

Bibliotekarstudentens nettleksikon om litteratur og medier

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Sist oppdatert 27.08.21

Visdomslitteratur

(_sjanger) Litteratur i og utenfor Bibelen som uttrykker noe grunnleggende om livet på en filosoferende, klarsynt og ofte meditativ måte.

“Humankind has collectively been grappling with understanding the elusive phenomenon of wisdom for centuries; we have examined wisdom from many perspectives. Over the course of history and in different locations on our planet, we have cared about wisdom [...] Oral traditions, songs, and storytelling were some of the earliest means of passing along our folk traditions of wisdom. Distinct bodies of ancient secular wisdom literature emerged in civilizations like Egypt and Mesopotamia as far back as 2500 BC. These wisdom literatures contain collections of parables, proverbs, and short stories, which epitomize principles of correct living, embody moral pronouncements, and contain crucial information about their society. ... In summary, the secular wisdom literature suggests that wisdom is social and interpersonal in nature, and that wise people exhibit exemplary understandings and behavior. (Holliday & Chandler, 1986, pp. 11-13) From those ancient folk traditions, concepts of wisdom have evolved distinctly within Eastern and Western cultures.” (Connie E. Taylor i https://qspace.library.queensu.ca/bitstream/handle/1974/13767/Taylor_Connie_E_201509_PhD.pdf; lesedato 09.11.20)

“Thanks to archaeological research in the past 150 years, we know today that wisdom literature similar to that in the Bible existed long before Solomon in the biblical world. From ancient Babylonia, Syria, and Egypt have come examples of ancient wisdom. The Egyptian wisdom is the most important because of the close connections that the people of the Nile Valley had with ancient Canaan and Israel over long periods of time. Biblical wisdom shares basic characteristics with the wisdom of the ancient Near East. First, wisdom is focused on the individual rather than the nation. [...] The wisdom of Babylonia and Egypt consists of the two types that we meet in the Bible – practical and philosophical. Practical wisdom helps the individual develop a sane, workable attitude toward life. [...] The sayings are short and easy to remember. They help the individual get along with others. The intent of practical wisdom is to guide a person through the difficulties of life to success.” (<https://pclawrenceville.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Intro-to-Wisdom-Literature-13-Nov.pdf>; lesedato 09.11.20)

“The oldest Egyptian examples are three manuals from the Old Kingdom, dated roughly fifteen hundred years before the time of Israel’s patron of Wisdom,

Solomon. One attributed to Ptah-hotep, a warrior of the Fifth Dynasty, portrays him looking back over a long successful life in the king's service. He is reminding his son that 'no-one is born wise'. Strict discipline, hard work and good manners are the recommended way to success. Personal responsibility, fair dealing and justice are commended because 'wrongdoing has never brought its undertaking into harbour.' Such wisdom obviously was valuable as contributing to a stable, moral political order" (Kealy 2012 s. 11).

Den indiske fabelsamlingen *Panchatantra* "exemplifies a kind of secular wisdom literature prevalent throughout the East, stressing intelligence and everyday knowledge rather than religious morality (Keith 243). The many moral verses that appear throughout the work and the resolutions of the stories' plots usually focus on a secular justice according to which rogues are punished and honest men vindicated." (Katharine S. Gittes i [https://documents.in/document/the-canterbury-
tales-and-the-arabic-frame-tradition.html](https://documents.in/document/the-canterbury-tales-and-the-arabic-frame-tradition.html); lesedato 08.11.20)

"Hávamál" inngår i den norrøne *Den eldre Edda* og består av 164 strofer som skal være Odins tale til menneskene. Diktet er blant annet utgitt i Ludvig Holm-Olsens oversettelse under tittelen *Hávamál: Vikingenes visdomsord* (1994). Strofe 1-77 kalles "visdomsdiktet" og dreier seg i stor grad om etikk og livssyn. Egenskaper som måtehold og gjestfrihet roses, mens godtroenhet og annen dumhet blir refset.

"These are the wisdom books in the Bible, in their probable order of writing: Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Ben Sira (also called Sirach, also called Ecclesiasticus), and the Wisdom of Solomon. [...] The sages wrote the wisdom books over the course of almost 1,000 years. The books passed through many different hands and many editors. [...] three different types of wisdom that run through all five previously mentioned books:

1) Village wisdom/folk wisdom is characterized by short, pithy statements, examples drawn from nature, framed as instruction from parents to their children.

2) Royal wisdom comes from one of the Israelite capitals. Its maxims instruct junior bureaucrats on the intricacies of palace politics.

3) Theological wisdom consists of deep reflection upon the most controversial of theological topics: Is there a God? If there is a God, why do such awful things happen? Is there a purpose to life? Are we any different from animals? What happens after death? Does everyone get what he or she deserves? Presumably, professional sages wrote these works to assert their position on these controversial subjects.

[...] experience shows that good people suffer, while evil people sleep peacefully in their beds. The sages agonized over the contradictions in their system [...] there was a great wisdom debate among the sages about whether God could be trusted in the

governance of the world and whether God was predictable or unpredictable. Most of the authors of Proverbs said yes, that God could indeed be trusted. But even then the sages had divergent ways to understand this confidence. Some argued that a careful practice of wisdom principles (honest speech, hard work, marital faithfulness, etc.) would inevitably lead to a happy, prosperous life. Others argued that, although God's governance of the world is flawless, humans can never be sure what God might do: even if you followed the right path, bad things could still happen to you. "The human mind plans the way, / but the LORD directs the steps" (Prov. 16:9)." (David Penchansky i https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/TB7_Wisdompt1_DP.pdf; lesedato 09.11.20)

"The books of *Job*, *Proverbs*, *Ecclesiastes*, *Wisdom of Solomon* and *Sirach* [dvs. *Siraks bok*] have been identified traditionally as wisdom literature. The name comes from the Hebrew word for wisdom (*hokmah*)" (Kealy 2012 s. 6). "[S]cholars note that the word "wisdom" is popular in all the books of the Wisdom Literature – found 183 times in *Proverbs*, *Job* and *Ecclesiastes* and over 100 times in *Sirach* and *Wisdom of Solomon*. It is found some 42 times in *Proverbs*, 18 times in *Job*, 28 times in *Qohelet* [dvs. *Forkynneren*], 60 times in *Sirach* (a total of 91 times including derivatives)" (Kealy 2012 s. 1).

"Much of the literature is attributed to Solomon: just as his father David was credited with the authorship of many psalms, so also Solomon became the favourite pseudonymous author of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Solomon and the Wisdom of Solomon." (Kealy 2012 s. 7-8)

"[I]n 1 Kings 3, Solomon asked God to give him a discerning heart, to give him wisdom, and God was pleased with that request, and He lavished wisdom upon him. Chapter 4 says, gave him "breath of mind like the sand that is on the seashore." No one, God Himself says, has ever been as wise as Solomon (apart from our Lord Jesus Christ). He was about twenty years old at the time, and God gave him this great wisdom. He took that wisdom then, and Solomon collected for us what we call the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament. He wrote three of the five books that we call Wisdom Literature. He wrote Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. [...] We're told that wisdom will confer upon us some amazing things, some amazing benefits. For example, wisdom protects and delivers us from all kinds of troubles, Proverbs 2:8. Wisdom helps us master every kind of difficulty that we might face in life, Ecclesiastes 8:5. Wisdom, Proverbs 13:14, rescues us from things that would destroy us. Proverbs 24:3, wisdom achieves lasting results. Ecclesiastes 9:11, wisdom brings success with it. Proverbs 3:35, wisdom bestows honor. It brings blessing, according to Proverbs 12:18." (Tom Pennington i <https://thewordunleashed.org/programs/sour>; lesedato 09.11.20)

"What was distinctive in Israel was the effort to describe the limits of human beings in their efforts to master life and its incalculable elements (Prov 16:1 ff; 19:14)." (Kealy 2012 s. 17)

Den bibelske visdomslitteraturen “is identified with the restless human search for God, respect for the mystery of God’s freedom, and awareness of the vast moral sphere of decision-making beyond formal cultic worship. [...] it tries to warn young men against the consequence of a lifestyle without self-control. [...] Nevertheless, in their fuller picture (Prov. 30:7-9) the wise insist on compassion and justice towards the poor (Prov. 21: 13; 29: 14) [...] the wisdom literature with its insistence on compassion and justice.” (Kealy 2012 s. 19)

I *Midrash*, et jødisk verk som kommenterer jødernes hellige tekster, fortelles det en historie om fire vismenn som mot slutten av sine liv får mulighet til å trenge inn til det helligste av det hellige. Én blir gal, en annen dør, den tredje begynner å leve i luksus og umoralske nytelser, mens den fjerde sperrer seg inne i studerkammeret (gjengitt fra Olievenstein 1987 s. 96).

Kristofer Uppdals *Kulten* (1947) er poesi og “religionsfenomenologi” i ett, skrevet hovedsakelig på 1930-tallet. En av inspirasjonskildene kan ha vært den tyske filosofen Friedrich Nietzsches bok *Slik talte Zarathustra* (1883-85), der hovedpersonen etter ti års ensomt opphold på fjellet går ned til menneskene for å dele sin visdom med dem. I *Kulten* “finnes det utvilsomt spor av nietzscheanske kategorier – eneren versus den store grå massen, eller kanskje i vårt tilfelle, Kulten versus resten av menneskene. Den holdningen som kommer til uttrykk i følgende passus fra *Jotunbrunnen*, rimer med Kulten sine prøvelser med å nå frem med sitt budskap: “At de er ueinig med meg, gjev meg rett. Det provar at det er noko nytt og ukjent eg kjem med.” Lidelsen og ensomheten blir forherliget i begge verk, likeså genidyrkelsen. Overmennesket må stå alene, han kan ikke være en del av massen. Georg Brandes siterer et Nietzsche-utsagn: “Hvad er offentlige Meninger? Det er private dovenskaper.” Det er nettopp disse private dovenskaper, og det gjengse lettlivet, både Zarathustra og Kulten vil få bukt med.” (Erlend O. Nødtvedt i <https://bora.uib.no/bora-xmlui/bitstream/handle/1956/7549/94843655.pdf>; lesedato 24.08.21)

Uppdals hovedpersonen Kulten “er sendt til jorden for å vende om menneskene. Han truer med evig pine for livsfuskerne, for de som dyrker en falsk humanisme, for de som ikke tar til seg profetens lære om overmennesket, utlagt som det ensomme mennesket som er istand til å la seg herde av lidelse, som tør å se realitetene i øynene, som tør å anerkjenne også sin destruktive natur. [...] Kulten er høyt hevet over gjennomsnittsmenneskene, de som frister en tilværelse nederst på stigen, for det er jo tross alt disse han er kommet for å frelse. Egentlig er det Kultens egen lidelseshistorie som blir det sentrale, hans martyrdom. I dette kommer det en steil individualisme til syne, en overmennesketenkning som er nær beslektet med det nietzscheanske. [...] et verk der størrelser som liv og estetikk, tekst og subjekt går sammen til et større hele.” (Erlend O. Nødtvedt i <https://bora.uib.no/bora-xmlui/bitstream/handle/1956/7549/94843655.pdf>; lesedato 24.08.21)

“Nietzsche’s underlying argument [i *Slik talte Zarathustra*] is that all human values are created by humans, rather than gods, or nature, or some underlying fundamental reality. Through his proxy, Zarathustra, Nietzsche argues that good and evil are names that we attribute to certain actions, behaviors, or ideas for strategic reasons. Nietzsche envisions humans at their best as creator beings, filling the world around them with values and significance. At their worst, humans are passive, cowardly, conformists attributing all of their historically and culturally specific values to the will of God or some essential nature. As Zarathustra travels, he encounters a few people who are willing to heed his call to empowerment and creativity, but he mainly meets small-minded fools intended to serve as counterexamples for Zarathustra himself. [...] *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is most famous for its proclamation that God is dead. [...] Nietzsche is challenging humanity to take responsibility for creating its own values and in doing so, becoming a better version of humanity than we currently are: the higher men, or the Superman. The Superman is not meant to be some brawny, amoral, he-man. Nietzsche intends the Superman to be symbolic of humanity’s potential. [...] Nietzsche is rallying us to fall in love with the world, to create meaning for ourselves, because no one else will do it for us.” (Benjamin Olson i <https://study.com/academy/lesson/thus-spoke-zarathustra-quotes-summary-analysis.html>; lesedato 24.08.21)

Noen verk er politisk kalkulert og ideologisk motivert visdomslitteratur.

“Turkmenistans første president, Saparmurat Nijazov, bedre kjent som Turkmenbasji, utga i 2001 første bind av *Ruhnama*, “Sjelens bok”, et storverk om turkmensk historie og kultur. Boken ble obligatorisk pensum på absolutt alle klassetrinn, og unødvendige fag som algebra og fysikk ble erstattet av studier av “Saparmurat Nijazovs litterære arv”. Imamer ble pålagt å predike fra *Ruhnama* i moskeene, eksamen i *Ruhnama* ble innført som en obligatorisk del av kjøreopplæringen, og alle biblioteker utenfor hovedstaden ble nedlagt.” (Erika Fatland i Morgenbladet 18.–24. oktober 2019 s. 35) En enorm statue av boka, som kan åpnes mekanisk, stod i 2019 fortsatt i Ashgabat i Turkmenistan. Nijazov “created a bizarre work known as “the *Ruhnama*.” [...] He wrote the *Ruhnama* (The Book of the Soul) in 2001 as a spiritual guide for the Turkmen nation, and as an attempt to “Turkmenize” the country. The *Ruhnama* features a weird combination of revisionist history, moral ideals, religious norms, and fairytales. The first volume was issued in 2001, and a second volume was published three years later. [...] Niyazov was once quoted saying, that God himself told him that everyone who has read the book would come directly to heaven. [...] As of now, Niyazov is the only author self-conscious enough to have created a giant monument to his fictitious work.” (<https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/giant-ruhnama>; lesedato 29.04.20)

“A dictator’s guide to the universe [...] Turkmenbashi was writing his nation, previously a scrap of desert colonized by foreign empires, into existence. The *Ruhnama* contained everything: moral teachings, history, folklore, discourses on politics, religious instruction, disquisitions on Turkmen character, praise for such potent national symbols as melons and rugs, excerpts from the constitution and

more poetry. He was attempting to create a majestic national identity, inextricably identified with his own good self, of course. [...] He had a (literally) captive readership: the book was everywhere, its title was written on mountains, and the TV “news” ended with readings from its pages. One programme consisted of passages being read aloud in multiple languages in a giant theatre, implying that the *Ruhnama*’s readership was international. [...] In space, however, a copy will orbit Earth for a lonely 150 years, if we can believe one story in the papers.” (Daniel Kalder i <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2006/dec/29/adictators-guidetotheunive>; lesedato 14.05.20)

“Earlier this month [juli 2014], President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow of Turkmenistan declared that universities in his nation would no longer test applicants on their knowledge of the *Ruhnama*. Most of the world ignored what seemed like a minor domestic issue, but for a population of Turkmenistan watchers – and many Turkmens themselves – this was cause for celebration. For Turkmenistan, eliminating the *Ruhnama* from public life is like rooting out the lingering power of its author, Berdimuhamedow’s predecessor and Turkmenistan’s first President for Life, Saparmurat Niyazov. The former Soviet strongman, shielded from scrutiny by geographic obscurity, neutrality, and extreme natural gas wealth, ruled the small country of 5 million from independence in 1990 until his death in 2006. [...] When the first volume was published in 2001, Niyazov started requiring schools and libraries to hold copies of the book, then demanded that mosques give it a place equal to the *Qur’an*, and finally installed *Ruhnama* rooms in most workplaces. Then he replaced algebra, physics, and physical education with hours of *Ruhnama* studies for students, made a 16-hour course on the text a mandatory element of driving tests, and included questions on his work in university entrance exams and governmental job interviews. Disrespect for the book was made a punishable offense, and September 12, the day of the book’s publication, became a national holiday. A giant electric-powered statue of the book in the capital of Ashgabat opens at 8 PM every evening to read a passage aloud, and in 2005 a copy was launched into space alongside the Turkmen flag in the hope of enlightening extraterrestrials. At the time of his death in 2006, Niyazov reportedly claimed that reading from the book three times a day would ensure you a place in heaven, although he insisted publicly that the *Ruhnama* was not religious literature because it was not the word of God. Instead he dubbed it “spiritual literature,” directly inspired by God.” (Mark Hay i <https://web.archive.org/web/20150320041544/http://www.vice.com/read/turkmenistan-is-putting-the-ruhnama-behind-them-126>; lesedato 15.05.20)

“Laurence Boadt, writing in Eerdmans *Dictionary of the Bible* (p. 1381) notes that, even though the wisdom books are different in form and style, they have certain elements in common:

1) Little interest in the history of Israel or such aspects as the Torah as a body of laws, the covenant, the possession of the land, the temple or cult.

2) Strong interest in the order of the universe and its rules of cause and effect, the nature of time, the limits to human mastery of the world and the ability to find God revealed in creation.

3) A willingness to explore the difficult and painful mysteries of life experience: death and divine reward and punishment, the inequity of fate and destiny in people's lives, the apparent arbitrariness of divine blessing.

4) The inscrutability of God's intention and plans.

5) The education of the young in the tried and true ways of tradition.

6) An interest in developing skilled administrators, leaders and good citizens.

7) Cultivation of a life of prudent behaviour and virtue.

For Boadt certain literary genres are prominent: the proverb (Proverbs, Sirach and Ecclesiastes); the dialogue (Job, Wisdom); didactic lesson (Proverbs 1-9 and Ecclesiastes); the metaphor or allegory found often in hymns and poems (Prov 8-9; Wis 7; Sirach 24; Ezek 28)." (Kealy 2012 s. 3)

"The collection of 30 sayings in *Proverbs* 22:20, which reminds us that the Lord will plead the cause of the poor who are robbed or cursed, derives, it seems, from the *Egyptian Instruction of 'Amen-em-ope* (of which the British Museum got a copy in 1888). In this manual of behaviour for officials in that dangerous world of the royal palace, the legal moon-god Thoth is pleading the cause of the poor against the oppressors. Rulers were expected to make sure the law was carried out justly and that evildoers were punished. But it was also expected that they would protect the needy, especially the "widows and orphans"." (Kealy 2012 s. 6)

"Ma'at is a key notion, a virtually untranslatable word in Egyptian wisdom, embracing such ideas as cosmic order, truth, righteousness, justice and law. It includes both the task and the promise; also the reward which awaits one on fulfilment." (Kealy 2012 s. 25)

Wisdomslitteratur "in other Near Eastern cultures [enn Israel] especially in Egypt and Babylonia [...] seemed to have, at some points, influenced Israel's own wisdom development. Stuart Weeks in *An Introduction to the Study of Wisdom Literature* (T &T Clarke, London, 2010, p. 2) rightly points out that although the English word wisdom is "loaded with overtones of thoughtfulness and experience", the underlying Hebrew work *hokmah* means something rather simpler and is actually closer in sense to the English "skill" or "knowhow"." (Kealy 2012 s. 7)

Noen tekster “insist that a person’s mind is incapable of comprehending the meaning of life whether because of native incapacity (Job) or simply because of the expected normal “damnabilities” of human existence (Ecclesiastes). This critical and occasionally pessimistic literature is reflected in the Egyptian *‘Dispute over Suicide’* and the *‘Song of the Harper’* from the late third millennium after the end of the Old Kingdom – a troubled period of widespread questioning of the teaching on material success. In the *‘Dispute over Suicide’* a man tired of life dialogues with his Ba (alter ego, or soul) in his perplexity:

To whom can I speak today?

There are no righteous.

The land is left to those who do wrong.

To whom can I speak today?

There is lack of a trusted friend;

One has recourse to an unknown to complain to him.

To whom can I speak today?

There is no-one contented of heart;

The one with whom one went, he no longer exists.

To whom can I speak today?

I am laden with wretchedness,

For lack of a trusted friend.

To whom can I speak today?

The sin which treads the earth,

It has no end” (Kealy 2012 s. 12)

“What has been described as the most striking personification in the whole Bible is the apparently later description of wisdom as a woman (Prov 1:20-33; 8:1-35; 9:1-6). In the opening chapter of Proverbs, wisdom is described as a woman who goes throughout the city seeking disciples – she is frequently contrasted with Lady Folly, who tries to seduce the simple into her discipleship (9: 1-6). In ch. 8 wisdom speaks at length in her own name, as she cries out in the marketplace, going beyond what any prophet would have promised. She offers life to those who listen to her: “Long life is in her right hand; in her left, riches and honours.” She is described as created in the beginning before the world was established. She is God’s craftsperson (8:30), providing God with the plan of creation, God’s delight, playing before God and “finding delight in the sons of men”. If wisdom is so close to Yahweh and so involved in creation, then the obvious conclusion is that there can be no gulf between wisdom and Yahwism. Clearly, all wisdom comes from Yahweh. The well-known ch. 28 in Job asks: “where can Wisdom be found?” and speaks of not finding Wisdom. The Abyss and the sea insist that they do not possess it. [...] In the end the answer is given that God alone knows where it is but no human person can discover where it is. Kim Paffenroth (*In Praise of Wisdom*, New York, Continuum, 2004, p. 37) however insists that “This feminine portrayal of wisdom imagines a divine presence that is much more vulnerable and accessible than the masculine of father, judge, warrior, and king more usually

applied to God in the Bible, and it is an enormous and valuable addition to the biblical concept of God.” ” (Kealy 2012 s. 23-24)

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