

“Now My Eyes Have Seen You”:
Re-Visioning Job’s Wife in the Book of Job

by
Roger John Scholtz

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DECLARATION

Thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, through the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics in the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

I, Roger John Scholtz, hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work; all citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged; and it shall only be submitted for the purposes of the above-mentioned degree.

Signed: Roger J Scholtz
Roger John Scholtz (PhD Candidate)

Date: 14/12/2015

Place: Kloof

SUPERVISOR

As the Supervisor of the above-mentioned PhD Candidate, I hereby approve this thesis for submission.

Signed: G. O. West
Professor Gerald West (Supervisor)

Date: 14/12/2015

Place: Pietermaritzburg

Abstract

This thesis argues that the book of Job charts the journey of transformation undertaken by Job to a new vision of God and a liberated experience of faith; and that a key catalyst in this journey was his wife. This view of Job's wife is laid against the backdrop of the three broad interpretive traditions that can be discerned in the reception history of Job's wife – seen in the Septuagint, the Rabbinic corpus, the Testament of Job, Christian tradition, art history and modern biblical scholarship. The first tradition presents an unambiguously negative picture of her as the agent of Satan who demonstrates her unfaithfulness as a wife by tempting her husband to betray his faith. The second presents a more sympathetic picture by acknowledging that she was also a victim of great suffering with her own story of loss and grief to share. The third focuses on the productive effect of her words on Job.

One of the exceptional receptions of Job's wife is found in William Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, a work that offers a stunning visual exposition of Job's journey of transformation and imagines Job's wife as being faithfully present with him throughout it. Blake's radical re-visioning of Job's wife invites a return to the biblical text to consider afresh her prominence and influence within the book as a whole. Insights from within and behind the text indeed establish the central place and indispensable part that Job's wife occupied within the social and economic fabric of Job's world.

A detailed analysis of the words of Job's wife reveals the inherent ambiguities within them that have given rise to a range of diverse interpretations of the meaning of her speech. The particular reading suggested in this study hears in her words a biting critique of the organising paradigm of Job's world, as well as the offer of a bold alternative to the rigid order and control that marked his anxious existence. It will be argued further that each of the core elements that make up her speech – the inadequacy of Job's worldview; the (paradoxical) posture of contestation; the experience of otherness; and the centrality of unitive consciousness – finds a sublime echo in the divine speeches. In response, Job's

own ambiguous and subversive use of language – like that of his wife and Yahweh – testifies to the renewed perspective within him, and the genuine transformation that can occur at the threshold of speech and silence.

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Introduction

1. “Now my eyes have seen you!” (Job 42:5)

The title of this thesis has been taken from some of the last words spoken by Job at the end of the book bearing his name.¹ They form part of his response, not just to the visionary words of Yahweh that had addressed him in chapters 38 – 41, but also to everything that he had endured before that – the disruption, loss, pain, loneliness, anguish and despair that he had known. These particular words, spoken after all these things, point to something deeply transformational that has occurred within him, as he says, “Now my eyes have seen you!”

It could be described as a *Sawubona* moment for Job.² A moment when Job recognised that he had come to see God in a whole new way. The implication of which is that he had come to see the world, his place in it and the entire life of faith in a whole new way too. Such transformation of perspective lies at the very heart of what the book is all about. As such, the book bears witness to a journey of transformation for Job, in which he is moved from a religious paradigm that is exposed as deeply flawed, to a new form of religious consciousness released from the preoccupation with order and control, capable of recognizing and celebrating the wonder and mystery of a world where even the wild and the chaotic have a place.

The painful impetus for this journey of transformation was provided by the circumstances of sudden and catastrophic loss that Job experienced, with the destruction of much of his estate and the deaths of all ten of his children. But this tragedy was not his alone. Much

¹ An exploratory article with a similar title, presenting some of the themes of this thesis, was published recently. See Roger J. Scholtz, "I Had Heard of You...But Now My Eye Sees You': Re-Visioning Job's Wife," *Old Testament Essays* 26, no. 3 (2013).

² '*Sawubona!*' is the standard greeting in isiZulu, one of the indigenous languages spoken in Southern Africa. The word literally means, "I see you!" – which is certainly a beautiful way to say, "Hello".

of this suffering was shared by his wife, whose response thrust Job onto a new path of examination and reflection of the underlying convictions that ordered his world. Her words to him came as a disturbing disruption of everything that he had assumed – words that he initially tried to dismiss – but in the end proved to be the crucial catalytic stimulus for the journey that would be his, that ultimately enabled him to see in a new way.

His words at the end of this journey – “Now my eyes have seen you!” – may well have been directed to Yahweh. But they could legitimately be heard as referring to his wife as well, for the transformation that he experienced surely included the recognition of the vital contribution that had been hers, as well as the vitality of her own faith and worldview.

2. Objective of the study and its methodological orientation

Seeing Job’s wife in this kind of way is not the norm within the history of interpretation of the book of Job. Indeed, on the strength of how her words have been commonly interpreted, her fleeting appearance and her seemingly minor role in the development of the book as a whole; Job’s wife has been largely ignored as an insignificant character of little consequence, or else has been viciously attacked for her blasphemous betrayal and infidelity as a wife. Notable exceptions have occurred that view Job’s wife in a far more favourable light, but even these more sympathetic readings of her have largely failed to recognise her singular impact upon the book in its entirety.

The objective of this study is to rehabilitate this jaundiced view of Job’s wife. It will seek to do so through a detailed exploration of the text, paying careful attention to the signs of her presence and influence throughout the book. This will include not only a thorough examination of her words, but also an assessment of her impact in non-verbal ways. The primary methodological orientation will be a literary analytical approach that will harness the insights that emerge from the interplay of constructive and deconstructive readings of the text. Constructive literary readings of biblical texts seek to appreciate the literary

artfulness and sophistication of the text, while uncovering its essential unity, structure and coherence. Deconstructive readings pay particular attention to the internal complexities, gaps, omissions and ambiguities in a text in order to demonstrate that rather than being a unified, logical whole, the text has irreconcilably contradictory meanings. Deconstruction highlights those details of a text that promote meanings that conflict with the surface meanings of a text. It also recognises that authoritative texts are often co-opted by those in power to silence or oppress the powerless, making justice for the powerless an important value of deconstructive readings. These literary analytical approaches are particularly relevant when it comes to an assessment of Job's wife, presenting diverse perspectives that can be gathered into a dialogical conversation as to her place and purpose within the book as a whole.³

Insights from other theoretical and methodological orientations will be drawn into this conversation from time to time, where such insights would add depth, nuance and perspective to the literary analytical readings that will be pursued. These include the insights from reception history; socio-historical criticism; social-anthropological, archaeological and ethnographic criticism; inter-textual analysis; and feminist criticism.

³ For a helpful overview of constructive and deconstructive readings of biblical texts under the broad umbrella of rhetorical criticism, see Dennis T. Olson, "Literary and Rhetorical Criticism," in *Methods for Exodus*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, *Methods in Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Rhetorical criticism could be viewed as a literary approach that mediates between the constructive and deconstructive orientations to biblical interpretation. It explores the ways "...by which a text establishes and manages its relationship to its audience in order to achieve a particular effect" (Dale Patrick and Allen Scult, *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. David M. Gunn, Bible and Literature Series, 26 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990), 12.) Rhetorical criticism therefore pays careful attention to such things as the design and structure of the text; its particular use of language; the range of stylistic devices it employs; repetition and variation; the different points of view, or voices, at play in the text, including the (often anonymous) narrator's voice; the development of the plot; the portrayal of characters and their mutual relationships; the manipulation of time and the tempo of the text. (Olson, "Literary and Rhetorical Criticism," 21-24. See further, Jerome T. Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative: A Guide to Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

Each of these theoretical and methodological resources will be carefully explained as they are taken up and used in the chapters that follow.

Further to this, the theological and philosophical thought of Peter Rollins will be included in the discussion as a theoretical conversation partner, representing a contemporary voice from beyond the formal discipline of biblical studies that can add a helpful perspective on questions to do with the nature of faith, which are so central to Job's journey of transformation.

3. Overview of the structure of the thesis

This thesis begins with an assertion in chapter one that questions regarding the nature and expression of faith, rather than the issue of unjust suffering, constitute the primary concern of the book of Job. As such, Peter Rollins is introduced as a credible theoretical conversation partner to include within this study, as questions similar to these lie at the heart of his theological project. An overview will be offered of some of the elements of Rollins' thought that have particular resonance with the reading of the book of Job that will be pursued here. A recurring melodic line that sounds through much of Rollins' work could be described as a leitmotif of the sublime, an important concept with which to interpret Job's transformational encounters with the divine speeches and the words of his wife.

Chapter two deals with the reception history of Job's wife, presented in a broadly chronological sequence. Three interpretive strands can be identified, to a greater or lesser degree, throughout the different stages of this reception history. The first presents an unambiguously negative picture of Job's wife as the agent of Satan who demonstrates her unfaithfulness as a wife by tempting her husband to betray his faith. The second presents a more sympathetic picture of Job's wife by acknowledging that she was also a victim of great suffering with her own story of loss and grief to share. The third focuses on the

productive effect of her words on Job and the influence that she has on Job's response, especially within the poetry section of the book.

Chapter three explores in detail one of the significant receptions of Job's wife in art that was identified in chapter two, namely William Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job*. The importance and relevance of this stunning visual exposition of the book of Job for this study is twofold. Firstly, Blake's artistic imagination offers a radical re-visioning of Job's wife by seeing her presence in virtually every episode of the Joban drama. Secondly, the series as a whole offers an inspired, provocative and graphic portrayal of Job's journey of transformation from lifeless forms of religious piety and false perspectives of God, to a vibrantly creative and liberated religious imagination. Full page reproductions of each of the illustrations from this series are included in the Appendix.

Blake's radical re-visioning of Job's wife invites a return to the text to consider afresh her prominence and influence within the book as a whole. This is the focus of chapter four, which will consider the input from behind-the-text, within-the-text and intertextual perspectives that point to the central place and indispensable part that Job's wife occupied within the social and economic fabric of Job's world. A notable exception to the textual considerations of this chapter are the actual words of Job's wife, which form the focus of the next chapter.

The task of chapter five is to engage in a comprehensive examination of the words of Job's wife, as they are found in Job 2:9. A detailed analysis of the Hebrew will be offered, along with a range of diverse interpretations of the meaning of her speech, as well as my own readings of her words. Finally, Job's response to the words of his wife, both in the prose and the poetry will be considered.

In chapter six, the connection between the words of Job's wife and the divine speeches will be explored. It will be argued that each of the core elements of Job's wife's speech

finds a sublime echo in the divine speeches, namely: the inadequacy of Job's worldview; the (paradoxical) posture of contestation; the experience of otherness; and the centrality of unitive consciousness. Various chaos traditions in the Hebrew Bible will be presented as a backdrop for engaging the particular content of the divine speeches, most notably the Sea and cosmic waters; the world of wild animals; and Behemoth and Leviathan.

Chapter seven concludes the study by reflecting on the use of language in the book of Job, and especially Job's transformed use of language at the end of the book. The intentional ambiguity of his closing speech in Job 42:2-6, along with his unconventional and subversive use of language in the epilogue, are indicative of the transformation that he has undergone. The fractures and fissures in Job's words at the end of the book highlight the limits of language, and further point to the relationship between speech and silence in the book. The threshold of speech and silence is the final theme to be explored, especially as it relates to Job's wife.

4. Interpretive focus

It is acknowledged that the interpretive focus of this study tends towards the individual, the theological and, possibly, the psycho-spiritual. Job and his wife are approached as individuals grappling with the theological issues of faith and the psycho-spiritual ramifications thereof. While it is not the particular focus of this thesis, the reading pursued in this study does not exclude an interpretation of Job or Job's wife being viewed as representing wider social groupings or categories of people, nor does it prevent the conclusions drawn from being appropriated within a broader hegemonic and socio-economic discourse around particular issues of faith, justice, suffering, power and oppression.⁴

⁴ By way of example, a small sample of recent African biblical scholarship that reads Job within a social justice framework, informed by the social context of HIV and its associated disease of AIDS, would include Gerald O. West, *'Senzeni Na?' Speaking of God 'What Is Right' in the Context of HIV Stigmatisation* (Forthcoming); "The Poetry of Job as a Resource for the

Notwithstanding this limitation of focus, a strength of the approach followed here is that by giving careful attention to each of the principle characters as individuals in their own right, the interconnectedness and intersections between them are brought into sharp focus. This is especially true of Job's wife and the God of the divine speeches, who gathers her contribution into the sublime vision of the world that is held before Job as the means to his final transformation.

Articulation of Embodied Lament in the Context of HIV and Aids in South Africa," in *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts*, ed. Nancy C. Lee and Carleen Mandolfo (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008); Gerald O. West and Bongzi Zengele, "Reading Job 'Positively' in the Context of HIV/AIDS in South Africa.," *Concilium* 4 (2004); Sarojini Nadar, "'Barak God and Die!' Women, HIV and a Theology of Suffering.," in *Grant Me Justice! HIV/AIDS & Gender Readings of the Bible*, ed. Musa W. Dube Dube and Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2004); "Re-Reading Job in the Midst of Suffering in the HIV/AIDS Era: How Not to Talk of God," *Old Testament Essays* 16, no. 2 (2003); Ghislain Tshikendwa Matadi, *Suffering, Belief, Hope: The Wisdom of Job for an Aids-Stricken Africa*, trans. Joseph P. Newman and Robert E. Czerny (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2007); Patrick Adeso, "Suffering in Job and in an African Perspective: Exegesis of Job 42:1-6," in *Sagesse Humaine Et Sagesse Divine Dans La Bible / Human Wisdom and Divine Wisdom in the Bible*, ed. JeanBosco Matand Bulembat (Nairobi: Pan African Association of Catholic Exegetes, 2005).

Risking Delight

After the benediction, the obligatory smiles,
the handshakes and how-are-you's over tea,
when the organ's lungs
had been emptied of all breath,
the spiraling smoke of deadened altar flame
had swirled into nothingness,
and the barrel-bolts of the double oak doors
had thudded into place,
sealing the tomb.

Only then did the transformation begin...

Under the watchful eyes of knights in stained glass
I'd weave through the forest maze of pew,
and lure transept trolls into stoney stupor,
and breach the moat and wall of kneelers and rail,
climbing high into pulpit parapet
triumphant,
exultant in the view
from this castle of heroic, uninhibited delight.

When did it happen? I wonder,
when being good was confused with being alive.
When pleasure was shut away in dungeons of disapproval
with shame its jailer.
Who decided? I wonder,
that unmeasured joy is dangerous
and happiness should not be pursued
lest another path be followed
away from that of faithfulness.

Could it be that the watchful eyes of the saints
are, in fact, twinkling with mischievous light?
That even now Father Job is calling me
to 'Come on up and enjoy the view!'
And discover again what it's like risking delight.

(Roger Scholtz)

Chapter 1: Faith and the Sublime

Before God can deliver us from ourselves, we must undeceive ourselves.

(St. Augustine)

1. Introduction

It is commonly asserted that the purpose of the book of Job is to address the theological issue of innocent suffering.⁵ Kamila Blessing states it bluntly, “The book of Job is a theodicy, an attempt to defend the justice and goodness of God in spite of the existence of evil in the world.”⁶ There is ample evidence in support of the view that the questions generated by gratuitous suffering constitute the book’s primary concern – the entire Joban drama is predicated upon his experience of sudden and calamitous suffering brought about through no wrongdoing of his own; the bulk of the book is dedicated to the attempts of Job and his friends to understand, interrogate, explain, justify or condemn his experience of suffering; and the resolution (or certainly the conclusion) of the book occurs when Job’s suffering is alleviated.

Yet, other commentators have recognised further key themes in the book beyond that of innocent suffering, suggesting that the book’s over-riding purpose may be more nuanced. For example, Carol Newsom, in the introduction to her commentary on the book of Job, identifies a host of theological issues with which the book is concerned, with the clear implication that the book’s purpose cannot be confined to the sole issue of innocent suffering.⁷ This view is certainly buoyed by the divine speeches that

⁵ See, for example, Samuel Rolles Driver and George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1921, (1986)), li; Marvin H. Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, ed. W.F. Albright and D.N. Freedman, 3rd ed., The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1973), lxxiii; J. Gerald Janzen, *Job*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 1.

⁶ Kamila A. Blessing, "Job," in *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Catherine C. Kroeger and Mary J. Evans (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 273.

⁷ These include: the motivations of human piety; the nature of the relationship between God and human beings; the proper conduct of a person in suffering; the way in which claims to

make no direct reference to the question of suffering, in any form, whatsoever.

Susannah Ticciati argues that the concept of integrity, rather than the problem of evil, is the book's primary concern:

The principle agenda of the book is conceived accordingly to be a critical exploration and reappraisal of the concept of integrity, interpreted most fundamentally, as in the question posed by the Satan,⁸ in terms of a relationship to God 'for naught'. This is to shift the emphasis from what is most often seen as the burden of the book – the problem of evil or unjust suffering – to the problem of obedience, sanctification, or transformation of self before God. Not that the former is not addressed; rather, it is only through an investigation of the true nature of human obedience that an adequate theodicy – as a description of God's involvement in a world corrupted by evil and suffering – can be developed.⁹

I would challenge Ticciati's use of the language of *obedience* in describing the concept of integrity – the God of the divine speeches seems to place little emphasis on the values of obedience and submission, as will be demonstrated in chapter 6 – but would agree that the “transformation of self before God” is an indispensable dimension of integrity, properly understood. More specifically, this transformation of self requires a transformation of religious consciousness, a transformation of one's understanding of the nature of faith, a transformation of one's primary posture before God, a transformation of one's sense of orientation within the world. It is this journey

knowledge are authorized; retributive justice as the central principle of reality; the relationship between order and chaos; the source of wisdom; the univocal or polyphonic nature of truth. (Carol A. Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck et al (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 334-38.)

⁸ The Hebrew rendering is *hasśāṭān*, to be distinguished from the character of Satan that would emerge much later in Jewish and Christian theology. See footnote 62 on p.41 in ch.2 below for a discussion of this important distinction. As a way of maintaining this distinction, the transliterated form of *hasśāṭān* will be used throughout this thesis when referring to the satan, except when quoting the words of others, or when the form 'Satan' is clearly required when referencing the usage from a particular historical context.

⁹ Susannah Ticciati, *Job and the Disruption of Identity: Reading Beyond Barth* (London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 1.

of transformation undertaken by Job that is described and demonstrated in the book bearing his name.

This is not to suggest that the issue of innocent suffering is of marginal significance in the book. Far from it, as it actually represents an indispensable aspect of Job's journey to transformation. Indeed, it was Job's experience of suffering that provided the impetus for this journey in the first place. But the purpose of this journey (and hence the book as a whole) is not primarily to resolve the issues around Job's suffering, but rather to address the issues around his faith and his religious consciousness that were foregrounded by his suffering. In other words, the issue of innocent suffering functions in the book as a means to an end, not an end in itself. That end is nothing less than a profound new understanding of the very nature of faith that holds the potential of radical transformation, not just for Job, but for the entire world.

The importance and necessity of this journey in this, and every generation cannot be overstated. As Pope Francis expressed it recently:

Our world is increasingly a place of violent conflict, hatred and brutal atrocities, committed even in the name of God and of religion. We know that no religion is immune from forms of individual delusion or ideological extremism. This means that we must be especially attentive to every type of fundamentalism, whether religious or of any other kind.¹⁰

¹⁰ An excerpt from the address of Pope Francis to a joint session of the United States Congress in Washington D.C. on 24 September 2015. A full transcript of the address can be found at https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150924_usa-us-congress.html [Accessed: 28 November 2015]. The Pontiff's point about atrocities being committed in the name of God and religion is certainly valid. Care, however, should be taken not to ascribe *purely* religious motives to acts of terror. In a recent address in London just a few days after the 13 November 2015 Paris terror attacks, renowned religion scholar Karen Armstrong made the point that such attacks are never motivated solely by religious concerns, but *always* encompass other motivating elements, usually political or economic (*The Curse and the Promise: Religion and Violence with Karen Armstrong*, podcast audio, <http://www.stmartin-in-the-fields.org/podcasts/the-curse-and-the-promise-religion-and-violence-with-karen-armstrong/>. [Accessed: 30 November 2015]). Thus

While the Pope's comments have particular relevance for those extreme expressions of religious fundamentalism that are written large on the canvas of world history through acts of terror, genocide, homophobia, and the like; within the ambit of individuals, families and local communities, the destructive potential of dysfunctional forms of faith is every bit as real. The difficulty, of course, lies in this being recognised. The nature of religious belief is such that it does not yield easily to a critique of its inadequacies and tends to conceal its capacity and propensity to deceive, especially from the very ones who assent to it. At issue here is not simply the content of a particular religious belief, important as that is, but rather the manner in which belief is held.¹¹

The reading of the book of Job that will be pursued here takes, as its departure point, the recognition that the expression of faith is not always what it seems. In the case of Job this is especially true. The very first verse of the book declares that he was “blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil” (1:1).¹² As such, Job's need for a transformation of religious consciousness is not immediately apparent. Indeed, the dominant religious paradigm that undergirds the prologue – and

it would seem that religious belief is often used as the peg upon which other ideological concerns are hung.

¹¹ An interesting positive case in point would be the Pontiff's remarkable global popularity – a 2014 Pew Research Center poll ascertained unprecedented levels of approval and support for Pope Francis in many quarters of the world and across a wide cross-section of religious affiliation, including those from other faith backgrounds, as well as those who self-identify as having no religious affiliation (see <http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/12/11/pope-francis-image-positive-in-much-of-world/> [Accessed: 29 November 2015]). While public popularity is notoriously fickle, is strongly influenced by the media, and is hardly the most reliable indicator of the value of a person's contribution to society, what is fascinating is that it would appear that Pope Francis' approval can be ascribed not simply to the particular beliefs he espouses, but rather the manner in which he holds them, demonstrating his humanity, humility and respect as he does so.

¹² Unless otherwise indicated, throughout this thesis all chapter and verse references are from the book of Job, and all scripture citations are from the NRSV.

even informs the LORD's place and part within it – sees no need for such a transformation.¹³ A disruption is therefore required.

The disruption occurs, *not* through the sudden and dramatic losses that Job endured, as not even the trauma of these tragedies challenged the organizing paradigm of Job's world – the same fundamental religious consciousness demonstrated by Job prior to his tragedies is evident in his response to them (cf. 1:5, 20-21). The disruption comes through *his wife*, who challenges his worldview, his relationship to God and his underlying assumptions about the nature of faith and life itself. As a direct consequence of her rupturing presence, Job is thrust on a journey in which he enters more directly into the raw experience of suffering, confronts his religious paradigm as it is mirrored to him through the obdurate rhetoric of his friends, and comes face to face with a wholly different order of reality through his encounter with YHWH in the divine speeches. All this was catalysed by his wife, who therefore shares the primary responsibility for Job's eventual transformation.

Her insertion into the landscape of Job's faith and her critique of the inadequacy of the prevailing religious paradigm that she identified there, finds resonance in another voice from the margins with a capacity to disrupt the centre of religious belief today. It is a contemporary one belonging to Peter Rollins, an Irish philosopher, theologian, author and public speaker. In many respects a kindred spirit to Job's wife, he has been chosen as a conversation partner within this study.

Before offering some biographical background to Peter Rollins and an overview of some of the key tenets of his thought, it needs to be acknowledged that the reasons for the choice of Rollins as a conversation partner within this project are less than obvious. Indeed, a number of reservations as to the appropriateness of this choice could be cited. For example, Rollins' work ventures into philosophical and theological

¹³ However, as will be demonstrated below, there is an internal deconstructing impetus at work within the prologue itself that points to the necessity of an overhaul of the entire faith paradigm upon which the prose narrative has been constructed.

terrain that would typically fall beyond the scope of a biblical study such as this which is primarily oriented around a literary analytical approach. Quite specifically, the theological dimensions of Rollins' thought, while concerned with the phenomenon of religion in general, are deeply rooted in the Christian tradition, draw heavily on the Christ-event and have a sharp ecclesio-cultural focus. Such considerations are not of primary importance for this study.¹⁴ It could therefore be argued that Rollins' thought operates in a different register to that of this project, and that his mode of discourse, while not completely foreign, represents a distinct dialect that makes translation a challenge.

However, it could also be argued that the very fact that Rollins' voice operates in a distinct register makes him an eminently suitable conversation partner within this study. Indeed, one of the central arguments of the thesis being forwarded here is that it is precisely the voices from the margins – that of Job's wife and that of YHWH in the divine speeches – that articulate an alternative perspective that offers to Job the possibility of genuine transformation. Rollins' voice is presented here in that same vein.

This is not to suggest that the otherness of Rollins' perspective is so removed that it lacks any direct connection with the book of Job. Far from it. Although the book of Job, and certainly Job's wife, have never been explicitly addressed in his writing to date, many of the themes that are central to Rollins' theological project have a direct bearing on the reading of the book of Job that will be offered here. These include the following: religious belief's inclination to idolatry; the concept of orthodoxy; the notion of faithful betrayal; the place of doubt and unknowing within a transformed religious consciousness; the idea of revelation as concealment; the limitations of religious language and its tendency to colonize God; the rupturing of the biblical text

¹⁴ Notable exceptions to this will be found in the chapter dealing with the reception history of Job's wife (ch.2) in which perspectives from the Christian tradition form a key part of that reception history; and in the chapter on William Blake's exposition of the book of Job (ch.3), where Christological and, to a lesser extent, ecclesiastical associations feature prominently in Blake's exposition.

by the wounding presence of the Word of God; the relationship between speech and silence within authentic theological discourse.

Rollins' particular treatment of themes like these presents a perspective that can illuminate and inform a reading of the book of Job, and especially the role of Job's wife within it. This is the primary reason for his selection as a conversation partner within this study. It should be noted further that methodologically, Rollins' deconstructionism resonates with one of the key hermeneutical inclinations of this study and the various deconstructive readings that will be presented of the biblical text, most notably of the words of Job's wife.

It is important to stress that Rollins' thought is being presented *not* as the overarching theoretical framework within which this study will be sited, but simply as another voice that will be added to the somewhat eclectic array of perspectives – from the diverse disciplines of reception history, socio-historical criticism, archaeology, social-anthropology, ethnographic criticism, literary theory, inter-textual analysis and feminist criticism – that will be drawn in from time to time, as need occasions it, into the primary mode of discourse of the literary analytical engagement with the text of Job that will encompass a combination of constructive, deconstructive and rhetorical critical readings. It should be noted further that the eclectic nature of the theoretical and methodological apparatus used in this study bears a certain affinity to and congruence with the structure of the book of Job. Simply put, the multiplicity of voices within this study echoes the multiplicity of voices within the polyphonic text that is the book of Job.¹⁵

¹⁵ This will be expanded upon later in this chapter when Newsom's use of the literary theory of Mikhail Bakhtin will be discussed, particularly the notion of "dialogic truth" that may emerge from a polyphonic text. For an excellent introduction to this aspect of her thought and her particular use of Bakhtin, see Carol A. Newsom, "Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth," *The Journal of Religion* 76 (1996).

2. Biographical background to Peter Rollins¹⁶

Peter Rollins was born on 31 March 1973 in Belfast, where he grew up during the Troubles – the decades long ethno-political conflict in Northern Ireland undergirded by deep-seated sectarian divisions between Roman Catholics and Protestants.¹⁷ The recurring theme in Rollins' work of tribal identity, in its many guises, being an obstacle to authentic faith points to the shaping influence that the dominant narrative of sectarian division in his formative years had upon him.¹⁸ Raised in a nominally religious Anglican (Church of Ireland) home, at the age of 17 he had what could be termed a radical religious experience within a charismatic evangelical Protestant church. For Rollins it was a true religious experience in the sense that it fundamentally changed his view of the world. He describes it as an experience of radical negation in which everything that he had formerly held dear was stripped of its sense of value and meaning for him.

Arising out of this conversion experience he became fully involved within this charismatic evangelical community, taking on its doctrine and immersing himself in its life and practice. He subsequently registered for a course in philosophy at Queen's University, Belfast, primarily to gain the tools he felt he needed in order to convince

¹⁶ Much of the biographical information presented here is drawn from an online podcast of an interview of Peter Rollins by Noel Debien on 28 October 2012, streamed on the ABC Local show *Sunday Nights*. (*The Interview: Irish Theologian Peter Rollins*, podcast audio, Sunday Nights <http://www.abc.net.au/sundaynights/stories/s3620330.htm>. [Accessed: 26 November 2015].)

¹⁷ The Troubles are generally regarded as referring to the period of conflict in Northern Ireland from the late 1960s to the signing of the Belfast Good Friday Agreement on 10 April 1998, during which time over 3500 people were killed.

¹⁸ One of Rollins' notable ideas that seeks to respond to the reality of tribal identities, is that of the concept of suspended space (which will be discussed further below). Suspended space refers to an intentional way of people gathering together, in which they deliberately disassociate themselves from their particular religious, theological, denominational, political, national, ideological, sexual and socio-economic identities in order to engage with ideas and encounter others beyond the tribal boundaries that usually inform such interactions. The impact of suspended space lies not simply in the genuinely new ways in which ideas and other people can be heard and seen, but also in the recognition of how ingrained and pervasive such tribal identities are, making an authentically suspended space an illusion. In other words, suspended space is both possible and impossible at the same time.

others of the truth of his new-found beliefs. Gradually, as he read more and was exposed to other ideas, he started to question his preconceived ideas to the point where he began to see philosophy as a way to expand his mind and not simply justify his convictions. His formal tertiary qualifications include a B.A. Honours in scholastic philosophy, an M.A. in political theory and social criticism, and a PhD in post-structural theory, all awarded by Queen's University, Belfast.

3. Rollins' theological project

Rollins' thought is elucidated in his six published books to date,¹⁹ echoed and illustrated in his public speaking, though it is difficult to categorize or summarize his thought with any precision. Thinkers and theorists who have most influenced his thinking and who make frequent explicit appearances in his work include Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John Caputo, Jacques Derrida, Meister Eckhart, Søren Kierkegaard, Jacques Lacan, Emmanuel Lévinas, Paul Tillich and Slavoj Žižek. His earlier work drew heavily on the apophatic tradition within Christian spirituality as well as post-structural theory. More recently, his work has been located along the trajectory of radical theology that has made something of a return following its initial rise and rapid decline (certainly within popular culture) in the 1960s.²⁰

¹⁹ Peter Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God* (London: SPCK, 2006); *The Fidelity of Betrayal: Towards a Church Beyond Belief* (Brewster: Paraclete Press, 2008); *The Orthodox Heretic and Other Impossible Tales* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2009); *Insurrection: To Believe Is Human; to Doubt, Divine* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2011); *The Idolatry of God: Breaking the Addiction to Certainty and Satisfaction* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2012); *The Divine Magician: The Disappearance of Religion and the Discovery of Faith* (New York: Howard Books, 2015).

²⁰ The antecedents of radical theology naturally predate the 1960s. Early traces of the themes that radical theology picks up – such as the nature of God's existence – are evident in the work of great Christian mystics like Meister Eckhart and John of the Cross. The “death of God” trope – one of the mainstays of radical theology – entered philosophical discourse through the 19th century German philosophers, Georg Hegel and Friedrich Nietzsche. In the first half of the 20th century, Paul Tillich's alternative ontological view of God as not an existent being but rather the ground of being itself, was a key influence in the thinking of what was to emerge as the ‘death of God’ school in the 1960s. (Ruether, however, questions whether it should be construed as a ‘school’ at all, given the divergent ways in which the term ‘death of God’ was used. See Rosemary Radford Ruether, “The Death of God Revisited:

Implications for Today," in *Resurrecting the Death of God : The Origins, Influence, and Return of Radical Theology*, ed. Daniel J. Peterson and G. Michael Zbaraschuk (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 23-24.) In 1961, Gabriel Vahanian published *The Death of God* (Gabriel A. Vahanian, *The Death of God: The Culture of Our Post-Christian Era* (New York: G. Braziller, 1961).) . This was followed in 1966 by Thomas Altizer and William Hamilton's *Radical Theology and the Death of God*, in which they affirmed radical theology as "...an attempt to set an atheist point of view within the spectrum of Christian possibilities" (Thomas J.J. Altizer and William Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1966), ix.) This atheist point of view should not be confused with the traditional, 'old-fashioned' form of atheism that asserts that there is no God and there never has been – accommodating such a point of view within Christianity (or religions like Judaism or Islam for that matter), would be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible. Rather, according to Altizer and Hamilton, an understanding of Christian atheism and the 'death of God' language that attends it, could refer to a range of possible positions that could legitimately be termed 'Christian,' that might include the following:

- (i) That there once was a God to whom adoration, praise and trust were appropriate, possible, and even necessary, but that now there is no such God. If there was a God, and if there now is not, it should be possible to indicate why this change took place, when it took place, and who was responsible for it.
- (ii) That the idea of God, the word 'God' itself, together with our traditional liturgical and theological language, are in need of radical reformulation.
- (iii) That certain concepts of God, often in the past confused with the classical Christian doctrine of God, must be destroyed: for example, God as problem solver, absolute power, necessary being, the object of ultimate concern.
- (iv) That of a mystical meaning: God must die in the world so that he can be born in us. In many forms of mysticism the death of Jesus on the cross is the time of that worldly death.
- (v) That our language about God is always inadequate and imperfect. (ibid., x-xi.)

Following the publication of *Radical Theology and the Death of God*, on 8 April 1966 *Time* magazine presented some of the suppositions of radical theology to a broader audience through a cover story entitled, "Is God Dead?" This fomented a fierce public debate (or certainly a media frenzy) and a strong neo-conservative backlash, in which the tenets of radical theology were roundly dismissed within popular culture and the likes of Altizer and Hamilton were vilified, predictably without a nuanced appreciation of their actual position. As one commentator recently put it, "The label [Altizer] received of "Christian atheist" was entirely misleading, as it mistook his critique of traditional forms of theism for a denial of the reality of the divine, which was never his intention. For Altizer, God is completely emptied into the world at the crucifixion. Through absolute *kenosis*, God is thus dead, yet resurrected in the flesh of the world" (George Shields, "The Return of Radical Theology: A Critical Examination of Peterson and Zbaraschuk, Eds., *Resurrecting the Death of God*," *Process Studies* 43, no. 2 (2014): 32.). In the ensuing decades of the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries, the resurgence of the destructive and alienating force of fundamentalist religion as a global phenomenon on the one hand, and the emergence of deconstructed

Rollins has also been identified with the so-called emerging church movement,²¹ even though he would resist such identification. He prefers the term ‘pyrotheology’ as a designation of his entire theological project – a term inspired by the Spanish anarchist Buenaventura Durruti’s statement that “the only church that illuminates is a burning church.”²² Rollins explains the term thus:

As the sequoia tree requires the minerals and clearing left by forest fires in order to grow, pyrotheology prepares the ground for a more fertile faith through self-

expressions of (Christian) faith on the other, has led to the resuscitation of an interest in radical theology. As Peterson passionately expresses it in the introduction to a recent volume on radical theology:

Radical theology may have been crucified and abandoned by popular culture shortly after its inception, but its return today is absolutely imperative. With great necessity and prophetic urgency, therefore, we declare the need to speak against a culture of misguided faith by resurrecting the death of God for public reconsideration. We invite the reader – religious or otherwise – to contemplate an updated and revised version of radical theology for our time, one that *actively seeks* to eradicate the gods of fundamentalist [religion]. (Daniel J. Peterson, "Introduction: Resurrecting the Death of God," in *Resurrecting the Death of God : The Origins, Influence, and Return of Radical Theology*, ed. Daniel J. Peterson and G. Michael Zbaraschuk (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 3.)

²¹ The so-called emerging church movement (ECM), also commonly referred to as emergent or emergence Christianity, is a predominantly Western, Christian religious phenomenon – although expressions of emergence Christianity can be found in the Global South (see Phyllis Tickle, *Emergence Christianity: What It Is, Where It Is Going, Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012).) – that can be broadly identified by its critical deconstruction of modern religion, especially in its institutionalized and hierarchical expressions.

The ECM is notoriously difficult to define, not least because its participants deliberately resist definition.... Participants often refuse to define the ECM outright and prefer to refer to it as a ‘conversation’ that embraces irony and contradiction.... Participating in the conversation is seen as a quest not to arrive at final answers about faith, but rather to keep the conversation going – raising ‘unanswerable’ questions as a means of expressing faith or experiencing God.... Maintaining the conversation means that participants are not urged to assent to creeds or a check-list of beliefs and behaviours” (Gladys Ganiel and Gerardo Marti, "Northern Ireland, America and the Emerging Church Movement: Exploring the Significance of Peter Rollins and the Ikon Collective," *Journal of the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions* 1, no. 1 (2014): 29.)

²² As quoted in Slavoj Žižek, "Dialectical Clarity Versus the Misty Conceit of Paradox," in *The Monstrosity of Christ : Paradox or Dialectic?*, ed. Creston Davis (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 287.

critical dialogue and creative community events. By theoretically setting fire to the layers of belief we put over reality to protect ourselves from reality, pyrotheology seeks to ignite a sense of greater depth in life beyond the need for wholeness and certainty.

Pyrotheology explores how the events testified to in the founding documents of Christianity invite us to fully embrace the reality of our brokenness and unknowing.

Pyrotheology does not seek to draw people into some kind of fractured existence, but rather to draw out the ways in which we already are fractured; a reality that our various cultural, political and religious narratives tend to eclipse. By short-circuiting the various techniques we use to avoid such self-confrontation and encouraging us to joyfully embrace what we unveil about ourselves through the process, the claim is that we will find that death is robbed of its sting and that a life in all its fullness is possible.²³

Rollins' pyrotheology project is not limited to his academic writing, but seeks practical and lived expression in the practices of the Ikon collective that he founded in Belfast.²⁴

²³ Peter Rollins, "Pyrotheology Theory," <http://pyrotheology.com>. [Accessed: 25 November 2015]

²⁴ Ikon began its life in Belfast in 2000 as a space in which the ideas underlying Rollins' pyrotheology (even though the term was not yet in use back then) could be explored and expressed. (A second Ikon collective has since been established in New York City.) While Ikon bears some of the marks of a church community, those involved prefer to refer to it as a 'collective' – a term that better captures for them the co-operative, non-hierarchical, creative and dialogical aspects of its life. Its main gatherings offer an experience of what is termed 'transformance art' – comprising a cocktail of live music, visual imagery, poetry, soundscapes, theatre, ritual and reflection upon some aspect of life or faith – within the context of what is called 'suspended space,' in which participants are invited to lay down their tribal identities (at least figuratively) in order to encounter others (and themselves) beyond the normal binary distinctions of religious–irreligious, theist–atheist, believer–non-believer, Catholic–Protestant, conservative–liberal, straight–gay, etc. (See <http://ikonbelfast.wordpress.com/about/> [Accessed: 26 November 2015].) For a detailed description of ten such Ikon gatherings, see *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 73-137.) In addition to the main gatherings, Ikon has developed other small group events in which further

The intention here is not to attempt to offer a comprehensive analysis of Rollins' thought to date, but rather to highlight those aspects of his thinking that cast particular light on the reading of the book of Job that is to follow.

4. Rollinsian themes for reading the book of Job

4.1 The rupturing event of God's Word

The first of Rollins' ideas that I wish to explore concerns his approach to scripture, especially with respect to the antagonisms, contradictions, ambiguities and inconsistencies that seem to pervade much of the Bible. When confronted with such conflicts and tensions within the biblical text, there are two common responses. The first involves the attempt to explain these frictions away, to harmonize the text into a clear, coherent and uncontentious unity. The second involves acknowledging the conflicts but denying the divine status of the text (or indeed the Bible as a whole), on the assumption that a divinely inspired text would not exhibit such woundedness. In response to these two common options Rollins writes:

But what if we are not forced to choose between these two positions? What if we can affirm these conflicts at one and the same moment that we affirm the idea of this text being deeply branded by the white-hot presence of God?....

For, if we shift our focus, it is possible to see that these ripples and ruptures within the text, far from counting against the work as something divinely inspired, are exactly what we would expect to find from that which is marked by and born out of the very depths of God....

These fractures, fissures and impenetrable descriptions within the text point to the volcanic activity of an unspeakable Event at work there, an Event that is never directly revealed but rather is indirectly hinted at via the various narratives

dimensions of the pyrotheology project are explored. For a more comprehensive description and assessment of Ikon, see Ganiel and Marti, "Northern Ireland, America and the Emerging Church Movement: Exploring the Significance of Peter Rollins and the Ikon Collective," 32-38.

of liberation, freedom, homecoming, resurrection, salvation, peace, and rebirth that have been generated in the aftermath of an encounter with this source, themes that span the entire work.²⁵

The implications of this for a book like Job, which is so full of ambiguity and contradiction, are significant indeed. Admittedly, the question of divine inspiration is not a primary concern for the academic discipline of biblical studies, but what Rollins' approach to scripture suggests is that the very points in the text that are most fraught with interpretive difficulty *may* well be the very sites of deepest revelation. This is consistent with the approach that will be taken in this thesis with respect to those elements of the book of Job that pose the greatest interpretive challenges. Particular focus will be given to the speech of Job's wife, where her disruption of Job's moral universe, and indeed her disruption of the narrative flow of the prologue itself, is seen as a key and defining moment in Job's journey of transformation and in the interpretation of the book as a whole. These strident disruptions occasioned by the words of Job's wife are echoed later in the book in the astonishing melodic counterpoint of the divine speeches.²⁶

4.2 Belief, God, Idolatry, A/theism, Un/knowning and Faith

The next cluster of ideas to be considered revolve around the broad theme of belief in God. At the heart of Rollins' entire project is the understanding – or, as he might put

²⁵ Rollins, *The Fidelity of Betrayal: Towards a Church Beyond Belief*, 40, 42, 48.

²⁶ The relationship between the speech of Job's wife and the divine speeches within the context of the book as a whole could best be described using a term from musical theory – counterpoint – which generally involves distinct, independent, yet harmonious lines of music that add their voices to the overall structure of the polyphony. In the words of John Rahn:

It is hard to write a beautiful song. It is harder to write several individually beautiful songs that, when sung simultaneously, sound as a more beautiful polyphonic whole. The internal structures that create each of the voices separately must contribute to the emergent structure of the polyphony, which in turn must reinforce and comment on the structures of the individual voices. The way that is accomplished in detail is... 'counterpoint'. (John Rahn and Benjamin Boretz, *Music inside Out: Going Too Far in Musical Essays*, ed. Saul Ostrow, Critical Voices in Art, Theory and Culture (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 2000), 177.)

it, the lack of understanding – of what is meant by the terms ‘belief,’ ‘God’ and ‘faith’.²⁷ Rollins critiques the common tendency to approach God as an object of religious belief, in which the believer, motivated either by fear or greed or a combination of both, considers God as someone (or something) that enters the believer’s world from time to time in order to fulfil a particular utilitarian role of offering meaning, security, certainty or satisfaction. Dietrich Bonhoeffer described this understanding of God as *deus ex machina*.²⁸ Such a view effectively reduces God to an idol, though most people, predictably, are not consciously aware of the idolatrous nature of their belief.²⁹

This is the focus of Rollins’ book *The Idolatry of God: Breaking the Addiction to Certainty and Satisfaction*. In it he argues that the common Christian presentation of

²⁷ In her discussion of these themes, Karen Armstrong makes a simple, yet helpful distinction between belief and faith. She writes, “There is a distinction between *belief* in a set of propositions and a *faith* that enables us to put our trust in them.” (Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), xvii.)

²⁸ The term *deus ex machina* (which literally means “God out of the machine”) derives from ancient Greek theatre, where an actor would be lowered onto the stage with ropes or cables in a box-like contraption as a way of signifying the entry of a supernatural being. This was often used as a way to resolve an impasse, overcome some conflict or introduce a new element necessary to advance the plot. Accordingly, the supernatural being was not an organic part of the story but was a contrived extrinsic device that would be dropped into the story in an intrusive and rather clumsy way to perform a particular role, before being removed. (Rollins, *Insurrection: To Believe Is Human; to Doubt, Divine*, 12.)

²⁹ In popular culture an idol is usually identified with a physical object, such as a statue. This is what Rollins refers to as an aesthetic idol – the Golden Calf in the book of Exodus being a famous biblical example. But he also refers to what he calls conceptual idolatry, in which God is reduced to an idea. He writes, “...the word ‘idolatry’...derives from the Greek term *eidōs* (meaning essence). This helps us get to the heart of what idolatry actually is. The term can refer to any attempt that would render the essence of God accessible, bringing God into either aesthetic visibility (in the form of a physical structure, such as a statue) or conceptual visibility (in the form of a concept, such as a theological system)” (*How (Not) to Speak of God*, 11-12.). Part of the genius of the biblical revelation is the way in which it presents many varied and often contradictory descriptions of God as a way of safeguarding against the conceptual idolatry that would inevitably ensue from homogeneous renderings of the divine. As such, the ‘truth’ of God attested to in the Bible is, to use the Bakhtinian term, a ‘dialogical truth’.

Christ as the ‘answer’ to the human experiences of darkness and dissatisfaction is a distortion that obscures the real purpose of Christ’s coming. He writes:

For what if we cannot grasp the manner in which Christ is the solution to the problem of our darkness and dissatisfaction because he is *not* the solution? What if, instead of being the solution (i.e. the one who offers a way for us to gain certainty and satisfaction), he actually confronts us as *a problem*, a problem that places every attempt to find a solution for these ailments into question? To put this another way, what if Christ does not fill the empty cup we bring to him, but rather smashes it to pieces – bringing freedom, not from our darkness and dissatisfaction, but in the very act of embracing them.... [in which they are] *stripped of their weight and robbed of their sting*.³⁰

As a response to the idolatrizing tendencies of religious belief to reduce God to an object that fulfils our need for meaning, security, certainty and satisfaction, Rollins draws on the interplay between the cataphatic and apophatic traditions in Christian spirituality to describe God as both known and unknown – which he represents as the un/known God.³¹ He rejects the binary oppositions of transcendence and immanence

³⁰ *The Idolatry of God: Breaking the Addiction to Certainty and Satisfaction*, 4.

³¹ Apophatic theology, also known as the *via negativa* or negative theology, is a form of theological discourse that attempts to describe God by way of negation, to speak only in terms of what God is not.

...the apophatic tradition arose early in the history of Christian thought. Emphasizing the importance of reaching “beyond” (*apo*) every “image” (*phasis*) one might use to speak of God, the movement emerged as a prophetic critique of theological presumption. It insisted that any similarity one might find between the Creator and some aspect of creation could not be expressed without acknowledging a still great dissimilarity. God may be like a rock in the way Yahweh stands firm for Israel, but there are far more ways in which God is not like a rock. Modesty of expression, therefore, must be the hallmark of theological language.

As a mode of speaking about God, the apophatic tradition guarded the boundaries of the theological enterprise, emphasizing the ineffable and incomprehensible character of the divine. (Belden C. Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 62.)

By contrast, cataphatic theology, also known as the *via positiva*, uses positive language to describe what God is believed to be. In the traditions of Eastern Orthodoxy, cataphatic

as competing ways of thinking about God, asserting instead that these are one and the same point – the two sides of a single coin – as God’s transcendence is both revealed and concealed in God’s immanence.³² In other words, God is known as the unknown – that built into the very fabric of authentic belief is the element of disbelief, that genuine faith is a/theistic (embracing the theistic element of belief as well as the atheistic element of disbelief, at the same time).³³

This recognition acts as an effective theological response to fundamentalism, as it unsettles the dark heart of its self-certain power.... fundamentalism can be understood as a particular way of believing one’s beliefs rather than referring to the actual content of one’s beliefs.³⁴ It can be described as holding a belief

theology is regarded as an important stepping stone on the path to spiritual maturity as a necessary precursor to apophatic theology.

³² Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 24-25.

³³ In developing this argument, Rollins draws heavily on Christ’s cry of dereliction and abandonment on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34). Rollins writes, “What we witness here is a form of atheism: not intellectual – Christ directly addresses God as he dies – but a felt loss of God.... This is a profoundly personal, painful, and existential atheism. Not an atheism that arises from rational reflection upon an absence of divinity but rather one that wells up from the trauma of personally experiencing that absence.... On the cross, Christ undergoes the deepest, most radical form of divine loss, one that is *experienced*.” (*Insurrection: To Believe Is Human; to Doubt, Divine*, 21.)

³⁴ The manner in which belief is held lies at the heart of Rollins’ understanding of orthodoxy. The word ‘orthodoxy’ is derived from two Greek words – *ortho*, meaning “right” or “correct”; and *doxa*, meaning “belief”. (It should be noted that this Greek word *doxa* was used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word for ‘glory’ (*kavōd*), and so it came to assume this further meaning.) As such, ‘orthodoxy’ has commonly been understood to be referring to the embracing of right belief, distinct from heretical belief. Rollins advocates a different understanding of orthodoxy as referring not to ‘right belief’ but rather ‘believing in the right way,’ that does not set it in a binary opposition to heresy but acknowledges (and even embraces) the fact that when it comes to our beliefs in God, we all get God wrong.

Thus we break down the binary opposition between orthodoxy and heresy by understanding the term ‘orthodox’ as referring to someone who engages with the world in the right way – that is, in the way of love. Here religious knowledge is not something that is opposed to love, nor secondary to it; rather, the only religious knowledge worth anything *is* love. By understanding orthodoxy in this manner, it is no longer distanced from what the liberation theologians call ‘orthopraxis’.... This means that the question, ‘What do you believe?’ must always be accompanied by the question, ‘How do you believe?’ We are left then with the idea of orthodoxy and orthopraxis as two terms

system in such a way that it mutually excludes all other systems, rejecting other views in direct proportion to how much they differ from one's own. In contrast, the a/theistic approach can be seen as a form of disbelieving what one believes, or rather, believing *in* God while remaining dubious concerning what one believes *about* God (a distinction that fundamentalism is unable to maintain.)³⁵

In similar vein, Simon Critchley suggests that the true nature of faith is revealed more clearly in the faith of those who do not assent to a particular set of religious creeds or dogma, and that such faith is possibly more *faithful* precisely because it is *faithless*, lacking the sureties of religion.³⁶

All of which has much to say to the notions of faith and God and the expressions of belief on display in the book of Job. The question posed at the outset of the book, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" (1:9) goes straight to the issue of idolatrous faith. It probes the possibility that Job's religious practice may be motivated by his need for certainty and satisfaction, and that within Job's religious paradigm, God has become an idol. The question itself, originating as it does in the heavenly realm, suggests that there may well be more to Job's remarkable piety than what is immediately apparent.

What is more, this question cannot be settled in heaven. Within the constructed moral universe of the prologue that establishes a binary division between heaven above and earth below, this is a truly remarkable admission – that questions about the true nature of faith cannot be answered in heaven without reference to the world below, that the very essence of faith cannot be known apart from the lived experience of grounded human reality. Simply put, the God of heaven (in the prologue) is unable to answer the

which refer to a loving engagement with the world that is mediated, though not enslaved by, our reading of the Bible. (*How (Not) to Speak of God*, 66.)

³⁵ Ibid., 26.

³⁶ Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 2. For a helpful engagement with these ideas of faith and faithlessness, with reference to the work of Rollins, see Katharine Sarah Moody, "The Faith of the Faith/Less?: Emerging Experiments in a/Theistic Association," *Political Theology* 14, no. 4 (2013).

question that will establish whether this God, in Job's experience, is truly God or merely an idol. Thus the very notion of God constructed by the text is deconstructed by it at the same time. Indeed, when *haśśāṭān* suggests that Job would curse God if all of his provisions of certainty and satisfaction were suddenly removed (cf. 1:11), at issue is not simply a question about the true nature of Job's faith, but also a question about the true or idolatrous nature of God.

On the face of it, the suffering inflicted upon Job and the manner of his response provides a resounding answer in the affirmative to the question still hanging in heaven. The authenticity of Job's disinterested faith and the God in which he has placed it, have been clearly established. This vindication should have been the end of the matter. Yet, once again, what is constructed within the text is immediately deconstructed. Surprisingly, the answer provided on earth does not suffice in heaven – the revelation of Job's faith is deemed to be inadequate.³⁷ A further (better) test for Job is required so that the nature of his faith can be finally and definitively known. Heaven's assumption that the lack of a conclusive answer was the fault of the inadequacy of the first test obscures the deeper truth that the real problem lay with the fundamental presupposition underlying the entire project in the first place – that 'faith' is something that can be determined in a rational and objective way. What emerges is that the nature of Job's faith can never be definitively and absolutely known. The text itself acknowledges this in presenting Job as both known (cf. 1:8; 2:3) and unknown (cf. 1:11-12; 2:5-6).

The religious paradigm that informs the discourse in heaven is one that cannot abide the uncertainty of unknowing. Within this paradigm, unknowing is regarded as a deficiency that needs to be overcome in order for faith to be established with confidence. Yet, the pursuit of such certainty is ultimately an exercise in futility that can never be satisfied, as the need for repeated tests of Job makes plain. Therefore, the conflict in heaven is not primarily between God and *haśśāṭān*, but rather between the

³⁷ This touches on the idea of revelation as concealment, an important one in Rollins' thought, which will be discussed shortly.

religious consciousness that they espouse (which they both share) and faith's resistance to rational, objectified categorization.

This dead-end is broken in the prologue by the appearance of Job's wife, who embodies a radically different consciousness as she articulates a scandalous challenge to the entire religious paradigm that is pre-occupied with the illusions of certainty and control. This is no *deus ex machina*, a contrivance that is introduced to resolve an impasse in the narrative (of which the text is not yet self-consciously aware), but rather the opposite. She is an organic part of Job's story, without being co-opted by the consciousness in which the story is embedded. With truly revolutionary courage, she offers to Job the option of letting go of his beliefs so that he might come to a new discovery of God and the meaning of faith.³⁸ As Rollins has put it:

Every time we lose the beliefs that tell us why we're here, where we're going, what we are about, everything disappears and we are left experiencing a void. And then we discover God in the midst of it. We lose God as the guarantor of meaning, the guarantor of satisfaction, the God who makes sure everything's fine and we discover God in the midst of love – when we give food to the hungry and water to the thirsty, when we embrace this world and celebrate it. So we lose God as an idol, and find God in the midst.³⁹

In concluding this section, let me share one of Rollins' parables from his book *The Orthodox Heretic and Other Impossible Tales*.⁴⁰ The parable is entitled, 'Finding Faith':

³⁸ This aspect of Job's wife's character and role, hitherto largely unexplored, has much to offer readings of the book of Job within a social-justice, liberationist register, where Job is seen not merely as an individual but as a representative of all who suffer unjustly. For readings of Job in that register see, for example, Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, trans. Michael J. O'Connell (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987); Elsa Tamez, "Job: 'Even When I Cry out "Violence!" I Am Not Answered.'," in *The Return of the Plague*, ed. José-Oscar Beozzo and Virgil Elizondo (London: SCM Press, 1997).

³⁹ "Interview," *Reform Magazine*, June 2012, 13.

⁴⁰ This book is a collection of thirty-three original parables, accompanied by commentary, that is "...designed to blow apart any dogmatic, religious defences that protect us from

There was once a fiery preacher who possessed a powerful but unusual gift. He found that, from an early age, when he prayed for individuals, they would supernaturally lose all of their religious convictions. They would invariably lose all of their beliefs about the prophets, the sacred Scriptures, and even God. So he learned not to pray for people but instead limited himself to preaching inspiring sermons and doing good works.

However, one day while travelling across the country, the preacher found himself in conversation with a businessman who happened to be going in the same direction. This businessman was a very powerful and ruthless merchant banker, one who was honoured by his colleagues and respected by his adversaries.

Their conversation began because the businessman, possessing a deep, abiding faith, had noticed the preacher reading from the Bible. He introduced himself to the preacher and they began to talk. As they chatted together this powerful man told the preacher all about his faith in God and his love of Christ. He spoke of how his work did not really define who he was but was simply what he had to do.

“The world of business is a cold one,” he confided to the preacher, “and in my line of work I find myself in situations that challenge my Christian convictions. But I try, as much as possible, to remain true to my faith. Indeed, I attend a local church every Sunday, participate in a prayer circle, engage in some youth work, and contribute to a weekly Bible study. These activities help to remind me of who I really am.”

After listening carefully to the businessman’s story, the preacher began to realize the purpose of his unseemly gift. So he turned to the businessman and said, “Would you allow me to pray a blessing into your life?”

The businessman readily agreed, unaware of what would happen. Sure enough, after the preacher had muttered a simple prayer, the man opened his eyes in astonishment.

“What a fool I have been for all these years!” he proclaimed. “It is clear to me now that there is no God above, who is looking out for me, and that there are no sacred texts to guide me, and there is no Spirit to inspire and protect me.”

As they parted company the businessman, still confused by what had taken place, returned home. But now that he no longer had any religious beliefs, he began to find it increasingly difficult to continue in his line of work. Faced with the fact that he was now just a hard-nosed businessman working in a corrupt system, rather than a man of God, he began to despise his activity. Within months he had a breakdown, and soon afterward gave up his line of work completely. Feeling better about himself, he then went on to give to the poor all the riches he had accumulated and began to use his considerable managerial expertise to challenge the very system he once participated in, and to help those who had been oppressed by it.

One day, many years later, he happened upon the preacher again while walking through town. He ran over, fell at the preacher’s feet, and began to weep with joy. Eventually he looked up at the preacher and smiled, “Thank you, my dear friend, for helping me discover my faith.”⁴¹

⁴¹ Rollins, *The Orthodox Heretic and Other Impossible Tales*, 57-60. This parable speaks powerfully to the question of how identity is constructed, and the role that religious belief plays in how people self-identify. In his commentary on Gal 3:28 – “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” – Rollins contends that this text is not making a case for one new super identity (‘Christian’) that subsumes all other identities, but rather points to the relinquishment of the very category of identity itself. He writes:

In other words, when we identify as followers of Christ we are not laying down all our other identities (republican or democrat, rich or poor, gay or straight) in order to affirm only one as truly important. Rather we lay down every identity, enacting what, in theology, is called kenosis. This is where we partake in Christ who became nothing, divesting himself of everything to become a servant.

Here we do not lay down our identity only to pick up our new identity in Christ. *Rather it is in laying down all our identities that we directly identify with Christ*

4.3 Faithful betrayal

In light of the concepts of belief, faith and God explored above, Rollins develops the idea of betrayal as an act of faithfulness. This is a key focus of his book *The Fidelity of Betrayal: Towards a Church Beyond Belief*. The betrayal to which Rollins refers is not merely the betrayal of false ideas of God or fundamentalist forms faith. The idea of that kind of betrayal is a rather mundane insight, as it is readily apparent that the betrayal (or disavowal) of that which is inherently false is a necessary precursor to liberation and transformation. A far more radical insight is that the betrayal of even authentic beliefs and healthy expressions of faith is an indispensable dimension of true faithfulness.⁴² This would be one way of reading the teaching of Christ that those who are willing to lose their life for the sake of the gospel will find it.⁴³

The notion of faithful betrayal has particular bearing on the reading of Job's wife. The primary reason for the vilification of Job's wife in the history of interpretation is that her words have been interpreted as a betrayal of her husband, or as an incitement for him to betray his faith.⁴⁴ But alternative ways of reading 'the betrayal of Job's wife' are possible. The first, which lies at the heart of this study, is that Job's wife was indeed calling Job to betray his prevailing religious paradigm as a form of faith that was holding him captive and robbing him of life in all its fullness.⁴⁵ In doing so, she was demonstrating her love and faithfulness to him. A second alternative goes even further – being located within the 'death of God' tradition of radical theology referred

("An Economy of Nobodies and Nothings," <http://peterrollins.net/2010/02/an-economy-of-nobodies-and-nothings/>. [Accessed: 1 December 2015]).

⁴² To illustrate his point, Rollins offers a provocative, yet not thoroughly convincing, reading of the betrayal of Judas Iscariot as a selfless act of love in which both Jesus and Judas were active participants (*The Fidelity of Betrayal: Towards a Church Beyond Belief*, 13-25.) Somewhat more compelling is the parable that Rollins has written to convey this idea entitled 'The mission of Judas' (*The Orthodox Heretic and Other Impossible Tales*, 100-03.)

⁴³ Mk 8:35; cf. Mt 16:25; Lk 9:24; Jn 12:24-25.

⁴⁴ The history of interpretation of Job's wife will be dealt with in detail in ch.2.

⁴⁵ In ch.5 below, which focuses on the words of Job's wife, this idea will be developed and discussed in detail.

to above – in that her words urging Job to “Curse God and die!” (2:9) represented a radical negation / disavowal / betrayal of the very idea of God.

The following parable by Rollins is entitled, ‘Betrayal’:

One day the temple Master called his youngest disciple to sit and eat with him in private. This disciple had been a devotee for many years and had carefully followed the ways of his teacher, learning to emulate the life of the Master as best he could.

But the great Master was now an elderly man and knew that he was close to death. He was fond of this disciple, yet he feared that the disciple was still some way from achieving enlightenment – not despite the Master’s diligence but rather precisely because of it. And so, as they sat together the Master addressed his disciple, saying, “You have been a thoughtful and dedicated follower of my teachings for many years, and you may well one day become a great teacher. However, I sense that you are in danger of betraying me in your thoughts and actions.”

“Never,” replied the disciple in shock. “Since I was young I have followed your ways, never deviating from the path that you have ploughed. I never cease to reflect upon your words, and I never tire of engaging in the rituals and prayers that you have taught. I swear to you that I would never betray you, my great teacher.”

“But you fail to understand, my young friend,” replied the Master. “The fact that you have never betrayed my teachings, and the fact that you swear never to betray them: this is to betray them already.”⁴⁶

4.4. Revelation

A final theme from Rollins’ thought to be briefly considered is his understanding of revelation. Revelation, in the biblical-theological sense of the word, is typically understood as that which reveals some sort of truth about God or the nature of faith.

⁴⁶ Rollins, *The Orthodox Heretic and Other Impossible Tales*, 117-18.

The common view of revelation is that its impetus is towards disclosure, bringing the things of God to light, making God known, making God more intelligible and accessible, even making God manifest. The opposite of revelation, thus understood, would be concealment.

For Rollins, however, concealment is an intrinsic dimension of revelation. Indeed, he speaks of revelation *as* concealment, but not in the sense that implies that nothing can ever be known of God who remains completely hidden. Rather, Rollins understands revelation as the overpowering light that reveals God *as* hidden, that makes God known *as* unknown.⁴⁷ “[R]evelation is often treated as if it can be deciphered into a dogmatic system rather than embraced as the site where the impenetrable secret of God transforms us.”⁴⁸ This understanding of revelation challenges forms of faith that are rooted in certitude, assured in its beliefs, confident in its convictions with little or no space for the presence of doubt. For these, revelation comes as a seismic event that shakes the very foundations of faith in rupturing, disturbing and bewildering ways.

This was Job’s experience that came to him, initially, through the embryonic revelatory event of his wife’s disruptive words, and then, more fully, through the revelatory encounter with God in the divine speeches. Between these two revelatory events, the other elements of the book – the human dialogue between Job and his friends (chs. 4-27),⁴⁹ Job’s soliloquy (chs. 29-31) and the Elihu speeches (chs. 32-37) – all demonstrate in varying ways a degree of resistance to this kind of revelation, through the self-assured and arrogant assertion of very particular understandings of God that were assumed to be incontrovertible.

The primary problem with idolatry is...that it falsely claims to understand the God that it is connected to.... If we fail to recognize that the term ‘God’ always

⁴⁷ *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 17.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Job’s opening soliloquy in the poetry section (ch. 3) is often treated as part of the human dialogue that follows in the ensuing chapters. I emphatically reject that association, as the dynamic at work within Job’s religious consciousness in ch.3 is of a wholly different order to that which unfolds in the human dialogue. This will be explained and discussed in ch. 5

falls short of that towards which the word is supposed to point, we will end up bowing down before our own conceptual creations forged from the raw materials of our self-image, rather than bowing before the one who stands over and above that creation. Hence Meister Eckhart famously prays, ‘God rid me of God’, a prayer that acknowledges how the God we are in relationship with is bigger, better and different than our understanding of that God.⁵⁰

5. The sublime

The discussion above of some of Rollins’ theological ideas bears out what was alluded to at the outset of the previous section – that his enigmatic thought is difficult to categorize or summarize.⁵¹ Notwithstanding this, it is possible to discern a recurring melodic line that sounds through much of his work that could be described as a leitmotif of the sublime. Rollins is drawn to the thresholds where rationality dissolves into mystery, and where the certainty of belief gives way to the wonder of doubt. This is evident in his use of language and the distinctive orthography he uses to convey it, frequently using terms in ways that embody the tension between the polarities they allude to and the threshold they define – for example, a/theism, a/theology, un/known, ir/religious, dis-course, un/belief, wHole, faith/less, Godisnowhere (God is nowhere / God is now here).⁵² Undergirding all of these ideas is Rollins’ sense of the disrupting / erupting event of God that draws human religious conviction and endeavour beyond itself into the realm of divine mystery. For these reasons, the melodic theme running through Rollins’ work could be described as a leitmotif of the sublime.

⁵⁰ Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 18-19.

⁵¹ For a further treatment of Rollins’ thought, especially within the context of the Continental and Post-Continental philosophy of religion traditions, see the recent publication by Katharine Sarah Moody, *Radical Theology and Emerging Christianity: Deconstruction, Materialism and Religious Practices*, ed. Patrice Haynes and Steven Shakespeare, *Intensities: Contemporary Continental Philosophies of Religion* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

⁵² Rollins’ penchant for using language in deliberately ambiguous ways is well illustrated in the titles of some of his books, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, *The Fidelity of Betrayal* and *The Orthodox Heretic*.

It is important to note that in everyday speech the word 'sublime' is commonly used as a vague superlative. But in the academic disciplines of philosophy, art history, literary studies or cultural criticism it has a range of more specific meanings. Of the term Luke White writes:

It might be used to refer to the transcendent, the numinous, the uplifting or the ecstatic. More particularly, it is also used to refer to the awe-inspiring, the grandiose or great. For some, the sublime is that which is terrifyingly vast or powerful. For others, the sublime is that which is unrepresentable, ungraspable or unimaginable. Above all, the sublime has come to refer to the 'rush' of intense aesthetic pleasure paradoxically stemming from the displeasure of fear, horror or pain.⁵³

In 1757, Edmund Burke published *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of Our Feelings of the Sublime and Beautiful*, in which he presented the sublime and the

⁵³ Luke White, "A Brief History of the Notion of the Sublime," http://www.lukewhite.me.uk/sub_history.htm. [Accessed: 3 December 2015]. The history of the usage of the term, or certainly the concept to which the term refers, can be traced back to the third century A.D. and the work of a Greek rhetorician by the name of Longinus that was entitled *Peri Hupsous*. The central thesis of this work focused on the capacity of great poetry or rhetoric not simply to persuade an audience in a rational way, but to captivate them, ravish them, enrapture them, and sweep them away in a fit of 'transport'. This was what Longinus described as the experience of *hupsous* (the sublime). In 1674 this work was translated into French by Nicolas Boileau who entitled it *Du Sublime* ('of the sublime'), thereby introducing the concept of the sublime into public and academic discourse. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it became a favourite term for articulating the radically new forms of taste for art and for the aesthetic appreciation of nature that were emerging at that time:

...the term was used to elevate the taste for ruins, for the Alpine, for storms, deserts and oceans, the supernatural and the shocking. It was through the notion of the sublime that the taste developed for the rugged rather than the harmonious or smooth, the forceful rather than the restrained or measured, the wild rather than the orderly or symmetrical, the primitive rather than the sophisticated.... To understand the extent of the legacy of the notion of the sublime, we need only imagine a time when these effects of art (or the contemplation of nature) were not valued or enjoyed: when mountains, for example, were not impressive and awe inspiring, but merely monstrous (and inconvenient) carbuncles disfiguring the symmetry of the earth. (ibid.)

beautiful not merely as different but as *opposing* categories. Burke argues that the basis of an experience of the sublime is some modification of terror or horror that derives from our sense of mortality – for example, the delight that ensues from finding oneself in the presence of significant danger and yet being preserved. For the empirically minded Burke, the concept of the sublime was largely removed from the religious and numinous associations that had been attached to it, though the response of terror and then wonder to a divine epiphany that is well-attested within the biblical narrative certainly accords with Burke’s basic thesis. His analysis can therefore be a helpful point of reference in considering Job’s experiences of the sublime.⁵⁴

The assertion that the melodic theme running through Rollins’ work could be described as a leitmotif of the sublime presents an important point of connection between Rollins and the work of Carol Newsom, that will be referenced throughout this study. Newsom uses the notion of the sublime as one of her interpretive keys for unlocking the divine speeches within the book of Job.⁵⁵ She writes:

Although one often speaks of a sublime object or text, properly speaking the sublime is not an object but rather an experience that emerges from an encounter with something.... this experience is one of “being on the outer fringe of our existence.” Its locus is “at the threshold from the human to that which transcends the human; which borders on the possible and the impossible; the knowable and the unknowable; the meaningful and the fortuitous; the finite and the infinite.”⁵⁶ Consequently, the sublime is classically described in terms of a crisis of understanding. Crucial to the sublime is the perceiving subject’s sense of being

⁵⁴ For an overview of the history of the concept of the sublime, as well as its application within different disciplines and areas of study, see Timothy M. Costelloe, *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For a similar historical overview together with a discussion of some of the major theorists of the sublime, see Philip Shaw, *The Sublime*, ed. John Drakakis, *The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2006).

⁵⁵ To be more accurate, Newsom uses the term ‘tragic sublime’ to describe Job’s encounter with God in the divine speeches – a term informed by Burke’s analysis of the sublime being connected to experiences of terror, as discussed above.

⁵⁶ Quoting Lap-chuen Tsang, *The Sublime: Groundwork Towards a Theory* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1998), 3, 6.

overwhelmed by something too immense, vast, or powerful to be grasped by the categories available to the mind. More than merely a cognitive crisis, it is a crisis of subjectivity itself. And yet what is in some respects a negative experience is paradoxically accompanied by a sense of “transport” or “elation,” or a moment in which the self is “realized” in a new way. Not surprisingly, the divine speeches in Job have often served as parade examples of the sublime.⁵⁷

Newsom’s use of the sublime is situated within the broader context of her study of the book of Job as a polyphonic text that evinces a dialogical form of truth, concepts she draws from the work of Mikhail Bakhtin.⁵⁸ Bakhtin draws a fundamental distinction between dialogic truth and monologic truth.⁵⁹ Dialogic truth arises in a polyphonic text (a text of many voices) at the very point where several unmerged voices intersect.

⁵⁷ Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: University Press, 2003), 236-37.

⁵⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin (1895 – 1975) was a Russian literary theorist who has been described variously as “the greatest Russian humanist of the twentieth century” and “the greatest theoretician of literature in the twentieth century” (Tzvetan Todorov, cited in Peter Slater, “Bakhtin on Hearing God’s Voice,” *Modern Theology* 23, no. 1 (2007): 1, 18.) His work, however, only gained currency in the Francophone and Anglophone world following his death. Since the 1980’s, Bakhtin’s thought has experienced a surge of popularity in the West, with his literary theories being applied across a host of diverse academic disciplines, not least of which would be biblical studies. For a helpful introduction to some of the ways in which Bakhtin’s thought is being appropriated in biblical studies, see Barbara Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship: An Introduction* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000). It is beyond the scope of this study to provide an overview of Bakhtin’s literary theories, or even a summary of his ideas. Discussion of Bakhtin will be limited to Newsom’s particular use of some of his key concepts, which will be dealt with in the main body of the text above. For a broader discussion on Bakhtin and genre theory, one of the key ways in which Newsom uses Bakhtin, see Roland Boer, ed. *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007).

⁵⁹ Monologic truth exhibits three significant qualities. Firstly, it is essentially propositional, composed of distinct, independent thoughts or ideas that could be articulated or repeated by anyone without affecting the ‘truth’ of what they convey. Secondly, monologic truth seeks unity and thus tends to gravitate towards systemization. Thirdly, monologic truth can be comprehended by a single consciousness. “Perhaps it would be more apt to say that the proposition or system of monologic thought is structured in such a way that, even if it is actually the product of many minds, it is capable of being spoken by a single voice” (Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*, 21-22.).

It emerges out of the conversational interaction between these diverse voices and conveys a perspective that no single voice in the dialogue can articulate on its own. As such, dialogic truth remains fundamentally open, exhibiting the quality of “unfinalizability” (to use the Bakhtinian term). Such truth implies a sense of transport beyond one’s own convictions to that which arises in the intersection of one’s own voice with that of the other.

As such, the truth that is embodied in an experience of the sublime is essentially dialogical in its nature, for the sublime implies an encounter with the other beyond the limits of the self. This is where Newsom’s use of the concept of the sublime to make sense of Job’s encounter with God in the divine speeches is so fitting and helpful, as it points to the essentially dialogical nature of that encounter. However, in my view she does not go far enough in her appropriation of the concept. For Job’s experience of the sublime in the divine speeches should not be understood as an isolated event confined to that particular moment, unrelated to all that had gone before and disconnected from other voices that had played a part in hinting towards what Job was now experiencing. Quite specifically, the genesis of this sublime experience for him should rightly be traced back to the words of his wife that utterly ruptured his worldview and drew him, in a deeply disorienting way, to the terrifying thresholds of belief and doubt, faithfulness and faithlessness, blessing and cursing. The intimations of the sublime in her words are borne out in the seven days of deep, brooding silence that Job falls into (2:13), and his resultant impassioned cry from the edge of the abyss (3:3-26) as he stares into the void of an obliterated existence. The rationality inherent in the discourse with his friends (4 – 27) and his own self-justifications (29 – 31), draws Job back from the abyss, until the appearance of the Lord reactivates the sublime within him, finally transporting him across the threshold that marks the culmination of his journey of transformation.

6. Conclusion

This thesis takes as its point of departure the assumption that the book of Job is, first and foremost, an exploration of the shaping influence of religious consciousness on

the nature of faith and its transformation, undertaken within the arena provided by Job's experience of innocent suffering. As such, there is an inescapably *theological* dimension to this study, even as its primary methodological orientation is a literary analytical engagement with the text of Job, while drawing on an eclectic array of other theoretical and methodological apparatus from time to time, as required by the polyphonic nature of the text.

The post-structural theological and philosophical thought of Peter Rollins – with his particular attention to the issues of religious belief, God and faith – make him a worthwhile (if unconventional) conversation partner in this study. Rollins' unique contribution lies in his sharp analysis of the operant dynamics in dysfunctional forms of faith, and the rupturing event of God that offers the hope of genuine transformation for religious consciousness. His interest in the thresholds between what is known and unknown, belief and doubt, presence and absence, the secular and the sacred, immanence and transcendence, and the dialogical relationship between these polarities, draws his work into the orbit of the sublime. This connects him with the work of Carol Newsom in her masterful publication *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*, in which she explores the sublime within the broader context of the dialogical nature of truth that is evident in the book of Job.

This frame invites a detailed exploration of Job's wife as a catalytic agent of the transformation of Job's religious consciousness, whose rupturing intervention thrust him on a journey beyond himself into the sublime. However, this is not how Job's wife has commonly been interpreted. In the following chapter the reception history of Job's wife will be explored, which will reveal the complexities inherent within an honest reading of this largely misunderstood and unappreciated character.

Chapter 2: The Reception History of Job's Wife

1. Introduction

A cursory glance at the book of Job suggests that Job's wife is a marginal character of negligible influence within the book as a whole. She makes the briefest of appearances that spans a mere two verses, and then exits the text never to be heard from again.

Hers is the shortest of all the speaking parts in the book – just six words in the original Hebrew – to which Job responds with a sharp rebuke, describing her speech as the sort of utterance that could be expected of “any foolish woman” (2:10).⁶⁰ Job's rebuke acts as a summary dismissal of his wife who, barring two passing references in 19:17 and 31:9-10, is never again mentioned, not even with the birth of further children to Job as part of his restoration in the epilogue (42:13).

Given this marginal place assigned to Job's wife within the text, how has she been viewed within the history of interpretation of the book of Job? Many commentators, following the example of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar (2:11-13), have simply ignored her, thereby entrenching her sense of marginalization.⁶¹ But over the ages many others have articulated interpretations, sometimes vociferously, of her part within the story and especially the motivation and meaning of the words that she uttered. It is these diverse responses in the reception history of Job's wife that form the focus of this chapter.

Three broad interpretive traditions can be identified within the reception history of Job's wife. The first, which undoubtedly represents the majority perspective, certainly within Christian tradition, could be characterized as an unambiguously negative view

⁶⁰ Unless otherwise indicated, all chapter and verse references are from the book of Job, and all scriptural citations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible.

⁶¹ David J.A. Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, Word Biblical Commentary 17 (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), xlix.

of Job's wife. Quite specifically, it identifies Job's wife as an agent of Satan⁶² who demonstrated her unfaithfulness as a wife by tempting her husband to betray his faith.

The second interpretive tradition recognizes that Job's wife was also a victim of great suffering and was grievously affected by Job's afflictions. The failure of the Masoretic Text (MT) to offer any acknowledgement of her suffering or provide any details of her experience creates a gap that this interpretive tradition seeks to fill. The attempt to recover aspects of this woman's untold story typically results in two judgements of the words she speaks in 2:9. The first would be to mitigate the overwhelmingly negative view of the first interpretive tradition by hearing her words as the product of almost unbearable pain. Her words are still interpreted negatively, but with a greater sense of compassion for the circumstances that occasioned them. The second judgement would be to interpret her words positively as the compassionate utterance of a heartbroken mother but still loving and faithful wife who genuinely desires what is best for Job.

The third interpretive tradition focuses on the productive effect of her words on Job and the influence that she has on Job's response, especially within the poetry sections of the book. This approach finds for Job's wife a place of greater prominence within the development of the book as a whole.

Each of these three interpretive traditions will be discussed in some detail in the broadly chronological survey of the reception history of Job's wife that is now to follow. It must be noted that the traditions themselves do not chart the chronological

⁶² An enduring anachronism in the interpretation of the prose narrative is the rendering of the Hebrew *hassātān* with the proper noun Satan, a figure that emerged only in later Jewish and Christian theology. In the book of Job *hassātān* is a member of the heavenly court, a subordinate of Yahweh and one who acts under Yahweh's authority. The word *hassātān* contains the definite article – literally 'the satan' – and so is more properly understood as denoting a role rather than a name. 'The accuser' is a common suggestion, with a role similar to that of a district attorney" (see Bruce Baloiian, "8477 שָׂטָן," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1231.). Nevertheless, the identification of this figure with Satan or the devil, especially within the Christian tradition, is a crucial feature within the history of interpretation of the book as a whole, and the role of Job's wife within it in particular.

development in the history of interpretation of Job's wife, and so should not be regarded as sequential. All three traditions can be identified, to a greater or lesser degree, at various stages within that history of interpretation.

2. The Septuagint

The Septuagint (LXX) expands the account of Job's wife in 2:9-10 of the MT by providing a description of the suffering she endured as a consequence of Job's affliction. The LXX account reads thus:

When a long time had passed, his wife said to him, "How long will you endure, saying, 'Behold, I will wait yet for a little while, looking for the hope of my salvation?' Behold, the memory of you has been blotted out from the earth, those sons and daughters, the travail and pain of my womb, whom with toil I reared for nothing. And yet you sit in the decay of worms, passing the nights under the open sky, while I roam and drudge about from place to place, waiting for the sun to go down so that I may rest from the toils and sorrows that now grip me. Now, say some word against the Lord, and die."⁶³

This expansion is the earliest example of the second interpretive tradition described above that sees Job's wife as a fellow sufferer with her own tale of woe to tell. Four brief observations about this passage can be made. Firstly, the passage begins with the words, "When a long time had passed," which suggests that Job's wife was not acting out of some hasty impulse.⁶⁴ Rather, the words that follow bear the mark of a prolonged period of reflection on her part and should be weighed accordingly.

⁶³ Cited in Samuel E. Balentine, *Job*, The Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2006), 64. Clines suggests that this passage may itself be a secondary addition to LXX, Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, 53. So too Fernandez Marcos who writes of Job's wife's diatribe in LXX, "This is probably a midrashic expansion introduced by a later hand and contains a different vocabulary from the rest of the book, although this analysis is in no way conclusive." Natalio Fernandez Marcos, "The Septuagint Reading of the Book of Job," in *The Book of Job*, ed. W.A.M. Beuken (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994), 261. The question of the authenticity of this passage in LXX is not a primary concern here. Whether it is original or a secondary addition does not alter the fact that it represents an early commentary on the book of Job which expands the details concerning Job's wife.

⁶⁴ Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, 53.

However her words are interpreted, this introductory phrase in LXX closes the door on the option that her words were simply an unconsidered emotional outburst from which she would later retreat in embarrassment. What she says, she clearly intends to say.

Secondly, the description of her suffering recognizes not only the grief of a mother who had lost her sons and daughters, but also the relentless demands thrust upon her by the dramatic change of material circumstances that Job's affliction had brought upon them. Whereas Job had claimed the admittedly dubious 'luxury' of wallowing in his misery ("...you sit in the decay of worms"), his wife had to "...roam and drudge from place to place," presumably to beg or seek menial labour so as to sustain their pitiful existence.⁶⁵

Thirdly, her words that she was "...waiting for the sun to go down so that I may rest from the toils and sorrows that now grip me," could be read in two ways – either as a literal reference to the end of each day and the brief respite to her daily grind and grief offered by the stupor of sleep; or as a figurative reference to death, and the release it promised for the burdens that were hers. If indeed Job's wife anticipated death as a form of release, her subsequent words to Job seeking to hasten his death could be understood as an expression of compassion towards him.⁶⁶ It is this very sentiment that Job embraces in his opening speech in the poetry section of the book (3:3-26) where he longs for the oblivion of death:

Why did I not die at birth...

⁶⁵ While LXX does not provide any explicit content to the drudging roaming from place to place of Job's wife, it is reasonable to conclude that it was motivated by economic necessity following the loss of their wealth and livelihood. Katherine Low translates this phrase of 2:9d of LXX with, "And from place to place I go about from house to house as a wanderer and a maidservant" (Katherine Low, *The Bible, Gender, and Reception History: The Case of Job's Wife* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 6.) In the *Testament of Job (T.Job)*, Job's wife responds to their economic predicament by working as a servant (*T.Job* 21:2) and also by selling her hair in the marketplace for a little bread (*T.Job* 23:1-11).

⁶⁶ Samuel Terrien suggests that Job's wife was proposing a "...theological method of committing euthanasia." (Cited in Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, 51.)

Now I would be lying down and quiet;

I would be asleep; then I would be at rest (3:11a, 13).

As such we catch here an early glimpse of the third interpretive tradition that recognizes the influence that Job's wife had on her husband.

Fourthly, LXX's translation of the words of Job's wife in the MT is significant. Where the MT has, "Curse God and die,"⁶⁷ LXX moderates the phrase to, "Now, say some word against the Lord, and die." The result is that the strident note of possible incitement to blasphemous imprecation in her words is softened. Yet, at the same time the ambiguity of meaning in her words is lost – whether she is invoking Job to curse or to bless God. The clear and unambiguous sense in LXX is that she is urging him to speak "against the Lord."⁶⁸

In summary, LXX's influence on the reception history of Job's wife centres on two important contributions. Firstly, it boldly steps into the gap left by the MT in acknowledging the reality of Job's wife's experience and the suffering she endured as a consequence of Job's afflictions. This acknowledgement is a cornerstone of the second interpretive tradition within the reception history of Job's wife. Secondly, while it softens the scandalous possibility that her words to Job were nothing short of an incitement to blasphemy, LXX's testimony is unequivocal that Job's wife advocated an adversarial stance with respect to the Lord. This characterization of Job's wife, as someone intrinsically opposed to God, undergirds the first interpretive

⁶⁷ The literal translation of this Hebrew phrase would be, "Bless God and die." The rendering of the Hebrew בָּרַךְ as 'Curse' rather than 'Bless' in 2:9, and elsewhere in the prologue (most commonly identified in 1:5, 11; 2:5), will be dealt with in ch.5 below. For an excellent treatment of this theme see Tod Linafelt, "The Undecidability of בָּרַךְ in the Prologue to Job and Beyond," *Biblical Interpretation* 4, no. 2 (1996).

⁶⁸ A further feature of LXX's translation of the entire section from 2:1-10 is that it fails to differentiate between the distinctive words employed by the MT in referring to God ('*ēlōhîm*) and the LORD (*Yahweh*), translating both occurrences with 'Lord' (*kurion*). Any subtle nuances of meaning in Job's wife's choice of the word 'God' ('*ēlōhîm*) in her speech in the MT are accordingly lost in LXX.

tradition with its overwhelmingly negative assessment of Job's wife as an agent of Satan.

3. Rabbinic perspectives and the Targum of Job⁶⁹

The way in which LXX adds to the words of Job's wife is described by Clines as "...an example of the midrashic tendency to provide details about minor characters and to elaborate brief speeches."⁷⁰ This midrashic tendency to fill in the gaps and flesh out the details of biblical characters, as it relates to Job's wife, is evident not just in LXX but in various other rabbinic writings which accordingly make a rich contribution to the conversation about the reception history of Job's wife. A number of salient and sometimes contradictory points emerge from the references to Job's wife within the rabbinic literature, four of which will be discussed here.⁷¹

⁶⁹ The Aramaic Targum of Job that was in existence no later than the ninth century CE. Weiss accepts the Palestinian origin of the text but writes that "it is very probable that in its present form the Targum of Job is a collection of various targums, perhaps even from different periods, composed by an editor or copyist." (Raphael Weiss, *The Aramaic Targum of Job* (Tel-Aviv: University Press, 1979), ix.) For a discussion on the vexed question of the dating of Tg.Job see Celine Mangan, "The Targum of Job," in *The Aramaic Bible: The Targums*, ed. Kevin Cathcart, Michael Maher, and Martin McNamara (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd., 1991). Another targum of the Book of Job (11QtgJob) was discovered at Qumran among the Dead Sea Scrolls, but unfortunately is fragmentary, containing approximately a sixth of the canonical book, and no reference to the passage from 2:9-10 under review here. See Adam S. van der Woude, "Targum of Job from Qumran Cave Eleven," *Australian Journal of Biblical Archaeology* 1, no. 2 (1969).; also Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Some Observations on the Targum of Job from Qumran Cave 11," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (1974).

⁷⁰ Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, 53.

⁷¹ It is important to note that the rabbinic literature does not speak with a uniform, monologic voice. Judith Baskin observes that "there are almost as many Jobs as rabbis who speak about him" ("Rabbinic Interpretations of Job," in *The Voice from the Whirlwind: Interpreting the Book of Job*, ed. Leo G. Perdue and W. Clark Gilpin (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 101.) Joanna Weinberg writes:

The sayings of the rabbis as enshrined in the Talmuds and Midrashim do not form a coherent, uniform and systematic body of thought. There are many concepts and many beliefs. This obvious fact has often been disregarded and readers of the literature have succumbed to the temptation to straitjacket the rabbis and to single out a specific view as truly representative of rabbinic thinking on a particular topic.... This multi-faceted approach of the rabbis is clearly evident in their treatment of Job and his book. A whole range of views on Job, often contradictory, are interspersed throughout the Talmudic

3.1 Job's wife identified as Dinah

Within the rabbinic literature there is a tradition that identifies Job's wife as Dinah, the daughter of Leah and Jacob, who was raped by Shechem (cf. Gen 34:1-31). This tradition is attested to in the Targum of Job⁷² (hereafter Tg.Job) as well as by various midrashim. For example, according to R. Abba ben Kahana:

Dinah was Job's wife, for in the case of Job's wife it is written, "Thou speakest as one of the foolish women (*nēbālōt*) speaketh" (Job 2:10), while with respect to Dinah, it says, "Because he had wrought a vile deed (*nēbālāh*) in Israel in lying with Jacob's daughter" (Gen 34:7).⁷³

Dinah's story⁷⁴ is a tragic tale of violation and abuse, not just at the hands of her rapist but also by her own brothers in the manner in which they respond.⁷⁵ Throughout the

and Midrashic corpora. (Joanna Weinberg, "Job Versus Abraham: The Quest for the Perfect God-Fearer in Rabbinic Tradition," in *The Book of Job*, ed. William A.M. Beuken (Leuven: University Press, 1994), 281.)

For a helpful overview of the diverse rabbinic positions on various issues concerning Job, such as where and when he lived, whether he was an Israelite or a gentile, whether he was innocent or not and therefore deserving of his afflictions, his relationship to other biblical characters and whether or not he maintained his righteousness or blasphemed God, see Jason Kalman, "With Friends Like These: Turning Points in the Jewish Exegesis of the Biblical Book of Job." (McGill University, 2005), 26-31. For a book-length treatment of this same theme see Judith R. Baskin, *Pharaoh's Counsellors : Job, Jethro, and Balaam in Rabbinic and Patristic Tradition* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983).

⁷² Tg.Job 2:9 reads: "His wife, Dinah said to him..."

⁷³ Midrash Rabbah Genesis (Vayera) 57:4. Cited in H. Freedman, *Genesis I*, ed. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, 10 vols., Midrash Rabbah (London: The Soncino Press, 1939), 505. R. Huna referred to Jacob giving Dinah in marriage to Job. Midrash Rabbah Genesis (Vayyishlach) 76:9, cited in *Genesis II*ibid., 709. In the Baba Bathra Tractate of the Babylonian Talmud, diverse traditions of Job's origins and historical context are mentioned, one of which is the tradition "that Job lived in the time of Jacob and married Dinah the daughter of Jacob" (BT *Baba Bathra*, 15b).

⁷⁴ Dinah ventured forth from her homestead to visit the women of the region, when she was raped by Shechem (Gen 34:1-2). After raping Dinah, Shechem seeks to marry her (Gen 34:3-4, 8, 11-12). Abhorrent as this may seem to our modern sensitivities, in that world the offer of marriage was in Dinah's best interests (cf. 2 Sam 13:16). Consent to the marriage is given by Dinah's brothers, on condition that Shechem and all the men of his city are circumcised (Gen 34:15-17). Following their circumcision, the painful immobility of the men of Shechem is taken advantage of by Simeon and Levi who attack and kill them all, while the rest of Jacob's

narrative Dinah is treated as a pawn within the wider machinations of the male characters in the story. As the pivotal character in the narrative she is given a strangely ancillary role. Susan Niditch writes:

One of the most striking aspects of the narrative is the degree to which Dinah is absent and present. She is, on the one hand, central to the action, the focus of Shechem's desire, the object of negotiations between Jacob and Hamor, the reason for her brothers' trickery, and the cause of tension between Jacob and his sons. On the other hand, she has no dialogue, no voice. How does she react to Shechem's speaking "tenderly" or to Jacob and Hamor's arrangements for her marriage to the rapist? What, for that matter, happens to her at the end of the story?⁷⁶

Dinah's 'absence' in her own story goes beyond the fact that she is given no voice. Even more disturbing is the reality that even her own story is finally not about her but rather about the male characters who dominate it. All of which has significant implications for the way in which Job's wife is understood if the rabbinic tradition of the identification between Dinah and Job's wife is appropriated. On one level, the simple fact of Dinah's history of abuse adds a new layer of insight into all that Job's wife endured. This is especially significant for those who seek to make sense of her words in the light of her painful experience. The Jewish humanist scholar Isaac

sons plunder the city (Gen 34:25-29). When Jacob challenges his sons for exposing him to reprisals from the inhabitants of the land, Simeon and Levi justify their actions on the grounds that their sister had been treated like a whore (Gen 34:30-31).

⁷⁵ There are, however, starkly contrasting contours along which Dinah's story can be traversed. Bechtel, for example, uses a philological approach to question whether rape is the appropriate moniker to describe the sexual encounter between Shechem and Dinah (Lyn M. Bechtel, "What If Dinah Is Not Raped? (Genesis 34)," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, no. 62 (1994).) See, further, the fascinating interchange between Fewell and Gunn on the one hand and Sternberg on the other in their respective assessments of Simeon and Levi as either villains or heroes (Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, "Tipping the Balance: Sternberg's Reader and the Rape of Dinah," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110, no. 2 (1991).; Meir Sternberg, "Biblical Poetics and Sexual Politics: From Reading to Counterreading," *ibid.* 111, no. 3 (1992).)

⁷⁶ Susan Niditch, "Genesis," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 27.

Heinemann, for example, draws a connection between her bitter words in 2:9 with the calamity she experienced while a maiden.⁷⁷

On another level, the violation visited upon Dinah – not just by the men within the text, but by the text itself in displacing her from her own story – offers a profound insight into the situation of Job's wife, who experiences a similar displacement.

Admittedly, the book of Job is not her story but rather her husband's. But as his wife, the mother of his children and his primary economic partner,⁷⁸ her story is inextricably tied up with his, as is his with hers. The negation of her story, not just by characters in the text – such as Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar who gather to console and comfort Job (2:11) yet utterly ignore his wife – but by the text itself, alerts us to the possibility that however the words of Job's wife are interpreted, she may well be someone 'more sinned against than sinning'.⁷⁹ These insights – arising out of Job's wife and Dinah's identification – find a home within the second interpretive tradition described above.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Cited in Tamar Kadari, "Wife of Job: Midrash and Aggadah," *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*. 1 March 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. (Viewed on October 9, 2013) <<http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/wife-of-job-midrash-and-aggadah>>.

⁷⁸ The idea of Job's wife being Job's primary economic partner and central to his material wellbeing will be discussed in detail below in ch. 4.

⁷⁹ The expression comes from Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Act 3 scene 2.

⁸⁰ A further witness to the tradition that Dinah was Job's wife can be found in Pseudo-Philo's first-century CE work entitled *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum*. Significantly, this work is explicit that Dinah was Job's only wife, which stands in stark contrast to the *Testament of Job*, for example, which dates from a similar period and asserts that Dinah was Job's second wife. The relevant passage from *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum* is in L.A.B. 8:7-8 and reads thus:

And Jacob dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Shechem the son of Hamor the Hurrrite raped Dinah his daughter and humiliated her. And the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, went in and killed the whole city of them by the sword; and they took their sister Dinah and went away from there. And afterward Job took her as a wife and fathered from her fourteen sons and six daughters; that is, seven sons and three daughters before he was struck down with suffering, and afterward seven sons and three daughters when he was healed. (Cited in Michael C. Legaspi, "Job's Wives in the *Testament of Job*: A Note on the Synthesis of Two Traditions," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127, no. 1 (2008): 73.)

3.2 The morality of Job's wife (and Dinah)

It is not only the second interpretive tradition, with its attempt to recover the untold story of suffering of Job's wife, that draws on the identification between Dinah and Job's wife. A further significant association between Dinah and Job's wife in the rabbinic literature relates to the censorious moral judgement to which they have both been subjected. The reference in Gen 34:1 that Dinah "went out" is interpreted in one midrash in Rabbah Genesis as an indication of immoral behaviour in that she went out like a harlot.⁸¹ This connects with Simeon and Levi's reference to their sister being "treated like a whore" (Gen 34:31).⁸²

Similarly, questions about the sexual morality of Job's wife are intimated. Or to be more accurate, the category of sexual morality is introduced as a point of comparison when talking about the conduct of Job's wife. Tg.Job translates the first part of Job's speech in 2:10 with, "You talk as any woman who acts shamefully from the house of her father talks," which contain strong overtones of sexual impropriety.⁸³ Job's

⁸¹ The midrash from Rabbah Genesis (Vayyishlach) 80:1 reads thus:

'Like the daughter so is the mother, like the generation so is its leader, like the altar so are its priests.'... What is really the meaning of this verse? 'A cow does not gore unless her calf kicks; a woman is not immoral until her daughter is immoral.' [i.e. the real character of a parent is seen in his or her offspring.] 'If so, then our mother Leah was a harlot! [Since we find her daughter Dinah acting immorally.] Even so, because it says, *And Leah went out to meet him* (Gen 30:16), which means that she went out to meet him adorned like a harlot'; therefore AND DINAH THE DAUGHTER OF LEAH WENT OUT. (Cited in Freedman, *Genesis II*, 736.)

⁸² Simeon and Levi's reference to Dinah being treated like a whore does not necessarily imply that she was acting like one. De Groot writes:

A rape victim is not a whore (Heb. *zonah*). A whore or a prostitute acts independently of her father or husband; she claims the right to control access to her body and falls outside the socially sanctioned relationships of a patriarchal society. The brothers, in putting the question this way, could be drawing attention to the similarity between rape and consorting with a prostitute. Both involve a man having sexual relations that are not sanctioned. (Christiana De Groot, "Genesis," in *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 23.)

⁸³ Cf. Deut 22:21, where a young bride whose virginity cannot be proved is said to have "wrought folly" (AV), "committed a disgraceful act" (NRSV) or "done an outrageous thing" (NIV) while in her father's house. The Hebrew noun variously translated here is *nēbālāh*,

rebuke of his wife that she has spoken like “one of the foolish women” (2:10 AV; Heb. *něbālōt*) has been interpreted as a moral judgement⁸⁴ which may contain an allusion to sexual misconduct. This is not to say that Job was actually accusing his wife of sexual misconduct, but rather that her words urging him to curse God were akin to the sexual betrayal of an unfaithful wife.

As already discussed, R. Abba ben Kahana's connection between Job's wife and Dinah was made precisely on the basis that cognates of the same verbal root נבל (*nbl*) appear in each of their respective stories. The question is raised, however, whether hints of sexual transgression should therefore be heard in Job's wife's story, or whether other associations with this verbal root echo in her story.

Phillips has identified three distinct categories in which the term *něbālāh* is used.⁸⁵ The first applies to sexual acts, such as the “outrage” committed by Shechem by raping Dinah (Gen 34:7). The second applies to non-sexual acts of an utterly disorderly and unruly nature.⁸⁶ The third applies to the spoken word, especially about God, such as the case of Job's friends in 42:8 who are guilty of *něbālāh* for having not spoken of God what is right.⁸⁷ Phillips concludes that *něbālāh* is:

...not a term reserved for sexual offences of a particularly abhorrent kind. Rather *nebalah* is a general expression for serious disorderly and unruly action resulting

which comes from the same root as *něbālōt* (“foolish women”) which Job uses of his wife in 2:10.

⁸⁴ So the footnote to 2:10 in the NIV Study Bible which states, “The Hebrew word rendered *foolish* denotes moral deficiency” (Kenneth L. Barker et al., eds., *The Niv Study Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1985), 737.)

⁸⁵ Anthony Phillips, “Nebalah: A Term for Serious Disorderly and Unruly Conduct,” *Vetus Testamentum* 24, no. 4 (1975): 237-42. See also Chou-Wee Pan, “5571 נבל,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 11-13.

⁸⁶ The examples cited by Phillips come from Josh 7:15 and 1 Sam 25:25. “Nebalah: A Term for Serious Disorderly and Unruly Conduct,” 240.

⁸⁷ The conventional view, reflected in most translations, is that it is the *friend's* foolishness that is being referenced here. However, a straightforward reading of 42:8 suggests that it is *God* who is the one doing *něbālāh*, which would make this occurrence unique within the Hebrew Bible. See Balentine, *Job*, 713.

in the break up of an existing relationship.... It indicates the end of an existing order consequent upon breach of rules which maintained that order.⁸⁸

While echoes of all three of these categories can be heard in Job's use of *nēbālōt* in 2:10, the second category identified by Phillips for the usage of the term seems most apt in making sense of Job's reply to his wife.⁸⁹ He understands her words urging him to 'Curse God and die' as being outrageously disorderly and unruly that threaten to fracture the bonds of relationship between him and her, as well as between him and God. It is this role, with or without the connotations of sexual deviance, which squares with the first interpretive tradition's characterization of Job's wife as an agent of Satan who tempts her husband to forsake his relationship with God. This brings us to the next important contribution within the rabbinic literature to the history of interpretation of Job's wife, namely the association forged between her and Eve.

3.3 Job's wife and Eve

An association between Job's wife and Eve is established in a midrash from Rabbah Genesis (Bereshith) 19:12 which reads:

Job said: I am not like him [Adam]: he said, THE WOMAN WHOM THOU GAVEST TO BE WITH ME, etc.: thus he hearkened to his wife, but I did not hearken to my wife. [Translating: for I am not like (Adam, who said: 'The woman whom Thou gavest') to be with me. When Job said that he would speak without fear of God, his friends pointed out that even Adam, though God's handiwork, could not stand before Him. To which Job replied that he was not

⁸⁸ Phillips, "Nebalah: A Term for Serious Disorderly and Unruly Conduct," 241.

⁸⁹ Erin Runions reads Job's use of *nēbālōt* in economic terms, relating it to his reference to בְּנֵי נֶבֶל ('children of a fool') in 30:8 which, she argues, belong to an economically impoverished group. Erin Runions, "Ms Job and the Problem of God: A Feminist, Existentialist, Materialist Reading," in *From the Margins 1 : Women of the Hebrew Bible and Their Afterlives*, ed. Peter S. Hawkins and Lesleigh C. Stahlberg (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 178-79.

like Adam, who obeyed his wife and sinned, whereas he had refused to obey her when she urged, *Blaspheme God, and die* (Job II, 9).]⁹⁰

This association is not developed any further in the rabbinic literature, but it does emerge again in the patristic period⁹¹ and becomes an important motif in medieval art and theology, as will be discussed below. It is significant that the rabbinic association between Job's wife and Eve presupposes a *verbal* influence that they each exerted on their husbands – an influence which Adam “obeyed” because he “hearkened to his wife” but Job did not. However, in the biblical account in Genesis 3, Eve does not say anything to Adam.⁹² She simply takes the forbidden fruit, eats it and gives some to her husband, who was with her, who also ate (Gen 3:6) – there is no hint in the text of any verbal enticement on the woman's part or any sense that the man needed to be convinced to join the woman in eating the fruit. She simply gave some of the fruit to him and he freely ate of it. This is the substance of the man's defense when he says to the LORD God, somewhat accusingly, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate” (Gen 3:12).

However, in the judgement spoken to the man in Gen 3:17 the LORD God says, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife...”⁹³ The implication is clear –

⁹⁰ Cited in Freedman, *Genesis I*, 157.

⁹¹ For example, in a letter from 385 C.E. dealing with a dispute with the Arians, Ambrose urged his congregants to withstand the onslaught of heretical ideas as did Job when confronted with his wife's deviant speech, and then compares her to Eve who deceived her husband. See Low, *The Bible, Gender, and Reception History: The Case of Job's Wife*, 31.

⁹² Strictly speaking the monikers ‘Adam’ and ‘Eve’ should not be used here, but rather ‘the man’ and ‘the woman’ (so NRSV). Eve is only named in Gen 3:20 after the events of the eating of the forbidden fruit, while the name Adam, used as a proper noun without the definite article, only appears for the first time in Gen 5:1. Throughout the Garden of Eden narrative in Gen 2-3, the definite article is used in referring to ‘the man’ (אָדָם). AV translates אָדָם as ‘Adam’ no fewer than eleven times in Gen 2-3 (cf. Gen 2:19, 20, 21, 23; 3:8, 9, 17, 20, 21).

⁹³ In Gen 3:6 it is stated that the man “was with her”, which opens the possibility that the man was present with the woman in the interchange that occurred between her and the serpent in 3:1-5. It could therefore be argued that the LORD God's assertion that the man listened to the voice of his wife (3:17) was inaccurate as it was actually the voice of the serpent that he

the root of the problem lay in the woman's deviant speech that should not have been trusted, even though in the text the deceptive and enticing words that were spoken were those of the serpent.⁹⁴ A connection is thereby forged between those words of the serpent and those presumed to have been spoken by the woman. This is the primary point of connection between Eve and Job's wife – the tempting words that they are both regarded as speaking to their husbands. Within later medieval Christian thought this view of Job's wife as a temptress undergirds the interpretive tradition that sees her as an agent of Satan.

3.4 Job's wife's influence

Within the rabbinic literature, Job's wife is seen as influencing Job in diverse ways. One view sees her as inciting Job to sin. Following their verbal exchange in 2:9-10, we read this concluding remark in the biblical text, "In all this Job did not sin with his lips" (2:10). This is subtly but significantly different from the concluding remark at the end of the previous chapter which states, "In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong-doing" (1:22). In the *Baba Bathra* tractate of the Babylonian Talmud, Raba offers this commentary on 2:10, "With his lips he did not sin but he did sin within his heart."⁹⁵ What is implied is that the words of Job's wife prompted sinful

heard. Accordingly, the persuasive speech that influenced the man belonged to the serpent and not the woman.

⁹⁴ For a treatment of the serpent's words and whether or not they were deceptive see R.W.L. Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," *Journal of Theological Studies* 39, no. 1 (1988): 1-27. See also A.S. Kapelrud, "You Shall Surely Not Die," in *History and Traditions of Early Israel: Studies Presented to Eduard Nielsen*, ed. Andre Lemaire and Benedikt Otzen (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 50-61. It is further recognized that the woman's words in Gen 3:2 could be regarded as deviant in that she embellished the prohibition that the LORD God had issued in Gen 2:16-17 by adding the phrase "nor shall you touch it". Given the fact that the original prohibition had been given to the man prior to the creation of the woman, this begs the question whether it was in fact the man who had misrepresented the words of the LORD God when he conveyed them to the woman. See Terence E Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck *et al* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 360.

⁹⁵ BT *Baba Bathra*, 16a.

thoughts within him. Raba goes on to discuss some of the blasphemies that then issued forth from Job's mouth because of what had been incited in his heart.⁹⁶

An alternative view within the rabbinic tradition is that Job's wife (understood here to be Dinah, the daughter of Jacob) had a positive influence on him and was the instrument of Job's conversion.⁹⁷ In a midrash on Gen 32:22 from Genesis Rabbah (Vayyishlach) 76:9 we read the following:

And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two handmaids and his eleven children." Where then was Dinah? He put her in a chest and locked her in, saying, 'This wicked man has an aspiring eye; let him not take her away from me.' R. Huna said in the name of R. Abba Bardela the Priest: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: *'To him that is ready to faint kindness is due from his neighbor (Job 6:14) : thou hast withheld kindness from thy neighbor; when thou gavest her in marriage to Job, didst thou not convert him?'*⁹⁸ Thou wouldst not give her in marriage to a circumcised person [Esau]; lo! she is now married to an uncircumcised one! [Shechem] Thou wouldst not give her in legitimate wedlock; lo! she is now taken in illegitimate fashion'; thus it is written, *And Dinah the daughter of Leah...went out,* etc. (Gen 34:1)⁹⁹

⁹⁶ cf. BT *Baba Bathra*, 16a. Raba describes Job as one who "sought to turn the dish upside down", which was a way of saying that Job declared all of God's works to be worthless. Some examples of the blasphemies that Raba (and other rabbis) accuse Job of would be his assertion in 9:24 that God had given the earth into the hand of the wicked; his attempt to exculpate the whole world of wrongdoing based on 10:7; his denial of the resurrection of the dead based on his words in 7:9; his 'blasphemy' in 9:17 that God crushes him with a tempest; and his suggestion that God has confused Iyyob (Job) with Oyeb (enemy). See Weinberg, "Job Versus Abraham: The Quest for the Perfect God-Fearer in Rabbinic Tradition," 294-95.

⁹⁷ The question as to Job's ethnic origin and the nature of his righteousness was the focus of much discussion and debate within the rabbinic tradition. For a helpful treatment of these diverse views see Baskin, "Rabbinic Interpretations of Job." See further John Day, "How Could Job Be an Edomite," in *The Book of Job*, ed. William A.M. Beuken (Leuven: University Press, 1994).

⁹⁸ Thus had you given her to Esau, he too might have been converted to the true God.

⁹⁹ Cited in Freedman, *Genesis II*, 709.

This idea of the converting influence of Job's wife on her husband is not developed any further in the rabbinic tradition, but it is an important antecedent of the interpretive tradition that recognizes the positive shaping influence that she had on Job.

3.5 Job's wife as an agent of righteousness

Solomon Wertheimer identifies the following passage as part of the reconstructed *Midrash Iyob*¹⁰⁰:

15. (Job 2:9) 'You still keep your integrity.'

What reason did she [Job's wife] have to say this to him?

It is to teach that he did not set aside his righteousness and the poor came in to him and he said to her, 'Provide for them.'

At that moment she said, 'You still keep your integrity.'¹⁰¹

The point of the midrash was to demonstrate that even in his time of suffering, Job maintained his righteousness by responding to the needs of the poor who came to him seeking help. What is significant for this discussion is that the physical task of providing for the poor was given to his wife who becomes the instrument through which Job's righteousness is enacted.

¹⁰⁰ Kalman writes:

The text of *Midrash Iyov* is no longer extant (if such a work ever existed), but Wertheimer (Wertheimer & Wertheimer 1952:151-188) assembled a collection of rabbinic passages supposedly having formed part of the volume at one time. In its current form, *Midrash Iyov* is the textual equivalent of a patchwork quilt: fifty-three passages culled from a variety of sources and arranged in verse order. Solomon Aaron Wertheimer, the Slovakia-born Jerusalem bibliophile first published it in 1902 in his *Leket Midrashim* (1902). It was later expanded and reissued by his grandson, Abraham, in the second volume of *Batei Midrashot*. (Jason Kalman, "Righteousness Restored: The Place of *Midrash Iyov* in the History of the Jewish Exegesis of the Biblical Book of Job," *Old Testament Essays* 19 (2006): 77.)

¹⁰¹ Cited in *ibid.*, 86.

4. The Testament of Job

The *Testament of Job* (hereafter *T.Job*) is a pseudepigraphical adaptation of the story of Job that dates from around the first century BCE to the first century CE.¹⁰² Its relationship to the biblical story of Job is difficult to characterize. On the one hand, it seems clear that the biblical account provides the overarching framework for *T.Job*. Many of the plot items and the entire cast of characters from the biblical story are adopted by *T.Job*, and the LXX version of the story is quoted verbatim by *T.Job* in numerous instances.¹⁰³ On the other hand, there is much in *T.Job* that bears no resemblance to the biblical story of Job, in either its MT or LXX versions, including long passages of unique material and, significantly, a wholly new take on the motivation for Job's suffering.¹⁰⁴ Seow goes so far as to question whether *T.Job* is even a reception of the biblical story at all, and suggests that it may be based on an alternative version.¹⁰⁵

The precise relationship between *T.Job* and the canonical Job is not a primary concern here. What is significant is the way in which Job's wife is presented, which represents

¹⁰² On the question of the dating of *T.Job* see Susan R. Garrett, "The "Weaker Sex" in the *Testament of Job*," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 112, no. 1 (1993): 55. See also Russell P. Spittler, "Testament of Job," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 833-34.

¹⁰³ See Christopher Begg, "Comparing Characters: The Book of Job and the *Testament of Job*," in *The Book of Job*, ed. W.A.M. Beuken (Leuven: University Press, 1994), 435. See also the conference paper presented by Jessie Rogers, "The *Testament of Job* as an Adaptation of Lxx Job," in *The International Conference on the Septuagint: Text-Critical and Hermeneutical Studies in the Septuagint* (Stellenbosch, South Africa 2011).

¹⁰⁴ In the biblical book, neither Job nor any of the other earthly characters know the reason for his suffering. Accordingly, the vexed question of unexplained suffering is an important focus of the book. In *T.Job* the reason for Job's suffering is made clear to him – he suffers because of Satan's retaliatory attacks on him for his destruction of an idolatrous temple (see Legaspi, "Job's Wives in the *Testament of Job*: A Note on the Synthesis of Two Traditions," 75.) Consequently, *T.Job* is not a text about unexplained suffering, but about endurance and perseverance in the face of righteous suffering.

¹⁰⁵ Choon-Leong Seow, "Reflections on the History of Consequences: The Case of Job," in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Peterson*, ed. J.M. LeMon and K.H. Richards (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 585.

an important development in her reception history. The most important contribution that *T.Job* makes to this reception history centres on its assertion that Job had two wives, the first of whom was Sitidos¹⁰⁶ and the second was Dinah.¹⁰⁷ Two brief and passing references are made to Dinah, but Sitidos occupies a prominent place in the narrative. There is for her a greatly expanded role compared to that of Job's wife in the biblical account.

4.1 Sitidos the servant

In response to the misfortunes that befell them, Job sits upon the dung-hill outside of the city, whereas Sitidos is the one who seeks to make provision for their material needs by working as a servant. At one point in the narrative Job says, "I saw with my own eyes...my first wife carrying water into the house of a certain nobleman as a maidservant so she might get bread and bring it to me" (*T.Job* 21:2).¹⁰⁸ This is a laudable role that casts Sitidos in a positive light as a loyal and faithful wife, willing to humble herself in assuming a role that was far beneath the station to which she had grown accustomed.

¹⁰⁶ There are numerous discrepancies within the manuscripts of *T.Job* as to the correct spelling of the name of Job's first wife, which appear to be variations of either 'Sitis' or 'Sitidos'. Van der Horst argues for the primacy of 'Sitidos' as the best rendition of the name of Job's first wife, seeing it as a derivative of the Greek σιτος ("bread") or σιτιζω ("to give bread"), as her struggle in providing bread for Job is a prominent part of her story. See Pieter W. van der Horst, "Images of Women in the Testament of Job," in *Studies on the Testament of Job*, ed. Michael A. Knibb and Pieter W. van der Horst (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 97.

¹⁰⁷ Legaspi argues persuasively that the assertion in *T.Job* that Job had two wives represents a synthesis of two traditions regarding the identity of Job's wife – namely that she was an Arabian woman (attested to in LXX Job 42:17b-c); and that she was Dinah, the daughter of Jacob (attested to in the rabbinic literature and explicitly referenced in the *Targum of Job*). See Legaspi, "Job's Wives in the *Testament of Job*: A Note on the Synthesis of Two Traditions," 71-75.

¹⁰⁸ Cited in Spittler, "Testament of Job," 848.

4.2 Selling her hair for bread

Yet, not even her willingness to work as a servant was enough to provide for both her and Job's most basic needs, and so she is driven to consider more extreme measures. In *T.Job* 22:3 Job said that "She would not hesitate to go out into the market to beg bread from the bread sellers so that she might bring it to me so I could eat."¹⁰⁹ On one occasion, as she went to the marketplace to beg, she was enticed to do something that was regarded as morally compromising – she sold her hair in exchange for some bread.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ The relevant passage reads thus:

And immediately my wife came near me and crying aloud and weeping she said: "Job! Job! How long wilt thou sit upon the dung-hill outside of the city, pondering yet for a while and expecting to obtain your hoped-for salvation!" And I have been wandering from place to place, roaming about as a hired servant, behold thy memory has already died away from earth. And my sons and the daughters that I carried on my bosom and the labors and pains that I sustained have been for nothing. And thou sittest in the malodorous state of soreness and worms, passing the nights in the cold air. And I have undergone all trials and troubles and pains, day and night until I succeeded in bringing bread to thee. For your surplus of bread is no longer allowed to me; and as I can scarcely take my own food and divide it between us, I pondered in my heart that it was not right that thou shouldst be in pain and hunger for bread. And so I ventured to go to the market without bashfulness and when the bread-seller told me: "Give me money and thou shalt have bread," I disclosed to him our state of distress. Then I heard him say: "If thou hast no money, hand me the hair of thy head, and take three loaves of bread in order that ye may live on these for three days." And I yielded to the wrong and said to him, "Rise and cut off my hair!" and he rose and in disgrace cut off with the scissors the hair of my head on the market place while the crowd stood by and wondered. Who would then not be astonished saying: "Is this Sitidos, the wife of Job, who had fourteen curtains to cover her inner sitting room, and doors within doors so that he was greatly honored who would be brought near her, and now behold, she barter off her hair for bread!" (*T.Job* 6:1-10, cited in M. R. James, "Testament of Job," in *Apocrypha Anecdota*, ed. M. R. James (Cambridge: University Press, 1897). Note that the versification used by James in his translation differs markedly from that of Spittler. The corresponding passage in Spittler's translation is found in *T.Job* 24:1 – 25:2.)

The passage goes on to recount a litany of public commentary that contrasted Sitidos' former life of wealth and plenty with the scandal that she now sells her hair for bread.

Susan Garrett offers an insight into the significance of this act for the early readers of *T.Job*. She writes:

...a modern reader is likely to sympathize with Sitidos. How could one not admire her Herculean labors or her noble sacrifices on behalf of Job?¹¹¹ But readers who shared the author's ideological construction of the female would have had a different set of reactions to this portrayal of Job's wife. Among such readers, the most striking aspect of the portrayal would probably have been the *exposure* entailed by the public shearing of Sitidos's hair.... For Sitidos to allow her hair to be exposed, loosed, and then cut off in public view would not have been construed by early readers of the *Testament of Job* as a noble act of largesse, a gift of love...but as a shameless forfeiture of the dignity and sexual modesty appropriate to one of Sitidos's station. It was a tragic and culpable move.¹¹²

4.3 Sitidos and Satan

The trader in the market-place to whom Sitidos sold her hair in exchange for some bread was none other than Satan in disguise, whom Sitidos failed to recognize. As she took the costly loaves of bread to Job, "Satan followed her along the road, walking stealthily, and leading her heart astray" (*T.Job* 23:11).¹¹³ It is at this point that Sitidos enjoins her husband to "...take the loaves, be satisfied. And then *speak some word against the Lord and die*. Then I too shall be freed from weariness that issues from the pain of your body." (*T.Job* 25:10)¹¹⁴

The implication is clear that Sitidos is being unknowingly influenced and manipulated by Satan who quite literally stands just behind her as she delivers this speech. But

¹¹¹ It is clear that Sitidos was indeed motivated by an unselfish concern for her husband. When placed in the invidious position of having to choose between retaining her hair or feeding her husband, she said to herself, "What good is the hair of my head compared to my hungry husband?" (*T.Job* 23:8).

¹¹² Garrett, "The "Weaker Sex" in the *Testament of Job*," 62-63.

¹¹³ Cited in Spittler, "Testament of Job," 849.

¹¹⁴ Cited in Spittler, *ibid.*, 850.

what she fails to see, namely the presence and influence of Satan, Job recognizes. He responds with these words:

“Do you not see the devil standing behind you and unsettling your reasoning so that he might deceive me too? For he seeks to make an exhibit of you *as one of the senseless women* who misguide their husbands' sincerity.” Again turning to Satan, who was behind my wife, I said, “Come up front! Stop hiding yourself!” (*T.Job* 26:6 – 27:1)¹¹⁵

Her culpability in falling prey to Satan's deceptions and accordingly being used by him is a moot point. Garrett argues that Sitidos is not only a victim but in consequence also an agent of Satan, demonstrating that the roles of victim and agent are interdependent rather than mutually exclusive.¹¹⁶ What some would regard as Sitidos' virtues – her concern for Job's material needs and for a proper burial for her children – are for Garrett “...the very attributes that tie females to the perishable realm and so enable Satan to use them to reach less vulnerable males.”¹¹⁷ If Garrett is correct in her analysis, then Sitidos' role as an agent of Satan ensues not through any deficient moral choice on her part, but simply by virtue of her womanhood.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Cited in Spittler, *ibid.*, 851.

¹¹⁶ See Garrett, "The "Weaker Sex" in the *Testament of Job*," 59.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ It is telling that one of the other female characters in *T.Job* is Job's doorkeeper who was also deceived and manipulated by Satan when he disguised himself as a beggar. Although this doormaid responded to the beggar with kindness and compassion, she is described as an evil servant for failing to follow Job's explicit instructions to give a burnt loaf of bread to the beggar, whom Job recognized as Satan. (*T.Job* 6:1 – 7:13) This story further illustrates the view in *T.Job* that women are preoccupied with corporeal affairs, and accordingly lack spiritual insight and are unable to participate in the heavenly realm (*ibid.*, 68.). It should be noted further that the special inheritance given to Job's daughters in *T.Job* consisted of multicoloured cords which, when worn, resulted in a transformed heart – “no longer minded toward earthly things” (*T.Job* 48:2) – and angelic speech. Job's concern was that his daughters be liberated from their natural female disposition of being preoccupied with earthly things. See further Robert A. Kugler and Richard L Rohrbaugh, "On Women and Honor in the *Testament of Job*," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 14, no. 1 (2004): 43-62.

4.4 Sitidos mourned

The death of Sitidos occasions a dramatic outpouring of lament by the community at large and the poor of the city in particular. Even the living animals join in weeping over her:

And all who saw cried out in an uproar of lament over her, and the sound reached through the whole city. When they rushed in to discover what had happened, they found her dead and the living animals standing about weeping over her.

And so bearing her in procession, they attended to her burial, locating her near the house that had collapsed on her children. And the poor of the city made a great lamentation, saying, "Look! This is [Sitidos], the woman of pride and splendor! She was not even considered worthy of a decent burial!" (*T.Job* 40:9-13)¹¹⁹

At the very least, this public outpouring of lament over the death of Sitidos is an acknowledgment that hers was a tragic tale of suffering that involved a dramatic and calamitous reversal of fortunes.

In assessing the place of *T.Job* in the reception history of Job's wife, the first two of the three dominant interpretive traditions within that reception history can find abundant material in *T.Job* in support of their respective positions. When Sitidos urges her husband to "speak some word against the Lord and die," Job recognizes the presence and influence of Satan hiding behind her to unsettle her reasoning in order to deceive him. As such, she becomes the unwitting agent of Satan. Indeed, while Satan's ploy to deceive Job fails, this statement of hers does serve to afflict Job further, as he attests when he says: "Look, I have lived seventeen years in these plagues submitting to the worms in my body, and my soul has never been depressed by my pains so much as by your statement" (*T.Job* 26:1-2).

¹¹⁹ Cited in Spittler, "Testament of Job," 860.

Yet, the reality of her suffering is acknowledged too. Job says to her, "I do indeed suffer these things, and you suffer them too: the loss both of our children and our goods" (*T.Job* 26:3). But the extent of Sitidos' suffering extends beyond the loss of children and material goods – it includes the loss of her dignity and elevated social status as she is reduced to a servant and feels compelled to endure the public humiliation and shame of cutting off her hair.

The third tradition that sees Job's wife as being a wife of influence is less developed in *T.Job*, other than the influence she had on preserving Job's existence by providing for his physical needs. Job is presented as having superior insight and spiritual discernment than his wife, which is in keeping with the gendered distinctions in *T.Job* of the differences between maleness and femaleness.

5. Christian perspectives: Augustine to Calvin

It was Augustine of Hippo who provided the impetus for an interpretive trajectory of Job's wife that would dominate the way in which she would be viewed and received within Christian thought for well over a millennium. A cornerstone of Augustine's theological thought was a view of Eden as constituting a place and moment in human history where the entire structure of the universe was compromised through a single willful act of disobedience on the part of Adam that introduced an irrevocable state of sinful depravity to humankind.¹²⁰ For Augustine, Eve played a decisive part in this cataclysmic act of disobedience, manipulated as she was by the serpent – who becomes a proxy for the Devil – to exert a corruptible influence over Adam. According to Augustine, this capacity to lead Adam astray is part of the inheritance that she has bequeathed to all women.

It is this constellation of ideas that Augustine draws on in dealing with Job's wife, seeing in her a type of Eve whom the Devil used to entice her husband into wrongdoing. In *A Sermon to Catechumens on the Creed*, Augustine writes of Job's wife:

¹²⁰ Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Random House, 1988), 130.

After the pattern of the serpent, who, in Paradise, deceived the first man whom God made, so now she also thought by suggesting blasphemy to succeed in deceiving a man who pleased God. How great were his sufferings, brethren! Who can suffer so much in his possessions, in his house, in his children, in his person, yea, in his wife, the temptress who remained to him? But even her Satan would long before have taken from him if he had not kept her to be his helper. He had overcome the first man by means of Eve, therefore he had kept his Eve.¹²¹

This way of seeing Job's wife as another Eve who acted as "the Devil's helper" (Augustine's phrase is *diaboli adiutrix*)¹²² became normative. Other Church Fathers from Augustine's era who echoed this perspective included, *inter alia*, Ambrose and John Chrysostom.¹²³ By way of illustration, in the fifth century Hesychius of Jerusalem, in his 'Homilies on Job' wrote:

Now, since the betrayer had been defeated in every battle, had failed in all his attempts, had been hindered in all his hunts, had been deprived in all his schemes, and all his traps had been broken, after destroying Job's wealth, after the death of his numerous children, after ripping Job's body with his blows, as a last, and in the betrayer's opinion, most compelling resource, he leads his wife against Job.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Cited in Low, *The Bible, Gender, and Reception History: The Case of Job's Wife*, 34.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ For textual examples from the writings of these, and other Church Fathers in support of this view see *ibid.*, 31-37. Chrysostom adds the further thought that Job's wife was so thoroughly under the control of Satan that he "suffers her to be silent and quiet" until he determined the precise and most opportune moment for her to speak when Job was "seasoned and worn" (cited in Sonya R. Meade, "Bless God and Die: An Examination of the Role of Job's Wife in the Masoretic Text of Job" (Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1997), 9.)

¹²⁴ Cited in Manlio Simonetti and Marco Conti, eds., *Job, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 13.

About two centuries after Augustine, Gregory the Great wrote his *Moralia on Job*, arguably the single most influential text on later medieval traditions of Job.¹²⁵

Katharine Low writes:

In Gregory's commentary, Job's wife functions as just another test that Job must overcome.... When Satan attempts to defeat Job, he does so through Job's wife, knowing that as Adam was prone to be deceived through his wife Eve, so might Job's wife persuade Job to curse God. Gregory refers to Satan as the serpent who, through his wife, the one closest to Job, attempted to sway his faith (III. viii).¹²⁶

Gregory's attitude towards suffering is key to understanding the way in which Job's wife is seen to be another test that threatens to compromise Job's faith. For Gregory, suffering is often not an evil, but a gift to faith. Within Gregory's framework, "[s]uffering turns the soul inward so that it can ascend toward God."¹²⁷ In urging Job to curse God, his wife was tempting him to turn aside from the response of faith that could recognize God's blessing even in the affliction that came from God's hand. Job's response to his wife in 2:10, "Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" is a classic example within Gregory's theological framework of someone who, in the midst of suffering, stood firm against the persuasions to abandon his faith.

¹²⁵ By the standards of contemporary critical biblical scholarship, Gregory's *Moralia on Job* is wide open to derisive critique. Schreiner writes:

As a commentary on Job...the modern reader finds the *Moralia* a most difficult text to read. Many historians have dismissed it altogether as an exegetical work. Dudden writes that "the form of the book disgusts the modern reader. It is...the endless allegorizing, the twisting of every word and phrase into a symbol of hidden truth, that is so inexplicably wearisome." (Susan R. Schreiner, *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found: Calvin's Exegesis of Job from Medieval and Modern Perspectives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 22.)

¹²⁶ Low, *The Bible, Gender, and Reception History: The Case of Job's Wife*, 38.

¹²⁷ Schreiner, *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found: Calvin's Exegesis of Job from Medieval and Modern Perspectives*, 27.

In these examples, it is easy to recognize the first interpretive tradition described above that sees Job's wife as an agent or ally of Satan. There is, however, at least one notable exception to this view of Job's wife that aligns more closely with the second interpretive tradition, and especially the perspective within it that sees Job's wife as being motivated by love for her husband. Katherine Low writes:

A sermon on divorce by Asterius of Amasea¹²⁸ offers a literary source that upholds Job's wife as an ideal wife.... Warning his audience not to take divorce lightly, Asterius points out a wife's role as a husband's healer (άνδρός θεραπείας) who comforts him in his distress and who can manage the household. He turns to Job's wife as an example. She sat with Job on the dunghill, scraping his sores and pulling worms from them. As an inseparable friend (άχώριστος φίλος), Job's wife falls into the sin of blasphemy only to urge Job to end his misery so that she might not see him continue on in pain. She took no account of her state of widowhood that would follow...and therefore thought not of herself.¹²⁹

Notwithstanding this exception that views Job's wife positively, the overwhelming weight of interpretive opinion falls on the side of the Augustinian view that sees Job's wife as the temptress agent of Satan. This mainstream view persisted through the Middle Ages, gathering the likes of Thomas Aquinas into its flow.¹³⁰ The next major

¹²⁸ Low dates this sermon to 386 CE. Low, *The Bible, Gender, and Reception History: The Case of Job's Wife*, 33.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ In his literal exposition of Job, Aquinas writes about Job's wife:

The afflictions of men are also usually relieved by consoling words, but exasperating words are spoken to the afflicted Job, so much more provoking as they are proffered by a person close to him. For there follows *Now his wife*, the only one whom the devil (who had cast down the first man through a woman) had left alive in order that through her he might upset the mind of the just man (cited in Anthony Damico and Martin D. Yaffe, eds., *Thomas Aquinas the Literal Exposition on Job: A Scriptural Commentary Concerning Providence* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 94.

In addition to overtly theological commentary that echoes this view of Job's wife, other medieval literature draws from the same well. One example would include Eustache Deschamps' *Le Miroir de Mariage*, written between 1381 and 1420, in which he "mentions

voice to echo this view was John Calvin in the sixteenth century.¹³¹ From 1554-55 he preached no fewer than 159 sermons to the people of Geneva on the book of Job in what amounted to a running exposition of the book.¹³² In the ninth sermon in the series Calvin preached on the section in Job 2 in which Job's wife appears, in which he expressed his views of her in the strongest, and some might say vitriolic terms. He described her variously as "an instrument of Satan", a "Shedevil", a "fiend of hell", one who was unmoved by her husband's situation and "showed herself to be like a savage beast", and who actively tormented her husband and provoked him to despair.¹³³

Job's wife as an example of wifely nastiness because if Job had listened to her advice, he would have missed paradise, just like Adam did when he listened to Eve" (Low, *The Bible, Gender, and Reception History: The Case of Job's Wife*, 42-43.) Variations on this theme do occur. In the fifteenth century Middle English poem, the "Life of Job", Satan is described as a serpent, reminiscent of Eden, and Job's wife suggests that Job's patience is futile as he will never recover. But when Job responds to his wife with words akin to those in the biblical story an unusual reversal occurs in that "God appears to Job and rebukes him for speaking hastily and insolently to his wife" (ibid., 47.) In two of the tales from Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* echoes of Job's wife are heard in ways that both repeat the prevailing view of her as a temptress and in ways that radically subvert that view. In 'The Tale of the Wife of Bath' Alisoun (the Wife of Bath) speaks words to her husband that repeat Eve's temptation whilst referencing Job. In 'The Clerk's Tale' Griselda (the Wife of Walter) is presented as Job in female form, a paragon of patience. For an intriguing discussion of these themes see Ann W. Astell, "Job's Wife, Walter's Wife, and the Wife of Bath," in *Old Testament Women in Western Literature*, ed. Raymond-Jean Frontain and Jan Wojcik (Conway, Ark: UCA Press, 1991). See also Low, *The Bible, Gender, and Reception History: The Case of Job's Wife*, 43-45.

¹³¹ Other prominent voices within that period articulated similar views of Job's wife, such as Martin Luther. Katherine Low writes:

In his *Lectures on Genesis*, Luther expounds on the ways Satan afflicts and torments humans and offers Job as an example of faithful endurance. Job's wife, however, acts as an example of hopelessness, disbelief, and despair, engaging in blasphemous words, the kind of words that represent Satan's slanderous ways. She encourages him to die in the Devil's name! (*The Bible, Gender, and Reception History: The Case of Job's Wife*, 89.)

¹³² Maarten Wisse, *Scripture between Identity and Creativity: A Hermeneutical Theory Building Upon Four Interpretations of Job* (Utrecht: Ars Disputandi, 2003), 51.

¹³³ Direct quotations from Calvin's sermons as cited in Meade, "Bless God and Die: An Examination of the Role of Job's Wife in the Masoretic Text of Job," 16-17.

Calvin follows the thinking of Gregory from almost a thousand years earlier in his attitude towards suffering. He regarded the suffering of the faithful as the biblical norm and held the view that "God afflicts those whom he loves."¹³⁴ The strength of Calvin's conviction on this point meant that the only way in which he could interpret the words of Job's wife urging Job to abandon his faith and curse God because of his sufferings was as an affront to the ways of God. Accordingly, Calvin denounces Job's wife in the strongest possible terms.

The interpretive trajectory from Augustine to Calvin privileges the interpretive tradition that sees Job's wife as an agent of Satan, to the virtual exclusion of the other interpretive traditions. Throughout much of this period, little to no consideration is given to her own story of pain and suffering, neither to the influence she may have had upon Job. Indeed, Job is most commonly portrayed as someone who resists the tempting influence of his wife and is unmoved by her blasphemous promptings. Having failed in her primary role as the agent of Satan to entice Job to curse God there is no further part for her to play in the book. Accordingly, within this interpretive framework the departure of Job's wife from the narrative in Job 2 signals the shutting of the door on her story, and no consideration is given to any further role or influence she may have had within the rest of the book.

6. Perspectives in art

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a comprehensive overview of the reception history of Job's wife within art.¹³⁵ However, a brief consideration of some of the distinctive representations of Job's wife in Christian art can helpfully illustrate the themes being explored here.

¹³⁴ Schreiner, *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found: Calvin's Exegesis of Job from Medieval and Modern Perspectives*, 96.

¹³⁵ For an excellent overview of the representations of the book of Job in art see Samuel Terrien, *The Iconography of Job through the Centuries: Artists as Biblical Interpreters* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996). For a detailed analysis of the depictions of Job's wife in Medieval art up to the time of the Renaissance see Low, *The Bible, Gender, and Reception History: The Case of Job's Wife*, 56-111.

6.1 Early Christian art

One of the most important repositories of early Christian art are the Roman catacombs. Within this collection the image of Job recurs more than twenty times.¹³⁶ Given that the catacombs date from the pre-Constantinian era when Christians were subject to intense state persecution at times, it is significant that Job is not depicted in lurid detail as a victim of overwhelming suffering, as might have been expected.

Terrien writes:

In these paintings the hero is never shown as a dispirited lamenter. He is not presented as the victim of a seemingly incurable disease or the target of social opprobrium, much less the object of divine malediction. Nowhere to be seen are Behemoth and Leviathan, that haunted the ancient mind as terrifying symbols of cosmic evil. Nor is Job shown as an old man harassed by sins or as a rebel accusing the Deity.¹³⁷

Rather than presenting graphic depictions of the misery of suffering, these paintings tend to emphasize eternal youth and the promise of new life. By focusing on the hope of transformation rather than on the repugnant realities of disease and the despair that is born of abject suffering, the tendency in these paintings is to interpret the elements of the story in a hopeful light. This is strikingly apparent in the depictions of Job's wife within the catacombs who is viewed as an instrument of blessing rather than an agent of malevolence. Terrien describes Job's wife in one of the frescoes of the so-called New Catacomb of the Via Latina:

Job's wife ... stands just behind him. She wears a dalmatic¹³⁸ with long, wide sleeves and lowers her face in an attitude of compassionate concern. She holds a

¹³⁶ Terrien, *The Iconography of Job through the Centuries: Artists as Biblical Interpreters*, 17.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

¹³⁸ A dalmatic is a long wide-sleeved tunic that was part of the dress of upper-class women within the Roman Empire. That is the most probable connotation of its use within this fresco, designating the social status of Job's wife as a woman of wealth and social influence. However, a further intriguing possibility exists. According to the *Liber Pontificalis* which provides a history of all the popes, Pope Sylvester I (314-335CE) introduced the dalmatic as a liturgical vestment, a usage which began in Rome and which has persisted to today. (See the

piece of bread on a stick or fork and is about to offer it to him. This is the first in a series of representations which appeared intermittently during subsequent centuries.¹³⁹ They exhibit the motif of the loving wife and tender nurse, not at all the mocking and argumentative woman of an equally persistent tradition.

Halfway between these two contrasting themes is the motif of the suffering mate, found also in another fresco of the New Catacombs on the Via Latina. In this picture, the woman remains with her husband. Not deserting him, she covers her nostrils with a shawl in an apparent protective gesture against the pestilential stench of the patient's disease. She too brings him bread.

In this Christian environment ... the eucharistic meal ... played a dramatic role. Because the eating of bread was understood as a far more substantial gesture than a merely physical act, it suggested to viewers of the catacombs the sacramental bread of life.¹⁴⁰

A further important detail in the way in which Job's wife is depicted in early Christian art has to do with the gesture of raising a covered hand to her face, that recurs repeatedly.¹⁴¹ In his description quoted above of one of the frescoes of the New Catacombs on the Via Latina, Terrien suggests that the covering of her nostrils by the

online Catholic Encyclopedia at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04608a.htm> [accessed on 12 June 2014].) If, as Terrien suggests, this fresco dates from the fourth century, and given the new liturgical association of the dalmatic introduced around that time, it is possible that Job's wife is being depicted not simply as a woman of eminent social standing but also in a priestly role. This is all the more telling given the fact that in the fresco she is offering Job some bread in what appears to be a sacramental gesture.

¹³⁹ A further telling example of this motif of Job's wife offering him [sacramental] bread comes from an eighth-century drawing of a bas-relief marble sculpture (now lost) on a sarcophagus found at Arles in Provence. In it, the small round loaf of bread that she offers to Job on a wooden fork has been baked with the sign of the cross. (Terrien, *The Iconography of Job through the Centuries: Artists as Biblical Interpreters*, 28-29.) Another example would be in a ninth-century copy of the sermons of Gregory of Nazianus (Low, *The Bible, Gender, and Reception History: The Case of Job's Wife*, 60.)

¹⁴⁰ Terrien, *The Iconography of Job through the Centuries: Artists as Biblical Interpreters*, 21.

¹⁴¹ The bas-relief sculpture of Job and his wife on the fourth century sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, which will be discussed below, provides an excellent example of this gesture.

woman was a protective gesture against the stench of her husband's disease. This interpretation is possibly fueled by the biblical reference in Job 19:17 when Job says, "My breath is repulsive to my wife." However, a different and far more compelling interpretation can be given to this gesture which casts it in a positive light. Low writes:

In early Christian art, Job's wife projects a pose with a veiled hand to the face, a symbol of modesty for a wife in early Christianity. Moshe Barasch argues that medieval art specifically adopted the motif of grieving from classical art and that "the most frequently represented gestures of sadness are the more restrained movements that late Hellenistic and Roman sculptors inherited from classical Greek art," such as the raising of the veiled hand to the face.¹⁴²

In summary, the compassionate gesture of raising a covered hand to the face as a sign of modesty and grief, as well as the sacramental gesture of offering bread to Job, cast Job's wife in a favourable light. These early depictions of Job's wife within Christian art fall squarely within the second interpretive tradition that views her positively as a faithful wife of love and compassion. Indeed, in the gesture of her modesty and grief it could be argued that she mediates the pastoral presence of God who shares in Job's suffering, while in the sacramental (and even priestly) gesture of administering bread to Job, she mediates the sustaining and restoring grace of God to Job.

This positive view of Job's wife in Christian art would soon change, arguably influenced by the thought of Augustine and others of his ilk, as stronger associations were forged between Job's wife and Satan.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Low, *The Bible, Gender, and Reception History: The Case of Job's Wife*, 61. The quote from Barasch comes from Moshe Barasch, *Gestures of Despair in Medieval and Early Renaissance Art* (New York: New York University Press, 1976), 11.

¹⁴³ While the strong connection forged between Job's wife and Satan is the most glaring development in the depiction of Job's wife in medieval art from what had been the earlier standard, another emerging difference in that period would be the subtle but significant changes in posture that Job's wife adopts. Foremost of these would be the uncovering of her mouth, but other changes in her posture signify an altered view of her general disposition

6.2 Job, his wife, and Satan in medieval Christian art

The “troublesome trio of Job, his wife, and Satan”¹⁴⁴ emerge as one of the important motifs on the Joban artistic landscape within the medieval period. An early expression of this motif can be found on the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus which dates from the fourth century.¹⁴⁵ Included on the sarcophagus is a scene of Job, Satan and Job's wife, placed immediately next to a scene of Adam, the serpent and Eve from the Garden of Eden. The juxtaposition of these two scenes and the relative positioning of the characters suggests a direct correlation between Job and Adam, Satan and the serpent, and Job's wife and Eve. The correlation between Job's wife and Eve establishes her in the role of temptress, and accordingly forges a clear association between her and Satan, the great tempter. In later centuries of the medieval period, this alignment between Satan and Job's wife became increasingly pronounced within Christian art.

A compelling example of this alignment can be found in the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* (abbreviated as SHS) or *Mirror of Human Salvation*, a fourteenth century illuminated manuscript in rhyming Latin verse.¹⁴⁶ SHS presents a popular Medieval typological theology, in which Job is seen as someone who prefigures the suffering

towards Job. For example, in the 11th-12th century bas-relief sculpture on one of the portals of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, the right hand of Job's wife is drawn away from him.

To withdraw her right hand, according to medieval gesture, is to reserve her position on a matter. When two individuals shared an oath or expressed faith for one another, they touched or clasped right hands. “Handfasting” or clasping right hands while exchanging vows was a common way for a couple to marry.... But his wife exhibits what J.A.

Burrow calls “gestures of pride, like those of scorn or anger” since she stands “aloof from any touching of other persons.” (Low, *The Bible, Gender, and Reception History: The Case of Job's Wife*, 63.)

¹⁴⁴ The phrase comes from Low, *ibid.*, 56.

¹⁴⁵ This sarcophagus was discovered in 1595 in the crypt of the Basilica of Saint Peter in Rome. (Terrien, *The Iconography of Job through the Centuries: Artists as Biblical Interpreters*, 25.)

¹⁴⁶ While written in the fourteenth century in Latin, SHS was transmitted in a number of different languages, surviving in over 400 manuscripts in the languages of Latin, Middle English, German, French, Dutch, and Czech. (Low, *The Bible, Gender, and Reception History: The Case of Job's Wife*, 59.)

Christ.¹⁴⁷ Whenever Job is joined by his wife in SHS, she is always accompanied by Satan in a way that foreshadows a specific moment in Christ's passion – his scourging. The consistent convention is for Satan to be depicted with an actual whip in his hand, whereas Job's wife participates in the scourging through her words. This is depicted either through a pointed finger of hers that indicates that she is engaged in speech, a common and identifiable gesture in both SHS and other sources.¹⁴⁸

Alternatively, her words are physically presented in a speech bubble above her head that she holds with an extended hand, much like a raised whip. The effect is clear, Job's wife lashes Job with her words. This is made explicit in the text of SHS.

Consider these lines from SHS XX, II. 69-74:

Job was whipped two ways. Satan scourged him with whips, and his wife lashed him with words, the one causing pain in his body, and other causing pain in his heart. Satan felt the hurt that he caused in the flesh was not sufficient so that he instigated Job's wife to wound her husband's spirit.¹⁴⁹

The point for this discussion is that within the Middle Ages especially, Job's wife came to be seen, almost exclusively, within the categories of the interpretive tradition that understood her to be an agent of Satan who actively participated in afflicting Job. Many further examples of this abound in the Christian art of this period, but the

¹⁴⁷ Typology is a theory in Christian theology that explores the predictive relationship between the Old and New Testaments, where characters, events or statements in the Old Testament are seen as types (or anti-types) of those in the New Testament, especially pertaining to the life of Christ. See James Barr, "Allegory and Typology," in *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Alan Richardson and John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1983), 11-15. It is interesting that in Roman and Byzantine times, Job was more commonly portrayed by early Christian artists as the prototype of Christ in Triumph, whereas the later manuscript illuminations of Latin Bibles, especially in the High to Late Middle Ages, increasingly presented him in his suffering aspect as a martyr saint. See Terrien, *The Iconography of Job through the Centuries: Artists as Biblical Interpreters*, 50.

¹⁴⁸ Low, *The Bible, Gender, and Reception History: The Case of Job's Wife*, 75.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

importance and widespread prevalence of SHS make this example an accurate representation of the dominant view of Job's wife of this period.¹⁵⁰

6.3 Job's wife in Renaissance art

In the Renaissance period – which spanned roughly the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries – two noticeable developments occurred in the depiction of Job's wife in Christian art. The first was the loosening of the strongly visual association between her and Satan, driven in part by a diminishing of Satan's presence within the iconography of Job in this period.¹⁵¹ The second was the representation of Job's wife as a shrew. Low writes:

By the end of the fourteenth century, Satan is a ubiquitous presence in art, frightening believers into repentance. As the sixteenth century winds down, however, and humanism, along with religious reformations, show effects in European societies, more subtle demonic cues appear in art of Job and his wife. This is because the role of Satan undergoes development in early modern theology. At the same time that satanic presence becomes more generic, complex, or even invisible in art of Job, a less subtle message emerges for Job's

¹⁵⁰ For further examples see Terrien's chapter on 'Medieval Manuscript Illuminations in Terrien, *The Iconography of Job through the Centuries: Artists as Biblical Interpreters*, 44-61. Terrien further cites two adjacent woodcarvings of the altarpiece of the Doberan Abbey, dating from the mid-fourteenth century, that place Job and Jesus side by side. In the one, Jesus is being mocked by two soldiers. In the other, Job is being derided by Satan and his wife. (ibid., 80-81.) Exceptions to this identification between Job's wife and Satan do occur. Terrien's reading of the tympanum on the North Transept portal of Chartres Cathedral, dating from the early thirteenth century, offers an unconvincing interpretation of Job's wife as a humane and loving wife filled with unqualified compassion for her husband, even though she stands right behind Satan and their arms touch. (ibid., 73-76.)

¹⁵¹ The reasons for the gradual disappearance of Satan from Joban artworks in the Renaissance era are complex, and probably have more to do with gradual shifts in diabolology and the notions of evil within the wider prevailing cultural discourse of the time than with any specific developments within Joban theology *per se*. For a further discussion of this broad theme see Neil Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987). See also William C. Tremmel, "Satan - the Dark Side," *Ilfiff Review* 42, no. 1 (1985). Tremmel's fascinating essay traces the transformation of the Satan myth from the dark side of God to the dark side of humanity.

wife. In general, Job's wife in early modern art represents a shrew, a "bad wife," in a more generic form than she does in medieval art.¹⁵²

Along with the representation of Job's wife as a shrew, a further development of her characterization in the art of this period is that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries she is overwhelmingly represented in the guise of an aged woman.¹⁵³ These shifts in the portrayal of Job's wife defy easy explanation, especially if one considers the influence of the complex issue of gender within this development.¹⁵⁴

In the Renaissance period the witch craze reached its zenith in what was surely a cultural expression of the struggle to redefine gendered behavioural codes and an increasing societal instability with regard to sexual identity.¹⁵⁵ According to Michael Bailey it was no coincidence that more often than not the women who were accused as witches had strong personalities and were known to defy cultural convention by overstepping the lines of proper female decorum.¹⁵⁶ Whether or not Job's wife was seen as a witch, her connection with the Devil – fueled in no small part by the allegations of the likes of John Calvin, as discussed above – meant that she was cast in the mold of a "bad wife" – a reference to a married woman who acted contrary to the

¹⁵² Low, *The Bible, Gender, and Reception History: The Case of Job's Wife*, 90.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁵⁴ For an excellent treatment of this subject, see Low's chapter entitled 'Job's Wife's Place in the Woman Question' in *ibid.*, 112-34.

¹⁵⁵ In 1486, a Dominican priest by the name of Heinrich Kramer published an influential work on witchcraft entitled *Malleus Maleficarum* (commonly translated as 'Hammer of Witches' or 'The Hammer of Witchcraft'). This work overwhelmingly assumes that witches are women – the Latin word for 'witch' in the title itself is rendered in the feminine form – and explicitly, women who make sexual pacts with the Devil. At issue here is any deviation from culturally defined gendered roles. For example, in the section on the prosecution of alleged witches, the *Malleus Maleficarum* offers the guidance for magistrates that if a woman does not cry during her trial it can automatically be concluded that she is a witch.

Unsurprisingly, women accused of witchcraft were far more likely to be single than married, and were also more likely to be older than younger. See Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 3rd ed. (London: Pearson, 2006), 141-63.

¹⁵⁶ Michael David Bailey, *Battling Demons : Witchcraft, Heresy, and Reform in the Late Middle Ages*, The Magic in History Series (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 53.

pre-defined cultural code of the kind of behaviour required from a wife. Indeed, with the gradual disappearance of Satan from Joban artwork in this period, this aspect of the characterization of Job's wife remained. The question that this raises is whether this represents a softening or an intensification of the first interpretive tradition that sees Job's wife as an agent of Satan. As Low puts it:

...the disappearance, or fading, of Satan in favor of generic forms of evil changes Job's wife's role as part of Satan's schemes to just another "bad wife." Or, on the flip side, one could argue that with Satan out of the picture, the evil of the scene transfers heavily to Job's wife.¹⁵⁷

Perhaps the answer to that question lies primarily in the eyes of the beholder. A fascinating example of the influence of the 'eyes of the beholder' in the interpretation of Job's wife in art would be Georges de La Tour's seventeenth century composition of Job and his wife.

6.4 Georges de La Tour's *Job and His Wife*



¹⁵⁷ Low, *The Bible, Gender, and Reception History: The Case of Job's Wife*, 134.

The work in question dates from the 1630's and has a fascinating history. Its origins were shrouded in mystery with its authorship and subject matter being uncertain. "It was tentatively attributed to Georges de La Tour in 1917 and in 1922, but its authorship was confirmed only in 1972, when a cleaning of the canvas revealed his signature."¹⁵⁸ More intriguing is how the painting has been seen. Being uncertain of its precise subject matter, art critics initially titled the painting "Saint Peter Delivered from Prison by an Angel."¹⁵⁹ The woman in the painting was seen as an angel, tenderly nursing a pitiful man with great compassion. However, in 1935 Jean Lafond used the broken pot at the man's feet to identify the scene with the book of Job, an identification that was corroborated a year later in a lengthier article by Werner Weisbach.¹⁶⁰ Following this revised identification, when the painting was exhibited in 1937 in Paris it bore the title *Job raillé par sa femme* (Job Mocked by His Wife).

Henceforth the saving "angel" of earlier critics was transformed into the domineering and unkind wife, and her facial expression and left-hand gesture, hitherto thought to be tender and loving, are now seen as glaring and derisive. To Benedict Nicholson (*sic*) and Christopher Wright, therefore, she is "a Lady MacBeth of a Wife," whose arm is "hovering like a threat above her husband's head."¹⁶¹

Alternative interpretations naturally exist. Both Terrien and Seow, for example, offer persuasive arguments for a positive reading of Job's wife in this painting by La Tour.¹⁶² Another compelling example would be the description of the painting by

¹⁵⁸ Terrien, *The Iconography of Job through the Centuries: Artists as Biblical Interpreters*, 166.

¹⁵⁹ Choon-Leong Seow, "Job's Wife," in *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World: An Introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Katherine Doob Sakenfield*, ed. Linda Day and Carolyn Pressler (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 146.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 147. The quote from Nicholson and Wright is taken from Benedict Nicholson and Christopher Wright, *Georges De La Tour* (London: Phaidon Press, 1974), 33.

¹⁶² See Terrien, *The Iconography of Job through the Centuries: Artists as Biblical Interpreters*, 166-69. Also, Seow, "Job's Wife," 147-48.

Muriel Spark in her novel *The Only Problem*.¹⁶³ Such interpretations belong within the second interpretive tradition that recognizes in Job's wife a person of care and compassion. However, for the purposes of the discussion here, the dramatic shift in the interpretation of the woman in La Tour's painting from compassionate angel to mocking wife is deeply revealing of the telling influence that preconceptions can have on what is seen.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Her description reads thus:

Job's wife, tall, sweet-faced, with the intimation of a beautiful body inside the large, tent-like case of her firm clothes, bending, long-necked, solicitous over Job. . . . Job is naked except for a loin cloth. He clasps his hands above his knees. His body seems to shrink, but it is the shrunkenness of pathos rather than want. Beside him is the piece of broken pottery that he has taken to scrape his wounds. His beard is thick. He is not an old man. Both are in their prime, a couple in their thirties. . . . His face looks up at his wife, sensitive, imploring some favour, urging some cause. What is his wife trying to tell him as she bends her sweet face towards him? What does he beg, this stricken man, so serene in his faith, so accomplished in argument? . . . Job and his wife are deeply in love. (Cited in Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, 52.)

¹⁶⁴ A further notable example in similar vein would be Albrecht Dürer's *Jabach* Altarpiece, which depicts Job's wife pouring water over Job's neck and shoulders. This act is variously interpreted either as an act of malice or an act of compassion. For an example of the former see Zefira Gitay, "The Portrayal of Job's Wife and Her Representation in the Visual Arts," in *Fortunate the Eyes That See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Astrid B. Beck, et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 521. For an example of the latter see Seow, "Job's Wife," 144-46. In her contribution to this discussion, Low cites the example of Xantippe, the wife of Socrates, who poured filthy water over his head. Low, *The Bible, Gender, and Reception History: The Case of Job's Wife*, 98. Muriel Sparks' *The Only Problem* was referenced in the footnote above. In commenting further on this novel, Samuel Balentine writes:

For an interesting perspective on how the conventional assessment of the wife exercises a strong and often misplaced influence on all interpreters, see Muriel Sparks, *The Only Problem* [New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1984]. Harvey, the central character of the novel, is writing a book on Job. He comes across this very painting by Georges de la Tour and is struck by how different the portrait is from that suggested by the text of the Bible. "In Harvey's mind there was much more in the painting to illuminate the subject of Job than in many of the lengthy commentaries that he knew so well. It was eloquent of a new idea." [76]. (Balentine, *Job*, 64.)

6.5 William Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of the Job*

William Blake's exposition of the book of Job through his series of twenty-one engravings is unparalleled in the history of art. This monumental work will be the focus of the next chapter of this thesis, which obviates the need for any lengthy treatment here.¹⁶⁵ What can be said that is relevant to this discussion of the history of interpretation of Job's wife is that within Blake's imagination a wholly new place for Job's wife is found within the book as a whole that had never been explored before within the history of art. In no fewer than eighteen of the twenty-one illustrations Job's wife is by his side, as Blake claims for her a prominent place within virtually every aspect of Job's story.¹⁶⁶ This is a striking departure from the biblical text where Job's wife appears for all of two verses and then disappears, never to be heard from, addressed or referred to again apart from two passing references.¹⁶⁷

Blake's interpretation radically subverts the first interpretive tradition that would see Job's wife as an agent of Satan. In the series Satan appears in plates 2, 3, 5, 6 and 16. In plates 2, 5 and 16 he is depicted between God who is enthroned in heaven, and Job and his wife who are on earth. The spatial arrangement is significant, as it is immediately apparent that Job's wife is on Job's side (she is literally placed next to him with their bodies touching) and not on Satan's side. Plate 3 depicts Satan destroying the house of Job's eldest son which resulted in the demise of all of his children. Significantly, this is one of the three engravings in the series where Job's wife is absent. Plate 6 depicts Satan smiting Job with boils as he stands on top of a supine with poisoned darts in his one hand and a vial of fire in his other. The gleeful activity of Satan is contrasted with Job's wife who buries her face in her hands as she

¹⁶⁵ All twenty-one engravings of the series are reproduced in the discussion that is to follow. Larger, full-page reproductions of each engraving can be found in Appendix A.

¹⁶⁶ The three illustrations in the collection where Job's wife is not present are plates 3, 11 and 20. Plate 3 is a depiction of Job's sons and daughters being overwhelmed by Satan in which Job himself is absent (cf. Job 1:18-19). Plate 11 is a depiction of Job's evil dreams (cf. Job 7:14). Plate 20 is a depiction of Job and his three daughters (cf. Job 42:13-15). With the possible exception of plate 20, the absence of Job's wife from these particular engravings is appropriate and consistent with the subject matter of each engraving.

¹⁶⁷ The two passing references to his wife made by Job are found in 19:17 and 31:10.

kneels at Job's feet with his feet resting on her lap. There isn't even the slightest hint that Job's wife is collaborating with Satan. Quite the contrary, she appears to be in abject despair.

A further way in which Blake subverts the first interpretive tradition is that nowhere in the *Illustrations* are the words of Job's wife from 2:9 recorded.¹⁶⁸ Her words in the biblical text, often regarded by commentators as deviant speech, have been the primary driving force behind the interpretation that views her as an agent of Satan. Blake strips this away as he claims for Job's wife a pivotal place in Job's unfolding drama undefined by any words she may have uttered and whose meaning remains ambiguous, thereby inviting the reader/viewer to consider her in a role beyond that of speech. Far from being a diminishment of her role, this 'silencing' of Job's wife can be seen as an elevation into the realm of the mystical, in which she embodies a presence and influence that is not dependent upon human speech.¹⁶⁹

Blake clearly breaks with the long-established tradition in the history of interpretation that saw Job's wife as an agent of Satan, or at least as an embodiment of some form of gendered deviance. Would the other interpretive traditions discussed above better describe his approach to Job's wife? I believe they would. The second of these recognizes that Job's wife is a person in her own right with her own story to tell. This is powerfully conveyed by Blake through the rich range of emotions and responses that Job's wife exhibits throughout the series. This underscores the point that she was not just a casual bystander to what was going on, but was intimately and personally

¹⁶⁸ As such, Job's wife is the only speaking character in the biblical text whose voice is not heard in the *Illustrations*. It is noted that none of Bildad's words appear in the marginal inscriptions. However, his 'voice' is nevertheless represented in the words of Eliphaz and Zophar which are included in the series. Similarly with the third messenger who reports the raid of the Chaldeans to Job, whose voice is certainly represented by the words of the other messengers, even though it is ambiguous whether or not his actual words are recorded. The caption of plate 4 – "And I only am escaped alone to tell thee" – are words that are common to all four the messengers.

¹⁶⁹ The relationship between speech and silence within the book of Job as a whole will be explored in chapter seven below.

involved with all that Job was experiencing. Indeed, it could be argued that she exhibits a richer range of appropriate emotion even than that which Job himself displays. In a majority of the illustrations Job is depicted with a very similar countenance that could be described as a mixture of raw grief and the numbing shock of the proverbial “deer caught in the headlights.” The impression is created that Job has been anaesthetized by his pain, whereas his wife feels it, and holds it. The point should not be overstated, especially given the eloquence and passion of Job's speeches in the book which refute any suggestion that he was paralyzed by his pain. But at the very least, the nuanced responses of Job's wife, as portrayed in Blake's illustrations, make the case powerfully that she was as fully present to the *meaning* of the unfolding drama as could be humanly expected.

The third interpretive tradition considers the influence that Job's wife had on Job, particularly through the productive effect of the words that she speaks to him. As already discussed, Blake does not use the words of Job's wife in his *Illustrations* at all, but this is not to say that she does not exert any influence on Job. Her influence, for Blake, lies not in anything she says but rather in the constancy of her companionship and the faithfulness of her suffering presence. Job's wife becomes for him an embodiment of the presence of Christ that becomes the key to Job's transformation. This will be explored in greater detail in the chapter on Blake that is to follow.

7. Perspectives in modern biblical scholarship¹⁷⁰

The final section of this discussion of the reception history of Job's wife concerns the interpretive perspectives of modern biblical scholarship. As an admittedly oversimplified generalization, two broad trends can be discerned within contemporary biblical scholarship with respect to the interpretation of Job's wife. The first would be

¹⁷⁰ It is noted that the term ‘modern’ can be understood in different ways. It is used here in a limited historical sense to indicate the latter stages of the late modern period and contemporary history, a period from the late 19th century to the present. It should not be confused with ‘modernism’, a term that describes a particular philosophical perspective distinct from other philosophical perspectives such as post-modernism.

the treatments of Job's wife that occur within commentaries of the book as a whole. Predictably, these treatments tend to be fairly brief and relatively unnuanced, with a preponderance of commentators siding with the majority view in the history of interpretation that sees Job's wife in negative terms, though notable exceptions do of course occur. In the main, these readings of Job's wife fall under the first interpretive tradition that sees Job's wife as an agent of Satan, though many modern commentators are hesitant to express their views in such a brazenly forthright way.

The second broad trend within the biblical scholarship of this area would be readings that emerge from a focused exploration of Job's wife in her own right. These readings are often driven by a feminist hermeneutic and tend to fall under the second and third interpretive traditions as a consequence, though once again there are some notable exceptions. A brief survey of the scholarship within these two broad trends will now be offered.

7.1 Readings of Job's wife within commentaries on the book of Job

A comprehensive survey of all the readings of Job's wife within the general commentaries on the book of Job is beyond the scope and intention of this chapter. A sampling of views will suffice in illustrating the essential points that need to be highlighted. Those who offer merely a passing comment of Job's wife invariably see her in a negative light, most commonly following the interpretation of the Church Fathers in identifying her with Eve and her role as a temptress. Dhorme writes, "She acts as intermediary between Satan and Job, as she was between the serpent and Adam."¹⁷¹ So too Pope and Rowley.¹⁷² According to Driver and Gray, "Job's wife, like Adam's (Gn.3), becomes, even if unwittingly, "diabolic adiutrix" (Aug.) . . . Her speech is, in fact, nothing less than impious; and, if spoken intentionally, she herself

¹⁷¹ Edouard Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, trans. Harold Knight (London: Nelson, 1967), 19.

¹⁷² See Marvin H. Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, 1st ed., The Anchor Bible, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965), 21-22. Also Harold Henry Rowley, *Job*, ed. Ronald E. Clements and Matthew Black, New Century Bible (London: Nelson, 1970), 36.

must be an impious woman.”¹⁷³ So too Habel who says “Her function, as Augustine said, is to play the role of *diabolic adjutrix*, the Satan's unwitting ally”¹⁷⁴ Hanson and Hanson refer to her “tempting words”.¹⁷⁵

She was the Satan's ally. . . . [who] tempted her husband to self-damnation by urging him to do exactly what the Satan had predicted he would do. . . . The Satan's temptation did not reach Job openly, so that its evil source would be recognized; it came more subtly, through the solicitude of a loving wife. . . . [who] has already lost faith, and wants Job to join her.¹⁷⁶

All these references from commentaries on the book of Job are representative examples of the first interpretive tradition that has continued to be the majority view within modern biblical scholarship. A further telling example comes from *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary*, a commentary written explicitly from the perspective of women and employing an underlying feminist hermeneutic. In her commentary on the book of Job within this volume, Kamila Blessing writes of Job's wife, “In the meantime we encounter Job's wife (Job 2:9). These are the only words spoken by a female in the story, and they do not bode well for women as she berates Job for his integrity and exhorts him to curse God and die. Job's wife does not have the capacity for disinterested faith.”¹⁷⁷

Those commentators that commit to more than just a few lines in their consideration of Job's wife usually offer a more nuanced reading of her, or at the very least

¹⁷³ S.R. Driver and G.B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job*, Icc Series (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1921), 25.

¹⁷⁴ Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job : A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 96.

¹⁷⁵ Anthony Hanson and Miriam Hanson, *Job: Introduction and Commentary* ed. John Marsh and Alan Richardson, Torch Bible Commentaries (London: SCM Press, 1953), 39.

¹⁷⁶ Francis I. Anderson, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. D.J. Wiseman, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 92-93.

¹⁷⁷ Kamila A. Blessing, "Job," in *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Catherine C. Kroeger and Mary J. Evans (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 278.

recognize the ambiguities within her role.¹⁷⁸ The first volume of David Clines's three volume commentary on the book of Job – which stands like an *opus magnum* in the field as a whole – applies his customary in-depth analysis to the diverse readings of Job's wife that have been offered in the history of interpretation. Clines highlights not only the variant readings of different commentators of the text, but the ambiguities inherent within the text itself in the words spoken by Job's wife.¹⁷⁹ Significantly, he also makes passing reference to the productive effect of her words on her husband – which is the basic premise of the third interpretive tradition – when he writes, “Though [Job] does not follow his wife's advice to the letter, he is from this point onward entirely infused by its spirit.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ It could be argued, however, that nuanced readings of Job's wife are inappropriate given the rhetorical intentions of the prose narrative. In her masterful work *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*, Carol Newsom argues eloquently and persuasively for a reading of the book of Job that takes seriously the generic character of the various elements that make up the book as a whole. Hearing the diverse voices that make up this polyphonic text in their own right requires a careful assessment of the distinctive genres in which these voices occur. Accordingly, the characterization of the genre of the prose tale is a critical issue in assessing the place and purpose of the characters within it, not least of which is Job's wife. The failure to do so could result in rhetorical functions being attributed to characters that are anomalous to the generic function of the texts in which they appear. For instance, if the prose tale is read as a straightforward didactic narrative, within such a generic framework the characters all play their parts in a mechanical, stylized and unambiguous way. See Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: University Press, 2003), 41-47. As such, a nuanced reading of Job's wife would be incongruous with the intentions of this generic form and therefore inappropriate. Alternatively, if the prose tale is read as a subversive didactic narrative, the door is opened for more nuanced readings of the role and function of different characters. In her earlier commentary on the book of Job, Newsom states that “The literary genius of the prose tale is that one genuinely cannot say whether it intends to be a straightforward didactic tale . . . or . . . a subversive didactic tale.” (“The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections,” in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck et al (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 361.) In a 2007 article, Newsom leans towards the view of the prose as “...a sophisticated didactic tale that should be theologically rehabilitated from the often dismissive treatment it has received in the past” (“Re-Considering Job,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 5, no. 2 (2007): 158.)

¹⁷⁹ A detailed analysis of the words of Job's wife will be offered in chapter five below.

¹⁸⁰ Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, 52.

Carol Newsom and Samuel Balentine both follow Clines in acknowledging the ambiguities inherent within the words of Job's wife, as well as the influence that those words came to exert over him.¹⁸¹ Newsom writes:

It is interesting that Job's outburst against his wife is the last thing he says for some time. Apparently not acknowledging the presence of the three friends who come to comfort him, Job sits in silence for seven days. When he finally speaks in chap. 3, his words sound distinctly like those of his wife. Though he does not exactly curse God, he curses the day of his birth. Though he does not die, he speaks longingly of death. In the chapters that follow his persistence in his integrity – both his moral righteousness and his honesty – motivates his angry, iconoclastic words. His wife's troubling questions have become his own.¹⁸²

Newsom's insightful comments open the door to the third interpretive tradition that recognizes the influence that Job's wife has on him. This view of Job's wife stands in stark contradistinction to the view inherent in the first interpretive tradition, which asserted not simply that Job's wife acted as an agent of Satan in tempting Job, but also that she had absolutely no influence on him whatsoever.¹⁸³ But such a view of Job's wife also challenges a perspective that can be discerned within some articulations of the second interpretive tradition that seeks more sympathetic interpretations of her motives and actions as a figure of pathos.¹⁸⁴ When the suffering endured by Job's wife is used as a justification for her utterances, explaining away her speech as the product

¹⁸¹ See Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 355-56. Also "Job," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 139-40. Balentine, *Job*, 62-65.

¹⁸² Newsom, "Job," 140.

¹⁸³ In drawing lines of comparison between Adam and Job on the one hand, and Eve and Job's wife on the other, the rabbis and Church Fathers were consistent in asserting that whereas Adam succumbed to the temptations of his wife, Job did not.

¹⁸⁴ Examples of such sympathetic readings would include Terrien's suggestion that she was compassionately proposing a "theological method of committing euthanasia" (cited in Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, 51.) Alden suggests that, in the light of her own suffering and pain, readers should "not be too hard on her" (Robert L. Alden, *Job*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 66.)

of almost unbearable pain, it is easy to dismiss her words in a somewhat patronizing way.

By making Job's wife a more sympathetic character, both the ancient writers and the modern commentators who follow their lead patronize her. Her words become "excusable," and consequently it is not necessary to take them seriously. What gets overlooked in this approach is that Job's wife is the one who recognizes, long before Job himself does, what is at stake theologically in innocent suffering: the conflict between innocence and integrity, on the one hand, and an affirmation of the goodness of God, on the other. It is the issue with which Job will struggle in the [remaining] chapters.¹⁸⁵

Having considered some of the readings of Job's wife by biblical scholars within their commentaries on the book of Job as a whole, we turn now to a consideration of the views of biblical scholars in various papers, journal articles and book sections that focus intentionally and explicitly on Job's wife. As a broad characterization, these readings of Job's wife seek to move beyond the cursory treatment of Job's wife inherent in the first interpretive tradition, and accordingly tend to fall within the second and third interpretive traditions in the manner in which Job's wife is perceived.¹⁸⁶

7.2 Gerald West – *Hearing Job's Wife*

An excellent example of a reading of Job's wife within the second interpretive tradition is offered by Gerald West.¹⁸⁷ In the light of the "long history of interpretation in which Job's wife has been severely battered" he makes an impassioned appeal for a reading of the book of Job that will seek to hear the cries of despair, agony, pain, frustration, rejection, confusion and outrage that are all part of this woman's untold

¹⁸⁵ Newsom, "Job," 140.

¹⁸⁶ Notable exceptions do occur, such as the crassly misogynist and vitriolic assault of Job's wife by Victor Sasson, "The Literary and Theological Function of Job's Wife in the Book of Job," *Biblica* 79, no. 1 (1998).

¹⁸⁷ Gerald O. West, "Hearing Job's Wife: Towards a Feminist Reading of Job," *Old Testament Essays* 4 (1991).

story.¹⁸⁸ West does not purport to do a feminist reading of Job's wife on the grounds that he is a male.¹⁸⁹ However, his appeal to hear Job's wife not just as an incidental character in somebody else's [a man's] narrative but as a person in her own right with a compelling story of her own to tell, resonates with the concerns of a feminist hermeneutic that seeks to recover the place of women in a male-dominated world.¹⁹⁰

7.3 Claire McGinnis – *Playing the Devil's Advocate in Job*

Given the long tradition of the connection between Satan and Job's wife in the history of interpretation of the book, Claire McGinnis offers a playful but compelling reading of Job's wife as one who plays the devil's advocate in the book, in the contemporary sense of the term. In urging Job to curse God and die, she is revealing to him the inherent dangers of such a response, to galvanize him further to remain true to his convictions. McGinnis writes, "...ultimately her suggestion wards off a threat that already exists; *she* verbalizes the option of cursing God so that Job will not."¹⁹¹ Her role is that of a benevolent provocateur who draws from her husband a verbal response that safeguards him from the threat of abandoning his faith. As such, her words have a productive effect on Job in that they elicit from him the desired response of expressing his persistent trust in the faithfulness of God, in spite of the calamities that had befallen him.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 107, 19.

¹⁸⁹ This begs the question whether feminist readings, by definition, are the exclusive purview of women.

Turning the text on its head is what feminists do. Any time *any* reader reads against the grain of the text, reads with a suspicious eye toward how the narrator wants you to read, you are performing a feminist reading. Focusing on the presence or absence of women in the text makes the reading a gendered one, not the eyes of a woman reading the text. (Alice Bach, "Man's World, Woman's Place: Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible," in *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, ed. Alice Bach (New York: Routledge, 1999), xxvi. [My emphasis, R.S.]

¹⁹⁰ See *ibid.*, xiii.

¹⁹¹ Claire M. McGinnis, "Playing the Devil's Advocate in Job: On Job's Wife," in *The Whirlwind: Essays on Job, Hermeneutics and Theology in Memory of Jane Morse* ed. Stephen L. Cook, Corinne L. Patton, and James W. Watts (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 140.

7.4 Rachel Magdalene – *Job's Wife as Hero*

As the title of her article suggests, Rachel Magdalene offers a bold and provocative interpretation of Job's wife as the true hero of the story.¹⁹² She does so by offering an intriguing, though ultimately unconvincing, reading of Job as a victim of torture under the violence of God's law. (She argues that all law is inherently violent.) According to Magdalene it is Job's wife who recognizes that Job is a victim of theocratic violence, which has caused him to embrace the torturer's worldview rather than his own.¹⁹³ The words of Job's wife are thus understood as a means of urging Job to resist, to challenge the God who has treated him so brutally and unjustly. "She is exhorting Job to provoke his perpetrator, through blasphemy, into bringing his whole force upon Job. This is the way of the martyr. In presenting that option, [she] invites him to confront the possibility of death.... Her challenge to him to stand up to God and martyr himself through blasphemy is what frees him."¹⁹⁴

Magdalene's reading falters on her assessment of Job as someone exhibiting the classic signs of a torture victim. Nevertheless, her suggestion that Job's wife confronts him with the possibility of death – not merely as a form of euthanasia to escape his pain, but as an active act of resistance that challenges the abusive worldview and legal system that has precipitated their oppressive condition – presents Job's wife in a strong and courageous, and indeed heroic light. It further opens the door to a fresh reading of Job's opening speech in the poetry of the book (ch.3) where he curses the day of his birth, and by implication the life that was given him as a consequence, and longs for the oblivion of death.

Why did I not die at birth,
come forth from the womb and expire? (3:11)

Why was I not buried like a stillborn child,
like an infant that never sees the light?" (3:16)

¹⁹² F. Rachel Magdalene, "Job's Wife as Hero: A Feminist-Forensic Reading of the Book of Job," *Biblical Interpretation* 14, no. 3 (2006).

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 232.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 233-34.

If Magdalene's interpretation has merit, then Job's 'death wish' in ch.3 can be interpreted not simply as the product of a depressed and suicidal sufferer who wants to end his pain, but is rather a radical act of subversive resistance to the entire order of creation. Indeed, scattered throughout his speech in ch.3 are images that represent a challenge to the created order and even seek a reversal of that order. In vv.4-5 Job seeks to unleash the chaotic forces of darkness to consume the day of his birth. In v.8 he seeks to rouse Leviathan, the archenemy of God in the cosmogonic battle who is opposed to the order of creation.

In v.9, Job curses the night precisely by breaking the bond that joins night to day: the time of dawn, when dark mingles with first light. Night is personified in ways that suggest a lover, one who waits expectantly, desiring to look upon the eyes of its partner, dawn. Job's curse would deny that union. The cosmic horror lurking in Job's curse is that it would break the dependable alternation of opposites upon which creation is established. God's promise to humankind after the flood was that "As long as the earth endures,/ seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,/ summer and winter, day and night,/ shall not cease" (Gen 8:22 NRSV).¹⁹⁵

If Job's words in ch.3 are an expression of revolutionary defiance of the order of creation, and if those words flow out of the exhortation of Job's wife that Job should challenge the inherently violent paradigm of God's system and refuse to live on God's terms, then Magdalene's interpretation of the speech of Job's wife represents a radical example of the third interpretive tradition that would see Job's wife as having a profound and shaping influence upon him. Echoes of her influential words can be heard later in the book when Job expresses the conviction that he will not retreat from his position even to the point of death, which is the martyr's way:

Far be it from me to say that you are right;
until I die I will not put away my integrity from me. (27:5)

¹⁹⁵ Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 368.

Indeed, he came to view the possibility of death as proffering a powerful protest and witness against the brutal violence that God had inflicted upon him:

O earth, do not cover my blood;
let my outcry find no resting place. (16:18)

Magdalene takes this even further by suggesting that the influence of Job's wife extends beyond Job to include God, the book as a whole and all those who read it. In concluding this section I quote her at some length:

Why is Mrs. Job's periscope included in the book of Job? It is to move Job from compliance to resistance. It is to rebirth Job's identity. She does not offer many words, but their effect is great. Mrs. Job's voice moves Job's voice. Her words make the rest of the story possible.... Job's wife is indeed wise and powerful. She is not the Satan's handmaiden, she is not a foolish woman, she is not offering Job theological euthanasia, and she is not one to be ignored. Rather, she is attempting to maintain her husband's integrity, nay his very humanity and normative-legal world, in the face of a God who appears to be torturously violent and unjust, and she succeeds. She moves both Job and God. In the process, she becomes a quiet hero, both in the story and beyond. Job's wife serves as a model of resistance for all those whose suffering is both terrible and unacknowledged. She teaches us all the lesson that compassion, generosity, generativity, and edification are still possible even under the worst of conditions. Job's wife, with just two painfully uttered sentences, joins the ranks of the wise.¹⁹⁶

7.5 Ellen van Wolde – *The Development of Job*

A further example of a reading of Job's wife that recognizes her influence on Job can be found in an article by Ellen van Wolde.¹⁹⁷ In it she traces the development that Job

¹⁹⁶ Magdalene, "Job's Wife as Hero: A Feminist-Forensic Reading of the Book of Job," 257.

¹⁹⁷ Ellen van Wolde, "The Development of Job: Mrs Job as Catalyst," in *A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

undergoes within the book as a whole.¹⁹⁸ The five phases in Job's development that she identifies are: the confrontation with his wife (2:9-10); the dialogues with his friends (3-37); YHWH's speeches and Job's first response (37-41); Job's reply in 42:1-5; and Job's reversal in 42:6.¹⁹⁹ Significantly, it is Job's wife who is the key and initiating catalyst within this development that Job undergoes, even though she appears to be of nominal importance to the plot as a whole.

The literary function of the woman in this story is intriguing. On the one hand she is completely overshadowed by her husband, and seems irrelevant to the story. On the other hand she sets Job thinking, although he dismisses her words as foolish. Nevertheless, her speech has its effect. By confronting Job with his own death and pointing out to him the choice between בָּרַךְ – blessing and בָּרַךְ –

¹⁹⁸ It is a moot point whether or not Job undergoes any transformation within the book as a whole. Certainly, the return in the concluding epilogue to the same narrative style as the prologue, accompanied by the restoration of Job's life to essentially what it was before, creates the impression that in the end nothing fundamental has changed for him. Yet, can that confidently be asserted, especially given the tumultuous journey that the reader has been taken on by the book as a whole? Newsom writes, "One needs to consider the significance of a return at the end of the book to the same narrative style with which the book began.... It is possible, I think, to imagine Job again uttering the words of 1:21...and 2:10.... What those words mean, or are capable of meaning, is quite different after one has encountered the voice from the whirlwind from what they meant when one first read them." (Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 637.) For a compelling and beautiful argument for the radical development and transformation of Job, albeit without any reference to Job's wife, see the chapter on Job by Ellen Davis in her book *Getting Involved With God*. She writes:

The two portraits of Father Job that stand at either end of this book mark the true measure of his transformation. Job, this man of integrity who was once so careful, fearful of God and of the *possible* sins of his children, becomes at the last freewheeling, breaking with custom to honor daughters alongside sons, bestowing inheritances and snappy names. The inspiration and model for this wild style of parenting is, of course, God the Creator. Job learned about it when God spoke out of the whirlwind. And now Job loves with the abandon characteristic of God's love – revolutionary in seeking our freedom, reveling in the untamed beauty of every child. (Ellen F. Davis, *Getting Involved with God : Rediscovering the Old Testament* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley Publications, 2001), 142-43.)

¹⁹⁹ van Wolde, "The Development of Job: Mrs Job as Catalyst," 203-21. In contrast to Davis' reading of Job's transformation cited above, van Wolde sees the epilogue as playing no part in Job's development.

cursing, she forces him to react.²⁰⁰ And he who has earlier chosen to bless and not sin, from now on does neither of the two. His wife introduces death and awakens doubt in him. Job is no longer sure of anything and begins to ask himself questions. He even starts to reason from a human point of view instead of automatically adopting the perspective of YHWH. Thus the woman plays an important part in the development of the story. With her help, Job changes from a cocksure believer into an asker of questions.²⁰¹

The final impact of the catalytic influence of Job's wife can only be assessed when Job's developmental journey has run its course. For van Wolde the process of development that Job undergoes through the five phases referred to above, results in two transformations for him: "he discovers that most things are beyond his scope, that he neither has nor could have insight into the masterplan of creation; and he briefly recognizes YHWH's way of seeing."²⁰² In other words, the net result of the influence of Job's wife, according to van Wolde, is to bring about Job's acceptance of God's perspective. This is in stark and diametric opposition to the reading of Magdalene discussed above.

7.6 Larisa Grams-Benitez – *An Unheard Voice Amidst the Commotion*

Larisa Grams-Benitez draws on the not-uncommon assertion within biblical scholarship that the book of Job belongs to the genre of a lawsuit drama.²⁰³ She calls

²⁰⁰ As already mentioned, the variable meanings of בָּרַךְ as either a reference to blessing or cursing in the prose prologue will be discussed in ch. 5 below. See Linafelt, "The Undecidability of בָּרַךְ in the Prologue to Job and Beyond."

²⁰¹ van Wolde, "The Development of Job: Mrs Job as Catalyst," 205. This same quotation occurs in van Wolde's earlier article "A Text-Semantic Study of the Hebrew Bible, Illustrated with Noah and Job," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113, no. 1 (1994): 34.

²⁰² "The Development of Job: Mrs Job as Catalyst," 221.

²⁰³ Larisa M. Grams-Benitez, "An Unheard Voice Amidst the Commotion: Analysis of Job 2:9-10 in Light of the Law of Retribution," *Journal of Latin American Hermeneutics* (2011). For a comprehensive, systematic and compelling treatment of the legal material in the book of Job see F. Rachel Magdalene, *On the Scales of Righteousness: Neo-Babylonian Trial Law and the Book of Job* (Providence, R.I.: Brown Judaic Studies, 2007). For the idea of the book of Job being read as a lawsuit drama see Sylvia Scholnik, "Lawsuit Drama in the Book of

Job's wife 'Jane Doe' – the forensic moniker for an unnamed woman, usually a victim – and asserts that this Jane Doe "...is the first person in the narrative to challenge the conventional law of retribution."²⁰⁴ Although Grams-Benitez does not explicitly make the connection, presumably it is the *legal* nature of Jane Doe's challenge – who attacks an ostensibly legal code in the law of retribution – that arouses within Job the idea of pursuing a legal contestation with God. Accordingly, the metaphor of a lawsuit with its attendant language becomes an increasingly important and prevalent part of Job's speech as the human dialogue with the three friends unfolds. Furthermore, the strongly interrogative nature of the divine speeches, akin to the robust cross-examination of a defense lawyer, suggests that even God is moved to respond to the allegations levelled by Job in legal categories. In these significant aspects of the book, the subtle influence of Job's wife can be discerned who initiated a legal challenge in the first place by exposing the inadequacy of the law of retribution.

7.7 Summary of the perspectives in modern biblical scholarship

The sampling of perspectives in modern biblical scholarship discussed above may not be exhaustive, but does provide a fair overview of the contours that have been traversed by modern scholars with regard to the research on Job's wife.²⁰⁵ Broadly

Job" (Brandeis University, 1975). See also Luis Alonso Schökel, "Toward a Dramatic Reading of the Book of Job," *Semeia*, no. 7 (1977). Alonso Schökel imagines a theatrical production of the book of Job replete with all the trimmings of a courtroom. In similar vein Carol Newsom also imagines a theatrical production of the book of Job, although without the courtroom staging – Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*, 259-60. As an aside, within their imaginal theatrical productions of the book, both Alonso Schökel and Newsom see Elihu (whose speeches occur in chapters 32-37 of the book) as a member of the audience who was not an original part of the cast but nevertheless reacts to the play and thereby contributes to it. Elihu "is an intruder in terms of the book's construction, an impulsive volunteer in terms of the cast; he is a witness to the provocative power of the book. This is why the book was composed: to transform the audience into the cast." (Alonso Schökel, "Toward a Dramatic Reading of the Book of Job," 48.)

²⁰⁴ Grams-Benitez, "An Unheard Voice Amidst the Commotion: Analysis of Job 2:9-10 in Light of the Law of Retribution," 2.

²⁰⁵ Other notable articles, chapters and dissertations on Job's wife not explicitly discussed here would include the following: Audrey Schindler, "One Who Has Borne Most: The *Cri De Coeur* of Job's Wife," *Australian Biblical Review* 54 (2006); Lyn M. Bechtel, "A Feminist

speaking, those who only make passing reference to Job's wife – typically within general commentaries of the book as a whole – tend to follow the first interpretive tradition in seeing her in a largely negative light as an agent of Satan, albeit an unwitting one. The more nuanced readings of the second and third interpretive traditions tend to be offered by those scholars who offer a focused treatment of Job's wife. The heightened sympathy for Job's wife of the second interpretive tradition either mitigates her culpability for her deviant speech, or reassesses her speech as a genuinely loving and compassionate utterance. Those who recognize her influence – as per the third interpretive tradition – draw markedly diverse conclusions as to how that influence operates and the consequences thereof. McGinnis, for example, sees the productive effect of the words of Job's wife eliciting in Job the response of faith, precisely because her words had articulated the ghastly alternative. Magdalene, by contrast, sees in her words an invitation to martyrdom, offering to Job the best means available for defiantly resisting the theocratic violence of an oppressive legal system, an invitation which Job accepts through his willingness to die, not as a victim, but as a martyr.

8. Conclusion

This chapter has explored the reception history of Job's wife from a range of different perspectives.²⁰⁶ In concluding this chapter, we turn now to the vital question of the

Approach to the Book of Job," in *A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); Don Schweitzer, "'Curse God and Die': Was Job's Wife Completely Wrong?," *Touchstone* 14, no. 3 (1996); Lillian R Klein, "Job and the Womb: Text About Men; Subtext About Women," in *A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); David Penchansky, "Job's Wife: The Satan's Handmaid," in *Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do What Is Right: Studies on the Nature of God in Tribute to James L. Crenshaw*, ed. David Penchansky and Paul L. Redditt (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000); Seow, "Reflections on the History of Consequences: The Case of Job.," "Job's Wife.," Meade, "Bless God and Die: An Examination of the Role of Job's Wife in the Masoretic Text of Job.," Mayer I. Gruber, "The Rhetoric of Familiarity and Contempt in Job 2:9-10," *Scriptura*, no. 87 (2004); Runions, "Ms Job and the Problem of God: A Feminist, Existentialist, Materialist Reading."

²⁰⁶ It is acknowledged that other significant areas exist in the reception history of Job's wife that lie beyond the scope of this chapter. Important examples would be the reception history

of Job's wife within literature and, to a lesser extent, within popular culture. For a fascinating treatment of Job and his wife in the literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with a particular emphasis on English literature, see Katherine Low's chapter entitled "Job's Wife's Place in the Woman Question" in Low, *The Bible, Gender, and Reception History: The Case of Job's Wife*, 112-34. Some notable literary examples from the first half of the twentieth century that draw on Job's wife would include: Robert Frost's 1945 dramatic poem *A Masque of Reason*. Archibald MacLeish's 1954 play entitled *J.B.* – see Janis P. Stout, "Re-Visions of Job: *J.B.* And "a Masque of Reason"," *Essays in Literature* 14, no. 2 (1987). H.G. Wells' 1919 novel *The Undying Fire* – see Meade, "Bless God and Die: An Examination of the Role of Job's Wife in the Masoretic Text of Job," 83-84. and Jon D. Levenson, *The Book of Job in Its Time and in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 30-39. Franz Kafka's novel *The Trial* (first published in 1925 with the German title *Der Prozess*) is a famous example of a modern literary work that draws on the themes from the book of Job as a whole. While the novel's protagonist Josef K is not married, the other female characters that surround him have been explored as figures embodying a resonance with Job's wife – see Martien Halvorson-Taylor, "The Strange Case of the Disappearing Woman: Biblical Resonances in Kafka's Fräulein Bürstner," in *From the Margins I: Women of the Hebrew Bible and Their Afterlives*, ed. Peter S. Hawkins and Lesleigh C Stahlberg (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009). Other lesser-known literary works from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries that feature Job's wife include Victoria Branden's *Mrs. Job* (1979), Jean Shaw's *Job's Wife* (1990), Philip Begho's *Job's Wife* (2002), Aimee Bender's *Job's Jobs* (2005) and Mona Gustafson Affinito's *Mrs Job* (2009) – see Emily O. Gravett, "Biblical Responses: Past and Present Retellings of the Enigmatic Mrs Job," *Biblical Interpretation* 20 (2012). For references to various adaptations of the book of Job in popular culture see David J.A. Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, Word Biblical Commentary 18b (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 1450-52. One further twentieth-century interpretation of Job that is worthy of mention here is the psychoanalytic study of the book by Carl Jung in his *Answer to Job*, originally published in German in 1952 as *Antwort auf Hiob* and first translated into English in 1954.

For Jung, the Book of Job portrays the period of psychic evolution when humanity confronted the darkness of God. In Job's story, Jung finds a God who readily submits to Satan's deceit, who tortures a guiltless man, and who finally turns on Job with a display of ruthless and brutal force. In the person of Job, he sees a man who could not stop seeking justice from God but who encountered only a God of power. . . . According to Jung, Job came face to face with God's "contradictory nature," with a God whose character is a "totality of inner opposites". . . . Seeing the "inner antinomy" in the deity, Jung realized that God's goodness and justice could contradict his injustice and power. Like the forces of creation, God had an amoral nature. (Schreiner, *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found: Calvin's Exegesis of Job from Medieval and Modern Perspectives*, 164-65.) *Answer to Job* is a complex and controversial work, the exploration of which is beyond our purposes here. One key observation that is relevant to this discussion is that Jung's central thesis in the book challenges the tendency – prevalent in the first interpretive tradition – to project attributes of darkness and evil onto Satan, and by extension Job's wife. Rather, the

influence, if any, that the various interpretations of Job's wife have had on the interpretation of the book as a whole. To phrase the question differently, what difference does one's reading of Job's wife make to the message that the book delivers? Or to put it in yet another way, if the passage on Job's wife (2:9-10) were excised from the book, would that make a material difference to how the rest of the book is read? These questions point to an intriguing area in Joban studies that still remains largely unexplored in modern biblical scholarship.

Predictably, the overwhelmingly negative view of Job's wife within the first interpretive tradition presents her role as simply a foil to Job that highlights his faithful fortitude when placed alongside her faithless, tempting and blasphemous guile. Commentators, both ancient and modern, who echo this assessment of Job's wife see in her an influence that is as inconsequential as her presence is brief. She immediately fades from sight and consciousness, and the rest of the book unfolds without any reference to her whatsoever. Not even the birth of further children to Job in his restoration at the end of the story is enough for her to merit as much as a passing mention. Within this perspective, Job's wife is not simply marginalized, she is utterly eradicated and accordingly plays no further part in the book or its interpretation. This sentiment is captured well by Eliphaz when he says:

Because they stretched out their hands against God,
and bid defiance to the Almighty,
running stubbornly against him with a thick-bossed shield....
they will not escape from darkness;
the flame will dry up their shoots,
and their blossom will be swept away by the wind. (15:25-26, 30)

locus of such attributes are more appropriately seated within the being of God. See Carl G. Jung, "Answer to Job," in *The Portable Jung*, ed. Joseph Campbell (New York: Viking Press, 1971). See also the relevant section in the chapter entitled 'Modern Readings of Job' in Schreiner, *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found: Calvin's Exegesis of Job from Medieval and Modern Perspectives*, 163-69.

More sympathetic readings of Job's wife, including those that seek to recover aspects of her untold story, cast her in a very different light. These readings, which fall within the second interpretive tradition, seek to carve out a space for her story to be heard in its own right. Yet, the place that this recovered story of hers occupies within the broader story of the book as a whole remains largely unconsidered. It would seem that within this interpretive tradition, hearing more of her untold story – valuable and important though that may be – becomes largely an end in itself that offers little to how the rest of the book is read and interpreted.

The third interpretive tradition, that seeks to identify the influence of Job's wife, is the most promising when it comes to a consideration of the impact that she has on the reading of the book as a whole. The focus of this interpretive tradition is almost exclusively on the influence that Job's wife has on Job through the words that she speaks to him. The impassioned outpouring of cursing and lament that erupts from his lips in ch.3 is read by some as a product of her words, as is the legal discourse that Job initiates later in the book. What is rarely considered is the influence that Job's wife has on God, or indeed the readers of the book, and how she changes the way in which everything else in the book is viewed. One notable exception would be the reading of Rachel Magdalene who opens the door to this kind of interpretation, even though she does not fully pursue it.²⁰⁷

Accordingly there is much fertile ground for fresh exploration of the ways in which Job's wife could be seen as the interpretive key to unlocking the book as a whole, not simply through the words that she speaks and her brief appearance which are explicitly recorded, but also through her silence and “pervasive absence” which are implied. This “pervasive absence” of Job's wife – paradoxical though it may sound – will be explored in chapter four of this thesis, as we look for shadows and listen for echoes of her presence in a text that seems to deny that presence. Further areas of exploration will be the disruption of the prevailing religious consciousness of the prose prologue that her words effect (chapter five), and the ways in which the

²⁰⁷ Magdalene, "Job's Wife as Hero: A Feminist-Forensic Reading of the Book of Job."

theology of her speech anticipates, in embryonic form, the theology of the divine speeches (chapter six). In chapter seven the threshold between speech and silence will be explored, a threshold on which Job's wife is firmly rooted and which offers the promise of a new hermeneutic for the reading of the book as a whole. But first, in the chapter that immediately follows (chapter three), one of the singular examples of the reception of Job's wife in art will be explored in detail – William Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job*. There are two motivating reasons for this exploration. Firstly, within Blake's imagination, Job's wife occupies a prominent and pervasive place in the drama of the book as a whole. Secondly, Blake's *Illustrations* chart Job's journey of transformation in a dramatic way, in which he is brought face to face with the nightmarish reality of his false religion, only to emerge to the sublime heights of a transformed religious consciousness.

Chapter 3: William Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job*

1. Introduction

William Blake (1757 – 1827), the English poet, engraver and painter, remains an enigma. As an artist and a thinker he has been derided and admired, celebrated and ignored. He has been acclaimed as a revolutionary visionary of unparalleled genius, and also dismissed as a madman.²⁰⁸ Some regard him as having had "...virtually no influence upon either our politics or our religion,"²⁰⁹ while others recognize his indelible mark in the work of many poets, artists, philosophers, social commentators and religious thinkers.²¹⁰ One contemporary art critic describes Blake as "...far and away the greatest artist Britain has ever produced" and arguably one of the world's ten greatest artists of all time.²¹¹ Yet, this critical acclaim eluded Blake in his lifetime and indeed for many years after his death. Adam Gilchrist, one of Blake's early biographers, had this to say of the art establishment's overall assessment of Blake's work:

²⁰⁸ William Wordsworth wrote of Blake following his death in 1827: "There was no doubt that this poor man was mad, but there is something in the madness of this man which interests me more than the sanity of Lord Byron and Walter Scott." (cited in J. Ezard, "Blake's Vision on Show," *The Guardian*, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2004/jul/06/artsandhumanities.arts.>)

²⁰⁹ Thomas J.J. Altizer, "The Revolutionary Vision of William Blake," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37, no. 1 (2009): 33.

²¹⁰ For a treatment of Blake's influence on Thomas Merton, for example, see Michael Griffith, "Thomas Merton on William Blake: "To Look through Matter into Eternity"," *The Merton Annual* 18 (2005). In a preview of a recent Blake exhibition, Narelle Doe wrote:

Blake still influences contemporary creativity and ideas. He is seen by many as one of the great synthesisers of cultural experience, attracting a myriad of followers with interests ranging from literature, painting, book design, politics, mysticism, philosophy, mythology through to music and film making ... John Everett Millais, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and G. F. Watts are just some of the Victorian artists [influenced by Blake] ... From the 1960s onward, writers, musicians and film makers like Allen Ginsberg, Bob Dylan, Jim Morrison of the Doors and John Lennon adopted Blake as a mystical seer and anti-establishment activist. (N. Doe, "William Blake's Artistic Legacy at the Whitworth Art Gallery," [Culture24.org.uk](http://www.culture24.org.uk), [http://www.culture24.org.uk/art/art53985?ixsid=.](http://www.culture24.org.uk/art/art53985?ixsid=))

²¹¹ J. Jones, "Blake's Heaven," *The Guardian*, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2005/apr/25/williamblake>

“The majority of connoisseurs, a set of men who, to tell the truth, know little more about art, the vital part of it, have no quicker perception or deeper insight into its poetic and spiritual qualities than the mob of educated men, though they prate more: *these were, as they still are, blind to his beauties.*”²¹²

It would seem that artistic genius, like beauty, is very much in the eye of the beholder. Not that Blake, himself, would have been surprised by such ambivalence. He recognized that “...Every body does not see alike.”²¹³ An enduring theme in his thinking was the distinction between true visionary insight and the distortions and deceptions that arise from superficial, narrow ways of seeing. Some lines of verse of Blake illustrate the point:

This Life's dim Windows of the Soul
Distorts the Heavens from Pole to Pole
And leads you to Believe a Lie
When you see with, not thro, the Eye. ²¹⁴

(from *The Everlasting Gospel*)²¹⁵

If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite.

For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern.

(from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*)²¹⁶

²¹² Alexander Gilchrist and Anne Gilchrist, *The Life of William Blake: With Selections from His Poems and Other Writings*, 2nd ed. (London: MacMillan and Co., 1880), 327. My emphasis. R.S. The first edition of Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake*, published in 1863, was subtitled '*Pictor Ignotus*', which is Latin for “unknown artist” – a telling reference to the sense of Blake's ongoing obscurity a generation after his death.

²¹³ ‘Letter to Rev Dr Trusler’, in David V. Erdman, ed. *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 702.

²¹⁴ It should be noted that Blake was liberal with his use of capitals in both his poetry and prose in ways which would not conform to the usual conventions of grammatical usage. In this chapter, the original spelling, abbreviations and capitalization used by Blake will be adhered to when quoting his words.

²¹⁵ Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 520.

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour

(from *Auguries of Innocence*)²¹⁷

For Blake, the capacity to see things as they truly are requires the exercise of the imagination.²¹⁸ This is especially true of any act of interpretation, be it of a biblical text or a work of art. It is this faculty which Blake brings to his own reading of Scripture, and which he expects of those who would engage with his art. Indeed, this is what he understood the purpose of his art to be – to arouse this faculty in others. In his epic prophetic poem 'Jerusalem', he describes his purpose:

I rest not from my great task!
To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes
Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought: into Eternity
Ever expanding in the Bosom of God, the Human Imagination.

(from *Jerusalem*)²¹⁹

Accordingly, he was dismissive of those who wanted the 'meaning' of his work laid bare, who sought concrete clarifications and explicit explanations of things which he regarded as full of mystery. In the same letter to Rev Dr Trusler cited above, Blake wrote:

You say that I want somebody to Elucidate my Ideas. But you ought to know that What is Grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men. That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care. The wisest of the Ancients

²¹⁶ Ibid., 39.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 490.

²¹⁸ Blake sometimes referred to Inspiration as Spiritual Sensation. For example, see his letter to Rev Dr Trusler (ibid., 703.).

²¹⁹ Ibid., 147.

considered what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction because it rouses the faculties to act.²²⁰

2. Blake's hermeneutic and the Bible

Blake's hermeneutic requires space for the reader to engage with the text or work of art imaginatively, exploring new vectors of meaning that may well lie beyond what the original author or artist intended. Within such a hermeneutical framework, texts and works of art should be approached as organic entities alive with surprising possibility, capable of astonishing the reader in unexpected and sometimes disturbing ways. Accordingly, the true power and transformative potential of a biblical text, for example, lies not in its delineation of some fixed, propositional truth that has become entrenched within religious discourse over time, but rather in its capacity to ignite the reader's imagination and draw him or her into a fresh visionary experience that holds the potential, at least, of deconstructing that which has been 'known' or accepted as normative.

It is for this reason that Blake held a very high view of the value of the Bible. In his letter to Rev Dr Trussler he wrote: "Why is the Bible more Entertaining and Instructive than any other book. Is it not because [it is] addressed to the Imagination which is Spiritual Sensation."²²¹ One of the prominent inscriptions in the *Laocoön*²²² reads, "The Old and New Testaments are the Great Code of Art", and lest there be any uncertainty about the significance of such a description for Blake, immediately following it are the words, "The whole Business of Man Is The Arts" and "Art is the Tree of Life".

This view of the Bible is clearly evident in Blake's own use of it, for the Bible was arguably the greatest stimulus of Blake's artistic imagination. In this he was not alone,

²²⁰ Ibid., 702.

²²¹ Ibid., 702-03.

²²² Blake's engraving which consisted of a reproduction of the marble sculpture known as *Laocoön and His Sons*, surrounded by inscriptions. It is also sometimes referred to as "Yah & his two Sons Satan & Adam," which is taken from the main caption of the work.

for he stood in a long line of those who expounded the scriptures through their art and for whom the Bible was a primary subject. But what was unique about Blake was the manner in which he used the Bible, not just as his subject matter, but also as an imaginative, interpretative partner in the very act of exposition itself. One of the ways he did so was through the juxtaposition of often seemingly unrelated words and images emanating from the Bible, thereby creating "...an interpretative dialectic in which readers' senses have to work hard to create meaning within the interpretative framework provided by Blake's illuminated texts."²²³ An exceptional example of this would be the engravings of his *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, which will be explored in detail below.²²⁴

One of the reasons why he worked as he did was because he wished to challenge the deep-rooted respect for authoritative texts with neatly defined meanings. He was a great hermeneutical pioneer who sought deliberately to provide an effective text, in the sense that it is less a text's ability to communicate information that is important than its ability to stir the imagination of those engaged with them.... Blake wanted people to learn from the Bible, not by harking back to some determined meaning. To this end he shaped a new way of communicating, therefore, to challenge convention and to express a different conception of human life. Fundamental to his view of written texts was that priority should always be given to the spirit rather than the letter of texts. He makes this point very clearly in his engravings for the book of Job.²²⁵

²²³ Christopher Rowland, "'Rouzing the Faculties to Act': William Blake, Merkabah Mysticism, the Theology of Liberation and the Exegetical Importance of Experience," *Biblical Interpretation* 11, no. 3 (2003): 545. An illuminated text refers to a text that is supplemented by additional artwork, either in the form of decorative initials, borders (known as marginalia) or illustrations.

²²⁴ These engravings were also referred to as 'Inventions to the Book of Job' (see Gilchrist and Gilchrist, *The Life of William Blake: With Selections from His Poems and Other Writings*, 327.).

²²⁵ Rowland, "'Rouzing the Faculties to Act': William Blake, Merkabah Mysticism, the Theology of Liberation and the Exegetical Importance of Experience," 545.

3. Blake's views on religion

Before turning to a detailed consideration of Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, it is essential first to consider Blake's views on religion – views which shaped his treatment of the book of Job in virtually every way. It could be argued that religion was the over-riding influence in all of Blake's art. Yet, his art was less an expression of religious devotion than an expression of religious protest:

Blake's usual religious posture, then, is not submission but protest; his poetry is a sustained prophetic denunciation of the cruelties, mental and corporeal, everywhere perpetrated in the name of God by those who claim to be doing his will. It is a detailed indictment of the collaboration of all the churches in the exploitation of the poor, the degradation of labor, the subordination of women, the abridgement of political liberty, the repression of sexual energy, and the discouragement of originality in the fine arts. In a time of intense political agitation he came to believe that a radical transformation of the nation's religious consciousness was the first prerequisite to serious political or economic reform.²²⁶

In *The [First] Book of Urizen*, Blake parodies the biblical account of creation with his own myth of the origin of the universe. In the myth, Urizen, a rebellious member of a community of beings called the Eternals, asserts his dominating control over the cosmos by attempting to impose "Laws of peace, of love, of unity" (from *The Book of Urizen*).²²⁷ While the ends of peace, love and unity may appear to be noble, the means through which Urizen attempts to achieve them – namely the imposition of law – is revealed as an archetypal error.²²⁸ As he does so, a new element appears in the

²²⁶ Robert Ryan, "Blake and Religion," in *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, ed. Morris Eaves (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 150.

²²⁷ Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 72.

²²⁸ Andrew Lincoln, "From *America to the Four Zoas*," in *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, ed. Morris Eaves (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 215.

universe wherever Urizen wanders, like a spider's web, which Blake called "The Net of Religion":

A cold shadow follow'd behind him
Like a spiders web, moist, cold, & dim
Drawing out from his sorrowing soul...
Where ever the footsteps of Urizen
Walk'd over the cities in sorrow.
Till a Web dark & cold, throughout all
The tormented element stretch'd
From the sorrows of Urizens soul...
None could break the Web, no wings of fire.
So twisted the cords, & so knotted
The meshes: twisted like to the human brain
And all call'd it, The Net of Religion

(from *The Book of Urizen*)²²⁹

It is this conception of religion as a web-like net of oppressive control and authoritarian rules that Blake decried throughout his life and in much of his art. His challenge of religion thus defined held nothing sacrosanct, not even the Bible itself. Notwithstanding his high regard of the value of the Bible and his description of the Old and New Testaments as "the Great Code of Art", as already mentioned, he recognized that the Bible could be used as an instrument of religious repression, especially when the written words of scripture are given an elevated authority to the exclusion of God's word heard within the human conscience and lived human experience. In his annotations to the Bishop of Landaff's *Apology for the Bible*, Blake wrote, "The Bible or Peculiar Word of God, Exclusive of Conscience or the Word of God Universal, is that Abomination which like the Jewish ceremonies is for ever

²²⁹ Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 82.

removed & henceforth every man may converse with God & be a King & Priest in his own house."²³⁰

Blake was especially critical of certain aspects of Old Testament religion, most notably law and sacrifice. He regarded the requirements of law and sacrifice as repressive elements of a religion of the letter shackled to the past, quite distinct from the freedom and grace evident in the true religion of Jesus which invites the unfettered use of imagination and celebrates the gift of constantly renewed visionary experience. "I know of no other Christianity and of no other Gospel than the liberty both of body & mind to exercise the Divine Arts of Imagination" (from *Jerusalem*, in Erdman, 1982, 231). In stark contrast to this, one of his most colourful Proverbs of Hell from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* states: "Prisons are built with stones of Law, Brothels with bricks of Religion."²³¹

Blake attributed many of the social ills and excesses plaguing England in his time to the flaws and falsehoods of a prevailing religious consciousness that was oriented to the observation of the law.²³² In *Jerusalem* he describes such religious consciousness as a wheel of fire that devours everything in its course:

I stood among my valleys of the south
And saw a flame of fire, even as a Wheel
Of fire surrounding all the heavens: it went
From west to east against the current of
Creation and devourd all things in its loud
Fury & thundering course round heaven and earth...
And I asked a Watcher & a Holy-One
Its Name? he answerd. It is the Wheel of Religion
I wept & said. Is this the law of Jesus

²³⁰ Ibid., 615.

²³¹ Ibid., 36.

²³² Ryan, "Blake and Religion," 150.

This terrible devouring sword turning every way
He answerd; Jesus died because he strove
Against the current of this Wheel
(from *Jerusalem*)²³³

While the effects of the devouring fire of false, law-based religion were written large upon the canvas of world history, its devastating ends could also be seen in the lives of individuals and the intimacies of households. Indeed, for Blake the connection between the personal and social dimensions of religion's effects was direct and immediate. This is one of the themes explored in his *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, in which the religious story of an individual serves as a microcosm of the religious story of a nation, and indeed of humanity as a whole.

4. Blake and the book of Job

The book of Job was for Blake a focus of artistic exploration for more than half of his life. In 1785 he completed a pen and ink sketch of Job, his wife, and the three friends. The following year he began an engraving of the same subject, which was published in 1793. In 1800 he completed a tempera painting entitled "Job and His Daughters", and in 1805 a pen, ink and watercolour of "Job Confessing His Presumption to God who Answers from the Whirlwind."²³⁴ In 1805-6 Blake produced a set of nineteen watercolours for Thomas Butts offering a comprehensive treatment of the book of Job as a whole. In 1821, this series was traced and re-coloured for Blake's friend and patron John Linnell, so that two versions of the watercolours – the so-called 'Butts' and 'Linnell' sets – were in existence. These watercolours formed the basis of the engravings that Blake produced from 1823-1825/6,²³⁵ as part of a Memorandum of

²³³ Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 232.

²³⁴ Gerald E. Bentley, *The Stranger from Paradise: A Biography of William Blake* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 395.

²³⁵ The engravings all bear the date of 8 March 1825 (except the first plate which was mistakenly dated 1828 in the imprint), by which time the series was complete, but it was not until the March of 1826 that they were formally published.

Agreement between Blake and Linnell at a time when Blake was in dire financial straits.

A number of salient points emerge from this brief account of Blake's engagement with the book of Job that are important to bear in mind when his exposition of the book is considered. Firstly, Blake's imaginative exploration of the book spanned a period of some forty years from 1785-1825. It would not be an excessive stretch of the imagination to notice an echo here of the forty years that the Israelites spent wandering in the wilderness, for there are arresting parallels between Blake's journey with the book of Job and that of the Israelites attested to in the biblical record. For the Israelites, the forty years in the wilderness marked the transition from captivity in Egypt to liberation in the Promised Land, in which their imaginations and senses were aroused to come to experience God in new ways.²³⁶ Similarly for Blake, the entire thrust of his work could be described as a journey of liberation from the captivity of false religion to the Promised Land (Jerusalem)²³⁷ in which God is experienced directly through the 'rouzing of the faculties'. It is this very journey that Job takes in the *Illustrations of the Book of Job*. However, an important point of departure exists between Blake's journey and that of the Israelites. For the Israelites, the central defining moment of their forty year sojourn in the wilderness was the giving of the Law at Sinai (Ex 19-20). For Blake, religion based on law is fundamentally and fatally flawed and leads to all kinds of distortions and terrors. Strikingly, it is this precise point of divergence that is highlighted at the very centre of his Job series in plate eleven, which will be discussed in detail below, and which forms the fulcrum point of the series as a whole.

²³⁶ The revelation of God as YHWH (cf. Ex 3:14-15) was a central theme in the Exodus event. This revelation had a strong sensory component to it for the Israelites – the sight of the pillars of cloud and fire (Ex 13:21-22); crossing the sea on dry ground (Ex 14:22); the satisfaction of hunger and thirst (Ex 16:12 & 17:5-6); the thunder, lightning, thick cloud, fire, smoke and trumpet blasts at Sinai (Ex 19:16-19).

²³⁷ 'Jerusalem' (or the New Jerusalem) was Blake's preferred image to refer to the concept of a transformed society, known most famously in the poem 'And did those feet in ancient time' (popularly referred to as 'Jerusalem') from the preface to the epic prophetic poem *Milton a Poem* (Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 95.).

Secondly, there is every reason to suppose that Blake would have felt a certain affinity with Job as a character well-acquainted with suffering. There is a certain resonance with their respective stories – not just in terms of their experience of suffering, but more particularly with their experience of God in the midst of suffering. Blake knew what it was like to be derided and misunderstood by his contemporaries, particularly in relation to his artistic vision. He also knew what it meant to be falsely accused, as the malicious charge of sedition brought against him in 1803 attests.²³⁸ For significant periods of his life his financial affairs and material wellbeing were precarious to say the least. It was for this very reason that John Linnell commissioned the *Job* engravings.²³⁹ Yet, in spite of these corporeal hardships, Blake's visionary communion with God remained steadfast – a communion which sustained him against “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.”²⁴⁰ In a letter to William Hayley dated 3 October 1803, Blake wrote: “...no one brings work to me. I am content that it shall be so as long as God pleases.... I laugh & sing for if on Earth neglected I am in heaven a Prince among Princes.... for as Man liveth not by bread alone I shall live altho I should want bread.”²⁴¹ This relationship between the experience of suffering and the visionary experience of God is another key theme which Blake explores in his *Illustrations of the Book of Job*.

²³⁸ The charge arose from an altercation between Blake and a soldier by the name of Private John Schofield that occurred in the garden of Blake's cottage in Felpham on 12 August 1803. Blake was charged, tried and eventually found not guilty, but not before a jury of his peers, in the initial stage of the legal proceedings, declared him to be “...a Wicked Seditious and Evil disposed person” (Bentley, *The Stranger from Paradise: A Biography of William Blake*, 258.).

²³⁹ In a letter a few years after Blake's death, Linnell wrote:

...it was [at Fountain Court] that he began to feel the want of employment and before I knew his distress he had sold all his collection of old prints.... this however was not enough to afford him permanent support & it was in hopes of obtaining a profit sufficient to supply his future wants that the publication of *Job* was begun at my suggestion & expense. (ibid., 395.)

²⁴⁰ The phrase comes from Hamlet's famous “To be, or not to be” speech in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Act III, Scene 1.

²⁴¹ Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 736-37.

Thirdly, the forty years that Blake spent engaging with the book of Job represents a sizeable and significant period of his life from relatively early in his career right up to its very end. It would be reasonable to say that over this timespan Blake's own thinking developed and matured. This progression of thought is clearly evident in the engravings of the book of Job, completed as they were at the very end of Blake's career. In the engravings we see how Blake took his earlier work on the book of Job – the Butts and Linell sets – and developed the ideas that were lying within them in embryo, bringing them to fuller and more nuanced expression. Robert Essick asserts that “The thematic shape of the entire series... came into being at a late stage in Blake's long history as an interpreter of the Book of Job.”²⁴²

This development of thought in the *Job* engravings was achieved through two significant expansions. Firstly, through the addition of extensive inscriptions and illuminated borders around the images of the Job story, which add a rich new layer of interpretative commentary to the images themselves. “The result is that an alternative reality is created outside the ruled lines of the central design, one which both comments on and amplifies the significance of the main image.”²⁴³ Through these marginalia, Blake introduces the idea that not even the designs themselves are impervious to illumination that could cast them in a significantly altered light, nor should they be. The genius of his engravings is that in their very design – comprising both central images and marginal inscriptions – Blake's open hermeneutic is internally at work.

²⁴² Cited in Penelope Minney, "Job's Gethsemane: Tradition and Imagination in William Blake's Illustrations for the Book of Job" (Durham University, 1997), 142. Minney 1997, 141ff) argues for a contrary view that the later engravings do not fundamentally alter the meaning of the earlier Butts watercolours (see *ibid.*, 141ff.). Her argument is a lucid and nuanced one, but is ultimately unconvincing as it relies too heavily on interim inscriptions on the first and last plates that Blake later erased, and fails to consider the possibility that Blake's own understanding of Job's journey developed over the course of his own life (Bentley, *The Stranger from Paradise: A Biography of William Blake*, 397.).

²⁴³ Morton D. Paley, *The Traveller in the Evening: The Last Works of William Blake* (Oxford Oxford University Press, 2003), 226.

The second element of the engravings which clearly demonstrate Blake's progression of thought is the addition of two new designs (plates seventeen and twenty) which were not included in the original Butts and Linell sets.²⁴⁴ As will be argued below, the significance of these two new designs cannot be overstated, not simply because of the importance of the individual content of each of these plates, but also because of their impact on the interpretation of the series as a whole. This is powerfully evident in the dramatic chiasmic structure which is discernible in the twenty-one plates, which the inclusion of these new plates makes possible. This chiasmic structure, which provides a key to unlocking Blake's interpretation of the book of Job as a whole, was absent in the earlier watercolour series. The many years of allowing his thoughts around the book of Job to gestate, resulted in the birthing of a powerful new exposition which before could only, at best, be hinted at.

However, at the heart of this powerful new exposition lies a profound irony. For the style in which Blake chose to express himself was regarded by many at the time to be thoroughly antiquated. His engravings of *Job* were done in the particular intaglio style in which he had first been trained as an apprentice.²⁴⁵ The poet Bernard Barton, in a

²⁴⁴ In the Memorandum of Agreement between Blake and John Linnell, in which the terms of the commission for the Job engravings is laid out, it states: "W. Blake agrees to Engrave the Set of Plates from his own Designs of Job's Captivity in number twenty..." (in Bentley, *The Stranger from Paradise: A Biography of William Blake*, 397.). The twenty plates most probably refer to the nineteen original designs plus an added title page. Blake's decision to add two new designs thus took place subsequent to this agreement being signed. He later added watercolours of the new designs to complete the Butts and Linell sets, bringing those collections up to twenty-one works each. Paley, however, suggests that when the Memorandum of Agreement was signed, one of the new designs was already in existence (Paley, *The Traveller in the Evening : The Last Works of William Blake*, 220.).

²⁴⁵ Intaglio refers to a printmaking technique in which the image is incised into a surface, and the incised line or sunken area holds the ink. In 1772 Blake was apprenticed to the engraver and printmaker James Basire for seven years, who instructed him in the method of intaglio. Basire's particular style was the old-fashioned line-engraving method used by Dürer two-and-a-half centuries earlier, and quite distinct from the flashier and more fashionable intaglio styles that were in vogue such as stipple or mezzotint (Bentley, *The Stranger from Paradise: A Biography of William Blake*, 33.).

letter to John Linnell dated a few years after Blake's death, wrote somewhat scathingly of the *Job* engravings:

There is a dryness and hardness in Blake's manner of engraving which is very apt to be repulsive to print-collectors in general – to any, indeed, who have not taste enough to appreciate the force and originality of his conceptions, in spite of the manner in which he has embodied them. I candidly own I am not surprised at this; his style is little calculated to take with admirers of modern engraving. It puts me in mind of some old prints I have seen.... I cannot but wish he could have clothed his imaginative creations in a garb more attractive to ordinary mortals, or else given simple outlines of them.²⁴⁶

The irony of Blake's choice of style for the *Job* engravings deepens, when one considers his own personal history of printmaking techniques. Relatively early in his career, Blake grew increasingly frustrated with the limitations of intaglio engraving, and started experimenting with an innovative publishing method that came to be known as relief etching. This remarkable innovation involved printing from the relief, or raised, part of the plate rather than from the intaglio, or incised, parts. He achieved this by drawing or writing directly onto the copper plate with an acid-resistant material and then pouring acid over the entire plate, thereby eating away the areas on the plate that would print white, leaving the text or image exposed in relief which would receive the ink.²⁴⁷ There were a number of advantages to relief etching: it allowed expressive and aesthetic effects which were impossible to achieve via intaglio; it enabled images and text to be applied directly to the plate at the same time in a seamless way; the text could accordingly be incorporated into the image as it was treated as handwritten script rather than mechanical letterpress; it enabled different coloured inks to be utilized in the printing process, which meant that every page in every book was a unique piece of art, with no two copies of any page being identical;

²⁴⁶ Cited in Paley, *The Traveller in the Evening: The Last Works of William Blake*, 222.

²⁴⁷ For a detailed step-by-step reconstruction of the process that Blake probably used for his relief etching, see Robert N. Essick, *William Blake, Printmaker* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 86ff.

and it gave Blake far greater control over the entire publishing process.²⁴⁸ Apart from these practical advantages, there was also a deeper philosophical significance to Blake's invention of relief etching. In the first instance, it was an emphatic expression of his insistence of the importance of boldly re-imagining received traditions. Furthermore, the mechanics of the actual technique of relief etching was a metaphor for the nature of true religion, in which all that is immaterial is burnt away, revealing the real and eternal which alone remain. Blake himself referred to relief etching as "printing in the infernal method, by means of corrosives...melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid." (from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*)²⁴⁹

In the light of all of this, Blake's decision to revert to the old-fashioned line-engraved intaglio method for his engravings of *Job* is deeply ironic, especially given the powerful new exposition of the book which his engravings present. One would think that his boldly inventive method of relief etching would have been a more fitting medium for his boldly inventive exposition of the book of Job. Could this decision of Blake's be part of the creative genius of this work, in which the innovative content of his exposition is juxtaposed with the archaic form in which it is presented, requiring the interpreter to grapple with the relationship between established tradition on the one hand and imaginative newness on the other? Blake's engravings of *The Illustrations of Job* seem to be making the salutary point that the journey to imaginative newness, of necessity, involves a passage through established tradition. Within the *Illustrations* themselves, as will be seen, this very journey is made explicit.

²⁴⁸ For a helpful treatment of the advantages and challenges of Blake's relief etching, see the relevant section within the online article on Blake's first illuminated manuscript '*All Religions are One*' at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_Religions_are_One [accessed on 4 December 2012].

²⁴⁹ Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 39.

5. The chiasmic structure of *Illustrations of the Book of Job*

It was Charles Norton, as early as 1875 in his book-length study of the *Illustrations*, who noticed that the later plates in the series counterbalance the earlier plates. This insight was further explored by Joseph Wicksteed in 1910, in his pioneering and highly influential book *Blake's Vision of the Book of Job*.²⁵⁰ Since Wicksteed, this recognition of what has been termed the antiphonal structure of the series has generally set the tone in the interpretation of the *Illustrations* as a whole.²⁵¹ Critical attention has tended to focus on the visual juxtaposition of the first and last plates, and the prominence of Satan in plates 2 – 6²⁵² with the counterbalancing prominence of God (Christ)²⁵³ in plates 13 – 17. These are valid and important observations that illustrate the antiphonal nature of the series.

However, I am of the view that characterizing the series as having a broad antiphonal structure does not go far enough in describing the precise relationship between the two halves of the series. A more accurate characterization would be that the series exhibits a chiasmic structure, which drills down to the level of individual plates in each half of the series that mirror each other and accordingly inform each other.²⁵⁴ At the heart of this chiasmus is plate 11, the middle plate which marks the lowest and darkest point in

²⁵⁰ Minney, "Job's Gethsemane: Tradition and Imagination in William Blake's Illustrations for the Book of Job," xviii.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 141.

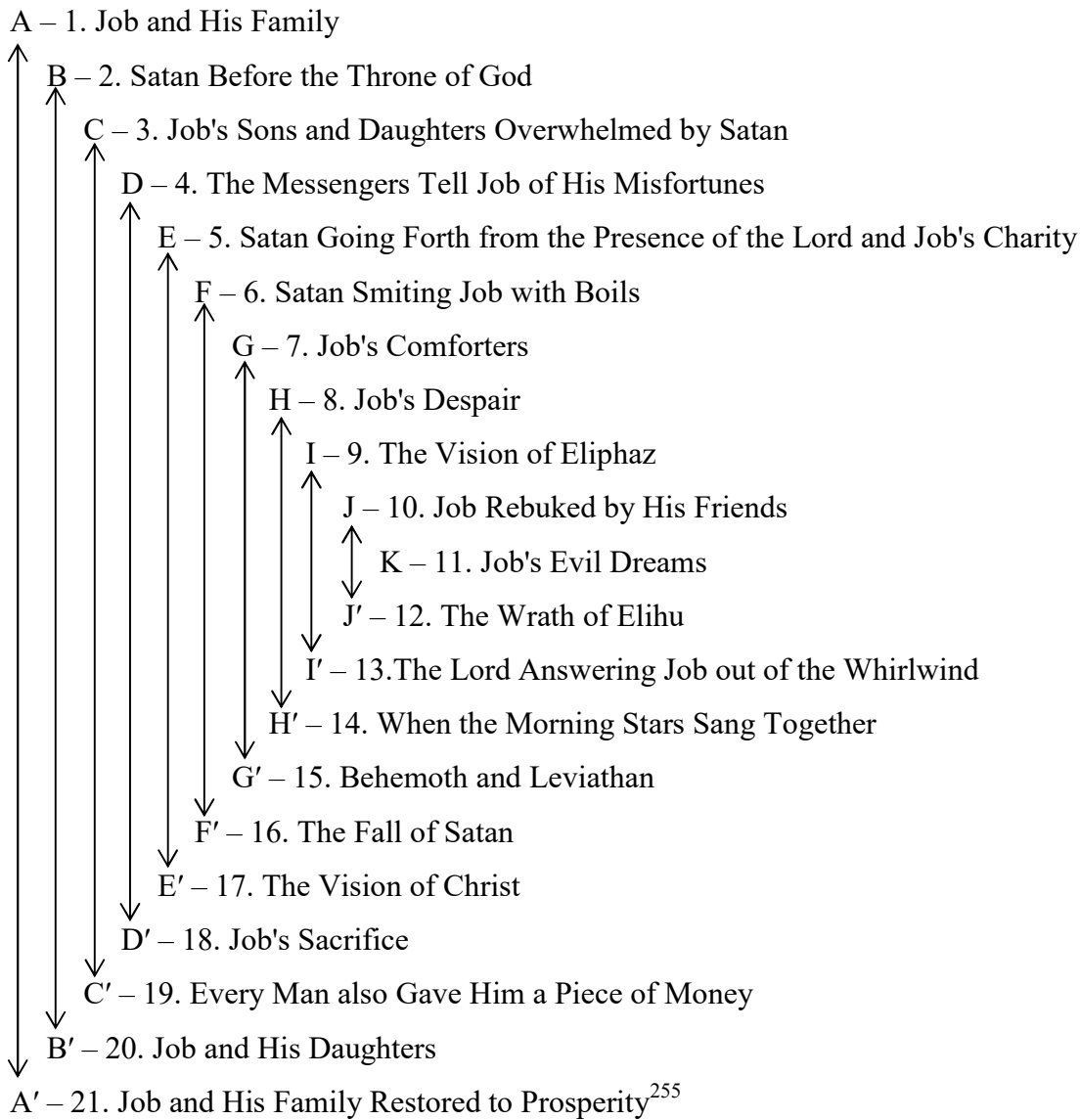
²⁵² In plate 4 Satan does not appear in the central image itself, but as a winged figure in the marginalia. Nevertheless, his is still an imposing presence in the engraving as he is depicted with sword in hand, standing over the earth. The devastating effects of his presence are evident in the tragic news that the messengers bring to Job and his wife.

²⁵³ The depictions of God in the second half of the series are also depictions of Christ. This is made explicit in plate 17, where words of Jesus from John 14 are inscribed in the margins, "He that hath seen me hath seen my Father also. I & my Father are One." Blake was unperturbed by the anachronism of Christological assertions being made within an Old Testament book.

²⁵⁴ Blake was well familiar with chiasmus as a literary device, and used it in other works. For a treatment of his use of chiasmus in *The Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem* see D. Whitmarsh-Knight 2010, <http://thefourzoascom.blogspot.com/2010/03/first-chiastic-structures-of-zoas-and.html>. [Accessed: 7 December 2012].

the series. As will be discussed below, this plate is the fulcrum point on which the interpretation of the entire series hinges.

The chiasmic structure of the *Job* engravings could be represented as follows:



²⁵⁵ The titles for each of the plates that have been used here are the descriptive titles used by the William Blake Archive [Available from: <http://www.blakearchive.org>]. It is important to note that Blake did not give any titles to his engravings. Some scholars use the most prominent biblical text in the margin of each illustration as the title – see, for example, S. Foster Damon, *Blake's Job* (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1966). The use of descriptive titles is in itself an interpretation, and could potentially distort the reading of a particular engraving. For example, the descriptive title given to plate 12 is 'The wrath of Elihu', but it is a moot point whether wrath best describes Elihu's disposition in the engraving. An even more dramatic example would be in plate 18, which has been given the descriptive title of 'Job's sacrifice', but the point being made is that Job, having just

Conceptualizing the series in this way reveals the journey of transformation that Job undergoes – a journey of descent and subsequent ascent.²⁵⁶ The first half of the series – the journey of descent – begins in a state of seeming bliss, with Job's family and flocks gathered around him as they read and pray together (plate 1). This state of contentment is then ruptured by the machinations of Satan in heaven and the horrific consequences for Job on earth (plates 2 – 6). The response of Job and his friends to his plight (plates 7 – 10) fails to bring any consolation, but only deepens the encroaching darkness as the religious paradigm out of which they operate is revealed to be wholly inadequate. Indeed, it is more than inadequate – it is false! This is made explicit in plate 11, which represents the nadir of his journey, in which Job comes to see that the God of his religious conception is truly a devil.

This gift of disillusionment (in the sense of having his illusions about God exposed and hence stripped away) enables Job to begin the journey of ascent in which he will come to re-imagine and rediscover who God really is. This requires retracing the steps that had brought Job to that point, which happens as each engraving in the second half of the series 'answers' or 'corrects' its corresponding engraving in the first half. It begins with Elihu who holds up one hand against the so-called wisdom of his elders and with the other points to the heavens (plate 12). This leads to a series of visionary encounters with God (plates 13 – 17) in which Job comes to see the world with all its beauty, paradox and ambiguity through the perspective of God. What follows are the responses of Job who prays on behalf of his friends (plate 18), his neighbours who

encountered God in a visionary way, renounces sacrifice in favour of authentic prayer. There is a deep irony at work here, for in one sense this is indeed Job's sacrifice – the sacrifice of his former religious persona who was forever sacrificing as a means of interceding on behalf of others (cf. Job 1:5).

²⁵⁶ The title page of the series (reproduced at the end of this chapter) shows the path of descent and ascent that Job must follow, represented by seven angels descending and reascending clockwise. These seven angels symbolized the seven Eyes of God – an important concept in Blake's thought that will be discussed below – which describe the stages of spiritual development from error to enlightenment.

bring him money (plate 19), and Job again who initiates his daughters into his experience of the mysteries of God (plate 20). The series concludes with Job and his family expressing their artistic imagination by playing the musical instruments (plate 21) that were untouched and unplayed in the first plate.

The centre of the chiastic structure, and the turning point for Job, comes in plate 11. Before discussing the chiastic pairings of the rest of the series, this central, fulcrum-point engraving will be considered.

5.1 Plate 11 – Job's Evil Dreams²⁵⁷



This central plate 11 is the focal point of the chiasmus and the fulcrum of the series as a whole. In it, a God-like figure hovers over a supine Job, which is strongly reminiscent of Blake's 1795 painting *Elohim Creating Adam*. In this engraving, however, the God-figure is unmistakably demonic, having wild, tousled hair, a cloven

²⁵⁷ All of the images of the engravings reproduced here are in the public domain and are accessible online at

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Blake's_Illustrations_of_the_Book_of_Job.

Larger copies of each engraving can be found in the Appendix.

hoof and is entwined by a serpent. His right hand points to the stone tablets of the Decalogue above, while his left hand points to the hellfire below, even as a chain is offered to him by one of the three scaly demons who grasp at Job out of the black flames below.²⁵⁸

This depiction has led many commentators to conclude that this is none other than Satan masquerading as God.²⁵⁹ Such a conclusion maintains the dualistic split between God who is good, and Satan who is evil. But another possibility exists that is even more radical – that this is indeed God. Or certainly the God that Job has served and who has been seen in the first half of the series, enthroned in heaven and engaging with Satan regarding the life and wellbeing of Job. A false God who is revealed to be a devil.

It has been suggested that the three demons who clutch at Job from below are the nightmare transformations of Job's comforters, perhaps because of their slavish adherence to the dictates of the Law.²⁶⁰ The relationship between the Law and the bondage of hell is made explicit by the devil-god, who points to each in a way that alludes to their symbiotic connection, suggesting that the one necessarily leads to the other.²⁶¹ In doing so, his outstretched arms cause him to assume a cruciform

²⁵⁸ Paley, *The Traveller in the Evening : The Last Works of William Blake*, 244.

²⁵⁹ See, for example, *ibid.*; Minney, "Job's Gethsemane: Tradition and Imagination in William Blake's Illustrations for the Book of Job," 172.

²⁶⁰ Paley, *The Traveller in the Evening : The Last Works of William Blake*, 244.

²⁶¹ Minney offers a different interpretation, that in this plate the Law and Damnation in Hell are presented as alternatives – “observe the Law or else you’ll burn in Hell” (Minney, "Job's Gethsemane: Tradition and Imagination in William Blake's Illustrations for the Book of Job," 172.). I'm of the view that Blake was suggesting something far more radical, namely that the slavish adherence to the Law leads to an experience of hell. Stähler argues that in Blake's system of thought both laws and hell “...are mutually dependent on each other as defining offence and penance” (Axel Stähler, "Writ(H)Ing Images: Imagination, the Human Form and the Divine in William Blake, Salman Rushdie and Simon Louvish," *English Studies* 89, no. 1 (2008): 97.).

posture.²⁶² This is a grotesque parody of the crucifixion, not as a site of life and liberation but rather of bondage and death. Indeed, this cruciform posture occurs earlier in the series in plate 6, where a cruciform Satan (complete with nimbus²⁶³) inflicts suffering on Job, flinging arrows from his one hand and pouring out a vial of fire from the other. Following plate 11, God assumes a cruciform posture in plates 13 and 14, as does Job in plates 18 and 20. The question is raised: which of these represents a true christological position? For in plate 11 the God that Job had served is revealed to be a terrifying distortion of the God revealed in Christ.

It is significant that for Job this realization comes through the medium of dreams and visions. The caption of plate 11 is a paraphrase of Job 7:14 – “With Dreams upon my bed thou scarest me and affrightest me with Visions.” Terrifying though these nightmares may be, they lead Job for the first time into the realm of the visionary²⁶⁴ where true insight becomes possible.²⁶⁵ Indeed, it is precisely at this devastating low-point where the true nature of the false God Job has been serving is exposed, that his journey into authentic maturity begins. It is a moment of death, but also one in which resurrection hope is expressed. Part of the inscription of plate 11 includes these words, rephrased from Job 19:25-27:

For I know that my Redeemer liveth & that he shall stand in the latter days upon
the Earth & after my skin destroy thou This body yet in my flesh shall I see God
whom I shall see for Myself and mine eyes shall behold & not Another
tho consumed be my wrought image

²⁶² This cruciform posture is one of the significant deviations from Blake's earlier *Elohim Creating Adam* on which this design was clearly based, suggesting a deliberate intention on Blake's part to represent this God-like figure in this way.

²⁶³ In art a nimbus is the bright or cloud-like disc surrounding the head of a subject, especially of a saint or a deity that is an indication of the sanctity or even the divinity of the subject.

²⁶⁴ In plate 9, Eliphaz's vision of God is presented to Job, but clearly this was not a visionary experience of his own.

²⁶⁵ Whereas we might say something like, “It was just a nightmare, it wasn't real,” for Blake Job's nightmares were visions of the truly real.

From the tomb-like nadir of plate 11, the second half of the series charts the path of Job's journey of resurrection, a path of ascent that culminates quite gloriously with Job and all his family sharing in the high art of making music together (plate 21) as an expression of their praise of God.

Having considered plate 11 which is the fulcrum-point of Job's journey, what follows now is a discussion of each of the paired images that make up the chiastic structure of the series, and how they describe Job's descent and subsequent ascent and the transformation he undergoes as a result.

5.2 Plates 1 and 21



Plate 1 – Job and His Family

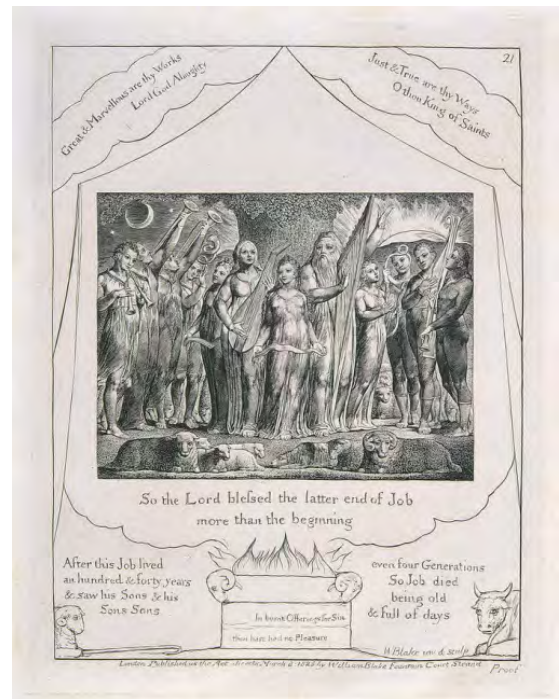


Plate 21 – Job and His Family Restored to Prosperity

The first and last plates in the series mark the parameters of the series as a whole and are arguably the most striking pairing in the chiastic structure. They are visually very similar, as the central images in both depict Job and his wife with their ten children and flocks beneath a large tree, flanked in the distance by the sun and moon. Common elements in the marginalia include clouds and a framing tent-like structure, a ram and

bull in the bottom corners, and a fiery altar. At first glance they appear to be virtually synonymous.

On closer inspection, however, the visual similarity of these two plates reveal their stark contrasts. In the first plate, Job and his wife are sitting with open books on their laps with their children kneeling around them in the posture of prayer. All the sons have shepherd's crooks, a symbol of pastoral devotion. Their posture and proximity to their parents, along with their sisters, suggests that all of Job's children are the model of obedience. The sense created is that this is a deeply devout and exemplary family, committed to reading the scriptures and praying together.²⁶⁶ Inscribed above the central image are the opening words of the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father which art in Heaven hallowed be thy name."²⁶⁷ While the Lord's Prayer is undoubtedly the best-known and most important prayer within the Christian faith, the inescapable reality is that it is a book prayer, the recitation of which can easily become formulaic.

Repeating prayers by rote is qualitatively different from prayer that arises out of one's own lived experience expressed in one's own words.²⁶⁸ Very significantly, musical instruments – so symbolic for Blake of the artistic imagination – are hanging up in the tree, unplayed.²⁶⁹ The main inscription beneath the image, 'Thus did Job continually' (Job 1:5), underscores the point that this is a faithful and consistent representation of all of Job's life.

²⁶⁶ This portrayal of Job's children represents a departure from the biblical text, where their proclivity for feasting and celebrating is described as an anxiety for Job who would offer burnt offerings on their behalf just in case they had sinned (cf. Job 1:4-5).

²⁶⁷ In the Butts and Linell watercolours, the opening words of the Lord's Prayer are written within the setting sun. Online images of the Butts and Linell sets are available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Blake%27s_Illustrations_of_the_Book_of_Job

²⁶⁸ Minney disputes this interpretation that the opening line of the Lord's Prayer in plate 1 connotes a legalistic form of piety. She argues that if Blake "...had wanted to depict Job and his family weighed down by a burden of law and formal repetition, he would hardly have chosen as target the opening words of the Lord's Prayer, which approaches God lovingly as Father" (Minney, "Job's Gethsemane: Tradition and Imagination in William Blake's Illustrations for the Book of Job," 160.).

²⁶⁹ The two sons on the far left and right each have an instrument at their side, but these also remain unplayed.

In the last plate, by contrast, the opened books have gone. The untouched instruments of the first plate are now being played, as Job and his wife and their sons and daughters sing and make music together. Job's outstretched hand and the inscription from Rev 15:3, "Great & Marvellous are thy Works Lord God Almighty Just & True are thy Ways O thou King of Saints" indicate that they are sharing together in the praises of God. David Bindman observes that through instrumental music, song and possibly dance, art and prayer have become one and the same for Job and his family.²⁷⁰ Indeed, there is an unmistakable note of artistic freedom and exuberance in the last plate that is in sharp contrast to the stiff uniformity and rigid control of the first. Clearly, the nature of Job's religious expression has dramatically changed, which reveals the deeper truth that Job's understanding of God has dramatically changed.

Other important differences between these two plates highlight the nature of the transformation that Job has undergone. The positions of the sun and moon in plate 1 are inverted in plate 21, so that the setting sun of the first plate, suggestive of the coming night of suffering and disillusionment that will soon envelop Job in darkness, becomes the rising sun of the last plate, pointing to the new day of understanding and insight that has dawned upon Job and his family. The slumbering sheep in the foreground of plate 1 have awakened in plate 21, suggesting a new enlivened consciousness, not just for Job but for all within his sphere of influence. Indeed, the final plate reveals that Job's journey of transformation has implications that reach way beyond the private and personal, extending to his family, his flocks and fields (the renewal of Job's physical landscape will be dealt with below), and even the cosmos itself, as the inversion of the sun and moon in the final plate attest.

Another crucially significant difference between the plates of this first chiasmic pairing concerns the Gothic cathedral in the background of the first plate which is missing in the last plate. It has become customary amongst commentators to identify this Gothic

²⁷⁰ David Bindman, "Blake as a Painter," in *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, ed. Morris Eaves (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 105.

cathedral as symbolic of true art.²⁷¹ This identification is based on Blake's own assertion that "...a Gothic Church is representative of true Art" (from *A Vision of the Last Judgement*),²⁷² as well as an inscription on the engraving *Joseph of Arimathea among The Rocks of Albion* in which Blake declared that the world was not worthy of the Gothic artists who built the cathedrals.²⁷³ For Paley, the presence of this Gothic cathedral "...indicates the persistent availability of vision."²⁷⁴

While these positive associations with Gothic architecture are accepted within Blake's wider corpus, they are misplaced in this particular instance in the interpretation of plate 1. For while it is true that those who designed and built the cathedrals displayed artistic imagination at its height, the same is not necessarily true of those who frequented them. What is often overlooked is that a Gothic cathedral, in its very form and function, is a repository of religious tradition and a structural expression of a particular brand of faith largely fixed in time and space. As such, the cathedral in plate 1 could be understood as a symbol of rigid, unyielding religious practice that is more concerned with the preservation of what is, than with the discovery of what is fresh and new. A profound irony is at work here as Blake uses a symbol that he had always associated with true art as a representation of the antithesis of true art. In doing so Blake is giving notice that all is not necessarily as it appears and that preconceived ideas and presuppositions need to be carefully scrutinized before being blindly accepted and believed. This is precisely what will be required of Job in his journey of religious transformation.

This admittedly negative interpretation of the Gothic cathedral in plate 1 is supported in two ways. Firstly, the other physical structure in the central design of plate 1 is a compound of five storehouses, suggestive of the safeguarding of Job's material prosperity. The cathedral and storehouses can thus be seen as structures that

²⁷¹ Minney, "Job's Gethsemane: Tradition and Imagination in William Blake's Illustrations for the Book of Job," 81.

²⁷² Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 559.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 671.

²⁷⁴ Paley, *The Traveller in the Evening : The Last Works of William Blake*, 232.

symbolize the protection of Job's religion and riches. Secondly, the only other occurrence of a Gothic cathedral in the series is in plate 4, when messengers run to tell Job and his wife the tragic news of the calamities that have befallen them.²⁷⁵

Significantly, in that engraving Job's wife wrings her hands above her head in a gesture of anguished grief, whereas Job holds his hands together and looks heavenward in a composed posture of prayer. According to the biblical account, the prayer that he utters is the famous, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:21)

The question that arises is whether this prayer of Job's is an authentic response of faith appropriate to the horrific news he has just heard, or the formulaic response of dead religion. W Vogels argues persuasively that Job's response to the news of his great loss was nothing more than the utterance of empty, pious slogans. He writes, "...when he loses everything, he really does not know what to do. His only responses are conventional rites and superficial, pious formulas."²⁷⁶ If Vogels is correct, then this moment demonstrates the utter failure of Job's faith in his hour of need. Tellingly, in plate 4 of the illustrations, as Job holds his hands together in prayer and looks heavenward²⁷⁷ the figure towards whom he unknowingly gazes, beyond the central image and standing boldly in the marginalia, is none other than Satan. In the light of all this, the presence of a Gothic cathedral in the distant background in plate 4 conveys the sense of the influence of rigid religious tradition that must be preserved and protected. This is precisely what Job seeks to do with his ritualistic response to the calamities that had befallen him, exposing the true character of his faith as something that is fixed and unbending and must be safeguarded at all costs.

²⁷⁵ A reproduction of this plate is included below in the discussion of the chiasmic pairing of plates 4 and 18.

²⁷⁶ Walter Vogels, "Job's Empty Pious Slogans," in *The Book of Job*, ed. Willem A.M. Beuken (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995), 376.

²⁷⁷ The only other time in the series that Job assumes this same posture is in plate 13, when the LORD answers him out of the whirlwind.

The presence of a Gothic cathedral in plate 1, and the corresponding absence of a cathedral or any other overtly religious structure in the last plate, elucidate further the transformation that Job has undergone. In the first plate Job has all the appearance of piety, and is no doubt sincere and committed in his religious practice. But his belief is tragically misplaced – a reality that is not immediately evident, but which will become shockingly apparent in the course of his journey. By contrast, in the final plate Job and his family offer a freed-up, authentic, exuberant and imaginative expression of praise to a very different God who takes no pleasure in the requirements of sacrifice as defined within some religious legal code. The inscription on the altar beneath the central image of plate 21 reads, “In burnt Offerings for Sin thou hast had no Pleasure” (Heb 10:6). The main inscription of the final plate confirms that the latter end of Job was more blessed than the beginning. The reason for this had already been declared at the very outset, for inscribed on the altar of the first plate were the words, “The Letter Killeth The Spirit giveth Life” (2 Cor 3:6). This indeed was Job’s experience.

5.3 Plates 2 and 20



Plate 2 – Satan Before the Throne of God



Plate 20 – Job and His Daughters

Although the descriptive title given to plate 2 is 'Satan Before the Throne of God', it fails to do justice to the essence of this engraving. One alternative could be 'Fathers and Sons.' The inscription at the very bottom of the engraving is a quotation from Job 1:6, "There was a day when the Sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord & Satan came also among them..." Mirroring these 'Sons of God' before the Lord in heaven are the sons (and daughters) of Job around him on earth. The main inscription on the plate is taken from Job 29:5, "When the Almighty was yet with me, When my Children were about me." There is an obvious resonance here with plate 20, the corresponding engraving in the chiasmic structure, which depicts Job and his three daughters.

Another possibility for a descriptive title of plate 2 could be 'The source of authority.' Both in heaven above and on the earth below, books and scrolls abound. As in plate 1, Job and his wife have open books on their laps. Paley offers this description:

The significant action going on is a comparison of texts. Two angels with opened scrolls at the left make eye contact with Job, who, with worried glance indicates with his right thumb a passage in the book he grips with his left hand.... Job's wife still has her book on her lap but looks over to her husband's. One son has entered from the right with an opened book and the one behind Job has opened a scroll. The question before the house appears to be whether the sons 'have sinned and cursed God in their hearts'.... The textual comparisons have their result in heaven above, where one angel flies up with a book, another with a scroll, and two more lay scrolls at the base of the throne. There sits the Chief Bookkeeper of all...with a volume opened on his lap.²⁷⁸

In the midst of all this feverish bookish activity, the figure of Satan appears for the first time.²⁷⁹ The dictates and demands of book religion open the door for him to do his work as accuser, as he appeals to the bookkeeping God on the throne for the authority to test Job's righteousness. He will do so as the Angel (or messenger) of the

²⁷⁸ Paley, *The Traveller in the Evening : The Last Works of William Blake*, 233-34.

²⁷⁹ A sobering comment, perhaps, for those ensconced within the academe?

Divine Presence, as the marginal inscription above the image makes clear. The phrase appears to be a translation of the two Hebrew words immediately below it,²⁸⁰ except that Blake has introduced a subtle irony. By leaving out the letter *alef* (א) from the first word, the meaning is changed from 'angel' (מלאך) to 'king' (מלך). The Hebrew phrase would then be translated as 'King Yahweh' or 'King Jehovah'. Blake is giving notice of the identification between this bookkeeping King Jehovah on the throne and Satan, the angel (or messenger) of the Divine Presence. Indeed, as alluded to above in the discussion of the Gothic cathedral in plate 1, all is not necessarily as it appears.

Oblivious to what is transpiring in heaven above, on the earth below Job's religious anxiety is apparent as he and his family busy themselves with the reading of books and scrolls. His over-riding concern as a father was that his children may have sinned and cursed God in their hearts (cf. Job 1:5), and so he turns to the Letter of what has been written. This is the source of Job's authority for the conduct of his life and the safeguarding of his family. He initiates his children into the observance of the law and the dictates and demands of book religion, unaware that it is this very same preoccupation that has opened the gate for Satan to do his worst.

In the bottom corners of the marginal designs stand a shepherd and shepherdess – possibly representing Job and his wife – inside the fence of a sheepfold where sheep are sleeping. However, the gate of the sheepfold is open, with a slumbering sheepdog lying in the gateway. The appearance of protection is created, but in reality the sheep are vulnerable and exposed. The pastoral protection that Job seeks to offer his children through the observance of book religion is fundamentally flawed. This will be tragically revealed in the following engraving which depicts the demise of Job's children at the hand of Satan.

The corresponding engraving in the chiasmic pairing – plate 20 – reveals a radically transformed picture. As in plate 2 it is a domestic scene with Job surrounded by his

²⁸⁰ In *The Laocoön*, the exact same English-Hebrew combination occurs: The English phrase 'The Angel of the Divine Presence' immediately above the Hebrew words מלאך יהוה.

children – though on this occasion it is just his three daughters. Any vestige of books or scrolls is gone.²⁸¹ Whereas in plate 2 Job pointed with his thumb to a word in a book, in plate 20 he points with outstretched arms to visual scenes on the walls behind him, as he tells his daughters his story. “Three scenes are readily identifiable behind Job: from left to right, the destruction of Job’s servants by the Chaldeans (1:17) with Satan overhead, God appearing out of the whirlwind as in [plate] 13, and the destruction of a ploughman by Satan himself (and not by the Sabeans as in Job 1:15).”²⁸²

In stretching out his arms as he points to these scenes which describe his journey of death and resurrection, Job assumes a cruciform posture. The implication is that as Job reflects on the wide sweep of his lived experience – which included the alienation of suffering and the wonder of divine revelation – there is an identification with the crucified and risen Christ, whose presence, Job now recognizes, was indeed with him. This is underscored by the marginal inscription at the bottom of the engraving, taken from Psalm 139:8, “If I ascend up into Heaven thou art there If I make my bed in Hell behold thou art there.”

This is what Job seeks to pass on to his daughters. This is what he seeks to initiate them into. He has learned that a slavish adherence to the Letter offers no security and is no way to live. Indeed, he has learned that such preoccupations are a symptom of false religion – that the image of God as a bookkeeping King on the throne is the image of a devil God. Job has been liberated from the bondage of book religion and the tyranny of unbending tradition. This is clearly evident in the ways in which he sees and treats his daughters, which represent a break from the received traditions of his

²⁸¹ The corresponding watercolour in the Butts set contains scrolls and a book. “The left-hand daughter has drawing or writing paper, the middle one is reading a book, and the one at the right has a scroll in her left hand. It has been considered since W.M. Rossetti’s catalogue [dating from 1880] that this rather poor drawing is largely by a hand other than Blake’s, and that it even may have been completed after Blake’s death” (Paley, *The Traveller in the Evening : The Last Works of William Blake*, 256.).

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 258.

day. This much is clear enough in the biblical record, where it is only the daughters whose names are recorded, given to them by their father²⁸³ (Job 42:14) who also gave them an inheritance along with their brothers (Job 42:15) – in clear contravention of the Israelite custom that a daughter would inherit from her father only if he didn't have any sons (Numbers 27:8). In plate 20, this gender-based disruption of cultural convention is dramatically driven home by Blake.

Firstly, this is the only engraving in the entire series where there are no male characters around Job. Secondly, this engraving strongly intimates that the “Inheritance” given to the daughters of Job refers not simply to material riches but also to the inheritance of spiritual insight and awakening.²⁸⁴ This is not to suggest that the brothers were excluded from this aspect of the inheritance. Indeed, in the final engraving (plate 21), all of Job's family join in the act of making music together. However, it is significant that in telling his story and initiating his family into that which he had come to know in a new way, it is his daughters whom Job chooses as the initial recipients of his new consciousness.

Thirdly, this engraving revises the place and importance of beauty in the world, and the connection between beauty and art. The main inscription on the plate is taken from

²⁸³ Clines notes firstly, that in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible, females are not usually named unless they have a prominent part to play in the plot, and secondly, in Hebrew society it is always the mothers who name children. According to Clines, Job's naming of his daughters here is the only instance of a father doing so in the Hebrew Bible (David J.A. Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, Word Biblical Commentary 18b (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 1237-38.).

²⁸⁴ In the Hebrew Bible, an “inheritance” (נחלה) most commonly referred to “...the division of the land within the kinship structure of Israel.... The sense of kinship and of specially significant property inherent in the words leads to a wide metaphorical use, of which the most theologically important...express the relationship between Israel and Yahweh” (Wright, 1997, 77). This metaphorical usage of the term to connote a special relational intimacy fits well with Blake's usage of the term here, which points to more than just material property. Besides, נחלה (in the sense of material property) was usually passed on to the inheriting descendants only after one's death (Clines, 2011, 1238) – which explains the scandal of the younger son's request in Jesus' well-known parable in Luke 15:11-32 – and according to the biblical text, Job would still live a further one hundred and forty years (42:16).

Job 42:15, "There were not found Women fair as the Daughters of Job in all the Land & their Father gave them Inheritance among their Brethren." The relationship between the daughters' beauty and their receiving an inheritance is a crucially important one to understand. Clines offers this instructive comment on this question:

The two halves of the verse, about the daughters' beauty and about their inheritance, are connected by a simple "and" [*wāw*], which leaves the relation of the two parts open to question. We saw in the prologue how the "and" suggests a causal connection: Job was blameless and upright "and" there were born to him seven sons and three daughters (1:1-2) – as if his piety were the reason for his perfect family. The same doubtless applies here: the daughters' beauty is the reason for their father's exceptional treatment of them.²⁸⁵

Some (feminist) commentators decry the insinuation that it was the daughters' physical beauty that prompted Job to give them an inheritance, and see in this a perpetuation of a patriarchal worldview in which women are sexually objectified and their value is defined according to their sexual appeal. Wilcox writes, "...what we have emphasized here is *not* the liberation of woman to become an equal to man, but painted, perfumed, sexual beauty. Job's old age is blessed with the almost illicit pleasure of sexually attractive daughters."²⁸⁶

However, to limit the daughters' beauty to something merely physical in a sexually objectified way is to diminish and demean the expansive nature of true beauty, and is to miss its true point. Certainly for Blake, such a crass reduction of beauty to a function of gratuitous sexual desire could never be justified. He viewed beauty not as a commodity to be craved but as a form of spiritual materialism that could transfigure individuals and transform societies.²⁸⁷ It should come as no surprise then that beauty, for Blake, was inextricably connected to Art. In *The Laocoön* he writes, "Art can

²⁸⁵ Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1238.

²⁸⁶ John T Wilcox, *The Bitterness of Job: A Philosophical Reading* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 222.

²⁸⁷ Susanne Sklar, "How Beauty Will Save the World: William Blake's Prophetic Vision," *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 7, no. 1 (2007): 30.

never exist without Naked Beauty displayed.”²⁸⁸ This relationship between Art and Beauty is delightfully expressed in the marginal designs of plate 20 where the inscription about the daughters’ beauty and inheritance is bracketed by a lyre and lute. In the final engraving of the series, one of the daughters will play the lyre and Job’s wife will play the lute.

Clearly, Job’s eyes have been opened to see his daughters in a whole new light. Unconstrained by cultural convention or the need to ‘play it by the book’, he goes public with his broadened perspective of who they really are, recognizing their individuality, celebrating their beauty, affirming their importance, redefining their place and honouring their rightful entitlements within his reconfigured world. Joan Chittister writes:

The symbol of Job's new world is the symbol of Job's three daughters – Dove, Cinnamon, and Eye-shadow, the translators call them – not invisible now, but named, not dependent but propertied, not faceless but uniquely gentle, personable and female. In Job's new world, the feminine is very present and just as powerful, just as established, just as influential as her brothers are. Job's new world, in other words, is the world turned upside down. In this world, the development of women does not diminish men, it enhances them. In this world, conflict is not the basis of security and peace and feminism does not signal weakness; it secures the strength of everyone.²⁸⁹

In plate 2 we see Job caught in the desperate anxiety of seeking to ‘get it right’ as he and his family try to follow the letter of the law, while above him a picture of God and heaven is revealed that both enables and authorizes the interrogation of his righteousness and the exploitation of his anxiety. This is part of Job’s necessary journey of descent into the darkness of disillusionment. In plate 20 we witness Job’s glorious emergence as one who has been freed from the shackles of his anxiety,

²⁸⁸ Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 275.

²⁸⁹ Joan Chittister, *Job's Daughters : Women and Power*, Madeleva Lecture in Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 70.

evidenced in his invitation to his daughters to consider the world in the light of his transformed perspective, even as he sees them in a whole new light.

5.4 Plates 3 and 19



Plate 3 – Job's Sons and Daughters
Overwhelmed by Satan



Plate 19 - Every Man also Gave Him a Piece of Money

The relationship between plates 3 and 19 in this third chiastic pairing is immediately apparent. The former is a scene of fiery destruction,²⁹⁰ the latter is one of fecund restoration.²⁹¹ In plate 3, the agent of the devastation is Satan – rather than the “...great wind from the Wilderness” (Job 1:19) in the main inscription of the engraving – who is depicted as a black, bat-winged figure with fire and lightning bolts

²⁹⁰ The destruction is not simply the demise of Job’s children (and their families), tragic though that is. It is also the destruction of the possibility of artistic expression. At the bottom of the central design lies a dead female figure, her feet resting on a tambourine, her hand on a lyre. To her right lies the dead body of a male figure who has fallen, somewhat unnaturally, into an inverted cruciform position above the scattered dishes that would have contained the elements of bread and wine for the children’s feast. The Christological reference is subtle but clear – the destruction is not just of a house and family, but of Art and the Gospel.

²⁹¹ The fecundity of Job’s restoration is apparent in the ripened wheat in Job’s field, the ripened figs that hang from the tree above Job and his wife, and the large bunches of grapes, roses and lilies that are included in the marginal designs.

coming from his hands. In plate 19, the agents of Job's material restoration are a man and three women who bring him gifts of money and jewellery.²⁹² The question asked and answered by this chiasmic pairing is this, 'By whose hand are these things wrought?' The answer given is that whoever the particular agents may be, ultimately this is the work of God. The marginal inscriptions across the top of plate 3 read, "The Fire of God is Fallen from Heaven" (Job 1:16) and "And the Lord said unto Satan Behold All that he hath is in thy Power" (Job 1:12). The corresponding inscriptions in plate 19 read, "The Lord maketh Poor & maketh Rich He bringeth Low & Lifteth up" (1 Samuel 2:7) and "who provideth for the Raven his Food When his young ones cry unto God" (Job 38:41).

²⁹² It is significant that the women are in the majority in this company of charitable givers. In the original watercolour of this scene in the Butts set, there were two women and one man. Blake has added another woman here, making this only the second engraving in the entire set (along with plate 20) where there are more women than men. The restoration that Job experiences has a preponderance of feminine energy embedded within it. The caption of the engraving, 'Every one also gave him a piece of Money' modifies the Authorised Version's "...every man also gave him a piece of money" (Job 42:11). This anticipates the counter-cultural gendered perspective that Job will embrace in the following engraving (plate 20) in relation to his daughters, which has already been discussed. In this engraving the woman at the head of the small company is holding out an ear-ring to Job's wife. The material restoration that is being offered is thus not simply one of monetary value, but includes the restoration of aesthetic beauty as well, which is seen to fall within the particular domain of the feminine. This is not to suggest that the specific role and function of women in the 'softer' task of the restoration of beauty is of secondary importance to the 'harder', more pragmatic task of monetary restoration. Far from it. As already discussed above, Beauty and Art are inextricably bound together, and so the absence of Beauty would make any monetary restoration artless and hollow.

5.5 Plates 4 and 18

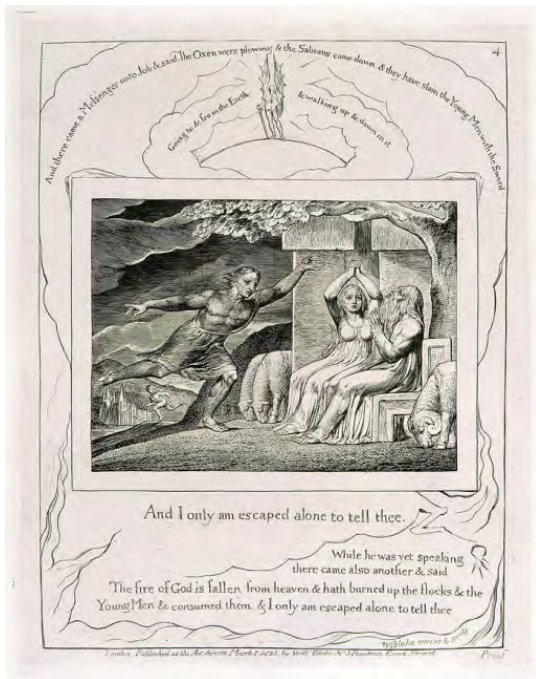


Plate 4 – The Messengers Tell Job of His Misfortunes



Plate 18 – Job's Sacrifice

The key to unlocking the chiasmic connection between plates 4 and 18 lies in considering Job's prayerful response to the events that have befallen him. In the discussion above of the first chiasmic pairing, the nature of Job's prayerful response in plate 4 was dealt with briefly. There the point was made that as Job presses his hands together and looks heavenward in prayer, the unknowing object of his prayerful gaze, in the marginalia, is none other than Satan. This is one of the defining moments in the whole series, when Job hears the news of the cataclysmic demise of virtually his entire world, and makes his response. By all appearances it seems that Job's faith remains resolute in the face of his tragic losses as he immediately turns to God in prayer. And in one sense this is true. But the telling point that Blake is making in this engraving is that when prayer has as its focus a false god (even unknowingly), while it may appear to be an act of religious piety, in the end it is empty and futile, offering nothing by way of authentic transformation. Job, of course, does not yet see this. But his journey of descent into the darkness of disillusionment has begun, in which he will come to

see his false religion for what it is, and come to a whole new understanding of the true nature of prayer.

This transformed notion of prayer is the subject of plate 18, the counterpoint to plate 4 in the chiasmic arrangement. The legitimacy of Job's prayer in this plate derives from two foundations – the authenticity of the God to whom Job prays, and the cogency of Job's unguarded self-offering. Each of these foundations will now be considered in turn.

As Job stands with outstretched arms before a flaming altar, we notice that his gaze is not upon the altar itself but above and beyond it. He has raised his face heavenward towards an enormous, radiant sun. The arc of his outstretched arms is extended with a swathe of cloud that continues beyond the frame of the central image into the margins of the engraving, incorporating three angels on the left and another three on the right. There is an echo here of Hebrews 12:1 which speaks of being surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.²⁹³ The foremost angel of each group is playing a musical instrument, the one on the left a double recorder, the one on the right a harp. Their artistic participation in the great circle of prayer of which Job is also a part attests to the authenticity of Job's prayerful action. As Blake stated it in *The Laocoön*, "Prayer is the Study of Art."²⁹⁴

At the centre of this cloud of Prayer and Art is the disc of a radiant sun, which also transcends the boundary between the central image and the marginal designs.

Because of its size, and because the natural sun will not rise until [plate] 21, this must be the spiritual sun, a Swedenborgian²⁹⁵ notion that Blake retained,

²⁹³ Although there is no explicit textual connection to this passage from Hebrews 12, the book of Hebrews was obviously known to Blake. The final inscription on the bottom of plate 21, "In burnt Offerings for Sin thou hast had no Pleasure" comes from Hebrews 10:6.

²⁹⁴ Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 274.

²⁹⁵ Emanuel Swedenborg was an eighteenth century Swedish philosopher and theologian whose writings greatly influenced Blake's own thinking.

according to which the spiritual sun is the Lord, its light divine truth, and its heat divine good.²⁹⁶

What Blake is portraying is the infinite extent of the God to whom Job prays, whose radiant glory can only at best be hinted at. This is in sharp contrast to the small bat-winged figure of Satan standing on the arc of the earth in the marginal design of plate 4 that was the focus of Job's unknowing gaze. In all these elements the first foundation of the legitimacy of Job's prayer in plate 18 is established – the authenticity of the God to whom Job prays.

The second foundation concerns the cogency of Job's unguarded self-offering. As Job stands with outstretched arms before the flaming stone altar, his wife and the three friends are kneeling at his left and right. Inscribed below the central image are words taken from Job 42:8, "And my Servant Job shall pray for you." The full verse is instructive to grasp the subtleties of what Blake is depicting in this engraving. In Job 42:7-8, the LORD speaks to Eliphaz and says, "Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly."

Job was, of course, well-acquainted with the practice of offering burnt offerings as a way of trying to influence the divine-human relationship in some kind of positive way. This had been one of the cornerstones of his own religious practice (cf. Job 1:5). However, his own painful experiences of devastation and loss exposed the practice as a dangerous folly that only served to entrench false notions of God. In his resulting journey of descent and ascent, Job came to disavow his former convictions and accept a radically transformed picture of who God was and what God was like. A picture of God in which the ritual requirements of sacrifice had no place.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶ Paley, *The Traveller in the Evening : The Last Works of William Blake*, 254.

²⁹⁷ The fact that it was God who instructed the friends to offer a sacrifice could be understood didactically, as a way to expose the futility of such ritualistic acts in and of themselves.

In the light of all of this, what would have been Job's response to his three friends coming to him in order to offer up a burnt offering for themselves, especially if they claimed they were doing so on God's explicit instruction? Surely he would have wanted to shake them by the scruffs of their collars and tell them that they were barking mad, that such futile ritualistic acts stem from delusion and error.

Remarkably, he responds by opening himself up to God in an unguarded act of prayerful self-offering.

That Job would respond in this way is precisely what the LORD said would happen in his speech to Eliphaz (cf. Job 42:8), though it is important to note that God did not actually tell Job to pray for his friends. Job's prayer was a spontaneous response of his own volition, offered on his friends' behalf, pleading with God not to deal with them according to their folly. As he does so we notice that for the first time in the entire series he is standing erect – an expression of the bold conviction that is his in his new-found understanding of God. Standing there with arms opened wide before the flaming offering of his friends' futile sacrifice, we can imagine him saying something like, "Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do" (cf. Luke 23:34).

Indeed, his cruciform posture in this engraving has strong christological associations.²⁹⁸ Paley suggests that his "...cruciform palms-up bodily attitude...indicates the giving up of self in imitation of Christ."²⁹⁹ This is further underscored when one considers that in a very real sense, Job replaces the friends' sacrifice. The friends have offered a burnt offering on their own behalf, but Job offers himself (and his prayer) on their behalf. It was Job's offering and not that of the friends that God accepted. This is made explicit in the marginal inscription above the central image which states, "Also the Lord accepted Job" (Job 42:9). This acceptance of Job was not primarily for Job's benefit, but for the benefit of the friends, as alluded

²⁹⁸ This is the first of two occurrences (the other being in plate 20) where Job assumes a cruciform posture.

²⁹⁹ Paley, *The Traveller in the Evening : The Last Works of William Blake*, 254.

to in God's speech to Eliphaz. Some versions – for example, RSV, NRSV, NIV, NLT, ESV – translate this verse with "...and the LORD accepted Job's prayer." But a literal rendering of the Hebrew phrasing of that verse would be, "...and the LORD accepted the face of Job."³⁰⁰ In other words, as Job turned his face to God, offering not some religious persona but his exposed, vulnerable self, there was something in that truthful face-to-face encounter that was effective in bringing about restoration.³⁰¹

Job becomes an embodiment of the Christological assertion that a transformed life that brings into focus the truth of who God really is has a powerfully redemptive quality to it. While the friends were the focus of Job's prayer, the restorative power of his prayerful presence was not limited to them. A further marginal inscription towards the bottom of the engraving reads, "And the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his Friends" (Job 42:10). Job's heartfelt intercession for his friends was not only a sign of his transformation but also another step along the path of his own restoration. From this point on in the series we see a widening circle of restored relationships unfolding. Minney writes, "Whereas in the first half of the series we saw Job become more and more isolated, now we see him become at one with his close friends, then in no. 19 with a wider circle of neighbours, in no. 20 with new daughters, and finally with the whole of his family."³⁰²

The final element of this engraving that merits comment in this discussion about the transformation of Job as a man of prayer is the text in the open book in the bottom left margin. It contains a fairly extensive quote from Matthew 5:44-45, 48:

I say unto you Love your Enemies bless them that curse you do good to them
that hate you & pray for them that despitefully use you & persecute you
That you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven, for

³⁰⁰ This is how the Douay-Rheims Bible translates this verse.

³⁰¹ This idea of Job's face-to-face connection with God is all the more poignant given the fact that in the earlier watercolour version of this scene in the Butts set, Job is facing forwards away from the altar and flame, and the radiant sun of the engraving cannot be seen.

³⁰² Minney, "Job's Gethsemane: Tradition and Imagination in William Blake's Illustrations for the Book of Job," 180.

he maketh his sun to shine on the Evil & on the Good &

sendeth rain on the Just & the Unjust

Be ye therefore perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect

Throughout his life Job had striven for perfection but had a false understanding of what that meant. He thought that it meant keeping on the right side of the line separating the good and the bad, and so sought to do so by rigidly following the letter of the Law and offering many sacrifices. But the teaching of Christ quoted in this engraving offers a radically different understanding of perfection. According to Christ, true perfection was modeled by the Father in heaven who offers his blessings of sunshine and rain unconditionally, to the evil and the good, the just and the unjust. In other words, the line separating the good and the bad is a worthless human construct that carries no weight in the eyes of God. True religion is not a giant reward-and-punishment game. Rather, it is about loving your enemies, doing good in the face of evil, praying for all – not because of the promise of reward for doing so or the threat of punishment for not, but simply because doing so makes one more human and more alive. This is what Job discovers, which his abandoned, prayerful self-offering on behalf of his friends in plate 18 so powerfully demonstrates.

5.6 Plates 5 and 17



Plate 5 – Satan Going Forth from the Presence of the Lord and Job's Charity



Plate 17 – The Vision of Christ

Plate 5 in the series bears a striking resemblance to Plate 2. In the central designs of each there are twin scenes from earth below and heaven above. In both, God is depicted as a bookkeeping deity on a throne, surrounded by angels and the figure of Satan. The earthly scenes depict Job's faith being expressed as two angels look on. In plate 2 it is in the presence of his children as he anxiously scrutinizes the requirements of book religion. In plate 5 it is in the presence of an old cripple as he engages in an act of charity.

Two things emerge from this comparison of plates 2 and 5 that are germane to the chiasmic relationship between plates 5 and 17. The first is Job's complete lack of awareness of what is transpiring in the heavenly realm. Although the affairs in heaven will have a direct bearing on his life on earth, Job remains oblivious to this fact. The angels who watch over him, although in his midst, are beyond his sight. In plate 5 Job does see a crippled old man and gives him some bread. But according to Minney, there was an embellishment popular in medieval art that would have been familiar to

Blake, in which Satan appeared to Job as a beggar in disguise.³⁰³ If this is Blake's usage of the trope here, not only is it a parody of the teaching in Matthew 25:40 that Christ is present in the poor and needy, it also underscores Job's blindness to the presence of God (in whatever form) in his midst.³⁰⁴ This is not Job's fault, per se. The entire religious paradigm being portrayed here is one in which God remains far-removed in heaven above, unwilling or unable to connect directly with his servant Job on earth.

The second significant thing apparent in plates 2 and 5 is the strong identification between God and Satan. This was explored in some detail in the discussion on plate 2. This same sense of identification is present in plate 5.³⁰⁵ The caption reads, "Then went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord" (Job 1:12), and below it the words, "Who maketh his Angels Spirits & his Ministers a Flaming Fire" (Psalm 104:4). The implication is clear – Satan will mediate God's presence on earth and will do God's work by pouring fire upon Job, fire which he has gathered in a vial from around the throne of God. There is a sense of anguished resignation in God to this sobering fact, as his expression and posture make clear, and as attested to by the inscription in the bottom margin, "And it grieved him at his heart" (Genesis 6:6).³⁰⁶ With an unmistakable air of despair, God has closed the book and lifted up one leg on the throne. The matter is no longer in his hands, as the marginal inscription above his head makes clear, "Behold he is in thy hand" (Job 2:6). God's emissary is on his way to do what he must.

³⁰³ Ibid., 166.

³⁰⁴ Minney is surely mistaken when she suggests that Job recognizes the devil in disguise in the crippled old man, and accordingly gives him a stone instead of bread (ibid.). If this were true then Job's words quoted in the marginal inscription would make no sense, "Did I not weep for him who was in trouble Was not my Soul afflicted for the Poor" (Job 30:25).

³⁰⁵ It is significant that within the series as a whole, on every occasion where God is depicted as a heavenly deity sitting on a throne with a book in hand (plates 2, 5 and 16), the figure of Satan is also depicted. Blake appears to be making the point that this ostensibly false notion of God casts a satanic shadow in the way in which it generates an inherently dualistic conception of reality.

³⁰⁶ This inscription is taken from the flood narrative in Genesis 6, in which God enlists the forces of chaos in the form of flood waters to blot out humankind from the earth.

Plate 17 provides a powerful and dramatic counterpoint to plate 5. In it the divide between heaven and earth is collapsed and Job comes to see God face to face. God is no longer a distant deity far-removed from Job, and Job is no longer blind to God's presence in his midst. This engraving marks the culmination of Job's theological enlightenment that has been unfolding in the second half of the series. His journey of awakening is captured in the main caption, "I have heard thee with the hearing of the Ear but now my Eye seeth thee" (Job 42:5).³⁰⁷ Job had already started hearing God in plate 13, the caption of which states "Then the Lord answered Job out of the Whirlwind" (Job 38:1). In plates 13, 14 and 15, virtually all of the marginal inscriptions consist of the direct speech of God, taken from the divine speeches in Job 38 – 42 and, in the case of plate 14, from God's creation speech in Genesis 1. These words of God that Job heard were essential for his theological enlightenment, drawing him into a radically new religious paradigm. But in Plate 17 Blake boldly declares that words are not enough, not even the words of God. To think that words are enough is to fall into the error of book religion. So while hearing has its place, true spiritual awakening will not occur until the eye sees. This is Job's experience in Plate 17, "I have heard thee with the hearing of the Ear but now my Eye seeth thee."

So what exactly does Job see as he comes face to face with God? The picture of God as an enthroned heavenly bookkeeper has already been exposed as false. So what does the true God really look like? There are two salient details about the physical appearance of God in the second half of the series, which are clearly discernible in plate 17, as well as in plates 13 and 14.³⁰⁸ The first is that there is a strong resemblance between God and Job. The second is that there is a strong resemblance between God and Christ – evident most clearly in the ways in which God frequently

³⁰⁷ Significantly, Blake follows the Vulgate in his use of this verse and not the Authorised Version which translates Job 42:5 with, "I have heard **of** thee..." (Most versions follow the AV. Exceptions are Douay-Rheims and the recent International Standard Version.) Hearing **of** God or hearing **about** God is clearly not the same thing as actually hearing God.

³⁰⁸ The one exception being plate 16 which, as already mentioned above and which will be discussed further below, is a depiction of the false god.

extends his arms in a cruciform posture. The point being made is a profoundly theological one about the interconnectedness of God and Christ and humanity.

This is brought home in a dramatic way through the words of the texts in the marginalia. For the first time in the series the textual content of books and scrolls can be read. Remarkably what is discovered is that these books say nothing about the requirements of the law, but rather speak about relationships, love and union. "All the quotations in this lower margin are from John 14, and have as their theme the unity of the divine and the further unity of the divine and the human."³⁰⁹ A few examples by way of illustration will suffice:

"If ye had known me ye would have known my Father also and from henceforth ye know him & have seen him" (John 14:21).

"Believe me that I am in the Father & the Father in me" (John 14:11)

"He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father & I will love him & manifest myself unto him" (John 14:21)

"And the Father will love him & we will come unto him & make our abode with him" (John 14:23)

"At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father & you in me & I in you" (John 14:20)

In plate 5 the point was made that God (the false god of Job's former religious paradigm) and Satan were one. In plate 17, the affirmation is made that God and Christ are one, and that Job (representing humankind) is drawn into that union and can share in that mutual indwelling. From this point on in the series we see Job's active identification with Christ, most evident in his cruciform posture in plates 18 and 20.

³⁰⁹ Paley, *The Traveller in the Evening : The Last Works of William Blake*, 253.

5.7 Plates 6 and 16

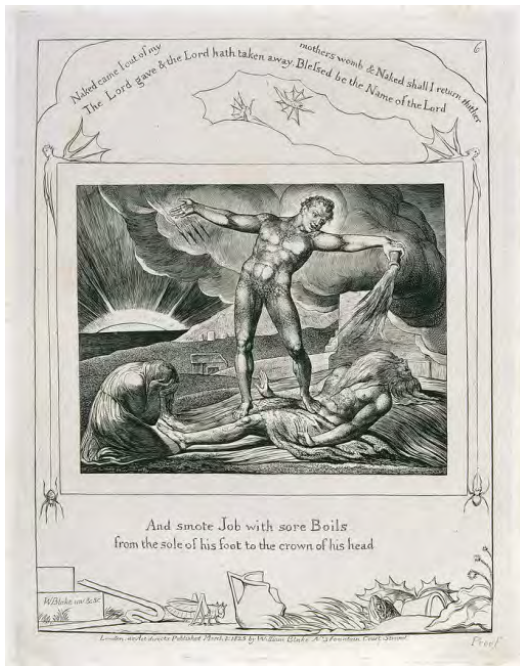


Plate 6 – Satan Smiting Job with Boils



Plate 16 – The Fall of Satan

The relationship between the engravings of this sixth chiasmic pairing centres on the figure of Satan. Plate 6 could be described as Satan's triumph, while plate 16 could be described as Satan's demise. In the earlier engraving, we see an exultant Satan standing on top of Job, fire pouring out of a vial in his left hand and poisoned arrows flying from his right. But these afflictions that Job suffers are not merely physical in their nature. According to Wright, "...the very physical manifestations point to something more fundamental: shame."³¹⁰ There is a strong echo of this situation in *Jerusalem* where the hero Albion cries out:

The disease of Shame covers me from head to feet: I have no hope
 Every boil upon my body is a separate & deadly Sin.
 Doubt first assailed me, then Shame took possession of me.³¹¹

Job's shame stems from the fact that he, an ostensibly righteous man, has been afflicted by God. Within his theological paradigm, the only possible explanation for

³¹⁰ Andrew Wright, *Blake's Job: A Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 21.

³¹¹ Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 166.

this is that Job is not all that he claims to be, that his righteousness is a sham, and he is deserving of God's curse, or certainly God's censure. This is the position that Job's three friends adopt to provide a theological rationale for his condition. An alternative scandalous possibility is that God is not all that he claims to be, that his justice is a sham, and that he is deserving of Job's curse or certainly Job's rejection. This possibility is one that Job is not yet able to entertain, as the inscription at the top of the engraving makes clear. Taken from Job 1:21, it recounts Job's resolute response to his afflictions, "The Lord gave & the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord." Ironically, in this defiant affirmation of his faith, he explicitly states that his loss is indeed the Lord's doing. For giving and taking away issues forth from the Lord's hand. In this affirmation, Job himself contributes to the development of the idea already introduced in plates 2, 3 and 5 that there is an identification between the God of Job's conception and Satan. This identification between God and Satan is further emphasized in plate 6 in a number of ways.

Principally, Satan becomes the embodiment of 'giving' and 'taking away', for what is given from Satan's hand effectively strips Job of everything that he has known about himself and God. In other words, the very act of giving is simultaneously an act of taking away – this is the way of Job's God. Further subtle clues in the engraving underscore the association between Satan and God. As already mentioned above, Satan has a nimbus around his head³¹² and assumes a cruciform posture in what could be described as a Christological parody. The arrows that fly from his right hand "...are unquestionably the arrows of the Almighty later referred to by Job in reply to the comfort of Eliphaz,"³¹³ when he says:

For the arrows of the Almighty are in me;

³¹² This nimbus was absent in the earlier watercolour in the Butts set.

³¹³ Wright, *Blake's Job: A Commentary*, 21. Damon offers a different, though not contradictory interpretation of the four arrows, seeing in them an indication of the death of Job's senses of sight, hearing, taste and smell. "The fifth, touch, which in its highest form is sex, man's easiest way into Eternity, is now corrupted" (S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 219.). Damon's interpretation stresses that what is taken away from Job are the very means through which his humanity is expressed in the world.

my spirit drinks their poison;
the terrors of God are arrayed against me (Job 6:4)

The marginal designs – which include a broken shepherd's crook, a grasshopper and broken pitcher (cf. Ecclesiastes 12:5-6), nettles and thistles,³¹⁴ poisonous spiders and bat-winged parodies of angels – add to the sense of desolation and decay evoked in the engraving. Whoever Satan is, this is clearly his day!

Plate 16 is a vision of a different day, a day of judgement when Satan is cast down. Job (and his wife and friends) are privy to this vision, witnessing for themselves Satan's fall. On first appearance it would seem that this is a straightforward portrayal of divine retribution – Satan had his day of triumph, but in the end God prevailed and Satan was defeated, cast down into the fiery abyss! (Three cheers for God! Job can finally sleep easier at night!) There is much in the engraving that seems to support this interpretation. Consider some of the marginal inscriptions:

“Hell is naked before him & Destruction has no covering” (Job 26:6).

“The Accuser of our Brethren is Cast down which accused them before our God day & night” (Revelation 12:10).

“The Prince of this World shall be cast out” (John 12:31).

“Even the devils are Subject to Us thro thy Name. Jesus said to them, I saw Satan as lightning fall from Heaven” (Luke 10:17-18).

However, difficulties exist with this interpretation. For one thing, it seems to endorse what Walter Wink calls “the myth of redemptive violence.”³¹⁵ For another, it is starkly

³¹⁴ The malevolence of nettles and thistles is attested to elsewhere in Blake's work. In *Milton* we read, “There is the Nettle that stings with soft down; and there / The indignant Thistle: whose bitterness is bred in his milk: / Who feeds on contempt of his neighbor” (Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 124.). Job echoes this sentiment in his ‘final’ words in Job 31:40. (This verse concludes with ‘The words of Job are ended’, though he will speak again in response to the divine speeches in 40:4-5 and 42:2-6.)

³¹⁵ Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 13. Wink traces the origins of this myth back to the Babylonian creation epic the *Enuma elish*, where order is established through the

out of place within this second half of the series. Indeed, this is the only engraving in the second half of the series that contains the figure of Satan.³¹⁶ It is also the only occurrence in the second half of God portrayed as a bookkeeping deity on a heavenly throne. It is this very image of God, evident in plates 2 and 5, that has already been exposed as lying at the very core of Job's false religion. Furthermore, nowhere in the series does this representation of God occur without the inclusion of the figure of Satan. It is as if such a conception of God casts an inevitable satanic shadow.

This leads to another interpretation of plate 16, not as vision of the fall of Satan, finally overthrown and defeated by God; but rather as a vision of the judgement of the entire dualistic project in which a good (law-abiding) God and an evil Satan are exposed as an illusory religious construct designed to provide some measure of control within the world, but which bears no resemblance to the reality of the living God.

The words of Jesus, "I saw Satan as lightning fall from Heaven," (Luke 10:18) and the language of being "cast down" or "cast out" that occurs in the marginal inscriptions, should accordingly be understood not as a reference to the violent defeat of a supremely evil being. Rather, these words should be understood as referring to the rejection of the entire concept of Satan within a dualistic religious paradigm, a concept that had become a moral and theological black hole, attracting to it all the projections of darkness and shame which enabled the development of a dualistic world view.

It is precisely this world view that Job has to abandon in his journey of transformation. Plate 16 portrays that important step in his awakening, which is of course costly for it also requires the abandonment of his previous conception of God as a law-scrutinizing deity on a heavenly throne.

necessary and unavoidable use of violence, thereby sanctifying violence as an ineradicable dimension of ultimate reality without which Evil cannot be overcome. He argues that this myth is very much alive and flourishing within our contemporary society and popular culture today. See *ibid.*, 13-31.

³¹⁶ Excluding the depictions of Satan on the murals behind Job in plate 20.

5.8 Plates 7 and 15

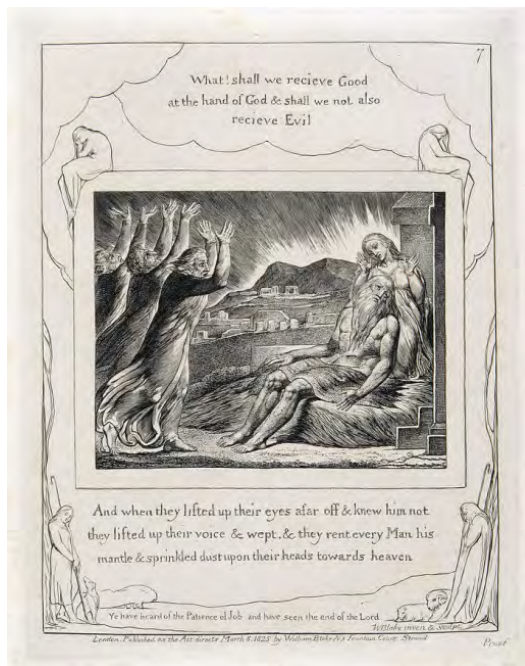


Plate 7 – Job’s Comforters

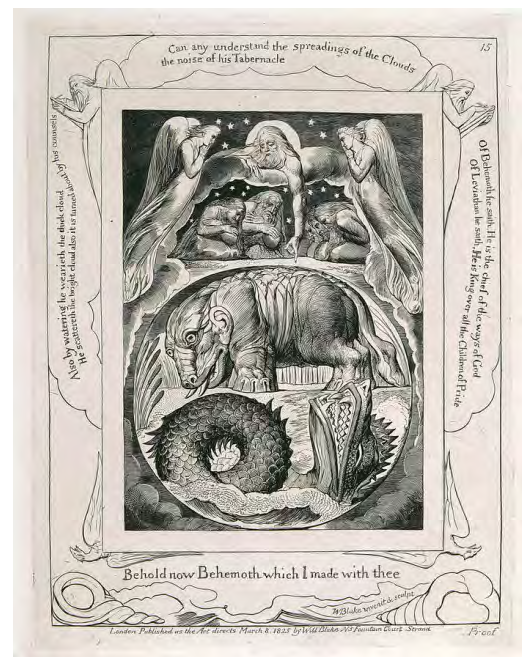


Plate 15 – Behemoth and Leviathan

In plate 7 Job’s friends appear for the first time. Theirs will be an enduring presence throughout much of the rest of the series, appearing in every engraving up until plate 18.³¹⁷ According to the biblical text, their express reason for gathering together was to console and comfort Job (Job 2:11). The main marginal inscription of plate 7, taken from Job 2:12, describes their initial actions of weeping, tearing their clothes and sprinkling dust upon their heads when they first saw Job – all conventional expressions of mourning and distress.³¹⁸ The friends have come to be in solidarity with Job. Their solidarity was not simply as an expression of pastoral compassion, but also of theological resonance. This idea of theological resonance is subtly introduced by

³¹⁷ The one possible exception being plate 11. Though, as mentioned above (cf. p17), the three demonic figures that grasp at Job from the fires of hell in that engraving have been interpreted as the nightmarish representations of the three friends.

³¹⁸ The precise meaning of “sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven” is unclear. Presumably, it is a gesture of solidarity in grief. Some scholars see in this action a magical gesture, either as a form of protection to avoid a similar fate (see Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation and Special Studies* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1978), 24.), or as a way of symbolically calling forth the same affliction on themselves as an expression of total empathy (Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job : A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 97.).

Blake through his use of the inscription above the central design, which is taken from Job's words in Job 2:10, "What! shall we receive [sic] Good at the hand of God & shall we not also receive Evil!" According to the biblical text, these words were spoken by Job to his wife *before* the arrival of the three friends. By recording them here in this plate, Blake is introducing an intriguing possibility that these words could equally have been spoken by the three friends, or at least echoed their inner thoughts, for they held the same theological convictions that the words conveyed.

This theological correspondence between Job and his friends, at least initially, lay at the heart of the comfort and consolation they sought to bring him. However, over the course of the events that follow, these friends will be exposed as "sorry comforters" (Job 16:2), precisely because of the abrasive theological garb in which their comfort and consolation was clothed.³¹⁹

The religious paradigm shared by Job and his friends is depicted in plate 7 by the ruins of Druidic temples in the space between Job and his friends in the middle distance.³²⁰ These Druidic structures are most prevalent in the first half of the series, clearly evident in plates 4 – 8 and 10.³²¹ Blake uses them to represent the ossified nature of

³¹⁹ In his poems *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, Blake insists that "Corporeal Friends are Spiritual Enemies" (in Erdman, 1982, 98 & 193).

³²⁰ In Blake's day it was assumed that the Druids were responsible for the creation of megalithic monuments such as Stonehenge, Britain's most famous example. Accordingly, megalithic depictions in Blake's work had ostensibly Druidic associations. According to Kathleen Raine, Blake's depictions of Druid religion vacillate between positive representations of the original purity of the religion through oak-trees and oak-groves, and negative representations of the "...cruel, ritualistic phase into which the religion degenerated by megaliths (stone being symbolic of the lifeless hardening of all things under the domination of a materialist philosophy)" (cited in Minney, "Job's Gethsemane: Tradition and Imagination in William Blake's Illustrations for the Book of Job," 79.). For a fuller treatment of Blake's understanding and use of Druidic religion see Peter F. Fisher, "Blake and the Druids," in *Blake: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Northrop Frye (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 156-78.

³²¹ These Druidic structures rapidly disappear in the second half of the series. They are clearly evident in plate 12, where the theology of the three friends is first challenged by Elihu, and then are barely perceptible in plate 13 when the Lord appears to Job out of the

the religious paradigm out of which Job and his friends operate. The ruinous state of these structures in plate 7 points to the inevitable demise of an inadequate theological framework that ultimately offers Job neither comfort nor consolation. At the very bottom of the engraving is an inscription taken from James 5:11, "Ye have heard of the Patience of Job and have seen the end of the Lord." The 'end of the Lord' referred to in the original biblical reference is that "...the Lord is pitiful, and of tender mercy" (James 5:11). The response of pity and tender mercy was surely the well-meaning intention of Job's friends in going to be with him, but their very understanding of the Lord meant that instead of compassion and mercy they offered the polar opposite and thereby exposed the duplicity of their belief. A further irony is therefore at work in this inscription, for it could be read that 'the Patience of Job' – meaning his attempt to hold on tenaciously to his inadequate belief system – has revealed, for those with eyes to see, 'the end of the Lord' – in the sense of the demise of this false and theologically bankrupt god-concept.

One of the central assertions of this thesis is that Job's wife was one of those whose eyes were opened to see the true nature of Job's false religion. Her place and purpose in the *Illustrations* will be discussed in detail later, but it bears mentioning here that with the appearance of the friends for the first time in plate 7, Job's wife is positioned on the other side of Job, in a position that Bo Lindberg observes is suggestive of a pietà.³²² In this the first engraving where Job's wife and the friends appear together, Blake is creating a sharp sense of divergence between them. Indeed, in eight of the ten remaining engravings where the friends and Job's wife appear together, she and the friends are positioned on opposite sides of Job, signifying the contrary perspectives

whirlwind. Thereafter they no longer occur. In the Butts and Linell watercolours, image # 18 depicting Job's sacrifice contains Druidic structures in the background, and the altar before which Job prays is a structure of hewn stone. In the engravings, in plate 18 the Druidic structures have been replaced by trees, and the altar is of unhewn stone, suggesting a Mosaic as opposed to a Druidic identification (Wright, 1972, 45; cf Ex 20:25).

³²² Paley, *The Traveller in the Evening : The Last Works of William Blake*, 240. A pietà is a subject in Christian art depicting Mary cradling the dead body of her son Jesus.

that they each hold.³²³ In plate 7, as Job turns his face away from the friends towards his wife, he does not realize that he is looking towards a cross that is barely perceptible in its lateral aspect on the extreme right of the central design. This is a hint that Job's comfort and consolation will not come from his friends, but from a radically different perspective that his wife is already beginning to perceive.

This radically different perspective is presented in plate 15, where Job is shown Behemoth and Leviathan from God's viewpoint. Ironically, it is these fearsome, formidable creatures, and not the friends, who become Job's comforters and consolers.

The characters of Behemoth and Leviathan are deeply enigmatic, and much critical ink has been spilled discussing their identity and significance within the book of Job. It is unnecessary to plough over all that ground here, other than to comment on one aspect of the debate that is relevant to this discussion.³²⁴ Scholars are divided as to whether Behemoth and Leviathan should be understood as natural animals or mythological creatures.³²⁵ One's entire interpretation of the divine speeches can turn

³²³ Of the two engravings where Job's wife is not on 'the other side of Job' in relation to the friends – plates 13 and 16 – her position nevertheless highlights her distinction from the friends. In plate 13, where the Lord appears out of the whirlwind, Job and his wife are both kneeling upright with their faces raised, whereas the friends are bowed low with their faces hidden. In plate 16, depicting the fall of Satan, Job and his wife are kneeling together on one side of a fiery abyss, whereas the friends are cowering on the other side.

³²⁴ Habel offers a helpful summary of the various options that have been offered as to the identity and function of Behemoth and Leviathan, identifying four primary positions: "[1] Behemoth is to be identified with the red hippopotamus as a symbol of the wicked to be hunted and conquered.... [2] Behemoth is a symbol of the mighty historical enemies of Israel.... [3] Behemoth and Leviathan are mythic symbols of the forces of chaos.... [4] Behemoth and Leviathan are mortal creatures like Job. The focus of the text, however, lies on their character, not as ordinary zoological entities or symbols of evil, but as didactic images employed by Yahweh to teach Job about God's ways" (Habel, *The Book of Job : A Commentary*, 557-58.).

³²⁵ Those scholars who see them as real creatures most commonly identify Behemoth with the hippopotamus and Leviathan with the crocodile. Examples of these would include Robert Gordis, *The Book of God and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 119-20; Edouard Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, trans. Harold Knight (London: Nelson, 1967), 619; Harold Henry Rowley, *Job*, ed. Ronald E. Clements and Matthew Black, New

on this very point, especially if one considers that as mythological creatures their presence could be perceived as a potential threat and challenge to the sovereignty of God.³²⁶ If Blake sees them as natural animals, then he uses them here as representatives of all the creatures of land and sea that fill the earth.³²⁷ If he sees them as mythological creatures, their presence within the world provides a perspective of the nature of reality that is fundamental to the reshaping of Job's worldview. It is this latter option that is more compelling, for a number of reasons.

There is precedent elsewhere in Blake's art for seeing mythological associations for Behemoth and Leviathan. In *Jerusalem* Blake describes Leviathan and Behemoth as "...the War by Sea enormous & the War / By Land astounding."³²⁸ This association is further developed in Blake's two companion tempera paintings entitled *The spiritual form of Nelson guiding Leviathan* and *The spiritual form of Pitt guiding Behemoth*.³²⁹

Century Bible (London: Nelson, 1970), 332-33; Adrian Van Selms, *Job: A Practical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 151-55; Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1183-201. Those who see Behemoth and Leviathan as mythological include Marvin H. Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, ed. W.F. Albright and D.N. Freedman, 3rd ed., The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1973), 320-34; John C. L. Gibson, *Job* (Edinburgh: St Andrew, 1985), 251. For a further discussion of this critical ambivalence see Carol A. Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck et al (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 618-22; Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1183-86, 91-92.

³²⁶ In the case of Leviathan, particularly, this adversarial association was well established within the thought-world of the ANE. Newsom writes, "...the name "Leviathan" brings with it a well-developed set of symbolic associations. Both in Ugaritic mythology and in the Bible, "Leviathan" (or "Lothan") is the name of a sea monster with which Yahweh, Baal, and Anat do battle. In the Baal epic, the god Mot refers to a victory of Baal, "when you killed Lotan, the Fleeing Serpent, finished off the Twisting Serpent, the seven-headed monster".... In the Bible, the psalmist praises Yahweh saying, "It was you who split open the sea by your power; / you broke the heads of the monster in the waters. / It was you who crushed the heads of Leviathan / and gave him as food to the creatures of the desert" (Ps 74:13-14 NIV)." (Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 621.)

³²⁷ The name Behemoth (בהמות) is the "plural of majesty" of the ordinary word for 'beast' or 'animal' (בהמה), making it the animal *par excellence* (ibid., 618.).

³²⁸ Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 251.

³²⁹ In *The spiritual form of Nelson guiding Leviathan*, Blake paints the "spiritual" likeness of Admiral Nelson, the naval strategist who famously led a great British victory over

In these references the mythological battle motif is clearly developed in Blake's own associations with the figures of Behemoth and Leviathan. It is my contention that these mythological associations are powerfully present in Blake's use of Behemoth and Leviathan in plate 15. As such they introduce a new element of potential conflict or chaos into the created order. Such a development serves the purpose of Job's unfolding journey of transformation very well, as will be explained shortly.³³⁰

A number of salient details in plate 15 need to be noted. For the first time in the series Job is elevated to a heavenly perspective. Over the preceding engravings of the second half of the series there has been a progression in Job's vision and indeed his capacity to see. In plate 12 there is just a hint of a higher perspective as Elihu points to the heavens in which stars are burning bright. But Job is still firmly rooted to the earth as he stares blankly ahead with open, but vacuous eyes. In plate 13 Job sees God for the first time, who swirls down to him in a whirlwind. In plate 14 his eyes are opened to a vision of God's created cosmos. In all of these, Job sees from an earth-bound

Napoleon's navy at the Battle of Trafalgar. In the painting he "...stands on top of the Biblical sea creature, Leviathan, whose body encircles him. Nelson controls the beast with a bridle, attached to its neck, which he holds loosely in his left hand. Trapped in, crushed under, or in one case, half-consumed within Leviathan's coiled body, ten figures, male and female, are arranged around the figure of Nelson; these represent the European nations defeated by the British during the Napoleonic Wars" (B. Pollit, "Blake's *the Spiritual Form of Nelson Guiding Leviathan*," Smarthistory, <http://smarthistory.khanacademy.org/blakes-the-spiritual-form-of-nelson-guiding-leviathan.html>). The companion painting *The spiritual form of Pitt guiding Behemoth* explores a similar theme, this time depicting the British Prime Minister, William Pitt, who led Britain into war with France following the French Revolution. Blake describes him as one who "...rides on the whirlwind, directing the storms of war: He is ordering the Reaper to reap the Vine of the Earth, and the Plowman to plow up the Cities and Towers" (in Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 530.). See further the chapter entitled 'Blake's visions of Leviathan and Behemoth' in Morton D. Paley, *Energy and the Imagination: A Study of the Development of Blake's Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 171-99.

³³⁰ The point should also be made that if Behemoth and Leviathan were merely animals, possibly representing the creatures of land and sea, then there would be little development in this engraving from the previous one where the creation of the cosmos and everything within it is depicted. Plate 15 would then simply be an elaboration of one dimension of the creation portrayed in plate 14. Throughout the series, each successive engraving represents a distinct development within the story as a whole – none of which could be regarded as superfluous.

perspective. But in plate 15, for the first time, he is elevated above the earth and looks down upon it from God's perspective. While a barrier of cloud still separates Job (and his companions) from God, God's pointing arm reaches across that barrier and the constellation of stars around God's head extend into the space that Job occupies. Job is thus being invited to see his own world with the light and perspective with which God sees it.

What he sees is a vision of the earth as a terraqueous globe, containing Behemoth and Leviathan, who fill it. In other words, the earth cannot be understood apart from the recognition of the pervasive presence of these wild and fearsome entities that are wholly beyond the control of settled human existence. These embodiments of "the War by Sea and Land" are at large within the world. As such, their very presence represents a potential threat to the peace and harmony of social order.

However, while Behemoth and Leviathan certainly fill the earth, they are also contained by it. There are limits to their sphere of influence. While they are utterly beyond the control of any human intervention, they are not beyond the control of God. This is the clear sense of the rhetorical questions God raises in the biblical text about Behemoth and Leviathan (Job 40:24 – 41:11). Indeed, God's control over these beings stems from the fact that God made them. The main caption of plate 15 is taken from Job 40:15, "Behold now Behemoth which I made with thee." By association, God's creation of Leviathan is also assumed.³³¹ This idea, that within the realm of God's creation there are threatening, chaotic and even evil realities that are somehow part of that creation yet subject to limitations, is well-attested to in the Hebrew scriptures.³³²

³³¹ It is, however, a moot point whether God created Leviathan or not. Within the mythological battle motif, Leviathan (or his equivalent) is a primordial rather than a created being. In the biblical text, Job 41:33 refers to Leviathan as "...a creature without fear", suggesting God's act of creation in giving Leviathan existence.

³³² These chaotic powers are often identified with the sea. A good example can be found in Jer 5:22: "I placed the sand as a boundary for the sea, / a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass; / though the waves toss, they cannot prevail, though they roar, they cannot pass over it." See also, Job 7:12; 38:8-11; Pss 74:13-14; 77:16; 89:9-10; 93:3-4; Is 27:1; 51:9-10; Ezek 29:3-5; 32:2-8; Hab 3:8-15; Zech 10:11. For a compelling treatment of this theme, see Jon D.

Blake captures this brilliantly in plate 15 as Behemoth and Leviathan are confined within the sphere of the globe as very definite limits are prescribed for them.

Behemoth even appears to be somewhat squashed. This is the perspective afforded by the heavenly vantage point of God.

The question remains, however, whether this perspective would have been a source of comfort and consolation for Job. Job's own experience of sudden and devastating loss attested to the reality of the chaotic within the world, and how easily the peace and harmony of settled human existence can be disrupted. In the light of that experience, Job could be justified in questioning the sovereignty and wisdom of God. For if Behemoth and Leviathan are embodiments of the warring powers of chaos at large within the world, then the God who made them is surely responsible for whatever devastation they cause. If God, in plate 15, is pointing to the fact that Behemoth and Leviathan's presence and influence in the world is limited, that would have been scant comfort for Job, because for him their presence and influence was patently not limited enough.

Two other intriguing possibilities exist that point to the purpose of this moment within Job's journey of transformation. The first is that God's control over Behemoth and Leviathan is not nearly as complete as the text suggests, and that not even God's role as their creator guarantees God's mastery over their actions. As such, Behemoth and Leviathan have become Frankensteinian monsters who have been unleashed by their Maker within the world, and there is precious little that God can do about it. Herein lies Job's comfort and consolation – the chaos he has experienced has nothing to do with his integrity, or even the integrity of God, but is simply a consequence of an (admittedly foolhardy) act of creation.

The second possibility, which in my view is even more compelling, is that this moment of disclosure of the existence of Behemoth and Leviathan has nothing to do

Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton: University Press, 1988).

with the categories of adversarial threat, mastery and control traditionally associated with these tropes. Indeed, the introduction of these two embodiments of potential conflict, chaos and warring antagonism need not necessarily imply a relationship of animosity between God and these two creatures. In pointing to Behemoth and Leviathan from his heavenly vantage point, and in calling Job to “Behold now Behemoth” who is “...the chief of the ways of God” (Job 40:19 and marginal inscription), God invites Job to consider that Behemoth and Leviathan are not unwelcome and undesirable entities within creation that have to be controlled (or certainly tolerated), but are an intentional and intrinsic part of God’s good creation, in whom God celebrates and exults. In the biblical text, it is almost as if God assumes the position of praise singer in describing these creatures. In speaking of Leviathan God says, “I will not keep silence concerning its limbs, or its mighty strength, or its splendid frame...” (Job 41:12) and goes on to describe Leviathan’s prowess and power in ringing superlatives. There is an unmistakable note of pride in the way in which God presents both Behemoth and Leviathan.

Why God would choose to make a world in which such dangerous and threatening creatures have such a central and exulted place is confounding. A different kind of logic and a different kind of wisdom seems to be at work here that is beyond human comprehension. As the marginal inscription above the central design puts it, “Can any understand the spreadings of the Clouds the noise of his Tabernacle” (Job 36:29). Job is being invited to ponder the sovereign freedom that allows God to delight in the presence of assumed adversaries, and the artistic vision that can re-imagine those adversaries as friends. Behemoth and Leviathan’s presence does not make the world more secure – indeed, their presence arguably makes the world less secure – but their presence certainly makes the world more interesting, and maybe that is the point. Maybe God’s primary concerns are not those of order and control, being the managing director of a tightly regulated, predictable universe of strict cause and effect. Maybe there’s a playfulness in God who likes to “mix it up a bit”, and who dares to suggest that within this world there are confounding elements that nevertheless have their

place and play their part in ensuring that whatever else may be said of this life, it can never be described as “dull”.

This notion of the playfulness of God leads to two final comments that need to be made about Behemoth in particular. The first is that, as already mentioned, in the marginal inscriptions he is described as “...the chief of the ways of God” (Job 40:19). This phrase (ראשיית דרכו) is the same as the one that occurs in Proverbs 8:22, referring to Wisdom. Clines suggests that even if the two texts had no knowledge of each other and the occurrence of the phrase is purely coincidental, the relationship between Wisdom and Behemoth still merits reflection.³³³ Certainly, Blake was very familiar with Wisdom's Song in Proverbs 8:4-36, drawing on it frequently in his other work.³³⁴ His explicit use of this phrase to describe Behemoth surely gathers into it the associations of Wisdom which, on reflection, is almost laughable. Whether or not Behemoth is identified with the hippopotamus, it is “The Beast, par excellence,”³³⁵ which seems a ridiculous choice for the embodiment of Wisdom. In granting to Behemoth, of all things, this elevated position – a position of which even Behemoth appears to be blissfully aware – a mischievous, playful side to God is revealed. “It is curious that in Prov 8 Wisdom is found “at play” (שחק) on the earth (8:31), while in this depiction of [Behemoth], it too, along with the other wild animals, is to be seen “at play” (שחק, the same verb) in its watery habitat (v20); perhaps then there is a hint that the deepest secrets of the universe are not solemn truths so much as delightful games.”³³⁶

³³³ Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1188.

³³⁴ One of Blake's designs, *The Ancient of Days*, was based upon Proverbs 8:27, "When he set a compass upon the face of the deep." It depicts a crouching Urizen – the god-like embodiment of conventional reason and law – holding a compass in his outstretched hand over a dark void below. Urizen's Emanation, or paired female counterpart, is Ahania. Harold Bloom writes, “Ahanian resembles the Wisdom of Proverbs 8:22-36, daily the delight of God. She is Urizen's source of renewal, the wise passivity in which he must take pleasure or else lose the active role of mental energy that is his life” (in Erdman, 1982, 954).

³³⁵ Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, 320.

³³⁶ Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1188. This same verb (שחק) also occurs in relation to Leviathan in Job 41:5.

The final comment that needs to be made about Behemoth is that in Blake's engraving, Behemoth has been given a large and conspicuously human ear. The main inscription on the engraving, "Behold now Behemoth which I made with thee" (Job 40:15), provides an explicit point of identification between Job and Behemoth – they are fellow creatures made by the same God. But that is where their mutual identification ends – Job is human whereas Behemoth is a wild beast of possibly mythological proportions. Except for one thing – Behemoth has a human ear.³³⁷ In other words, Job and Behemoth share the same capacity to hear.

Throughout the discourses within the biblical text, Job's repeated plea was for a hearing with God (cf. Job 9:14-16; 32-35; 10:2; 13:3, 22; 19:7; 23:1-7) – to hear the charges that God would lay against him and to present his case in reply. In pointing out Behemoth to Job, it is as if God is saying to Job, somewhat playfully, 'If you want a hearing with me, then listen with the same ear as Behemoth, and hear what he hears.' And what is it that Behemoth has heard? As the chief of the ways of God, Behemoth would have heard the mighty words of creation with which God spoke the world into being and the singing of the morning stars in response, as depicted in the marginalia of plate 14. He would also hear the "noise of his Tabernacle" as the inscription in plate 15 states, which is an allusion to the unfathomable mystery of God's ways. In other words, what Behemoth hears from God are not the neat answers to a whole lot of questions about the meaning of life, but rather the thunderings of God through which the world, in all its inscrutable mystery, comes into being. This is precisely what Job hears in the divine speeches when God finally speaks, not to answer any of the questions that Job raised but to draw him into the wild and risky exuberance of life.

In this chiasmic pairing of plates 7 and 15, instead of the friends with their ossified theological dogmatism, it is Behemoth and Leviathan who become Job's comforters, precisely because they do not provide any slick answers to Job's dilemma. Rather, as fellow creatures of the earth, whose exact nature and identity cannot be established

³³⁷ Or alternatively, Job (together with all humans for that matter) has a Behemothian ear.

with any certainty, they are living embodiments for Job of the great mystery that not even the wild and chaotic are beyond the arc of the holy which encompasses all things. In Behemoth especially, Job discovers a fellow creature with a kindred capacity to listen deeply to the lilting harmonies and discordant tones of mystery that reverberate throughout the universe and echo in his own experience. Indeed, he is not alone!

5.9 Plates 8 and 14



Plate 8 – Job's Despair

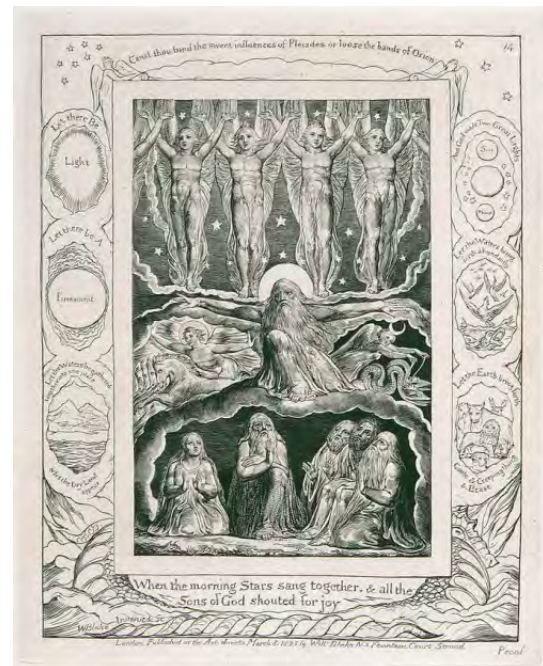


Plate 14 – When the Morning Stars Sang Together

The chiasmic relationship between plates 8 and 14 centres on the themes of creation and joy – with plate 14 offering an exuberant expression of these things, and plate 8 the despairing negation thereof. The lower marginal inscription of plate 8 recounts how Job's friends sat with him in silence for seven days and nights, following the calamities that had befallen him. "And they sat down with him upon the ground seven days & seven nights & none spake a word unto him for they saw that his grief was very great" (Job 2:13). The central design itself, along with the other inscriptions, depict Job's anguished curse of the day of his birth that pours forth from him at the beginning of the poetry section of the book. "Let the Day perish wherein I was Born"

(Job 3:3) and "Lo let that night be solitary & let no joyful voice come therein" (Job 3:7).

Job's curse focuses on the day of his birth and the night of his conception. The day is cursed with a deprivation of light ("Let that day be darkness" – Job 3:4), which is an allusion to and reversal of God's words of creation in Genesis 1:3, "Let there be light."³³⁸ The night is cursed with a deprivation of relationship and joy (cf Job 3:7).

In v.9, Job curses night precisely by breaking the bond that joins night to day: the time of dawn, when dark mingles with first light. Night is personified in ways that suggest a lover, one who waits expectantly, desiring to look upon the eyes of its partner, dawn. Job's curse would deny that union. The cosmic horror lurking in Job's curse is that it would break the dependable alternation of opposites upon which creation is established.³³⁹

Job's curse of the night and day of his creation implies a reversal of God's creation. Essentially, he is advocating a doctrine of cosmic nihilism that is profoundly anti-creational. The three friends and Job's wife are kneeling on either side of Job, their faces bowed and hidden, a posture that suggests the unbearable nature of what they are witnessing and hearing. Eliphaz, in the foreground, looks like he might be covering his ear with his hand so as not to hear the despairing, blasphemous words from Job's mouth.³⁴⁰ Behind Job, dark ominous clouds dominate the skyline and the hills in the distance are in deep shadow. The day has truly ended for Job. The landscape is barren, with the only signs of vegetation in the engraving being the foreboding thorns, thistles and poisonous fungi in the lower margin. He throws his hands up to the heavens in a cry of abject despair.

³³⁸ Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 367.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 368.

³⁴⁰ Throughout the series, Blake's relative positioning of the three friends remains constant – Eliphaz, with a long beard, is always in the front or foreground; Bildad, with darker, curly hair, is in the middle; and Zophar, with a short beard, is at the back.

What Job fails to see is that behind him on the dark hillside in the distance, above the body of his kneeling wife beside him, is the faint but clearly perceptible outline of a cross. It will only be in the second half of the series that the transformative hope of the cross enters into Job's consciousness. For now, all is darkness and despair for him as he curses the day of his birth.

His despairing curse of creation, occurring after the seven days and nights in which not a word was spoken as his friends sat with him in silence, is the polar opposite of the joyous song of the morning stars at the dawn of creation, which is the subject of plate 14.

This plate is one of the most vivid and aesthetically beautiful engravings in the entire series. The marginal designs are rich in detail, depicting the creation story as told in Genesis 1. In contrast to the seven days and nights of silence referred to in plate 8, here the creative words of God are recorded, "Let there Be Light", "Let there be a Firmament", "Let the Waters be gathered together in one place" and so on. In the bottom margin we see a large sea creature, presumably Leviathan, which is a reminder of the risky diversity inherent in God's creation and is a precursor to the following engraving where Behemoth and Leviathan will be the central focus. Surprisingly, Leviathan's back cradles the words of the main inscription, "When the morning Stars sang together, & all the Sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38:7). This curious juxtaposition highlights the inscrutable, sovereign authority of the Creator in enlisting the so-called arch-nemesis of creation as the bearer of the news of the dawn of creation's joyful song.

This sovereign authority of God is expressed in three further ways. Firstly, the words of God from Genesis 1 included in the marginalia convey the sense that God's speech contains tremendous creative power. Secondly, in the top margin of the engraving there is an inscription taken from Job 38:31, "Canst thou bind the sweet influences of

Pleiades or loose the bands of Orion”³⁴¹ which emphasizes God's sovereign authority over the structures of the cosmos. Thirdly, within the central design itself God, with outstretched arms, is releasing the pagan sun-god Helios and his sister, the moon-god Selene, in their chariots drawn by horses and serpents. The point is clear – God is the sovereign Lord of creation.

Echoing throughout this engraving is the unmistakable note of joy, as the main inscription in the bottom margin from Job 38:7 makes explicit, “When the morning Stars sang together, & all the Sons of God shouted for joy.” Dominating the top third of the central design is a row of angels surrounded by stars, their arms outstretched in exultant praise of creation.³⁴² As Job and his companions gaze up at this scene from their cavern in the bottom third of the design, there is a sense of awe and wonder within them as they witness the beauty and mystery of creation. Job's descent into abject, nihilistic despair in plate 8 is reversed in plate 14 as he is drawn up into a vision of the vibrant joy of creation.

³⁴¹ Pleiades and Orion are two constellations represented in the top left and right corners of the engraving respectively. The “sweet influences of Pleiades” is apparently a reference to the fruits and flowers brought about by the spring rains, which it was thought were somehow stimulated by this constellation (Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1063.). Driver sees here “...the seasonal influences of the stars: the Pleiades are the harbingers of spring and Orion is the herald of winter. To “bind” the Pleiades would thus be, functionally, to check the spring floods that they unleash, and to loose Orion's belt would be to disable the autumn rains.... Whatever the precise reference of binding the Pleiades and loosing Orion may be, the point is that Job cannot alter the structure of the cosmos; the functions of the constellations are a matter of divine decree” (ibid., 1113-14.).

³⁴² In the original watercolours of the Butts and Linell sets, Blake painted a row of just four angels. In the engraving, Blake added the arms, hands and wings of two more angels on the outer edges of the design area, suggesting an infinite succession of angels (Paley, *The Traveller in the Evening : The Last Works of William Blake*, 248.).

5.10 Plates 9 and 13



Plate 9 – The Vision of Eliphaz



Plate 13 – The Lord Answering Job out of the Whirlwind

Job's descent into darkness and despair in plate 8 appears to be arrested in plate 9 with the vision of Eliphaz. In this engraving, for the first time in the series, Job sees beyond the earthly realm into a heavenly perspective as Eliphaz points him to a vision he had of God in the night and relates God's response to his situation. Could this be the answer that Job was looking for?

The marginal inscriptions³⁴³ of this engraving are taken from Eliphaz's first speech in the book, in which he describes his vision thus:

Amid thoughts from visions of the night,
 when deep sleep falls on mortals
 dread came upon me, and trembling,
 which made all my bones shake.
 A spirit glided past my face;

³⁴³ "Then a Spirit passed before my face the hair of my flesh stood up" (Job 4:15); and "Shall mortal Man be more Just than God? Shall a Man be more Pure than his Maker? Behold he putteth no trust in his Saints & his Angels he chargeth with folly" (Job 4:17-18).

the hair of my flesh bristled.
It stood still,
but I could not discern its appearance.
A form was before my eyes;
there was silence, then I heard a voice:
'Can mortals be righteous before God?
Can human beings be pure before their Maker?
Even in his servants he puts not trust,
and his angels he charges with error. (Job 4:13-18)

If this vision of Eliphaz is to be trusted, then Job has got his answer. God has spoken and put the question beyond all doubt – mortal man is not more just than God nor more pure than his maker, for not even saints and angels are without fault.³⁴⁴ Job's consolation will come when he accepts this uncompromising truth and surrenders himself into the hands of God.³⁴⁵ Is this, for Job, the way out of his darkness and despair?

As readers of the book of Job we know the answer to that question – that Job rejects the resolution that Eliphaz presents. But if that conclusion is suspended for a moment and this engraving is considered simply in its own light, what indications are there within the engraving itself to suggest that Eliphaz's vision is not to be trusted?

The first observation that needs to be made concerns the cloud-enclosed space in which the vision occurs. Joseph Wicksteed recognized in the use of cloud barriers a threshold between different worlds. "Wicksteed argues that the inner and outer worlds are to be distinguished by the use of the cloud belt throughout the series, the two worlds being differentiated according to a principle enunciated in *Jerusalem*: 'What is

³⁴⁴ In the upper marginal inscription taken from Job 4:17-18, Blake substitutes the AV's "servants" with "Saints".

³⁴⁵ In the same speech Eliphaz goes on to say, "How happy is the one whom God reproves; therefore do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. For he wounds, but he binds up; he strikes, but his hands heal" (Job 5:17-18).

Above is Within.”³⁴⁶ This insight – that the world above is a representation of the world within – is of particular relevance to Eliphaz's vision. What he points to as a heavenly vision could be nothing more than a projection of his own inner world, a possibility which could, of course, be true of all heavenly visions. This does not necessarily negate the value of such visions, but it does alert us to the possibility that what is often presented as divine revelation may be better understood as inner projection. This possibility is underscored in the engraving by “...the resemblance between the Eliphaz who is rebuking Job and the God who is depicted in the design.”³⁴⁷ A further curious detail of the vision in plate 9 is that the particular shape and form of the clouds that enclose it bear a striking resemblance to the human intestinal tract. Whether or not this was Blake's intention, it awakens us to the possibility that what Eliphaz is pointing to is an understanding of God that comes out of his gut, which has been formed by everything that he has digested and metabolized within the theological paradigm in which he has been operating. Accordingly, what is seen in this vision may be revealing a whole lot more about Eliphaz than what it does about God.

A second observation concerns the iridescence of the spirit in Eliphaz's vision. In the original Butts watercolour, this God-figure is surrounded by an intense, almost blinding light. But in the engraving, Blake has made two significant alterations. There is now a clearly defined nimbus around his head, making explicit the suggestion that this being is indeed divine, or certainly is perceived as such by Eliphaz. But at the same time the intense light emanating from this figure has changed, for the rays that now flow from him are more akin to piercing shards of darkness rather than beams of light. His feet blacken the cloud on which he stands and there is something ominous and foreboding about his presence.

This leads to the third observation, which concerns the posture of the God-figure. He stands erect, static, with his arms concealed and staring coldly ahead with a grim and

³⁴⁶ Wright, *Blake's Job: A Commentary*, 65.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

threatening disposition. Damon writes, "This God is a nightmare. His arms are bound because by his very nature he is obliged to punish."³⁴⁸ As will be discussed shortly, this is in stark contrast to the God of plate 13 who swirls out of a whirlwind with dynamic energy and outstretched arms, assuming a cruciform posture. Indeed, the folded, concealed arms of the God of Eliphaz's vision establishes this God as another antithesis of the cruciform Christ.³⁴⁹

The fourth observation that needs to be made about this engraving is that Eliphaz responds to this epiphany with fear. This is evident in his hair standing on end, which is also referenced in the inscription in the bottom margin. But Eliphaz's fear could well have a different quality to it beyond that which is commonly attested to in experiences of an epiphany. When he says in Job 4:14, "Dread came upon me," the Hebrew word used here is *paḥad* (פחד), usually translated with 'dread', 'terror' or 'trembling'. But the word can be read as a proper noun – Pahad – as a name for God.³⁵⁰ Certainly, Pahad was the name used by Blake as the fifth of the seven Eyes of God.³⁵¹ This leads Damon to conclude that the God of Eliphaz's vision is none other

³⁴⁸ Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake*, 219.

³⁴⁹ The other antitheses of the cruciform Christ in the series are found in plates 6 and 11, in the figures of Satan and the demonic deity of Job's dreams. In plate 6, Satan's outstretched hands are not for the purposes of healing and redemption, but rather for misery and torment, containing as they do poisoned arrows and a vial of affliction. In plate 11, the outstretched arms of Job's false God point to the Law and the fiery bondage of hell.

³⁵⁰ In Gen 31:42 & 53 we find the unusual designation *paḥad yiṣḥaq* (פחד יצחק), rendered as "the fear of Isaac", that appears to be a name for God (see M.V. Van Pelt and W.C. Kaiser Jr., "7064 פחד," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 598.).

³⁵¹ The seven Eyes of God, within Blake's thought, represent the course of human thought in its efforts to find an ideal by which to live, and accordingly also chart the journey of experience through which humankind must pass in order to reach the true God:

The first Eye is Lucifer, the complete egotist (such as we all are born); he "refus'd to die for Satan & in pride he forsook his charge" (*Four Zoas* viii:399). The next three represent the infernal system of Justice, inverted in the order of its discovery: (2) Molech, the Executioner, who would solve problems by annihilating all opposition, fails through impatience; (3) Elohim, the Judge (definer of guilt), who creates Satan and Adam, then faints, wearied; (4) Shaddai, the Accuser, who fails through anger. The result is (5) Pahad (Pachad), the state of bewildered terror at the results of Justice.

than Pahad, the divine embodiment of terror.³⁵² If Damon is correct, there is a profound irony at work. For in pointing Job to Pahad, Eliphaz is pointing him to the very thing that Job had already declared had befallen him with terror. At the end of his first speech in the poetry section, Job had said:

Truly the thing [*pahad*] that I fear [*pāhadī*] comes upon me
and what I dread befalls me. (Job 3:25)

Through his own testimony, Eliphaz confirms for Job that this God is not for him. And if this is the only God there is, a source of fear and dread, then rather than offering Job any respite from his despair, Eliphaz only deepens it.

The final observation concerns the marginal designs, which consist of barren trees with drooping and possibly broken branches. Damon describes them as "...the sterile forests of error."³⁵³ Wright suggests that they "...give sting to the aridness of the words of Eliphaz."³⁵⁴ The trees that cradle Eliphaz's vision, much like Eliphaz himself, are petrified – hardened and lifeless while remaining rigidly rooted in their place.

It is these same trees that provide an immediate visual link with plate 13 where, in the lower margin, they have been flattened by the force of the whirlwind. The whirlwind is, of course, the vehicle through which God appears to Job as the main inscription

Next is the attempt at order: (6) Jehovah, the law-giver, who becomes leprous, seeking to grasp Eternity. Finally (7) Jesus, who abrogates the whole system with the Forgiveness of Sins, and is sacrificed to Satan. (Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake*, 134.)

Taking the seven angels of the title-page of the *Illustrations* as his departure point, Damon uses the Seven Eyes of God as the structural basis for his analysis of the series as a whole. He suggests that Blake devotes two plates to each of the seven eyes (or angels) in turn; and having reached a climax the order is then reversed, with the final plate ending where the first began (Wright, 1972, 66). Intriguing though this structural analysis of the series may be, it is unconvincing.

³⁵² *Blake's Job*, 28.

³⁵³ *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake*, 219.

³⁵⁴ Wright, *Blake's Job: A Commentary*, 27.

makes clear, 'Then the Lord answered Job out of the Whirlwind' (Job 38:1). The flattening of the trees conveys a sense of the overwhelming, irresistible presence of this God who, with dynamic power, sweeps over all in his path. A secondary marginal inscription from Psalm 104:3³⁵⁵ – 'Who maketh the Clouds his Chariot & walketh on the Wings of the Wind' – highlights, through its militaristic imagery, the formidable nature of the appearance of God.³⁵⁶ Like the trees in the bottom margin, the three friends are blown flat by the blast of God's appearing, revealing the utter incapacity of their theological ideas to stand before God. By contrast, Job and his wife are not overwhelmed in the face of God's dynamic presence, even though Job's hair is blown back by the force of the wind. God's presence does not obliterate all in its path.

While the flattening of the trees and friends (representing the overcoming of error) is a consequence of the appearance of God in the whirlwind, it is not the primary focus. God's compassionate gaze is extended towards Job and his wife as he stretches out his arms and moves towards them. This is the first time in the series that God has appeared within the earthly realm. In contrast to the response of Eliphaz in his vision in plate 9, Job and his wife do not respond to God with terror. Theirs is the response of wonder as they kneel before God with their hands clasped in prayer. Yet, this God is certainly not one to be trifled with in a familiar way. His swirling presence is part of a greater reality that is beyond Job's vision. This is clear in the marginal designs where the sweep of the whirlwind extends beyond the central image in which six other god-like figures are linked together.³⁵⁷ The God that is made manifest to Job and his wife is the seventh figure in this chain, completing what is surely meant to be a

³⁵⁵ This is the first marginal inscription in the second half of the series that comes from a book other than the book of Job. The fact that it is taken from Psalm 104 is significant, as the content of Psalm 104 bears a remarkable affinity with the content of the divine speeches in Job 38 – 41. It is as if Blake is intimating that the God who emerges in the divine speeches – to be explicated in the coming illustrations – is already hinted at elsewhere in scripture.

³⁵⁶ The symbolism of the cloud being God's chariot and the wind his winged horse (Weiser, 1962, 667) connects with the mythical battle motif of the Canaanites. "In the Canaanite worldview, Baal, god of the storm, rode the clouds and commanded the winds" (McCann, 1996, 1097).

³⁵⁷ The first of these is barely perceptible with just a hint of a face being recognizable.

representation of the Seven Eyes of God.³⁵⁸ As such, there is an intended identification here between the God who appears to Job, and Christ (the seventh eye of God in Blake's schema) – an identification further strengthened by the incarnational nature of God entering the earthly realm, and the cruciform posture God assumes in the engraving with his outstretched arms.³⁵⁹ Job's conscious spiritual awakening and re-imagining of God has thus begun.

The inscription in the upper margin is taken from the opening words of the divine speeches in Job 38:2, 'Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge.' There are two ways in which this inscription could be understood. The first is that it could be read as an uncompromised condemnation of Job's ignorant insolence in obscuring the divine plan. In his commentary on this verse, Clines writes:

The question is condemnatory, and puts Job in the wrong at the very start. It is no way to begin a pleasant conversation or even a dispute between equals, for it shows a superior person expressing annoyance at an inferior's lack of comprehension. It is not the language of legal argument, such as Job has been hoping for; it is not measured or deliberative language, but more of an outburst against Job personally.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁸ See the earlier footnote explaining this concept in Blake's thought.

³⁵⁹ The motif of the outstretched arm is an important one throughout the *Illustrations*, evident in one form or another in 17 of the 21 engravings (the exceptions being plates 1, 7, 16 and 19). It is a motif that resonates not simply with the crucifixion of Christ (when the outstretched arms assume a very particular cruciform posture as in plates 6, 11, 13 and 18), but also with the idea of the outstretched hand (arm) being an expression of power and might. "The theological metaphor of God's hand (comp. arm) seems to have its roots in Israel's experience of God's redeeming them from slavery in Egypt. In the Exodus reports the outstretched arm of God and of Moses play a decisive role" (Manfred Dreytza, "3338 7," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 403.). In Exodus 3:20 we read the words of God spoken to Moses, "So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all my wonders that I will perform in it; after that he will let you go" (Exodus 3:20). Within that narrative, the staff that Moses takes in his hand becomes an extension of the mighty arm of God (Ex 4:18). See too Ex 6:1; 7:19; 13:3.

³⁶⁰ Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1095.

In other words, the God who comes to Job is not a fluffy, sentimental deity, but is one who responds decisively and directly to errors and distortions that obscure the truth of who he is and the nature of the world that he has created. The flattening of the three friends (and the forests of error) already bear testimony to that truth.

An alternative reading of this inscription is to hear the question as referring to Eliphaz. Admittedly, such an interpretation would be at odds with the progression of the biblical text,³⁶¹ but is not without merit within the context of the *Illustrations*.

Certainly, within this chiasmic pairing the only human to speak is Eliphaz, and his words are revealed to be in error. His cowering posture in plate 13 and his hands thrust up above his bowed head suggest that he has been confronted with and feels convicted by the error of his religious understanding.³⁶²

However these opening words from the divine speeches are read, their severity should not be overstated. The uncompromising directness of these words are not intended to

³⁶¹ The question in Job 38:2 is addressed to Job and is usually understood to be referring to him too. However, it has been suggested that it could be a reference to Elihu, the last person to have spoken in the book before the divine speeches (ibid., 1052.). The possibility that Eliphaz is the one being referred to is largely without biblical substantiation.

³⁶² Eliphaz's hands have played a prominent part in his responses within the series to this point. The first appearance of the three friends in plate 7 is marked by Eliphaz leading the others with hands raised up to heaven in a gesture of anguished lament. In plate 8 Eliphaz's left hand covers his ear (or certainly his hidden face) as he closes himself off from Job's tortured curse of the day of his birth. In plate 9 his extended left hand points to his vision, and in the vision itself his left hand is held up in fearful retreat before the terrifying presence of God. In plate 10 his hands are extended in a dramatic pose of accusation against Job. If the three demons in plate 11 are taken to be representations of the three friends, then Eliphaz's hands are holding the chains with which Job is to be bound. In plate 12, Eliphaz's left hand has been lowered to his knee, but it is still in the gnarled accusatory form as in plate 10 as he listens, seethingly, to Elihu's rebuke. Following plate 13, in the five remaining engravings in which Eliphaz appears, his hands are either hidden or are barely perceptible. The relationship between hands and power is well-established within the Old Testament and the semantic range of the word *yād* (hand). Dreytza writes that "The metaphorical use of *yād* covers a wide range of the concept of 'power'" (Dreytza, "3338 יד."). The prominence of Eliphaz's hands in the earlier engravings in which he appears and their later obscurity following the appearance of God in the whirlwind, suggest the initial assertion and subsequent diminishment of Eliphaz's power and authority.

evoked terror, but rather to cut through any ignorant delusions that would prevent Job from seeing the divine design. Accordingly, the tone is not that of an enraged deity but rather that of an exasperated parent. Certainly, paternal imagery is evoked in the final inscription in the bottom margin taken from Job 38:28, 'Hath the Rain a Father & who hath begotten the Drops of the Dew.' The biblical reference goes on to state, 'From whose womb did the ice come forth, / and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven?' (Job 38:29), adding a maternal element to the imagery being used. The God who answers Job out of the whirlwind comes as a dynamic, decisive presence, not to overwhelm Job with terror, but rather with uncompromising parental passion to draw Job into an experience of the wild exuberance of the world that lay at the heart of God's cosmic design.

5.11 Plates 10 and 12

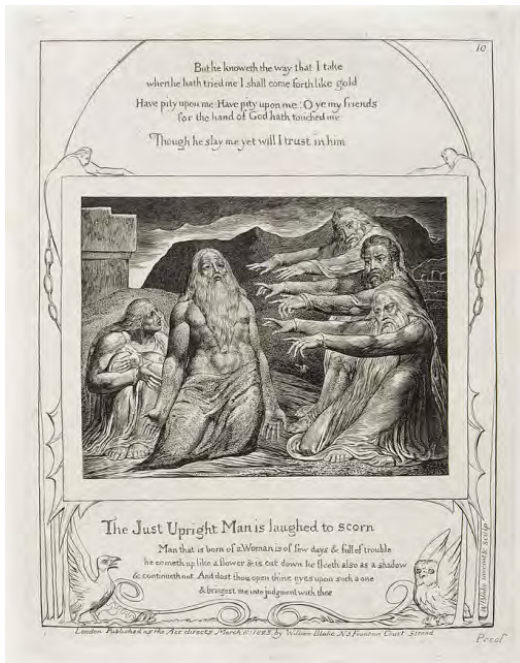


Plate 10 – Job Rebuked by His Friends

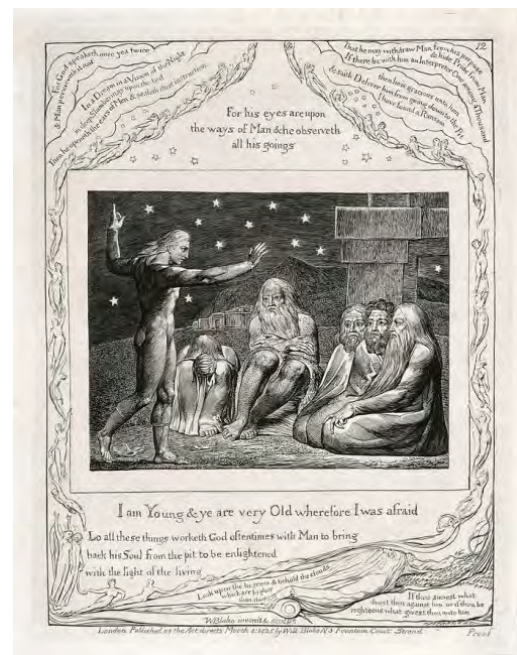


Plate 12 – The Wrath of Elihu

The final chiasmic pairing of the series focuses on the diverse responses of the three friends and Elihu to Job's situation. In plate 10, Job's three so-called friends point mocking fingers of scornful condemnation at him, very sure of the correctness of their position that allows them to stand in judgement over him. In plate 12, the youthful

Elihu holds up a hand to the wisdom of his elders, and points to the heavens (and the text of the marginalia) suggesting that there is another perspective that they haven't yet considered.

The scene depicted in the central image of plate 10 is a new one imagined by Blake which does not occur in the book of Job *per se*. It is based on a line in one of Job's speeches, which serves as the main inscription for the engraving, "The Just Upright Man is laughed to scorn" (Job 12:4). In the engraving, Blake translates this line into a discrete event in which all three of the friends actively participate, that could be termed 'The mocking of Job.'³⁶³ When the friends first appeared in the series in plate 7, they approached Job from his right side, with their hands raised up to the heavens in a gesture of anguished lament directed towards God. They came towards Job as one with whom they shared a theological affinity, for the purpose of expressing their solidarity with him in his suffering and to use their common religious paradigm to try to make sense of what he was enduring. But in plate 10 their position has dramatically changed. They are now on the other side of Job, and their outstretched arms no longer extend to the heavens but point mockingly and accusingly at him. Their intent to distance themselves from him is clear.

This nasty habit, as it appears to us, of laughing at the afflictions of others perhaps originates in a desire to dissociate oneself from the victim of a curse, divine or human; by taunting or mocking the sufferer one distances oneself from the disaster and thus protects oneself from its baleful influence.... The innocent Job is the butt of those secure in their piety.... For their security is grounded upon their convictions of exact retribution; they cannot be harmed, for they are righteous. And they maintain their security by instantly designating any sufferer an evildoer; if anyone suffers injury, that person deserves moral

³⁶³ Minney suggests that these "friends-turned-accusers prefigure the mocking of Christ" (Minney, "Job's Gethsemane: Tradition and Imagination in William Blake's Illustrations for the Book of Job," 171.).

condemnation as well (“add insult to injury” is their principle); and if anyone is staggering beneath misfortune, that person is an apt target for censure.³⁶⁴

Whatever the motivation and justification within their own minds of their behaviour, the scornful mocking of the three friends signifies that Job's demise is complete, for not only has he been tried, touched and slain by God (as the three inscriptions in the upper margins describe), but the very ones who came to be with him in his suffering and whom he regards as his friends have turned against him and distanced themselves from him. Theirs becomes an antagonistic presence as they regard him as some sort of spiritual prey, and certainly the target of their derision.³⁶⁵

This is alluded to in the marginal designs in the bottom corners of the engraving as two birds of prey grasp a snake and a rat in their talons, suggestive of the way in which the friends have turned upon Job.³⁶⁶ In the central design immediately beneath the accusing, outstretched arms of the friends, a lone flower grows.³⁶⁷ This flower symbolizes the fragility and transience of human existence, rather than hope and promise as Wright suggests.³⁶⁸ This is clear from the inscription in the bottom margin taken from Job 14:1-3 in which Job says that Man “...cometh up like a flower & is cut down.” This is where Job finds himself as the first half of the series approaches its lowest point – cut down not just by the hand of God, but also by the mocking condemnation of his friends who represent the religious paradigm that he had always embraced as his own.

³⁶⁴ David J.A. Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, Word Biblical Commentary 17 (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 290-91.

³⁶⁵ This idea of Job feeling like a target is explicitly referred to in Job 16:13b-14a, when Job says of God, “...he set me up as his target; his archers surround me.” This could be a reference to how Job perceived the friends – as God's militia intent on attacking the one whom God has targeted. See too Job 10:17 and Job 19:12.

³⁶⁶ Damon refers to these as “...the cuckoo of slander, the owl of false wisdom, and the adder of hate” (1973, 219).

³⁶⁷ This flower is unique to the engravings, as neither the Butts nor Linell paintings of this scene include it.

³⁶⁸ Wright, *Blake's Job: A Commentary*, 29.

The mocking attack of Job's friends in plate 10 is contrasted by the surprising defense offered by Elihu in plate 12. Indeed, it would be more accurate to describe Elihu's response not as a defense but as an attack in its own right, for he challenges openly and directly the religious paradigm of the three friends as he points to a higher alternative. As such, Blake's characterization of Elihu in plate 12 represents another unique contribution to his interpretation of the book of Job as a whole. Occurring as it does at the start of the second half of the series, the engraving frames Elihu's role positively as part of Job's journey of ascent into a new religious consciousness. This is in contrast to the strong criticisms leveled against Elihu by many commentators of the biblical text – Good called him “a pompous, insensitive bore”; Curtis described him as “a fanatic and a bigot”; while Rowley dismissed him as “ridiculous”.³⁶⁹ Habel argues that the text exposes Elihu as a brash and impulsive fool.³⁷⁰ In addition to this, many commentators argue that the Elihu speeches are a later addition to the book of Job and some question their importance as a result.³⁷¹

The Elihu speeches (xxxii-xxxvii) are rejected as interpolations by many critics who regard them as having scant value either as literature or as a solution to the problem of evil. Their style is diffuse and pretentious, a large part of the content of the four discourses being devoted to prolix and pompous prolegomena. For the most part Elihu's arguments merely echo what the friends have already said repeatedly, yet he has the effrontery to offer them as if they were novel and decisive.³⁷²

³⁶⁹ All cited in Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 564.

³⁷⁰ Habel, *The Book of Job : A Commentary*, 444.

³⁷¹ See Samuel Rolles Driver and George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1921, (1986)), xl; Rowley, *Job*, 13; Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: University Press, 2003), 201. A few notable exceptions – for example, Janzen and Habel – regard the Elihu speeches as an integral part of the original composition, while Eissfeldt considers the Elihu speeches to be “...the climax of the work and the author's best word on the problem of evil” (Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, xxvii-xxviii.).

³⁷² *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, xxvii.

But in Blake's *Illustrations*, Elihu plays a central and positive role in initiating the transformative journey of ascent that Job will undertake in the second half of the series.³⁷³ The engraving conveys this in three principal ways.

Firstly, the religious paradigm represented by Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar is subverted in the engraving. The posture Elihu assumes is telling, as he looks directly at the three friends with his right arm extended and his hand held up towards them in a gesture of spurning reproof.³⁷⁴ Wright is surely mistaken in seeing in Elihu's raised and open palm a gesture of benediction.³⁷⁵ He is clearly rebuffing the friends and the theology they espouse. His posture contains an echo of the words of the LORD in the divine speeches, "Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped" (Job 38:11).

Elihu's challenge of their religious paradigm is conveyed not just through his physical posture. The main inscription of the engraving, "I am Young & ye are very Old wherefore I was afraid" (Job 32:6) indicates an awareness in Elihu that his opinion contradicts theirs. This is explicitly borne out in the inscription in the bottom right corner when Elihu says, "If thou sinnest what doest thou against him, or if thou be righteous what givest thou unto him" (Job 35:6-7). In other words, Elihu boldly declares that "...the true God is not the God of Morality but one who is unconcerned about the petty faults and virtues of his children."³⁷⁶ This assertion – that human sin or righteousness has no impact on God – is a direct contradiction of the entire moral universe in which the friends have been operating. The curled fingers of Eliphaz's left

³⁷³ Lindberg observes that the marginal inscriptions of plate 12, all of which are taken from the Elihu speeches, consist of no less than 166 words of Elihu, "surpassed only by Jesus, who, in plate 17, has 170 words" (cited in Paley, *The Traveller in the Evening : The Last Works of William Blake*, 246.).

³⁷⁴ In contemporary popular culture the expression, "Talk to the hand!" would be a fair description of Elihu's disposition towards the friends. This expression arose in the 1990's as a put-down of what someone else was saying, and would often be accompanied with a physical gesture of holding up one's hand to the other.

³⁷⁵ Wright, *Blake's Job: A Commentary*, 33.

³⁷⁶ Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake*, 220.

hand (which mirror those of his in plate 10), together with his steely-cold stare suggest an undercurrent of animosity towards Elihu. But for Job, the undercutting of the friends' theological position alerts him to the possibility of an alternative way of seeing God and understanding the world. This is necessary if he is to awaken from his spiritual slumber and undertake the journey of ascent into a new religious consciousness.

Secondly, plate 12 offers the reassurance that Job has not, in fact, fallen beyond the reach and help of God, even if that is how it seems. A number of the marginal inscriptions make this clear. The inscription above the central design – “For his eyes are upon the ways of Man & he observeth all his goings” (Job 34:21) – affirms that no matter where Job has gone, God sees him. Two further inscriptions from Job 33 reference the deliverance God affects for those faced with the grim reality of the Pit.³⁷⁷ The first of these speaks of an intervention that prevents the descent into the Pit itself – “Deliver him from going down to the Pit” (Job 33:24). The second affirms that even should the Pit be reached, it is not a final and terminal destination – “Lo all these

³⁷⁷ The Hebrew word used here for the Pit is תַּחַת (*šahat*). “The densest collocation of occurrences of *šahat* is in Job 33 (5x out of 21), a passage that provides special insight into the OT notion of the hereafter.... Together with its synonyms... *šahat* bears the idea both of grave and the netherworld, the two concepts frequently overlapping and not clearly distinguished in most OT contexts” (Eugene H. Merrill, “8846 תַּחַת,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 94.). In his compelling treatment of the etymology of *šahat* Moshe Held makes the fascinating assertion that *šahat* is, in fact, a homonym with the further meaning of ‘net’ – evidenced in Ezekiel 19:8 where *šahat* is employed as a clear parallelism with *rešet*, the more common Hebrew word for net. He writes, “A thorough scrutiny of all cases of *šahat* in the Hebrew Bible...leads to the conclusion that biblical Hebrew knows a *šahat* II ‘net’, completely distinct from and independent of the substantive ‘pit, netherworld’” (Moshe Held, “Pits and Pitfalls in Akkadian and Biblical Hebrew,” *JANES* 5 (1973): 181.). While it is improbable that Blake would have been aware of this additional meaning of the word, and while it is uncontested that in Job 33:23, 30 *šahat* is used with its more usual sense of ‘pit,’ Held’s insight introduces a further possible shade of meaning to the inscriptions in plate 12. The Pit from which Job is delivered could be understood as a net that caught him, a safety-net if you will that kept him from falling beyond the reach of God’s deliverance.

things worketh God oftentimes with Man to bring back his Soul from the pit to be enlightened with the light of the living" (Job 33:29-20).

A striking feature of plate 12 is the preponderance of stars that feature both in the central design and in the marginalia. With the exception of the lone star in plate 1, this is the first occurrence of stars in the series. Their presence underscores the point that Job has not been forgotten and has not plunged beyond the reach of God. Blake is quite specific on this association between the stars of heaven and the relationship between God and humanity. In his poem *The Four Zoas* he writes:

Thus were the stars of heaven created like a golden chain
To bind the Body of Man to heaven from falling into the Abyss³⁷⁸

There are exactly twelve stars that appear in the central design against the night sky behind Elihu.³⁷⁹ This is significant to Wright who sees in these twelve stars a suggestion of the twelve sons of Israel and especially their restoration and return envisioned in Revelation 7.³⁸⁰ As such, the very stars above Job's head which have been absent throughout all of his ordeal and which even now he barely perceives, attests to the fact that he has not been cut off but finds himself within the broader narrative of God's faithful and long-suffering dealings with God's people.

Thirdly, this engraving initiates Job's journey of ascent in the second half of the series through its own internal imagery of ascent. Elihu's left hand is pointing up. God's deliverance from the Pit, as referenced in the marginal inscriptions, is a deliverance that necessarily involves the act of raising up. In the bottom margin there is the figure of a slumbering Job who bears more of Elihu's words on his robe, "Look upon the

³⁷⁸ Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 322.

³⁷⁹ In the corresponding Butts and Linnell watercolours, there were seventeen and thirteen respectively.

³⁸⁰ Wright, *Blake's Job: A Commentary*, 33. The theme of the restoration of the lost tribes of Israel was an important one in Blake's thought. In *Jerusalem*, he assigns gates and counties to the twelve sons of Israel within the four kingdoms of the British Isles. (See Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 226-27.)

heavens & behold the clouds which are higher than thou" (Job 35:5). In the bottom left-hand corner two angels with upstretched arms are encouraging a horde of small figures to do just that, as they rise from their slumber and stream up both of the vertical margins to form a funnel extending beyond the upper margin.³⁸¹ Emanating as they do from the sleeping form of Job, these figures demonstrate the journey of ascent that awaits Job once he awakens from his spiritual slumber. The theological victimization at the hands of his friends that he was subjected to in plate 10 has been reversed. A bold new possibility is opening up before Job that will result in the radical transformation of everything that he has known. The nightmare of plate 11, and indeed all the earlier engravings, is turning into the bright hope of new understanding. As the inscriptions in the upper right margin put it, "For God speaketh once yea twice & Man perceiveth it not. In a Dream in a Vision of the Night in deep Slumberings upon the bed. Then he openeth the ears of Men & sealet their instruction" (Job 33:14-16).

6. Job's wife in Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job*

Having discussed at length the chiasmic structure of the *Illustrations*, we turn now to a consideration of Job's wife in the series as a whole. Three important observations are apparent when Blake's portrayal of Job's wife is considered. The first is the pervasiveness of her presence throughout the series. In eighteen of the twenty-one illustrations, Job's wife is by his side.³⁸² This is a striking departure from the biblical text where Job's wife appears for all of two verses and then disappears, never to be heard from, addressed or referred to again.³⁸³

³⁸¹ About these figures in the upper margins are the constellations of Orion and Pleiades, twelve more stars and the clouds of heaven.

³⁸² The three illustrations in the collection where Job's wife is not present are plates 3, 11 and 20. Plate 3 is a depiction of Job's sons and daughters being overwhelmed by Satan in which Job himself is absent (cf. Job 1:18-19). Plate 11 is a depiction of Job's evil dreams (cf. Job 7:14). Plate 20 is a depiction of Job and his three daughters (cf. Job 42:13-15). With the possible exception of plate 20, the absence of Job's wife from these particular engravings is appropriate and consistent with the subject matter of each engraving.

³⁸³ Two passing references to his wife are made by Job in 19:17 and 31:10.

But in Blake's exposition of Job's story, Job's wife is an integral part of everything he experienced. In the opening scenes depicting life in Job's household (plates 1 and 2), she is there. When the messengers tell Job his misfortune (plate 4), she is there. When Job's acts of charity are depicted (plate 5), she is there. When Job is afflicted by Satan (plate 6), she is there. When the three friends arrive to comfort Job (plate 7), she is there. When Job curses the day of his birth (plate 8), she is there. And so it continues. When Job is rebuked by his friends (plate 9), when Elihu enters the fray (plate 12), and when Job is finally answered by the LORD out of the whirlwind (plate 13), his wife is there. Indeed, as Job is drawn into a vision of the cosmos through the divine speeches (plates 14 – 17), his wife is there to share the revelation that is given him. And in the depictions of Job's restoration, his wife is a central figure (plates 18, 19 and 21).

The simple fact of the physical presence of Job's wife in every aspect of the unfolding drama of the book, as Blake interprets it, is remarkable in its own right. But Blake's portrayal of Job's wife goes beyond a formulaic rendering of an ever-present, faithful wife – as if she were merely a mechanical appendage or obligatory placeholder in the narrative. No. She is portrayed with a full range of emotions and responses that conveys that she is a complex person in her own right who is an active (albeit silent) participant in all that is taking place.

We see her disposition of serene devotion when the initial peace and prosperity of Job's household is described (plate 1). We see her concerned engagement with Job in his anxiety regarding the requirements of the law (plate 2). We see her heart-rending anguish when the horrific news of the messengers is received (plate 4). We see her tender support of Job in his acts of charity (plate 5), and her anguished distress in his hour of affliction (plate 6). We see her sorrowful concern as Job leans against her for support on the ash heap (plate 7). We see her hiding her face when Job cries out in despair as he curses the day of his birth (plate 8). We see her looking on with incredulous disbelief as Job's friends point accusing fingers of rebuke at him (plate 10). We see her clenching her hands and bowing her head in fervent prayer as Elihu

challenges the theological paradigm out of which Job and the three friends especially have been operating, suggesting a passionate intercession on her part that Elihu's words might open up a new religious path for Job (plate 12). We see her eyes wide open in wonder as the LORD speaks out of the whirlwind and reveals the mysteries of the cosmos (plates 13 and 14). We see her hands pressed gently together in a gesture of prayer, and her tranquil face uplifted to God whose hands extend over her and Job in benediction (plate 17). We see her joining in the prayer that Job offers on behalf of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar (plate 18). We see her gracious humility when friends come bearing gifts (plate 19), and her thankful devotion as she and Job and their restored family make music together (plate 21).

This wide range of emotion exhibited by Job's wife underscores the point that she was not just a casual bystander to what was going on, but was intimately and personally involved with all that Job was experiencing. Indeed, it could be argued that she exhibits a richer range of appropriate emotion even than that which Job himself displays. In a majority of the illustrations Job is depicted with a very similar countenance that could be described as a mixture of raw grief and the numbing shock of the proverbial "deer caught in the headlights." The impression is created that Job has been anaesthetized by his pain, whereas his wife feels it, and holds it. The point should not be overstated, especially given the eloquence and passion of Job's speeches in the book which refute any suggestion that he was paralyzed by his pain. But at the very least, the nuanced responses of Job's wife, as portrayed in Blake's illustrations, make the case powerfully that she was as fully present to the *meaning* of the unfolding drama as could be humanly expected.

Blake's portrayal of Job's wife as a faithful, constant companion who was physically and emotionally present to Job throughout his journey of descent and ascent, holds one of the interpretive keys that can unlock the meaning of the series as a whole. In plate 20, we see Job initiating his daughters into the mystery of this journey of death and resurrection, of descent and ascent, as he stretches out his arms in a cruciform posture and points to scenes from his life that describe this journey that was his. In his

cruciform posture Job identifies with the crucified and risen Christ whose presence, he now recognizes, was indeed with him. The point is driven home through the marginal inscription at the bottom of the engraving, taken from Psalm 139:8, "If I ascend up into Heaven thou art there If I make my bed in Hell behold thou art there."

This affirmation of the enduring presence of Christ in the heavenly heights and hellish depths of everything that had happened to him is precisely what he had experienced, first hand, in the enduring presence and companionship of his wife. Indeed, in a very real sense Job's journey of descent and ascent was his wife's journey too, for she too was touched deeply and directly by all that had taken place. The inscription from Psalm 139 could be words in the mouth of Job spoken to his wife, "If I ascend up into Heaven thou art there If I make my bed in Hell behold thou art there." Her constant companionship and intimate sharing of Job's journey meant that Job's wife was the one who mediated the presence of Christ to Job. Hers was an incarnational presence, a physical embodiment of the nearness of God, even if Job failed to recognize this at first. Indeed, in much of the human dialogue in the biblical text, he had fantasized about gaining an audience with God (cf. Job 9:2-4, 14-16; 10:2; 13:3, 17-19), oblivious to the significance of the faithful companionship of his wife. In the end, having undergone the journey that was his, in plate 20 we see that Job was able to look back on it all and acknowledge that truly he was not alone.³⁸⁴

The second important observation about Job's wife in the *Illustrations* concerns her relative positioning within the various engravings. In fourteen of her eighteen

³⁸⁴ The other marginal inscription in plate 20, also taken from Psalm 139, reads thus: "How precious are thy thoughts unto me O God how great is the sum of them" (Psalm 139:17). The 'thoughts of God unto Job' could be understood as a reference to Job's wife, as one of the ways in which God remembered Job and gifted him with the presence of such a faithful companion. Significantly, the following verse in that Psalm says, "I come to the end [I awake] – I am still with thee" (Ps 139:18b). If echoes of this verse are heard in the context of plate 20, it suggests that in the end Job's eyes were opened to the fact that his former sense of isolation and abandonment was an illusion.

appearances, she appears to the right of Job.³⁸⁵ In his seminal 1910 study entitled *Blake's Vision of the Book of Job*, Joseph Wicksteed offered a detailed consideration of the significance of right and left. "In his endeavor to relate the Illustrations to Blake's system, he applies with great assiduity an interpretation of the symbolism of the series whereby right and left stand for spiritual and material respectively."³⁸⁶ If Wicksteed's analysis is accepted, the positioning of Job's wife on his right hand side suggests that she represents a spiritual influence for Job.

More significant, perhaps, is the observation that whenever Job's wife and the three friends appear together, they are always on opposite sides of Job.³⁸⁷ Given the false religious paradigm that the friends represent, this relative positioning of Job's wife is highly significant, pointing to the fact that in contrast to the theological error of the friends, the perspectives of Job's wife are true.

A further intriguing dimension of the meaning of the positioning and posture of Job's wife can be discerned in a cluster of three engravings, being plates 6 – 8. These engravings focus on the suffering of Job and contain subtle allusions to the passion of Christ.³⁸⁸ Significantly, it is Job's wife in each of these engravings who makes the

³⁸⁵ The four appearances where this pattern is broken are in plate 7, where she stands neither to his left nor right but behind Job; plate 13, where she is between Job and God appearing in the whirlwind; plate 16, where Job and his wife together occupy the right side of the fiery abyss from where they witness the fall of Satan; and plate 18, where Job has turned around in prayer so that his wife is now effectively on his left side.

³⁸⁶ Wright, *Blake's Job: A Commentary*, 65.

³⁸⁷ The one exception to this pattern is plate 16, but as mentioned in the footnote above, the clear and unambiguous sense created in this engraving is that Job and his wife together are on one side of the fiery abyss and the friends are on the other.

³⁸⁸ Blake draws on a tradition well-established in medieval art that Job was clearly seen as a prefiguring of Christ. This tradition has earlier antecedents dating back to the early Church Fathers. "Saint Gregory the Great's *Commentary on the Book of Job* describes Job's sufferings as prefiguring those of Christ." (Leslie Ross, *Medieval Art: A Topical Dictionary* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996), 136.) Saint Zeno of Verona, in a colourful sermon dating from the fourth century, said this:

My beloved brethren, the story of Job prefigures that of Christ. Thus we understand it, and we can see the truth of this by detailed comparison.... Everything that Job had, he

allusions apparent. In plate 6, she kneels weeping with Job's feet on her lap, caressing them with her hair, as Satan pours out a vial on Job's head. This alludes to the story of Jesus being anointed by a woman in anticipation of his coming death (John 12:1-8; cf. Mark 14:1-9; Matthew 26:6-13; Luke 7:37-50).³⁸⁹ In plate 7, as already discussed above, the position of Job leaning against his wife suggests a *pietà*. In plate 8 she kneels before Job as he raises his arms to the heavens and utters his cry of utter dereliction, an ominous foreshadowing of the cry that Jesus will utter on the cross when he screams, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34; Matthew 27:46). As she kneels, above her head against the hillside in the distance the outline of a cross can be seen, identifying her as one of the women who was either at the foot of the cross (John 19:25) or who was watching from a distance (Matthew 27:55; Mark 15:40; Luke 23:49).

The simple conclusion that can be drawn from these two observations about Job's wife is that her presence and positioning within the series are laden with meaning, and that Blake uses Job's wife as a key character in the delivery of the message of the *Illustrations* as a whole.

lost; and for love of us the Lord forgot all his heavenly blessings and made himself poor.... Job was disfigured with boils; and the Lord, taking on human flesh, was fouled with the sins of all mankind.... Job sits on a dunghill full of worms; and the Lord lived in a real dunghill, that is, this world, surrounded by men seething with every vice and every crime: true worms (in *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol 3, p651).

Such was the influence of this association between Job and Christ that in medieval art elements of Job's story were used in the depiction of Christ's passion. For example, as an allusion to Job's dunghill, the scourging of Christ is often set on a little hill rather than in the praetorium referred to in the gospels (Minney, "Job's Gethsemane: Tradition and Imagination in William Blake's *Illustrations for the Book of Job*," 168.).

³⁸⁹ Distinct versions of this story appear in the various gospels. In the gospels of Matthew (Mt 26:6-13) and Mark (Mk 14:3-9) the woman is nameless and pours perfume on Jesus' head in preparation for his burial. In John's gospel (Jn 12:1-8), the woman is identified as Mary, who pours perfume on Jesus' feet and wipes them with her hair, also as an act of preparation for burial. In Luke's gospel (Lk 7:36-50), the woman is identified as a sinner who not only anoints Jesus' feet with ointment, but also weeps on them, dries them with her hair, and kisses them.

This leads to the third admittedly puzzling observation about Job's wife in the *Illustrations*. And that is that her spoken words in the biblical text, recorded in Job 2:9, do not appear in the *Illustrations* at all. The closest reference we have to them is the marginal inscription in plate 7 which records part of Job's reply to his wife's speech, "What! shall we receive Good at the hand of God & shall we not also receive Evil" (Job 2:10). As such, Job's wife is the only speaking character in the biblical text whose voice is not heard in the *Illustrations*.³⁹⁰ Given what has already been established about the prominence and importance of Job's wife in the series, Blake's silencing of Job's wife appears incongruous.

A simple but unsatisfactory explanation is that Blake may have thought that the words of Job's wife reflected poorly on her and would have undermined the role he intended for her within the series. As such, he chose simply to ignore her embarrassing words which were at odds with his imaginative vision of her. Alternatively, Blake may not have had a negative view of her words (see the positive reading of Job 2:9 below), but recognized that the long history of the vilification of Job's wife meant that her words, if reproduced in the *Illustrations*, would have prejudiced most readers against her.

A more nuanced explanation is that Blake silenced Job's wife precisely because he wished to illustrate that the real value and measure of a person's contribution lay not in the intellectual thoughts and ideas they held but rather in their capacity to be present and their willingness to share the experiences of life. Job's wife has consistently been judged, and harshly so, on the basis of a mere six words she speaks,³⁹¹ rather than on the basis of her presence and participation in the totality of Job's story. Blake's portrayal of Job's wife redresses this jaundiced view of her by foregrounding her faithful companionship to Job as the key contribution she offered to his situation.

³⁹⁰ It is noted that none of Bildad's words appear in the marginal inscriptions. However, his 'voice' is nevertheless represented in the words of Eliphaz and Zophar which are included in the series.

³⁹¹ English translations mask the fact that in the original Hebrew, Job's wife utters just six words.

A further possible explanation for the omission of the words of Job's wife in the *Illustrations* centres on a positive reading of Job 2:9. In saying to Job, "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die" (Job 2:9), she was challenging the deficient religious paradigm that he was so invested in clinging on to (his 'persisting in his integrity'), and was urging him to renounce ('curse') his false god and die to that old religious consciousness, in the hope that a new and better way of living will be found. This is precisely what Job came to do over the course of his ensuing journey of death and resurrection. As such, his wife displays remarkable insight into the true nature of his dilemma and the task that was before him if he was to be transformed.

If Blake read Job 2:9 in such a way, why then would he not include these important words in the *Illustrations* which sought to expound this exact perspective? One suggestion has already been offered above, that Blake may have felt that the traditional, critical reading of these words would predominate in readers' interpretations, clouding their imaginations from seeing Job's wife in a new light. Another suggestion is that the insight of Job's wife was one that Job had to discover for himself through the long and painful journey of descent and ascent that was his. Presenting the resolution to his dilemma too soon in the piece may have circumvented the necessary process of his transformation. In much the same way that Job has to wait until chapter 38 in the book to hear God speak to him, so too the *Illustrations* have to wait for the truth that is already evident in the words of Job's wife to emerge. The fact that Job's wife does not speak at all in the *Illustrations* could then be understood as a self-limiting act of loving restraint on her behalf, as she gives Job the space to discover for himself the truth that she has already perceived.

7. Conclusion

The religious thought and artistic vision of William Blake find powerful expression in his *Illustrations of the Book of Job*. It is an unparalleled visual commentary on the book of Job that offers a compelling interpretation of this enigmatic story. The principal focus of Blake's exposition is on the distinction between true and false

religion, and the journey that is required to move from the perception of God as a staid, remote, law-giving, book-keeping deity who requires sacrifice, to the recognition of God as a dynamic, present, playful visionary who delights in beauty, music and art. Blake's conception of this journey for Job is of a journey of descent and ascent, of death and resurrection. This is borne out in the chiasmic structure of the *Illustrations*. Within this structure the first half of the series describes Job's journey of descent, from the seemingly idyllic life of unquestioned devotion, through the collapse of Job's entire world, to the nadir of plate 11 where he comes to see that the God whom he had been serving was a false god. The second half of the series 'retraces' and 'redeems' the journey of descent in a corresponding journey of ascent in which Job comes to see God, the world and his relationships in a whole new light. The series concludes with the restoration, or more accurately the recreation, of Job in which he and his wife – who has been a faithful companion throughout the depths and heights of his journey – together with their children, make music in praise of God and in celebration of the great and wondrous gift of life.

Chapter 4 : The Prominence and Influence of Job's Wife

1. Introduction

A central assertion of this thesis is that Job's wife occupies a place of far greater prominence and influence within the book than what has been commonly assumed. This runs counter to the mainstream of scholarly opinion that has been quick to assign Job's wife a marginal place at best; or, to be more accurate, has been slow to challenge the conclusion that she is merely a minor character of negligible significance. Even among those scholars who have offered a more nuanced reading of her role and story, there are none who have explored her shaping influence upon the interpretation of the book as a whole.

The reasons for this marginalization of Job's wife are not hard to find within the text itself. Hers is the shortest of all the speaking parts in the book – just six words in the original Hebrew. She makes the briefest of appearances that spans a mere two verses, and then all but disappears from the text. Job makes just two passing references to her later in the book (19:17 and 31:9-10),³⁹² and even when ten further children are born to Job (42:13), no mention is made of his wife whose agency in their birth was presumably required.³⁹³ What is more, the few brief words that are hers are summarily dismissed by Job as the sort of utterance that could be expected of “any foolish woman” (2:10).

Given this marginalization of Job's wife by the text itself, what justification is there – behind the text, within the text and intertextually – for claiming a place of greater prominence and influence for her within the book as a whole? This is the question that directs the central focus of this chapter.

³⁹² In 19:17 Job says, “My breath is repulsive to my wife” and in 31:9-10 he says, “If my heart has been enticed by another woman...then let my wife grind for another, and let other men kneel over her.”

³⁹³ In *T.Job* these children were born to another woman whom Job married following the death of his first wife. See section 4 on p.56ff. in ch.2 above.

2. Behind-the-text perspectives

A so-called behind-the-text reading privileges the historical and sociological world in which the text is embedded and from which it emerges.³⁹⁴ The social, economic, political, cultural and religious dimensions of the text are foregrounded in this mode of reading, which become the lenses through which the text is explored and through which obscure or hidden elements are brought into focus.

2.1 Establishing the historical and social world of the book of Job

Establishing the historical and social world of the book of Job requires attention to certain key questions such as who wrote the book, and when, where and for whom it was written. These are not simple questions to answer. A great deal of critical ink has been spilled over the issue of the 'unity' or 'integrity' of the book of Job, and whether its compositional history is better explained diachronically – that is, having developed over time through the agency of multiple authors; or synchronically – that is, being composed in one particular historical moment.³⁹⁵

³⁹⁴ For a brief, yet helpful, overview of such a mode of reading see Gerald O. West, *Contextual Bible Study* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1993), 24-30.

³⁹⁵ Those scholars who seek to trace the compositional history of the book of Job diachronically as the work of different authors at different times usually cite the literary disjunctions within the book as the obvious impetus for such an exploration. Such literary disjunctions include the sharp and seemingly contradictory juxtaposition of the prose and the poetry and especially the nature and disposition of Job within each; the breakdown of the pattern and content of the human dialogue between Job and his friends in the third cycle of speeches in chs.24-27; the interlude of the poem on wisdom in ch.28; the 'intrusion' of the Elihu speeches in chs.32-37 with the notable absence of any other references to Elihu anywhere else in the book; and, for at least some scholars, the presence of a second, enigmatic divine speech in chs.40-41.

Although there are many different versions and variations of the hypothesis of a diachronic compositional history, Newsom helpfully identifies four broad stages in the unfolding development of the book that are commonly identified within this hypothesis. See Carol A. Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck et al (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 321-22.

The first stage would have been the existence of an ancient folk tale, originally told orally, about a legendary pious figure by the name of Job. Broad parallels to the story of Job

Even if this vexed question of the unity of the book were disregarded – with its attendant implications for the historical and social context(s) from which it emerged – and only the final form of the book were considered, there still remain widely ranging estimates for the dating of the book as a whole. Clines asserts that most scholars date the final form of the book to somewhere between the seventh and second centuries

in other cultures attest to the existence of this literary motif and the trope of a pious sufferer in the literature of the ANE. Examples would include the Canaanite epic of Keret; Egyptian texts known as the 'Dispute Over Suicide' and 'The Protests of the Eloquent Peasant'; a Sumerian text entitled 'Man and His God'; and most strikingly, a Babylonian text known as *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* ('I will praise the Lord of Wisdom'), sometimes referred to as the 'Babylonian Job' (David J.A. Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, Word Biblical Commentary 17 (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), lix-lx.) This first stage is represented by the prose frame of chs.1-2 and 42:7-17, and would have included a middle part of the story – no longer extant – of a dialogue between Job and his friends in which they spoke contemptuously of God while Job refused to curse God.

The second stage occurred when an Israelite author either used or adapted the ancient folk tale "...as the framework for a much more ambitious, sophisticated retelling of the story in which the figure of Job does not remain the patiently enduring character of the traditional tale, but challenges God's treatment of him." (Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 321.) The poetic dialogue between Job and his friends replaced whatever they might have said in the old story. The divine speeches (38:1 – 42:6) formed the climax of this author's contribution, though he retained the original conclusion of the ancient tale. The hymn in praise of Wisdom (28:1-28) may have been the work of this author as a transition between Job's dialogue with his friends and his dialogue with God, or it may have been an addition by a later author. See John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, Nicot Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 27.

The third stage would account for the Elihu speeches as the contribution of a later author who was dissatisfied with the new version of the book of Job, and felt the need to provide what he felt would be a more decisive refutation of Job's arguments.

The fourth stage occurred during the transmission of the book when copyists tried to soften the blasphemous tone of Job's words by putting some of Bildad's and Zophar's speeches in Job's mouth.

In contrast to the hypothesis of a diachronic compositional history, a growing trend within Joban scholarship has been to approach the book as a unified whole and to consider its final-form interpretation. As Newsom correctly observes, "...the important issue is not how the book attained its present form but how the shape of the book contributes to its meaning." (Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 323.) For an excellent historical overview of the ebbs and flows in Joban scholarship regarding this issue of the text's unity, see Newsom's *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: University Press, 2003), 3-10.

BCE.³⁹⁶ Newsom narrows that range by stating that a majority of scholars opt for a date between the seventh and fifth centuries BCE.³⁹⁷

In addition to the uncertainties of the date when the book was written (or finalised), questions concerning its authorship, geographic location and audience generate further challenges. The book of Job – together with the books of Proverbs and Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes) in the Old Testament, and Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon in the Apocrypha – belongs to a small cluster of books that are termed “wisdom literature” in biblical studies.³⁹⁸ Two different settings have been posited for the production of Israel's wisdom literature: the tribe and the royal sponsored school. Proponents of the tribal theory trace the didactic emphases of wisdom literature to the regulations laid down by tribal elders governing social relations within the tribe. Proponents of the royal school theory, drawing on examples from other cultures in the ANE, postulate that the emergence of a circle of professional scribes or poets was a consequence of the establishment of a skilled bureaucracy within the royal court for the administrative purposes of maintaining records and accounts, as well as for diplomatic correspondence with foreign powers which required a knowledge of foreign languages and writing conventions.³⁹⁹ The relevance of this for our purposes here lies in the fact that the social setting of either the tribe or the royal school for Israel's wisdom literature points in different directions as to the primary audience of such literature – namely a rural peasantry in the case of the tribal theory or an urban elite in the case of the royal school theory. Simply put, should Israel's wisdom literature be read as the organic distillation of wisdom that percolated through the grounded experience of ordinary people living together on the land; or the hegemonic product of the (royal and religious) power elite, influenced by international relations and concerns for the maintenance of the status quo?

³⁹⁶ Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, lvii.

³⁹⁷ Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 325.

³⁹⁸ Richard J. Clifford, "Introduction to Wisdom Literature," *ibid.*, ed. Leander E. Keck et al (1997), 1.

³⁹⁹ *ibid.*, 7.

In the light of the significant uncertainties as to the date, authorship, audience and social setting of the book of Job, is it possible to establish the historical and social world of the book with any degree of confidence? Accordingly, if the world behind the text remains so elusive, can the contributions of behind-the-text perspectives to the interpretation of the book carry any authority or claim any legitimacy?

An alternative strategy would be to consider the historical and social world suggested within the text itself, and to allow the rhetorical function of this world to inform any behind-the-text perspectives. It is to this task that we now turn.

The book opens with a geographic reference to the "land of Uz" (1:1). Its precise location is unknown, but according to 1:3 it was somewhere in "the east".⁴⁰⁰ What is clear is that a non-Israelite locality is presupposed, strengthened by the use of the foreign-sounding name "Job." Newsom writes, "Job's archaic name and foreign homeland help to establish a sense of narrative distance, which facilitates the presentation of Job as a paradigmatic figure."⁴⁰¹ Yet, he is presented as a servant and devotee of Yahweh (1:8, 20-21), inviting the Israelite audience to identify with him, albeit from a distance. The rhetorical effect of presenting Job's background and identity in this way is that for an Israelite audience (of whatever historical period), his character was sufficiently familiar for his story to be taken seriously as an example of

⁴⁰⁰ On the strength of other brief biblical references, various suggestions have been made that Uz lay either to the south of Israel in Edomite territory (Lam 4:21; cf. Gen 36:28), or to the northeast of Israel in Aramean territory (Gen 10:23; cf. Gen 22:21). See Newsom, *The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections*, 344; also B.T. Napier, "Uz," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick et al (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962). Balentine makes the helpful observation that "...for the Joban story it is likely that this orientation [of "the east"] is more theological than geographical. In Hebraic tradition, the east is the direction that orients the entire cosmos in the ways of its Creator. The primeval garden of Eden was planted "in the east" (Gen 2:8), thus marking the place on earth where humankind was first introduced to God's cosmic design." (Samuel E. Balentine, *Job*, The Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2006), 41.)

⁴⁰¹ Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 345.

authentic faith, but also sufficiently unfamiliar for his experience of faith to be considered on its own terms without a hasty dismissal of it being unorthodox. As will be seen later, the capacity to remain open to unorthodox and even seemingly heretical perspectives is a key requirement for the reader if the challenge to faith presented by Job's wife – and the book as a whole – is to be recognized and understood.

As a foreign devotee of Yahweh, the simultaneity of Job's proximity and distance to an Israelite audience is established. This sense of remote connection is deepened through the recognizably patriarchal historical and social setting of the story. Clines writes:

The story of the Book of Job is set in the patriarchal era depicted in Genesis: like Abraham, for example, Job's wealth consists of his animals and his servants (1:3; 42:12; cf. Gen 12:16), and he himself as head of his family offers sacrifices without the intervention of any priest (1:5; cf. Gen 15:9-10). Like the patriarchs of Genesis, who live 175, 180, 147 and 100 (*sic*)⁴⁰² years (Gen 25:7; 35:28; 47:28; 50:26), Job lives 140 years (42:16). But the narrator is clearly depicting an archaic age and not writing of his own time.⁴⁰³

On the strength of this it can be surmised that the historical and social world suggested within the text aligns broadly with the historical and social world of ancient (pre-monarchic) Israel, or certainly with the agrarian economic milieu of ancient Palestine in Iron Age I (c. 1200 – 1000 BCE). This recognition opens the door for much fruitful exploration of various behind-the-text perspectives that can enable Job's wife to be seen in new ways. These, in turn, invite a revisitation of the text to consider the subtle

⁴⁰² According to Gen 50:26, Joseph died at the age of 110.

⁴⁰³ Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, lvii. The identification of the patriarchal period as the broad historical setting for the story of Job is further attested to within the rabbinic tradition. As discussed in section 3.1 on p.46 ff. in ch.1 above, the rabbinic tradition identifies Job's wife as Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, which explicitly locates the story of Job within the patriarchal period. Furthermore, the name of the first and foremost of Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite (2:11; 4:1; 15:1; 22:1; 42:7, 9), has a strong patriarchal connection in that one of Esau's sons was Eliphaz who was the father of Teman (Gen 36:4, 11).

clues hidden there that point to a far greater prominence and influence for Job's wife than what has commonly been assumed.

2.2 The lives of women in ancient Israel – the work of Carol Meyers

Reconstructing the lives and roles of women in ancient Israel has been one of the outstanding contributions of archaeologist and biblical scholar Carol Meyers over many years.⁴⁰⁴ Utilising a multi-disciplinary approach that draws archaeological, social-anthropological and ethnographic insights into conversation with the biblical text, she has challenged many of the assumptions that have been made about the isolation, seclusion and subordination of women in ancient Israel commonly made by biblical commentators, even (or maybe especially) those writing from within a feminist framework.⁴⁰⁵ The intent of her challenge is not to suggest that there was

⁴⁰⁴ Meyers' truly impressive output within this broad area of research includes a number of monographs, most notably *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988)., recently extensively revised and republished as *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).; as well as many articles and book chapters, a selection of which include: "Archaeology - a Window to the Lives of Israelite Women," in *Torah*, ed. Irmtraud Fischer, et al. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011); "In the Household and Beyond: The Social World of Israelite Women," *Studia Theologica* 63 (2009); "Engendering Syro-Palestinian Archaeology: Reasons and Resources," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 66, no. 4 (2003); "Having Their Space and Eating There Too: Bread Production and Female Power in Ancient Israelite Households," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*, no. 5 (2002); "Women and the Domestic Economy of Early Israel," in *Women in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Alice Bach (New York: Routledge, 1997); "Procreation, Production, and Protection: Male-Female Balance in Early Israel," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 51, no. 4 (1983).

⁴⁰⁵ Meyers cites a telling example of these kinds of assumptions when she writes:

One of the first studies of women in the Hebrew Bible in contemporary feminist scholarship, Phyllis Bird's essay on "Images of Women in the Old Testament," mentions women as indistinct background figures, without names, voices, or status. Her analysis of biblical texts leads her to conclude that women were dependent on men in economic, religious, and political spheres and that they are presented as inferior to men. [See Phyllis A. Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament," in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 49-50.] Decades later, similar perceptions – some based on general cultural notions, others on readings

absolute parity in the social roles and status of women and men, nor to deny the reality of certain social restrictions imposed upon women and the economic vulnerabilities they were exposed to in a patrilineal society that was organised along male descent lines.⁴⁰⁶ Rather, her intent is to guard against anachronistic retro projections of later repressive patriarchal regimes that can distort the picture of what life was really like for women in ancient Israel, diminish the regard and value in which they were held, deny the significance of their contribution, and ignore the not inconsiderable power that they were able to exercise in certain key spheres of influence.⁴⁰⁷

Meyers' challenge is built on two key foundations. The first is the distinction she makes between Israelite women and biblical women.⁴⁰⁸ She argues that the Hebrew

of biblical passages without consideration of social context – still are common. (Meyers, "Archaeology - a Window to the Lives of Israelite Women," 62.)

⁴⁰⁶ In an earlier article, Meyers traces the roots of the restriction of women to the seismic social changes that occurred at the time of the transition from the Bronze to Iron Ages. She writes:

During the Late Bronze Age, wars, famines, and plagues created a demographic crisis which intensified the role of women in domestic affairs and childbearing. When the crisis passed, the restriction of women to domestic circles was ingrained in Israelite society and ultimately became the basis for their subordination through the remainder of the biblical period and on into modern times. ("The Roots of Restriction: Women in Early Israel," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 41, no. 3 (1978): 91.)

⁴⁰⁷ In her 2013 Presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature, Meyers presented a bold case that the term "patriarchy" was an inadequate descriptor of ancient Israel, and argued that the patriarchy model should be abandoned as a way of thinking about that period of Israel's history. See "Was Ancient Israel a Patriarchal Society?," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133, no. 1 (2014).

⁴⁰⁸ The exact meaning of the term 'Israelite' is not without its own challenges, especially within the period of Iron Age I which forms the backdrop to this discussion. In the subsequent period of Iron Age II (1000 – 540 BCE), with the emergence of a monarchical, territorial state, the term 'Israelite' denoted a particular national (and indeed religious) identity, rather than an ethnic one. But prior to the time of the Monarchy, the precise content of the term remains unclear. Ahlström, for example, suggests that rather than ethnic designations, 'Canaan' referred to the urban and cultural centres whereas 'Israel' referred to the wooded highlands. (Gösta W. Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine from the Palaeolithic Period to Alexander's Conquest*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 285.)

Bible is a problematic source for reconstructing the lives of Israelite women, and that the women on display in the Bible cannot be regarded as emblematic of their unnamed and unmentioned sisters.⁴⁰⁹ The second is a careful consideration of the domestic agrarian economy of that milieu – utilising archaeological, social-anthropological and ethnographic tools – to identify the roles and contributions of women (and men) within that economy.

2.3 The role of women within the domestic agrarian economy of ancient Israel

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to detail the dramatic socio-economic and cultural changes that occurred in the Southern Levant in the 12th century BCE – which corresponds in the archaeological record to the period of transition from the Late Bronze Age to Iron Age I. Suffice to say that the dramatic collapse of Canaanite cities and the shift from the city-state model as a primary mode of societal and economic organisation to the proliferation of smaller, relatively independent and self-sufficient rural settlements (villages, hamlets or farmsteads), especially in the sparsely populated hill country of central Palestine, had significant implications for the everyday experiences of those inhabitants of the land and particularly the role of women within this redefined domestic, agrarian economy.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁹ Some of the reasons offered by Meyers as to why the Hebrew Bible is an unreliable source for elucidating the lives of Israelite women include the following: there are relatively few women who appear in its pages; those who appear tend to have exceptional roles as leaders, heroes or the wives of patriarchs or kings, and are therefore hardly representative of ordinary women; the text is dominated by national concerns, produced and presented within an urban context that largely ignores the everyday concerns of ordinary people, especially those in rural contexts; the legal material contains a heavy male bias, directed as it was primarily to the male heads of households, and those that did concern women were disproportionately focused on sexuality and reproductive issues, which certainly did not represent the sum total of a woman's existence. See Meyers, "Archaeology - a Window to the Lives of Israelite Women," 62-67.

⁴¹⁰ Reasons for this collapse are complex, but included shifts in international power dynamics, disruptions in international trade and dislocations of significant numbers of people with the demise of the Hittite empire in Anatolia, the end of the Mycenaean civilization in Greece, and the increase of marauding invasions of the 'Sea Peoples' (a term for up to nine different groups of seafaring raiders that included the Peleset, the biblical 'Philistines') in the

A number of features about this domestic, agrarian economy have particular implications for our understanding of the role of women within it. In the first instance, the settlement in the remote central highlands and the devolution of urban economic activity meant that the very survival of these highland inhabitants depended entirely on their ability to produce at least the minimum requirements for their own subsistence.

The climatic and topographical challenges of the central highlands were such that agricultural endeavour there was a highly labour-intensive operation. Foremost of these challenges was the issue of water security. Perennial water sources were virtually non-existent, which led to crop selection that could survive by the winter rains and summer dew.⁴¹¹ But the water requirements of humans and animals required year-round supplies, which could only be secured through the technological innovation of the water cistern. A classic statement in the archaeological register was Albright's assertion in 1949 that the highland frontier of Israel was able to be opened

eastern Mediterranean. Ahlström's comments on the implications of this collapse are instructive:

The collapse of the Hittite empire and other states created political and economic instability in the eastern Mediterranean around the twelfth century BCE. It terminated the Mycenaean 'monopoly' of the sea trade, as well as terminating the big powers' control of the overland trade routes. As we know, many urban economic centers were destroyed during this period, and with them their culture. The result was that such a 'frontier' country as Palestine with its sparsely populated hilly regions no longer benefitted from the international economic system and the kind of stability that the political and international market could provide for communities in marginal areas. This means that the populations on the fringes of the economic trade system (which was an urban phenomenon) had to secure their own economic system, which could mean a change in lifestyle. Here we find one of the reasons for the growth of settlements in the Palestinian hills during the twelfth and eleventh centuries BCE. (Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine from the Palaeolithic Period to Alexander's Conquest*, 334.)

On the Late Bronze Age collapse, see further, Neil Asher Silberman, "Of Bronze Age Crisis and Collapse," *Archaeology* 43, no. 5 (1990); Albert Leonard, Jr., "Archaeological Sources for the History of Palestine: The Late Bronze Age," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 52, no. 1 (1989).

⁴¹¹ Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*, 51, 54.

up "...thanks to the rapid spread of the act . . . of constructing cisterns and lining them with waterproof lime plaster."⁴¹² Meyers writes, "The introduction of the cistern into the inventory of Iron Age technologies was perhaps the *sine qua non* for the Israelite settlement of the highlands."⁴¹³ Construction of such cisterns was highly labour-intensive.

Other highly labour-intensive features of agricultural production were the clearing of land and the construction of terraces, through which the size and accessibility of viable arable land was extended. In addition to this, the seasonal requirements of ploughing, sowing and harvesting; the daily requirements of grazing and milking animals such as goats, sheep, cows and oxen; and all the other daily domestic necessities of subsistence within a household (some of which will be discussed below), meant that labour was a critical requirement for survival. The easiest way to achieve this was through large families. The implications of which, for women, are quite obvious – their role as child-bearers was essential if the longer-term labour needs of a household were to be met.

This role was not without its risks. The reality of high infant mortality meant that multiple pregnancies for every surviving child were the norm, and the inherent dangers of childbirth for the mother had a negative impact on the average life span of women.⁴¹⁴ But given the crucial importance of large families for survival and the rigorous demands and dangers of childbearing, it is likely that this role would have carried inherent social value and conferred upon mothers a certain status and standing within the household and the community. Indeed, the injunction to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28) finds its way into the religious consciousness of Israel as a

⁴¹² W.F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1949), 113.

⁴¹³ Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*, 54.

⁴¹⁴ It is estimated that just thirty years was the average life-span of women in ancient Israel, based on skeletal remains found in tombs, whereas men lived on average ten years longer. ("Everyday Life: Women in the Period of the Hebrew Bible," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 255.)

divine imperative, whereas the condition of barrenness was regarded as a curse (cf. Gen 16:2; 20:18; 1 Sam 1:5).⁴¹⁵

The mothering role was not separated from the other domestic obligations of a woman within the household, but was thoroughly integrated therein. Even over the period of carrying, birthing, weaning and raising young children, a woman would have continued to fulfil many other responsibilities within the home.⁴¹⁶ Following the birth of a child, responsibility for its care would have fallen almost exclusively upon the mother throughout the years of early childhood, although older children, grandmothers and aunts would certainly have helped. This meant that the socialization and informal education of young children was largely the domain of the mother. This continued beyond early childhood through the managerial function of mothers who would have overseen the many household activities that older children would have been required to fulfil.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁵ For a fascinating treatment of rabbinic perspectives of barrenness, see Judith R. Baskin, "Rabbinic Reflections on the Barren Wife," *The Harvard Theological Review* 82, no. 1 (1989). See also Rachel Havrelock, "The Myth of Birthing the Hero: Heroic Barrenness in the Hebrew Bible," (Brill Academic Publishers, 2008).

⁴¹⁶ Women would also have been involved in daily and seasonal field labour, such as weeding, planting and harvesting, especially in the gardens contiguous to the physical dwelling. The more physically demanding agricultural activities of clearing land, digging cisterns, building terraces and ploughing would have been undertaken primarily by men. Meyers, "Everyday Life: Women in the Period of the Hebrew Bible," 254.

⁴¹⁷ Within Israelite society, parental authority over children was shared by both fathers and mothers, with both parents being accorded the same right to respect – cf. Ex 20:12; Lev 20:9; Deut 21:18-21. In several places in the Hebrew Bible, the term "mother's house" or "mother's household" (בֵּית אִמִּי) is used (Gen 24:28; Ruth 1:8; SS 3:4; 8:2), rather than the more common "father's household" (בֵּית אָב), usually in the context of marriageable daughters, suggesting that mothers played some role in interfamily marriage arrangements. (See *ibid.*, 256.) Mothers were also the ones who usually named their children – cf. Gen 4:25; 19:37, 38; 29:32-35; 30:6, 8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 24, 35:18; 38:4-5; Ex 2:10; Jdg 13:24; 1 Sam 1:20; 4:21; 1 Chr 4:9; 7:16. A notable exception to this pattern is Job's naming of his daughters in 42:14 (which will be discussed below), although Clines is surely mistaken when he says that "this is the only place in the Hebrew Bible where a father names" (David J.A. Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, Word Biblical Commentary 18b (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 1238.) Instances where fathers name their children include Gen 4:26; 5:3; 16:15; 21:3; 38:3;

These additional household activities would have included the tasks around the manufacture of clothing – spinning, weaving, sewing – as well as tasks involved with the preparation and preservation of foodstuffs. One of the most important of which concerned the processing of cereal crops for the production of bread, the daily staff of life.

The process of transforming raw grains into baked bread was a complex one, requiring a combination of hard labour as well as technological expertise. According to Meyers, women would have exercised almost complete control over this vital daily function. Utilising ethnographic, ethnohistorical and iconographic data, she presents a compelling case that bread production in ancient Israel was a female-specific activity, often carried out in community with other women.⁴¹⁸ This had significant bearing on women's influence within the household, and the social, personal and even socio-political power that would have accrued to them as a direct, or indirect result of their particular economic contributions.⁴¹⁹

In concluding this discussion, two final quotes from Carol Meyers are instructive:

This examination of the [ancient Israelite] household as an arena of economic processes, carried out by women as well as men and involving multiple social worlds, allows us to recognize women as social actors whose connections with each other, within and across households, contributed in important and often unrecognized ways to the socioeconomic viability and political stability of their communities.⁴²⁰

41:51-52; Ex 2:22; 2 Sam 12:24; 1 Chr 7:23; cf. Gen 25:25; Hos 1:4, 6. What is significant is that there is no record in the Hebrew Bible of a father naming a daughter, with the sole possible exception of Hos 1:6.

⁴¹⁸ Meyers, "Having Their Space and Eating There Too: Bread Production and Female Power in Ancient Israelite Households."

⁴¹⁹ *ibid.*, 30-33.

⁴²⁰ "In the Household and Beyond: The Social World of Israelite Women," 35.

...women's economic contributions to the family household can be summarized by emphasizing two salient features. The first is the extraordinary, at least in comparison to modern life, amount of time involved in carrying out life-supporting daily activities. The time required for indoor, courtyard, and outdoor work, with some seasonal variation, was surely more than ten hours a day. The second, perhaps less noticeable but highly significant in terms of gender relations, is the degree of technological expertise involved in many if not most of these tasks. Whereas male farmwork is often characterized by activities requiring sustained efforts and physical strength, women's labor features a series of sophisticated and intricate operations. Many female (and male) jobs were simple and repetitive. But many more female tasks involved skill, experience, and planning.⁴²¹

3. Within-the-text perspectives

The discussion above of the lives and roles of women within ancient (premonarchic) Israel – which, it is argued, represents an appropriate and meaningful socio-historical backdrop for reading the book of Job and assessing the contribution of Job's wife within in – invites a return to the text itself to uncover any clues that, in the light of these behind-the-text perspectives, point to the prominence and influence of Job's wife that may have gone unnoticed.

The actual words of Job's wife in 2:9 and their effect upon Job and the interpretation of the book as a whole will be explored in chs. 5 and 6 below. The discussion here will focus on other elements within the text, particularly within the narrative frame of the prologue (1:1 – 2:13) and the epilogue (42:7-17). These are Job's wealth; Job's social status; Job's children ; Job's daughters in the epilogue; Job's sustenance and the provision of bread.

⁴²¹ "Everyday Life: Women in the Period of the Hebrew Bible," 255.

3.1 Job's wealth

The opening verses of the book describe Job as a man of considerable wealth, possessing large numbers of sheep, camels, oxen, donkeys and servants (1:3). The enormous size of Job's estate is a clear indicator that he had been massively successful economically, to the point of being described as "the greatest of all the people of the east" (1:3). How is this inordinate wealth creation explained? The text offers two subtly distinct explanations.⁴²²

The first is that Job's wealth was a consequence of his piety. In describing him as a man who was "blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned from evil" (1:1), the text then draws a causal connection between his piety and the children and possessions that were his (1:2-3). It does so through the use of the conjunction *wə* (ו) at the beginning of v.2 and v.3. This *waw* consecutive could be translated with a simple "and" or it could be translated "and so", suggesting a causal link between v.1 and vv.2-3. Newsom writes:

Does Job just happen to be rich and have a large family, or does he have these things because he is a man of exemplary piety? Although the narrator does not say explicitly, the very description of Job's family and wealth suggest a connection. All the numbers used are symbolic, suggesting completeness and perfection: seven sons and three daughters, for a total of ten children; sheep and camels in the same ratio of seven thousand and three thousand; and agricultural animals in a balanced distribution of five hundred plus five hundred. Just as Job's piety is complete and perfect, so also his family and property are complete and perfect.⁴²³

What is often overlooked, however, is that the causal link between v.1 and vv.2-3 is not the only such link possible in these verses. By the exact same logic, the *waw*

⁴²² The option that Job's wealth was acquired through inheritance can be excluded on the strength of 1:10, which states that it was "the work of his hands" that was blessed and that "his possessions have increased in the land."

⁴²³ Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 345.

consecutive at the beginning of v.3 establishes a causal link with v.2. In other words, it could be argued that Job's material wealth is related to the many children he had. To paraphrase these opening verses, reading a causal link in both the *waw* consecutives at the beginning of v.2 and v.3: "Job was pious, and so he had a large family, and because of this he grew exceedingly wealthy."

This reading resonates with the second explanation for Job's wealth offered by the text just a few verses later in ch.1. It comes from the heavenly conversation between the LORD and *haśśāṭān*, where Job's material success is described by *haśśāṭān* (and not disputed by God) as a direct consequence of the protective blessing (a "fence") that the LORD placed around Job and his household, enabling the work of his hands to be blessed (a reference to agricultural endeavor, cf. Gen 5:29) and the increase of his possessions in the land – primarily the flocks mentioned at the start of the chapter (1:10). In other words, the blessing of the Lord which occasioned such significant material prosperity for Job was mediated through the flourishing and safe-guarding of *Job and his household*.

The connection between a large family and material prosperity, hinted at in both of these explanations of Job's considerable wealth, is consistent with the economic necessity of procreation within the agrarian economy of ancient Israel. And the principle agent in the provision of many children to Job was, of course, his wife. Indeed, it could be argued that the reproductive capacity of Job's wife had a direct bearing on his economic wellbeing.

But it was not simply through her role as child-bearer that Job's wife contributed to Job's material wellbeing. Following the discussion above of the role of women in the domestic agrarian economy of ancient Israel, her further role in the production, transformation and allocation of material resources, either through her own direct labour or through her managerial oversight of other members of the household (children and servants), would have been a crucial component of the overall economic health and sustainability of Job's household.

3.2 Job's social status

The description of Job's considerable wealth in the first few verses of the book concludes with the assertion in 1:3 that he was "...the greatest of all the people of the east." His greatness should be understood not simply in economic terms, but rather as a measure of his considerable social standing, of which his material wealth was but a part.

By his own designation, he was one who was highly respected in the community as a person of authority and stature, one who championed the cause of the poor and the needy:⁴²⁴

⁴²⁴ The *Testament of Job* details Job's munificence to the poor in a hyperbolic way. In T. Job the numbers of sheep, camels, donkeys and oxen referenced in the biblical account in 1:3, refer to those animals dedicated solely to the benefit of the poor. For example, he designated 7000 sheep (out of a flock of 130 000) to be sheared for clothing the widows, orphans, the poor and helpless (T. Job 9:2-3).

For an alternative perspective that offers a stinging critique of Job's charity to the poor and his socio-economic largesse, see Erin Runions, "Ms Job and the Problem of God: A Feminist, Existentialist, Materialist Reading," in *From the Margins 1 : Women of the Hebrew Bible and Their Afterlives*, ed. Peter S. Hawkins and Lesleigh C. Stahlberg (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009). Probing the contradiction between Job's idyllic reverie in ch.29 of his past benevolence to the poor, and his hostile thoughts about them in ch.30, Runions writes:

Why would Job shift so suddenly between remembrance of rescuing the poor and reviling them? Might the Disney version of Job's former wealth be hiding something? Does the fact that such hostilities so easily emerge (on both sides) suggest that Job's memories might gloss over conflicts already on the boil? Might it point to a social situation in which there are hard feelings between the rich and the poor, in which philanthropy is also replete with revulsion and antagonism?

Certainly his friends think that maybe all was not as Job remembered in his glowing self-portrait. Earlier in the poem, Zophar strongly hints that Job oppressed the poor, by foreclosing on their houses (20:18-23). Eliphaz accuses him of not having helped the poor (22:6-9) and suggests that maybe he should give away some of his gold (22:24-25). The friends indicate that maybe Job is not blameless when it comes to financial wheeling and dealing. Of course the friends cannot be fully trusted, we know, but at the end of the day, the text, via God, does not accuse them of being wrong about Job, only in having spoken incorrectly about God (42:7-8). (ibid., 180-81.)

When I went out to the gate of the city,
 when I took my seat in the square,
the young men saw me and withdrew,
 and the aged rose up and stood;
the nobles refrained from talking,
 and laid their hands on their mouths;
the voices of princes were hushed,
 and their tongues stuck to the roof of their mouths.
When the ear heard, it commended me,
 And when the eye saw, it approved;
because I delivered the poor who cried,
 and the orphan who had no helper....
I was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame.
I was a father to the needy,
 and I championed the cause of the stranger....
I chose their way, and sat as chief,
 and I lived like a king among his troops,
like one who comforts mourners. (29:7-12, 15-16, 25)

Even Eliphaz, who through the course of the human dialogue (chs.3-27) will grow increasingly antagonistic towards Job, begins his opening speech by acknowledging the supportive, authoritative role that Job assumed within the community:

You have instructed many;
 you have strengthened the weak hands.
Your words have supported those who were stumbling,
 and you have made firm the feeble knees. (4:3-4)

Job's stature within his community points to the presence and positive influence of his wife in at least two ways. Firstly, the very fact that Job had the capacity to extend himself within the wider social sphere as an elder within the community is evidence of

the stability and economic well-being within his own household. Simply put, Job was free to exercise civic responsibility because his subsistence needs and those of his household were being adequately attended to. The wisdom hymn in Prov 31:10-31 offers a key insight in this regard. This text will be returned to later in this chapter and explored in greater detail, but one point can be highlighted here for the purposes of this discussion. In lauding the virtues of a capable wife, which include her oversight of the household's economic activities, the hymn makes this reference to the husband of such a wife:

Her husband is known in the city gates,
taking his seat among the elders of the land. (Prov 31:23)

In a paper exploring the male-female balance in ancient Israel, Meyers considers the three basic societal activities of procreation, production and protection and the energies invested in each by both men and women in pre-monarchic Israelite society.⁴²⁵ When males were required to invest more energy in the activities of protection – for instance, going off to battle in times of war – this necessitated a greater investment in the activities of production on the part of women. A different way of understanding this is that as women invested themselves more fully in the activities of production, this enabled the males to expend more energy in the activities of protection.

The male-dominated activities of protection were not limited to warfare, but included the just ordering of the wider community in general and the protection of the poor and marginalized in particular. This is a role that Job seems to have played with distinction within his community. His capacity to do so was in no small measure a consequence of the support and succor offered him by his wife.

Secondly, Job's eminent social status reflects on his wife in that it speaks of his credibility in the eyes of his community, a credibility in which she was positively

⁴²⁵ Meyers, "Procreation, Production, and Protection: Male-Female Balance in Early Israel."

implicated and to which she made a singular contribution. Job's standing and authority within the community would surely have been compromised were his wife regarded as being even of questionable repute.⁴²⁶

3.3 Job's children

The most obvious implicit referent to Job's wife in the book must surely be Job's children for they are, of course, her children too. This simple observation is especially significant given the reference in 42:13 to further sons and daughters being born to Job. This presupposes the agency of Job's wife, thereby establishing her presence at the end of the story and not just at its beginning. Before considering the significance of these children in the epilogue, the first set of children needs to be examined for the clues they provide for seeing Job and his wife more clearly.

The children in the prologue represent for Job a source of existential anxiety over which he tries to exercise some measure of ritualistic and pietistic control. The first thing we learn about these children is their appetite for a party. Regular feasts were held in the homes of each of the sons, to which their sisters were invited (1:4). Viewed positively, Job's sons exhibit a remarkable degree of harmonious mutuality and generosity in their times of shared festivity in which their sisters are intentionally included.

Given the recurring theme in the Hebrew Bible of conflict and hostility between brothers – for example, Cain and Abel (Gen 4); Jacob and Esau (Gen 27); Joseph and his brothers (Gen 37); Abimelech and his brothers (Judg 9); Eliab and David (1 Sam

⁴²⁶ For a treatment of the themes of honour, shame and social status in antiquity from a gendered perspective see Zeba Crook, "Honor, Shame, and Social Status Revisited," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 3 (2009). It is telling that in 31:9-10 – a passage that will be considered further below – the greatest humiliation that Job can imagine (envisioned in the passage as the appropriate punishment for the sin of adultery) is for his wife to be disgraced. As Clines puts it, "for a woman of his household to be shamed is the worst blow his own honor can suffer" (David J.A. Clines, *Job 21 - 37*, Word Biblical Commentary 18a (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 1018.)

17:28-30); Absalom and Amnon (2 Sam 13); Adonijah and Solomon (1 Kgs 1-2)⁴²⁷ – Job has much reason for thanksgiving for the ability of his sons and daughters to get along and their capacity for shared celebration. However, he doesn't see it that way. For Job, his children's festivities are a source of deep anxiety that threaten the very foundation of his world. It is telling that the first words of Job in the book are these: "It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed⁴²⁸ God in their hearts" (1:5). As a precaution and a safeguard, he would sacrifice burnt offerings on their behalf whenever their days of feasting were over (1:5). And to underscore the tremendous seriousness with which Job undertook these pious acts of intercession on behalf of his children, the scene concludes with the comment, "This is what Job always did." (1:5)

The precise occasion and character of these feasts are unclear. Newsom suggests that "...what is referred to here is a cycle of banquets lasting several days, hosted by each son on the occasion of his birthday."⁴²⁹ If correct, this adds weight to the positive, healthy and wholesome intention of these feasts as joyous celebrations of the gift of life, which in subtle ways would also have been a remembrance and honouring of their parents who gave them life, and especially their mother who brought them into

⁴²⁷ See Victor P. Hamilton, "278 נא," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 347.

⁴²⁸ The Hebrew word translated here as "cursed" is in fact the word "blessed" (*bāarak*) which is used euphemistically, thereby introducing a note of ambiguity into the very notion of blessing. There are seven occurrences of this word in the prose narrative (1:5, 10, 11, 21; 2:5, 9; 42:12), requiring the reader to decide when it is being used literally or euphemistically. This important feature of the prologue will be explored in detail in ch. 5. See Tod Linafelt, "The Undecidability of בָּרַךְ in the Prologue to Job and Beyond," *Biblical Interpretation* 4, no. 2 (1996).

⁴²⁹ Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 345. So too, Balentine, *Job*, 48; Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, 15. The NIV translates this verse with "His sons used to hold feasts in their homes on their birthdays..." The expression that suggests a birthday in 1:4 is "his day" (יוֹמֵי), which recurs in 3:1 where it is commonly translated as "the day of his birth" or "the day he was born". The text is ambiguous whether it was the 'birthday boy' who hosted the party, or whether his brothers threw a party for him in his house, but the result is the same.

the world. It also stands in sharp contrast to Job cursing the day of his birth in 3:1. If these were birthday celebrations, it begs the question why Job was not invited. Maybe he was but refused to attend for fear of being implicated in the blasphemy that could unwittingly occur on such occasions. Maybe he just wasn't that much fun to have around at a party. Whatever the reason, his absence is significant, for given the crucial necessity of the birth of children within that socio-economic milieu, Job of all people should have had reason for joyful gratitude on the occasion of his sons' birthdays.

The contrast between the dispositions of Job and his children could not be more marked. Job, who has already been identified as "blameless and upright" (1:1), seems to operate out of a worldview characterized by the fear of giving offence, even unwittingly, to God.⁴³⁰ Consequently, there is a sense of strict control that he exercises over every aspect of his life.⁴³¹ This control is evident, not only in his acts of piety on behalf of his children, but especially in his response following the news of the calamities that had befallen him (1:20-22).⁴³² His children, by contrast, seem unconstrained by such religious sensibilities. They exhibit a remarkable proclivity towards feasting and merriment, unfettered by their father's anxiety on their behalf.

The question arises – how is this distinction between Job and his children in the prologue explained? Are these children of his hedonistic reprobates exhibiting the rebelliousness of adolescence, or worse, a callous, obstinate indifference to the faith of their father? Has Job failed in his paternal responsibility to raise morally upright

⁴³⁰ Job's concern for his children was not simply that they might curse God, but that they might curse God in their hearts (1:5). This introduces the possibility of them unthinkingly or even unconsciously cursing God.

⁴³¹ The numbers of his children (ten, in the ratio of seven to three), his sheep and camels (ten thousand, in the same ratio of seven to three), and his oxen and donkeys (one thousand), 1:2-3, are clearly symbolic numbers suggesting completeness and perfection. It could be argued that such a precise estate points to a deep and neurotic need to exercise complete control.

⁴³² Vogels characterizes Job's actions and words in 1:20-22 as empty, conventional rites and superficial, formulaic religious responses, rather than the authentic outpourings of a grieving heart. See Walter Vogels, "Job's Empty Pious Slogans," in *The Book of Job*, ed. Willem A.M. Beuken (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995).

children who honour him with their obedience? Such possibilities gravitate against the tenor of the narrative tale which seeks to make the point that the sufferings that befell Job were not the result of any wickedness or inadequacy – neither his nor his children's. If his children's festive behavior cannot be explained as rebelliousness or wickedness, then the most likely alternative is that they were operating out of a radically different worldview from that of their father. A worldview unregimented by rigid rules and the fearful consequences of breaking them, but free to risk delight, to celebrate the joy of being alive and to revel in the gift of being family together.

How would such a worldview have been formed within them? The most plausible explanation is that this was a consequence of their mother's influence. She was the one whose very body brought them into the world and who nursed them at her breast. In a very direct way, the life that was in them was nurtured by the life that was in her. This extends way beyond the merely physical dimensions of existence. As Janzen puts it, "...behind the human mother's breast stands the breast of God."⁴³³ At the very least, the capacity within Job's children to celebrate life in the way in which they did hints at the kind of woman they had for a mother who nurtured this capacity within them.

We turn now to consider the significance of the children in the epilogue, and the ways they too enable us to see Job and his wife more clearly. If Job's further children at the end of the story (42:13) are seen merely as "replacements" for his earlier children, what will be missed is the transformation in Job that their very existence signals.⁴³⁴

Ellen Davis writes:

⁴³³ J. Gerald Janzen, *At the Scent of Water : The Ground of Hope in the Book of Job* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2009), 76.

⁴³⁴ An underlying supposition within this thesis is that over the course of the book as a whole, Job undergoes a significant transformation, in which his wife plays a crucial and catalytic role. For a further treatment of the role of Job's wife in the transformation of Job, see Ellen van Wolde, "The Development of Job: Mrs Job as Catalyst," in *A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

...the clearest expression of the renewal of Job's mind is not anything he says. It is his willingness to have more children. I have heard it said in modern Israel that the most courageous act of faith the Jews have ever performed was to have babies after the Holocaust, to trust God with more defenseless children. The note at the end of the book that Job had seven sons and three daughters is often considered to be a cheap parting shot – as though God could make it all up by giving Job another set of children to replace the ones who were lost. But that is to judge the last scene of the book from the wrong side. This book is not about justifying God's actions; it is about Job's transformation. It is useless to ask how much (or how little) it costs God to give more children. The real question is how much it costs Job to become a father again.⁴³⁵

According to Davis, the decision to have more children would have been costly for Job. But it would also have been costly for Job's wife to become a mother again – and not just because of the physical demands upon her body and the personal risks associated with at least ten further pregnancies.⁴³⁶ The emotional pain of a mother losing all ten of her children at once cannot be overstated. Such a trauma would change her forever, leaving a mark that would never be erased. The decision for such a mother to have more children would have been an agonizing one, with each new birth being a bitter-sweet reminder of her previous loss. Yet, as hinted at in the nature of the first set of children, Job's wife was surely someone with an appetite for life. Together with Job she has more children – a transformative experience for him in which she draws him over to a different way of being in the world, which she had always embodied.

⁴³⁵ Ellen F. Davis, *Getting Involved with God : Rediscovering the Old Testament* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley Publications, 2001), 141-42.

⁴³⁶ It is not my concern here to consider the literal plausibility of the narrative tale and the implications of one woman having a total of twenty children.

3.4 Job's daughters in the epilogue

The curious detail about Job's daughters in 42:14-15 provides a key interpretive clue to the change that Job has undergone by the conclusion of the book and the influence of his wife in that change. The significance of these verses is often overlooked. Bruce Zuckerman, for example, writes:

There are elements in the story (especially in the Epilogue) that seem completely extraneous.... The most obvious example is the discussion of Job's daughters in 42:14-15. One could excise these verses from the conclusion of Job's story without any adverse effect. One could even make a good case that this tightening of the narrative line would be a distinct benefit, since it would make the conclusion more direct and simple, thereby heightening its overall impact.⁴³⁷

Far from being an "extraneous" element that "one could excise...from the conclusion of Job's story without any adverse effect," the verses on Job's daughters in the epilogue provide an important and indispensable insight into the nature of Job's transformation. They comprise three aspects – the naming of his daughters, the description of their considerable beauty and his granting them an inheritance along with their brothers.

3.4.1 *Naming the daughters*

As already mentioned above, the norm in the Hebrew Bible is for mothers, rather than fathers, to name their children, although exceptions to this pattern do occur.⁴³⁸

Accordingly, the detail that Job is the one who names his daughters could be read in various ways. One possibility is that by Job fulfilling this ostensibly motherly function, the absence of his wife is further highlighted. The irony, however, is that drawing attention to Job's missing (or apparently "non-existent") wife in this way

⁴³⁷ Bruce Zuckerman, *Job the Silent : A Study in Historical Counterpoint* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 159.

⁴³⁸ See footnote 417 on p.197 above.

simply serves to confirm her presence and agency as a mother, for the simple and incontrovertible reason that there are children to name in the first place.

A second option is that Job's naming of his daughters could be read as a sign of the disruption of old customs and the challenge of traditional conventions. Naming children is not inherently or intrinsically a function of motherhood, which Job now confidently (or defiantly) asserts as someone newly liberated from the strictures and constraints of his former moral universe. A third possibility, not dissimilar to the second, is that by assuming a traditionally feminine role in naming his daughters, Job is declaring that the arbitrary binary divisions that had demarcated and regimented his former life, offering the illusion of order and control, no longer hold sway over him, evidenced as he now identifies more directly with the feminine in a truly transcendent way. Indeed, it is telling that it is only the *daughters* who are named in the text, highlighting the privileging of the feminine in Job's recreated universe.

A fourth possibility is that Job named his daughters because his wife deliberately and intentionally refused to do so, thereby affording Job the opportunity to speak in a new and transformative way. Notwithstanding the verdict of the LORD in the epilogue that Job has "spoken of me [the LORD] what is right" (42:7, 8), according to Job's wife in the prologue, Job's formulaic speech had been inadequate, precisely because it betrayed his abject failure to recognize what was hidden in plain view before him. By remaining silent at this juncture, she graciously invites Job to a new way of both seeing and speaking, by boldly naming what is before him in a daringly eye-opening way. This is precisely what he does in the names that he chooses for his daughters.

The first he named Jemimah, which possibly means "dove" or "turtle-dove".⁴³⁹ The second he named Keziah, which means "cassia," a fragrant spice of the cinnamon

⁴³⁹ This name is a *hapax legomenon*, and so its precise meaning is uncertain. BDB (p.410b) connects "Jemimah" with the Arabic *yamamat* "dove". So too Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1229; Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 635; Balentine, *Job*, 717. The Hebrew word for dove recurs repeatedly in the love poem that is the Song of

family that was used in perfumery.⁴⁴⁰ The third was named Keren-happuch, which means “horn of antimony”, a cosmetic eyeshadow.⁴⁴¹ Each of these names are daringly sensuous, unapologetically highlighting and celebrating the femininity of his daughters.

3.4.2 *The daughters' beauty and inheritance*

The text goes on to describe their considerable beauty, stating that “In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters” (42:15), and concludes with the astonishing detail about them being given an inheritance by their father along with their brothers, a flagrant contradiction and disregard of the clearly established provisions for inheritance within the biblical tradition, one of the bedrocks upon which the patrilineal society of ancient Israel was rooted.⁴⁴²

Solomon, where it is used to describe the beloved. For example, “My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, / the darling of her mother, / flawless to her that bore her” (SS 6:9).

⁴⁴⁰ The common noun “cassia” occurs in Ps 45:8 as a *hapax legomenon*, where it refers to the scenting of the king's robes for the marriage ceremony, or, according to Clines, the *queen's* clothes. Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1238. See Richard E. Averbeck, “קציעה 7904,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997).

⁴⁴¹ Antimony is described in BDB as a “black mineral powder, for increasing brilliance of eyes by darkening edges of lids” (p.806b).

⁴⁴² Numbers 27:1-8 recounts the story of the daughters of Zelophehad who claimed an inheritance right because their father had died without any male issue. The thrust of the story is quite specific that the rights of sons to inherit were pre-eminent, and that daughters could only inherit if there were no sons. This is made explicit in the new legal provision that arose out of this incident, “If a man dies, and has no son, then you shall pass his inheritance on to his daughter” (Num 27:8). Cf. Jos 17:3-6. However, in Gen 31:14-16, Rachel and Leah express certain inheritance expectations, even though they had brothers. See O.J. Baab, “Marriage,” in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick et al (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 702. See also Christopher J.H. Wright, “נחל 5706,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997). The idea of patrimony, the ancestral-land (*nahalah* נַחֲלָה), was a central cultural component of the Israelite household economy, which those in possession of the land had a profound obligation to uphold. Tropper writes:

Landholding families sought to preserve their patrimonies at all costs since, in a certain sense, the patrimony did not really belong to them. Rather, the patrimony was considered the property of a much larger timeless family which extended far into the past and

Once again, the presence of a *waw* consecutive in 42:15 requires an assessment of whether the clause about the daughters' inheritance is a logical or necessary consequence of that which immediately precedes it, namely the clause concerning their considerable beauty. Simply put, did Job break with tradition in giving his daughters an inheritance along with their brothers, just because they were good looking? A feminist critique rightly decries the insinuation that it was their physical beauty that prompted Job to act in this way. Some commentators see in this a perpetuation of a patriarchal worldview in which women's value is defined according to their sexual appeal. Wilcox writes:

...what we have emphasized here is *not* the liberation of woman to become an equal to man, but painted, perfumed, sexual beauty. Job's old age is blessed with the almost illicit pleasure of sexually attractive daughters.⁴⁴³

However, to limit the daughters' beauty to something merely physical in a sexually objectified way is to diminish and demean the true nature of beauty. After the horrors that Job had endured in which the brutal injustice of life had been laid bare in all its naked ugliness, the capacity to recognize beauty is itself a beautiful thing, and testifies to a healing and transforming grace at work within Job.

Certainly, there is an unmistakable femininity to this beauty. Indeed, it is no coincidence that these are *female* characters that are the focus of the conclusion of the story. In the male-dominated landscape of the book, it is precisely the revisioning of the feminine that allows Job to give expression to the dramatic shift that has occurred within him. Stephen Mitchell expresses it well when he says, "There is something

indefinitely into the future. Current landholders were therefore viewed simply as the contemporary custodians of the patrimony. (Amram Tropper, "The Economics of Jewish Childhood in Late Antiquity," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 76 (2005): 197.)

For a comprehensive treatment of the legal provisions and practices governing property transfer in the Bible, see Richard H. Hiers, "Transfer of Property by Inheritance and Bequest in Biblical Law and Tradition," *Journal of Law and Religion* 10, no. 1 (1993).

⁴⁴³ John T. Wilcox, *The Bitterness of Job: A Philosophical Reading* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 222.

enormously satisfying about this prominence of the feminine at the end of Job.... It is as if, once Job has learned to surrender, his world too gives up the male compulsion to control. [The daughters] appear with the luminous power of figures in a dream: we can't quite figure out why they are so important, but we know they are."⁴⁴⁴

Clearly, Job's eyes have been opened to see his daughters in a whole new light. Unconstrained by cultural convention or the need to "play it by the book," he goes public with his broadened perspective of who they really are, recognizing their individuality, celebrating their beauty, affirming their importance, redefining their place and honouring their rightful entitlements within his reconfigured world.

This newfound capacity to see his daughters in fresh ways is perhaps the most compelling evidence of the transformation that Job has undergone. His encounter with the LORD in the whirlwind was certainly the decisive moment of this transformation, but the enduring presence and influence of his wife, who already embodied the perspectives of this new worldview, surely played a complementary and catalytic part in that work of transformation. Could it be that in his daughters, Job was now able to recognize a reflection of his wife, and that the ways in which he honours them at the end of the story is a way for him to honour her? At the very least, in a subtle but palpable way, the presence and influence of Job's wife is felt through her daughters at the very conclusion of the book, as it had been at the very beginning through all her children.

3.5 Job's sustenance and the provision of bread

The wholesale destruction of Job's estate and the death of his children (1:13-19) raise certain questions about his continued subsistence. For instance, how long did he have to survive before his eventual restoration, and how exactly did he achieve this, given the fact that all his means of production had been obliterated? These are questions

⁴⁴⁴ Stephen Mitchell, *The Book of Job*, Rev. ed. (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1987), xxx.

unaddressed by the biblical text, and might even betray an inappropriately literalist view of the events that befell Job that could distract from the real import and meaning of his story.

But not so the *Testament of Job*, which boldly answers these questions directly. *T.Job* clearly states that Job spent, quite incredibly, no less than forty-eight years on the dung heap outside the city, during which time he was cared for by his wife who provided bread for him.⁴⁴⁵ She did so by working as a servant, by begging in the market place, and finally by selling her hair.⁴⁴⁶ One of the variant names for Job's wife in *T.Job*, Sitidos, is thought to be a derivative of either of the Greek words for 'bread' or 'giving bread', indicating the importance and centrality of this role performed by Job's wife.⁴⁴⁷

Within the biblical text itself only a few temporal markers exist that indicate the passage of time and hint at the duration of Job's season of affliction. The phrase "One day..." (וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם) in 2:1, following the calamities of ch.1, suggests an indefinite period of time had passed after Job's first round of woes before the next onslaught began.⁴⁴⁸ The three friends sit with Job in silence for "seven days and seven nights" (2:13). In the human dialogue, Job says that he has been "allotted months of emptiness" (7:3) as he describes the unending nature of his suffering. (While any diligent student who has painstakingly grappled with the Hebrew poetry of the human dialogue knows that the back-and-forth of the disputation between Job and his friends went on for a *very* long time!) The point of this is that these subtle temporal markers in the text convey the sense that Job's suffering, with all the privation that it brought,

⁴⁴⁵ *T.Job* 21:1 (Spittler). The translation by James puts the duration of Job's affliction as seven years.

⁴⁴⁶ *T.Job* 21:2; 22:3; 23:1-11.

⁴⁴⁷ See Pieter W. van der Horst, "Images of Women in the Testament of Job," in *Studies on the Testament of Job*, ed. Michael A. Knibb and Pieter W. van der Horst (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 97.

⁴⁴⁸ So the *International Standard Version* translates the phrase as "Some time later..."

was not a fleeting experience. And yet, he was somehow sustained throughout it all, in spite of his own mental state of mind in which he actively longed for death.⁴⁴⁹

This opens a gap in the text for the presence and agency of his wife to be recognized as she somehow found a way to provide for Job's material needs. Three pieces of evidence lend weight to this conclusion. Firstly, as already discussed above, bread production in ancient Israel was a female-specific activity. As the only female character in the book during Job's season of affliction, his wife is the most plausible candidate for this role.

Secondly, the text gravitates against the possibility that Job was the recipient of the charity of others. In his closing soliloquy in chps.29-31, Job laments the fact that whereas he had championed the cause of the poor and needy (cf. 29:12-13, 15-16), he has now become an object of derision, rather than compassion:

And now they mock me in song;
I am a byword to them.
They abhor me, they keep aloof from me;
they do not hesitate to spit at the sight of me....
On my right hand the rabble rise up;
they send me sprawling, and build roads for my ruin.
They break up my path, they promote my calamity;
no one restrains them. (30:9-10, 12-13)

Thirdly, Job himself makes direct reference to his wife's ongoing role in the processes of food production during his time of suffering and impoverishment. He does so in ch.31, the context of which is his protestation of innocence through the use of an elaborate oath of exculpation. "The oath here has the form of a curse upon oneself that is meant to come into effect if the person swearing it is telling a lie. The punishment Job calls down upon himself does not always correspond very closely to the crime in

⁴⁴⁹ Cf. 3:11-26; 6:8-9; 10:18-22; 17:1

question, but there is in general a concept of retribution underlying the principle of such an oath."⁴⁵⁰

The section in question involves a declaration by Job of his innocence of the sin of adultery, and the punishment he thinks would be appropriate were he guilty of such a crime:

If my heart has been enticed by a woman,
and I have lain in wait at my neighbor's door;
then let my wife grind for another,
and let other men kneel over her. (31:9-10)

It sounds strange to our modern ears that the punishment for violating another man's wife should be the violation of one's own wife.⁴⁵¹ But the operant logic here for Job is that if he robbed another man of his wife, then justice demands that he should forfeit his own wife.⁴⁵² For our purposes here, the telling phrase is, "then let my wife grind for another." While some see in the term "grind" a sexual connotation – which corresponds with the unambiguously sexual image in the second part of the verse of men kneeling over his wife – such a sexual connotation would require an emendation of the text.⁴⁵³ Rather, the term "grind" can be read in its plain sense referring to the function of grinding grain within the process of bread production.

⁴⁵⁰ Clines, *Job 21 - 37*, 1012.

⁴⁵¹ The punishment for adultery, according to Lev 20:10, is death by stoning for both parties.

⁴⁵² Phyllis Bird writes:

Adultery was a violation of the fundamental and exclusive right of a man to the sexuality of his wife. It was an attack upon his authority in the family and consequently upon the solidarity and integrity of the family itself. The adulterer robbed the husband of his essential honor, while the unfaithful wife defied his authority, offering to another man that which belonged only to him – and that which constituted her primary responsibility toward him. (Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament," 51.)

⁴⁵³ See Clines, *Job 21 - 37*, 962-63, 1019. Cf. Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 553. A particularly vivid example of such a translation would be Stephen Mitchell's rendering of 31:9-10: "If my loins were seduced by a woman and I

For Job, the loss of his wife would include, first and foremost, the loss of this key aspect of her industry within his life. Significantly, the formulation of this aspect of his oath occurs within the context of his destitution, giving a strong indication that even in his penury his wife was still present and labouring to provide for his daily needs.

In doing so, Job's wife foreshadows and reflects a key aspect of the nature of God that will be revealed in the divine speeches. Namely, the surprising outpouring of sustenance in the desolate wastelands and the provision of food for wild animals:

Who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain,
and a way for the thunderbolt,
to bring rain on a land where no one lives,
on the desert, which is empty of human life,
to satisfy the waste and desolate land,
and to make the ground put forth grass? (38:25-27)

Can you hunt the prey for the lion,
or satisfy the appetite of the young lions....
Who provides for the raven its prey,
when its young ones cry to God,
and wander about for lack of food? (38:39-41)

There can be little doubt that Job's experience of suffering was like a desolate wasteland for him.⁴⁵⁴ He identifies directly and explicitly with the animals of the wilderness when he says, "I am the brother of jackals, and a companion of ostriches"

loitered at my neighbor's door – let any man take my wife and grind in between her thighs!" (Mitchell, *The Book of Job*, 73.)

⁴⁵⁴ In 19:13-19, Job describes his sense of alienation from family and friends, and the experience of isolation and abandonment that was his, in which the comforts and configurations of his former life have all been stripped away.

(30:29). By providing sustenance for Job in this condition, against all the odds, Job's wife quite literally becomes an embodiment of God.

This is underscored at the end of the book, where in the epilogue it states that the LORD restored the fortunes of Job (42:10), and thereafter his family and former acquaintances came and "ate bread with him in his house" (42:11). Once again, assuming the agency of Job's wife in the production of bread, the provision of this meal – as a sign of Job's return from the wilderness of isolation and his restoration to community – points to the role of Job's wife as an instrument of divine providential grace within his life.

4. Intertextual perspectives⁴⁵⁵

What justification is there for claiming a place of greater prominence and influence for Job's wife within the book as a whole? This has been the guiding question of this chapter. Thus far, explorations behind the text and within the text have revealed that

⁴⁵⁵ The term "intertextuality" was first coined in 1966 by the philosopher and literary critic Julia Kristeva. (See María Jesús Martínez Alfaro, "Intertextuality: Origins and Development of the Concept," *Atlantis* 18, no. 1/2 (1996): 268.) She used it to broaden Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of "dialogism", in which he asserted that the novel as a linguistic entity was not a single unified whole but rather a hybrid collection of many ideas, forms and voices, a veritable "mosaic of quotations" as it were, coalescing as a supposed dialogue between the novelist and earlier writers. (Jill Felicity Durey, "The State of Play and Interplay in Intertextuality," *Style* 25, no. 4 (1991): 617.) Over the intervening half a century since the term was first introduced it has come to be used in a variety of ways. "Intertextuality is one of those extremely useful and yet strangely vague theoretical concepts: the liberal definition would be that it refers to any form of interrelation between any number of texts, from the instances of clear reactions of one text to another (as in parody, for example) to the more general idea that there is not a single text that does not possess traces of other texts within itself." (Andrea Lesic-Thomas, "Behind Bakhtin: Russian Formalism and Kristeva's Intertextuality," *Paragraph* 28, no. 3 (2005): 1.) As such, a word of caution needs to be sounded. If the central concern of intertextual interpretation is to notice or forge connections between texts, this can easily lead to a never-ending reading process, as any text is potentially the intertext of every other text. For a critique of intertextuality as a tool for literary interpretation, see William Irwin, "Against Intertextuality," *Philosophy and Literature* 28, no. 2 (2004).

as a woman, a wife and a mother she played an instrumental part in helping to build Job's initial circumstances of prosperity; in sustaining him through his subsequent experience of privation; and in his eventual restoration within a renewed and revisioned universe.

We turn now to a consideration of two other passages within the Hebrew Bible that connect with the story of Job's wife in ways that confirm some of the insights gained in this chapter thus far. The parallels between these passages and the story of Job's wife are such that they add their corroborating testimony in support of the assertion that Job's wife can rightly be regarded as a woman of prominence and influence within the book as a whole. The first will be a very brief reference to the 'capable wife' in Prov 31:10-31. The second will be a substantial treatment of Abigail in 1 Sam 25.

4.1 The capable wife in Proverbs 31:10-31

The reason for citing this passage as an intertextual reference to Job's wife stems from a direct textual connection, already alluded to above, between Prov 31:23 and Job 29:7-8. The two passages read thus:

Her husband is known in the city gates,
taking his seat among the elders of the land. (Prov 31:23)

When I went out to the gate of the city,
when I took my seat in the square,
the young men saw me and withdrew,
and the aged rose up and stood. (Job 29:7-8)

Carol Meyer's insights about the male-female balance in the division of labour in ancient Israel among the three primary societal activities of procreation, production and protection were discussed earlier in this chapter. The point that was made is that procreation was a predominantly female domain, protection a predominantly male

one, and the activities of production were shared among the sexes in varying ways, depending on their relative availability from the other tasks of procreation or protection. As mentioned above, the male-dominated activities of protection were not limited to warfare, but included the just ordering of the wider community in general and the protection of the poor and marginalized in particular. A husband's ability to engage in these sorts of civic activities was therefore an indication that the immediate needs concerning the activities of production within his household were being adequately managed. This is explicitly established in Prov 31, where the central thrust of the passage is on the wife's extensive management of the domestic economy of the household:

She seeks wool and flax,
and works with willing hands....
She rises while it is still night
and provides food for her household
and tasks for her servant girls.
She considers a field and buys it;
with the fruit of her hand she plants a vineyard....
She perceives that her merchandise is profitable....
...all her household are clothed in crimson....
She makes linen garments and sells them....
She looks well to the ways of her household....

(Prov 31:13, 15-16, 18a, 21b, 24a, 27a)

In the light of these substantial economic activities in which this capable wife orders the activities of production within the household, her husband is free to "take his seat among the elders of the land" (Prov 31:23b).

The reference to Job doing likewise (Job 29:7-8) draws a direct line of comparison between the capable wife of Proverbs 31 and Job's own wife, suggesting that her

influence and importance within the domestic economy of Job's household, including the building up of the considerable wealth of Job's estate, was substantial.

This intertextual connection lends weight to one of the assertions within this chapter of the crucial role that women played in the domestic agrarian economy of ancient Israel. In the light of this, we turn now to what will be a far more substantial intertextual analysis of the story of Abigail in 1 Sam 25, and the light that her story sheds on that of Job's wife.

4.2 Abigail, the wife of Nabal and David (1 Sam 25)

The colourful story of Abigail in 1 Sam 25 has been selected as an intertextual conversation partner within this chapter on the prominence and influence of Job's wife for two broad reasons – one general, and one specific. The general reason is that Abigail's story validates the assertions made earlier in this discussion of the kind of influence that a wife could have exercised within the agrarian domestic economy of ancient Israel. On this point alone her story casts light on the kind of influence that Job's wife could similarly have exercised within her household.

And yet, tellingly, Abigail's story – in which a woman is allowed to retain the role of chief protagonist on a stage cluttered with male characters – is atypical within the androcentric bias of the biblical narrative. What is more, ultimately even this story about a courageous, independent and sharp-witted woman is swallowed up within another more privileged story about a man.⁴⁵⁶ For even though Abigail takes the bold risk of stepping beyond the confines of the gender-delineated role that had been given to her and is surprisingly lauded within the text for her good sense, her strategic

⁴⁵⁶ For example, Barbara Green argues that 1 Sam 25 is part of a larger literary unit that comprises 1 Sam 24-26, the purpose of which is to explore the relationship between David and Saul, the demise of Saul as king and especially the issue of how Saul's reign must not end. Within this analysis, Nabal (Abigail's husband) is simply a rhetorical representation of the character of Saul while Abigail, similarly, is merely a literary pawn on a chessboard of monarchic intrigue. See Barbara Green, "Enacting Imaginatively the Unthinkable: 1 Samuel 25 and the Story of Saul," *Biblical Interpretation* 11, no. 1 (2003).

foresight and visionary speech as a consequence; in the end she is silenced by the continuing narrative that imposes upon her the restrictions prescribed by the language of *wife*.⁴⁵⁷ Alice Bach writes:

Women have moments of strong speech and proud action in male-centered biblical narratives, but strong independent women act at the pleasure of their male creators. Too forceful and they embody male fears, and must be silenced or written out of the narrative.⁴⁵⁸

The silencing (or narrative death) of Abigail raises intriguing questions about the tolerable limits for the prominence and influence of women sanctioned by the biblical text, and whether the silencing (and attempted narrative murder)⁴⁵⁹ of Job's wife can be read in a similar way.

The specific reason for the choice of this story as an intertextual conversation partner within this discussion has to do with the particular lines of convergence between Abigail and Job's wife on the one hand, and Job and Nabal on the other. Before

⁴⁵⁷ The silencing of Abigail is evident in the fact that following her acceptance of David's proposal of marriage she never gets to speak again in the biblical narrative. On only five subsequent occasions in the Hebrew Bible is her name recounted, but then only ever as one of David's wives – always the second, after Ahinoam. (Cf. 1 Sam 27:3; 30:5; 2 Sam 2:2; 3:3; 1 Chr 3:1.) Even the birth of a son, Chileab, is described as David's son (2 Sam 3:3). Following the death of Amnon, David's firstborn, who was murdered by his half-brother Absalom (2 Sam 13:23-29), Chileab would have been next in line to succeed David as king, which would have placed Abigail in the prominent position of mother to the king. Yet, Chileab does not feature in the succession intrigues and battles between David's sons, and indeed is never even mentioned again following the reports of his birth. Thus, at every turn the text imposes upon Abigail a form of narrative death.

⁴⁵⁸ Alice Bach, *The Pleasure of Her Text : Feminist Readings of Biblical & Historical Texts* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 7. Bach goes on to offer some speculative suggestions for the influence that Abigail may have exercised among the other wives of David, even though such a role is unattested by the biblical narrative. *Ibid.*, 37.

⁴⁵⁹ I say 'attempted' because as will be discussed in ch. 7, the silence of Job's wife does not necessarily equate to absence, or narrative death, but a different kind of presence and influence for her in the text.

turning to these convergences, a brief synopsis of the key elements of the story in 1 Sam 25 would be helpful.

4.2.1 *Synopsis of 1 Samuel 25*

Abigail's husband was a very wealthy man by the name of Nabal with sizeable flocks and herds, who was shearing his sheep (vv.2-3).⁴⁶⁰ Sheepshearing was a festive time of excess and plenty,⁴⁶¹ recognized by David as the ideal opportunity (literally "a good day" – v.8) to seek compensation from Nabal for the protection afforded his flocks and shepherds by David's men in the wilderness (vv.4-8).⁴⁶² Nabal refused David's request in a sneeringly dismissive way, whereupon David swore lethal reprisals for the offense he had been given (vv.9-13, 21-22). Upon being informed of all that had happened (vv.14-17), Abigail takes the risky initiative of dissuading David from his stated intention of taking vengeance. She does so through a combination of material gifts of food for David (vv.18-20) and through an eloquent and prophetic speech, in which she apologizes for her husband's folly and invokes the LORD'S restraining influence to guard David from any bloodguilt that would compromise his ascent to the throne (vv.23-31). David is persuaded and relents, recognizing in Abigail the agency and blessing of the LORD (vv.32-35). Following Abigail's disclosure to Nabal – after he had sobered up from a drunken feast – of all that had transpired with David, the LORD strikes Nabal dead (vv.36-38).⁴⁶³ David sees in Nabal's death the retributive

⁴⁶⁰ All verse references in the sections focusing on Abigail's story that follow, unless otherwise indicated, are from 1 Sam 25.

⁴⁶¹ According to Geoghegan, "sheepshearing in ancient Israel was much more than a pastoral duty; it was a significant celebration, characterized by feasting, drunkenness and the settling of old scores." (Jeffrey C. Geoghegan, "Israelite Sheepshearing and David's Rise to Power," *Biblica* 87, no. 1 (2006): 55.)

⁴⁶² Some commentators have suggested that David was running a protection racket. See Bruce C. Birch, "The First and Second Books of Samuel: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck et al (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 1166; Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 176, 79.

⁴⁶³ Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of vv.37-38 is a treat, "But in the morning, after Nabal had sobered up, she told him the whole story. Right then and there he had a heart attack and fell

justice of the LORD at work. He then seeks to make Abigail his wife, to which she consents (vv.39-42).

4.2.2 *Abigail's example of a wife's influence*

Abigail demonstrates a remarkable degree of authority and autonomy over the resources of her household. She has access to and control over large quantities of food (vv.18, 27, 35) and is able to issue orders to household servants that are obeyed (vv.19, 42). When she speaks it is “with the wise and diplomatic rhetoric of a woman accustomed to being in charge.”⁴⁶⁴ This corroborates the picture painted earlier in this chapter of the influential role that women, and especially wives, would have played within the household economy of pre-monarchic Israel.⁴⁶⁵ This leads Levenson to see

into a coma. About ten days later God finished him off and he died.” (Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 505.) For an interesting discussion about possible medical diagnoses of what happened to Nabal, and the points of connection and disconnection between the Hebrew words for “heart” and the physical human organ of the same name, see Marjorie O' Rourke Boyle, “The Law of the Heart: The Death of a Fool (1 Samuel 25),” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120, no. 3.

⁴⁶⁴ Carol Meyers, “Was Ancient Israel a Patriarchal Society?,” *ibid.* 133, no. 1 (2014): 22.

⁴⁶⁵ It is acknowledged that Abigail's story is set within the socio-historical context of the early monarchy, and the composition thereof would have occurred even later than that. (For a helpful summary of some of the major positions and approaches concerning the composition and dating of the books of Samuel, including Martin Noth's influential hypothesis of the so-called Deuteronomistic History, see Birch, “The First and Second Books of Samuel: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections,” 951-55.) But the socio-economic landscape and gender relations of pre-monarchic Israel would still have pertained, as the institution of the monarchy was still being established and so the concomitant structural changes within society that accompanied the monarchy hadn't yet truly taken root. Indeed, one of the features of the narrative at this juncture is that the position and security of the first king, Saul, was tenuous at best. [The Abigail story is bracketed on either side in 1 Sam 24 and 1 Sam 26 by two parallel stories of David sparing Saul's life. Furthermore, the particular function of this story within DtrH is to contribute to a broader narrative that seeks to legitimize David's ascent to the throne, and delegitimize Saul. Accordingly, “the character of Nabal in this story seems to represent Saul in many details” (*ibid.*, 1164.) For a detailed discussion of the Saul-Nabal connection, see Robert Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History. Part Two: 1 Samuel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 211-12.]

in Abigail an example of the capable wife described in Prov 31:10-31,⁴⁶⁶ thereby forging a connection with Job's wife who, as demonstrated above, represents a comparable example of such a wife. At the very least, as the wife and mother of a large and wealthy household, Job's wife occupied a similar position to Abigail, and therefore could reasonably have exercised a similar kind of influence.

4.2.3 *Abigail's independence and good sense*

Abigail shows herself to be an independently minded woman, capable of taking the initiative and making her own decisions. The text is explicit that she acted without seeking her husband's approval and even without his knowledge (vv.19, 36); she is able to leave the estate on her own without a chaperone (v.19)⁴⁶⁷; and later in the story she accepts David's proposal of marriage herself (v.41), without the intermediation of any other male characters. Such autonomous action on the part of a female, and especially a wife, runs against the grain of the patriarchal tenor of the biblical text, and could be interpreted negatively as a sign of a troublesome, disobedient and disrespectful woman. And yet, this is not the assessment made of Abigail in the text.

She is identified at the start of the story as an intelligent⁴⁶⁸ or discerning⁴⁶⁹ woman (v.3, literally "of good sense" – *tôbat śēkel* טוֹבַת־שֶׁקֶל). The fact that this characteristic of hers is the first thing mentioned following the description of her husband's considerable wealth and current economic activity of sheepshearing, suggests that the prosperity of their household may have been a product of her influence and her good sense in no small measure. Furthermore, she is identified later in the story as the emissary and agent of the LORD, whom David blesses for her "good sense" (vv.32-33 – *ta'mēk* תַּמְעָק) and eventually takes as his wife (v.42). Abigail's story, therefore,

⁴⁶⁶ Jon D. Levenson, "1 Samuel 25 as Literature and History," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (1978): 11-28. See also Jon D. Levenson and Baruch Halpern, "The Political Import of David's Marriages," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99, no. 4 (1980): 507.

⁴⁶⁷ Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 39.

⁴⁶⁸ NEB, NIV, NASB, ISV, JB

⁴⁶⁹ ESV

introduces the possibility that a woman acting and speaking of her own volition, even (or especially) when she does so as a critique of her husband – as Job's wife does – may indeed be doing so out of good sense. And that such “good sense” can be recognized (and described) in different ways. The pointed question this raises with regard to Job's wife is whether her independent speech and action towards her husband can also be regarded as a demonstration of deeper insight and good sense, even though it is dismissed by Job as the product of foolishness.

4.2.4 *Nabal and Job*

There are a number of literary connections and associations between the stories of Abigail and Job's wife, even if concrete allusions in either text cannot be definitively established.⁴⁷⁰ This is especially true when their respective husbands, Nabal and Job, are compared and contrasted.⁴⁷¹ Both their stories begin in very similar ways – “There was a man in Maon...” (1 Sam 25:2) and “There was once a man in the land of Uz...” (Job 1:1). Both stories introduce these men by referencing their substantial wealth, evident in the considerable flocks and herds that they each possessed, and the content of their character, although significantly the order in which these are mentioned differ. In other words, Nabal and Job are introduced as comparable characters.

⁴⁷⁰ A key distinguishing element of what is meant by the term “allusion” within literary criticism is authorial intention. “An allusion is an *intended* indirect reference that calls for associations that go beyond mere substitution of a referent.” (Irwin, “Against Intertextuality,” 227. My emphasis. R.S.) Identifying allusions to the other story within either of the stories of Abigail or Job's wife requires the establishment of authorial intent, which in turn requires the establishment of the primacy of one text over the other, and the likely familiarity of the earlier story for the author of the later. Given the challenges with identifying and dating the authorship of the books of Job and Samuel, such a task is beyond the scope or need of the discussion here. Nevertheless, while allusions between the stories may not exist (or may not be able to be definitively established), other points of connection between them can be discerned that can influence the ways in which both stories might be read.

⁴⁷¹ For the purposes of this exercise, the points of comparison and contrast between Nabal and Job will be limited to the Job we encounter in the prologue (Job 1:1 – 2:13).

However, whereas Job's character was exemplary (Job 1:1), Nabal was "surly and mean" (1 Sam 25:3). Consequently, while they are both described as *gādōl* (גָּדוֹל – "great" / "rich"), in Job's case it is a greatness that includes not only material wealth but also the strength of his piety, whereas Nabal's greatness consists merely of riches.

Nabal's name (נָבָל) literally means 'fool'. His folly is seen primarily in his "surly and mean" (cf. v.3) response to David's request for compensation for the protection given to Nabal's flocks and shepherds in the wilderness against the threat of plundering cattle thieves. This threat was precisely what had befallen Job. His troubles began when Sabean marauders attacked and killed his cattle-handlers and stole all his oxen and donkeys (Job 1:14-15). And lest this be shrugged aside as an isolated incident, another similar incursion by the Chaldeans resulted in the further devastating loss of life and livestock (Job 1:17).

And yet, in response to the news of these and other calamities, Job responded with a generosity of spirit that was still able to acknowledge that the LORD gives and takes away, and so continued to bless his name (Job 1:21). By contrast, Nabal was shearing his sheep and anticipating the festivity and prosperity that this represented, and yet refused to respond with generosity nor acknowledge the debt of gratitude he owed to David whose security presence had safeguarded Nabal's vulnerable assets. Even Nabal's own servants could recognize the legitimacy of David's request and the offense of Nabal's insulting refusal to grant it (vv.14-17). One of his servants calls him a "son of Belial" (v.17 – literally, a "son of worthlessness"), which his wife Abigail affirms when she likewise calls him a "man of Belial" (v.25).⁴⁷²

⁴⁷² In later pseudepigraphic literature, Belial was consistently used as the proper name for the Prince of Evil, also known as Satan. See T.H. Gaster, "Belial," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick et al (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962). A similar antecedent of Satan is found in the prologue of the book of Job, in the character of *has'sātān*.

David's security presence in the wilderness was likened to a protective wall by day and by night (v.16). This image connects further with Job's story, in that God's blessing of Job and his household was described as a protecting fence that encircled everything that Job had (Job 1:10). The difference between Job and Nabal is that Job lived with deferential respect for the source of his protection (cf. Job 1:5) and continued to do so even when that protection was withdrawn, whereas Nabal clearly did not. David's oath of vengeance against Nabal was effectively a threat to remove this wall of protection.⁴⁷³

One final literary connection between the characters of Nabal and Job can be found in the theme of feasting and wine that appears in both stories. Job's primary anxiety that his children might curse God was heightened whenever they got together to have a feast (Job 1:4-5). It was precisely on such a feast day, when his children were drinking wine, that Job heard the news of the calamities that had befallen him, including the death of his children (Job 1:13, 18).

In the story of Nabal, it was the festivities surrounding the time of sheepshearing that prompted David to make his request that he and his servants should share in the bounty of Nabal's table.⁴⁷⁴ It was Nabal's refusal to share his feast that precipitated his demise. And it was after a sumptuous feast in his house, "like the feast of a king" when he got utterly drunk (v.36), that Nabal heard the news from his wife that added to the pounding in his head and cut him to the heart, from which he never recovered. This is the final and decisive point of contrast between Nabal and Job, for while this marked the end of Nabal, in the case of Job the calamitous news that he received

⁴⁷³ The expression used by David to refer to Nabal's men whom he vowed to kill was the phrase *maš'îm bēqîr* – מִשְׁפֵּי בְקִיר (vv.22, 34), which literally means "any who urinates against the wall". Nabal's folly in 'pissing against the wall' of David's protection – that is, disdain it – not only endangered his men but ultimately led to his own demise.

⁴⁷⁴ The "good day" of v.8 is translated as "feast day" (NRSV, ESV, NKJV) or "festive time / day" (NIV, NASB).

marked the beginning of a long process of transformation for him in which his wife, as will be seen, played a crucial and catalytic part.

4.2.5 *Nābāl and Folly*

It has already been stated that Nabal's name literally means 'fool'. His name introduces an important word link with the story of Job, for the same verbal root is used by Job when he accuses his wife of speaking as one of the "foolish women" (Job 2:10 – *nēbālōt* נְבָלֹת). However, whereas the foolishness of Nabal is confirmed by his actions and attested to by the explicit testimony of his punning wife when she says of him, "for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him" (v.25), the alleged foolishness of Job's wife is one of the critical assessments of her character that needs to be carefully navigated.

Job was quick to leap to the conclusion that his wife was speaking as one of the *nēbālōt*. But as the book unfolds, the accuracy of this conclusion is far from certain as the assumed good sense or folly of particular utterances, actions and convictions are rigorously probed, and the conclusions offered by the text are ambiguous at best. An excellent example can be found in the epilogue in Job 42:8, where a form of the idiom "do foolishness" (*āśāh nēbālāh* – אָשָׂה נְבָלָה) occurs. The conventional view, reflected in most translations, is that it is the *friend's* foolishness that is being referenced here, so that the thrust of Job's prayer is that God would not deal with the friends as *their* folly deserves.⁴⁷⁵ However, a careful reading of 42:8 suggests that it is *God* who is the one doing *nēbālāh*, which suggests that Job's prayer may have gone something like: "O Lord, do not do anything foolish when you deal with the friends."⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁵ So, for example, NRSV renders the relevant clause in 42:8 with, "I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly." Similarly, NIV, ESV, NASB, AV, NKJV, JB. Two exceptions where God is presented as the one doing *nēbālāh* would be Young's Literal Translation that renders it with "...for surely his face I accept, so as not to do with you folly" and NEB which offers, "I will surely show him favour by not being harsh with you."

⁴⁷⁶ Balentine, *Job*, 713.

In all of the other instances of this idiom in the Hebrew Bible it is people, and never God, who are the ones guilty of *něbālāh*.⁴⁷⁷ Does the text follow this convention – as suggested by most translations – or is something more radical being suggested, namely that God is capable of doing *něbālāh* and it is only Job's intercession that prevents this? The point being made is that ambiguity and uncertainty exists around the use of this word in the book of Job.⁴⁷⁸ Which alerts the reader that Job's dismissal of his wife's speech as being that of a foolish woman may well have been far too hasty. The content and impact of the words of Job's wife will be the focus of the next chapter. But before turning to that crucial discussion, one final and significant point of consideration of 1 Sam 25 as an intertext for the story of Job's wife needs to be explored, namely the content and impact of Abigail's words.

4.2.6 *Abigail's Words*

Abigail's capacity to act in authoritative, independent and effective ways has already been discussed. But it is the content and impact of her words that proved to be the decisive aspect of her risky intervention. A close reading of her words reveals that they were imbued with great power, as well as deep irony.

⁴⁷⁷ Cf. Gen 34:7; Deut 22:21; Josh 7:15; Judg 19:23-24; 20:6; 2 Sam 13:12; Jer 29:33. It should further be noted that in a number of these instances, *něbālāh* has a stronger meaning than mere folly, but refers to reprehensible and shameful acts. See Anthony Phillips, "Nebalah: A Term for Serious Disorderly and Unruly Conduct," *Vetus Testamentum* 24, no. 4 (1975).

⁴⁷⁸ The only other occurrence of this root is found in 30:8 with the expression "sons of fools" (*běně nābāl* בְּנֵי נָבָל). The context is Job's acerbic attack on the youngsters who mock him who themselves are hungry and needy (30:3-4), outcasts and homeless (30:5-7). And yet, just a few verses earlier Job had proudly affirmed, "I was a father to the needy, and I championed the cause of the stranger." (29:16). The phrase that Job uses of these needy individuals (*běně nābāl*) could also be translated as "sons of a fool", introducing a note of ambiguity as to whether it is his own foolishness that is being referenced. Certainly, in describing them as the outcasts of the earth ("whipped out of the land" – 30:8), there is a strong echo of Job's own situation. See Chou-Wee Pan, "5571 נָבָל," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 12.

Her words occur in three speeches. Two shorter declarative statements (of five and seven words each – in v.19 and v.41), bracket what is one of the longest speeches by a woman in the entire Bible, and also one of the longest, uninterrupted speeches that David ever listens to (vv.24-31), second only to the words of the LORD to David spoken through the prophet Nathan in 2 Sam 7:5-16.⁴⁷⁹

Abigail's words can be read on three different levels, which could be termed the superficial, the prophetic and the ironic. The *superficial level* refers to a surface reading in which the plain sense of Abigail's words, especially those spoken directly to David in her lengthy middle speech, can be assessed as to their import and impact, which are impressive indeed. Through a masterful and eloquent combination of deference, humility, apology, flattery, appeal, persuasion, motivation and inspiration, Abigail weaves her words in such a way that the entire direction of the narrative is altered. David is moved by what he hears and responds with a three-fold blessing (vv.32-33), revoking the vow he had made to exact vengeance upon Nabal and all that he had (v.22), and recapitulating the three-fold greeting of peace of his initial intention (v.6). Simply put, Abigail's words saved the day – they saved her husband Nabal and all his men; they saved her future husband and the future king of Israel from culpable bloodguilt; and they also saved Abigail from widowhood without a future – although as will be discussed shortly, Abigail's 'salvation' is deeply ironic. To the extent that her words were able to achieve all this, effecting a decisive change in the direction of the entire narrative, they are revealed as words of considerable power.⁴⁸⁰

The *prophetic level* recognizes that Abigail's words are not simply concerned about the immediate perils of her own domestic situation precipitated by the foolishness of

⁴⁷⁹ Significantly, elements of Abigail's speech to David anticipate the central thrust of this later speech of the LORD in 2 Sam 7:5-16. A similar pattern occurs in the book of Job where the speech of Job's wife to her husband anticipates and foreshadows the divine speeches later in the book, as will be demonstrated in chapter six below.

⁴⁸⁰ The power of Abigail's words is further highlighted when her (unrecorded) words to Nabal quite literally stopped his heart (cf. v.37).

her husband, but touch on the larger political issues relating to the succession of the monarchy. In v.28 she says to David, “the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house.” This expression for “sure house” (*bayit ne'ēmān* בַּיִת נְאֻמָּן) anticipates the assurance the LORD will give to David in 2 Sam 7:16 that the LORD would make his house sure, a promise repeated again to Solomon in 1 Ki 11:38, “I will be with you, and will build you an enduring house (*bayit ne'ēmān* בַּיִת נְאֻמָּן), as I built for David.” The witness of this wider narrative confirms the power of Abigail's words in their ability to name, and possibly even call forth, what was not yet immediately obvious – that this homeless fugitive called David would in fact become the future king of Israel.⁴⁸¹

The *ironic level* of Abigail's words can be seen when the themes of power and salvation are considered. The irony of the power dynamics at work within the text is pronounced. Within her speech to David, Abigail consistently and repeatedly refers to David as “my lord” (*'ādōnī* אֲדֹנָי – vv.24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31); and to herself as a “maidservant” (*'āmātēkā* אֲמָתְךָ – vv.24, 25, 28, 31; *šiphātēkā* שִׁפְחָתְךָ – v.27), a term more appropriate for a lower-class woman of no power. She thereby continually avers a power hierarchy between them in which she surrenders power and control to David. This is heightened by the hyperbolic, almost comical description of the physical posture that Abigail assumes as a sign of her deferential submission before David. The text literally reports that she fell before David, on her face, bowing to the ground, falling at his feet (vv.23-24).

And yet, even as she emphasizes David's power and her subservience before him, the irony is that she is the one who takes firm control of the situation, demonstrating that

⁴⁸¹ The prophetic power of Abigail's words can also be seen in the effect they had on David's behaviour in subsequent chapters. The central thrust of Abigail's speech to David was to convince him not to be guilty of bloodshed without cause. Bach writes, “the echo of her prophecy in chap. 26 guides David's hand when he so flamboyantly seizes, then returns, Saul's spear.” (Bach, *The Pleasure of Her Text : Feminist Readings of Biblical & Historical Texts*, 37.)

she is anything but a “maidservant”. She is arguably the most powerful character in the story and certainly the most influential, demonstrated by the fact that she is the only character in the entire episode to interact with all of the other characters.⁴⁸² She seeks out David and when she finds him she doesn't wait to be spoken to, but takes the initiative in addressing David and directing their conversation. She dismisses her husband Nabal as a fool and assumes personal responsibility for what had happened, effectively usurping his position of authority. When she says that she did not see the young men that David had sent (v.25), and then presents to David the gift of food that she had authorized and organized – which is what David had originally wanted in the first place – the subtle implication is that David had clearly approached the wrong person with his request.⁴⁸³

Abigail then goes on to enlist none other than the LORD in her cause. When she says that “the LORD has restrained you from bloodguilt and from taking vengeance with your own hand” (v.26), the fact is that she is the one who is doing so. She then boldly commits the LORD to a particular course of action when she matter of factly declares, “the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house” (v.28), and then confidently assumes that the LORD'S appointment of David as ruler over Israel is a foregone conclusion (v.30). Which begs the question as to how it was that Abigail was privy to such hot (and even treasonous) information, or was this simply the work of a consummate salesperson able to express the very things that the other party was wanting to hear?

In the end, Abigail achieves the outcome she had desired as David grants her request. But most telling of all is that Abigail effected a change not simply in David's behavior and his chosen course of action, but also a change in his perception and his ability to

⁴⁸² *ibid.*, 35.

⁴⁸³ The text does not hint in any explicit way at any foolishness on David's part, but reading between the lines of what Abigail is saying could raise the subversive question, “Who really is the fool here?”

see what was truly at stake. When he finally gets to speak, he responds with enthusiasm and gratitude as he says to Abigail:

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent you to meet me today! Blessed be your good sense, and blessed be you, who have kept me today from bloodguilt and from avenging myself by my own hand! (vv.32-33)

No wonder that later in the story, following Nabal's death, David wants to make this "maidservant" with such insight and influence his wife. Yet, by doing so, her power and influence within the narrative come to an abrupt end. Which introduces a further irony in Abigail's story, evident when the theme of salvation is considered.

Abigail's words (and actions) have saving power. They end up saving Nabal from David's promised act of lethal vengeance; saving David from the guilt of culpable homicide; and saving herself from the dire consequences that would surely have followed Nabal's extermination.⁴⁸⁴ But each one of these salvations is, in fact, short-lived. Nabal is saved from David's hand, only to be struck down by the LORD (who seems strangely immune from any charges of bloodguilt). David is saved from bloodguilt that would have compromised his claim to the throne, only to succumb to that very transgression through an abuse of kingly power in his next engagement with another man and his wife – Uriah and Bathsheba (cf. 2 Sam 11). And while Abigail 'survived' the mortal threat of this entire episode and ends up becoming David's wife, in another sense she suffers a narrative death as her eloquence is silenced and her brilliance marginalized, lest she threaten the established male hegemony of the narrative. As Alice Bach puts it, "in exercising power and speaking in her own distinctive voice, perhaps Abigail has been guilty of the crime of female ambition. In order for male power to be restored, her voice must be stifled."⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸⁴ David's vengeful intention was not simply to kill Nabal, but to utterly eradicate him (and all memory of him) from the land, evidenced by his vow to remove every male that was his (vv.22, 34), which would have included any sons that he may have had, even though none are mentioned in the text.

⁴⁸⁵ Bach, *The Pleasure of Her Text : Feminist Readings of Biblical & Historical Texts*, 37.

In concluding this section, some final comments on Abigail's distinctive voice would be fitting. A deconstructive reading of Abigail's story suggests that she was aware of the fate that awaited her.⁴⁸⁶ The key to this claim can be found in a close reading of Abigail's opening and closing speeches that bracket her lengthy speech to David.

In her opening speech in v.19, Abigail says to the young men who are with her, "Go on ahead of me..." In one sense, this is simply a routine instruction to a group of servants which they are expected to obey. But in another sense, Abigail's words hint at an underlying phenomenon within the gendered landscape of the biblical narrative, namely the privileged position that men occupy within it. Whether it be the "young men" referenced here (from the nom. *na'ar* נַעַר), or other men (the most frequent nom. for which is *'iš* אִישׁ), or named male characters, they are always the ones that get to "go on ahead"; the ones who are seen first and who enjoy an upfront status and visibility. All of which Abigail recognizes.

⁴⁸⁶ See the explanation of deconstruction on p.3 in the Introduction above. A further helpful definition of this method is offered by Dennis Olson:

Deconstruction involves a careful and detailed reading of a text, highlighting its internal complexity and the gaps and omissions that may be filled in with a variety of different meanings, many of which may be contradictory. Deconstruction involves teasing out and highlighting those details of a text that promote meanings and commitments that are in fundamental conflict with meanings and commitments that may appear at the surface of a text. The potential conflict in meaning demonstrates that any given text is unstable in meaning and open to a variety of interpretations that reflect the ideology of the reader. An urgent warning arising out of deconstructive interpretations is that authoritative texts are used by the powerful to silence or oppress the less powerful. As a result justice is an overriding value of deconstructive readings. In the name of justice, Derrida resisted claims by "master readers" to have privileged knowledge of the one true meaning of a text. Moreover, he assumed that *authors of texts are not in full and conscious command of what they write*, often including repressed and unconscious elements that undo what they believe they are promoting even as they write. (Dennis T. Olson, "Literary and Rhetorical Criticism," in *Methods for Exodus*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, *Methods in Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 19-20. My emphasis. RS.)

But then her speech continues. In the Hebrew she offers the interjection, “Behold!” – which could be paraphrased with something like, “But take careful note of this...”⁴⁸⁷ The telling words that follow are these, “I am coming after you.” Whatever the surface meaning of these words may be concerning the details and timing of her travel agenda, they can also be read as signaling Abigail's intention to enter the fray of this male-dominated landscape – “I am coming after you!” Which is precisely what she does, and in scandalously subversive ways. Indeed, immediately after her opening speech, the narrator reports that Abigail did not tell her husband (literally, “her man”) what she was doing – a further indication that she was stepping beyond the bounds of what would have been regarded as normative and respectable behavior for a woman.⁴⁸⁸

A fascinating transition occurs in the Hebrew text at this point. Following Abigail's declaration of her intention to step decisively and boldly into the male-dominated terrain of the text, the text is substantially and significantly emptied of virtually all references to men and young men. Up until this point the text is literally awash with such references that are densely clustered together – the root for “young men” (*na'ar* נָעָר) occurring no fewer than nine times, and the root for “man” (*'iš* אִישׁ) ten times in the space of just eighteen verses.⁴⁸⁹ But following Abigail's first speech, these words recur only two and three times respectively in the entire remainder of the episode that

⁴⁸⁷ This word is not rendered in NRSV, NIV, JB, NEB. The use of this interjection is “mostly confined to calling attention to some fact upon which action is to be taken, or a conclusion based.” (Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *The New Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Lafayette: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1981), 243.)

⁴⁸⁸ Cue, as some background music, the 1982 hit single ‘Maneater’ by Hall & Oates, with its lyrics, “Oh, oh here she comes, watch out boy she'll chew you up, oh, oh here she comes. She's a maneater! Oh, oh here she comes!”

⁴⁸⁹ The Deuteronomistic historian has a particular fondness for the word *na'ar* נָעָר, accounting for nearly two-thirds of its 239 appearances in the Hebrew Bible, with nearly a third of the total distribution (89 occurrences) being found in 1 – 2 Samuel. See Victor P. Hamilton, “5853 נָעָר,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 124.

spans the next twenty-four verses. This dramatic textual shift signals the manner in which Abigail's presence effectively displaces men from their position of dominance and privilege within the text.

But this displacement will be short-lived, which Abigail seems to perceive. She anticipates her narrative exit (and demise) in her final speech in v.41, which is filled with irony. Bowing down with her face to the ground, Abigail says to the servants of David who have come to take her to him as his wife, "Behold, your handmaid is a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord." (v.41 – ESV). As with her opening speech, the interjection, "Behold!" alerts the reader to pay careful attention to what is to follow.⁴⁹⁰ In particular, the careful attention needed is to recognize that Abigail's final words do not express the genuine submission and deference of a humble and recently widowed woman who freely and willingly accepts the marriage proposal of the future king, as a surface reading of the text would suggest; but rather that her words constitute an ironic site of resistance that exposes the patriarchal prejudice of the narrative's androcentric agenda.

Three textual markers point to such a deconstructive reading. Firstly, David's marriage 'proposal' was not made to Abigail in person, but was sent via his servants (vv.39-40). Furthermore, while the NRSV has it that David "wooed Abigail" (v.39), the verb used simply means "to speak to"; although the construction is somewhat clumsy given the fact that David was not there in person. That David did not approach Abigail directly is not, in itself, unusual as the initiation and negotiation of the marriage transaction seldom involved the bridegroom or bride, but rather their fathers or male siblings.⁴⁹¹ But that traditional pattern is hardly operant here, not least because

⁴⁹⁰ The grammatical construction of the word in this instance is the demonstrable participle *hinêh* הִנֵּה, a variation from the earlier occurrence in v.19 where the demonstrable adverb *hinnî* הִנְנִי was used. Notwithstanding this grammatical variation, the rhetorical function and impact of both words remains the same.

⁴⁹¹ John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1965), 548; Baab, "Marriage," 283. Cf. Gen 24:1-50; 29:15-28; 34:1-17.

Abigail is not merely a passive bystander to the process as was commonly the case for a bride. Therefore, David's reluctance to speak to Abigail becomes a conspicuous detail that raises the question whether he felt intimidated or threatened by her. His behaviour certainly stands in stark contrast to her bold approach and direct verbal engagement with him earlier in the story, in which she wielded such influence and exercised such decisive control. It suggests an attempt to recover a more clear-cut position of male dominance following the ambiguity of what had transpired between David and Abigail earlier.

Secondly, David's 'proposal' has an unmistakable note of coercion about it. Regardless of how some translations soften the text, the bottom line is that David is not asking Abigail to marry him, but has sent his servants to take her to him as his wife. The verb *lqh* לקח ("take" or "grasp") is repeated in v.39 and v.40 to describe the manner in which David intends Abigail to become his wife.⁴⁹² It is the same verb that is used in 1 Sam 24:11 to describe Saul's efforts to hunt David in order to take his life; and also in 1 Sam 26:12 where David took Saul's spear as a sign of the capacity that was his to take Saul's life.

Thirdly, Abigail's response to David's rapacious advance is filled with biting irony. The deferential humility with which she presented herself to David earlier in the story was clearly a tactical device within her broader rhetorical strategy. Now she ramps up her subservience to an excessive degree that borders on the hyperbolic. In her final speech she clusters together both terms for "maidservant" that she had used earlier in her speech to David (*'āmah* אַמָּה and *šiphāh* שִׁפְחָה), expanding the scope of her servility to such an extent that she places herself at (and beneath) the feet of David's servants. In doing so she lampoons the ludicrous blindness of the patriarchal agenda that cannot see how utterly inadequate and inappropriate such a feeble woman would

⁴⁹² For a thorough treatment of the full range of this verb's semantic content that illustrates its coercive quality see P. J. J. S. Els, "4374 לקח," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997).

be as the wife of a king. Indeed, not even David realizes that it was because of the very opposite qualities in Abigail that he was drawn to her in the first place.

The even deeper irony is that in declaring that she would “wash the feet of the servants of my lord,” Abigail was embracing her fate at the hands of the male authors of the broader biblical narrative, who would empty the threat of her subversive power by reducing her to a silent prop in service of the needs of their particular agenda to advance the cause of David.⁴⁹³ And yet, even this surrender to her fate as a powerful female subjected to an untimely narrative death is not without a hint of subversive hope. For immediately after these final words of hers, we read that Abigail got up hurriedly, and with five young women behind her – symbolizing the strength, support and solidarity of female companionship (the word used is the plural of *na'ārāh* נַעֲרָה, the feminine form of the “young men” who so dominated the earlier part of the story) – she *went after* the messengers of David to become his wife (v.42). Hence the story closes with a loud echo of Abigail's opening speech when she declared, “I am coming after you.” The question remains whether readers of the text will be able to pay careful enough attention to hear and discern in Abigail's ensuing silence a compelling testimony that dares to challenge the assumptions of the dominant and domineering patriarchal worldview.

⁴⁹³ This episode is part of a commonly identified larger literary unit (1 Sam 16:1 – 2 Sam 5:10) with a particular apologetic intent dubbed variously a history of the rise of David or the narrative of David's rise. “According to the “classical” form of this interpretation, the [Narrative of David's Rise] expresses the redactor's concerns with efforts to consolidate the Davidic dynasty during the Solomonic period. 1 Samuel 25, too, it is argued, reflects the redactor's tendency to avert any criticism of David and to demonstrate his chosen status.” (Mark E. Biddle, “Ancestral Motifs in 1 Samuel 25: Intertextuality and Characterization,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 121, no. 4 (2002): 618, note 3.) Levenson and Halpern argue that David's marriage to Abigail was a savvy consolidation of his political power in the south. See Jon D. Levenson and Baruch Halpern, “The Political Import of David's Marriages,” *ibid.* 99 (1980).

4.2.7 *Abigail and Job's Wife*

In light of this discussion, there are several connections that can be drawn between Abigail and Job's wife – women who, in many ways, could be described as kindred spirits. Certainly, Abigail's story suggests a range of reading strategies that can cast greater light on the story of Job's wife. In particular would be the somewhat surprising conclusion that emerges from her story that a wife who adopts a contrary position to that of her husband can nevertheless be recognized as a woman of good sense.

Another would be the need for an active vigilance to the possible layers of meaning present within female utterances, precisely because the mere presence of a woman's voice within the male-dominated landscape of the biblical narrative already represents a rupture to the dominant perspective of the text. Yet another would be an attentiveness to the voice of silence and the witness of absence, especially when such silence and absence are difficult to explain. Each of these strategies has particular relevance when it comes to a careful and nuanced reading of Job's wife and can help to ascertain the true contribution of Job's wife to the book as a whole.

5. Conclusion

The task of this chapter has been to seek justification for claiming for Job's wife a place of greater prominence and influence within the book of Job. Three broad sites of exploration – behind the text, within the text and intertextually – have been examined. The behind-the-text perspectives probed the likely socio-historical background to the story of Job, and especially the role of women within the domestic agrarian economy of pre-monarchic Israel. It emerged that woman played a key and vital part in many essential aspects of this economy, which meant that they would have exercised considerable power and influence within the household. This speaks directly to the authority and influence that Job's wife would have wielded, and the status and respect she would have enjoyed within Job's substantial household.

Considerations within the text involved searching for any signs of the presence and influence of Job's wife. A number of details within the text that pointed precisely to such signs were highlighted. These included Job's wealth; Job's social status; Job's

children; Job's daughters in the epilogue; Job's sustenance and the provision of bread. In each of these, the presence, imprint and agency of Job's wife can be discerned.

The inter-textual perspectives within this chapter have allowed for a broader gaze across the biblical landscape as a whole, looking with particular attention for stories about women that resonate with the story or circumstances of Job's wife in some way. Two such women were brought into sharp focus within this survey – the capable wife in Prov 31:10-31; and Abigail, the wife of Nabal and later David in 1 Sam 25. The women that they were and the things that they did can illuminate Job's wife with a fresh and revealing light and can suggest particular strategies for reading her story in ways that can uncover the subtleties and nuances that it contains.

A significant omission in the deliberations of this chapter has been a consideration of the speech of Job's wife in 2:9. The meaning and impact of the words that she speaks form an indispensable part of any assessment of her prominence and influence within the book as a whole. This is the focus of the following chapter, to which we now turn.

Chapter 5: The Words of Job's Wife

1. Introduction

The previous chapter offered justifications for claiming for Job's wife a place of far greater prominence and influence within the book as a whole than what has commonly been assumed. So-called behind the text, within the text and inter-textual considerations were scrutinized as part of this task, but the actual words spoken by Job's wife in 2:9 were not examined. This crucial element is the focus of this chapter, in which the words of Job's wife will be explored in detail. Particular attention will be given to the range of possible meanings of the Hebrew words she employed; the range of possible meanings of her speech as a whole; the impact of her speech on Job as demonstrated by his responses to her words in both the prose and the poetry; the connection between her words and the words of YHWH⁴⁹⁴ in the divine speeches; and the influence of her words upon the interpretation of the book in its totality. Methodologically, this chapter will utilize a literary analytical approach that considers the implications of constructive and deconstructive readings of the text.⁴⁹⁵

2. The Hebrew words of Job's wife

The six words spoken by Job's wife in the original Hebrew⁴⁹⁶ of 2:9 read thus:

עֲדָה מִתְנַיִק בְּתַמְתָּהּ בְּרַף אֱלֹהִים וְמָת:

⁴⁹⁴ As a way of distinguishing the LORD of the prose tale from the LORD of the divine speeches – which represent, within my reading of the book of Job, two very different manifestations of deity – I will reference the latter as YHWH, utilising the consonants of the tetragrammaton, and the former as LORD.

⁴⁹⁵ For an explanation of these literary analytical methodologies, see pp.2-3 of the Introduction above.

⁴⁹⁶ It is acknowledged that the “original Hebrew” consisted only of a consonantal text and did not contain the vowel points that were added to the so-called Masoretic Text (MT) by the Masoretes as vocalization and accentuation aids around the seventh to tenth centuries CE. The vowel points and accents used here are taken from *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, an edition of the MT published in 1977.

The Hebrew form of the text is not disputed, and so no textual emendations for this verse are suggested. But different translations reveal some nuances of meaning in these words, as the following sampling of translations makes evident:

“Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die.”⁴⁹⁷

“Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die.”⁴⁹⁸

“Do you remain firm in your integrity? Curse God and die!”⁴⁹⁹

“Are you still unshaken in your integrity? Curse God and die!”⁵⁰⁰

“Do you now still mean to persist in your blamelessness? Curse God and die.”⁵⁰¹

“Dost thou still continue in thy simplicity? Bless God and die.”⁵⁰²

“Still holding on to your precious integrity, are you? Curse God and be done with it!”⁵⁰³

“You are still as faithful as ever, aren't you? Why don't you curse God and die?”⁵⁰⁴

The second half of this speech – most commonly translated as “Curse God and die!” – is the most well-known and oft-quoted part of it. It is largely on the strength of this phrase alone, translated in this way, that Job's wife has been villified in the history of interpretation.⁵⁰⁵ As will be discussed shortly, there is much ambiguity in this phrase; and the common translation, and certainly its assumed meaning, are far from certain. But it is interesting to note that the first part of this speech has received much less consideration. Central to the argument being developed here is the absolutely crucial importance of the first half of this speech, which holds the key to unlocking the meaning of the speech in its entirety. Careful and detailed attention to the words and

⁴⁹⁷ NRSV

⁴⁹⁸ ESV; RSV; NASB

⁴⁹⁹ ISV

⁵⁰⁰ NEB

⁵⁰¹ JB

⁵⁰² Douay-Rheims Bible

⁵⁰³ The Message

⁵⁰⁴ GNB

⁵⁰⁵ In ch.2 above, the so-called ‘first interpretive strand’ of the reception history of Job's wife was discussed in detail, in which she was viewed in an overwhelmingly negative light as the agent of Satan who tempted her husband to abandon his integrity and his faith in God.

phrases that comprise this verse is essential to inform a nuanced reading of the words of Job's wife. It is to this important task that we now turn.

2.1 'ōdekā (עֵדְכָא)

The first word to come from the lips of Job's wife ('ōdekā – עֵדְכָא) is the start of a question, "Do you still..." or "Are you still...?"⁵⁰⁶ When used as an adverb it expresses continuance or persistence, usually of something in the past.⁵⁰⁷ While little critical comment has been offered of this word in the context of the speech of Job's wife, it does provide an important clue to Job's disposition, in that it conveys the sense of recognition within Job's wife that, notwithstanding the calamities that had befallen him, nothing has changed for Job fundamentally. Who better than a wife, who has shared so much of his life and his loss, to recognize this about him? That in spite of everything else that he had lost, there is something that he continues to hold on to.

The word also provides an important clue to the disposition of Job's wife for it conveys an unmistakable note of exasperation and even judgment, especially if it is read in the interrogative. Indeed, what follows in her speech is the articulation of a sentiment that conveys a clear critique of the unflinching position that Job tenaciously maintains.⁵⁰⁸ Far from being a positive and commendable quality of steadfast

⁵⁰⁶ While virtually all versions translate the first half of the speech of Job's wife in the interrogative, not everyone does so. Ellen van Wolde, for example, translates the phrase as a simple declarative statement, "You still keep your integrity." (Ellen van Wolde, "The Development of Job: Mrs Job as Catalyst," in *A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 203.)

⁵⁰⁷ Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *The New Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Lafayette: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1981), 728.

⁵⁰⁸ The critique sounded in this first word spoken by Job's wife may be amplified by a further subtle association. The root of the word (עוד) is a homonym with the verb עוד, which can carry the sense of warning, testifying against or accusing. See Robert B. Chisholm, "6386 עוד," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997). A good example can be found in 1 Kgs 21:10, 13, where testimony against Naboth is brought by a pair of false witnesses in a pair of verses which curiously also employ the word for blessing (brk ברך) euphemistically, as is the case later in 2:9, which will be discussed below. This verb (עוד) occurs only once in the book

endurance, the fact that Job “still” holds on to whatever it is that he’s holding onto (which will be explored shortly) is for Job’s wife a sign of dis-ease and even dysfunction, and is reason enough for a decisive and risky intervention on her part in which she will challenge the very core of her husband’s beliefs.

2.2 *maḥăzîq bêtummātekā* (מַחֲזִיק בְּתִמְמַתְּךָ) (מחזיק)

The next words in 2:9 which make up the rest of the first half of the speech of Job’s wife are *maḥăzîq bêtummātekā* (מַחֲזִיק בְּתִמְמַתְּךָ) – translated by NRSV as “persist in your integrity”. The phrase is fraught with ambiguity and therefore requires particular attention; with its constituent parts – the verb *ḥzq* (חזק) and the noun *tummâ* (תִּמְמָה) – in need of careful assessment. We will start with a consideration of first the noun and then the verb, before moving on to a discussion of their occurrence together within the prose prologue.

The noun *tummâ* derives from the verbal root *tmm* (תמם) – meaning “to be complete” (in the Qal.) – a root of crucial thematic importance within the book of Job. A helpful English umbrella term for the thematic constellation around this root would be the word ‘integrity’. Olivier writes:

In Heb. the concept of integrity is for the most part expressed by the root *tmm* and its derivatives. It occurs in various forms and functions...conveying the

of Job, in 29:11, where it is paired with other important thematic words in the book. Clines translates the verse as follows:

*When the ear heard, it called me blessed,
when the eye saw, it testified for me.* (29:11)

Clines makes the observation that whereas in 1 Kgs 21:10, 13 (cited above), the verb has the sense of “testify against”; here it has the sense of “testify for”. (See David J.A. Clines, *Job 21 - 37*, Word Biblical Commentary 18a (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 929, 38.) It is also coupled with the expression “called me blessed” within a doublet that talks about the hearing of the ear and the seeing of the eye (cf. 42:5). While all of this may simply be dismissed as a curious coincidence, the assonance of the homonymic connection between this verb and the first word uttered by Job’s wife may hint at how her words might be heard and seen – as a testimony against Job; or, indeed, as a testimony for him.

meaning of that which is complete, blameless, just, honest, perfect, peaceful, etc.; hence an attribute or attitude that reflects genuineness and reliability.⁵⁰⁹

The significance of this root in the book of Job is indicated by the fact that virtually all its derivatives are represented in the book. The adjective *tām* (תָּם) appears in the opening verse as one of the first things we learn about Job, that he was “blameless” (1:1).⁵¹⁰ This description of Job is twice confirmed by the LORD (in 1:8 and 2:3), and is part of Job's own insistent self-appraisal, when he says:

*Though I am innocent, my own mouth would condemn me;
though I am blameless [tām – תָּם], he would prove me perverse.*

I am blameless [tām – תָּם] (9:20-21)

Job repeats this claim of blamelessness – using the different adjectival form of *tāmîm* (תָּמִים) – when he refers to himself as “a just and blameless man” (12:4).⁵¹¹

Significantly, this form of the adjective (*tāmîm* – תָּמִים) has a particular function elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible where it is used overwhelmingly in connection with cultic regulations pertaining to the bringing of offerings. “Stereotyped priestly formulae (cf. Lev 22:21) specify that every offering “must be without defect or blemish to be acceptable” (to the Lord); that is to say, *tāmîm* designates the unobjectionable condition of an offering animal, one that is healthy, without defect, and free of any blemish (Lev 9:2; cf. Exod 12:5; Num 6:14; 28:19).”⁵¹² Given the fact that the meticulous offering of sacrifices on behalf of his children – as a precautionary measure in case they may have inadvertently sinned and cursed God in their hearts – is explicitly cited as one of Job's ongoing practices (1:5) and is an important example offered at the outset of the book of the kind of man that he was; it would appear that cultic associations are an implicit part of the field of meaning of *tmm* and its

⁵⁰⁹ J.P.J. Olivier, "9462 תָּם," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997).

⁵¹⁰ The adjective can also mean, *inter alia*, innocent, pure, pious or perfect. *Ibid.*, 307.

⁵¹¹ The same adjectival form enters Elihu's lexicon as a way for him to describe both himself and God as being “perfect in knowledge” (36:4; 37:16).

⁵¹² Olivier, "9462 307 ", תָּם.

derivatives in the book of Job. Although not explicitly stated as such in the text, Job could be described as *tām* because the offering of his life (as an act of cultic devotion) to God was *tāmîm*.⁵¹³

Other occurrences of this root are scattered throughout the text. All in all, *tmm* and its derivatives can be found no fewer than eighteen times in the book as a whole, appearing on the lips of the narrator (2x),⁵¹⁴ the LORD (3x),⁵¹⁵ Job (7x),⁵¹⁶ Eliphaz (2x),⁵¹⁷ Bildad (1x),⁵¹⁸ Elihu (2x),⁵¹⁹ and Job's wife (1x).⁵²⁰ In the light of the prevalence and distribution of this word, three important observations need to be made. Firstly, it would be fair to say that this term – with the cluster of meaning orbiting around it, such as blamelessness, integrity, fullness, completion, perfection – features prominently within the moral universe of the text. Indeed, it is precisely this quality in Job that was the pretext for the heavenly wager between the LORD and *has'sāṭān*, as well as the basis for his protestations of innocence in the human dialogue and his demands for a hearing with God.

Secondly, two conspicuous sections of the book not included in the distribution of the term would be the divine speeches and the epilogue. In other words, the word is limited to the parts of the book that precede the decisive 'turn' that occurs in the

⁵¹³ This raises the possibility that cultic dimensions may well be imbedded within the heavenly wager between the LORD and *has'sāṭān*. At issue in the wager is the question of the possibility of disinterested worship, or whether devotion to God is merely a byproduct of divine blessing and would take other deviant forms ("he will curse you to your face" – 1:11) if the blessing were removed. Job's perfection (*tām*) makes him a cultically acceptable offering to be sacrificed on the altar of divine uncertainty and insecurity, as a way of settling the question one way or another.

⁵¹⁴ 1:1; 31:40

⁵¹⁵ 1:8; 2:3a, 3b

⁵¹⁶ 9:20, 21, 22; 12:4; 21:23; 27:5; 31:6

⁵¹⁷ 4:6; 22:3

⁵¹⁸ 8:20

⁵¹⁹ 36:4; 37:16

⁵²⁰ 2:9

divine speeches, and should therefore be viewed in the light of the particular brand(s) of religious consciousness that those earlier parts of the book exhibit.⁵²¹

Thirdly, in every instance of the occurrence of the word (in all of its derivative forms), there is a clear and unambiguous sense that it refers to a positive and desirable quality or action – with one sole and noteworthy exception: *the speech of Job's wife*. One of the ways to read this speech is to hear in her words a critique of the legitimacy of the *tummâ* that her husband insists on maintaining. As such, she represents a solitary voice of challenge to the assumptions around this term held in common by the narrator, God, Job and his friends. This strident note of dissidence sounded by Job's wife with respect to the overarching notion of 'integrity' alerts us to the possibility that the term may not be as positive (or even benign) as what may commonly be assumed, at least within the reckoning of Job's wife.

Might there be a better way of translating *tummâ* so as to convey a clearer sense of the criticism implicit in Job's wife's words than what the word 'integrity' allows? Or to phrase the question differently, "What associations does Job's wife make with the *tummâ* of her husband that echo through her words of critique?" The gravitational field of this root, as it occurs in the book of Job, draws into its orbit a number of elements which inform the nuanced meaning that Job's wife attaches to it. Leaving aside the scenes in heaven to which Job's wife was not privy, she would have had direct experience of two aspects of Job's behaviour that offered a window in to the inner dynamics of his character, and prompted his assessment as a man of 'integrity'. The first would have been Job's ritualistic behaviour in offering precautionary sacrifices on behalf of his children (1:5) – behaviour motivated by deep feelings of insecurity and fear and the consequent need to exert a measure of control. The very first words of Job recorded in the book reveal a great deal about his fearful insecurity,

⁵²¹ A key argument of this thesis is that the divine speeches represent a decisive and transformative shift in consciousness within the book as a whole that is anticipated and foreshadowed in the words of Job's wife. The central tenets of this argument will be expounded later in this chapter and in the one to follow. The significance of the absence of *tmm* or its derivatives in the divine speeches will be discussed in ch. 6.

“It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts” (1:5). The bottom line for Job was that the world was a precarious place, which meant that his station within it could easily be shaken by some unwitting act of his children that might trigger divine retribution. His response was to impose a measure of order and control through ritualistic means, oblivious to the irony that sacrifices could somehow constrain such a capricious deity. (The deeper dramatic irony of the text is that it was precisely his sacrifices – and other aspects of his blameless and upright life – that prompted God to initiate Job's demise.)

The second behavioural aspect that his wife would have experienced directly was his response to the calamities that befell them. The illusion of his ability to maintain order and exercise control through ritual means was tragically exposed through the devastating losses he suffered. Yet, he continued to offer a ritualistic response, almost as a reflex reaction, in the actions and words he offered in 1:20-21. Vogels writes, “A careful reading of Job's reactions in the first part of the book...suggests that Job is possibly not the deep believer he has been proclaimed to be. When he loses everything he really does not know what to do. His only response are conventional rites and superficial, pious formulas.”⁵²²

Having witnessed all of this, Job's wife was able to recognise that far from being a positive and commendable quality, the particular religious paradigm that undergirded Job's *tummâ* was such that this was the very thing keeping him from a new kind of consciousness. What Job (and indeed God) viewed as ‘integrity’, Job's wife recognised as a form of religious fundamentalism which she rigorously, and rightly, critiqued. Newsom puts it well when she writes, “But has his integrity itself become such a fetish that he cannot recognize the perversity of blessing the one who destroys him for no reason?”⁵²³

⁵²² Walter Vogels, "Job's Empty Pious Slogans," in *The Book of Job*, ed. Willem A.M. Beuken (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995), 376.

⁵²³ Carol A. Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck et al (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 361.

The inherent critique in Job's wife's words becomes even more apparent when the verb in this phrase is considered, to which we now turn.

The root meaning of the verb *ḥzq* (חזק) is “to be strong” (in the Qal). Its range of meanings in the Hiphil, especially when followed by the preposition *bē* (the form in which it occurs in 2:9), include the following: lay hold of, hold fast to, keep hold of, catch fast, adhere to, devote oneself to, show strength or resolve, seize, grasp or grip tightly.⁵²⁴ Imbedded in the meaning of the word is the forceful assertion of strength and control in a resolute way. The sense of persistence in the word goes beyond mere endurance, conveying rather the feeling of robust tenacity and strong-minded determination that verges on obstinacy. Stated positively, the determination to hold onto something could be described as gutsy perseverance. Stated negatively, the same determination could be described as neurotic and compulsive attachment.

These nuances of meaning for *ḥzq* come squarely into play when considering the way in which the verb is used within the particular phrase under consideration here.

Especially if one considers that a virtually identical form of this phrase occurs just a few verses earlier. In 2:3, the LORD says to *haśśāṭān* that Job still “persists in his integrity” – *mahăzîq bētummātōw* (מַחֲזִיק בְּתַמּוּמָתוֹ). In navigating the nuances of possible meaning for *ḥzq* within this phrase, I want to introduce the suggestion that in the LORD'S speech in 2:3 it is intended one way, whereas in Job's wife's speech in 2:9 it is intended another.

In the first occurrence, Job's perseverance in his integrity is unquestionably viewed positively. Indeed, it is a source of further pride and admiration within the LORD, who adds this to Job's other commendable qualities of being “a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil” (2:3). Not even the LORD's stunning admission that follows – “although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no

⁵²⁴ Robin Wakely, “2616 חזק,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 64, 72-73.

reason”(2:3) – is enough to raise even the slightest doubt that persevering in integrity is a healthy and commendable thing.

Not so in the speech of Job's wife. In this later occurrence of the phrase a starkly different tone is struck. Far from being an admirable quality, in his wife's eyes Job's “perseverance” has become rigid attachment and obstinate grasping in a compulsive way. To the point that he fails to see the scandal of what the LORD has already conceded, that he was incited by *haśśāṭān* to destroy Job for no reason. And while Job's wife was not privy to this admission, she has already seen enough to convince her that Job's form of faith has become deeply damaging to his wellbeing. The remedy that she suggests in the second half of her speech is radical and controversial, and also full of ambiguity and double meanings.

2.3 *bārēk* 'ēlōhîm (בָּרַךְ אֱלֹהִים)

The first part of the second half of Job's wife's speech contains another pivotal phrase on which the entire meaning of this speech can hinge. As with the phrase preceding it, it too is fraught with ambiguity and requires careful navigation. The Hebrew literally reads, “Bless God,” but a majority of translations render it with “Curse God.”⁵²⁵ At issue here is whether the word *bārēk* (בָּרַךְ) should be read literally as ‘bless,’ or whether it is a euphemism for ‘curse’ that is used in order to avoid the impropriety of a written phrase that expresses the cursing of God.⁵²⁶ This is one of seven instances of the occurrence of this word in the prose tale (1:5, 10, 11, 21; 2:5, 9; 42:12) where “the reader must negotiate its meaning. Does it mean ‘bless’ or ‘curse’? Even though most of the instances are easily enough resolved, the antithetical use of the word ‘bless’

⁵²⁵ As demonstrated by the translations cited above. The one exception in the examples quoted is the Dhouay-Rheims translation that renders the phrase as, “Bless God [and die.]” This is an English translation of the Latin Vulgate's “*benedic Deo [et morere]*” which itself was a literal rendering of the original Hebrew.

⁵²⁶ A similar example occurs in 1 Kgs 21:10, 13, where Naboth is falsely accused of having cursed (lit. “blessed”) God and the king. However, there are instances where the literal words “curse God” (*yēqallēl 'ēlōhāw* יִקְלֵל אֱלֹהֵי יְיָ) are found (Lev 24:15; Ex 22:28). See Newsom, “The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections,” 346.

draws attention to itself."⁵²⁷ Nowhere is this more true than in Job's wife's speech in 2:9 – the only instance of the word within the prose tale where there is genuine ambiguity as to its meaning.⁵²⁸

Three observations need to be made about the ambiguity of the meaning of בָּרַךְ in the prose, and especially within the speech of Job's wife. Firstly, the other two characters to use this word in the prose tale are Job and *has'sāṭān*, who both have opportunity to use the word in its literal and euphemistic senses.⁵²⁹ The fact that Job's wife uses the word only once means that the ambiguity of her employment of the word is heightened. In the section to follow on the meaning of the words of Job's wife, the implications of both a literal and euphemistic reading of this word in this speech will be considered.

Secondly, the ambiguity inherent in this word can be seen as an intentional rhetorical device designed to attune the reader to the theological ambivalence within the book as a whole. In other words, the ambiguity is deliberate, strategic and necessary, and

⁵²⁷ Ibid.

⁵²⁸ Of the other six occurrences of *brk* (בָּרַךְ) in the prose, three of them have the clear, literal sense of 'bless' (1:10, 21; 42:12), and three have the clear, euphemistic sense of 'curse' (1:5, 11; 2:5). See Ellen van Wolde, "A Text-Semantic Study of the Hebrew Bible, Illustrated with Noah and Job," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113, no. 1 (1994): 32-33. For a contrary view that argues for ambiguity within all, or certainly more, of the occurrences of בָּרַךְ in the prose, see Tod Linafelt, "The Undecidability of בָּרַךְ in the Prologue to Job and Beyond," *Biblical Interpretation* 4, no. 2 (1996). (A further example of reading בָּרַךְ as 'bless' in 1:5 can be found in James L. Crenshaw, "Job 3," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible & Theology* 69, no. 1 (2015): 85.) Linafelt's attempt to read the word literally in 1:5; 1:11 and 2:5, while creative, is ultimately unconvincing. He nevertheless makes a valid point about the inherent ambiguity and "undecidability" (a Derridean concept) of the word within the prose tale, and especially within Job's wife's speech. For an example of another way of reading this word and appropriating its meaning within the context of HIV / AIDS suffering, see Sarojini Nadar, "'Barak God and Die!': Women, HIV, and a Theology of Suffering.," in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, ed. R.S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006).

⁵²⁹ Job uses בָּרַךְ euphemistically as 'curse' in 1:5, and literally as 'bless' in 1:21. *Has'sāṭān* uses it literally in 1:10 and euphemistically in the very next verse in 1:11, and again in 2:5.

accordingly should be approached less as an issue to be *resolved* than as a feature to be *embraced*. Tod Linafelt says it well when he writes:

My contention is that this semantic undecidability is an indicator of a theological faultline that runs the length of the book. Tremors associated with this faultline will no doubt be felt at various points in the book, but are felt most keenly on points of blessing and curse, life and death. That is, the book of Job functions to redefine (or at least re-examine the assumptions of) the meaning of בָּרַךְ.⁵³⁰

This opens the door to a quantum reading of בָּרַךְ in Job's wife's speech in which blessing and curse co-exist at the same time, not unlike Schrödinger's cat in quantum theory.⁵³¹ In other words, for Job's wife blessing can be a curse, whereas cursing can lead to blessing. Reading בָּרַךְ literally or euphemistically contains echoes of the alternative reading.

Thirdly, when Job and *hasśātān* use בָּרַךְ euphemistically in the sense of "curse" (1:5, 11; 2:5), the object of the cursing that they reference is God.⁵³² Accordingly, such cursing is viewed in an extremely negative light, without even the slightest hint that it

⁵³⁰ Linafelt, "The Undecidability of בָּרַךְ in the Prologue to Job and Beyond."

⁵³¹ Schrödinger's cat is the mascot of the new physics, a thought experiment devised by quantum theorist Erwin Schrödinger to illustrate some of seemingly impossible both/and possibilities within quantum reality. Within the thought experiment, Schrödinger's cat lives inside an opaque box where a strange device is randomly triggered by the decay of a radioactive substance to feed it either good food or poison. The common sense of our everyday world dictates that *either* the good food *or* the poison would be dispensed and so the cat would be *either* dead *or* alive. But this is no ordinary cat but a quantum one, capable of holding both possibilities as mutually co-existent realities, even though they are mutually contradictory ones. Which means that in a quantum sense the cat is *both* dead *and* alive at the same time. Until the box is opened and the cat is examined, in which case it presents as either dead or alive, depending on whether the examiner checks for signs of life or indications of death. See Ian Marshall and Danah Zohar, *Who's Afraid of Schrödinger's Cat? An a-to-Z Guide to All the New Science Ideas You Need to Keep up with the New Thinking* (New York: Quill William Morrow, 1997), xiii-xv.

⁵³² In Job's speech in 1:5, it is explicitly stated that God is the object of the curse through the use of the word *'ēlōhîm* (אֱלֹהִים). In *hasśātān*'s speeches in 1:11 and 2:5 this is implied as he is speaking to God and says that "he will curse you to your face."

could be seen in any other way. For Job, the mere possibility that his children may have inadvertently cursed God in their hearts fills him with anxiety. For God and *haśśāṭān*, their heavenly wager was constructed in such a way that if Job cursed God it meant that he had failed his test and proved that his piety was not unconditional. Implicit in the heavenly wager is God's hope that Job would not curse him. To put it bluntly, cursing God is *bad, bad, bad!*

But in Job's wife's speech a very different and subversive logic seems to be at work. Reading בָּרַךְ euphemistically, she boldly urges Job to curse God, without any hint of hesitation, apology or restraint. This point more than any other has been the reason for the scathing condemnation and denunciation she has suffered at the hands of countless commentators over the ages. But far from being an undesirable and deleterious choice, cursing God is presented by Job's wife as a necessary, beneficial and ultimately transformational course of action for him to follow. Of course, exactly who or what she means by the word "God" (אֱלֹהִים – *'ēlōhîm*) is a vital point to consider. It will be argued below that the "God" to whom Job's wife refers is intimately connected with the paradigm that informs and undergirds Job's "integrity" (religious consciousness / religious fundamentalism).

One final comment about בָּרַךְ concerns the relationship between the verbs "to bless" and "to kneel":

Older etymological discussions tended to treat these two roots as one (cf., e.g., BDB . . .), positing a development from knee > kneel > kneel before (a superior) > receive blessing or, in OT usage, bless, praise (the superior) on bended knees. For the most part, however, such speculation has been rejected . . . and the roots are listed as *brk* I and II.⁵³³

⁵³³ Michael L. Brown, "1385 בָּרַךְ " in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 757. So too Williams, who asserts that the "traditional association of "kneel" (*brk* I, used in q. and hi.) and 'bless' (*brk* II, used in pi., pu., hitp. and ni.) derives from the assumption that the person who was to be blessed knelt to receive the benediction." (William C. Williams, "1384 בָּרַךְ " *ibid.*, 755.)

While “bless” and “kneel” are no longer regarded as coming from the same root, there is nevertheless a homonymic connection that they share. This association points to the realities of hierarchy and subservience implicit within the concept of blessing, especially when one of the parties in the blessing transaction is God. The significance of this for our discussion here is that if the act of blessing God implied a posture of subservience (the physical manifestation of which would be kneeling), it raises the question what posture would accompany the act of cursing God, remembering that such “cursing” still carries a homonymic connection to “kneel”? Would it be ironic kneeling, or ‘not kneeling’ (what exactly would that mean?), or some other posture? What does this have to say about the nature of the divine-human relationship that Job's wife seems to be advocating, and especially the call of YHWH to Job in the divine speeches to gird up his loins like a man (38:3; 40:7), a posture very different from kneeling?

2.4 *wāmut* (תָּמַת)

The final Hebrew word in the speech of Job's wife (*wāmut* – תָּמַת) is universally translated, “and die.”⁵³⁴ After all the ambiguity, complexity and uncertainty within the rest of her speech, it comes as a surprise (and possibly a sense of relief) that the meaning of this final word is clear. And yet, upon closer inspection this is not as apparent as what initially seems to be the case. While the translation of the word is not disputed, what exactly Job's wife means by it is filled with ambiguity and is consequently wide open to interpretation.

As with the other parts of her speech, there seems to be a deeply subversive dynamic at work within her use of this word, which is all the more poignant given the fact that

⁵³⁴ Of the 49 English translations surveyed, all but one of them translate this word with “and die” (see <https://www.biblegateway.com/verse/en/Job%202:9>, accessed on 28 September 2015). The sole exception is Eugene Peterson's paraphrased translation, in which he renders the second half of Job's wife's speech as, “Curse God and be done with it!” (Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 845.)

it is the last word from her lips ever to be recorded. The boldness and directness with which she suggests the possibility of death for Job stands in direct contrast to the concerns and sentiments expressed between the LORD and *haśśātān* in their heavenly conversation. Indeed, the rationale presented by *haśśātān* for a further assault upon Job is that the preservation of one's life is the deepest human motivation – “All that people have they will give to save their lives” (2:4) – and until Job has been faced with the very real threat of death, his testing could not be regarded as complete. This logic is tacitly acknowledged by the LORD, but still insists that certain restraints must be observed, limiting what could be done to Job. On both occasions when the LORD placed Job and his possessions in *haśśātān*'s power, he was careful to prescribe limits to that power that would safeguard Job's own person. In 1:12 the LORD says, “Very well, all that he has is in your power; only do not stretch out your hand against him!” And when *haśśātān* obtained permission to ‘up the ante’ to afflict Job's “bone and flesh,”⁵³⁵ the LORD says in 2:6, “Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life.” Clearly, as far as the LORD was concerned, the death of Job represented a line that could not be crossed, not least because the termination of Job's life would have meant the premature termination of the heavenly wager before it was settled, leaving the question about disinterested piety unresolved.

⁵³⁵ Most translators read the phrase “touch his bone and his flesh” (2:5) as referring to an affliction of Job's physical body – hence, for example, the NIV's use of the English idiom “flesh and bone” to translate the phrase. However, David Shepherd offers a different reading. He connects it to the phrase in the second creation story in Genesis, when the man says of the woman created from his rib, “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23). Shepherd argues that the phrase refers to Job's wife and especially her capacity to extend Job's life through the provision of children. He writes:

The Satan's allegation is clearly that the preservation of Job's wife – and with her Job's prospects for ongoing life in the form of progeny – prevents a meaningful assessment of whether Job's piety is as unmotivated as God maintains. In light of the Satan's allegation, his suggestion to eliminate her seems eminently reasonable: so long as she remains, Job need not curse, for in her rests the possibility of Job restocking his quiver (Ps. 127). (David Shepherd, “Strike His Bone and His Flesh!: Reading Job from the Beginning,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 33, no. 1 (2008): 92.)

These sentiments and concerns regarding death shared between the LORD and *haśśātān* in their heavenly discourse reveal that the moral world they inhabit is one where the line between life and death is solid and absolute, with death representing the ultimate and final negation. The tragic deaths of all of Job's children as the horrific climax of Job's first test underscores the point in an emphatic way. This is something that Job recognises, for in response to the news of the catastrophic losses of property and life, he responds with conventional acts of mourning (1:20)⁵³⁶ and a proverb expressing the inevitable and irreversible progression from birth to death that he knows he cannot escape – “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there” (1:21).⁵³⁷

On the face of it, it appears as if Job has a mature and realistic attitude towards death as a necessary and unavoidable dimension of life. When he goes on to assert, “...the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away, blessed be the name of the LORD” (1:21), he is expressing “the conviction that in all of life, in birth and in death, in what is given and what is taken away, God is worthy of praise and adoration.”⁵³⁸ And yet, upon closer inspection it would appear that Job's response in fact functions as a moral performance that shields him from the full implications of death as the ultimate negation. His deliberate, measured actions are stereotypically conventional which, together with his formulaic words, become a ritualistic and mostly external way of

⁵³⁶ The particular actions that mark Job's initial response are deliberate and stereotypical rites of mourning – he tears his robe (cf. Gen 37:29, 34; Josh 7:6; 2 Sam 1:11; 3:31; 13:31; Ezra 9:3; Esth 4:1), shaves his head (cf. Is 15:2; 22:12; Jer 7:29; 16:6; 41:5; Ezek 7:18; Amos 8:10; Mic 1:16), and falls on the ground (cf. Josh 7:6; 2 Sam 13:31). (Samuel E. Balentine, *Job*, The Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2006), 56; David J.A. Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, Word Biblical Commentary 17 (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 34-35.)

⁵³⁷ The reference of returning to his mother's womb (“there” or “thither”), as a metaphor for death, is expounded by David Clines in reference to Ps 139. He writes:

The best clue...lies in Ps 139, where v13 speaks of an individual's creation in the mother's womb, and v15 of that same individual's creation in the depths of the earth. The images surrounding the origin of humankind and that of the individual are fused.... So here too [in Job 1:21] the imagery of the individual's birth is silently fused with the imagery of humankind's creation, so that “thither” is indeed the earth. (*Job 1 - 20*, 37.)

⁵³⁸ Balentine, *Job*, 57.

acknowledging death's reality without having to experience deep within himself (and his moral universe) the inherent loss of control that it inevitably brings. Certainly, the deaths of his children are permitted to touch this particular moral universe he inhabits, but only to the extent of activating a pietistic response designed to function as a trusted mechanism for the imposition of a sense of order. Simply put, Job is unable to access the depths of desolation and negation that the deaths of his children represent because the religious consciousness forged by his faith paradigm had become a hedge around him.⁵³⁹

An important aside that bears mentioning at this point is that Job's insulation from the negation of death shifts dramatically and decisively at the start of the poetry section when he gives full voice in ch.3 to a radically different perspective of death. Which begs the question as to what precipitated this extraordinary shift within him? This question will be returned to later in this chapter where it will be argued that the influence of Job's wife's speech on Job can be seen most clearly in Job's remarkable speech in which he curses the day of his birth, appropriating the absolute negation of death as a possible and legitimate mechanism of transformation as his wife suggested.

But to return to the discussion at hand, the attitudes to death in the prose tale exhibited by the LORD, *haśśātān* and Job himself are subverted by Job's wife in the bold and direct way in which she presents death to Job as a viable and even desirable option for him to embrace. This has led some commentators, such as Samuel Terrien, to think that Job's wife was advocating a "theological method of committing euthanasia" as a compassionate way to end his pain.⁵⁴⁰ While such a position on the part of Job's wife would certainly be a subversive challenge of the attitudes to death held by the other key characters in the prologue, the suggestion that she was advocating euthanasia as a way for Job to escape his pain does not go nearly far enough. For what Job's wife is

⁵³⁹ How ironic that in seeking to remove the protective hedge of God's blessing from around Job, which was *haśśātān*'s motivation for bringing disaster upon him in the first place (cf. 1:10), the hedge of his faith paradigm remained secure, and may even have been strengthened.

⁵⁴⁰ Cited in Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, 51.

subverting is not simply the assumption that death should be avoided, but rather the very notion of death itself. The death that Job's wife suggests is not merely a means to end Job's pain but is rather a gateway into a new and radically transformed consciousness.

Of course, Job's wife doesn't get any opportunity to expound this perspective on death in any detail. She is simply allowed to name it through the utterance of this single word – *wāmut* (מָוֹת). But like a seed that is willing to fall to the ground and die, as the text unfolds this embryonic idea will germinate in the silence, take root in the fallow ground of Job's human experience, break open the hardened crust of religious certitude and conviction, before growing into fullness within the divine speeches, in which Job finally experiences the death his wife hinted at through his experience of the tragic sublime and the transformed consciousness it produced within him, which William Desmond describes as a kind of dying. He writes:

Thus we might liken [tragic insight] to a process of being drowned: the air of everyday instrumentalities is withdrawn, we cannot breathe, we are being asphyxiated by a knowing that we cannot process, cannot digest. We are brought under, going under, undergoing, in shock from a lightning-bolt out of the Once and the Never.⁵⁴¹

3. Interpretations of the meaning of Job's wife's speech

Having analysed the constituent parts of the speech of Job's wife in fair detail, we turn now to a consideration of the meaning of her words as a whole, drawing on the insights gleaned in the previous section.

Before presenting my own reading of her words, as helpful background let me offer ten different interpretations of her speech that have been articulated by others that provide a fairly comprehensive (though not exhaustive) overview of the range of

⁵⁴¹ William Desmond, "Being at a Loss: Reflections on Philosophy and the Tragic," in *Tragedy and Philosophy*, ed. N. Georgopoulos (New York: Macmillan, 1993), 179. Cited in Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: University Press, 2003), 253.

possible meaning in the words of Job's wife.⁵⁴² Some of these interpretations are mutually exclusive, but many of the elements within them are overlapping. In some of the examples the words of Job's wife will be paraphrased (and amplified) as a way of clarifying the meaning intended.

3.1 Inciting or tempting Job to abandon his faith

The majority reading takes the words of Job's wife at face value, hearing in her speech a disillusioned and angry wife who urges her husband to abandon his faith, reject (i.e. curse) God, and give up on life. Some would add that in doing so she becomes an ally (whether unwitting or otherwise) of Satan in tempting Job to sin. At the core of this interpretation is the unquestioned judgment that what Job's wife was advocating was truly monstrous. Certainly, within the moral universe of the prose tale in which Job has been paraded as a paragon of God-fearing faith, even the slightest suggestion of apostasy would only be seen in a highly censorious and disparaging light, let alone an unveiled, full-frontal incitement to a blasphemous rejection of God and negation of faith. Small wonder that Job's wife has been vilified and denounced so vociferously.

Such a simple and unnuanced reading of Job's wife aligns well with a reading of the prose tale as a straightforward didactic narrative in which all the characters play their parts in a mechanical, predictable and unambiguous way to the sole end of furthering the linear development of the plot and the monologic truth it seeks to convey.⁵⁴³ This is precisely what Job's wife does within this reading of her words. By urging Job to curse God and die, she plays her outrageous part by providing the hero of the tale a further opportunity to demonstrate the strength of his faith and resolve, which he does as he rejects her diabolical counsel, passing his test with flying colours in the process.

⁵⁴² In the discussion on the reception history of Job's wife in ch.2 above, some of the different ways in which the words of Job's wife have been heard and interpreted were presented. This section here recaps and expands some of the material from that chapter.

⁵⁴³ See footnote 178 on p.83 in ch.2 above which offers a brief but important comment about Carol Newsom's superb treatment of the genre of the prose tale, addressing the question of whether the prose tale should be read as a naïve or a subversive didactic narrative. See further Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*, 32-71.

However, there are compelling reasons to view the naïveté of the prose tale as a false naïveté that points to the elements of subversion at work within the text as a whole.⁵⁴⁴ Foremost of these is Job's wife, and so a straightforward, unnuanced reading of her as a traitorous wife who urges her husband to abandon his faith and give up on life is emphatically rejected, at least as the sole and definitive interpretation of her words.⁵⁴⁵

3.2 Legal accusations and the judgment of God

The words of Job's wife could be heard as a legal challenge of the law of retribution and a judgment of God's unjust treatment of Job within that legal paradigm. The notion of a lawsuit with God will emerge strongly in the poetry section as an idea that grips hold of Job that he will not let go.⁵⁴⁶ But this reading of the speech of Job's wife suggests that she is the one who introduces the category of legal contestation as a means of responding to divine injustice.⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁴ For a fuller discussion of this idea see David J.A. Clines, "False Naivety in the Prologue to Job," *HAR* 9 (1985).

⁵⁴⁵ The Bakhtinian notion of dialogic truth recognizes the place and importance of diverse, unmerged voices in contributing to an articulation of the truth that cannot be conveyed by a single voice on its own. (See the discussion on Bakhtin's understanding of dialogic truth on pp.37-38 in ch.1 above.) As such, this reading of Job's wife, and indeed the others that are to follow, each play their part in shaping a nuanced interpretation of her role in the book that none of them can reveal on their own.

⁵⁴⁶ The motif of a legal trial with God dominates Job's speech in 9:1 – 10:22; and the language of a lawsuit recurs repeatedly at various other points in the human dialogue and Job's concluding soliloquy (cf. 13:3, 18-19, 22; 16:8, 18-19; 19:23-24, 28-29; 23:2-7; 31:35).

⁵⁴⁷ Rachel Magdalene makes a compelling argument that in the scenes in heaven, *haśśātān* is the one who first initiates a lawsuit. She writes:

I argue that the Satan, as a private third-party prosecutor, brings a formal legal indictment against Job for having the guilty mind of a blasphemer.... The Satan does not assert that Job has blasphemed, only that he will because he has the guilty mind, or guilty intention (*mens rea*), of a blasphemer. Even though having a guilty mind alone is typically insufficient for a finding of guilt in a human court, and the court must also find that some guilty act (*actus reus*) was committed, having a guilty intention is grounds for criminal sanctions in the divine court.... Job faces a very serious charge, in a real trial, which can result in a terrible outcome for him if he should be convicted. This is not a mere test of faith.

She does so based on two assumptions. The first is the doctrine of retribution itself, which articulated a direct causal relationship between sin and suffering on the one hand, and righteousness and blessing on the other. In the ANE, anyone "suffering some adverse condition, such as illness or crop failure, typically interpreted it as some form of divine legal investigation or trial punishment."⁵⁴⁸ The second is her belief in her husband's innocence, attested to in her affirming words to him when she says, "You still maintain your integrity." Of course, the second assumption contradicts the first. The resolution of such a contradiction lies either in abandoning her belief in her husband's innocence, or revising the tenets of the doctrine of retribution. Job's wife does neither. Instead, she accuses God of injustice, and calls her husband to enforce a costly act of retributive justice, by cursing God and surrendering his life as a testimony against him.

This legal accusation and judgment of God can be heard in the words of Job's wife, which could be paraphrased (and amplified) as follows:

Your integrity is still intact, and is clearly beyond reproach. Yet, look at how you've been treated, with such monstrous injustice. Instead of being blessed as you deserve you've been cursed by God, who has violated the order of things by punishing you for no reason. Now this is what God deserves (for the punishment should fit the crime) – to be cursed! Instead of blessing God, curse him. This is what your integrity demands. And when you die, your innocent death will be a witness against him!

The Satan also accuses God of unfairly favouring Job, maybe even aiding and abetting the accused. God has disrupted, according to the Satan, the moral economy by bringing good to Job before it was deserved. Obedience and faith beget blessings, not *vice versa*.... Hence, once the Satan brings a formal accusation, the legal process moves into action, and every being connected to the case must cooperate with it, including Job and God. (F. Rachel Magdalene, "Job's Wife as Hero: A Feminist-Forensic Reading of the Book of Job," *Biblical Interpretation* 14, no. 3 (2006): 221-23.)

Within such a framework, the three friends (Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar) could be viewed as less the friends of Job than the friends of the court (*amici curiae*), who offer their unsolicited input to the case at hand.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 220.

3.3 Bitterness and Blame

It is also possible to hear in the words of Job's wife the unmistakable note of bitterness and blame directed towards Job for the losses that she had to endure. Clines writes:

Through no fault of her own, but solely because of the social structures of her time, her own well-being has been wholly dependent on Job's. She has relied on him for her economic existence, for her social status, and for her moral standing in the community. But now, at a stroke, she has lost everything. Her income is gone, now that the cattle and servants have been destroyed, her position as matriarch and wife of a prince has been lost, and she is open to the obloquy of guilt by association. All this in addition to the sudden loss of her ten children. And who is to blame? No one but her husband. All that rising early in the mornings to offer sacrifices in case the children had sinned (1:5) was nothing but the scrupulosity of the hypocrite. It is not the children but the husband who has brought disaster upon the household. And Job has uttered no word of regret for his unarguable responsibility for the destruction of the family, but insists on "maintaining his integrity." The only honorable act from this guilty man now would be for him to call down the wrath of God upon his own head.⁵⁴⁹

With this sense of the psychological disposition of Job's wife, her words could be paraphrased as follows:

The audacity! That you of all people still insist that you're a man of 'integrity'! Let me tell you what real 'integrity' means here – for you to face up to the truth of your guilt and accept the consequences of your shameful wrongdoing. I dare you to call down the wrath of God upon you, that your life might be like that of our children, as you rightly deserve.

⁵⁴⁹ Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, 51.

3.4 Encouraging Job to end his pain

A starkly different interpretation of the words of Job's wife, first articulated by Samuel Terrien, is to hear in them the compassion and concern of a loving wife who wants to end her husband's unbearable pain. Far from uttering angry words motivated by malicious intent, bitterness or blame, she advocates a way out of his suffering. "She encourages Job to do the one forbidden thing that would ensure his immediate destruction and the end to his interminable agony. [She] is helping him, not damning him."⁵⁵⁰

And if she recommends Job to "curse" God and so bring death upon himself...it can only be because she feels that sudden death must be better for Job than lingering pain from which no recovery seems possible. It is an impious suggestion she makes, but it does not arise out of impiety; it is humane and entirely for Job's benefit, this "theological method of committing euthanasia" (Terrien).⁵⁵¹

3.5 Encouraging Job to maintain his integrity to the end

This reading is suggested by Balentine. The loathsome sores with which Job was afflicted would have seemed life threatening.⁵⁵² With the seeming inevitability of Job's death looming large before them both, Job's wife encourages him to maintain his integrity to the end.

⁵⁵⁰ David Penchansky, "Job's Wife: The Satan's Handmaid," in *Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do What Is Right: Studies on the Nature of God in Tribute to James L. Crenshaw*, ed. David Penchansky and Paul L. Redditt (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 224.

⁵⁵¹ Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, 51.

⁵⁵² Even though the Lord had explicitly commanded *hasśāṭān* to spare Job's life, the whole point of this second affliction was that it should carry the very real threat of death for, according to *hasśāṭān*, therein lay the real test of Job's faith, "All that people have they will give to save their lives" (2:4). It can therefore be concluded that Job's physical affliction would have presented not simply as an uncomfortable skin irritation but as a serious and potentially life-threatening condition.

*In spite of everything that has happened I can see that you've managed to hold fast to your faith and your integrity remains uncompromised. Don't give up now. Continue to bless God right up to the very end, and then you can die (in peace).*⁵⁵³

3.6 Forcing Job to make a decision – the intentional ambiguity of *tummâ* (תַּמָּה)

In the discussion above that explored the meaning of the individual words and phrases of Job's wife's speech, the range of meanings contained in the root *tmm* (תַּמַּם) were mentioned. Carol Newsom takes this observation in a slightly different direction, suggesting two nuanced alternatives to the meaning of this speech and the particular decision it forces from Job, based on the ambiguity of *tummâ*. She writes:

There is an ambiguity in her words, however, that is seldom recognized, one that revolves around the thematically crucial word "integrity." The term "integrity" (*tummah*) denotes a person whose conduct is in complete accord with moral and religious norms and whose character is one of utter honesty, without guile. Job's wife's disturbing question hints at a tension between these two aspects of the word. Her question could be understood in two different senses. She could be heard as saying: "Do you still persist in your integrity (= righteousness)? Look where it has gotten you. Give it up, as God has given you up. Curse God, and then die." Or she could be understood as saying: "Do you still persist in your integrity (= honesty)? If so, stand by it and say what is truly in your heart. Curse God before you die."⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵³ This rendering is very close to that suggested by Balentine. (Balentine, *Job*, 63.) A major difficulty with an interpretation like this is how it accommodates Job's dismissive response of his wife's words as being like those of "any foolish woman" (2:10), as such a cutting response would hardly ensue from words of encouragement for Job to maintain his integrity and continue to bless God. One explanation could be that the brevity (and ambiguity) of the words of Job's wife resulted in their intended meaning being grossly misunderstood by Job.

⁵⁵⁴ Carol A. Newsom, "Job," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 139-40. Cf. "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 356.

3.7 Forcing Job to make a decision – the intentional ambiguity of *brk* (ברך)

In similar vein to the previous interpretation, the words of Job's wife can be read as forcing a decision from Job, which this time hinges on the ambiguity of *brk* (ברך).

Ellen van Wolde suggests that both meanings of this word are simultaneously operant in the speech of Job's wife, functioning side by side to delineate the choice that confronts Job. She writes:

In 2:9 Job's wife forces her husband to choose. He can curse God, which might make God leave him and result in his death.... Alternatively, Job can bless God and die with that blessing on his lips.... This syntagmatic double force of ברך shows the exact choice that Job is faced with: the choice between blessing or cursing God and between life and death. Job's wife confronts her husband with this choice and with its implication – that is, death. She represents absolute confrontation. Consider what you are doing, make a decision, and do not just undergo everything passively. It is his wife's question that sets Job thinking.⁵⁵⁵

3.8 A true and loyal partner

Gerald Janzen argues for a positive construal of the words of Job's wife as those of a true and loyal partner. He draws on the connection with the account of the creation of a helpmate for the man in Genesis 2, suggested by *haśśātān*'s use of the phrase “touch his bone and his flesh” in 2:5. In touching Job's bone and flesh, Job's wife was personally and directly implicated – for according to the Genesis 2 account, as his wife she was “bone of [his] bone, and flesh of [his] flesh” (Gen 2:23). As such, she was able to identify with his experience in a way in which no one else was able, for in a real sense it was her experience too. As his helpmate and partner, she was in the painful yet privileged position of being able to articulate the questions and possibilities for action arising out of Job's experience, even before he was able to recognise them for himself. And this is what she does. Janzen writes:

The role is the “helpmeet” one of asking the thankless question which already lies latent within a slumbering or semi-awakened moral and religious and

⁵⁵⁵ van Wolde, "A Text-Semantic Study of the Hebrew Bible, Illustrated with Noah and Job," 33.

existential consciousness. Not until that question, and the alternative for existence which it poses, has been felt in force deep within the soul as a real possibility for action is human existence ready for maturity before Yahweh in the community and in the world. Whether the alternative posed by this question is one that ought to be chosen or to be declined is something that the individual must decide. How one decides determines whether one affirms and participates in establishing one's integrity at a new level or whether one denies one's integrity and implicates oneself in its deterioration and loss.⁵⁵⁶

It is a true and loyal partner who risks articulating such a provocative yet necessary question, drawing it out of the depths of being and into the awareness of the beloved. Janzen argues that through her question, she points Job to a new form of consciousness that recognizes that integrity cannot be sustained simply through submissive piety, but requires taking active responsibility for independent self-affirmation.⁵⁵⁷

3.9 Playing the devil's advocate

Claire McGinnis offers a novel reading of Job's wife as someone playing the devil's advocate, in the contemporary sense of the term.⁵⁵⁸ She articulates a contrary position

⁵⁵⁶ J. Gerald Janzen, *Job, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 49-50.

⁵⁵⁷ Janzen paraphrases the words of Job's wife in ways that approximate aspects of my own reading that will be discussed below. His paraphrase reads as follows:

Do you still possess your own integrity as an individual? Are you not in danger, through your continuing piety, of denying the implications of your own experience, your own sense of what makes sense, your responsibility as a moral being? Are you not in danger of "bad faith" in alienating yourself from yourself by this disgusting display of fawning religiosity? If you really want to keep a grip (*mahziq*) on your integrity, you will wake up to the fact that your integrity arises as your own self-grounded project and has nothing to do with God – and you will curse God, even if that means you die. (ibid., 50.)

⁵⁵⁸ Cf. section 7.3 on p.86 in ch.2 above.

for the purpose of exposing its deficiency – “her suggestion wards off a threat that already exists; *she* verbalizes the option of cursing God so that Job will not.”⁵⁵⁹

McGinnis observes that Job's response to the calamities of ch.1 is expressed physically and verbally. Various ritualistic actions – which included the response of worship – in 1:20 are immediately followed by his doxological words in 1:21. In ch.2, however, this pattern is broken. Following his affliction with loathsome sores, his physical response is purely profane – he scrapes himself with a potsherd while sitting among the ashes (2:8) – and he says nothing. McGinnis sees in this broken pattern an indication that Job may well have been wavering in his resolve. His wife recognises the precarious position in which Job finds himself, and so before he can speak and possibly say something blasphemous with dire and irrevocable consequences for them both, she interjects. She assumes the role of a benevolent provocateur who draws from her husband a verbal response that safeguards him from the threat of abandoning his faith. McGinnis writes:

She sees Job, in the shock of what has so suddenly befallen him, sitting on the fence: to bless God or curse God, that is the question. And so she presents this blasphemous position not because it is the position she wants Job to take, but because she knows that once she verbalizes it, once this position is held out to Job *by another* as an option, he will refuse it. She takes a calculated risk concerning what kind of response such an outrageous suggestion will evoke. She says what she does to provoke him to take publicly, as it were, precisely the opposite position.⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵⁹ Claire M. McGinnis, "Playing the Devil's Advocate in Job: On Job's Wife," in *The Whirlwind: Essays on Job, Hermeneutics and Theology in Memory of Jane Morse* ed. Stephen L. Cook, Corinne L. Patton, and James W. Watts (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 140.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 138.

3.10 Martyrdom as an act of resistance and protest

The final interpretation of Job's wife's speech to be considered in this section is that offered by Rachel Magdalene.⁵⁶¹ Magdalene argues that Job is a victim of extreme theocratic violence, to the point that he exhibits symptoms of a torture victim. This is what Job's wife recognises. She also understands that as a victim of such violence and as an unconscious strategy for survival, Job has assumed the torturer's worldview as his own. Furthermore, she grasps the heart of the issue at hand – whether this God should be blessed or blasphemed, whether passive acquiescence or active resistance will be Job's response. Her words are a heroic attempt to enable her husband to resist. She encourages him to hold fast to his integrity and then, contrary to their own best interests, urges him to blaspheme God:

She offers Job a means by which to perform the ultimate act of resistance to the violence of oppressive legal systems: martyrdom.... She forces him to choose whether he will bless God or blaspheme God. She forces him to accept or reject passivity. She forces him to confront the possibility of death.... She is exhorting Job to provoke his perpetrator, through blasphemy, into bringing his whole force upon Job. This is the way of the martyr.... [who], through his or her death, states loudly and clearly that he or she will not live on the torturer's terms – with the torturer's worldview and under the torturer's abusive legal system. Mrs Job's words put both of their bodies on the line. She demands that Job be certain about where he is going to place his commitments.⁵⁶²

4. Further readings of the words of Job's wife

In the light of all of the above, let me now offer my own readings of the words of Job's wife. The first is my primary reading of her words that anchors the argument of this thesis. The secondary reading is a variation that draws on some of the same elements as the primary reading, but lands in a different place as to the psychological

⁵⁶¹ Cf. section 7.4 on pp.87-89 in ch. 2 above.

⁵⁶² Magdalene, "Job's Wife as Hero: A Feminist-Forensic Reading of the Book of Job," 233-35.

frame of mind of Job's wife, and hence her underlying disposition towards her husband, and indeed the motivation and intention behind her words. Although the secondary reading is, in my assessment, less compelling than the primary one, it is offered as a reminder that defined interpretations held with conviction are never absolute and can always suggest further interpretive possibilities. Before turning to these readings, a few comments are necessary concerning the interpretive decisions and assumptions upon which these readings are founded.

4.1 Interpretive decisions as to the meaning of particular words and phrases

A responsible and credible reading of Job's wife's speech needs to give careful consideration to the interpretive 'forks in the road' that characterise it, representing critical points of decision as to which particular interpretive path will be followed which can dramatically alter the reading at which one finally arrives. These would include the following:

- whether the first three words are read in the interrogative, or as a declarative statement;
- what exactly is meant by the word *tummâ* (תִּמְמָה);
- whether the phrase "persist in your integrity" (*maḥăzîq bêtummātekā* – מַחֲזִיק בְּתִמְמַתְּךָ) refers to a desirable or undesirable quality;
- whether *brk* (בֵּרַךְ) is read literally as "blessed", euphemistically as "cursed", ambiguously as conveying either meaning, or quantumly as conveying both meanings simultaneously;
- whether the phrase "curse God" (*bārēk 'ēlōhîm* – בָּרַךְ אֱלֹהִים – reading *brk* euphemistically) is seen as a renunciation of faith or a courageous affirmation thereof, which, in turn, infers either a positive or negative view of "God";
- whether the reference to death implies a desirable or undesirable outcome.

The departure point of my primary reading is Job's wife's use of the word *tummâ* (תִּמְמָה) and the negative connotation that she attaches to it, certainly as she sees it embodied within Job. Far from being a desirable and commendable attribute, she sees Job's so-called "integrity" as an aspect of his character shaped by his particular brand

of faith that has forged an inherently false picture of God within him. Job's anxious concern to live a blameless life, while well-intentioned, has plugged into a neurotic religious worldview that, according to his wife, proves utterly incapable of serving him within the existential crisis he is currently facing. The moral and cultic associations clustered within the root *tmm* (תמם) and its derivatives – as already discussed above – help to define the moral orbit of *tummâ* in Job's world as revolving primarily around the obsessive concern with right and wrong. Job's wife takes deep and serious exception to this aspect of Job's character, a perspective wholly at odds with that held by Job, God and even *haśśātān*.

But what of the critique that such a negative connotation of *tummâ* should be dismissed on the grounds that it falls outside of the (positive) parameters with which the word is used elsewhere in the book of Job and the Hebrew Bible? The discussion earlier in this chapter on the word itself has already responded to this critique in part, but one further comment is necessary. The marginal place of Job's wife and her voice's consequent lack of privilege and authority meant that a subversive subtlety was essential if her words were ever to enjoy even a hearing. Her contrary use of a term such as *tummâ* is an excellent example of such subversive subtlety at work, in which she dares to challenge the assumptions and associations of the word, but in a way that is not immediately obvious.

This negative connotation of *tummâ* within the mind of Job's wife is amplified by her negative use of the verb *ḥzq* (חזק), denoting a grasping attachment in a fanatical and compulsive way. All of which is to say that the phrase *maḥzīq bētummātekā* (מַחֲזִיק בְּתוּמַתְּךָ), as used by Job's wife, refers to a problematic and highly undesirable quality. Accordingly, the common translation of the phrase as “persist in your integrity” is inadequate in conveying the disapprobation of Job's wife that these words convey. Alternative paraphrased translations that more accurately convey the sentiment of Job's wife's word could include the following: “attached to your toxic religious fundamentalism”; “trapped in your destructive worldview”; “gripped by your fanatical religious paradigm.”

This understanding of *tummâ* and the phrase *maḥăzîq bêtummātekā* is the key departure point of my reading of the words of Job's wife. Which has further implications for some of the other interpretive decisions that need to be made regarding the meaning of particular words or phrases in the speech, as outlined above. Firstly, the question whether the first three words of her speech should be read in the interrogative or as a declarative statement becomes inconsequential, because either option makes no material difference to the sense of the phrase.⁵⁶³

Secondly, the *religious* foundation of Job's attachment to his toxic religious fundamentalism has implications for the view of God that pertains within this paradigm. Thus, the reference to "God" ('ēlōhîm – אֱלֹהִים) in the second half of Job's wife's speech suggests a negative connotation – a false god if you will. Such a view of God impacts the way in which בֵּרַךְ can be read, and more particularly the nature of the death that is connected to the blessing or cursing of this God. In other words, the death that ensues from the blessing of a false god is a negative thing; whereas the death that ensues from the cursing of a false god could be a transformative thing.

Accordingly, within my interpretation of the words of Job's wife, the determination of whether בֵּרַךְ should be read literally or euphemistically is of marginal consequence as either reading can make sense – and very importantly, both can meaningfully accommodate Job's response in 2:10 – as will be demonstrated shortly. While I do have a clear preference for reading בֵּרַךְ euphemistically as "curse" for a number of

⁵⁶³ The distinction between reading the first half of the speech in the interrogative or as a declarative statement is only valid if there is an attempt to read these words positively – i.e. "You still persist in your integrity!" can be heard as a positive affirmation (when "persisting in integrity" is viewed as a desirable quality), whereas "Do you still persist in your integrity?" conveys a tone of negative critique. However, if the phrase *maḥăzîq bêtummātekā* has a negative connotation, it makes no material difference whether these words are read in the interrogative or not – i.e. "Are you still attached to your toxic religious fundamentalism?" and "You're still attached to your toxic religious fundamentalism!" convey the same essential sentiment.

reasons that will be discussed below, its alternative literal sense remains an important component in the assessment of Job's wife's speech as a whole.

4.2 My primary reading of the speech of Job's wife

We finally come to my primary reading of the speech of Job's wife which, for the sake of clarity, will be presented as an amplified paraphrase:

Are you still attached to your toxic religious fundamentalism, which you've interpreted as 'integrity' and have assumed will guarantee your security? Can you not see the poverty and futility of such a worldview? It's a way of seeing the world that is imprisoning you, preventing you from truly experiencing life in all its complexity. Let it go. Instead, do the craziest thing imaginable. Dare to renounce the 'God' that is the object of your faith who has become your jailer. Yes, curse this false God. I know that it will feel like a death. But do not be afraid. It's a necessary form of dying so that a new, authentic and transformed self might emerge that will be capable of seeing in exciting new ways the truth of God, the world, and our place within it.

This amplified paraphrase reads בָּרַךְ euphemistically as 'curse,' which is my preferred reading.⁵⁶⁴ But my interpretation of Job's wife's speech can readily accommodate a literal reading of בָּרַךְ as 'bless,' which yields the following paraphrase that remains consistent with the meaning of the one above:

Are you still attached to your toxic religious fundamentalism, which you've interpreted as 'integrity' and have assumed will guarantee your security? Can you not see the poverty and futility of such a worldview? It's a way of seeing the world that is

⁵⁶⁴ My preference for reading 'curse' over 'bless' is founded on two key aspects of the interpretation of the words of Job's wife. The first has to do with her appropriation of the words of both the LORD and *haśśāṭān*. Because *haśśāṭān* used בָּרַךְ with the sense of 'curse' in his references to what he claimed Job would do (1:11; 2:5), her appropriation of his words requires her to use it with the same sense too. The second has to do with the introduction of a note of adversarial contestation with God which forms an important link with the divine speeches. Clearly, saying "Curse God" is far more adversarial than saying "Bless God." Furthermore, see the following footnote below.

*imprisoning you, preventing you from truly experiencing life in all its complexity. Make no mistake, devoting yourself to the 'God' who commands this kind of faith is bad news. Indeed, blessing this God will surely bring death, not life.*⁵⁶⁵

4.3 A secondary reading – resentment of Job's faith

Job and his wife had an extensive estate and a large family that had taken years to build and grow. Yet, all this was wiped out in the space of a single day. The circumstances, timing and enormity of the losses were such that this couldn't easily be attributed to coincidence or simple bad luck. Clearly, a higher (divine) agenda was at work and Job and his wife were the ones to face the full brunt of its devastating impact. All ten of their children were dead and gone, their material security was in ruins and their social situation was precarious in the extreme. Within the moral universe of the text, everything pointed in one direction – the hand of God was somehow involved.⁵⁶⁶

Job's wife had no reason to suspect that her husband shared any culpability for what they had suffered. She knew that he was a good man. She knew about his sacrifices on behalf of their children. She knew about his devotion and his integrity. Job had not brought this upon them. God was the one who needed to answer for what had happened. But Job's response demonstrated his unwillingness, or maybe even his

⁵⁶⁵ A further reason for my preference for reading 'curse' over 'bless' is apparent from this paraphrase, in which the second half of the speech adds little of substance in that it simply offers a restatement of the essential point of the first half of the speech. As such, reading בָּרַךְ literally results in the entire speech being a description of the essential problem facing Job without the offer of any resolution. By contrast, reading בָּרַךְ euphemistically introduces a radical note of resolution that provides for Job a way out of his bondage.

⁵⁶⁶ The expression used by *has'sātān* in both heavenly scenes is that God should "stretch out [his] hand" (1:11; 2:5) in order to touch ("smite" or "strike" is arguably a better translation of נָגַע) Job. The same expression is used by God in prescribing limits to what *has'sātān* is permitted to do, when he says, "only do not stretch out your hand against him" (1:12). Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible the hand of God is a symbol of divine power (cf. Ex 13:3), and the outstretched hand (or arm) of God represents a powerful offensive (cf. Ex 3:20; 9:15; Deut 4:34) as well as liberatory (cf. Deut 5:15; Jer 31:21) capability. In response to his wife, Job acknowledges in 2:10 that good and bad come from the hand of God.

inability, to ask those sorts of hard questions of God. His response was not to challenge God but to bless God, effectively exonerating God of any wrongdoing.

Suddenly, Job's wife saw his faith in a new and damning light. She recognised that Job's religious paradigm was fundamentally incapable of honest and robust engagement with God. She could see that it was more important for Job that the image of God in his mind (and the image of himself as a devotee of this God) be preserved and defended at all costs, than the truth about God be revealed or even pursued. Not even the deaths of all ten of their children, and the reckoning that those untimely deaths demanded, could trump Job's insistence that God was not answerable to any allegations of wrongdoing. A chilling new awareness came over Job's wife – her husband's response revealed that he was effectively aiding and abetting God, acting as an accessory after the fact as he shielded God from justice, and thereby sharing the culpability of complicity in the murder of their children. Worst of all, this fanatical collusion carried the smugly self-serving labels of piety, devotion and integrity. But still she held her tongue, willing to wait and see whether Job's defense of God would be vindicated, and whether perhaps she may have erred in her assessment of his faith. When he was inflicted with loathsome sores and still refused to open his mouth even to question God, she finally opened hers and found the kind of incisive words, laced with biting sarcasm, that Job had been incapable of uttering:

Are you still holding on desperately to your precious 'integrity'? Can you not see that it's a sham, blinding you to the truth of what's really going on here? But sure, carry on. Knock yourself out Job. Continue blessing your brutish god. And then you might as well die. Because with this kind of faith you're as good as dead anyway.

4.4 Interpreting the speech of Job's wife

At the heart of Job's wife speech, as I read it in both my primary and secondary readings, is a challenge of the religious paradigm upon which Job had based his life and which had been the foundation of his sense of security. It is this religious worldview, with its need for certainty, its illusion of control, its "blessed rage for

order”⁵⁶⁷ and its insistence on drawing sharp dividing lines between the dualisms of right and wrong that Job's wife recognizes as inadequate, and challenges accordingly. Along with her challenge of this paradigm is a critique of the God who sustains it but who, in fact, is a product of the paradigm in the first place.

The inadequacy of Job's faith paradigm lay not simply in its failure as an insurance policy, proving incapable of affording Job and his household the kind of guaranteed protection that it had implicitly underwritten in spite of Job's consistent payment of premiums, if you will, through his pious religious practices. The real inadequacy lay in its refusal to allow Job to respond to the tragedies that befell him in ways that would have led to a radically redefined form of faith. His experience of suffering held deeply transformative potential for him by provoking profound and far-ranging questions about the very foundations of his life – his identity as a person of faith; his understanding of God; his view of the world. But the closed (“complete” – $\square\eta$) character of his stolid faith could not entertain such possibilities, closing the door on any suggestion of fresh enquiry, new insight and novel response.

For her part, Job's wife initially watched and waited in silence to see what would transpire in Job and how he would react. When she witnessed his constrained and mechanical response following his first set of disasters, and his refusal to engage following the second, it became glaringly apparent that Job's faith was functioning as a shield, preventing him from being touched at his very core and thereby squandering the promise of radical transformation that his circumstances presented.⁵⁶⁸ She

⁵⁶⁷ The expression comes from a line in a Wallace Stevens poem entitled ‘The Idea of Order at Key West.’ See also David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order : The New Pluralism in Theology : With a New Preface* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁵⁶⁸ In the heavenly wager, *hasśātān* incited the LORD to “touch” Job (1:11; 2:5). Initially, it was his possessions and children that were touched, and subsequently his person. Their failure, however, to recognise that not even these grievous afflictions had really “touched” (or “struck”) Job to his very core because they did not “touch” the protective shield of his worldview, is indicative of the fact that the LORD of the prose, together with *hasśātān*, were themselves constructs of this worldview. By operating within this religious paradigm, they were incapable of recognising anything beyond it because for them too, this is all that existed.

intervenes by naming the core problem, Job's misguided sense of "integrity" that was actually a damaging form of religious consciousness, and then goes on to name a remedy.

Her remedy was for Job to curse God and to face squarely the death that such a renunciation would inevitably bring. Of course, it would not be a literal death, but rather the radical negation of faith as Job had come to understand it, thereby creating the space for a new and authentic form of faith to emerge, and with it a radically transformed understanding of God, the world and humanity's place within it. On the face of it, to "curse God" is highly risky behaviour. It is provocative, aggressive and confrontational.

What if God were to take offense and bring his whole force to bear against Job? What kind of annihilation for Job would ensue? But this is precisely what Job's wife is counting on and advocating – a contestation with God that provokes a death that leads to life. And, as will be explored in the next chapter, this is precisely what happens in the divine speeches – as YHWH invites Job into a robust divine contestation in which the inadequacy of his faith paradigm is exposed, allowing a new kind of faith to emerge.

The implicit vindication of Job's wife provided by the divine speeches both raises the question as to where her insight originated, as well as pointing to an answer to that question.⁵⁶⁹ For in the divine speeches it is in the cosmic classroom of creation that the

Therefore, the LORD is able to affirm (with considerable pride) that Job "still persists in his integrity" (2:3), without realising that all that Job is clinging onto is a form of religious consciousness incapable of exploring the true nature of its construct of God. No wonder that *hasśātān* and the LORD both intuit that Job has still not really been tested, hence the need for another test. Had there been a third scene in heaven following Job's second test, one could imagine the same conversation pattern unfolding – the LORD affirming the persistence of Job's integrity and *hasśātān* looking for a further test to which Job should be subjected.

⁵⁶⁹ The hymn to wisdom in ch.28 – which marks the transition from the human dialogue between Job and his friends, to Job's final soliloquy – raises the question, "Where shall wisdom be found?" (28:12; cf. v.20). Clines comments:

insights of a new faith paradigm are unveiled for Job. For Job's wife, those lessons had already been learned, for a microcosm of that cosmic classroom would have been her own participation in the mystery of creation and her direct knowledge of the intimate juxtaposition of life and death, primarily through her experiences as a mother.

Indeed, as a mother of ten, Job's wife would have endured many sufferings and would have confronted the spectre of death many times before.⁵⁷⁰ The details of her life's story are not known,⁵⁷¹ but we can surmise that whatever hardships she may have endured did not embitter her but produced within her an appetite for life. Her

Why should the question "Where shall wisdom be found?" be raised at all in the book of Job? Who among the characters is wanting to know the answer, which of them is supposed to be able to benefit from the answer, and what in any case has the acquisition of wisdom to do with the quest of Job for justice or the endeavour of the friends to expound to him the doctrine of retribution? (Clines, *Job 21 - 37*, 908.)

The poem answers the question by declaring that wisdom is beyond the reach and ken of mortals ("Mortals do not know the way to it, / and it is not found in the land of the living" – 28:13); hidden from all creatures ("It is hidden from the eyes of all living, / and concealed from the birds of the air" – 28:21); uncontained by either the sea (28:14) or the depths of the earth (cf. 28:1-11). Only the realm of death has heard a rumour of it (28:22), but then only a rumour. However, "God understands the way to it, / and knows its place" (28:23), for in the very act of creation, wisdom was revealed to God (28:25-27). Having answered the question, the poem proceeds to undermine the very answer it has offered, by declaring in its closing verse, "Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." (28:28). According to this conclusion, Job would be a man of wisdom, because in the very first verse of the book he is described as "one who feared God and turned away from evil" (1:1). Yet, the inadequacies of his moral system have already been exposed, and his need for a different kind of consciousness has already been established.

⁵⁷⁰ As was discussed in ch.4 above, the risks and incidence of miscarriage, as well as infant and maternal mortality in childbirth was exceptionally high in the pre-modern world of the ANE. This, together with the very real risks of early childhood mortality, surely meant that as a mother of ten, Job's wife was all too familiar with the threat of death as an inextricable dimension of life, as well as the reality of her fundamental lack of control within the complex mystery that is life.

⁵⁷¹ Some of the rabbinic conjecture about the back story of Job's wife has already been discussed, most notably, her identification as Dinah who endured the trauma of rape. See section 3.1 in ch.2 above.

children's proclivity for feasting and celebration, and her decision to have more children at the end of the story, provide substance to this claim.⁵⁷²

However the source of her wisdom and insight be explained, the bottom line is that Job's wife has access to a liberated form of consciousness that she longs for Job to discover for himself. The irony of Job's hasty dismissal of her words as those of a "foolish woman" (2:11) only serves to highlight the depth of his need. But she knows that for Job to be liberated from the shackles of his fundamentalism, the narrow notion of "God" held within his worldview must be renounced. Her speech seeks to expose this deep need in Job and to spur him on to the kind of risky openness through which a renewed image of God and a liberated consciousness might arise. Her words are designed to provoke an existential crisis in Job in which he will dare to question the very foundations of his world in ways that he would never ordinarily have considered. Such is the subversive nature of her speech.

4.5 The subversive use of language by Job's wife

The subtleties of the subversion at work within Job's wife's speech can be seen in her masterful choice of language. This becomes apparent when it is considered that most of her speech echoes the words of the LORD and *haśśāṭān*. When she says, "Do you still persist in your integrity?" she is echoing, in slightly modified form, the words of the LORD in 2:3. And when she says, "Curse God," she is similarly echoing a form of the words of *haśśāṭān* in 1:11 and 2:5. In doing so, she is the first character on earth to hint at the conversation (and contestation) that has been taking place within the heavenly realm. Furthermore, by gathering the words of both the LORD and *haśśāṭān* within one utterance and making them her own, she is demonstrating the capacity of her consciousness to hold together that which appears to be contradictory. It is precisely this kind of unitive consciousness that she advocates for Job, and which the divine speeches will articulate as well.

⁵⁷² See section 3.3 in ch.4 above for a fuller discussion of this claim.

However, in echoing the words of the LORD and *haśśāṭān*, Job’s wife thoroughly subverts them by completing inverting their meaning. This has already been hinted at above, but the following simple chart illustrates the point:

Phrase / Word	The LORD and <i>haśśāṭān</i>	Job’s wife
“persist in integrity”	2:3 – a positive quality, indicative of faith at its best	2:9 – a negative quality, indicative of faith at its worst
“curse God”	1:11; 2:5 – a negative response, indicative of a loss of faith (or the self- serving nature of Job’s faith)	2:9 – a courageous response, indicative of a new kind of faith
“die”	never directly used or mentioned, an ending – to be avoided (cf. 1:12; 2:4, 6)	2:9 – boldly named, a beginning – to be embraced

The particular use (or avoidance) of certain language by the LORD and *haśśāṭān* and the meaning they attach to it reveals that they share the same essential paradigm – one which does not contemplate even the possibility of alternative meanings of the words they employ. Even the variable use of ברך in their conversation happens quite unconsciously without any hint of ambiguity in what they both understand the word to mean when it is used either literally or euphemistically.

In contrast to this, Job’s wife employs the same language but imbues it with radically different meanings. In doing so she opens a window onto a whole new moral universe, the very possibility of which had never even been considered by Job, or indeed the LORD and *haśśāṭān*. Suddenly, all sorts of exciting, yet disturbing possibilities spring forth. The very yardstick of faith – *tummâ* – becomes the sign of its failure. Cursing God, can be a blessing (or blessing God can be a curse). Death can give way to life. Through it all she alerts Job (and the reader) that language is far from benign. Furthermore, she illustrates powerfully the limits of language.

4.6 The limits of language

Before concluding this section on this alternative reading of the words of Job's wife and turning to Job's responses in the prose and the poetry, a few brief comments on the limits of language are in order.

Job's wife's speech demonstrates the limits of language in a masterful way. Her subversion of the language used by the LORD and *haśśātān* introduces a new and important consciousness *within* the text⁵⁷³ – namely, the ambiguity inherent in all language and the constraints it is subject to in its capacity to articulate meaning. The introduction of this consciousness is all the more significant given its context within the prose prologue which employs language in a very direct and blunt way.⁵⁷⁴ By subtly disrupting the uniformity, regularity and clarity of the language of the prologue, Job's wife's speech gives notice of the need for vigilance in how words are read and heard. Her words also point to the cracks and fissures in language into which interpretive wedges can be driven that can pry open the text in novel ways, uncovering unexpected treasures of hidden meaning that lay buried in the text.

⁵⁷³ Not even the variable use of בָּרַךְ within the prose raises this consciousness *within* the text, because the word is used unselfconsciously and without any hint of ambiguity as to its intended meaning by all the characters who use it in the prologue, with the sole exception of Job's wife.

⁵⁷⁴ In speaking of the language, style and plot of the prologue, Clines writes: The *language* is – by contrast with the rich metaphor-laden language of the dialogues – of a striking severity. Only in the Satan's speeches in 1:10 and 2:4 is there even the coloration of lively colloquial speech ("put a hedge about him"; "skin for skin"). The *style* is as plain as anything in the Hebrew Bible; beside the two post-positive adjectives in 1:1 and 2:3, "blameless" (*tām*) and "upright" (*yāšār*), there are only two attributive adjectives ("great" [*gādōl*] in 1:19; "grievous" [*ra'*] in 2:7) in the whole piece, and repetition is the most conspicuous stylistic feature. The *plot* is naïve as black and white is naïve: Job must be the *greatest* of the sons of the East, *none like him* on earth, *blameless* and upright; he must lose *all* his possessions in *one* day, he must be afflicted *from the crown of his head to the sole of his feet*. His downfall must result from a *divine* conspiracy against him, of which he must have not the slightest suspicion. And to his fate he must respond with inscrutable oriental submissiveness. (Clines, "False Naivety in the Prologue to Job," 127.)

As the book unfolds, its store of confidence in language's ability to articulate and clarify meaning, with which it begins, gradually gives way to a growing suspicion as to the efficacy and cogency of language. The deluge of words poured forth by Job and the three friends in the human dialogue eventually dry up, and their dialogue finally breaks down unresolved.⁵⁷⁵ The concluding words in the poem on wisdom in ch.28 seem to call into question the essential message of the rest of the poem.⁵⁷⁶ When Elihu steps forward, confident in his ability to articulate the rebuffing answer to Job that Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar had failed to offer (32:3-5); his lengthy discourse (32:6 – 37:24, the longest uninterrupted utterance of all the characters in the book) seem to offer little that is substantially new or helpful.⁵⁷⁷ The divine speeches open a window

⁵⁷⁵ The collapse of the human dialogue is masterfully conveyed not simply through the cessation of speeches by the participants, but also through the collapse of the clear alternating pattern of speeches between each of the three friends and Job. In the third cycle of speeches (chs. 22-27), the established pattern in the earlier speech cycles breaks down, in that Zophar does not speak. Furthermore, Job's words in 27:7-23 (excluding vv.11-12), and indeed a section from an earlier speech of his in this third cycle (24:18-24) sound very much like the words of the friends, so that some commentators attribute this section to Zophar. (See Clines *Job 21 - 37*, 661-75, 908.)

⁵⁷⁶ The message of the first 27 verses of the poem centres on the hidden, inaccessible and elusive nature of wisdom, with God being the only one who knows the way to it. Yet in the concluding verse this is undermined by trotting out a stock proverb from the wisdom tradition that "the fear of the Lord is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding" (28:28; cf. Prov 1:7; 9:10; 15:33).

⁵⁷⁷ Elihu's discourse comprises four speeches (32:6b-33:33; 34:2-37; 35:2-16; 36:2-33) divided by very brief narrative interludes ("Elihu continued and said" – 34:1; 35:1; 36:1). The fact that it is presented in this way, as opposed to one single speech, suggests the sense of a desperate need within him to find more and more words to better express what he is trying to say. (A feeling with which this writer is all too familiar!) Which underscores the basic point being made here about the limitations of language. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to consider Elihu's discourse in any depth, two comments are germane to this discussion. Firstly, as one of the most verbose characters in the book (he is second only to Job in the number of verses – 159 in all – that he speaks), Elihu says surprisingly little. His contribution has been largely pilloried as an irritating, unnecessary and inconsequential intrusion that many commentators regard as a later addition to the book. (See Balentine, *Job*, 511.) As such, Elihu stands as a stellar example of the principle that a surfeit of words does not necessarily represent perspicacity, and indeed could imply its inverse. Secondly, a note of caution needs to be sounded, however, that Elihu's words not be dismissed too readily as being superfluous, lest we too fall into the trap of making hasty assumptions about the meaning and value of his words. Certainly, his insistent demand for a hearing (32:10; 33:1,

onto the sublime character of God's "design" (38:2 – עצה) as being wholly beyond the realm or reckoning of human experience, and yet ironically it is precisely in human words that this design is presented. Most telling of all, perhaps, would be the closing words of Job in 42:2-6 (and especially in v.6) which are so fraught with ambiguity and undecidability that they demonstrate, in a truly sublime way, the limitations of language and call forth a profound humility as a result.⁵⁷⁸

5. Job's response in the prose

Having explored the words of Job's wife in considerable detail, we turn now to Job's response to his wife's speech as it occurs in the prose. (His response in the poetry will be dealt with in the next section.) In the prologue, Job responds to the words of his wife verbally (his speech in 2:10), and non-verbally (his sitting in silence for seven days in 2:13).

An initial observation is that the sequence of his verbal and non-verbal responses inverts the pattern of Job's usual method of response established earlier in the prologue. That pattern involved non-verbal actions followed by a verbal utterance. In 1:5, Job responded to the disturbing activity of his children's feasting by a cluster of non-verbal actions – he would send and sanctify them and rise early in the morning and offer burnt sacrifices for them all – which were then followed by a verbal utterance – "It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." The narrator underscores the pattern by commenting that "This is what Job always did" (1:5).

The same pattern recurs following the disturbing news in 1:14-19 of his devastating losses. Job responds with a cluster of non-verbal actions – he arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, fell on the ground and worshiped (1:20) – followed by a verbal

31, 33; 34:2, 10, 16; 36:2) gives us ample opportunity to consider consciously and deliberately whether we will do so. At the very least, Newsom advocates that we approach Elihu with a "deliberately generous curiosity." (Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*, 201.)

⁵⁷⁸ This final speech of Job will be dealt with in ch.7.

utterance – “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (1:21).⁵⁷⁹

The first part of this pattern is repeated following Job’s disturbing affliction with loathsome sores (2:7), as he responds with a cluster of non-verbal actions – he took a potsherd with which to scrape himself and sat among the ashes (2:8). But then the pattern is interrupted. Before Job is able to offer a verbal utterance his wife interjects with her speech.⁵⁸⁰ In other words, she breaks the cycle of Job’s habitual mode of response to disturbing episodes. Indeed, following her speech – which certainly would have qualified as a disturbing episode for Job given its biting denunciation of his worldview – Job responds in a novel way by *first* speaking and *then* engaging in a cluster of non-verbal acts – sitting on the ground and keeping silent (2:13). It is a subtle indication of the disruptive influence of Job’s wife in provoking within Job new ways of seeing and engaging with the world.

5.1 Job’s Verbal Response in 2:10

Job’s verbal response to his wife in 2:10 consists of two elements. Firstly, he denounces her speech as that which could be expected of one of the “foolish women” (*něbālōt* – נְבִילֹת). However, Job is careful not to say that his wife *is* a foolish woman, but rather that she is *speaking like* one of them.⁵⁸¹ In other words, it is her words rather than her person that resemble the *něbālōt* – an important distinction.

⁵⁷⁹ Richard Medina makes a strong case that Job’s actions and words in 1:20-21 were not arbitrary or random, but represented a tightly structured ritualistic response of mourning. See Richard W. Medina, "Job's Entrée into a Ritual of Mourning as Seen in the Opening Prose of the Book of Job," *Die Welt des Orients* 38 (2008).

⁵⁸⁰ As already discussed (see para. 2.4 above), McGinnis also sees the speech of Job’s wife as a deliberate interruption of this patterned response. In her reading, the interruption is to prevent Job from blaspheming God. (McGinnis, "Playing the Devil's Advocate in Job: On Job's Wife," 125.)

⁵⁸¹ See Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, 53.

Consider what may well have ensued had Job called his wife one of the *něbālōt*. Within his moral universe where character and “integrity” played such an important part in defining a person’s place and status, he would surely have felt entirely justified in ignoring his wife’s words without any due consideration of their merit if she were labelled a fool. While our modern sensibilities would decry such a justification as an *ad hominem* response, Job would have felt no such compunction in dismissing her words based on a moral deficiency within her character. Indeed, such a blanket dismissal of everything a “fool” had said would have been seen as entirely legitimate and even expected of someone who was blameless (*tām* – תָּמִי).

This is especially so given the fact that the term *nbl* (נָבַל), conventionally translated as “foolish”, was not simply indicative of intellectual ineptitude but also had strong moral and social connotations, referring to those who renounce God (Ps 14:1), who heap scorn on the righteous (Ps 39:8) and who are shunned and disregarded as socially disreputable (Is 32:5; Prov 17:7).⁵⁸² Robert Gordis’ assessment of the word is that it “refers not to intellectual weakness but to moral obtuseness and blindness to religious truth.”⁵⁸³ Chou-Wee Pan writes, “*nbl* and its cognates in the OT refer to one who acts foolishly in a moral or religious sense, breaking social orders or behaving treacherously towards God.”⁵⁸⁴

To be sure, Job does still renounce his wife’s words. But the crucial distinction is that he can only do so after due consideration of the words themselves, and not simply because they’re spoken by a fool. And while his first instinct and reaction is to dismiss them as the sort of words spoken by the *něbālōt*, in giving them his consideration they were afforded the opportunity to touch something within him. Of course, just because

⁵⁸² Balentine, *Job*, 63, 65. Cf. Newsom, “The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections,” 356; K. Van Der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia : A Comparative Study*, Studia Semitica Neerlandica (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1985), 107.

⁵⁸³ Cited in Janzen, *Job*, 55.

⁵⁸⁴ Chou-Wee Pan, “5571 נָבַל,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 11. See also Anthony Phillips, “Nebalah: A Term for Serious Disorderly and Unruly Conduct,” *Vetus Testamentum* 24, no. 4 (1975).

Job's initial reaction is to renounce his wife's words as being like those spoken by a fool, does not necessarily make them so. His critique may well say more about himself, and the paradigm that has shaped him, than it does about his wife. What is clear, whatever Job has heard – and we must allow the possibility that Job has completely misheard his wife – it has touched a raw nerve within him.

The change to his usual patterned response of actions preceding words (already discussed) is one indication of the subtle ways – that Job is not even conscious of – in which the words of his wife have begun to shift something within him. Another indication of something subconscious beginning to stir within him can be seen in the second part of his verbal response to his wife.

The second element of Job's speech in 2:10 is the wisdom-like saying that comes from his lips, "Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" It would appear that once again, Job is drawing on the wisdom of his religious tradition. Newsom writes, "Although it is not otherwise attested in wisdom literature, the rhythmic balance of the saying suggests that here, too, Job turns to tradition for words to orient himself and his wife to a proper response."⁵⁸⁵ It reveals a great deal that Job's "go to" response in this situation is a wisdom-like saying, as had been the case in his verbal response in 1:21. Clearly, the tradition undergirding a saying like this represented for him a source of security and reassurance in times of duress. Yet, a careful assessment of his words reveal that there are at least four things about this particular speech in 2:10b that suggest that something is shifting within him.

Firstly, these particular words of Job take shape in the form of a question – the first that he ever asks in the book. His previous utterances have all been declarative statements. In other words, whenever Job had spoken previously, there had always been a note of conviction and certainty in his words.⁵⁸⁶ But now, for the first time, a

⁵⁸⁵ Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 356.

⁵⁸⁶ Even in 1:5, where Job expresses the possibility that his children may have sinned and cursed God in their hearts, he does so, not with a question, but with a declarative statement.

question forms on his lips. Admittedly, it is a rhetorical question with a clear and particular answer in mind.⁵⁸⁷ But the very fact that he's articulated a question suggests that a door of enquiry has opened, even a fraction, within him. This is the last thing that Job says in the prose, and he will not speak again for a significant period of time. As such, this question will hang over his head, lingering in his mind together with his wife's words that elicited it, fermenting his visceral outburst in ch.3.

Secondly, the rhetorical question asked by Job suggests, almost matter-of-factly, that both good and evil (the Hebrew word used is *rā' – רָע*) come from the hand of God. This was a standard theological assertion, which resonates with his earlier speech in 1:21 about the LORD both giving and taking away. "The notion that both "weal and woe" come from God [was] a conventional way of acknowledging God's sovereignty (Is 45:7; cf. Deut 32:39)."⁵⁸⁸ Although this was an established theological affirmation, reciting it as a theoretical idea was one thing; but truly pondering its implications for his life – especially as someone whose very identity was wrapped up in turning *away* from evil (the accompaniment to "fearing God"; cf. 1:1) – was altogether another. The door of enquiry opened by the question itself, and the fact that it would linger with him for so long, suggest that the relationships between God, good and evil shifted from being a point of theological abstraction to an earnest and burning question within Job that demanded more than just a perfunctory response.

Thirdly, there is an important shift in perspective from Job's earlier speech in 1:21. Ellen van Wolde writes, "...the perspective from which Job speaks has changed completely. In 1.21 he speaks from a heavenly or godly perspective: 'YHWH gives and takes'. In 2.10, however, he speaks from an earthly or human perspective: 'Should we accept good from the hands of [God], should we not accept evil?'"⁵⁸⁹ Up until this

⁵⁸⁷ In response to the rhetorical question, "Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" the required answer is "No!" Job is effectively saying, "We can't just receive good things from God. If we're willing to accept the good things that come our way, then we must be prepared to accept the bad things as well."

⁵⁸⁸ Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 356.

⁵⁸⁹ van Wolde, "The Development of Job: Mrs Job as Catalyst," 205.

point Job's entire life has been concerned with God's requirements, God's perspective, God's point of view. This was the primary orientation of his world. In the opening verse of the book he is described as "one who feared God and turned away from evil" (1:1). Nothing happened to Job without him thinking about God or referencing God (cf. 1:5, 20-22.)⁵⁹⁰ Now in this speech in 2:10 God certainly is mentioned, but a new point of view is presented. Human experience becomes a legitimate new vantage point from which to reflect upon the world and the complexity of life within it.

Only through this change of perspective, and thus from that moment on, can the confrontation of the perspectives of human beings and God become the main theme of the book of Job. This confrontation could not have begun had not Job undergone a change, which also happens as a result of what his wife says.⁵⁹¹

Finally, a further shift from Job's earlier utterances is evident in the detached way in which he refers to God in this speech. In 1:5 he referred to "God" (*'ēlōhîm* – אֱלֹהִים). In 1:21 he repeatedly referred to the LORD (*YHWH* – יְהוָה). But here in 2:10, he literally refers to "the God" (*hā'ēlōhîm* – הָאֱלֹהִים) by adding the definite article, which could accordingly be translated as "the deity". This raises the question whether a degree of dissociation is taking place within Job as to who God really is, and if an element of doubt has crept into his mind (even subconsciously) whether his assertions about God still hold true.

It is Job's wife who has been the catalyst in these shifts in Job:

She sets Job thinking, although he dismisses her words as foolish.

Nevertheless, her speech has its effect.... [She] introduces death and awakens

⁵⁹⁰ An exception would be Job's response in 2:8 to his bodily affliction, which simply talks about him scraping himself with a potsherd and sitting among the ashes, without making any reference to God. However, as already discussed above, Job's wife's speech that follows in 2:9 interrupts Job's usual response, presumably before he was able to make reference to God. And when he does get to speak in 2:10, God is mentioned.

⁵⁹¹ Ellen van Wolde, *Mr and Mrs Job* (London: SCM Press, 1997), 27.

doubt in him. Job is no longer sure of anything and begins to ask himself questions. He even starts from a human point of view instead of automatically adopting the perspective of Yhwh. Thus the woman plays an important part in the development of the story. With her help, Job changes from a cocksure believer into an asker of questions.⁵⁹²

All of which is to say that while Job appears to be standing steadfast in his religious convictions and resolute in his critique of his wife's words, beneath the surface certain cracks can be discerned that suggest that his wife's speech has shaken him in more substantial ways than he is willing to admit, even to himself. The narrator's comment that "In all this Job did not sin *with his lips*" (2:10), modifying the earlier assessment that "Job did not sin" (1:22), has been interpreted as an acknowledgment that his words do not mirror all that was going on within his heart and mind.⁵⁹³ As Janzen puts it, "...a space has begun to open between what Job is saying and what he is thinking."⁵⁹⁴ His further response to the words of his wife give credence to this assertion. Before turning to this non-verbal response, a careful consideration of the context in which it occurs is needed, which is the concluding episode of the prologue (2:11-13).

5.2 The final scene of the prologue – 2:11-13

It has been argued above that Job's wife's speech in 2:9 represented a major upheaval that disturbed the tectonic plates undergirding Job's entire world view. Her words reverberated across the landscape of the prologue with thundering intensity, shaking not only the ground upon which Job was standing, but also the ground of the text itself. The aftershocks of this seismic event will continue to be felt throughout the rest of the book, but especially in the immediate aftermath of the event itself.

⁵⁹² "The Development of Job: Mrs Job as Catalyst," 205; "A Text-Semantic Study of the Hebrew Bible, Illustrated with Noah and Job," 34. Cf. *Mr and Mrs Job*, 26.

⁵⁹³ In the Baba Bathra tractate of the Babylonian Talmud, Raba offers this comment, "With his lips he did not sin but he did sin within his heart." (BT *Baba Bathra*, 16a.)

⁵⁹⁴ Janzen, *Job*, 51.

A deconstructive reading of the final episode of the prologue (2:11-13) reveals this to be so, evidenced by the fissures in the text that suddenly appear. These include the collapse of the fundamental structure of the broader narrative, the subversion of speech, the introduction of the three friends, and the real purpose of their visit. Each of these fissures will now be explored, before turning to Job's non-verbal response in 2:13.

5.2.1 *The structural collapse of the narrative*

Up until this point, the narrative has been tightly structured around five scenes, alternating between earth and heaven.⁵⁹⁵ The narrative flow anticipates (and certainly requires) a sixth scene in heaven in which the LORD would once again affirm Job's unwavering piety and persistent integrity, and *has'sāṭān* would be forced to concede the point under review as to the possibility of disinterested piety.⁵⁹⁶ But this is not what occurs. Instead of the sixth scene taking place in heaven, it takes place on earth, and instead of the LORD and *has'sāṭān* in dialogue, three friends of Job, who will shortly become conversation partners with him, are introduced. At the precise moment when the prose narrative is expected to reach its climax – which its own tight internal structure has been building towards and anticipating – at that very moment the narrative structure collapses. Instead of Job's vindication in heaven, new characters enter the scene. Instead of a resolution to the question of Job's disinterested piety, the matter remains open and unanswered. Instead of a conclusion, it feels like a whole new chapter has just begun on a radically redefined landscape.

5.2.2 *The subversion of speech*

A second narrative crack opens up in this scene through its subversion of speech, evidenced by the fact that this is the only scene in the prologue that contains no speech whatsoever. This absence of speech is foregrounded when the text makes a point of reporting that “no one spoke a word” (2:13). As such, it represents a remarkable

⁵⁹⁵ Scene 1 is located on earth (1:1-5); scene 2 in heaven (1:6-12); scene 3 on earth (1:13-22); scene 4 in heaven (2:1-6); scene 5 on earth (2:7-10).

⁵⁹⁶ This would then set up a seventh and final scene on earth (the epilogue), in which Job's fortunes are restored.

departure from the rest of the prose, where the plot is explicitly developed and advanced through the spoken words of the various characters, and where the central narrative tension turns on the question of how Job will speak to God – with a blessing or with a curse.

Of particular significance is the fact that the anticipated speech from heaven is not heard (see the discussion in the section immediately above), raising questions as to what the ominous silence from heaven means – a silence that will continue for most of the book until YHWH finally breaks it in ch.38. But it is not just the heavenly discourse that is silenced. All the earthly characters fall silent too. Not even the loud arrival of the three friends is enough to unlock their lips in speech, made all the more noticeable by the fact that they were nevertheless able to raise their voices and weep aloud (2:12). In spite of itself, the prose prologue seems to be hinting at the limitations of speech, an astonishing acknowledgment to emerge at this point in the book, especially given the fact that as the prologue falls silent, it gives way to 39 chapters of virtually unbroken speech.⁵⁹⁷

5.2.3 *The introduction of the three friends*

The appearance of the three friends at the end of the prologue represents a disruption to the anticipated flow of the narrative (as already argued above). Their insertion into

⁵⁹⁷ There is a certain irony that it required a speech – that of Job's wife – to crack open certain presuppositions so that the limitations of speech could be exposed. While this may appear to be a contradiction, in many respects Job's wife's speech is quite atypical as far as speeches in the book of Job go, and could possibly even be described as a non-speech-like speech, for a number of reasons: they are the only words spoken by a woman in the entire book; it is the shortest speaking part of any character in the book; at six words it is one of the shortest speeches in the entire book [Job's initial speech in 1:5 is also just six words long; and technically, the initial question and answer interchange between the LORD and *hasśātān* in 1:7 and 2:2 comprised shorter speeches, but these were part of a longer dialogue]; almost every word within it is used with an inverted sense of its meaning; and most telling of all, it is the opening speech of a character that marks the end of her speaking, as Job's wife falls silent for the rest of the book. Her speech thereby prompts an important question as to the relationship between speech and silence in the book, a relationship that will be explored in ch.7.

the text at this point establishes an important connection between the events of the prologue and the human dialogue that is to follow shortly, locating them with Job and establishing them as credible conversation partners with him. But this reason on its own can hardly account for their introduction at this point.⁵⁹⁸ Close scrutiny of these new characters is required in order to assess the significance of their presence and purpose within the prose.

The first thing we learn about them is that they are Job's friends. The Hebrew word used here is *rē'ē* (רַעִי – a derivative of רָעָה which means “to associate with”) which is universally translated as “friends”. But the emotional content of *friendliness* that our modern usage would attach to the word is of lesser importance than the sense of companionship (usually on a journey or task) that the Hebrew usage conveys. Accordingly, Hess offers the assessment that “Job's three “friends” are companions in his “journey” of suffering (Job 2:11; 12:4; 19:21; 32:3; 35:4; 42:7, 10).”⁵⁹⁹ This nuance to the word suggests that the arrival of the friends was not simply for the sake of extending emotional support to Job, but indicated a particular task of solidarity that they felt compelled to undertake. Perhaps we could think of them as Job's “comrades”.⁶⁰⁰ They are introduced as Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and

⁵⁹⁸ Contra Gordis, who suggests that 2:11-13 was one of two brief jointures (the other being 42:7-10) that were added by the poet in order to effect the necessary transitions from the prose prologue to the poetry and back to the prose epilogue. He goes on to describe the arrival of the three friends as setting the stage for the great debate that will shortly unfold. (Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 73, 76.) He thereby limits the significance of 2:11-13 to its preparatory function for what is to follow, without due consideration of its place and purpose within the prologue.

⁵⁹⁹ (Richard S. Hess, “8287 רָעָה,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1146.)

⁶⁰⁰ Within the context of Southern African political history, the use of the term “comrade” (which was drawn from Communist and Maoist Socialist rhetoric) referred to a companion or partner in the struggle for liberation. While many comrades became great personal friends, the term did not denote friendship *per se*, but rather a broad ideological affinity and solidarity of purpose within a particular political struggle. Today, when the term ‘comrade’ is exchanged between members of the ruling ZANU PF party in Zimbabwe, or indeed the ruling ANC party in South Africa, it simply means party cadre, irrespective of whether the person

Zophar and Naamathite.⁶⁰¹ “The significance of the names and locations is no longer entirely clear, although the likelihood is that the three are presented as Edomites [see the previous footnote] and, therefore, countrymen of Job.”⁶⁰² The order in which their names appear (and in which they will speak in the poetry) never varies, suggesting that they functioned as a unit (a cohort perhaps?), in their dealings with Job.

Sympathy and kindness may well have been part of their motivation for coming to see Job. This is certainly the common assessment of their visit as presented in the prologue, that it was “wholly supportive in intention” (Clines) and “motivated by loyalty and compassion” (Balentine).⁶⁰³ It is further commonly asserted that it is only after Job starts speaking in the poetry that their attitude towards him gradually

participated directly in the liberation struggle or not. (Pedzisai Mashiri, "Terms of Address in Shona: A Sociolinguistic Approach," *Zambezia* 26, no. 1 (1999): 105.)

⁶⁰¹ The specific names and places of origin of Job's friends are not of great significance to the discussion here other than to establish that they shared an affinity to Job in terms of their national identity and origins, in that they were all outsiders to Israel. In 1:1 Job is described as a man from the land of Uz, which certainly lay outside of Israel. (“The importance of the name Uz lies not in where such a place is, but in where it is not... that it is not in Israel.” Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, 10.) This created a certain narrative distance for the Israelite audience enabling Job to be presented as a paradigmatic figure; but not *so* much distance (in 1:21 Job is presented as a worshiper of YHWH) as to render him inaccessible to that audience. So too with the three friends who came from afar, yet not too far – with Edom being the most likely option. Indeed, Clines finds Edomite connections for all three of the friends, as well as Job. He writes:

All six proper names in this verse have therefore a stronger or weaker Edomite connection (that of Naamah being the weakest), as does the name Uz in 1:1.... So Job's friends seem to be represented as countrymen of his, sharing the same values and traditions, not the historical and cultic traditions of Israel, but the religious views one might expect from descendants of Abraham, that is, for practical purposes, general Israelite religious and social ideas shorn of whatever might strike the hearer as distinctively Israelite.

The significance of the Edom connection is not far to seek. Two prophetic texts (Jer 49:7; Obad 8; cf. also Bar 3:2-3) witness to a tradition that Edom was renowned for its “wisdom”.... It is perhaps significant that this book that portrays a debate of the wise is set in an Edomite location, that is to say, just outside Israel, in order not to be distracted by Israelite distinctives, but just next-door to Israel because it is an Israelite audience that is being addressed. (ibid., 59.)

⁶⁰² Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 357.

⁶⁰³ Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, 57; Balentine, *Job*, 67.

changes to one of animosity.⁶⁰⁴ But there is good reason to suggest that the motivation for their visit was not simply the expression of sympathy and pastoral kindness; and that their animosity towards Job, so noticeable in the human dialogue, is already present in the prologue, albeit it in a veiled way. This becomes evident when the real purpose of their visit is scrutinised.

5.2.4 *The real purpose of the friends' visit*

On the face of it, the purpose of the friends' visit seems to be pastoral. The text reports that "They met together to go and console and comfort [Job]" (2:11). However, when some gaps in the text are explored, it would appear that there there was considerably more at stake for these three comrades of Job than the simple desire or sense of obligation to be present with him in a pastoral way. It will be argued that it is inadequate, and even misleading, to think of the friends' visit simply in terms of pastoral care, as an agenda beyond sympathy seems to be at work.

We read in 2:11 that the three friends heard of all the troubles that had come upon Job, each at his own home. Exactly *how* this happened is not explained.⁶⁰⁵ It is also not clear exactly *what* they heard, what "all these troubles that had come upon [Job]" referred to. At the very least it would surely have included news of the calamitous losses he had suffered (1:14-19) as well as his physical condition (2:7); but could

⁶⁰⁴ So Clines writes, "...it is only when they find [Job] recalcitrant and unteachable, as they see it, that they become his enemies, "torturer-comforters" as he calls them (16:2)." (Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, 57.)

⁶⁰⁵ While the biblical text offers no hint as to how the friends learned of Job's misfortune, various traditions arose around this question. The Targum notes that "the friends discerned something was wrong when they saw the trees in their garden wither, the meat they were eating turn into raw meat, and their wine turn into blood." (Balentine, *Job*, 66.) Pope references another Jewish tradition:

According to Jewish legend the three friends entered Job's house simultaneously, though they lived three hundred miles apart. Each had a crown, or, according to another version, a tree on which were carved images of the others; and as soon as one suffered misfortune his image was altered. Thus the friends learned of Job's calamity. (Marvin H. Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, ed. W.F. Albright and D.N. Freedman, 3rd ed., The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1973), 24.)

conceivably have included a report of the interchange between Job and his wife, which presumably occurred in public and therefore in the hearing of others.⁶⁰⁶ However the news reached the friends, the fact that it did was proof enough that Job's story had entered the public discourse – that the “Job matter” had been let loose within the thought and reflection of society at large. Given Job's standing as “the greatest of all the people of the east” (1:4), it is not hard to imagine the conjecture and speculation that would have accompanied the talk of his demise, such is the cost of notoriety. Maybe the friends heard not only the hard facts of Job's losses, but also the hushed accounts of what Job's wife had said and the impact that this had on Job's own state of mind. Maybe along with the news they heard whispered opinions that Job was facing a crisis of faith that threatened to undo him – “He's even started asking questions now.”

All of which is to suggest that the friends may well have received this news with considerable alarm – not just because of their concern for Job's personal wellbeing, but also because of their concern for the preservation of the social order of which they were all a part, and from which they presumably benefited.⁶⁰⁷ If something like this could happen to Job who was so blameless and upright, what did it mean for them? And if the rumours were true about challenges and questions being raised about the moral order of things, this represented a threatening situation to the status quo that required urgent and decisive intervention.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁶ Clines writes, “...it is almost universally assumed by interpreters that the ashes in which Job sits are in the public ash-heap outside the town” (Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, 50.)

⁶⁰⁷ Their particular association with Job as his friends, along with the fact that they are *named* characters in the text, suggest that they shared a similar elevated social station to that of Job, and therefore also shared a vested interest in the preservation of the social and moral order that undergirded their station.

⁶⁰⁸ If the news of Job's troubles included reports of his steadfast perseverance in his faith, as per the traditional reading, then the friends' visit could hardly be construed as an intervention *per se*, as none would have been needed, but simply one of sympathy, support and encouragement for Job to keep on trusting God. But this reading is rejected here not just because of my reading of the speech of Job's wife and Job's response to it, but also because of the internal textual evidence within 2:11-13 that is to be explored shortly.

Together, the friends considered their response and made their plans accordingly. The reference that “[t]hey met together” (the Hebrew word וַיִּקְרְאוּ literally means “to make an appointment”), indicates a deliberate intentionality on their part – there would be nothing coincidental or haphazard about their visit. The stated purpose for meeting together was in order “to go and console and comfort him.” This was a traditional expression of solidarity in grief, the absence of which made the experience of sorrow even more difficult for the sufferer to endure (cf. Ps 69:20; Is 51:19; Nah 3:7).⁶⁰⁹ Yet, the verbs that make up this expression carry further possible nuances of meaning that could point beyond sympathetic consolation and comfort.

The verb “console” (*nûd* – נוד) literally means to “move back and forth” and so comes to refer to a demonstration of grief or sympathy by shaking or nodding the head. But such a shaking of the head could also be construed as a gesture of disapproval, judgment or scorn.⁶¹⁰ The verb “comfort” (*nḥm* – נחם), in its passive form, can also convey the meanings of being sorry, repenting, changing one’s mind. While that is not the form in which it occurs here, a possible shade of meaning in the friends’ offer of comfort to Job could be a hint towards Job’s need for repentance, or certainly a change of mind.⁶¹¹ Janzen endorses a reading in this direction. He writes of the occurrence of this verb here:

Occurring in the active voice, the verb means something which no English verb quite captures. It refers to the action (usually the action of speaking...) by which one hopes to bring about a change in or hopes to encourage another to effect a change in how that other feels, thinks, and intends concerning a given

⁶⁰⁹ Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 357.

⁶¹⁰ See Elmer A. Martens, "5653 נוד," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997).

⁶¹¹ The point should not be over-stated, but this sentiment of Job’s need for repentance is clearly articulated by the friends in the human dialogue (22:23; cf. 8:5-6; 11:13-14), and by the end of the poetry this is precisely what Job does when he says in 42:6, “I repent / change my mind [the passive form of *nḥm* is used] concerning dust and ashes.” It is, however, noted that 42:6 is fraught with ambiguity, and various competing translations and interpretations of this verse exist. If Job is indeed “repenting” in 42:6, it is almost certainly not the kind of repentance that the friends had in mind. This verse will be discussed in greater detail in ch.6.

state of affairs.... The friends hope to enter deeply with Job into his condition and then to help him come out of it in a manner which enables him to go on with his life in a spirit other than that of perpetual bereavement.⁶¹²

If the expression “to go and console and comfort him” contains even a hint of disapproval and/or the intention to affect some kind of change within Job, it alerts us to the possibility that there was a further agenda to the friends’ visit than mere sympathy. The assertion being made here is that there was, which is supported and strengthened by the events that are reported in 2:12-13.

Firstly, we read in 2:12 that “[w]hen they saw [Job] from a distance, they did not recognize him.” The reason they did not recognize him, as blithely explained by Rowley, was because Job “was so disfigured by his disease.”⁶¹³ But this does not account for the clear assertion in the text that they did see him from a distance, implying that they were, in fact, able to see that it was indeed Job, even from afar.⁶¹⁴ The verb “to recognize” (*nkr* – נכר) can refer not simply to visual identification, but can also mean “to acknowledge” someone.⁶¹⁵ A contemporary example would be that of a chairperson of a conference who “recognizes” a speaker on the floor, thereby granting the person the right to address the conference. Without being “recognized” in this way, the person has no standing to speak and cannot be heard. In a similar vein, the friends’ refusal to recognize Job, even though they could see him, is a strong indication of a wariness towards him. In the light of the reports that they had heard

⁶¹² Janzen, *Job*, 57.

⁶¹³ Harold Henry Rowley, *Job*, ed. Ronald E. Clements, 2nd ed., New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1976), 38. So too Driver and Gray who assert that Job’s features had been “marred by disease beyond recognition” (Samuel Rolles Driver and George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1921, (1986)), 27.) Cf. Edouard Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, trans. Harold Knight (London: Nelson, 1967), 22; Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, 24.

⁶¹⁴ Clines offers a detailed discussion of the complexities of this awkward construction. See Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, 59-61.

⁶¹⁵ See Terence E. Fretheim, “5795 נכר,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 108.

and the uncertainty these generated as to Job's theological and emotional state of mind, they distance themselves from him, as a precaution, lest their visit of him be interpreted as their endorsement of whatever it is that he might say.⁶¹⁶ "The fact is, as the next verse says, that they do not say a word to him for seven days – which is explanatory of what not recognizing him implies."⁶¹⁷

Secondly, we read further in 2:12 that "they raised their voices and wept aloud." This was not a spontaneous outpouring of lament due to them suddenly being overcome with emotion when they saw the sorry state of their friend. Rather, this, together with their other actions in 2:12 (tearing their robes and throwing dust upon their heads), was part of a clearly defined ritualised public mourning performance. By raising their voices and weeping aloud, they were drawing public attention to the posture they were explicitly adopting towards Job, namely that of mourners. This gets played out further when they "tore their robes", an established part of a mourning ritual (exactly as Job had done in 1:20), and "threw dust upon their heads", another well-established mourning rite (Josh 7:6; 1 Sam 4:12; 2 Sam 13:19; 15:32; Lam 2:10; Ezek 27:30.)

The reference to them throwing dust on their heads is expressed in a curious way. The Hebrew formulation literally says that "they sprinkled dust on their heads towards heaven". This has led to wide speculation as to how this verse should be read.⁶¹⁸ The

⁶¹⁶ It is instructive that the denominative verb *nkr* (נכר) has the meaning "to act or treat as foreign or strange." (Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The New Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 649.)

⁶¹⁷ Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, 61.

⁶¹⁸ Dhorme resolved the difficult construction by identifying two distinct rituals – throwing dust on one's head; and throwing dust toward heaven – which he argued had been juxtaposed and amalgamated into one awkward phrase here. (See Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, 22.) "Gordis saw here an apotropaic rite of throwing dust over the head (i.e., backwards, like over the shoulder) toward heaven, so as to ward off from themselves the evil that had befallen Job from that direction." (Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, 62.) Another suggestion is that throwing dust to heaven was a form of intercession, a way to appeal to God to intervene graciously in the life of the sufferer. (See Balentine, *Job*, 68.) Perhaps the most colourful reading, diametrically opposite to the one by Gordis, is offered by Habel, who writes:

If the reading "into the heavens" is original...then their action recalls the symbolic or magical act of Moses throwing ashes heavenward to produce the same sort of "boils" as

key to unlocking this phrase, in my reading of it, lies in the use of the verb *zrq* (זרק), meaning “to sprinkle”. This is a most unusual choice of verb for the mourning rite of throwing dust on one's head, as nowhere else does that rite utilise this verb. However, the verb is used repeatedly within the context of cultic rituals, most commonly of priests sprinkling blood upon the altar.⁶¹⁹ By *sprinkling* dust on their heads, the friends were assuming a priestlike role in their enactment of a mourning ritual, and by doing so *towards heaven* they were offering their ritual act to God, possibly as a form of cultic sacrifice.

All of which leads to some startling conclusions about the purpose of the friends' visit and its *de facto* agenda. Their refusal to recognize Job, followed by their ritualized public acts of mourning imply that they regarded him as one who was already dead, or as good as dead. Indeed, the period of seven days and nights that they sat with him (2:13) was a standard timeframe for a period of mourning (Gen 50:10; 1 Sam 31:13; Ezek 3:15), while the fact that they did not speak to him during that time underscores the point that from their perspective they were sitting in the presence of a corpse. The way in which the text reports this is that “no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.” The very great suffering in Job that they saw was not simply the grief that was still his for the earlier losses he had suffered some time

those which now afflict Job (Ex 9:10....) Thus the friends perform a rite which symbolically calls forth the same sickness on themselves as an act of total empathy. They are one with the dust of the earth and one with Job in his diseases. (Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job : A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 97.)

⁶¹⁹ Of the 35 occurrences of the verb in the OT, 26 of them are in explicitly cultic contexts, referring mostly to priestly ritualistic action, which include rites of purification. See Victor P. Hamilton, "2450 זרק," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997). One of the non-sacramental occurrences of the word refers to King Josiah taking the dust of the sacred poles and carved images of the Baal altars that he had destroyed and scattering it over the graves of those who had sacrificed to the Baals as a way of purging Judah of the apostasy that had flourished within the land (2 Chr 34:4). Hence, the associations of purity, orthodoxy and cultic ritual are particularly intense within this particular verb and are vividly evoked by it..

previous, but surely encompassed the death-like existential crisis that he was facing and the agonising loss of control that it represented for him in that current moment.⁶²⁰

Furthermore, in the deliberateness of their ritual behaviour that included certain priestlike enactments, the friends effectively displaced the (priestly) Job of blameless piety – who had sacrificed on behalf of his children (1:5) and had followed the ritualistic protocols of mourning with meticulous decorum (1:20-21) – becoming the ones in the text who now sought to exert ritual control over the threatening upheaval that Job's situation had come to represent.⁶²¹ The real purpose of their visit is thus revealed – they had come to 'batten down the hatches' of a moral universe that was threatening to be engulfed beneath a tsunami of existential doubt that seemed to have already consumed Job, their former captain, along with his first mate, who apparently had both been swept overboard.

⁶²⁰ Richard Rohr says that all suffering implies a loss of control, which is precisely where its transforming potential resides within the journey to spiritual maturity. (See Richard Rohr, *Job and the Mystery of Suffering* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), 52-54; Richard Rohr and Joseph Martos, *The Wild Man's Journey: Reflections on Male Spirituality* (Cincinnati: St Anthony Messenger Press, 1996), xxxiv-xxxv.)

⁶²¹ The exercise of control over the threatening forces within the world through ritual enactment was a mainstay of religious expression within the world of the ANE. An excellent example would be the Babylonian Akitu (New Year) festival, in which the forces of chaos were ritually re-created and then subdued. Sommer writes:

The festival...represents a descent into chaos which ultimately led to the re-establishment of cosmic, theological, and political order.... [It] included a re-enactment of Tiamat's defeat by Marduk, an event that was explicitly mentioned during the festival when *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian epic of Marduk the creator, was recited. (Benjamin D. Sommer, "The Babylonian Akitu Festival: Rectifying the King or Renewing the Cosmos?," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 27 (2000): 81-82.)

For an excellent treatment of this same theme within the faith of Israel, with particular reference to the way in which the Sabbath came to supplant the New Year festival as the ritualized time in which the establishment of creation over the forces of chaos was completed, consummated and mimetically reenacted by the worshiping community of Israel, see Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton: University Press, 1988), 68-77.

To express it another way: In recognizing the inherent threat of Job's faith dilemma to the sustained good order of their moral universe, the friends regard Job as a fallen⁶²² comrade and offer up their rite of mourning for Job's death (moral demise) to God as a form of cultic sacrifice, thereby cleansing the land of any possible corrupting influence that his situation might have had on the status quo.

A critique of such a reading is that it requires great astuteness in the friends to recognise the existential faith crisis happening in Job and the challenge that his anguished questioning represents to their own faith paradigm. What were the signs and indications that alerted them to the fact that something dramatic had started to shift within Job? And if the text is mostly silent on that question, might it nevertheless offer some signs and indications to us as its readers that would alert us in the same way? Which brings us back to Job and the non-verbal response that was his.

5.3 Job's Non-Verbal Response in 2:13

A final crack can be discerned in the concluding episode of the prologue that points to the significant shift happening in Job. It concerns the specific actions of his non-verbal response following his verbal response to his wife. The fissure appears in how this non-verbal response is conveyed by the text, in which his actions are reported only indirectly, thereby creating a certain vagueness about them. We can surmise that Job sat on the ground in silence for at least seven days and seven nights, because that is what the three friends who had come to be in solidarity with him did (2:13).⁶²³ But

⁶²² In both senses of the word, as having lapsed morally and as having died.

⁶²³ The period of seven days and seven nights refers to the time that *they* sat in silence with him. Exactly how long Job sat in silence prior to the arrival of the three friends is unknown. Driver and Gray write:

It is clearly implied that some time elapsed between Job's last calamity (⁶⁻¹⁰) and the arrival of his friends: for first the news has to reach each of them in their several homes, which lay some distance from one another; then, as וייעדו implies, they communicated with one another and fixed on a rendezvous from which they should proceed in company to Job's home, and then the journey itself must have taken some time. With this implication of the Prologue allusions in the speeches agree; for in 7³ Job speaks of months of pain already past. (Driver and Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job*, 26-27.)

this cannot be concluded with complete confidence and certainty as the text remains silent as to the precise nature of Job's actions. It is a stark and conspicuous contrast to all of the other actions of Job in the prologue (1:5; 1:20; 2:8), which are clear, decisive and incontrovertibly his.⁶²⁴ This shift, introducing an uncharacteristic indistinctness as to what it is exactly that Job is doing, represents a further subtle indication that the clarity and conviction that had always marked his life has been disturbed. The disruption of his wife's interjection continues to be felt as Job grapples with the implications of her challenge upon his entire frame of reference.

And so a mist of sorts descends over Job, shrouding him from view. It is not clear, even to himself, what is happening. He just sits. He does not say a word. The text has managed to render his world a formless void, and one can only imagine what forces are moving over the face of the deep of Job's brooding silence (cf. Gen 1:2). For the friends, the seven days and seven nights that they sit with Job were clearly for them a period of mourning.⁶²⁵ Maybe it was for Job too – a time to mourn the death of his former self. But there is surely more. The assonance with the seven days of creation is too strong to ignore. Certainly, when Job finally breaks the silence and speaks in ch.3, it is as if he is a new creation, wholly unrecognizable from the Job we encounter in the earlier parts of the prologue prior to the intervention of his wife.

If the reference to seven days and seven nights in 2:13 contains an echo of the creation story in Genesis 1 and thereby points to a process of recreation that Job is undergoing, a crucial question to consider is this: whose words hold creative power over the formless void of Job's world?⁶²⁶ Clearly, it is not the friends' as the text is explicit that they did not say a word to him. The only credible option is that it was the words of

⁶²⁴ In the conversations in heaven (1:6-12; 2:1-6), the LORD extols Job's piety based on the consistent evidence of the kind of life that he actually lived. Even *haśśātān*, who queries the *motives* behind Job's exemplary behaviour, never disputes the merits nor the content of Job's actions themselves, presumably because there was nothing ambiguous about what Job actually did.

⁶²⁵ Cf. Gen 50:10; 1 Sam 31:13; Ezek 3:15.

⁶²⁶ In the creation story of Gen 1, creation is effected through the spoken word of God. In the second creation story in Gen 2, creation is a product of God's action.

Job's wife that hovered over his life and continued to echo in his head and his heart with formative, creative power. Or to be more precise, it was the words of Job's wife, together with his words of response, that paired together to germinate a new consciousness within him. This dialogical coupling of a man and his wife produced the fruit of a new form of faith that Job would soon begin to express. Its initial articulation, as we shall shortly see in the discussion to follow on Job's response in the poetry, bore all the marks of a raw immaturity. But nevertheless, the birthing of a new religious consciousness that emerged out of the womb-like tomb of Job's shrouded silence at the end of the prologue was so fundamentally new, that an entire new literary form – namely poetry – would be required to give expression to it.

If the dialogical interchange between Job and his wife in 2:9-10 represented the moment of conception of Job's new faith (of which he was still unaware), his time of brooding silence in 2:11-13 its gestation, and his verbal outburst in 3:1ff its birth; then the dialogical interchanges between Job and his friends in chs.4-27, and between YHWH and Job in 38:1 – 42:6 could correspond to seasons of adolescence and maturity respectively. Thus, the words of Job's wife (and Job's response) anticipate, in embryonic form, the words of YHWH in the divine speeches (and Job's response).⁶²⁷

Before turning to Job's response to his wife's words in the poetry, one final comment regarding this concluding episode of the prologue is needed. As already mentioned, the precise nature of Job's actions in 2:11-13 is unclear as Job recedes behind a veil of uncertainty and the focus shifts to the actions of the three friends. It is therefore unclear to what extent Job was even aware of the actions of his friends and their significance.⁶²⁸ But assuming they acted within his presence, or at least within his conscious awareness, the public, ritualistic nature of their behaviour would have been an immediate visual reflection for him of what their particular religious consciousness looked like, an embodiment perhaps of what it was that his wife was referring to when

⁶²⁷ The connection between the words of Job's wife and the divine speeches will be alluded to briefly below, but will constitute the central focus of ch.6.

⁶²⁸ The text suggests that the symbolic actions of 2:12 happened at some distance from Job.

she challenged the grasping of “integrity”. Unable to recognise in himself what she meant, suddenly Job caught a glimpse of the controlling nature of such faith, and its emptiness was exposed. It is not hard to imagine the barely conscious words forming at the back of his mind, “Now my eyes have seen you!”

What follows is one of the definitive turns of the entire book, as the prose of the prologue falls silent and new poetic voices burst forth with intensity and eloquence.

6. Job's response in the poetry

The poetry section of the book in fact opens with a line of prose, “After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth” (3:1). The words “After this” could refer to the seven days and nights of silence (2:13), or indeed to everything that has occurred in the preceding narrative. The reference to Job opening his mouth retains the prologue's focus on Job's mouth, who up to this point had not “sinned with his lips” (2:10).⁶²⁹ The reference to cursing connects with the dominant theme of cursing throughout the prologue (1:5, 11; 2:5, 9). And the reference to the day of his birth (literally, “his day”), echoes the allusion to Job's birth in 1:21.⁶³⁰ All of which indicates a strong sense of continuity with what has gone before, signaling that what is to follow should not be read, and indeed cannot be fully understood, apart from the context of the preceding prose prologue.⁶³¹

This helps to clarify the particular task and approach of this section as it pertains to Job's further responses to the words of his wife. His responses in the poetry will be considered in three sections: his opening speech in ch.3; his response within the human dialogue with his friends in chs.4-27; and his closing soliloquy in chs.29-31

⁶²⁹ Balentine, *Job*, 80-81.

⁶³⁰ The reference to “his day” (3:1) also contains an echo of Job's son's feasts which they celebrated each on “his day” (1:4).

⁶³¹ A strong case could be made that 3:1 should be read as the concluding verse of the prose prologue. The introductory phrase to the speech is provided by 3:2 “And Job spoke and said:” (AKJV), as is customary throughout the human dialogue (cf. 4:1; 6:1; 8:1; 9:1; 11:1; 12:1; 15:1; 16:1; 18:1; 19:1; 20:1; 21:1; 22:1; 23:1; 25:1; 26:1; 27:1).

6.1 Job curses the day he was born

As powerful and poignant as Job's opening speech in the poetry may be, the purpose here is not to offer a detailed analysis of the speech as a whole, but simply to consider the points of connection between 3:1-26 and the words of Job's wife, with an ear to hearing the extent to which Job's words have been influenced by what she has stirred within him.

Two immediate and obvious points of connection between the words of Job's wife in ch.2 and Job's words in ch.3 would be around the themes of cursing and death. In 2:9 Job's wife urges him to curse God and die. Job responds in ways that indicate strongly that he has taken her words to heart. "Though he does not exactly curse God, he curses the day of his birth. Though he does not die, he speaks longingly of death."⁶³² On these grounds alone we could conclude that the Job who emerges in the poetry does so in no small measure as a product of the shaping influence of his wife.

6.1.1 *Job curses the day he was born...or does he?*

However, it should come as no great surprise that there is a subtlety and nuance to even these seemingly obvious points of connection that therefore require further careful consideration. In particular, the references to cursing. Job's wife had urged him to curse, but in the prologue Job refused to do so, such was the influence of his integrity formed by his religious paradigm. But now in the poetry that is what apparently happens. At least, according to the *narrator's* judgement, who reports in 3:1, "Job opened his mouth and cursed...."⁶³³ But when we hear Job's *own* words

⁶³² Newsom, "Job," 140.

⁶³³ The verb "to curse" that is used here is not בָּרַךְ as in the prologue, but the piel form of *qll* (קָלַל). Later in the speech, the language of cursing reappears (3:8) with two further verbs employed – *nqb* (נָקַב) and *'rr* (אָרַר) – although according to Long, in the case of נָקַב there is a certain morphological ambiguity in this occurrence that casts some doubt on whether cursing is indeed implied, or whether this is an intransitive form of the root *qbb* (קָבַב), meaning 'curse,' which is a byform of נָקַב. (Gary Alan Long, "5918 נָקַב," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997). Cf. Robert P. Gordon, "7686 קָבַב," *ibid.*) The significance of this is that the varied, and at times ambiguous, use of language employed for cursing suggests that

from 3:3ff, we need to ask whether this judgement is accurate; whether he does, in fact, curse. The explicit vocabulary of cursing does not appear in his speech, with the one exception of 3:8, and even there the (somewhat ambiguous) reference to calling forth a curse is displaced to the lips of others, rather than Job himself.⁶³⁴ Clines observes that “strictly speaking, [Job’s speech] is not a curse, but a wish or malediction.”⁶³⁵ The point should not be overstated, as Job clearly speaks about the day of his birth (and the night of his conception) in a bitterly oblitative way that sounds very much *like* a curse.⁶³⁶ But the question nevertheless is raised as to whether Job, in fact, curses like his wife said he should.

Furthermore, he certainly does not appear to curse God as she had urged, but rather the day of his birth. This could be interpreted as an act of tremendous faithful restraint on his part, that even *in extremis* he refused to curse God and chose rather to direct his curse elsewhere. Accordingly, Moore argues that “we must respect the fact that Job does not take the ultimate step and curse God. There is, then, no irreconcilable contradiction between the Job of the prologue and the Job of chap. 3 on this score.”⁶³⁷

Some even argue that though framed as a curse (or a very close approximation thereof), his words – like those of Jeremiah in Jer 20:14-18 which express remarkably similar sentiments – are actually an implicit appeal to God for God’s gracious intervention. What Zuckerman calls “a lament-of-final-resort,” the purpose of which

as a concept it can be expressed and understood in diverse ways. For a comprehensive treatment of the language of cursing within the Hebrew Bible see Herbert Chanan Brichto, *The Problem of "Curse" in the Hebrew Bible* (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis, 1963).

⁶³⁴ The first part of the verse reads in the NRSV, “Let those curse [unambiguously ‘curse’ if reading קִבַּב; or, if reading נִקַּב, possibly ‘pierce’ (so E. Ullendorff, “Job III 8,” *Vetus Testamentum* 11 (1961): 350-51.) or “mark” (so YLT)] it [i.e. that night (of his conception), or possibly that day (of his birth – so NIV)] who curse the Sea [or the day]” (3:8a).

⁶³⁵ Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, 81.

⁶³⁶ His very first word in the poetry is *yōbad* (יָבַד) – “perish” (which ISV translates as “annihilated”) – which he uses to talk about the day of his birth. Crenshaw translates it with “damned” (Crenshaw, “Job 3,” 85.)

⁶³⁷ Rick D. Moore, “The Integrity of Job,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 45 (1983): 24.

was “to portray a sufferer’s distress in the most nihilistic terms possible for the purpose of attracting God’s attention and thus leading to the rescue of the sufferer from affliction.”⁶³⁸

So what exactly is going on here? How should Job’s speech in ch.3 be read? Does Job curse or doesn’t he, and if he does, how might God be implicated, even if the curse is not overtly directed at God? In the final analysis, what is the purpose of this speech? Is it an appeal to God or a renunciation of God? As such, is Job’s speech an indication that his wife has succeeded in eliciting within him a fundamentally changed religious perspective, or has she fallen short in that objective?

In considering these questions, two comments by Balentine regarding the dynamics of cursing within the Hebrew Bible may be helpful. I quote him at some length:

First, in the Hebrew Bible, to speak a curse (or blessing) is to utter words that are understood to set in motion the very action the curse articulates. When Job curses the day of his birth, he expresses the wish that that day had never existed (vv. 3-5)... His wish intends to be more than an utterance. It is an act that seeks to bring about the very death that his misery has forced him to contemplate but has not allowed him to experience. In this context, Job’s curse raises an interesting question. How can his words reverse something that has already happened in the past? He cannot “unbirth” himself. Such considerations have lead (*sic*) to the suggestion that this curse expresses an empty wish. It is not only a rhetorical utterance; it is also a hopeless one, perhaps even an absurd one.

[Second], curses (and blessings) are only effective when they are spoken by authorized persons...under proper conditions.... The power of the utterance rests not in the words themselves, but in the authority and status of the person who speaks them.... [But] Job has no official title; he is neither king, nor priest, nor prophet. He has no official standing in the community, other than that

⁶³⁸ Bruce Zuckerman, *Job the Silent : A Study in Historical Counterpoint* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 125-26.

which God has provided – “the greatest of all the people of the east” – and even this distinction has been replaced by another that would seem to diminish rather than enhance his stature. Job's “greatness” is now defined by what he has lost, not by what he possesses. By what authority, then, and with what power does Job speak these words? Can one whose status is defined only by suffering that is “very great” expect to challenge and change anything in heaven or on earth?⁶³⁹

In addition to this, Gordon makes a key observation when he writes, “For a curse to be effective it had to have divine authority and to be properly directed. OT is clear as to the second point: An undeserved curse will not alight upon its intended victim (Prov 26:2), and an unwarranted curse may recoil upon its originator (Ps 109:17-20).”⁶⁴⁰ In other words, cursing needed to be done with integrity and required divine sanction, if it was to have any teeth at all. Groundless and speculative cursing called the integrity of the one cursing into question.

On the strength of all these comments above, it can be concluded that Job's speech in 3:3-26 does not meet the technical requirements of a curse, *per se*, and certainly not of a curse of God. But that is not to suggest that the potency of his words are in any way diminished. Quite the contrary. A careful reading of his words reveals that this is not just an emotional outburst, an outlet for Job to vent his feelings and let off some steam. His speech goes way beyond that. He steps outside the parameters of what would technically constitute a legitimate and efficacious curse – in itself an indication that he is no longer dependent upon formulary expression to say what he needs to say – to launch a verbal assault that seeks to dismantle the fundamental assumptions of his own personal religious paradigm, and to mount a challenge against the very order of creation itself. Accordingly, the question as to whether or not he actually curses (God) or not, is immaterial. At issue is the consciousness that undergirds *all* talk about God,

⁶³⁹ Balentine, *Job*, 81-82.

⁶⁴⁰ Robert P. Gordon, "Curse, Malediction," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 492.

whether sacred or sacrilegious. What Job demonstrates so emphatically in this speech are the beginnings of a new such consciousness within him that changes the rules completely regarding all talk of God.

6.1.2 *The dismantling of Job's personal religious paradigm*

The structure and content of Job's speech in 3:3-26 reveals a deliberate dismantling of the foundational convictions of his faith that were evident and operant in the prologue. There's a striking correspondence in the thematic structure of ch.3 to the progression of thought in Job's speech in 1:21. In making this observation, Moore writes:

In the same order, this most crucial utterance speaks of the womb, the tomb, and the giver of life. In this unmistakable evidence the poetic lament of Job 3 is a step-by-step rebuttal of Job's manifesto of faith in 1:21. The opening soliloquy of the poetic Job has been written to confute the opening (*sic*) soliloquy of the narrative Job. The following diagram should help illustrate this:

	<i>Job 1:21</i>	<i>Job 3</i>
	1:21a	3:1-10
A.	Reverent acceptance of the womb: "Naked I came from my mother's womb"	Job denigrates the womb: "It did not shut the doors of my womb"
	1:21b	3:11-19
B.	Reverent acceptance of the tomb: "and naked shall I return"	Job regrets delay of the tomb: "I should have been at rest"
	1:21c	3:20-23
C.	Reverent acceptance of deity: "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away"	Indirect questioning of deity: "Why is light given to him that is in misery?"
	1:21d	3:24-26
D.	Theocentric praise: "Blessed be the name of the Lord."	Egocentric lament: "The thing I fear comes upon me."

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⁶⁴¹ Moore, "The Integrity of Job," 26.

Job's soliloquy in 1:21 had been the key indication that he was still maintaining his integrity, as the LORD observes in 2:3. Therefore, the thorough deconstruction of this utterance in his opening soliloquy in the poetry points to the impact of Job's wife's influence in questioning this quality in Job. Instead of seeing his so-called "integrity" as a desirable attribute to be safeguarded at all costs, Job imagines the complete annihilation of such formulaic faith through the utter negation of death.

6.1.3 *Job's challenge of the order of creation*

But it is not just his former formulaic ways of expressing faith that are the target of Job's verbal assault. Even as he dares to dismantle his *personal* faith convictions, on another level he dares to mount a *cosmic* challenge of the very order of creation. This progression from the personal to the cosmic is seen in the way in which his initial incantation against the day of his birth and the night of his conception has implications for the very idea of day and night, without which the order of the creation would collapse.

The key point of reference here is the creation story in Genesis 1, and especially the first act of creation through God's spoken word:

Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. (Gen 1:3-5)

The distinction between night and day, and their regular alternation, constitute the most basic and fundamental aspect of the order of creation, upon which the rest of creation is established. But this is precisely what Job's speech attacks. Leo Perdue puts it well:

In [Genesis 1] the act of separating light from darkness, naming day and night, and giving them their function of ordering the temporal structure of reality, is the first and primary act of creation. Consequently, the appearance of each new day responding to God's command is a recreation of the temporal order.

Priestly ritual and calendar are designed to maintain the separation of light and darkness and the recurring cycle of day and night. By contrast Job's curse destroys this separation, hurling Day and Night back into the oblivion of undifferentiated chaos, thereby deconstructing order and meaning. With this series of curses, Job seeks to reverse creation, thereby negating all life, including his own.⁶³⁶

The elements from Job's speech that demonstrate his challenge of the fundamental order of creation would include the following:

When Job says in 3:4, "Let there be darkness" (יְהִי חֹשֶׁךְ), he is challenging the primary act of God's creation – the words in Gen 1:3, "Let there be light" (יְהִי אוֹר). Indeed, Job's incantation against the day of his birth seeks to eviscerate its essential nature, namely its capacity to embody light. By robbing day of light, day is disemboweled, and essentially ceases to be what it is.

Let that day be darkness!

...[let not] light shine on it.

Let gloom and deep darkness claim it. (3:4-5a)

He then moves on to night, to mount an attack against it too. He does so by intoning that night no longer be counted among the days and months of the year (3:6b).⁶³⁷ With

⁶³⁶ Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt: Metaphorical Theology in the Book of Job*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 112 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1991), 98. Fishbane finds a corresponding pattern between the sequence of Job's incantations in 3:3-13 and the ordering of the priestly creation story of Gen 1:1-2:4a. (See also Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary*, 103-04.) Fishbane writes,

The whole thrust of the text in Job iii 1-13 is to provide a systematic *bouleversement*, or reversal, of the cosmicizing acts of creation described in Gen. i-ii 4a. Job, in the process of cursing the day of his birth (v. 1), binds spell to spell in his articulation of an absolute and unrestrained death wish for himself and the entire creation. (Michael Fishbane, "Jeremiah IV 23-26 and Job III 3-13: A Recovered Use of the Creation Pattern," *Vetus Testamentum* 21, no. 2 (1971): 153.

⁶³⁷ NIV translates 3:6b with "may it not be included [reading the revocalized 'al-yēhad (אֶל-יְהַד) in place of 'al-yihad (אֶל-יִהַד)] among the days of the year".

night being the first part of day in the creational design (cf. Gen 1:5: "And there was evening and there was morning, the first day"), its exclusion from the days and months of the year effectively means the elimination of the regular cycles through which time is ordered.⁶³⁸

Job brings his poetic assault on day and night to a conclusion when he says:

Let the stars of its dawn be dark;
 let it hope for light, but have none;
 may it not see the eyelids of the morning (3:9)

Newsom's commentary on this verse bears quoting:

In v.9 Job curses night precisely by breaking the bond that joins night to day: the time of dawn, when dark mingles with the first light. Night is personified in ways that suggest a lover, one who waits expectantly, desiring to look upon the eyes of its partner, dawn. Job's curse would deny that union. The cosmic horror lurking in Job's curse is that it would break the dependable alternation of opposites upon which creation is established. God's promise to humankind after the flood was that "As long as the earth endures,/ seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,/ summer and winter, day and night,/ shall not cease" (Gen 8:22 NRSV).⁶³⁹

A further indication of the cosmic dimensions of Job's challenge is found in the reference to the rousing of Leviathan in 3:8. A fuller discussion on this key character in the book will be offered in the next chapter on the divine speeches, but for now just a few very brief comments will suffice. In the mythological thought-world of the ANE, Leviathan was a sea monster who personified the waters of chaos that threatened creation itself. Leviathan was therefore understood to be the arch-adversary of the creator God, who needed to be defeated (or at least constrained) by God lest creation be engulfed by chaos. By referencing the rousing of Leviathan, Job is entering the fray of the cosmic battle-motif, invoking the enemy of God to be in the

⁶³⁸ Balentine, *Job*, 86.

⁶³⁹ Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 368.

mix of his assault on the order of creation. Indeed, there is something Leviathanesque about Job himself, in the way in which he mounts his opposition to the created order.

All of which suggests that a seismic shift has occurred in Job in his view of God and the world. The question as to whether he actually curses or not is of lesser significance. What is important, and what the content of his speech in 3:3-26 makes abundantly clear, is that Job has taken an active step into a new way of thinking, and talking, about God and faith – in which his former concerns of honouring and preserving the strictures of what was deemed to be acceptable have dissolved; death, and the negation it brings, is embraced; and God is no longer an object of uncritical reverential awe, but an adversary who can be robustly and vigorously challenged.

The sentiments of Job's wife have clearly lodged deep within him. The religious consciousness with which he viewed the world and through which he made sense of his reality has been exposed as fraudulent. In the vast and formless void that was once his faith, he launches an intense assault upon the very order of creation, seeking the oblivion of its collapse and the liberation that its demise would bring.

Job has caught a glimpse of the rest and release that complete relinquishment would bring and through his words has sought to activate the same. But, of course, the efficacy of his words extends to his moral universe, not the physical one. In spite of what he says and what it points to within him, the day of his birth does *not* perish. Day and Night, stars and dawn, darkness and light do *not* cease to be what they are. The shifting consciousness within him has not yet found reciprocal expression in his external world. Consequently, he concludes his speech with these telling words,

I am not at ease, nor am I quiet;

I have no rest; but trouble comes. (3:26)

His words are strangely prescient of what awaits him as his journey to a transformed consciousness still seeks maturation. The trouble that draws near comes in a surprising guise – the words, doctrine and zealous conviction of his three friends.

6.2 Job's response within the human dialogue

The friends' disquiet with the indications of Job's shifting convictions was already evident in the prologue, where they engaged in ritualized, public displays of mourning for a Job whom they regarded as already dead. This was their way to safeguard their social order from any possible contaminating influence of Job's implicit challenge of the status quo. Now, following Job's outburst in ch.3, they can contain themselves no longer. They initiate a robust conversation with him. The so-called human dialogue ensues in chs. 4 – 27.⁶⁴⁰

As was the case with the preceding section, the intention here (mercifully) is not to offer a detailed analysis of the speeches of the human dialogue, but rather to focus on Job's response to the words of his wife. The basic supposition of my reading of the human dialogue (4 – 27), as it relates to Job's continued response to the words of his wife, could be summarized as follows:

The dialogue with the friends effectively lures Job back into a way of thinking and speaking that is focused on who is right and who is wrong. In the process his longing for death diminishes as he becomes energised by the prospect of establishing his innocence in a court of law. In doing so, he draws away from the alternative consciousness advocated by his wife.

⁶⁴⁰ While some commentators include ch.3 within their analysis of the dialogue between Job and his friends (e.g., Francis I. Anderson, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. D.J. Wiseman, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 96ff; Driver and Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job*, xxi; Kenneth L. Barker et al., eds., *The NIV Study Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1985), 733.), the dialogue proper – structured around three cycles of alternating speeches between each of the friends and Job – only begins in ch.4. (The first cycle – chs. 4-14; the second cycle – chs. 15-21; the third cycle – chs. 22-27.) While Eliphaz's speech in chs.4-5 is clearly precipitated by Job's soliloquy in ch.3, it is important to maintain a distinction between ch.3 and the speeches that follow. As will be demonstrated shortly, the consciousness underlying Job's words in ch.3 is at odds with that on display within the dialogue.

Job's outburst in ch.3 demonstrates that the new form of religious consciousness that his wife had advocated had started taking shape within him, albeit in a raw and undeveloped way. For his friends who happened to overhear his tirade, it all sounded quite bizarre and downright outrageous – hard to hear and even harder to understand. But for them it simply could not go unanswered. Failing to respond would have been tantamount to endorsement. Eliphaz is the first to “venture a word” (4:2) with Job, offering a commentary on Job's situation and the ways of God within the world with the confidence and certainty afforded by the perspective of a predictable and unambiguous theological system. He concludes his speech by saying,

See, we have searched it out; it is true.

Hear, and know it for yourself. (5:27)

It is a crucial moment in the book. Eliphaz is claiming that he and his friends, and by extension the religious paradigm that they shared, truly understand how things work in the world and therefore what is really going on with Job. Therefore, all that is needed is for Job to come to know what they know, and then a sense of order and control can be restored to his world. Job takes the bait. He responds, not because he agrees with Eliphaz but because he's come to see things in a radically different way, and therefore believes that Eliphaz is wrong. But in doing so he gets drawn into a lengthy dialogue with the friends, in which the terms and categories of their conversation are predicated on the binary opposites of right and wrong, innocence and guilt, righteousness and wickedness. In the process, Job gradually retreats from the radical position he had taken in ch.3, and gets lured back into a way of thinking and speaking that is focused on who is right and who is wrong. This can be seen in two ways: Job's shifting attitude towards death; and the emergence of the language of legal contestation.

6.2.1 *Job's shifting attitude towards death*

In Job's first speech within the dialogue (chs.6-7), his longing for death which had been so forcefully articulated in his soliloquy in ch.3, is still evident.

O that I might have my request,
and that God would grant my desire;

that it would please God to crush me,
that he would let loose his hand and cut me off!
This would be my consolation. (6:8-10a)

...I would choose strangling and death rather than this body.
I loathe my life; I would not live forever. (7:15-16a)

At the end of his second speech in the dialogue (chs.9-10), he expresses this same longing for death, but then immediately modifies it, suggesting that some comfort (or brightness) might be found before he dies:

Why did you bring me forth from the womb?
Would that I had died before any eye had seen me,
and were as though I had not been,
carried from the womb to the grave.
Are not the days of my life few?
Let me alone,
that I may find a little comfort [lit. "that I may brighten up a little"]
before I go, never to return,
to the land of gloom and deep darkness,
the land of gloom and chaos where light is like darkness. (10:18-22)

Significantly, this shifting attitude towards death occurs at the end of a speech where Job first considers the idea of a legal contestation with God.⁶⁴¹ This change of attitude continues in his next speech (chs.12-14) in which human death (unlike that of a felled tree) is seen as an abrogation of hope:

For there is hope for a tree,
if it is cut down, that it will sprout again,

⁶⁴¹ The emergence of legal rhetoric and Job's increasing attraction to lawsuit language will be discussed shortly.

and that its shoots will not cease.
Though its root grows old in the earth,
and its stump dies in the ground,
yet at the scent of water it will bud
and put forth branches like a young plant.
But mortals die, and are laid low;
humans expire, and where are they?
As waters fail from a lake,
and a river wastes away and dries up,
so mortals lie down and do not rise again;
until the heavens are no more, they will not awake
or be roused out of their sleep. (14:7-12; cf. 17:13-16)

Job's concern is that death would deny him his day in court, and would silence his plea for justice. He accordingly voices the appeal:

O earth, do not cover my blood;
let my outcry find no resting place. (16:18)

Job's wife had held out the prospect of death as something that Job did not need to fear or avoid. He initially took those sentiments of hers to heart, seeing in death the offer of rest and release. What he failed to grasp fully, however, is that the negation of death that his wife was advocating was not negation for negation's sake; but rather the means to a new and transformed consciousness. Within the human dialogue, the vision of that transformed consciousness was lost, and so Job came to see death as nothing more than oblivion, in which his hope for vindication would never be fulfilled.

6.2.2 *The language of legal contestation*

As alluded to above, the reason for Job's shifting attitude towards death can be traced to the emergence of the idea within him of a legal contestation with God. It arose, at first, as an impossibility:

...how can a mortal be just before God?

If one wished to contend with him,
one could not answer him once in a thousand. (9:2b-3)

But even as Job continues to express the utter impossibility of a trial with God, the very act of giving voice to the impossibility of being vindicated in this way resulted in the idea rooting itself within him, where it grew into more than just an idle wish.

Clines writes:

We should note that the hopelessness of the quest for vindication is not felt by Job so radically that he forthwith abandons the search. Not only does he revert to the quest at various points in this speech, but also he develops the rather tentative thoughts of 9:3, 14, 19-20, 32-33, in which he simply toys with the possibility of bringing God to trial, into the outright summons to God of 13:22 and 31:35.⁶⁴²

The legal motif continues in the dialogue, though notably only in the speeches of Job.⁶⁴³ Although the friends don't contribute to the language of this motif, the very terms of their engagement with Job – determining who is right and who is wrong, who is innocent and who is guilty – is precisely the task of the legal process. In other words, they supplied the fundamental orientation to the question that allowed Job to step into the language of legal discourse.

6.2.3 *Job maintains his integrity*

The nature of the terms of engagement between Job and his friends – which focused on determining who was right or wrong, innocent or guilty – meant that their dialogue reached an impasse and ultimately broke down.⁶⁴⁴ Job has boldly asserted his innocence throughout, helped with the rhetoric of lawsuit language.

⁶⁴² Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, 226.

⁶⁴³ The language of legal disputation can be discerned in 9:2-3, 14-16, 19-24, 32-33; 10:1-2; 13:3, 7-8, 18-19, 22; 16:8, 18-19; 19:7, 23-29; 23:2-7; 31:35.

⁶⁴⁴ The breakdown of the human dialogue is masterfully conveyed through the breakdown of the sequential alternation of speeches between each of the three friends and Job in the third cycle of speeches. Of this third cycle of speeches, Balentine offers these comments:

In what will be his final speech in the dialogue, Job utters these revealing words:

Far be it from me to say that you are right;

until I die [verbal root *gāva* – עָוָה]

I will not put away my integrity [*tummāti* – תְּמִימֹתַי] from me.

I hold fast my righteousness, and will not let it go. (27:5-6a)

The charge of Job's wife was that Job insisted on clinging onto his integrity. In spite of the significant shift in disposition that Job demonstrated in his opening poetic soliloquy, the nature of his engagement with his friends was such that by the end of the dialogue, Job is as insistent and intransigent as ever in asserting his faultlessness. His addiction to certitude and control proved too strong to break, but of course he remains blind to his condition. This is demonstrated further in his closing soliloquy.

6.3 Job's closing soliloquy (29:1 – 31:40)

Job's confident assertion of his innocence and his defiant declaration that he would never relinquish his integrity leads him to the closing arguments of his defense, which occur in his soliloquy in chs.29-31.

The most notable aspect of this speech is the telling disconnect it reveals between Job's *conscious* descriptions of his behaviour and situation; and the *unconscious* dimensions of these things which point to starkly different assessments of his life than the judgments he offers.

The speeches are not only well-worn, they also seem to be disintegrating. Indeed, the present arrangement of the text suggests that the dialogue between Job and his friends breaks down and breaks off. Bildad's speech (25:1-6) is unusually short – six verses – while Job's response (26-27) is disproportionately long. Zophar's final speech is missing altogether, thus when Job finishes responding to Bildad, there is an awkward pause (27:1), and then Job goes on, as if adding to what he has already said to Bildad.... The disarray in the dialogues may be the author's way of suggesting that the dialogue between Job and his friends has reached an impasse where all arguments falter. (Balentine, *Job*, 339.)

In ch.29, Job recounts his past life, with particular reference to his social elevation that he attributed to his care of the poor:

When I went out to the gate of the city,
when I took my seat in the square,
the young men saw me and withdrew,
and the aged rose up and stood....
When the ear heard, it commended me,
and when the eye saw, it approved;
because I delivered the poor who cried,
and the orphan who had no helper....
I was eyes to the blind,
and feet to the lame.
I was a father to the needy,
and I championed the cause of the stranger. (29:7-8, 11-12, 15-16)

But in ch.30 Job laments his present situation in which he feels he is no longer accorded the honour and respect that is his due. He is especially disparaging of the poor who treat him with particular contempt:

But now they make sport of me,
those who are younger than I,
whose fathers I would have disdained
to set with the dogs of my flock....
Through want and hard hunger
they gnaw the dry and desolate ground....
They are driven out from society;
people shout after them as after a thief....
A senseless, disreputable brood,
they have been whipped out of the land.
And now they mock me in song;
I am a byword to them.
They abhor me, they keep aloof from me;

they do not hesitate to spit at the sight of me.

Because God has loosed my bowstring and humbled me,

they have cast off restraint in my presence. (30:1, 3, 5, 8-11)

In the face of Job's perception that his honour has been trampled by those without honour, his concern for the poor gives way to contempt.⁶⁴⁵ Reflecting on this, Erin Runions makes a keen observation and poses some pointed questions:

A contradiction thus emerges in chs. 29 and 30, between Job's idyllic reverie about his past benevolent responses to those less fortunate than he and his present hostile thoughts about the poor and their plot against him....Why would Job shift so suddenly between remembrance of rescuing the poor and reviling them? Might the Disney version of Job's former wealth be hiding something? Does not the fact that such hostilities so easily emerge (on both sides) suggest that Job's memories might gloss over conflicts already on the boil? Might it point to a social situation in which there are hard feelings between the rich and the poor, in which philanthropy is also replete with revulsion and antagonism?⁶⁴⁶

But Job is conscious of none of this. The narrative that he has constructed of his former life is one in which he could do no wrong. Imbedded within it is the assumption that as a consequence he deserves a whole lot more gratitude and respect than he's receiving. This points to the resurgence of a retributive worldview within Job. The visionary insight in his wife's words has largely been forgotten, as Job's sense of blamelessness and uprightness blinds him from a deeper perception of reality around him. A further voice and vision will be needed if the seed of a transformed consciousness sown within him by his wife will ever come to fruition in his life.

⁶⁴⁵ Newsom, "Job," 143.

⁶⁴⁶ Erin Runions, "Ms Job and the Problem of God: A Feminist, Existentialist, Materialist Reading," in *From the Margins 1 : Women of the Hebrew Bible and Their Afterlives*, ed. Peter S. Hawkins and Lesleigh C. Stahlberg (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 180-81.

7. Conclusion

In this chapter detailed consideration has been given to the words of Job's wife in 2:9, words that have occasioned vastly different responses and varied interpretations. The ambiguity inherent in her words, not just in the use of בָּרַךְ but in the entire speech, points to the central dynamic operant within it – namely a subversion of the entire religious paradigm upon which the prologue (certainly up to the point of her appearance) had been predicated and which had constituted the bedrock of Job's faith identity and practice.

The particular reading of the words of Job's wife presented here adopts, as its point of departure, a piercing critique of Job's religious worldview which produced great anxiety within him, resulting in mechanical and formulaic religious behaviour that offered to him the illusion of control. Within such a religious worldview, Job's sense of "integrity", far from being a positive and commendable quality, was a performance-driven mechanism that kept him locked in this inadequate form of faith.

In all that unfolds in most of the prologue, Job's wife is not mentioned. But as Blake's artistic vision of the book reminds us, silence and obscurity within the text does not necessarily equate to absence. Having played such a central part in helping to build and grow all that Job had, the losses he suffered were her losses too. The tremendous grief of everything that she endured, which included the deaths of all ten of her children, afforded her a clarity to observe Job's responses and recognise in a new way what was really going on within him. It was like a cry went up within her, "Now my eyes have seen you!" What she saw was that so long as Job continued to maintain this sense of "integrity" of his, his continued service and devotion to God (his "blessing" of God) could only bring about death for him, rather than life.

Courageously, she steps out of the obscurity that the text had imposed upon her and dares to speak provocative words that would shake the very foundations of Job's world and the world of the text itself – in which even the heavenly duo of the LORD and *haśśātān* were implicated. She interrogates Job's insistence on clinging to what

she sees to be a futile and impoverished worldview, exposing the toxicity of his religious fundamentalism. She urges him to reject the God of this paradigm, to curse this God, and to embrace the metaphoric death that such a renunciation would inevitably bring, trusting the necessity of such a death if new life is to ensue.

Her speech lands with shuddering impact, disrupting the narrative flow of the text, disturbing Job's familiar modes of response, and irrevocably changing the direction of the entire book. Although Job's immediate instinct is to dismiss his wife's words as being like those spoken by foolish women, her words prompt him to start questioning the assumptions of his faith for the first time, albeit it in a very rudimentary way. This draws him into an uncertain period of prolonged brooding silence, punctuated only by his three friends' attempt to assert a measure of control over a situation that threatened to undermine the good order of the system they felt obligated to uphold. They do so through their public ritualistic response as mourners that treated Job as one already dead, thereby confirming their recognition that something dramatic (and dangerous) had started to shift in Job.

This is borne out in Job's further responses in the poetry. His initial speech in ch.3, while not technically a curse of God, represented an emphatic dismantling of the core structure of his former faith, as well as an assault on the core structure of creation. Job thereby positions himself in an adversarial position with respect to God, whose purposes in the world he deems to be oppressive and whose presence is regarded as a source of terror. He rejects the gift of life as a curse rather than a blessing; and actively seeks to embrace the absolute negation of death.

The embryonic conception of a new faith paradigm within the words of Job's wife is therefore seen to be birthed in Job, bursting into the text like a screaming newborn at the start of the poetry section of the book. Yet, there was a rawness and an immaturity in its expression that needed to be grown and tempered; or, as the friends' perceived it, smothered. Desperate to defend and justify the old order, they took issue with Job, adopting a new strategy of verbal engagement with him, quite different from their

approach in the prologue. Job took the bait and got drawn into a lengthy dialogue with them, challenging their assumptions, asserting his innocence and demanding vindication. But in doing so he fell back into old patterns of thinking and operating, falling foul once again of the lack of self-awareness that his obstinate assertion of his blamelessness and uprightness occasioned.

By the end of the human dialogue and his closing soliloquy, Job's journey of transformation had reached an impasse. Through the catalytic influence of his wife's words he had begun to explore new ways of thinking about God and faith, and had confirmed his rejection of the utter inadequacy of the faith paradigm championed by his friends. But on his own he was unable to break completely free of the old categories and concepts of faith that had laid captive his mind, inhibiting him from entering fully into the transformed consciousness towards which his wife's words had pointed. Something more was needed for his journey of transformation to continue.

Thus the stage is set for the climactic culmination of the poetry, the divine speeches, that will shift Job's impasse, move the narrative to a point of resolution and draw Job's journey of transformation into a place of fruition and freedom.⁶⁴⁷ It is to this

⁶⁴⁷ It is acknowledged, of course, that Job's closing soliloquy in chs. 29-31 is followed by the Elihu speeches in chs. 32-37, and not immediately by the divine speeches. But in the reading of Job's wife presented within this thesis the Elihu speeches need not be considered, for two reasons. Firstly, there is little evidence of a *direct* influence on Elihu exerted by Job's wife. His speeches are essentially a response to the three friends and his assessment of the inadequacy of their argument; who in turn were responding to Job and their assessment of the errors within his new rhetoric; who in turn was influenced by his wife. An assessment of Elihu's speeches will therefore add little of substance to the development of this study.

Secondly, given the strong likelihood that the Elihu speeches are a later addition to the book of Job, excluding them from consideration here could hardly be regarded as a glaring or compromising omission. Admittedly, issues around the compositional history of the book of Job have not been a concern of this study, as a final form reading of the book has been adopted as the primary departure point in the interpretation offered here. But one judicious exception could certainly be made with the case of the Elihu speeches, which bear compelling marks of the work of a distinct and later hand to the rest of the book. Indeed, of all the issues in the book that usually garner attention when discussing its compositional history, the Elihu speeches are most readily and commonly explained as a later addition.

vaunted highpoint of the book that we now turn, but with a particular intention – to seek the ways in which the divine speeches expound what Job's wife had already alluded to. The startling discovery that will be made is that the radical religious consciousness that precipitated her words foreshadowed the religious consciousness evident within the divine speeches. Herein lies arguably one of the book's greatest surprises: that a so-called 'minor' female character whose appearance is confined to a couple of verses in which she speaks just a few brief words which are then summarily dismissed by the 'hero' as the kind spoken by foolish women – that the words of this

Balentine writes, "A variety of historical-critical arguments, both stylistic and substantive, support the near consensus scholarly view that Elihu's speeches are a later addition to the book of Job, most likely composed by a different author from the one(s) responsible for the other speeches." (Balentine, *Job*, 512.) He cites the following points that are commonly made in such a discernment:

- Elihu is not mentioned in any other parts of the book apart from his speeches in chs. 32-37.
- Neither the friends nor Job speak to him or of him
- He is the only character with an Israelite name and possible Israelite genealogy
- He is the only character in the poetry to use Job's name, which he does repeatedly. (In the prose, the LORD and *haśśātān* do use Job's name.)
- Other distinctive linguistic traits are evident in the Elihu speeches, including an extensive use of the divine name 'ēl (אֱל) when referring to God as well as many more Aramaisms than in the other speeches. (For analysis and statistics of Elihu's distinctive vocabulary, see Driver and Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job*, xli-xlviii.)
- He cites or alludes to the previous speeches of Job and the friends (e.g., 33:8-13; 34:5-6; 35:2-3), and anticipates the divine speeches (36:22 – 37:24), suggesting that the author of the Elihu speeches is a later reader of what had already been written. (Balentine, *Job*, 512.)

Newsom's words offer a fitting summation, "The overall impression is that chaps. 32-37 derive from a later writer, dissatisfied with the failure of a powerful book and confident of his ability to supply the voice it lacks." (Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 558.)

A smaller group of scholars have, however, argued that the Elihu speeches are an integral part of the original composition of the book, or at least function as part of its overall literary design, and therefore contribute significantly to its overall message. Most notable amongst these would be Habel and Janzen. (See Norman C. Habel, "The Role of Elihu in the Design of the Book of Job," in *In the Shelter of Elyon: Essays on Ancient Palestinian Life and Literature in Honor of G.W. Ahlström*, ed. W.B. Barrick and J.R. Spencer (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984); Janzen, *Job*, 217-18.)

woman find a sublime echo in those uttered by YHWH in the divine speeches upon which the entire book turns.

Chapter 6: The Divine Speeches

1. Introduction

The brevity of Job's wife's speech belies its profundity. In the space of just six words she challenged the dysfunctional religious paradigm that undergirded Job's essentially superficial faith, and urged a risky alternative that pointed to a radically new form of consciousness for him. Her penetrating insight into Job's deepest need arose out of a *Sawubona* moment in which, as a consequence of great suffering and great love, she came to see him with a new clarity.⁶⁴⁸ It is not hard to imagine the cry rising within her, "Now my eyes have seen you!" The words she speaks in 2:9, few as they were, dropped like seeds into the dust of Job's condition, promising the possibility of the rebirth of his faith, liberated from its blessed rage for order and its anxious impulse to control. Yet, the brevity of her words meant that the full implications of what they pointed to could not yet be seen. Such is the nature of seed.

Job's opening words in the poetry section of the book gave voice, in a raw and intensely visceral way, to the birthing of this new religious consciousness within him. But gradually the other voices of his friends drew him back into old habits of thinking in which the categories of right and wrong, innocence and guilt, blamelessness and culpability, blessing and curse dominated the landscape of his mind and shaped the utterances of his mouth.⁶⁴⁹ To be sure, the ways in which he speaks about God and especially his imagination of a lawsuit with God, represent significant shifts for Job from the fearful, formulaic ways of thinking and talking about God that were on display in the prologue. But even these are informed by a consciousness that remains rooted in a binary view of the world divided by a rigid line separating good and evil.

⁶⁴⁸ As discussed in the Introduction to the thesis as a whole, *Sawubona* is the standard greeting in isiZulu, and literally means, "I see you."

⁶⁴⁹ For a fascinating treatment of the shifts that occurred in Job's speech, from his initial outburst in ch.3 to the calculated legal rhetoric he employs in the unfolding human dialogue, culminating in his avowal of innocence in chs.29-31 as a deliberate legal strategy, see John E. Hartley, "From Lament to Oath: A Study of Progression in the Speeches of Job," in *The Book of Job*, ed. Willem A.M. Beuken (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995).

Clearly, hearing the words of his wife was not enough for Job. He needed something more. He needed to *see* what this new worldview she was advocating looked like. Without such a vision to fire his imagination so that he could come to see God, the world and his place in it in a wholly new light, his journey to a transformed consciousness would never breach that decisive threshold that would truly enable a new kind of faith within him.

2. The divine speeches within Job’s journey of transformation

The divine speeches provide such a vision for Job, drawing him across a decisive threshold of perspective upon which the entire book turns. At the end of the divine speeches Job will say, “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you” (42:5 NIV). And yet, exactly what the divine speeches mean and how they should be interpreted remains a subject of passionate debate and disagreement among trained and ordinary readers alike.⁶⁵⁰ “The divine speeches have generated interpretative

⁶⁵⁰ I use the term “ordinary readers” in the same way that West does, to signify those who have had no formal biblical studies training. (Gerald West, *Contextual Bible Study* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1993), 8.) In my experience of reading the divine speeches with ordinary readers in ecclesiastical contexts, the energy with which different responses and interpretations are usually expressed is quite extraordinary. As for the trained readers, and especially biblical commentators, the stark divergence of opinion among them about the particular God on display in the divine speeches and the strikingly different conclusions they offer as to the tone and meaning of the divine speeches are too numerous and varied to summarize here in any sort of comprehensive way. Fretheim offers a very brief yet helpful summation, by categorizing the images of God that emerge in the varied interpretations of the divine speeches under three broad umbrellas: 1. God as Lord, Warrior, Judge; 2. God as Parent; 3. God as Creator, Sage. (Terence E Fretheim, “God in the Book of Job,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 26 (1999): 89-90.) As an illustration of this divergence see, for example, the side-by-side presentations of “God the Sage” (N. Habel) and “God the Victor” (T. Mettinger) in Leo G. Perdue and W. Clark Gilpin, eds., *The Voice from the Whirlwind: Interpreting the Book of Job* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 21-49. As always, Clines’ exhaustive bibliography charts the terrain that has been covered in a comprehensive way. For the divine speeches see David J.A. Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, Word Biblical Commentary 18b (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 1039-48, 141-144.

responses which seem as diverse and as irreconcilable as the disputes between Job and his friends.”⁶⁵¹

A particular point of deliberation concerns the vexed question as to what kind of a response the divine speeches actually offer to Job, especially in the light of the obvious observation that God fails to address any of the questions or accusations that Job raised. The long build up to the divine speeches through the human dialogue framed the discourse in a very particular way, creating an expectation of the sorts of issues and categories that God would surely have to address, if and when God should eventually speak. But such expectations are simply ignored in the divine speeches.

[Job] has initiated a way of speaking about his relationship with God based on a legal metaphor and developed by means of reflection on his own moral identity as a person of honor.... [He] has so dominated the dialogue that no other way of talking seems credible. Consequently, expectations for what God will say are shaped by the deep investment that both Job and the reader have in the assumptions and moral claims embedded in Job’s way of perceiving the issues.

God’s answer comes as a complete overturning of these frustrations and a frustration of the desire for an explicit reply to Job’s own words.⁶⁵²

What typically follows in many interpretations is then to consider the ways in which God’s ‘non-answer’ to Job is indeed an answer.⁶⁵³ While such an approach certainly

⁶⁵¹ J. Gerald Janzen, *Job, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 225. Matityahu Tsevat offers an interesting perspective as to why the message of the divine speeches is stated so obliquely, generating such diverse interpretations. He writes,

...the very radicalism of the book’s answer, shattering a central biblical doctrine and a belief cherished in ancient Israel, would itself demand the protection of a veil.... the answer of God, presenting a doctrine as radical as it was new,...may never have been tolerated or preserved for us but for the protection of its form, its eschewal of the direct, categorical pronouncement. (Matityahu Tsevat, "The Meaning of the Book of Job," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 37 (1966): 103.)

⁶⁵² Carol A. Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck et al (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 595.

has its merits, I wish to advocate a different strategy for approaching the divine speeches. The intention of the divine speeches, in my reading of them, is expressly *not* to provide Job with any answers to the questions he has raised or the accusations he has levelled against God. Doing so – regardless of whether Job would find such answers satisfactory or not – would be to engage with him at a level of consciousness that offered no prospect of genuine transformation, and indeed would only serve to endorse and entrench that level of consciousness within him. The deadlock and eventual collapse of the human dialogue was already ample evidence of the futility of such an approach; while the presumption that all that was needed to resolve the matter was a ‘better’ answer had been exposed as fundamentally flawed.⁶⁵⁴

⁶⁵³ In an article on God’s answer to Job, Wesley Morrison describes two important interpretations of how God’s non-answer to Job is indeed an answer. The first is what he calls the “Standard Interpretation” (actually a family of interpretations that all present the same essential point), in which the answer given by God to Job is that God had perfectly good reasons for treating Job the way He did, but Job should not presume (or expect) to know what those reasons are. As an aside, William Safire expresses this view in a colourful and humorous way when he writes, “It is as if God appears in a tie-dyed T-shirt emblazoned with the words ‘Because I’m God, That’s Why.’” (William Safire, *The First Dissident: The Book of Job in Today’s Politics* (Norwalk: The Easton Press, 1992). The second is an interpretation by Stephen Mitchell in which God’s answer to Job is a wholesale rejection of the demand for moral order in the world. (Wesley Morrison, "God's Answer to Job," *Religious Studies* 32, no. 3 (1996).) By way of comparison, a radically different interpretation is offered by Athalya Brenner who concludes that Job is satisfied with God’s response because in it Job has achieved what he was seeking – the assurance that God cares, is accessible, listens to him and acknowledges what he has endured. (Athalya Brenner, "God's Answer to Job," *Vetus Testamentum* 31, no. 2 (1981).)

⁶⁵⁴ This was precisely the error that Elihu fell into. However the Elihu speeches are viewed within the compositional history of the book of Job (see footnote 647 on pp.325-326 in ch. 5 above), Elihu stepped forward and entered the conversation because he felt that the friends had failed to answer Job and that a better answer could be articulated (32:3, 12, 14-17). However, in spite of his best and exhaustive efforts in an uninterrupted series of four speeches that add up to the single longest utterance (159 verses in all) of any of the characters of the entire book, Elihu was unable to bring any resolution to the matter at hand. The point of his failure lies not in the inadequacy of his answer – as if an even better answer would have succeeded where he failed – but rather in his presumption that a theological answer was all that was needed.

Rather than providing answers, the divine speeches seek to give Job an experience of the sublime, drawing him across a perspective threshold that would enable a new consciousness within him – or to be more accurate, to present the possibility of such a new consciousness within him. As such, the divine speeches function in fundamentally the same way as the speech of Job’s wife. Indeed, in the divine speeches we hear a sublime echo of the words of Job’s wife, in which everything that she said and all that she was pointing Job toward gets expounded in rich and stirring detail. The task of this chapter is to trace these connections and to show how it is that what Job’s wife initiated with her words in ch.2 comes to fulfilment in the words of YHWH in chs.38-41.

3. The divine speeches as a sublime echo of the words of Job’s wife

The introduction of the notion of the divine speeches being a *sublime* echo of the words of Job’s wife is deliberate. Newsom’s description of the sublime in terms of a particular kind of numinous experience is key to understanding the sense in which the term is used here. This description was cited in ch. 1, but such is its importance that it bears repeating again:

Although one often speaks of a sublime object or text, properly speaking the sublime is not an object but rather an experience that emerges from an encounter with something.... this experience is one of “being on the outer fringe of our existence.” Its locus is “at the threshold from the human to that which transcends the human; which borders on the possible and the impossible; the knowable and the unknowable; the meaningful and the fortuitous; the finite and the infinite.”⁶⁵⁵ Consequently, the sublime is classically described in terms of a crisis of understanding. Crucial to the sublime is the perceiving subject’s sense of being overwhelmed by something too immense, vast, or powerful to be grasped by the categories available to the mind. More than merely a cognitive crisis, it is a crisis of subjectivity itself. And yet what is in some respects a negative experience is paradoxically accompanied by a sense of “transport” or “elation,” or a moment

⁶⁵⁵ Quoting Lap-chuen Tsang, *The Sublime: Groundwork Towards a Theory* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1998), 3, 6.

in which the self is “realized” in a new way. Not surprisingly, the divine speeches in Job have often served as parade examples of the sublime.⁶⁵⁶

In the light of this description, it could be argued that the words of Job’s wife carried intimations of the sublime within them, for they certainly drew Job to the outer fringes of his experience, to the threshold of the impossible, the unknowable, the infinite. At the very least, they foreshadow the divine speeches, hinting at the visionary experience of the sublime that awaits Job and that will finally bring about the transformation of his consciousness.

The core elements that make up the speech of Job’s wife will therefore provide the framework for the assessment of the divine speeches in this chapter.⁶⁵⁷ The first of these is the inadequacy of Job’s worldview, expressed by Job’s wife in her question, “Do you still persist in your integrity?” The second is the paradoxical posture of contestation, conveyed by Job’s wife in her ambiguous challenge to him to “Curse God.” The third is the invitation to an experience of otherness, voiced by Job’s wife in her words, “...and die.” And the fourth emerges from the structure of her speech as a whole, in its subversion of binary oppositions and its articulation of a unitive consciousness. Each of these four core elements (or themes) will now be used as lenses through which the divine speeches can be viewed, enabling the echoes and reflections of Job’s wife’s words in the words of YHWH to be heard and seen.

3.1 The inadequacy of Job’s worldview

The opening words of Job’s wife take shape in the form of a question that challenges the underlying, organising paradigm of Job’s faith and life – “Do you still persist in

⁶⁵⁶ Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: University Press, 2003), 236-37.

⁶⁵⁷ As is true of any framework, this chosen framework for an assessment of the divine speeches imposes certain limitations on the scope of the exploration that can be undertaken, which will mean that many intriguing facets of the divine speeches will not be able to be explored. The purpose here is not to probe every nook and cranny of the divine speeches – a virtually impossible task in any case – but to maintain a sharp focus on the way in which the divine speeches expound Job’s wife’s words, and the sentiments underlying them.

your integrity?” This critique is echoed by YHWH in the opening words of the first divine speech, which also take shape in the form of a question:

Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? (38:2)

Some commentators have suggested that Elihu is the one being referred to in the question “Who is this?” as he was the last person to speak in the chapters immediately preceding the divine speeches.⁶⁵⁸ However, I follow the broad scholarly consensus that it is indeed Job to whom God refers.⁶⁵⁹ There are two elements to the accusation that YHWH levels against Job – that Job “darkens counsel” (or, as Clines translates the phrase, “obscures the Design”)⁶⁶⁰ and that he does so by “words without knowledge.”

The nominative *dā‘at* (דָּעַת) – “knowledge” – refers not simply to the content of abstract intellectual information, but rather to a form of knowing that is fundamentally relational in character, gained through the intimacy of direct personal experience, especially through seeing and hearing.⁶⁶¹ According to YHWH, Job lacks this kind of

⁶⁵⁸ This position assumes that the Elihu speeches, in their current location, were part of the original book of Job. (For a view that argues for an alternative location of the Elihu speeches, see David J.A. Clines, "Putting Elihu in His Place: A Proposal for the Relocation of Job 32-37," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 29, no. 2 (2004).) Karl Wilcox is one of those who argue that Elihu is being referenced here, based on the apparent grammatical mismatch of the third-person question in 38:2, “Who is this?” and the second-person summons in 38:3, “Gird up your loins.” He further argues that such a reading avoids the contradiction between the LORD’s assessment in 42:7-8 that Job had “spoken of me what is right” and the allegation here that Job had spoken with “words without knowledge.” Karl G. Wilcox, "Who Is This...? A Reading of Job 38.2," *ibid.* 23, no. 78 (1998). For a rebuttal of Wilcox’s argument see John J. Bimson, "Who Is ‘This’ in “Who Is This...?” (Job 38.2)? A Response to Karl G. Wilcox," *ibid.* 25, no. 87 (2000). For a refutation of Bimson’s rebuttal see C.L. Brinks, "Who Speaks Words without Knowledge? A Response to Wilcox and Bimson," *ibid.* 35, no. 2 (2010).

⁶⁵⁹ Cf. Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1095; Harold Henry Rowley, *Job*, ed. Ronald E. Clements, 2nd ed., New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1976), 241; Edouard Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, trans. Harold Knight (London: Nelson, 1967), 575; Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 601.

⁶⁶⁰ Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1048.

⁶⁶¹ Terence E. Fretheim, "3359 דָּעַת," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 410.

knowing when it comes to his perception of how things really are, and alleges that Job's articulations on the nature of reality – being without this knowledge – are consequently a misrepresentation of God's design (*'ēṣā* – עֶשָׂא) of the universe. At which point we need to pause and ask what makes this so. What lies at the root of Job's lack of knowledge? Two possibilities present themselves.

The first is that this lack of knowledge was simply a function of Job's humanity – a lack that would be true of any man or woman due to the inadequacies of their human faculties to grasp the immensities of God's עֶשָׂא. In other words, an ability to experience the true order of reality in a way that would be sufficient to gain knowledge of God's עֶשָׂא lies beyond the reach of humanity.

If so, the main thrust of God's allegation would then be that Job's fault lay not in his lack of knowledge *per se* – for “if Job's ignorance is intrinsic to the human condition, he certainly is not blameworthy”⁶⁶² – but rather in his lack of awareness of the full extent of his lack of knowledge. His hubris meant that he spoke with the self-

Fretheim goes on to say that within the book of Proverbs, “the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of God are two sides of the same reality (1:29; 9:10); fear of God is reverential awe, finding expression in uprightness and devotion; knowledge of God means a fullness of relationship with God and walking in his ways” (ibid., 411.) This is the sentiment that underlies the descriptions of Job as one who was blameless and upright, who feared God and turned away from evil (Job 1:1, 8; 2:3). The allegation in 38:2 that Job speaks without דַעַת represents a serious challenge to the paradigm that draws connections between these concepts.

In the book of Proverbs, *dā'at* (דַעַת) is also often used interchangeably with two other related terms – “wisdom” (*hokmā* – חֻכְמָה) and “understanding” (*tēbûnâ* – תְבוּנָה). For example:

For the LORD gives wisdom [חֻכְמָה];
from his mouth come knowledge [דַעַת] and understanding [תְבוּנָה]. (Prov 2:6)

The LORD by wisdom [חֻכְמָה] founded the earth;
by understanding [תְבוּנָה] he established the heavens;
by his knowledge [דַעַת] the deeps broke open,
and the clouds drop down the dew. (Prov 3:19-20)

⁶⁶² Dale Patrick and Allen Scult, *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation*, Bible and Literature Series, 26 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990), 95.

assurance and audacity of someone who had this knowledge, when in fact he did not. The barrage of rhetorical questions that then rain down on Job for the rest of the speech, interrogating him about aspects of the cosmos that he as a human could not possibly know and experiences of reality that he could not possibly have had, then serve to highlight his puniness and ignorance as a mere mortal. Within such a reading it is hard not to conclude that YHWH is flexing some divine biceps as he cuts a pretentious Job down to size, unmasking any possible delusions of grandeur and pummels him into submission. This inevitably leads to the Standard Interpretation of the divine speeches (as described by Morrision, cited in footnote 653 above) – that the ways of God are beyond human fathoming, which Job simply needs to accept.

A second option as to why Job lacks this knowledge leads to far richer interpretive possibilities, and therefore is preferred. Rather than seeing it as an inescapable limitation of the human condition, Job's lack of knowledge is a function of the particular way in which he has chosen to process his experience of reality. Or to be more accurate, Job's lack of knowledge is a consequence of his failure to allow his experience of reality (particularly his experiences of great suffering) to break through the theological apparatus he had developed to shield him from such experience. Indeed, it is precisely Job's *words* that are without knowledge that are cited as the problem. That is, the particular framework Job uses to construct meaning and the system of articulation he uses to express it – the language, concepts, categories and doctrinal convictions – get in the way of him “getting it”.

This has already been amply illustrated in his stiff, formulaic response in 1:20-21; his reference to the binary categories of good and evil in 2:10; and in his obsession with questions of guilt and innocence in the human dialogue and his closing soliloquy. A notable exception was his utterance in ch.3, which exploded as an unfiltered outburst of raw experience. But such a way of speaking was short-lived for Job and proved incapable of withstanding the seductive pull of the more familiar and certain modes of theological discourse in which he and his friends become embroiled.

The point being made here is that, notwithstanding the limitations of the human condition, an *experience* of reality that would enable *knowledge* of God's design is possible for human beings. However, for Job, his way of viewing the world gets in the way of this transformative possibility. This is what YHWH exposes, not simply in his opening question in the first divine speech – which finds an echo in the opening question of the second divine speech, “Will you put even me in the wrong? / Will you condemn me that you may be justified?” (40:8) – but in the barrage of questions that rain down on Job, highlighting the poverty of his perspective and the inadequacies of his worldview.

Exposing Job's deficiencies through an overpowering visual tour of the cosmos was not an act of caprice on the part of a ruthless deity who had taken offense at Job's insolence. Overwhelming Job in this way was not an end in itself. Rather, Job's entire religious paradigm needed to be dismantled so that a new kind of experience could be his which would enable a whole new kind of consciousness. Balentine puts it well when he writes, “Proving Job's deficiencies is not the *end* of what God has to say. It is only a *beginning*. And this beginning in turn opens the door for Job to respond with more than a confession of ignorance. Ultimately, Job will answer God's challenge by declaring that he sees and understands more about the design for the cosmos than he did before (40:5).”⁶⁶³

3.2 The (paradoxical) posture of contestation

When Job's wife told him to “Curse God,” she was advocating that Job assume an attitudinal posture of contestation *vis-à-vis* God. This was a scandalous suggestion that was diametrically opposed to the accepted postures of religious piety that expected attitudes of servility, reverence, devotion, obedience, loyalty and submission to be extended towards the deity. Urging Job to curse God bore all the markings of a defiant act of confrontation and rebellion that implied the abandonment of faith. Within Job's religious paradigm there was no space to view his wife's words as anything other than

⁶⁶³ Samuel E. Balentine, *Job*, The Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2006), 643-44.

a call to insubordination and infidelity. Yet, the way she chose to express this possibility was filled with ambiguity and paradox, as the lengthy discussion in the previous chapter on the meanings of בָּרַךְ bore out. Her words quite literally raise the question of what it *really* means for Job to curse/bless God?

Remarkably, this posture of contestation is precisely what YHWH invites Job to adopt from the very outset of the divine speeches. Following the news of his initial calamities, Job had fallen to the ground in worship (1:20), where he remained, sitting among the dust and ashes (cf. 2:8, 13), presumably for much of the book.⁶⁶⁴ But now YHWH calls forth something quite different from Job.⁶⁶⁵ Repeated in the opening lines of both divine speeches are these words:

Gird up your loins like a man,
I will question you, and you shall declare to me. (38:3; 40:7)

⁶⁶⁴ Throughout the poetry section up until the divine speeches (chs.3 – 37), there is no indication of any change to Job's *physical* posture.

⁶⁶⁵ It is acknowledged that within the human dialogue Job's speech at times assumes a strongly antagonistic tone, describing God in adversarial terms. An excellent example of this can be found in the second cycle of the dialogue, where Job speaks of God:

He has torn me in his wrath, and hated me;
he has gnashed his teeth at me;
my adversary sharpens his eyes against me....
I was at ease, and he broke me in two;
he seized me by the neck and dashed me to pieces;
he set me up as his target;
his archers surround me.
He slashes open my kidneys, and shows no mercy;
he pours out my gall on the ground.
He bursts upon me again and again;
he rushes at me like a warrior. (16:9, 12-14; cf. 7:12; 19:10-12)

Notwithstanding the presence of this kind of language in Job's speeches within the human dialogue, the argument to be advanced here is that in the divine speeches YHWH invites Job to assume a qualitatively different posture of contestation than what his earlier adversarial rhetoric implies – a posture of contestation that results in the flourishing of both parties, rather than the annihilation of the weaker one.

Girding the loins involved tying a belt around the loins and tucking the outer garment or robe into it, to prevent it from being an encumbrance in vigorous physical activity.⁶⁶⁶ “In the most basic sense, [it]...represents the expectation of a coming activity. In other words, one girds one’s loins as a preparation for physical action, such as battle.”⁶⁶⁷ Clines spells out the implications of this for Job when he writes:

Yahweh’s call to Job to gird up his loins is a call to combat, to the combat between warriors, to the combat of heroes. If he is to gird up his loins, he must be expected to fight, or at least, to be attacked....God tells Job without qualification that he regards him as his opponent.⁶⁶⁸

On the face of it, this seems like bad news for Job. To be regarded by YHWH as an adversary meant certain death, or at least crushing defeat. To shift to a more contemporary metaphor, in calling Job to gird up his loins, YHWH was telling Job to put on his boxing gloves and climb into the ring with him in order to go a few rounds, except the weight classifications of these two opponents were hopelessly mismatched. How could the lightweight Job possibly stand up to the heavyweight God? Sure enough, YHWH starts throwing a furious array of punches at Job: *Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Who determined its measurements? Who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk? Who laid its cornerstone?* (cf. 38:4-6). The relentless barrage continues throughout the first divine speech. Surely Job would be knocked out cold, never to get up again. As the first round of this divine onslaught comes to an end, Job can’t take any more and throws in the towel. He says to God:

See, I am of small account; what shall I answer you?

I lay my hand on my mouth.

⁶⁶⁶ Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1096.

⁶⁶⁷ Katherine Low, "Implications Surrounding Girding the Loins in Light of Gender, Body, and Power," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 36, no. 1 (2011): 3-4. See further the unpublished electronic article by David J.A. Clines, "Loingirding and Other Male Activities in the Book of Job,"

https://www.academia.edu/2469762/Loingirding_and_Other_Male_Activities_in_the_Book_of_Job. [Accessed: 2 November 2015].

⁶⁶⁸ *Job 38 - 42*, 1097.

I have spoken once, and will not answer;
twice, but will proceed no further. (40:4-5)

At which point the contest, by every indication, is effectively over. YHWH had said, “I will question you, and you shall declare to me” (38:3), but Job concedes the bout by saying, “...what shall I answer you? / I lay my hand on my mouth” (40:4). Whatever internal disposition is implied by the gesture, the external consequence of laying his hand on his mouth is the cessation of speech.⁶⁶⁹ “Thus Job’s reply is a reluctant admission that Yahweh is the greater power and that he will press his case no further against such a formidable opponent. For Job the case may as well be closed.”⁶⁷⁰

But curiously not for YHWH, who refuses to accept Job’s submission. For a second time he summons Job to gird up his loins like a man (40:7), but then escalates this call to contest by adding what Klassen describes as taunts of the Divine Warrior.⁶⁷¹ I like to think of the section in 40:7-14 as a Divine Haka.⁶⁷² YHWH stares Job straight in the

⁶⁶⁹ The internal disposition implied by Job’s gesture of laying his hand on his mouth is explored by Gregory Glazov who surveys the diverse meanings proposed by various commentators, which include: astonishment, reverence, respect, repentance, humiliation and obeisance. He makes the observation that these options oscillate between two poles of meaning – there are those who interpret the gesture as ‘self-diminutive’ (based on the *shame-pole*) and those who interpret it as ‘other-magnifying’ (based on the pole of *awe*). Gregory Y. Glazov, “The Significance of the ‘Hand on the Mouth’ Gesture in Job XL 4,” *Vetus Testamentum* 52, no. 1 (2002): 31, 35. A contrary view is presented by Curtis, who interprets the gesture as an expression of Job’s disgust at Yahweh’s words. (See John B. Curtis, “On Job’s Response to Yahweh,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98, no. 4 (1979).) This view is in service of Curtis’ overall assessment of Job’s responses to the divine speeches in 40:4-5 and 42:2-6, which he reads as an expression of Job’s loathing contempt and revulsion of a God whom he regards as evil. Curtis’ reading will be discussed further a little later in this chapter.

⁶⁷⁰ Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job : A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 549.

⁶⁷¹ See Randy Klassen, “Taunts of the Divine Warrior in Job 40:6-14,” *Direction* 40, no. 2 (2011).

⁶⁷² The *haka*, introduced to popular culture by the New Zealand rugby team, is a traditional war-cry-cum-dance of the Maori people of New Zealand. Originally performed by warriors before a battle, the *haka* was a way of proclaiming their strength and determination in order to intimidate the opposition as they threw down the challenge to them. But paradoxically, the

eye as he names and challenges the basis of Job’s complaint, “Will you even put me in the wrong? / Will you condemn me that you may be justified?” (40:8). The language recognises the legal nature of Job’s complaint with juridical terminology abounding.⁶⁷³ Yet, a courtroom process will not suffice for the engagement that YHWH still has in mind. “The courtroom is not big enough to hold the divine defendant, and the legal metaphor is cracked wide open. The juridical imagery is itself weighed and found wanting; a grander sort of discourse is needed.”⁶⁷⁴

As the Divine Haka continues the language shifts to a chest-thumping roar on the part of YHWH who challenges Job by referencing, with cosmic undertones, his superior strength, “Have you an arm like God, / and can you thunder with a voice like his?” (40:9). It is a key moment for unlocking the divine speeches because the question of superior strength has already been settled, with Job having already conceded that he was “of small account” (40:4). Which means that in repeating (and indeed escalating) this challenge to contestation, YHWH is acting either as a bully who takes sadistic delight in kicking Job when he’s down; or as a buffoon who does not yet realise that the contest has already been conceded; or else, as I read it, something else is going on that would explain YHWH’s refusal to accept Job’s earlier attempted capitulation.

YHWH wants Job to stay in the ring, not so that he could knock him out, but rather so that Job could gain for himself the radically transformed perspective that arises when God is encountered face to face. This is what the posture of divine contestation offers, which is very different from the kind of legal contestation that is focused on proving who is right and who is wrong. This divine contestation is nothing less than an experience of the sublime, a raw encounter with naked strength – the strength of God

haka is also a demonstration of respect for the opposition, intended not simply to intimidate but also to evoke courage that would make them worthy of the battle. See Wikipedia Contributors, "Haka," <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haka>. [Accessed: 3 November 2015].

⁶⁷³ The relevant juridical terms used in this verse include the nom. *mišpāṭī* – מִשְׁפָּטִי (meaning “my justice” / “my judgement” / “my legal cause”), together with the verbs *ršʿ* – רָשַׁע (“to condemn” / “to declare wicked”) and *šdq* – שָׁדַק (“to be [or declare to be] innocent / righteous”).

⁶⁷⁴ Klassen, "Taunts of the Divine Warrior in Job 40:6-14," 210.

and the strength of the rival, in which God apparently delights. Indeed, YHWH's call to contest continues by stirring Job's imagination with images that he would never have contemplated for himself:

Deck yourself with majesty and dignity;
 clothe yourself with glory and splendor.
 Pour out the overflowings of your anger....
 Look on all who are proud, and bring them low....
 bind their faces in the world below.
 And I myself will praise ['ōwdekā – יְהַלֵּל]⁶⁷⁵ you,
 because your own right hand
 has brought salvation for you.⁶⁷⁶ (40:10-11a, 12a, 13b-14)

The point here is *not* that Job would actually be able to achieve these exploits, nor that he should think of himself in grandiose ways that would be patently delusional.

Neither is it that God takes pleasure in mocking and taunting Job, rubbing his nose in his puny humanity. The point is that within *God's* imagination, Job can be thought of in these terms without any hint of intimidation, insecurity or perceived threat. Indeed, YHWH is even comfortable to speak of Job as the object of YHWH's own praise. This remarkably relaxed and easy-going attitude of YHWH towards opponents and rivals, and indeed an active delight in the strength of adversaries, is powerfully demonstrated as the second divine speech moves to its thrilling, climactic descriptions of Behemoth and Leviathan, which will be discussed below.

What emerges from all of this is that the purpose of YHWH's vigorous call to contest is not for the sake of conquest but rather transformed consciousness.⁶⁷⁷ Within the

⁶⁷⁵ This verb (יְהַלֵּל) is an astonishing one for YHWH to use in reference to Job, for it conveys the sense of praise, confession, thanksgiving and worship. It is used as “a technical term in the Psalter for worship which acknowledges and glorifies divine rule (see Pss. 18.50; 30.13; 35.18; 43.4; 44.9; 54.8; 99.3)” (Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt: Metaphorical Theology in the Book of Job*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 112 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1991), 220.).

⁶⁷⁶ This last verse (40:14) is Clines' translation. Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1145.

Divine Design (הַצָּדָה), submission before God seems not to be the highest virtue nor God's primary concern. There is therefore an inherent paradox in this summons to contestation with God: it involves a real experience of the overwhelming strength and power of God, yet its intention is not to vanquish. (We hear here an echo of the paradox and ambiguity in the call to contest sounded by Job's wife when she urged him to בָּרַךְ God, to curse in such a way as to bless.) In other words, YHWH's invitation to Job to assume a posture of contestation is really an invitation that draws Job into a form of encounter with God that goes way beyond the question of who is right or wrong, strong or weak. It is an invitation to a new way of being in relationship with God, a new way of seeing the world, a new level of consciousness and with it, a new identity.⁶⁷⁸

⁶⁷⁷ Hartley is therefore surely mistaken when he says that in this passage "Yahweh is seeking to overcome Job's resistance by gently and persuasively leading him to submission" (John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, Nicot Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 518. Firstly, YHWH's engagement with Job is rough and robust, not gentle at all. Secondly, Job's submission is patently *not* the objective of this passage, as such submission had already been offered by Job and refused by God.

⁶⁷⁸ One of the formative stories of Israel's identity – the account of Jacob wrestling at Peniel in Gen 32:22-32 – is an important antecedent of this encounter. Within this story the identity of Jacob's opponent is intentionally ambiguous. Initially he appears only as a "man" (יִשׁ – וְאִישׁ, v.24), but then there emerges the sense that this is none other than God in human form (Terence E. Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck *et al* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 565.) Yet remarkably, this assailant does not overwhelm Jacob (v.25). Having wrestled with him through the night until the breaking of a new day, Jacob is given the new name of "Israel," for as his opponent put it, "...you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed" (v.28). As for Jacob, he was under no illusions that he had encountered God – "I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved" (v.30) is his assessment of what had happened. Gerhard von Rad offers an important comment regarding the paradigmatic significance of this episode for the faith of Israel. He writes:

The content of the narrative is certainly not exhausted in the presentation and interpretation of a brief event in the life of the ancestor. Rather, it contains experiences of faith that extend from the ancient period down to the time of the narrator; there is charged to it something of the result of the entire divine history into which Israel was drawn. *This event did not simply occur at a definite biographical point in Jacob's life, but as it is now related it is clearly transparent as a type of that which Israel experienced from time to time with God.* Israel has here presented its entire history with God almost prophetically as such a struggle until the breaking of the day. The narrative itself makes this extended

This suggests that the overall goal of Yahweh's confrontation with Job is different from that of Yahweh's confrontation with the gods in Deutero-Isaiah. In Deutero-Isaiah, Yahweh's purpose is to expose the emptiness of their claims to Israel's fear and loyalty and to establish himself as sole Lord of all. In the Book of Job, however, Yahweh moves beyond Job's submission, which was granted in his initial response of 40:4-5. Yahweh summons Job to more than the vindication he was demanding. Rather, the Yahweh-speech is a call, an invitation to Job, toward the restoration of a proper relationship between himself and Job, a relationship built on the same care and open trust that operates in the rest of the universe.⁶⁷⁹

In the light of this paradoxical view of contestation – in which adversaries are not regarded as rivals to be vanquished but as participants to be celebrated – and before continuing the discussion of the ways in which the words of Job's wife are echoed and expounded in the divine speeches, a digression is necessary to consider the relationship between chaos and the God of creation in the Old Testament.

3.3 Excursus: Chaos and the God of creation⁶⁸⁰

The term "chaos" has come to be used in biblical scholarship to refer to those unruly, anti-creational forces that are opposed to the purposes of God and the good order of creation. Within the thought-world of the ANE, and especially its various creation mythologies, these forces of chaos are commonly identified with the raging waters of the sea and are often personified as great sea-monsters or dragons. According to these

interpretation probable by equating the names Jacob and Israel. (Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, trans. John. H. Marks, The Old Testament Library (London: SCM Press, 1961), 320. My emphasis. R.S.)

⁶⁷⁹ Henry Rowold, "Yahweh's Challenge to Rival: The Form and Function of the Yahweh-Speech in Job 38-39," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (1985): 211.

⁶⁸⁰ Stylistically speaking, the use of an excursus in an academic work such as this is regarded by some as *passé*. Nevertheless, the decision to include this excursus has been made to introduce some important historical-critical concerns into the literary analysis of this section, which could be thought of as drawing another voice from a different place into this conversation.

mythologies, the act of creation involves a primordial battle between the creator god and a sea-monster.⁶⁸¹ Creation is predicated upon the defeat of this chaos monster which is known by various names – Leviathan, Rahab, Yam, Lotan and Tannin, to name a few.⁶⁸²

Traces of this mythological complex are clearly evident within the Hebrew scriptures, although the underlying concepts have been appropriated in quite diverse ways. Indeed, it is possible to speak of different ‘chaos traditions’ within the Hebrew Bible, each of which will now be considered in turn.

3.3.1 *Chaos as a personified opponent of God*

Perhaps the oldest chaos tradition in the Hebrew Bible, and the one closest to the concept of chaos evident in the primordial battle motif of other ANE cultures – the so-

⁶⁸¹ The Babylonian creation epic *Enûma elish* is one such example. It describes the battle between Tiamat, a primeval embodiment of the salt water ocean (usually depicted as a dragon), and Marduk, a heroic warrior god. Marduk triumphs and splits the carcass of the slain Tiamat in two to create the cosmos, making a boundary for the waters and posting guards so that they will not cross the boundary. (See *Enûma elish*, Tablet IV, lines 135-140. Kathryn Schifferdecker, *Out of the Whirlwind: Creation Theology in the Book of Job*, Harvard Theological Studies 61 (Cambridge: Harvard Theological Studies distributed by Harvard University Press, 2008), 64; N.J. Girardot, "Chaos," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. M. Eliade (New York: MacMillan, 1987), 215.) Another ANE example is the Ugaritic account of the primordial battle between Ba'al and Yam, a sea prince or sea monster. While accounts of other battles of Baal exist – most notably his battle with Mot – “Yam appears to be Baal’s ‘fundamental’ opponent; he is the prince of the sea, and the sea, that is, the water, is the primordial element of chaos” (Jakob H. Grønbaek, "Baal's Battle with Yam — a Canaanite Creation Fight " *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 10, no. 33 (1985): 31.) The term *Chaoskampf* (German for “struggle against chaos”) is commonly used to refer to this combat myth which finds expression in many cultures beyond those of the ANE. In addition to the Babylonian myth of Marduk vs. Tiamat, and the Canaanite myth of Ba'al vs. Yam cited above, examples from other cultures would include: Thor vs. Jörmungandr (Norse), Zeus vs. Typhon and Apollo vs. Python (Greek), Tarhunt vs. Illuyanka (Hittite), Indra vs. Vritra (Vedic), Ōraētaona vs. Aži Dahāka (Zoroastrian), Ra vs. Apep (Egyptian).

⁶⁸² Of these names, the most significant within the book of Job is undoubtedly Leviathan, which is mentioned in 3:8 and is the climactic focus of the second divine speech in 41:1-34 [Heb: 40:25 – 41:26]. However, Rahab is also mentioned in two important contexts (9:13; 26:12).

called *Chaoskampf* – understands chaos as a personified opponent of God. The personification of chaos, often conveyed through the use of proper nouns (such as Leviathan and Rahab) to name it, presents the forces of chaos as an antagonistic adversary of God threatening the good order of creation, that needs to be defeated. A distinctive feature of this tradition is that whenever this battle motif is invoked, God (Yahweh) always emerges as the victor. Two notable examples can illustrate the point:

You divided the sea by your might;
 you broke the heads of the dragons in the waters.
 You crushed the heads of Leviathan;
 you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness. (Ps 74:13-14)

On that day the LORD with his cruel and great and strong sword will punish
 Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will kill the
 dragon that is in the sea. (Is 27:1)⁶⁸³

⁶⁸³ The use of the battle-with-Leviathan motif within the eschatological setting of this verse (“On that day...”) is an example of the “Urzeit-Endzeit” continuum (“urzeit” refers to the primeval era and “endzeit” to the eschaton) in the Old Testament, in which biblical reflection on the eschaton anticipates a return to the conflicts of creation (Gene M. Tucker, "The Book of Isaiah 1-39: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck et al (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 226.) The exposition of this idea was comprehensively presented by Hermann Gunkel in his seminal work on the theme. See Hermann Gunkel and Heinrich Zimmern, *Schöpfung Und Chaos in Urzeit Und Endzeit : Eine Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung Über Gen 1 Und Ap Joh 12* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1895). Brevard Childs writes:

The prophetic hope of the new age was pictured in terms of God's former redemptive acts. However, the last events were now to fulfil the original purpose of the first. The return to the past signifies the continuity in the one will of God; the newness of the end indicates the full intensity of the light which at first shone only in dim reflection. The new of the *Endzeit* became the criterion for determining what was qualitatively new at the *Urzeit*. (Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1960), 81.)

Yet, while God is always portrayed as the victor within this battle motif, the defeat of chaos, while strategic, is not complete. The picture that emerges from certain passages in the Hebrew Bible is of the confinement and limitation of chaos. Consider, for example, the following:

Do you not fear me? says the LORD;
Do you not tremble before me?
I placed the sand as a boundary for the sea,
a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass;
though the waves toss, they cannot prevail,
though they roar, they cannot pass over it. (Jer 5:22)

...he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command. (Prov 8:29)

Texts like these suggest that the defeat of chaos in its battle with God has not resulted in its complete annihilation, but simply in its confinement. The survival of chaos after the victory of God is one of the cornerstone arguments in Jon Levenson's masterful monograph, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*. He writes,

...the confinement of chaos rather than its elimination is the essence of creation, and the survival of ordered reality hangs only upon God's vigilance in ensuring that those cosmic dikes do not fail, that the bars and doors of the Sea's jail cell do not give way, that the great fish does not slip his hook....

The survival of the tamed agent of chaos, whether imagined as the Sea, Leviathan, or whatever, points to an essential and generally overlooked tension.... On the one hand, YHWH's unique power to defeat and subjugate his adversary and to establish order is unquestioned. On the other hand, those passages that concede the survival of the defeated enemy raise obliquely the possibility that his defeat may yet be reversed.⁶⁸⁴

⁶⁸⁴ Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton: University Press, 1988), 17-18.

Any disruption to the benevolent and life-sustaining order of a stable community – which was the whole point of creation within the ANE rather than some abstract doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*⁶⁸⁵ – through discord, anarchy, disaster or social disintegration, would have been interpreted as an assault by the forces of chaos upon the creative purposes of God. The need for divine vigilance and might in quashing such a threat was paramount. Simply put, chaos as a personified opponent of God could never be indulged or even disregarded, because the relationship between it and God was inherently conflictual.

3.3.2 *Chaos as a non-oppositional elemental entity*

A second chaos tradition in the Hebrew Bible is one which perceives chaos as offering no opposition or threat to God. Within this tradition the drama of creation is devoid of any hint of conflict or contestation, having only one protagonist – God – who creates effortlessly without any struggle or resistance. A further feature of some articulations of this tradition is that chaos is “...an inert mass lacking order or differentiation. God creates by isolating the various elements that will make up the created universe, and thereby imposes a structure upon the primeval muck. In this tradition God is a potter and chaos the unworked clay, a metaphor familiar from the Bible itself (e.g., Gen. ii 7; Isa. xxix 16, lxiv 8; Jer. xviii 1-6).”⁶⁸⁶

The emergence of this tradition developed in stages, growing out of the older chaos tradition of opposition and conflict. Two important texts in the Hebrew Bible chart this development. The first is Psalm 104, a nature-hymn proclaiming the cosmic reign of God.⁶⁸⁷ Echoes of the creation battle motif can be heard at various points in this psalm. In v.3a the psalmist says of God, “...you set the beams of your chambers on

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁶⁸⁶ Michael Deroche, "Isaiah XLV 7 and the Creation of Chaos?," *Vetus Testamentum* 42, no. 1 (1992): 11.

⁶⁸⁷ Cf. Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (London: SCM Press, 1962), 666; J. Clinton McCann Jr, "The Book of Psalms: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck *et al* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 1096.

the waters,” suggesting the mythological background of the divine warrior’s defeat of the cosmic waters as the basis for the establishment of a created order.⁶⁸⁸ As the psalm continues, the threat of the waters rising up over creation is thoroughly subjugated and confined by the sovereign authority and action of the LORD:

You cover [the earth] with the deep as with a garment;
the waters stood above the mountains.
At your rebuke they flee;
at the sound of your thunder they take to flight.
They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys
to the place that you appointed for them.
You set a boundary that they may not pass,
so that they might not again cover the earth. (Ps 104:6-9)

This confining boundary imposed upon the waters by God is so that they might not again cover the earth in a chaotic and unruly way (v.9). But such is God’s sovereign authority that *God* uses the deep to cover the earth “as with a garment” (v.6), enlisting the waters within God’s providential purposes for creation:

You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
they flow between the hills,
giving drink to every wild animal;
the wild asses quench their thirst....
From your lofty abode you water the mountains;
the earth is satisfied with the fruits of your work. (Ps 104:10-11, 13)

This progression of understanding of the place of the chaotic waters within the cosmos reaches its climax towards the end of the psalm. Having taken a tour of creation in which the watering of the earth and the provision of food and shelter for all of its creatures is clearly evident (vv.10-24), the psalmist returns to the sea, “great and wide...[containing] living things both small and great” (v.25). Among which is none other than Leviathan, no longer the terrifying primordial chaos monster of old, but

⁶⁸⁸ "The Book of Psalms: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 1097.

now just another of the myriad creatures of creation who owes its very existence to God's creative decision and action.⁶⁸⁹ Indeed, the astonishing claim of the psalm is that God formed Leviathan as a plaything (v.26), God's "rubber ducky" as Levenson colourfully describes it.⁶⁹⁰

The point that every creature (including Leviathan) is completely dependent upon the sovereign and providential care of God is powerfully underscored in the psalmist's concluding summation:

These all look to you
to give them their food in due season;
when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.
When you send forth your spirit, they are created. (Ps 104:27-30a)

Psalm 104 therefore represents an important development in the understanding of chaos, containing within itself a progression from chaos as a living opponent of God that God subjugates, towards a view in which the cosmic waters, and Leviathan in particular, become objects of God's creative action and delight, no longer offering any hint of opposition to God's creative purposes.

⁶⁸⁹ According to Levenson, this is the only instance in the Hebrew bible where Leviathan – who elsewhere is always presented as a primordial being – is explicitly described as a creation of God. (Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence*, 49.) However, Levenson fails to address Job 41:33 [Heb: 41:25], in which Leviathan is described as a "creature" or "one made".

⁶⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

A second key text in the Hebrew Bible in which this tradition is further developed is the creation account of Genesis 1.⁶⁹¹ The notion of chaos as inert, lifeless matter is readily discerned at the start of the account:

...the earth was a **formless void** [*tōhū wābōhū* – תְּהוֹ וּבְהוֹ] and darkness covered the face of **the deep** [*tēhôm* – תְּהוֹם], while a wind from God swept over the face of **the waters** [*hammāyim* – הַמַּיִם]. (Gen 1:2)

The three terms highlighted above – a formless void, the deep, the waters – describe the primeval “raw material” of the earth’s pre-existent chaotic condition prior to the act of God’s creation. While von Rad confidently asserts the mythological associations of the first two of these terms, what seems more plausible is that what we find here is a demythologizing of the primordial conditions prior to creation.⁶⁹² The sense of inertia in these primeval elements is strong, highlighted by the fact that the only indication of any activity or movement belongs to the wind of God that swept (or hovered or brooded) over the face of the waters. This demythologization of the chaotic is particularly apparent later in the Genesis 1 creation account:

...in v.21, the description of the fifth day of creation, when God (*’ēlōhîm*) creates the swimming and flying things, the text pointedly tells us that he created

⁶⁹¹ The relationship between Ps 104 and Genesis 1 is a subject of some debate amongst biblical commentators. Carroll Stuhlmueller draws direct parallels between these two texts, but argues for a pre-exilic date for the psalm, suggesting that any interaction with Genesis 1 (an exilic text) would have been with its earlier oral form (Carroll Stuhlmueller, *Psalms 2: Psalms 73-150*, Old Testament Message 22 (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983), 109-10.). By contrast, McCann disputes any direct literary influence, in either direction, between these two texts (McCann Jr, "The Book of Psalms: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 1096.). Weiser accounts for the similarities between them by suggesting that they both have their origin in a common cultic tradition (Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, 666.) Levenson weighs in on the debate by suggesting a genetic connection between the two texts, arguing that “the two passages stand within the same stream of thought, with the Genesis text chronologically later, even as its present placement as the overture to the Torah renders it axiologically prior” (Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence*, 59.).

⁶⁹² Von Rad refers to *tēhôm* (תְּהוֹם) variously as the “sea of chaos” or “primeval flood” and boldly states that it is “unquestionably connected with the Babylonian Tiamat... [while] *bōhū* is probably related to Baau, the nocturnal mother goddess in Phoenician mythology” (von Rad, *Genesis*, 48.)

“the great sea monsters” (*hattannînim haggědōlîm*). The term *tannîn* is elsewhere used to refer to Leviathan.⁶⁹³ The special notice given the creation of these *tannînim* in Genesis 1:21 is surely to be associated with the central role of Leviathan (under whatever name) in other creation stories, Gentile and Israelite alike. The author wishes us to know explicitly that these monsters are not primordial and neither free of God’s rule nor an embarrassment to it. Indeed, whereas elsewhere in the chapter, God usually either calls entities into existence by God’s mere command or “makes” them (*wayya ‘as’*), only in the case of the sea monster in this verse and of humanity in v.27 is it said that God *created* (*wayyibrā’*) a specific species.... Leviathan is now only one member of a whole species of marine animals, a species that God not only creates, but pronounces good, blesses, and charges “to be fertile and increase.” All hint of opposition to God on the part of these animals has vanished....

That the great sea monsters of Genesis 1:21 are not created until the fifth day further underscores their subordination to God. Unlike God, they are not primordial, and far from playing an essential role in the emergence of the rest of nature, they in fact appear only toward the end of the primal week.⁶⁹⁴

3.3.3 *Chaos as the agent of God*

A third chaos tradition can be identified within the Hebrew Bible, one in which chaos is enlisted as God’s agent or instrument. In this tradition God views chaos not as an opponent to be overcome, but as a resource to be used to bring about God’s purposes. A dramatic example would be the flood narratives in Genesis 6 – 9, in which God harnesses the floodwaters of chaos in an apparent reversal of creation (cf. Gen 1:6-7 which references the separation of the waters above and below the dome of the sky), in order to purge the earth of its corruption. Von Rad writes:

An understanding of the Priestly story of the Flood depends materially on the correct translation of the word *mabbûl*. *Mabbûl*...does not mean “flood,”

⁶⁹³ Isaiah 27:1

⁶⁹⁴ Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence*, 54-55.

“inundation,” or even “destruction,” but it is a technical term for a part of the world structure, namely, the heavenly ocean.... According to the Priestly representation we must understand the Flood, therefore, as a catastrophe involving the entire cosmos. When the heavenly ocean breaks forth upon the earth below, and the primeval sea beneath the earth, which is restrained by God, now freed from its bonds, gushes up through yawning chasms onto the earth, then there is a destruction of the entire cosmic system according to Biblical cosmogony. The two halves of the chaotic primeval sea, separated – the one up, the other below – by God’s creative government, are again united; creation begins to sink again into chaos.⁶⁹⁵

The author and initiator of the flood is none other than God, who claims unequivocal responsibility for the flood and its consequences when he says, “For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die” (Gen 6:17). God’s motivation for returning creation to a pre-creation state of chaos is the desire to cleanse it of its corruption and violence. To this end God enlists the forces of chaos as instruments to be used in the hands of the Almighty.

Another example would be the plague narrative in Exodus 7 – 12, in which chaotic elements unleashed by God utterly disrupt the good order of creation – water is no longer water but blood (Ex 7:14-25); frogs, gnats, flies and locusts swarm out of control (Ex 8:1-32; 10:1-20); diseases of animals and people run amok (Ex 9:1-12); thunder and hail rain down without restraint (Ex 9:13-35); light is swallowed by darkness (Ex 10:21-29); death strikes with merciless vehemence (Ex 12:29-32). The introduction to the plague narrative – the account of Aaron’s rod becoming a serpent and swallowing those of Pharaoh’s magicians (Ex 7:8-13) – is instructive, in that the symbol chosen to present the credentials of Moses and Aaron as the emissaries of

⁶⁹⁵ von Rad, *Genesis*, 124.

YHWH – a ravenous serpent – has strong resonances with the chaos monster.⁶⁹⁶ All of which culminates in the episode of the sea crossing (Ex 14:1-31), in which the sea is used by God both as an instrument of salvation for liberating the Israelites and as a weapon of destruction for defeating the Egyptians. Again, the forces of chaos have been placed in the employ of God to be used to affect God's divine purposes.

3.3.4 *Chaos traditions, the words of Job's wife and the divine speeches*

This discussion of various chaos traditions in the Hebrew Bible provides a helpful backdrop for our continued consideration of the divine speeches in the book of Job, and their relation to the words of Job's wife.

Thus far, the echoes in the divine speeches of two of the four core themes within Job's wife's speech have been considered – namely, the inadequacy of Job's world view and the (paradoxical) posture of contestation. The further elements of experiencing otherness and considering the paradigm of unitive consciousness will now be explored, drawing on the insights of the chaos traditions gained above.

⁶⁹⁶ It should be noted that Brueggemann regards this episode as the first of the plagues, and not simply an introduction. He then counts the plague on livestock and the plague of boils as one plague to arrive at the death of the firstborn as the tenth plague. (See Walter Brueggemann, "The Book of Exodus: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck *et al* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 739, 53.) In similar vein, Pixley speaks of the ten wonders, the first being the serpents (Ex 7:8-13) and the tenth being darkness (Ex 10:21-29). (George V. Pixley, *On Exodus: A Liberation Perspective* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987).) If, as Fretheim argues (see Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," 387-92.), the plagues are understood as signs of impending judgement – namely, the Passover night (Ex 12:29) and the sea drowning (Ex 14:23-28) – then it makes sense to regard this episode as the first plague, while the final "plague" of the Egyptian firstborn should then be regarded as standing outside the list of plagues as it is not a sign of impending judgement but part of the judgement itself. Within such a reading, the final plague would be that of darkness, representing the complete reversal of creation to the precreation state of darkness and chaos. Childs is therefore surely mistaken in describing the plague of darkness as "a rather harmless anti-climax" (Brevard S. Childs, *Exodus: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (London: SCM Press, 1974), 143.)

3.4 An experience of otherness

The final word to come from the mouth of Job's wife is *wāmut* (מָוֹת) – "...and die." As already discussed in ch. 5 above, the very suggestion of this possibility represented a radical option for Job that lay well beyond anything he had ever previously contemplated. For in daring to articulate the possibility of death, Job's wife was presenting the fundamental loss of control that death ultimately represented. For someone whose entire existence had centred upon the careful ordering of his affairs within the prescribed bounds of religious orthopraxy in order to protect and safeguard life – not simply his own but also that of his family and community – to consider death as a state to seek out was anathema to him. It was to venture into the dangerous domain of the wild and chaotic. It was an invitation to explore alterity, to be open to the risky realm of otherness.

This is precisely the invitation that YHWH extends to Job in the divine speeches by presenting to him a vision of the otherness within creation and, by implication, the otherness within God. YHWH's exposure of the inadequacy of Job's worldview along with a persistent call to contestation, already discussed above, draw Job beyond the fence that had been constructed around him and his house and all that he had (cf. 1:9), obscuring his perspective and hedging in his imagination. The divine speeches move Job outside the barriers and boundaries of his former faith paradigm, exposing him to a panoramic view of the cosmos that was utterly beyond anything that Job had ever previously contemplated.

This exposure to otherness happens in three ways. Firstly, through the particular content of the descriptions of the diverse elements that make up the cosmos, in which a discernible progression can be detected. The progression moves from entities with which Job would have had some direct experience and familiarity – the very earth itself upon which he lived (38:4-7); the sea (38:8-11); the dawn, and darkness and light (38:12-21); snow and hail, rain and dew (38:22-30); the stars in the night sky (38:31-33); stormclouds and lightning (38:34-38) – to the world of wild animals with which Job would have had limited or no direct experience (38:39 – 39:30); to the

mythical creatures of Behemoth and Leviathan (40:15 – 41:34 [Heb: 40:15 – 41:26]) that were utterly beyond his experience and whose very existence was far from certain.

Secondly, humanity is conspicuous by its absence from this panorama of the cosmos. The presence, influence and impact of people are wholly missing from this picture of the world.⁶⁹⁷ Even those elements of the world that would have been familiar to Job

⁶⁹⁷ Four exceptions to this would be the reference to the wicked in 38:13, 15; the passing remark about human habitation in 38:26; the reference to the tumult of the city and the shouts of the driver in 39:7; and the description of the war horse in 39:19-25. With respect to the reference to the wicked in 38:13, 15, I am drawn to Clines' astronomical rendering of these verses in which he translates *rēšā 'îm* (רִשְׁעִים) as the name of a constellation ("Dog-stars") rather than "the wicked," following either a scribal error in which רִשְׁעִים was written for שְׁעִירִים ("hairy ones"), a term used in Arabic for the two constellations of Canis Major and Minor; or a specialized reference to the constellations of Canis and Orion's Hound that had a reputation in antiquity for bringing the evils of pestilence, fire and fever. His translation of these verses reads thus:

...so that the Dog-stars are shaken loose?

...as the light of the Dog-stars fades,

and the Navigator's Line breaks up. (38:13b, 15, in Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1049.)

The compelling motivation for his argument merits repeating in its entirety. He writes:

First, we would expect the strophe to concern only cosmological matters, as does everything else in this first section (vv 4-38) of the first divine speech, and not to refer to humans. Secondly, the presence of the wicked is surprising, for there is very little about humans in the whole of the Yahweh speeches, and even less about any moral government there may be in the world.... Thirdly, in the Masoretic text the word for "wicked" (רִשְׁעִים) in vv 13 and 15 is written abnormally, with the middle letter elevated above the line – which is probably a sign that the scribes thought there was something odd about the word. Fourthly, the relation between the cosmological material (vv 12-13a, 14) and the references to the wicked (vv 13b, 15) is hard to determine. Fifthly, the phrase "high arm" (זרוע רמה), used apparently of the wicked (v 15), occurs nowhere else.... For these reasons, G.R. Driver (followed by NEB, REB) appears to have been on the right track when he argued that all the references to the "wicked" cloak original allusions to stars and constellations. (*ibid.*, 1103.)

The reference to human habitation in 38:26 is actually a reference to the absence of human life. With respect to the tumult of the city and the shouts of the driver in 39:7, the point being made is that the onager (wild ass) is utterly unaffected by the activity of human settlement. Finally, while the description of the war horse in 39:19-25 is situated within the context of the unmistakably human activity of warfare, the point of the description is the horse's utter wildness and fearlessness in the face of battle. Indeed, its unbridled lust for battle

are presented in ways that highlight his complete lack of understanding of their origins and how they actually functioned. Furthermore, the particular categories and concerns that were central dimensions of Job's world are not even mentioned. Most notable is the absence of any moral language.⁶⁹⁸ A particular omission worth noting is that of the root *tmm* (תָּמַם) and its derivatives. As discussed in ch. 5 above, this term with the cluster of meaning orbiting around it – such as blamelessness, integrity and perfection – features prominently within the moral universe of the prologue and the human dialogue. It is an important orienting word that serves as something of a moral compass within Job's world. Yet, within the world of the divine speeches, this term has no place.

Thirdly, Job's exposure to otherness comes through the way in which YHWH's extraordinary relationship with these entities beyond the realm of the human is presented. Indeed, it could be argued that it was Job's exposure to the otherness of God in relation to the otherness of the world that constitutes the primary thrust and purpose of the divine speeches. The surprising nature of the relationship between God and elements of God's world will now be illustrated by reference to a few key motifs in the divine speeches.

3.4.1 *The sea and cosmic waters*

The sea was a powerful symbol of the primordial forces of chaos opposed to God's purposes of creation. Within the first chaos tradition discussed above, the sea was an opponent of God that had to be defeated, or at the very least contained. This idea of adversarial conflict between God and the sea is present elsewhere in the book of Job. Consider the following words of Job taken from the human dialogue:

Am I the Sea, or the Dragon,

demonstrates an autonomy beyond that of human control, to the point that the presence of humans, from the horse's perspective, is utterly inconsequential.

⁶⁹⁸ The only exception to this would be the reference to the wicked in 40:12, discounting the translation of "wicked" in 38:13b, 15a as discussed in the footnote above. Even the words in 40:8 that appear to have moral associations – מִשְׁפָּט ("judgment"), רָשָׁע ("condemn") and צַדִּיק ("righteous") – are used in a forensic, rather than an ethical sense (ibid.).

that you set a guard over me? (7:12)

...who alone stretched out the heavens
and trampled the waves of the Sea.⁶⁹⁹ (9:8)

By his power he stilled the Sea;
by his understanding he struck down Rahab.
...his hand pierced the fleeing serpent. (26:12, 13b)

Echoes of this battle motif, and especially the need to confine the raging sea, can be heard in the first reference to the sea in the divine speeches:

Or who shut in the sea with doors...
and prescribed bounds for it,
and set bars and doors,
and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no further,
and here shall your proud waves be stopped’? (38:8a, 10-11)

Yet, in the midst of this description that conformed to the traditional understanding of the relationship between God and the sea, a startling new idea is introduced:

Or who shut in the sea with doors
when it burst out of the womb? –
when I made the clouds its garment,
and thick darkness its swaddling band... (38:8-9)

Here the sea is conceptualized, not as a fierce monster of chaos, but as a newborn baby; and YHWH’s role is not that of vanquisher, but of midwife, who ushers the sea into the world and then clothes it with clouds and swaddles it with thick darkness.⁷⁰⁰

⁶⁹⁹ The definite article is missing, suggesting that “Sea” could be read as a proper name.

⁷⁰⁰ Although she does not deal with this particular passage, Juliana Claassens explores different images of God as a delivering presence in the Hebrew bible that include the roles of mourner, mother and midwife. She offers the insightful observation that the context in which these non-traditional ways of thinking and speaking about God arose were often contexts of

The image that is evoked is of YHWH holding and cradling the sea in her arms, and maybe even gazing upon it with wonder and delight. This image modifies the references to the confinement of the sea in 38:8-11, suggesting that it is the containment necessary for an unruly child rather than an antagonistic adversary.⁷⁰¹ The traditional adversarial relationship between God and the sea is thus thoroughly subverted. Newsom writes:

In striking contrast to the motif of battle between God and the sea...God here appears as the midwife who births the sea and wraps it in the swaddling bands of cloud and darkness.... Birth is an event in which an irrepressible force breaks through containment and transgresses boundaries. Specifically, the breaking through of water from the womb signals the onset of the process. Swaddling bands in which babies were wrapped were restraints to prevent the baby's arms and legs from moving about and were believed to calm the child. Thus, both the aggressive force of the sea and the restraints placed upon it are taken up into this new image. The image of the baby in turn transforms the emotional resonance of the image of the sea. Far from being a hostile, alien power it is associated with the vigour of new life, and the restraints placed upon it are associated with nurture and protection.⁷⁰²

The point could be pushed even further if the question were asked, "From whose womb did the sea burst forth?" Dianne Bergant rightly notes that the text does not state that YHWH created the sea.⁷⁰³ Nevertheless, the text implies that God was

trauma and despair, in which traditional language about God proved inadequate. See L. Juliana M. Claassens, *Mourner, Mother, Midwife: Reimagining God's Delivering Presence in the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press).

⁷⁰¹ See J. Gerald Janzen, "On the Moral Nature of God's Power: Yahweh and the Sea in Job and Deutero-Isaiah.," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (1994): 468.

⁷⁰² Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 602.

⁷⁰³ Dianne Bergant, *Job, Ecclesiastes* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1982), 183-84. The Qumran Targum renders 38:8 as follows:

Did you shut the Sea within doors?

When it gushed from the womb of the deep...

Thus, the likes of Ticciati and Pope both identify the womb from which the Sea emerged as the cosmic, primordial abyss. See Susannah Ticciati, *Job and the Disruption of Identity:*

somehow responsible for the sea's origins and was intimately involved in the event of its birth. Timothy Beal suggests that maybe God and the Sea (Yam) are something like family. He writes:

In our present turn-of-the-century culture of psychotherapy, oriented toward reflection on family dynamics, some might go so far as to ask whether Yam is in some sense an expression of another, more chaotic aspect within the godhead (i.e., divine family), or whether Yam is a revelation of God's inner child. We need not go that far, however, to see that in this passage the chaos monster Yam is not completely eradicated from the world, nor is it completely dissociated from the creator God. It is a personification of primordial chaos *within* cosmos, intimately related to the divine.⁷⁰⁴

This surprisingly intimate connection between God and the origins of the cosmic waters is further hinted at a little later in the speech through the use of more parenting and birthing imagery:

Has the rain a father,
or who has begotten the drops of dew?
From whose womb did the ice come forth,
and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven? (38:28-29)⁷⁰⁵

All of which is to say that the traditional conception of the relationship between God and the sea / cosmic waters as one of antagonism, aggression and conflict is thoroughly subverted in the first divine speech. Indeed, far from being the objects of God's aggression, the waters – in the form of snow and hail – are described in 38:22-23 as God's agents and instruments in the day of battle. But perhaps the most startling

Reading Beyond Barth (London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 105; Marvin H. Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, ed. W.F. Albright and D.N. Freedman, 3rd ed., The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1973), 293-94.

⁷⁰⁴ Timothy K. Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 49.

⁷⁰⁵ For a focused treatment of these two verses, and an overview of the answers to the questions posed therein provided by various commentators, see Gregory Vall, "'From Whose Womb Did the Ice Come Forth?' Procreation Images in Job 38:28-29," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 57 (1995).

reference to this affable and easy-going relationship between God and the cosmic waters is found in 38:34 when YHWH asks Job:

Can you lift up your voice to the clouds,
so that a flood of waters may cover you?

The unspoken answer from Job that the question elicits would be, “No, not I, but you can O LORD.” In the tradition that sees chaos as an adversary, being enveloped by the floodwaters of chaos was akin to defeat or certainly subordination.⁷⁰⁶ Yet, God can imagine such a scenario in which God’s own voice would call forth such a situation, but the possibility elicits not even the slightest hint of anxiety or concern. The otherness of God is thus seen in the nature of the surprising relationship of benevolence that God enjoys with the cosmic waters.

One final reference for this section dealing with the cosmic waters will suffice. Within the ANE, the necessity of rain for human survival and flourishing was paramount, and kings “took pride in cutting the canals and building the irrigation systems that secured the prosperity of their kingdoms.”⁷⁰⁷ Indeed, the construction of such irrigation systems was one of the defining acts of human civilization in the ANE.⁷⁰⁸ It was the quintessential human intervention that exercised a measure of control over the accessibility and availability of water. Ensuring and regulating the supply of water proved decisive in transforming harsh and inhospitable environments into ones suitable for human habitation.

This idea is both taken up, and subverted, within the divine speeches. The relevant pericope reads as follows:

⁷⁰⁶ In 22:11, the identical phrase about being covered by floodwaters – *wēšip ‘at mayim tēkassēkā* (וְשִׁפְעַת־מַיִם תִּכְסֶּה) – is used by Eliphaz to reference the punishment of the wicked, highlighting how very different its usage is in the divine speeches. This is a further illustration of how radically ‘other’ God’s perspective is from anything that Job had been exposed to before.

⁷⁰⁷ Balentine, *Job*, 653.

⁷⁰⁸ Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 604.

Who has cut a channel [*tē'ālā* – תְּעָלָה] for the torrents of rain [*laššetep* – לַשֶּׁטֶפ],
 and a way for the thunderbolt,
 to bring rain on a land where no one lives,
 on the desert, which is empty of human life,
 to satisfy the waste and desolate land [*šō'ā ūmēšō'ā* – שׂוֹא וּמְשׂוֹאָה],
 and to make the ground put forth grass? (38:25-27)

The notion of controlling and regulating the supply of water through irrigation is taken up in the reference to a channel being cut for the torrential rain (38:25).⁷⁰⁹ This, in itself, is a somewhat bizarre image, as the distinctive feature of torrential rain is its overwhelming and overflowing nature, resistant to any form of containment or control.⁷¹⁰ But the idea is subverted when the focus and objective of this divine irrigation system is disclosed – “to bring rain on a land where no one lives,” and “to satisfy the waste and desolate land,” which, by all conventional human assessments, would render the entire exercise pointless, wasteful and even irresponsible. Clearly, a very different set of criteria are used to measure value within the economy of God’s design.

⁷⁰⁹ The word for channel [*tē'ālā* – תְּעָלָה] is translated elsewhere as “water-course” or “conduit” or “trench,” but its usage in the Hebrew bible is always within the context of systems of water irrigation (cf. 1 Ki 18:32, 35, 38; 2 Ki 18:17; 20:20; Is 7:3; 36:2; Ezek 31:4.) – not to be confused with the different noun that is spelt the same meaning “healing” (Jer 30:13; 46:11). See Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *The New Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Lafayette: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1981), 752.

⁷¹⁰ The word translated by NRSV as “torrents of rain” is the nom. *šetep* (שֶׁטֶפ), which could be translated as “flood” or “flooding downpour,” conveying the sense of an overflowing or overwhelming force. The term is commonly used to depict divine judgment, often through military conquest, where the flood overwhelms everything before it (Is 8:8; 28:2, 15, 17, 18; 30:28; Jer 47:2; Dan 9:26; 11:10, 22, 40). By very definition, the flood is not confined to a particular path, but rather overwhelms and devastates everything in *its* path. See Michael A. Grisanti and Elmer A. Martens, “8851 שֶׁטֶפ,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997).

The identical phrase for a “waste and desolate land” (*šō`â ûmēšō`â* – שׁוֹמֵשׁוֹׁא) was used by Job in 30:3, with strongly negative connotations, when he described the despised outcasts grubbing out a meagre existence in a “waste and desolate land” characterised by hunger, want and hardship. “In Job’s view, such a place is both dehumanized and godforsaken. Yet this is precisely the place that God “satisfies” with rain and causes to bring forth grass, an image associated with creation (Gen 1:11; 2:5-6).”⁷¹¹ What Job had dismissed as a place of privation and impoverishment was actually the site of God’s gratuitous and abundant provision.

3.4.2 *The world of wild animals*

Job’s exposure to radical alterity continues as the first divine speech shifts to a consideration of the world of wild animals (38:39 – 39:30). All of the animals that YHWH mentions share one thing in common – they are wild, undomesticated animals that have nothing to do with the world of humans.⁷¹² Almost all of them belong to the hostile and alien realm of the desert wilderness.⁷¹³ And almost all of them “...are understood to be ritually unclean, thus unacceptable, at least from a conventional priestly perspective, as offerings to God.”⁷¹⁴ Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, such animals were commonly identified with places of desolation – hostile and dangerous – that were often associated with God’s judgment (cf. Lev 26:22; Is 34:8-15; Jer 5:6; 50:39-40; Hab 1:8).

Yet, the manner in which these animals are portrayed in the divine speeches subverts the traditional Israelite perspective of them. This occurs in two ways. Firstly, the unprecedented attention to detail in the descriptions of these animals betrays an intimacy and familiarity with them on the part of God, implying that God was fully “at

⁷¹¹ Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 604.

⁷¹² The one exception to this, as already discussed in footnote 697 on p.356 above, is the war horse (39:19-25). But the horse’s wild and unbridled lust for battle makes something of a mockery of any human assumption that this animal can be domesticated, in the usual sense of the word.

⁷¹³ Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*, 245.

⁷¹⁴ Balentine, *Job*, 659.

home” with them. When reference is made to such animals elsewhere in the Hebrew scriptures, the mere fact of their presence is usually noted (cf. Is 13:21-22; 34:11, 13-15; Jer 50:39; Zeph 2:14.) In such references there is little or nothing by way of detailed description of their distinctive characteristics, habits or behaviour; and their sole significance seems to vest in the fact of their wildness. Consequently, ostriches, satyrs, hyenas, jackals, hawks, ravens and vultures tend to merge into an homogenous mass that simply bears the label “wild”. By contrast, YHWH’s vivid descriptions of the wild animals are presented with unparalleled detail, conveying an intimate understanding of their peculiarities and impulses and challenging the prejudicial human tendency to lump them all into one generic and undifferentiated category.

Secondly, these wild animals are clearly the recipients of God’s providential care, who feeds them, cares for them and imbues them with the distinctive qualities that make them the unique creatures that they are. This is evident in the feeding of the lion and the raven (38:39-41); in the calving of mountain goats and deer (39:1-4); in providing free range for the wild ass (39:5-8) and unbridled strength for the wild ox (39:9-12); in the idiosyncratic abandon of the ostrich (39:13-18); in the fearlessness of the horse (39:19-25); and the soaring flight of the hawk and eagle (39:26-30).

The idea that wild animals living beyond the sphere of the human should be the recipients of God’s bountiful provision and intentional care was something that Job would never have previously contemplated. Job’s relationship to animals was largely confined to the functional utility he could derive from them. His domestic flocks and herds were a sign and measure of his wealth (1:3; cf. 42:12); they were objects he used in the cultic sacrifices that he offered as a regular practice (1:5), and were instruments of the generosity he extended to the poor (31:20). Wild animals made an occasional appearance in his moral vocabulary, but always with negative allusions to either the foolish (11:12), the wicked (24:5) or the outcast (30:29). Consequently, the manner in which YHWH spoke about the wild animals and extended providential care to them would have been a radical disruption of Job’s of them.

It should be noted further that within the thought-world of the ANE, wild animals played an important symbolic role in the royal drama of order being imposed over chaos, which is often depicted in the iconography of the ANE. Newsom writes:

Near Eastern kings are often represented as hunting many of the animals depicted in the divine speeches. As a symbolic act, the royal hunt represented the king's role in protecting the integrity of the land against hostile forces. In the Mesopotamian iconic motif of the "Lord of the animals," a divine figure is flanked by wild animals, which he grasps in each hand in an evident enactment of control. Like the chaotic sea, the animals represent an anarchic force that is part of the world but limited by divine power.⁷¹⁵

Yet, in the divine speeches there is no hint of this. Indeed, the very first wild animal to begin the series, the lion, being the predatory animal *par excellence* in the ancient world, was the prey of choice in the ancient Near Eastern royal hunt.⁷¹⁶ But rather than hunt the lion, YHWH is the one who hunts *for* the lion – "Can you hunt the prey for the lion, / or satisfy the appetite of the young lions?" (38:39). Indeed, the traditional pattern of hunter and hunted is inverted, to a degree, in the closing verses of the speech. The final wild animal in the series is the vulture, whose young are fed on the blood and the corpses of those slain (*hālālīm* – חַלְלִים) in battle.⁷¹⁷ Newsom writes, "Here is the food that God provides, the blood that the young will drink. With this sublimely horrific image of human beings as the foodstuff of young vultures, God concludes the speech."⁷¹⁸

⁷¹⁵ Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*, 245.

⁷¹⁶ For a thorough treatment of the royal lion hunt motif within Mesopotamian culture and iconography, see Michael B. Dick, "The Neo-Assyrian Royal Lion Hunt and Yahweh's Answer to Job," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125, no. 2 (2006).

⁷¹⁷ The nom. *nešer* (נֶשֶׁר), as used in the Hebrew scriptures, can refer to various kinds of eagles or vultures. The particular translation chosen, i.e., either vultures or eagles, should be determined by the context. (N. Kiuchi, "5979 נֶשֶׁר," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 200.) While many translations favour "eagle" in 38:27, my preference is for "vulture" given the reference in 39:30 to its young sucking up blood and feeding on the corpses of the slain – behaviour more reminiscent of that of the vulture than the eagle.

⁷¹⁸ Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*, 247-48.

In other words, if a dividing line were to be drawn between the realms of the domestic and the wild, between the centre and the periphery, between culture and nature, between the ordered and the chaotic, between what is presumed to be blessed and godforsaken, between the human and the non-human; the startling (and indeed scandalous) point to emerge from the divine speeches is that YHWH is fully at home on the far side of that line, shattering any presumptions that Job may have had that God belonged on his side. Not that God is constrained, of course, to either side of that dividing line. Indeed, as will be demonstrated shortly in our discussion of the second divine speech, such binary oppositions utterly break down within God's אֱלֹהִים. But before Job can grasp this he must first come face to face with the otherness of God. This is what happens for him in the first divine speech.⁷¹⁹

All of which must have felt to Job a bit like dying. The ordered world as he knew it, with its neatly delineated divisions between good and bad, in and out, had been blown away by the explosive content of YHWH's words that blasted forth from the storm of God's appearance. Job's wife had been right – Job needed to die! Not a literal, physical death, but a death nevertheless in which everything that gave his life meaning and structure would be stripped away.⁷²⁰ Yet, what Job would discover is that not even this experience of radical otherness lay beyond the knowledge, care and delight of God. For him, it would be the gateway into a new and transformed consciousness.

⁷¹⁹ It could be argued that in the second divine speech, the sections on Behemoth and Leviathan deepen this sense of the otherness of God, precisely through God's extraordinary relationship with them both which demonstrates God's familiarity with and delight in these strange creatures (or mythological beings?) from beyond the human realm. While this is certainly true, that is not the primary intention of the second divine speech, in my reading of it. If it were, it would simply be a continuation and amplification of the first divine speech, and could therefore be dismissed as redundant. (George Bernard Shaw famously described the second divine speech as a "noble irrelevance" – see David Wolfers, "The Lord's Second Speech in the Book of Job," *Vetus Testamentum* 40, no. 4 (1990): 474.) As will be demonstrated shortly, the second divine speech has a unique and crucial role within the book as a whole, particularly in the way in which it echoes one of the key, overarching sentiments of Job's wife expressed within her speech as a whole.

⁷²⁰ What Rollins would describe as radical negation.

3.5 Unitive consciousness

The final core element of the speech of Job's wife to be used as a lens for viewing the divine speeches is that which emerges from the structure of her speech as a whole - namely, its subversion of binary oppositions and its articulation of a unitive consciousness. She begins her speech by challenging the paradigm that undergirded Job's entire life as a source of bondage for him, and ends her speech by speaking of death as a source of freedom for him. At the same time, she gathers into one single utterance the words of the LORD and *haśśāṭān*, holding together that which appears to be contradictory and mutually exclusive. In doing so she simultaneously affirms and subverts on earth the words that had been spoken in heaven.⁷²¹ Taken as a whole, her speech is truly remarkable in its capacity to hold together the binary opposites of life and death, blessing and cursing, affirmation and subversion, heaven and earth. As such it demonstrates an alternative unitive consciousness. The same unitive consciousness that can be discerned in the divine speeches, especially in the sections describing Behemoth and Leviathan, as well as in the overall impact of the divine speeches as a whole.

3.5.1 *Behemoth and Leviathan*

The passages describing Behemoth (40:15-24) and Leviathan (41:1-34 [Heb: 40:25 – 41:26]) are amongst the most enigmatic in the entire book, and a great deal of critical ink has been spilled trying to make sense of these baffling beings. There are many paths of enquiry that could be followed into the mystifying terrain that they occupy, and so any such exploration undertaken here will, of necessity, be selective and partial. For the purposes of the task at hand of considering the divine speeches through the lens of the unitive consciousness introduced by Job's wife, the discussion here will focus on just two aspects of Behemoth and Leviathan: their identity – whether they

⁷²¹ The subversive dimensions of her speech, particularly in the manner in which she inverted the meaning of the words of the LORD and *haśśāṭān*, were discussed in detail in ch.5 above – see especially section 4.5 on pp. 280-281.

are mythological beings or real creatures; and their relationship with YHWH, which influences how their place within the world is understood.

3.5.2 *Mythological or real?*

One of the sharp dividing lines in scholarly opinion around Behemoth and Leviathan is commonly drawn through the question of their identity – whether these are real creatures or mythological beings.

For those that regard them as real animals, Behemoth is commonly identified as the hippopotamus and Leviathan as the crocodile.⁷²² Those aspects of their descriptions which seem a little incredible or unrealistic are then explained as being the literary features of poetic hyperbole. Gordis' offers a fair representation of this viewpoint:

Then follow exultant descriptions of two massive beasts – *Behemot*, the hippopotamus (40:15-24), and *Leviathan*, the crocodile (40:25 – 41:26). These are not literal, exact delineations, but poetic pictures rich in hyperbole. It is possible

⁷²² These identifications can be traced back to S. Bochart's *Hierozyicon 2*, cols. 769-96, published in 1663. (John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 65.) Instances of this view can be found, for example, in the following: Samuel Rolles Driver and George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1921, (1986)); Anthony Hanson and Miriam Hanson, *Job: Introduction and Commentary* ed. John Marsh and Alan Richardson, Torch Bible Commentaries (London: SCM Press, 1953), 112; Robert Gordis, *The Book of God and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 119-20; Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, 619; Harold Henry Rowley, *Job*, ed. Ronald E. Clements and Matthew Black, New Century Bible (London: Nelson, 1970), 332-33; Adrian Van Selms, *Job: A Practical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 151-55; Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1183-90. Other identifiers are occasionally named, such as the water buffalo for Behemoth (B. Couroyer, "Qui Est Behemoth?," *RB* 82 (1975).) or the elephant (see Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, 320.), or the whale, dolphin or tunny fish for Leviathan (see G.R. Driver, "Mythical Monsters in the Old Testament," in *Studi Orientalistici in Onore Di Giorgio Levi Della Vida. 1*, ed. Giorgio Levi Della Vida (Roma: Istituto per l'Oriente, 1956), 238; Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament*, 66-68.).

for example. See Couroyer, "Qui Est Behemoth?"; Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, 320.

that, carried along by his enthusiasm and exultation, the poet borrowed images from ancient oriental myths which tell of the creative god who fights and conquers primordial beasts of terrifying dimensions. But he is not interested in imaginary creatures from the dim mythological past – he is concerned with the actual present, with the vast universe as it is governed by its Maker. The hippopotamus and the crocodile are real beasts and their choice for inclusion in these paeans of praise is by no means accidental.⁷²³

Important textual evidence in support of this view would be the explicit references to Behemoth being made by YHWH (40:15) who is also its Maker (40:19), and a similar reference to Leviathan being a “creature” (literally, “one who is made” – 41:33). These references challenge any claim to them being primordial as opposed to created beings. This is strengthened, in the case of Behemoth in particular, by the overtly creaturely behaviour attributed to it – eating grass like an ox (40:15); lying under the lotus plant (40:21); being shaded by trees (40:22); wallowing in the marsh, the wadi and the river (40:21-23).

Others view Behemoth and Leviathan as mythological beings – monsters representing the forces of chaos.⁷²⁴ A stronger case can be made for such a mythological identification for Leviathan than can be made for Behemoth, for the simple reason that the name ‘Leviathan’ brings with it a well-developed set of mythological associations, as already discussed above.⁷²⁵ Nevertheless, the juxtaposition of the two within the divine speeches, and indeed in other post-biblical texts, suggest that a mythological

⁷²³ Gordis, *The Book of God and Man*, 119-20.

⁷²⁴ See, for example, Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, 320-22; Habel, *The Book of Job : A Commentary*, 559; John C. L. Gibson, *Job* (Edinburgh: St Andrew, 1985), 251.

⁷²⁵ Mary Wakeman has argued, somewhat unconvincingly, that in addition to the well-established motif of a sea monster in the Hebrew scriptures – known by various names, such as Leviathan – traces of an earth monster motif can also be discerned in the Old Testament. This earth monster, known as Eres, is also called Behemoth. See Mary K. Wakeman, "The Biblical Earth Monster in the Cosmogonic Combat Myth," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88, no. 3 (1969). For a critique and refutation of Wakeman's argument, see Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament*, 84-86.

association for one must at least suggest a similar mythological association for the other.⁷²⁶ Certainly, given the familiarity of the poet with the concept of a primordial monster (cf. 7:12; 9:13; 26:12-13), as well as the explicit reference to Leviathan with primordial overtones in 3:8, it seems unlikely that the mythologically charged name of ‘Leviathan’ would have been used if at least some mythological connotation were not intended. From a literary and rhetorical perspective, a strong case can be made that a flat reading of Behemoth and Leviathan as the hippopotamus and crocodile, without any shades of mythology present, would diminish the sense of dramatic development within the divine speeches, as there would be little within such a reading to distinguish this section from that of the wild animals preceding it in 38:39 – 39:30.⁷²⁷

It would appear that the depictions of Behemoth and Leviathan are fraught with ambiguity as to how they should be seen. Which raises the question whether this ambiguity needs to be settled one way or the other; or whether, as an intrinsic part of the design of the second divine speech that points to its essential meaning, it should remain unresolved. I would argue for the latter option. Similar to Linafelt’s insight regarding the undecidability of בָּרָךְ in the speech of Job’s wife,⁷²⁸ the undecidability of the identities of Behemoth and Leviathan needs to be maintained if they are to be fully encountered at the nexus of the two seemingly mutually exclusive realms of the

⁷²⁶ The post-biblical texts where Behemoth and Leviathan appear together include 1 Enoch 60:7-9; 2 Esdras 6:49-52 and the Apocalypse of Baruch 24:4. For an extensive treatment of the reasons in support of a mythological identification for Behemoth in its own right, see Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, 320-22.

⁷²⁷ Gordis makes a strained and ultimately unpersuasive attempt to see in the descriptions of Behemoth and Leviathan (as real animals) a development from the earlier descriptions of the other wild animals. He argues that the first set of animals all possess a beauty and grace which humans can appreciate, whereas the hippopotamus and crocodile are physically repulsive. Their glorification is thus intended as a subversion of anthropocentric perspectives of beauty and grace. “Precisely because they are unbeautiful by human standards, these monstrosities, fashioned by God’s hand, are a revelation of the limitless range of God’s creative thought.” (Gordis, *The Book of God and Man*, 120.) It would be an understatement to say that Gordis is stretching his point, as there are doubtless many who can recognize in both the hippopotamus and the crocodile true beauty and grace.

⁷²⁸ See Tod Linafelt, “The Undecidability of בָּרָךְ in the Prologue to Job and Beyond,” *Biblical Interpretation* 4, no. 2 (1996).

mythological and the real where they both seem equally at home. In other words, Behemoth and Leviathan are presented as living embodiments of a unitive consciousness that declares binary oppositions to be secondary, not fundamental. It is precisely his face-to-face encounter with this kind of consciousness that draws from Job a response that bears witness to a new and transformed way of being for him within the world, releasing him from his preoccupation with determining innocence or guilt and his need to know who's right and who's wrong. Newsom's words offer a helpful clarification of the point:

The old dispute about whether Behemoth and Leviathan are animals (e.g., the hippopotamus and the crocodile) or mythical monsters engages in a false dichotomy. They are animals in the sense that they are creatures of God. That much is said explicitly about Behemoth (40:15), and Leviathan also is best understood, as in Ps 104:26, as a creature made by God (41:33 [25]; cf. Gen 1:21). Although the description of these creatures may well draw details from the hippopotamus and the crocodile, they are not "mere" animals. There is a suggestion of the primordial about Behemoth (40:15),⁷²⁹ and Leviathan is described in terms that clearly evoke the mythic traditions associated with its name (41:18-21 [10-13]). These are liminal creatures, betwixt and between the categories of ordinary animal and mythic being. As with medieval maps in which the outer oceans bear the inscription "Here be dragons," Behemoth and Leviathan are creatures that mark the limits of the symbolic map of the world. Even more than the wild animals of chaps. 38–39, they represent the frightening and alien "other," bearing the terror of the chaotic in their very being. The subtle articulation of this theme in both parts of the divine speech evoked no response from Job. Now it is amplified in a way that permits no evasion.⁷³⁰

⁷²⁹ In my view 40:19 provides a stronger hint of the primordial in Behemoth – "the first of the great acts of God."

⁷³⁰ Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 615. Job's response that Newsom references comes in 42:2-6, which will be discussed in ch.7 below.

3.5.3 *YHWH's relationship with Behemoth and Leviathan*

What do the accounts of Behemoth and Leviathan reveal about God, the nature of God's relationship with them, and their place within the world? The traditional view argued by many biblical commentators is that the reason these fearsome creatures (whether real or mythological) are singled out for special attention is to reveal God's superior power and sovereignty over them and to remind Job that God alone is able to control or defeat the hostile (and chaotic) forces that they symbolize.

There is strong textual evidence in support of this view. Allusions to God's subjugating power over Behemoth can be heard in two references especially:

...only its Maker can approach it with the sword. (40:19b)

Can one take it with hooks
or pierce its nose with a snare? (40:24)

Similar textual evidence for Leviathan can readily be found, as the first section of the passage describing this fearsome creature contains numerous images that are suggestive of God's subjugating power over it, along with strong echoes of the cosmic battle and royal hunt motifs which God alone is able to undertake:

Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook,
or press down its tongue with a cord?

Can you put a rope in its nose,
or pierce its jaw with a hook?

Can you fill its skin with harpoons,
or its head with fishing spears?

Lay hands on it;
think of the battle; you will not do it again! (41:1-2, 7-8 [40:25-26, 31-32])

The conclusion that is commonly drawn when focusing on these verses alone is that there is an adversarial relationship of hostility between YHWH on the one hand and

Behemoth and Leviathan on the other, but YHWH's superior might means that he always retains the upper hand in whatever conflict may arise between them. Yet, when the descriptions of Behemoth and Leviathan are considered in their entirety, a more nuanced picture of their relationship with God emerges. One in which God seems far more interested in describing and celebrating the immensity of their power and might, than in the containment thereof.

The textual ambiguity in 40:19b is a case in point. The Hebrew literally reads, "...his maker brings near sword," which could be read as Behemoth's sword (not God's) that YHWH gives to him. Exactly what this sword refers to and what it means is not clear.⁷³¹ Whatever it may be, the image projected by this reading is of YHWH arming Behemoth, which thoroughly subverts the idea that there is a conflictual and antagonistic relationship between them.

When this is added to the other descriptions about Behemoth – its extraordinary strength and power (40:16-18)⁷³²; its elevated status as being "the first of the great acts of God" (40:19a); its complete ease and confidence within its habitat (40:20-22), even in the face of possible belligerence being directed against it (40:23)⁷³³ – the resultant picture of the relationship between Behemoth and God is considerably more complex

⁷³¹ Newsom suggests that it is given to Behemoth as a token of his lordship over other animals *ibid.*, 619. Rowley thinks its "...probable that the reference is to the sharp, chisel-edged tusks with which the hippopotamus attacks its enemies when aroused" (Rowley, *Job*, 257.) For other possibilities, see Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1152.

⁷³² Balentine suggests that the description of its tail being "stiff like a cedar" (40:17a) is a euphemism for an erect penis, suggesting that Behemoth's strength and power includes a particular capacity for creating life (Balentine, *Job*, 684.). The parallel term in 40:17b, "thighs" (*paḥādāw* – פַּחְאָדָּו), is translated as "testicles" in the Peshitta and Vulgate, a translation that strengthens the sexual inference of the verse. (Schifferdecker, *Out of the Whirlwind: Creation Theology in the Book of Job*, 161.)

⁷³³ The phrase, "Even if the river is turbulent," (40:23a) could be rendered literally as, "Though Nahar [the primordial river?] oppresses [*ya 'āšōq* – פְּשָׁעַ],", which introduces a note of violence and aggression, before which Behemoth remains unmoved and wholly unperturbed.

than what the traditional view of Behemoth's subjugation before God's superior power will allow. Balentine puts it brilliantly when he writes:

What is perhaps most striking about all these descriptions of Behemoth is that God does *not* regard this creature as a threat to creation's order or as an opponent that God must defeat in order to be God. Instead, God commends Behemoth to Job as a model for what it means to be a creature worthy of the Creator's pride and praise. The lesson for Job seems to be that those who dare to stand before their maker with exceptional strength, proud prerogatives, and fierce trust come as near to realizing God's primordial design for life in this world as it is humanly possible to do.⁷³⁴

If a more nuanced relationship with God is hinted at in the Behemoth passage, it is thundered forth in the Leviathan passage. As mentioned above, in the first part of this passage there is a strong echo of the battle motif, in which the imagery of being hunted (41:1a, 7 [40:25a, 31]); captured (41:1b, 2, 9a [40:25b, 26; 41:1a]); enslaved (41:3-4 [40:27-28]); emasculated (41:5 [40:29]) and commodified (41:6 [40:30]) is used in reference to Leviathan. Admittedly, the point being made is that these improbable scenarios are utterly impossible for Job, but the very fact that such imagery is used suggests that this is how God might think of Leviathan.

Then, a decisive turn in the speech occurs, as the tone and focus of God's words shift in a dramatic way. While the speech is still technically being addressed to Job, he quickly recedes into the background to the point where he is virtually invisible. The barrage of questions directed at him gives way to an exultant description of Leviathan in which God becomes totally absorbed. The transition to this section (41:10-11 [41:2-3]) provides a crucial key to the interpretation of what follows. But the verses in question are fraught with ambiguity around the alternation between third person and first person pronouns. This arises from the uncertainty of the personal pronoun in 41:10b [41:2b], in which the manuscript tradition is divided fairly evenly between using the first or the third person. This leads to interpretive decisions having to be

⁷³⁴ Balentine, *Job*, 686.

made as to how the personal pronouns in 41:11 [41:3] are read. The translations of NRSV and NIV illustrate the ambiguity:

No one is so fierce as to dare to stir *it* up.

Who can stand before *it* [Heb: *me*; multiple mss: *it*]?

Who can confront *it* [Heb: *me*] and be safe?

– under the whole heaven, who [Heb: *to me*]? (41:10-11 [41:2-3] – NRSV)

This translation retains the third person pronouns throughout, maintaining the focus upon Leviathan and asserting that there is no-one under the whole heaven that can stand in opposition to it.⁷³⁵ By contrast, the NIV reflects the first person pronouns of the Hebrew, which shifts the focus from Leviathan to God:

No one is fierce enough to rouse *him*.

Who then is able to stand against *me*?

Who has a claim against *me* that I must pay?

Everything under heaven belongs to *me*. (41:10-11 [41:2-3] – NIV)

This translation conveys the sense that the rhetorical mechanism being used here is a comparative move from the lesser to the greater – that if no one is able to stand in opposition against Leviathan, how much more can anyone not stand in opposition against God.⁷³⁶ This sets up the interpretation of the rest of the speech, that however exultant God may be about Leviathan's impressive might, the underlying point is that

⁷³⁵ Clines takes the same approach, reasoning that the first person pronoun makes no sense in the context, as the issue at hand is not about who can stand before God, but before Leviathan (Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1161.).

⁷³⁶ This is the principle known as *a minore ad maius* – from the lesser to the greater. For Claus Westermann, this is a key principle underlying the construction of the divine speeches as a whole that serves its central, unifying motif of praise of the creator. Interestingly, he sees the passage being considered here (41:10-11 [41:2-3]) as the conclusion of the words of God, with the subsequent description of Leviathan (41:12-34 [41:4-26]) being a secondary addition. (Claus Westermann, *The Structure of the Book of Job: A Form-Critical Analysis*, trans. Charles A. Muenchow (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 108-22.)

God is even mightier. Showcasing Leviathan's strength is simply a way for God to showcase his superior strength. In other words, the point of this transitional passage is to highlight the *difference* between the two – yes, Leviathan is impressive, but that is nothing compared to God!

While I concur with the NIV's retention of the first person pronouns (particularly in 41:11 [41:3]), the interpretation that follows that highlights the *difference* between God and Leviathan is inadequate, and gravitates against the clear thrust of the remainder of the Leviathan passage (41:12-34 [41:4-26]). Another possibility exists.⁷³⁷ The abrupt transition to first person pronouns in 41:11 [41:3] in a passage otherwise dedicated to describing Leviathan, and the uncertainty as to whether God is referencing himself or Leviathan in 41:10b [41:2b], creates the impression that there is an ease of identification that God feels with Leviathan, even to the extent that "God represents himself as being in the image of Leviathan."⁷³⁸ The point being made is not about their *difference* but rather their *similarity*, in which God appears to feel a

⁷³⁷ The interpretation to follow is naturally not the only possibility. For example, Henry Rowold translates these verses in a way that suggests that the confrontation in view is between Leviathan and YHWH, rather than between Leviathan and a third party, or indeed YHWH and a third party. His translation of 41:10-11 [41:2-3] reads as follows:

Is he not fierce when one arouses him?

Yet who is he that he will take his stand over against me?

Who has confronted me that I should sue for peace?

Under the whole of heaven, he is mine!

(Henry Rowold, "Leviathan and Job in Job 41:2-3," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105, no. 1 (1986): 104.) The weakness of this translation (apart from the strained last line) is that it plays to the *Chaoskampf* motif and intensifies the theme of adversarial confrontation between Leviathan and God in which God's power over Leviathan is emphasized, precisely at a point in the speech where any vestiges of that theme disappear entirely. However, if 41:12 [41:4] is read as "Did I not silence his boastings, his mighty word, and his persuasive case?" as opposed to "I will not keep silence concerning his limbs, his power, and his exquisite form," (see Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*, 251. for a discussion of these translations), that would be a strong counter-argument to this critique, as the silencing of Leviathan's boasting on the part of God would constitute a continuation of the theme of adversarial confrontation.

⁷³⁸ *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*, 251.

remarkable affinity to Leviathan. As God puts it in the key, concluding phrase of this transitional passage:

Everything under heaven belongs to me. (41:11b [41:3b])

The stage is set for the climactic conclusion to the divine speeches, in which YHWH erupts into an exuberant paean of praise in celebration of Leviathan's impressive power and might. In doing so, God quite remarkably assumes the role of an *imbongi* or praise singer in recounting Leviathan's greatness.⁷³⁹ Even more remarkable is that God's praise focuses precisely on those very attributes that make Leviathan a formidable foe in battle – impenetrable armour, terrifying weaponry, and a fearless disregard of the puny attempts to assail his being.

Clearly, Leviathan poses no threat to God. In spite of his warlike constitution and mythological pedigree as God's primordial rival, there is not even the slightest hint of an adversarial relationship between them. Without feeling the least bit intimidated by this fearsome creature, or even the need to assert his own strength, YHWH gets completely absorbed in lauding Leviathan's greatness, unable to stop heaping image upon image in a cascading outpouring of praise.

This description overwhelms the imagination, piling feature upon feature to create an impossible image, thereby conceiving and inconceivable monstrosity: its coat of mail ... the doors of its face ... terror surrounding its teeth ... its back is made from fusing together rows of shields ... it sneezes light ... its eyes glow like the dawn ... flames and sparks spew forth from its mouth ... smoke billows from its nostrils ... terror dances before it ... it is clad in immovable, hard-cost folds of flesh ... its heart is hard as stone ... its belly is covered with sharp

⁷³⁹ In Xhosa and Zulu tradition, an *imbongi*

...is an official attached to the court of a Chief whose profession it is to record the praise-names, victories and laudable characteristics of the Chief. These praises, called *Izibongo*, were recited in a high pitched voice and vigorous performance at public occasions. Their attire often includes animal skins, a head-dress of animal bladders or beads, a long sharp stick and shield may be carried as accessories." (ESAT Contributors, "Imbongi," <http://esat.sun.ac.za/index.php/Imbongi>. [Accessed on 20 November 2015]).

potsherds. This description of Leviathan is an impossibly over-determined amalgam of features (fire, water, smoke, armor, weaponry, anamalia, etc.) stitched together in one monstrous body.... That is, there is no language for it, no way to represent it. Failing to find adequate words to describe the monster, this text uses language to go beyond language, to conjure something beyond imagining.⁷⁴⁰

Celebrating Leviathan in this way, even to the very limits of God's own language, reveals an alternative consciousness in God from that which would insist on asserting God's own power, opposing and expunging any potential threat. What is finally made apparent is a relationship with Leviathan (and Behemoth) in which God affirms a surprisingly intimate level of connection and identification with these strange creatures, celebrating the wonder of their presence and asserting the importance of their place within the world. For as God had declared, "Everything under heaven belongs to me!" (41:11b [41:3b]).

4. The overall impact of the divine speeches

The vibrancy and complexity of the divine speeches, with their powerful poetry, evocative imagery, confounding ambiguity, intricate subtlety and at times maddening obscurity, can present an overwhelming experience for readers of the text. Therein lies something of the creative genius of these words. For in wrestling with them, and in daring to encounter whatever lies within and beyond them, one is drawn into something of Job's overwhelming experience of the whirlwind. As was true for him, there are surely many aspects of this experience beyond our understanding; and certainly, in the consideration of the divine speeches that has been offered here there are many dimensions of the terrain that remain unexplored. But just as Job was not left untouched by his encounter with the sublime, and was moved to venture a response (which will be considered in the next chapter), so too we might step back from the detail of the text and consider what the overall impact of the divine speeches might be.

⁷⁴⁰ Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters*, 52.

There are, predictably, many ways in which this question can be answered, although few of the answers are themselves predictable. And any answer which is offered will, of necessity, be partial (in both senses of the word). Within the context of this discussion here, I wish to venture an answer to this question by suggesting that the overall impact of the divine speeches can best be discerned in the ways in which it articulates a new kind of consciousness – a consciousness which could be described as unitive.

YHWH's bold assertion in the midst of the climactic conclusion of the divine speeches was this, "Everything under heaven belongs to me!" (41:11b [41:3b] – NIV). This could be a summary statement of the divine speeches as a whole, which could be condensed even further to just two words – everything belongs! In taking Job on a tour of the cosmos, this is what YHWH points out to him: the firm foundations of the earth, and the unruly outbursting of the sea; the dwelling of light, and the gates of deep darkness; the storehouses of snow and hail in the heavens above, and the torrents of rain on the desolate land below; stars blazing in the night sky, and clouds thick and dark with rain; hungry lion cubs, and calving deer; wild donkeys and fearless horses; ostrich wings flapping wildly as it runs and laughs, and outstretched eagle wings as it soars and hunts. Tumultuous and wild though much of this may seem, YHWH declares that everything belongs. Within the chaotic order (or maybe the ordered chaos) of God's Design (*'ēṣâ – תְּצַו*), everything belongs. Taken to the thresholds of these things, beyond the limits of his experience or understanding, Job's perspective is transformed. Newsom writes:

The things to which Job's attention are directed are things at the edges of creation: the place where the very bases of the earth are sunk, the boundary between the sea and land, the place of dawn at the edge of the earth, the springs of the abyssal sea, the gates of the underworld, the paths that terminate at the houses of light and darkness at the edge of the cosmos. These mark the boundary between formlessness and structure, order and disorder, life and death, the darkness that harbors violence and the light that dispels it. The very oppositions that simultaneously make life possible and threaten it

are manifested even as they are declared to be unknowable and uncontrollable by human understanding and will.⁷⁴¹

To this could be added the liminal creatures Behemoth and Leviathan – mighty, powerful, proud and strong. Fearsome adversaries, yet celebrated by God as partners and participants in the great cosmic dance (not battle) of creation. Indeed, the Divine Design is such that the very things that appear to be contradictory or mutually exclusive are the very things that are held together in the wild and exuberant dance of creation, where everything belongs, existing together “...in a delicate and powerful dialectic beyond the ken of man, and the balance between them is part of the unfathomable beauty of creation.”⁷⁴²

The turn-around for Job occurs when he comes to see that the things that were on the very periphery of his moral universe are actually the very things at the centre of God’s *הַעֲלֵי*. And what he assumed was central to his life and faith, turn out to be but one (rather peripheral) part of a much greater whole. This is what his wife had known, through the insight of the transformed consciousness that was hers. The echoing of her words in the divine speeches declare that within God’s world, she too belongs.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter the divine speeches at the end of the book of Job have been explored from the perspective of how they echo and expound the themes expressed by Job’s wife at the beginning of it. The four core thematic elements of her speech – the inadequacy of Job’s worldview; the paradoxical posture of contestation; the experience of otherness; and unitive consciousness – are all represented in the divine speeches, where they are elaborated and developed as a way of drawing Job into an experience of the sublime, which will ultimately prove transformational for him.

⁷⁴¹ Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*, 242.

⁷⁴² Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1985), 98.

The exposure of the inadequacy of Job’s worldview occurs through YHWH’s direct challenge of Job as someone who “...darkens counsel [‘ēṣā – הַצִּלְמוֹת] by words without knowledge” (38:2), and through the subsequent interrogatory tour of the cosmos that reveals that God’s design (‘ēṣā – הַצִּלְמוֹת) is way beyond what Job’s faith paradigm can comprehend.

The call to contestation that YHWH extended to Job (“Gird up your loins like a man” – 38:2; 40:7), drew Job into an encounter with the sublime that offered to him the possibility of a radically transformed perspective. The barrage of questions that rained down on Job and YHWH’s refusal to accept Job’s initial surrender are indicative of the robust nature of divine contestation. But paradoxically, the objective of such divine contestation is not conquest but transformed consciousness – so different from the legal contestation to which Job had grown attached, with its blinkered focus on proving who is right and who is wrong.

Job’s encounter with the sublime exposed him to an experience of otherness – the otherness of creation, and the otherness of God. The scandalous familiarity and intimacy with which God related to entities like the raging sea and cosmic waters, as well as many wild animals that occupied terrain beyond the human – not to mention God’s unorthodox relationship with Behemoth and Leviathan – challenged all of the moral categories that Job had employed for exerting a measure of control over his world. For him it was a challenge that would have felt akin to dying. Indeed, this experience of otherness entailed the necessary and inevitable death of many of his assumptions and convictions about God.

Through it all Job came to recognise a different kind of consciousness within God and the Divine Design (הַצִּלְמוֹת) of the world. It was a unitive consciousness that moved beyond the dualisms of binary opposites and a view of the world that neatly divided everything into the categories of sacred and profane. A unitive consciousness able to celebrate the place and importance of liminal creatures like Leviathan and Behemoth, wild animals in wild places, the raging sea and the cosmic waters, even while

acknowledging the chaotic, unruly, fearsome and unbridled power in these things. A unitive consciousness that finds at the risky thresholds of order and chaos, the mythological and the real, darkness and light, death and life, great reason for joy and delight.

All this is revealed to Job through the speeches of his wife and YHWH. But it is not simply the activity of speech that affects Job's transformation, but also its sacred counterpart – silence! It is to this threshold between speech and silence that we now turn in the final chapter.

The Wasp

It would have been easy enough,
I guess,
to crush him.
He was just sitting there,
by my feet,
unperturbed.
Not swooping or diving
with his usual bluster and bravado,
but quiet,
not irreverent,
as if in prayer.

I had reason enough to do it.
Just yesterday he stung me!
And not just once!
He stung me!
And then dared do it again
for no apparent reason other than he could
and to remind me, perhaps, that he was there,
demanding a greater wariness,
not just of him but of all his swarming kin
that now I see in arrogant profusion:
The winged squadrons of Amalek
fortressing themselves in earthen sanctuaries,
fulfilling the ancient command to be fruitful and multiply.

With one swift strike of my foot,
or even the lazy grinding of a toe
I could crush his head
and the unrepentant threat would be expunged.
For now.
But where would that end?
What kind of Sabbath would that be?

With deliberate brooding care,
like the great Midwife of the Deep
I turn aside and let him be
Joyfully stepping over my Leviathan.

(Roger Scholtz)

Chapter 7: The Use of Language and the Threshold of Speech and Silence

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter the divine speeches were explored as a sublime echo of the words of Job's wife. The essential point that was made is that this echo can be heard in the ways in which the various elements of the speech of Job's wife are taken up and expounded in the utterances of YHWH out of the whirlwind. But there's a further sense in which an echoing resonance can be heard between their respective speeches – namely, in the way in which they both utilize language. In other words, there is an affinity between these speeches not only in *what* they say but also in *how* they say it. On the face of it, this may seem like an odd claim, given the vast disparities between the language on display in each of their utterances.

In the case of the divine speeches, the language is rich and vast. In the first divine speech a dazzling, dizzying array of vivid images are used in quick-fire succession that rain down upon Job in a drenching deluge of almost apocalyptic proportions. In the second divine speech the pace slows down but the language intensifies, engaging Job “in a tightly focused exercise of close and rigorous contemplation.”⁷⁴³ The sumptuous palette of images from which YHWH paints a sublime word picture of the world is one of the distinguishing marks that give this section of the book its climactic flavour and set it apart from all that had gone before. Indeed, this was a literary necessity for the book and a key compositional challenge for its author. Newsom writes, “In a book already flooded with words, how does one make space for God's words? How is it possible to imagine God's speech so that the divine words engage what has gone before without sounding merely like one of the previous characters?”⁷⁴⁴ The ringing superlatives with which the

⁷⁴³ Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: University Press, 2003), 248.

⁷⁴⁴ "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck et al (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 597-98.

divine speeches are often lauded suggest that this challenge was successfully navigated.⁷⁴⁵ Robert Alter writes:

If the poetry of Job...looms above all other biblical poetry in virtuosity and sheer expressive power, the culminating poem that God speaks out of the storm soars beyond everything that has preceded it in the book, the poet having wrought a poetic idiom even richer and more awesome than the one he gave Job. Through this pushing of poetic expression toward its own upper limits, the concluding speech helps us see the panorama of creation, as perhaps we could do only through poetry, with the eyes of God.⁷⁴⁶

By contrast, the language of Job's wife speech is far more modest. This is not surprising given the fact that she is limited to just six words within the context of the stark linguistic

⁷⁴⁵ It is acknowledged, however, that not all scholars concur that the divine speeches achieve a distinctive form that sets them apart from the rest of the book in the kind of climactic way that would be expected of the book's *dénouement*, or indeed if they constitute a *dénouement* at all. For example, some have described the divine speeches as a "sublime irrelevance" (E. M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Sheffield: Almond, 1981), 235.); "beyond the absurd" (D. Cox, *The Triumph of Impotence* (Rome: Università Gregoriana Editrice, 1978), 113.); and "pompous and overbearing" (David Robertson, cited in James G. Williams, "Deciphering the Unspoken: The Theophany of Job," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 49 (1978): 60.). Williams characterizes the theology of the divine speeches as "poor", a feeble attempt to respond to the compelling sociological commentary of the human dialogue ("Job and the God of Victims," in *The Voice from the Whirlwind: Interpreting the Book of Job*, ed. Leo G. Perdue and W. Clark Gilpin (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 222.), while René Gerard dismisses the divine speeches as a later addition to the book that "simply represents a God of persecutors taking refuge in nature" (ibid., 218.). Yet, perspectives such as these remain a minority view, as most scholars recognize the exceptional quality of the divine speeches and their literary excellence. For example, as early as 1913 James Strahan wrote, "It is in the divine speech that the author of Job proves himself one of the supreme poets of nature, a writer gifted with descriptive powers almost without a parallel" (cited in Harold Henry Rowley, *Job*, ed. Ronald E. Clements, 2nd ed., New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1976), 240.

⁷⁴⁶ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1985), 87.

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landscape of the prose prologue.⁷⁴⁷ Yet, the severe limitations of the language at Job's wife's disposal only serve to highlight the remarkable use that she makes of it. As stated in the previous chapter, the brevity of her speech belies its profundity. The few words that she speaks are laden with meaning, opening up a whole new world of possibility for Job and impacting the interpretation of the book as a whole. In a very real sense, her words punch way above their weight. In doing so they point to the remarkable capacity of language to transcend its own bounds.

Therefore, while the paucity of words in Job's wife's speech contrasts with the sheer abundance of the metaphor-laden imagery of the divine speeches, the productive effect that they have upon Job in initiating Job's journey of transformation is consonant with the impact of the divine rhetoric in bringing that journey to its culmination. The reason for this, as will be demonstrated shortly, can be attributed to the fact that both Job's wife and YHWH in the divine speeches use language in an open-ended way, rather than as an instrument for trying to assert dogma or exert control. This becomes evident in Job's own use of language at the end of the book, which in itself is a key indicator of the transformation that he has undergone. Furthermore, this use of language – by Job's wife, YHWH, and finally Job himself – points to the crucial threshold between speech and silence, which is a further way of revisiting the book as a whole and especially the role of Job's wife within it. These themes will be the focus of this concluding chapter of this study.

⁷⁴⁷ See Clines' comment about the striking severity of the language of the prose when contrasted with that of the poetry (David J.A. Clines, "False Naivety in the Prologue to Job," *HAR* 9 (1985): 127.).

2. The use of language in the book of Job⁷⁴⁸

The manner in which language is used is a key and recurring concern in the book of Job. At the outset of the book, the source of Job's deepest anxiety – which speaks to the underlying religious paradigm upon which his pietistic practice was based – was his fear that his children may use deviant language about God, even in an unconscious and interior way (1:5). The wagers in heaven between the LORD and *haśśātān* were constructed in such a way that they would be settled one way or the other by the language choices that Job would make – whether he would curse God, or not (1:11; 2:5). Job's virtuous verbal response to the tragic losses that he suffered demonstrated the extent of his pertinacious piety (1:21). His initial dismissal of the words of his wife was based on his assessment that she was speaking like one of the foolish women (2:10). Following Job's impassioned outburst in chapter three, his three friends break their silence and offer words of their own to correct what they perceive to be his aberrant language. In the protracted verbal interchange that follows between Job and his friends, all of them grow increasingly entrenched in what they have to say, vehement in how they say it, and dismissive of what the other has to say.

In all of this there is a strong moral dimension in the ways in which language is viewed, expressed and experienced. Simply put, the underlying premise governing the use of language in the moral universe of these characters is that there is a right way and a wrong way to speak. For much of the book, the characters use language to assert that their way of speaking is correct, and to expose how the contrary perspectives of others are not. As such, language in the mouths of especially Job and his three friends (to which Elihu could

⁷⁴⁸ In speaking about the use of language in the book of Job, the intention here is not to get drawn into the rich fields of semiotic theory and the philosophy of language. For a very accessible introduction to the discipline of semiotics, see Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007). For a more rigorous introduction see Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok, *Advances in Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976); *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok, *Advances in Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

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be added), was an instrument in service of a worldview obsessed with the binary oppositions of who was right and who was wrong, of innocence and guilt. They used language in declarative ways to endorse their own systems and structures of meaning, and to assert their presumption of control. This is especially evident in the dogmatic pronouncements of the friends in defence of the doctrine of retributive justice; or the dogmatic pronouncements of Job of the righteousness of his cause. At the end of the book, the judgment of the LORD of the prose epilogue, directed towards the three friends, was that “...you have not spoken of me what is right” (42:7, 8). While in a similar vein YHWH asks of Job at the outset of the divine speeches, “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?” (38:2).⁷⁴⁹

In sharp contrast to this moralistic use of language focused on attacking error and defending already established convictions, the words of Job’s wife and those of YHWH in the divine speeches exhibit a remarkable quality of openness – like an open door – through which Job is invited into a heuristic exploration of new possibilities that he had never previously contemplated. This is not to suggest that being open-ended, these speeches lacked a decisive note of challenge. On the contrary, it was precisely the robust challenge of Job’s established position that enabled these utterances to point him towards something authentically new. The point being that in the process, the words spoken to Job did not box and bracket his imagination, but freed it to take flight, enabling him to envision a bold new way of being in the world. This is more readily recognized in the

⁷⁴⁹ One of the interpretive conundrums of the book is the discrepancy between YHWH’s critique in the divine speeches of Job’s words being those that “darken counsel...without knowledge” (38:2), and the affirmation of the LORD in the prose epilogue that Job, in contrast to his friends, had “spoken of [God] what is right” (42:7, 8). Attempts at resolving this difficulty usually centre on some form of argument that highlights the discontinuity between the prose and the prose. So, for example, Newsom asserts that the LORD’s affirmation of Job in 42:7, 8 must be a gesture back to the prose tale of the prologue because “Job cannot be both praised for speaking ‘correctly’ (42:7) and rebuked for speaking ‘words without knowledge’ that obscure the design of God (38:2)” (Newsom, “The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections,” 634.) This particular issue will be addressed later in this chapter in section 5.6 on pp.410-412.

divine speeches, where the stirring alternative of a world at ease with the wild and chaotic represented such a radical departure from Job's neurotic need for the strict imposition of order and control. In the case of the speech of Job's wife, the open-ended, imagination-stirring nature of her words is evident in the uncertainty and ambiguity inherent in them.⁷⁵⁰ This is borne out in the way in which Job's initial, self-righteous dismissal of her words gives way to a protracted period of brooding silence, followed by a visceral eruption (in ch.3) as he explores some of the ramifications of the radical deconstruction of his entire worldview effected by her words. This alternative way of using language will be adopted by Job, and is evidence of the transformation at work within him. This is evident in his words in ch.3, his responses to the two divine speeches, and his use of language in the epilogue. It is to these words of Job that we now turn.

3. Job's response to his wife in his opening soliloquy in the poetry (3:3-26)

Job's opening speech in the poetry section of the book (3:3-26) has already been thoroughly dealt with, obviating the need for any further detailed consideration here.⁷⁵¹ A few brief reiterations from that earlier discussion will suffice for the sake of this discussion. Job's outburst in ch.3 voiced a radically new orientation for him within the world, especially in his use of language. Regardless of whether one assesses his words as excessively emotional, misguided, purgative, overstated, puerile or misdirected, the fact remains that this speech points to a loosening of the shackles imposed by his former faith paradigm. The Job of ch.3 is a far cry from the anxious father of 1:5, sacrificing on behalf of his children as a precautionary measure, just in case they said (or even thought) something that may have given God offense; and the unfiltered, visceral outpourings from his mouth could not be further removed from his measured, virtuous, composed incantation in 1:21 in response to the news of the deaths of all ten of his children!

⁷⁵⁰ This is most explicit in the case of Job's wife's use of בָּרַךְ (bless / curse), but extends to every element of her brief speech. These ambiguities were discussed in ch.5 above.

⁷⁵¹ See section 6.1 in ch.5 above.

As such, while it is uncertain how exactly to characterize Job's newly emerging consciousness, two things are clear – it involved a relinquishment of what had previously been held sacred, and it involved a new way of speaking. All this arose out of his wife's challenging provocation, calling into question the integrity of the foundational paradigm of his entire life; and a protracted period of deep, brooding silence in which he encountered something of the terror of the sublime within his wife's words. The same elements of this pattern – challenging provocation, silence, sublime encounter, relinquishment, revisioning, new ways of using language – will be repeated in the divine speeches and Job's response to them, to which we now turn.

4. Job's response to the first divine speech (40:4-5)

Job's verbal response to the first divine speech reads thus:

See, I am of small account; what shall I answer you?

I lay my hand on my mouth.

I have spoken once, and I will not answer;

twice, but will proceed no further. (40:4-5)

In the brief discussion of these words in the previous chapter, it was suggested that having been drawn into the ring with YHWH in what was a hopelessly mismatched contest, Job concedes the bout by throwing in the proverbial towel with these words in 40:4-5.⁷⁵² A common view is that Job's refusal to engage God verbally should be interpreted as his wholesale capitulation before the greater power of his opponent, abandoning his quest for justice and declining to press his case any further.⁷⁵³ However,

⁷⁵² See section 3.2 in ch.6 above.

⁷⁵³ See, for example, Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job : A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 549.

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Job's refusal to speak does not imply an unconditional act of surrender, but simply a retreat from his dependence upon words as a way of engaging with God.⁷⁵⁴

Thomas Dailey refers to Job's response as a sophisticated silence in which Job initiates a new stance before God. The gesture of putting his hand over his mouth is seen as a symbolic invocation of the power of silence in which his not-speaking becomes deep listening.⁷⁵⁵ Far from being a sign of resigned submission, Job's silence can be seen as a positive, proactive posture of renewed openness before God. Dailey writes:

Job's silence activates a new stance. Faced with the stormy words of the divine interlocutor whom he had so ardently sought (cf. 13.22-23), Job becomes passive, his speech laconic. Now, in stark contrast to the Dialogues, he will be quiet.

But this silence need not be construed as cowering capitulation; rather, in terms of the narrative development, it can symbolize Job's renewed resolve. In the previous discourses among the human interlocutors, each had managed to present his own perspective, whether that of religious tradition or personal experience, without actually engaging the other in a true dialogue; effectively talking past each other, no significant communication occurred. In his reply to Yahweh, however, Job relinquishes this ineffectual approach. Foregoing any boisterous debate, he chooses instead the way of quiet consideration. From the former exteriority of public controversy about divine justice in the world, he moves now toward the interiority

⁷⁵⁴ According to Clines, capitulation by Job at this point in the unfolding drama would be almost inexplicable. He further suggests that Job has yet to listen truly to YHWH, evidenced by the way in which he has taken the divine speech personally – “Behold, I am of little account” (40:4) – when belittling Job was not YHWH's primary intention. (David J.A. Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, Word Biblical Commentary 18b (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 1138.)

⁷⁵⁵ For a discussion of various interpretations of the ‘hand on the mouth’ gesture, see footnote 669 on p.340 in ch.6 above.

of personal contemplation of the divinity and the cosmos as they are made present to him.⁷⁵⁶

Job's new attitude towards his own use of language marks a key moment in his journey of transformation, and in the progression of the book as a whole. Significantly, YHWH's final speech in the poetry, in which Job is brought face-to-face with Behemoth and Leviathan, comes precisely at the moment when Job embraces this new mode of engagement and response, one which shifts him from verbal disputation to silent contemplation and receptivity. As the saying goes, "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear."⁷⁵⁷ For Job to apprehend the deep truth of God's design that these strange teachers (Behemoth and Leviathan) embodied, the cessation of speech was a prerequisite. This is not to suggest, however, that Job will never speak again. Indeed, notwithstanding his declaration in 40:5 that he will speak no more, Job does in fact speak again in response to the second divine speech. But as will be demonstrated shortly, his manner of speaking in 42:2-6 is not a mere reversion to the kind of speech that he uttered before in the earlier parts of the poetry. This speech is qualitatively different in that it releases his language from the bondage of binary oppositions, rigid monologic assertions and dogmatic definitions of right and wrong, creating space for an ease with ambiguity and a glad openness to paradox.

5. Job's response to the second divine speech (42:2-6)

Following his virtual rollercoaster ride through the cosmos that culminated in the mindblowing biopics of Behemoth and Leviathan, which offered him a sublime glimpse of God's הַצֵּדִיק ('design'), Job breaks his silence and re-enlists the faculty of speech, but in a wholly novel way. What he says will be his last recorded words in the book, and consequently are of crucial importance in assessing the transformation of religious

⁷⁵⁶ Thomas F. Dailey, "The Wisdom of Divine Disputation? On Job 40.2-5," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 63 (1994): 116.

⁷⁵⁷ The saying is attributed either to the Buddha or to the Theosophists.

consciousness that he has experienced, and the extent of his wife's shaping influence on his worldview. Given its importance, this final speech of Job will be considered in some detail, verse by verse.

5.1 Verse 2

I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. (42:2)

The first words of Job in this his final speech affirm God's omnipotence and autonomy, in what sounds very much like a traditional, orthodox religious confession. But these words should not be confused with a traditional assertion of God's might and power – which, incidentally, Job had already made elsewhere in the poetry (cf. 9:4-10; 12:13-16; 23:13). This affirmation follows what Job has grasped of God's design, in which even the wild and the chaotic have an integral place. The startling fact that God's purpose for creation embraces the very forces and elements that were allegedly opposed to it, highlights the paradoxical nature of God's design. Indeed, Job's recognition that "no purpose of yours can be thwarted," extends to any and every plan, be it good or bad, without any moral limitations.⁷⁵⁸ Job's acknowledgment and acceptance of this represents a dramatic departure from his insistence earlier in the poetry that there should be a moral reckoning for injustice (cf. 16:18-19), and indeed his entire religious paradigm that was founded upon an inherently moralistic view of the world.

5.2 Verse 3

'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?'
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,

⁷⁵⁸ According to van Wolde, the parallelism in this verse establishes a link between "everything" (or "all things") in v.2a, and the "plan" (or "purpose") in v.2b – implying that God's purposes are not even subject to moral limitations. Ellen van Wolde, "The Development of Job: Mrs Job as Catalyst," in *A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 211.

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things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. (42:3)

It is commonly observed that in 42:3a Job is quoting the opening line of the first divine speech in 38:2.⁷⁵⁹ The NIV inserts the words, “You asked,” at the beginning of the verse, making explicit the premise that this is indeed a direct quote.⁷⁶⁰ The great disadvantage of this addition is that a crucial element of ambiguity generated within this verse is destroyed as a result. The ambiguity is that these words may be construed not simply as a quotation, in which case Job himself would be the referent in the question, but as an original utterance of Job, in which case the question he poses could be referring to God.

This admittedly unconventional reading of 42:3a, that Job is not quoting God but posing a question about God, stands on three supporting pillars. The first is that this phrase is not a verbatim quotation of 38:2, but at best a paraphrase of it. This requires that, at the very least, it be weighed on its own merits as constituting an original utterance of Job, especially given the fact that these words do in fact come from his lips. The second is the shift from “darkens [*mahšîk* – מְחַשֵּׁק] counsel” in 38:2, to “hides [*ma’lîm* – מְעַלִּים] counsel” in 42:3a. The latter phrase – which could also be translated “conceals counsel” – need not necessarily have a negative connotation, especially when Rollins’ notion of revelation as concealment is borne in mind.⁷⁶¹

Thirdly, 38:2 refers to Job darkening counsel by *words* without knowledge. At issue here was the manner in which Job’s use of language served to obscure the divine design. In

⁷⁵⁹ See, for example, Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1214; Samuel E. Balentine, *Job*, The Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2006), 692-93; Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 627; John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, Nicot Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 536; J. Gerald Janzen, *Job*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 252; Habel, *The Book of Job : A Commentary*, 576.

⁷⁶⁰ So too numerous other versions, for example, REB, TEV, NLT, NKJV, NET. Cf. Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1204.

⁷⁶¹ See section 4.4 in ch.1 above.

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42:3a, however, there is no reference to *words*, but only to *knowledge* (*dā'at* – נֵצַח) – a word that comes with a lot of baggage in the book of Job. For while knowledge is generally assumed to be a positive quality in the book of Job – the absence of knowledge is clearly critiqued as undesirable in 38:2 – the precise content of the word seems to be readily colonized by the agenda of the speaker. For example, in the human dialogue Job says to God:

According to Your knowledge I am indeed not guilty,

Yet there is no deliverance from Your hand. (10:7, NASB)

In other words, God's knowledge of Job's innocence proved inconsequential as far as the alleviation of his situation was concerned. One can imagine Job asking the question, "What good then is knowledge, even for God, if it fails to make any material impact on issues of justice?" In 13:2, Job says to his friends, "What you know [literally 'your knowledge'], I also know." Yet, this shared knowledge base is unable to resolve the theological and ideological impasse that exists between them. In 15:2, Eliphaz refers to Job's speech as "windy knowledge," implying either a lack of substance or, as Clines reads it, a tempestuous and violent character to this 'knowledge'.⁷⁶² In 21:14, Job makes the observation that even though the wicked do not desire the knowledge of God's ways, there are no particularly adverse consequences for them as a result. Elihu is quick to affirm that knowledge is sincerely spoken from his lips (33:3), and is equally quick to dismiss Job's speech as being without knowledge (34:35; 35:16). All of which is to suggest that in the book of Job, the concept of knowledge is very much in the eye of the beholder (or in the mouth of the speaker), and that it can easily be co-opted as a criterion for binary judgments. Consequently, the phrase "without knowledge" [*bēlî dā'at* – נֵצַח יְלִי] in 42:3a – which could also be rendered as "outside knowledge" – need not be viewed negatively, if the concept of knowledge being referred to is the kind that was used to assert a sense of moral superiority in a dualistic way. Indeed, for God to render the nature of his design inaccessible to this kind of knowing ("to hide counsel outside of

⁷⁶² See David J.A. Clines, *Job 1 - 20*, Word Biblical Commentary 17 (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 347.

knowledge”) could be understood as another aspect of God’s mysterious ordering of the world.

Therefore, 42:3a could be read as words spoken by Job in reference to God, in which he expresses his incredulity (and wonder) that God would conceal the nature of his design from traditional bases of knowledge. This is exactly what he had experienced personally in the divine speeches, where the familiar categories that he had always used to make sense of the world were exposed as utterly inadequate to apprehend the mystery of God’s design. He acknowledges as much in the rest of the verse:

Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. (42:3b)

The point of this alternative reading of 42:3a is not to assert it over the more traditional way of reading this stich as a quotation of God’s words, but to demonstrate the fact that uncertainty and ambiguity has started to infuse Job’s speech. (As will be demonstrated shortly, this sense of ambiguity only deepens as this final speech of his continues.)

Certainly, there is much to commend the more conventional reading within an assessment of Job’s transformation. For, by quoting the words of God, albeit it in a paraphrase, Job is allowing God’s use of language to become his own. This internalizing of God’s words, questions and perspectives speaks of a fundamental change of orientation within Job. “By such a use of words, such a taking into himself of God’s words against him, he enacts already a change of mind.”⁷⁶³

With either reading of 42:3a, the rest of the verse is an acknowledgment by Job of the inadequacies of his former use of language. But it could also be a wry and somewhat tongue-in-cheek admission on his part that even *now*, in talking about things such as God’s הַצְּדָקָה , and knowledge, and the purposes of God that cannot be thwarted, he is talking

⁷⁶³ Janzen, *Job*, 252.

about things that he does not understand, that are simply too wonderful for him to fully grasp. If so, this points to a remarkable newfound freedom in Job, in which he seems quite at peace, and even seems to delight in the fact that in God's world there are vast and wondrous mysteries beyond his comprehension.

5.3 Verse 4

‘Hear, and I will speak;

I will question you, and you declare to me.’ (42:4)

As was the case with the preceding verse, 42:4b is commonly regarded as a quotation of God's words from the divine speeches.⁷⁶⁴ Certainly, the stich “I will question you, and you declare to me” [’eš ’ālĕkā wĕhōdî ’ēnî – יהוה יעני אשאלך] is a verbatim quote of 38:3b and 40:7b. (42:4a – “Hear, I will speak,” is not a direct quotation of God's words, but could be regarded as a poetic expansion of 42:4b.⁷⁶⁵) However, in light of the discussion of 42:3a where it was demonstrated that real ambiguity exists as to whether Job was quoting a question of God referring to himself, or whether he was asking a question of his own that referred to God, so too this verse needs to be navigated in a similar way.⁷⁶⁶

What would be the implications of reading 42:4 as words of Job addressed to God? It could be understood as a reiteration of his earlier demand for a hearing with God (cf. 13:3, 22; 31:35). However, in the earlier parts of the poetry, Job's demand for a hearing with God was not undergirded with the confidence that he would be able to speak or that he would be heard (cf. 9:3, 14-16; 19:7). There is certainly no trace here of that earlier reticence and lack of confidence, which suggests that this verse is not simply a throwback

⁷⁶⁴ See, for example, Samuel Rolles Driver and George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1921, (1986)), 372; Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 536.

⁷⁶⁵ Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 628.

⁷⁶⁶ Contra Rowley, who emphatically declares, “It cannot...be regarded as what Job is now saying to God, but as best as reminiscence of what God has said to him” (Rowley, *Job*, 265.)

to Job's earlier modes of addressing God. (It should be remembered that Job had already withdrawn from such modes of speaking in 40:4-5, as discussed above.) The boldness of the words, "Hear, and I will speak," express a confidence, not only in God's willingness to hear, but also in Job's capacity to communicate, precisely due to his newfound appreciation of a liberated use of language that is no longer directed towards the end of making rigid, binary judgments. Furthermore, the old paradigm of questioning and responding as a dogmatic mechanism of asserting authority and control is now no more.

However this verse is read, what is clear is that these words can be heard as coming from the mouths of both God and Job. As such, these words convey a sense of abandoned freedom in Job to question and be questioned, to engage and be engaged, to stand with boldness before the scrutiny of the divine.

5.4 Verse 5

I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees you. (42:5)

The traditional reading of this verse is based upon the assumption that "the hearing of the ear" refers to the traditional teaching and theology which had formed the basis of Job's prior understanding of God.⁷⁶⁷ "The contrast in 42.5 is between orthodox tradition (i.e. what Job had heard of God) and personal experience and conviction (i.e. what Job was now seeing for himself)."⁷⁶⁸ A hierarchy is thus established, with hearing being relegated to an inferior position, in terms of revelatory value, to that of visionary experience.⁷⁶⁹ Driver and Gray express it in this way:

⁷⁶⁷ Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 536.

⁷⁶⁸ Anthony Hanson and Miriam Hanson, *Job: Introduction and Commentary* ed. John Marsh and Alan Richardson, Torch Bible Commentaries (London: SCM Press, 1953), 112.

⁷⁶⁹ For a thorough and informative discussion of visual and auditory modes of perception in the Hebrew Bible, see George Savran, "Seeing Is Believing: On the Relative Priority of Visual and Verbal Perception of the Divine," *Biblical Interpretation* 17 (2009). Savran makes the case that

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Vision is here contrasted as direct personal experience of what a person is and does with hearing as knowledge at second-hand, knowledge of some other's experience or report of that person, knowledge which, even if not mingled with error, as was the traditional doctrine of God, which had been passed on to Job, must at best be blurred and indistinct.⁷⁷⁰

It is hard to argue against the point that hearsay religion is superseded by a direct spiritual encounter with the divine.⁷⁷¹ But it is highly debatable whether that is the point that is being made in this verse. A number of factors gravitate against an interpretation of this verse that sets up a binary opposition between 'hearing about' and 'seeing directly'.

Firstly, while many translations of 42:5a convey the sense that Job had heard "of" God or "about" God, the Hebrew construction is more direct, "I have heard you with the hearing of the ears."⁷⁷² It is therefore highly improbable that Job is referring to the teachings of his religious tradition or the theological perspectives of others. The plain sense is that he is referring here to what he heard directly from YHWH in the divine speeches.

Secondly, strictly speaking, Job has not seen YHWH at all – there is no indication of any visual perception of the divine – but has only heard YHWH speak. The vivid imagery of the divine speeches certainly gives them an undeniably visual quality, but this only underscores the point of the connection between hearing and seeing. For it is only as Job hears the graphic words of God used in open-ended ways to stir his imagination, that he as a hearer of divine language is enabled to 'see' in his mind's eye the world as God sees it. Of course, the precise shapes, dimensions, contours and hues of all the various

in the Hebrew Bible, hearing God is generally regarded as being more important than seeing God, unless both modes of perception occur together, in which case seeing the divine is sometimes viewed as the preferred mode of perception.

⁷⁷⁰ Driver and Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job*, 372.

⁷⁷¹ Janzen, *Job*, 253.

⁷⁷² See Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1216.

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elements of God's world that make up the picture in Job's mind are all the product of his own imagination, and how he allows the words of God to take shape within him.

Thirdly, the denigration of hearing gravitates against the tenor of the previous verse (42:4), irrespective of whether it is read as the words of God or of Job. If read as the words of God, then in that verse, "Job characterizes God's command to him to listen while God speaks. It would [therefore] be odd if Job's next words were a denigration of 'hearing.'"⁷⁷³

Fourthly, it is grammatically quite possible to render the *waw* conjunction (ו) in the verse as "and" rather than "but", thereby indicating that the two halves of the verse are equivalent rather than contrastive. All of which suggests the following translation of 42:5, "I have heard you with my ears, and now my eye sees you." In other words, as a consequence of listening to God, Job is now able to see God in a new way.⁷⁷⁴

While these words of Job's are clearly referring to God, one cannot help but notice that they could equally apply to his wife. Indeed, Job's entire journey of transformation was initiated by her words to him. Initially he did not want to listen to them and tried to dismiss her words as those of one of the foolish women. But coming from a beloved companion who had shared so much of his life and loss, her words lodged deep within him. As Job attended to her words, daring to hear what all they had to say and the possibilities they presented, so they began to work, like yeast, within him, so that he could have said to her, "I have heard you with my ears." Together with the divine speeches, the sublime effect of her words upon Job finally resulted in his eyes being

⁷⁷³ Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 628.

⁷⁷⁴ Clines makes the further valid point that elsewhere in the book of Job, and indeed in the Hebrew Bible, hearing and seeing are regarded as parallel forms of perception, and are never contrasted with one another – cf., for example, 13:1; 29:11; Gen 24:30; Ex 3:7; 2 Ki 19:16; Prov 20:12; Ps 48:8[9]. (Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1217.)

opened to God and the world in a whole new way. Surely then his words, “Now my eyes have seen you,” could be heard as being spoken to her as well.

5.5 Verse 6

The sections above discussing the other verses of this final speech of Job each began with a translation (from the NRSV) of the verse in question. But for this final verse of Job’s reply (42:6), a translation is omitted for the time being, on the grounds that this verse, more than any other in the speech (and arguably in the entire book), is fraught with interpretive challenges. So much so, that no one single translation can possibly do justice to its complexities and ambiguity.

The Hebrew of 42:6 reads thus:

עַל־כֵּן אֶמְאַס וְנִתְמַתִּי עַל־עַפְרָר וְאַפָּר:

Virtually every word in 42:6 is open to more than one interpretation, with a consequence that this verse has generated many diverse translations and continues to be the focus of assiduous scholarly debate as to its meaning.⁷⁷⁵ The principal textual difficulties can be summarised under four points:

(1) The meaning of אֶמְאַס is uncertain. This verb could derive from the root מאס I, with a cluster of possible meanings that include ‘despise’, ‘reject’, ‘refuse’, ‘retract’, ‘repudiate’.⁷⁷⁶ Variants of this include ‘feel loathing, contempt, revulsion’. Alternatively,

⁷⁷⁵ For a comprehensive overview of most of the issues concerned, see Clines’ four-and-a-half pages of dense text-critical notes pertaining to this verse (ibid., 1207-11.) . See also, William Morrow, "Consolation, Rejection, and Repentance in Job 42:6," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105, no. 2 (1986); Ellen van Wolde, "Job 42,1-6: The Reversal of Job," in *The Book of Job*, ed. Willem A.M. Beuken (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995), 242-50; "The Development of Job: Mrs Job as Catalyst," 214-20; Charles A. Muenchow, "Dust and Dirt in Job 42:6," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108, no. 4 (1989).

⁷⁷⁶ Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *The New Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Lafayette: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1981), 549; Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections,"

it could derive from מאס II (a secondary form of מסמ), meaning ‘dissolve’, ‘melt’, ‘vanish’, with the derived meaning of ‘submit’ or ‘yield’.⁷⁷⁷

(2) The verb מאס lacks an object. Consequently, it can either be read reflexively, or some implied object is supplied.⁷⁷⁸ A number of options exist in this regard, for example, the ‘dust and ashes’ that follow later in the verse (serving as a double-duty object for both verbs in the verse); or Job’s words; or his lawsuit against God; or, as Curtis boldly suggests, maybe even God himself.⁷⁷⁹

(3) The meaning of וַיִּנְחַמְתִּי is also uncertain. The verb נחם has many divergent meanings, both in the *pi’el* and the *niph’al* (it is most likely that it is in the *niph’al* here), that include, ‘regret’, ‘be sorry’, ‘repent’, ‘relent’, ‘be comforted’, ‘be consoled’, ‘have compassion’, ‘be moved to pity’.⁷⁸⁰

(4) Exactly what the phrase עָפָר וָאֵשׁ (“dust and ashes”) refers to is unclear. It could refer to the ash heap on which Job was sitting, but this involves only one term of the phrase. Alternatively, it could refer to symbols of mourning. In Ezek 27:30, for example, those engaged in a mourning ritual are described as follows, “They throw dust on their heads and wallow in ashes.”⁷⁸¹ A further possibility is that the phrase refers to the human

629; Marvin H. Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, ed. W.F. Albright and D.N. Freedman, 3rd ed., The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1973), 347.

⁷⁷⁷ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The New Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 587. So too, Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1205.

⁷⁷⁸ The irregular meter of the Masoretic Text may be an indication that there has been some omission from the text, which some suggest is the elusive ‘missing object’ of מאס. (*Job 38 - 42*, 1207.)

⁷⁷⁹ John B. Curtis, "On Job's Response to Yahweh," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98, no. 4 (1979): 504.

⁷⁸⁰ Mike Butterworth, "5714 נחם," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997); Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1208. For a thorough semantic study of the various occurrences of נחם in the Hebrew Bible, see H. Van Dyke Parunak, "A Semantic Study of NHM," *Biblica* 56 (1975).

⁷⁸¹ When the three friends first visited Job, they “threw dust in the air upon their heads” (2:12), in what was ostensibly a mourning gesture. See the discussion in section 5.2.4 on pp.299-300 in ch.5 above.

condition.⁷⁸² Wolfers suggests that it is synonymous with ‘flesh and blood’.⁷⁸³ Habel suggests that the idiom ‘dust and ashes’ connotes self-negation and worthlessness.⁷⁸⁴ These options do not exhaust the interpretive possibilities of what the phrase might refer to.⁷⁸⁵

Given these textual complexities, it should come as no surprise that there are widely divergent translations of this verse. Newsom, for example, presents no fewer than five possible translations:

- (1) “Therefore I despise myself and repent upon dust and ashes” (i.e., in humiliation; cf. NRSV; NIV);
- (2) “Therefore I retract my words and repent of dust and ashes” (i.e., the symbols of mourning);
- (3) “Therefore I reject and forswear dust and ashes” (i.e., the symbols of mourning);
- (4) “Therefore I retract my words and have changed my mind concerning dust and ashes” (i.e., the human condition);

⁷⁸² Cf. Gen 18:27, “Abraham answered, ‘Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes.’” In popular culture, the phrase “ashes to ashes, dust to dust” – which is taken from the burial service of the 1662 version of the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* – has a clear and strong association with human mortality and frailty. Clines challenges the view that regards ‘dust and ashes’ as a referent for ‘the human condition’ on the grounds that he deems it most unlikely that Job would be speaking at this juncture on behalf of humanity (Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1211.).

⁷⁸³ David Wolfers, *Deep Things out of Darkness: The Book of Job* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 461.

⁷⁸⁴ Habel, *The Book of Job : A Commentary*, 583.

⁷⁸⁵ It should be noted further that some authorities regard אפר as etymologically related to עפר, rendering the meaning of both terms roughly equivalent, with ‘dust and earth’ or ‘dust and dirt’ being the result. For an example of an interpretation of 42:6 that is based on such an equivalence in the two terms, see Muenchow, “Dust and Dirt in Job 42:6.”

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(5) “Therefore I retract my words, and I am comforted concerning dust and ashes”
(i.e., the human condition).⁷⁸⁶

Tellingly, she goes on to say, “These examples do not exhaust the various nuances that might be heard in the ambiguity of the Hebrew of 42:6, but they suggest something of the possible range of meaning.”⁷⁸⁷ This vast range of interpretive possibilities for 42:6 raises important questions as to how this ambiguity and uncertainty is to be viewed. Is the text’s ambiguity something that needs to be resolved or retained? Is it regarded as a weakness of the text that compromises the integrity of whatever reading is ultimately offered? Or is it a strength of the text that makes an important interpretive point in its own right? Consider, for example, Clines’ disposition when he writes of 42:6, “This crucial verse...forms the climax of the whole dispute between Job and Yahweh. But *sadly* it contains three major uncertainties...”⁷⁸⁸ It would seem for Clines, the lamentable ambiguities of the verse obscure its meaning. While this is undoubtedly accurate on one level, my preferred approach is to see in the ambiguities of this final verse (and indeed of the speech as a whole) a key to its interpretation, and therefore an aspect of the text to be embraced.⁷⁸⁹

⁷⁸⁶ Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 629. For a comprehensive comparison of no fewer than six ancient and thirty-four modern translations of 42:6, see N.F. Schmidt, "Theophany and the Divine Discourses of Job" (University of the Free State, 2002), 123-25.

⁷⁸⁷ Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," 629. Clines translates the verse with, “So I submit, and I accept consolation for my dust and ashes” (Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1205.).

⁷⁸⁸ *Job 38 - 42*, 1218. [My emphasis. R.S.]

⁷⁸⁹ Morrow argues that the ambiguity in this verse is not merely a function of the varying interpretive strategies that we bring to our reading of it, but is an *intentional* part of the text’s original design. He writes, “...these varying interpretations can be best explained by positing an ambiguity that has been *deliberately* structured into 42:6 by the Joban author” (Morrow, "Consolation, Rejection, and Repentance in Job 42:6," 212. [My emphasis. R.S.]).

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The very fact that Job's language is marked by an inherent ambiguity that renders his words open to interpretation, points to a transformed consciousness within him that has been liberated from dogmatism and absolutism. Indeed, there is almost a hint of playfulness in his words, as he speaks in a way that suggests that there are different voices (or even different Jobs) within him, which each have their place in the wide-open world of God's design that is too wonderful for human knowing. Indeed, within this world in which God serves as the midwife of the sea (38:8-9), hunts prey for the lion (38:39) and acts as the praise singer of Leviathan (41:12-34), to name just a few of God's remarkable roles, how could there possibly *not* be a place for every voice that might arise from within Job?

By way of illustration, let me conclude this section by describing three different Jobs that could well emerge from 42:6 and his closing speech as a whole – a submissive Job, a defiant Job and an enlightened Job. Each of these pictures of Job are informed, not only by his words in 42:2-6 (and possibly 40:4-5), but also by the way in which the divine speeches are interpreted.⁷⁹⁰

5.5.1 *A submissive Job*

The most common picture to emerge from 42:6 is that of a submissive, self-effacing, repentant Job. The translation, “therefore I despise myself, / and repent in dust and ashes”

⁷⁹⁰ William Morrow offers a helpful comment in this regard concerning the varying interpretations of this final verse of Job's speech (and the speech as a whole) that can all claim some justification from the text itself. He writes:

In my opinion, the best explanation for these contradictory or ambiguous signals in the Joban response is that which is posited for 42:6 also. The author has used language in such a way as to allow the reader's understanding of Yahweh's revelation to interpret Job's response. Different signals may be emphasized depending on the reader's reaction. The view that Job ends in self-abasement thus flows logically from a certain understanding of the Joban response. However, the emphasis on other signals may lead the exegete to prefer a much more elated or restrained interpretation of Job's final words, one that eschews the concept of repentance while allowing Job some sort of reconciliation with his own predicament. (ibid., 224.)

(42:6, NRSV, RSV, NIV, ESV) conveys this sense.⁷⁹¹ This picture of Job is informed by the traditional interpretation of the divine speeches as a demonstration of the sovereign authority and majesty of God, before which Job's insignificance is exposed. Job's response is one of humble submission as he acknowledges that he erred in the accusations he levelled against God. Variations of this picture of Job naturally occur. For example, there is the distinction between his submission as a genuine spiritual act of repentance and contrition, or as merely a retraction of his legal case against God. Accordingly, within this overarching picture of a submissive Job, there are nuances to what might be termed his inner disposition – whether he is genuinely consoled regarding his situation, satisfied by God's response, accepting of his inability to grasp the complexities of God's design, acquiescent in the awareness that his case can never be dealt with.

5.5.2 *A defiant Job*

A radically different (and in many respects polar opposite) picture of a fiercely defiant Job can also be discerned in this text. A comprehensive exposition of this minority view has been offered by John Curtis, who interprets Job's words of response to the divine speeches (42:2-6 as well as 40:4-5) as an unequivocal rejection of God. Undergirding this thoroughly deconstructive reading is his interpretation of the divine speeches, in which he hears a tone of overpowering, domineering superiority.

The tenor of the entirety of the Yahweh speech is that of the overwhelming power and majesty of God as compared with the frailty and ignorance of Job. Yahweh, in effect, says: How can a man who is as weak and unlearned as Job dare to challenge a God who has unlimited power and knowledge with regard to all things?

Challenged by God in such terms, Job must respond. Yahweh has focused the issues in the simplest possible terms: Job can either accept the divine appraisal of the universe and of Job's place in it, or Job can reject God. There is no middle

⁷⁹¹ Similarly, see the translations of KJV, ASV, GNB, CEV.

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ground left for compromise. Confronted by a choice so clearly defined, Job reacts, as he must: He totally and unequivocally rejects Yahweh.⁷⁹²

According to Curtis, the reason for Job's contemptuous rejection of YHWH (which will be demonstrated shortly in his translation of 42:6) is because of YHWH's contemptuous, arrogant and boasting rejection of Job's anguished plea. Job's contempt for YHWH's failure to address the substantive issues he raised is evident in his response to the first divine speech. Curtis paraphrases that response in 40:4,

Although I dealt with matters that to you are trivial when I spoke earlier,
I will now with contemptuous revulsion cease speaking altogether.⁷⁹³

The issue for Job is that it feels pointless trying to speak to a god who is so concerned with great matters, like cosmology, that the comparatively small human problems, such as the suffering of the innocent, are completely ignored. Curtis continues:

This is bitter sarcasm, slashing out against a god who is irrelevant. Job is saying, "In all that I said previously, I was not concerned with great things—neither acts of divine creation nor cosmological and biological mysteries. These are grave and weighty matters that concern the deity. And these were the only things you could talk about in your speech...; but I was not interested in these ponderous concerns. I was only interested in small, insignificant issues: Why do I suffer? Why does God afflict me? What have I done to deserve all this torture? Why does God not treat me justly? These minor matters—they are just too unimportant to interest God. They are too microscopic to merit his notice. Yes, Yahweh, I did speak of affairs that were to you rather trivial in all that I said. I only wanted to know why you are evil."⁷⁹⁴

⁷⁹² Curtis, "On Job's Response to Yahweh," 497.

⁷⁹³ *Ibid.*, 507.

⁷⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

Which brings us to Curtis' translation of 42:6. The substantiating arguments he uses to arrive at this translation are not of primary concern here, but simply the conclusion he reaches which illustrates the picture of Job under consideration:

Therefore I feel loathing contempt and revulsion [toward you, O God];
and I am sorry for frail man.⁷⁹⁵

This deconstructive reading of Job's final words is provocative, controversial and not without considerable weaknesses.⁷⁹⁶ But it presents another plausible picture of Job that could emerge from his closing speech, which could legitimately be added to the richly diverse gallery of images that dominate the closing chapters of the poetry in a wondrously perplexing way.

5.5.3 *An enlightened Job*

My own reading of Job's final words seeks to move beyond the binary choice of either a repentant Job or a defiant Job. It is certainly not a synthesis of these two opposing possibilities, but draws elements from each. It is a reading that recognizes the journey of transformation that Job has been on, in which the fundamental orienting paradigm of his faith and life has been challenged to the point that he finally has to let go of all of his categories for understanding God and the world. In this regard there is an essential element of repentance, or certainly relinquishment, as Job turns aside from a particular faith paradigm that had become destructive and a barrier to genuine transformation. But in this reading there is also an element of defiance in Job – or perhaps more accurately, an element of robust resolve – as, encouraged by God's healthy regard for spirited contestation, Job refuses to cower in humiliated self-abasement, but stands before God with boldness and speaks with surprising conviction and freedom.

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid., 505.

⁷⁹⁶ For a critique of Curtis' reading see William Morrow, "Consolation, Rejection, and Repentance in Job 42:6," *ibid.* 105, no. 2 (1986): 214-16.

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As with the other pictures of Job presented above, this reading is informed by my interpretation of the divine speeches. Particularly the invitation they present to Job to see everything in a wholly new way. In presenting to Job a panoramic perspective of the cosmos, highlighting especially the places, elements and creatures that were utterly beyond the reach or ken of his limited human experience, YHWH enabled Job to see that the arc of the divine stretches over all things, beneath which everything belongs. This sublime encounter drew Job beyond the dualistic ways of thinking that was so characteristic of his rational mind and shaped so much of religious consciousness, into the realm of silence (cf. 40:4-5) and the wide-open domain of contemplation.⁷⁹⁷

At the risk of pigeon-holing this reading by the inevitable limitations of a particular translation, let me nevertheless offer a very loose paraphrase of Job's final speech as a way of presenting this picture of an enlightened Job. The casual, colloquial tone that can be heard at times in the midst of more formal theological language is an intentional attempt to convey the juxtaposition within Job between the seriousness of a newfound theological paradigm, and the joyful sense of freedom that this new way of seeing God and his own place in the world represented for him:

Now I get it – you really are free to do things your own way,

you won't be boxed by narrow definitions

or commandeered by rigid dogma.

How marvelous that your design is concealed from conventional wisdom.

I missed this at first, so evident in my ways of speaking and thinking,

and even now, there's so much of your enterprise that is beyond me.

But you urged me to listen carefully to what was sounding deep within,

⁷⁹⁷ There are a plethora of spiritual masters who teach about the journey into contemplation. For one particularly accessible treatment of this subject that resonates with some of the themes of Job's own story, see Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999).

to be questioned and challenged, to contest and contemplate.

That's why I can now relinquish my former view of the world

with its fearful need for ordered certainty,

and embrace the mystery and ambiguity of life. (40:2-6, my paraphrase)⁷⁹⁸

5.6 Speaking what is right

The different portraits of Job sketched above each see Job in a different way. These different ways of seeing him come from the different ways of hearing his words. Clearly, the sentiments of 42:5 – “I have heard you...and now I see you” – apply not only to God (and Job’s wife), but to all who hear Job’s story and see him accordingly. So which of these ways of seeing (or if you prefer, hearing) Job is correct? Or to put it differently, which of Job’s ways of speaking is the right one?

This is not a banal question. In the very next verse following Job’s final words, we read of the wrath of the LORD kindled against Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar because they did not speak of God what is right (42:7). Twice in quick succession the LORD then affirms that, in stark contrast to these three friends, Job *has* spoken what is right. The difficulties

⁷⁹⁸ Eugene Peterson’s paraphrased translation of 42:2-6 is worth citing as a point of comparison:

I’m convinced: You can do anything and everything.

Nothing and no one can upset your plans.

You asked, ‘Who is this muddying the water,

ignorantly confusing the issue, second-guessing my purposes?’

I admit it. I was the one. I babbled on about things far beyond me,

made small talk about wonders way over my head.

You told me, ‘Listen, and let me do the talking.

Let me ask the questions. *You* give the answers.’

I admit I once lived by rumors of you;

now I have it all firsthand—from my own eyes and ears!

I’m sorry—forgive me. I’ll never do that again, I promise!

I’ll never again live on crusts of hearsay, crumbs of rumor.

(Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002).)

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presented by this divine affirmation of Job's use of language, especially in the light of YHWH's stinging rebuke of Job's words in 38:2, have already been alluded to above.⁷⁹⁹ One way of resolving the contradiction between these two assessments of Job's speech is to consider the shift that occurred in Job's use of language following the initial assessment in 38:3 and the LORD's pronouncement over the rightness of Job's speech in 42:7-8.⁸⁰⁰ It could thus be concluded that the LORD's affirmation in the epilogue that Job has spoken what is right refers to the words that he spoke in 42:2-6 (and 40:4-5) in response to the divine speeches. Which brings us back to the question with which this section began, in the light of the different portraits of Job on display, which of Job's ways of speaking is the right one?

A way forward on this issue is provided by Rollins' insight about the true nature of orthodoxy, which, he argues, is less about believing the right things, and more about believing in the right way.⁸⁰¹ Applying this insight, it could be argued that the crux of Job's transformation in his use of language is not that he finally got to speak what is right about God – in the sense of stumbling upon the one absolutely true and completely inerrant theological insight into God's being and nature – but rather that he finally discovered what it meant to speak about God in the right way. A way of speaking that no longer wielded language as a weapon of dogmatic domination and coercive control, but saw it as humbly pointing beyond itself to the wide open mystery of God, the world and the experience of life in God's world. This is what Job had experienced in the words of his wife, and in the words of YHWH from the whirlwind, that drew him beyond his narrow frame of reference into a terrifying, yet ultimately exhilarating and liberating

⁷⁹⁹ See footnote 749 on p.388 above.

⁸⁰⁰ Of course, the contradiction between these two assessments of Job's speech (in 38:3 and 42:7-8) does not necessarily need to be resolved, especially if a Bakhtinian dialogical reading of the book as a whole is adopted, in which case these contradictions can simply be heard, and held up, as belonging to different voices that contribute to the dialogical truth of this polyphonic text. See, for example, Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*.

⁸⁰¹ See footnote 34 on p.25 in ch.1 above.

experience of the sublime. With that transformative encounter still fresh in his mind and ringing in his ears, he offers his final response, filled with deliberate, playful ambiguity, confident that even those parts that were inadequate or even ‘wrong’, within God’s design, would still be drawn under the arc of the divine and could still belong.

6. Job’s use of language in the epilogue

The last recorded words of Job are those found in his speech in 42:2-6 that has just been discussed. But his final speech at the end of the poetry section does not mark the end of his speaking. In the concluding epilogue, two further speech events of Job are reported – when he prays for his friends (42:9) and when he names his daughters (42:14) – even though the actual words that he uses are not. In a book that consists, overwhelmingly, of the direct speech of its various characters, this represents a curious and significant departure. Indeed, these are the only instances in the entire book where the speech of a character is not directly reported.⁸⁰² This startling disruption of the pattern of speaking that has been followed throughout the book calls attention to these utterances of Job as deeply subversive speech events. Indeed, as will be demonstrated shortly, in each of these utterances, Job uses language in highly unconventional and subversive ways. Tellingly, while the words he uses are silenced, their impact can be clearly seen. As such, these deeply transformative ‘unheard-and-yet-seen’ speech events point us to the crucial relationship between speech and silence in the book of Job. This will be the focus of the next section, and the final theme to be explored in this study.

6.1 Job prays for his friends (42:9)

After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: “My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you

⁸⁰² The one possible exception being the three friends’ approach to Job in 42:9, in accordance with the LORD’s instruction to them to go to Job and offer up a burnt offering so that Job might pray to God on their behalf. While the friends, presumably, would have spoken to Job to explain what they had heard from the LORD, there is no explicit reference in the text to them actually speaking.

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have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has done.” So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the Lord had told them; and the LORD accepted Job’s prayer. (42:7-10)

There are two curious details about this episode that need to be highlighted, that cast the relationship between Job and God in a new light. The first is that there is a certain ambiguity as to whom the substantial burnt offering of seven bulls and seven rams required of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, as mandated by the LORD, should be offered. Conventional religious wisdom and protocol dictates that such burnt offerings should be offered to God, and that any role played by Job in the equation would have simply been that of an intermediary. Yet the particular sequence of instructions that the friends were required to follow seems to indicate that they were to take the animals to Job and offer up a sacrifice for themselves so that Job would pray for them, and that what God would accept was Job’s prayer. Indeed, having said to the friends, “My wrath is kindled against you...” (42:7) – “...the first and only exhibition of God’s anger in the narrative of the book”⁸⁰³ – God seems unwilling to deal with the friends directly (in spite of the irony that God is speaking to them). As such, God was not interested in the sacrifice of the friends but only in the prayer that Job would offer, which suggests that the purpose of the sacrifice was to secure Job’s intercession, maybe through the dramatic gesture of a costly sacrifice to convince Job how desperate they were for his help. If accurate, this means that as the intended recipient of the friends’ burnt offering, Job has been elevated to the level of God in the sacrificial system.

⁸⁰³ Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1232.

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The second curious detail is that Job's prayer seems to be as much for God's benefit as it is for the friends'.⁸⁰⁴ The translation cited above (taken from the NRSV) does a serious injustice to the text by smoothing over one of its greatest anomalies, namely that in 42:8 the LORD seems capable of outrageous behaviour – literally “doing foolishness” (*āśāh nēbālāh* – אָשָׂה נְבָלָה).⁸⁰⁵ As already mentioned previously, the conventional view reflected in most translations (such as the NRSV) is that it is the *friend's* foolishness that is being referenced here, so that the thrust of Job's prayer is that God would not deal with the friends as *their* folly deserves.⁸⁰⁶ However, the clear sense of the Hebrew of 42:8 indicates that it is *God* who is the one who threatens *nēbālāh*. “It is interesting that in threatening to act outrageously against the friends Yahweh evidently does not recognize that he has acted against Job in that very way.”⁸⁰⁷ Job's prayer therefore comes as a true intercession, not simply between God and the friends, but also between God and behaviour incongruous to divine justice and mercy. Balentine writes:

Could it be that both God and the friends need the loyalty of one like Job if they are to live fully into their true identities? The epilogue suggests that if Job does not pray the friends will be doomed. And if Job does not pray, the epilogue hints that God might exact a judgment that is incongruent with divine justice and mercy. In short, the friends are wrong, but they are worth praying for. God is angry, but God can be persuaded to check the anger, *if* someone like Job prays. God, too, it seems is worth praying for.⁸⁰⁸

⁸⁰⁴ Samuel E. Balentine, "My Servant Job Shall Pray for You," *Theology Today* 58, no. 4 (2002): 503.

⁸⁰⁵ “Doing foolishness” is a technically accurate, albeit insipid rendering of the phrase, which has the far stronger sense of an outrageous or sacrilegious act. For an excellent discussion of the term *nēbālāh*, see Anthony Phillips, "Nebalah: A Term for Serious Disorderly and Unruly Conduct," *Vetus Testamentum* 24, no. 4 (1975).

⁸⁰⁶ See section 4.2.5 on p.230 in ch.4 above.

⁸⁰⁷ Clines, *Job 38 - 42*, 1233.

⁸⁰⁸ Balentine, "My Servant Job Shall Pray for You," 503. See further Philippe Guillaume and Michael Schunk, "Job's Intercession: Antidote to Divine Folly," *Biblica* 88, no. 4 (2007).

This should not be viewed as Job trying to change God. He has already acknowledged in 42:2 that God can do all things and that no purpose of God's can be thwarted; and, what is more, the whole initiative in Job's intercession was God's. Yet, the incontrovertible fact is that when Job prays, God does change. The *nēbālāh* that God threatened is averted and, what is even more significant, God then relents from keeping Job in a condition of unresolved suffering. "And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends" (42:10). In the description of Job's restoration that follows (42:11-13), we can *see* the dramatic effects of his prayer, even though we cannot hear its particular content.⁸⁰⁹

Job's prayer is therefore presented as a profoundly transformational utterance, not simply because of its productive effect on God, the friends and Job's own material circumstances, but also because it points to the power and impact of voices that may not be heard, but that nevertheless do speak.

6.2 Job names his daughters (42:14)

The second 'unheard-and-yet-seen' speech event in the epilogue is when Job names his daughters (42:14). The pericope in 42:13-15 that deals with Job's daughters has already been discussed in detail in chapter 4.⁸¹⁰ In that earlier discussion it was highlighted that it is unusual in the Hebrew Bible for a father to name his children, as that was the mother's prerogative. Of the handful of instances where a father names his children, it is always a son that is named, making the reference in 42:14 the only occurrence in the Hebrew Bible

⁸⁰⁹ Maybe Job's prayer went something like this: "O Lord, I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. So be sure not to do anything foolish when you deal with these three friends." This proposed wording for Job's prayer is my own, but it has been informed by that suggested by Balentine, *Job*, 713.

⁸¹⁰ See section 3.4 on p.210 ff. in ch.4 above.

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where a father names his daughters.⁸¹¹ This means that in regard to this important and well-established social convention of naming children, Job's act of naming his daughters is highly unconventional, an act which, by definition, involves the use of language – in this case, subversively.

The subversive nature of Job's use of language here is further borne out in the particular names that he chose for his daughters – Jemimah, meaning “turtle-dove”; Keziah, a fragrant spice (“cassia”) used in perfumery; and Keren-happuch, which means “horn of antimony,” a cosmetic eyeshadow. Each of these names is daringly sensuous, highlighting and celebrating the femininity of his daughters, with no particular religious associations at all. On the other rare occasions in the Hebrew Bible when fathers do name their children, the reasons for them doing so and the particular names chosen commonly have some sort of religious motivation.⁸¹² But Job is wholly unconcerned about such considerations here. The requirements and expectations of social protocols and religious conventions have lost all of their operant power over him – a strong indicator of the change that Job has undergone, especially when one considers the ways he used to behave in the prologue (cf. 1:5). Indeed, in his willingness to stand against the constraints and dictates of the social and religious structures of his day, Job was carving out a new space of freedom, not just for himself, but also for his daughters (who would be given an inheritance along with their brothers), for the wider community of which he was a part (cf. 42:11), and ultimately for the generations that were to come after him (cf. 42:16). As Rollins would put it, this was truly an act of faithful betrayal.

⁸¹¹ The one possible exception to this is the LORD's instruction to Hosea to name his daughter (Hos 1:6). See footnote 417 on pp.197-198 in ch.4 above for a fuller reference to the naming of children in the Hebrew Bible.

⁸¹² The example of Hosea being instructed by God to name his children (which included a daughter) is a telling case in point, in that the names given to them were in service of an explicit theological agenda (cf. Hos 1:4-9).

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Job's daughters hence become literal embodiments of Job's transformed consciousness and liberated mode of being. Wherever they went, they literally carried their father's subversive use of language with them in the names that were theirs, while their unparalleled beauty (42:15) only served to draw further attention to who they were and what they embodied. Of course, the further radically subversive detail that Job gave his daughters an inheritance along with his sons further underscores the point of the dramatic transformation that is evident in Job from the man we first met at the start of the book.⁸¹³

Ellen Davis puts it brilliantly when she writes:

The two portraits of Father Job that stand at either end of this book mark the true measure of his transformation. Job, this man of integrity who was once so careful, fearful of God and of the *possible* sins of his children, becomes at the last freewheeling, breaking with custom to honor daughters alongside sons, bestowing inheritances and snappy names. The inspiration and model for this wild style of parenting is, of course, God the Creator.⁸¹⁴ Job learned about it when God spoke out of the whirlwind. And now Job loves with the abandon characteristic of God's love

⁸¹³ For a detailed discussion of the significance of Job's daughters being given an inheritance along with his sons, see section 3.4.2 on p.212 ff. in ch.4 above.

⁸¹⁴ Annie Dillard's stunning description of the wild exuberance of the Creator, which resonates strongly with all that was said in the divine speeches, is worth citing in its entirety:

The world is full of creatures that for some reasons seem stranger to us than others, and libraries are full of books describing them – hagfish, platypuses, lizardlike pangolins four feet long with bright green, lapped scales like umbrella-tree leaves on a bush hut root, butterflies emerging from anthills, spiderlings wafting through the air clutching tiny silken balloons, horseshoe crabs...the creator creates. Does he stoop, does he speak, does he save, succor, prevail? Maybe. But he creates; he creates everything and anything. The creator goes off on one wild, specific tangent after another, or millions simultaneously, with an exuberance that would seem to be unwarranted, and with an abandoned energy sprung from an unfathomable font. What is going on here? The point of the dragonfly's terrible lip, the giant water bug, birdsong, or the beautiful dazzle and flash of sunlighted minnows, is not that it all fits together like clockwork – for it doesn't, not even inside the goldfish bowl – but that it all flows so freely wild, like the creek, that it all surges in such a free, fringed tangle. Freedom is the world's water and weather, the world's nourishment freely given, its soil and sap: and the creator loves pizzazz. (Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 136-37.)

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– revolutionary in seeking our freedom, reveling in the untamed beauty of every child.⁸¹⁵

In the epilogue, which of course marks the end of the book, the words of Job are no longer heard, even though their thunderous impact can be clearly seen. Thus, the voice of Job is silenced, even as it rings forth in a loud and emphatic way. This paradox brings us to the final theme to be explored in this study, the threshold of speech and silence.

7. The threshold of speech and silence

A literary text, by definition, is a form of communication that foregrounds the words it uses. It is the words on the page that are read – the stain of ink that is the focus – and through those words the voices within the text (and indeed those behind it), are able to be heard. This is particularly conspicuous in the book of Job, where most of the words on the page are the direct and immediate expressions of the voices of the various characters that make up the book.⁸¹⁶

All literary analytical readings of the text pay close attention to the words that are on the page. But deconstructive readings, in particular, also consider the words that are not there, recognising that the gaps, omissions and silences in the text often have as much to say as the text itself.⁸¹⁷ With this in mind, we turn now to consider the relationship

⁸¹⁵ Ellen F. Davis, *Getting Involved with God : Rediscovering the Old Testament* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley Publications, 2001), 142-43.

⁸¹⁶ In the previous section the point was made that the last two utterances of Job (in 42:9 and 42:14) are referenced in the text only indirectly, the only instances in the entire book where the actual words of a character's speech are not recorded verbatim. But even here, Job's voice is still represented through the words on the page which, in these instances, express the voice of the narrator.

⁸¹⁷ Feminist biblical criticism offers a particularly vivid example of this in some of the methodologies it employs, especially in its attempts to recover the lost or silent voices of women within the biblical text. For a compelling example of this approach with respect to Job's wife, see Gerald O. West, "Hearing Job's Wife: Towards a Feminist Reading of Job," *Old Testament Essays* 4 (1991). In his article, West listens out for, and is able to hear, the cries of despair, agony, pain, frustration, rejection, confusion and outrage that are all part of the untold story of Job's

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between speech and silence in the book of Job. For one of the distinctive features of this text is that there are significant shifts between speech and silence for virtually all of its characters. Many of the moments of silence that arise are not merely indicative of the cessation of speech, but represent definitive postures of articulation that speak in their own right. The implication of these ‘articulations of silence’ is that the voices of at least some of the characters – most notably, Job’s wife – are heard not only in their direct speech that is captured in the words on the page, but also in the spaces before and after those words.

A meaningful frame that could help to locate this discussion within the broader frame of this study as a whole would be that defined by the apophatic and cataphatic traditions in Western spirituality, and particularly the use that Rollins makes of them.⁸¹⁸ For in addressing questions about God and faith, these traditions recognise that there is much that can be said about God that is true, and there is much that is true about God that cannot be said. The failure to recognise both sides of this equilibrium is what can lead to destructive distortions. Rollins appropriates this with his notion of God as un/known, and in his assertion that “...that which we cannot speak of is the one thing about whom and to whom we must never stop speaking.”⁸¹⁹ Indeed, Rollins would affirm that instead of seeing the unspeakable as that which brings all language to a halt, it is the very place where the most inspiring language begins.⁸²⁰ As such, the threshold of speech and silence in the book of Job can point us to a truer, deeper way in which the issues of God and the nature of faith are held, expressed and explored.

wife. See section 7.2 in ch.2 above. For two helpful overviews of feminist biblical criticism in general, that both include a brief historical overview as well as some methodological considerations, see Naomi Steinberg, "Feminist Criticism," in *Methods for Exodus*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, *Methods in Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Carolyn Osiek, "Reading the Bible as Women," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck et al (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).

⁸¹⁸ See section 4.2, and especially footnote 31 on pp.24-25, in ch.1 above.

⁸¹⁹ Peter Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God* (London: SPCK, 2006), xii.

⁸²⁰ *Ibid.*

7.1 Isak Dinesen's *The Blank Page*

Before venturing into the un/known threshold of speech and silence in the book of Job, a brief deviation may shed some helpful light on this task. *The Blank Page* is an intriguing short story by Isak Dinesen.⁸²¹ It tells the story of an old woman storyteller from a long line of storytellers – stretching back to her grandmother, and her grandmother's grandmother – who was describing the place and power of the voice of silence in the craft of storytelling. At one point the old woman asks:

Who then...tells a finer tale than any of us? Silence does. And where does one read a deeper tale than upon the most perfectly printed page of the most precious book? Upon the blank page. When a royal and gallant pen, in the moment of its highest inspiration, has written down its tale with the rarest ink of all — where, then, may one read a still deeper, sweeter, merrier and more cruel tale than that? Upon the blank page.⁸²²

To illustrate her point, the old storyteller then tells a story. Susan Gubar offers a helpful summary of this story-within-a-story:

The story of “The Blank Page” centers on the sisters of a Carmelite order of nuns who grow flax to manufacture the most exquisite linen in Portugal. This linen is so fine that it is used for the bridal sheets of all the neighboring royal houses. After the wedding night, it is solemnly and publicly displayed to attest to the virginity of the princess and is then reclaimed by the convent where the central piece of the stained sheet “which bore witness to the honor of a royal bride” is mounted, framed, and

⁸²¹ Isak Dinesen is the pseudonym of Karen Blixen (1885 – 1962). *The Blank Page* is a short story originally published in 1957 as part of an anthology of short stories entitled *Last Tales*. (Isak Dinesen, *Last Tales* (New York: Random House, 1957).) Citations from the story are taken from “The Blank Page (from *Last Tales*),” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 3, no. 2 (2004). For a brilliant application of this short story to the subject of gendered readings of the biblical text, see Hugh Pyper, “Speaking Silence: Male Readers, Women's Readings and the Biblical Text,” *Literature and Theology* 8, no. 3 (1994).

⁸²² Dinesen, “The Blank Page (from *Last Tales*),” 162.

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hung in a long gallery with a plate identifying the name of the princess. These “faded markings” on the sheets are of special interest to female pilgrims who journey to the remote country convent, for “each separate canvas with its coroneted name-plate has a story to tell, and each has been set up in loyalty to the story.” But pilgrims and sisters alike are especially fascinated by the framed canvas over the one nameless plate which displays the blank, snow-white sheet that gives the story its title.⁸²³

What does the blank sheet on display amidst all the other marked sheets attest to? What story does it tell? The story of a princess who was not a virgin on her wedding night? Or the story of an impotent husband? Or a woman left at the altar? Or a Machiavellian betrayal? Or a tragedy? Or something else perhaps? “Whatever its meaning, the sheet testifies to a disruption of the expected course of events. It proclaims the unusual which is the impulse for storytelling. Its purity implies impurity and sets in train a whole narrative of concealment and revelation.”⁸²⁴ The story concludes with these words:

It is in front of this piece of pure white linen that the old princesses of Portugal — worldly wise, dutiful, long-suffering queens, wives and mothers — and their noble old playmates, bridesmaids and maids-of-honour have most often stood still.

It is in front of the blank page that old and young nuns, with the Mother Abbess herself, sink into deepest thought.⁸²⁵

Therein lies the eloquence of the blank page, and the power of silence.

⁸²³ Susan Gubar, "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 2 (1981): 247-48.

⁸²⁴ Pyper, "Speaking Silence: Male Readers, Women's Readings and the Biblical Text," 297.

⁸²⁵ Dinesen, "The Blank Page (from *Last Tales*)," 165.

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7.2 The speech and silence of Job's wife

The unjust victimization and marginalization of Job's wife has been draped across the long history of Joban interpretation like a dirty red rag, flagging the perilous place in the text where a wife's feeble faith buckled beneath the burden of suffering and grief, giving way to infidelity and blasphemous betrayal. This macabre and unmerited standard has been raised over the battleground of the interpretation of this text on two poles of error. The first is the error of mishearing *what* she had to say.⁸²⁶ The second is the error of mishearing *how* she said it, by assuming that her voice was confined simply to her speech, that her audible words captured in a single line of text on a page was *all* that she had to say.

Indeed, it is commonly assumed that the contribution of Job's wife to the book of Job is limited to the two verses in the text where she makes an explicit appearance, speaks just six words, is rebuked by her husband and promptly disappears, never to be heard from again. The pericope in 2:9-10 where all of this takes place consequently defines the parameters for assessing her role and significance in the book of Job. Within the confines of these parameters, even the most sympathetic and generous interpretation of her words cannot do justice to the voice of this wife, mother and woman of extraordinary faith.

By contrast, William Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job* provides a stunning visual exposition of a broader way of seeing Job's wife and hearing her voice.⁸²⁷ Within Blake's imagination, Job's wife is not confined to a tiny slither of the story, but is envisioned as being present with Job through every part of it, a constant and faithful silent companion who never leaves his side. What would such an imaginative revisioning of the presence of Job's wife throughout the book of Job mean to the way in which her voice is heard?

⁸²⁶ The interpretations and 'misinterpretations' of the words of Job's wife have been explored in detail in ch.2 above on the reception history of Job's wife.

⁸²⁷ See ch.3 above, and especially section 6 on pp.177-184.

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How does Job's wife's silence, thus conceived as a pervasive silence, impact the ways in which the audible words of her speech are interpreted?

The incontrovertible fact of the text is that Job's wife's voice recedes into silence following her speech in 2:9. But in the aftermath of her disruptive, provocative and catalytic words, her silence most surely speaks. In this regard, her words bear the distinctive mark of what Rollins terms "the rupturing event of God's Word", the reverberations of which continue to disturb, challenge and destabilize the assumptions, certainties and securities of the status quo.

In holy silence she would have heard, with a mixture of alarm and hope, the visceral outpourings of her husband's lament in ch.3, as he finally gave voice to the abyss within him that her words, and the silence that followed them, had drawn from the very depths of his being. In frustrated silence she would have heard the endless windiness of the three friends, trapped in the same superficial faith paradigm as Job, as they tried to reason and justify the correctness of their narrow view of the world; as well as the futility of her husband's response as he was drawn back into old patterns of thinking and speaking that offered no hope for any genuine change. In compassionate silence she would have heard Job's anguished reflections upon his life and his desperate protestations of innocence. In vindicated silence she would have heard the voice from the whirlwind; and in hope-filled silence the transformed language of her husband's response. In joyful silence she would have heard Job's bold prayer and the names he gave to their daughters, pointing to the promise of a transformed life that they would still know together.

As a silent witness to all of these things Job's wife would have listened deeply to all that was going on. But what is perhaps more to the point is the way in which her silence would have enabled Job to listen more deeply to all that was going on. Indeed, the transformation that was ultimately his was effected through the perspective of an alternative religious consciousness that she initiated within him, articulated at first in her

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words, and then reinforced and reiterated through the constancy of her pervasive, silent presence, reminding Job of the hope and promise of a new kind of faith. In the final analysis, if the words of Job's wife led Job (and by extension, us as the readers) to the very edge of language, then her ensuing silence draws us (along with Job) across the threshold to a place where new understandings become possible and radical transformations can be affected – understandings and transformations that may not be able to be adequately described, but can certainly be experienced.

7.3 The speech and silence of other characters in the book of Job

The comments that follow regarding the threshold of speech and silence that operates, in one way or another, in other characters in the book of Job are certainly not exhaustive, but do at least gesture toward the prevalence of this theme in the book as a whole.

7.3.1 *The LORD and haśśātān*

The entire drama of the book of Job unfolds out of the verbal interchanges between the LORD and *haśśātān* in heaven that are presented in two parallel episodes in 1:6-12 and 2:1-6. The point of contention between them is the question of the basis of Job's remarkable piety which, they supposed, could only be incontrovertibly established through the language choices that Job would make in the face of calamitous suffering – whether he would curse God or not. The formulaic regularity of the speech patterns shared by the LORD and *haśśātān* is one of the rhetorical devices of the prose narrative, establishing a rhythm of ordered predictability.

The speech of Job's wife disrupts this rhythmic pattern, which effectively results in the silencing of these two characters. Their silencing suggests that the particular perspective on faith expressed in their speech that precipitated the Joban drama has been suspended, to allow less ordered and formulaic perspectives to be heard and considered. In the case of *haśśātān*, his silencing is complete. The LORD, however, reappears in the epilogue and is given further words to speak. But what must be navigated is whether the LORD of the

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epilogue is reprising his former role and identity from the prologue, or whether in the intervening silence, Job's journey of transformation and especially the voice of YHWH in the divine speeches has effected a transformation in the LORD also.

7.3.2 *The friends*

Read together as a unit, the three friends are second only to Job in the number of words that issue forth from their mouths. Their speech has an unambiguously theological motivation as they operate together as the mouthpiece of the doctrine of retributive justice. Together they function as Job's dialogue partner in chapters 4 – 27, sharing in a protracted verbal interchange that finally breaks down in frustration and futility.

In many respects, their speech is set up to fail. Given the background to the reasons for Job's suffering that the reader is privy to, the doctrinal pontifications of the friends sound contrived and hollow, even though there are certainly valid elements in what they say. Furthermore, their seemingly blind allegiance to an irreproachable God who offers certainty and satisfaction to those who truly believe, sounds very much like the idolatry of God that Rollins critiques so vigorously.⁸²⁸ Small wonder then that as elocutionists they have been roundly pilloried, and as dogmatists emphatically disregarded.

But it should be remembered, of course, that their introduction within the text presented them in a quite different light – not as verbose interlocutors but as Job's silent companions. Indeed, their silent solidarity with Job in his time of suffering is often paraded as a stellar example of faithful companionship and true compassion in times of adversity. However, as argued above, the silent presence of the friends was not necessarily a sign of their benign solidarity.⁸²⁹ Certainly, what seems clear is that any

⁸²⁸ See section 4.2 on pp. 22-30 in ch.1 above.

⁸²⁹ See sections 5.2.3 and 5.2.4 on pp.292-302 in ch.5 above.

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capacity within them for genuine openly receptive silence was trumped by their need to correct theological error and defend God's honour.

7.3.3 *YHWH*

The threshold of speech and silence as demonstrated in YHWH is one of the crucial interpretive keys for the book. For most of the book of Job, YHWH remains silent. Not even Job's impassioned verbal assault on the very structures of creation (3:2-26) occasioned so much as a murmur from heaven. The interminable, circuitous dialogue between Job and his friends proved unable to grind God down to the point of breaking the silence out of sheer exasperation. For Job, the silence is deafening. Again and again he speaks about wanting a hearing with God, or at least some word from heaven (cf. 9:14-16; 13:3, 22; 19:7; 23:3-7). But the full range of human words must first run their course, to which the silence of God throughout most of the book bears ample witness.

When the silence of YHWH is finally broken with the divine speeches in 38 – 41, it seems as if nothing of Job's cry has been heard. The failure of the divine speeches to answer any of Job's questions or address any of the substantive theological issues that were debated with his friends (such as the fate of the wicked, for example), suggests that YHWH's silence really was a form of disinterested absence. But therein lies the rub of the threshold of speech and silence in YHWH, for the content of the divine speeches – and the eventual transformation in Job they provoked – reveal that in the silence there was a keen attentiveness to Job's deepest need. As such, the silence and speech of YHWH are of a piece, together bearing witness to the unconstrained freedom of God to be present in a transcendent way. Or as Rollins might express it, the silence and speech of YHWH bears witness to the transcendent immanence of the divine.

7.3.4 *Job*

Job is the chief protagonist in the drama of the book that bears his name. From the moment the curtain rises until it finally falls, he barely exits the stage for the duration of

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the production.⁸³⁰ He interacts personally and directly in one way or another with all of the other characters, with the sole exception of the Lord of the narrative tale. He also has more lines to learn than any other character, and so his voice dominates the landscape of the text. Indeed, without his words, the structure of much of the book would simply collapse. His is a large, loud and at times overpowering *presence* within the book as a whole.

Given the centrality of the words that are his, and the importance of the shifts in his language that point to his transformation, it is truly significant that the two decisive (sublime) moments in his journey of transformation came to him through the words of others, but were processed by him, not with his own words, but with silence. The first was the speech of his wife, which precipitated for Job seven days of deeply reflective and brooding silence (2:13) in which he was drawn beyond the boundaries of everything that he thought he knew about God. The second came through the divine speeches, which silenced Job's speech (40:4-5) and thrust him into a bold and disturbing new vision of reality.

The text does not record the voice of silence within Job, or exactly what he heard it saying. All that we can see is the evidence of his transformed ways of speaking – initially in 3:3-26, and ultimately in 42:2-6 – at these thresholds of speech and silence. Perhaps the Rollinsian notion of revelation as concealment is most apt to describe what transpires for Job at that sublime intersection.

8. Conclusion

This concluding chapter has explored the use of language within the book of Job, with particular reference to Job's use of language in response to the speeches of his wife and YHWH. The changes in the way in which Job uses language is one of the clearest

⁸³⁰ The two brief scenes in heaven (1:6-12 and 2:1-6) are the only scenes in the entire book where Job is not present.

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indications of the transformation that has taken place within him. This can be understood, not so much as Job finally speaking what is right – for by the end of the book he seems fully alive to the reality of the enduring ambiguities, contradictions and paradoxes that make such a goal a fantasy – but rather as Job speaking in the right kind of way.

Within this kind of speaking – speaking in the right way – words are used not to confine but to liberate, not to impose but to invite, not to control but to release, not to define meaning but to celebrate the endless possibilities of wonder and the delight of living in a wildly chaotic world teeming with mystery and grace. Within this kind of speaking, the voice of silence can also be heard. Sounding from the deeper places, echoing with the strains of the sublime. So it was with the voices of Job's wife, and YHWH, and in the end, Job himself. And yes, ultimately, also the book that bears his name.

Where the story-teller is loyal, eternally and unswervingly loyal to the story, there, in the end, silence will speak. Where the story has been betrayed, silence is but emptiness. But we, the faithful, when we have spoken our last word, will hear the voice of silence.⁸³¹

⁸³¹ Dinesen, "The Blank Page (from *Last Tales*)," 162.

Conclusions

1. Summarized overview of the project

The stated objective of this thesis has been to rehabilitate a jaundiced view of Job's wife in which she has been seen as a minor character of little consequence to the interpretation of the book of Job as a whole; as well as a villainous character deserving of condemnation and contempt for her blasphemous betrayal and tempting treachery as an unfaithful wife. The primary methodological orientation for undertaking this task has been a literary analytical exploration of the role of Job's wife within the book – utilising the tools of both constructive and deconstructive readings of the text – through a thorough examination of her words and their impact on other characters, as well as an assessment of her influence on the landscape of the text in non-verbal ways. This literary analytical exploration has been undertaken against the backdrop of the theoretical work of Peter Rollins, whose voice has been drawn into this study as a conversation partner offering a provocative theological perspective on the nature of faith, belief and religious language that ventures into the realm of the sublime.

A detailed consideration of the reception history of Job's wife – in the Septuagint, the Rabbinic corpus, the Testament of Job, Christian tradition, art history and modern biblical scholarship – reveals three broad interpretive traditions with respect to Job's wife. The first, representing a majority perspective, certainly within Christian tradition, presents an unambiguously negative view of Job's wife who betrayed her husband by tempting him to abandon his faith. The second seeks to mitigate the censorious judgment of Job's wife as an unfaithful wife by recognizing that she too was a victim of great suffering, whose words can be interpreted accordingly as the product of almost unbearable pain. Within this tradition an alternative hearing of her words is also represented – as the compassionate utterance of a heartbroken mother but still loving and faithful wife who genuinely desires what is best for Job. A third interpretive tradition focuses on the productive effect of her words on Job and the ways in which she

influences Job's response, especially within the poetry sections of the book. These three traditions, being broadly concurrent rather than sequential, do not themselves chart the chronological development of the reception history of Job's wife as each can be identified, to a greater or lesser degree, across the entire trajectory of that history of interpretation. The laying bare of these three diverse strands of tradition in the history of interpretation of Job's wife is one of the contributions of this study to the body of work on Job's wife.

An exceptional and wholly unique reception of Job's wife is found in William Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, a work that offers an unparalleled visual exposition of the book of Job as a whole. Within this series of engravings, Blake charts Job's journey of transformation from lifeless forms of religious piety in which he was shackled to a bookkeeping understanding of faith and an inherently false picture of God, to a liberated religious consciousness in which Job's spiritual imagination is awakened to see God in new ways, enlivened by the creative impulses of music and art. A significant insight and contribution of this study lies in its identification of the chiasmic structure employed by Blake in his *Illustrations*, in which the corresponding plates of the two halves of the series offer a dialogical witness to Job's spiritual journey of descent and subsequent ascent.

A further seminal insight within this study is the recognition of the pervasive presence of Job's wife in virtually every episode of Blake's exposition of the Joban drama, as she is presented as being at her husband's side to share every step of his journey of transformation. This crucial feature of Blake's visual exposition suggests that far from being a minor character of negligible influence, Job's wife could rightly be seen as one of the central characters of the book whose presence and influence is far more pervasive than what is commonly assumed. This radical re-visioning of Job's wife provided the major impetus for this study, inviting a return to the text to consider afresh her presence and influence within the book as a whole.

This return to the text prompted an exploration of the cultural, social and economic life of Job's wife that emerged from behind-the-text considerations of her role. By placing the book within its larger ancient Near eastern context, and drawing on the insights from socio-historical, social-anthropological and ethnographic criticism, the study uncovered the significant contribution most likely made by Job's wife to the economic and social wellbeing of Job's household within the context of a labour-intensive domestic agrarian economy. Perspectives within the text itself confirm a far more pervasive influence for Job's wife beyond her role as a speaker of a few words in the narrative. Explicit references within the text to Job's wealth, social status and children, as well as implicit references to his sustenance and the provision of bread, all point to the influence and agency of Job's wife. The diversity and significance of the role played by Job's wife is corroborated through intertextual analyses of two other wives in the Bible – the capable wife of Proverbs 31 and the story of Abigail in 1 Samuel 25 – illustrating the complex roles that female biblical characters often played in navigating patriarchal ideologies, while contributing to the overall wellbeing of the households of which they were a part.

The detailed analysis of the speech of Job's wife revealed inherent ambiguities in the words she used and the manner in which she used them, which have given rise to a wide range of diverse interpretations of the meaning of her speech. The particular reading pursued in this study has been to hear in the words of Job's wife a critique of the organising paradigm of Job's world and a presentation of a bold alternative to the impulses towards control and order that characterized his anxious existence. Her words constitute a disruption of Job's moral universe as she challenges his misplaced sense of integrity and urges him to renounce the idolatrous God upon which his moral universe was predicated. Her words also disrupt the narrative flow of the prologue, subvert the language used by the LORD and *haśśāṭān*, silence the dialogue in heaven and ultimately precipitate the structural collapse of the prologue. As such, her words represent a seismic rupturing of the landscape of the text that shake the sure ground upon which Job's entire

world had been constructed, thrusting him into the unfamiliar territory of existential rumination as he stares into the formless void that was once the certainty of his faith.

In response Job launches an intense assault upon the very order of creation in his soliloquy at the start of the poetry section of the book, seeking the oblivion of its collapse and the liberation that death was presumed to bring. This visceral eruption is not merely an ‘uncharacteristic outburst’ but points to a shifting consciousness in Job – his former anxiety about offending God, even inadvertently, has dissolved; death, and the negation it brings, is embraced; and God is no longer an object of uncritical, reverential awe but an adversary who can be robustly and vigorously challenged.

A key and novel insight of this project is that the new emerging consciousness evident in Job at the start of the poetry section does not simply unfold in a linear fashion, but is challenged by the prevailing religious paradigm that had previously constituted the organising centre of Job’s worldview. This gets played out in the human dialogue between Job and the three friends in which their verbal engagement with him, precipitated by his raw articulation of the alternative consciousness advocated by his wife, has the effect of pulling him back into a way of thinking and speaking that is focused on the binary oppositions of right and wrong, innocence and guilt, righteousness and wickedness. Even though Job and the three friends adopt conflicting positions in their engagement with one another, the undergirding language and categories used by all of them to do so conform to a particular religious paradigm that is essentially dualistic in its orientation. This is clearly evident in the strong emphases on the fate of the wicked and the righteous in the human dialogue, as well as the language of legal contestation employed by Job that is sharply focused on establishing innocence or guilt. The eventual breakdown of the human dialogue signals the incapacity of the consciousness underlying it to resolve the impasse that arises from its insistence on establishing who is right and who is wrong.

A further intervention was required for Job's new religious consciousness, aroused within him by his wife but largely dormant throughout the human dialogue, to gain greater traction within him so as to thrust him into a thoroughly transformed mode of being. This intervention comes through the divine speeches, in which Job is drawn across the threshold of the sublime into a vision and experience of the world beyond the binary absolutes that had anchored his former worldview. A key insight of this study is that within the divine speeches a sublime echo of the words of Job's wife can be heard, as the core elements of her speech – namely, the inadequacy of Job's worldview, the paradoxical posture of contestation, the experience of otherness, and the nature of unitive consciousness – are all gathered up and find vivid expression in the words that sound from the whirlwind. YHWH's challenge of Job as someone who darkens counsel by words without knowledge and the call to contestation to Job to gird up his loins like a man, drew Job into a sublime experience of the otherness of creation and the otherness of God in which he came to recognise a different kind of consciousness within God and the divine design of the world – a unitive consciousness beyond the binary oppositions that neatly divided everything into the categories of sacred and profane; a unitive consciousness able to celebrate the place and importance of liminal creatures like Leviathan and Behemoth, wild animals in wild places, the raging sea and cosmic waters, even while acknowledging the chaotic, unruly, fearsome and unbridled power in these things; a unitive consciousness that finds at the risky thresholds of order and chaos, the mythological and the real, darkness and light, death and life, great reason for joy and delight.

The resonance between the speech of Job's wife and the divine speeches lies not simply in what each of these speeches convey, but also in how they convey it. For both Job's wife and YHWH use language in open-ended ways rather than as an instrument for trying to assert dogma or exert control. This is mirrored in Job's own use of language at the end of the book, in itself a telling indicator of the transformation that he has undergone as a consequence of his encounter with the sublime. This shift in Job's use of language begins in his initial response to the first divine speech, in which Job initiates a new stance before

God, turning away from the dogmatism of verbal disputation to a new posture of openness and receptivity, embodied in his new-found stance of silent contemplation. This points to the final crucial threshold explored within this study – the threshold of speech and silence.

One of the overarching themes of this project is that the influence of Job's wife extends far beyond her role as the speaker of a handful of words in one small corner of the book, regardless of how disruptive, provocative and catalytic those words may have been. The silence that the rest of the text imposes upon her is not an empty silence. Reverberating through the shifting ground of Job's disrupted world; thundering through the divine intonations from whirlwind; resounding through the playful ambiguities of Job's awe-filled response to his encounter with the sublime; and ringing through the joyful sounds of new children, feasting and restoration, the voice of Job's wife can be heard – a voice that offers its silent testimony to the transformative power of speaking in the right way.

2. Originality of the study and contribution to the field

Some of the contributions of this study to the body of work on the book of Job in general and Job's wife in particular have already been alluded to above in the summarized overview of the project. Particular insights that are original to this study include: the categorization of the different strands of tradition within the reception history of Job's wife; the identification of the chiasmic structure of William Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job* and the detailed analysis of this opus arising out of this chiasmic arrangement; the application of insights into the cultural, social and economic role of women in the domestic agrarian economy of ancient Israel to the role and influence of Job's wife within the book as a whole; the particular reading of the words of Job's wife as a catalytic disruption of Job's moral universe and a subversive disruption of the narrative flow of the prologue; the particular reading of the human dialogue as a mechanism whereby Job is drawn back into an earlier mode of consciousness that challenges the alternative consciousness initiated in him by his wife and evident, in embryonic form, in his opening

soliloquy in the poetry; the recognition of the divine speeches as a sublime echo of the speech of Job's wife; and the particular manner in which the limitations of language are explored and expressed at the end of the book.

Beyond these particular insights, the originality of the study and the key contribution that it makes to the body of research in this field lies in the specific approach that it adopts in its attempt to rehabilitate Job's wife, and the manner in which it argues for a reading of Job's wife that influences the interpretation of the book as a whole. Using the backdrop of Peter Rollins' theological project that seeks to rehabilitate the notions of God, faith, religious language and belief, the study demonstrates that questions regarding the core nature of faith and the transformation of religious consciousness, rather than the issue of unjust suffering, constitute the primary concerns of the book of Job, and that the pervasive and catalytic influence of Job's wife provides the critical impetus for the engagement with these concerns. The bold claim of this project is that apart from Job's wife, rehabilitated and re-visioned as this study has done, a definitive dimension of the overall meaning of the book of Job would remain forever obscured.

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Appendix

William Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job*⁸³²

Title Plate:



⁸³² All of these images from *Illustrations of the Book of Job* are in the public domain. They are available online at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Blake's_Illustrations_of_the_Book_of_Job [Accessed: 7 December 2015].

Plate 1: Job and his family



Plate 2: Satan before the throne of God



Plate 3: Job's sons and daughters overwhelmed by Satan



Plate 4: The messengers tell Job of his misfortunes



Plate 5: Satan goes forth from the presence of the Lord and Job's charity



Plate 6: Satan smiting Job with boils

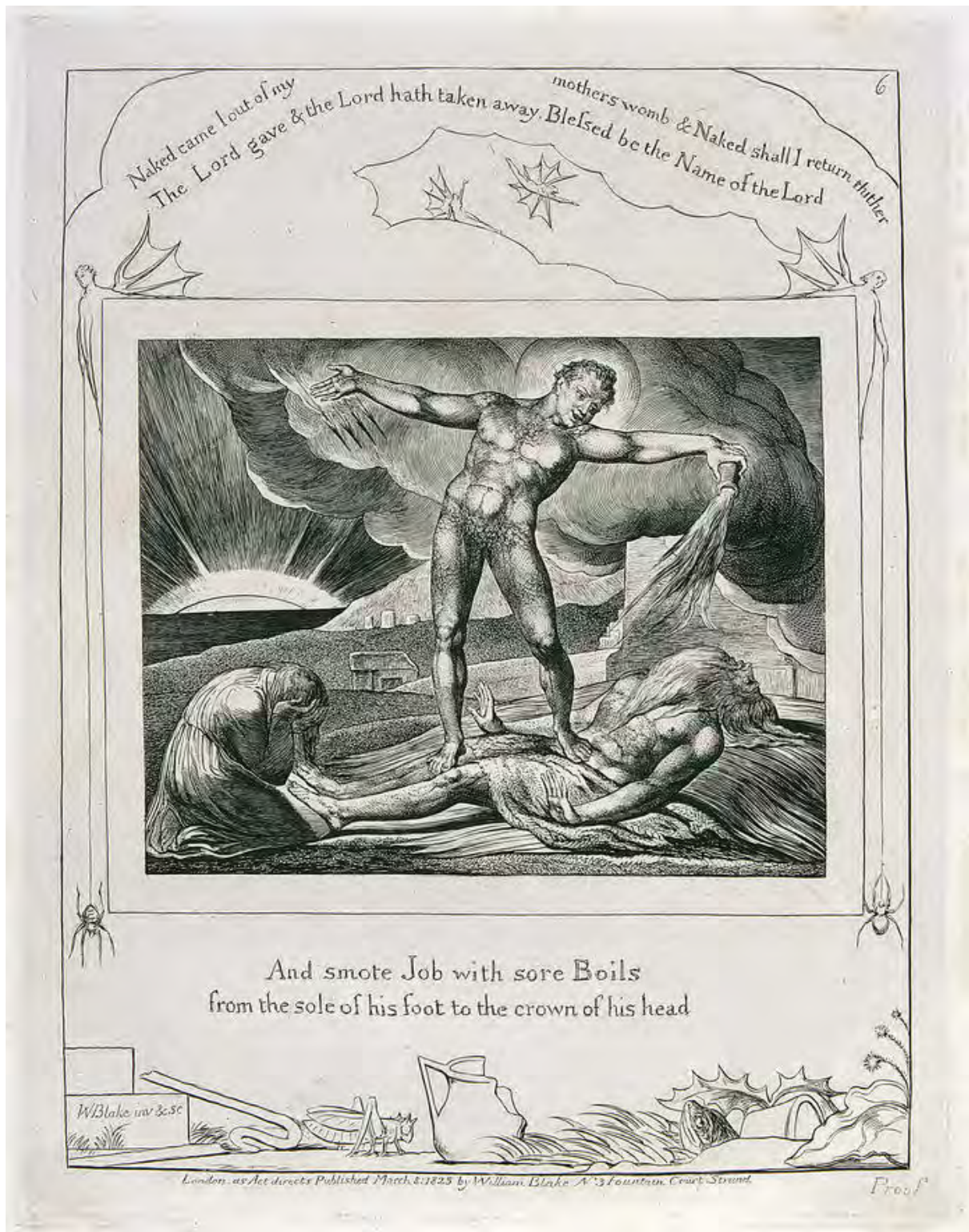


Plate 7: Job's comforters

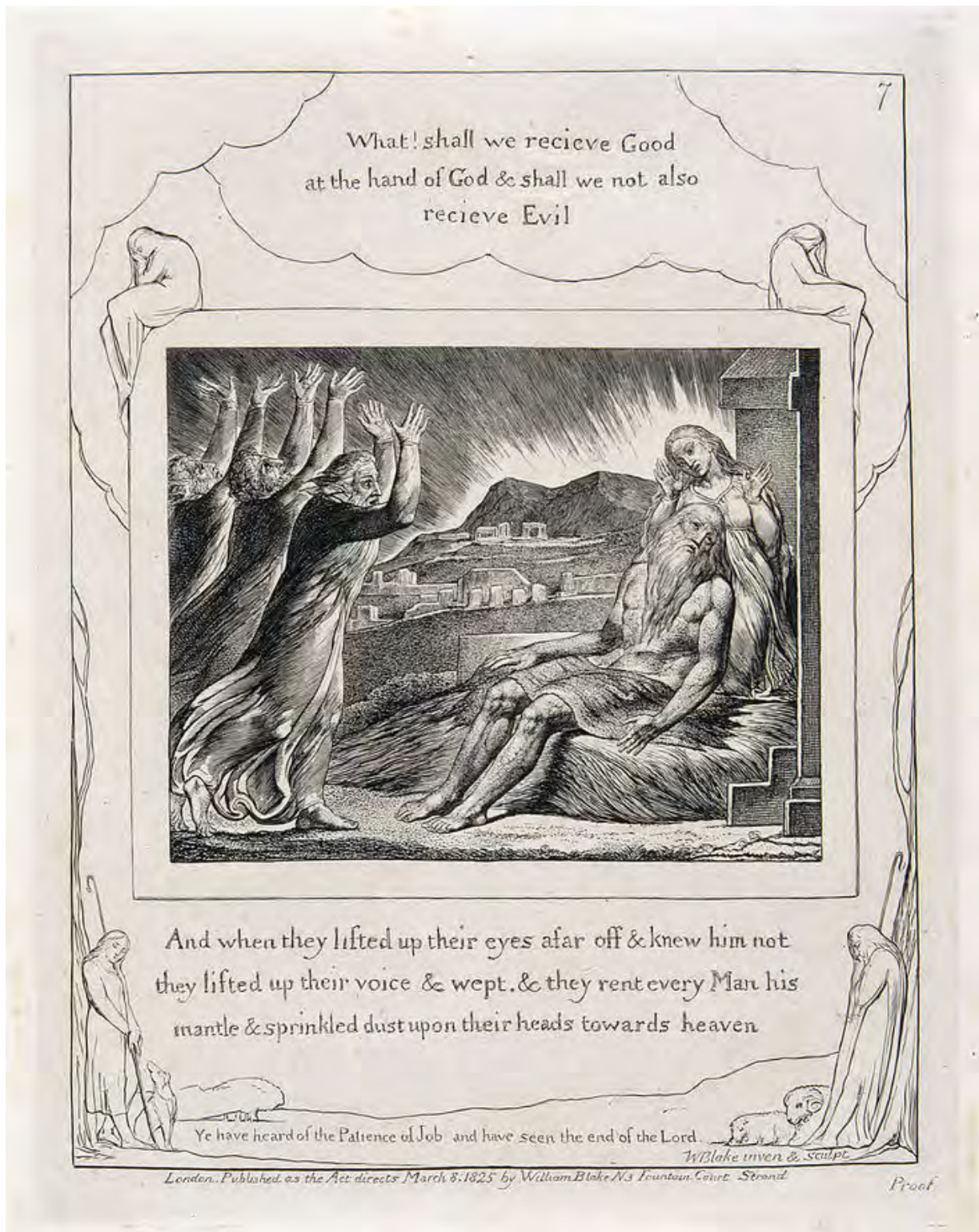


Plate 8: Job's despair



Plate 9: The vision of Eliphaz



Plate 10: Job rebuked by his friends



Plate 11: Job's evil dreams



Plate 12: The wrath of Elihu

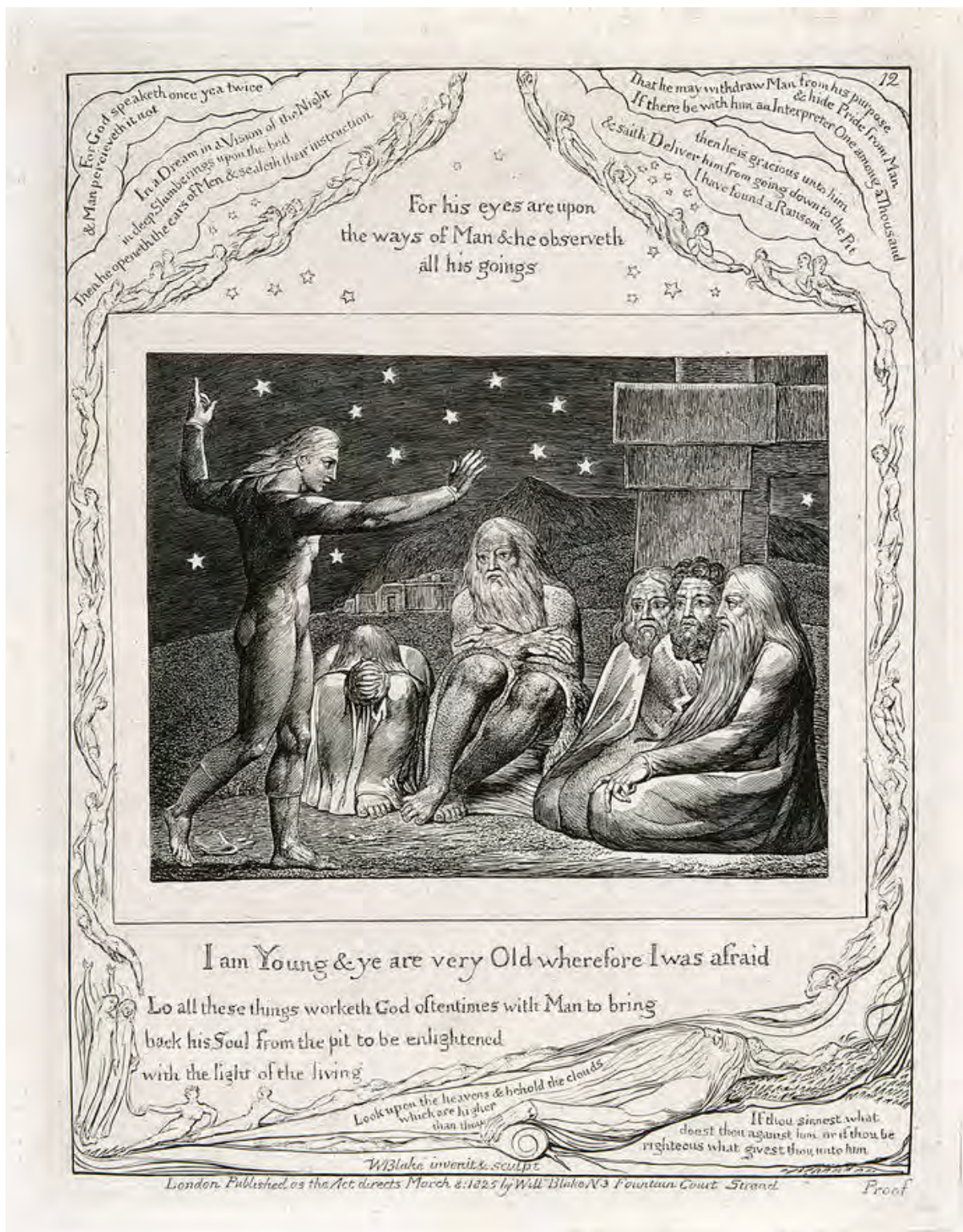


Plate 13: The Lord answering Job out of the whirlwind



Plate 14: When the morning stars sang together



Plate 15: Behemoth and Leviathan



Plate 16: The fall of Satan



Plate 17: The vision of Christ



Plate 18: Job's sacrifice



Plate 19: Everyone also gave him a piece of money



Plate 20: Job and his daughters

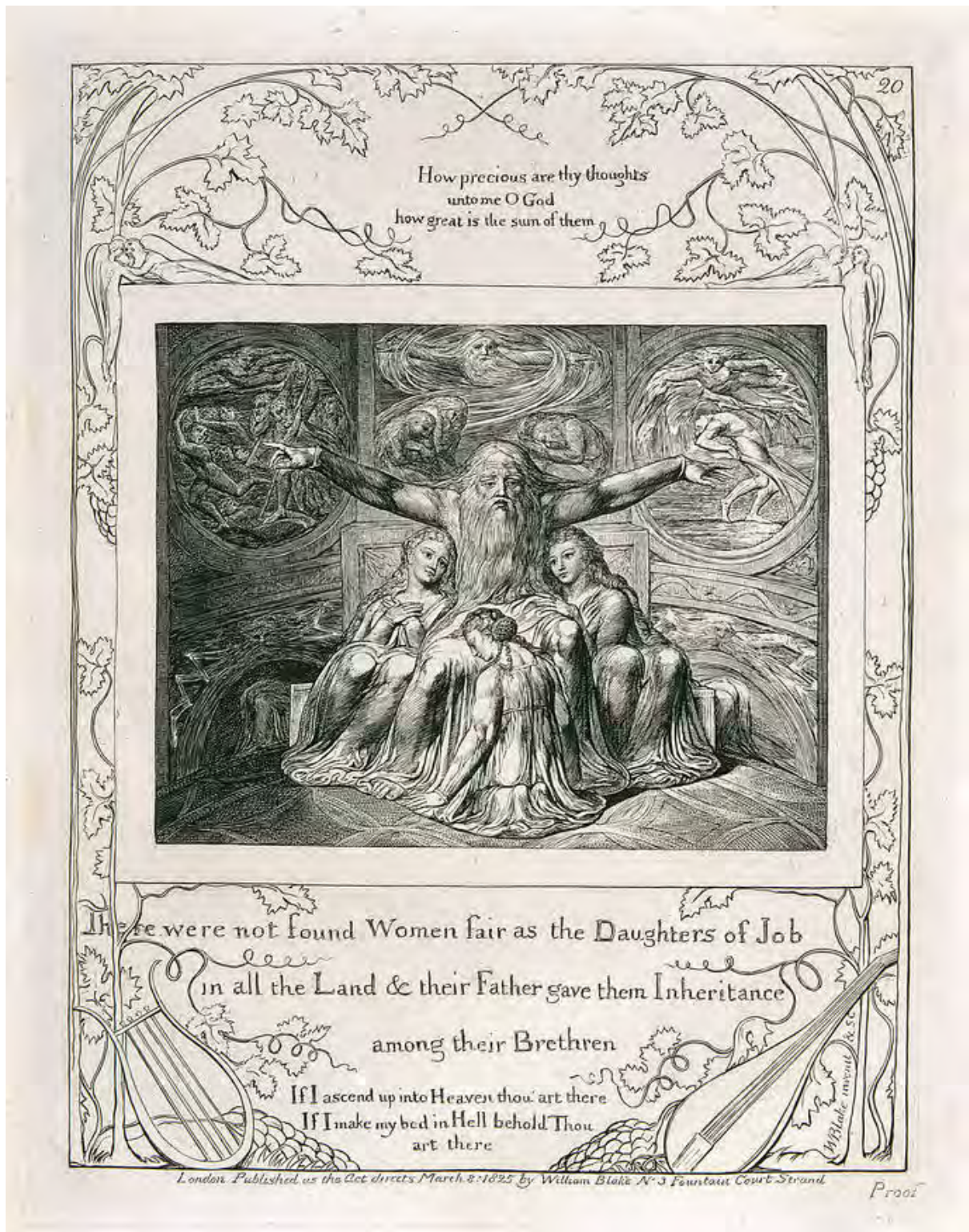


Plate 21: Job and his family restored to prosperity

