

# The KJV Translation of the Old Testament: The Case of Job

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## 1. *Phrases that have entered the English language*

Perhaps surprisingly, the KJV of Job has provided only two phrases that may safely be said to have ‘entered the English language’:

Escaped by the skin of my teeth (19:19)

The root of the matter (19:28)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, in both cases, though the KJV’s literal translation is unexceptionable, the original meaning has been misunderstood. ‘The root of the matter’ is generally used today to mean the essential or inner part of something, the core,<sup>1</sup> but roots are more properly the origin of things than their essence. The friends whom Job imagines saying ‘the root of the matter is in him’ are meaning that Job is the cause of his own suffering; it would make no sense to say that the essence of Job’s suffering lies in himself.

As for the ‘skin of the teeth’, we should take into view the whole sentence, since it is only in the light of the first colon that the second can be understood at all:

My bone cleaueth to my skinne, and to my flesh, and I am escaped with the skinne of my teeth (19:19).

That Job’s bones should cleave to his flesh would seem quite satisfactory, anatomically. But ‘cleaving’ (Heb. *dābaq*) is not used of two things sticking together, but of one thing sticking to or clinging to another, the weaker to the stronger or the lesser to the greater, Ruth to Naomi (Ruth 1:14), a virulent skin disease to Gehazi (2 Kgs 5:27), the tongue to the roof of the mouth (Job 29:10). An interesting play on the sense of the verb is made at 2 Sam. 23:10 where the warrior Eleazar keeps on smiting the Philistines ‘vntill his hand was wearie, and his hand claue vnto the sword’; usually it would be the sword that would ‘cleave’ to one’s hand, not the hand to the sword, but in the warrior’s manic or supernaturally heightened state the hand becomes an appendage to the sword!

In a healthy body, the flesh and skin cling to, or hang on, the bones, the framework of the body. But Job’s bones are so weakened, which means to say, he is so lacking in psychic energy, that they cannot support his flesh, but must themselves be supported by it. It is an image of the decay of vigour. Parallel to that is his sense that he is ‘escaped with the skin of his teeth’, which is, he has survived but he has lost everything. He has no skin left on him apart from the skin of his teeth, which we know is no skin at all, for he has been flayed alive, punished by beating that has damaged and stripped off his skin.<sup>2</sup>

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1 ‘An essential part or element; core’ (*Webster’s II: New World Dictionary* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2005], p. 985b).

<sup>2</sup> We might compare the tyrannical rulers of Mic. 3.3 who like butchers ‘flay (*pāšaq*) or ‘tear off’ (*gāzal*) the skin from the bodies of the people (Wyclif has the phrase, ‘Thus, as god seiþ of tyrauntis, þei taken here skyn fro þe bak, & eten & drynkyn mennus blood’ [‘Of Prelates’,

In modern English, to escape with the skin of one's teeth is to have a genuine, though narrow, escape. For Job, it is no escape at all, no more than a Pyrrhic victory is a victory. And by the way, it is 'with' the skin of the teeth (as the KJV rightly has, following the Geneva Bible), not 'by' the skin of the teeth (as RV, ASV, RSV, NRSV), which is unintelligible.<sup>3</sup> Still less is it:

NAB I have escaped with my flesh between my teeth  
JB my bones stick out like teeth (sim. NJB)  
NEB, REB and I gnaw my under-lip with my teeth.<sup>4</sup>  
TEV My skin hangs loose on my bones; I have barely escaped with my life.

## 2. Phrases familiar to a literate audience

Few though the phrases may be that have come into ordinary English usage from KJV Job, there are many phrases and sentences that are familiar to very many educated speakers of the language. One can easily think of examples:

Man that is borne of a woman, is of few dayes, and full of trouble (14:1).  
Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward (5:7).

The price of wisdom is above rubies (28:18).  
Canst thou bind, the sweet influences of Pleiades? (38:31)  
Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither (1:21).  
Hast thou not poured me out as milk, and curdled me like cheese? (10:10).

Curse God, and die (2:9).  
Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life (2:4).  
Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one (14:4).

A land of darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness (10:22).  
There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest (3:17).  
My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle (7:6).

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Chap. 9, in *The English Works of Wyclif* [London: Trübner & Co., 1880], p. 73). For further treatment of the Job passages discussed in this paper, see my commentary: *Job 1–20* (Word Biblical Commentary, 17; Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1989); *Job 21–37* (Word Biblical Commentary, 18A; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006); *Job 38–42* (Word Biblical Commentary, 18B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> 'By the skin of one's teeth' is the more popular form; Google has 1,390,000 hits for 'by the skin of his teeth' as against 1,110,00 for 'with', and 127,00 hits for 'by the skin of my teeth' as against 87,500 for 'with'.

<sup>4</sup> This translation depends on the proposal of G.R. Driver, 'Problems in the Hebrew Text of Job', in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East, Presented to Professor Harold Henry Rowley ... in Celebration of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (VTSup, 3; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1955), pp. 72-93 (80-81), that 'ôr is not 'skin' but a homonym (see David J.A. Clines [ed.], *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, VII (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2001, p. 318b), and that ml̄t is not 'escape' but a byform of mrt̄ 'make smooth, rub' (see David J.A. Clines [ed.], *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, VI (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001, p. 299b [the *Dictionary* is hereafter referred to as *DCH*]).

No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you (12:2).  
But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee (12:7).

Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him (13:5).  
If a man die, shall he live again? (14:14).

Every one of these deserves a scrutiny, but I will take just the first. Considering the KJV's predecessors<sup>5</sup> for 14:1,

WYCLIF (c. 1395) A man is borun of a womman, and lyueth schort tyme, and is fillid with many wretchidnessis.

COVERDALE (1535) Man that is borne of a woman, hath but a shorte tyme to lyue, and is full of dyuerse miseries.

GENEVA (1560) Man that is borne of woman, is of short continuance, and full of trouble.

BISHOPS' BIBLE (1568) Man that is borne of woman, hath but a short time to lyue, and is full of miserie.

KJV's 'Man that is borne of a woman, is of few dayes, and full of trouble' is a triumph, pointed, gnomic, and in tune with the lapidary Hebrew, which it renders literally (except for *qəṣar yāmîm*, which is 'short of days'). 'Fillid with many wretchidnessis', 'of short continuance' and 'full of dyuerse miseries' are all very fine in their way, but the simplicity of the KJV outdoes them all.

The punctuation is interesting and important. As is well known, Elizabethan punctuation marks were speed regulators, and represented the pauses a reader might make in the reading rather than reflecting our modern ideas of grammatical logic<sup>6</sup>; even today's readers are likely to make a short pause after 'woman' even though we would not in a written text suffer a comma to intervene between a subject and its verb. But consider what happened when the ASV revision was published in 1901:

ASV Man, that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble.

We are now in the world of modern punctuation; the insertion of a comma after 'man' (not in the RV of 1885, of which the ASV was a revision) sadly changes the clause that follows from a defining to a descriptive clause.<sup>7</sup> In the KJV the defining clause makes the reader wonder, if only for an instant, 'Are there any humans not born of a woman?', and as well, 'Is being born of a *woman* the problem?'; the ASV turns that reader-involving phrasing into a banal and otiose clause. It appears, incidentally, that it was in April 1611 that *Macbeth* was first performed on the London stage, its plot hinging on the singular case of a man not born of woman! (IV.1.86; 5.7.3).

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<sup>5</sup> For texts of Wyclif, Coverdale, the Bishops' Bible and the Geneva Bible, I have used [www.studylight.org](http://www.studylight.org). For the text of the KJV in the original spelling, I used [www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/1611-Bible/](http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/1611-Bible/).

<sup>6</sup> Whether or not it was the printer who was in most cases responsible for the punctuation of a text, as Edwin J. Howard, 'The Printer and Elizabethan Punctuation', *Studies in Philology* 27 (1930), pp. 220-29.

<sup>7</sup> Cf., for example, Albert Charles Hamilton, 'Punctuation', in *The Spenser Encyclopedia* (ed. A.C. Hamilton; London: Routledge, 1990), p. 570.

Of course today we cannot allow the gender-exclusive word ‘man’ to stand, but it is a real loss to forego the assonance of ‘man’ and woman’ (the Hebrew itself had no assonance, since the terms were *‘ādām* and *‘iššā*), and the resulting modern translations are uniformly clunky:

NJB a human being, born of woman, whose life is short but full of trouble.

REB Every being born of woman is short-lived and full of trouble.

NIV Mortals, born of woman, are of few days and full of trouble.

### 3. *Well-known passages*

Now I will look at some well-known Joban passages in the KJV in the light of its predecessors and successors.

#### a. *Job 19:23-27*

*Oh that my wordes were now written, oh that they were printed in a booke!* (v. 23). It may seem strange, when printing was little more than 150 years old, that the KJV translators should have imagined that Job could have had his words printed in a book! No other Bible version, before or after the KJV, has the phrase. The KJV was struggling with the Hebrew, which has Job wishing his words could be ‘engraved’ or ‘inscribed’ (*ḥāqāq*) in a *sēper*, traditionally translated ‘book’, but more properly ‘document’ or ‘writing’. But you don’t ‘engrave’ things in written documents, and the KJV rightly looked for a word that conveyed the sense of ‘pressing down and leaving a mark’. The term was ‘print’, which was used in Lev. 19:28 (‘Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you’) and had been used in Job 13:27 (‘thou settest a print upon the heels of my feet’). Shakespeare has horses ‘Printing their proud Hoofes i’ th’ receiuing Earth’ (*Henry V* [1623] Prol. 27).<sup>8</sup> We compare from the KJV’s past:

WYCLIF Who yueth to me,<sup>9</sup> that tho be writun in a book with an yrun poyntil

COVERDALE O that they were put in a boke

GENEVA oh that they were written euen in a booke

BISHOPS’ BIBLE O that they were put in a boke

Successor translations usually have ‘inscribe’ for *ḥāqāq*, but that may be too physical a term for mere writing, and it may be that the word *sēper* actually means an inscription (NEB, REB) or monument (NJB)—which would make ‘engrave, inscribe’ the *mot juste*.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. *OED*, s.v. ‘print, v.’, §1.a ‘to press (something hard) into or upon a softer substance or surface, so as to leave an indentation or imprint’; §2.a ‘to impress or stamp (a form, figure, mark, etc.) in or on a soft substance; to set or trace (a mark, figure, etc.) on any surface, by carving, writing, etc.’ (it’s hard to see the distinction). In the seventeenth century, a pen can print, as in Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus* IV. i. 74 ‘Heauen guide thy pen to print thy sorrowes plaine’.

<sup>9</sup> The Vulgate *quis mihi tribuat* ‘who will grant me’ was a very literal translation of the Hebrew, *mī yittēn* ‘who will give’, the usual idiom for expressing a wish.

*My redeemer liveth* (v. 24). Wyclif has the Middle English ‘ayenbiere’, i.e. back-buyer, redeemer. Coverdale introduced ‘redeemer’. The Bishops’ Bible strangely has ‘my redeemer saueth’, when the Hebrew is plainly *ḥay* ‘lives’.

*He shall stand at the latter day, vpon the earth* (v. 25). Wyclif had ‘Y schal rise fro the erthe’ and Coverdale ‘I shall ryse out of the earth’, following the Vulgate *de terra surrecturus sim*. The Bishops’ Bible correctly understood that the Hebrew had God as the subject, but it wrongly wrote ‘he shall rayse vp at the latter day them that lye in the dust’. The Hebrew is lit. ‘last upon dust he shall rise’, which is admittedly odd. Geneva had ‘he shall stand the last on the earth’, which is surprisingly good, since the idea is that the last to speak is the victor in a legal contest (cf. NEB, REB ‘he will rise last to speak in court’). KJV’s ‘at the latter day’ is not quite right, since Heb. *’ahārôn* does not by itself mean ‘latter day’.

*After my skin, wormes destroy this body* (v. 26). There are no worms in the Hebrew, which has, literally, ‘and after my skin (masc.) they have stripped off (or, flayed) this (fem.)’, which is certainly corrupt. The Bishops’ Bible was the first to introduce the worms, with ‘though after my skinne the [wormes] destroy this body’; then the Geneva Bible dispensed with the brackets and wrote ‘though after my skin wormes destroy this bodie’. It is a very reasonable solution to the question of who does the stripping off, though as a matter of fact it is not worms but bacteria that eat cadavers. Handel’s *Messiah* has ensured that the KJV’s worms live on, though they appear in no subsequent translation.<sup>10</sup>

b. *Job 40:15–41:34 Behemoth and Leviathan*

*Hee moueth his taile like a Cedar: the sinewes of his stones are wrapt together* (40:17). The Hebrew is very difficult. The first colon seems to say that Behemoth *ḥāfēš* his tail like a cedar, but what does *ḥāfēš* mean? It could be the usual *ḥāfēš* I ‘desire’, but that would mean taking the verb as a temporal clause, as the Bishops’ Bible rendering ‘when he wyll’, and Geneva’s ‘when hee taketh [sexual] pleasure’.<sup>11</sup>

WYCLIF He streyneth his tail as a cedre; the senewis of his `stones of gendrure  
ben foldid togidere.

COVERDALE He spredeth out his tale like a Cedre tre, all his vaynes are stiff.

GENEVA When hee taketh pleasure, his taile is like a cedar: the sinews of his  
stones are wrapt together.

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<sup>10</sup> The Hebrew lexicon of Johannes Buxtorf was first published in 1607. I have referred in this paper to my copy of the ninth edition, *Lexicon hebraicum et chaldaicum: complectens omnes voces, tam primas quam derivatas, quae in sacris Bibliis, hebraea, et ex parte chaldaea lingua scriptis, extant...; accessit Lexicon breve rabbinico-philosophicum..., cum indice locorum scripturae et vocum latino. Editio nona, de novo recognita, et innumeris in locis aucta et emendata* (Basel: Johannes Ludwig König and Johannes Brandmyllerius [Brandmüller], 1689). No copy of the 1607 edition appears in Copac, the combined catalogues of UK research libraries, so I do not know where the copy the KJV translators used may be found (there is not one earlier than 1646 in the Library of Westminster Abbey, so Dr Tony Trowles kindly informs me, nor one earlier than 1621 in Lambeth Palace Library).

<sup>11</sup> So also Samuel Terrien, *Job* (Commentaire de l’Ancien Testament, 13; Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1963).

BISHOPS' BIBLE When he wyll, he spreadeth out his tayle lyke a Cedar tree, all his sinowes are stiffe.

Wyclif's 'streyneth' apparently is the now obsolete 'strain', 'bind tightly, clasp, squeeze', which Wyclif used at Num. 30:14, in both cases to translate the Vulgate *constringere* 'bind'<sup>12</sup>; it is hard to see what binding its tail like a cedar could mean, but it is obviously parallel to folding together the sinews of its testicles ('stones of gendrure'). Contrary to the Vulgate, Coverdale<sup>13</sup> and the Bishops' Bible thought it meant 'spread', apparently on the basis of the shape of a cedar tree, since there is no linguistic evidence for such a meaning that I know of (the Bishops' Bible apparently translated it twice, once as 'desire, take pleasure', once as 'spread out').

The KJV 'Hee moueth his taile like a Cedar' took a new tack, no doubt in dependence, as in many places, on the new Hebrew lexicon of Johannes Buxtorf published in 1607. Buxtorf (1564–1629),<sup>14</sup> the Basel Hebraist, was famous for his knowledge of Jewish lexicography and interpretation, and incorporated in his lexicon many opinions of Jewish scholars like Rashi, ibn Ezra, and Gersonides (Ralbag). For this verb, Buxtorf cited the view of ibn Ezra and Gersonides that it is like *ḥāfaz* 'move quickly', together with another view also attributed to ibn Ezra that the verb forms a temporal clause, 'when he wishes' (an interpretation we have seen in the Bishops' Bible and the Geneva Bible).

It is hard to see, nevertheless, what moving the tail like a cedar could mean; cedar trees are not notable for moving, one would have thought. Most modern translations and commentators think that the verb should mean 'stiffen', but equally without any adequate linguistic justification. If the 'tail' of Behemoth is its penis,<sup>15</sup> and its 'stones' are its testicles, the line would make good sense. But the 'stones' are more likely the 'thighs' (*paḥad*),<sup>16</sup> and I think the sense is 'It stiffens tail like a cedar; the sinews of its thighs are intertwined'.

*Behold, he drinketh vp a riuer, and hasteth not: he trusteth that he can draw vp Iordan into his mouth* (40:23). It is a picturesque scene. KJV's predecessors had:

WYCLIF He schal soupe vp the flood, and he schal not wondre; he hath trist, that Jordan schal flowe in to his mouth.

COVERDALE Lo, without eny laboure might he drynke out the whole floude, and suppe off Iordane without eny trauayle.

GENEVA Behold, he spoyleth the riuer, and hasteth not: he trusteth that he can draw vp Iorden into his mouth.

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<sup>12</sup> At Gen. 31:40 he used it in the sense of 'press hard upon, afflict'; the Vulgate does not use *constringere* here.

<sup>13</sup> Luther, whose translation Coverdale used, had 'stretches itself out' (*streckt sich*), but Coverdale did not take that suggestion up.

<sup>14</sup> On Buxtorf, see Gareth Lloyd Jones, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England: A Third Language* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), and Stephen G. Burnett, *From Christian Hebraism to Jewish Studies: Johannes Buxtorf (1564–1629) and Hebrew Learning in the Seventeenth Century* (Studies in the History of Christian Thought, 68; Leiden: Brill, 1996).

<sup>15</sup> Such a sense is attested for post-biblical Hebrew (Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalim, and the Midrashic Literature* [London: Luzac, 1903], p. 406a).

<sup>16</sup> See *DCH*, VI, p. 675b.

BISHOPS' BIBLE Beholde, he drinketh vp whole ryuers and feareth not, he thinketh that he can drawe vp Iordane into his mouth.

Wyclif,<sup>17</sup> Coverdale, and the Bishops' Bible, followed by the KJV, take the verb *'āšaq* to mean 'drink', following Vulgate *absorbebit*, though the Hebrew cannot mean that. The usual meaning of the Hebrew *'āšaq* is rather 'oppress', which the Geneva Bible attempts to express with 'spoyleth', i.e. despoils. Today it is much more common to see 'the river' as the subject, and to translate 'if the river is turbulent' (so RSV, NRSV, NIV).<sup>18</sup>

The verse continues: *lō' yahpōz* 'he is not frightened', the verb meaning 'be in trepidation, hurry', the same *hāpaz* that we encountered as a presumed byform of *hāfēš* in v. 17 above. Wyclif followed the Vulgate *mirabitur* with 'he schal [not] wondre', but the Bishops' Bible and Geneva, with 'feareth [not]' and 'hasteth [not]', identified the same verb *hāpaz* though they understood it in somewhat different senses.<sup>19</sup> Coverdale 'without eny labour' perhaps was following Luther's *achtet's nicht groß* 'thinks nothing of it'.

*When he rayseth vp himselfe, the mightie are afraid: by reason of breakings they purifie themselues. The sword of him that layeth at him cannot hold: the speare, the dart, nor the habergeon* (41:25-26 [Heb. 17-18]). Now regarding Leviathan we find some puzzles in the KJV. My own translation, identifying Leviathan as the crocodile, has:

- 25 When it jumps, heroes are terrified;  
at its splashes they are beside themselves.  
26 If a sword should strike it, it can have no effect;  
no more can spear or dart or javelin.<sup>20</sup>

I will not examine all the variations in KJV's predecessors:

WYCLIF Whanne he schal be takun awei, aungels schulen drede; and thei aferd schulen be purgid. 26 Whanne swerd takith hym, it may not stonde, nethir spere, nether haburioun.

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<sup>17</sup> Wyclif's 'soupe up' is the verb 'sup' in the sense labelled 1.a. by *OED*, 'To take (liquid) into the mouth in small quantities (as opposed to a draught)'. Wyclif used it at Isa. 28:7 'thei weren sopun up of wyn, thei erriden in drunkenesse', and at 1 Cor. 15:54 'Deth is sopun vp in victorie'.

<sup>18</sup> I prefer to translate 'even in the river is in spate', following the proposal of G.R. Driver as find a new word *'āšaq* here ('Difficult Words in the Hebrew Prophets', in *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy Presented to Professor Theodore H. Robinson* (ed. H.H. Rowley; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1950), pp. 52-72 (60), also followed by NEB, REB; see my *Job 38-42*, pp. 109, 119-20, and *DCH*, VI, p. 620b.

<sup>19</sup> I cannot explain the translation of *gīah* as 'draw up' (KJV, following Bishops' Bible and Geneva). Vulgate had *influat* 'flows, rushes', and the Hebrew verb seems unexceptionable, though perhaps a little odd in this connection.

<sup>20</sup> RSV has 'When he raises himself up the mighty are afraid; at the crashing they are beside themselves. 26 Though the sword reaches him, it does not avail; nor the spear, the dart, or the javelin.'

COVERDALE When he goeth: the mightiest off all are afrayed, and the wawes heuy. 26 Yff he drawe out the swearde, there maye nether speare ner brest plate abyde him.

GENEVA The mightie are afrayd of his maiestie, and for feare they faint in themselues. 26 When the sword doeth touch him, he will not rise vp, nor for the speare, dart nor habergeon.

BISHOPS' BIBLE When he goeth the mightie are afraide, and feare troubleth them. 26 If any man drawe out a sword at him, it shall not hurt him: there may neither speare, laueling, nor brestplate abide him.

Wyclif's 'aungels' deserve a word, nonetheless. The Hebrew has *'ēlīm* 'gods', so 'angels' is a fair translation; interestingly, NRSV also has 'the gods' (though RSV had 'the mighty'), and NJPS has 'divine beings', though the plural does not occur anywhere else in Job, and it is hard to see how gods would come to be spectators of crocodiles. Most other modern translations take the form as a variant spelling for *'ayilīm* 'rams, chiefs', and so render 'the mighty'.

Leviathan is pictured raising itself up, which I understand of the crocodile's terrifying 'jumps', when, thrusting its tail and paddling with the back feet, it projects itself into the air vertically until half or more of its body is out of the water.<sup>21</sup> If that is the picture, the 'breakings' of KJV, which is a fair translation of the Hebrew *šeber* 'breaking', are the tremendous splashes as the five-metre (16 ft) long beast, weighing as much as 730 kg (1650 lbs), falls back into the water.<sup>22</sup>

So what are the mighty doing in their fear by *purifying* themselves? The Hebrew *hātā* is the ordinary word for 'miss, sin', but it occurs some eight times in Numbers in the sense 'purify oneself'. That will not suit here, and the KJV is really unintelligible. The BDB lexicon suggests 'miss oneself, lose oneself, fig. for be bewildered, beside oneself',<sup>23</sup> which is not entirely convincing but acceptable *faute de mieux*.

'Lay at' is a now mostly obsolete term for 'aim blows or an attack at',<sup>24</sup> and 'hold' is 'prevail'.<sup>25</sup> It the second half of v. 26 that is most puzzling. Pretty plainly, we have a set of three weapons that are ineffective against Leviathan, parallel to the sword in the first colon. So what is the 'habergeon' doing here? That is no weapon, but a 'sleeveless coat or jacket of mail or scale armour' (*OED*). It appears also in KJV's 2 Chron. 26:14, among military accoutrements 'shields, and speares, and helmets, and habergions, and bowes, and slings to cast stones', where weapons and articles of defence are combined (similarly at Neh. 4:16). The Hebrew here in Job is *širyā*, a word that occurs only once, and which the KJV confused with the similar word *širyôn* 'habergeon, coat of mail, harness, breastplate', as the KJV translates it variously in its eight occurrences. In so doing they were only following their predecessors, who all have 'breastplate' or 'habergeon'.<sup>26</sup> Subsequent translations uniformly have a weapon, whether pointed shaft (RV, ASV), javelin (RSV, NRSV, NAB, NIV, NEB, REB) or

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<sup>21</sup> Video clip at [www.junglewalk.com](http://www.junglewalk.com).

<sup>22</sup> This is the Nile crocodile; see [animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/reptiles/nile-crocodile/](http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/reptiles/nile-crocodile/).

<sup>23</sup> F. Brown, S.R. Driver, and C.A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1906), p. 307b [hereafter referred to as BDB].

<sup>24</sup> *OED*, s.v. 'lay', v. I, §32.c, quoting this passage.

<sup>25</sup> *OED*, s.v. 'hold', v., §26 (intrans.), without any example closely analogous to the present passage.

<sup>26</sup> So too Buxtorf, p. 847 (*lorica*, breastplate).

lance (NJPS, JB, NJB), except that the the marginal reading of the RV of 1885 retains the impossible ‘coat of mail’.

c. *Some other passages: Job 5:5; 26:13*

1. *Whose haruest the hungry eateth vp, and taketh it euen out of the thorns, and the robber swalloweth vp their substance* (5:5). The picture here is of the children of the foolish man:

WYCLIF and thei, that thirsten, schulen drynke hise richessis.

COVERDALE the thurstie had droncke vp his riches

GENEVA and the thirstie shall drinke vp their substance.

BISHOPS' BIBLE and the thurstie drunke vp their labour:

The KJV goes a quite different route: it is not the thirsty, but the robber, who consumes the possessions of the foolish man's children. No previous or subsequent version saw a robber here, but KJV was following Buxtorf's translation of the Hebrew *šammîm* as *horridus*, i.e. ‘hairy’, which he charmingly explains as ‘robber’ (*praedo*), since, he says, robbers are accustomed to wear their hair long—an idea he says derived from R. Levi Gershom (Gersonides).<sup>27</sup> If I had not thought to look up Buxtorf, I should never have known why the KJV translated the word ‘robber’, and I have searched in vain in the commentaries for an explanation.

2. *Hee diuideth the sea with his power, and by his vnderstanding he smiteth through the proud.* (13) *By his spirit he hath garnished the heauens; his hand hath formed the crooked serpent* (26:12-13). This is at creation. Before the KJV, the renderings were:

WYCLIF In the strengthe of hym the sees weren gaderid togidere sudeynly, and his prudence smoot the proude. (13) His spiryt ournede heuenes, and the crokid serpent was led out bi his hond, ledynge out as a mydwijf ledith out a child.

COVERDALE He stilleth the see with his power, & thorow his wysdome hath he set forth ye worlde. (13) With his sprete hath he garnished the heauens, & with his hande hath he wounded the rebellious serpent.

GENEVA The sea is calme by his power, and by his vnderstanding he smiteth the pride thereof. (13) His Spirite hath garnished the heauens, & his hand hath formed the crooked serpent.

BISHOPS' BIBLE He stilleth the sea with his power, and through his wysdome smyteth he the strength therof. (13) His spirite hath garnished the heauens, & his hand hath made the crooked serpent.

Wyclif evidently followed the Vulgate's *maria congregata sunt* ‘the seas were gathered together’, which cannot be justified from the Hebrew, but perhaps was

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<sup>27</sup> Buxtorf, *Lexicon hebraicum*, p. 652. The Hebrew word occurs only here; most today emend it to *šēmē'îm* ‘thirsty’, with an aleph as the middle letter (as in Psa. 107:5), and the Vulgate's *sitientes* obviously did the same. Buxtorf's interpretation was very influential: Edward Leigh was still repeating it in his *Critica sacra* (3rd edn; London: Thomas Underhill, 1650), p. 205; and Edmund Castell in his *Lexicon heptaglotton* (London: T. Roycroft, 1669), col. 3187. The Hebrew *šammîm* was connected by Buxtorf and others with *šimmâ*, a word that today is always glossed as ‘veil’, but which was understood in the seventeenth century as ‘hair’, especially the hair falling down in front of the face), as in Cant. 4:1, 3; 6:7.

inspired by Gen. 1:9.<sup>28</sup> The other predecessor versions to the KJV took the verb *rāga* ‘to mean ‘make still’,<sup>29</sup> as several of our modern versions do (RSV, NRSV, NJPS). But we find the KJV once again reliant on Buxtorf, who offered for this verse *disrupit* ‘broke apart, dashed in pieces’<sup>30</sup>; hence KJV ‘smiteth’. This would be a second verb *rāga* ‘, which is accepted by some modern lexica,<sup>31</sup> and is represented in modern translations like NAB ‘stirs up’, NIV ‘churned up’, NJB ‘whipped up’, and REB ‘cleft’. It is hard to understand what God might have had to gain by stirring up the sea at creation, but if he was smiting or cleaving in two the primaeval sea monster, as Marduk did to Tiamat, that would make perfect sense. So at this point the KJV offers an interpretation that is by no means superseded.

As for v. 13, it is not surprising, given the cosmic context, that everyone today wants to translate *rūhō* as ‘his wind’ or ‘his breath’. More interesting is the term ‘garnished’. Vulgate had *ornavit*, which Wyclif turned by ‘ournede’, a verb *orn* not attested in *OED* later than the sixteenth century. KJV’s other predecessors all have ‘garnished’, a term that *OED* glosses as ‘To dress, clothe, esp. in an elegant fashion’ (§3), or ‘To fit out with anything that adorns or beautifies; to decorate, ornament, or embellish’ (§4). Quite how KJV imagined God’s spirit garnishing the heavens I do not know (perhaps decorating them with the heavenly bodies?); the translation ‘garnished’ survives, however, in RV and ASV. The Hebrew is a little odd, lit. ‘by his wind the heavens (became) beauty, clearness’, a noun instead of an adjective as we would expect. It would be wonderful if the idea of the heavens as a molten mirror (as in 37:18) lay in the background here and ‘the movement of winds across the sky [were] represented as God’s breathing on its surface in order to polish it’.<sup>32</sup> It is more likely, however, that the primaeval world is envisaged as obscured by dark clouds (as in 38:9), which God’s wind swept away at creation, when the ‘crooked serpent’ Leviathan (as in Isa. 27:1), a symbol of chaos, was fatally wounded.

Coverdale, with his ‘wounded’, which he probably got from Luther’s *zerschmettert* ‘shattered’, unknowingly anticipated the standard view today that the Hebrew verb is *ḥālal* ‘bore, pierce’ (as all our modern versions, RV, ASV, RSV, NRSV, NJPS, NAB, NIV, have; NJB ‘transfixed’ and REB ‘slays’ do not differ in their understanding). But KJV stuck with the older tradition, which derived the verb from the root *ḥūl* ‘writhe in pain; bring forth a child’. It saw a reference to childbirth, which goes back to the Vulgate *obstetricante manu eius eductus est coluber tortuosus* ‘and by his midwife hand the twisting serpent was brought forth’.<sup>33</sup> Wyclif had struggled

<sup>28</sup> So E. Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (trans. H. Knight; London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1967 [original *Le livre de Job* (Paris: Gabalda, 1926)], p. 374.

<sup>29</sup> I cannot tell where Coverdale got this rendering, being no Hebraist himself. It was not from Luther, who had the exact opposite: *wird das Meer plötzlich ungestüm* ‘the sea suddenly became tempestuous’.

<sup>30</sup> Buxtorf, p. 715; Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), p. 585a s.v. *dirumpo*.

<sup>31</sup> See BDB, רָגַע I ‘disturb’ (p. 920b), II ‘be at rest’ (p. 921a); *DCH*, VII, pp. ????. The Koehler–Baumgartner lexicon, however, know only one verb *rg* ‘(*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (ed. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner; trans. M.E.J. Richardson; 5 vols.; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), III, p. 1188a).

<sup>32</sup> T.H. Gaster, ‘Firmament’, in *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (ed. G.A. Buttrick; 4 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), II, p. 270a.

<sup>33</sup> Where did the midwife deity come from? I presume that the Vulgate wondered how a ‘hand’ comes to figure in a reference to birth, and deduced that it must be the hand of a midwife.

with *eductus*, no doubt aware that the common verb *educō* ‘lead out’ also had a specialized meaning ‘assist as a midwife at birth’<sup>34</sup>; hence his over-elaborate ‘led out bi his hond, ledynge out as a mydwijf ledith out a child’.<sup>35</sup> The Bishops’ Bible tame translation ‘made’ and Geneva’s ‘formed’, followed by the KJV, dropped the image of the midwife and even that of birth (for how would God have given birth to the crooked serpent *with his hand?*). Evocative though that image is, the context calls for a more dramatic event in tune with the violent images of the previous verse, where God stilled (or, divided) the sea and crushed Rahab, the sea monster.

#### 4. Conclusion

My study of the KJV of the Book of Job provokes some reflections in me:

1. I have found it very rewarding, and always fascinating, to compare the KJV with its predecessors and successors, but I don’t know that many people have done it. There is lot more work to be done on this front.
2. The KJV is much more like a sixteenth-century Bible than a twentieth-century one, not surprisingly.<sup>36</sup> Quite apart from its Elizabethan English (as with Shakespeare, a really good commentator should look up the *OED* for every word), the KJV does not share with modern translations a commitment to make sense of a verse within the context of its chapter; the KJV translators seem to have been content to attempt a sense for a verse in itself.
3. The KJV translators not infrequently seem out of their depth. In a verse like these, for example:

He that is ready to slip with his feet is as a lamp despised in the thought of him  
that is at ease (14:2).  
And thou hast filled me with wrinkles, which is a witness against me: and my  
leanness rising up in me beareth witness to my face (16:8).

one feels that the translators had simply given up hope of making sense, and have decided to translate their text word for word even though it had no discernible meaning.

4. The KJV was a truly Anglican enterprise, forming a *via media* between faithfulness to the tradition, as represented by the Vulgate and the earlier English versions, and openness to the new Hebrew learning strongly influenced by Jewish scholars.
5. To judge by the Book of Job, the KJV was a fine version, often superior to its predecessors, but not infrequently equalled or excelled by modern versions.

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<sup>34</sup> Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, p. 827b.

<sup>35</sup> *OED* does not recognize this usage of ‘lead out’; it should be mentioned in *s.v.* ‘lead’ *v.* I, §8.e ‘In literalisms of translation; = L. *ducere* and its compounds’, where other literalisms of Wyclif appear.

<sup>36</sup> I like to imagine the KJV company, after a hard day in the Jerusalem Chamber, strolling along the Thames to catch the latest Shakespeare at the Globe, *Cymbeline* in 1609, *The Winter’s Tale* in 1610, or *The Tempest* in 1611.