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"Another Look at Job 18:2,3."

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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 structures 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, inDer 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.

In a recent article in this journal1 David Wolfers proposed a new and ingenious reading for the crux of 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 עמלות in 18:3, Wolfers suggested that we translate the word עמלות as a dialectical variant of עמלות (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 עמלות 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 qasba).

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 누ו- in 누ו- for the singular antecedent 누ו in Job 22:21: נועו 누ו 누ו כל הבתים [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: נועו 누ו זвать את הבתים [Raise your eyes, and behold those who come from the north.] We should add to this the words of Micah in 1:11: נועו 누ו זвать את הבתים [Piss on inhabitant of Shapir.] Such incongruences are probably best explained as colloquial usages.


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which have crept into the literary language.

On the other hand, as suggested by Gordis, 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: [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 opposite to the tenor of the debate.

Another reason why we should read the crux: עֹֽדִיָּה לְךָ 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 [the iniquitous strides are confined] (18:7); and the mention of numerous hunters' tools including רְשֶׁת [net] (18:8); שָׁפָה [toils] (18:8); מַפְעִי [trap] (18:9); קֶשֶׁת [noose] (18:9); טָסּוֹם/תַּבָּל [a hidden rope] (18:10); and הָאֲבָדָה [snare] (18:10).

In addition, the line מִדְוָֽאָה לְךָ [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
