

BLESS GOD AND DIE:
AN EXAMINATION OF THE ROLE OF JOB'S WIFE
IN THE MASORETIC TEXT OF JOB

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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**BLESS GOD AND DIE:
AN EXAMINATION OF THE ROLE OF JOB'S WIFE
IN THE MASORETIC TEXT OF JOB**

by

Sonya R. Meade

**A thesis submitted to the
School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the degree of
Master of Arts**

**Department of Religious Studies
Memorial University of Newfoundland**



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0-612-25866-1

Abstract

This thesis is a study of the first two chapters, or the Prologue, in the Book of Job. The concentration is on the character of Job's wife who is heard from only in 2:9. By studying the parallel structure of chapters one and two in the Prologue to Job, the role of Job's wife becomes highlighted. Her inability to fit into this parallel structure becomes the focus of this thesis as it is questioned why and how she does not fit, and her purpose or role is examined. The first chapter reviews the history of misogynist commentaries that portray Job's wife in a less than favourable light. An examination of this history allows for the feminist-critical study of Job's wife which follows in chapter two. In pursuing the role of Job's wife, chapter three studies her character to see how she does, or does not, fit structurally in the Prologue to the Book of Job. Finally, chapter four examines the speech of Job's wife in 2:9 in detail to see if she can be reconstructed. Her character will be revealed as one who, like her husband, experiences a range of emotions and feelings, and who, also like her husband, can be said to suffer. In summary, this thesis is a feminist-critical study of the often underestimated character of Job's wife in Job 2:9.

Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone in the Department of Religious Studies, especially Mary, whom I had the pleasure to work with on several occasions, for their support and advice as I completed my Master's program.

I would especially like to thank Dr. Kim Parker for his endless guidance, direction, and supervision during these past two years. I consider myself extremely fortunate to have had him as my supervisor and without him, I don't think I would have made it this far.

I would like to express my thanks to the School of Graduate Studies and the Department of Religious Studies as well for all of their financial support while I completed my program.

A big thank you also to my Mom and Dad and the rest of my family and friends for all of their support and encouragement, for their pride has made it all worthwhile.

Thanks also to the Rev. Dr. Terrence Kleven. It was "Dr. K" who first aroused my interest in the Book of Job and his wise words compelled me to further my study in this interesting area.

And last, but not least, I would like to give many thanks to my husband John, whose support, love, and patience have seen me through when I thought there was no end in sight.

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Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to re-examine the role of Job's wife in the Masoretic text of Job in order to see how "problematic" she is for Job. Such an examination will take into account the extent to which Job's wife can be said to "suffer" and, as well, account for the presence of Job's wife in terms of a narrative structure. The goal of this thesis will be to shift focus from the negative portrayal of Job's wife as she has been presented in the history of interpretation. By examining both her role and her position in the narrative, I will try to show Job's wife in a more sympathetic light, revealing not just the fact that she does have a specific function in the book, but also showing what that function is.

The first chapter, "State of the Question", examines how Job's wife has been vilified by various scholars, both early and modern. In the early commentaries, the majority of scholars viewed her as a foolish and insignificant character who played so minor a role that she was often completely ignored. The chapter continues by examining modern commentators who insist on portraying Job's wife in a negative light. Although they are not as blatantly misogynist as previous scholars, they nevertheless do not cast Job's wife in the role of a sympathetic character. Ironically, some of these modern commentators are women themselves.

Chapter two, "methodology" outlines a feminist literary-critical approach. By utilising the modern trends in feminist scholarship, and by

taking the feminist-critical approach, I will try to show how Job's wife can be considered to play a prominent role in the Masoretic text of Job. A key concern is the idea of female experience, and this will be applied to the character of Job's wife as she is a female who experiences great loss and suffering. This aspect of female experience will strengthen and highlight the role of Job's wife and aid in the task of portraying Job's wife in a sympathetic light. By taking the feminist-critical approach and by using the concept of female experience, then, I will attempt to reconstruct the negative portrayal that has so long been attributed to Job's wife, and construct a new positive model whereby Job's wife may be seen in a more sympathetic light.

Chapter three outlines the narrative structure of the Prologue to Job and gives a detailed description of the parallels found between chapters one and two of the Book of Job. With the exception of 2:9, each verse in chapter one is mirrored by a parallel verse in chapter two. By pointing out these parallels, it will be possible to foreground Job's wife, and show how, and why, she does not fit in a structural sense.

The fourth and final chapter focuses on exegesis. An exegesis of Job's wife will provide an explanation of her role in the Masoretic text of Job. This role will be explained not only in terms of the context of 2:9, but also in terms of how she, through the ambiguity of her speech, foreshadows the ambiguity and duality of God's character in the

theophany at the end of the Book of Job. The duality of her words is seen in the examination of the Hebrew word **אֵל**, and the various contexts in which it is used in the Book of Job. Essentially, the main focus of this thesis is to discover the purpose of the role of Job's wife in the Masoretic text of Job. Such a discovery may also provide a useful map to guide one in a reading of both the characters of Job and God.

Chapter 1

State of the Question

Introduction

In the Prologue to the Book of Job, we hear for the first and only time from a character who has been undermined, underexposed, and very definitely underestimated. This character is Job's wife. She speaks but once, and her one line of speech seems to have forever cast her in a negative light. She questions her husband's integrity and urges him to curse God. Her only words are found in 2:9 which read "Do you still insist in your integrity? Curse God, and die."

(וְהָאִשָּׁה לִי אֵלֶּיךָ מֵחֵץ בְּמִלִּין בְּיָד אֱלֹהִים מוֹת) ¹ For these few lines, Job's wife has been vilified by the majority of scholars. This chapter will outline and explain the views of scholars who have commented on the role of Job's wife in the Book of Job in order to understand from whence the view of Job's wife as a loathsome companion to the pious and upright Job has arisen.² My study of the views of scholars

¹For the purpose of this study I will be using The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), unless otherwise indicated. I will also be using the תורה נביאים וכתובים, Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, K. Elliger and W. Rudolph (eds.) (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1967/77, a critical edition) when I make reference to the Hebrew text.

²A slightly different portrayal of Job's wife can also be found in the Septuagint (LXX) or Greek translation of the Book of Job. In this study, however, reference will be made solely to the Masoretic text of Job.

commenting on Job's wife will take into account both early and modern commentators.

History of Interpretation

Early Commentators

Saint Augustine (354-430) often referred to the Book of Job when delivering his homilies. It is in his homily on Psalm LVI, though, that he expressly refers to Job's wife, and to the temptations of Job in the Prologue to the tale. According to Augustine, although Satan, the tempter, took away all that Job had (his animals, his servants, his children, his wealth) he was not merciful enough to take away Job's wife.³ Satan permitted Job's wife to live, to use her as his aide and his partner as he tempted Job. For Augustine, Satan could depend on the help of Job's wife just as he could depend on the help of Eve to deceive Adam in the beginning of the Book of Genesis.⁴ Augustine's

Although Job's wife has a longer speech in the LXX, I will not be using the Greek translation of the Book of Job because the majority of commentators that I make reference to deal solely with the Masoretic text.

³ Philip Schaff (ed.), A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church Volume VIII, Saint Augustine: Expositions on the Book of Psalms. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969-1975), p.224.

⁴ Schaff (ed), Saint Augustine: Expositions on the Book of Psalms, Vol. VIII, p.224.

attitude toward women implies that a woman's purpose on the earth is to tempt man and aid Satan in bringing about the demise and inevitable destruction of all men. He believes that Job's wife is just like Eve because both women cast negative shadows upon their husbands. As Augustine writes, "Merciful do ye deem the devil, that he left him a wife? He knew through whom he had deceived Adam".⁵ The only difference between the women is that Eve succeeds in tempting Adam whereas Job's wife fails in tempting Job. Augustine comments that even though Job was suffering and in a great deal of pain, he was still lucid enough to respond to his wife and make her aware of her wrongs. For even though Job was

with wound smitten from head even unto feet, whole nevertheless within, he made answer to the woman tempting, out of the light of the living, out of the light of his heart: 'thou hast spoken as though one of the unwise women', that is, as though one that hath not the light of the living.⁶

Job's wife speaks these words only because she cannot and is not wise enough to see into her husband's heart and soul. She sees only the physical features of her husband, his sores and disease. She does not

⁵ Schaff (ed), Saint Augustine: Expositions on the Book of Psalms, Vol.VIII, p.224.

⁶ Schaff (ed), Saint Augustine: Expositions on the Book of Psalms, Vol.VIII, p.224.

love her husband enough to see her husband's interior beauty as God can. In Augustine's words, "for then she might more have loved her husband, if the interior beauty she had known, and had beheld the place where he was beautiful before the eyes of God".⁷ Thus, according to Augustine, Job's wife is a foolish woman.⁸

Saint John Chrysostom (354-406), like Augustine, also spoke a great deal about the Book of Job, and he shares many of the same views of Augustine. Chrysostom, though, devotes time to expressing his rather strong views on the female gender as a whole. Using the same example of Eve and the serpent as did Augustine, Chrysostom says that women are easily deceived, "for it is the part of woman to be deceived".⁹ Eve was easily deceived, according to Chrysostom, because she was a woman. Women, therefore, are subject to men, and they should be, for "equality of honour causeth contention", and this is due to the deceit that was seen in the first woman, Eve.¹⁰ Woman was not subject to man

⁷ Schaff (ed), Saint Augustine: Expositions on the Book of Psalms, Vol. VIII, pp.224-25.

⁸ Schaff (ed), Saint Augustine: Expositions on the Book of Psalms, Vol. VIII, p.224.

⁹ Philip Schaff (ed.), A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church Volume XII, Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969-1975), p.384.

¹⁰ Schaff (ed), Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, Vol. XII, p.150.

in the beginning, but woman made herself subject to man because she abused her privileges. As Chrysostom says:

She was not subjected as soon as she was made; nor, when He brought her to the man, did either she hear any such thing from God, nor did the man say any such word to her: he said indeed that she was 'bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh':(Gen. 2:23) but of rule or subjection he nowhere made mention unto her. But when she made ill use of her privilege and she who had been made a helper was found to be an ensnarer and ruined all, then she is justly told for the future, 'thy turning shall be to thy husband.'(Gen. 3:16).¹¹

Therefore, it is woman's own fault that she is subject to man, for she brought it upon herself.

After realising Chrysostom's strong attitudes towards women, it is not surprising to discover his negative feeling towards Job's wife.

Chrysostom writes that Satan deliberately spared Job's wife from the calamities that befell Job because Satan could use her to "tempt and ensnare" Job.¹² Furthermore, Satan did not permit her to speak or react to the loss of her children or her wealth until he thought she could take no more. Chrysostom explains why she did not speak out earlier:

Whereas if she had approached him at the beginning of his misfortune, neither she would have found him so unnerved, nor would she have had it in her power to swell out and exaggerate the misfortune by her words. But now when

¹¹ Schaff (ed), Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, Vol.XII, pp.150-51.

¹²Schaff (ed.), Saint Chrysostom : Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, Vol. XII, p.166.

she saw him through the length of time thirsting for release, and desiring the termination of what pressed on him vehemently then she doth come upon him.¹³

Chrysostom believes that this is the perfect time to allow Job's wife to speak: "And observe his craft" Chrysostom writes of Satan, as "he suffers her to be silent and quiet" until he finally brings Job's wife to her husband, "seasoned and worn".¹⁴ Only after Job is afflicted from head to toe with a terrible skin disease does Satan allow her to speak. If Job's wife had spoken to her husband at any point before this, Job would have been stronger, and Satan might not have achieved the results he both hoped for and expected. Chrysostom portrays Job's wife as a puppet or pawn of Satan. This coincides with Chrysostom's overall view of women, for women are neither wise nor strong enough to be able to think, act, or speak on their own. The words that Job's wife speak to her husband reveal what Chrysostom calls her "crafty wickedness" as she attempts to persuade Job to turn his back on God and curse Him.¹⁵

Chrysostom, however, seems to contradict himself here. If women

¹³Schaff (ed), Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, Vol.XII, p.166.

¹⁴Schaff (ed), Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, Vol.XII, p.166.

¹⁵Schaff (ed), Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, Vol. XII, p.166.

cannot speak or act on their own, how can they also be crafty? The adjective "crafty" describes a shrewd character, someone who is able to think and have ideas. This goes against Chrysostom's view of women if he feels they are weak and subject to men. We must also make note of the fact that the person trying to convince Job to curse his God is a *woman*. Chrysostom continues to assume he intimately knows Job's character by saying that before Job turned to rebuke his wife, Job was determined not to be weakened by her devices. As Chrysostom says, "she no doubt expected to excite fountains of tears".¹⁶ So, when we consider the list of things which caused Job to suffer, we should also add to that list the "devices of his wife", for she also caused him suffering and grief. According to Chrysostom, most women have the tendency to do this, for he says "Many (men) at least even without external accidents have been cast down by the counsel of woman alone".¹⁷ Furthermore, Chrysostom writes "For when the wife of Job speaks, a Devil is at work".¹⁸ Chrysostom may not just be referring here to Job's wife working with the Devil, nor is he just implying that the Devil

¹⁶Schaff (ed), Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, Vol. XII, p.167.

¹⁷Schaff (ed), Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, Vol.XII, p.167.

¹⁸Schaff (ed), Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, Vol. XII, p.292.

is working through her. By suggesting that Job's wife is "a devil at work", Chrysostom implies that Job's wife is a devil, essentially saying that she is an evil and vile woman who is crafty and wicked, and is only interested in the downfall of her husband. Chrysostom is very clear here about his opinion of Job's wife, and also about women in general.

As with Augustine and Chrysostom, Gregory the Great (ca 540-604) also gives a negative portrayal of Job's wife. As Ann Astell summarizes, the few mysterious words spoken by Job's wife in 2:9 "[have] earned (her) a prominent position in misogynist literature, a position secured for her by Saint Gregory the Great's influential sixth-century commentary Moralia in Job."¹⁹ Gregory urges us to take note of the fact, as did Augustine and Chrysostom, that, with God's permission, Satan, being a shrewd and crafty character, took away from Job all that he had. Satan, however, proved himself to be even more cunning when he let Job's wife remain alive to play the role as his abettor. Job's wife, however, cannot be said to be acting of her own volition. Just as Chrysostom's description of Job's wife brought to mind a pawn, or puppet, so does Gregory's description of her. Gregory says:

Now the woman is close to the man and joined to him.
Therefore he [Satan] fixed his hold on the heart of the

¹⁹Ann Astell, "Job's Wife, Walter's Wife, and the Wife of Bath" from Raymond-Jean Frontain and Jan Wojcik's Old Testament Women in Western Literature (Conway, AR: UCA Press, 1991), p.93.

woman, and as it were found in it a ladder whereby he might be able to mount up to the heart of the man. He seized the mind of the wife, which was the ladder to the husband.²⁰

Satan even cleverly chose just the right time for Job's wife to speak to her husband. According to Gregory, this perfect time came right after everything was taken from him, when he was afflicted with a skin disease, and it seemed that nothing else could go wrong. "Thus after the losses of his goods, after the death of his children, after the wounding and rending of his limbs, the old foe put in motion the tongue of his wife".²¹

The comparison of Job's wife to Eve, it seems, was a common theme among the early commentators. Gregory links Job's wife with Eve in the description of an archetypal temptress, and Gregory believes the words of Job's wife are strikingly similar to those found in Adam's temptation by Eve.²² Unlike Augustine and Chrysostom, though, Gregory goes further in analysing the exchange between Job and his wife. Gregory detects "an eroticism not apparent in the literal meaning of their words".²³ Satan is eager to conquer Job's soul, so he uses the

²⁰Gregory the Great, Morals on the Book of Job (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1844), p.137.

²¹Gregory the Great, Morals on the Book of Job, p.138.

²²Astell, "Job's Wife, Walter's Wife, and the Wife of Bath", p.94.

²³Astell, "Job's Wife, Walter's Wife, and the Wife of Bath", p.94.

heart of Job's wife as a ladder and uses her affection for her husband to try to reach the heart of Job.²⁴ After all that has happened, Job appears vulnerable before his wife, the person to whom he is closest. With her words, she may be able to conquer his heart and soul. With his power, Satan enables Job's wife to move her tongue and speak. Gregory identifies the words spoken by Job's wife as being related, and close, to her body and its "carnal allurements".²⁵ From all that Gregory has said, it is evident that he sees Job's wife, and women, only in terms of sex, and believes a woman will use her sexual power to achieve whatever she wants. Despite this, however, Job's wife does not succeed. She speaks foolish words, and therefore is a foolish woman.

Augustine, Chrysostom, and Gregory all portray Job's wife as a character who works hand in hand with Satan. Satan takes away all that Job has, and uses Job's wife to continue with the evil he had begun. According to these three early commentators, Job's wife worked intimately with Satan to try to achieve the results Satan desired. However, no mention is made of Job's wife until 2:9. In the dialogues between God and Satan in the Prologue, God allows Satan first to destroy Job's material possessions and family, and then to destroy Job's

²⁴The following description is taken from Astell's article "Job's Wife, Walter's Wife, and the Wife of Bath", p.94.

²⁵Astell, "Job's Wife, Walter's Wife, and the Wife of Bath", p.94.

health. In fact, neither God nor Satan mention Job's wife at all. No reference is made to her in chapter one of the Prologue, and her brief appearance in 2:9 is all we hear from Job's wife. If Job's wife worked so closely with Satan, would she not at least be mentioned or referred to, however obscurely, before her appearance in 2:9? Yet these early commentators insist on linking Job's wife with Satan, even though there is no evidence to prove such a partnership. This type of characterization of Job's wife continues with the opinions of commentators who follow Augustine, Chrysostom, and Gregory, and the opinions of these men will be examined next.

In his Literal Exposition on the Book of Job, Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) attempts to present a commentary to his readers which explains the Book of Job in a literal sense in order to explain the suffering of Job. When a person is sick or suffering from some form of mental or physical anguish, the people around that person who love and care for him or her usually do their best to keep them comfortable and peaceful. Such is not the case with Job. According to Aquinas, "only exasperating words are spoken to the afflicted Job, so much more provoking as they are proffered by a person close to him" namely, his wife.²⁶ The devil left Job's wife alive so that through her, he would be

²⁶Thomas Aquinas, The Literal Exposition on Job (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), p.94.

able to "upset the mind of a just man".²⁷ Job's wife speaks to her husband words of "derision" ("Why are you holding fast to your integrity?") which are followed by words of "perverse suggestion" ("Curse God"), and her final words are those of "desperation" ("And die!").²⁸ Not only was Job's wife cruel enough to insult her husband's intelligence by speaking such foolish words, she also insulted God because she was "speaking against divine wisdom".²⁹ For this, Job's wife deserves the sharp rebuke she receives from her husband. It is his duty to put her in her place, and to make her understand how irrational she sounded. Aquinas praises Job's admonishment of his wife in the next verse, 2:10; "But he said to her: 'You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?'". In Job's rebuke to his wife, Aquinas feels that Job exemplifies the "perfect wisdom of man", and shows his wife that such intelligent thought can only come from a man, and therefore a woman is not capable of being as rational as a man.³⁰ As a result, Aquinas believes that we should not be surprised that such thoughtless and foolish words could have come from the mouth of a woman. This sentiment was also

²⁷Aquinas, The Literal Exposition on Job, p.94.

²⁸Aquinas, The Literal Exposition on Job, p.95.

²⁹Aquinas, The Literal Exposition on Job, p.95.

³⁰Aquinas, The Literal Exposition on Job, p.95.

expressed by Augustine, Chrysostom, and Gregory.

John Calvin, like many other early commentators, believes that he understands why Job suffers. Calvin believes that "God afflicts those whom He loves" and proof of this can be seen not only in the afflictions of Job, but also in those of Abraham, David, and Christ.³¹ When Calvin continues to describe the affliction and anguish suffered by Job, he includes that Job was "tormented by his wife", and this added considerably to his physical and spiritual pain and temptation.³² More evidence of Calvin's views on Job's wife can be found in his commentary on 2:9 in his Sermons on Job. Calvin says that "Job's wife's comments to him provoke him to despair".³³ Because it was his wife who spoke these words to Job, Calvin says it was a "double war unto Job, when besides the possibility of being tempted in himself, his own wife provoked him to despair".³⁴ Calvin continues to give his own description of Job's wife. Calvin does not see Job's wife as a person, or as a woman who has suffered a loss as great as her husband. His contempt for Job's wife is obvious when he depicts her as "an

³¹Susan E. Schreiner, Where Shall Wisdom Be Found? (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p.96.

³²Schreiner, Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?, p.104.

³³John Calvin, Sermons on Job 16th-17th Century Facsimile Editions. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1993), p.39.

³⁴Calvin, Sermons on Job, p.39.

instrument of Satan", "as a Shedevil, or as a fiend of hell".³⁵ If she wants to be a good wife, which is what a man like Job deserves, she should not have spoken such foolish words. Instead, she should "pray God, that her husband may guide her...and be always able to instruct her".³⁶ It is bad enough that Job had to endure such loss and suffering, but even beyond that, he had to endure the torment caused by his wife.³⁷ Worse than that, though, according to Calvin, is that Job's wife is not moved at all by her husband's situation.³⁸ Calvin portrays Job's wife as a cold, unfeeling person who does not care about her husband, the father of her children. In fact, Calvin says she "showed herself to be like a savage beast in this situation".³⁹ Once Calvin's opinions about Job's wife have been read, it is obvious how he feels about her character. His opinions are strikingly similar to those of Augustine, Chrysostom, Gregory, and Aquinas.

All of the early commentators which were previously discussed essentially held the same beliefs about Job's wife. According to them,

³⁵Calvin, Sermons on Job, p.40.

³⁶Calvin, Sermons on Job, p.41.

³⁷John Calvin, Sermons from Job (Grand Rapids, Mich.:Baker Book House, 1952), p.4.

³⁸Calvin, Sermons from Job, p.107.

³⁹Calvin, Sermons from Job, p.107.

she was an evil and wicked woman who cared nothing for her husband and was only concerned with her own well being. These early commentators insisted on linking Job's wife with Satan, regardless of the fact that there was no evidence to prove such claims. By continually casting Job's wife in the role of Satan's aide, these men reinforced a negative portrayal of Job's wife, leading unsuspecting readers of the text to believe that Job's wife was actually a bad person, a foolish woman, and basically an insignificant character. This negative view of Job's wife was carried on by generations of commentators, and only recently have scholars begun to examine the role of Job's wife more closely. Yet even in these modern times, some scholars persist in characterising Job's wife as the evil and vile woman that early commentators described so long ago. It is now to these modern commentators and their views that we will turn.

Modern Male Commentators

In the previous pages I have explained the negative opinions of Job's wife by the early commentators. Modern day commentators, however, have followed in the wake of the opinions which were expressed by early commentators such as Augustine, Chrysostom, Gregory, Aquinas, and Calvin. Even though the attitudes toward women have changed over the centuries, some recent scholars on the Book of

Job still cannot excuse or justify the actions of Job's wife. And, unlike the early commentators, who were all men, some of these recent scholars are, ironically, women themselves.

Although it may be surprising to hear negative comments made toward Job's wife by modern female commentators, it may be less surprising to hear them come from recent male commentators. Even though the words used to describe Job's wife by modern male commentators may vary, and although they are not as blatantly misogynist as previous scholars, they nevertheless do not cast Job's wife in the role of a sympathetic character. The underlying meaning of their words remains the same when some of these recent scholars repeat the same descriptions that men like Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin used in a "less enlightened" age.

Driver and Gray, in their commentary on Job, only mention Job's wife briefly, as do most commentators, but the little they do say is not favourable. As many other commentators before them have done, they compare Job's wife to Eve and repeat Augustine's description of her as a "diaboli adiutrix", or the devil's helpmate.⁴⁰ The only possible way that Job's wife can be seen in a positive light is if she is compared to Job.

⁴⁰Samuel Rolles Driver and George Buchanan Gray, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1964, originally published in 1921), p.25.

Her negativity serves to exemplify the piety and righteousness of Job's character.⁴¹ Job's wife makes it even more obvious just how pious Job is, because his positive character can be seen in contrast to the negative character of his wife. Her poor character flaws only enhance or emphasise all of the positive attributes of Job's character. Therefore, Job's wife does something positive by making the reader aware of her negativity.

Meir Weiss regards the words spoken by Job's wife to her husband as a "new trial" for Job, over and above the one with which he already has to contend. The immensity of this new trial is increased not only because of what she says, but also because of who she is: his wife.⁴² As his wife, she is expected to be fully supportive of her husband, regardless of what decisions he may make. Weiss believes that Job's wife is neglecting her "wifely" role or duties. She fails to support her husband when he needed her the most, and her lack of support only serves to increase the strain Job is experiencing.⁴³ Weiss echoes the words that were spoken by the earlier commentators.

⁴¹Driver and Gray, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job, p.25.

⁴²Meir Weiss, The Story of Job's beginning: Job 1-2: A Literary Analysis (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1983), p.69.

⁴³Weiss, The Story of Job's Beginning, p.69.

Because Job's wife increases the strain her husband is experiencing, she is proving to be just as much a tempter as Satan is himself. By repeating the opinions of the early commentators, Weiss reinforces the negative shadow that has loomed over Job's wife for generations.

Although Norman Habel speaks very little about the role played by Job's wife, what he does say proves to be anything but positive or sympathetic. Habel draws together much that the previous commentators have said, both early and modern. Habel believes that Job faces his ultimate test when he hears the words his wife speaks to him.⁴⁴ Because Job's wife speaks these words, she is immediately identified with Satan, and Habel says her function is to be Satan's ally. The narrator reinforces this as he has Job's wife serve as "the earthly mouthpiece for the hidden Satan".⁴⁵

John Hartley, like Driver and Gray, also believes there was only one good aspect which resulted from the role of Job's wife: to show how unusual and brave Job was as he silently accepted all that had happened to him.⁴⁶ Her entrance into the tale should cause the reader

⁴⁴Norman C. Habel, The Book of Job: A Commentary (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985), p.96.

⁴⁵Habel, The Book of Job, p.96.

⁴⁶John E. Hartley, The Book of Job (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), p.83.

to be even more sympathetic to Job, for his wife proved to be yet another part of his trial.⁴⁷ Job's wife was not able to comprehend her husband and could not understand why he would even want to hold fast to his integrity. But Hartley believes that Job's wife, instead of seeing this as one of her husband's many wonderful and unique assets, was afraid he was becoming a religious fanatic who refused to face the reality that surrounded him.⁴⁸ Job's wife was certain in her belief that Job should lash out at God for all that had happened. And, as Weiss also stated, Hartley believes that the words spoken by Job's wife proved to be the most trying event of all, for she was speaking out of the bond that was created between them when they were married.⁴⁹ By speaking these words to her husband, Job's wife echoed Satan's challenge to, and his doubts about, human faith in God when Satan said "All that a man has he will give for his own life" (2:4, NRSV).⁵⁰ Not only does Hartley attempt to show the negativity of Job's wife by linking her with Satan, he also says she is doubtful of the human faith in God, which means *she* is doubtful of her own faith in God. How can such a person be portrayed in a positive light?

⁴⁷Hartley, The Book of Job, p.83.

⁴⁸Hartley, The Book of Job, p.83.

⁴⁹Hartley, The Book of Job, p.85.

⁵⁰Hartley, The Book of Job, p.85.

Leo Perdue also uses the same description for Job's wife as many commentators before him. He refers to Job's wife as the second antagonist as she urges her husband to "Curse God and die".⁵¹ According to Perdue, her words seem "to be less of a direct challenge to Yahweh's authority and more an escape from the hideous lot which has been determined for Job".⁵² A good wife, however, would not consider trying to "escape". She would stand by her husband and support him, regardless of the situation or problem. Perdue says she begins "the movement towards rebellion", an action she should not have taken.⁵³ Her actions prove that she is not a good wife, or even a good role model for the female race. She does not know how to act as a woman should, or how to keep her place. As a result, Perdue does not believe Job's wife should be viewed as a positive character in the story. Perdue, like Weiss, continues in the same vein as the early commentators. Although the early commentators wrote many years ago, their words live on and are continually being revived by modern scholars such as Perdue. He keeps both the spirit and the beliefs of the early commentators alive as he continues to view Job's wife as Chrysostom did by believing that

⁵¹Leo Perdue, Wisdom in Revolt (Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1991), p.87.

⁵²Perdue, Wisdom in Revolt, p.266.

⁵³Perdue, Wisdom in Revolt, p.266.

women are subject to men and should keep their place in society as good women and good wives, both of which, according to Perdue, Job's wife is not.

Modern Female Commentators

As I stated previously, while it may not be surprising to hear negative comments about Job's wife from male commentators, it is definitely surprising to hear them come from modern female commentators. However, the following female commentators adhere to the beliefs expressed by the early commentators, and continue to portray Job's wife in a negative light.

An early feminist, Elisabeth Cady Stanton is the author of The Woman's Bible. Ironically, however, she adheres to the beliefs expressed by Chrysostom, Aquinas, and other early commentators when discussing Job's wife. She admits that very little is said of women in the Book of Job, and what is said is by no means complimentary.⁵⁴ Many of the early commentators described Job's wife as a tool of Satan, used to bring about the downfall of Job, and Stanton agrees with this description. According to Stanton, Job's wife did nothing more than

⁵⁴Elisabeth Cady Stanton, The Original Feminist Attack on the Bible (The Woman's Bible) (New York: Arno Press, 1974. Originally published in 1895 and 1898), p.94.

ridicule and mock her husband and his faith in God.⁵⁵ The only reason Job's wife was left alive was to play the role of Job's tempter, and the disgust she showed towards Job proved to be his last and hardest affliction.⁵⁶ Job's wife, Stanton believes, does not just want Job to give up, she wants him to commit suicide. It would be better for both him and her if he were to die at once, then neither of them would have to suffer a life of constant misery.⁵⁷ Essentially, Job's wife deserts her husband and impatiently waits for his inevitable death. Stanton's contribution to the study of Job's wife only reinforces the negative opinions we have already been given by the early male commentators. Her words seem to bridge the gap between early and modern scholars as she brings the patristic misogynist views in line with her own.

Edith Deen is another feminist commentator who does not give a glowing description of Job's wife. Although not as harsh as some of the other scholars, Deen still does not portray Job's wife in a favourable light. Deen compares Job's wife to her husband, and says she urges her husband to curse God and die because she may not be as faithful or as

⁵⁵Stanton, The Woman's Bible, p.94.

⁵⁶Stanton, The Woman's Bible, p.94.

⁵⁷Stanton, The Woman's Bible, p.95.

patient as Job.⁵⁸ Deen feels there is certainly nothing outstanding about Job's wife. She is not as well known as Job, who was famed for being upright, just, and pious. His wife was "an ordinary, normal woman" who, "though a dutiful wife", did not "suffer with her husband in his hour of agony".⁵⁹ Because of that, she could not "share with him the marvellous victory of trusting God in spite of not understanding Him".⁶⁰ Thus, Job's wife is not as dutiful and loyal as she could have, and should have, been. Deen, like Stanton, continues to define Job's wife as a negative character and, as a result, does nothing to sever the link that continues with the early commentators.

Ann Astell is a more recent feminist scholar and as such, one would expect her to be sensitized to women's issues. Yet she still cannot view Job's wife in redemptive terms. Like Stanton and Deen, she echoes the words of the early commentators. Just as the early patristic commentators compare Job's wife to Eve, so does Astell. Astell says that in the character of Job's wife one can easily see a re-enactment of Eve's temptation of Adam as Job's wife tries her best to tempt Job.⁶¹ At

⁵⁸Edith Deen, All the Women of the Bible (New York: Harper and Row, 1955), p.333.

⁵⁹Deen, All the Women of the Bible, p.333.

⁶⁰Deen, All the Women of the Bible, p.333.

⁶¹Ann W Astell, Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), p.94.

the instigation of Satan, Job's wife leads her husband into despair by speaking words of poor persuasion and by attempting to seduce her husband as she appeals to his sensuality.⁶² However, Astell's words do not have textual support and are, as such, just conjecture on her part. Even though the words of Job's wife are strongly reminiscent of what Satan wants Job to do, namely "curse" (𐤒𐤍) God, at no point does the reader hear the name of Job's wife mentioned by either God or Job. How can Job's wife be instigated by Satan if Satan never speaks to or about her? Astell's words are strikingly similar to Calvin's when she speaks of leading Job into despair. Her description of the words of Job's wife being those of poor persuasion sound much the same as Aquinas' description of Job's wife's words as "perverse suggestion". Both Astell and Aquinas, by describing the words of Job's wife as suggestive and persuasive, paint Job's wife as a character who is able to convince her husband to do anything she wishes. Astell also describes Job's wife as attempting to seduce her husband by appealing to his sensuality. This is strongly reminiscent of Gregory's depiction of the actions of Job's wife as she uses her body and its "carnal allurements". Also, it is ironic to note that Astell, in her article "Job's Wife, Walter's Wife, and the Wife of Bath" essentially refers to Gregory

⁶²Astell, Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth, p.94.

as a misogynist.⁶³ Astell, it seems, has combined the opinions of several of the early commentators in order to form her own description of Job's wife. By doing so, perhaps she felt she strengthened her own argument by backing it with the arguments of several influential commentators, thus giving her own words more credence.

Conclusion

In summary, then, Job's wife is a tool of the devil, a wicked, uncaring, and unsympathetic woman who cares nothing for the plight and pain of her husband. She is concerned only with herself. Given the trend of the early commentators' views on Job's wife, and some of the modern commentators as well, it is obvious why Job's wife has never been permitted a purposeful, positive role. With such negative opinions in the history of interpretation, it is hardly possible to view her in any other way. And even today, some modern commentators insist on portraying Job's wife in a negative light.

This chapter has provided the details of the descriptions of both the early commentators and some modern scholars. It is against this background that I will show that Job's wife is indeed a sympathetic character who has a very important role in the Book of Job, despite the

⁶³Astell, "Job's Wife, Walter's Wife, and the Wife of Bath", p.93.

negative opinions of the previously mentioned scholars. This will be done by utilising a feminist approach to Job 2:9. A feminist-critical perspective allows the reader to view Job's wife as a *female* character, whose feminine needs, feelings, and concerns have not yet been addressed by previous scholars who did not study her from a feminist point of view.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Introduction

In chapter one, detailed examples were given which showed how Job's wife was portrayed negatively throughout the history of interpretation. For the most part, however, these scholars were not aware of, or chose to ignore, the modern trends in feminist scholarship. By utilising this feminist scholarship, and by taking the feminist-critical approach, this chapter will show how Job's wife can be considered to play a prominent role in the Masoretic text of Job.

Feminist Literary Criticism

Feminists who study literary works are most concerned with finding out how the attitudes and beliefs about women's inferiority are reinforced by literature.⁶⁴ Pam Morris says that male critics "usually assume that their perception of a text will be shared by all readers, even when the interpretation offered is restrictively masculine or even misogynistic".⁶⁵ Evidence of this was presented in the previous chapter in the writings of Saint Augustine, Saint Chrysostom, Gregory the Great,

⁶⁴Pam Morris, Literature and Feminism: An Introduction (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), p.8.

⁶⁵Morris, Literature and Feminism, p.38.

Thomas Aquinas, and John Calvin. These men, and many others, wrote about Job's wife, using her as an example of how a wife should not act. Their tones in discussing her are decidedly negative, reproachful, and even misogynist at times. That these critics are men reinforces the main problem or obstacle for feminist critics. According to Sydney Janet Kaplan, feminist criticism attempts to overcome this problem, for feminist criticism begins in the personal response of women readers and critics, not in the response of male readers and critics.⁶⁶ Male critics cannot accurately analyse the roles and attitudes of women in literature *because they are men*. This does not necessarily mean that a man cannot be a feminist. Morris' answer would be yes, a man can be a feminist⁶⁷ but

a feminist man will always be positioned quite differently from a feminist woman in relation to gender-based social injustice. He can recognise and deplore the structures of gender inequality, but he cannot experience them as a woman.⁶⁸

Women can more easily relate to and comprehend "gender-based social injustice" because it is usually towards them that it is directed. The

⁶⁶Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn, eds. Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism (London and New York: Methuen and Company Limited, 1985), p.37.

⁶⁷Morris admits that this is controversial, and not all feminists would agree with her on this topic.

⁶⁸Morris, Literature and Feminism, p.2.

same follows when women read of any marginalisation of female characters in literature. Women are able to be more precise in their evaluations of females in literature because they can more easily relate to a female character. What men have, therefore, are merely ideas about women, and these ideas do not present or reflect a woman's historical reality.⁶⁸ The bulk of such research on women focuses mainly on what men, or male critics, thought about women, and not primarily on the female characters themselves.⁷⁰ Therefore, we need to shift our concern directly to these female characters, and not leave them on the periphery or margins of literature. If Job's wife is placed in the centre of our concern, then, the focus is directly on her. The reader can put aside male historians' comments on Job's wife, not be influenced by what Job himself says to her, and can thus create their own image and impression of Job's wife, one which is derived solely from the actions and words of Job's wife.

Phyllis Bird, in her article "Images of Women in the Old

⁶⁸Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "Remembering the Past in Creating the Future: Historical Critical Scholarship and Feminist Biblical Interpretation" from Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship, Adela Yarbo Collins, ed. (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1985), p.57.

⁷⁰Bernadette J. Brooten, "Early Christian Women and Their Cultural Context: Issues of Method in Historical Reconstruction" from Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship, Adela Yarbo Collins, ed. (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1985), p.65.

Testament", identifies another obstacle for feminist literary critics. Her area of concern is the Old Testament itself, which she refers to as a "man's book, where women appear for the most part simply as adjuncts of men, significant only in the context of men's activities".⁷¹ This is clearly shown in the discussion of the literature concerning Job's wife. She seems to exist only in relation to Job; that is, how her words are directed towards and profoundly affect Job. Even her purpose in the Prologue is seen in relation to Job, for, according to Bruce Zuckerman, the role and words of Job's wife can be used to emphasise the extreme piety of Job. As Zuckerman argues, Job holds fast to his integrity even in the face of his wife's suffering, thereby reinforcing the strength of Job's resolve and character.⁷²

David Jobling, in his article "Mieke Bal on Biblical Narrative", asserts there are mainly two types of feminist literary criticism: a recuperative and a deconstructive approach. A recuperative approach tries to "pry open the male defined 'canon' of 'great books' or 'classics' by recovering and reading suppressed writing by women", and the

⁷¹Phyllis Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament" from Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions, Rosemary Radford Ruether, ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster Press, 1974), p.41.

⁷²Bruce Zuckerman, Job the Silent (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.168.

deconstructive approach concentrates "on critical, subversive rereading of the male canon".⁷³ In this thesis I will concentrate on what Jobling calls a "recuperative" approach. Catherine Belsey explains what this process entails. Its purpose is "to examine the process of its production" and "to locate the point of contradiction within the text".⁷⁴ Once a contradiction is discovered, the reader reconstructs the text based on what contradictions have been found. This kind of feminist-critical approach will seek to reconstruct the negative portrayal that has so long been attributed to Job's wife, revealing a new positive model whereby Job's wife may be seen in a more sympathetic light. According to Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, in order to do this I must "challenge dominant scholarship by insisting that history must be written not from the perspective of the 'historical winners' but from that of the silenced or marginalised".⁷⁵ In other words, we need to view the situation from the point of view of Job's wife, from a female perspective. If we try to see it through her eyes, we may see it in a whole new light. Fiorenza

⁷³David Jobling, "Mieke Bal on Biblical Narrative", Religious Studies Review, Vol. 17, No. 1, January 1991, p.2.

⁷⁴Catherine Belsey, "Constructing the Subject, Deconstructing the Text" from Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism, Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl, eds. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991), p.601.

⁷⁵Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, But She Said (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), p.33.

discusses this aspect of context as well, and says it is important to consider the context, for "what we see depends on where we stand".⁷⁶

These sentiments are also echoed in the words of Mary Ellmann. Ellmann believes she has an explanation for the rising interest in feminist criticism. She believes it derives from a need felt by female readers to see their own experiences reflected in literature, for very few male authors and critics have been successful in giving its female audience female characters with whom they can identify.⁷⁷ This reflects Fiorenza's statement that "what we see depends on where we stand" for, as Ellmann observes, male authors and critics cannot, and do not, portray female characters in the same way a female author or critic would. Although males and females can have different points of view, feminist criticism has the advantage of exposing women readers to different ways of sympathising with female characters in literature than was previously the case.⁷⁸

Since much of the portrayal of women in the Bible is ambiguous,

⁷⁶Fiorenza, But She Said, p.46.

⁷⁷Mary Ellmann, "Thinking about Women" from Feminist Literary Criticism: Explorations in Theory, Josephine Donovan, ed. (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1975), p.15.

⁷⁸This idea is not without its controversy, for there are some male readers who can share some insights about female characters, as indicated by Morris earlier.

women biblical scholars have, in recent times, begun to study the textual ambiguities instead of assuming male historians' commentaries about them.⁷⁹ Ambiguous and seemingly patriarchal passages can hold surprising interpretations which may challenge the belief systems of the past and which may challenge the "dominant impression" that Fiorenza spoke about.⁸⁰ Challenging or reconstructing it from a feminist-critical perspective would mean deriving a different impression of certain texts. Again, as Fiorenza says, "What we see depends on where we stand" and, from where feminist critics stand, the "dominant impression" is simply not adequate.

Taking the feminist-critical approach, however, does not simply involve a woman reading and responding to a piece of literature which may or may not have female characters in it. A great deal of work is required, but to put it simply, "feminist scholarship undertakes the dual task of deconstructing predominantly male cultural paradigms and reconstructing a female perspective and experience in an effort to

⁷⁹Ambiguity arises in the various ways that women are viewed in the Old Testament. Some are seen as harlots and whores, while others are depicted as virtuous and wise. Not all scholars share the same opinions on whether or not a particular woman, such as Job's wife, should be viewed as one or the other.

⁸⁰Christopher Rowland, "The Power of the Fathers" from Who Needs Feminism?: Men Respond to Sexism in the Church, Richard Holloway, ed. (Great Britain: SPCK Press, 1991), p.69.

change the tradition that has silenced and marginalised (women)".⁸¹ In reference to Job's wife, these "male cultural paradigms" were seen in the writings of historical scholars such as Thomas Aquinas, Gregory the Great, and others. In the next chapter, I will attempt to "reconstruct" Job's wife as her words and actions will be explained from a "female perspective and experience".

With this in mind, one should also be aware that the reconstructive work of feminist critics does not involve a complete re-writing of a particular text. As T. Drorah Setel argues, feminist critics, especially those concerned with biblical studies, are not attempting to revamp the contents of an established piece of work.⁸² They are concerned with studying and reviewing the form and intent of the piece of work. By doing so, feminist critics broaden their experience. They not only become more aware of the past, they also become more aware of themselves for "the experience of [their] own work can be seen as a transforming process".⁸³ It seems to be a common misunderstanding that feminist critics want to rewrite any piece of literature that negates or

⁸¹Greene and Kahn, Making a Difference, p.1.

⁸²T. Drorah Setel, "Feminist Insights and the Question of Method" in Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship, Adela Yarbo Collins,ed. (Chico, California:Scholars Press,1985),p.42.

⁸³Setel, "Feminist Insights and the Question of Method", p.42.

silences women, and put forth their own "feminist" version of the story. Yet that is not the case. Feminist critics do not want to rewrite their own versions, as Setel argues. Since much of history has been written from a male point of view, feminist critics merely want to re-examine, in closer detail, pieces of literature which do not have a strong female presence even though it contains female characters.

Feminist critics, as previously mentioned, are concerned with studying any work of literature that has "silenced or marginalised women". However, because the focus of this thesis is on the Prologue to the Book of Job, there should be some discussion on how feminist critics specifically view the Old Testament. According to Alice L. Laffey, the biblical texts were "produced by a patriarchal society" and therefore are "patriarchal in character".⁴⁴ Elizabeth A. Castelli agrees with Laffey. She says:

we can safely acknowledge that there are many parts of the biblical text that do reflect patriarchal expectations and modes of thought. Further, we know that the Bible as a whole has been used frequently throughout history toward patriarchal ends.⁴⁵

⁴⁴Alice L. Laffey, An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), p.2.

⁴⁵Elizabeth A. Castelli, "Les Belles Infideles?/ Fidelity or Feminism? The Meanings of Feminist Biblical Translation" from Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Introduction, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, ed. Vol. One (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1993), p.194.

This patriarchy which one encounters in their reading of the Old Testament undermines the equality of women and their experiences, and it is the duty of feminist biblical critics to try to uncover this patriarchal bias.⁸⁶ The duty of feminist biblical critics also involves placing "at the centre of its attention everywoman's struggles to transform patriarchal structures, both in biblical and in our own times".⁸⁷ Before any such transformation can take place, though, the feminist biblical critic must "recognise that biblical texts reflect the patriarchal cultures that produced them".⁸⁸ Only then can the feminist biblical critic successfully reconstruct a text. Unfortunately, the ideas of patriarchy are not confined to the Old Testament. As the last chapter showed, patriarchal ideas surface in commentaries by male critics like Augustine, Chrysostom, and others.

Women such as Job's wife did not fare well in the patriarchal society. The male was the "responsible" person. He was the head of the household, and as such he was responsible not only for his own

⁸⁶Laffey, An Introduction to the Old Testament, p.3.

⁸⁷Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "Introduction: Transforming the Legacy of The Woman's Bible" from Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Introduction, Vol. One. (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1993), p.21.

⁸⁸Monika Fander, "Historical-Critical Methods" from Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Introduction, Vol. One. (New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1993), p.373.

actions, but also for any and all actions of his dependents.⁸⁹

Dependents included the man's wife, children, and any animals or livestock. As we see in the Book of Job, not only does Job's wife not have a name, but, according to this, she cannot even be seen as an individual because her husband, not her, is responsible for everything she says and does. The fact that she does not even have a name is an important factor in a feminist critique. The fact that women's names are not mentioned indicates that they are denied their own personal identity, and so they, like material possessions, belong to the men.⁹⁰ This is common practice in the Old Testament writings, as women, such as Job's wife, were only identified by the men to whom they belonged, whether it was their husbands, their fathers, their brothers, or even their sons.⁹¹ This can all be summed up in the words of Phyllis Bird; "Women are adjuncts to men: they are minor characters necessary to a plot that revolves about males".⁹² These words are especially true for Job's wife. She appears in a piece of work dedicated to her husband. Its title even bears his name; "The Book of Job". She plays a very minor role in a tale that revolves around Job. While she does add a little to the drama, she

⁸⁹Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament", p.49.

⁹⁰Laffey, An Introduction to the Old Testament, p.188.

⁹¹Laffey, An Introduction to the Old Testament, p.193.

⁹²Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament", p.60.

is quickly dismissed and easily forgotten. This, however, need not be the last word on the subject.

A feminist-critical approach using a reconstructive technique will help to make the reader become conscious of how one can read and interpret biblical texts in a different way.⁹³ The reader must keep in mind that most of the interpretation of biblical texts has been done, until recently, by male critics and scholars. Because of this, female readers have been oblivious to and ignorant of many female characters in the Old Testament, and therefore do not realise the importance of the presence and roles of these female characters.⁹⁴ By using a feminist-critical approach, then, readers can question and even try to weaken the patriarchal framework of the Old Testament.⁹⁵ Also, feminist critics can attempt to devise alternatives to these patriarchal ideas and, by doing so, develop a new feminist perspective towards the Old Testament.⁹⁶

Female Experience

An aspect of feminist scholarship which will be useful in this study

⁹³Laffey, An Introduction to the Old Testament, p.220.

⁹⁴Laffey, An Introduction to the Old Testament, p.220.

⁹⁵Elizabeth Gross, "Conclusion: What is Feminist Theory?" from Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory, Carole Pateman and Elizabeth Gross, eds. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987), p.195.

⁹⁶Gross, "Conclusion: What is Feminist Theory?", p.195.

is the feminists' concern with female experience. The concern here is with the female experience of Job's wife, and the female experience of any female reader who reads about Job's wife. One should not dismiss biblical texts by deeming them to be without that female experience, for to do so would imply an "implicit acceptance of women's historical nonexistence".⁹⁷ In other words, feminist critics of biblical scholarship do admit that the biblical texts contain significant female experiences. However, they are also aware that these female experiences have often only been viewed from a male perspective. Their aim is to re-read and reconstruct these biblical texts solely from a feminist perspective. It is important to note too, in this regard, that feminist critics do not only re-read biblical texts which deal with women or with texts which contain female imagery. Their interest, according to Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, involves all of biblical literature.⁹⁸ Texts such as the Book of Job only mention women in passing, and it is texts such as these that also concern feminist critics. Because women like Job's wife rarely speak or appear in the text, it is the task of feminist biblical scholars to maximize their roles to the best of their abilities.

⁹⁷Setel, "Feminist Insights and the Question of Method", p.39.

⁹⁸Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, Far More Precious than Jewels: Perspectives on Biblical Women (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), p.43.

Ambiguity and Translation

There is one final, but very important, factor that feminist biblical critics must keep in mind.⁹⁹ When analysing or critiquing a text or passage, the critic must be able to accurately translate specific passages, especially those which silence or marginalise women. In their studies of biblical texts, feminist critics have noted the ambiguity of passages when read in their original language. When translated, the (male) scholars have taken away this ambiguity, and translated various words in different ways so that the translation will "support the idea of male authority".¹⁰⁰ When this occurs, the (male) scholars are really just

fragmenting women, leaving their stories incomplete so that they are not full characters, [and this] is typical of biblical narrative [for] readers tend to fill the gaps in the easiest way; that is, according to convention and presuppositions.¹⁰¹

One example of this can be found in Exum's study of Sarah in her chapter "The (M)other's Place" in her book Fragmented Women. In Genesis 18:12 Sarah says "After I have grown old, and my husband is

⁹⁹The following is one of eight strategies which are outlined in Rebecca Merrill Groothuis' Women Caught in the Conflict: The Culture War Between Traditionalism and Feminism (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1994), p.112.

¹⁰⁰Groothuis, Women Caught in the Conflict, p.112.

¹⁰¹Cheryl Exum, Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1993), p.67.

old, shall I have pleasure?" The critic may understand this in terms of sexual desire or pleasure. Sarah is afraid that Abraham will no longer be able to provide her sexual pleasure because of his old age. However, if a critic understands her words in this way, Sarah is being given a voice, and she is expressing her concerns about sex. If such is the case, the narrator would be acknowledging "female sexual pleasure" and doing that has "serious repercussions".¹⁰² This slip is corrected, though, in the next verse, Genesis 18:13, when the Lord said "Why did Sarah laugh and say 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?'" Exum describes this verse as being written in "non-threatening, patriarchally acceptable terms".¹⁰³ This means that now, unlike with Sarah's words, there is no threat to the male's ability to sexually please a woman, and no mention of sexual desire at all. The ambiguity is obvious in this story. Sarah, a woman, may be talking about sex but God, usually viewed as a male, is referring only to reproduction. Who is referring to what? Who really meant what? There is no clear cut, true answer, there is only ambiguity.

Another very strong example of the problems and ambiguities that may be encountered in translations can be found in the word **אֵל** which

¹⁰²Exum, Fragmented Women, p.143.

¹⁰³Exum, Fragmented Women, p.143.

is spoken by Job's wife. In Hebrew, **בָּרַךְ** can mean either bless or curse.¹⁰⁴ The way the word is translated depends entirely on the context of the verse and/or passage in which it is found. Therefore, if a reader is unable to accurately translate passages which have ambiguous words such as **בָּרַךְ**, then the reader is also unable to fully comprehend the situation which is taking place.

Conclusion

To conclude, what feminist critics must do is re-read the texts, whether they be biblical or not, and study them from a female point of view. In this thesis, the text is a biblical text; the Prologue to the Book of Job. Cheryl Exum, like the majority of feminist critics, argues that we should reconstruct biblical stories, such as the Book of Job, through a feminist critical approach. She echoes the words of Phyllis Bird when she acknowledges the fact that women in biblical stories occupy the minor roles in tales that are mostly about the lives of men.¹⁰⁵ Exum also follows the same line as Fiorenza in that she believes we need to reconstruct these stories from a feminist point of view because if we do

¹⁰⁴Francis Brown, et.al., A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), p.139.

¹⁰⁵J. Cheryl Exum, Fragmented Women (Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1993), p.9.

not do this, all we will be doing is describing "what ancient men had to say about women".¹⁰⁶ We will never be able to avoid negative portrayals of women if we just read and believe patriarchal commentaries by men such as John Calvin or Gregory the Great. We need to, as Phyllis Tribble says, "reinterpret familiar (texts) to shape a remnant theology that challenges the sexism of Scripture".¹⁰⁷ This reinterpretation, this feminist-critical reconstruction, will enable us to reinterpret the role that Job's wife plays in the Prologue to Job.

¹⁰⁶Exum, Fragmented Women, p.11.

¹⁰⁷Phyllis Tribble, Texts of Terror (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p.3.

Chapter 3

Narrative Structure of Job 1-2

Introduction

Even though many scholars comment, albeit negatively, on Job's wife, few of them have ever seriously attempted to discuss her character. What is intended here is to provide a different way to interpret the contribution of Job's wife from a feminist point of view. This chapter will show the contribution of Job's wife in terms of the structure of the Prologue to the Book of Job. It is necessary to provide a structural account of the Prologue if one is to argue that she is an important character. By pointing out the parallels between chapters one and two, I will try to show that Job's wife in 2:9 does not fit into the overall structure of the Prologue. It is my contention that this verse purposely does not fit, so it is possible that the biblical author *wanted* the readers to notice Job's wife, perhaps indicating that she does have a very important role in the tale.

Parallel Structure

When one examines the structure of chapters one and two, the parallels are immediately evident. The structure of chapter one mirrors the structure of chapter two. From the beginning to the end of both

chapters, the events which unfold occur in the same order, in the same manner, and involve mostly the same characters. Even the same words are spoken, for the most part, and this becomes evident not only in the English versions of the text, but also in the original Hebrew.

Chapter 1:1-5 begins the Prologue to Job with an introduction to the tale. The reader is introduced to the main character of the book, Job, and is provided details about his background and life. This section reads:

There once was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. He had seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys, and very many servants; so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east.

It is commonly believed that 1:1-5 has no parallel verse and, because it is an introduction to a tale, does not need to be paralleled. Good, however, shows that there is a relationship between 1:1-5, the beginning of the Prologue, and 2:11-13, the end of the Prologue.¹⁰⁸ The description of Job at the beginning is the reason why his friends appear at the end, and that reason is "evil". In 1:1 we are told that Job avoids evil (מַעַר) and in 2:11, Job's friends come when they hear of the evil that had befallen Job (רָעָה). Good also draws a connection in the issue of "days". In 1:4, 5,

¹⁰⁸The following description of the parallel structures of 1:1-5 and 2:11-13 is taken from E.M. Good's In Turns of Tempest, p.191.

and 13 we are told of the feast days held by Job's sons and daughters, and 1:6 and 2:1 tell us of the days the heavenly beings, Satan, and God meet in Heaven. The theme of "days" recurs in 2:13 when Job and his friends spend seven days and nights in silence. Even the number "seven" is mirrored as it parallels the number of sons of Job.

Therefore, 1:1-5 does have a parallel structure which can be found in 2:11-13. The connection comes as "evil formerly avoided [1:1-5] is now present [2:11-13]; days have reversed their character".¹⁰⁹ From this point on, however, the parallel structure is not as obscure and is made much more evident as even most of the words spoken in chapter one are repeated in chapter two.

Chapters 1:6-12 and 2:1-6 in the Prologue of Job involve a meeting in Heaven between God and His heavenly beings, and one of these beings is Satan. In both of these chapters the meetings involve the same setting and characters.¹¹⁰ Chapter 1:6 reads "one day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them"

(וַיָּבֹאוּ הָרוּחַ וַיִּבְרְכוּ בְּפִי הָאֱלֹהִים לְמַעַן עַל יְדֵיָּהּ וַיִּבְרַךְ אֱמָם הַשָּׁמַיִם בְּיוֹמָם)

¹⁰⁹Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, p.191.

¹¹⁰ The following quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the New Oxford Annotated Bible.

Parallels Between Chapters One and Two¹¹²

Episode One

Episode Two

A. "There once was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil." (1:1-5)

FRAME

A1. "Now when Job's three friends heard of all these troubles that had come upon him, each of them set out from his home." (2:11-13)

B. "One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them." (1:6-7)

SETTING

B1. "One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord." (2:1-2)

C. "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil." (1:8)

BOAST

C1. "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil." (2:3)

D. "Then Satan answered the Lord. 'Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not put a fence around him and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions you have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.'" (1:9-11)

CHALLENGE

D1. "Then Satan answered the Lord. 'Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives. But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.'" (2:4-5)

E. "The Lord said to Satan. 'Very well, all that he has is in your power; only do not stretch out your hand against him.'" (1:12a)

ACCEPTANCE

E1. "The Lord said to Satan. 'Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life.'" (2:6)

F. "So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord..." Job's oxen, donkeys, servants, sheep, camels, sons and daughters were all killed. (1:12b-19)

TRIALS

F1. So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head." (2:7-8)

JOB'S WIFE

"Then his wife said to him. 'Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die.'" (2:9)

G. "He said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there; the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.'" (1:20-21)

RESOLUTION

G1. "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" (2:10)

H. "In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing." (1:22)

CLOSURE

H1. "In all this Job did not sin with his lips." (2:10c)

¹¹²This chart is based on the one found in Norman Habel's The Book of Job on pages 79-80.

Likewise, verse 2:1 reads "One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord"

(וַיָּבֹאוּ הַמַּלְאָכִים לְהִנָּחֵם עַל יְהוָה וַיָּבֹא אִתָּם שָׂטָן לְהִנָּחֵם עַל יְהוָה.)

These verses begin the parallel structures and set the stage for the events which follow. The reader is introduced to the character of Satan, and discovers that Satan has a close working relationship with God. In order to fully understand what that relationship is, and how it works, the reader must continue to the next verse.

After Satan and the heavenly beings have come before God, He asks them where they have been. Satan replies to God's question in both 1:7 and 2:2 "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it"

(וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל שָׂטָן מֵאֵימָה אַתָּה וּמֵאֵימָה אַתָּה.)

Satan seems to be some type of heavenly angel on patrol, who has returned after a day of work to present his report to God. The relationship between God and Satan is becoming clearer to the reader now as a dialogue opens up between God and Satan. Even though there were other heavenly beings mentioned, it seems Satan is the only character that the reader, and God, needs to be concerned with, for Satan is the only heavenly being who answered God's question.

God proceeds to ask Satan and the heavenly beings another question; have they noticed His servant Job and his righteous character? God's boast about his servant Job is found in 1:8 and 2:3; "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil"

(וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל הַשָּׂטָן הֲשִׁמַּעְתָּ לְבָבְךָ עַל עַבְדִּי אִיּוֹב כִּי אֵין כָּמוֹהוּ בָּאָרֶץ אִישׁ
וְעַם וְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֵלֹהִים וְסָר מִדָּעַ.)

The similarities are evident in the parallel verse in 2:3, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him in the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason."

(וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל הַשָּׂטָן הֲשִׁמַּעְתָּ לְבָבְךָ עַל עַבְדִּי אִיּוֹב כִּי אֵין כָּמוֹהוּ בָּאָרֶץ אִישׁ
וְעַם וְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֵלֹהִים וְסָר מִדָּעַ מִחַיִּיק בְּעִצּוֹתַי וְהִסְדַּעְתִּי לוֹ לַבְּלֹעַ חֶסֶם.)

God has complete faith in the piety and righteousness of His servant Job, and He probably does not expect to be challenged in either of His boasts. We notice that the ending of 2:3 differs from 1:8 as God responds to Satan and the results of the tests Job has endured. These tests need to be acknowledged in 2:3 so that the reader will know God's position in Satan's testing of Job.

Satan, however, is not as convinced of Job's piety as God is, and

challenges God to test Job in 1:9-11. These verses read:

Then Satan answered the Lord, 'Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not put a fence around him and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions you have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face!

(וַיַּעַן הַשָּׂטָן אֶת יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר הַחַסֵּם יְדֵי אֱלֹהִים: הֲלֹא אֵת
שָׁבַח בְּיָדוֹ בָּרַךְ בְּכֹחוֹ בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר לִי מִשְׁמֵיב מִמֶּלֶךְ יָדוֹ בְּרָכָה וּמִקְדָּח
כָּפֹץ בְּאֶרֶץ: וְהִיטֵל שְׁלֹחַ מִיָּדוֹ וְגַם בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר לִי אֵם לֹא עַל פְּנֵי יִסְכְּךָ).

This challenge is repeated, albeit with differences, in 2:4-6:

Then Satan answered the Lord, 'Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives. But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.

(וַיַּעַן הַשָּׂטָן אֶת יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹד בָּרֶךְ
עוֹד וְכָל שֶׁר לֹאִישׁ קָנָה בְּחַיֵּי מֵאֲדָמָה שְׁלֹחַ מִיָּדוֹ וְגַם אֶל עֲצָמוֹ וְאֶל בָּשָׂרוֹ
אֵם לֹא אֶל פְּנֵי יִסְכְּךָ).

Again, as with 1:8 and 2:3, there is a variation in the words used, but the underlying meaning is essentially the same. In 1:9-11, Satan challenges God to take away all of Job's material possessions, "the work of his hands", and Satan believes that will cause Job to curse God. In 2:4-6, after realising that Job remained true to God, Satan's tone seems to become more vehement, and now he challenges God to take away Job's health, to "touch his bone and his flesh". Satan is probably feeling a little desperate now as he was wrong in his prediction of 1:9-11. Satan needs to redeem himself, to prove himself to God, and his desperation can almost be heard in his words. Yet, the parallels are evident and the basic idea remains the same; take away from Job and Job will curse God.

Satan obviously does not have as much faith in God's servant Job as God Himself does. The reader may be somewhat surprised to hear Satan issue a challenge to God. It is not often that a challenge is put before God, and the reader anxiously reads on to see how God will react to Satan's words.

Surprisingly, though, God does not refuse Satan, and accepts the challenge put forth to Him. 1:12 tells of this acceptance as God says, "Very well, all that he has is in your power; only do not stretch out your hand against him! So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord" (ויאמר יְהוָה אֶל הַשָּׂטָן רְחוּם כָּל אֲשֶׁר לִי בְיָדְךָ רַק אֱלֹהִים אֶל תִּשְׁלַח יָדְךָ וְיָמָא הַשָּׂטָן מִנִּי יָרֻחַ).

God uses much the same words when He accepts Satan's second challenge in 2:6 when He says, "Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life" (ויאמר יְהוָה אֶל הַשָּׂטָן רְחוּם רָצִי בְיָדְךָ אֲךָ אֶת נַפְשׁוֹ שֶׁמֶּה). If the reader was surprised to hear Satan speak such words to God in the previous parallel verses, he or she is even more surprised to discover that God actually accepts a challenge from Satan not only once, but twice, as He agrees to Satan's suggestions in chapters one and two.

The scene then shifts from Heaven to earth in 1:13, and this is paralleled in 2:7-8 as we are told of the trials that Job is forced to endure. 1:13-19 chronicles a series of messengers who visit Job to inform him of the loss of his oxen, donkeys, sheep, servants, and finally,

his ten children, all in that order. Although the scene which parallels this in chapter two is much shorter (2:7-8), the idea that Job suffers another loss is the same. This time it is the loss of his health as Satan inflicts him with a terrible skin disease. Job also loses his dignity as he seats himself on a dungheap once he becomes afflicted with his skin ailment.

Once the challenge is accepted and the trials are “over”, there is a change in the structure, and the parallels in the chapters are interrupted. A new character is introduced, someone we have not heard from before: Job’s wife. Her brief appearance occurs in 2:9 which reads “Do you still insist in your integrity? Curse/Bless God, and die!”¹¹² (וַיֹּאמֶר לֵאשׁוּרָה עֲדָה מִיָּדְךָ מִיִּשְׁתָּק בְּעִנְיִי בָּאֱלֹהִים). Questions immediately arise; Who is she? What is her role, and what purpose will she serve? How has she been affected by all of this loss? Why has she not been killed, and why was she not mentioned in the first place? David Clines attempts to answer some of these questions in his Word Biblical Commentary when he briefly discusses her role in terms of the structure of chapter two. He believes her entrance is important in aiding the narrative of the story. Because Job’s wife enters and asks a question,

¹¹²As stated earlier, for the purposes of this thesis, any English translation of biblical verses will be taken from the New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version.

she evokes a verbal response from Job, a response which is delayed by Job's silence and his wife's challenge. Therefore, according to Clines, the character of Job's wife serves the purpose of introducing tension, delay, and eventually resolution when Job responds to her in 2:10.¹¹³

The parallels between chapters one and two continue, albeit with differences, after the introduction of Job's wife. In chapter one, which does not include the character of Job's wife, Job comes to a resolution, and accepts what has happened as the will of God in 1:21 when he says "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there; the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord"

(וערם יצתי מבטן אבני וערם אשוב שמה יראה נטן ויחיה לקח ידי שם יראה מנעך).

Job echoes this resolution in 2:10 as he says "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?"

(בם את הטוב נקבל מנחת המלכים ואת הרע לא נקבל).

Job refuses to succumb to the losses that he has endured, and his words reveal to the reader that he accepts what has happened to him.

Finally, each chapter ends in a similar vein, with both 1:22 and 2:10 reminding the reader that in spite of all that has happened, Job did not curse God or sin. 1:22 reads "In all this Job did not sin or charge God

¹¹³David Clines, Word Biblical Commentary Volume 17, Job 1-20 (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1989), p.50.

with wrongdoing"

(בכל זאת לא חטא איוב ולא עון תפלה לאדם).

and 2:10 is much the same with "In all this Job did not sin with his lips"

(בכל זאת לא חטא איוב בשפתיו).

It is obvious from the descriptions of both chapters and their parallels that chapter two reflects chapter one with one exception; the appearance of Job's wife in 2:9. One point worth noting is the actual words used in these parallel verses. There is no doubt that chapter two mirrors chapter one for the verses and the words are almost identical, until we reach 2:9. Chapter 1:6-19 and chapter 2:1-8 are worded almost exactly the same way with the events in chapter two being repeated exactly the way the events in chapter one were narrated. However, after Job's wife makes her entrance in 2:9, we notice a slight variation in the wording of 1:12 and its parallel verse in 2:10 which relay Job's responses. Although they are still parallel verses and the meaning of each verse is essentially the same, Job's response in 1:12 is much longer than that of 2:10. It is possible that this may indicate that Job is indeed affected by the words of his wife. As Carol Newsom notes, "it is interesting that Job's outburst against his wife is the last thing he says for some time". Many commentators would argue this, for it is commonly believed that Job, upon hearing the words of his wife, called her a "fool". The actual word Job uses is רבולות. The root of this word is נבל

which means to “be senseless, foolish”.¹¹⁴ Brown, Driver, and Briggs cite Job 2:10 as an example and explain it to mean “as acting immorally”.¹¹⁵ Gordis, however, mentions that Job does not refer to his wife as a fool. Job only tells her that she speaks as a fool would. Gordis believes that Job’s “vague chastising shows that he recognises that her bitter words come out of love and concern for him.”¹¹⁶ The early male commentators would obviously not agree with this, but they lived in a “less enlightened” age and could not see Job’s wife in positive terms at all.

Conclusion

Strictly in terms of structure, Job’s wife does not fit. She essentially upsets the balance of two parallel chapters. I want to argue, however, that Job’s wife does have a purpose to serve, and plays a very important role in the text. The fact that she does not fit into the parallel structure of the Prologue is a deliberate attempt to cause the reader to stop and consider her role, highlighting, rather than casting a shadow

¹¹⁴Brown, et.al., A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, p.614.

¹¹⁵Brown, et.al., A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, p.615.

¹¹⁶Gordis, The Book of Job: A Commentary, p.21.

over, her role. Job's wife is so obviously out of place that her introduction forces the reader to divert his/her attention away from Job for a moment and to focus it instead on Job's wife. Her placement at that particular juncture, in chapter 2:9, seems to be very strategic. What is now needed is a feminist perspective on what Job's wife says, and where she is placed, and the reasons for both.

עֲשֵׂהוּ
 עַד שֶׁיֵּשׁ לָךְ שׂוֹמֵר
 2:10

וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 2:6

וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 2:4

וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 2:3

וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 2:1

וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 2:7

וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 2:1

וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 11-6:1

וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 8:1

וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הָיָה
 1:6

Chapter 4

Exegesis

Introduction

From the above discussion, it is obvious that Job's wife does not fit into the structural framework of the Prologue to Job. Every situation in chapter one is mirrored in chapter two, and every event in chapter one is reflected by the events which follow in chapter two. Only one verse is out of place: 2:9. Only one character does not fit: Job's wife. The structure of the Prologue to the Book of Job which was just examined suggests that Job's wife does indeed have an important role to play in the tale. In this section I want to discuss what the role of Job's wife might be through an exegetical examination of 2:9.

While Job's wife certainly offers proof in her words that she does indeed possess some knowledge and insight, she also has feelings. Above all, she has *female* feelings, and responds to the events in chapters one and two as a woman. Although it may sound odd to suggest that she has "feelings" insofar as she is just a female character in a story or a literary fiction, no one questions whether or not Job has "feelings" in scholarly discussions. It is therefore entirely possible to understand her as a character who suffers a great loss, just as Job did. As Ilana Pardes reminds the readers, we should also keep in mind that

Job's wife, too, is a victim and is affected by the losses suffered at the hands of God and Satan.¹¹⁷ No mention is made in the biblical text of how Job's wife feels about or is affected by the loss of her husband's wealth, possessions, and, most of all, her children. Just as numerous commentators have speculated on how Job himself probably felt, only a few have speculated on how Job's wife must have felt as well.

Sympathetic Male Commentators

As seen in chapter one, the majority of the scholars who do comment on Job's wife are males, and while many of them do acknowledge, in some small way, that Job's wife may have suffered, they are still analysing the passage from a male point of view. As I indicated in chapter two, while it is possible for men to be feminists, men still have different experiences from a woman. Nevertheless, there are some male readers who can share some insights about female characters such as Job's wife.

Samuel Terrien grants that one can sympathise with Job's wife. Although he says she "taunts" her husband with her words, he also admits there is a possibility that she was so affected by her husband's

¹¹⁷Iana Pardes, Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), p.147.

plight that she offered "in effect a theological method of euthanasia".¹¹⁸ By admitting that this is a possibility, Terrien ultimately acknowledges that Job's wife can be seen in a sympathetic light as he portrays her as a character who endures suffering and loss just as her husband. Another commentator, Robert Gordis, believes that Job's wife suffered because of these losses, and she urges her husband to "curse God and die" because she is "unable to witness his (Job's) agony".¹¹⁹ Gordis also believes the description of Job's wife as the "assistant of Satan" is unkind, for her reaction in 2:9 is derived from her love and concern for her husband.¹²⁰ Gordis succeeds in showing the character of Job's wife in a way that she has rarely been viewed before, as a woman towards whom the reader can feel sympathetic. Weiss, likewise, admits that the suffering and torment of Job's wife was "doubtless equal to Job's".¹²¹ Rarely has Job's wife been compared to Job, and when she has been, it has been done only in a negative light. Weiss, however, presents the reader with an equal comparison of Job and his wife in terms of

¹¹⁸Samuel Terrien, Job: Poet of Existence (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1957), p.42.

¹¹⁹Robert Gordis, The Book of Job: Commentary. New Translation, and Special Studies (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978), p.3.

¹²⁰Robert Gordis, The Book of Job and Man: A Study of Job (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p.11.

¹²¹Weiss, The Story of Job's Beginning, p.70.

suffering. Therefore, if the reader feels sorry for or sympathetic towards Job because of the losses he has endured, Weiss essentially argues that the reader should feel the same sympathy for Job's wife for her suffering, as stated earlier, was "doubtless equal to Job's".

John Hartley, who believes that the words of Job's wife were just as trying for Job as were the losses themselves, also concedes that there is a possibility that Job's wife was suffering and cared so much for her husband that her only desire was to end his pain.¹²² Even though Hartley mainly casts Job's wife as a negative character, he still cannot omit the possibility that Job's wife may have been speaking out of more than just her negative character; she may have actually been speaking out of her pain.

David Clines is another male commentator who sympathises, to a certain extent, with Job's wife. He firmly believes that Job's wife has full faith in her husband's integrity, and the only reason she utters those words to Job is because she feels death is the best, and only, solution to Job's physical and mental pain.¹²³ Like Hartley, Clines feels an obligation to add the good with the bad, thus admitting that the character of Job's wife is not all bad and she does have some good qualities. Finally,

¹²²Hartley, The Book of Job, p.84.

¹²³Clines, Word Biblical Commentary, p.51.

Arthur Frederick Ide takes note of the fact that Job, in all of his suffering and misery, failed to turn to the person closest to him for comfort: his wife.¹²⁴ Ide realises that it would have been difficult for anyone, male or female, to remain silent in the face of such adversity, and the words Job's wife spoke to her husband arise as a direct result of this adversity. In this case, Ide recognises Job's wife not only as a female character, but also as a "person" who reacts to suffering, regardless of their gender. Ide sees beyond Job's wife as a female and acknowledges that suffering and loss are not increased or decreased by the person's gender.

The preceding examples suggest that there are male scholars who are able to view Job's wife in a sympathetic light. Just as there were female scholars who had difficulty casting Job's wife as a positive character, there are male scholars who comment on the depth of the pain and suffering endured by Job's wife. In chapter one, female commentators such as Edith Deen and Elisabeth Cady Stanton showed that feminism did not necessarily mean that one was sympathetic to the plights of all women. Likewise, Gordis, Weiss, and Ides show that being a male does not always mean that men are incapable of understanding the problems that women encounter. These male commentators may not have all positive things to say about Job's wife, but at least they

¹²⁴Arthur Frederick Ide, Battered and Bruised: All the Women of the Old Testament (Las Colinas: Monument Press, 1993), p.270.

concede that it was possible that she suffered as much as her husband Job. From their arguments, we can at least discern that they are somewhat sympathetic to Job's wife. While this may be a step in the right direction, these men still do not portray Job's wife in as sympathetic a light as perhaps she should be seen, nor do they discuss her role in the Prologue in anything other than patronizing tones. They do portray her as a sympathetic character, but only in relation to the suffering of her husband. They do not comment on whether or not Job's wife fits into the overall structure or theme of the Book of Job.

Although all of these male commentators do admit that there is a possibility that Job's wife may have suffered, all they are essentially doing is trying to explain why Job's wife uttered what they believe are negative words in 2:9. They still admit that her words are negative, and most of them even scorn her for speaking these words in the first place. One might want to recall Fiorenza's words at this point: "What we see depends on where we stand". Since these opinions come from male commentators, it is legitimate to ask the extent to which a man can understand what Job's wife, a female, is experiencing.¹²⁵ It is not possible for a male to *fully* comprehend the feelings and emotions of a woman, just as it is not possible for a woman to fully comprehend the

¹²⁵This issue was discussed in chapter two.

feelings and emotions of a man. Only a man can, in effect, empathise completely with the experiences of another man, and likewise for a woman. However, while empathy may never be reached, some level of understanding can be achieved. As seen earlier, it is possible for male scholars to understand, to a certain extent, what Job's wife is experiencing. Although this is seen from a male point of view, it is still seen.

Consider the words of Alicia Suskin Ostriker as she attempts to give us insight into how a woman would read about and understand the character of Job's wife:

No woman can read the story without thinking about the permanence: the dead are dead. Job has his recompense but the killed children remain underground where she cannot touch them again.

And who compensates the wife, who has had to live with Job in all his phases. He in all his phases the focus of the story, she occupies its periphery [sic]. She is preserved alive so that she can be conscious of her peripheral status, rather than mercifully and suddenly annihilated. Job has many lines, but she has one and says it early. "Curse God and die"- that is woman's wisdom. For she knows all along that God is not just. Never in her heart of hearts has she been deluded by the pieties she mouths along with the rest of the community. When her husband is stricken, and complains, she rushes in immediately with her knowledge.¹²⁸

This preceding excerpt truly does give the reader, especially the

¹²⁸Alicia Suskin Ostriker, The Nakedness of the Fathers: Biblical Visions and Revisions (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994), pp.235-236.

female reader, insight into the feelings of Job's wife. Ostriker writes about the experience of a woman as a woman, and by doing so, successfully conveys a feminine perspective on the female character of Job's wife. None of the male commentators speculated on how Job's wife might feel when she realised she would never hold her children in her arms again. None of them described the words spoken by Job's wife as "woman's wisdom", and none of them accredited Job's wife with having knowledge. These male commentators, at the most, explain her words as deriving from overwrought emotions, and never allude to her as being insightful. Exum believes the first step in recovering the voices of women in male stories is to overturn these male stories.¹²⁷ This is what Ostriker argued in that paragraph as she ignored the male perspective and male characters of the story and focused solely on the female character and her placement, actions, feelings, and words in the story.

A Translation of 2:9

While one may never know exactly what Job's wife meant when she spoke her words, it may be useful to give my own translation of 2:9. By doing so, I hope to show that it may be possible to gain some new

¹²⁷ Exum, Fragmented Women, p.9.

insight from a fresh approach or interpretation, as well as point out the problems encountered with ambiguities in the translation process.

The entire verse of 2:9 in Hebrew reads thus:

וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אִשְׁתּוֹ וְעַתָּה אַתָּה חָזָק וְאֵלֹהִים מֵעַתָּה וְעַתָּה אַתָּה חָזָק וְאֵלֹהִים מֵעַתָּה וְעַתָּה אַתָּה חָזָק וְאֵלֹהִים מֵעַתָּה

The first three words (וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו) are easily translated as “his wife said to him”. The next word, however, is a little tricky. עַתָּה can be broken down into two parts; אַתָּה and עַתָּה. אַתָּה is a second masculine singular suffix meaning “you” or “your”. עַתָּה is a preposition which can mean “still”, “until”, or “unto”. How עַתָּה is translated depends entirely on how the rest of the verse is translated, for it needs to make sense with the verse as a whole. The next word is a Hiphil participle of חָזַק (חָזָק) and can be translated as “making strong” or “being strong”. Following that is חֲזָקָה, which is translated as “in your integrity”. The last three words are the words which have caused Job’s wife to be viewed in such a negative light: וְעַתָּה, “bless/curse”; אֵלֹהִים, “God”; וְעַתָּה, “and die”. When the translations of all of the words of 2:9 are arranged we have a very literal translation to read “and she said to him his wife unto you make strong in your integrity bless/curse God and die”. In smoother English verse 2:9 reads thus: “and his wife said, You still have strength and your integrity. Bless God and die”. When read this way, the words of Job’s wife do not sound negative at all. There is almost a hint of pride in her voice as she praises Job for his strength and his integrity, and tells

him that death would not be shameful after having lived such a wonderful life. Or she may be telling Job that even after all that has happened, at least he still has his inner strength and integrity, so it would not be so terrible to bless God one last time and then finally die. Later in this chapter I will examine a number of various ways that the words of Job's wife can be understood, paying particular attention to the word ברך ("bless/curse").

Another point worth noting is the placement of punctuation in the translations. As Walter Vogels and E.M. Good note, the statement of Job's wife has no interrogative mark.¹²⁸ Yet most scholars translate the first part of the speech of Job's wife as a question; "Do you still persist in your integrity?" (NRSV), "Are you still trying to be godly?" (Living Bible), "Dost thou still retain thine integrity?" (KJV), and "Are you still holding on to your integrity?" (NIV). If there is no interrogative mark, why do all of these translators believe the first part of the speech of Job's wife is a question? They do so because one can, within the rules of Hebrew grammar, translate it as a question when כֵּן is translated as an adverb of time.¹²⁹ In this way, כֵּן תִּבְרַךְ may be understood as "Do you

¹²⁸Walter Vogels, "Job's Superficial Faith in His First Reactions to Suffering", *Eglise et Theologie*, Vol.25, 1994, p.353. Also, Good, *Job*, p.52.

¹²⁹Brown, Driver, and Briggs discuss כֵּן as an adverb of time which may express "continuance, persistence, usually of the past or present, still, yet" on p. 728 in *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*.

still". However, it may also be understood as "You still", which means it is not necessary to translate it as a question. The main point here is that translating 2:9 as a question is not the only way it can be interpreted. It is possible to place a different emphasis on her words if it is not translated as a question. Therefore, I suggest that one does not necessarily have to translate the words of Job's wife negatively.

Interpreting the Words of Job's Wife

One of the difficult philological problems in this verse concerns the Hebrew word בָּרַךְ .¹³⁰ As I mentioned at the end of chapter two, בָּרַךְ is an ambiguous word which has a dual meaning: it can either mean "bless" or "curse".¹³¹ In fact, both Satan and Job use the word בָּרַךְ to

¹³⁰I am only going to deal with the root word בָּרַךְ which is found in a variety of forms in the Prologue to Job. It is in the Piel perfect, third common plural, in 1:5. In 1:10 it is in the Piel perfect, second masculine singular; in 1:11 it is in the Piel imperfect third masculine singular with a second masculine singular suffix. In 1:21 the word is in Pual participle, and in 2:5 it is in the same form as it was in 1:11. Finally, in 2:9 it is in the Piel imperative, second masculine singular suffix.

¹³¹In Driver and Gray's commentary on Job there is an extensive discussion concerning how to translate בָּרַךְ . In the discussion of בָּרַךְ as found in 1:5 it is translated literally as "and blessed". According to Driver and Gray, בָּרַךְ has been interpreted as having a number of different meanings, depending on the context in which it is found. For example, בָּרַךְ has been translated as "to bless at parting" or "to bid farewell", which then developed into meaning "to renounce". Driver and Gray acknowledge that these interpretations are strictly hypothetical and there is no evidence to corroborate these translations. They also say that "in 1:5 and 2:9 the rendering, whatever the Hebrew text was, is not literal" (Part II, pg.5). The

mean both "bless" and "curse". In his challenges to God in 1:9-11 and 2:4-6, Satan claims that Job will "curse [God] to [His] face". When Satan uses this verb **קלל** in 1:11, he predicts that Job will curse God for all that has befallen. Satan wishes to prove that Job is not as righteous or pious as God believes His servant to be. Nevertheless, Satan uses **קלל** to mean "bless" when he remarks that Job's piety is only a result of God's "blessing" (1:10). In his first challenge Satan uses **קלל** in two different ways, though the context indicates quite clearly how one should translate it. In 1:10 Satan says that God has "blessed the work" of Job's hands (**קלל**) and, in the very next verse, Satan predicts that Job will "curse" (**קלל**) God. Job himself uses **קלל** to imply "curse" when he offers burnt offerings for his sons who may have "cursed" God. On the other hand, Job's first reaction to the loss of his family and possessions is to undergo a ritual mourning and exclaim that the name of the Lord is "blessed" (1:21).

Job's wife however, is only given one opportunity to use the word **קלל** (and indeed only one speech), and, as such, a cloud of ambiguity hangs over her speech. Does she want Job to bless or curse God? Many translations of the Hebrew text, however, unambiguously

main point is that the meaning of **קלל** can only be determined through whatever context in which it was found. This reinforces the issue of the ambiguity of **קלל**, and shows that, when spoken by Job's wife, **קלל** does not necessarily have to be interpreted only as "curse".

translate her use of **קל** to mean "curse".¹³² However, her words can indicate a variety of meanings, depending on how they are read, and by whom. If translated as "bless" instead of "curse", one may understand her words as encouragement. She may be encouraging her husband to bless God, and by doing so Job would essentially be thanking God for allowing him to live such a good and prosperous life as Job himself does in 1:21. Once he "blesses" God, Job can then die peacefully, knowing that he took the opportunity to thank God. This opportunity presented itself with the encouraging words from his wife. Job's wife may not be the partner of Satan. She is one who encourages her husband to do what she thought was best. Even after she lost all ten of her children, her main concern was with her husband as she stayed by his side at the dungheap. No one can be certain what Job's wife really meant when she used the word **קל**, though some light can be shed on the meaning of her words through a contextual analysis. In what follows

¹³²Most translations of the Book of Job interpret **קל** in 2:9 to mean "curse" instead of "bless". Some examples are The One Year Bible, or Living Bible, which translates 2:9 as "Are you still trying to be godly when God has done all this to you? Curse him and die." The King James Version interprets 2:9 as "Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die." The New International Version reads 2:9 as "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" The New Jerusalem Bible also translates her words as "curse" as 2:9 reads "Why persist in this integrity of yours? Curse God and die." The Revised Standard Version reads 2:9 as "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God, and die". And finally, the New English Bible translates 2:9 as "Are you still unshaken in your integrity? Curse God and die!".

therefore, I want to suggest a novel way of interpreting the words of Job's wife by suggesting a contextual relationship between her words and those of both Satan (1:9-11 and 2:4-6) and God (2:3).

In chapter one of this thesis it became evident that early scholars and commentators felt Job's wife could *only* fit when seen as having a connection to Satan, though this was always seen in a pejorative way. Augustine, for example, believed Satan purposely left Job's wife alive to use her as his partner and aide in his tempting of Job. Chrysostom echoes Augustine in this belief, opining that Satan served his own needs by permitting Job's wife to live. Gregory the Great, too, felt that Satan kept Job's wife alive for the sole purpose of being his abettor as he attempted to bring about the downfall of Job. And Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin continue in this vein as both scholars reiterate the words of Augustine, Chrysostom, and Gregory. Therefore, if one only read the opinions of these men, it would be a foregone conclusion that yes, Job's wife does fit, *but only* if she is seen as Satan's evil partner. As a character who acts of her own volition, however, these commentators would probably feel that she does not belong in the Prologue at all. I will argue, however, that Job's wife does have some connection to Satan, but not in the way envisioned by the early commentators.

One can establish a more neutral relation between Job's wife and

Satan by examining the enigmatic and ambiguous term **כִּלְמָה**. Both Satan and Job's wife want Job to "bless/curse" God (**בִּרְכָה אֱלֹהִים כִּלְמָה**). As we have seen, Satan uses **כִּלְמָה** to mean both "curse" (1:11) and "bless" (1:10). In the case of Job's wife, however, we cannot be certain what she means by her only use of the word in 2:9. Since no unequivocal meaning can be placed on the word **כִּלְמָה**, it may be that the reader is to understand the words of Job's wife ambiguously. Thus Job's wife may be "aligned" with Satan insofar as the ambiguity of the word **כִּלְמָה** is concerned. In a similar way, she is also aligned with her husband, Job. Job uses the word **כִּלְמָה** to mean both "curse" (1:5) and "bless" (1:21). Her connection to both Satan (the antagonist) and Job (the protagonist) therefore, may further underlie the ambiguity of her use of **כִּלְמָה**, and prohibits the would-be interpreter from definitively and accurately translating the meaning of the word.

Some further insight into how to translate **כִּלְמָה** can be gained by examining the first part of her speech when, according to the NRSV, she says to Job, "Do you still persist in your integrity?" (**הֲתִשָּׁבֵעַ בְּעִדְיָהּ עַד הַכֹּהֵן**). These words can also be seen in 2:3 as God tells Satan that Job "still persists in his integrity" (**עַד הַכֹּהֵן בְּעִדְיָהּ**). The Hebrew text of 2:3 is strikingly similar to that of 2:9. When God speaks of Job's integrity in 2:3, it is understood to be something positive, and it seems apparent that Job's wife understands Job's integrity in 2:9 as

being positive. We can then interpret her speech as "You are still holding fast to your integrity!" Echoing God's words from 2:3, she may be congratulating him on such an amazing accomplishment. Depending on how the sentence is read, and where the emphasis on the words is placed, her words can be understood as having a number of different meanings.¹³³ She may be admiring and praising her husband for being so strong in the face of such adversity; after all that has happened, you are still holding fast to your integrity! As I showed earlier in my own translation, it is possible to hear pride in her voice when read this way.

The reader may also hear pity in her voice as she begs her husband to end this nightmare: "How terrible it must be for you as you hold fast to your integrity!" Perhaps Job's wife cannot bear to see the man she loves in such pain and suffering. In these terms she can be seen as one who wants only the best for her husband, even if that does mean death.

However, her words can be completely turned around to represent other meanings. Her tone may have been accusing: "How can you even try to hold on to your integrity when everyone knows you are a sinner; the fact that you are suffering proves it!" The accusing tone would show Job's wife to be insightful as she sees the contradictions

¹³³The following examples were taken from Walter Vogels, "Job's Superficial Faith in His First Reactions to Suffering", p.353.

between piety and suffering even when Job's friends (and many readers) cannot.

The reader may even detect a note of sarcasm; "Why should you play the role of a pious person when it is obvious that you do not even have any integrity to maintain?" Furthermore, interpreting her words in such a way would align Job's wife with his friends, as this is the argument they present to Job when they come to visit him. It would also support the arguments of early misogynist commentators as they believe Job's wife succeeds only in accusing and harassing her husband.

Finally, one may also hear reproach in her words. She may be reproaching Job for being dishonest and pretending to have integrity when he really had none at all: "How can you sit there and act like such a righteous person when you aren't even honest enough to admit that you have no integrity?" Job's wife may be seeing Job as a superficial and dishonest person, and is reproaching him for pretending to be something he is obviously not.

Rebellion, sarcasm, accusation, and reproach are all possibilities that most male commentators would use to describe the words of Job's wife, and, indeed, have used in the past. That became obvious in chapter one when we examined the early commentators and their history of interpreting the words of Job's wife. While it may be possible to view Job's wife in these possible ways, it is important to note that these are

not the only possible views. The issue of ambiguity prevents the negative view from being the only possibility. Because there is more than one way to interpret רָעָה , as a positive “bless” instead of a negative “curse”, then there is also a possibility that Job’s wife can be viewed as a positive character instead of a negative one.

The purpose of exploring these options is to show that there is not one meaning to the words Job’s wife speaks, but a plurality of meanings. As Vogels says, “the possibilities are nearly infinite” when one examines how the reader can interpret the words spoken by Job’s wife.¹³⁴ Good believes that knowledge of this will “help readers liberate their imaginations... to focus on its depth..., on its multiplicity, not its illusory simplicity.”¹³⁵ The fact that there are so many ways one can interpret the words of Job’s wife prevents the readers from assuming they know the meaning of the story with certainty.¹³⁶ By allowing the ambiguity in the words of Job’s wife to remain, one can help overturn the patriarchal “closure” this passage has received throughout the history of interpretation. When a scholar removes any trace of ambiguity by translating רָעָה as “curse”, we encounter what Exum calls “the idea of

¹³⁴Vogels, “Job’s Superficial Faith in His First Reactions to Suffering”, p.354.

¹³⁵Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, p. 202.

¹³⁶Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, p.202.

male authority". Such is the case with the words spoken by Job's wife. Even though ברך can be translated to mean "bless" or "curse", when it is translated as the word spoken by Job's wife, it is continually translated as "curse".

Good also suggests that the duality of the bless/curse duality can symbolise the duality we find in God.¹³⁷ Although this duality may not be seen right away, it is certainly found in chapter 38 when God appears to Job in the theophany. In this theophany God belittles Job and essentially rebukes him because Job does not know what he is talking about. Sarcasm can even be detected in God's words when He speaks to Job as God says "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements-surely you know!" (38:4-5, NRSV). The central meaning of this theophany is that because God is all knowing and all powerful and the creator of everything, Job is wrong in his attitude towards God.¹³⁸ Yet, when Job is rewarded in the Epilogue, God tells Job that he was in the "right" (42:7). This impression would come from the words of 42:10 which reads "and the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he

¹³⁷Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, p.202.

¹³⁸Robert M. Polzin, *Biblical Structuralism: Method and Subjectivity in the Study of Ancient Texts* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1977), p.72.

had prayed for his friends; and the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before." This would seem to contradict the idea expressed in chapter thirty eight where God belittles Job's knowledge. God's words, then, of chapter 38 seem to contradict His actions of chapter 42.¹³⁹ Is Job right or wrong? Is God right or wrong? From the words that God says to Job, we discover another side in God's character, the side that mocks and belittles Job. Robert Polzin, when describing the actions of God, uses words such as "insensitive and also cruel" as God does not try to console Job, but instead "brings Job to his knees, demands recognition of His power and removes Job's sufferings only after He forces a cry of repentance from Job's lips".¹⁴⁰ Just as there were two ways to interpret תָּו, we now discover there are at least two ways to view God. Therefore, Job's wife's ambiguity laden speech foreshadows the ambiguity laden theophany in chapter 38. This ambiguity in God's nature is not one that Job or his friends seem to be aware of, but Job's wife may be said to possess a certain knowledge and insight which no scholar has credited her with having in the past.

Therefore, I believe that a relationship can be found between Job's wife and God's second speech in the Prologue. Job's wife admits

¹³⁹Polzin, Biblical Structuralism, p.60.

¹⁴⁰Polzin, Biblical Structuralism, p.106.

that what God says of Job is true. God, in 2:3, tells Satan that Job “still persists in his integrity” (תָּעַדַּךְ בַּמִּצִּיחַ בַּגִּבּוֹרִת), and this is echoed in the words of Job’s wife when she says to Job “you still persist in your integrity” (עַדְךָ בַּמִּצִּיחַ בַּגִּבּוֹרִת). Newsom argues that Job’s wife “echoes God’s assessment of Job as one who persists in integrity”.¹⁴¹ This is one way in which Job’s wife can be said to agree in God’s assessment of Job.

Another possible way the reader can link Job’s wife to God can be in the ambiguity of her words. Just as there are a number of ways to interpret her words, there is also more than one way to interpret one’s view of God. At the end of the book, God rewards Job for “speaking what is right” (42:7). God, then, seems to have an ambiguous character. This word, “ambiguous”, has also been used in relation to Job’s wife, or, more specifically, in relation to the words spoken by Job’s wife. Therefore, a relationship can be found between God and Job’s wife. Ambiguity is the theme which links these two characters in the Book of Job. The words of Job’s wife are ambiguous, and the actions of God reflect ambiguity. In addition, the dual nature of the words of Job’s wife foreshadow the dual nature of the character of God. Therefore, Job’s wife can be said to have a very important function in the Book of Job as

¹⁴¹Newsom, “Job”, p.131.

the ambiguity of her words alerts readers to the ambiguity of God's character.¹⁴²

A third view of God may arise when one considers the issue of retribution. Basically, retribution means that a person who has lived a righteous life will be rewarded by God for being a faithful servant. However, if a person has led a sinful life, there will be no rewards, only punishment. The reader is informed in the opening verses of the Prologue that Job is "blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil". Therefore, one would assume that Job would receive his just rewards. However, Job is punished and suffers great loss, even though he was "blameless and upright". As a result, the reader encounters a problem in the idea of retribution, for it does not seem to work for Job. There is a possibility that Job's wife recognises this problem of retribution. As Newsom suggests, Job's wife may in fact see the problem of the suffering of one who is said to have integrity.

¹⁴² Furthermore, Job's wife can also be said to have a similar connection to Job himself. Depending on how we interpret the words of Job's wife, a clearer picture of the true character of Job may be obtained. For example, if the words of Job's wife are interpreted as being supportive, that would cast Job in a more negative light as he is not returning the love his wife is extending to him. She tries to offer him kind words and Job only rebukes her and turns away from her, essentially just dismissing her. This does not correspond with the picture of Job that we have been given: that of a righteous, pious man who is a loving and dutiful father. Even if we interpret the words of Job's wife as being negative, they surely are no more negative than what Job himself is to either his friends or God, although Job himself is still granted a certain amount of integrity.

This is what is debated in the discussions which follow between Job and his friends. If God is good, why would He allow His innocent and righteous servants to suffer? This shows a conflict between the positive and negative attributes of God. God usually is viewed in a positive light, as a Deity who looks after His loyal servants. Yet, He also seems to be a God who does not care about innocent suffering, which is indicated in His actions and responses in chapters thirty-eight to forty-two. In these chapters, in the theophany, God seems to mock and belittle Job.

Modern Re-Writings of the Book of Job

For the most part, information and opinions on Job and Job's wife can be found in numerous commentaries and novels, written by both male and female scholars. There is, however, another area in which a reader can discover the characters of Job and his wife. This genre is the one of plays. There have been several plays written with the Book of Job used as its backdrop, and some of these include J.B.:A Play in Verse by Archibald MacLeish, The Undying Fire by H.G. Wells, The Trial of God by Elie Wiesel, and The Trial by Harold Pinter. In each of these plays one can find varying interpretations of the Book of Job. The concern here, however, rests in the first two plays, as these are the two which have a major female character who is supposed to represent Job's wife.

In The Undying Fire, the character who represents Job is known as

Job Huss, and Job's wife is represented by Mrs. Huss.¹⁴³ Mr. Huss experiences many trials as a series of mishaps and unfortunate events occur at the school at which he is the Headmaster. His illness is not as mysterious as that of the biblical Job: Mr. Huss has cancer. Along with all of this is the news that their only son is shot down over German lines while flying with the Royal Flying Corps. Mrs. Huss (Job's wife) is described as a "worthy but emotional lady"(p.24). After the first series of mishaps and accidents, she seemed to take control and did not break down. Instead, she told her husband he must "pull himself together and pick up"(p.24). However, once Mrs. Huss became aware of her husband's illness and the possible death of their only son, she became, in the words of her husband, "insane now and cruel with sorrow" and was experiencing "insatiable grief and petty cruelty"(pp.27&29). Again, in the face of adversity, like so many other people, Mrs. Huss finds it difficult to overcome her grief. This view of Mrs. Huss is in fact similar to the majority of views of Job's wife as indicated in the history of interpretation: a woman of "petty cruelty".

In Archibald MacLeish's play J.B., Job is represented as J.B., and Job's wife is known as Sarah.¹⁴⁴ In Sarah's character the reader discovers

¹⁴³The following quotations are taken from H.G. Wells' The Undying Fire (New York:The Macmillan Company, 1922).

¹⁴⁴ The following quotations are taken from Archibald MacLeish's play

a woman, a mother, who is concerned about her children's awareness and respect for God. She asks her children at mealtime "Has any one of you thanked God? Really thanked Him?"(p.29). In the biblical tale of Job, it is Job who prays against the possible impiety of his children. Here Sarah takes that role while J.B. "busies himself", is "uncomfortable", and essentially tries to avoid Sarah's questions (p.30). It seems as though J.B. takes God for granted, but Sarah does not. The day is Thanksgiving, and J.B. appears to be more concerned with his hunger than with the meaning of both the food and the day. As the play progresses, though, so does time, and each of their children is killed, either by a war, a drunk driver, or other accidents. Sarah, as anyone would, asks "Why did He do it to them?"(p.70). It is logical to want to question why, any normal person would. J.B., however, refuses to do so, for to question does not help or fix the situation. When the next child dies, Sarah cries out "Oh, my baby! Oh, my baby!"(p.83). Her fourth child is dead and the reader can almost hear the pain and agony in her voice. This shows a side of her that many readers have not seen in Job's wife: a sympathetic side. Sarah repeats these words later as she says "My poor babies! Oh, my babies!"(p.107) and this reinforces the sympathy felt for her earlier. In J.B., the reader is given the character of Sarah who is sensible, reverent, and devoted to her husband

and children. She speaks more than one line and is present throughout the whole play. Although this play was written by a male writer, he succeeds in portraying her as a sympathetic character. She plays the role of a mother and a wife who loses almost everything that she holds dear, and the reader hears her voice throughout each episode. Although he is still writing from a male point of view, MacLeish is able, to some extent, to relate the experiences of Job's wife from a "feminist" perspective. He, like Gordis, Clines, and Terrien, is able to witness and comprehend the suffering of Job's wife. Even though MacLeish portrays Sarah/Job's wife from a male perspective, and cannot develop her role from the point of view of female experience, he successfully expands the character of Job's wife into a female character who can be seen in a sympathetic light. MacLeish gives her the voice and the words that she lacked in the Masoretic text of Job, and with these words the reader sees her not as the helpmate of the devil, but as a woman who has loved and lost, and yet survived.

Conclusion

Depending on how one interprets her words, the purpose of Job's wife in the Prologue may very well be to question God, His righteousness, and the idea of retribution. She opens up the possibility that we may speak

out against God, instead of just accepting everything He commands.¹⁴⁵ Job's wife allows the readers to view the Book of Job in a different light and, as a result, allows us to question so many things we had been afraid to confront, question, or doubt before. Newsom aptly defines the significance of the character of Job's wife as she says:

Job's wife is the one who recognises, long before Job himself does, what is at stake theologically in innocent suffering: the conflict between innocence and integrity, on the one hand, and an affirmation of the goodness of God, on the other. It is the issue with which Job will struggle in the following chapters.¹⁴⁶

Therefore, Job's wife should not be disregarded and viewed as a foolish woman who has no respect for her husband. In fact, she should be viewed as one who challenges the traditional notion of Job's God and, in doing so, foreshadows the theophany at the end of the book. The purpose of Job's wife might well be to provide a critique on a traditional view of God. This traditional view sees God as a loving and providential God who believes in the necessity of divine retribution. Live a good, pious life, and you will be rewarded but live a life that is not so holy and righteous and you will suffer punishment in the end. This traditional view is challenged as Job, who is pious and upright, still suffers punishment, and God does not

¹⁴⁵Ilana Pardes, Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach, p.148.

¹⁴⁶Newsom, "Job", p.132.

necessarily act as the traditional loving God. This view was enhanced by the ambiguity of the words of Job's wife, in particular, her use of the word **כִּלְאָה**. The ambiguity of **כִּלְאָה** is derived from the fact that it can be interpreted as either "bless" or "curse". Satan uses the word **כִּלְאָה** three times, one of which is translated as "bless" and the other two as "curse". Yet each time Satan speaks this word, there does not seem to be a confusion as to how it should be interpreted. According to Satan, God has "blessed" Job and Job will "curse" God. How can one be certain that **כִּלְאָה** is to be interpreted as "bless" in one verse and "curse" in the next? In actual fact, one *cannot* be certain, nor can one constantly interpret **כִּלְאָה** of 2:9 as "curse" without allowing for the possibility that it may also be interpreted as "bless". And if **כִּלְאָה** is translated as "bless" in 2:9, there is also a possibility that Job's wife may be viewed in a positive light, thus casting aside the negative shadow that has continually loomed over her character in every translation by most commentators for generations. It is time for Job's wife to come out from this shadow and be acknowledged as a significant character, and not just the "helpmate of the devil".

Conclusion

In the first chapter, "State of the Question", I showed how Job's wife has been continually cast in a negative light by numerous scholars, examining the opinions of both early and modern commentators. Both viewed Job's wife as a minor character whom they rarely mentioned, if at all. When she was discussed by these commentators, they portrayed her as an extremely negative character who only added to the trials suffered by her husband, Job.

In chapter two I continued by outlining the approach which was taken in studying the character of Job's wife. This approach was a feminist literary-critical approach, with an important concern being the idea of female experience. Utilising the feminist-critical approach aided me in reconstructing the negative portrayal of Job's wife that has so long been attributed to her character.

Chapter three concentrated on the narrative structure of the Prologue to Job, paying particular attention to the parallels found between chapters one and two of the Book of Job. By making these parallels obvious, it was also possible to make the character of Job's wife more obvious, thus showing how and why Job's wife does not fit in a structural sense.

The final chapter focused on an exegetical examination of Job's

wife. This enabled me to explain the role of Job's wife and to show how she, through the ambiguity of her words, played a very important role not only in the Prologue to the Book of Job, but also in the context of the book as a whole. This was done by thoroughly examining the Hebrew word **אִשָּׁה** when it was used not only by her, but also by Satan in his words to God.

Job's wife has been cast in a negative light and has had a shadow looming over her role for far too long. By examining the parallel structures of chapters one and two in the Prologue to Job, it was seen that she did not fit. Being out of place, however, is what makes the reader notice Job's wife, and causes us to stop and consider her role. She no longer has to be seen as the "helpmate of the devil" or as a "fiend of hell". She plays a very important role as she makes readers aware of the ambiguity and duality of God's character and intentions. By examining the role of Job's wife from a feminist-critical perspective, the reader is able to relate to the situation of Job's wife by seeing and understanding Job's wife as *a woman*, and not as a casual observer who cannot relate to the female experience. As Ostriker made evident, it is hardly possible for any woman to read about Job's wife and not wonder what it must have been like to be in such a position. Job's wife plays a very important role as she opens the eyes and minds of readers, especially female readers. Thanks to modern feminist critical studies on

biblical texts such as the Book of Job, Job's wife can be recognised as a necessary and important character, and not as the traditional helpmate of Satan that feminists have long since disregarded. Job's wife, therefore, is a sympathetic character, and she most definitely does add to the Book of Job.

Suggestions For Further Study

The character of Job's wife in 2:9 of the Masoretic text of Job has been undermined, underestimated, and usually ignored. She rarely has been viewed in a sympathetic light, nor has she been described as a character whose presence aids and adds to the Book of Job. In this thesis I have tried to overcome the historical interpretations of early commentators, and I have tried to look past continuing negative portrayals by modern scholars. I have attempted to concentrate on portraying Job's wife as a positive character who had to endure trials and tribulations just as her husband Job did. Her suffering may have been just as great as Job's, yet while Job is exemplified for his patience, piety, and righteousness, Job's wife is scorned for her bitterness and her inability to love God as her husband does. Like so many other women in the Old Testament, her strength, resolve, and determination are ignored, and she is cast aside as a foolish and insignificant character.

The recuperative feminist-critical methodology that I have used has not only given Job's wife a positive role in the Book of Job, it may also be used to resurrect other "lost" women of the Old Testament. Female characters such as Lot's wife, Jephthah's daughter, the Levite's concubine, and countless others in the Old Testament have been

neglected and negated for far too long by the male dominated establishment of scholars and commentators. There have been many works written by feminist critics which draw attention to female characters of the Old Testament, however. Authors such as Alice Laffey, Phyllis Trible, Cheryl Exum, and many others have written about these biblical women, and the works of these female authors further nuance the meaning of the biblical female characters. And while these authors certainly resurrect the "lost" women of the Old Testament, a feminist reading will allow one to re-read the entire book from a feminist perspective. Re-examining the roles and actions of these biblical women through a feminist-critical perspective and utilising the idea of female experience may cause readers to reconsider these biblical women and their importance. As shown with Job's wife, studying the stories with a view to female experience and using the feminist-critical perspective causes the reader to gain a whole new insight, not only in terms of the characters, but also in terms of the tales in which they are found.

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