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"Janus Parallelism in Job and Its Literary Significance."

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JANUS PARALLELISM IN JOB
AND ITS LITERARY SIGNIFICANCE

In a recent article in this journal, Anthony Ceresko suggested that we see the famous crux interpretum מְנַהְג הָיָה in Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6 as an example of the sophisticated literary device known as "Janus parallelism." The term, which was coined by Cyrus Gordon, describes a situation in which the second stich of a tristich contains a pun that parallels in a polysemous way both the previous and following stichs.

To illustrate, I refer to Ceresko's frequently repeated Janus in Amos.

Because of three wicked acts of GN-

And now a fourth!

As Ceresko points out, the expression מָכַר נָשָׁה may be read both as "I will not let him return (to me)" (i.e., from the root מָכַר) and as "I will indeed fan/blow upon it (i.e., the fire [of my fury])" (i.e., from the root מָכַר). As the former, the expression parallels the previous mention of wicked acts not to be forgiven; and as the latter, מָכַר נָשָׁה faces ahead to the mention of a devouring fire.

As Ceresko's article demonstrates, the list of known Janus parallels continues to grow. Moreover, the device also has been discovered in Ugaritic, Akkadian, Arabic, and Sumerian literature as well.


2 C. H. Gordon, "New Directions," BASP 15 (1978) 59. Note, however, that the device was discovered already by David Yellin, albeit called by another name in his מְנַהְג הָיָה, "Tarbiz 1 (1929) 1-17.


Despite the recent headway that scholars have made in searching out examples of Janus parallelism, little effort has been made to situate the device within its literary context. What has resulted is a mere cataloguing of examples, without a discussion of the function of Janus parallelism.

What I hope to demonstrate is that Janus parallelism can serve a function beyond mere rhetorical and literary embellishment. I will limit my remarks to the book of Job and to a few of the many Janus parallels found therein. I have chosen Job because it is a lengthy poetic discourse teeming with wordplay and one that sets up a protagonist, Job, against four opponents in what may be described as a type of theological poetic contest. As Elihu impatiently put it in 33:5: "If you are able, respond to me, prepare for the contest, take your stand."

Note that within this literary context of debate such word-savvy wit takes on the character of a highly charged demonstration of one-upmanship. Thus, we must not divorce the literary device from its context. It will prove worthwhile, therefore, to develop this context further before demonstrating the function of Janus parallelism. That the argumentative context of the book of Job is one that involves crafty language can be seen most easily by the Jobian characters' references to words. Indeed, when one examines the remarks made about words by each of the characters in the book of Job, Job's opponents' concern with his double-talk becomes evident. For example, in 15:2-6 Eliphaz rhetorically asks Job:

Does a wise man answer with windy opinions, and fill his belly with the east wind? Should he argue with useless talk, with words that are of no worth?

You subvert piety and restrain prayer to God. Your sinfulness dictates your speech, so you choose crafty language.

In 34:2-3, Elihu exhorts: "Hear my words, wise ones, and give ear to my knowledge, for the ear tests words as the palate tastes food," and again in 34:16: "Therefore, understand and hear this, listen to what I say." These repeated exhortations to listen carefully are important here, for they signal a necessity to pay attention not only to the content of Elihu's message but also to the manner in which he delivers it—that is, through crafty language. Witness also his words in 33:8: "Indeed, you have stated in my hearing, I heard the sound of your words" (לRates טִר). Elihu's use here of the word קֶשֶׁת ("sound") is suggestive of the manner in which Job speaks.

It is in such statements by Elihu that we may discern a subtextual doctrine regarding wordplay. For example, in 36:1 Elihu makes Job aware that despite his prowess at paronomasia and polysemy, it is God who is the grand manipulator: "Wait a little, and I will declare; that moreover words belong to God." According to Elihu, it is God who creates words, and thus he alone can exploit the potentially powerful relationships between words: "the storm wind comes from its chamber, and the cold from its constellations; by the breath of God ice is formed, and the expanse of water becomes solid" (37:9-10). Note here how it is...
the breathing of God that is credited with turning "cold" (דמעות) into "ice" (קרח), a change that requires of a speaker only a harder breath.

Moreover, it is in the characters' expressed concern for words and their manipulation that one finds oblique references to wordplay. For instance, in 6:3 Job states that his grief compels his manner of speech: "On account of this have I spoken indistinctly." The havoc that Job's wordplays wreak on the ears of his friends becomes a source of contention between them. Hence, in 4:12 Eliphaz remarks on Job's subtlety: "A word came to me in secret, my ear caught but a whisper of it." It is Job's attempt to enter and win the debate that compels Bildad to bestow on him the epithet "word-hunter." Let us now take a look at the game of Job's hunt by turning to a Janus parallelism in Job 7:6-7:

6. My days are more trifling than a weaver's shuttle. They go without נקדה.
7. Remember, my life is but a wind, my eyes will see no more good.

Here the word נקדה means both "thread" and "hope." As the former, it parallels "a weaver's shuttle" in line 6 and as the latter it parallels the expression of Job's falling hope in line 7. Cementing the connection is the appearance of נקדה in conjunction with נקדה in Prov 11:23. Moreover, נקדה is used with the root נקדה also in Prov 26:12 and Ezek 19:15.

The LXX's κεφαλή ελεκτρία and Vulgate's spe both reflect only "hope." However, the Vulgate's addition in 7:6a of quam a texente tela succiditur, "(more) than the web is cut by the weaver," suggests an attempt to render the Hebrew allusion to thread. The Targum, however, finds an apt circumlocution to capture the pun: "they wear out (or: weave) and are cut off without hope." Note here that "wear out, aside from meaning "without," also may allude to נקדה ("thread") a meaning that the reader

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6 Cf. the reference to slurred speech in Obad 16. All translations are the author's own.
7 Even if Eliphaz here refers to his own revelatory experience, a concern with allusive speech is apparent.
10 It also may be connected to two roots in line 5: נקדה ("clothed") and ננקדה ("dust"), which may reflect the garment called נקדה in Ugaritic. See C. H. Gordon, UT, 465, s.v. נקדה (1106-7, cf. 24): "20 נקדה garments."
12 E.g., BDB, 193. The Peshitta renders similarly with the expression: נקדה פֶּרֶץ, but נקדה does not mean "thread" in Syriac. Cf. נקדה פֶּרֶץ in Job 5:16 for a similar play.
was to catch, especially after noticing the extra verb כָּפָה ("cut"). Rashi, ibn Ezra, Moshe Qimhi, Ralbag, and Y. Altschuler’s Metzudat David all appear to have been aware of the pun, and many modern commentators who have defined this word have noted the presence of a wordplay. Though aware of the pun, W. Michel, following E. Dhorme, rendered “and cease with the end of a thread.”

That the poet of the book of Job deliberately placed both meanings into Job’s mouth can be seen by Bildad’s referential reply in 8:14-15: כָּפָה אֱלֹהִים אָדָם יָמָה "the hope of the godless will perish; his confidence is a mere gossamer thread; his trust, but a spider’s web." Bildad, in an effort to “one-up” Job in the poetic contest, not only utilized both meanings of הכפה but transformed the root ("weaver’s shuttle") of 7:6 into an חֲפָף ("spider"). That the root כפה occurs in connection with a spider in Isa 59:5 illustrates the skill with which both Job and Bildad weave their remarks. It is here that we begin to see the function of Janus parallelism within the context of a word-contest in Job, namely, as a referential device. It is not merely that the pivot word parallels the previous and following stichs but that the polysemous root used in the construction extends in both directions throughout the dialogues. Thus, we may understand Job’s word choice as a play on his previous statement in 3:9 and on Eliphaz’s words in 4:6 and 5:16. In 3:9 Job laments his birth as one who כפה לֵא הָאָדָם, “hopes for light and there is none.” In 4:6, it is Eliphaz who asks Job: “Is not your hope כפה אָדָם, a poor, integrity?” Job 5:16, also in the mouth of Eliphaz, reads: כפה לֵא הָאָדָם, “there is hope for the poor.” That the word כפה ("poor") also may be read as “hanging” (i.e., חֲפָף), which can be used of thread (e.g., חֲפָף in Isa 38:12), may explain why Job chose to pun on it in 7:6. In 7:2 we read: "as the days of a hireling are his days, as a servant who pants for the shade, and as a hireling who hopes (כפה) for his wage.” Note how כפה, רָדָה, and דִּמְעָה serve to establish an expectation for the polyseme in 7:6. Observe also that 7:6 alerts the reader to the connection by beginning with כפה. Thus, כفة in 7:6 is an example of antanaclasis used in a Janus construction. The root כפה is used again for its association with “marking” in 17:13a (by Job): כفة אֱלֹהִים אָדָם, "If I must mark Sheol as my home." Yet, as if to settle the debate of words and their usages, it is God who thunders unequivocally from the whirlwind (38:5): כפה אֱלֹהִים אָדָם, “Who measured it (the earth) with a plumbline?”

15 This may explain the polysemous line in 9:25 as well, which rests on the expectation built up by the use of כפה.
17 Cf. Jer 31:39 and Isa 34:17, where כפא occurs with the meaning "mark off (territory)."
18 In Isa 34:11 we find a very similar phraseology connecting "marking/measuring" with destruction: כפה אֱלֹהִים אָדָם כפה אֱלֹהִים אָדָם. This strengthens the connection between Yahweh’s words in Job 38:5 and Job’s and his friends’ previous uses of the root כפה.
Another example of Janus parallelism can be found in Job 20:23-24.

23. To fill his belly to the full. He will send his wrath against him. And rain down upon him מ🥥 רכוז.
24. If he flees from an iron weapon, a bronze arrow will pierce him.

The word מַעְלָר typically has been understood as "in his battle-fury," as if derived from the root לָלֶם ("do battle"). However, as the phrase follows upon "to fill his belly to the full," the reader is invited to understand מַעְלָר as "for his bread, food," with מַעְלָר as a by-form of מֵעַר ("bread"; cf. the segholate noun מֵעָר and its derived nominal form מַעְלָר [albeit feminine], or perhaps the related words מֵעָר and מָעָר).

Consequently, there is reason to see two meanings in מַעְלָר in Job 20:23-24. With the meaning "with his food" מַעְלָר reminds us of יִשְׁלַח בְּחַלַּה מַעְלָר as "to fill his belly;" with the meaning "in his battle-fury," the polyseme foreshadows נֵבֶר מַעְלָר בְּרִאשֹׁנָה מַעְלָר בְּרִאשֹׁנָה, "if he flees from an iron weapon, a bronze arrow will pierce him." Note that the former parallel is bolstered by the use of מֵעָר as "food" in conjunction with the verb מִכְבַּר in Prov 20:17. As "fighting" מַעְלָר parallels מַכְבַּר in Jer 33:5. Note also that the root מַעָר means "fight" in Job 15:23-24; 15:26 and may have provided the poet with the referential impetus for the pun here. The connection of מַעְלָר with the weapons of war in v. 24 also is strengthened by a contrast between מַעְלָר ("bread") and מָעָר ("bow") in 2 Kgs 6:22. Thus Job 20:23-24 is a Janus parallel.

Saadiah Gaon, Rashã, and Y. Altschuler's Metsudat David and Metsudat Zion render מַעְלָר as "battle-fury," whereas Ibn Ezra and Ralbag translate מַעְלָר as "on his flesh." Moshe Qimhi renders מַעְלָר as "his flesh or his food." The modern commentators, for example, David Yellin, Marvin Pope, and R. Gordin, render with the LXX and

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19 So BDB, 535.
20 Along with HALAT, 2.499. Others choose to emend the word, e.g., KB, 478. For the relationship of segholates to qetìl forms, see Constance Wallace Gordon, "Qetìl Nouns in Classical Hebrew," ABR-Naharin 29 (1991) 83-86.
21 מֵעָר may mean "battle-fury" in Job 15:23 as well.
22 Note a semantically similar word play in the Epic of Gilgamesh. Tablet XI:45-47:

45 He will bring you a harvest of wealth,
46 in the morning kukki-cakes
47 and in the evening, he will shower down a rain of wheat (kidarti).
Noteworthy here is the use of the Akkadian words kukki in line 46, both "a type of cake" and "darkness," and kidarti in line 47, both "wheat" and "oppression, calamity." See CAD K 498, s.v. kukki. A similar play on the polyvalent root לָלֶם may adhere also in Ugaritic. See Gordon, UT, 'Anat IV:67-68. [bark] mdhmu [atf] bprmn ddylymn ask [slm] bkr ar[bdd] bl[d] dymyst, "Shall I put bread (war) in [the earth]? Shall I set mandrakes in the dust? Shall I pour [peace] in the midst of the earth, a plethora of lovely things in the midst of the fields." Cf. Num 11:4-9, where the object that rains from the sky (i.e., manna) brings sustenance and not destruction.
23 Yellin, 144; Pope, Job, 150, 153; Gordis, Book of Job, 210, 219.
Vulgata, whereas S. R. Driver and Dhorme follow the Targum's "flesh, bread." N. H. Tur-Sinai and A. Guillaume differ greatly, the former giving the reading "upon their cheeks" (requiring him to emend and to revocalize), and the latter opting for "into his very bowels" without comment. Of special interest is J. Hartley's remark (even though he does not note the forward parallel to the weapons of war): "With its first meaning MT is understood as 'on his flesh.' This affords a good parallel with 'his belly' in the first line. With the second meaning MT reads 'in his wrath'; the parallel is then with 'his burning anger.'

The divergence between the LXX, Vulgate, and Peshitta, on the one hand, and the Targum, ibn Ezra, and Ralbag, on the other, demonstrates that Job 20:22–24 was understood in multiple ways. The significance of this Janus is dependent largely on the context of chap. 20. Previously, in Job 20:12–16, Zophar described the evildoer as follows:

Though evil is sweet to his mouth, and he conceals it under his tongue; though he saves it, (and) does not let it go, (he) holds it inside his mouth. His food (לַכְּבָּד) in his bowels turns into asps' venom (נַעַרְשֵׁים) within him. The riches he swallows he vomits; God empties it out of his stomach (יָבִין). He sucks the poison of asps; the tongue of the viper kills him.

The evildoer to whom Zophar refers is Job, whose dangerous words are compared to a serpent's venom, which, though concealed (perhaps by way of polysemy), will devour...
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him eventually. Zophar’s discourse should not be separated from his use of the pivot הַיּוֹלֵד in 20:23 only a few verses later. Support for this connection comes from הַיּוֹלֵד ("stomach") and the root הֵרָב (here "venom, gall"), which appear again in the same context in 20:23–25. Contextually, then, the "food" suggested by הַיּוֹלֵד is not "bread" per se but the wicked words which the evildoer (read: Job) conceals under his tongue and which become the agent of God’s wrath. In essence, Zophar is telling Job that his own words will do him in.

Though I could cite many additional examples of Janus parallelism in Job and its referential function within the context of a debate, limitations of space force me to refer the reader again elsewhere for additional evidence.

Nevertheless, the evidence above suggests at least two new avenues for research. First, with respect to Job 7:6–7 and 20:23–24, the reader will remember that some of the ancient translations demonstrated an attempt to preserve the polysemy, either through equally punful renderings or through epexegetis. This suggests not only an awareness of biblical puns during the periods that gave rise to the various versions but also a sociological, perhaps religious, desire to leave them intact. Moreover, such polysemy and other types of lingual sophistication may explain some of the divergences that the various versions show when compared with the MT.

Second, it should be noted that such secret and allusive linguistic subtleties are tied up with the characters’ understanding of what constitutes wisdom. For example, Zophar reprimands Job in 11:2–6 by asking:

Is a multitude of words unanswerable? Must a loquacious person be right?
Your prattle may silence men; you may mock without being rebuked . . . but
would that God speak, and talk to you himself. He would tell you the secrets
of wisdom (וְיִלְבִין לְעַנֵּס), for there are two sides to sagacity (וְיִלְבִין לְעַנֵּס).

Wittily, Zophar remarks that just as Job has relied on double-talk, so too there are two sides to God’s understanding, one of which Job does not perceive. What makes Zophar’s point so poignant is his polysemous wisecrack immediately afterwards: “And know that God itta’ your iniquity” (11:6c). Here the verb נָשָׁה means both “forget” and “demand payment for.” To Zophar, then, the double side of God’s wisdom is that he both forgets and demands retribution, depending on the patron’s perception.

To each of the characters, hidden speech is equated with wisdom. In 28:20, the so-called Hymn to Wisdom, for example, we find the query: “But wisdom, whence does it come, and where is the place of understanding? For it is hidden from the eyes of all living things, concealed even from the birds of the air.”

In sum, the numerous displays of word-wise wit in the book of Job are to be seen

28 Note that הַיּוֹלֵד appears antanaclastically in 20:20 as “children” as well. For this usage, cf. Hos 9:16. Such key words help to underscore the lines that contain them, e.g., 20:23.
29 Note that Zophar also exploits the root for its polysemy in Job 20:25.
30 See my dissertation cited in n. 3.
31 The connection between wordplay and wisdom also might explain why Zophar’s words in Job 11:2–6 prepare us for Yahweh’s speeches, whereas his statement in Job 11:6c brings us toward the resolution of the epilogue.
not as mere literary embellishments and flares of poetic style but rather as demonstrations of wit and one-upmanship. Indeed, the sampling offered here is only a handful; dozens more could be cited.34 Perhaps on a more profound level, such word manipulation should be understood as the very essence of wisdom. We do well to compare also the opening of the book of Proverbs (1:2, 1:3, 1:6): "To know wisdom and instruction, to comprehend the words of understanding, to receive the discipline of wisdom, justice, right, and equity... is to understand an allegory, and a figure, the words of the wise, and their riddles." Clearly, to receive the wisdom and knowledge of the Israelites one must be capable of discerning meaning by analogy and allusion through wordplay.

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34 See n. 3.