

Prof. Scott B. Noegel
Chair, Dept. of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization
University of Washington

“Another Look at Job 18:2,3.”

First Published in:
Jewish Bible Quarterly 23/3 (1995), 159-161.

edge of Hebrew was minimal. His Hebrew was good enough to read the central prayers and some passages of the Bible, but mostly, he had to rely on translations.²⁴ Interestingly enough, there are fragments of Hebrew prayer and Hebrew word structure in Beer-Hofmann's plays. Very often, Beer-Hofmann omits the verb "to be," thus imitating a Hebrew grammatical structure.

Additionally, Beer-Hofmann injected biblical atmosphere into his works by detailing the practice of ancient customs. For example, in *Der junge David*, the priests celebrate the holy custom of declaring the arrival of the New Moon.²⁵ They search the sky for the first sliver of the New Moon. Then, trumpets are blown at the first sighting. Finally, bonfires and torches are lit to signal the news all over the country. In biblical times, torches were used to signal any kind of news over distances. Beer-Hofmann has King Saul communicate his order by this means, calling the people of Israel to war.²⁶

Another practice is exemplified when the messengers bearing the news of Saul's death wear clothes torn in the front as a sign of mourning. And Abiathar is not allowed to participate in the burial of the prophet Samuel because members of the priestly class (kohanim) are forbidden to be near dead bodies.

Richard Beer-Hofmann's precise knowledge of the Bible did not prevent him from interpreting it in his own way. This demonstrates his self-confident attitude towards God. In a way, he wrote his own version of a given biblical story, his own *Midrash*.²⁷ Over centuries Jewish sages gave their interpretations, *midrashim*, to the biblical texts. That Beer-Hofmann put himself (unknowingly?) in this tradition shows how much he believed in the prophetic authority of the poet.

24. According to Sol Liptzin, "Richard Beer-Hofmann and Joseph Widmann," *Modern Austrian Literature* 8 (1975), Nr. 3/4, p. 74.

25. Richard Beer-Hofmann, *Gesammelte Werke*, pp. 284, 285, 289, 297, 298. Beer-Hofmann quotes Riehm, *Handwörterbuch des biblischen Altertums*, concerning that custom; RBH, GW, p. 893.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 202, 203.

27. Ernst Simon applied this term to Beer-Hofmann's work. E. Simon, "Rosch-Haschana-Gedanken zu Richard Beer-Hofmanns Schauspiel 'Der junge David,'" *Jüdische Rundschau* 39, Nr. 72/72, Berlin, 7.11.1934, p. 3.

JBQ 23 (1995), 159-161

ANOTHER LOOK AT JOB 18:2,3

Scott B. Noegel

In a recent article in this journal¹ David Wolfers proposed a new and ingenious reading for the crux קנצי למליך in Job 18:2. Basing his reading on the apparent problem of plural verbal forms used for a singular subject (namely Job), the connection of the sons of Kenaz with the tribal affiliations of Job's three friends, and on the reading "are we considered unclean" for נטמינו in 18:3, Wolfers suggested that we translate the word קנצי as a dialectical variant of קנזי (Kenizzites). Accordingly, Wolfers suggests we translate 18:2-3: 'How long will you [Jews] treat us Kenizzites with such contempt?' While there may be sufficient reason to accept קנצי למליך as a play on the tribal name Kenizzite, there are several reasons why we should prefer Delitzch's previous translation,² "hunt for words" (based on the Arabic *qansa*).

First, the incongruence in number which Wolfers sees as problematic, though rare in the Hebrew Bible, is not unattested. Note the use of the plural suffix הם- in בהם for the singular antecedent עמו in Job 22:21: הסכן נא עמו ושלם בהם תבואתך טובה [Agree with him and be at peace, and well-being will come to you through him.] Inversely, compare the use of singular verbs with plural subjects in Jeremiah 13:20: שאי עיניכם וראי הבאים מצפון [Raise your eyes, and behold those who come from the north.] We should add to this the words of Micah in 1:11: עברי לכם יושבת שפיר [Pass on inhabitant of Shapir.] Such incongruences are probably best explained as colloquial usages

1. David Wolfers, "Three Singular Plurals, Job 18:2,3," *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, 22 (1994), pp. 21-25.

2. F. Delitzch, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Job*, (Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1949).

Scott B. Noegel received his Ph.D. in 1994 from the Department of Near Eastern Studies at Cornell University. He has published on Sumerian autobiographies, biblical narrative devices, and on wordplay in Ugaritic and Akkadian literature. Currently, he is working on a monograph on the dialect of the biblical Song of Songs and its political import.

which have crept into the literary language.³ Compare, for example, the Hebrew (and Arabic equivalent) colloquial greeting: שלום עליכם [*peace be upon you*].

On the other hand, as suggested by Gordis,⁴ the use of plural verbal and suffix forms for singular subjects might be a rare feature of elevated style, as in Song of Songs 5:1: שתו ושכרו דודים [*Eat friend, drink, be drunk with love*].

Moreover, even if we reject the argument based on the presence of colloquialisms in Job, we still may see in Bildad's quip the employment of enallage; i.e., a directional shift in address, an ubiquitous, albeit under-researched, characteristic of biblical Hebrew poetry. The use of second person plural forms in 18:3b, therefore, might represent Bildad's frustration, not just with Job, but with all of his friends. Such frustration is found later in the words of Elihu (e.g., 32:3, 6-16) and, therefore, is apposite to the tenor of the debate.

Another reason why we should read the crux קנצי למלין as "hunt for words" is that the reading makes better sense contextually. Note how the phrase heads a chapter which is filled with references to the hunter's craft. For example, we find יצרו צערי אוננו [*the iniquitous strides are confined*] (18:7); and the mention of numerous hunters' tools including רשת [net] (18:8); שכבה [toils] (18:8); פח [trap] (18:9); צמים [noose] (18:9); טמון/חבל [a hidden rope] (18:10); and מלכדה [snare] (18:10).

In addition, the line מדוע נחשבנו כבהמה נטמינו בעיניכם (18:3) which Wolfers sees as alluding to the uncleanness of Job's words, and as a reaction to Job's earlier statement in 16:9, also is understood best within the context of hunting imagery. The line simply means 'do you consider us as beasts, are we stupid [i.e., able to be trapped] in your eyes?'

Nevertheless, the reading "Kenizzite" proposed by Wolfers should not be altogether rejected, but rather seen as a wordplay. Such plays on the names of tribes and characters in the book appear in Job and fit well the poet's proclivity

3. Gary A. Rendsburg, *Diglossia in Ancient Hebrew*, American Oriental Series 72 (New Haven, CT.: American Oriental Society, 1990), pp. 79-83.

4. Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation and Special Studies*, (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1978), p. 190.

the meaning "unclean" should not be ruled out.

for paronomasia.⁶ See, for example, the puns on Job's name in 13:24: יחשבני לאויב לך ותחשבני לאויב לך [*And treat me like an enemy*] and 33:10: יחשבני לאויב לך [*considers me His enemy*]; the quip on Eliphaz the Temanite (6:19): הביטו הבריות תמא [*Caravans from Tema look to them*]; Zophar (27:16): אם יצבר כסף כעפר כסף [*should he pile up silver like dust*]; and the euphemism "curse" (ברך), e.g., 1:11, 2:5, 9) in the name Elihu son of Barachel (ברכאל).⁷

Thus, while there is reason to see in Job 18:2-3 a witty subtextual allusion to the Kenizzites, the reading "word hunter" is to be preferred.

6. John Curtis Briggs, "Word Play in the Speeches of Elihu (Job 32-37)," *Proceedings of the Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies*, 12 (1992), pp. 23-30; Scott B. Noegel, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job with Excurses on the Device in Extra-Jobian and Extra-biblical Near Eastern Literature*, (Ph.D. Dissertation: Cornell University, 1994).

7. For similar referencing with this root in Job see Ellen van Wolde, "A Text-Semantic Study of the Hebrew Bible, Illustrated with Noah and Job," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 113 (1994), pp. 31-34.