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The Unreliable Narrator of Job

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THE UNRELIABLE NARRATOR OF JOB*

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One of the most obviously artificial devices of the storyteller is the trick of going beneath the surface of the action to obtain a reliable view of a character's mind and heart. Whatever our ideas may be about the natural way to tell a story, artifice is unmistakably present whenever the author tells us what no one in so-called real life could possibly know. In life we never know anyone but ourselves by thoroughly reliable internal signs, and most of us achieve an all too partial view even of ourselves. It is in a way strange, then, that in literature from the very beginning we have been told motives directly and authoritatively without being forced to rely on those shaky inferences about other men which we cannot avoid in our own lives.

'There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, one that feared God, and eschewed evil'. With one stroke the unknown author has given us a kind of information never obtained about real people, even about our most intimate friends. Yet it is information that we must accept without question if we are to grasp the story that is to follow. In life if a friend confided his view that his friend was 'perfect and upright', we would accept the information with qualifications imposed by our knowledge of the speaker's character or of the general fallibility of mankind. We could never trust even the most reliable of witnesses as completely as we trust the author of the opening statement about Job... This form of artificial authority has been present in most narrative until recent times.[1]

These are the opening paragraphs of *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne Booth's influential study of narrative style. It described how modern novels have gradually moved away from using such 'implied, undramatized narrators', usually called 'omniscient' narrators, in favor of

dramatized, often unreliable narration provided by the story's characters. I do not wish to query Booth's account of the historical development of this trend nor his analysis of its strengths and weaknesses, but I do want to challenge his initial example. Is it true that the author of Job wished us to accept the narrator's authority 'without question if we are to grasp the story that is to follow'? Or does Job instead present one of the first unreliable narrators in world literature?

Omniscience in Biblical Narrative

By describing a narrator as 'omniscient', critics do not usually mean to invoke theological definitions of the term. An omniscient narrator is simply presented as knowing 'what no one in so-called real life could possibly know', as Booth put it. Authors construct narrators just as they do characters, and narrators can be given distinctive characteristics; omniscience is one of these.[2] Booth's observation about the ubiquity of omniscient narration in older literatures certainly applies to the Hebrew Bible: anonymous, third-person narrators tell the stories from the creation of the world through the ups and downs of Israel's history, spanning time and space without any difficulty and sometimes providing inside views of characters' thoughts, including those of God (e.g. Gen. 1.26; 6.6-7). The use of such narrators was not required in Israel's literary culture: Nehemiah's first-person 'memoir' shows that biblical writers knew how to dramatize a narrator, and prophets' reports of heavenly visions (e.g. 1 Kgs 22.19-23; Isa. 6; Ezek. 1; etc.) demonstrate how superhuman knowledge could be grounded in claims of divine revelation. Yet the Bible usually makes no attempt to either dramatize or authorize its omniscient narrators, but instead, like a novel, simply relies on readers' acceptance of this storytelling convention.[3]

Unlike most modern novels, however, the Bible also depicts an omniscient character, God. I do not mean to say that the Bible always depicts

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1. W.C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2nd edn, 1983 [1961]), pp. 3-4.

2. For descriptions of the various kinds of omniscient narrators, see Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, pp. 160-61; and S. Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), pp. 196-262.

3. Contra N. Wolterstorff, who argued that biblical narrators should be described as 'inspired' rather than as 'omniscient' (*Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], pp. 243-52).

God as technically omniscient—knowing everything—but only that, like the narrator, God knows what humans cannot know, at least without divine assistance.[4] God and the narrator usually show their omniscience in different ways: God displays it through actions and by making predictions, but rarely by narrating a story, while the narrator tells stories in such a way as to show knowledge of all relevant factors, whether in heaven or on earth. The use in biblical narrative of this dual omniscience led Meir Sternberg to claim that it was an intentional strategy to reinforce the text's religious authority: 'The very choice to devise an omniscient narrator serves the purpose of staging and glorifying an omniscient God'.[5] However, the ubiquity of omniscient narration in ancient literature undermines the notion that it was invented to serve Israel's theological ends. Sternberg was nevertheless right that the Bible's juxtaposition of an omniscient narrator with an omniscient character deserves more critical analysis than it has so far received.

Literary theorists usually argue that an omniscient narrator speaks with the author's voice and mediates the entire story to readers, even when quoting characters. 'In so far as a novel does not refer directly to this [implied] author, there will be no distinction between him and the implied, undramatized narrator', Booth noted and so concluded that, in Job, 'the reliability of God's statements ultimately depends on the author himself; it is he who names God and assures us that this voice is truly His'.[6] Authors can distance themselves from their narrators by dramatizing them as characters in their own right, and even by providing the readers with clues that some of the narration may be unreliable. The use of such dramatized narrators has been a hallmark of much modern fiction. It is generally supposed, however, that the Bible's undramatized narrators who authoritatively depict the thoughts and words of God must speak for the authors.[7] In the Pentateuch, for example, God's many speeches containing commandments and

4. D.J.A. Clines notes that, in Job's prologue, God is 'wise beyond human comprehension' but cannot know the future if the adversary's experiment is to make any sense (*Job 1–20* [WBC, 17; Dallas: Word Books, 1989], pp. 28-29).

5. M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 89; see also pp. 92, 117, 123, 155-59.

6. Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, pp. 151, 4.

7. 'Once we know that God is God in Job...the authors speak whenever God speaks' (Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, p. 18).

blessings reinforce the authority of the narrative that surrounds them, so that omniscient character and narrator both contribute in different ways to the persuasive influence of Torah.[8]

The book of Job, however, reaches its climax in a pair of divine speeches (Job 38–41) that question any human's ability to comprehend God's actions. God's questions to Job implicitly attack all explanations of divine action as 'words without knowledge' (38.2) because God's governance of the world is beyond human understanding. If God's creation of the weather (ch. 38) and the animals (ch. 39) is incomprehensible, then so are human destinies. If the purpose of the monstrous Behemoth and Leviathan cannot be explained, then neither can the purpose of suffering. Yet the story of the adversary's challenge to God in Job 1–2 is not at all hard to understand; the characters act quite normally, so normally, in fact, that the chief difficulty for interpreters has been to explain why God behaves so like a fallible human in this account. People who justify themselves at others' expense are unfortunately too common in our experience; this is not how we like to think of God. As Robert Frost had Job say:

> 'Twas human of You. I expected more
> Than I could understand and what I get
> Is almost less than I can understand.[9]

So the book of Job juxtaposes the omniscient character's assertion that humans cannot comprehend the way the world works, including the reasons for Job's suffering, with the omniscient narrator's rather banal explanation for precisely that situation. Who should be believed? Or, to put it in technical language, does the omniscient narrator or the omniscient character speak for the implied author? Put this bluntly, the obvious answer in view of the religious perspective of the Bible would seem to be the omniscient character God, yet interpreters have usually not given this answer.

There are several reasons for this. First, popular impressions of the book seem to have been shaped entirely by the prose narrative,

8. J.W. Watts, *Reading Law: The Rhetorical Shaping of the Pentateuch* (Biblical Seminar, 59; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), pp. 121-24; *idem*, 'Reader Identification and Alienation in the Legal Rhetoric of the Pentateuch', *BibInt* 7 (1999), pp. 101-112 (101-106).

9. 'The Masque of Reason' (1945), lines 331-33, in R. Frost, *The Poetry of Robert Frost* (ed. E.C. Lathem; New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1969), p. 395.

producing the proverbial 'patient' Job. Second, historical critics noticed the conflicts between the prose and poetic sections of the book and produced various theories of the book's chronological development that reduced the tension between the divine speeches of chs. 38–41 and the prose narrative by assigning them to different authors. Third, interpreters of Job who have paid attention to its narrative form and defended its unity, at least as conceived by the final author, have generally followed literary theorists in equating the narrator with the implied author. They therefore subordinated all quoted speeches to the narrator's control and decided any contradictions between them in the narrator's favor.[10] Fourth, many commentators have given up on trying to resolve the book's contradictions and argued that it was intended to portray contradictory points of view as vividly as possible.[11]

Some interpreters more interested in the book's message than its literary form have argued, however, that the author's position must be found in the speeches voiced by God in chs. 38–41. M. Buber suggested that the book presents four views of God: in the prose narrative, the friends' speeches, Job's speeches, and the divine theophany respectively, each of which is meant to improve and replace its predecessor.[12] The philosopher John Wilcox stated the issue more bluntly: 'Surely the view of God Himself, in His speeches from the whirlwind, is normative' and 'the theophany undermines the prologue'.[13] My thesis is that

Wilcox was exactly right about the intentions that shaped the book, but we can describe the means it uses more precisely. The author of Job used the device of an unreliable narrator to make one part of the book undermine another.

Prose Narrator versus Divine Poet

A number of interpreters have pointed out features of the prose prologue and epilogue that seem intentionally unrealistic, and so function as clues to readers to take the story as fiction. This interpretive tack is already attested among some early religious interpreters. The Babylonian Talmud preserves the view that Job was not a historical person and the book is a parable, though it also presents arguments for its historicity.[14] Modern analyses of the prose narrative's literary features have also emphasized its lack of realism. For example, Clines and Brenner have shown how the story expresses intentional naivety by stereotypes and exaggeration. The prologue presents stereotypical sequences of threes (daughters, thousands of camels, friends) and sevens (sons, thousands of sheep) laid out in five precisely parallel scenes alternating between heaven and earth and containing only two speakers at a time.[15] Exaggerations in the plot involve, among other things, a 'perfect' man who bears every conceivably kind of personal suffering short of death and a god who afflicts a devout worshiper to prove a point to a subordinate.[16] The unrealistic nature of the story thus seems increasingly clear to many interpreters.

They disagree, however, on how its unrealistic features affect the meaning of the book. Clines argued that the intentional naivety of the prose story reflects 'a subtle artistic severity' that presents the book's initial case for 'a categorical reversal of [the doctrine of retribution] which is certified by the narrator to be no misprision, and which no less

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10. For example, Clines argued that, because the narrator transmits direct quoted speech, 'the words in the mouth of God have no privileged status compared with words spoken directly by the narrator in describing God's motives and actions' ('God in the Pentateuch: Reading against the Grain', in *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* [JSOTSup, 205; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995], pp. 187-211 [187]; for his application of this principle to Job, see *Job 1–20*, p. 65).

11. E.g. A. Cooper argued that the prologue even taken by itself introduces three different perspectives, any of which a reader may adopt and follow throughout the book: Satan's, that there is a link between behavior and reward/punishment; Job's, that the moral order is real but hidden from humans; and God's, that there is no moral order ('Reading and Misreading the Prologue of Job', *JSOT* 46 [1990], pp. 67-79 [71-73]).

12. M. Buber, *The Prophetic Faith* (trans. C. Witton-Davies; New York: Macmillan, 1949), pp. 189-97. For discussion, see J.D. Levenson, *The Book of Job in its Time and in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 19-29.

13. J.T. Wilcox, *The Bitterness of Job: A Philosophical Reading* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), pp. 43, 174.

14. *B. B. Bat.* 15a. Similarly among ancient Christians, Theodore of Mopsuestia considered the story an illustrative drama (*PL*, LXVI, pp. 697-98; see M.H. Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation and Notes* [AB, 15; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965], p. xxix).

15. D.J.A. Clines, 'False Naivety in the Prologue to Job', *HAR* 9 (1985), pp. 127-36; *idem, Job 1–20*, p. 6; A. Brenner, 'Job the Pious? The Characterization of Job in the Narrative Framework of the Book', *JSOT* 43 (1989), pp. 37-52 (41-43).

16. For other unrealistic features of the story, see Brenner, 'Job the Pious?', pp. 39-41, 43-46.

a character than God authorizes explicitly'.[17] For Clines, then, the omniscient God of the prologue supports the omniscient narrator's implicit claim to be giving a true account of the circumstances behind Job's suffering. More commonly, however, modern interpreters find contrast rather than continuity between the prose story and the poetic dialogues. Brenner suggests that the prose story is 'an ironic exaggeration of the concept of conventional piety' that is then undermined by the dialogues. She argues that the narrator's role shifts between the two parts of the book to match their contrasting claims:

> In the narrative, the author is overtly omniscient. He knows everything about Job; is familiar with the heavenly court; is certainly better informed about the reasons for Job's fate than Job himself is. Within the poem this aspect of authorial presence undergoes a shift. The author is still omniscient, in the sense that he determines the progress of the discussion and the allotment of viewpoints to the characters, but he is covertly so. External events give way to internal drama, action is supplanted by speech and viewpoints depicted not through deeds but, instead, through the convention of speaking voices.[18]

She concludes that the author intentionally juxtaposed two modes of writing to distinguish the unreal (prose story) from the real (poetry). Hoffman agreed that 'the author deliberately wrote a story that seemingly declares of itself "I am not true", "I am not an imitation of any reality"'. He nuanced this analysis by noting that the transition to realism does not occur abruptly with the shift from prose to poetry, but gradually throughout the latter part of the prologue and the first part of the epilogue:

> Towards its end—from 2.8 on—the prologue begins to assume mimetic coloration; the schematic elements disappear, being replaced by descriptions of realia and of expected psychological reactions... The same holds true for the beginning of the epilogue—42.7-10—which is also mimetic in character.[19]

This debate over the impact of the narrative's unrealistic cast can be clarified by recognizing the book's deliberate use of an unreliable

17. Clines, *Job 1–20*, pp. 9, 65. Cooper also maintained that the prologue presents the book's main themes, though suggesting three contradictory and unreconcilable claims as in the poetic dialogues ('Reading and Misreading', pp. 68-73).

18. Brenner, 'Job the Pious', p. 47.

19. Y. Hoffman, *A Blemished Perfection: The Book of Job in Context* (JSOTSup, 213; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), pp. 271, 274.

narrator. The unrealistic features of the prose cited in these studies support the idea that the author deliberately depicted the narrator as unreliable, but the most decisive evidence is found in the poetry: the divine speeches of chs. 38–41 bluntly deny that humans can reliably tell any such story. Even reversing the doctrine of retribution, as Clines understood the prologue to do, claims too much for human wisdom if one takes seriously God's sarcastic questions to Job. God's catalog of Job's ignorance about creation and nature (ch. 38) points out that humans have no access to the divine councils described by the narrator in 1.6-12 and 2.1-7. The questions 'Will you put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be justified?' (40.8) recall not just Job's charges against God, but also the narrator's depiction of God being goaded by the adversary's challenge into allowing Job to suffer everything imaginable short of death. The moral assessment of Job offered by the narrator at the outset (1.1) appears bland and naive after reading God's amoral assessment of Leviathan's power as exceeding that of all earthly creatures (41.33) and terrifying the gods (41.25), among other things. The narrator's descriptions of divine and human motives thus become suspect. Just how unreliable is this narrator? The effect of the narrator's unreliability could extend to undermining the entire frame story of incredible disasters and an incredible restoration. It could even undermine the ascription of the speeches in chs. 38–41 to God. Short of this extreme, the book presents a narrator who implicitly claims omniscience by telling a story about God and then presents God denying the possibility of such a story. As Wilcox noted, the author must surely have expected God's authority to trump that of an anonymous, undramatized narrator.

The book's execution of the technique of unreliable narration is inconsistent, however. It has difficulty clearly separating the claims of the narrator from those of God. For one thing, God also speaks in the prose narrative where divine statements support the narrator's point of view, as Clines observed. Though the stylistic difference between prose and poetry draws a sharp division between the narrative and the dialogs, the narrator's role in introducing the speeches preserves a sense of narratorial authority even within the dialogs, though in a modified way as Brenner noted. These difficulties stem not just from particular features of the story of Job, but from the conventional authority of omniscient narration itself: few readers think to question what an undramatized narrator tells them unless they are jolted into recognizing

problems in the story. Modern authors employing unreliable narration have therefore usually dramatized the narrator as a specific character in order to make the problems more evident to readers. The writer of Job took a different approach: besides providing clues of the narrator's naivety, the book presented a character of presumably even greater authority to contest any human's ability to tell such a story. The dialog still depends, however, on some features of the prose narrative for its own coherence, at least on the descriptions of Job's suffering and the arrival of the friends in the prologue and, in the epilogue, on God's validation of Job's right to question God and condemnation of the friends' self-righteous explanations. The book, therefore, does not transition cleanly from the fantastic to the real when it changes styles of writing, but moves gradually from one to the other and then back again, as Hoffman showed. As a result, the book's contradiction of its narrator's authority is obscured by the demands of its plot.

The Book's Attack on Omniscient Narration

If this description of the book's intent is accepted, it immediately raises the question: What is the real target of the book's criticism? If the author constructed the omniscient narrator of the prose as a foil, whom does it represent? Any answers to this question should be found in the contents of the divine speeches (Job 38–41) that undermine any claim to omniscient human narration.

The speeches do not explicitly question stories of divine justice or retribution, though such accounts certainly fall implicitly under their criticism. Instead, God raises questions about creation and nature in three catalogs dedicated to the cosmos (38.4-38), the animals (38.39–39.30), and the monstrous Behemoth and Leviathan (chs. 40–41). The book's attack therefore targets more than just the doctrine of retribution; it aims at narrators who claim to reveal the secrets of the cosmos. Within biblical literature, Proverbs provides the most obvious example of such a narrator. Personified Wisdom claims first-hand knowledge of creation (8.22-31) as part of her appeal to 'hear instruction and be wise' (8.33). In Job, God's opening question, 'Where were you when I founded the earth?' (Job 38.4) mocks Wisdom's claim that 'I was there when he set up the heaven... I was beside him when he established the earth's foundations' (Prov. 8.27, 29-30), and God's sarcastic queries of Job's creative power and knowledge (Job 38.5, 8, 12, 16, 22, 31-35)

challenge Wisdom's claims to being involved in creation (Prov. 8.30-31). Of course, Wisdom is not human and so not subject to the same limitations as Job. The verbal similarities between the passages are not close enough to show that the author of Job had Proverbs specifically in mind. The contrast, however, between the two books' overall themes as well as between these two specific texts suggests that Proverbs is at least a very clear example of the views that Job's writer intended to challenge, and that the tendency in Proverbs-like literature to narrate creation accounts was the target that prompted the construction of Job's unreliable narrator. Proverbs' contention is that Wisdom can mediate at least some divine understanding to humans: they will usually prosper by following her teachings. The book of Job's denial of Wisdom's ability to grant prosperity to the devout and the prudent climaxes with God challenging Wisdom's more fundamental cosmological claims as well.

Proverbs' description of creation promises understanding, but is in fact short on details. Did the writer of Job have the Bible's more specific creation narratives, Genesis 1 and 2, in mind as well? Probably not; thematic parallels, such as placing limits on the sea (Job 38.8-11; Gen. 1.6-10), issuing orders to the dawn (Job 38.12; Gen. 1.3-5), and creating monstrous sea creatures (Job 40.15; Gen. 1.21) are not sufficiently specific to suggest direct allusions.[20] The more likely targets were cosmogenic myths circulating in Israel and neighboring cultures. The elaborate portrayals of Behemoth and Leviathan in Job 40–41 echo motifs of primordial battle between the creator god and monsters of chaos found in myths from Mesopotamia and Ugarit.[21] Their depiction as a supernatural hippopotamus and crocodile uses motifs from Egyptian stories of fights between the gods Horus and Seth.[22] Allusions to these stories in other parts of the Bible show their currency in ancient

20. T.N.D. Mettinger argued that the author of Job was familiar with Gen. 1–3 and cited the following parallels: Gen. 1.3//Job 3.4; Gen. 1.21//Job 40.15; Gen. 2.7; 3.19//Job 1.21; 4.19; 10.9; Gen. 2.7//Job 27.3; 32.7-8; 33.4; Gen. 2.21-24//Job 18.12; Gen. 3//Job 31.33 ('The God of Job: Avenger, Tyrant, or Victor?', in L.G. Perdue and W.C. Gilpin [eds.], *The Voice from the Whirlwind: Interpreting the Book of Job* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992], pp. 39-49 [48, 236 n. 44]).

21. Pope, *Job*, pp. 268-70, 276-78.

22. See Mettinger, 'The God of Job', pp. 45-46 and literature cited there, as well as C. Patton, 'The Beauty of the Beast: Leviathan and Behemoth in Light of Catholic Theology' in this volume.

Israel.[23] God's questions in Job 40–41 evoke these stories only to deny any human's competence to tell them.

The divine speeches employ the literary conventions of the catalog, a very old and common genre, especially in ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature.[24] Hoffman summarized the effect of the three catalogs focusing on creation (38.4-38), animals (38.39–39.30), and Behemoth and Leviathan (40.15–41.26/Eng. 41.34): 'due to the density of the first section, the sense of reading a catalogue is preserved until the end of the entire speech', even though the last section has few elements and much description.[25] The speeches thus attack the wisdom traditions' use of the catalog genre. A catalog embodies and demonstrates a claim to a fundamental kind of understanding that can place things in appropriate relationship to one another. By casting the catalog form as a series of sarcastic questions, the author of Job presents an anti-catalog of everything humans cannot know and undermines the claim to wisdom manifested by the catalog form itself. Again, the brunt of the criticism falls on any narrator who would dare voice such a catalog.

The book of Job's claim that creation narratives are insupportable applies to the creation stories of Genesis and to the rest of the Bible's omniscient narrators, even if they were not its immediate targets. The book thus subverts a major feature of traditional religious discourse: the ability to tell stories about God without constant recourse to claims of divine revelation.

The Failure of Job's Unreliable Narrator

The book has not, however, been read as depicting an unreliable narrator. Though occasionally questioning the historicity of Job and the book's doctrinal stances, religious interpreters have not recognized the book's critique of the convention of omniscient narration in religious stories. That is testimony to the power of this literary convention: despite the obvious emphasis that the book gives to its 39 chapters of

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23. See G. von Rad, 'Hiob xxxviii und die altägyptische Weisheit', in N. North and D.W. Thomas (eds.), *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (VTSup, 3; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960), pp. 293-301; J. Gray, 'The Book of Job in the Context of N.E. Literature', *ZAW* 82 (1970), pp. 251-69; Hoffman, *Blemished Perfection*, pp. 84-114.

24. Isa. 27.1; Ezek. 29.3; 32.2; Ps. 74.12-14.

25. Hoffman, *Blemished Perfection*, pp. 103-104.

poetic dialogs, the three narrative chapters have more than held their own in shaping how readers understand the book. The omniscient narrator has been widely believed even though the omniscient divine character attacks all such stories. Thus, literary convention regularly trumps theological predisposition in readers' experience of the book. Religious interpreters may also have avoided the implications of the conflict over narratorial claims because of the danger they pose to other biblical and religious narratives. They did not say so explicitly, because they have not viewed Job as raising this challenge. Yet some uneasiness about the unvalidated claims of the Bible's omniscient narrators expressed itself in the tendency to credit them to prophetic, or at least pious, authors and so to suggest revelatory origins for biblical narratives that they do not claim for themselves. Hence the Babylonian Talmud's ascription of Job and the Pentateuch to Moses, the history books to Joshua, Samuel, Jeremiah, and other priests and prophets, and so on,[26] to suggest that the narratives originated in revelatory experiences like those they narrate. Subsequent theories of inspiration and special revelation attempted to systematize this transformation of the literary convention of omniscient narration into the religious experience of prophetic inspiration. In this interpretive process, Job's critique of the literary convention could not be heard.

Modern critics have usually missed the brunt of the book's attack for different reasons. The tendency of historical criticism to see every contradiction as evidence for multiple authors and editors makes it impossible to recognize the deliberate contradictions required to portray an unreliable narrator. That recognition is just as impossible for narratological interpreters who believe that the undramatized narrators must speak for the author and control characters' words. Since the book of Job does not take the modernist approach to unreliability by dramatizing the narrator, modern literary critics have been in no better position than traditional interpreters or historical critics to recognize the book's unreliable narration.

The author of Job attempted to use one literary convention, that of a divine omniscient character, to attack the use of another literary convention, the omniscient narrator. The latter convention, however, has

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26. *B. B. Bat.* 15a. The passage goes on to include the views of rabbinic authorities who dated Job considerably later than Moses. See J.R. Baskin, 'Rabbinic Interpretations of Job', in Perdue and Gilpin (eds.), *The Voice from the Whirlwind*, pp. 101-10.

for theological and literary reasons proven far more durable than the former, so the author's attempt to portray an unreliable narrator failed to influence readers' understanding of Job. Booth described in detail the risks of using unreliable narrators, noting that they 'make stronger demands on the reader's powers of inference than do reliable narrators'. As a result, 'in all periods and in many different genres we find speakers who win credence when they should be doubted, or who lead critics to dispute the precise degree for their untrustworthiness'. Booth therefore ended his book with a discussion of the 'morality of narration', made necessary because of the likelihood that many readers will be misled by unreliable narration into equating the narrator's views with those of the author.[27] Here is where he could have cited the book of Job and the history of its interpretation: in literature from the very beginning authors who have attempted to undermine their narrators have misled readers and made trouble for critics.

27. Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, pp. 159, 316, 377-97.

RELECTURE, HERMENEUTICS, AND CHRIST'S PASSION IN THE PSALMS

Stephen L. Cook

Introduction

A common personal discovery and fascination with the topic of *relecture* was one of the first shared interests connecting my life's path with that of Jane Anderson Morse. Back in our student days at Yale in the spring of 1988, Brevard Childs encouraged us both to work on *relecture* (re-reading or reinterpretation of biblical texts) for our term papers in his graduate seminar, 'Problems in the Psalter'. Jim Watts and Corri Patton, the other two editors of this volume, were in that doctoral seminar as well, and I believe that the course had a vitalizing effect on all of our scholarly careers. As an immediate result of the seminar, several of us published our first scholarly articles. Corri's first publication arose out of that seminar, a study of Ps. 132 and method. (I shall reference this study in the discussion of Ps. 132 below.) Likewise, following upon work in that seminar, I published an article in the *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* on the *Nachgeschichte* of some of the psalms. In that essay I drew on Joachim Becker's 1966 volume in the *relecture* tradition, *Israel deutet seine Psalmen*. At the time of her death, Jane was using the practice of *relecture* in her work assessing the texts of Job.

In this contribution, I want again to take up the topic of *relecture* in relation to the Psalms. I have always been grateful that Jane Morse gave me a copy of her 1988 Yale seminar paper on 'Psalms Interpretation and the Anthological School', which I have since used fruitfully in my own teaching of the Psalms. I would like to summarize and to draw on her paper in this study. Some of her provocative interests and insights may thereby gain a wider audience.

I am particularly interested here in one subtopic of Jane Morse's essay, the topic of the roots of messianism in the Hebrew Bible. As part