. 147).

And the *marshal*, that has been announced and prepared by the refrains, contains the following characteristic: “The proverb, or *marshal* of 8:6-7, conveys a crucial piece of didactic wisdom concerning love by expressing a common experience with a memorable choice of words. Those who have been in love truly know that love is as strong as death, jealousy as unyielding as the grave, and that it burns like an unquenchable mighty flame. Only a fool would awaken this type of powerful emotion for the wrong person, when the type of love depicted in the Song is not present” (p. 147).

Second, in this context of the opposition between wise and foolish love Jennifer L. Andruska places the intertextual relation with Proverbs 7. She considers Song of Songs as a literary piece prior to Proverbs 7 and affirms: “Proverbs 7 adopts aspects of the Song, using its language, images and themes to create an ‘arresting wisdom lesson’ concerning the misuse of sexuality and its disastrous results” (p. 88).

Yet, the author says: “The seductress in Proverbs 7 convincingly masquerades as the lover in the Song, and makes the youth feel like he is experiencing the same love, but the reader is meant to note some important differences. In the Song their love is mutual and reciprocal” (p. 90) and she concludes: “Collectively, the two books present didactic pictures of what wise and foolish love might look like (p. 88).”

The third and – according to our opinion – most important contribution of the research undertaken by Jennifer L. Andruska for the understanding of the message of the Song of Songs relates to the consequences of the former statements for the reader. At the same time it provides – besides the Solomonic

attribution – a strong argument to count the Poem among other wisdom literary texts. The author affirms: “The Song is didactic. It aims to teach and provides instruction, yet its goal extends far beyond this to the transformation of its readers into wise lovers” (pp. 175–176). And she explains it in the following way: “We are meant to identify with these lovers because we are meant to emulate them by participating in a similar type of love relationship. We are meant to become similar types of lovers, who pursue the particular type of relationship they display throughout the Song, so that we find the same type of love they enjoy” (p. 156).

The final conclusion concerning the involvement of the reader in the didactic strategy of the author of the Song of Songs has been summarized in the last chapter: “In the Song, readers identify with particular types of lovers in a particular type of love relationship, who prescriptively model normative values and behaviour, so that as readers identify with them and internalize this particular vision of love in their perceptions, intentions, emotions, desires and virtues, transformation occurs. [...] The reader is shaped both cognitively and emotionally, so that they are transformed into the type of lover who is able to discern wise love in their own life and has the emotional intelligence to actually implement the wise instruction by pursuing this type of love and not others. [...] The Song aims to didactically transform its reader into a wise lover with the ability to make sound judgments in love and apply what they have learned in various contexts and situations” (p. 176).

Beyond these interesting and inspiring conclusions, there is one statement that invites us to adopt a critical position. In the first chapter we read: “One final indication that the Song should be understood literally, as the display of love between two human lovers, is its strong parallels with ancient Egyptian love songs, which also concern human love. This will be discussed in greater detail in the following methodology chapter as well as in chapter six, but for now it is sufficient to say that the parallel themes, motifs and conventions, which are used in the Egyptian material to depict romantic love between humans, make it likely that the Song uses them to do the same. Since there is nothing in the text signalling otherwise, this book will take the position that the Song is the literal depiction of love between two human lovers” (p. 4).

We agree with the last sentence. Indeed, there is nothing in the Song of Songs that compels the reader to undertake an allegoristic approach to the text. Yet there are two fundamental arguments that invite to nuance such categorical statement. First, the Egyptian love songs have not been included in a corpus of Writings that assumed a canonical position in the religious tradition of the Western Culture. Second, it is a matter of fact that throughout two millenniums both Jewish and Christian communities of faith developed inspiring and creative hermeneutics based on the allegorical method of interpretation. Of course, the literal approach

to the text – following Origen, Jerome and others – should be the first and fundamental. Yet the more-than-literal interpretation merits to be taken in consideration and bears a living testimony of how the reader undertakes a creative dialog with the biblical text.