

# Exploring the feminine-masculine dichotomy in Job 1:15-19: A text-art collaboration



**Author:**  
Adriaan Lamprecht<sup>1</sup>

**Affiliation:**  
<sup>1</sup>Department of Ancient Texts, Faculty of Theology, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

**Corresponding author:**  
Adriaan Lamprecht,  
at.lamprecht@nwu.ac.za

**Dates:**  
Received: 18 Apr. 2022  
Accepted: 28 June 2023  
Published: 09 Oct. 2023

**How to cite this article:**  
Lamprecht, A., 2023, 'Exploring the feminine-masculine dichotomy in Job 1:15-19: A text-art collaboration', *In die Skriflig* 57(1), a2972. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v57i1.2972>

**Copyright:**  
© 2023. The Authors.  
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

This article addresses the problematic nature of the traditional approach to interpreting and translating Job 1:15–19 and the conventional artistic depictions of the four calamities experienced by Job. The traditional view is grounded in an objectivistic perspective on language, which assumes that meaning is founded on historical truth and can only be established through direct correspondence between a sentence and an objective state in the world. However, this approach is problematic when viewed through the lens of experientialist language theory, and its emphasis on representational formats. This article argues that the representational format in the narrative of Job 1:15–19 is characterised by a fixed conceptual element; specifically, the dichotomy between feminine and masculine, which operates as a contested point within the narrative. To establish the boundaries and refine the theoretical principles necessary for elucidating unconscious conceptual image schemas such as feminine-masculine, this article proposes a blended text-art approach as a means of representing the perceptual system that underlies this contested concept. Collaborating with a local artist, Hennie Kruger, the aim of this article is to identify meaningful patterns in the image schema and provide a redescription of experience, by means of a process of perceptual meaning analysis within the context of art, as an 'essentially contested concept'. This article personifies Sheba as a metonymy for the voiceless sufferer – the widow and orphan – as well as fire from God out of heaven, mantic wisdom, and wind-all in the feminine gender. By rendering abstract concepts more immediate and accessible, the image schema of feminine-masculine is made more tangible. While the image schema of feminine-masculine is inherently schematic, and therefore, more abstract in nature, the combination and flow of the four paintings embody the concordant nature of an image schema, with individual mental images elucidating the details of the schema. Ultimately, the paradox evident in each scene serves to illustrate the disruption of the divine order within the feminine-masculine image schema.

**Contribution:** This article contributes to the understanding and translation of the calamities described in Job 1 in the Hebrew Bible.

**Keywords:** Job 1; calamity; art; feminine–masculine image schema; Bible.

## Introduction

The present article is inspired by the academic career of Professor Nicholas Leigh Allen, a renowned art historian whose fervour for ancient cultures has been a source of inspiration. This article is dedicated to Professor Allen and seeks to explore the intersection between text and art, with specific reference to the four calamities that befell Job, as narrated in Job 1:15–19.<sup>1</sup> The book of Job is classified under wisdom literature and is placed between the books of Psalms and Proverbs in the Hebrew Bible. While Job 1 and 2, and the final portion of Job 42 (vs. 7–17) are generally regarded as narrative, the remainder of the book is considered poetry based on its textual form. The authorship, historicity, place of origin, time of writing, and purpose of the book of Job continue to be topics of debate among scholars.<sup>2</sup>

This article focuses on Job 1:15–19, which recounts the four calamities that befell Job's offspring, possessions, and servants. This passage is situated between two significant sections of Job 1. The first section includes a paired fourfold description of Job's complete character, consisting of attributes such as purity (pure like virgin olive oil), righteousness (straight like a measuring line), fear of

### Read online:



Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

1. Until his retirement in 2022, Professor Allen held the position of research professor in Ancient Cultures at the North-West University in Potchefstroom, South Africa. This article is also dedicated to Hennie Kruger, the artist behind the paintings featured herein, who passed away in 2021.

2. To name but a few, see the studies of Gordis (1978), Hoffman (1981), Habel (1985), Hartley (1988), Pope (1965), Polzin (1974), Sarna (1957), Steinmann (1996), Westermann (1981) and Wilson (2015).

God (accepting the vertical hierarchical authority structure), and avoidance of evil (intentional decision to refrain from engaging in harmful actions), along with references to his children, possessions, and servants (Job 1:1–5). The second part of the first section is the first dialogue between Yahweh and the satan (Job 1:6–12).<sup>3</sup> The second significant section follows Job 1:15–19. This section encompasses several key events, including the confirmation of Job's complete character through a ritualistic act (Job 1:20–22), the second discussion between Yahweh and the satan (Job 2:1–6), a second round of calamities involving inflammation and sore spots (Job 2:7–10), and the ritual performed by Job's three friends, which mimics his state of death (Job 2:11–13).<sup>4</sup>

The study of the four calamities in the book of Job represents a significant and multifaceted topic of inquiry. Firstly, it offers valuable insights into the ancient Near Eastern perspective on the concept of calamity, suffering, chaos, and death. The presence of chaos amid order or order amid chaos, the attribution of responsibility for chaos, and the question of why bad things happen to good people are fundamental inquiries that are central to the book of Job. These inquiries remain relevant to contemporary religious communities. Secondly, an investigation into the calamities can provide insight into the literary character of Job, particularly in relation to his three friends. Such an inquiry can help to identify the author's use of literary techniques, and how they structure the speeches of each character. Lastly, the study of the four calamities can shed light on the broader themes of the book of Job. Such an inquiry could involve an investigation into the nature of wisdom, the presence or absence of typical Israelite content, and how the book fits into the wider Hebrew Bible. Overall, the study of the four calamities in Job 1 is profound, and an important area of inquiry that can help deepen our understanding of the human mind, our relationships with fellow humans, and our interactions with nature and the unnatural.

The present article seeks to address the various questions and enigmas surrounding Job 1:15–19, as explicated in the following part.

## Problem statement

Calls for inclusivity in understanding the meaning-making processes of biblical literature have been made. However, an examination of Job's 'afflictions' (Job 1:15–19) in translations, art representations, articles (e.g. Bar-Efrat 2000:87; Pinker 2009:12–13), and commentaries (e.g. Clines 1989; Delitzsch 1876; Wilson 2015) uncovers a significant discrepancy between grammatical evidence and the translated or interpreted forms.

Despite clear grammatical evidence found in Job 1:15, 16, 19, 2:10, 11, 22, which guide readers to interpret the calamities based on their language-specific semblance, scholars and artists studying Job have overlooked this evidence. Instead, they continue to adhere to a traditional view that interprets

3. The Hebrew word for 'satan' is definite (שָׁטָן) and is therefore not a proper name.

4. For a complete discussion of the fourfold groupings and structures in Job 1–2, as well as in the complete book of Job, see Patrick (2005:185–206).

the four calamities and their subsequent meaning as a direct correspondence 'between symbols and things/events in the world' (Kövecses 2006:9).<sup>5</sup>

In existing translations of Job 1:15–19, an objectivistic view of language has been employed, which assumes that meaning is grounded in historical truth and can only be established through a direct relationship between a sentence and a state in the world that is reasonable. Scholars (see e.g. Bar-Efrat 2000:108–109, 185; Pinker 2009:12–13; Wilson 2015:35) who subscribe to this view, refer to the 'first and third calamities' as 'caused by man (the Sabaeans and the gangs)', while translations of the text also reflect this interpretation. This approach has been reflected in the artistic renderings of the four calamities by figures such as William Blake, Leon Bonnat, and Albrecht Dürer, who have adhered to the traditional view that 'art imitates, represents, or models objective reality' (Kövecses 2006:56). However, this objectivistic view is problematic when viewed through the experientialist view on language and its representational forms.

To address this issue, the present article endeavours to identify meaningful patterns underlying Job 1:15–19, and to highlight the contested point in the Job 1–2 narrative. Through an analysis of an underlying image schema, this article seeks to demonstrate that art, as an 'essentially contested concept', can be utilised to identify the redescription of experience through a process of perceptual meaning analysis.

## Hypothesis

The account of Job 1:15–19 in the biblical Hebrew text reveals that the ancient Near Eastern people believed in a divine order, which they perceived as evident in nature and society. However, this order was sometimes disrupted by occasional vicissitudes. The narrative highlights the contrast between the feminine-masculine image schema,<sup>6</sup> which is deeply ingrained in the human mind and manifested in the natural and social world. This schema serves as a point of contention in the story.

Through the identification of the image schema of feminine-masculine as a fundamental aspect of experientialism within the Cognitive Linguistics framework, it may be possible for art to elucidate the mental representations that underlie the Job 1:15–19 text. This view aligns with the concept of art as an 'essentially contested concept', as proposed by Gallie (1956:167–198). In the ensuing section, a summary of this methodological framework will be presented.

## Methodological framework

In the context of the problem statement, which describes the 'objectivistic view' of text and language, traditional linguistic

5. Traditionally, scholars studying biblical Hebrew primarily focused on its historical dimensions and utilised the comparative philological method. This approach was predominantly philological in nature, emphasising the linguistic and literary aspects of the language (see also Van Wolde 2005:2; Lamprecht 2015:6).

6. To distinguish a linguistic term from a conceptual structure, in this article the former will be referred to as feminine (with small letters), and the latter as FEMININE (with capital letters).

approaches such as Grammatical-historical, Structuralism, and Transformational Generative Grammar have primarily focused on the formal properties of language, such as grammar and syntax (see also Lamprecht 2015:4–9). These approaches tend to view language as an arbitrary system of signs.<sup>7</sup> Experientialism, on the other hand, is a theoretical framework within Cognitive Linguistics that emphasises the experiential framework of humans in shaping language and thought. According to this theory, our understanding of abstract concepts and categories is fundamentally grounded in our bodily experiences and perceptions of the world. Therefore, our linguistic and cognitive systems are closely intertwined, and language reflects the way we perceive and interact with the world around us (Evans & Green 2006). A fundamental element of experientialism is the concept of ‘image schema’. Lakoff (1987) and Johnson (1987) propose that image schemas serve as one of the ‘embodied’ anchors that form the basis of the entire conceptual system. According to Johnson’s (1987:xix) definition, an image schema is ‘a recurring, dynamic pattern of our perceptual interactions and motor programs that gives coherence to our experience’.<sup>8</sup> When elementary properties of entities in structural descriptions occur repeatedly, certain schematic structures begin to emerge and get represented in the brain.<sup>9</sup> Johnson (1987:29) argues that these redescriptional patterns emerge as meaningful structures, mainly at the level of our bodily movements and our perceptual interactions. Given that human experience is structured in part by the nature of our bodies, two types of image schemas commonly occur: perceptual image schemas (as described by Lakoff 1987)<sup>10</sup> and kinesthetic image schemas (as described by Talmy 1988).<sup>11</sup>

The present discourse endeavours to explore the traditional perspectives on art, and the movements that cancel them, followed by a brief analysis of the portrayal of biblical Job in the realm of art. The discussion will highlight the interplay between conventional linguistics, translation studies, and Joban art, thereby culminating in an objective interpretation of the four calamities depicted in Job 1.

## Art as an essentially contested category

Since the late 1960s, the field of translation and interpreting has undergone a notable expansion in scope. In contrast to

7. See Harris (1993) for a more comprehensive discussion of approaches towards language through the centuries.

8. It is experienced meaningful to humans by virtue of their embodiment, which forms the basis of many of humans’ most fundamental concepts.

9. Examples of such elementary properties are lines, surfaces, weight, vertical or horizontal extension, roughness or softness, sweetness, or bitterness (Kövecses 2006:207).

10. Johnson (1987:126) lists the following common image schemas: balance, compulsion, blockage, counterforce, restraint removal, enablement, attraction, mass-count, path, link, centre-periphery, cycle, near-far, scale, part-whole, merging, splitting, full-empty, matching, superimposition, iteration, contact, process, surface, object and collection. See also Lamprecht (2015:42–46).

11. Among the various kinaesthetic image schemas proposed are the part-whole schema (consisting of a whole, parts, and a configuration), the link schema (two entities connected by a link) and the centre-periphery schema (consisting of an entity with an area, a centre, and a periphery).

conventional linguistics and translation studies, contemporary translation studies have moved beyond limiting their primary focus to textual materials and have instead endeavoured to encompass a range of non-verbal materials, including art, which is widely recognised as an essentially contested concept.

## Traditional views on art

In his chapter on *Contesting categories in culture*, Kövecses (2006:51–61) summarises the emerging features of the traditional view of art, and the art movements that have cancelled them.

The author highlights several of these features, including firstly, the notion that art represents objective reality, which has been contested by impressionism, expressionism, and surrealism. Secondly, the belief that art should evoke objective and rational thoughts has been cancelled by symbolism and surrealism (Kövecses 2006:51). Thirdly, the notion that art is representational, consisting of natural figures and forms, has been challenged by symbolism, cubism, and abstract art. Lastly, the idea that art uses canonical themes has been contested by constructivism, social realism, and pop art.

Gallie (1956:167–198) stipulates certain criteria to define what he calls ‘essentially contested concepts’, one of which is that the art achievement must be internally complex. Kövecses (2006:58–60) identifies this condition as describable in terms of the characteristics in (1) – (4), each of which can be cancelled, resulting in defining art as an essentially contested concept. Accordingly, this article will contest the distinct categories in the art of various Joban artists and scrutinise their conceptions of text and reality.

## Biblical Job and art

The narrative of Job has served as a source of inspiration for artists across centuries, with notable examples including the works of William Blake, Leon Bonnat, Georges de La Tour, Ilya Repin, Gerard Seghers, Jean Fouquet, Jan Lievens, Fra Bartolommeo, the woodcuts of Albrecht Dürer and the sculptures of Auguste Rodin. Additionally, the story of Job has been adapted into more contemporary art forms, such as the film *Job’s Passion* (2004)<sup>12</sup> and the Broadway musical *Job* (2006).<sup>13</sup> Despite the diverse themes present in the 42-chapter opus, it is noteworthy that the story of Job has not been a subject of significant interest in the artistic realm. This could be attributed to the complexity of the text, which may be

12. *Job’s passion* is an Indian drama film of 2004 that delves into the socio-economic hardships faced by a poor farmer, named Job. Written and directed by P.S. Ramnath, the movie chronicles Job’s struggles to make ends meet, and his unrelenting love for farming and the land that he tills. Despite being compelled to work as a farm labourer to provide for his family, Job’s passion for agriculture continues to drive him forward. Through its portrayal of Job’s journey, the film sheds light on the challenges of rural life, including poverty and social injustice.

13. *Job* is a musical production that draws inspiration from the narrative of Job as depicted in the Old Testament of the Bible. Stephen Schwartz authored the music and lyrics for the show, which is primarily concerned with Job’s ordeals of suffering and his unwavering devotion to God. The production premiered on Broadway in 1976, with Bob Gunton assuming the titular role.

challenging to comprehend, and the difficulty of visually representing the story.

In the subsequent section, this article will contest the interpretations of only three renowned artists regarding the calamities that befell Job.

### William Blake

William Blake's *Illustrations of the book of Job*, produced during the final decade of his life, are widely regarded as some of his most exceptional works.<sup>14</sup> His Job intaglio engravings are considered to be his masterpieces in this medium (Whittaker 1967:322). While the series of 22 illustrations remain largely faithful to the biblical narrative, Blake also incorporates several embellishments to create a more abstract meditation on the nature of evil, power, and faith in the universe. Despite his familiarity with the Hebrew text of Job, Blake's artwork suggests his belief in the ability of art to evoke objective and rational thoughts through cultural representations that are recognisable and comprehensible to his audience. He, for instance, portrays *the satan* as a human-bat anthropomorphism, *God* as an old man with long hair, a beard, and an open book in front of him, *Behemoth* as a hippopotamus, and *Leviathan* as a snake. Furthermore, Blake includes two 'reality' themes, namely 'The fall of Satan' and 'The vision of Christ', which are not present in the Hebrew text of Job.

### Leon Bonnat

Leon Bonnat's oil painting titled, *Job*, portrays the suffering caused by the calamities (in Job 1 and 2) and spirituality of the biblical figure, Job. The painting presents Job as naked and alone, set against a dark background, which is suggestive of his desire for death.<sup>15</sup> Through the painting, Bonnat effectively conveys the reality and objectivity of the human experience of suffering. Job's despair is further illustrated by his wishes expressed in Job 3, where he desires that the day and night of his birth, as part of the hemerological calendar text tradition, be erased from history and replaced by darkness and the shadow of death. He goes further by wishing that darkness (חֹשֶׁךְ) and the shadow of death (צֶלְמָוֶת) be the guardian parents for his 'day and night'. The use of the semantic framework of *dark* versus *light* serves to emphasise the force of depression behind Job's yearning.

Bonnat's depiction of Job features the figure with his head tilted towards the heavens, beseeching divine intervention, and with his palms facing upwards and empty, symbolising his lack of possessions, including children, livestock, and support. Overall, the painting captures the essence of Job's plight, depicting his emotional and spiritual distress in a compelling manner.

### Albrecht Dürer

Albrecht Dürer's diptych features two paintings: the left panel of which portrays Job in a nearly nude state, seated on

a pile of straw.<sup>16</sup> In this scene, his wife, clothed in the typical attire of Dürer's culture, is depicted pouring water on him from a wooden jar. The background of the painting displays a fire and dark clouds gathering, with a solitary figure running away from the scene. The right panel of the diptych shows two of Job's friends playing musical instruments, likely a flute and drums. In the background, a group of horsemen can be seen chasing after camels.

While Dürer's paintings are rich in cultural interpretations, they lack a precise adherence to the textual facts associated with Job's story. For instance, the depiction of Job's wife pouring water on him from a wooden jar, as well as Job's friends playing musical instruments, do not align with specific textual descriptions of the events in the biblical story.

### Other artists

Numerous artists have attempted to depict the experience of Job through various artworks. It is notable that most of these depictions centred on the narrative part of the story, Job 1–2, with only a select few seeking to explore larger themes such as *God answers Job*, as seen in William Blake's work.<sup>17</sup> Other notable pieces include Georges de La Tour's 'Job ridiculed by his wife',<sup>18</sup> Ilya Repin's 'Job and his friends',<sup>19</sup> Gerard Seghers' 'The patient Job',<sup>20</sup> Jean Fouquet's 'Job and his false comforters',<sup>21</sup> Jan Lievens' 'Job',<sup>22</sup> and Fra Bartolommeo's 'Job'.<sup>23</sup> Despite variations in artistic style and interpretation, these artworks share a common interest in conveying the essence of Job's experience, offering valuable insight into the timeless appeal and relevance of this enduring biblical story.

The discourse on the diverse art depictions provides evidence that art is primarily founded on essential features and basic-level categorisation (see also Kövecses 2002:51–52), serving as a deeply rooted cultural archetype. Consequently, as we endeavour to dispute the different art categories of various Joban artists, our individual interpretations of reality are brought into question. This predicament raises the issue of interpreting and translating the four calamities in Job 1 and the study's challenge of reality. The subsequent section examines the pre-conceptual experience of calamities among ancient Near Eastern societies, as well as their conceptual-level organisation and structuring of ideas, to grasp the encyclopaedic knowledge system of the chaos-order concept.

16. See <https://www.artbible.info/art/large/807.html> for the 'Job on the dunghill with his wife' painting and <https://www.artbible.info/art/large/808.html> for the picture of 'Job's two friends playing music'.

17. See <https://www.artbible.info/art/large/626.html>

18. See <https://www.artbible.info/art/large/135.html>

19. See <https://www.artbible.info/art/large/136.html>

20. See <https://www.artbible.info/art/large/825.html>

21. See <https://www.artbible.info/art/large/729.html>

22. See <https://www.artbible.info/art/large/820.html>

23. See <https://www.artbible.info/art/large/1011.html>

14. See the William Blake Archive, <https://blakearchive.org>

15. For a detailed picture, see <https://www.wikiart.org/en/leon-bonnat/job-1880>



## The four calamities in the text

### Background of Job 1:15–19

The establishment of the setting for the entire content and dialogue of the book of Job (Job 3–42) is accomplished in chapter 1 through seven distinct movements, as previously discussed. The chain of calamitous events that afflict Job (Job 1:15–19) is categorised within the third of these movements.<sup>24</sup> In order to provide a contextual background for this particular section, it is pertinent to examine the following linguistic evidence:

- Contrary to expectations, the prologue of the book of Job commences with a marked word order, wherein the noun 'man' (אִישׁ הַהוּא בְּאֶרֶץ-עֻזַּי) is topicalised. This topicalisation is further affirmed in the subsequent syntactical composition, which features the predicate + subject construction (אֵיזֹב שָׁמַיִם). The narrator reinforces the positive qualities attributed to Job through the repeated use of vav-consecutive. By utilising the vav-consecutive and marked word orders, the narrator creates an expectation for the qualities that follow in the subsequent extensions. Thus, the narrator gradually builds a portrait of Job by characterising him with four distinct descriptive terms: (1) תָּם (pure/blameless), (2) יָשָׁר וְיָתֵד (straight/upright), (3) יִירָא אֱלֹהִים (God-fearing), and (4) וְנָרַע מִרָע (avoiding evil). The first two of the four descriptive terms used to characterise Job denote his ideal relationship with other human beings, in accordance with מִשְׁפָּט (human justice), while the latter two represent his ideal relationship with God, in accordance with צֶדֶק (divine justice; see Job 8:3). God himself confirms this characterisation of Job by employing the same four descriptive terms in Job 1:8. Job's perfection (as a גִּבּוֹר [Geber] in contrast to a אִישׁ [mortal human] see Job 3:3, 23 and 14:10,12) is conveyed through various means, including the narrator's description, the description of other characters such as God, the contrast between Job's actions and societal norms, and even Job's own words, which provide insight into his inner life (Berlin 1983:41–42).
- The narrator of the book of Job employs complete numbers in Job 1:2–3 to describe the protagonist's wealth and thereby confirms his just personification. The enumeration of Job's wealth includes firstly, the שְׁבַע בָּנִים וְשְׁלֹשׁ בָּנוֹת (seven sons and three daughters). This number signifies a wealthy and prosperous family. Secondly, the narrator reports that Job possessed מֵאוֹת אֲמֹדִי-בָקָר (7 000 small cattle and 3 000 camels and 500 yoke of cows and 500 pregnant she-asses), totalling to 12 000 livestock. These complete numbers portray Job as a wealthy and prosperous man and confirm his relationship with his God.

The subsequent narrative in Job 1:14–19 presents a direct contradiction to the comprehensive characterisation of Job, as described in Job 1:1–3. The unfolding events are not only starkly different from Job's established identity, but they also carry an element of profound disbelief. It is indeed

unthinkable that something of such contrasting nature could occur to Job, given his established position and character.

### Grammatical evidence of the four calamities

In this part, I will, first analyse the applicable text according to the content's grammatical evidence; thereafter I will draw some concluding remarks based on the semantic and contextual domain of the words in question.

#### Example (a) Job 1:14–15

(14) וּמַלְאָךְ בָּא אֶל-אִיזֹב וַיֹּאמֶר הִבָּקֵר הֵינוּ הָרְשׁוֹת וְהָאֲתָנוֹת רְעוֹת עַל-יְדֵיָהֶם:

A messenger came to Job and said:

The herd of cows was peaceful, and beside them, the donkey mares were grazing,

(15) וַתִּפֹּל שִׁבְאָה וַתִּקְחֵם וְאֶת-הַנְּעָרִים הָיוּ לְפִי-תַרְבִּי, וְאֶת-לִטְאָה וְרִקְצָאֲנִי לְבִדִּי לְהַגִּיד לָךְ:

when suddenly Sheba launched an attack. She seized them and the young men accompanying them were struck down with the sharpness of the sword. But I alone was deliberately spared for my task, namely: to bring you this message.

#### Grammatical evidence of example (a)

וַתִּפֹּל : vav-consecutive + Qal imperfect feminine singular of נָפַל

וַתִּקְחֵם : vav-consecutive + Qal imperfect feminine singular + pronominal suffix 3 masculine plural of לָקַח

שִׁבְאָה is the subject of the verbs וַתִּפֹּל and וַתִּקְחֵם, thus feminine singular and should be translated as 'Sheba'.

הָרְשׁוֹת : Qal participle feminine plural of רָשָׁה. The participle is a verbal adjective that describes the noun הַבָּקָר. Translations take the subject הַבָּקָר (grammatically masculine singular) as masculine plural. However, Joel 4:8 consists of an example where the masculine plural form has been used. Therefore, Garr (1992:56) explains that הַבָּקָר is an example of a suppletive zero allomorph in Hebrew. Therefore, in this case, הַבָּקָר is a feminine plural noun and should be translated as 'cows'.

#### Discussion of example (a)

According to Lamprecht (2005), Sheba serves as a symbol of feminine compassion and metonymy, representing the widow and orphan as described in Psalm 72. In a paradoxical turn of events, Sheba commits a seemingly unthinkable act by depriving Job of his source of wealth. Specifically, Sheba takes away Job's female livestock, including cows and pregnant she-asses, and emasculates his marriageable young men, resulting in the destruction of the heart of Job's wealth. This action prevents any future growth and continuity, which is unexpected, considering that the emasculation of the very individuals responsible for the provisioning system that Job relies upon for comfort, seems counterintuitive.

#### Example (b) Job 1:16

עוֹד יְהוָה מְדַבֵּר וְהוּא בָּא וַיֹּאמֶר אֵשׁ אֱלֹהִים נִפְלְהָ מִן-הַשָּׁמַיִם וַתִּבְעַר בְּצֹאן וּבְנָעָרִים וַתֹּאכְלֵם וְאֶת-לִטְאָה וְרִקְצָאֲנִי לְבִדִּי לְהַגִּיד לָךְ:

<sup>24</sup>See also Greenberg (1987:284) for a different layout.

While he was still speaking, another messenger entered and said:

Fire from Elohim suddenly fell from heaven, causing it to flare up among the small livestock and the young men. It consumed them. But I alone was deliberately spared for my task, namely: to bring you this message.

### Grammatical evidence of example (b)

אש (fire) : Noun feminine singular

נפלה Qal perfect 3 feminine singular of נפל

ותבער Vav-consecutive + Qal imperfect feminine singular of בער

ותאכלם Vav-consecutive + Qal imperfect feminine singular of אכל

+ pronominal suffix 3 masculine plural

אש is the subject of the verbs נפלה, ותבער, ותאכלם, thus feminine singular.

### Discussion of example (b)

The initial calamity that befell Job may have been manageable, but the subsequent catastrophe likely left him shattered. The occurrence of fire from heaven, an inexplicable phenomenon commonly regarded as a direct act of God, resulted in the devastation of Job's livestock and the loss of his servants. The outcome of this tragedy was both incomprehensible and paradoxical, as it challenged the notion of God to whom Job had offered sacrifices seven times seven (Job 1:5). This suggests an underlying insinuation of cultic sacrifice, highlighting the perplexing nature of Job's experience.

### Example (c) Job 1:17

עוד | זה מדבר וזה בא ואמר בְּנֵיךְ וּבְנוֹתֶיךָ אָכְלִים וְשׂוֹתִים לִּי בְּבֵית אֲחֵיהֶם הַכּוֹרִ: וַיִּחָחוּם וְאֶת־הַנְּעָרִים הָיוּ לִפְי־חֶרֶב וְאֶמְלָטָה רַק־אֲנִי לְבָדִי לְהַגִּיד לָךְ:

While he was still speaking, another messenger entered and said,

The Chaldeans imposed a task on three groups of leaders. They carried out a raid against the camels and seized them. They struck down the young men accompanying them with the sharpness of the sword. But I alone was deliberately spared for my task, namely: to bring you this message.

### Grammatical evidence of example (c)

שלושה ראשים three heads or leaders or veterans = implicature: wisdom (חכמה) = feminine

### Discussion of example (c)

Although there is no overt grammatical evidence to support a clear reference to a feminine phenomenon, the semantic implicature of the words suggests a transparent relation: the number three is often associated with wisdom, as is the reference to elders or veterans. Notably, the concept of wisdom (חכמה) in Hebrew is considered feminine. The third occurrence in the text is remarkable and serves to underscore a paradox: how wisdom (represented by the three elders) could turn against itself and advocate for violence, thereby negating the fundamental tenet of humanity. Additionally, the camels in Hebrew that are often viewed as an 'award

for good deeds' (Brentjes 1960:23–52) have been skinned; yet, it is the same wisdom that undoes this 'award', which is inexplicable.

### Example (d) Job 1:18–19

(81) עַד זֶה מְדַבֵּר וְזֶה בָּא וַיֹּאמֶר בְּנֵיךְ וּבְנוֹתֶיךָ אָכְלִים וְשׂוֹתִים לִי בְּבֵית אֲחֵיהֶם הַכּוֹרִ:

While he was still speaking, another messenger entered and said,

While your sons and daughters were busy eating and drinking wine in the house of their brother, the first born ...

(19)

וְהִנֵּה רִיחַ גְּדוֹלָה בָּאָה | מַעֲבָר הַמִּדְבָּר וַיֵּצֵעַ בְּאַרְבַּע פְּנוֹת הַבַּיִת וַיִּפֹּל עַל־הַנְּעָרִים וְנִמְוָתוּ: וְאֶמְלָטָה רַק־אֲנִי לְבָדִי לְהַגִּיד לָךְ:

... and suddenly, a mighty wind! It came from one side and from the other side of the desert. Unfortunately, it tore at the four corner pillars of the house. Then it fell upon the young men, and they perished. But I alone was deliberately spared for my task, namely: to bring you this message.

### Grammatical evidence of example (d)

רוח (wind) Noun feminine singular

גְּדוֹלָה Adjective feminine singular

בָּאָה Qal perf. 3 feminine singular of בא

### Discussion of example (d)

Amid the already overwhelming series of catastrophic events, a fourth calamity befell Job, which is believed to be beyond understanding, as per a common wisdom saying that states, 'three is perfect, but four is beyond comprehension' (consider, for example the numerical riddle found in Pr 30:18–19). In this instance, the personification of God, represented for man by the wind (רוח), transformed into the deadly Sirocco desert wind, resulting in death. This tragedy was unthinkable, particularly for Job, who was regarded as a perfect man of God.

Overall, these occurrences reflect a complex interplay between language, cultural symbolism, and semantic interpretation, revealing the challenges inherent in understanding ancient texts.

Considering a close reading of the nouns used to describe the successive calamities, a discernible pattern emerges. Firstly, the noun שְׂבָא [Sheba], representing the first calamity, is morphologically feminine. The second calamity is denoted by the noun אֵשׁ [fire], which is also morphologically feminine. The fourth calamity is signified by the noun רוּחַ, meaning *wind* or *spirit*, which is likewise morphologically feminine. The third calamity is a composite of individual concepts, namely 'three' (שְׁלֹשָׁה), 'elders', 'leaders' or 'experts' (רָאשִׁים), and Chaldeans (כַּשְׁדִּים), which together form an emergent concept, namely wisdom (חֲכָמָה) or magic, a subcategory of wisdom (Sasson 1995:1896–1898). The Chaldeans were renowned for their exceptional wisdom and expertise in various areas of life, such as astronomy, astrology, and magic (see Saggs 1962 and Oppenheim 1964). The abstract concept of wisdom (חֲכָמָה) is also morphologically feminine.

Taken together, an important and noticeable pattern emerges from these four calamities: all of them feature a feminine morphological gender, highlighting a significant aspect of the symbolic and linguistic elements at play in this narrative.

Upon analysing the grammar of the Hebrew text, it becomes evident that the chain of calamities experienced by Job was not a series of separate events, but: (1) a repetition of feminine afflictions, namely Sheba, lightning or fire, three elders (representing wisdom), and wind; (2) classified according to unnatural and contra-societal affinities or paradoxes. The cumulative effect of these disasters is expressed through the repetitions, with each tragedy following hard on the heels of the other, falling in rapid succession, and allowing no relaxation or opportunity to recover (Bar-Efrat 2000:109), or to perform a ritual to reverse the calamity.

Therefore, it is reasonable to ask whether these feminine schematic phenomena should be considered and compared when analysing various literary works in the Hebrew Bible. The answer is, yes. Employing this technique, reinforces the reality for both the affected parties and the reader. Firstly, it heightens the tension between the feminine versus masculine opposites and, secondly, it encourages an audience unused to visual images to use its mind's eye to visualise what matters, and what is at stake for the disputants engaged in the action. This approach creates an image in which the relationship between the image and the order-chaos are connected, and the order-chaos in the image is present.

Accepting the premise that prototypical narratives are predominantly generated from prototypes and that figurative meanings always constitute abstract meanings (Kövecses 2006:88, 204), the blending of text and art in Job 1:15–19 is explained in the following part.

## Blending text and art: The feminine-masculine image schema

Firstly, the Dialogue Text was a common literary tradition among ancient Near Eastern literature, characterised by a form of popular entertainment, where two opposing points of view were put forward by two personified contestants who argued their respective merits. The text of Job follows this tradition, presenting an introduction (prologue) that portrays the disputants (God or Satan, Job or friends) and how they fit into the great cosmological (ethical) order. Following this, the grounds of their argument are established, namely the tension between experiential unnatural and contra-societal phenomena and the order in which they believe. This tension is explicated in a figurative way, in terms of the feminine versus masculine experience of nature and society. The feminine symbolises chaotic elements, encompassing unnatural and contra-societal phenomena, while the masculine concept represents the notion of order.

Secondly, the composition of Job advocates or defends certain positions or beliefs. The author had to depict Job as the chosen one, despite being a disputant and disobedient.

The discrepancy between unnatural and contra-societal experiential facts and the traditional belief in a divine order had to be explained in terms of order versus chaos. The writers anchored their defences not only in the will of their Israelite gods, but also through certain fixed concepts such as feminine-masculine-specific differences. This concept of scene elaboration is regarded as a conceptual memory structure, containing information about a setting that takes place for the achievement of a certain goal. Fundamental to the feminine versus masculine frame, is a knowledge structure that belongs to prior knowledge (of the writer as well as the reader). This consciousness of the writer or reader processes information by means of analogy. Many myths are stories and are considered by people as prototypical narratives in literary cultures in the ancient Near East (Sonik 2014:265–293). This new 'incoming' information, borrowed from the prototype, is compared, and accommodated to a template that is permanently stored in one's memory. In this way, and with this stored information as a record, the reproduction of texts or genre formation becomes activated.

Thirdly, the author of Job has historicised the myth of the cosmic battle between day and night, or light and darkness in his account of separate events: the character-building of Job and the four feminine afflictions. The mythical day or light (יָמִים) in Job 1:1–5 is identified with the believed Order, and the mythical night or darkness (לַיְלָה) is identified with the feminine enigmatic phenomena in society and nature (Job 1:15–19) and it represents Chaos. When the text refers repeatedly to feminine afflictions, it refers to a scene(s) that belong to the prior knowledge of writers and readers. Certain natural and societal affinities were linked with information from the 'cultural context'. The image of the four feminines corresponds with prototyped and stereotyped information about a setting, which is the abstract and mythical night or darkness. In this way, genre formation reminds us about the way in which genres can contain a vast storehouse of experiential wisdom, of which we are often unaware, but which can be partially reconstructed under the pressure of new experiences.

Fourthly, the unrestricted use of all complete numbers (3 – 4 – 7 – 10 – 12) and which are generally associated with Cosmic Order in ancient Near Eastern literature, serves as a substitute for repetition as a literary device and acts for the masculine as a sign of prosperity and therefore Order, while the two unnatural and two contra-social afflictions act as a surrogate for repetition for the feminine.

The development of the Job narrative from the basic mythological pattern is packed with experiential affinities and is more distinctly associated with feminine phenomena, on the abstract to concrete continuum. Because the Hebrew Bible belongs to the category of sacred texts, traditional approaches towards the study of biblical Hebrew literature have not really treated biblical literature as art for art's sake. Consequently, there has been a reluctance to acknowledge that biblical writers may have utilised their imagination, senses, and emotions while composing according to their own discretion.





Source: Kruger, H., 2011a, *Sheba* [Oil on canvas] , Post-modernistic realism with a mystic facet (surrealism), n.p.

Note: Size of painting: 100cm × 150 cm.

**FIGURE 1:** Sheba.

As part of a project on 'informative visual translation', a combination of text and art is proposed to depict the perceptual system underlying the contested concept. Collaborating with the renowned local artist Hennie Kruger, the aim is to identify meaningful patterns in the image schema, and subsequently redefine the experience through a process of perceptual meaning analysis.

The first painting in the series (Figure 1), centres around the female character, Sheba, who represents the plight of the widow and orphan. The painting depicts an orphan seated on four steps, while an elderly woman's hand, adorned with a cut-off wedding ring, is also featured. In the background, there are cows and she-asses, which serve as symbols of fertility. Sheba, the metonymy for the widow and orphan, is depicted triumphantly as she wields her sword and does something that is against her character. She emasculates the young man who is responsible for caring for the widow and orphan.

The second painting within the series (Figure 2), portrays a depiction of lightning, or fire from God. The seven sheep featured within the composition, symbolise the larger number of small cattle, specifically 7 000, which have been subjected to combustion. The painting reveals the paradox that pertains to the traditional interpretation of fire as an attribute of God that is inherently good, yet also responsible for the destruction of the cattle that humans offer to the same divine entity. Additionally, the painting reveals that the servant responsible for preparing such offerings is likewise consumed by the flames.

In the third painting (Figure 3), the depiction of three elders or heads is evident. The attire worn by the figures is representative of the Chaldean culture. The composition of the individual concepts, specifically the numerically based 'three', the descriptors 'elders' or 'leaders', and the reference to the Chaldeans, coalesce to form an emergent conceptualisation of wisdom or magic, the latter being a



Source: Kruger, H., 2011b, *Fire* [Oil on canvas] , Post-modernistic realism with a mystic facet (surrealism), n.p.

Note: Size of painting: 100cm × 150 cm. Art category:

**FIGURE 2:** Fire.



Source: Kruger, H., 2011c, *Wisdom* [Oil on canvas] , Post-modernistic realism with a mystic facet (surrealism), n.p.

Note: Size of painting: 100cm × 150 cm.

**FIGURE 3:** Wisdom.

subcategory of wisdom. The presence of camels, a symbol of wisdom, is complemented by the portrayal of an oil lamp, which is also emblematic of wisdom (Ex 35:4–5, 8). It is important to observe that the camels were stolen by the wise men themselves, thereby emphasising a paradoxical element within the text.

The final piece in the series (Figure 4) presents an additional attribute of God, namely the wind. Depicted within this painting is a tempestuous scene on the horizon, replete with the ruinous aftermath of a house that has been laid waste. The arch of the door, which remains intact, is symbolic of the mythological arch of the world that serves to impede the descent of water from the heavens onto the earth. The paradox embodied in this work is manifest, as it portrays a divine attribute that has the capacity both to construct and destroy.

The combination and flow of the four paintings (Figures 5) serve as a means of embodying the concordant nature of an





Source: Kruger, H., 2011d, *Wind* [Oil on canvas], Post-modernistic realism with a mystic facet (surrealism), n.p.

Note: Size of painting: 100cm × 150 cm.

**FIGURE 4:** Wind.



Source: Kruger, H., 2011e, *The four calamities in Job 1* [Oil on canvas], Post-modernistic realism with a mystic facet (surrealism), n.p.

Note: Size of painting: 100cm × 150 cm.

**FIGURE 5:** The four calamities in Job 1.

image schema, thereby making the abstract concept of feminine-masculine more immediate and accessible. While the feminine-masculine image schema is inherently schematic and abstract, the individual mental images associated with each painting clarify the details of the schema. The aim of this pictorial representation is to illustrate the disruption of the Divine Order within the feminine-masculine image schema, which is made evident through the paradox depicted in each scene.

## Conclusion

In the conclusive statements of his work, MacDonald (1992) identifies a significant obstacle in the interpretation of the meaning-generating process in discourses, specifically the lack of an established theoretical framework:

... we may someday understand the connection between discourse and its social, cultural, and cognitive contexts well enough to provide a consistent and coherent set of terms and methodologies that will help the biblical scholar understand certain aspects of the

world behind a biblical text that have not been illuminated by the more traditional means of analysis ... (p. 175)

This statement posits the necessity of a theoretical framework for the study of the schematic structures utilised in genre formation within ancient religious documents. Additionally, it highlights the importance of moving away from traditional approaches towards language, which have been limited by a restricted focus on experiential methods.

To address these issues, interdisciplinary research is required to explore the complex relationship between linguistic and text-structural forms and schematic representations of the world. This would entail investigating the connection between genre formation, as a variant of common ancient literary types, and prototypical narratives, which are paradigmatic stories that exhibit significant structural similarities across cultures.

The study of these literary frames in a culture necessitates a theoretical foundation that can account for the intricate network of frames and their interrelatedness. The discussion reveals that a significant portion of culture is constructed through frames; frames that are comprehended in terms of other frames.

Moreover, understanding the underlying cultural symbols in the Job narrative is contingent on the image schematic concepts that the narrators employ in their comprehension. In the Job narrative, the mythic cultural schema of feminine versus masculine is transformed into social reality and natural explanation. This transformation is evident in the paradoxical nature of recurring feminine afflictions, and their categorisation based on unconventional and counter-societal associations.

The blending of text and art in this study presents a vivid world in which we can imaginatively participate. It structures our experiences, subtly anew in the sense that natural orders of colour and tone, shape, texture, volume, and harmony are suddenly confronted by the unnatural and contra-societal.

## Acknowledgements

### Competing interests

The author declares that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

### Author's contributions

A.L. is the sole author of this research article.

### Ethical considerations

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

## Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

## Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

## References

- Bar-Efrat, S., 2000, *Narrative art in the Bible*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield.
- Berlin, A., 1983, *Poetics and interpretation of biblical narrative*, Almond Press, Sheffield.
- Brentjes, B., 1960, 'Das Kamel im Alten Orient', *Klio* 38(1), 23–52. <https://doi.org/10.1524/klio.1960.38.jg.23>
- Clines, D.J.A., 1989, 'Job 1–20', in D.A. Hubbard & G.W. Barker (eds.), *Word Books*, Dallas, TX. (*World Biblical Commentary*, vol. 17).
- Delitzsch, F., 1876, 'Das Buch Iob' in C.F. Keil & F. Delitzsch (eds.), *Biblischer Commentar über poetischen Bücher des Alten Testaments*, 2. Buch, Dörffling & Franke, Leipzig.
- Evans, V. & Green, M., 2006, *Cognitive linguistics: An introduction*, Lawrence Erlbaum, London.
- Gallie, W.B., 1956, 'Essentially contested concepts', in *The proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 51, pp. 167–198, Harrison, London.
- Garr, W.R., 1992, 'The linguistic study of morphology', in W.R. Bodine (ed.), *Linguistics and biblical Hebrew*, pp. 49–64, Eisenbrauns, Wiona Lake, IN.
- Gordis, R., 1978, *The book of God and man: A study of Job*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Greenberg, M., 1987, 'Job', in R. Alter & F. Kermode (eds.), *The literary guide to the Bible*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- Habel, N.C., 1985, *The book of Job*, Westminster, Philadelphia, PA. (OTL).
- Harris, R.A., 1993, *The linguistic wars*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Hartley, J.E., 1988, *The book of Job*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI. (NICOT)
- Hoffman, Y., 1981, 'The relation between the prologue and the speech-cycles in Job: A reconsideration', *Vetus Testamentum* 31(2), 160–170. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1517679>
- Johnson, M., 1987, *The body in the mind: The bodily basis of meaning, imagination, and reason*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Kövecses, Z., 2006, *Language, mind and culture: A practical introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Kruger, H., 2011a, *Sheba* [Oil on canvas], Post-modernistic realism with a mystic facet (surrealism), n.p.
- Kruger, H., 2011b, *Fire* [Oil on canvas], Post-modernistic realism with a mystic facet (surrealism), n.p.
- Kruger, H., 2011c, *Wisdom* [Oil on canvas], Post-modernistic realism with a mystic facet (surrealism), n.p.
- Kruger, H., 2011d, *Wind* [Oil on canvas], Post-modernistic realism with a mystic facet (surrealism), n.p.
- Kruger, H., 2011e, *The four calamities in Job 1* [Oil on canvas], Post-modernistic realism with a mystic facet (surrealism), n.p.
- Lakoff, G., 1987, *Women, fire and dangerous things: What categories reveal about the mind*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Lamprecht, A., 2005, 'The setting of the Makkeph in an idea cluster: On Homonymy and Metonymy', *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 31(2), 107–127.
- Lamprecht, A., 2015, *Spatial cognition and the death metaphor in the Hebrew Bible*, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein.
- Macdonald, P., 1992, 'Discourse analysis and biblical interpretation', in W.R. Bodine (ed.), *Linguistics and biblical Hebrew*, pp. 153–175, Eisenbrauns, Wiona Lake, IN.
- Oppenheim, A.L., 1964, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a dead civilization*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Patrick, J.E., 2005, 'The fourfold structure of Job: Variations on a theme', *Vetus Testamentum* 55(2), 185–206. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1568533053741973>
- Pinker, A., 2009, 'The core story in the Prologue–Epilogue of the book of Job', *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 6, a1. <https://doi.org/10.5508/jhs.2006.v6.a1>
- Polzin, R., 1974, The framework of the book of Job, *Interpretation* 28(2), 200. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002096437402800205>
- Pope, M.H., 1965, *Job: A new translation with introduction and commentary*, Doubleday, New York, NY. (AB 15)).
- Saggs, H.W.F., 1962, *The greatness that was Babylon. A survey of the ancient civilization of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley*, Sidgwick & Jackson, London.
- Sarna, N.M., 1957, 'Epic substratum in the prose of Job', *Vetus Testamentum* 76(1), 13–25. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3262127>
- Sasson, J.M. (ed.), 1995, *Civilizations of the ancient Near East*, Charles Scribner, Michigan, MI.
- Sonik, K., 2014, 'Pictorial mythology and narrative in the Ancient Near East', in M. Feldman & B. Brown (eds.), *Critical approaches to ancient Near Eastern art*, pp. 265–293, De Gruyter, Berlin.
- Steinmann, A.E., 1996, The structure and message of the book of Job, *Vetus Testamentum* 46(1), 85–100. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1568533962581035>
- Talmy, L., 1988, 'Force dynamics in language and cognition', *Cognitive Science* 12(1), 49–100. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15516709cog1201\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15516709cog1201_2)
- Van Wolde, E., 2005, 'Cognitive linguistics and its implications to Genesis 28:10–22', in P.J.E. Chatelion Counet & U.F. Berges (eds.), *One text, a thousand methods: Studies in memory of Sjef van Tilborg*, pp.125–148, Brill, Leiden. (Biblical Interpretation Series 71).
- Westermann, C., 1981, *The structure of the book of Job: A form-critical analysis*, Westminster, Philadelphia, PA.
- Whittaker, J., 1967, *Divine images: The life and work of William Blake*, Reaktion Books, London.
- William Blake Archive, viewed 29 January 2023, from <https://blakearchive.org>.
- Wilson, L., 2015, 'Job', in J. Gordon McConville & C. Bartholomew (eds.), *The two horizons Old Testament Commentary*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.).