

Loingirding and Other Male Activities in the Book of Job

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The Book of Job is perhaps not the obvious place to turn for a paper on the Gendered Body in the Hebrew Bible, and I turn to it only because of the intersection of two current programmes of mine. The first is my interest in masculinity in the Hebrew Bible, which has led to two papers, on David and on the Book of Psalms as sites of masculine inscription. And the second is my vow that this year I will write on nothing but the book of Job.

What is male about the book of Job? I wondered. No doubt the book, like all the books of the Hebrew Bible, was written by a man for men, but where is that conditioning factor expressed in the book, and how is its argument constrained by it? In a few years' time, I don't doubt, the answers I have for those questions will seem very shallow and naive, but at the moment I don't think anyone else has even asked the question, and this paper will have to be of the nature of a first attempt.

Perhaps the most obvious place to start was with what the text explicitly accounts male activities; I suspect that the masculinity inscribed in the text will be more implicit than explicit, since masculinity usually regards itself as the norm and so does not have to give an account of itself. All the same, let us begin with what lies on the surface.

1. Loingirding

If there is one thing that men do according to the book of Job, it is loingirding. Twice God says to Job, Gird up your loins like a man; I will question you, and you must tell me (38:3; 40:7):

ynI["áydI/h"w" Ú%"I]a;v]a,"w"α Ú"yx<-l;j} rb,g<"k] an:Arz:a'

If Job girds his loins like a man, it suggests that women do not gird their loins at all, or that there is a specially male way of loingirding. It also implies that while a man may leave his loins ungirded and still be a man, when he does gird his loins, in some sense he puts on his masculinity as well as his girdle.

So what are the loins, then, and what are they for? The loins (μyxil;j} and μyIn"t]m; are apparently exact synonyms) are that part of the body between the waist and the upper thighs; they include the belly, the buttocks, the hips and the genitals. The undergarments of the priests reach from their 'loins' (μyIn"t]m;), i.e. their waists, to their thighs (μyIk'rEy') (Exod 28:42). In English, the loins are more narrowly defined: they are that part of the lower back between the ribs and the pelvis. Of the 58

occurrences of the term (μyxil;j} 11 times, μyIn"t}m 47 times), three are in reference to procreation (always μyxil;j}, Gen 35:11; 1 Kgs 8:19; 2 Chron 6:9), a son being said to come 'from the loins'. In 15 other places, the loins are encircled by a belt or girdle (μyxil;j}, Isa 5:27; 11:5; Job 38:3; 40:7; μyIn"t}m;, 1 Kgs 2:5; 2 Kgs 1:8; Jer 13:1, 2, 4, 11; the belt is implied in Exod 12:11; 1 Kgs 18:46; 2 Kgs 4:29; 9:1; Jer 1:17 [μyIn"t}m;]). A belt 'cleaves' (qbd) to the loins of a man (Jer 13:11). The loins (μyIn"t}m;) are where an enemy's sword can smite (Deut 33:11; cf. smiting 'hip to thigh' [ËrEy:Al[q/v] in Judg 15:8). In Gen 37:34; 1 Kgs 20:31, 32; Isa 32:11; Jer 48:37 sackcloth is girded on the loins (in Amos 8:10 it is 'put upon' [hl[hiph] the loins), which must mean that it is tied around the waist and covers the lower part of the body; it is similar for the undergarments of the priests in Ezek 44:18. Symbolically, loins signify strength, as in Nah 2:2, where Israel is exhorted to make its loins strong and fortify its power, or in 1 Kgs 12:10 (parallel, 2 Chron 10:10), where Rehoboam boasts that his little finger will be thicker than his father's loins, or in Job 40:16, where Leviathan's strength is in his loins. In Job 31:20, the loins (μyxil;j}) of a poor person 'bless' Job because he has provided a sheepskin as warm clothing; no doubt the skin, like the sackcloth, is tied about the waist. Metaphorically, righteousness can be the belt about one's loins (Isa 11:5), and the redoubtable woman of Proverbs 31 girds her loins with strength (31:17). In a time of anxiety or war, the loins tremble (Ps 69:24 [23]; Ezek 29:7), there is much pain in the loins (Nah 2:10), affliction is laid on the loins (Psa 66:11). or, as in Jer 30:6, men put their hands on their loins like a woman in travail, which I understand to mean hugging themselves about the waist???

The loins are not gendered; everyone has loins. But it is only men who 'gird their loins', that is, with a belt. Women can gird sackcloth about (l[, 'upon') their loins (Isa 32:11; cf. 3:24 qc; tr<gO}m', 'a girdle of sackcloth'), but they do not their robes tight about their waist. It is men, not women, who have waists in ancient Israel.

Why would a man want to put a belt about his loins? There must be activities for which the normal loose flowing clothes would be a hindrance. Normally a man would wear a 'tunic' (tntk) as an undergarment and an enveloping 'robe' (ly[m), like the modern qumbaz, as an outer garment. In the market and at the council of elders it was comfortable. But for vigorous activities the robe would get in the way, unless it was tied about the waist. Hence the 'belt' (r/gj) or hr/gj), probably a folded strip of woollen cloth or linen (Jer 13:1), or a piece of leather (like Elijah's belt, 2 Kgs 1:8), which will hold the robe tight and will at the same time be a useful place for carrying a short sword (like Joab's in 2 Sam 20:8, or the wall-builders' in Neh 4:12) - or money (Matt 10:9; Mark 6:8), or even a scribe's inkhorn (Ezek 9:2, 3, 11). Soldiers are defined as 'those who gird on a belt' (2 Kgs 3:21). In just one place (Isa 3:24) there is a reference to a woman's belt (hr:/gj), which the context makes plain is a decorative item (it is parallel to perfume, hair-do, a fancy robe (? lyglytiP)), and beauty). Paul, in a different cultural context, apparently wears a belt for everyday activities (Acts 21:11), just like the Alpha and Omega (Rev 1:13) and the 24 heavenly elders (15:6). To untie someone's belt is to disable them for activity; thus Yahweh will 'loose the loins' of kings in the path of the victorious Cyrus (Isa 45:1), and he loosens the belts of kings (Job 12:18) in depriving them of their power.

So for which male activities does a man need to do loingirding? According to the evidence of the texts, mostly for fighting (2 Sam 20:8; 1 Kgs 2:5; Isa 5:27); it is verbal

warfare Job must prepare for, no doubt, but it is warfare all the same (Job 38:3; 40:7). But loingirding is also for travelling: the passover is to be eaten in haste, with the loins girded (Exod 12:11); Gehazi must gird his loins and take his staff in hand to travel to the Shunammite woman (2 Kgs 4:29); one of the sons of the prophets must gird his loins to take a jar of oil to anoint Jehu (2 Kgs 9:1); Jeremiah must gird his loins for arising and speaking to Israel (Jer 1:17; cf. 13:1). And it is in preparation for running, as with Elijah in 1 Kgs 18:46, though strangely enough, Elijah seems to wear the belt as everyday apparel since you can recognize him by his leather belt (2 Kgs 1:8). So it is a little difficult to see how Elijah can gird his loins if they are already girded. And also the girding of the loins with a richly decorated belt can be for display: in a splendid account of the female gaze, not of course authentic, but attributed to the female Oholibah by the male writer we have come to know as Ezekiel the Pornographer:

And when her sister Aholibah saw this, she was more corrupt in her inordinate love than she, and in her whoredoms more than her sister in her whoredoms. She doted upon the Assyrians her neighbours, captains and rulers clothed most gorgeously, horsemen riding upon horses, all of them desirable young men [W]hen she saw men pourtrayed upon the wall, the images of the Chaldeans pourtrayed with vermilion, girded with girdles upon their loins, exceeding in dyed attire upon their heads, all of them princes to look to, after the manner of the Babylonians of Chaldea, the land of their nativity: And as soon as she saw them with her eyes, she doted upon them, and sent messengers unto them into Chaldea (kjv).

I conclude that loingirding is a gendered activity. Men gird their loins because they are embarking on some strenuous male activity, fighting, running, travelling or showing off. Women could gird their loins as easily as men, and it would not be unfeminine to have a belt in one's wardrobe. But social gendering excludes loingirding from among typically female activities.

What about Yahweh's call to Job to gird up his loins? What strenuous activity is Job being summoned to her? It will not be running or travelling; it is to combat, to the combat between warriors, to the combat of heroes, perhaps even of heroes as representatives of opposing forces, of Job as representative of humanity and Yahweh as the representative of cosmic order. Job has started the conflict. It is he who has represented the relation between him and God as a legal dispute, a *rîb* in which he is summoning God to judgment, or alternatively, is inviting God to bring his charges against him (41:). For Job, the issue has always been one of justice, which he envisages as being resolved in a legal proceeding. He has sometimes, indeed, pictured God as a warrior who besets and besieges him. But he does not see himself fighting back. Job's recourse to this unjust attack on his life and liberty has been to appeal to justice.

And now Yahweh calls on him to gird up his loins. Why, what is to happen now? Job will not need to gird up his loins for a session in court. However stressful, that would not be a strenuous activity. If he is to gird up his loins, he must be expected to fight, or at least, to be attacked. God sets aside his claim to be a disputant and tells

him in this phrase that he regards him as an opponent, and enemy, who needs courage and strength-not a just cause-to be able to confront him. God, in short, transforms the legal dispute into a trial of strength. It is all metaphorically speaking, of course, and the conflict will still be a matter of words. But Job had better understand that summoning God to trial will not lead to a calm, rational, orderly legal process. God takes the summons personally, and he intends to fight. A superior male has been injured by an inferior and he intends to get his revenge.

2. Fighting

This talk of loingirding in preparation for fighting leads me to ask whether fighting itself, which is a characteristically male activity, is prominent in the book of Job. I should just interject that in studying the David story I concluded that being a warrior is the principal token of masculinity in those narratives.

Without the prompting of the question from outside the book of Job, I don't think it would have occurred to me to speaking of fighting as a prominent feature of the book. In my own world, fighting is something done by other men, with guns and bombs, whereas in the academic world I inhabit, I have been inclined to think that despite our differences we function amicably and collaboratively, on the whole. And if I tended to view the book of Job as a proto-seminar, an intellectual debate.

When male commentators hear aggression in the speeches of Job or the friends or God, they are not dismayed. When Zophar says

Should a multitude of words go unanswered?

Should a man win vindication by mere talk?

Will your pratings silence men

so that you may mock on without any to shame you,

so that you may say, "My doctrine is pure,"

and "I am clean in your sight [O God]!"? (11:2-4)

or when Job calls his friends 'torturer-comforters' (16:2), or when Zophar professes himself 'defamed' by Job (20:2) or when God mocks Job's ignorance ('surely you know!', 38:5), commentators think this is all good knockabout stuff, a bit rough and tumble, no doubt, sometimes impolite. If the language is 'ironic' or 'exaggerated', it does not mean what it says, does not entirely mean what it apparently says, and it isn't as aggressive or polemical as it appears.

But what if we regard the whole of the book of Job as a fight? Every speaker wants to be right, has to be right, has to win. Winning is matter of the others losing, being right consists of the others being wrong. If the friends are right that Job is a sinner, Job is wrong that he is an innocent man. If God is right that it is not a matter of whether Job is innocent or not but of whether God knows what he is doing in governing the universe, then Job is wrong when he insists that is all about the question of justice and injustice.

This is no collaborative discussion, in which the participants are united and on the one side in wrestling with a problem that defeats them all. The dialogues are set up as a debate, and the debate is a disputation, and the disputation is a fight, among

opponents. Even the formality of the structure, in which each of the friends speaks in turn and Job 'replies' (to use a euphemism) to each in turn, has, from this perspective, the symmetry of rounds in a boxing match, of the rhythms of assaults by rows of warriors in classical warfare, of waves of bombers in the second world war.

It is a male text that sets up the question of the book of Job in terms of interpersonal opposition. It is indeed something of a tour de force to make the subject matter into a fight, since what is given before the dialogues begin point in another direction. That is to say, the friends and Job are in agreement theologically over 99% of what they believe: they are co-religionists, they accept the doctrine of retribution, of this-worldly rewards for piety, of the transcendence of God, and so on and so on. Their differences are miniscule, and, when the dialogues open, probably non-existent. What is more, they have come to Uz in order to 'comfort' Job; the narrator is not being ironic when he tells us that in 2:11. How do they manage to turn their comfort into a fight?

I think it is because they are male that they revert to fighting as their default mode. They have been brought up in a culture where the warrior is an ideal type. Their fathers and mothers have encouraged them to 'play the man', which means to act strong and practise killing others. Their role models, if they are chieftains, are not lawgivers and accountants and judges and collectors of proverbs. They are men of blood. Even if Eliphaz and Bildad and the others have never raised a sabre in anger, their culture scripts them for aggression. And if there is no call for physical aggression, as there cannot be against their old friend Job, all their training for problem-solving is to make a fight out of it. Just last week I heard on the radio a contributor to a programme about Northern Ireland say, in all seriousness, that there is only one way to resolve differences between two parties who believe they each have right on their side: it is war.

Excesses like that apart, I do not want to say that the typically male mode of handling difference—that is, through confrontation—is bad. That would be too simplistic. Since the male mode is part of our culture, and the male way of being has been to a large extent determinative of culture, it is deeply inscribed. The male baby could be thrown out only with the loss of an ocean of cultural bathwater. I think, for example, of the way stories are structured on principles of binary opposition, as Greimas and the structuralists have shown us. Feminists and new men and deconstructionists shun binary oppositions; but they are interesting and intriguing—and educational, as Kieran Egan has shown in discussing the effectiveness of story in developing the imagination.

3. Seeking and Maintaining Honour

A third area where I would look for male assumptions in the book of Job is the matter of honour. It is a key concept in Mediterranean culture, as many recent writers have been pointing out; some even would call ancient Israel an 'honour-;shame' culture. But it is also a patriarchal culture, and a concern with honour is an especially male concern. The cultural anthropologists concur. '[H]onour is a value embodied by adult males'; 'Honour is bound up with male ideology'.

What is honour? It is a recognition by the group of the status of a male. It is a competitive matter, for a man's honour ranking is relative to those of all the other males in his group. It is constantly open to challenge, and a man with honour always has to be prepared to defend it.

Strangely or not, the word 'honour' (dwbk) appears only rarely in the book of Job (at 19:19; 29:20), but I will argue nevertheless that this is in one sense what the book is all about. Job casts the issue of the book as one of justice (am I being fairly treated or not?) and God casts it as one of wisdom (do I know what I am doing or not?). But what Job most wants, and what he most lacks, is the status, the honour he formerly enjoyed.

I hasten to say that I do not think a quest for honour, though it is quintessentially male, is necessarily a bad thing. Inasmuch as honour implies the power to dominate other people, male and female, I am less partial to it, though I would want to insist as well that a position at the top of the pole should not necessarily be construed in terms of power. Some leaders find their position an opportunity to control others, but some leaders are more constrained by their sense of responsibility and their obligations to those they lead. And in any case, honour means very much more than being in the dominant position. Since honour is granted, or withheld, by the group, a person achieves honour only by embodying the ideals of the group. If those ideals include, as they do in the case of Job, integrity, altruism, and wisdom, we could only disparage the quest for honour if we dissented from those ideals ourselves.

What is wrong with honour in Israelite society, as I would judge it, is not that it existed, but that it was confined to males. As far as I can find out, in the Hebrew Bible, while women can be shamed, they cannot be honoured. If it is indeed possible to honour one's father and mother, as Exod. 20.12 and Deut. 5.16 have it, it must be a different kind of honour for the mother as for the father; for the father's honour is a public one, attributed and assigned in a sphere in which mothers do not move. Or it may be that text means that one should honour one's father and not dishonour one's mother. However we interpret that text, the fact is that honour is a male concern and a male property.

In the first of the two key texts about honour in the book of Job, Job complains of the many ways in which God has assaulted him:

I cry out "Violence!" I am not answered;
I shout for help, but there is no justice.
He has barred my way so that I cannot pass;
he has veiled my path in darkness.
He has stripped me of my honor,
taken the crown from my head.
From every side he has ruined me, and I have perished;
he has torn my hope up by the roots.
He has kindled his anger against me,
he counts me his enemy (19:7-11)

He is the hapless citizen set upon by thugs and unable to summon any passerby to his aid (v 7), the traveler who finds his path blocked and nightfall overtaking him (v

8), the prince who is humiliated by an alien lord (v 9), the plant that is pulled down or pulled out of the ground (v 10), the warrior compelled into singlehanded combat (v 11), the king or city surrounded by hosts of besieging enemies (v 12).

The particular image connected with honour (v 9) is of a distinguished and honoured person being dishonoured by having his fine clothes stripped from him as an act of humiliation. Job's honor is his righteousness, which he has worn like a garment (29:14); by being visited with calamity and clothed instead in sackcloth (16:15), Job has been marked out as an evildoer for all the world to see. He has been "clothed with shame," like the enemies in 8:22. The "crown" (trf[]) is equally his honor or reputation as a righteous man; cf. Ps 8:6 (5) "crowned [rf[]] him with glory and honor." Stripping him of his honour is the sum and substance of God' assaults on him.

In the second key text (29:18-20), Job remembers his former expectations:

18 Then I thought, "I shall die among my nestlings,
and I shall multiply my days like the phoenix,
19 my roots open to the waters,
and the dew lodging in my branches,
20 my glory fresh with me,
and my bow ever renewed in my hand."

A key ingredient in Job's former life, according to this text, was "honour" (dwbk). It was not his exercise of power, it was not the satisfaction of bringing help to the needy, it was not his consciousness of the divine presence. They were all factors that contributed to the quality of his life, but what he really enjoyed, and what he so desperately lacks now is honor. Honor was an acknowledgment of worth by his society; though it was always open to contestation, to gain it and to keep it was, in a traditional society like his, the primary goal of an adult male. What Job craves, and what he once enjoyed, was honor perpetually "fresh" (vdj, "new"), new signals of approval and recognition by his peers.

There is indeed a darker side to this honour. Not many would begrudge Job, or anyone, all the honor they can get, if honour means merely praise for adhering to socially approved values. But there is a cost in acquiring and keeping honour. Along with fresh honor goes an ever-pliant "bow" (tvq). Job does not represent himself in his speeches as a warrior (as, for example, the psalmists commonly do), and all the fighting he does is metaphorical. But his language is a reminder that in the quest for honor there are winners and losers; just as on the battlefield those who retire with "honour" are the victors and those with "shame" the vanquished, so in the social jockeying for position those who are not honoured but shamed are indeed the vanquished, even if the force of arms against them is entirely metaphorical. Job's "bow" is not his strength that he merely keeps in reserve but the power that must be constantly in service to sustain a man of honor in his status. His bow is not a mere symbol of "manliness" (Delitzsch) or "manly vigor" (e.g. Hartley) or "strength and resilience" (Alden) or sexual vigor (Fedrizzi, Good) and the like; we should not forget that bows are only used for inflicting injury and death on other people. There is nothing innocent about this image, which symbolizes not just internal strength but

power over the life of others.

To our ears, the concept of honour is not a little stilted and dated. There is a stiffness about acting honorably or being a man of honour, and we have a suspicion that honourable behaviour, though estimable in itself, might be a little false. Perhaps this is because we still recognize that honour is the approval of society, and we suspect that acting in accord with the standards of one's society might well be to act against one's own instincts, desires or character, to act inauthentically. We are more impressed by a person's individual integrity, even if it is quirky and non-conformist, than by an adherence to social norms.

But in any case, the concept of honour still sounds, to my ears, a male one. A woman's honour is an idea that I can locate most easily in the world of historical romances, where it means quite definitely her sexual chastity. A woman does not lose her honour by cheating at cards or failing to pay her debts, but almost entirely by being in the wrong bed. A man can lose his honour in many ways, for the male world of honour is a fragile one. A woman, in such a world, begins her adult life in a state of honour; she cannot increase, but she can lose it definitively if she allows herself to be dishonoured, or even if she is dishonoured against her will. A man's honour can rise and fall; it is always open to revaluation, and it needs to be jealously preserved.

This male world of honour, which was still in existence in Edwardian high society, and may still exist in the world of the stock market and the international bank (Nick Leeson being a recent example of the antitype, of the 'cad' or 'bounder', as anyone should have been able to tell from his accent). In a collective sense, it attaches to certain companies and their chairmen who are 'one of us', whose word is their bond and whose integrity is unchallenged-until the moment they are put behind bars, that is). This was in essence the world of Job too, where deference and respect for the man of honour and standing was the norm:

When I would go out by the gate of the town
and take my seat in the square,
the younger men would see me and withdraw,
the older men would rise and remain standing,
the princes would refrain from speaking,
and clap their hand to their mouth,
the voice of the nobles would be hushed,
and their tongue would cleave to their palate (29:7-10).

4. Objectifying the Body

I think it is a male tendency to separate one's self from one's body. If I am wrong, this section will have nothing to do with the gendered body, though it will still, I hope, be a true observation about the book of Job. I believe that women have, for physiological and social reasons, no doubt, a more close and intimate relationship with their bodies. So if we find in the book of Job indications of a disjunction between the self and the body, we may have signals of masculinity in the text.

Let me say at the beginning what I think about this male tendency. I think it is quite wrong and mostly harmful. Can there be a self that is disembodied? I think not, not on this planet anyway, and even in another world I would go with Gerard Manley Hopkins, formerly of this city:

Man's spirit will be flesh-bound when found at best.
Meadowdown is not distressed for a rainbow footing it,
nor he for his bones risen.

I came across this issue when I was studying the interesting text 31:1:

I laid an injunction on my eyes;
How then could I even look upon a young woman ?

I took it that Job does not mean that he compelled himself to avert his eyes when he passed young women in the street. In Job's culture there is nothing wrong with men, even married men, looking with pleasure, delight, longing or even lust upon young women. How is a man of Job's social standing ever going to acquire a second wife or concubines otherwise? It is only if he acts on his desires that trouble could arise, but not necessarily even then. If she is already married or engaged, he runs a risk of social sanctions, even death, if he follows his desires (Deut 22:23-27), and if she is a virgin he must pay her father a fine and undertake to marry her (Exod 22:15-16 [16-17]; Deut 22:28-29). But if she is not, or is for example a prostitute, there is no social shame. In short, looking itself is no sin, and even acting upon the look may not be a sin, though there is a risk that it may be. What Job means to say is that he keeps himself so far from any misconduct on this score, he says, that he simply proscribes his desire. He lays a covenant obligation on himself (tyrb trk). The preposition (l) indicates that it is not a covenant between equals, him and his eyes, but the kind of requirement a suzerain will make of a vassal. The example is deliberately trivial, in Job's view; he means to make an a fortiori argument. If he so rigorously repressed an impulse that could just possibly lead to sin, how much more would he have been careful to avoid any deliberate act of wrongdoing.

But the point I am interested in here is that he describes the curbing of his desire as laying a command upon his eyes, as if he were the master and his eyes were an unruly servant. It is a common enough idea in the OT that sin proceeds from the eyes; cf. Gen 3:6; 2 Sam 11:2; Ps 119:37; Eccles 14:10. Ben Sira too advises his reader to entertain no thoughts about a virgin, though his reason is wholly prudential: it is "lest you be enmeshed in damages for her" (Di Lella's translation). The same dissociation of self and body comes to expression not a few times in the subsequent lines: here, he, the "real" Job, has imposed an injunction on his eyes; in v 5 he imagines that his "foot" may have hastened to deceit, in v 7 that his "heart" may have followed his "eyes" and that some blemish may have attached itself to his "hands". In v 9 his "heart" could have been enticed to his neighbor's wife, or in v 27 to false worship. In v 30 he could have let his "mouth" sin. All this is not just picturesque poetic language, although of course it is all metaphorical. What it bespeaks is a worrying disjunction between the person and the body. In other circumstances, it

could enable an offloading of guilt from the person to the body: 'it was my tongue that swore, my mind's unsworn', as Euripides has it.

It is not the only place even in this chapter, where the body could have been the guilty party:

If my heart has been enticed to a woman,
and I have lain in wait by my neighbor's door,
then let my wife grind for another,
let others kneel over her.

if I have gazed with delight at the sun when it shone,
or the moon moving in splendor,
and my heart has been secretly enticed,
and my mouth has kissed my hand -
this also would be a punishable crime,
for I would have been false to God above.

If I have rejoiced at the ruin of one who hated me,
and was excited when evil overtook him-
(I have not let my mouth sin
by asking for his life with a curse)-

Is this male language? Not in the sense that no woman could say it, for women too can sin with their mouths or find their hearts enticed. The issue rather is whether women's socialization, in ancient Israel or in our time, is as likely to lead them to blame their body for their own faults. I think not.

5. Persuasive Speech and Problem-Solving

In my study of the David narrative, I was somewhat surprised to discover that speech and persuasiveness was a male characteristic. We ourselves know of the 'strong, silent type' as one masculine stereotype, but the plausible talker like Odysseus or David is rather more strongly represented in the book of Job. These chieftains who come to comfort Job must be famous for their rhetoric and earn their honour in the world of men at least as much for their speech-making abilities as for their warriorhood. This speech-making is another form of control, another sign of male power or strength, a surrogate for the sword, it may be. All the interlocutors expect to win, expect to grind their opponent down, expect to be victorious in the end.

And along with the competitive aspect of speech-making goes a belief in its efficacy. They would not engage in this apparently interminable cycle of speeches unless they thought some good would come of it. They believe in speech as a way of resolving differences, of solving problems.

For that matter, they also believe in solving problems. The men of this book take for granted that Job's suffering constitutes a problem, and that they should devote energy to attempting to resolve it. That is a choice they make when they encounter

Job's suffering; it is not a necessary step to take. Job is suffering, there is no question about that. But whether rational talk about his suffering, constituting it into a problem, is a helpful way of dealing with it, is another matter. I have a feeling that belief in the efficacy of speech and of turning the realities of experience into the stuff of problems is a belief in which men especially are nurtured in the course of their socialization. Perhaps it is interesting that there does not appear to be a 'problem' of childbearing or menstruation, not, at any rate, as there is a 'problem' of the best form of government of societies or of the principle of retribution.

Is the book of Job a male text, then, not just in its origin and authorship, not just in its intention and readership, not just in its characters, but in the very issues that concern it, the approaches it makes to human experience, perhaps even in the way that the story gets hijacked by the seminar?