

SEMEIOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE BOOK OF JOB*

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Modern redaction theory assumes that some parts of the book of job are less genuine than others. The job of the Prolog is not the job of the Dialog. Bruce Vawter says in his *Job and Jonah*, "It is the poetic job and the poetic job alone who is of interest to the sensitive observer of religious experience." Then after quoting John L. McKenzie to the effect that the Prolog is so unrealistic that it becomes revolting Vawter demurs somewhat. For though the story is untrue to life it is "not unfortunately untrue to what is perceived as life by the majority of our fellow beings."¹ In other words the author is using the prose story that he might parody that conventional wisdom in order to make a more profound theological statement. Unfortunately that conventional wisdom includes Psalm 1, which is not false though it has only one side of the truth when it affirms that everything a righteous man does prospers. Vawter at least considers job a literary unit and not the work of a mindless redactor. Terrien's commentary in *Interpreter's Bible* is typical old-school historicism. On historico-critical grounds he determines what is genuine and then interprets the rest in terms of genre, setting, and intention. To Terrien the book is a "festal tragedy" for celebration during a hypothetical "New Year Festival." For such historicism the date and source are usually tied closely to the interpretation. Some see the book as a product of the Exile, even viewing it as a parable of the suffering nation. But J. J. M. Roberts maintains one cannot use the date of the book "to provide a ready-made background for its inter-

**Studies in the Book of Job* (Semeia 7; ed. Robert Polzin and David Robertson; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977. 154) *The Book of Job and Ricoeur's Hermeneutics* (Semeia 19; ed. by John Dominic Crossan; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981. 123).

¹ *Job and Jonah: Questioning the Hidden God* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983) 43, 44.

pretation, and lacking this an historical framework is hard to establish, since Job simply ignores Israel's epic and prophetic traditions."² Many critics have lost interest in source criticism and other aspects of historical criticism. They find other types of literary criticism more rewarding. Although most accept a redaction view of the book's origin they prefer to deal with it in its final literary context in terms of rhetoric and structure, and various new hermeneutical approaches including sociological, psychological, and semeiological emphases. Comparative linguistic research continues but with a chastened methodology.³ Structural studies have resulted in a tendency to look on the book as a unified literary work rather than a conglomeration of vaguely related and sometimes unrelated or even contradictory material. As the quotation from Bruce Vawter above shows, the incongruities are now looked upon as purposive and integral to the book's meaning. In 1977 R. M. Polzin devoted Part II of his book on biblical structuralism to an attempt at structural analysis of the book. His synchronic analysis stands in contrast to the diachronic interpretations of earlier literary- and form-critical scholars.⁴

This article will examine some recent semeiological approaches as presented in issues 7 and 19 of the experimental journal *Semeia*. In keeping with the purpose of *Semeia* the approach is exploratory, probing new and emerging areas and methods of criticism and the application of new hermeneutical principles. There are eight contributors to *Semeia* 7 and eleven to *Semeia* 19, each with his own viewpoint. Our purpose is not to deal with every view and every critique but to present those aspects of these studies which reflect .

² See J. J. M. Roberts "Job and the Israelite Religious Tradition," *ZAW* 89 (1977) 110.

³ A. R. Ceresko's *Job 29-31 in the Light of North-West Semitic* (BibOr 36, Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980) is a prime example of the welcome change.

⁴ Polzin concludes with the statement, "The figures of the story, far from being arbitrary, capricious, and mutually contradictory, interrelate with one another to help form a coherent message" (*Biblical Structuralism, Method and Subjectivity in the Study of Ancient Texts* [Semeia Supplements; ed. Wm. A. Beardslee; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977] 120). Two excellent synchronic analyses appeared in *Studia Biblica* 1978: 1 (JSOT Supplement Series II; Sheffield: JSOT, 1979) entitled "The Book of Job: Unity and Meaning," by J. A. Baker (pp. 17-26), and "The Authorship and Structure of the Book of Job," by J. F. A. Sawyer (pp. 253-57). Also see C. Westermann's *The Structure of the Book of Job: A Form-Critical Analysis* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981)

most clearly a hermeneutic which tends to reverse the traditional approach to the book. Because the traditional approach may not always be the correct approach we will also try to remain open to any perspective that does not violate the principle of the analogy of Scripture.

In *Semeia* 7 (pp. 1-39) William Whedbee interprets the book of Job as comedy. Comic staples are said to be there-incongruity, repetition, U-shaped plot and the presence of archetypal characters. For example Elihu, a comic character who speaks banal words, appears with precise timing. God is expected following Job's challenge at the end of his peroration (31 :35-37) but Elihu appears instead, a Johnny-come-lately, from nowhere. The author creates a brilliant caricature of the friends as wise counselors. As for Job, his discursive rambling has no orderly progression but he is a master of parodies. In chapters 3, 9, and 14 he is said to parody the complaint formula and 9:2-10 is thought to be an ironic parody of Eliphaz's doxological hymn in 5:9-16 which Job uses to twist Eliphaz's intention and convey the opposite meaning. As Whedbee puts it on page 16, Job quotes Eliphaz verbatim in 9:10 (cf. 5:9) "as a fitting climax to his sardonic song to a God of chaos."

Whedbee's idea is provocative but is Job sarcastic about God's power and wisdom so that the statement, "His wisdom is profound, his power is vast" is irony? There is no contextual signal that the meaning should be reversed in 9:4-13. To Job the question is not whether God is all powerful but how he uses his power, God's justice not his power is Job's problem. Job is not using irony when he asks, "Who can say to him, 'What are you doing?'" (9:12). Job would have had no dilemma had he only believed God was less than sovereign. Believing in God's sovereignty his imagination constructed a phantom god who was unjust (9:16-24). There was no other logical way out of the dilemma. As he says in 9:24, "If it is not he, then who is it?" But Job inconsistently still believes God is just by whom he can swear (27:2) and by whom he will be vindicated (13:18). Our main explanation of this is that Job is a sufferer whose reason and experience conflict and as a result so do his words. He argues God against God. Refusal to accept this incongruity at face value led the tidy minds of earlier critics to rearrange the text.

This irony approach which reverses the meaning of a text has merit but must be contextually controlled. Whedbee's view is a considerable improvement over David Robertson's extreme and un-

trolled use of irony in his article, "The Book of Job: A Literary Study."⁵ Robertson believes the irony in the book is pervasive. Whenever Job speaks positively of God it is tongue-in-cheek. As in chapter 9 Job says in 12:13, "To God belong wisdom and power; counsel and understanding are his." Instead of extolling God's wisdom and power Robertson also sees this as a criticism of God for not being very wise or powerful. A wise man destroys in order to rebuild, but when God does, it is impossible to rebuild. "What he tears down cannot be rebuilt" (12:14). A wise man would use the weather for good but God "holds back the waters and there is drought and when he lets them loose they devastate the land" (12:15). In other words God mismanages the universe; he uses his power unwisely. Again, if this is the correct interpretation then Job has no basis for his theodicy dilemma. A more restrained view sees here a parody not of God but of the counselor's lopsided and simplistic understanding of God's relationship to the world. Job is attempting to answer Zophar's question, "Can you fathom the mysteries of God?" (11:70). He is saying that God's actions are indeed mysterious and strange. The mystery is profound but he knows as much about it as they do. In an often overlooked use of irony in 12:12 Job expresses amazement that they who are sages are so shallow: "Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding?" That sarcastic question leads into the poem on God's wisdom and power in 12:13-25 which is a powerful statement of the sovereign freedom of God. He cannot be made to act in ways suitable to man. God's mysterious acts in the history of man only serve to prove the case. (12:16-25).

A major issue is the meaning and function of the Yahweh speeches. How one resolves these speeches and Job's response to them is an important key to a comprehensive interpretation of the book. Von Rad's view is traditional: The purpose of the speeches is to glorify God's justice towards his creatures, to show that he is good but that his justice cannot be comprehended by man, it can only be adored. But to David Robertson the author's purpose in the speeches is to prove that Yahweh is a charlatan god. What Job suggested God would do in 9:14-20 he actually does in the speeches. But does he? (Cf. 9:17.) Is the author putting on the lips of Job irony as a parody of Yahweh who is presented as one who has the power and skill of a)

⁵ Soundings 56 (1973) 446-69.

god but who cannot govern with justice? Is Job's repentance tongue-in-cheek? Is Job mocking God when he predicted he would knuckle under--"my mouth would declare me guilty" (9:20a, 13-15)? As additional proof of the parody on Yahweh Robertson offers the thought that, in the Epilog, God approves of Job's sorry words. So the poet like a medicine man has developed a strategy for curing man's fear by ridiculing the object feared.

In contrast, Whedbee hears in the Yahweh speeches a playful festive note. The irony is best interpreted as elements in a comic vision. E. M. Good was correct in noting that Yahweh shuts the issue from "justice" (Job's question) to "order" when he says to Job, "Would you annul my *mispat*?"⁶ Whedbee thinks Robertson's tongue-in-cheek repentance of Job might be compatible with his comedy view of the book but surmises it is too simple. Job's repentance is an authentic response of the hero because he has now been given, through the vision, a double view, that is, a divine and human view of himself and the world. He now sees the world through God's eyes. Also, the genuineness of Job's confession following his repentance becomes important to Whedbee for it is equivalent to the recognition scene in a comic plot: "I talked of things I did not know" (42:3). Many modern interpreters discount the Epilog but Whedbee emphasizes it since such a happy ending confirms his comic perspective. Though too constrictive this approach is nearer the nerve center of the book than Robertson's unbridled views. Certainly in the first Yahweh speech there is a twinkle in the LORD'S eye as he walks with Job through his creation, contemplating with him by means of ironic questions the marvels of nature. This he does not to humiliate Job but to prove to him that he, the Almighty Creator, is still his friend: The whimsical note comes through clearly in the ostrich passage in 39:13-18. Imagine a bird with legs that can tear open a lion, that has wings but can't fly yet can run faster than a horse. God's pointing out how his creatures appear ridiculous has a serious purpose. He is teaching Job something of his sovereign freedom.

L. Alonso Schokel proposes a dramatic reading of Job in four acts. Among the groups of actors Elihu represents the audience who eventually intrudes upon the stage. After the Prolog, God as spec-

⁶ See Good's *Irony in the Old Testament* (London: Allenson, 1965) and S. H. Scholnick, "The Meaning of *mispat* in the Book of Job," *JBL* 101 (1982) 521-29.

tator, who overhears but cannot be seen, is addressed but does not respond. One purpose is to transform the audience into the cast, for only by participating can the meaning be understood. But to do so puts one under the gaze of God. Like Job we all discover the chasm between us and God. We see ourselves in Job as both villain and hero. After such suspense in the drama, at long last God, the director of the strange play, leaves the spectator role and assumes the part of an actor. Job has complained that he cannot see God, but now out of the whirlwind God's mask vanishes and Job sees him for who he is.

James G. Williams correctly warns that the Scriptures as a whole will not fit easily into types or genres derived from outside the biblical tradition. For example, historically personages of the comic type are of inferior classes or of the *nouveaux riches*. There is also the matter of defining comedy. Is being funny or amusing a necessary ingredient? Williams thinks so. Is the inevitability of "natural law" beyond good and evil basic to comic perspective? If so that excludes the Bible, according to Williams. Alonso Schokel ignores the Epilog probably because it was difficult to work into his dramatic interpretation. The happy ending through Job's newly won twofold vision fits the comic perspective better, though Whedbee fails to mention Job's daughters with their whimsical names and the implied marriage festivities.

The information theories of language on which this semeiological approach is based call for signs and signals in the text in order to detect a subtlety such as irony, but as Williams says, "The ironic manner of speaking is adverse to signals." The hermeneutical test of irony is whether it makes sense of the text; in Williams' words, "a sense that is faithful to the context and to that for which the text is the pretext." Williams sees the whole book dominated by the image of Job as intercessor in the Epilog. Hints throughout the book point to this. In the Prolog God puts great stakes in Job as his servant. He is intercessor for his sons in the Prolog. And in the Epilog this is expanded to the "friends" themselves, of whom God says, "You have not spoken the truth about me." Eliphaz unwittingly speaks of Job's happy ending when he says Job's repentance would be followed by an ideal life (5:22-27) and by Job's ability to deliver the guilty (22:29-30), which ironically becomes the "friends" themselves in the Epilog. The purpose of God's ironic rhetorical questions to Job is not to belittle him but to prove Job is important to God. How

could a mere mortal establish justice on earth? "Or could he?" asks Williams. "The irony of an ironic reading is that God's questions may conceal the 'literal' truth." So Williams sees the structure of the book outlining Job's spiritual journey.⁷ This comes close to the traditional view that sees God accomplishing a higher purpose through Job's suffering though one might seriously question Williams' use of the divine irony, as we shall see later.

Issue 19 (1981) of *Semeia* is entitled "The Book of Job and Ricoeur's Hermeneutics." It consists of a general essay by Loretta Dornisch on that subject followed by four essays on Paul Ricoeur and Job 38. Part III is made up of six discussions of the preceding essays. According to Ricoeur the historico-critical and semeiological methods are not in conflict. Ricoeur holds that writing detaches the meaning from dependence on the writer, freeing it for other times and places. Because the original time and place no longer exist the writing is freed from the author's meaning. Since we interpret out of different traditions there are many possible meanings but not an infinite number. Different approaches should aim for a logic of probable interpretation, a convergence rather than a conflict of interpretations. Historical and sociological tools are valid so long as one avoids the illusions of source, author, audience, etc., as end goals. "A text accomplishes its meaning only in personal appropriation. The moment of exegesis is not that of existential decision (Bultmann) but that of meaning."⁸ But this moment of meaning must be distinguished from the moment when the reader grasps the meaning, when it is actualized for the reader. This he calls the moment of signification." The semantic must precede the existential.

Ricoeur criticizes the standard interpretations of the Book of Job for systematization, which precludes the play of symbolic meaning on multiple levels. We let "historicism, the genetic problem, awareness of internal inconsistencies in the text to interfere with our understanding of the many levels of meaning, the intended symbolic or paradoxical incongruities, and even the resistance to systematization, all of which are precisely ways the author uses to communicate the complexity and ambiguity of the human condition."⁹

There are troublesome notions here. First of all, how do we keep the text from becoming absolute, totally divorced from the author's

⁷ *Semeia* 7.140-41.

⁸ *Semeia* 19.12

⁹ Dornisch quoting Ricoeur (*Semeia* 19.14).

intended meaning? M. W. Fox criticizes Ricoeur on this very point. Though Ricoeur rejects "the fallacy of the absolute text" Fox doesn't see how he can do this along with his acceptance of "semantic autonomy." Inscription (writing) entails, according to Ricoeur, "disconnection of the mental intention of the author from the verbal meaning of the text, of what the author meant and what the text means.

On this Fox observes: "The author's meaning is reduced to a mere historical datum with no more relevance to the text's meaning than does the interpretation of each and every reader."¹⁰ If this criticism is valid, which it appears to be, it fatally damages the foundation of Ricoeur's hermeneutic. But its superstructure is also shaky. Ricoeur thinks there can be a convergence of methodologies. The historico-critical and the semeiotic approaches can be joined since to him the history of the text remains a part of the text. So there are many valid methods for interpreting Job and many meanings are the result. If this sounds confusing it is because it is. The only limitation on the number of meanings a text can have is based on the continuing history of the text, the ongoing dialectic of tradition and interpretation. However, there still remain some lessons to be learned from Ricoeur's developing theory of interpretation. Dornisch lists five key themes which when applied to the book of Job clearly reveal Ricoeur's theory as of 1981.

The first of these is "symbol." Interpretation of symbols is not the whole of hermeneutics but is the condensation point. In symbol, language is revealed in its strongest force and with its greatest fullness. "The symbol is the privileged place of the experience of the surplus of meaning."¹¹ Is it ever valid to use this principle of extended meaning? All literary tropes are symbols but can they convey an extended message? I think this is possible only when we can show from the context that the author intended the symbol to be used in that way. Later I will attempt to show that the second divine speech in Job fits the context and the purpose of the book when viewed from this perspective. In contrast historico-critical opinion considers the speech an irrelevant addition.

A second Ricoeurian theme is what he has called "Explanation-Understanding." "Explanation calls on any human discipline that

¹⁰ *Semeia* 19.60.

¹¹ Dornisch quoting Ricoeur (*Semeia* 19.17).

can legitimately research the text. Here the goal of interpretation is governed by the relationship of explanation and understanding. Understanding begins as a guess, moves through a complex set of procedures involving a dialectic of explanation-and-continually-developing-understanding, and reaches a state of conclusion at the level of appropriation. Such a process moves from a guess to validation using the logic of probability along the lines developed by E. D. Hirsch.¹² Every exegete must ask, "What are my presuppositions and, what is my hermeneutical theory?" Without accepting all of Ricoeur's philosophical baggage I find it very difficult to find fault with this procedure.

The rule of metaphor is Ricoeur's next theme. Metaphor is more than ornamental figure, it is "the place of the creation of new language, new meaning, new being." To Ricoeur metaphor permeates the prose and poetry of Job and this is different than merely seeing many metaphors. Metaphor provides not an analogical model but a theoretical model which by means of "a language of extravagance" describes a new vision of reality. The metaphorical twist in Job moves through "complex processes of describing and redescribing reality, reaching a climax in Job 38, where the rhetorical shift is so dramatic as to bring about a new vision of reality."¹³ The importance of metaphor can hardly be overemphasized but Ricoeur may be doing just that when, on the basis of his rule of metaphor, he asserts that all interpretations partly miss the mark because the text is irreducible. Ricoeur thinks philology, history, etc., can help us better understand the metaphor but they can't translate the metaphor or substitute for it.

This leads us to the philosophical basis of Ricoeur's interpretation theory, which is rooted in German idealism with its suspicion of propositional truth. This idealist tradition has been criticized by Buber and other philosophers for failing to recognize the reality of encounter and dialogue. For example, A. Lacocque views the Job text as a grand metaphor where Yahweh is a controlling symbol and qualifier and the inexplicable suffering of man is a limit-experience:⁴ He makes a Ricoeurian case for claiming Job is about "the impotence of religion and philosophy." Religion (the counselors) and philos-

¹² *Semeia* 19.18.

¹³ *Semeia* 19.13.

¹⁴ See his article in *Semeia* 19, Part II, entitled "Job or the Impotence of Religion and Philosophy."

ophy (job) give way to an existential I-Thou relationship exhibited in the divine speeches, where both parties are affected by events lived in common. What the text means goes beyond what the author meant. The surplus of meaning in the symbolic Job speaks of a powerless God who is nevertheless still God and not a God of retribution but one who suffers with us. This view raises the question: "What God?" It is a view which many modern interpreters think dominates the book. The answer is given in various forms. To Lacocque the Tetragram is the key. The main point is Job in process from "religion" to intimate relationship (covenant) with that God whose name is YHWH. Lacocque sees a new ontology of God arising with the divine discourses beginning in chapter 38. In this new relationship and understanding Job moves to being "the suffering servant" as in Isaiah 53. There are concepts here that deserve more study. It is far superior to the view that answers the question, "What God?" with the reply that Job's appeal to a *go'el* is to a sympathetic personal or patron God while rejecting the high god YHWH with his retributive justice.¹⁵

Another aspect of Ricoeur's hermeneutic centers on his view of narrative. The key here is to understand the relationship between history and fiction which requires that one separate historical "truth claims" from fictional "truth claims." This is not surprising bearing in mind that Ricoeur, as a French Protestant during the 1930s, was strongly influenced by Barth and Kierkegaard. For him the biblical text must communicate a kerygma that calls for personal response and must never become a dead letter. A theory of metaphor and a theory of narrative raises the problem of imagination for Ricoeur. That is the power of forming images of things that are absent. Imagination frees itself from the confines of reality. It frees us from the symbols history has created for us and gives us power to recreate that history to a new reality. Ricoeur thinks the author of Job is using bold imagination to teach a new theological reality. The story projects a world with a narrow ideology which because of his suffering Job questions. He pushes his questioning to a boundary, a limit, a new horizon where the questions cannot be denied even though there is no answer. To see is not to see. It is such paradoxical incongruity that leads to new levels of symbolic meaning in the book. There are elements of truth in this approach but with Ricoeur's presuppositions

¹⁵ See footnote 17.

the new meaning comes at the expense of the analogy of Scripture. The God whom Job sees is "the inscrutable God of terror" and the book of Job is a dramatic refutation of the theory of retribution and the ethical view of the world, a view both Job and the counselors were afflicted with. Since the publication in English of Ricoeur's *The Symbolism of Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) a number of similar hermeneutical treatments of the book of Job have appeared.

A. Lacocque's "Job and the Symbolism of Evil" represents a faithful application of Ricoeur's hermeneutic while D. Robertson's approach uses only some of the pinnacles.¹⁶ Some, like Robertson, see God caricatured as a god of power and skill but one who can't govern with justice; others see in the book a god so transcendent, so far (removed from man, and so concerned with all the earth that he has no time to care or understand if one righteous person suffers. The latter is the view of J. B. Curtis, who believes the book contains a positive assertion of a personal god who thinks like a human being and can therefore be Job's advocate, witness, and intercessor before the unconcerned high god.¹⁷ Such a view flies in the face of Job's clear monotheistic assertion in chapter 31 where Job denies allegiance to other gods (the sun or the moon) under oath. He concludes, ". . . for I would have been unfaithful to God on high" (v 28). Unfortunately the methods and the presuppositions of such critics stand in the way of an interpretation based on the context and on the analogy of Scripture. But a discriminating use of those insights that are valid judged from a right set of presuppositions can add to our understanding of the book of Job.

The Theophany is the key to the book but we must accept the entire Theophany. Unlike Semeia 19 which deals only with chapter 38 both divine speeches are important for a full appreciation of that message which fits the purpose of the book. The author is not presenting a parody of a high god who is indifferent to Job's suffering nor is he using irony to humiliate Job. The irony is meant to instruct not to humiliate. Job now has the privilege of sitting at the feet of the same God whom the Hebrew author, under Israel's covenant,

¹⁶ On page 314 of *The Symbolism of Evil* Ricoeur states, "The book of Job is the upsetting document that records this shattering of the moral vision of the world." See *Biblical Research* 24-25 (1979-80) 7-19 for Lacocque's article and others, and footnote 5 above for Robertson. See *Semeia* 4 (1975) for additional material on Ricoeur's interpretation of Scripture.

¹⁷ *JBL* 102 (1983) 549-62.

knew as YHWH. He is the One Job so desperately wanted to see (9:11; 23:3-4). Far from being crushed Job is being made wonderfully aware of who God is in a universe full of paradoxes and yet filled with wonder. Job learns to take God at his word without understanding the mysteries of his universe much less the reason why he is suffering. F. I. Andersen has stated it well, though with a somewhat hyperbolic conclusion:

Job is vindicated in a faith in God's goodness that has survived a terrible deprivation and, indeed, grown in scope, unsupported by Israel's historical creed of the mighty acts of God, unsupported by life in the covenant community, unsupported by cult institutions, unsupported by revealed knowledge from the prophets, unsupported by tradition and contradicted by experience. Next to Jesus, Job must surely be the greatest believer in the whole Bible.¹⁸

G. B. Gray in speaking about the relationship of the Yahweh speeches to the purpose of the book of Job notes that what these speeches do not contain is almost as important as what they do.¹⁹ The speeches do not reverse God's judgment in the Prolog about Job. The Accuser was wrong in impugning Job's inner reasons for being righteous and the friends were wrong about Job's outward conduct as a reason for his suffering. God's rebuke of Job in 38:2 was only for what he said during his intense suffering, not for earlier sins. The latter would have proved that the purely penal theory of suffering was correct. The friends by their theory implied they knew completely God's ways. One of the purposes of the Yahweh speeches is to show that neither they nor Job possessed such knowledge. God shows Job how limited man's knowledge is. He begins with the words, "Who is this that darkens my counsel [*'esah* = purpose] by words without knowledge?" (38:2). He then proceeds to turn Job's attention away from the legal aspect of *mispāt* to its ruling aspect and thereby Job comes to see the larger dimension of God's relationship with his creatures. On the surface it would appear that the speeches concentrate only on the natural world but careful reading reveals something more. In the first speech (chapters 38 and 39) God's creative works are in view and Job learns of the wonder of natural paradoxes and of the sovereign freedom of the Creator and Sus-

¹⁸ *Job: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976) 271.

¹⁹ *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921) Introduction, par. 38. "

tainer. job is humbled and agrees that his words about God's *mispat* were based on ignorance. "I put my hand to my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer-twice, but I will say no more" (40:4, 4 5). The second speech begins on an entirely different note. The introduction in 40:8-14 tells about God's power and ability to crush the wicked and to look on every proud one and bring him low. The purpose here goes beyond showing job that God is Creator and Sustainer of the natural world. It is to convince job that God is Lord also of the moral order which includes the justice aspect of *mispat*. Appropriately job's response this time is repentance, for this is what he questioned (42:1-6). Far from its being a meaningless appendage, in this second speech Yahweh as his own defense attorney moves to the very heart of his case. From his limited perspective job has misunderstood God's attitude toward wickedness. Those who contend either that Yahweh is amoral or that one purpose of the book is to set aside the biblical doctrine of justice and retribution must ignore 40:8-14. job's preoccupation with his own vindication had obscured the real issue-that God alone has the power and majesty to destroy evil and save the righteous. The message is that job's right hand can't save but God's can (40:14).job must now acknowledge God not only as Creator but as Saviour. It is precisely these two attributes of God that stand behind the Yahweh speeches (his power and his justice). Seeing 40:8-14 as prolog to the descriptions of Behemoth and Leviathan reveals how they serve the purpose of the book in a subtle and yet forceful way. Here is where I believe a semeiological hermeneutic is called for. Both terms (Behemoth and Leviathan) are used literally and metaphorically in other OT passages. Metaphorically Leviathan represents forces that oppose Yahweh, whether at the Red Sea in Ps 74:14 or at the End Time in Isa 27:1. The intensive ending on Behemoth turns the ordinary word for a bovine into a monster (cf. Ps 73:22).²⁰ Those who insist these creatures are literal must face two questions. Why are they not mentioned in the first speech where they would belong? And why the hyperbolic language and the stress on their invincibility? But if they are graphic symbols of cosmic powers such as the Satan in the Prolog then the speech is a fitting climax. The Accuser cannot be openly mentioned without revealing to job information he must not know

²⁰ The Canaanite goddess Anat conquered the seven-headed Leviathan along with a bovine creature called "the ferocious bullock" (*ANET* 137, line 41).

if he is to continue as a model to his readers who must suffer in ignorance of God's explicit purpose. So Job never learns about the events in the divine council. But his repentance shows he has gotten the message of the second speech—that God is also omnipotent in the moral sphere. He alone will put down all evil and bring to pass all his holy will. There is nothing else Job needs to know, except

that this Sovereign Lord of the Universe is his friend (42:7, 8). G. K. Chesterton, in a chapter entitled "Man is Most Comforted by Paradoxes,"²¹ enlightens us considerably on why he believes God appears to Job with a battery of questions rather than answers. Chesterton is convinced that a trivial poet would have had God appear and give answers. By these questions God himself takes up the role of a skeptic and turns Job's rationalism (e.g. his doubts about God's justice) against itself. God ironically accepts a kind of equality with Job as he calls on Job to gird up his loins for a fair intellectual duel. Job had asked God for a bill of indictment (31:35). But God has no indictment, he merely asks the right to cross-examine this one who has been plying him with questions. Though called the Socratic method Jesus used this questioning technique masterfully. He questioned those who came with their questions (Luke 1:1-5; 20:1-8, 27-44). The method sometimes plies the doubter with questions until he doubts his doubts. Job is simply overwhelmed with mysteries and paradoxes for which he has no answers but in the midst of it all he comes to understand what is too good to be told, that God knows what he is doing in his universe. Job had many questions to put to God but instead of God's trying to prove that it is an explainable world he insists that it is stranger than Job had ever imagined and yet in all the strangeness there is brightness and joy and divine opposition to evil and wrong. Thus the reader comes to understand that in a world of such paradoxes Job was suffering not because he was the worst of men but because he was one of the best, a man who suffered only to prove that God was true and the Accuser a liar.

Indeed, he is a grand type. In all his wounds he prefigured the wounds of that One, who as the antitypical innocent sufferer, the

²¹ See L. L. Glatzer, *The Dimensions of Job* (New York: Schocken, 1969) 228-37.

only truly holy man and God in the flesh, provided for us the ultimate solution to the problem of evil.

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The problem of interpretation Modern man lives in a verbalized world, and that is why his worldview features find their mark in the text as in one of the types of semiotic system [1, c. 57]. That is why the current stage of development of linguistic thought is characterized by a great interest regarding the problem of studying a literary text as an independent research object. The problem of interpretation of the text has been a topic of philosophical interest since ancient times. A classical science, which deals with the understanding of texts is called hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is derived from the Greek word ἑρμηνεύω (hermeneuō, "translate, interpret"). Folk etymology places its origin with Hermes, the mythological Greek deity who was the 'messenger of the gods'. SEMEIOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE BOOK OF JOB 141 could a mere mortal establish justice on earth? "Or could he?" asks Williams. "The irony of an ironic reading is that God's questions may conceal the 'literal' truth." So Williams sees the structure of the book outlining Job's spiritual journey. Part III is made up of six discussions of the preceding essays. According to Ricoeur the historico-critical and semeiological methods are not in conflict. Ricoeur holds that writing detaches the meaning from dependence on the writer, freeing it for other times and places. Because the original time and place no longer exist the writing is freed from the author's meaning. Since we interpret out of different traditions there are many possible meanings but not an infinite number. The book of Job provides a model for how one begins to work toward integration and wholeness by living through the reality of trauma with one another. By excavating the fast-held god image formulated within the Deuteronomistic theology underlying the book of Job, and Job's not-so-subtle aggression in response, I will show how his story re-evaluates and re-imagines entrenched god images that oppress and divide in times of crisis. Such re-imagining enables Job's ego maturation as he challenges the communal dogma constructed during postexilic Israel that perpetuated isolation and inward regressio... The translation of Job in this article is based on the author's own translation in consultation with C. L. Seow. References. Albers, R. (2003).

Description: Bibliography; book of Job. Copyright: Attribution Non-Commercial (BY-NC).
Wolterstroff, Nicholas. "The Promise of Speech-act Theory for Biblical Interpretation." In *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation*, edited by Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, and Karl Moller, 73-90. Cumbria/Grand Rapids, Mich. The Book of Job is a canonical work in both Christian and Jewish liturgy. In the story, Job, a man of faith, is tested by God through various horrible afflictions. Interpretations of this profoundly odd book are as many as the centuries of commentary it has undergone, but it is arguably one of the most beautifully-written books of the Bible - even the most secular of literary scholars still praise its pacing and profound wording. Meridian Magazine "If Job 1:21: Interpretation and Commentary is any indication of the rest of the series, the subsequent volumes will be pleasures to read and study." Zwinglius Redivivus "Professor Seow's contribution to Job-an scholarship has magnificently surpassed all of his predecessors; this is the finest, most thorough, most readable, most informative commentary on the book of Job and I cannot wait, I simply cannot rest, until the second volume is out and I can read it. . . . His work sets a new standard for biblical commentaries, and raises high expectations for any future volume published in the Illuminationsseries." Journal of Ancient Judaism "This commentary is more than impressive and sets a new standard against which all