



GOD AND THE SEA IN JOB 38

COLLIN R. CORNELL
PRINCETON, NJ

The book of Job is about God's relation to suffering and chaos. In any reading, the divine speeches play a crucial role in posing this vis-à-vis. After the dialogues in which Job has pled repeatedly to God for an audience (13:15, 20, 22; 31:35–37), God finally responds, beginning in chapter 38. The poetic addresses that follow brim with pictures of God's actions towards the primordial, weird, and wild components of the cosmos. Carol Newsom has written that "the key interpretive question for understanding the significance of the divine speeches has to do with the nature of the relationship established in these images between God and the symbols of the chaotic."¹ Scholarly interpretations of the divine speeches envision two overall possibilities for this relationship: God opposes chaos and claims victory over it, or God identifies with chaos as its designer and advocate.²

This article explores one poetic stanza within the first divine speech: Job 38:8–11.³ Verses 8–11 play off the common biblical and ancient Near Eastern trope of God's cosmogonic battle with the Sea.⁴ Consequently, the stanza occupies an important place in the initial divine speech because it is the first to collocate God and a symbol of chaos. As with the speeches at large, scholarly opinion is divided over whether this stanza frames God as the controlling

¹ Carol Newsom, *Book of Job: a Contest of Moral Imaginations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 243.

² Trygve Mettinger, "The God of Job: Avenger, Tyrant, or Victor?" in Leo G. Perdue and W. Clark Gilpin (eds.), *The Voice from the Whirlwind* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 39. Mettinger formulates the difference as between monistic and dualistic readings, i.e., between a God who includes both good and evil and a God who hypostatizes only the one and opposes the other.

³ The use of the poetic term "stanza" is not justified by graphic demarcation in manuscripts of Job 38, either the Aleppo or Leningrad Codices. However, most scholars agree that smaller, subordinate units are discernible within the larger whole of biblical poems on the basis of key words, distinct openings and closings, and other formulae. Cf. Wilfred G. Wilson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques* (London: T&T Clark International, 2005 [orig. JSOT Press, 1984]), 160–168.

⁴ E.g., Babylonian *Enuma Elish*, Ugaritic Baal and Yām, Pss 74, 89.

antagonist or caring proponent of the Sea. I will argue that, in continuity with the preceding stanza (vv 4–7) showcasing God’s singular power, Job 38:8–11 primarily emphasizes God’s control over the Sea. However, vv 8–11 also subtly destabilize this theme by evoking God’s care for the Sea. The stanza begins to unsteady and reimagine God’s conventional opposition to the forces of chaos, anticipating the content of the following stanzas and the second divine speech.

SHUTTING IN THE SEA (V 8)

Verse 8a highlights God’s power over and opposition to the Sea. This thesis counts the following features in its favor: a verb of constraint heads the line, the line loops thematically and grammatically into the preceding stanza about God’s unique power, and the line reverses Job’s call for chaos in chapter 3.⁵ The verb וַיִּסַּף of 8a fronts the theme of God’s containment of the Sea: most translations render this verb as “cover” or “shut up.” The verb may derive from either of two Hebrew roots, which both occur in forms identical to that of 8a elsewhere in the Bible. On the one hand, וַיִּסַּף could be the *qal* waw-consecutive⁶ of סָכַף , “to cover” or “overshadow,” as at Exod 40:21 (or cf. imperfect at Ps 91:4). The root סָכַף is related to the substantive מָסָף , a word meaning “screen” and used in the Priestly materials for the curtains in the tabernacle (Exod 27, 35). This verb also occurs in *hiphil* participle form in Judges 3:24 as a euphemism used by the servants of Eglon king of Moab to describe his relieving himself (i.e., “covering his

⁵ This article will consistently use the term “line” to refer to the smallest poetic units within the poem. The Leningrad Codex separates the stanza’s *verses* by making a gap in the middle of its column but it gives no graphic recognition to *line*-divisions, wrapping verses around columnar ends indiscriminately. However, excepting the last verse of the stanza that puts וְהָיָה יִשְׁבֹּת (textual emendation, see p 14; MT וּפְאֵרֵי שִׁית “here shall be stopped,” 38:11b) together with הַמִּיָּמִיךָ (“from your days,” 38:12a) on the line succeeding from וְלֹא תִסִּיף (“and no further,” 38:11a), the Aleppo Codex lineates 38:8–11 as in BHS, dividing each half-verse with the columnar gap. This graphemic evidence coincides with the syntactic divisions of 38:8–11, as shown, for example, by the nearly-consistent use of ו at the start of each half-verse, thereby justifying my use of “line” for these sentential groupings. Cf. F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, “‘Verse, Properly So Called’: The Line in Biblical Poetry” (*in preparation*).

⁶ Terminologically, “waw-consecutive” is not wholly satisfactory, since this form does not always follow another verb sequentially. Some have opted recently to call it simply the “*waw-yiqtol* form” (Seow) or the “consecutive preterite” (Hackett) instead of the more traditional (and misleading) “converted imperfect.” It is now widely recognized that the form derives from a **yaqtul* preterite (Anson Rainey, “The Ancient Hebrew Prefix Conjugation in the Light of Amarna Canaanite,” *Hebrew Studies* 27 [1986], 4–19). I have chosen “waw-consecutive” because of its wide currency.

feet”). The combination of סכך with ב preposition is well attested, in which case the preposition modifies the object that does the covering (e.g., the cherubim’s wings in Exod 25:20, 37:9; anger in Lam 3:43; a cloud, Job 3:44). On the other hand, וַיִּסְךְ could also be the *hiphil* waw-consecutive of סוך (also שוך) “to hedge about” or “close in,” as in Job 1:10 (הֲלֹא אֶתְּהָ שָׂכַכְתָּ), “have you not hedged him in,” i.e., protectively) and 3:23 (וַיִּסְךְ אֱלֹהִים), “God has hedged him in,” i.e., obstructively). This verb occurs also with the preposition ב in Hos 2:8 (הֲנִנִּי־שָׁךְ אֶת־דְּרָכְךָ בַּסִּירִים), “I will hedge your way in with thorns”). The root is related to words meaning “hedge” (מְסוּכָה) and “branch” (שׁוֹךְ). The evidence of the versions is ambiguous, but perhaps favors the second option; only the rabbinic Targum offers a minority report (טלל, to “cover” or “shade”; cf. Gen 19:8; Exod 25:20; Num 10:34, etc.).⁷ In either case, God’s control is the titular subject of the first line in the new stanza: God shuts in the Sea with doors.

The thematic and grammatical continuity of 8a with the preceding stanza also emboldens the concept of God’s control over the Sea in this verse. Verses 4–7 directly before 8a address a train of questions to Job, in fulfilment of YHWH’s programmatic statement in 3b (וַאֲשֶׁאֱלֶךְ). The verbal actions of each clause follow one another sequentially in describing God’s primordial building of the world (יסד in 4a, שים 5a, נטה in 5b, ירה in 6b). The vocabulary used for these deeds occurs together elsewhere, notably in Second Isaiah, where it also celebrates YHWH’s unique power.⁸ Here the rhetorical emphasis falls not only on YHWH’s singular power but also on Job’s absence from and incapacity for such acts.

That vv 8–11 function as a unit distinct from vv 4–7 is shown by the introduction of a new word in 8a (ים, Sea) which acts as

⁷ Henceforward RtgJob, whose base text is MS Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Urbina I= ט (David M. Stec, *The Text of the Targum of Job: An Introduction and Critical Edition* [AGJU, Leiden/New York: E.J. Brill, 1994]). RtgJob also includes the verb סגר, to shut, in the same line (וסגר וטלל). OG features φράσσω, “to shut, close, stop,” which translates סוך in Hos 2:8. Nonetheless, OG renders the identical form וַיִּסְךְ in Job 3:23 by συγκαλείω, to “shut or enclose,” which it also uses for Hebrew סגר in Job 3:10. OG’s translation of all the finite verbs in the stanza with 1cs represents a harmonization rather than a different *Vorlage*. 11Q10 uses the verb סוג, “hold back,” in 2ms + interrogative ה. Vulgate features *conclisit*, “he closed.”

⁸ Second Isaiah counts a total of four clustered words in common with Job 38: Isa 48:13, 51:13, 16 all have forms of the paired roots יָסַד-אַרְץ; also note the occurrence of verb + noun phrases for stretching out or establishing “the heavens” (שָׁמַיִם) in each of these verses (טפח in Isa 48:13; נטה in 51:13; נטע in 51:16). The verb נטה, “to stretch out,” in Job 38:5b also occurs in these places, Isa 44:24, 45:12, 51:13. Isa 44:13 features the conjunction of נטה with קו, “line,” as in Job 38:5b. Cf. also Prov 3:19 when YHWH in “wisdom” (חֵכְמָה, synonym of בִּינָה as in Job 38:4b) “established the earth” (יָסַד-אֶרֶץ, also in 38:4a).

object in all the following lines until 12a. The semantic range of the verbs shift from those of *construction* in vv 4–7 to *restraint* and *birth* in vv 8–11. Also, both lines of verse 11 feature actions of cessation (וְלֹא תִסִּיף “and no further”; וּפֹאֵר יִשְׁבֹּת “here shall stop”), a closural clue common in Job, e.g., 3:10, 5:16, 7:10, 39:4.⁹ Nonetheless, despite its separate integrity as a poetic unit, the verbal action of 8a continues the description from vv 4–7 of YHWH’s uniquely powerful deeds at the beginning of creation. The verbal ideas of each stanza differ: the movement of 4–7 is positive (building) and that of 8a, prohibitive (containment). Nonetheless, whereas subsequent stanzas in chapter 38 describe regular or gnomic aspects of the world (e.g., morning and dawn, death and the deep, weather and the constellations, etc.), the first two both attest unique, punctiliar actions at the world’s beginning. These two actions, of construction and constraint, are also often associated in the creation traditions of the Bible and the ancient Near East (cf. Prov 8:29 and Ps 104:9, where verbs for establishment and constraint occur within verses of each other; cf. also *Enuma Elish*). The thematic coincidence of creation and containment here in Job 38 as elsewhere strengthens the rhetorical continuity of 8a with the previous stanza: 8a, too, declaims God’s extreme and singular power, to which Job is wholly incommensurate.

The grammar of 8a also links it with the preceding stanza, as a continuation of the question asked in 6b (מִי־יָרָה). In MT, the 3ms form of וַיִּסָּד has no clear grammatical antecedent; the previous verb in 7b is also in third person, but plural. Many commentators resolve this lack of a subject by emending MT towards the Vulgate’s interrogative, *quis conclusit*, “who closed,” correcting the Hebrew to מִי סָד, “who shut.”¹⁰ On this hypothesis, the מ of the original מִי at the head of 8a was omitted by haplography with the מ closing 7b (אֱלֹהִים). The ו of MT וַיִּסָּד is then either a mistaken transcription of the ך in מִי or a compensatory addition made after the מ from the original מִי had already dropped out. This text-critical reconstruction conforms 8a to the previous stanza’s pattern of interrogative + perfect verb + adverbial clause (vv 4a, 5a, 5b, 6a, 6b).

Such grammatical echoing would reinforce the close connection of 8a with the preceding stanza. But the relation of 8a with vv 4–7 is even more direct than syntactic repetition: a better solution to the problem of the 3ms verb leaves MT unchanged, and understands וַיִּסָּד as referring back to the interrogative 3ms subject of 6b (מִי־יָרָה). This hypothesis explains the presence of the simple 3ms verbs in RtgJob, which are difficult to derive given an original

⁹ C.L. Seow, “Poetic Closure in Job: the First Cycle,” *JSOT* 34 (2010), 433–446.

¹⁰ E.g., Edouard Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (trans. Harold Knight; Nashville: T. Nelson, 1984 [orig. Paris: V. Lecoffre, 1926]), 577.

מִי in 8a. On this explanation, the Vulgate's interrogative is a coordinating insertion rather than a sign of a different Vorlage.¹¹ Leaving MT intact avoids the convolution of supposing that the ו of MT is an addition or misreading. Moreover, the pattern of interrogative + perfect verb + adverbial clause is not even throughout the poem to this point (e.g., 7b, which is a waw-consecutive related to the preceding clause, but nonetheless finite, unlike the two infinitives of 8b and 9a below), giving space to this exception. Ehrlich and Dhorme suppose that the intervening lines of 7a and 7b prevent וַיִּסְּף from referring back to מִי־יָרָה,¹² but some precedent exists for waw-consecutives referring back to מִי as their subject after intervening material, e.g., Jer 23:8. Thematically and grammatically, then, 8a relates closely to the first stanza in the chapter, whose preeminent purpose is to show God's unique power and Job's incommensurability.

Some scholars have proposed emendations to the MT of 8a that make the line describe only the Sea's birth rather than God's constraint of it. Literarily, such a text-critical reconstruction removes the theme of God's antagonism towards the Sea from the stanza's important opening line, leaving this opposition only perhaps in the last two verses (10, 11). Because this text-critical move makes God's caring and advocatory role lead the stanza, defending my thesis that vv 8–11 primarily emphasize God's control over the Sea necessitates a detailed rebuttal. Amending 8a so that it depicts the Sea's birth has the following attractions: making 8a about birthing rather than restraining the Sea creates parallelism between 8a and 8b, which relationship between lines has been consistent in the poem up to this point (and after it, e.g., the additive parallelism of vv 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11). The proposed emendations keep the two themes of birth and control separate and sequential in the stanza rather than curiously intermingled as in MT. These proposals have the additional virtue of giving the verb of 8a a proximate third person subject, namely, the Sea.

Specifically, Driver suggests a corruption of the first word (וַיִּסְּף), and reads the rest of the line as בְּהִלְדָּת or בְּלִדָּת, *hophal* infinitive construct from יָלַד, "when the sea was born."¹³ In favor

¹¹ OG "I closed/fenced in" (ἐφραξα) does not represent a real variant, but a translator's pass at a smoother reading: not only is OG periphrastic in this chapter at large (e.g., v 14), but there are other instances of changing the person from second or third to first (e.g., vv 12, 21). 8a is a case of assimilation to the series of first person verbs that closely follow (vv 9, 10, 11). Chrysostom (ἐφραξας) and 11Q10 (התסוג) testify to a 2ms verb here in 8a; 11Q10 has an interrogative ה prefix, and Chrysostom should probably be understood as a question as well. These forms also represent editorial smoothing, a conformation to the second-person question pattern of earlier in the chapter.

¹² Arnold Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur Hebräischen Bibel* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1908). Dhorme, *A Commentary*, 577.

¹³ G. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job*

of this reading, he posits the awkwardness of making “doors” the complement of the verb סוּךְ, “hedge about,” as well as the stylistic offensiveness of repeating דִּלְתָיִם again in 10b. Blommerde leaves the consonantal text intact, but reads the finite verb as וַיִּסַּךְ, *hophal* or passive *qal* from נָסַךְ, to “pour out,” and the preposition בַּ on בְּדִלְתָיִם as “ablatival”: “when the sea poured out of the two doors,”¹⁴ i.e., from the vulva.¹⁵

But the above proposals suffer from two major faults: the evidence of the ancient versions and the principle of *lectio difficilior*. The ancient translations all appear to read either Hebrew סוּךְ or סַכַּךְ (see above). Driver and Blommerde thus require that the corruption in the text have occurred not only before the consolidation of MT but before the development of the Hebrew textual traditions underlying the versions. This claims too much on the basis of only stylistic evidences. Secondly, the juxtaposition of the Sea’s containment (8a) with its exit (8b) in the same verse is a more complex reading than a verse whose two halves describe the same event of the Sea’s prurption, especially given the poem’s precedent of additive parallelism.

Other more specific problems discredit these emendations: Driver leaves the corruption of וַיִּסַּךְ at the head of the clause unexplained. His substitution of בְּהִלָּדָתָם or בְּלִדָתָם for בְּדִלְתָיִם requires metathesis as well as an implausible scribal deletion of הֵ or an unattested collapse of the causative הֵ into the בַּ preposition.¹⁶ He alleges that repetition such as that of דִּלְתָיִם both in 8a and in 10b is stylistically offensive, but this is untrue of Job and this chapter (cf. repetition of רִשְׁעִים in 13b and 15; of שְׁעָרַי in 17; דְּרָךְ in 24, 25). As for Blommerde’s case, the verb נָסַךְ that Blommerde reads for וַיִּסַּךְ typically describes sacrificial offerings, libations, or metallic artwork and never birth as here.¹⁷ Furthermore, Blommerde’s reading requires “ablatival” בַּ (“from the double doors”). Ugaritic literature helped scholars to see the presence of this usage in biblical Hebrew,¹⁸ and it is possibly attested, if rarely,

(Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1921), 299. Cf. also H. Bauer and P. Leander, *Historische Grammatik der Hebräischen Sprache des Alten Testaments* (Halle an der Saale: Niemeyer, 1922), 379.

¹⁴ A. Blommerde, *Northwest Semitic Grammar and Job* (Rome: Pontifical Bible Institute, 1969), 133.

¹⁵ As in Fuchs’ translation, “aus den Toren (des Mutterleibes).” Gisela Fuchs, *Mythos und Hiobdichtung: Aufnahme und Umdeutung Altorientalischer Vorstellungen* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1993), 194.

¹⁶ Hebrew verbs whose infinitive construct forms begin with הֵ (*niphāl*, *hiphīl*, *hophal*, and *hithpael*) do not syncopate after the בַּ preposition. Cf. Lev 26:43 for the only (other) example in the Hebrew Bible of a *hophal* infinitive construct with the בַּ preposition—where the הֵ does not drop out.

¹⁷ G. Fuchs, *Mythos*, 195.

¹⁸ Dennis Pardee, “The Preposition in Ugaritic,” *UF* 8 (1976), 215–322.

in Job.¹⁹ Nonetheless, “ablatival” ב is never used with דָּלַת, but, in all other biblical cases, the meaning of this preposition with this noun is instrumental or locative (e.g., Deut 15:17; Judg 16:3; 2 Kgs 6:32, 12:9). On the other hand, the two verses in which מִן occurs before the dual of doors (דְּלֵתַי) and in concert with the verb יָצָא (Josh 2:19; Judg 11:31) show that the sense Blommerde proposes for v. 8a (“went out from the doors”) was grammatically available to the Joban poet in more conventional Hebrew. In the end, the most plausible reading of 8a shows God shutting in the Sea and not the Sea’s birth.

8a highlights God’s power over and opposition to the Sea by fronting a verb of containment, by linking thematically and grammatically into the preceding stanza about God’s primordial strength, and, lastly, by countering Job’s curse in chapter 3. A web of lexemes holds Job 3 and 38 together, indicating that the first divine speech should be read intentionally against the first unit of the dialogues. Where Job calls for darkness (forms of חָשֶׁךְ in 3:4, 5, 9) to seize the day of his birth, God accuses Job of causing darkness himself (חָשֶׁךְ in 38:2). Where Job wishes that the “stars of its morning” (בּוֹכְבֵי נֶשֶׁפֹּ) (3:9) would blacken out, God points to their celebration over God’s work of establishing the cosmos (בּוֹכְבֵי בִקְרָה, 38:7). Where Job curses the night of his conception for not shutting the doors of his womb (דְּלֵתַי בְּטֶנִי) but releasing him to trouble, God claims to have shut in the Sea with doors (בְּדֵלְתַיִם, 38:8a). Job in ch 3 assumes the Sea as God’s foe: he calls for those who curse the Sea to curse also this night (3:8a).²⁰ The Sea is, by default, a monstrous chaos-being, and Job directs some of the opposition and horror due it towards the night of his birth. In 7:12 he also presumes the Sea as the object of God’s opposition.²¹ While different verbs describe the night “shutting” (סָגַר) the doors of the womb in 3:10a and God “shutting in” (סָכַד or סוּד) the Sea with doors in 38:8a, their range of meaning is so similar that OG

¹⁹ Nahum Sarna proposes 4:21, 7:14, 20:20. “Interchange of Prepositions *Beth* and *Min*,” *JBL* 78 (1959), 315.

²⁰ C.L. Seow, “Orthography, Textual Criticism, and the Poetry of Job,” *JBL* 130 (2011), 74.

²¹ On Blommerde’s hypothesis, explained above, the double doors in 38:8a, as in 3:10a, refer to the vulva from which the Sea emerged. Blommerde then imagines that God responds to Job by saying, in effect, “not only did I not shut the doors of your womb, but when my chaos-opponent the Sea emerged from the doors of *its* womb, I was present to care for it (v 9).” God does not reverse Job’s curse, but strangely confirms Job’s request for the ascendancy of chaos by disclosing God’s collusion with the wild, unholy powers that Job invokes. However, literary considerations tell against this reading: introducing God’s solidarity with the Sea so soon after God’s confrontative first address (38:2, 3) and speech about establishing the ordered world (vv 4–7) would be both sudden and radical. This article proposes a more graded and subtle movement away from the conventional opposition of God and chaos.

translates with the same verb (*συγκλείω*) both in 3:10 and also in 3:23, which latter verse features the exact same Hebrew verb form as in 38:8a (גִּיחַ). God in 38:8a thus rebuts Job by showing God's decisive power over the uncontrolled forces of chaos and death. Though the stanza as a whole (and even the following line) will subtly reframe God's relation to chaos, at least for this first line the poem upholds the conventional antagonism of God and Sea.

Verse 8b describes the Sea's gushing forth from the womb. This line is important for this article's thesis about God's control (and care for) the Sea because it introduces the Sea's birth: God's shutting in the Sea with doors (8a) occurs not in its adulthood but at the time of its emergence from the womb (8b). This line constitutes the beginning of the poem's reimagining of God's relation to chaos and a radical reformulation of the *Chaoskampf* tradition: the Sea is no powerful opponent and rival, but a newborn infant, a quintessentially dependent and helpless being. By introducing the Sea's birth, 8b sets up for the next and even more subversive event of verse 9 (God's swaddling). However, casting the Sea as an infant does not straightforwardly empty the Sea of its usual dramatic or threatening ambience, because the Sea "gushes forth" (גִּיחַ), a verb implying sudden and aggressive expulsion, and for which both natal and mythical parallels exist.²²

Besides recasting the Sea as an infant, 8b also subtly undercuts the dynamic of God's antagonistic control over the Sea in 8a by juxtaposing it against one of breaching (8b). The verse stages one action and then subtly defuses it by describing its contrary: God fences in the Sea – when it gushes out! The contrast in vowel quality (at least in the MT's Tiberian Hebrew) of the stressed syllables reinforces the semantic transition between the lines: open vowels punctuate God's shutting in the Sea in 8a and *i/e* sounds the Sea's rushing forth from the womb in 8b.²³

However, the contrast between the two lines is only on the thematic level: neither envisioning the Sea as a newborn nor describing its breaching alongside its containment overtly correct the first, fronted motif of God's powerful control over chaos. Confinement and breaching in 8b do not grammatically contrast with one another: rather, the syntax of 8b indicates concomitance, and the juxtaposition between lines is only conceptual. A few Greek versions read infinitive בְּגִיחוֹ and אֲצִי sequentially. OG

²² Although *Masora parva* marks בְּגִיחוֹ as a *hapax legomenon*, its meaning as a *qal* infinitive construct + 3ms (subject) suffix from the verb גִּיחַ, to "burst forth," is clear (cf. *hiphil* in Judg 20:33 to describe *ambush*). The same verb occurs in *qal* in Ezek 32:2, where its subject is compared with תַּנִּינִים, "dragons," which burst forth בְּגִיחוֹתֵיךָ, "in your rivers." Dan 7:2 also associate this verb with waters, and Ps 22:10 links it with birth: מִבֶּטֶן, "from the womb," occurs directly after the verb.

²³ As such, the line also echoes the contrasting but paired movements of Job 1:10, where the satan observes how God has Job "fenced in" (שָׁכַתָּ), same verb as in 8a) but his wealth (מִקְנֵהוּ) overflows (פָּרַץ).

translates בְּגִיחַ with ἐμαιμασσειν, a verb which could describe the actual bursting forth (as in Hebrew) as well as the “quivering with eagerness” before birth (which אֵץ at the end of the line then describes). Aquila renders בְּגִיחַ with ἐν τῷ παλαίειν, “wrestling,” perhaps referring to prenatal sloshing around (cf. Mic 4:10). However, it is more likely that, as in verse 7a, the infinitive frames the time of the clause before it: “he shut in the Sea with doors, when it gushed out.” As in 7b, the subsequent finite verb אֵץ describes the same action as the preceding infinitive (cf. Job 6:17 for a similar construction).²⁴

In sum, 8b contrasts against God’s powerful control over the Sea in 8a by casting the Sea as a newborn infant and by showing the Sea rushing out. Nonetheless, the Sea does not wholly lose its threatening aspect, as the verb for its expulsion marks. Finally, the undetermined nature of the womb from which the Sea came adds an enigmatic or ominous dimension to the spare scene the line renders of its birth. The versions expand Hebrew מְרֶחֶם, “from the womb,” seeking to give it some bearings: OG κοιλίας μητρός, “from the mother’s womb,” RtgJob מן תהומא ממן רחמא, “from the deep, from the the womb,” 11Q10 מן רחם תהומא, “from the womb of the deep.”²⁵ However, the MT’s lack of specificity regarding from whose womb the Sea emerges echoes the indeterminacy of Job’s own in 3:10 (“my womb”). The omission of “mother” in both passages connects them, and perhaps serves to point up the conflict at the book’s center over who is responsible for the world’s moral morass. Who (metaphorically) “gives birth” to the sufferer and to chaos?²⁶

SWADDLING THE SEA (V 9)

Verse 9 is pivotal in the first divine speech. Describing the Sea as a newborn and thematically contrasting confinement with breaching in verse 8 subtly reconstitute the relation between God and the Sea. The imagery of verse 9 sharpens and heightens this reframing, posing God not as an opponent of the Sea but as caretaker to its newborn infancy. If God’s relation to the baby Sea still remained ambiguous in v 8, v 9 depicts God exercising an unmistakably maternal role towards the Sea by giving it clothing. Although שִׁים and לְבוּשׁ do not occur together elsewhere in the

²⁴ Ernst Jenni, *Die Hebräischen Präpositionen, Bd 1* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1992), 316–327.

²⁵ Joseph Ziegler, *Job, Septuaginta* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982). David Shepherd, *Targum and Translation: A Reconsideration of the Qumran Aramaic Version of Job*, *Studia Semitica Neerlandica*, (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2004). Michael Sokoloff, *The Targum to Job from Qumran Cave XI* (Jerusalem: Bar-Ilan Univ., 1974).

²⁶ Incidentally, the word “mother” occurs infrequently in Job, and its connotation is ambiguous; it is associated with death (1:21, 17:14) or punishment (24:20).

Bible, their meaning here is clear and the versions translate the first line consistently.²⁷ Similarly, הַתְּלָה in 9b is a *hapax legomenon*, but its meaning here (“swaddling band”) is transparent because the same verbal root occurs in a similar context in Ezekiel²⁸ and a similar register obtains in postbiblical Hebrew.²⁹

Some scholars have used comparative evidence to interpret v 9 as a restatement of God’s restraint of the Sea in 8a by a different trope. Swaddling, they argue, is in v 9 an act of control over a violent, monstrous infant, as in KTU 1.12³⁰ and in Mandaean Right Ginza.³¹ However, the Ugaritic text is far too fragmentary to cite as good evidence for this case.³² Besides the late date of the Ginza that makes comparison against Job tenuous,³³ this interpretation of

²⁷ 11Q10 has בְּשׂוֹת עֲנַנִּים לְבוֹשׁ, “when [I] set clouds for its clothing.” OG ἐθέμην, “I place/put,” and ἀμφιάσιν, “garments”; RtgJob בשׂוֹאוֹתֵי עֲנַנִּים כְּסוֹתֶיהָ, “when I appointed clouds its covering”; Vulgate *ponerem nubem vestimentum*, “I made a cloud the garment.”

²⁸ Ezekiel uses the same root in *pual* and *hophal* in 16:4 to describe the scene of an infant’s care; in 30:21 he uses the root substantively to describe a bandage applied to a wound of war.

²⁹ G. Fuchs, *Mythos*, 194. But cf. Aquila and Theodotion who translate by Greek πλάνησις, “wanderer,” apparently misreading for Hebrew מְהַתְּלוֹת, which OG translates by the same Greek word πλάνησις in Isa 30:10.

³⁰ Found in 1930, *beige terre*. Andree Herdner, *Corpus des Tablettes en Cunéiformes Alphabétiques Découvertes à Ras Shamra-Ugarit de 1929 à 1939* (Paris Imprimerie Nationale, 1963). In this Ugaritic fragment, El invents a plan to defeat his enemy Baal: he sends two divine handmaidens out into the wilderness to give birth to creatures called Eaters (*aklm*) and Devourers (*qmm*) which have humps like buffalo and horns like bulls. El instructs these maidens to take *hilk*, “your swaddling” (cognate root with Job 38:9).

³¹ In this esoteric text, the first person speaker is a god of light, Hibil-Ziwa, who describes the birth of Ur, a Lord of Darkness, to his mother Ruha. After Ur’s birth, Ruha swaddles Ur for three hundred and sixty thousand years; afterwards, Ur falls into the (cosmic) dark waters. Hibil-Ziwa sees that Ur will grow into a giant “more than the greatest of giants,” and so contains him inside of seven golden walls. W. Brandt (ed.) *Ginzā, Mandäische Schriften* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1893).

³² Both Pope and Fuchs draw on this text while discussing the motif of restraining a violent infant, but hesitate to invoke it directly to support their reading of swaddling as restraint in v 9 because of its fragmentary character. Marvin H. Pope, *Job*, 3d ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965), 293; G. Fuchs, *Mythos*, 198; Dirk Kinet, *Ugarit, Geschichte und Kultur Einer Stadt in der Umwelt Des Alten Testaments*, Stuttgartarter Bibelstudien (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1981), 84.

³³ Fuchs herself admits the chronological problems with using the Mandaean scriptures for reading Job (*Mythos*, 49). The Right Ginza was collected in the second half of the 7th c. BCE, though its traditions may date from much longer before its literary codification. Sinasi Gunduz, *The Knowledge of Life: the Origins and Early History of the Mandaeans and their Relation to the Sabians of the Qur’an and to the Harranians*

the swaddling, repeated since Gunkel, has misconstrued the Mandaean text.³⁴ The wrapping of the monstrous infant Ur-Ziwa by his mother Ruha is not antagonistic. Ruha is also a kind of monster, and she has eagerly anticipated the birth of her son.³⁵ Ur-Ziwa's restraint is effected later by another party, namely, the Ginza's narrator. God's act of swaddling the Sea in v 9 retains its caring, maternal aspect and its contrast against God's powerful control in v 8.

Other scholars have argued that v 9 represents an ironic radicalization and not a subversion of the traditional *Chaoskampf* motif. The point of the swaddling imagery is not to communicate God's advocacy for the Sea, God's traditional opponent, but to abase and diminish the Sea in comparison with God's superabundant power.³⁶ Not only is the Sea unequal to God in martial combat; to God it is only a helpless baby!³⁷ However, this interpretation overlooks the important datum of the material constituting the swaddling clothes. The scene is not one of straightforward maternal care with the swaddling as a neutral set piece. Rather, the clothing given to the infant Sea is of a numinous nature: "cloud" (עָנָן) and "thick darkness" (עֲרֶפֶל).

These words (עָנָן and עֲרֶפֶל) occur elsewhere in Job: in 26:8, Job appeals to the way God binds up water inside the clouds (עָנָן) as one in a litany of terrifying mysteries characteristic of God, Job's overweening adversary (cf. similarly in 37:11, 15). עֲרֶפֶל occurs in 22:13, when Eliphaz describes the deep darkness and thick cloud surrounding God in God's transcendence. Elsewhere in the Bible, these two words occur directly together, theophanically in Deuteronomy (4:11, 5:22; cf. also Ps 97:2) or in reference to a day of judgment in some prophets (Ezek 34:12; Joel 2:2; Zeph 1:15). Another word for cloud, עָב, features in different ways throughout Job to evoke God's might and mystery (20:6, 22:14, 36:29, 37:16).

Verse 9 thus not only stages God as the Sea's caretaker rather than its jailer – but the clothing within which God wraps the Sea adds a further subversive dimension to the scene. God shrouds the Sea in numinous cloud, which elsewhere accompanies God's own presence and arrival. In this way, v 9 anticipates the odd *communicatio idiomatum* that characterizes the great creatures of the second divine speech, e.g., God's exultation over their power and greatness which otherwise only God possesses (40:16, 41:7a, 34).³⁸ Verse 9 gives a charged and ambivalent scene: God caring for the newborn Sea by clothing it in numinous cloud.

(Oxford: Oxford, 1994), 55.

³⁴ H. Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos: Eine Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen 1 und Ap Job 12* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895), 92.

³⁵ W. Brandt, *Ginza*, 168.

³⁶ T. Mettinger, "God," 41.

³⁷Cf. Ps 104:26 where Leviathan is portrayed as God's plaything.

³⁸ C. Newsom, *Book of Job*, 248.

SETTING LIMITS (VV 10 AND 11)

The last two verses of the stanza belong together: by different ways they both enunciate the same theme, namely, God's containment of the Sea. In the first line, God, now speaking in first person,³⁹ claims, "I have set my boundary⁴⁰ on it (the Sea) / and I have placed a bar and doors (on it)." The meaning of the second line also clearly comprises God's direct address of the Sea to command its limitation. The MT verb **וַאֲשַׁבֵּר** at the head of v 10 has been variously emended, because the usual denotation of **שָׁבַר**, "to break," does not make sense here.⁴¹ Over against such text-critical alternatives, the versions understood the line in roughly similar ways, all pertaining to God's constraint of the Sea: OG **ἐθέμεν**, "I placed bounds for it," Vulgate *circumdedi* "I set my bounds," RtgJob **פִּשְׁקַת**, "I placed bounds upon it." Notably, the Arabic cognate *tabara*, "to destroy, ruin," is also used in the sense of "to limit, confine."⁴² Apparently then **שָׁבַר חֶק** is an idiom for setting a boundary, parallel to the expression in Prov 8:29, also applied to the Sea (**שִׁים חֶק**).⁴³

Verse 10b also and more concretely bespeaks God's restraint of the Sea, repeating the double doors from 8a. Scholars often compare the bar and door of Job 38:10b with a passage from the Babylonian creation epic, *Enuma Elish*, in which Marduk sets a bar and guard over the cloven body of Tiamat, the primordial monster goddess of the ocean, lest "her waters escape."⁴⁴ These verses also represent a different form of a motif present elsewhere in the Bible, namely, that of God's powerful circumscription of the waters at creation (Jer 5:22; Prov 8:29; Ps 104:9; even Gen 1).

³⁹ 11Q10 has **וַתִּשׂוּהוּ** "and do you (2ms) place boundaries on it." However, this is explicable in terms of its general conformation of all the lines in the stanza to the 2ms interrogative form ("will you hold back the Sea," v. 8; "do you place boundaries," v. 10, "did you say," v. 11).

⁴⁰ The versions go slightly different directions regarding the number and pronominal possessive of **חֶק**, "boundary," which elsewhere in Job means "decree" (23:4) or "limit" (14:5, 13; 28:26). OG has **ὄρια**, boundaries; Vulgate *terminis meis*, "my boundaries"; RtgJob **גִּזְרֹתַי**, "my decree(s)," and 11Q10 **תְּחֻמֵּיךָ**, "boundaries." The mixed evidence for plural or singular is explicable in terms of an unpointed *Vorlage*. I understand the MT's suffix here as 1cs subjective, rather than a 3ms as Blommerde, Fohrer, et al.

⁴¹ Instead of MT **וַאֲשַׁבֵּר**, critics posit **אָשִׁית** "I placed" (Merx, Wright), **אָסַקְרָה** "I closed" (Hoffman), **אָסַגְרָה** "I closed" (Fohrer), **אָסַקְרָה** "I inscribed" (Beer), and **אָשַׁמְרָה** "I kept" (Ehrlich), among others.

⁴² Edward Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London Edinburgh, Williams and Norgate, 1863–93), 330.

⁴³ Gerhard Liedke, *Gestalt und Bezeichnung Alttestamentlicher Rechtsätze: Eine Formsgeschichtlich-terminologische Studien* (WMANT 39 Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1971), 163.

⁴⁴ ANET, 67, line 140.

Verse 11 changes to direct speech, addressed to the Sea. This rhetorical move anticipates the (presumably verbal) “command” of the following verse (12a) and also echoes traditions of God’s powerful voice found elsewhere in the Bible (cf. Gen 1; also Ps 24, 46:6). Ending the stanza with direct speech points up God’s power: over against the *Chaoskampf* tradition, God’s words suffice where other gods toil. The two lines of the verse feature significant symmetry, both cascading from the prominently fronted פה, “here,” at the start of each clause. At least in the Tiberian Hebrew of the MT, a strong assonance characterizes the whole verse. The repeated *ō/ō* lends the verse a driving forward movement, and perhaps also onomatopoeically evokes the sound of the Sea’s own waves (פִּלְיָא), whose reach God here determines.

Verse 11 thus ends the stanza by demonstrating God’s power over the Sea, but the tone of the line is not monochromatic. Its direct speech and its use of “pride”-language subtly continue the reframing of the relationship between God and Sea that verse 9 more vividly effected. The direct speech of v 11 is unique within the divine speeches. The divine speeches themselves in 38–41 constitute protracted direct speeches to Job, but they do not elsewhere feature a smaller, embedded address as here. Excepting the prose prologue in which YHWH speaks with the satan (1:7, 8, 12, 2:2, 3, 6) and 11:5 where Job wishes that God would speak, the book of Job is otherwise conspicuously empty of divine speech. Notably, then, God’s few speeches in Job are directed towards personal beings: the satan and Job. Over against the stanza’s other lines in which the Sea is an object of God’s constraint, the direct speech in v 11 perpetuates the Sea’s personal aspect, which v 8b began with the idea of birth and v 9 emphasized by the action of swaddling. This personal note complicates and softens the dynamic of God’s containment.

Some scholars cite the personal color of the direct speech as a warrant for construing the last two verses of the stanza as an extension of the parental tropes begun in 8b and continued in v 9. This interpretation also adduces the temporal linearity of the poem: just as the first stanza follows a sequence, so also in vv 8–11, birth (v 8b) precedes swaddling (v 9). The next life-stage event in the growth of the Sea would be toddlerhood or perhaps young adulthood, described in vv 10 and 11. So Dhorme: “the sea has been depicted as a new-borne babe issuing from the maternal womb and covered with swaddling bands. It is going to become an adult capable of receiving commands and of becoming subject to a law.”⁴⁵ Habel follows a similar tack: “this violent chaos monster is but an infant...wrapped in baby clothes, placed in a playpen [*sic*], and told to stay in its place.”⁴⁶ However, these interpretations

⁴⁵ E. Dhorme, *Commentary*, 578.

⁴⁶ Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (Philadelphia : Westminster Press, 1985), 538.

overstate the effect of the line's personal tonality and defy the syntax of the stanza, which is not sequential: rather, after the subordinate interlude of vv 8b–9 describing the time of the action in 8a, vv 10, 11 by their finite verbs resume the main action of the Sea's restraint.

The second line (11b) of the stanza's last verse commands the Sea's "proud waves" to stop. This "pride" language, as will be seen, destabilizes the emphasis on God's opposition to the Sea. This line as it stands in MT is hardly coherent, though two versions support the verb **שׁית**, to place. One manuscript [ב] of RtgJob translates **תשׁוי**, "you will place,"⁴⁷ and Symmachus with **τετάχθω τό ἔπαρμα** "the height (of your waves) will be set" (cf. Symmachus Job 24:25 and 37:15, translating the semantically similar **שׁים**). Other versions indicate a different *Vorlage*. OG reads **συντριβήσεται** "it will be broken," and Vulgate *confringes*, "you will break." Some commentators propose prefixed or infixed forms of **שבר**, "to break," to accommodate the latter data, and then must assert that the final **ר** dropped out, perhaps because of its visual similarity to the following **ב** in Paleo-Hebrew script. But a simpler hypothesis posits the *qal* or *niphal* of **שבת**, "to stop," which OG also renders with **συντριβω** (Ezek 6:6). **זָאוֹן**, "pride," is the subject of *niphal* **שבת** in Ezek 30:18 (cf. also Ezek 7:24 and Isa 11:13). This emendation assumes only a metathesis of final **ת** and the initial **ב** on **זָאוֹן**.⁴⁸

The word **זָאוֹן** literally pertains to height, and some commentators take it in this straightforward sense: God commands the restraint of the Sea's physically towering, threatening surf.⁴⁹ Others understand the noun in its common metaphorical meaning of exaltation, majesty. When the word is attributed to God in the Bible, its connotation is positive (cf. Exod 15:7; Isa 24:14; Mic 5:4). But as used with humans, peoples, cities, **זָאוֹן** often refers to inordinate glory, unlawful power, and arrogance (cf. Lev 26:19; Jer 13:9; Ezek 16:56; Zech 9:6, etc.). Interpreters usually understand the "pride" of the Sea's waves in 11b in this second way: in keeping with the *Chaoskampf* tradition, God checks and names the illegitimate and rival strength of the Sea.

However, the weight of **זָאוֹן** in 11b is far more ambiguous, anticipating the ambiguity of God's attitude towards the two great creatures of the second divine speech. Assuming that **זָאוֹן** bears a penumbra of haughtiness would make it unique in the stanza. Although I have argued that the stanza primarily describes God's

⁴⁷ Sally L. Gold, "Understanding the Book of Job: 11Q10, the Peshitta and the Rabbinic Targum: Illustrations From a Synoptic Analysis of Job 37-39." (DPhil. diss., University of Oxford 2007), 151.

⁴⁸ RtgJob **יתייבש**, "will dry up," misreads for some form of Hebrew **יבש**, "to dry up."

⁴⁹ E.g., G. Fuchs, *Mythos*, 200; G. Fohrer, *Das Buch Hiob* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus G. Mohn, 1963), 487.

containment of the Sea, nowhere else in vv 8–11 does the poem attribute any moral shortcomings to the Sea – or to any other creatures in the first divine speech. In fact, over against the usual *Chaoskampf* motif of the Sea as a villainous power, this stanza has pictured it as a newborn infant, effectively neutralizing its moral status. Moreover, the bearing of “pride/height” vocabulary is far from obvious in the divine speeches at large: God does not necessarily condemn the grandness of other beings.⁵⁰ The first stanza after the introductory formula in the second divine speech shows God customarily assuming majesty (יָסַד) but abasing the “proud” amongst humankind (גָּבַהּ, 40:11b, 12a). But then the remainder of the second divine speech defies this basic dynamic of God’s opposition to the strength and excellence of possible challengers: the rest of the poem does not portray God humiliating competitors, but celebrating the vast power (even perhaps “pride,” גָּבַהּ, in 41:7a) of two mythical creatures. In view of this, God’s use of יָסַד to describe the Sea’s waves probably encompasses their physical greatness – but without a clearly condemnatory tone.

In sum, I have argued that the stanza of Job 38:8–11 primarily emphasizes God’s powerful control over the Sea, in continuity with the preceding poetic unit whose theme is God’s singular power and Job’s incommensurability. However, vv 8–11 also begin subtly reframing God’s conventional antagonism towards the Sea, preliminary to the following stanzas and the second divine speech that realize this reimagination more vividly. The stanza affirms God’s antagonistic power over the Sea by fronting a verb of constraint in its first line, looping thematically and grammatically into the previous stanza, and ending with God physically establishing and verbally commanding the Sea’s limitation. The stanza reframes God’s relation to the Sea by recasting the Sea as a helpless newborn, contrasting its rushing out with its containment, depicting God swaddling it, addressing it personally, and anticipating the ambiguous “pride”-language of the second divine speech.

⁵⁰ C. Newsom, *Book of Job*, 248.