

The poet, having given Job such vividly powerful language for the articulation of his outrage and his anguish, now fashions still greater poetry for God. The wide-ranging panorama of creation in the Voice from the Whirlwind shows a sublimity of expression, a plasticity of description, an ability to evoke the complex and dynamic interplay of beauty and violence in the natural world, and even an originality of metaphoric inventiveness, that surpasses all the poetry, great as it is, that Job has spoken. Many readers over the centuries have felt that God's speech to Job is no real answer to the problem of undeserved suffering, and some have complained that it amounts to a kind of cosmic bullying of puny man by an overpowering deity. One must concede that it is not exactly an answer to the problem because for those who believe that life should not be arbitrary there can be no real answer concerning the good person who loses a child (not to speak of ten children) or the blameless dear one who dies in an accident or is stricken with a terrible wasting disease. But God's thundering challenge to Job is not bullying. Rather, it rousingly introduces a comprehensive overview of the nature of reality that exposes the limits of Job's human perspective, anchored as it is in the restricted compass of human knowledge and the inevitable egoism of suffering. The vehicle of that overview is an order of poetry created to match the grandeur—or perhaps the omniscience—of God. The visionary experience that this poetry enables for Job is of a vast creation shot through with unfathomable paradoxes, such as the conjoining of the nurturing instinct with cruelty, where in place of the sufferer's longing for absolute darkness the morning stars sing together and there is a rhythmic interplay between light and darkness.

Poetry of such virtuosity and power, dependent as it must be on the expressive force of the original words and their ordering, is bound to pale in translation. The English version offered here is an attempt—which, inescapably, can be no more than intermittently successful—to convey something of the concreteness, the rhythmic compactness, the metaphoric richness, and the lexical vividness of the Hebrew. Perhaps one can draw a degree of encouragement from the fact that the greatness of the Book of Job has somehow managed to shine through in a long line of variously imperfect translations. My hope is that the present translation might manage to let that poetic light show in the English at least a little more than it has in earlier renderings.

I

A man there was in the land of Uz—Job, his name. And the man was 1
blameless and upright and feared God and shunned evil. And seven 2
sons were born to him, and three daughters. And his flocks came to 3
seven thousand sheep and three thousand camels and five hundred
yokes of cattle and five hundred she-asses and a great abundance of

1. *A man there was in the land of Uz.* These initial words signal the fable-like character of the frame-story. The opening formula, "A man there was," *'ish hayah*, resembles the first words of Nathan's parable of the poor man's ewe in 2 Samuel 12, "Two men there were in a single town," *shney 'anashim hayu be'ir ahat*. The more classical formula for starting a story in Hebrew narrative is "there was a man," *wayehi 'ish*, the order of verb and subject reversed and the converted imperfect form of the verb used.

Uz. Many scholars have located this land in Edom, across the Jordan from the Land of Israel. But it is really a never-never land somewhere to the east, as befits the fable and the universalizing thrust of the whole book. In this regard, the fact that *'uts* in Hebrew means "counsel" or "advice" invites one to construe this as the Land of Counsel.

2. *seven sons . . . three daughters.* These make a sum of ten, and all the numbers that follow yield multiples of ten. If the story is meant to evoke the pastoral world of the Patriarchs, it is clearly a stylized rendering of that world, as these formulaic numbers suggest and as the studied use of refrain-like repetitions throughout the tale equally suggests.

3. *flocks.* The Hebrew *migneḥ*, deriving from a root that means "to acquire," can mean either flocks or possessions. In a pastoral society, possessions would be chiefly flocks, and what follows is, except for the reference to slaves, a catalogue of livestock. The use in verse 10 of the verb "spread" (more literally, "burst forth") in conjunction with *migneḥ* also argues for the sense of "flocks."

- 4 slaves. And that man was greater than all the dwellers of the East. And his sons would go and hold a feast, in each one's house on his set day, 5 and they would call to their sisters to eat and drink with them. And it happened when the days of the feast came round, that Job would send and consecrate them and rise early in the morning and offer up burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job thought, Perhaps my sons have offended and cursed God in their hearts. Thus would Job do at all times.
- 6 And one day, the sons of God came to stand in attendance before the 7 LORD, and the Adversary, too, came among them. And the LORD said to the Adversary, "From where do you come?" And the Adversary answered the LORD and said, "From roaming the earth and walking 8 about in it." And the LORD said to the Adversary, "Have you paid heed to my servant Job, for there is none like him on earth, a blameless and 9 upright man, who fears God and shuns evil?" And the Adversary

5. *offer up burnt offerings*. In the pastoral, pre-national, and non-Israelite setting of the story, there is neither temple nor priesthood, and Job, the pious monotheist, performs his own sacrifices.

cursed God. The Hebrew says, euphemistically, "blessed God." Many think this is a scribal substitution to avoid a blasphemous phrase, though it is also possible that the euphemism was actually used in speech. The same usage occurs in the Adversary's words in verse 12.

6. *the sons of God*. This celestial entourage is a literary vestige of the pre-monotheistic notion of a council of the gods and is reflected in several of the canonical psalms (perhaps, most notably, in Psalm 82).

the Adversary. The Hebrew is *hasatan*, and invariably uses the definite article because the designation indicates a function, not a proper name. The word *satan* is a person, thing, or set of circumstances that constitutes an obstacle or frustrates one's purposes. Only toward the very end of the biblical period would the term begin to drop the definite article and refer to a demonic figure. Marvin Pope imagines *hasatan* here as a kind of intelligence agent working for God, but the dialogue suggests rather an element of jealousy (when God lavishes praise on Job) and cynical mean-spiritedness.

8. *blameless . . . upright . . . who fears God and shuns evil*. The verbatim repetition by God of the narrator's characterization of Job confirms its perfect authority.

answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have 10 You not hedged him about and his household and all that he has all around? The work of his hands You have blessed, and his flocks have spread over the land. And yet, reach out Your hand, pray, and strike all 11 he has. Will he not curse You to Your face?" And the LORD said to the 12 Adversary, "Look, all that he has is in your hands. Only against him do not reach out your hand." And the Adversary went out from before the LORD's presence.

And one day, his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking 13 wine in the house of their brother, the firstborn. And a messenger came 14 to Job and said, "The cattle were plowing and the she-asses grazing by them, and Sabeans fell upon them and took them, and the lads they 15 struck down by the edge of the sword, and I alone escaped to tell you." This one was still speaking when another came and said, "God's fire fell 16 from the heavens and burned among the sheep and the lads and consumed them, and I alone escaped to tell you." This one was still speak- 17 ing when another came and said, "Chaldeans set out in three bands and pounced upon the camels and took them, and the lads they struck

11. *reach out Your hand, pray, and strike all he has*. The Adversary carefully formulates this outrageous request to strip Job of possessions and offspring with the polite particle of entreaty, "pray," *na'*.

12. *in your hands*. The Hebrew uses the singular and pointedly plays with "reach out Your hand" both before and after this phrase. It is therefore unwise to render the phrase as "in your trust" or "in your power," as English translators since 1611 have done.

14-18. The tale of disasters, hewing to the general procedure of extensive repetition deployed here, alternates between attacks by marauders (verses 15 and 17) and natural catastrophes (verses 16 and 18). It also follows a common biblical pattern of three plus one—three disasters that destroy Job's property and a fourth that kills his children.

15. *the lads*. That is, the servants.

16. *God's fire*. This is probably a reference to lightning. "God," *'eholim*, might be merely an intensifier—that is, "awesome fire."

18 down by the edge of the sword." This one was still speaking when
another came and said, "Your sons and your daughters were eating and
19 drinking wine in the house of their brother, the firstborn. And, look, a
great wind came from beyond the wilderness and struck the four corners
of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they died. And I alone
20 escaped to tell you." And Job rose and tore his garment and shaved his
21 head and fell to the earth and bowed down. And he said,

"Naked I came out from my mother's womb,
and naked shall I return there.
The LORD has given and the LORD has taken.
May the LORD's name be blessed."

22 With all this, Job did not offend, nor did he put blame on God.

19. *the young people*. The Hebrew *ne'arim* is the same word used for "lads" or servants, but here it refers to Job's sons and daughters and hence a gender-inclusive translation is required.

And I alone escaped to tell you. This thrice-repeated refrain is aptly picked up by Melville in the haunting conclusion of *Moby-Dick*, when everything on the *Pequod* is wiped out, only Ishmael surviving.

20. *shaved his head*. This (like the rending of the garment) is a general sign of mourning, though prohibited in Israel and thus a neat way of reminding the audience that Job is not an Israelite.

21. *Naked I came out . . . naked shall I return there*. Job's acceptance of his dire fate (which gave rise to the notion of the "patient Job") is cast as a solemn two-line poem. This first line exhibits a link of narrative development between the two versets: first birth, then death. The reference of "there" has a loose associative logic: the grave is not the womb, but it is part of mother earth from which the first man was made. There is something "existential" in this brief poetic statement: whatever a man acquires in life—even in the children he begets—are supernumerary to the fundamental condition of nakedness in which he enters and leaves life.

May the LORD's name be blessed. Here Job makes exactly the opposite declaration to the one the Adversary expected: he says "blessed" in its actual meaning, not as an antithetical euphemism.

And one day, the sons of God came to stand in attendance before the LORD, and the Adversary, too, came among them to stand in attendance before the LORD. And the LORD said to the Adversary, "From whence do you come?" And the Adversary answered the LORD and said, "From roaming the earth and walking about in it." And the LORD said to the Adversary, "Have you paid heed to My servant Job, for there is none like him on earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and shuns evil and still clings to his innocence, and you incited Me against him to destroy him for nothing." And the Adversary answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! A man will give all he has for his own life. Yet, reach

1. *And one day*. Still following the stylized folktale narrative procedure of elaborate verbatim repetition, the story now repeats all the language of 1:6–8, with only a couple of insignificant variations: here the Adversary is said "to stand in attendance," which was merely implied in 1:6; and here God asks him "From whence" (*'ey mizeh*) rather than "From where" (*me'ayin*). The first new material appears in God's accusatory words to the Adversary at the end of verse 3: "still clings to his innocence, and you incited Me against him to destroy him for nothing."

4. *Skin for skin!* In this second dialogue between God and the Adversary, the pace picks up. Instead of offering a detailed account of Job's circumstances (1:10–11), the Adversary responds brusquely and pithily. Almost all interpreters agree that "Skin for skin" is some sort of proverb, but there is no clear consensus on its meaning. In light of the second half of the verse, which is manifestly an explanation of these three words, and in light of the Adversary's next line of attack, which is to strike Job with an acutely painful skin disease, a plausible interpretation would be the following: what is most precious to a man is his own physical being; in the end, he is prepared to sacrifice everything, even the

out, pray, Your hand and strike his bone and his flesh. Will he not curse
6 You to Your face?" And the LORD said to the Adversary, "Here he is in
7 your hands. Only preserve his life." And the Adversary went out from
before the LORD's presence. And he struck Job with a grievous burning
8 rash from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. And he took a
potsherd to scrape himself with, and he was sitting among the ashes.
9 And his wife said to him, "Do you still cling to your innocence? Curse
10 God and die." And he said to her, "You speak as one of the base women
would speak. Shall we accept good from God, too, and evil we shall not
accept?" With all this, Job did not offend with his lips.

"skin" (or lives) of his own dear ones, but hurt him badly in his own flesh and bones, and he will abandon all his principles of integrity.

6. *Here he is in your hands.* God's acquiescence in this perverse experiment is a puzzle for ethical monotheism, and perhaps one must say that the origins of the folktale are from a time when there was no real ethical monotheism. In any case, this wager or test is never addressed in the rest of the book.

7. *And the Adversary went out . . . and he struck Job.* In keeping with the acceleration of narrative tempo, the Adversary immediately proceeds from his exchange with God to his mischief, with no intervening narrative material as in 1:13-14.

burning rash. The Hebrew *sheḥin* derives from a root that means "hot" and is the same term used in Exodus for the fifth plague. Attempts at a precise medical diagnosis are pointless: the essential idea is that a burning rash covering the entire body from the soles of the feet to the head would be agonizing (and also disfiguring, as the initial failure of the three friends to recognize Job suggests).

9. *Do you still cling to your innocence? Curse God and die.* Again, the euphemism of "bless" for "curse" appears. Job's wife either assumes that cursing God will immediately lead to Job's death, which might be just as well, or that, given his ghastly state, he will soon die anyway, so that he might as well curse the deity who inflicted these horrors on him. In either case, her use of the repeated phrase "still cling to your innocence" (the Hebrew equally suggests "blamelessness" or "integrity") is sarcastic: what is the point of your innocence, she says, after all that has happened? In the body of the poem, Job will still cling to his innocence, in the very act of accusing God, as God recognizes at the end of the book.

And Job's three companions heard of all this harm that had come upon him, and they came, each from his place—Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, and they agreed to meet to grieve with him and to comfort him. And they lifted up their eyes from afar and did not recognize him, and they lifted up their voices and wept, and each tore his garment, and they tossed dust on their heads toward the heavens. And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spoke a word to him, for they saw that the pain was very great.

10. *accept.* The Hebrew verb *qabel* is Late Biblical, so this may be a point where the writer's own period leaked through the archaizing style he adopted for the frame-story. A few others, including the prepositions that follow a couple of the verbs, have been identified by Avi Hurvitz, a historian of biblical Hebrew.

11. *Job's three companions.* The precise location of their respective homelands has been debated by scholars, though it is clear that their places of origin reflect a spread of a few hundred miles to the east of the Jordan. One of the companions, Eliphaz, has a name associated with the descendants of Esau, or Edom. Bildad is probably a pagan name ("son of Adad"). In any case, the geographical background suggests that Job, "greater than all the dwellers of the East," was a man who had international connections.

to grieve with him. The literal sense of the Hebrew verb is to nod the head, as a sign of mourning or sympathy.

12. *they lifted up their eyes . . . they lifted up their voices.* In the elegant repetition, one act leads to the other, from seeing Job's disfigurement to an immediate physical response of grief.

tossed dust on their heads toward the heavens. This, like the rending of the garments, is a gesture of mourning. The Septuagint lacks "toward the heavens," perhaps because the Greek translators considered it superfluous.

13. *none spoke a word to him, for they saw that the pain was very great.* In the frame-story, the three companions seem deeply sympathetic with Job and respectful of his suffering. This argues for a discrepancy between the frame-story and the poem, where they are accusatory and even contemptuous of him. One might imagine that after the seven days of mourning, they came to the conclusion that he must have been a scoundrel to deserve all this suffering, but that seems forced.

1,2 **A**fterward, Job opened his mouth and cursed his day. And Job spoke up and he said:

3 Annul the day that I was born
and the night that said, "A man is conceived."

4 That day, let it be darkness.
Let God above not seek it out,
nor brightness shine upon it.

3. *Annul the day that I was born.* The Job poet displays a virtuosity that transcends all other biblical poetry. Thus, the very first words of the poem begin with a strong accent for emphasis of feeling and an emphatic alliteration: *yo'vad yom 'ivaled bo*. The initial verb (intransitive in the Hebrew) means to die or to be lost, and therefore "perish," used by the King James Version and several modern translations, is semantically accurate but in regard to diction is a bit fussy and lacks the directness of the Hebrew. A couple of modern translators have opted for "damn," but *yo'vad* is neither an expletive nor does it imply damnation, which is not a biblical idea. The force of what follows is that Job would like to expunge the day of his birth from the calendar, which is a contextual justification for "annul." This choice sacrifices the initial stress but does yield an iambic cadence.

and the night that said, "A man is conceived." Day and night are a formulaic word-pair in biblical poetic parallelism. But in a spectacular deployment of the pattern of intensification that generally characterizes the relationship between the first and second verset in a line of biblical poetry, Job asks not only that the day of his birth be expunged but, nine months earlier, the very act of conception that led to the birth. The phrase "the night that said" might also be construed as a third-person singular with unspecified subject standing in for a passive: "the night when it was said." From this point on, the poet proceeds to work over first the day, then the night, summing up language to expunge each in turn.

Let darkness, death's shadow, foul it, 5
let a cloud-mass rest upon it,
let day-gloom dismay it.
That night, let murk overtake it. 6
Let it not join in the days of the year,
let it not enter the number of months.
Oh, let that night be barren, 7
let it have no song of joy.
Let the day-cursers hex it, 8
those ready to rouse Leviathan.
Let its twilight stars go dark. 9
Let it hope for day in vain,
and let it not see the eyelids of dawn.

5. *darkness . . . cloud-mass . . . day-gloom.* In calling up different terms for the blocking out of light, the poet reflects a richness of lexical resources that makes him stand out among biblical poets. The most unusual term here is *kimrrey yom*, "day-gloom," probably derived from an Aramaic root that means "darkness," and perhaps referring to an eclipse, though that is not certain. The oddness of the English rendering here is meant to intimate the strangeness of the word in the Hebrew.

7. *let that night be barren, / let it have no song of joy.* The line moves in a metonymic slide from the wished-for barrenness of Job's mother to the night of conception as barren and joyless.

8. *the day-cursers . . . those ready to rouse Leviathan.* As will happen again and again in the poem, the poet switches into a mythological register. Leviathan is the fearsome primordial sea-monster subdued by the god of order in Canaanite mythology. For this reason, some scholars prefer to read "Yamm-cursers" for "day-cursers," assuming the Hebrew *yam* instead of *yom*. In either case, the cursers are mythological or magical agents.

9. *Let its twilight stars go dark.* In this triadic line, we have a temporal sequence of (a) light fading in the evening, (b) a night of hoping for a daybreak that never comes, (c) a dawn that does not come.

the eyelids of dawn. This exquisite and surprising image—another hallmark of this poet's originality—simultaneously indicates the first crack of light on the eastern horizon and the movement of the awakening person's eyes taking in the

- 10 For it did not shut the belly's doors
to hide wretchedness from my eyes.
11 Why did I not die from the womb,
from the belly come out, breathe my last?
12 Why did knees welcome me,
and why breasts, that I should suck?
13 For now I would lie and be still,
would sleep and know repose
14 with kings and the councilors of earth,
who build ruins for themselves,
15 or with princes, possessors of gold,
who fill their houses with silver.
16 Or like a buried stillborn I'd be,
like babes who never saw light.

first light of day. The metaphor will recur late in the poem in the most unanticipated context.

10. *the belly's doors*. The Hebrew says "my belly," an ellipsis for "my mother's belly." *wretchedness*. This recurrent term in Job, *'amal*, is here put forth as a virtual synonym for "life" or "the world." Job's anguish could scarcely be expressed more compactly.

12. *knees welcome me*. The simplest explanation is a reference to the mother's knees, parted as the newborn emerges.

14. *build ruins for themselves*. In this brilliantly compact formulation of the futility of all human endeavor, kings build great edifices for themselves that are destined to turn to ruins. One thinks of Shelley's "Ozymandias."

16. *stillborn . . . babes who never saw light*. Here the poem refers directly back to the idea of dying at birth in verse 11.

buried stillborn. Many render *tamun* as "hidden," which is what the word means in earlier biblical Hebrew, but the term in this Late Biblical text, as the context makes clear, has traveled toward the sense of "buried" that it has in rabbinic Hebrew.

- There the wicked cease their troubling, 17
and there the weary repose.
All together the prisoners are tranquil, 18
they hear not the taskmaster's voice.
The small and the great are there, 19
and the slave is free of his master.
Why give light to the wretched 20
and life to the deeply embittered,
who wait for death in vain, 21
dig for it more than for treasure,
who rejoice at the tomb, 22
are glad when they find the grave?
—To a man whose way is hidden, 23
and God has hedged him about.

17. *There the wicked*. The catalogue of human types (wicked, weary, prisoners, slaves, taskmaster) reveals a vision of life that involves hierarchies of domination and acts of exploitation.

20. *Why give light*. The Hebrew says, "Why should he give light," but it is not clearly the case, as many assume, that the pronoun refers to God. As elsewhere, the unspecified third-person singular may function as a passive, and thus the translation keeps the ambiguity of grammatical reference.

deeply embittered. The Hebrew *nefesh* ("life-breath," "essential self") is an intensifier, hence "deeply."

21. *treasure*. The Hebrew *matmon* ("something buried") derives from the same root as "buried" in verse 16.

22. *the tomb*. The Masoretic text reads *gil*, "joy." This translation adopts a commonly proposed emendation, *gal*, literally, "grave mound." A scribe may have been led into the error by the proximity of a verb of rejoicing.

23. *to a man*. This phrase appears to refer back to the verb at the beginning of verse 20, "Why give . . . ?"

hedged him about. In the Adversary's words in 1:10, this very verb referred to God's protection of Job. Here, it is pointedly turned around to mean that God has blocked Job on every side.

- 24 For before my bread my moaning comes,
and my roar pours out like water.
25 For I feared a thing—it befell me,
what I dreaded came upon me.
26 I was not quiet, I was not still,
I had no repose, and trouble came.

26. *not quiet . . . not still . . . no repose . . . trouble came.* The poem ends climactically with a string of terms expressing constant perturbation, the very opposite of the condition of peaceful non-existence for which Job longs.

- And Eliphaz the Temanite spoke out and he said: 1
If speech were tried against you, could you stand it? 2
Yet who can hold back words?
Look, you reprov'd many, 3
and slack hands you strengthened.
The stumbler your words lifted up, 4
and bended knees you bolstered.
But now it comes to you and you cannot stand it, 5
it reaches you and you are dismayed.
Is not your reverence your safety, 6
your hope—your blameless ways?

2. *If speech were tried against you.* Eliphaz's opening words register an awareness that Job is likely to resist all reproof.

3. *Look, you reprov'd many.* The opening rhetorical strategy is to pay Job a kind of backhanded compliment: he was known as a man who gave encouragement to the failing and also did not hesitate to rebuke those guilty of misdeeds. He should, then, be prepared to accept justified reproof himself, but Eliphaz fears this is not the case ("But now it comes to you and you cannot stand it").

6. *Is not your reverence your safety.* The whole line is cast in an elegant chiasm (abb'a'): reverence-safety-hope-blameless ways. Job should have nothing to fear from warranted rebuke because his God-fearing life and his integrity have always given him security and hope. If he reaffirms these virtues, in the light of his friends' reproof, he will still be all right, despite all that has befallen him.

- 7 Recall, pray: what innocent man has died,
and where were the upright demolished?
8 As I have seen, those who plow mischief,
those who plant wretchedness, reap it.
9 Through God's breath they die,
before his nostrils' breathing they vanish.
10 The lion's roar, the maned beast's sound—
and the young lions' teeth are smashed.
11 The king of beasts dies with no prey,
the whelps of the lion are scattered.
12 And to me came a word in secret,
and my ear caught a tag-end of it,
13 in musings from nighttime's visions
when slumber falls upon men.
14 Fear called to me, and trembling,
and all my limbs it gripped with fear.

7. *Recall*. This verb is symptomatic of Eliphaz's argument. The knowledge that the innocent are never overtaken by disaster is something we have always known, and need only recall. If Job is plunged in a sea of disasters, there must be good reason for it.

8. *plow . . . plant . . . reap*. This conventional agricultural metaphor marks a strict line of causality in the moral realm: just as the planted seed will grow according to its kind, evil acts will produce a harvest of calamity for their perpetrators.

10. *The lion's roar*. The lexical wealth of the Job poet defies translation. There are five different biblical words for lion—*'aryeh*, *shahal*, *kefir*, *layish*, and *lavi*—and all five of them are used in these two lines. The King James Version, in a strategy of desperation, associated different terms with lions of different ages, but no one really knows what the original differentiations were, or if there were any. (This translation, in a gesture to tradition, adopts just one of the 1611 inventions, "young lions" for *kefirim*.)

the young lions' teeth are smashed. The force of both lines is that even such fearsomely powerful beasts can be reduced by God to impotence, their whelps scattered with no prey to nurture them.

- And a spirit passed over my face,
made the hair on my flesh stand on end.
It halted, its look unfamiliar,
an image before my eyes,
stillness, and a sound did I hear:
Can a mortal be cleared before God,
can a man be made pure by his Maker?
Why, His servants He does not trust,
His agents He charges with blame.
All the more so, the clay-house dwellers,
whose foundation is in the dust,
who are crushed more quickly than moths.
From morning to eve they are shattered,
unawares they are lost forever.

12. *and to me came a word in secret*. Eliphaz presents his perception of man's inevitably flawed stature before God as the revelation of a scary night-vision.

15. *A spirit*. The Hebrew *ruah* can also mean "breath" or "wind," but the context of nocturnal terror surely argues for a spectral apparition.

16. *its look unfamiliar*. Literally, "I did not recognize its look."

17. *Can a mortal be cleared before God*. These are the words of the spirit speaking to Eliphaz.

18. *servants . . . agents*. These are the courtiers of the celestial entourage and the divine messengers, the "angels" of traditional terminology.

19. *clay-house dwellers*. The clay house, as both ancient and modern commentators have noted, is the human body, a transient habitation with a foundation in dust, as the account of the creation of the first human being in Genesis 2 reminds us.

20. *From morning to eve*. This is a hyperbolic representation of the brevity of the human life span.

21 Should their life-thread be broken within them,
they die, and without any wisdom.

21. *their life-thread*. The Hebrew *yeter* is a cord that can be either a tent-cord (which is how some interpreters understand it here) or a bowstring. One gets the sense of some essential cord within the human body, the breaking of which immediately leads to death. The image strongly conveys the fragility of man's physical existence, which at any moment can come to an end.

they die, and without any wisdom. Eliphaz, of course, means to impart conventional wisdom to Job. But the greater part of humankind, he proposes, is cut off by sudden death before attaining true wisdom.

Call out, pray: will any answer you,
and to whom of the angels will you turn?
For anger kills a fool,
and the simple, envy slays.
I have seen a fool striking root—
all at once his abode I saw cursed.
His children are distant from rescue
and are crushed in the gate—none will save.
Whose harvest the hungry eat
and from among thorns they take it away,
and the thirsty pant for their wealth.
For crime does not spring from the dust,
nor from the soil does wretchedness sprout.

3. *I have seen a fool striking root— / all at once his abode I saw cursed*. This line summarizes the moral calculus of mainline Wisdom literature that the three companions bring to bear against Job: the prosperity of the fool or the wrongdoer is illusory and ephemeral. The Hebrew of the second verset says literally, "all at once his abode I cursed," and this translation understands this as an ellipsis for the speaker's perception that the house has been suddenly cursed. Others emend the verb to read "is cursed," eliminating the first-person singular.

4. *crushed in the gate*. The gates of the town were the place for enacting justice. They were also where a victorious enemy entered.

5. *from among thorns*. The Hebrew is obscure, and the text looks corrupt here.

6. *For crime does not spring from the dust*. Moral mischief is perpetrated by conscious human agents; it does not just spring up spontaneously like grass or weeds.

- 7 But man is to wretchedness born
like sparks flying upward.
8 Yet I search for El
and to God I make my case,
9 Who does great things without limit
wonders beyond all number,
10 Who brings rain down on the earth
and sends water over the fields,
11 Who raises the lowly on high—
the downcast are lifted in rescue.
12 Thwarts the designs of the cunning,
and their hands do not perform wisely.
13 He entraps the wise in their cunning,
and the crooked's counsel proves hasty.
14 By day they encounter darkness,
as in night they go groping at noon.

7. *But man is to wretchedness born.* This pronouncement may have a double edge. Man's fate is misery; but, given Eliphaz's moralism, he may also be saying that wretchedness is the predictable consequence of the perversity of human nature.

like sparks flying upward. The Hebrew *beney reshef* is understood by some to be an explicitly mythological reference because Reshef is the Northwest Semitic god of pestilence and the underworld. However, with the emphasis here on man as a source of trouble, the concrete image of sparks makes better sense: just as a fire sends burning sparks swirling upward, man creates wretchedness all around him.

8. *Yet I search for El.* Eliphaz is now quick to assert his own piety, in contrast to the general rule of troublemaking humankind that he has just expressed. What follows is a celebratory catalogue of God's power and providential acts, cast, as we might expect, in rather traditional poetry—in fact, reminiscent of Psalms. The Job poet cannily devises for each of the three companions poetry that has its moments of strength but is often rather conventional, in keeping with their worldview. The startling originality of Job's poetry stands out in contrast.

14. *By day they encounter darkness, / as in night they go groping at noon.* This line is another instance of the Job poet's fondness for chiasmic structures: a (day), b (encounter), c (darkness), c' (night), b' (go groping), a' (noon).

- He rescues the simple from the sword,
and from the hand of the strong, the impoverished,
and the indigent then has hope,
and wickedness clamps its mouth shut.
Why, happy the man whom God corrects.
Shaddai's reproof do not spurn!
For He causes pain and binds the wound,
He deals blows but His hands will heal.
In six straits He will save you,
and in seven harm will not touch you.
In famine He redeems you from death,
and in battle from the sword.
From the scourge of the tongue you are hidden,
and you shall fear not assault when it comes.

15. *the simple from the sword.* The Masoretic text appears to say "from the sword from their mouth." The only way to save this reading would be to drop the second "from" as a dittography, thus yielding "from the sword of their mouth," which is a possible biblical metaphor. This translation follows Pope, who emends *mipihem*, "from their mouth," to *peta'im*, "the simple." Perhaps "mouth" at the end of the next line influenced the copyist to make a mistake here.

18. *He causes pain and binds the wound.* This whole line is particularly addressed to Job's present predicament of terrible suffering. Job is encouraged to imagine that his agony is "reproof" from God, Who will heal him when he mends his sinful ways.

19. *In six straits He will save you.* This celebration of God's providential care for the just, which continues to the end of verse 26, is again reminiscent of Psalms. Compare, for example, Psalm 91.

21. *From the scourge of the tongue.* It is also possible to construe this phrase, as many interpreters have done, to mean: "When the tongue [that is, of slander] goes wandering."

assault. The primary sense of the Hebrew *shod* is "plunder," but in the present context, the element of violence implied by the term is salient.

- 22 At assault and starvation you laugh,
and the beast of the earth you fear not.
23 With the stones of the field is your pact,
the beasts of the field leagued with you.
24 And you shall know that your tent is peaceful,
probe your home and find nothing amiss.
25 And you shall know that your seed is abundant,
your offspring like the grass of the earth.
26 You shall come to the grave in vigor,
as grain-shocks mount in their season.
27 Look, this we have searched, it is so.
Hear it, and you—you should know.

24. *find nothing amiss*. The verb *teḥeta'* commonly means "to offend" (King James Version, "sin"), but its original sense, derived from archery, is "to miss the mark." The likely idea here is that when the just man looks into his house, everything is in order.

26. *in vigor*. The meaning of the Hebrew *kelah* has long been disputed. The only other time it appears in the Bible is also in Job (30:2), where it is matched in the poetic parallelism with "strength," and hence the inference about what it means. If that inference is correct, then Eliphaz is saying that the just man remains hale and hearty until his death, which is simply a natural process of coming to an end, like the harvest invoked in the second verset.

27. *we have searched*. This first-person plural epitomizes Eliphaz's stance: he speaks with the assurance of collective wisdom.

and you—you should know. The second-person pronoun, generally omitted before a conjugated verb, is emphatic, *we'atah da'-lakh*, pointing the finger at Job: as for you, you should certainly know this home truth.

- And Job spoke out and he said: 1
Could my anguish but be weighed, 2
and my disaster on the scales be borne,
they would be heavier now than the sand of the sea. 3
Thus my words are choked back.
For Shaddai's arrows are in me— 4
their venom my spirit drinks.
The terrors of God beset me.
Does the wild ass bray over his grass, 5
the ox bellow over his feed?
Is tasteless food eaten unsalted, 6
does the oozing of mallows have savor?
My throat refuses to touch them. 7
They resemble my sickening flesh.

3. *are choked back*. The unusual verb *la'u* appears to derive from *lo'a*, gullet. Others understand it to mean "spewed out."

4. *venom*. God, violating the ancient equivalent of a Geneva Convention, uses poisoned arrows.

5. *the wild ass bray . . . the ox bellow*. The answer to these rhetorical questions is of course "no": an animal has no need to make noise when it is given food. This phenomenon of natural eating in the animal realm is then antithetically complemented by the idea in the next line that flavorless food is inedible for humans.

7. *My throat refuses to touch them*. For Job in his suffering, all food has become nauseating.

They resemble my sickening flesh. The translation is an educated guess. The

- 3 How have you counseled without wisdom,
and abundantly proffered advice?
4 To whom have you told words,
and whose breath has come out of you?

2-4. These verses break off, to be followed by a new formula for introducing Job's speech. Either a long section has been lost, or these lines belong somewhere in a previous speech of Job's.

And Job again took up his theme and he said:
By God, Who denied me justice
and by Shaddai Who embittered my life,
as long as my breath is within me,
and God's spirit in my nostrils,
my lips will never speak evil;
nor my tongue ever utter deceit.
Far be it from me to declare you right,
till I breathe my last I will not renounce my virtue.
To my rightness I cling, I will not let go,
my heart has not caused reproach all my days.
Let my enemy be deemed a wicked man
and my adversary a wrongdoer.

[And Zophar the Naamathite spoke up and he said:]
For what hope has the tainted to profit,
when God takes away his life?
Will God hear his scream
when disaster befalls him?

2. *By God . . . by Shaddai.* Job begins his confession of innocence by pronouncing a solemn oath in the name of the very deity who has been persecuting him.

8. *For what hope has the tainted to profit.* This speech begins with a recurrent central theme of the friends' verbal assault on Job: the man who has polluted himself through evil acts will never really profit from them because God's stern retribution will overtake him (as it has overtaken Job).

- 10 Will he delight in Shaddai,
will he call upon God at all times?
- 11 Let me teach you with God's own force,
what is with Shaddai I will not conceal.
- 12 Look, all of you have beheld it,
and why do you spew empty breath?
- 13 This is the wicked man's share with God,
the portion that oppressors take from Shaddai.
- 14 If his sons be many, it is for the sword,
and his offspring will go without bread.
- 15 His survivors will be buried in the death-plague,
and his widows will not keen.
- 16 Should he heap up silver like dust
and like mud lay up apparel,
17 he'll lay up, and the just man will wear it,
and the silver the blameless share out.
- 18 He will build his house like the moth,
like a shack that a watchman puts up.
- 19 Rich he lies down—it's not taken away.
He opens up his eyes and it's gone.

11. *Let me teach you with God's own force.* This smug assumption that the speaker knows what God knows about good and evil, reward and punishment, is characteristic of the friends.

12. *Look, all of you have beheld it, / and why do you spew empty breath?* These impatient words make sense coming from Zophar as the last of the three reprovers to speak in the debate. He turns to his two friends and berates them for not making their case against Job more forcefully clear to him.

15. *his widows will not keen.* The plural, of course, presupposes polygamy. Presumably, the widows will not mourn because they have no use for their good-for-nothing husband.

19. *it's not taken away.* The referent of the Hebrew verb is ambiguous, but it seems likely that it refers to the rich man's wealth.

- Terror will take him like water;
by night the storm snatches him up. 20
- The east wind bears him off and he's gone,
it sweeps him away from his place. 21
- It flings itself on him unsparing,
from its power he strives to flee. 22
- It claps its hands against him,
and hisses at him from its place. 23

20. *like water.* Though some emend this word, thinking it an odd simile, it may simply refer to the way a flood overwhelms a person or sweeps him away—a very common image for death or disaster in Psalms. "Water" and "storm" would then be parallel terms for destruction in the two verses.

21. *the east wind.* As elsewhere (including the frame-story), the east wind, blowing from the desert, parches and blights.

23. *claps its hands . . . hisses.* Both are conventional gestures of scorn, but at the same time the sounds of clapping and hissing or whistling neatly evoke the violent motion of the storm-wind.

- 1 **Y**es, there's a mine for silver
and a place where gold is refined.
2 Iron from the dust is taken
and from stone the copper to smelt.

1. *Yes, there's a mine for silver.* This rhapsodic celebration of divine wisdom is clearly not part of the debate between Job and his three reprovers, and the strong scholarly consensus is that it is an editorial interpolation, perhaps with the aim of introducing a pious view of wisdom in this book that is such a radical challenge to the guiding assumptions of Wisdom literature. Robert Gordis, noting some affinities with the general poetic language of Job, imagines that this is an earlier composition by the Job poet, which he decided to insert here as a kind of interlude before Job's final confession of innocence. That proposal, though beguiling, is fanciful: this looks like the work of another poet with a very different worldview. As a hymn to divine wisdom, however, it does exhibit considerable poetic force.

silver . . . gold. These precious substances appear later in the poem in the list of objects of value that cannot equal the worth of wisdom. The mining of silver and gold and then the smelting of copper also introduce the notion of man's technological resourcefulness. As the lines that follow vividly declare, man searches out all the remote places of the earth, sinking mine-shafts into the depths of the ground, damming rivers, everywhere in ardent pursuit of treasure. Yet all this brilliant technology is nothing in comparison to the value of real wisdom.

a place where gold is refined. The movement from the source of silver in the first verset to the place of refining gold in the second verset participates in the general pattern of narrative development between the two halves of lines in biblical poetry.

- An end has man set to darkness,
and each limit he has probed,
the stone of deep gloom and death's shadow.
He breaks under a stream without dwellers,
forgotten by any foot,
remote and devoid of men.
The earth from which bread comes forth,
and beneath it a churning like fire.
The source of the sapphire, its stones,
and gold dust is there.
A path that the vulture knows not
nor the eye of the falcon beholds.
The proud beasts have never trod on it,
nor the lion passed over it.
To the flintstone he set his hand,
upended mountains from their roots.
Through the rocks he hacked out channels,
and all precious things his eye has seen.
The wellsprings of rivers he blocked.
What was hidden he brought out to light.

3. *An end has man set to darkness.* The Hebrew says merely "he has set"; the implied antecedent, "man," has been added for the sake of clarity. Given the image in the third verset of stone as the abode of darkness, what is probably suggested here is that man, tunneling into stone for precious minerals, opens it to the light, or, perhaps, brings torchlight down into the mines.

4. *breaks under a stream.* This is a poetic image of digging tunnels under rivers.

5. *beneath it a churning like fire.* Thought it is unlikely that the poet had any notion of the earth's molten core, he seems to have had a sense of what is beneath the surface of the earth as a realm of fluid unstable forces, while the surface above provides humankind its daily bread.

8. *The proud beasts have never trod on it.* The places that man the restless miner reaches in his quest for precious minerals are so remote that even wild animals do not live there. The existence of copper mines in the rocky desert region near the Gulf of Aqaba might have encouraged this image.

- 12 But wisdom, where is it found,
and where is the place of insight?
- 13 Man does not know its worth,
and it is not found in the land of the living.
- 14 The Deep has said, "It is not in me,"
and the Sea has said, "It is not with me."
- 15 It cannot be got for fine gold,
nor can silver be paid as its price.
- 16 It cannot be weighed in the gold of Ophir,
in precious onyx and sapphire.
- 17 Gold and glass cannot equal it,
nor its worth in golden vessels.
- 18 Coral and crystal—not to be mentioned,
wisdom's value surpasses rubies.
- 19 Ethiopian topaz can't equal it,
in pure gold it cannot be weighed.
- 20 And wisdom, from where does it come,
and where is the place of insight?
- 21 It is hidden from the eye of all living,
from the fowl of the heavens, concealed.

12. *But wisdom, where is it found.* All this human searching into the dark and remote places of the earth may discover treasure but not what is far more precious, wisdom.

15. *fine gold.* This is the first of four different Hebrew terms for gold that the poet deploys in the next five lines.

20. *And wisdom, from where does it come.* The use of this entire line as a refrain is in keeping with the celebratory purpose of the poem.

- Perdition and Death have said,
"With our own ears we heard its rumor." 22
- God grasps its way,
and He knows its place. 23
- For He looks to the ends of the earth,
beneath all the heavens He sees, 24
- to gauge the heft of the wind,
and to weigh water with a measure, 25
- when He fixes a limit for rain
and a way for the thunderhead. 26
- Then He saw and recounted it,
set it firm and probed it, too. 27

22. *Perdition and Death.* This mythological pair answers to the pair, Deep and Sea, in verse 15. The effect of both is to give a cosmic sweep to the celebration of divine wisdom: it is not to be found in the sea or the great abyss or the underworld realm of death but only with God.

25. *to gauge the heft of the wind.* The wind, of course, cannot be weighed—except by God.

to weigh water with a measure. Several English versions render this as "mete out water with a measure." The point, however, is not that God doles out measures of water but rather that He alone, as Creator, can weigh the huge mass of the primordial waters.

27. *Then He saw and recounted it.* The past tense of the verbs indicates that this act of divine reflection comes at the end of the process of creation, a process intimated in verses 24–26. The poet may have in mind the reiterated "And He saw that it was good" in the first account of creation. The recounting, then, might be the authoritative narrative of creation in Genesis.

set it firm. This is the verb regularly used for establishing things on a firm foundation—houses, dynasties, the world.

and probed it, too. God not only set creation on a firm foundation but also, through His unique wisdom, searched out and understood every one of its components.

28 And He said to man:
 Look, fear of the Master, that is wisdom,
 and the shunning of evil is insight.

28. *And He said to man.* This clause (two words in the Hebrew) is an extra-metrical introduction to the concluding line of the poem. Extra-metrical elements, especially for the introduction of direct speech, are fairly common in prophetic poetry.

the Master. The Hebrew uses *'adonai* here, and only here, in the Book of Job, which has led some scholars to think it is textually suspect. Many manuscripts read YHWH, but that divine name is also not used in Job until the Voice from the Whirlwind. Since by the Late Biblical period YHWH was pronounced as though it were *'adonai*, that may have led to the switch here, though it is hard to know which term was the original one.

fear of the Master . . . the shunning of evil. The reiterated question in the refrain of where is wisdom is now given a resonant answer at the very end of the poem. But such neat confidence is alien to the Job poet, even where he evokes God's speech at the end of the book.

1
2
3
4
5

And Job again took up his theme and he said:
 Would that I were as in moons of yore,
 as the days when God watched over me,
 when He shined his lamp over my head,
 by its light I walked in darkness,
 as I was in the days of my prime—
 God an intimate of my tent,
 when Shaddai still was with me,
 all around me my lads;

1. *And Job again took up his theme.* With the repetition of this formula from 27:1, we are back on track with Job's concluding confession of innocence.

3. *when He shined his lamp over my head.* The concrete image is of God "watching over" Job solicitously, holding a lit oil lamp (which would have been a wick in oil in a shallow concave ceramic dish) above him so that he can walk safely through the dark.

4. *God an intimate of my tent.* Literally, "When God's council [that is, His exclusive intimate company] was at my tent."

5. *my lads.* Though the Hebrew *ne'arim* could refer either to Job's seven dead sons or to his retainers, the latter meaning is more likely because the context here is Job's recollection of the imposing standing in society he enjoyed before all the disasters befell him.

- 6 when my feet bathed in curds
and the rock poured out streams of oil,
7 when I went out to the city's gate,
in the square I secured my seat.
8 Lads saw me and took cover,
the aged arose, stood up.
9 Noblemen held back their words,
their palm they put to their mouth.
10 The voice of the princes was muffled;
their tongue to their palate stuck.
11 When the ear heard, it affirmed me,
and the eye saw and acclaimed me.
12 For I would free the poor who cried out,
the orphan with no one to help him.
13 The perishing man's blessing would reach me,
and the widow's heart I made sing.
14 Righteousness I donned and it clothed me,
like a cloak and a headdress, my justice.
15 Eyes I became for the blind,
and legs for the lame I was.
16 A father I was for the impoverished,
a stranger's cause I took up.
17 And I cracked the wrongdoer's jaws,
from his teeth I would wrench the prey.

6. *curds . . . oil*. These are, of course, hyperbolic expressions of affluence. Compare Deuteronomy 32:13: "He suckled him honey from the crag / and oil from the flinty stone."

7. *the city's gate . . . the square*. The square before the city's gate was the place where justice was deliberated, and Job, as the leading notable of the community—compare verses 8–11—would have had a regular place there.

11. *affirmed me*. The verb *'asher* literally means to say *'ashrey*, "happy is he."

12. *I would free the poor*. Exercising his role in administering justice, Job acted on behalf of the helpless—the poor, the orphan, the widow, the man about to perish, the handicapped, the victim of wrongdoing (verses 12–17).

- And I thought: In my nest I shall breathe my last, 18
and my days will abound like the sand.
My root will be open to water, 19
and dew in my branches abide,
my glory renewed within me, 20
and my bow ever fresh in my hand.
To me they would listen awaiting 21
and fall silent at my advice.
At my speech they would say nothing further, 22
and upon them my word would drop.
They waited for me as for rain, 23
and gaped open their mouths as for showers.
I laughed to them—they scarcely trusted—
but my face's light they did not dim.
I chose their way and sat as chief,

18. *In my nest I shall breathe my last*. As a consequence of a life dedicated to virtuous acts, Job thought he had every reason to expect he would die a tranquil death in the bosom of his family.

my days will abound like the sand. The Hebrew word for "sand," *hol*, has a homonym that means "phoenix," and many interpreters have been attracted to that meaning because the phoenix is eternal, reborn out of its own ashes. However, Job is not imagining eternal life, only a very long life, and the equation between (grains of) sand and things so abounding, or so many (the verbal stem *r-b-h*, as here) that they are innumerable, is a common biblical idiom.

20. *within me*. The literal sense of the Hebrew preposition is "with me" or "alongside me."

my bow ever fresh in my hand. The poet probably has in mind that after very extended usage, the bowstring begins to go slack and the wood of the bow loses its spring, but this bow—a metaphor for Job's strength—is constantly renewed.

22. *At my speech they would say nothing further*. This verse and the previous one pick up the theme of verses 9 and 10. Some critics have proposed moving these lines to earlier in the poem for the sake of seamless continuity, but such wholesale rearrangement of the text seems neither necessary nor warranted.

my word would drop. The "dropping" is of a liquid, and is close to "drip," an image of blessed fructification in a semi-arid region that was reflected in verse 19 and is vividly developed in verse 23.

- 24 I laughed to them—they scarcely trusted—
but my face's light they did not dim.
25 I chose their way and sat as chief,
I dwelled like a king in his brigade
when he comforts the mourning.

24. *I laughed to them—they scarcely trusted.* This whole verse is the one obscure juncture in an otherwise transparent chapter. The interpretation assumed in this translation is that Job, expatiating to his listeners, expresses a joyfulness that they in their plight can hardly trust, yet they do not presume to object to his buoyant mood. The verb understood here as "dim" has given rise to widely divergent constructions and hence to very different readings of the line.

25. *when he comforts the mourning.* Some critics, puzzled by this clause, have drastically emended the Hebrew, but it seems reasonably intelligible as it stands in the received text: Job, like a king in the midst of his royal brigade, offers comfort to those of his men who have suffered losses—metaphorically, the loss of comrades fallen in battle—as in general he has rescued victims, fought on behalf of orphans and widows, and so forth.

And now mere striplings laugh at me
whose fathers I spurned
to put with the dogs of my flock.
The strength of their hands—what use to me?
From them the vigor has gone:
In want and starvation bereft
they flee to desert land,
the darkness of desolate dunes,
plucking saltwort from the bush,
the roots of broomwood their bread.

1. *mere striplings.* The Hebrew says "ones younger than I" or, more literally, "lesser than I in days."

whose fathers I spurned. The society in which Job was once one of the greatest of those who dwell in the East is hierarchical in regard both to social-economic standing and to age. Even the fathers of Job's mockers would have been beneath his notice, unfit to run with his sheep dogs, and how much more so their half-baked sons.

2. *the strength of their hands—what use to me?* Job's mockers assail him in the ostensible vigor of their youth, but he imagines that it will vanish in a moment, and he proceeds to elaborate a fantasy of the striplings turned into miserable pariahs banished to the wilderness (verses 3–8).

3. *the darkness of desolate dunes.* The Hebrew shows prominent alliteration and wordplay: 'emesh sho'ah umesho'ah. The last two words would literally mean something like "desolation and desolateness."

- 5 From within they are banished—
people shout over them as at thieves.
- 6 In river ravines they encamp,
holes in the dust and crags.
- 7 Among bushes they bray,
beneath thornplants they huddle.
- 8 Vile creatures and nameless, too,
they are struck from the land.
- 9 And now I become their taunt,
I become their mocking word.
- 10 They despised me, were distant to me,
and from my face they did not spare their spit.
- 11 For my bowstring they loosed and abused me,
cast off restraint toward me.
- 12 On the right, raw youths stand up,
they make me run off
and pave against me their roadways of ruin.
- 13 They shatter my path,
my disaster devise,
and none helps me against them.

5. *from within*. The Hebrew *min-gew* is the first of a whole series of obscure places in this chapter. Some interpreters, arguing from a proposed Northwest Semitic cognate, understand it to mean "from the community." In rabbinic Hebrew, *gew* or *go* can mean "inside," and that linguistic connection seems less of a stretch than the purported Semitic cognate. "Within" then would refer to home, companionship, the boundaries of civilized habitation.

7. *they bray*. The Hebrew verb *yinhaqu*, generally used for donkeys, nicely conveys the reduction of the banished men to brutishness.

9. *And now I become their taunt*. Job, having vividly conjured up the wretched fate deserved by, or about to overtake, his young mockers, now bitterly turns to the unrestrained derision to which they are subjecting him.

11. *my bowstring they loosed*. The slackening of the bowstring is an image of deprivation of power, of unmanning.

12. *they make me run off*. Literally, "they send off my feet."

- Like a wide water-burst they come,
in the shape of a tempest they tumble.
- Terror rolls over me,
pursues my path like the wind,
and my rescue like a cloud passes on.
- And now my life spills out,
days of affliction seize me.
- At night my limbs are pierced,
and my sinews know no rest.
- With great power He seizes my garment,
grabs hold of me at the collar.
- He hurls me into the muck,
and I become like dust and ashes.
- I scream to You and You do not answer,
I stand still and You do not observe me.
- You become a cruel one toward me,
with the might of Your hand You hound me.

15. *my path*. The translation reads *netivati*, "my path," with several manuscripts and the Syriac version, instead of the Masoretic *nedivati* ("my nobility"?).

my rescue like a cloud passes on. There is no need to see, as many interpreters have done, an exotic meaning in *yeshu'ati*, which everywhere else means "rescue." Job, cast into deepest desperation, sees a fleeting vision of his hoped-for rescue sailing off from him like a cloud.

17. *my limbs are pierced*. One might also understand this as "He pierces my limbs," the antecedent being God.

18. *With great power He seizes my garment*. The wording of this entire verse is obscure, and hence any translation is conjectural.

20. *You do not observe me*. The received text reads "You observe me," but various manuscripts as well as the Vulgate show the negative.

- 22 You bear me up, on the wind make me straddle,
break me apart in a storm.
23 For I know You'll return me to death,
the meetinghouse of all living things.
24 But one would not reach out against the afflicted
if in his disaster he screamed.
25 Have I not wept for the bleak-fated man,
sorrowed for the impoverished?
26 For I hoped for good and evil came.
I expected light and darkness fell.
27 My innards seethed and would not be still,
days of affliction greeted me.
28 In gloom did I walk, with no sun,
I rose in assembly and I screamed.
29 Brother I was to the jackals,
companion to ostriches.
30 My skin turned black upon me,
my limbs were scorched by drought.
31 And my lyre has turned into mourning,
my flute, a keening sound.

22. *storm*. The marginal gloss (*qeri*) instructs us to read the word in the Hebrew consonantal text, *tushiwah*, as *tushiah*, "wisdom" or "prudence," but it is more likely a variant spelling of *teshu'ah*, "uproar" or "storm."

24. *the afflicted . . . he screamed*. The verse as it stands in the received text is opaque. The translation reads '*ani*, "the afflicted," for the Masoretic '*i*, "heap of ruins," and *shiwea'*, "he screamed," for *shua'*, "nobleman." If all this is correct, the idea would be that no one would abuse a helpless suffering person—so why does God persecute me in this way?

25. *bleak-fated*. Literally, "hard of day."

29. *Brother I was to the jackals*. In a painful reversal, the fate of brutalization and banishment from society that Job conjured up for his mockers has befallen him instead.

- A pact I sealed with my eyes—
I will not gaze on a virgin.
And what is the share from God above,
the portion from Shaddai in the heights?
Is there not ruin for the wrongdoer,
and estrangement for those who do evil?
Does He not see my way,
and all my steps count?
Have I walked in a lie,
has my foot hurried to deceit?
Let Him weigh me on fair scales,
that God know my blamelessness.
If my stride has strayed from the way,
and my heart gone after my eyes,
or the least thing stuck to my palms,

1. *A pact I sealed with my eyes*. After the catalogue of woes in the previous section of this final speech, Job begins a series of affirmations of the scrupulously virtuous life he led. Not only did he avoid promiscuity (verse 9), but he even strictly refrained from gazing with lust at nubile women. This profession of innocence is interrupted in verses 2–4 by a declaration—not exactly in keeping with what Job says elsewhere—that God watches wrongdoers from above and punishes them. Some scholars have proposed moving around various verses in this chapter in order to produce better continuities, but all such surgical procedures on the text are necessarily conjectural.

5. *Have I walked*. This line initiates a whole series that employs the Hebrew form that indicates swearing an oath.

- 8 let me sow and another shall eat,
my offspring torn up by the roots.
9 If my heart was seduced by a woman,
and at the door of my friend I lurked,
10 let my wife grind for another
and upon her let others crouch.
11 For that is lewdness,
and that is a grave crime.
12 For it is fire that consumes to Perdition,
and in all my yield eats the roots.
13 If I spurned the case of my slave
or my slave-girl, in their brief against me,
14 what would I do when God stands up,
and when He assays it, what would I answer?
15 Why, my Maker made him in the belly,
and formed him in the selfsame womb.
16 Did I hold back the poor from their desire
or make the eyes of the widow pine?
17 Did I eat my bread alone,
and an orphan not eat from it?

8. *sow . . . eat . . . torn up by the roots.* In an agricultural society, these images are standard metaphors for all forms of endeavor.

10. *let my wife grind for another.* The verb here is a kind of violent pun. Grinding in a small stone hand mill is a domestic activity regularly performed by the woman in preparing food for her husband and family. But the crouching of other men over her in the second verset turns the grinding into a representation of the sexual act.

13. *If I spurned the case of my slave.* Job moves on from sexual morality to social justice. Even a slave has legal rights and may bring a suit against his master, and Job says that in the days of his prosperity he always honored those rights.

15. *the selfsame womb.* Job, of course, does not mean that he and the slave had the same mother but rather that they share the same human condition, each having been formed in the womb. Hence, despite the economic disparity, an existential parity obtains between them.

- For from my youth like a father I raised him,
and from my mother's womb I led him.
18 If I saw a man failing, ungarbed,
and no garment for the impoverished,
19 did his loins not then bless me,
and from my sheep's shearing was he not warmed?
20 If I raised my hand against an orphan,
when I saw my advantage in the gate,
21 let my shoulder fall out of its socket
and my arm break off from its shaft.
22 For ruin from God is my fear,
and His presence I cannot withstand.
23 If I made gold my bulwark,
and fine gold I called my trust,
24 if I rejoiced that my wealth was great
and that abundance my hand had found,
25 if I saw light when it gleamed
and the moon gliding grand,
26

18. *from my mother's womb I led him.* The received text says "led her," a difference of one syllable in a suffix, which some then understand to refer to the slave-girl in the second half of verse 13. Such a distant antecedent seems unlikely, and it is more plausible to emend the suffix. The "mother's womb" is obviously a hyperbole, Job declaring that from his earliest days he looked after the poor.

20. *did his loins not then bless me.* The loins, now comfortably wrapped in the garment Job provides, are the poetic enunciator of the blessing.

21. *my advantage in the gate.* The gate is where courts of justice were conducted. The term rendered here as "advantage" is in most other contexts "rescue," the idea being that you come out on top.

22. *let my shoulder fall out of its socket.* This would be measure-for-measure justice, a retaliation for raising one's hand against the orphan.

26. *light when it gleamed . . . the moon gliding grand.* As the erotic language of the next line makes clear, this would be an ecstatic response to the moon, perhaps as manifestation of a deity.

- 27 and my heart was seduced in secret,
and my hand caressed my mouth,
28 this, too, would be a grave crime,
for I would have denied God above.
29 If I rejoiced at my foe's disaster,
and exulted when harm found him out—
30 yet I did not let my mouth offend
to seek out his life in an oath.
31 Did the men of my tent ever say,
"Would that we were never sated of his flesh."
32 The sojourner did not sleep outside.
My doors to the wayfarer I opened.
33 Did I hide like Adam my wrongdoings,
to bury within me my crime,
34 that I should fear the teeming crowd,
and the scorn of clans terrify me,
fall silent and keep within doors?

27. *my hand caressed my mouth.* The gesture is both sensual and cultic. We should keep in mind that Job, for all his quarrel with God, remains a staunch monotheist.

28. *this, too, would be a grave crime.* It is fitting that the same term of condemnation used for adultery in verse 11 is presented here in connection with succumbing to the pagan-erotic seduction of the moon.

29. *If I rejoiced at my foe's disaster.* Job's profession of innocence here goes beyond the norm of biblical morality, which often (as in Psalms) is happy to express exultation when disaster overtakes an enemy.

31. *"Would that we were never sated of his flesh."* The victim of this metaphoric cannibalism would have to be the helpless and the unhoused—perhaps explicitly the sojourner and the wayfarer of the next line.

33. *Did I hide like Adam my wrongdoings.* This would be the first human after eating the forbidden fruit and trying to hide from God.

- Would that I had someone to hear me out.
Here's my mark—let Shaddai answer me,
and let my accuser indict his writ.
I would bear it upon my shoulder,
bind it as a crown upon me.
The number of my steps I would tell Him,
like a prince I would approach him.
If my soil has cried out against me,
and together its furrows wept,
if I ate its yield without payment,
and drove its owners to despair,

35. *Would that I had someone to hear me out.* Job reverts to the idea of having his day in court with God that he repeatedly favored earlier.

Here's my mark. The mark is probably the mark with a personal seal by which a person would authenticate a legal document.

36. *I would bear it upon my shoulder.* So confident is Job that the accusations against him are baseless that he would proudly wear the writ of indictment as an ornament.

37. *The number of my steps I would tell Him.* Job would readily report everything he has done because he is confident, as he said in verses 5 and 6, that he never walked in a lie or allowed his stride to stray.

like a prince. The Hebrew *nagid* puns on *agidenu*, "I would tell him," the two words sharing the same root.

39. *drove its owners to despair.* Some would like to understand this as "its tenants" because Job has just referred to the soil as his, but the Hebrew *be'alim* means "owners." Perhaps the possessive attached to "soil" refers to renting soil (note the reference to payment). It is conceivable that a wealthy man like Job, besides the plots he owned outright, might have rented additional fields in order to grow crops for profit.

40 instead of wheat let nettles grow,
and instead of barley, stinkweed.

Here end the words of Job.

40. *stinkweed*. It is notable that the last angry word of Job's argument in his own defense is "stinkweed," *bo'shah*.

Here end the words of Job. This is a formal marker of closure and may well be original in the text. At this point, one might expect God's response to Job. Instead, as we shall now see, someone else intervenes.

And these three men left off answering Job because he was right in his own eyes. And Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite from the clan of Ram flared up in anger, against Job his anger flared, for his claiming to be in the right more than God. And against his three companions his anger flared because they had not found an answer that showed Job guilty. And Elihu waited out Job's words, for they were his elders. And Elihu saw that the three men could utter no answer, and his anger flared.

2. *Elihu*. Though some scholars have tried to save the Elihu speeches as an integral part of the book, the plausible consensus is that it is an interpolation, the work of another poet. No hint of Elihu's presence is made in the frame-story at the beginning, and he is equally absent from the closing of the frame in Chapter 42. The poetry he speaks is by and large not up to the level of the poetry in the debate between Job and his three reprovers, and there is a whole series of Hebrew terms that appear only in the Elihu speeches. His name, though feasible in biblical usage, appears to be satirically devised as an intimation of his impatiently presumptuous character. The literal meaning of Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite from the clan of Ram is "He-is-my-God the son of God-has-blessed the Scornful One from the High Clan."

4. *waited out Job's words*. The implication is that he waited out both Job's words and those of the three companions, but it is Job's argument that he wants to refute.

5. *could utter no answer*. Literally, "there was no answer in the mouth."

- 1 **A**nd the LORD answered Job from the whirlwind and He said:
 2 Who is this who darkens counsel
 in words without knowledge?
 3 Gird your loins like a man,
 that I may ask you, and you can inform Me.
 4 Where were you when I founded earth?
 Tell, if you know understanding.

1. *the whirlwind.* Though the Hebrew *se'arah* probably means simply "storm," this translation choice, and the consequent phrase, the Voice from the Whirlwind, have been so deeply embedded in the imagination of speakers of English after the King James Version that it seems wise not to tamper with it.

2. *Who is this who darkens counsel.* With God's speech as the climax of the book, the Job poet takes a risk that only a supreme artist confident in his genius could do. He had already created for Job the most extraordinarily powerful poetry to express Job's intolerable anguish and his anger against God. Now, when God finally speaks, the poet fashions for Him still greater poetry, which thus becomes a poetic manifestation of God's transcendent power and also an image-for-image response to the death-wish poem that frames Job's entire argument. The unusual phrase "darkens counsel" is not merely an indication of speaking ignorantly (as the parallel in the second verset spells out) but a rejoinder to the spate of images of darkness blotting out light in the death-wish poem of Chapter 3. In pointed contrast to that poem, the opening section of the Voice from the Whirlwind introduces images of light and then traces a dynamic interplay between light and darkness.

4. *Where were you when I founded earth.* God's speech moves in a narrative progression from cosmogony (38:4-21) to meteorology (38:22-38)—which is to

- Who fixed its measures, do you know, 5
 or who stretched a line upon it?
 In what were its sockets sunk, 6
 or who laid its cornerstone,
 when the morning stars sang together, 7
 and all the sons of God shouted for joy?
 Who hedged the sea with double doors, 8
 when it gushed forth from the womb.
 when I made cloud its clothing, 9
 and thick mist its swaddling bands?

say, the play of natural forces across the created world invoked in the cosmogonic section—to zoology (38:39-39:40)—which is to say, the panorama of living creatures thriving in the play of the natural forces of creation—to zoology with a mythic heightening (40:15-41:26).

5. *a line.* This is the builder's line, used to construct straight angles.

7. *when the morning stars sang together.* The verb for singing, *ron*, is from the same root as *renanah* "glad song," which Job (3:7) wished to expunge from the night he was conceived. The morning stars are also a counterpoint to the stars of dawn on the night of conception that Job wished never to appear. This splendid vision of the celestial beings joining in joyous song in celebration of creation is not intimated in other biblical accounts of how God created the world.

8. *hedged the sea.* The idea of blocking, or imprisoning, the fiercely raging sea, which continues in some of the subsequent lines, shows the trace of the Canaanite creation myth. But the verb chosen here is the same one Job used (3:23) in his complaint that God had closed off all routes to him.

the womb. This metaphor for the sea as the matrix of creation is the first of a whole series of birth images that answer to the language of the death-wish poem, in which Job expresses the desire never to have been born, for the womb to have been his tomb. Here, by contrast, an awesome surge of energy comes forth from the womb of creation.

9. *swaddling bands.* This utterly original metaphor depicts the sheets or strips of white mist hovering over the primordial sea, and because swaddling bands are used for infants, it extends the imagery of birth.

- 10 I made breakers upon it My limit,
and set a bolt with double doors.
11 And I said, "Thus far come, no farther,
here halt the surge of your waves."
12 Have you ever commanded the morning,
appointed the dawn to its place,
13 to seize the earth's corners,
that the wicked be shaken from it?
14 It turns like sealing clay,
takes color like a garment,
15 and their light is withdrawn from the wicked,
and the upraised arm is broken.
16 Have you come into the springs of the sea,
in the bottommost deep walked about?
17 Have the gates of death been laid bare to you,
and the gates of death's shadow have you seen?
18 Did you take in the breadth of the earth?
Tell, if you know it all.
19 Where is the way that light dwells,
and darkness, where is its place,

12. *morning . . . dawn*. Looking beyond the primordial sea to the earth, the poet begins, strategically, with images of light—again, precisely what Job wanted to extinguish forever.

13. *to seize the earth's corners*. Evidently, it is light that takes hold of the far corners of the earth, "shaking out," or exposing, the wicked who hide in night's darkness.

14. *It turns like sealing clay*. The antecedent of "it" is the earth: just as the unshaped matter of sealing clay becomes a distinct form when the seal is stamped on it, the earth, shapeless in darkness, assumes distinct form as the light of day spreads over it.

takes color. The Masoretic *yityatsvu*, "take a stand," makes no sense, and it is emended here to *titstaba*.

19. *Where is the way that light dwells, / and darkness, where is its place*. The poet naturally begins with light, but in the complementary parallelism of the line,

- that you might take it to its home
and understand the paths to its house?
20 You know, for were you born then,
and the number of your days is great!
21 Have you come into the storehouse of snow,
the storehouse of hail have you seen,
22 which I keep for a time of strife,
for a day of battle and war?
23 By what way does the west wind fan out,
the east wind whip over the earth?
24 Who split a channel for the torrent,
and a way for the thunderstorm,
25 to rain on a land without man,
wilderness bare of humankind,
26

darkness also has its place. Creation, like the diurnal cycle, is a pulsing rhythm of light and darkness, whereas Job, in the egoism of his suffering, exercised an imagination only of darkness.

21. *You know, for you were born then*. This whole line is of course a sarcastic address to Job, whose minuscule life span could not measure up to the vastness of timeless creation. It also echoes back ironically against Job's wish never to have been born.

23. *which I keep for a time of strife*. The storehouses of snow and hail are manifestly mythological locations where God stockpiles these elements as weapons for future combat against some unspecified cosmic foe.

24. *the west wind fan out*. The noun 'or usually means "light," but that sense is hard to reconcile with the verb, which may have a military connotation, as in Genesis 14:15, where it means to fan out or deploy. Some construe it as "lightning," though that use of the term is restricted to the Elihu speeches and accords neither with the verb nor with the poetic parallelism. This translation deems likely the scholarly proposal that in this instance 'or reflects the Aramaic 'oriya, "west wind."

26. *to rain on a land without man*. It is one of the many enigmas of God's creation that rain pours down on places utterly devoid of human habitation. This idea is in keeping with the radical rejection of anthropocentrism, elsewhere assumed in biblical thought, that informs God's poem.

- 27 to sate the desolate dunes
and make the grass sprout there?
- 28 Does the rain have a father,
or who begot the drops of dew?
- 29 From whose belly did the ice come forth,
to the frost of the heavens who gave birth?
- 30 Water congeals like stone,
and the face of the deep locks hard.
- 31 Can you tie the bands of the Pleiades,
or loose Orion's reins?
- 32 Can you bring constellations out in their season,
lead the Great Bear and her cubs?
- 33 Do you know the laws of the heavens,
can you fix their rule on earth?
- 34 Can you lift your voice to the cloud,
that the water-spate cover you?
- 35 Can you send lightning bolts on their way,
and they will say to you, "Here we are!"?

27. *desolate dunes*. See the comment on the identical phrase in 30:3, page 123.

28. *a father . . . begot*. Again, the poet invokes imagery of conception and birth in answer to Job's expressed desire to expunge them.

29. *whose belly . . . who gave birth*. The birth imagery now moves from father to mother. In keeping with the boldness of the poet, it is a daring move because it evokes a virtually oxymoronic picture of hard cold ice coming out of a womb.

32. *constellations*. Many interpreters, going back to the King James Version and before it, construe the Hebrew *mazarot* as the name of an unidentified constellation, but it seems more likely that it is a dialectic variant of *mazalot*, which simply means "constellations."

33. *their rule*. The Hebrew suffix indicates "his" or "its," which has led some to identify God as the antecedent. But the plausible antecedent is the stars, thought to govern or predict the affairs of men. This could be a small scribal error, though fluid switching between singular and plural is rather common in biblical usage.

- Who placed in the hidden parts wisdom, 36
or who gave the mind understanding?
- Who counted the skies in wisdom, 37
and the jars of the heavens who tilted,
- when the dust melts to a mass, 38
and the clods cling fast together?
- Can you hunt prey for the lion, 39
fill the king of beast's appetite,
- when it crouches in its den, 40
lies in ambush in the covert?
- Who readies the raven's prey 41
when its young cry out to God
and stray deprived of food?

36. *the hidden parts . . . the mind*. The meaning of the two nouns here, *tuhot* and *sekhwi*, have long been disputed. Some think they refer to birds, the ibis and the rooster, or even to mythological figures.

37. *Who counted the skies*. What is probably assumed is a multiplicity of heavens (in the Pseudepigrapha and in some rabbinic legends they are seven in number).

the jars of the heavens who tilted. This is an original image of the source of rain. Elsewhere, as in the Flood story, there are casements in the vault of the heavens that are opened to let down the rain.

38. *the clods cling fast together*. This image of rain-soaked clods of earth turned into an amalgam of mud completes the meteorological section of the poem. After rain, snow, hail, ice, wind, and the patterns of the stars, the poet is ready to turn to the animal kingdom.

39. *the lion . . . the king of beast's appetite*. The Hebrew actually switches from the singular in the first verset to a plural in the second verset (see the comment on verse 33) and then continues in the plural in the next line. The translation keeps all these references in the singular in order to avoid confusion for the English reader. Many modern translations show "lioness," presumably because it is the lioness who does the hunting, but the Hebrew nouns in both halves of the verse are masculine.

- 1 Do you know the mountain goats' birth time,
do you mark the calving of the gazelles?
- 2 Do you number the months till they come to term
and know their birthing time?
- 3 They crouch, burst forth with their babes,
their young they push out to the world.
- 4 Their offspring batten, grow big in the wild,
they go out and do not return.
- 5 Who set the wild ass free,
and the onager's reins who loosed,
6 whose home I made in the steppes,
his dwelling-place flats of salt?
- 7 He scoffs at the bustling city,
the driver's shouts he does not hear.
- 8 He roams mountains for his forage,
and every green thing he seeks.

1. *the mountain goats' birth time.* Continuing the images of a creation teeming with births that is a thematic rejoinder to Job's language longing for death, the poet offers a vivid vignette of the birthing of mountain goat and gazelle.

3. *burst forth.* The literal meaning of the Hebrew verb is "split open," a word choice that strikingly conveys the poet's sense that the procreative drive in nature (and the nurturing one as well) cannot be separated from violence.

4. *they go out and do not return.* The separation of the young from their mothers, a biological imperative, prepares the way for the subsequent images of feral freedom in the wild, beyond the realm of human control.

- Will the wild ox want to serve you,
pass the night at your feeding trough?
- Bind the wild ox with cord for the furrow,
will he harrow the valleys behind you?
- Can you rely on him with his great power
and leave your labor to him?
- Can you trust him to bring back your seed,
gather grain on your threshing floor?
- The ostrich's wing joyously beats.
Is the pinion, the plume, like the stork's?
- For she leaves her eggs on the ground,
and in the dust she lets them warm.
- And she forgets that a foot can crush them,
and a beast of the field stomp on them—
harsh, abandons her young to a stranger,
in vain her labor, without fear.

13. *the ostrich's wing joyously beats.* This entire verse is notoriously obscure. Modern scholars are generally agreed that the bird in question is an ostrich, though the term used here is not the usual *bat-ya'anah* but rather a kind of poetic epithet, "wing of song," or perhaps, better, "screech-wing," a designation alluding to the loud sounds the ostrich makes. The somewhat enigmatic verb *ne'elasaḥ* appears to derive from a root associated with joy, or perhaps joyful movement (in Proverbs 7:18 it appears in a verb for sex).

Is the pinion, the plume, like the stork's? Although each Hebrew word of this verset is understandable, they make little sense together and hence any translation is no more than a guess. A very literal rendering of the Hebrew would sound like this: "is a pinion a stork and plume."

14. *For she leaves her eggs on the ground.* This notion that the ostrich abandons all the eggs she lays and does not stay to hatch them is no more than ancient folk zoology.

16. *harsh, abandons her young to a stranger.* The translation is an interpretive surmise. The literal, cryptic sense of the Hebrew is "She hardened [the verb is in the wrong grammatical gender] her young to [someone?] not hers."

in vain her labor, without fear. This reproduces the Hebrew literally. The labor in vain would refer to her going to the trouble of laying these neglected eggs. Perhaps the cryptic "without fear" might mean that she exhibits no fear, though she should, about what might happen to her offspring.

- 17 For God made her forgetful of wisdom,
and He did not allot her insight.
- 18 Now on the height she races,
she scoffs at the horse and its rider.
- 19 Do you give might to the horse,
do you clothe his neck with a mane?
- 20 Do you make his roar like locusts—
his splendid snort is terror.
- 21 He churns up the valley exulting,
in power goes out to the clash of arms.
- 22 He scoffs at fear and is undaunted,
turns not back before the sword.
- 23 Over him rattles the quiver,
the blade, the javelin, and the spear.
- 24 With clamor and clatter he swallows the ground,
and ignores the trumpet's sound.
- 25 At the trumpet he says, "Aha,"
and from afar he scents the fray,
the thunder of captains, the shouts.

17. *God made her forgetful of wisdom.* The ostrich, abandoning her young, is one of the enigmas of nature, suggesting that there is no readily discernible moral pattern in the order of creation. Other creatures, as the poem has already shown and will show again, lavish care on their offspring.

18. *she races.* The verb *hamri'* occurs only here. The Aramaic translations understood it to mean "soar" (and in modern Hebrew it is used for a plane's taking off from the ground), but ostriches don't fly. The translation is a guess based on context.

20. *roar like locusts.* The poet seems to be thinking of the great clamorous sound—a frightening sound—made by a vast swarm of locusts.

24. *With clamor and clatter.* The translation emulates the strong alliteration of the Hebrew, *berá'ash werógez*, though the second Hebrew term is closer to "rage" or a state of disturbance.

- Does the hawk soar by your wisdom,
spread his wings to fly away south? 26
- By your word does the eagle mount
and set his nest on high? 27
- On the crag he dwells and beds down,
on the crest of the crag his stronghold. 28
- From there he seeks out food,
from afar his eyes look down. 29
- His chicks lap up blood,
where the slain are, there he is. 30

26. *soar.* The unusual Hebrew verb is cognate with *'evrah*, "pinion," a poetic term for "wing," so it is conceivable that it refers not to the act of flight but, like the second verset, to spreading wings.

28. *the crag.* This remote, inaccessible habitat of the bird of prey complements the uninhabited steppes where the wild ass lives.

30. *His chicks lap up blood.* One of the remarkable aspects of the Job poet's vision of nature is that it so completely unsentimental. The creatures of the wild (with the exception of the peculiar ostrich) are endowed with an instinct to nurture their young. For carnivores, however, that nurture involves violence—destroying living creatures in order to sustain life in the offspring. The concluding image, then, of God's first speech is of the fledgling eagles in the nest, their little beaks open to gulp down the bloody scraps of flesh that their parent has brought them. The moral calculus of nature clearly does not jibe with the simple set of equations and consequences laid out in Proverbs and in Psalms.

- 1 **A**nd the LORD answered Job and He said:
 2 Will he who disputes with Shaddai be reproved?
 Who argues with God, let him answer!
 3 And Job answered the LORD and he said:
 4 Look, I am worthless. What can I say back to You?
 My hand I put over my mouth.
 5 Once have I spoken and I will not answer,
 twice, and will not go on.
 6 And the LORD answered Job from the whirlwind and He said:
 7 Gird your loins like a man.
 Let me ask you, and you will inform Me.
 8 Will you indeed thwart My case,
 hold Me guilty, so you can be right?
 9 If you have an arm like God's,
 and with a voice like His you can thunder,

1. *And the LORD answered Job and He said.* After completing the poetic sweep of the great panorama of creation from the beginning of things to the world of living creatures, God turns in direct confrontation to Job, who now (verses 4 and 5) is abashed and renounces his challenge to God.

7. *Gird your loins like a man.* As the LORD launches on His second speech, He repeats verbatim the opening formula of the first speech. He then proceeds to turn around Job's language of a legal dispute (verse 8) and to ask Job sarcastically whether he is capable of exercising God's power (verses 9-14).

- put on pride and preeminence,
 and grandeur and glory don. 10
 Let loose your utmost wrath,
 see every proud man, bring him low. 11
 See every proud man, make him kneel,
 tramp on the wicked where they are. 12
 Bury them in the dust together,
 shut them up in the grave. 13
 And I on my part shall acclaim you,
 for your right hand triumphs for you. 14
 Look, pray: Behemoth, whom I made with you,
 grass like cattle he eats. 15

10. *pride and preeminence . . . grandeur and glory.* The translation follows the double alliteration of the Hebrew: *ga'on wegovah . . . wehod wehadar.*

11. *your utmost wrath.* The Hebrew says literally "the wraths of your fury," but, as elsewhere, the locking together of synonymous nouns in the construct state is an intensifier.

13. *the grave.* The Hebrew *tamun* means literally "the hidden [place?]," but this is evidently an epithet for the grave (or, perhaps, the underworld), especially since the verbal stem *t-m-n*, also used at the beginning of the line, means both to hide and to bury.

15. *Behemoth.* The Hebrew word means "beast." It is in plural form, possibly a plural of intensification or majesty, but the noun is treated as singular and masculine (indeed, spectacularly masculine) throughout. Behemoth clearly takes off from the Egyptian hippopotamus, but in his daunting proportions, his fierce virility, and his absolute impregnability, he represents a mythological heightening of the actual beast, just as Leviathan is even more patently a mythological heightening of the Egyptian crocodile. The fact that the poet probably never laid eyes on these fabled beasts but knew of them through travelers' yarns no doubt facilitated this transition from zoology to myth. Whether there is some counterpart to Behemoth in Canaanite or Sumerian myth, as some have claimed, is a matter of dispute.

- 16 Look, pray: the power in his loins,
the virile strength in his belly's muscles.
- 17 He makes his tail stand like a cedar,
his balls' sinews twine together.
- 18 His bones are bars of bronze,
his limbs like iron rods.
- 19 He is the first of the ways of God.
Let his Maker draw near him with His sword!
- 20 For the mountains offer their yield to him,
every beast of the field plays there.
- 21 Underneath the lotus he lies,
in the covert of reeds and marsh.
- 22 The lotus hedges him, shades him,
the brook willows stand around him.
- 23 Look, he swallows a river at his ease,
untroubled while Jordan pours into his mouth.

16. *loins . . . virile strength*. Both terms point to sexuality—the loins by metonymy and “virile strength” because the Hebrew term *ʿon* is characteristically used for sexual potency.

17. *makes his tail stand like a cedar*. The exiguous tale of the hippopotamus scarcely fills this bill, but in all likelihood “tail” is a euphemism for a different part of the male animal's anatomy.

balls. The rare *pehadim* has long been understood—and was so understood by the King James translators, who rendered it as “stones”—as an Aramaicism reflecting *pahdaʿ*, testicle.

19. *Let his Maker draw near him with His sword*. More literally, “bring His sword near to him.” The verset is a little enigmatic, but it is usually understood to mean that only Behemoth's Maker would dare to approach him with a sword.

21. *the lotus . . . the covert of reeds and marsh*. This native habitat of the hippopotamus is distinctly Egyptian.

23. *swallows*. The verb usually means “to oppress.” The hyperbolic sense here may be that Behemoth demolishes a whole river in one long, easy gulp.
untroubled. Literally, “he is secure.”

Jordan. In biblical poetry, which constantly needs synonyms because of its dependence on semantic parallelism, both Jordan and the Nile (*yeʿor*) are used as terms for “river.”

- 24 Could one take him with one's eyes,
with barbs pierce his nose?
- 25 Could you draw Leviathan with a hook,
and with a cord press down his tongue?
- 26 Could you put a lead line in his nose,
and with a fishhook pierce his cheek?
- 27 Would he urgently entreat you,
would he speak to you gentle words?
- 28 Would he seal a pact with you,
that you take him as lifelong slave?
- 29 Could you play with him like a bird,
and leash him for your young women?
- 30 Could hucksters haggle over him,
divide him among the traders?
- 31 Could you fill his skin with darts,
and a fisherman's net with his head?
- 32 Just put your hand upon him—
you will no more recall how to battle.

25. *Leviathan*. Though associated with the crocodile of the Nile, Leviathan (Ugaritic *lotan*, Hebrew *liwyatan*) is a prime actor in Canaanite mythology as a sea-monster, and in keeping with his role here in the climactic passage of the poem, he is more prominently mythological than Behemoth. There is no formal introduction or indication of transition for the Leviathan section, but the “barbs” of the last Behemoth line and the hook of the first Leviathan line create a linkage.

26. *lead line*. The Hebrew *ʿagmon* usually means “reed,” so this rendering is a guess based on context.

31. *Could you fill his skin with darts*. This notion of the absolute invulnerability of Leviathan to all human weapons—which caught Melville's attention in *Moby-Dick*—is elaborated in 41:19–21.

and a fisherman's net with his head. The translation follows the Hebrew, which in the first verset has Leviathan's skin as the object of the verb “fill” and here has, as the object of the same verb, a fisherman's net, into which Leviathan's head would be put.

32. *you will no more recall how to battle*. The Hebrew syntax is somewhat cryptic, though the general sense seems clear. Very literally, it reads, “Recall battle, you will do no more.”

- 1 Look, all hope of him is dashed,
at his mere sight one is cast down.
2 No fierce one could arouse him,
and who before Me could stand up?
3 Who could go before Me in this I'd reward,
under all the heavens he would be mine.
4 I would not keep silent about him,
about his heroic acts and surpassing grace.

1. *all hope of him is dashed.* That is, any hope to vanquish Leviathan will be frustrated.

one is cast down. The translation is an interpretive inference from a single word in the Hebrew, *yutal*, "will be cast."

2. *arouse him.* The same verb is used with Leviathan as its object in 3:8, "ready to rouse Leviathan." One suspects it was part of the mythological scenario.

3. *Who could go before Me in this I'd reward.* The Hebrew is cryptic. The possible meaning is that God alone has the power to subdue Leviathan, but if a mortal man could really do it, God would abundantly reward him.

4. *I would not keep silent about him.* These words would seem to refer to the hypothetical hero who would vanquish Leviathan, though they are ambiguous enough that they might refer to Leviathan himself. In that case, instead of the conditional "I would not keep silent," the translation would require a simple indicative, "I will not keep silent." "Heroic acts," however, sounds more appropriate for a human.

- Who can uncover his outer garb,
come into his double mail? 5
Who can pry open the doors of his face? 6
All around his teeth is terror.
His back is rows of shields,
closed with the tightest seal. 7
Each touches against the next,
no breath can come between them. 8
Each sticks fast to the next,
locked together, they will not part. 9
His sneezes shoot out light, 10
and his eyes are like the eyelids of dawn.
Firebrands leap from his mouth, 11
sparks of fire fly into the air.

5. *outer garb . . . double mail.* The description of the fabled beast begins with physical features of the crocodile—here, its plated armor. The second noun in the received text is *risno*, "his reins," but the Septuagint reading, *siryono*, "his armor," is more plausible.

6. *the doors of his face.* These are, of course, his powerful jaws.

7. *back.* The received text reads *ga'awah*, which means "pride," but both the Septuagint and the Vulgate used a Hebrew text that must have read, more plausibly, *gewah*, "back."

10. *His sneezes shoot out light.* At this point, the poet clearly moves from the Egyptian crocodile to a mythological fire-breathing dragon.

and his eyes are like the eyelids of dawn. This verset is one of the most arresting—and daring—moves of the Job poet. He had used this altogether striking image at the beginning of the book, in Job's death-wish poem (3:9, and see the comment on that verse). Now he brings it back, not hesitating to locate an image of exquisite beauty at the heart of terror. It is precisely this paradox that epitomizes his vision of Leviathan—a frightening and alien creature—yet, in God's creation, also a thing of beauty.

11. *fly into the air.* More literally, "escape."

- 12 From his nostrils smoke comes out,
like a boiling vat on brushwood.
- 13 His breath kindles coals,
and flame comes out of his mouth.
- 14 Strength abides in his neck,
and before him power dances.
- 15 The folds of his flesh cling together;
hard-cast, he will not totter.
- 16 His heart is cast hard as stone,
cast hard as a nether millstone.
- 17 When he rears up, the gods are frightened,
when he crashes down, they cringe.
- 18 Who overtakes him with sword, it will not avail,
nor spear nor dart nor lance.
- 19 Iron he deems as straw,
and bronze as rotten wood.
- 20 No arrow can make him flee,
slingstones for him turn to straw.

14. *power dances*. The precise meaning of the noun *de'avah* is a little in doubt. Some construe it as "violence" or "terror." The verb *taduts* usually means "to exult." Some ancient versions show *taruts* (a small orthographic difference), "runs."

16. *nether millstone*. In the biblical-poetic pattern of intensification from first verset to second, the beast's heart is at first hard as stone, then hard as a nether millstone, which would have to be especially hard and heavy in order to bear the pressure of grinding.

17. *rears up . . . crashes down*. Both words in the Hebrew are semantically ambiguous, and so this interpretation is conjectural.

18. *sword*. This paradigmatic weapon then triggers a whole catalogue of weapons that would be useless against Leviathan.

20. *arrow*. The Hebrew uses a poetic epithet, "son of the bow."

- Missiles are deemed as straw,
and he mocks the javelin's clatter. 21
- Beneath him, jagged shards,
he draws a harrow over the mud. 22
- He makes the deep boil like a pot,
turns sea to an ointment pan. 23
- Behind him glistens a wake,
he makes the deep seem hoary. 24
- He has no match on earth,
made as he is without fear. 25
- All that is lofty he can see.
He is king over all proud beasts. 26

21. *Missiles*. The mysterious *totah* appears only here, and all that is known about it is that it must be some sort of weapon. Modern Hebrew has adopted it for "cannon."

24. *Behind him glistens a wake*. The last visual sighting of Leviathan is of his wake as he churns through the water and out of the field of human vision. It is notable that this whole poem, which began with the light of the morning stars and a question about where light dwells, concludes with a wake shining on the surface of the abyss.

26. *He is king over all proud beasts*. The same phrase, *beney shahats*, "proud beasts," occurs in 28:8, in the Hymn to Wisdom. Since there it refers to beasts, it is reasonable to assume that the meaning here is the same. What is remarkable about this whole powerfully vivid evocation of Leviathan is that the monotheistic poet has taken a figure from mythology, traditionally seen as the cosmic enemy of the god of order, and transformed it into this daunting creature that is preeminent in, but also very much a part of, God's teeming creation.

- 1 **A**nd Job answered the LORD and he said:
 2 I know You can do anything,
 and no devising is beyond You.
 3 "Who is this obscuring counsel without knowledge?"
 Therefore I told but did not understand,
 wonders beyond me that I did not know.
 4 "Hear, pray, and I will speak.
 Let me ask you, that you may inform me."

2. *I know You can do anything.* Job's final recantation begins by a recognition of God's omnipotence, though it might be noted that he had conceded this attribute all along in his complaint against God, raising doubts not about divine power but about divine justice.

3. *"Who is this obscuring counsel without knowledge?"* Job is directly quoting God's first words to him in 38:2 (only substituting a synonymous verb). He does this in order to grant the validity of God's challenge to him.
wonders beyond me that I did not know. The wonders are the spectacular vision of God's complex creation, from cosmogony to Leviathan, that has been vouchsafed to Job through the Voice from the Whirlwind.

4. *Let me ask you, that you may inform me.* Job again quotes from the beginning of God's speech to him, 38:2, in order to concede the justice of God's position.

- By the ear's rumor I heard of You,
 and now my eye has seen You.
 Therefore do I recant,
 And I repent in dust and ashes.

And it happened after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that 7
 the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "My wrath has flared against
 you and your two companions because you have not spoken rightly of Me 8
 as did My servant Job. And now, take for yourselves seven bulls and
 seven rams and go to My servant Job, and offer a burnt-offering for your-
 selves, and Job My servant will pray on your behalf. To him only I shall
 show favor, not to do a vile thing to you, for you have not spoken rightly
 of Me as did my servant Job." And Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the 9
 Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went out and did according to all

5. *By the ear's rumor I heard of You, / and now my eye has seen you.* "The ear's rumor" is literally "the hearing of the ear," and picks up the imperative "hear" of the previous line. The seeing of the eye is a testimony to the persuasive power of the poetry that God has spoken to Job out of the whirlwind. Through that long chain of vividly arresting images, from the swaddling bands of mist drifting over the primordial sea at creation to the fearsomely armored Leviathan, whose eyes are like the eyelids of dawn, Job has been led to see the multifarious character of God's vast creation, its unfathomable fusion of beauty and cruelty, and through this he has come to understand the incommensurability between his human notions of right and wrong and the structure of reality. But he may not see God Himself because God addresses him from a storm-cloud.

7. *you have not spoken rightly of Me as did My servant Job.* The three companions had repeatedly proffered lies—about Job and about the divine system of justice—in order to preserve their pat notion of reward and punishment. They were, in effect, corrupted witnesses on God's behalf. Though the LORD from the whirlwind roundly rebuked Job for his presumption, Job in the debate, unlike his three companions, had remained honest to his own observation of reality and his awareness of his own acts; so, even in his presumption, he had spoken "rightly" about God, had clung to his integrity. Thus God pointedly continues here to call Job His "servant," as He did in his exchanges with the Adversary.

that the LORD had spoken to them, and the LORD showed favor to Job.
10 And the LORD restored Job's fortunes when he prayed for his compan-
11 ions, and the LORD increased twofold all that Job had. And all his male
and female kinfolk and all who had known him before came and broke
bread with him in his house and grieved with him and comforted him for
all the harm that the LORD had brought on him. And each of them gave
12 him one kesitah and one golden ring. And the LORD blessed Job's latter
days more than his former days, and he had fourteen thousand sheep and
six thousand camels and a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand she-

9. *the LORD showed favor to Job.* That is, God accepted Job's intercession on behalf of the three companions because of Job's integrity.

10. *the LORD increased twofold all that Job had.* As countless readers have objected, this doubling of property is scarcely adequate compensation for all Job's sufferings, and even more so, the ten new children scarcely heal the wound of the loss of the first ten lives. But the book ends in the folktale world of the frame-story, where everything is reduced to schematic patterns and formulaic numbers, and perhaps in this world such a question cannot properly be asked.

11. *all his male and female kinfolk.* The Hebrew says "all his brothers and his sisters," but the narrative context suggests that the broader biblical meaning of this kinship term is likely here.

broke bread. Literally, "ate bread [that is, food]."

grieved with him and comforted him. These are precisely the actions performed by the three companions in 2:12, but here they are actually restorative, and breaking bread together marks the return of the pariah Job to the human community.

kesitah. An evidently valuable coin mentioned in several other biblical texts, though nothing more is known about it.

one golden ring. The *nezem* is a large ring, worn on the ear or nose, not on a finger.

asses. And he had seven sons and three daughters. And he called the 13,14
name of the first one Dove and the name of the second Cinnamon and
the name of the third Horn of Eyeshade. And there were no women in 15
the land so beautiful as Job's daughters. And their father gave them an
estate among their brothers. And Job lived a hundred and forty years after 16
this, and he saw his children and his children's children, four genera-
tions. And Job died, aged and sated in years. 17

14. *Dove . . . Cinnamon . . . Horn of Eyeshade.* These strange and lovely names (the sons remain anonymous and no names were assigned to Job's children in the opening frame-story) are mystifying. The Hebrew names *Yemimah*, *Qetsi'iah*, *Qeren hapukh* have no currency elsewhere in the Bible. The writer may have wanted to intimate that after all Job's suffering, which included hideous disfigurement as well as violent loss, a principle of grace and beauty enters his life in the restoration of his fortunes. Thus, the three daughters have names associated with feminine delicacy and the arts of attraction, and they are said to be the most beautiful women in the land.

15. *gave them an estate among their brothers.* This was not the standard biblical practice of inheritance.

16. *children.* *Banim* can mean either "sons" or "children," but the prominent attention just given to Job's three daughters suggests that the more inclusive sense is intended. It may be especially fitting that Job, having begun his complaint by wishing that his own birth could be eradicated, at the end is witness to a chain of births of his offspring.

