THE RELATION BETWEEN THE PROLOGUE AND THE SPEECH-CYCLES IN JOB

A Reconsideration

by

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The book of Job combines a dramatic plot and theological discussion, which are distinct from each other: a short prologue and epilogue in prose containing all the elements of the plot form a framework for the poetic speeches [1]), which deal with the most basic problems of theology-theodicy, reward and punishment, etc. This combination, of which various examples occur in other literatures as well, has led many scholars to treat the book of Job as a real drama, comparing it to other dramas, especially those of the Greeks [2]). On the other hand, since such a combination is unique in the Bible, other scholars have wondered whether the same author could be responsible for both the poetry and the prose in the book. It is this latter aspect with which this article deals, confining itself to the relationship between the speeches and the prologue, while leaving the epilogue aside. My interest is not "historical"—reconstructing the growth of the book—but purely literary. I shall try to demonstrate that those two elements must be regarded as essential and original components in one integral artistic work, the book of Job.

I

The relationship between the prose prologue and the poetic speeches has been interpreted in three main ways:

(1) The whole book is the work of one author, and the artistic design of the prologue naturally serves well the speeches which constitute the main body of the book [3]).

(2) The poetic speeches were composed independently, before the prose story, and the latter was shaped later to fit the former [4]).

(3) The prose and poetry were composed independently of each other and put together by an editor at a later stage [5]).

The formulation of the three views directs our attention towards "historical" questions which have nothing to do with the literary interpretation *per se* of the present text. Nevertheless it reflects a real and serious interpretative problem. For the three views listed result from two principal approaches to the understanding of the book. The first, leading to interpretations (1) and (2) is based on the conviction that there is a close connection between the prologue and the speeches, with no real discrepancies between them. The second approach, leading to the third interpretation, claims that the contradictions and the inconsistencies between the prologue and the speeches are so obvious and sharp that they make any harmonistic interpretation of the book impossible, at least without far-reaching concessions to good taste. Hence, for the purpose of literary discussion it is preferable (rather than dealing with the three views mentioned) to concentrate on examining the two underlying approaches. However, for the sake of clarification as far as the "historical" question is concerned I state here that I share the widely accepted view that the prose plot is based on a popular legend whose hero was Job the righteous (see Ezek. xiv 14).

II

Those who claim that the book was formed by joining two independent literary compositions have pointed out various discrepancies

[1]) We shall also use the common term "dialogues", though they are not real dialogues. There are only slight connections between the speeches, which makes them monologues of a sort rather then dialogues. There have been many unsuccessful attempts to rearange the speeches to make them more "dialogues". See N. H. Smith, *The Book of Job* (London, 1968), pp. 9-10; N. H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job* (Jerusalem, 1941), pp. 545-78 (Heb.), and recently M. P. Reddy, "The Book of Job—A reconstruction", *ZAW* 90 (1978), pp. 59-94.

[2]) D. D. Raphael, *The Paradox of Tragedy* (London, 1960), pp. 37-51; G. Murray, *Aeschylus the Creator of Tragedy* (Oxford, 1940), pp. 87-110.

[3]) P. (E.) Dhorme, *Le livre de Job* (Paris, 1926), pp. LX-LXVII = E. tr. *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (London, 1967), pp. lxxv-lxxxv; H. H. Rowley, *Job* (London, 1970), pp. 8-12.

[4]) S. R. Driver and G. B. Gray, *The Book of Job* (Edinburgh, 1921), p. xxxv.

[5]) M. Tsevat, "The Meaning of the Book of Job", *HUCA* 73 (1966), p. 73; B. Duhm, *Das Buch Hiob* (Freiburg i. B., Leipzig, and Tübingen, 1897), pp. VIII, 10-11. Many scholars prefer the suggestion that the prose prologue should be split into separate pieces, but I cannot accept their opinion. See A. Alt, "Zur Vorgeschichte des Buches Hiob", *ZAW* 55 (1937), pp. 265-8. For a review of the various opinions see G. Fohrer "Zur Vorgeschichte und Komposition des Buches Hiob", *VT* 6 (1956), pp. 249-67.

between the prologue and the poetic speeches, which, in their opinion, tilt the scales against the unity of the book.

(1) The prologue is written in clear classical Hebrew, while the dialogues use a very difficult style, full of Aramaic roots and archaisms.

(2) The prologue consistently uses the Tetragrammaton (on i 6—Elohim—see below) while the poetry does not use it at all, preferring other terms such as El, Eloah, Shaddai [6]).

(3) There is no hint of Satan in the dialogues, and his responsibility for the calamities is utterly disregarded.

(4) Job's sons and servants are supposed to be dead according to the prologue, but are mentioned in the speeches as alive (xix 13-19, xxx 1).

(5) There is a definite difference between Job's personality in the prologue and the speeches.

(6) God is depicted in a very anthropomorphic manner in the prologue, in contrast to the majestic manifestation in the speeches.

(7) The main problem of the speeches differs entirely from the subject of the prologue.

The first four points (1-4) seem to be too trivial to prove the original independence of the prologue and the dialogues. It is only natural to use a lofty, high-flown style in poetry, and it may well be that the writer purposely adopted two different styles in order to differentiate clearly the plot and the discussions. The variety of names of God can also be easily explained. As Job and his friends are gentiles, who do not recognize YHWH, they cannot be expected to use His name; hence, the prologue states that Job was *yᵉrē' 'ᵉlōhīm* (one that feared Elohim, i 1, 8) and not *yᵉrē' yhwh* (one that feared YHWH). On the other hand, the author, who knows everything done in heaven, legitimately uses the Tetragrammaton [7]) in the prologue as well as in the speeches (xxxviii 1, xl 1, 3, xlii 1).

The disregard of Satan in the speeches [8]) is also well explained by the literary conventions of the book: Job and his friends know nothing about the wager, and by ignoring Satan the author brings into focus the real existential problem dealt with in the dialogues.

As to the apparent contradictions in minor details, it is wrong to deduce from the prologue that none of Job's servants saved his life, so mention of them in the speeches creates no problem at all; and the phrase *bᵉnē biṭnī* ("sons of my belly", xix 17) is too obscure to be regarded as a contradiction of the story of the sons' death [9]).

In contrast to points 1-4, the next three are very serious arguments, and it is doubtful whether the elaboration of a simple harmonistic approach would be adequate here.

(a) It is rightly argued that there is a wide and unbridgeable gap between the personality of Job in the two sections. The poetic speeches present him as a rebel, daring to criticize the ways of God bitterly, while in the prologue he appears as an obedient, submissive person accepting his suffering willingly. Job's declaration "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (i 21) clearly illuminates his view that God owes him nothing, and does not even need to justify this deeds, since he only took away what he had previously voluntarily given. The picture in the speeches is quite the opposite. Here Job attacks God bluntly, accusing him as the prime judge of the world, who systematically distorts justice by neglecting the righteous and preferring the strong. This difference in the characterization of Job is a part of a general tendency to introduce him in the prologue as an ideal, utopian, superhuman righteous person, contrary to the tendency of the speeches to present a very human personality, who suffers a grave ideological as well as mental crisis.

The attempts to harmonize these "two Jobs" by finding psychological justifications for this change have failed. Thus M. Weiss claims [10]) that the first hint of the undermining of Job's absolute confidence in God is already to be found in the prologue, so that there is no real gap between the latter and the speeches, but rather

[6]) With the exception of xii 9 (*yhwh*), xxviii 28 (*'ᵃdōnāy*), where the writer seems to be quoting a current epigram, which he does not want to change.

[7]) As to i 6 *bᵉnē hā'ᵉlōhīm*, the phrase is a remnant of an ancient myth (Gen. vi 1) and it is thus obvious why the writer did not change it into *bᵉnē yhwh*.

[8]) Satan is not mentioned in the epilogue either, which has led some scholars to draw critical conclusions about the original unity of the epilogue. See A. Alt (n. 5, above), G. Fohrer (n. 5, above), and K. Fullerton, "The Original Conclusion of the Book of Job", *ZAW* 42 (1924), pp. 116-36.

[9]) The LXX translated υἱοὺς παλλακίδων μου "the sons of my concubines", since we expect the phrase "sons of my belly" to be spoken by a woman and not by a man. Some commentators understood the phrase as "my brothers", which is more then doubtful. However, the death of the sons is also alluded to in the poetic speeches, and if there is a contradiction in this case it is not only between the speeches and the prologue, but within the speeches as well.

[10]) *The Story about the Beginning of Job* (Jerusalem, 1969, Heb.).

a gradual and smooth progression, as shown by a comparison of i 22 ("In all this Job sinned not") with ii 10 ("In all this did not Job sin with his lips"). According to Weiss, the latter alludes to the possibility that in his heart (though not with his lips) Job did sin after "his bone and his flesh" were touched. This interpretation cannot, however, be accepted if attention is paid to the whole verse i 22, which goes on to say "... nor charged God foolishly", an absolute parallel to "did not sin with his lips" in ii 10. Thus there is no progression in loss of faith. Another unacceptable explanation is that the seven days of silence (mentioned in the prologue) aggravated Job's suffering to such a degree that he compulsively gave vent to his feelings using the drastic style of ch. iii. But, though psychologically such an explanation is valid, on the literary level it is irrelevant and, anyhow, the fact still remains that the sharp change in Job's personality comes in ch. iii, and not in the prologue.

(b) The Lord in the prologue seems to represent quite a different image from the Lord in the speeches. In the prologue he is very anthrophomorphic, popular, earthly. Though living in heaven, he is tempted by Satan and prepared to take part in a kind of gambling—just like the gods in Greek mythology. What a clear difference between such a God and the transcendental, glorious, abstract being of the poetic speeches!

(c) The last difference—perhaps the most meaningful one—is in the question in which each part of the book is interested. There seems to be no connection between the simple, vulgar curiosity about who will win the contest, the Lord or Satan (or even the question in its loftier wording: does disinterested righteousness exists at all?) and the most cardinal problem about the management of the world by its Creator. Indeed, it can be argued that in the nature of things a debate may end by dealing with a different problem from what was originally intended, but again, this home truth is irrelevant to the artistic mimesis of the book.

Some scholars have explained that since the prologue is based on a fixed, detailed popular legend the author who employed it could not avoid some discrepancies. However, there was nothing to prevent him from conserving the main features of the legend (of which we know hardly anything) and at the same time smoothing over dissonant elements in it. He might, for instance, have attempted to moderate the popular motif of the wager, which does not accord with the main body of the book, the dialogues. The same holds for Job's description as a superhuman character whose confidence in God is absolute. The author could have sown some seeds in the prologue, let them sprout later in the speeches, and thus strengthened the linkage between the two. For example, the problem of theodicy could have been alluded to in the prologue, in either Job's words or his wife's. To sum up: the sharp disparity between the prologue and the speeches seems to justify the assumption that they were composed separately, each having its own existence prior to being combined in one literary unit.

III

All these arguments, convincing as they may be, are methodologically insufficient to support the assumption that the connection between the prologue and the speeches is too flimsy to be original and too artificial to justify a harmonistic approach to the book. Before a definite decision can be reached, it is essential to examine the problem from another point of view, a new one, so far as I know: to what extent do all the details in the prologue serve it *per se*, and to what extent are they inherently essential to it? I suggest that there are some elements whose existence in the prologue is intelligible only if the following speeches are taken into consideration.

(a) The description of Job as a perfect saint "That there is none like him in the earth" (i 8). It has already been indicated by some traditional Jewish sages that such a superlative description of righteousness does not figure even in the stories about Abraham and Moses [11]). Indeed, it is obvious enough that the author does not wish to depict a realistic character, but makes an absolute idealization—to the point of abstraction—of Job's personality. Such an idealization is not suitable for introducing the problem of the existence of disinterested righteousness, since that is an empirical and not a theoretical question. Actually, there is even an inner logical contradiction in the prologue, which axiomatically states that Job is a perfect saint and at the same time comes to examine this very statement. The empirical problem necessitates the introduction of a realistic, earthly character (like Noah, Abraham, Moses, whose human weaknesses are not concealed in the biblical stories) and not a sterilized, utopian, superhuman personage like Job. For what reason,

[11]) *Yalqut Shimoni* to Job, 892: "Rabbi Yochanan said: what is said about Job is much greater than what is said about Abraham".

then, did the author shape his main character in this manner? It seems to me that such an axiom regarding Job's righteousness must have been dictated by the needs of the debate in the poetic speeches. The abstract and theoretical problem in the dialogues, whether or not the Lord judges people according to criteria of justice intelligible to a human mind, necessitates an axiomatic (hence a theoretical) presupposition about Job's absolute righteousness. Any other starting point would inevitably weaken the essence of Job's argument and favour that of his friends, who explain his suffering—explicitly or implicitly—as a consequence of his sins. In other words, for the sake of a clear and sharp introduction of the principal problem, the author of the dialogues was compelled to emphasize Job's absolute, axiomatic righteousness, in order to refute any superficial explanation for his suffering. This axiom, which does not fit the prologue itself, but is indispensable for the discussion in the speeches, is nevertheless found in the prologue.

(b) Satan's declaration that Job "will curse thee to thy face" (i 11), too, does not fit the prologue. In order to prove that Job's righteousness is nothing but the consequence of cool calculating profit-seeking, Satan does not need to "promise" such an extreme blasphemy by Job.

It would have been quite sufficient for this purpose to claim that Job would no longer behave uprightly and avoid evil; that might have been complete proof that profit was the only reason for his righteousness. Cursing God to his face is deemed the utmost expression of evil and transgression (see Ex. xxii 27; Lev. xxiv 15-16) and Job would obviously have been considered wicked even if he failed to reach such a degree of sinfulness. If, for example, Job started to rob, cheat, oppress the poor, would that not be a decisive proof that his righteousness was not genuine? Logically the answer is affirmative but, according to Satan, it cannot be accepted as sufficient proof. Hence the proposed experimental system itself is irrational. It enables Job to behave wickedly but, unless he curses God, to be regarded as righteous still, with the theoretical problem concerning the essence of righteousness unsolved.

My suggestion is that this element, which does not itself correspond with the aim of the prologue, is vital to the dialogues. By putting in the mouth of Satan the promise "he will curse you to your face" the author shifts the centre of gravity from deeds to words, which from now on will be the sole criterion for Job's personality. Henceforth Job will be examined not in deeds but in words, and so a perfect bridge is built to the poetry, which lacks any elements of action but consists only of talk. Furthermore, by setting such an extreme limit as cursing God to his face, the author of the dialogues gave himself enough room for manoeuvering with the words which can be put in Job's mouth. Job could speak insolently and bitterly against God, shout indictments like "The earth is given into the hand of the wicked, he covers the faces of the judges thereof; if not, where, and who is he?" (ix 24)—and still Satan would not be reckoned the winner of the wager, since God was not cursed.

Once again we confront a basic element of the prologue which can be understood only against the background of the poetic dialogues.

(c) "For Job said, it may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts" (i 5). Here, too, the question is what does this information contribute to the prologue as such? It adds nothing to Job's righteousness. On the contrary, a sin of the sons (a possible one, since we do not know if they really sinned) can be regarded as their father's fault. Had Job's apprehension at least concerned some minor transgressions of his sons, it might have been understood; but what led the author to remark that Job thought of such a serious sin as cursing God, even if only in their heart? Moreover, this detail spoils one of the basic assumptions of the prologue, namely, that all the calamities were not a punishment, but just a consequence of the wager between Satan and God. If the sons did sin and cursed God in their hearts their death was justified, and had nothing to do with the contest; if on the other hand they did not sin, why suggest such a possibility at all? It seems that once again we must turn to the speeches to illuminate the need for this element in the prologue. In three different speeches (v 4, viii 4, xx 10), Job's friends allude to the possibility that the sons' death was a consequence of their own wickedness, and Job has no reason to complain. Obviously enough, the author rejects this superficial solution, but he wants this possibility to be considered seriously by the readers, and so he must give it a fair chance, and must not introduce it *a priori* as an absurdity. Such a chance is indeed given by expressing Job's apprehension about the uprightness of his sons.

To put it differently, Job's righteousness must be regarded as axiomatic, but not so his sons'. Now that the seeds of suspicion about their character have been sown in the prologue, the reader cannot without a second thought reject the principle of retaliation as

a key to Job's suffering. By arousing suspicion, the author forces us to examine the principle earnestly and carefully, and only then to decide against it.

It is therefore clear that there are some elements in the prologue which can be intelligible only if we assume that the author of the dialogues is responsible for them. Hence, there was no independent existence for the prologue.

IV

It seems that we have reached two contradictory conclusions. If one author wrote both the prose prologue and the poetic dialogues, how can all the sharp differences between them be explained? Why does the same author who builds bridges to lead us from the prologue to the speeches erect barriers which prevent a smooth passage?

I suggest that this ambivalence is a premeditated literary device, and at the same time a genuine expression of the author's dialectic approach to the problems he raised. His reliance upon the popular legend as well as the style used in the prologue discloses the clear intention of giving the story the nature of a naive tale. Everyone who is familiar with this *genre* would already find the seeds of the good *finale* in the midst of the calamities. Such a pseudo-naive presentation is well suited to the conventional (or, better still, dogmatic) reader, who would never doubt the heavenly judgement, and is evidently quite sure of Job's rosy future. The employment of legendary features in the prologue prepares that reader mentally for the coming harsh accusations of Job; it anaesthetizes his awareness, strengthening the illusion of a plain world, free from deep existential problems. This is vital, lest he develops an inner resistance, which might produce a mental gap, detrimental to the very understanding of Job's arguments.

The other side of the coin is even more important. This sophisticated conjunction of the prologue and the speeches is nicely adapted to the requirements of readers of the other type, the sceptics who observe the world with a more discriminating eye. They are supposed to be sensitive enough to perceive the author's ironic wink and to realize that a legendary cover is actually an escape from reality or rather a mask which must be thrown off before the truth behind it can be exposed. Thus the author aims to say that reality and the mythic world of the prologue (and epilogue), with its stereotyped problems and solutions guaranteed in advance, are two different levels which should be definitely separated from each other. Every reader capable of understanding this evidently realizes that the author has shrewdly stated his view that a complicated reality cannot offer unequivocal solutions to man's existential problems (a view obviously expressed also in God's answer to Job).

How can this dialectic—ironic attitude of the author's towards data that he himself established be evaluated? It is not the irony of the omniscient, who puts himself high above both the reader and the story; but that of the hesitating sceptic, who makes irony a device for discovering the truth [12]), which is not always unequivocal. It is the irony that has been described by Kierkegaard: "Irony arises from the constant placing of the particularities of the finite together with the infinite ethical requirements, thus permitting the contradiction to come into being" [13]). Thus, the dialectic relations between the prologue and the speeches are by no means merely an external literary device, but an honest reflection of the author's ambivalence towards his subject. Such an attitude provides him with an objective, not too close vantage point, despite his highly emotional involvement. As a matter of fact, this standpoint was already chosen by the author when he opted to make the popular tale a basis for his work. Thus, by referring to the popular myth about Job the righteous, not only does the writer find a common denominator for most of his audiences, but also hides himself dialectically behind a legend that provides him with an ambivalent overview of presuppositions which he himself set down, but to which he is nevertheless not fully committed. In semi-ironic disguise his dialectical attitude, already recognized in the prologue, is elucidated by the prologue's relationship to the speeches.

This irony, the author's wink from between the lines, which breaks the literary illusion, is a clearly alien element, and one might deny the relevance of such a modern approach to an ancient piece of literature like the book of Job. Yet, I think that such a denial is to be rejected, even without using the theoretical argument about the timelessness of artistic devices. My claim is that the basic artistic

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[12]) Regarding the irony of Socrates Swabey writes: "Irony as a method was employed by Socrates ... as a means of discovering logical and moral truth" (p. 46), and "With irony, the contradiction between the hidden reality and outward show, between the temporal and eternal, between the relative and the absolute appears (p. 53). See M. C. Swabey, *Comic Laughter* (New Haven, Conn., 1961). For more about irony, see S. Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, trans. L. M. Capel (London, 1966).

[13]) *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. D. F. Swenson (Princeton, 1944), p. 443.

design of the book creates a position of alienation. The prologue is written from the vantage point of the omniscient writer, who shares his information with the reader, and thus sets him apart from the heroes of the book. That is to say, all the way through the dialogues the reader finds himself parallel to the heroes, and even when he reaches the greatest degree of emotional identification with any of them, he still cannot entirely identify himself with them, as he is privy to a very important detail which is hidden from them. In other words, the basic standpoint of the reader creates alienation throughout the whole work, and one must not give up making an exegetical use of this fact. Conversely, neglecting this feature would be turning a blind eye to one of the most essential literary truths of the book of Job.

"THE SKIES WILL UNCOVER HIS INIQUITY": SATIRE IN THE SECOND SPEECH OF ZOPHAR (JOB XX)

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The following analysis of Job xx seeks to demonstrate three theses:

(1) Zophar is specifically answering the speech of Job in chapter xix (as well as several earlier speeches of Job) [1].
(2) Zophar's reply provides additional and powerful proof that Job's cries for an "umpire" (ix 33), a "witness" (xvi 19), and a "vindicator" (xix 25) are not cries for God but for a third party in the dispute [2].
(3) Satire is the key to a proper understanding of the relationships between the speeches of Job and the speeches of the friends.

Let us turn to the last problem first, because the other two must be seen in its light: it is essential to define carefully the meaning of satire, as that word will be used in this article. "Satire is militant irony", writes Northrop Frye (*Anatomy of Criticism* [Princeton, 1957], p. 224). Going on to distinguish the two terms, irony and satire, he states:

> Irony is consistent both with complete realism of content and with the suppression of attitude on the part of the author. Satire demands at least a token fantasy, a content which the reader recognizes as grotesque, and at least an implicit moral standard, the latter being essential in a militant attitude to experience (p. 224).

One can conclude from this distinction that irony is best characterized by ambiguity of intention on the part of the author. For example, at Saul's public coronation ceremony at Mizpah (1 Sam. x 17-27), Samuel proclaims Saul king with these words:

[1] It is common for commentators to deny that any speech of the dialogue directly answers a preceding speech. So, for example, S. Terrien, "The Book of Job", *IB* 3 (New York and Nashville, 1954), p. 1063, and H. H. Rowley, *Job* (London, 1970), p. 177.

[2] Further bibliographical references will be provided in the context of a discussion of this problem below, but it is instructive to note that the most recent commentary, that of Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job* (New York, 1978), once again insists that Job does not have any third figure in view at any of those places; cf. pp. 526-9.