Re-considering Job

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ABSTRACT

Although recent scholarship on Job has tended to approach the book from interpretive stances that are at some distance from traditional historical-critical verities, the classic historical-critical questions about the unity of the book continue to dominate the way questions are posed. Hermeneutical disputes about the book focus on interpreters' decisions to find a way to preserve a resistant Job, or to advocate for an interpretation of the divine speeches that makes comprehensible a Job who 'sees' in a new way, and so is willing to renounce his alienation. A new direction of Joban scholarship focuses on the reception history of the book.

Keywords: bless/curse, book of Job, dialogue; dialogism, innocent suffering, Job's wife, theodicy, wisdom (Israelite; ancient Near Eastern).

1. *The Legacy of Historical-Critical Issues in Non-Historical-Critical Scholarship*

Although this overview of recent scholarship on Job concerns itself primarily with the past twelve years or so, it is instructive to situate the present scholarly conversations about Job within a larger framework. The set of issues concerning the perceived lack of unity in the composition of the book of Job was framed by historical criticism in the late nineteenth century. These issues still dominate scholarly discussion, even though the solutions proposed often differ sharply from those of the classical historical-critical model. Indeed, in a recent essay, Lawrie reflects in some perplexity that historical criticism, which presented itself as a rigorous, even scientific method, has, after some two centuries, 'not led to either generally accepted answers to the traditional questions of historical criticism or a radically new

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understanding of the book' (2001: 141). This is not to say that historical criticism has not produced real progress in understanding Job. Advances in linguistics and in documenting the cultural context of the book have certainly reduced the number of ways in which we misunderstand it. The most important issues concerning Job, however, are hermeneutical rather than properly *wissenschäftliche*. Nevertheless, even if increasing numbers of scholars are no longer satisfied with historical criticism's solutions to the problems it identified, the problems themselves appear to have lost little of their appeal. Both modernity and post-modernity are fascinated with the significance of difference, whether that be figured as contradiction, fissure, paradox, tension, self-interference, or some other model.

If Lawrie is correct, as in large part I think he is, that no strikingly new understandings of the book have been produced in recent years, what accounts for the continuing enormous outpouring of scholarship on Job? The book of Job, of course, is no ordinary book, combining as it does both metaphysical outrage and a sense of wonder. But Pyper, drawing on insights about the transactive nature of the reading process (1992), helps to explain why the old historical-critical issues remain so potent even in non-historical-critical interpretation:

> The process involving author, text and reader [is] a communicative one; the whole point is to achieve a change in the reader. Job creates us as readers as we seek to create a coherent reading of Job. We are left in the grip of a book which has made us its readers and yet refuses our demands that it lay bare its meaning… If, however, we decide to open ourselves to it, we will be left bearing wounds (1992: 252).

It is not just the book that has the structure of a contradiction, but the very nature of our relationship to the book.

Recent strategies for reading Job continue the trajectory of the 1980s and early 1990s in attempting to find a model that allows for reading the book as a whole, while still giving the dissonances or contradictions their due. For some, this means acknowledging the traditional historical-critical model, but choosing to read in a canonical context (Gradl 2001: 13-20, 30). For others, it means an orientation to the book of Job as tensive but coherent narrative composed by a single author (Whybray 1998: 9-27). But a variety of other models have been suggested that deal more explicitly with the problem. Hoffmann describes the book of Job as possessing a 'catalogic' and 'anthological' character (1996: 109-14) in which an author collected a variety of perspectives without fully resolving the tensions among them. Indeed, this anthological structure made the book 'a ready-made vehicle

capable of absorbing more material than it already contained, and perhaps even inviting additions' (1996: 291). Köhlmoos, who actually argues for a fairly elaborate redaction-critical development of the book of Job (1999), nevertheless invokes the work of Umberto Eco to claim that every text possesses a 'text strategy' contained in its narrative and discursive text structures. By attending to these, the reader is able to grasp the different elements of the book as a more or less sustained argument concerning the relationship among God, world, and humanity.

The most common approach, however, makes the dialogical nature of the book the fundamental hermeneutical key. Not only is dialogue featured in the exchange between Job and his friends and between Job and God, but because speech and dialogue are so thematically central, dialogue can also serve as the trope by which the parts of the book are seen to interact with one another (Müllner 2003). In a dissertation (published in 1994), Cheney invokes the genre of the frame tale to explore the way in which this type of writing serves to establish and sustain tensions among diverse materials and contrasting characterizations. Whether or not the ancient Near Eastern frame tales (Tale of the Eloquent Peasant) and *Ahiqar* are in fact comparable structurally to the book of Job, examining Job from the perspective of 'active intertextual structures' (1994: 33) is a fruitful avenue of approach. While Cheney mentions the work of Mikhail Bakhtin briefly, Bakhtin (1981; 1984) becomes the primary conversation partner for Newsom's dialogical approach to Job (2002; 2003a). She suggests that the book of Job be heuristically understood as a kind of 'polyphonic text' in which various genres and voices are structured so as to produce a dialogue with one another. The discordant juncture between the divine speeches and the prose epilogue can be read as a strategy for preventing even the perspective of God from having the decisive word. Most recently, Stordalen argues for a more comprehensive engagement with Bakhtinian perspectives, outlining a series of ways in which Bakhtin's analysis of Dostoevsky and carnival (Bakhtin 1968; 1981) might also be employed to explore the 'dialogic poetics' of Job (Stordalen 2006).

Other dialogical approaches do not invoke a theoretical base, but reach similar conclusions. In 'Der Hiobprolog und das Hiobproblem' Schmid argues (2001) that the prologue essentially undercuts the solutions of the dialogue and divine speeches. But by means of its own hyperbolic rhetoric, it also enacts a self-critique, thus relativizing all of the proffered solutions of the book and resisting the sense of the dominance of a single perspective. Although still invoking the term 'deconstructive' in his analysis of Job, Clines shifts the focus of the significance of that reading perspective in

a recent article, claiming that 'the book's effect, when it is single-mindedly considered as the sum of its parts, can only be to engage the reader in the conversation it engenders' (1998a: 253).

2. Exegetical and Hermeneutical Perspectives on the Major Parts of Job

a. *The Prologue (Job 1–2)*

Given the propensity for final form readings of Job in recent scholarship, most of the work on the prose tale examines the prose in its relation to the rest of the book, that is, as 'prologue' and 'epilogue' to the more complex work. To focus on the prose tale as an entity in itself requires either a historical-critical paradigm, or a form of dialogical analysis that allows for the provisional 'disentangling' of the parts of the book. Thus, Syring provides a thoroughgoing redaction-critical study of the Joban prose tale itself in *Hiob und sein Anwalt* (2004), though he also helpfully attends to issues of reception history. Newsom's dialogue of genres allows her also to consider the prose tale as an entity (2003a: 32-71). She views it as a sophisticated didactic tale that should be theologically rehabilitated from the often dismissive treatment it has received in the past. Read from the perspective of a narrative ethics like that of Booth (1988) and Nussbaum (1990), it appears to be a story that models a form of piety that is both unassailable and unalienated. When examined in light of an alternative theory of narrative ethics, however, the disquieting aspects of the tale come to the fore, thus allowing it also to serve as a prelude to the necessary 'interruption' by the dialogue.

Scholars who read the prologue in relation to the book as a whole often look for ways in which these chapters introduce the complexities of the book as a whole, or otherwise point to the book's self-destabilizing structures. In contrast to Schmid (2001), who sees the prologue as undermining the claims of the dialogue and the divine speeches, Watts (2001) argues that the assault on claims to human knowledge about God in chs. 38–41 effectively reconstructs the narrator of the prose tale, not as an omniscient narrator, but as an unreliable one. Less radically, Vogels reads Job's 'empty pious slogans' (1994: 369, 376) and subtly changing representation as artistic and psychological means of preparing the transition from the prose tale to the poetic dialogues. A number of scholars, most notably Linafelt (1996), have focused on the supposedly euphemistic ברך (*bērēk*: bless/curse) in the prose tale. Not only must the reader negotiate its meaning with every occurrence, but the meaning is often contextually undecidable. Thus, from

early in the prose tale, the destabilized and destablizing character of the book of Job is already causing readerly sweat.

Since it is Mrs. Job who most famously says '*bārēk* [ברך] God and die', it is not surprising that debates about her role and function in the text remain a lively topic. While most scholars see her as a kind of catalyst, propelling Job into issues and attitudes he does not yet fully grasp (van Wolde 1995; Greenstein 2004a), her motives have also been interpreted as only playing the 'devil's advocate' in a pre-emptive fashion, allowing Job to hear and reject such a stance rather than falling prey to it himself (McGinnis 2001). The difficulty of interpreting her role has been underscored by recent treatments of the reception history of her character. While the negative evaluation of her in patristic exegesis is well known, more positive representations of Mrs. Job also appear, especially in paintings and illustrations (Gitay 1995; Maier and Schroer 1998: 193-202; Seow 2007).

Since the prose tale serves as the entry to the book as a whole, some studies that are ostensibly about the entire book take their cue primarily from the prose tale. Clines's 'Why Is There a Book of Job, and What Does It Do to You if You Read It?' takes a materialist and psychoanalytical approach to the character of Job. While the demanding literary quality of the whole book suggests an elite author and readership, it is the character of Job, the rich man who loses his wealth and health, that persuades Clines that the book's social milieu is among the privileged. Clines also sees the effects of the book on readers to support elite interests (i.e., among other things, that 'there is a causal relation between piety and prosperity, and that that relation is unproblematic' [1994: 17]). While Clines's discomfort with the book is evident, Müller's continuing engagement with the frame tale of Job (1994) is less preoccupied with normative judgment. In 'Die Hiobrahmenerzählung und ihre altorientalischen Parallelen als Paradigmen einer weisheitlichen Wirklichkeitswahrnahme', Müller continues his longstanding concern to clarify the genre of the prose tale by comparing it with Ahiqar and the Assyrian 'Poor Man of Nipur'. But he also is concerned with the pragmatics of the function of the book and its reception in antiquity, though with more of a philosophical hermeneutical orientation and with less of an edgy wariness about the values of the book than Clines manifests. One wishes that these two essays, published cheek by jowl in Beuken's volume (1994), could be restaged as a conversation.

b. *The Dialogue (Job 3–27)*

The dialogue as a unit has attracted a measure of attention in recent scholarship. In contrast to the still prevailing opinion that the dialogue is

inconceivable without the framing of the prose tale, a number of studies have, at least in passing, observed that one can easily consider the dialogue between Job and his friends to be an autonomous composition, whether or not it was an actual pre-existing document. This argument is usually made on the basis of its striking similarity to the Babylonian Theodicy, a dialogue between a sufferer and his friend, which lacks any prose framework (see Syring 2004: 169; Newsom 2003a: 80-81; Maier and Schroer 1998: 180). The significance of these observations depends on one's sense of the book as a whole, but they do tend to open up the possibilities both for one's sense of the historical development of the book, and for one's sense of its synchronic meaning.

While there are innumerable exegetical studies that attempt to clarify one or another passage in the dialogues, one challenge to consensus scholarship on the basic interpretation of the dialogues comes from Newsom (2003a: 96-127; 2003b), who attempts to rehabilitate the friends as making intellectually and pastorally significant efforts to provide Job with resources for his problems. Assuming that the wisdom dialogue intends a relatively balanced play of opinion, Newsom reads the friends as offering Job (who defines his problem as an experience of 'turmoil', 3.26) integrative narratives for his suffering, the pragmatic resources of practices of piety (prayer), and narratives ('the fate of the wicked') that reinforce confidence in the basic moral structure of the world. Only after Job repudiates their program (ch. 21) does Eliphaz declare Job himself to be one of the wicked (ch. 22), thus leading to the demise of the dialogue in the third cycle.

Most of the intellectual energy that has been directed at the dialogues during the past dozen years or so has been focused on the problematic so-called third cycle (Job 21–27 or 22–27). Witte has produced two important monographs. One is a set of philological and text-critical notes to the third cycle (1995). The other, *Vom Leiden zur Lehre* (1994), is a subtly developed redaction-critical study of that text. In it, Witte discusses how three successive layers of redaction transform Job from one who suffers into one who teaches, an internal transformation that is in continuity with the early reception history of the book. The three redactional stages he sees include a *Niedrigkeitsredaktion* (lowliness redaction) that delineates a negative anthropology, a *Majestätsredaktion* (majesty redaction) that celebrates God's creative majesty, and a *Gerechtigkeitsredaktion* (righteousness redaction) that emphasizes divine justice.

Redaction criticism is a deeply controversial method in contemporary scholarship, and the fault lines of its persuasiveness generally run along linguistic and geographical lines. German and French scholarship tends

to continue to embrace it (though with some notable dissenting voices), whereas Anglo-American scholarship tends to be skeptical of its claims (though more persuaded where 'empirical' evidence can be produced). In part, this intellectual difference has to do with different sociologies of knowledge. However the details of these differences of intellectual culture work themselves out, scholars need a way to translate the results of the different paradigms into usable data, rather than simply ignoring scholarship based on different assumptions. The exegetical insights of such a subtle reader as Witte should be readily translatable by scholars who reject his diachronic paradigm of three successive redactions. What Witte reads as successive rethinkings can also be reread as a type of dialogism internal to the characters' own perspectives. While scholarship should not give up attempts to discern historical shifts in the conceptualizations of issues (most commonly recognized in the Elihu speeches), the evidence of conceptual tension identified by redaction critics can often be interpreted also in synchronic terms.

Witte's redactional model, to be sure, is not the only one to address the problems of the third cycle. Hoffman (1996: 285-88) argues that the book of Job was something of a work in progress, with the third cycle being uncompleted notes. The contemporary interpretation of these chapters more or less canvasses well-known options, though with some modifications. Notably, scholars seem much less inclined to redistribute the awkward parts of Job's speech in chs. 24 and 27. Gradl (2001: 228, 230-31) cautiously opts for treating the speech as Job's own words, reflecting his own self-contradictory experience of the world. Numerous scholars suggest that the disarray is a sign of a conversation falling apart, or even of a deliberate sabotaging of speech (e.g., Newsom 2003a: 164-68). Lo argues more particularly that the very difficult ch. 27 is an explicit strategy by Job to bring the dialogue to an end. She reads 27.7-10 as an imprecation against the friends and then reads vv. 13-23 (the 'fate of the wicked' set piece) as Job's turning the tables upon his friends as he proclaims God's judgment on them (2003: 192-93). In so doing, he silences them.

c. *The Poem on Wisdom (Job 28)*

When I last wrote an overview of Joban scholarship (Newsom 1993), only one small paragraph was devoted to Job 28. In the intervening years, Job 28 has become an exceptional site for scholarly conversation. For reasons that are not entirely clear, this chapter has become the focus not only for articles but also for a monograph (Lo 2003), a dedicated periodical issue of *Review and Expositor* edited by Balentine (2002), and even an international

conference (van Wolde 2003). Few parts of the book of Job have been as contested.

A large range of issues has been debated. First is the question of the speaker of the passage, which is answered in one of several ways. Some (e.g., Hoffman 1996: 278-85; Coogan 1999: 205) adhere to the view that the poem is a late redactional addition. Others see the poem as an original part of the book of Job, but independent of the other voices in the text (e.g., Fiddes 1996: 186; Newsom 1996; 2003a: 169-71), or as the voice of the narrator from the prose tale (Cheney 1994: 42-48), commenting upon the dialogues. Not surprisingly, given the continuing interest in final form readings, several scholars have attempted to read ch. 28 as part of Job's long monologue, since it follows his speech in ch. 27 without any indication of a change in speakers. Whybray rejects the notion that the theme of the poem is irrelevant to the dialogues, since wisdom has been frequently mentioned, while van Oorschot (1994: 197-200) distinguishes between the ways wisdom is used in the dialogues and in ch. 28. Taking ch. 28 as Job's own speech, Whybray sees it as 'Job's final comment on the problem of the possession or lack of wisdom that had caused so much acrimony in the dialogue' (1998: 21). The change in tone reflects Job's disengagement from the friends, and recognition that God alone has wisdom. In this way, 'he shows himself to be already on the way towards the self-assessment that he will make in ch. 42, when he will at last have encountered God and listened to God's account of himself' (1998: 21). Lo argues somewhat similarly. As noted above, she sees ch. 27 as marking Job's way of concluding the dialogue with the friends. If humans have no wisdom, then he must seek out God's wisdom. Thus ch. 28 'functions as a bridge between the dialogue and the speeches that follow' (2003: 49). Rhetorically, however, it serves as a pseudo-climax, since the final verse appears to offer a resolution of Job's sense of inner conflict, but cannot really provide an adequate resolution, thus leading Job to continue his speech with a defense of his moral and religious integrity (2003: 222). The effect of reading ch. 28 in relation to chs. 22–31 is to give Job a complex and dynamic psychological portraiture.

A recent new twist on the issue has been proposed independently by Clines and Greenstein, both of whom would attribute ch. 28 to Elihu. Clines (2003: 80) argues that the wisdom poem has considerable affinities with Elihu's themes and motifs, especially the theme of God as teacher. Moreover, the Elihu speeches have been misplaced and were 'originally designed to come after chap. 27'. Relocated there, the divine speech follows immediately after Job's final speech. Greenstein (2003: 270-72) similarly notes the thematic role that possessing and teaching wisdom have

in Elihu's speeches, as well as the linguistic links between Job 37 and 28. Apparently, however, he considers ch. 28 to have become misplaced, not the Elihu speeches as a whole.

Equally contested, though with fewer options, is the issue of what the poem says and how it depicts wisdom. At opposite ends of the spectrum are Coogan (1999: 207-208), who considers the poem (excluding the redactional v. 28) to be about personified wisdom, and Clines, who considers the entire poem to be about human, not divine, wisdom (Clines 2003: 78). For Clines, vv. 23-27 do not describe God's activity in finding wisdom, but simply the time at which (i.e., during creation) God determined the nature of human wisdom (v. 28). Most scholars, however, assume that the first part of the poem is about transcendent (but not personified) wisdom, with v. 28 addressing human wisdom (van Oorschot 1994: 187; Fiddes 1996: 179-80; Newsom 1996: 533; Whybray 1998: 21; Greenstein 2003: 274-75; Lo 2003: 209). There is a considerable difference, however, as to whether the poem is talking about two kinds of wisdom, or one. For one set of scholars, the poem draws a sharp contrast. Transcendent wisdom belongs to God, and, as Whybray puts it, 'verse 28…speaks of a quite different and inferior kind of wisdom that God has made available to human beings' (1998: 124). Similarly, van Oorschot argues that the final verse does not recover human access to the wisdom described in the preceding verses. '*Der Leser wird vielmehr zur* Einwilligung in eine theozentrisch begründed Skepsis *aufgefordert und* ihm wird als "seine" Weisheit die Gottesfurcht dargeboten' ('The reader is rather called upon to *acquiesce in a theocentrically grounded skepticism and the fear of God is presented to him as "his" wisdom*'; 1994: 200; emphasis in original; cf. Gradl 2001: 250-51).

The alternative position, that v. 28 does in fact unite human and transcendent wisdom, usually depends on an analysis of the poetic strategy of ch. 28. Both Hoffman (1996: 280) and Fiddes (1996) use the term 'riddle' to describe the craft of the poem. As Hoffman describes it, 'the chapter therefore uses a tactic which might be described as "the unexpected turnabout": the reader is led to one conclusion, but then is suddenly shown an error, and is redirected to the opposite conclusion' (1996: 280). Having thought that wisdom was totally inaccessible, the reader discovers in vv. 23-27 that God knows its place. Having concluded that only God can know wisdom, the poem reorients the reader once again, as 'that conclusion too is turned on its head: humans do possess wisdom—"Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding" (v. 28)' (1996: 280).

The nature of this common wisdom is clarified by a comparison of vv. 23-27 with v. 28. For Fiddes (1996) the riddle of the poem is in its play on

the nature of 'hidden' wisdom and wisdom's 'place'. The verbs describing God's pragmatic activities in the course of creation hold the clue to the nature of wisdom. 'The question is "Where shall wisdom be found?" and the answer is that there is no literal place where it is buried and no path that can be followed to it… Wisdom cannot be found *somewhere*, because it is the comprehending of *everywhere*' (1996: 179, emphasis in the original). Moreover, wisdom is not a thing that can be possessed. Rather, 'wisdom can only be found in exercising it' (1996: 179; similarly, Greenstein 2003: 274-75). That is to say, the notion that there is a contrast between divine transcendent wisdom and human pragmatic wisdom (Gradl 2001: 251) is mistaken. Transcendent wisdom *is* a form of pragmatic wisdom. The final verse, which describes human wisdom, is not a contrast, but 'a counterbalance…with the purpose of affirming the preceding poem, rather than contradicting it' (Lo 2003: 213). Just as God's engages in acts of cosmic creation, so humans are engaged in acts of moral creation in fearing God and turning from evil (Newsom 1996: 532).

As noted at the beginning of this section, Job 28 was taken as the textual basis for a primarily methodologically oriented international conference, the proceedings of which were published as *Job 28: Cognition in Context* (van Wolde 2003). The purpose of the conference was 'to bring together three disciplines, biblical studies, Hebrew semantics, and cognitive linguistics, in order to promote cross-fertilization' (2003: viii). While not all of the contributions in this volume address issues of semantics in relation to Job 28, those of van Wolde, Clines, Muraoka, Elwold, Aitken, Van Hecke, and Kamp are directly relevant. For readers interested in an orientation to cognitive linguistics, the essays by Taylor and Langacker are highly recommended.

d. *Job's Closing Speech (Job 29–31)*

By comparison with Job 28, this section of the book has been rather neglected in recent years. One can, of course, usually count on finding contrary opinions among biblical scholars, and one is not disappointed here. Representing a more or less traditional view, Brown attends to the way in which these chapters configure Job's developing character within the book. Implicitly and unknowingly, they are a reply to the accuser's question about Job's motives in the prose tale, for in ch. 29 'Job explains his conduct as a *response to* rather than *an occasion for* divine beneficence' (1996: 79, emphasis in the original). Since his present dismal fate, outlined in ch. 30, would seem to contradict the traditional expectation of a congruence between inner character and outward circumstances, Job continues his

self-presentation with the oaths that serve to reassert his integrity. These chapters mark an advance over Job's earlier claims of integrity, however, in that they now show that his integrity 'is anchored not so much in the traditional categories of moral virtue as in Job's newly found autonomy and courage' (1996: 82). By contrast, in 'Those Golden Days: Job and the Perils of Nostalgia', Clines (1998b) continues his reading of the book through the lens of a hermeneutics of suspicion, seeing Job as one who remembers his past in self-serving ways, perhaps even exaggerates his qualities and social standing, and exhibits his nostalgia for lost social privileges.

Others have examined these speeches less in terms of the character of Job, and more in terms of their role in the rhetoric of the book. Hoffman considers them in light of the trial motif developed within the book. Although Job's self-indictment is 'one not grounded in any legal reality' (1996: 164), since it deals largely with hidden sins and not public actions, it nevertheless allows Job to 'turn the tables on his original remarks regarding the trial: the paradox of God being at once the accuser (without presenting the accusation), the judge, and the one sentencing is reversed: now Job is at once the accused, the accuser, and the one passing verdict. The circle is thereby closed on the trial motif in the book' (1996: 165). Lo sees chs. 29–31 in relation to ch. 28, which she considers part of Job's speech. In that context, the space between 28.28 and 29.1 is where Job 'decides to give up traditional wisdom, and turns to confront God directly' (2003: 221). Job demonstrates that he is one who has embodied fear of God and turning from evil, but because this has not prevented his distress, he uses the oath of innocence to provoke God to a response.

Newsom (1994; 2003a: 183-99) also focuses on rhetoric. Having exhausted the possibilities of the dialogue with the friends, the polyphonic author of Job now tries another experiment with language, one in which Job speaks in the accents of a working rhetorical world, 'a language sufficiently flexible and resourceful to provide him with what he needs to envision a resolution to this problem' (2003a: 184). Whether the audience to whom Job speaks is actual or imaginary, it functions as a Bakhtinian 'superaddressee', the one whose responsive understanding is presumed (Newsom 2003a: 186). Job repeatedly inscribes God into his account of the moral world. In an almost 'Durkheimian' way, God is the social and moral order writ large, and so could not do other than to clear Job (Newsom 2003a: 198-99). When God actually speaks, however, he will challenge the adequacy of Job's words, not through direct refutation, but by challenging the system of tropes and images (the moral world of village patriarchy) upon which they are built.

In addition to studies that focus on the function of Job's monologue, a series of studies have attempted to clarify the most important intertexts for ch. 31. A detailed study by Kunz (2001) examines the striking parallels between Job 31 and chapter 125 of the Egyptian Book of the Dead. While there is no evidence of direct influence, the author of Job appears to know the Egyptian understanding of the judgment of the dead, though the conceptual horizons in Job remain decidedly this-worldly. Oeming (1994), by contrast, situates the Decalogue as the primary intertext for ch. 31, examining not only the ways in which traces of the Decalogue's norms can be seen in ch. 31, but also the ways in which that chapter goes beyond, or elaborates on, the Decalogue. Finally, Witte (2004) suggests a new interpretation of Job's 'sign' in 31.25-27. Rather than taking it as a signature on a legal document, he suggests that it should rather be seen as a protective sign (cf. Ezek. 9.4), specifically, a kind of proto-phylactery containing verses from the Torah to be worn on the forehead. Such a sign would function to show that the bearer belongs to God and is loyal to God, but it would also protect the bearer in the encounter with God (2004: 729).

e. *The Elihu Speeches (Job 32–37)*

Elihu seems to be faring much better now than he was when I last surveyed Joban scholarship (Newsom 1993). He has even been suggested by Weinberg as the author of the entire book of Job (1998). Weinberg observes that Elihu has a much more developed genealogy than the other characters, the components of which are not symbolic. Thematic key-words that occur with particular density not only in the Elihu speeches, but also in other parts of the book, are evidence for the author's hand. Finally, he is the one character not rebuked by God in the book. While it is doubtful that Weinberg's suggestion will be widely adopted, Elihu's highly specific genealogical pedigree has suggested to some others (Newsom 1996: 562) that the self-identification, like that of Ben Sira in Sirach, might at least be the name of the actual author of Job 32–37.

Although there have been defenses of Elihu's authenticity as a character in the original plan of the book of Job (Waters 1999), most still consider him to be a late addition to the book. It is, however, this very role that is attracting more favorable attention than Elihu has enjoyed for a while. Wahl is undoubtedly his most eloquent champion. Wahl's monograph (1993) makes the case that the Elihu speeches were a late (third century BCE) addition to the book of Job by a learned sage who has read the book of Job and carefully developed the arguments of the friends in a logically and elegantly composed addition to the book. Elihu's program is to construct

an argument that bridges from Job's final speech to the divine speeches that answer Job from the whirlwind. While many readers will not be quite as enthusiastic as Wahl in declaring the Elihu speeches to be a 'poetic masterpiece' (1993: 161), Wahl does make a compelling case for the intellectual and aesthetic significance of these chapters.

Independently of each other, but both informed by Wahl's work, Müllner (2004) and Newsom (2003a: 200-33) have similarly argued that Elihu is of interest because he represents the first reading or commentary on the book of Job. Müllner decides not to consider the question of the Elihu speeches as a chronologically later addition, but focuses on them in terms of their 'literary diachronological' status. Elihu is a belated character, in that he does not appear until the text itself has marked the conversation as finished (Job 31.40). Thus, even within the book itself, he is carefully positioned as the 'model reader'. By taking issue with the notion that age itself guarantees wisdom, Elihu establishes a certain common ground with Job (Müllner 2004: 459), though he expands the friends' critique of Job as well. Müllner does, however, also recognize that the literary belatedness of the Elihu character corresponds to the historical belatedness of the author of the Elihu speeches (2004: 465). In this regard, she insists that the Elihu speeches should not be seen simply as a later redactional stage in the book's development. Rather, '*was die historisch diachrone Betrachtungweise dennoch leistet, ist, dass sie Einblick gibt in die Entstehung von später kanonisch gewordenen Texten, in Verschriftlichungsprozesse, die zunächst Leseprozesse waren. Elihu führt uns an die Grenze von Textentstehung und Kommentierung*' ('What the historical, diachronic approach accomplishes is that it gives insight into the development of texts that later became canonical, into writing processes that were first of all reading processes. Elihu leads us to the boundary between text formation and commentary'; 2004: 467). For Müllner, the gift that Elihu brings to even more belated readers is that he is the one who makes visible the space for further commentary on the book of Job.

From a somewhat different theoretical perspective, Newsom (2003a: 200-204) also understands Elihu as 'the dissatisfied reader' who writes himself into the book. Analogously to the way in which Hoffman sees Job as an 'anthological' text that invites further additions (see above), Newsom uses Bakhtin's perception of the polyphonic text (Bakhtin 1984: 6-7) that engages bystanders in its quarrel to explain why a later reader literally wrote himself into the book. Newsom asks whether it is possible to trace the outlines of subtly different, historically conditioned 'moral imaginations' that created the impetus for a writer to respond to the book of Job in

ways that to twenty- and twenty-first-century audiences now seem almost imperceptible but which perhaps were more readily understood in antiquity. The psychology of repentance (2003a: 211-16), an 'eschatological' awareness of sudden judgment (2003a: 218-19), and the spiritual discipline of the contemplation of nature (2003a: 220-30) are identified as possible indicators of such a shift in the moral compass of this later generation.

f. *The Divine Speeches (Job 38–41)*

In 'In Job's Face/Facing Job', Greenstein observes that 'the whirlwind speeches, more than any other section of the book, appear in the diverse literature written about them like a readerly Rorschach test' (1999: 302). While that comment may suggest more pure subjectivity than actually exists in scholarship, the widely varying interpretations of the divine speeches do illustrate nicely the workings of the hermeneutical circle. Most interpreters seem to begin with a sense of the whole of the divine speeches, from which they then develop an understanding of the meaning of the component parts. While examples of questionable exegesis do exist, as Greenstein points out (1999: 304), the complex structure of the book, the obliqueness of the speeches as a response to Job, and their densely imagistic quality genuinely permit multiple interpretations of them. Here, more than anywhere in the book, one cannot speak of 'progress' in understanding the divine speeches. What one can do is to observe the way in which the framing of the issues affects the choices interpreters make. One of these decisions is how to read the frame tale in relation to the divine speeches. A final form reading that takes the entire book as operating on a single narrative plane invites readers to compare the verbal response to Job with what the reader knows to be the true cause of his suffering. Thus, Miles ponders why the divine speeches make no reference to God's justice, when it is so frequent a topic in the Psalms. The reason is that 'on this occasion, thanks to the ingenuity of the Job-fabulist, the Lord's inscrutable ways have been made all too scrutable. The deity has something to hide, to be blunt, and he hides it by rising to his full majestic stature, drawing the robes of creation around him, and regally changing the subject' in order to conceal the fact that 'he has subjected a just man to torture on a whim' (1995: 315-16).

Not everyone who reads the book as a narrative whole, however, comes to the same interpretation. Whybray, without making moral judgment on 'the experiment that resulted from Yahweh's conversation with the Satan' (1998: 173), argues that the purpose of the divine speeches was to demonstrate the design of the cosmos and the true nature of God, of which Job and

his friends were ignorant (1998: 158). What is revealed is not only a 'well-ordered cosmos' but 'by implication, the insignificance of purely human concerns in his sight' (1998: 160). Obviously, something else is involved in the interpretation of the divine speeches besides the decision to read on a single narrative plane.

Greenstein (1999) suggests that the divergence in interpretation may have to do with readers' inclination to shift the focus of their identification from Job, developed in the course of the dialogues, to God, when God begins to speak (1999: 301, 303). Greenstein is relentlessly critical of such readerly identification, seeing it not only as self-aggrandizing, but either as 'a will to power, to perch oneself in the position of advantage *vis-à-vis* other humans, be they characters or real persons', or an act of masochistic self-mortification by exposing oneself to the same humiliation Job undergoes (1999: 305). Thus, refusing to abandon Job, the 'daring fighter', Greenstein reads the divine speeches as a pure display of amoral power. The wild animals, and Leviathan in particular, are 'reflexes, symbols, of their creator', their primary characteristics being 'their brute power and terrifying nature' (1999: 311-12). Since Job had already attributed these characteristics to God, the divine speeches have the result of silencing Job, while telling him nothing that he did not know before (1999: 313).

Whereas Greenstein sees the reader as seduced by the divine speeches away from an identification with Job, Clines (1998a) sees Job as the seductive character with whom the reader ought to make a break. Our attachment to Job is intense. 'Even when we have borne in upon us that Job is in the wrong in virtually everything he says—in that he is still arguing from the false premise that his suffering is punishment—we still want to cheer Job on, to lend him our consent to protest at the injustices in human existence, to call God to account' (1998a: 253). But Clines sees something deeply problematic with this desire, held both by Job and most readers. Job makes religion into an opiate of the people by assuming that social justice is primarily God's business rather than human responsibility. The 'danger for theology' is not in what God says, but in what Job says, and the fact that his ideas come 'bundled with a charming, or rather, well-nigh irresistible, portrait of the character Job himself' (1998a: 256). If the divine speeches effect a break with the reader's identification with Job, that is all to the good. Clines interprets the divine speeches as clarifying the nature of the world and the role of God in the cosmos. The world is an immense business, and God is not the accountant but the CEO. The world has a universal order, but it is not that of retribution. 'It lives for itself, and if anything is instrumental, if anything serves a purpose other than itself, that is coincidental' (1998a: 257). In this

essentially post-religious reading of Job, the fundamental conclusion is one not drawn by the book itself. 'The suffering of the poor is a human problem, created by humans and soluble, if it is soluble at all, by humans. To collapse the social problem into a theological one, to make it God's problem, is, however traditional a theological move it may be, an abdication of responsibility' (1998a: 258).

Newsom, too, makes questions of identification and the respective roles of the characters central to her interpretation. In an earlier writing (1994), she had succumbed to the temptation decried by Greenstein to 'moralize' the divine speeches, but in later works (esp. 2003a), she moves away from that interpretation. The question she explores is not first of all the reader's identification with God, but Job's excessive and misguided identification with God in his final monologue. Job is baffled and outraged at his situation because he thought that by knowing what was best in himself and his culture, he could know God. When challenged, God would respond in a way that fulfilled Job's expectations of God (2003a: 196). God, however, both directly and indirectly, disabuses Job (and the reader) of this notion. The content of the divine speeches contain affirmations of a divine order; but they also build toward increasingly prominent images of the chaotic, climaxing in the extended, vivid description of Leviathan (p. 243). 'From the striking metaphor of the sea as swaddled infant, to the celebration of the wildness of those creatures who mock and spurn human control, to the ecstatic description of Leviathan, the uncomfortable sense grows that God's identification with the chaotic is as strong as with the symbols of order' (p. 252). Since the pre-modern world did not sharply distinguish between the realms of natural order and moral order, it seems unlikely that the divine speeches are an actual repudiation of the divine as a source of moral order in the social realm. But they do insist on 'another relationship of congruence, that between God and Leviathan' which highlights the nonmoral and nonrational dimensions of deity (p. 252). Thus, the conflict of two necessities: the human passion for order and for meaning making on the one hand; and the unmasterable violence of existence, with its indifference to human values, on the other, constructs a tragically structured world (p. 253). The reader's tendency to identify with the divine speeches is not based in self-aggrandizement or masochism, but is the effect of the rhetoric of the tragic sublime (pp. 253-56). This identification is not total, nor does it necessarily coincide with ideological persuasion. Understanding the divine speeches through the lens of the tragic sublime allows Job's perception to be transformed, without resolving the irresolvable fractures of reality.

The question about readerly identification does not always involve characters in the book, but may also be a hermeneutical choice of the community within which and for whom one interprets. In 'Hiob in Lateinamerika', Berges reads through the eyes of the suffering children of the poor in Latin America. When he asks wherein lies the 'truth' of the book of Job, he finds it not in the constantive claims of any of the characters of the book, but in the speech act of Job's 'Klage und Anklage' (lament and complaint; 1994: 311). For Berges, the force of the book is to challenge not simply one or another inadequate theological system, but the enterprise of theological system-building itself. Berges analyzes the divine speeches in terms that have now become familiar: the critique of the assumption that an order of retributive justice is built into creation; the non-rationalized presence of evil and the chaotic in the world; the implication that unfair and innocent suffering is part of this chaos; and the representation not only of the power, but also of the powerlessness of God, and so on (1994: 312-14). But just as Berges's reader is about to assume that Berges, too, is reading the divine speeches as a correction of Job's inadequate theology, he moves in a very different direction. Like Miles, he notes the absence of claims to righteousness and opposition to evil in the divine speeches, such as one finds in the psalms. Job had heard in these psalms about the God of righteousness and justice, but now '*gesehen hat Hiob einen Gott, der trotz oder gerade wegen seiner Allmacht den unschuldig Leidenden nicht gerecht spricht*' ('Job has seen a God who, in spite of, or precisely because of, his almightiness does not speak rightly to the innocent sufferers'; 1994: 314). For Berges, as for Miles, the divine speeches become the third and final test of Job (1994: 316). In his reading, examined further below, Job resists the temptation to identify with the divine explanation, and the book itself refuses to resolve Job's 'Klage und Anklage' or that of the children of Latin America.

g. *Job's Reply (Job 42.1-6)*

In my previous survey of Job scholarship I listed eight different translations of Job 42.6, and observed that an interpreter's translation of that verse served as 'a capsule summary of the interpretation of the whole book' (Newsom 1993: 111). In a very careful and linguistically sophisticated study of Job 42.1-6, van Wolde (1994) investigates whether the text offers many possible meanings or only a limited number. The results of her analysis indicate that the *ketiv/qere* (what is written/what is read aloud) in v. 1 leaves open two alternative possibilities (I know/you know). Although vv. 2-4 are elliptical, there are clear indications of a shift between Job's point of view (vv. 2, 3b, 5) and YHWH's (vv. 3a, 4a, b). The alternation of points

of view is what motivates Job's own change in v. 6 (1994: 228-37). At the end of a meticulous examination of the various issues in v. 6, although she recognizes a plurality of possibilities, she makes her own 'well-considered choice among this plurality of possibilities, without however denying the multiplicity of the text in relation to the language system' (1994: 247). Fundamental to her analysis is that *ʾemʾas* indicates a turning away from something and *niḥamṭî, ʿal* represents the closing of a period of mourning. The *athnach* separating the verb and the preposition suggests that the phrase *ʿāpār we-ʾēper* serves as a double-duty object for both verbs. Allowing for slightly different possible nuances in the verbs, she translates as follows: 'Therefore I turn away from/repudiate and comfort myself/repent of dust and ashes' (1994: 250). Despite the persuasive case she makes for this translation, interpreters seem as keen as ever to exploit the ambiguities of this verse in a bewildering variety of translations and paraphrases. Its ambiguity is simply too hermeneutically valuable to let go.

The interpretation of the divine speeches and the translation and interpretation of Job's reply are, of course, closely interrelated issues. So it is not surprising that of the sample of interpretations of the divine speeches surveyed above, Miles (1995), Greenstein (1999) and Berges (1994) all opt for a translation that leaves Job utterly unrepentant. Miles (1995: 319) also adopts the *ketiv* ('You know'), which introduces an 'ambiguous and potentially ironic' tone into Job's reply, a tone that is continued in vv. 2-5. Miles's idiomatic rendering of v. 6 is 'Now that my eyes have seen you, I shudder with sorrow for mortal clay' (1995: 325). Berges also reads Job as disgusted, but he renders the second phrase as 'so finde ich Trost auf Staub und Asche' ('Thus I find comfort in dust and ashes'), signifying that the only comfort Job has resides in the fact that he has not departed from his insistence on his innocence. For Greenstein, Job is 'fed up' (*ʾemʾas* without object) and 'sorry about' the way it is for 'humans' (i.e., 'dust and ashes'; 1999: 311). In direct response to van Wolde's study, Greenstein ponders, given the ambiguities of the text, 'why one would want to have Job surrender his autonomy when one is free to do otherwise' (p. 313). We are back to the hermeneutical circle.

Whybray, too, finds his interpretation of the divine speeches supported by the possibilities of v. 6, interpreting the verse to indicate Job's rejecting and changing his mind concerning 'his earlier misapprehension about God that had led him to challenge him'. The phrase 'dust and ashes' 'reinforces Job's confession of ignorance and insignificance with a word of humility and self-abasement' (1998: 171). Newsom (2003a) can leave the ambiguous verse untranslated, allowing it to serve as 'a Bakhtinian word with a

loophole' (2003a: 255), assisting the polyphonic author's desire to leave the book unfinalized. And Clines (1998a) can play a riff on Job's new understanding of the divine CEO's mission statement. 'Now that I have been apprised of your vision [*ʿênî rāʾātĕkā*], I am internalizing it [*ʾemʾas*; from *mʾs* as a byform of *mss*, 'melt'], and I feel more integrated into the company ethos [*niḥamṭî*], although still awaiting reinstatement after my present low-ranking situation [*ʿal-ʿāpār wāʾēper*]' (1998a: 257).

h. *The Epilogue (Job 42.7-17)*

If Job's reply is sufficiently linguistically malleable to accommodate contradictory understandings of the divine speeches and their implications for Job and for the world, how have interpreters recently dealt with the problems presented by the prose epilogue? In particular, the perplexing vv. 7-9 have attracted considerable attention. If God has just rebuked Job for speaking words without knowledge, how is it that God now refers to Job as having spoken 'what is correct' and the friends as having failed to do so? Historical-critical approaches could simply point to the apparent contradiction as the rough edges left by a somewhat clumsy redactional splicing of the prose tale and the Job poem. Newsom's reading of Job as a polyphonic text can also take advantage of a similar differentiation between the parts of the book to see the contradiction as resisting finalization in the book and even establishing a dialogue between the non-tragic perspective of the prose tale taken on its own and the tragic perspective articulated in the divine speeches (2003a: 256-58). But for final form readers the problem is more complex. They must find a way in which the surprising statement leads one to a sense of the meaning of the book as a whole.

One traditional solution, which Whybray endorses, is to see God's commendation of Job's words as referring simply to his retraction in 42.1-6 (1998: 172-73). Nam, however, more properly recognizes that God's comments must refer to the content of the entire dialogue. While he is able to account for the condemnation of the friends (their assumptions about God as one who regularly enforces retributive justice were wrong), Nam shies away from the implication that God is endorsing Job's actual words in the dialogue. He therefore attempts to translate *nĕkônâ* as 'constructively' (2003: 81). However, as Greenstein (2004b) points out in his review of Nam, this translation is not philologically defensible. A similar interpretation of the verses, but with a different linguistic basis, is that of Oeming (2001). It is not one of Job's particular statements about God that is praised, either in the prose prologue, the dialogue, or the final response. The crucial prepositional phrase should not be translated as 'about me' but 'to me'. '*Gott lobt*

*vielmehr die Sprech*richtung *Hiobs, die innere Haltung, das Wissen darum, wohin and woher er zo denken hat: eine* Rede zu Gott' ('God rather praises the *bearing* of Job's speech, its inner mindset, the knowledge of whence and whither he has come to such thinking: a *speech addressed to God'* [emphasis in original]; 2001: 138; cf. Ngwa 2005: 103). Correspondingly, the friends are not blamed for what they have said, but for their attitude toward God.

More boldly, Berges (1994) takes full advantage of the shock value of the verses. Job's refusal to accept God's theological discourse from the whirlwind constituted his successful meeting of the third trial, and for this reason God now declares Job's words to be correct. God declares Job's heretical theology to be orthodox! (1994: 316). This by no means resolves the book for Berges, who sees the book as confronting not only the dark side of the world, but also the dark side of God, whom the suffering must continually confront with their cries. Hoffman similarly sees the verses as functioning to 'leave no room for doubt as to the author's stance regarding the question of the nature of the true believer: one who, like Job, is unwilling to ignore the dilemmas raised by his or her faith, does not reconcile her or himself with their existence, yet nevertheless continues in faith, albeit with certain doubts, pain and suffering' (1996: 139).

The epilogue as a whole, of course, presents problems for many interpretations, since it seems to return to the paradigm of retributive justice. For Whybray, however, it is simply the expected return to the *status quo ante* that follows a test of limited duration (1998: 173). For Janzen (1998), who sees Job as truly comforted by the divine speeches and their imagery of creation and divine care, the point of the epilogue is not recompense, but Job's returning 'lust for life' (1998: 152, 160). Ngwa searches in the details of the epilogue for something that 'transcends the retributive component of the text' (2005: 145), which he locates primarily in the image of God's lifting the face of Job, his servant. The presence of Job and his friends experiencing 'the transcendence and immanence of God at the altar' signals that the epilogue is as much a new beginning as an ending (2005: 145). Such readings do not satisfy the more skeptical readers, however. For Miles, the book of Job is less about Job's changed perception than God's. It is God's loss of innocence. 'After Job, God knows his own ambiguity as he has never known it before… He now knows that…he has a fiend-susceptible side and that mankind's conscience can be finer than his' (1995: 328; cf. Spieckermann 2003). Thus the epilogue signals God's abandoning of his wager with the devil, as he 'atones for his wrongdoing by doubling Job's initial fortune' (Miles 1995: 327).

I began this survey of recent readings of Job with the observations of Pyper (1992); his comments on the epilogue also provide a fitting way to close. He pauses over the statement that 'God blessed the latter years of Job's life more than the former'. Given the ambiguity of ברך (*bērēk*), which alternatively can signify 'bless' or 'curse', in the prologue, is it also ambiguous here? Is this part of what makes the epilogue so disturbing? Pyper muses on the way in which, not just with respect to the ambiguous word *bērēk*, but with respect to the deeply ambiguous book of Job itself, readers are always engaged in rewriting and so changing the text. Yet, the process of reading is also about the text's ability to change readers. Here is the mystery of reading and interpretation.

> The crucial question remaining is whether, in either case, we are seeking to avoid or to express the alteration the text can effect in us. Do we seek to alleviate the suffering of the reader or, as Kafka would urge, to embrace its potential to shock us awake? The critical method may be used to disarm the text, but it is also possible to see the text itself as much as the retinue of interpretations as the product of a history of deflections of its assaults upon us. The interpreter's role therefore becomes the stripping away of these accretions in order to restore the text's power to change us (1992: 248).

The last dozen years or so of Job interpretation reflect a mixture of these ways of dealing with the *agon* of reading. The desire to make the text say what one wants it to say and needs it to say is very powerful. This impulse is as strong among those who wish to discredit the God of the book as it is among those who wish to defend and protect that God. Since we have long ago disabused ourselves of the illusion that there can be purely objective interpretation of complex literary works, and since Job is in so many ways a deeply ambiguous text, the best defense against self-serving rewritings of the text is the continual encounter between well-grounded interpretations deriving from widely differing hermeneutical perspectives.

3. *Widening the Circle*

While most scholarly work on Job during the past dozen years has focused on the issues framed by the development of historical-critical scholarship, there has also been a significant development of interest in the reception history of the book. As reception history becomes increasingly integrated into biblical studies, it offers the promise of moving the hermeneutical engagement with Job beyond the current set of issues and problems. Although much of the reception historical literature is produced by scholars

working in other disciplines, more and more biblical scholars are contributing to this research.

Reception historical studies of Job tend to focus either on a distinct period or religious tradition. For Judaism, Oberhänsli-Widmer (1998) surveys the classical Jewish reception of Job from antiquity through the Rabbinic period, but complements it with a study of Jewish interpretation of Job in the twentieth century. As much as anything, it is the ambiguity of Job as a conversation partner for Jews that has made him important to Jewish writers, especially after the Shoah. The more specialized study of Eisen (2004) focuses on the interpretation of Job in medieval Jewish philosophy, an investigation that he candidly acknowledges only begins to engage the extant materials, since there are nearly eighty known commentaries on Job from the middle ages, most of them unpublished.

Several works have examined the Christian traditions of interpretation of Job, including studies of patristic interpretations of Job (Astell 1994; Perraymond 2002) and the very important monograph of Schreiner (1994), which situates Calvin's exegesis of Job in conversation with earlier Christian and Jewish medieval interpretations. Less attention has been paid to the reception of Job in Islam, although here, too, there are signs of interest, as in Déclais's recent study of three Islamic narratives about Job (1996).

The interpretation of Job appears not only in texts, of course, but also in images. Terrien's remarkable book, *The Iconography of Job through the Centuries: Artists as Biblical Interpreters* (1996), is the most comprehensive treatment. It has recently been supplemented both by Perraymond's study of early Christian Joban iconography (2002), and by the beautiful and well-informed exhibition catalogue for the recent exhibit of Joban art, by Vicchio and Edinberg (2002), at St John's College in Maryland.

Finally, the literary reception of Job, especially in Europe, has received considerable attention. In addition to Oberhänsli-Widmer's study (1998), Bochet provides a broad survey of the literary reception of Job (2000). These works are complemented by more focused studies on Job in German literature since the Enlightenment (Schrader 1992), and Job in twentieth-century literature (Langenhorst 1994).

As this brief account of recent titles indicates, reception historical studies either tend to provide broad overviews or to focus on specific periods or traditions. Moreover, they also tend not to be methodologically self-reflective. As biblical scholars increasingly begin to do reception historical work, this area of study is likely to be reconfigured, since biblical scholars will have to think through what it means for reception history

to be considered as an integral part of biblical studies. In addition, the focus of biblical scholars is less likely to be on a single period or figure and more likely to be comparative across traditions. Seow's work in progress on the history of reception of Job, provisionally entitled *Joban Junctures: The Impact of Job Among Christians, Jews, and Muslims from Antiquity to the Sixteenth Century*, exhibits both of these qualities. As the title suggests, his work is explicitly comparative, tracing intra- and inter-religious dialogues and debates. It also moves beyond the texts and images themselves to the social-historical contexts of the interpretations that were developed at different periods. I suspect and hope that when the next review of Joban scholarship is published in this journal, not only will many of the familiar issues continue to be discussed, but that the effect of the new interest in reception history will also widen the range of conversation partners with whom biblical studies is engaged. If that should happen, then it just might send the hermeneutical conversation in some new and unexpected directions.

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