

MY PSALM HAS TURNED INTO WEEPING

THE DIALOGICAL INTERTEXTUALITY OF

ALLUSIONS TO THE PSALMS IN JOB¹

Will Kynes

The ‘bitter parody’ of Psalm 8:5 in Job 7:17-18 has long been recognised but its hermeneutical implications have not been fully explored. The repetition of the phrase **מַה־אֲנוּשׁ** (‘What are human beings?’), the common structure of both passages, and the recurrence of the verb **פָּקַד** set in a context which reverses its meaning, have led to a nearly unanimous consensus that Job is intentionally twisting the meaning of the psalm from a hymn of praise for God’s watchful care to a complaint against his overbearing attention. Rarely, however, has the question which naturally follows been pursued: if the author of Job interacted with Psalm 8 in such a knowing and sophisticated way, what other allusions to the Psalms may likewise make significant contributions to the dialogue between Job, his friends, and God?

To answer that question, this thesis employs a new method for identifying allusions and interpreting their significance that incorporates aspects of both ‘diachronic’ and ‘synchronic’ intertextual approaches. In this study ‘diachronic’ is considered a *sequential* way of reading connections between texts, in which the relative dates of texts are important because one author is referring to the work of another, and ‘synchronic’ a *simultaneous* interpretive approach, in which readers may read texts ‘all at one time’ and pursue textual resonances irrespective of direct historical relationships between them. The method developed in the thesis proceeds in eight steps that address the texts from alternating diachronic and synchronic perspectives, ranging from identification (synchronic) to historical implications (diachronic). A

¹ Will Kynes (Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge University, 2012) Supervisor: Dr Katharine Dell. A slightly revised form of this dissertation has been published as *My Psalm Has Turned into Weeping’: Job’s Dialogue with the Psalms* (BZAW; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012).

crucial third step, coherence, uses a synchronic comparison of the possible significance of the purported allusion when considered in both directions to come to a diachronic conclusion on the direction of dependence. Thus, Job is likely alluding to Psalm 8 and not vice versa because parodying the psalmist's praise would accentuate Job's complaint, but an allusion to Job's accusations would undercut the psalmist's worship. This enables allusions to be addressed in texts where the relative dates are unknown, like Job and most of the Psalms.

This method is applied to the sections of Job and the Psalms in which the intertextual connections are the most pronounced: the Job dialogue and six psalms that fall into three broad categories—praise (Psalms 8 and 107), supplication (Psalms 139 and 39), and instruction (Psalms 1 and 73). In each case, Job's dependence on the Psalms is determined to be the more likely explanation of the parallel, and in all but one case (Psalm 39), allusions to the same psalm appear in the speeches of both Job and the friends. For example, Eliphaz responds to Job's parody of Psalm 8 by alluding to the psalm in Job 15:14-16, not to parody it, but to support his argument that Job should abandon his lament because sinful humans are insignificant before God. Job answers with a further parody in 19:9, again complaining at God's treatment. Bildad then alludes to the psalm once more (25:4-6) to attempt to rebut Job's argument along similar lines to Eliphaz. The low view of humanity advocated by the friends in response to Job's parodies suggests that, though Job is parodying the high view presented in the psalm, he is doing so in order to appeal to it against his current oppressive experience of God.

Thus, as a whole, the contrasting uses to which Job and the friends put these psalms reflect conflicting interpretive approaches. Job parodies and exaggerates the psalms in order to appeal to the God they describe, one who cares for (Psalms 8, 107, 139) and is present with (Psalms 73, 139) God's people and acts with justice (Psalms 1, 73, 107), thereby inspiring hope in the midst of despair (Psalm 39). The friends, however, transform the positive messages of the psalms into negative ones that denigrate humanity (Psalm 8), suggest guilt (Psalm 107), threaten with unavoidable judgment (Psalm 139), ignore lament (Psalm 39), warn of retribution (Psalm 1), and accuse of wickedness (Psalm 73). This interpretive dispute uncovers latent tensions in these psalms by capitalising on their ambiguities, which enable both sides to

use them as support for the contrasting views on the appropriate behaviour in the midst of affliction.

The thesis also provides historical insight into both texts, particularly in terms of the authority accorded the Psalms when Job was written. Since both sides believe these psalms will have force in their debate, they must have had some authoritative status, but the divergent interpretations offered of the same psalms indicates that exegetical flexibility remains. The thesis also points to developments in the debate over the nature of retribution when Job was written. For example, though Job complains of the apparent failure of the doctrine of retribution in his case, he cannot be rejecting it since doing so would leave him with no ground on which to charge God with injustice and demand rectification.

As a whole, the dialogue created between Job and these psalms indicates the concern the book has with the proper response to suffering and the role the interpretation of authoritative texts may play in that reaction. The friends' pious proof-texting twists these psalms to reinforce their own strict retributive worldview, while Job, expressing his piety through parody, inverts the texts to strengthen his appeal to their depiction of proper divine-human relationship, joining a broad tradition in the Hebrew Bible of those who dare to challenge God to act justly.