**Semantics in the Study of Wisdom**

Rachel Frish

My primary areas of research are prophetic literature and biblical wisdom literature. My research examines the development of wisdom traditions within the Bible and in extra-biblical texts. The wisdom tradition is unique in that its source of authority is human in a world where God’s authority and control are unquestionable, and my work traces how questions of epistemology and authority are dealt with in biblical and Second Temple literature. My starting point for delving into these questions is philological and semantic research. Despite the use of a collection of expressions shared by all Hebrew speakers, careful semantic examination of facets of these expressions’ meanings, both synchronic and diachronic, sheds considerable light on the different worldviews of their authors. As such, we can observe their development within the different traditions.

In my dissertation, “Sapiential Statements in the Book of Jeremiah and their Role in the Tapestry of Trophesies in the Book,” I examine the ways in which wisdom is integrated into prophetic speech. This study is based on new identification of the sapiential sections in the book, and I discuss at length the central question of how to identify correlations to wisdom in texts that do not clearly belong to the sapiential genre. The dissertation proposes a new methodology for dealing with this question: not a quantitative examination of wisdom expressions, but instead tracking the unique semantic tone that wisdom literature imparts upon characteristic phrases. For example, the word חכם appears throughout the Bible, and for that reason it is difficult to use it as a criterion for identifying the wisdom correlation. However, when we focus on the particular connotations of this word in wisdom literature, we discover that חכם is the ideal individual, a person who can grasp the order of the world with his intellect and teach it to others. Therefore, only texts that present חכמה and חכם in this manner – and not every text in which these words appear – reflect familiarity with the sapiential tradition. Only after using this method to identify wisdom texts in the book of Jeremiah do I turn to the literary and theological study of these passages and broader questions of theology and epistemology. More broadly, my research contributes to reaffirming the very existence of wisdom as a distinctive category within the Bible, a category that was undermined in several recent studies.

The Cambridge-Yale Biblical Semantics Workshop will be an exceptional opportunity for me to expand my familiarity with the broad scope of research in biblical semantics, and will provide me with a solid foundation for my own future studies. I am very excited to have the opportunity to meet experts in the field and work with fellow students on a joint research project. I look forward to contributing my part as a scholar integrating semantic and literary research in the study of wisdom literature, and to become part of the group of junior scholars who are establishing this method as an effective and important tool for biblical research.