Debating Suffering
The Voices of Lamentations Personified in Job’s Dialogue

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Abstract
Focusing on Lamentations 3, the “theological heart” of the book (O’Connor 2002), and the chapter with closest parallels to the book of Job, this paper will explore how the “voices” in Lamentations correspond to the characters in Job’s dialogue. The close connections between the two books, which have previously been surprisingly overlooked (Aitken 2013), invite this consideration of whether Job may be an early reception of Lamentations. Though some have addressed the close lexical links between the chapter and Job’s laments in chs. 16 and 19 (Lévêque 1970; Mettinger 1993; Aitken 2013), the resonance between the more positive “didactic voice” (Mandolfo 2007) in Lam 3:22-41 and Job’s friends has received less attention, though it is perhaps the “most Joblike” section of the chapter (Berlin 2002). More than that, the parallels between Job and these two sections of the chapter are not discrete, as they tend to be treated. Once they are recognized, they can no longer be considered the result of the clashing of traditions or mixing of genres in Lamentations. The personification of these voices and dramatization of their polyphonic engagement in Job suggests their interaction was part of Israelite reflection on suffering. Further, this technique corresponds with the use of the psalms in Job (Kynes 2012), which suggests the dramatic amplification of this dialogue from Lamentations was intentional. Considering the potential reception of Lamentations 3 in
Job, therefore, affords an opportunity to compare how Job and the supplicant in Lamentations 3 make their complaints, how the friends and the “didactic voice” respond, and how the two books similarly employ the dialogue of multiple voices to respond to suffering.

Suffering is a constant undercurrent of the Hebrew Bible that frequently lashes at the surface, creating deep swells of emotion and crashing waves of complaint. Though the troughs of these breakers often descend into despair, their crests reach upward from the tumult, at least for a moment, grasping at hope. In its intense representation of this experience, the book of Lamentations claws at its readers like a drowning man, pulling them into the churning currents. The interpretation of Lam 3, which combines the book’s highest whitecap with troughs as deep as any other chapter, reveals how readers flail to keep their heads above the surface. To bring order to this chaos, interpreters consistently organize the chapter into different “voices.”

In these efforts, modern readers are following the lead of what appears to be one of the book’s earliest interpreters, the author of Job. Since the book of Job likewise lurches through surging suffering, reading Job and Lamentations together has a certain “inevitability” (Aitken 2013). And yet, despite the common recognition of the “Job-like” character of Lamentations, particularly ch. 3, in commentaries (Berlin 2002, 85), surprisingly little research has attempted to weather the waves churned up by the intersection of these two books (Aitken 2013, 205). The echoes of the “voices” in Lam 3 in the speeches of both Job and his friends amplify the chapter’s dialogical reflection on suffering, and reveal how interpreters, ancient and modern, instinctively separate and personify the voices in Lam 3,
even as they struggle to hold them together. This intertextual comparison also illuminates the figure who struggles to keep his head above the turbulent waters of Lam 3.

Intertextual Method

I will dive into this issue while putting diachronic and synchronic, or author-oriented and reader-oriented, approaches to intertextuality in dialogue, since these two approaches are inextricably intertwined.¹ From a diachronic perspective, I will argue that the striking use of the siege metaphor from Lam 3 in Job 16 and 19 provides compelling, though admittedly not conclusive, evidence of an allusion, an “intentional implicit reference to an earlier expression” (Kynes 2012, 31), that encourages readers to compare Job’s experience with that described in Lamentations. This connecting allusion invites readers into a broader synchronic comparison between the texts, which considers other potential allusions between them while reflecting on how each text illuminates the meaning of the other.

Because biblical authors rarely cited their sources, most arguments for intentional references to earlier texts must roam in the realm of probability, where some will weigh the evidence differently than others. However, the Job poet clearly demonstrates an affinity for allusion through the frequent allusions Job and his friends make to each other’s speeches, often while changing both the wording and context of the original (Kynes 2012, 46–49; Lyons 2013). Further, I find some of the evidence for intertextual allusion, such as the parody of Ps 8:5 in Job 7:17-18 or the verbatim repetition of an entire verse from Ps 107:40 in Job 12:21, 24, to be such compelling indicators of authorial intentionality that the possibility of further allusions must be considered (see Kynes 2012, 63–67, 80–81). Even so, the implicit

¹ For more on this intertextual method and its compatibility with intertextual theory, see Kynes 2012, 17–60; Kynes 2013a.
nature of allusions means the possibility of shared reference to a lost common source or some other cultural influence can never be definitively denied. These texts were written in the midst of a “wide-ranging network of interconnections,” but using this fact to oppose the search for allusions is a false dichotomy (pace Kwon 2016, 41), since such a network would facilitate allusions, even if its complex nature may make them difficult to prove. This uncertainty, however, only limits the diachronic conclusions that may be reached. Though it may reduce the force of the synchronic comparisons potential allusions inspire, it does not eliminate their interpretive value.

“I am the נביא who has seen affliction” (Lam 3:1)

The steady flow of its acrostic form hardly matches the thematic and syntactic currents that intermingle in Lam 3. As a result, scholars consistently break the text into different sections but rarely agree on where the divisions occur. I will focus on the first two sections of the chapter, the complaints of the “man” (נביא) regarding the divinely initiated violence he has suffered in vv. 1-18, and the “sapiential consolation” which responds in impersonal, abstract generalizations to his complaints in vv. 25–39, declaring divine goodness and justice and eschewing complaint (Dobbs-Allsopp 2002, 119), as well as the transitional verses immediately surrounding them.

The Voices of Lamentations 3

Though perhaps the most striking, the tension between these two sections is hardly the only one in the chapter. Magne Sæbø (1993, 300–1) notes the tensions between the unifying

Commentators generally agree a gender-neutral translation obscures important connotations of the Hebrew word נביא, which consistently has a male referent (see Bier 2015, 106–7).
overarching acrostic pattern of the chapter and the “variegated tradition fragments” within it, between the “I” and the “we” (vv. 40–47) that speak, between the chapter’s personal and historically situated features and its “timeless” instructions, and between the theology of Lam 3 and that of the chapters which surround it. These factors all contribute to the common conclusion that the chapter consists of multiple “voices.” Some, such as Westermann (1994, 191), externalize these voices as different individual “components” compiled from different traditions over time. Others, such as Bier (2015, 108), internalize them as an “internal dialogue” within a single speaker (similarly, Berlin 2002, 84 n. 1; Dobbs-Allsopp 2002, 105). Some, argue the move to first-person plural indicates a second voice (e.g., Hillers 1972, 72), while others see the transition as an effect of the collective nature of the “I” who speaks in the chapter (Albrektson 1963, 126–28).

Proposals of different voices, either behind the text or within it, do not actually resolve any of the tensions Saebø identifies; they simply personify them. Even when those voices are simply reflections of an inner debate, it is a debate nonetheless, in which the single speaker “reasons with himself” (Berlin 2002, 92; similarly, Provan 1991, 95; Bier 2015, 125). This leads naturally to interpretations of Lamentations as a polyphonic dialogue, in which the text’s message exists only in the plurality of consciousnesses; is embodied; resists systemization; and is unfinalizable (see Bier 2015, 33–34; cf. Boase 2006, 23–34).

Who is the גבר?

Interpreters have long attempted to personify Lam 3 in another way, however, by identifying the person who speaks in the text, but who only refers to himself as “the man who has seen affliction” (v. 1). A number of proposals have been made. These include Jeremiah, the traditional view (see 2 Chr 35:25), resurrected in modern scholarship in a figurative sense, as
well as a series of other figures, including Jehoiachin and Zedekiah, or a former soldier or temple singer (see Bezzel 2011, 253–54). To these historical individuals have been added proposals for a number of different historical communities, such as Zion, all Israel, or the exiles (see Salters 2010, 186). Arguing that an individual can better lament and engage in private contemplation and repentance and prayer than a community, Hillers (1972, 64) considers the speaker as representative of the typical sufferer, an “everyman” who serves as a “model for the nation.” Thus, even though he opposes the collective interpretation of the speaker, his reading still leans in that direction. After all, other features of the text, most notably the first-person plural, draw the community into the text even if an individual is speaking throughout (Salters 2010, 185–86).

This debate reflects the “fluid personality” in texts across the Hebrew Bible, in which the individual and the community flow into one another, such that communal complaints are frequently communicated in individual terms (Gordis 1974, 170–73). This phenomenon, evident in the debate over the “I” in the Psalms, reflects a basic Israelite instinct toward personifying lament (Kynes 2013c). This personification makes the sufferings of the community more concrete in the experience of a single individual, which infuses it with the authority of firsthand experience, even if the figurative experience of a fictive persona (Berlin 2002, 84, 88). “An individual human being relating personal experiences” need not be set against the representation of the suffering of the community (pace Westermann 1994, 172), but may be the most effective means for doing so. Lamentations 3, then, demonstrates how this “fluid personality” flows both ways, as it takes general experience and narrows it down to an individual, but then, over the course of the chapter, “gradually broadens to include human experience more generally” (Dobbs-Allsopp 2002, 107).
When interpreters attempt to associate Lam 3 with a particular historical individual, they are following the lead of the scribes who added the superscriptions to the Psalms or incorporated them into biblical narratives (1 Sam 2:1-10; Isa 38:10-20; Jer 11:18–12:6) and thereby made them more broadly applicable by applying them to a specific individual (see Childs 1979, 521). Arguing, then, that the descriptions in Lamentations are too “concrete” for the “everyman” or representative figure interpretations (Saebø 1993, 299) misunderstands this imagery’s intended rhetorical effect. Only through being concrete enough to represent real experience can it truly resonate with any other sufferer or even the community as a whole. The continuing debate over which individual or communal experience Lam 3 represents testifies to the text’s deft tiptoe along the line between generality and specificity, as its conventional and yet concrete language both enables and invites the text to be applied to a wide variety of specific situations. Dobbs-Allsopp (2002, 115), while arguing along these lines, claims the song’s literary context in Lamentations provides the text with its particularity, associating it with Jerusalem’s destruction. Readers who use other intertextual connections to put the text in different literary contexts, connecting it with other individuals or communities, however, demonstrate that this experience of suffering hardly exhausts its semantic potential.

“What גבורה is Like Job?” (Job 34:7)

Drawing on that potential, another specific figure has been associated with the גבורה of Lam 3: Job. Gordis (1974, 174) refers to the chapter as a “Job lament,” and Berlin (2002, 85) finds it “perhaps more than coincidental” that Job refers to himself as a גבורה in his first speech (Job
Aitken (2013, 206–7) cites several instances of the association between Job and the devastation of Jerusalem in Lamentations in rabbinic interpretation, including an early midrash that considers “I am the גבר” in Lam 3:1 a reference to Job in light of Elihu’s question, “What גבר is like Job?” (34:7) (Lamentations Rabbati 3:1). The synchronic intertextual comparison the rabbis make between the two books, in which Lam 3 is prominent, is justified by numerous lexical parallels between them (see Aitken 2013, 207–8). These include the common experience of suffering from God’s “rod” (Lam 3:1; Job 9:34-35) and his “arrows” (Lam 3:12-13; Job 6:4), being a “laughingstock” (Lam 3:14; Job 12:4), and feeling “bitterness” (Lam 3:15; Job 9:18). For Aitken, however, these isolated parallels do not justify a diachronic intertextual relationship between the texts, since they could simply result from the similar subject matter they share. Though he considers the recurrent parallels to Lam 3 in Job 19 (Lévêque 1970, 1:382–86) and Job 16 (Mettinger 1993, 269–71) as possible exceptions, Aitken concludes that they too more likely result from common motifs (210; see Clines 1989, 442; cf. Hillers 1972, 63).

Connecting Allusion: Job under Siege

Lévêque, as Aitken observes (210), simply presents a “mosaic” of lexical parallels rather than “a consistent allusion to one passage.” He simply lists a series of 16 isolated lexical and thematic parallels, many consisting of only one repeated word (384). The sheer number and precision of the parallels all grouped in a single chapter of Job, however, are sufficient to convince Lévêque that they cannot be the result of chance (382). Because parallels to all five chapters of Lamentations are found together in a single chapter of Job, he concludes Job must

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3 See, similarly, Brandscheidt (1983, 51), who notes the large role the term plays in Job, where it appears 15 times, more than any other biblical book.
be the alluding text rather than the multiple authors of Lamentations all drawing on one chapter from Job (382–3).

A closer look at Lévêque’s table reveals, though, that the allusions are not as isolated as they may at first appear. One collection of parallels in Job 19:6-8 corresponds to another in Lam 3:6-9.⁴

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job 19:6-8</th>
<th>Lam 3:6-9</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 know then that God has put me in the wrong</td>
<td>6 he has made me sit in darkness [מָחַשֵׁכִים]</td>
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<tr>
<td>and closed his net around me.</td>
<td>like the dead of long ago.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Even when I cry out [אָשַׁוֵע], “Violence!” I cannot escape;</td>
<td>7 He has walled [גָּדַר] me about so that I am not answered;</td>
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<tr>
<td>I call aloud [אָשֵׁא], but there is no justice.</td>
<td>he has put heavy chains on me;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 He has walled up [גָּדַר] my way so that I cannot pass,</td>
<td>8 though I call [אָשֵׁא] and cry [אֶזְﬠַק] for help,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and he has set darkness [ךְךַחֹשֶׁ] upon my paths.</td>
<td>9 he has blocked [גָּדַר] my ways with hewn stones,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he has made my paths crooked [ﬠִוָּה].</td>
<td>he has made my paths crooked [ﬠִוְּתָנִי].</td>
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This extended parallel has a number of notable features. First, starting in the middle (Job 19:7; Lam 3:8), the verb שׁוע ("cry") is only combined with one of the biforms of "call" (זעק or זעם) in only two other verses in the Hebrew Bible (Hab 1:2⁵ and Job 35:9, both using זעם). In both Job and Lamentations, these unanswered cries are enclosed by the imagery of being

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⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are from the NRSV.
⁵ Habakkuk also cries out “violence” (חמס) as does Job. It would not be beyond the literary skill of the author of Job to combine allusions to two different passages in a single verse, since he does this with passages within the dialogues, e.g., Job 25:4; cf. Job 9:2; 15:14 (Kynes 2012, 48).
surrounded. In Lamentations the verb גדר is repeated in both instances (vv. 7, 9), while Job first speaks of God “surrounding” (hiphil of נָעַצָך) him in his net (v. 6) and then repeats the verb גדר when he, like Lamentations, speaks of his “way” being walled up (v. 8), though using a different word. Finally, both passages use the imagery of God making them “crooked” and putting them in “darkness,” but the order of the shared terms is reversed. Job begins with a reference to being made crooked (piel of עוה⁶) and ends with a reference to “darkness” (חשך); Lamentations begins with a reference to “darkness” (מחשך) and ends with paths made crooked (piel of עוה). The passages, then, combine lexical, thematic, and structural parallels. Job does use a different form for three of the five shared words, but the Job poet makes changes like this even in allusions within the book (e.g., Job 21:17; cf. 18:5-6), so small variations like these may accord with his allusive technique rather than argue against it (see Kynes 2012, 46–49).

This indicates at least a strong correspondence between the two texts, if not an actual allusion from one to the other, but one more factor should be considered. After a potential allusion to Lam 5:16 in v. 9 (see Kynes 2012, 73–74 n. 65), Job continues in vv. 10-12 to expand on the imagery from Lam 3:7-9 and depict himself as a besieged city. This metaphor is “somewhat unexpected” in Job (Clines 1989, 442), but fitting in Lam 3, where Zion’s suffering stands behind the individual’s agony (Provan 1991, 85). For Mettinger (1993, 272–73), this tips the balance toward affirming the Job poet’s allusion to Lamentations, since, citing Michael Riffaterre, markers of an intertext are “both the problem, when seen from the text, and the solution when their other, intertextual side is revealed.” When shared terminology appears in different contexts, it may enforce rather than militate against an

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⁶ See HALOT, which suggests this verb may be a secondary form of עוה.
intentional allusion, as both the internal coherence of the potential allusion in its new context and external coherence of its fit with its original context are considered (Kynes 2012, 52–54; pace Kwon 2016, 41).

Reinforcing this intertextual connection, Job applies siege imagery to himself in a second passage, 16:12-13, where he again draws on language from Lam 3.

**Job 16:12-13**

12 I was at ease, and he broke me in two  
11 he led me off my way and tore me to pieces  

12 I was at ease, and he broke me in two  
11 he led me off my way and tore me to pieces  

**Lam 3:11-13**

11 he led me off my way and tore me to pieces  
12 he bent his bow and set me as a mark for his arrow.  

12 he bent his bow and set me as a mark for his arrow.  
11 he led me off my way and tore me to pieces  

he seized me by the neck and dashed me to pieces;  
he has made me desolate;  

he set me up as his target;  
as a mark for his arrow.  

13 his archers surround me.  
13 He shot into my vitals and shows no mercy;  

He slashes open my kidneys and shows no mercy;  

he pours out my gall on the ground.  

Both texts begin with accusing God of breaking the sufferer into pieces, though using different words, before making him into a “target,” and damaging his “kidneys.” The analogy of the destruction of a person with the destruction of a city again appears to be inspired by Lam 3 (Schmid 2007, 249).

Comparing Job 19 and Lam 3, Lévêque (1970, 385) notes how in both hope bursts forth (Lam 3:21-24; Job 19:25) without transition from a crescendo of despair (Lam 3:18; Job 19:10, 20). He also notes the similar move to confidence in Job 16:19-21. Job follows some

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7 Again, the spelling differs slightly. The word, which appears 16 times in the Hebrew Bible, means “guard” in every other instance, with the exception of the narrative in 1 Sam 20:20.
of his angriest accusations against God with his strongest flights of hope. The common juxtaposition of hope and despair in both texts suggests, at least, that the two emotions were not as inimical to each other as they may seem. Job testifies with Lam 3 to “the peculiar biblical idea that hope is born out of pain” (Dobbs-Allsopp 2002, 117).

Recurrence: The Friends’ Attempted Consolation

The structural parallels between Lam 3 and Job do not end here, however, as the potential allusions to Lam 3 in Job 16 and 19 solder the texts together and encourage readers to see where else the current running between them might flow (see Kynes 2012, 55). The whiplash between despair and hope in Lam 3 is matched by a disorienting juxtaposition of impassioned complaint and reasoned instruction. Lee (2002, 180), for example, observes that the second singer she hears in Lam 3:25–41 is “diametrically opposed” to the first, as he defends God instead of accusing him and advocates keeping silent before God’s punishment, rather than complaining. Commentators commonly note the resonance between Job’s friends and the “sapiential consolation” in the middle of Lam 3, which is unified by a contrasting viewpoint, mood, and subject matter from 3:1-18 and involves “contemplation of traditional attitudes about how to cope with suffering” (Dobbs-Allsopp 2002, 119–21; cf. Gordis 1974, 139–40; Lee 2002, 174; Bouzard 2014, 77). Berlin (2002, 94) even calls these verses the “most Joblike” in the chapter.

Though the lexical connections are not as strong as the links between the chapter’s opening voice and Job’s laments, this “sapiential consolation” includes sentiments remarkably similar to those of Job’s friends. Nearly every idea expressed in these verses appears at some point on the lips of Job’s friends, occasionally with the same words. Like the “sapiential consolation” in Lam 3, the friends encourage Job to “seek” (דרשׁ) God (Lam 3:25;
Job 5:8), chastise him for speaking (Lam 3:26; Job 8:2; 11:2-3; 15:2-3; 18:2),
declare the blessing of divine reproof (Lam 3:27-28; Job 5:17; 33:19-30; 36:7-15), combine the possibility of “hope” (תוקם) with the imagery of a shut “mouth” (פי) (Lam 3:29; Job 5:16), and promise the overcoming of insults (Lam 3:30; Job 5:21), the end of divine rejection (Lam 3:30; Job 8:20-21), and the divine compassion that follows divine affliction (Lam 3:31; Job 5:18), since the just deity “does not oppress” (לא ענה), at least not willingly (Lam 3:32; Job 37:23), though humans may be “crushed” (דכא) (Lam 3:34; Job 4:18-19; cf. 5:4; 22:9; 34:25). Whereas Lam 3:35-36 may use a rhetorical question to affirm that the Lord sees when the “justice” (משפט) of a גבר is perverted and his case “subverted” (ועטה), Bildad uses rhetorical questions to deny that God will “pervert” (ועטה) “justice” (משפט (Job 8:3; cf. 34:12, 17-21; 37:23-24). As Lam 3:37-38 attributes all things, good and bad, to the “command” (צוה) of the Lord, so Elihu speaks of the rain and lightning obeying God’s “command” (צוה) “whether for correction, or for his land, or for love” (Job 37:11-13). Both texts consider complaint an inappropriate response to God’s gifts, whether that is life (Lam 3:39; see Provan 1991, 99) or other comforts (Job 15:11-13; cf. 34:36-37). Both advocate careful “examining” (חקור; Lam 3:40; Job 5:27) and “return to the Lord” (שׁוב עד—יהוה; Lam 3:40; Job 22:23). Finally, in Lamentations, this repentance involves “lifting up”

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8 The prologue also advocates the silent submission of Lam 3:26 through the initial responses of both Job (Brandscheidt 1983, 62) and the friends (Aitken 2013, 213).
9 Cf. 5:18-27 (Brandscheidt 1983, 63).
10 This verb appears 11 times in the Hebrew Bible, but only in Job and Lamentations in a legal context (Salters 2010, 271).
11 Job also accepts “good” and “bad” from God in the prologue (2:10) (Berlin 2002, 85).
“hearts” (לבב) and “hands” (כף), while for the friends, Job must prepare his “heart” (לב) and stretch out his “hands” (כף), before he can “lift up” (נשׂא) his face (Job 11:13, 15).

This section of Lam 3, which shares its “basic outlook” with Job’s friends, also shares their “choric function” in that, like the chorus in Greek tragedy, both provide “the link to the known and familiar” and thus become “the foil against which one is to read the rest of the book” (Dobbs-Allsopp 1997, 49; Dobbs-Allsopp 2002, 119). As Lam 3 descends back into affliction, it, like the book of Job, derives its “power and success” from “its ability to hold and affirm conflicting and contradictory truths without eventually surrendering either” (Dobbs-Allsopp 2002, 120). The conflicting positions of Job and the friends are mirrored in the contradictions between the sentiments in the “sapiential consolation” and those expressed elsewhere in the book, as this voice even appears to allude to and dispute other voices.

These “intentional” correspondences, like those in Job, “force the reader to measure and compare traditional attitudes and dispositions with the suffered reality that comprises the fabric of these poems” (Dobbs-Allsopp 2002, 121–22). Reading these conventional ideas in the midst of Lamentations forces one to ask with Berlin (2002, 94) whether the poet of Lam 3 believes them like Job’s friends or rejects them like Job.

Recognizing the intertextual interplay between Job and Lam 3 adds a further dimension to this intratextual conflict. As in the dialogical interpretation of the Psalms in Job (see Kynes 2012, 183–87), potential allusions to the same verses from Lam 3 by both Job and his friends makes their theological debate a hermeneutical one, as well, as they interpret and apply Lam 3 to Job’s situation in different ways. For example, while similarly endorsing the

12 See Salters 2010, 250. See also the parallel to Job 22:26, which comes on the heels of the encouragement to “return to the Almighty” (v. 23) as it does in Lam 3:40-41.

13 E.g., the “yoke” (על) as a symbol of suffering (Lam 1:14) is used to declare the benefits of divine reproof (Lam 3:27).
blessing of divine reproof (Job 5:17; Lam 3:226-27), Eliphaz in 5:21 claims even more forcefully than Lam 3:30 that the righteous need not fear insults, but Job uses three of the five Hebrew words in Lam 3:30 in 16:10 to claim he has suffered precisely this indignity before going on to draw on the siege imagery from Lam 3 (see Brandscheidt 1983, 63). Similarly, when Bildad in 8:3 more emphatically denies divine perversion (עות) of justice than Lam 3:35-36, Job in 19:6 uses the same verb to retort that God has indeed perverted justice in his case in the midst of a second allusion to the siege metaphor.

Mandolfo has observed how a didactic voice typically intrudes into psalmic laments to express traditional views. She has traced this interplay of voices both in Lam 3 (2007b, 71), where she sees the didactic voice speaking in vv. 22-42, and in Job, where Job and the friends make the implicit dialogue in the Psalms explicit and literal (2007a, 47 n. 5, 52). In both cases, she argues the authors are engaging with generic expectations evident in psalmic laments. However, if the author of Job does indeed allude directly to a number of psalms, such that Job and the friends draw on the tensions within the psalms as weapons in their argument (Kynes 2012), then the striking contrast between the supplicant’s suffering and the didactic voice’s instruction in Lam 3 could have easily inspired him to do the same thing with that text. As he has Job personify himself as the גבר in Lam 3, the author of Job personifies the polyphonic debate in that chapter in Job’s dialogue with his friends.

From a ritual perspective, Lambert (2015, 561–62) argues, the friends’ “agonistic relationship” with Job actually fulfilled their prescribed role, providing “consolation,” not to transform Job’s subjective emotion state, but to restore him from a state of mourning to normal participation in society. In Lamentations, the “sapiential consolation” performs a similar role, as it too attempts to bring the גבר out of his mourning and into acceptable social
behavior. However, like the friends, these words also fail, as “the language of wisdom is overwhelmed by the language of lament” (Berlin 2002, 95).

Holistic Interpretation: The “Missing Voice” Speaks

Further thematic and lexical resonances between Lam 3 and Job could be explored, but the close correspondence both between Job’s speeches and the chapter’s first section and between Job’s friends and the second section, is sufficient to highlight the polyphonic dialogue in Lam 3. When compared to Dostoevsky’s novels, which Bakhtin considered exemplary dialogic texts, the רוא of Lam 3 is more like the internally conflicted Raskolnikov of Crime and Punishment, while Job and his friends embody the positions of that debate like Alyosha, Ivan, and Dimitri in The Brothers Karamazov. The dialogic features of Lam 3 are accentuated by comparison with Job’s dialogue, and may very well have been the result of the Job poet’s appropriation and adaptation of the chapter given the connecting allusions between them, as he created a true dialogue of suffering that is even more plural, embodied, unsystemizable, and unfinalizable.

And yet, he cannot quite pull it off. Like so many readers of Lamentations, the author of Job is unable to allow this debate to remain unresolved. He provides the divine voice that readers of Lamentations feel is “missing” (O’Connor 2002, 83–95; cf. Provan 1991, 25). Whether or not the “orthodox confessions” in the middle of Lam 3 are intended rhetorically to force this response (Bouzard 2014, 70, 77), their failure to console, like that of Job’s friends, creates an expectation for a divine answer. God, in Job, provides the effective “consolation” that Lamentations lacks, and that Job’s friends are unable to provide, which can overcome his ritual morning (Lambert 2015, 563). If the intertextual comparison of the two texts uncovers “a dispute over … the inefficacy of certain types of comfort” (Aitken
2013, 215), then, by associating sentiments from Lam 3 with Job’s friends, the Job dialogue demonstrates the failure of even orthodox human speech to console some types of mourning (see Mandolfo 2007a, 62–63), with the divine verdict against the friends’ consolations added for good measure (Job 42:7). Whether through its absence or its inclusion, the two texts together argue some storms of suffering can only be stilled by a divine word, which is in keeping with theophanies in other laments (e.g., Pss 18; 74; 77; Gowan 1992, 95). Rather than undermining human speech and “quashing the dialogic” (Bier 2015, 193–94), dignifies it with a response and becomes its ritual consummation (see Lambert 2015, 574–75).

Canonical Reciprocity

Indeed, the author of Job does not appear to be the only biblical author to share this instinct to provide a divine response to Lam 3. In Isaiah 40–55, which shares with Job a belief that divine speech can effectively console mourning (Lambert 2015, 569), the deity declares “comfort” for Jerusalem (Isa 40:1). As Jeremiah stands behind Lam 3, so Lam 3 may also stand behind Isaiah 40–55, serving as one of the models for the suffering servant (Gottwald 1954, 115–16; Tull Willey 1997, 220), and an inspiration for its words of consolation for Jerusalem (see Bier 2015, 205–7). Allusions to each of these texts in Job indicate its author intertwined his work with all three.14

Whether intentional or not, the connections between these texts inevitably draw Job into a network of texts reflecting on the destruction of Jerusalem (Léveque 1970, 385). The reciprocal relationship created between the texts by their intertextual dialogue means, on the one hand, that Job’s restoration may provide hope to the גבר and the exiled community he represents (see Lambert 2015, 569–71). On the other hand, since Job was likely written after
that national restoration had occurred, Job’s allusions to Lam 3 within the dialogue could be intended to set his continuing innocent suffering against the redemption of sinful Jerusalem (see Brandscheidt 1983, 352; Mettinger 1993, 274). This makes the contrast of culpability between Job and Jerusalem not an argument against their comparison, but precisely the rhetorical reason for Job’s allusions. And, finally, the dialogical nature of both texts, in which swirling accusations crash against rigid orthodoxy, endorses the canonical dialogue in which they participate. Far from silencing Job or the גבר, the divine voice who enters into this dialogue endorses Job’s complaints (Job 42:7). Through its inclusion of both books, the canon does the same.

Bibliography


14 See Dell 2013; Kynes 2013b; Seow 2013, 41–42.


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