The Elevation of Unknown Things

Madison Scott-Clary

May 11, 2022

> Job puts forward a note of interrogation; God answers with a note of exclamation. Instead of proving to Job that it is an explicable world, He insists that it is a much stranger world than Job ever thought it was.
>
> (Chesterton 1929)

All stories are perforce interpolations within real events, or at least the initial imaginings of fictional events. The story is not written the events happen. All stories, all conversations. They all occur at least at one layer of remove and at least a fraction of a second too late.

Stories are as bound to time as we are, and all we can do is steal back a little bit of memory through however many words. All we can do with these memories pinned in place is regard them from a second level of distance and make guesses. Guesses as to meaning, guesses as to content, guesses as to the context in which those memories might have led to their origin.

At a guess, there is no book in the Bible buried deeper under layers of guesses than Job.[1]

Perhaps it is the dire nature by which both approach the world. Job takes a look at the world, heaves a weary sigh, and says, "I suppose this is it. This is the lot we have been given in life." While Revelation looks at the world and growls deep in its throat, a sound coming from the belly, and says, "This must not be it. This cannot be the way in which the world works."[2]

Or perhaps it is the way in which they view death. While Job looks on death almost fondly,[3] Revelation reiterates the Christian sentiment that death has been defeated in the context of apocalypse.[4] The world that was is no more, and as there is everlasting life beyond it, it is worth considering only in that context and otherwise only worth discarding.

Additionally, while Jews doubtless have a dim opinion of Revelation, given its relative irrelevance in their lives, Job has been the subject of both rabbinical teaching and Christian exegesis for centuries now. This may be where it outstrips Revelation in its importa and interest.

And what interest! As Alter says, "The Book of Job is in several ways the most mysterious book of the Hebrew Bible."[5] (Alter 2019, p. 457) He then proceeds to discuss

[1]Revelation might take the cake within Christianity, but is unimportant to this discussion. There is much that falls out of its existence that I care very much about, of course. I care about the way it is used, and while I will be discussing the way that Job is used, I also care about the text, which is not something I can say about Revelation.

[2]A simplification, of course, but perhaps a good starting point.

[3]And while I am (quite obviously) not yet fond of death, I can appreciate the fact that one has at least known it.

[4]That is, 'a revealing, a pulling back of the curtain'.

[5]I should note that I am not a Jew. I write this from the context of a Quaker who was raised an atheist living within the Protestant/Evangelical bubble that is much of America.

the book for eight pages before even getting to the translation (which, while not uncommon among the books in his translation, still stands out as rather a lot of introduction). The editors of the New Oxford Annotated Bible (NOAB) agree on this, saying, "Among the books of the Bible, Job is highly unusual, and, unsurprisingly, its force has often been misunderstood or evaded." (Coogan 2018, p. 735) This relative inaccessibility, opaqueness of prose (should one choose to ignore the poetic nature of the central work), and the mixed dates of composition have doubtless played their role in it.

Chief among those for our purpose is the mixed dates of composition. There appear to be four pieces involved in the book: the framing device, which is perhaps the oldest; the discourse between Job and his friends; the later addition of the Hymn to Wisdom, an interruption from Job in chapter 28; and the addition of the character of Elihu, written perhaps most recently.

In the Hebrew Bible, it is set in the *'Ketuvim'* (writings, the 'kh' in *Tanakh*) between Proverbs and The Song of Songs. In the Christian bible, it is set at the beginning of the poetic books, between the prophets and Psalms.

In both cases, it is classified within the genre of wisdom literature. That is, its topic is one of scholarly, daily, or religious wisdom, something closer to education, rather than of origin stories (as is the case with many of the books of the Torah along with the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles) or prophecy (as is the case with *Nevi'im* and Revelation). This sets it among Ecclesiastes,[6] The Song of Songs, Proverbs, and so on.

Perhaps unique among wisdom literature, however, it seems to have one core thesis. Ecclesiastes has the core theses of a life well lived, self-created meaning, and wis-

[6]If Job is worth an essay, Ecclesiastes is worth a book. I do not yet have that in me.

dom, while Psalms, Proverbs, Wisdom, and Sirach are largely compilations of vast forms of wisdom.

The canonicity of Job is not in dispute. The character of Job *is* mentioned in other books of the Hebrew Bible (and thus the Septuagint, the foundation of the Christian Old Testament). Ezekiel lists him along with Noah and Daniel as one of the three exemplary, righteous men, leading to the conclusion that he must have, at the very least, existed as a folkloric figure prior to the authorship of the Book of Ezekiel.[7] It's old. It's old and it's complex and it's storied.

And yet it remains, does it not? It remains and is its own testament to its power, as NOAB has it, its mystery, as Alter has it.

It remains.

Framing Devices

The framing device of Job is as follows:

Job is a prosperous and pious man living in the merry old land of *Uz*. He is wealthy in livestock and in family, with his 7,000 sheep, his 3,000 camels, his cattle and she-asses, his slaves and his ten children. His seven sons love and respect each other, and he loves them all in turn (though he does seem a tad suspicious of their piety, making sacrifices in their names on their appointed days).

[7]In fact, the Talmud suggests that "Moses wrote his own book, i.e., the Torah, and the portion of Balaam in the Torah, and the book of Job." (Bava Barta 14b, *etc.*) That it also suggests that Job was among those who returned from the Babylonian exile and that was not real and that it is all an allegory does little to shed light on the matter.

God, holding court with the sons of God, greets the Adversary[8] and asks where they have been. They respond that they have been roaming the Earth, to which God replies, "Have you paid heed to My servant Job, for there is none like him on earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and shuns evil?" (Job 1:8, Alter)

And here is where we first run into trouble, for now is when the Adversary, the Accuser, shoots back, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not hedged him about and his household and all that he has all around? The work of his hands You have blessed, and his flocks have spread over the land. And yet, reach out Your hand, pray, and strike all he has. Will he not curse You to Your face?"

And God does it. He does it! He gives Job up to the Adversary, and of course, all that Job has, all that he's gained and all of his offspring, are destroyed. Cattle and she-asses? Felled by the Sabeans. Camels? Stolen by the Chaldaeans. Sheep? Burnt up by none other than the fire of God Himself. His men are dead. His sons and daughters are

[8]This is the translation of the phrase in Hebrew, *ha-satan*. Alter notes that it wasn't until much more recently that this was refigured as specifically Satan: "The word *satan* is a person, thing, or set of circumstances that constitutes an obstacle or frustrates one's purposes."[9] (Alter 2019, p. 466) The Jewish Publication Society concurs. (Job 1:6, JPS) It is job title more than it is identity. In fact, the transition from the Adversary to Satan himself is fraught.[10] The specifically academic New Oxford Annotated Bible (NOAB) retains the New Revised Standard Version translation as Satan *qua* Satan, but acknowledges in translation footnotes each time the term *ha-satan* shows up that this is "Or *the Accuser;* Heb. *ha-satan*". (Coogan 2018, p. 736)

[9]Shortly after I started to realize just how ill-suited I was to music education, I went through a change of identity online. While before I had gone by the name 'Ranna', cribbed from Garth Nix's excellent Old Kingdom series, I now began to go by the name Makyo, from a zen Buddhist term which bears a similar meaning. Something about just how focused many of the general teacher education classes were on things other than education filled me with a sense that I might not actually be in any way helping students, but simply standing in their way. I was *makyō*. I was *satan*.

[10]I, at one point, was overtaken by the need to tell my story through the frame of a conversation with an ally. I described them — or perhaps they described themselves; the boundary between framing device and reality blurs — as "an ally, not a friend." Towards the end of the project, we had a 'conversation' wherein I attempt to describe their inverse. Their response: "Not your enemy, but your adversary." (Scott-Clary 2020a, p. 25)

dead, crushed beneath the walls of a house torn by a sudden wind.

Job, pious as he is, does not curse God. He tears his clothes, bows down, and blesses Him.

Once more, God says to the Adversary that there is none more pious than Job, and once more the Adversary jeers, "Skin for skin! A man will give all he has for his own life. Yet, reach out, pray, Your hand and strike his bone and his flesh. Will he not curse You to Your face?" (Job 2:5, Alter)

Yet again, God gives Job up to the Adversary — "Only preserve his life" — who strikes Job with a rash from head to toe, leaving him to sit among the ashes and scrape at his flesh.

His friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar commiserate with him, sitting silent with him for seven days and nights. Even Job's wife seems to sigh: "Do you still cling to your innocence? Curse God and die."[11] (Job 2:9, Alter)

And now we skip all the way to the last chapter of the book for the conclusion of the framing device. God commands that Job's friends offer up sacrifices on his behalf, and when they do, all of Job's wealth is restored twice over. 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels and so on, down to seven more sons and three more daughters (which he gives the delightful names Dove, Cinnamon, and Horn of Eyeshade). Job lives another hundred and forty years, long enough to see four generations of offspring, until he dies "aged

[11]There is a difference in interpretation, here. On the one hand, Alter suggests that Job's wife is being sardonic here, saying, "Job's wife assumes either that cursing God will immediately lead to Job's death, which might be just as well, or that, given his ghastly state, he will soon die anyway" (Alter 2019, p. 469). Might as well curse anyway, eh?

The editors of the NOAB take a more sympathetic view of the exchange. Job's wife is seen as far more sympathetic: "The outcome of all Job's piety has been to rob his wife of her ten children, her social standing, and her livelihood." (Coogan 2018, p. 737) Curse God, then. Who else could be responsible? How can you continue to praise after our ten (admittedly unnamed) children have died?

and sated in years." (Job 42:17, Alter)

Of all of the book of Job, it is this framing device which seems to cause the most controversy. Even the Apocrypals podcast, whose tagline is "Where two non-believers read the bible and try not to be jerks about it", drops the 'and try not to be jerks about it' for this episode, host Chris Sims explaining, "Unfortunately, this week we are reading the book of Job." (Cereno and Sims 2022)

Sims's argument boils down to the fact that this framing device leads to Job being a narrative, moral, and commercial failure: a narrative failure for not resolving any of its plot points, a moral failure because it fails to explain why bad things happen to good people, and a commercial failure because "it is the most cogent argument against religion that I have ever heard."

It's a compelling argument, too. He goes on to explain that it is almost the inverse of Pascal's wager, in that it "presents a world where it is impossible to distinguish between God's wrath and God's indifference." Whereas Pascal would have it that there is no downside to believing in God as there is the possibility of infinite salvation if you do and you're right and infinite damnation if you don't and you're wrong. Here, we are presented with the fact that, whether or not you believe in God, you're equally liable to suffer.

This, it should be noted, is an argument presented from a contemporary Christian perspective (Sims mentions earlier in the episode that reading the Book of Job is one of the reasons he is no longer a Christian,[12] but he still speaks from the perspective

[12]Indeed, the hosts of the podcast The Bible for Normal People (tagline: The Only God-Ordained Podcast on the Internet — what is it with podcasts and their taglines?), list the difficulty and, yes, perhaps moral failure of the Book of Job has led to a sizeable portion of the genre of apologetics within contemporary biblically literalist Christian traditions, saying, "[...] that's why you need a really hefty apologetics

of an ex-Christian). The interpretations of the same text a hundred years ago, a thousand years ago, twenty-four hundred years ago were all different. For instance, Cereno explains that the historical context of the book, written between the sixth and fourth century BCE, does not include the same context of the afterlife. The pre-biblical Jewish audience of Job when it was first penned would have had the concept of *Sheol* — that place of of stillness and darkness where both the righteous and unrighteous wind up — rather than than the contemporary understanding of an afterlife. This was written before the concept of the messiah, before heaven and hell and life after death.

In this context, Job's life being torn to shreds means that his brief time here on Earth, the only time he has with nothing after it, is one that divides ones life into finite fractions, into a before, a during, and an after. Job is struck for, what, two weeks? We may only guess, as the Adversary's second visit to the sons of God and the Lord. And yet those are two weeks out of a finite number of years.[13]

Job having a new family (some of them even have names!) and twice the wealth before does not replace the life that he had before, does not make up for lost children,

industry to keep [biblical literalism] intact". (Enns and Byas 2022)

[13] A fantastic spot for the word 'intercalary', those days that fit between the years which do not fall within the calendar.

> A year starts not on January first.
> The days may hunder but the seasons speak
> of time's long march, of fast time, slow time. Thirst
> for "start" and "end" neglects the limen sleek.
> So, why do some unsubtle sciences
> forget about the in-betweens? Those pure
> uncolored dreams made mere contrivances;
> "between the years" now simply: "year, then year".
>
> (Scott-Clary 2020b, p. 3)

Our lives as a whole — indeed, as a spiral — might yet have use for interstitial, intercalary days, intercalary time. An intriguing thought, is it not?

but it does at least bring some joy for those next century and a half.

This centers God's response as the sticking point. He spends four chapters responding to Job the conversations that have taken place between him and his friends. While these conversations make up the majority of the book,[14] His response solely in the context of this framing device (which, we must remember, is an older folktale which has been re-cast as a framing device for the rest of the book) gives us a particular flavor of 'God works in mysterious ways' with more nuance than one commonly finds when that phrase is employed.

God appears to Job and his friends and expounds on the fact that none of them do — nor indeed can — possibly understand the ways in which he works. They're not just mysterious, they're vast and incomprehensible. This makes the most sense in a panentheistic view. If He is outside time, then, from our point of view, those ways stretch both forwards and back. If they envelop and pervade all things tangible and intangible, then they are beyond even our causal domain.

Even in a grounded, Jahwist, immediate and physical view of God (He is, after all, there in the form of a whirlwind), his entrance comes off as bizarre and unnerving. He passes through the physical plane as the Sphere does through the Square's planar existence. Even in so physical a form, He proves His very incomprehensibility.

And if He does not exist? The folktale and the book as a whole do not depend on the existence of God in their interpretation. They still work to repudiate the idea that, if bad things happen to you, it is because you're a bad person.

These interpretations are doing a lot of heavy lifting, however. They accept at face

[14] Which will no doubt take up the majority of this essay.

value Job's capitulation in chapter 40, where, after being thoroughly excoriated by no less than God Himself, he says, "Look, I am worthless. What can I say back to You?" (Job 40:4, Alter) and "I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but will proceed no further." (Job 40:5, NRSV)[15]

Who can blame Job? God is quite frankly terrifying. No matter how strongly I might call God to account, I strongly suspect that I, too, would fall flat on my face and do what I could to have so terrible a gaze move away from me.

But one must wonder just how much longer that desire to call God to account must have lingered in Job's heart afterwards. He lived another 140 years; did he forget his ten children? Did he forget those thousands of heads of livestock? For doubtless he had

[15]Alter has, "My hand I put over my mouth. Once have I spoken and I will not answer, twice, and will not go on." This captures the poetic nature[16] of the rest of the book in a delightfully austere way, but the NRSV provides a simpler, if less poetic version, included for the sake of clarity on this point in particular.

[16]I figured I was done with Weinberger's text when I finished the previous essay,[17] and yet here I am once more, leaning on him. "In its way a spiritual exercise, translation is dependent on the dissolution of the translator's ego: an absolute humility toward the text." (Weinberger and Paz 2016, p. 20) It does rather raise the question, though, how much reading a single-translator text such as Alter's or David Bently Hart's take on the New Testament can be an act of intent. Weinberger goes on to say, "A bad translation is the insistent voice of the translator — that is, when one sees no poet and hears only the translator speaking."

Mackenzie Morgan, however, makes the point that single-translator Bibles can offer some welcome divergence in viewpoints, as the committees that translate Bibles such as the NRSV "tend toward traditional translations; whereas a single translator can say, "Hang on, I think this actually means..." " (Morgan 2021)

We are talking about the Bible, though. We're not talking about Wang Wei. We're not talking about Dwale. As before,

> I do not know which to prefer,
> The beauty of inflections
> or the beauty of innuendoes
>
> (Stevens 1917)

[17]I thought I was done talking about Dwale, too, and yet here we are.

favorites! Did he still think of his great abundance of slaves? Did he think of these late at night even though he had ten new children, new favorite sheep, a new abundance of slaves? He must have. For our sakes, he must have.

And yet, that's the thing. So many of these arguments for and against the validity and importance of this book center God. It is the bible, of course, and that is often what one must do in a sacred text.

Our Job, though, our poor, ruined man, has he changed? Has he grown into something new? Has he integrated who he was during those weeks or months of grief with who he was before that? Has he built for himself a new identity? Has he become braver? More fearful?

There is a saying that, with near-death experiences, there are two likely outcomes. One is that you become a braver, more vivacious person. You live your life all the fuller because you got so close to not living at all. After all, if you have been given a second chance, why not?

But still, there's that second option: you become consumed by fear. You freeze up and do not leave the house. Any potential source of death is a thing to become avoided.[18]

This is no value judgement. To be consumed by fear after having your own mortality stand up before you, sneer down its nose, and give you a playful shove bears no shame. It is an honest acceptance of who you are in the face of the enormity of the universe.

[18]It need not be permanent, of course. When the me who I was died and I lived my intercalary life, terror filled me, yes, but not for long. Matthew died, and I was nothing but fear for years, and then Madison was born, replacing fear.

And sure, it might be a spectrum, and there's probably that absolute midpoint where there is no change. You make it through that brush with death and come out the other side precisely the same as you were before. There is terror in this prospect, that death might be so overwhelming that there is nothing you can do but wrap that experience up in butcher paper, tie it with twine, and set it up in the attic.

Alter argues that the names that Job gives his new daughters points to a change. "The writer may have wanted to intimate that after all Job's suffering, which included hideous disfigurement and violent loss, a principle of grace and beauty enters his life in the restoration of his fortunes." (Alter 2019, p. 579) This is indeed a beautiful take on it, too. Job comes out the other side and names his daughters after growing things, beautiful things. Dove and Cinnamon and Horn of Eyeshade, the most beautiful in the land and a sign of Job's joy in living.[19]

The Book of Job asks a question. It is the question of theodicy: "why is there suffering in the world?" How could a God who is omnicient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent allow suffering to happen? If He is all-knowing and all-powerful, can he be all-good if he allows life to suffer? If he is all-knowing and all-good, can he not stop the suffering?

So far, however, we have just looked at the framing device. It raises the question while glossing over the answer itself, waving it away in favor of allowing Job to come out all the better in the end. Happily-ever-afters are for folktales, yes, but our folktale

[19]One worries,[20] however, that this is not what happened. Folktales are folktales and there is only so much we can tease out of the text itself. That Job names his daughters and lives another 140 years before dying of old age provides little enough context as to his state of mind. We, of course, have other resources. The Anglicans have their three-legged stool — scripture, tradition, reason — and the Methodists their Wesleyan quadrilateral — which adds 'experience' — and so we have at our disposal tradition, reason, and experience beyond just the scripture itself.

[20]Or, well, *I* worry. I do not think many apologists worry, and this is not a work of apologetics. I am not an apologist, and whether or not I even believe in God is up in the air.

occupies only 1/14th of the book itself. What remains is the denser part and, should we see change in Job, it is perhaps here that we will.

Interpolations

Allow a small diversion.

It is important to reckon with two interpolations within the text that appear to be later additions, and it would be nice to address these before coming to the text that they interrupt.

The first interpolation is that of a poem that comprises the entirety of chapter 28. The poem takes the form of a Hymn to Wisdom that Alter describes as "a fine poem in its own right, but one that expresses a pious view of wisdom as fear of the Lord that could scarcely be that of Job". (Alter 2019, p. 458)

The NOAB, however, suggests an additional interpretation of the Hymn to Wisdom, which is that it may have originally been the conclusion of Elihu's speech. For evidence, they mention that this topic, the elevation of wisdom, feels familiar to those chapters of Elihu's, wherein the youngster harps on the topic of wisdom and knowledge at length. Additionally, the editors note the similarity in the final verse of the Hymn, "And he said to humankind,"Truly the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding" " (Job 28:28, NRSV) closely echoes Elihu's final words as they stand: "Therefore mortals fear him; he does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit." (Job 37:24, NRSV)

The hymn itself is a respectable piece of poetry. It begins in a roundabout way, discussing the acquisition of physical wealth. It describes the ways in which gold and

silver are extracted from the earth and copper smelted from ore. It describes paths unseen by beast, ones that require work to acquire. Throughout these few verses (1–11) runs a very clear directionality. From the start, they are heading *towards* something. They are pointing *at* something. Verse 12 illuminates: "But wisdom, where is it found, and where is the place of discernment?" (Job 28:12, Alter)

Certainly not beneath the earth! If Qohelet[21] has taught us anything, it is that. Wisdom abides despite toil, despite merriment, despite even riches.

In fact, though many of the same ideas within the hymn are also there in Ecclesiastes, those in the latter tend to be more refined, more fleshed out. This might be due to the later date of composition of the former, but may also be due to the context of the book and the interpolated nature of the hymn. The author of the hymn views wisdom as an ephemeral concept. It is not something that can be held or perceived by man, or, indeed, life itself: "It is hidden from the eye of all living" (Job 28:21, Alter). Even other abstract (though often personified) concepts seem to have difficulty with it: "Perdition and Death have said, "With our own ears we have heard its rumor."" (Job 28:22, Alter)

Qohelet, on the other hand, has a much more grounded view. He says that wisdom is one of those things that you gain by experiencing, something that abides through all of the ups and downs in your life and is only ever strengthened. This is not to say that he is in any way upbeat, however. Wisdom, folly, riches, merriment, these all will

[21]That is, the teacher in Ecclesiastes.[22]

[22]I wrote that silly book, *Qoheleth*, with the knowledge of the misspelling right there at my fingertips and yet still managed to do so. Ah well, I was young, once, and dumb.

Which is not to say that I am not now, of course. I certainly feel it sometimes. Even the young bit. Madison is, what, eight now? Not many eight year olds are smart. I still fumble. I still seem to create those humiliating moments that stick in the memory and make me wince whenever they come up, though they've changed in tenor over the years.

go with you to the grave. They, too, will be meaningless.

That is, until, one gets to the end of Ecclesiastes. The second half of chapter 12 is, per Alter, likely an interpolation of its own, where an epilogist rounds out the remainder of the book with some sounder, more conventional piety. "The last word, all being heard: fear God and keep His commands, for that is all humankind. Since every deed will God bring to judgment, for every hidden act, be it good or Evil" (Job 12:13-14, Alter) echoes the end of the hymn, which puts it, "Look, fear of the master, that is wisdom, and the shunning of evil is insight."

Both of these interpolations seem to be taking the raw feelings of the authors of Job and Ecclesiastes and trying to soften them, shaving off all those coarse edges.

In Job we have a man striving to be heard by God Himself, and in Ecclesiastes, we have a teacher who is bordering on nihilism,[23] yet both of these editors are trying to fit these texts into the context of a tradition that, while it does include (and even encourage) the capacity to call God to account and to feel that certain sense of nihilism, would still appreciate a somewhat more positive view within its scripture.

((More...))

The second of these interpolations is the Elihu's speech — and, indeed, the entire character of Elihu, who is never mentioned outside his own chapters[24] — in chapters

[23]It occurs to me that perhaps one outcome for Job is that *he* becomes Qohelet. Can one imagine going through the events of Job and not coming away with at least a little bit of nihilism? A little bit more stoic than when one went in? Your family dies. Your livelihood is stripped away. You sit in the pit of ashes with lesions all over your body, and then God comes down in his whirlwind and fixes it all for you. You look back on all of your piety, you look back on all of your wealth, and suddenly yes, it is all a chasing after the wind.

[24]I think we all must have one, an Elihu. One of those people who enters our lives seemingly at random, sticks around for a while, speaking a little too loud and a little too long, and then leaves again, leaving nothing but a sour taste in the mouth and a sense of bafflement. I know that I have one, though they're back in my past. They slipped in sometime around 2011 or so, perhaps 2010, a friend of a friend at

32–37. Alter holds a particularly dim view of Elihu, stating, "At this point, in the original text, the Lord would have spoken out from the whirlwind, but a lapse in judgment by an ancient editor postponed that brilliant consummation for six chapters in which the tedious Elihu is allowed to hold forth." (Alter 2019, p. 460) Few seem convinced that the character and his speeches are from the original text. The NOAB, notably bearish on the whole Bible, agrees that this may indeed be the case, though it does so with a sigh and a tone of resignation, adding, "In any case, the Elihu speeches are part of the book we now have". (Coogan 2018, p. 767)

The editors of the NOAB offer additional insight, that Elihu's speeches may have simply been shuffled out of order (a problem elsewhere in the text) and that his speeches may have originally come after the final of Job's three friends' speeches after chapter 27. This both lends credence to the Hymn to Wisdom in chapter 28 being the conclusion of his own speech and ensures that God replies to Job immediately after *his* final speech rather than after Elihu's, which would better fit the structure of the book. There is no reason it cannot be both, of course; the two additions could have been both interpolations and inserted out of order through some mix-up or whim in an early editor's haste.

Elihu presents a departure from the rest of the book.

As the framing device draws to a close, we are introduced to three of Job's friends: Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. All three are presented as Job's contemporaries. They are wise, they are learned. They have, we can

---

first, and then perhaps a friend, and then disappeared in a huff sometime early on in 2012. Said huff took the form of a few sanctimonious statements that left me so in doubt of my identity that my transition was delayed by at least a year, easy. All that came before my intercalary years, and doubtless contributed to the death of Matthew.

guess, known him for years now. These three friends have seen a lot with Job, rejoiced with him, wept with him, much as they do in the introduction.

Job and his friends have three rounds of arguments, which shall be covered soon, and then, beginning in chapter 32, Elihu is introduced out of nowhere. "So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes" (Job 32:1, NRSV)[25] is where we leave off,[27] and then this youngster, this whippersnapper, this upstart Elihu picks up.

"I am young in years, and you are aged. Therefore I was awed and feared to speak my mind with you," (Job 32:6, Alter) he begins, and we are off to the races, or at least some brash exhortations to wisdom. ((On Elihu))

[25]It is interesting to note the differences in tradition, here. Alter has "because he was right in his own eyes" but offers no note as to why, which is a little disappointing. JPS agrees with him ("for he considered himself right" (Job 32:1, JPS)). Both of these are Jewish sources.

Christian sources, however, all lean on righteous, while the HCSB, NIV, and KJV having identical wording for that phrase. This colors the meaning, does it not? JPS and Alter describe Elihu as being angry because he is declaring himself more right than God, where as the Christian sources all interpret the text as Job justifying himself *rather than* God. Interestingly, the 2001 translation of the Septuagint has Elihu upset that Job is declaring himself righteous before God, a sense of uncolored plainness that is missing from the other translations. In this case, Elihu is seemingly upset at Job for being upset.[26]

If you will forgive me for getting further into the weeds, the next verse is all over the place in translation. KJV and NIV suggest that Elihu is upset at Job's friends because they couldn't find any fault in Job but still condemned him. JPS agrees, but uses 'merely' before 'condemn' which adds a value judgement. Alter has him upset because Job's friends couldn't show Job to be guilty. Though it is difficult to pin down why, Alter posits that Elihu is angry at Job's friends because they just couldn't actually find a way to condemn him: "because they had not found an answer that showed Job guilty" (Job 32:3, Alter) (a sentiment echoed in the footnotes for verse 13: "In attributing this statement to the three reprovers, Elihu shows them admitting the failure of their own arguments." (Alter 2019, p. 548)), while the NRSV walks the middle path with "because they had found no answer, though they had declared Job to be in the wrong." (Job 32:3, NRSV)

Weinberger continues to be relevant: "[...] translation is more than a leap from dictionary to dictionary; it is a reimagining of the poem." (Weinberger and Paz 2016, p. 46)

[26]And here our very own Elihus return. They return and they roll their eyes and stand, arms akimbo, before us. Why are you angry? Why are you crying? Who cares if you're right? They are in the position of authority, are they not? Get it together.

[27]Did they give up? Did they see that Job was starting to change, was starting to stand up for himself, and realize that hey, maybe this was for the best? It seems deeper than simply winning an argument.

All stories are perforce interpolations within real events, this essay began, and that holds true here.

Bibliography

Alter, Robert (Trans.) (2019). *The Hebrew Bible — The Writings*. W. W. Norton & Company.

Cereno, Benito and Chris Sims (2022). *Ep. 101: The Apocrypals Solve Theodicy*. https://apocrypals.libsyn.com/101-the-apocrypals-solve-theodicy-the-book-of-job.

Chesterton, G. K. (1929). *Introduction to the Book of Job*. https://www.chesterton.org/introduction-to-job/.

Coogan, Michael D. (Ed.) (2018). *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha, Fifth Edition (NRSV)*. Oxford University Press USA.

Enns, Pete and Jared Byas (2022). *Ep. 200: Does the Bible Still Matter?* https://peteenns.com/episode-200-pete-enns-jared-byas-does-the-bible-still-matter/.

Morgan, Mackenzie (2021). *TikTok on Bible translations*. https://vm.tiktok.com/ZTdbWEMtW/.

Scott-Clary, Madison (2020a). *ally from Start to Finish*. self-published.

— (2020b). *Eigengrau: Poems 2015–2020*. self published, pp. 68–71.

Stevens, Wallace (1917). *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*. https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Thirteen_Ways_of_Looking_at_a_Blackbird. Accessed Jan 9, 2022.

Weinberger, Eliot and Octavio Paz (2016). *Nineteen ways of looking at Wang Wei: (with more ways)*. New Directions Paperbook.